



CHAPTER XI—Continued.

"Yes," she admitted. "That was about all."

"So, now he's dead; he don't cut no more anymore."

"But are you sure he's dead?"

"Sure!" she sneeringly. "I don't know how I could be no sure. I turned the cuss over an' he was cold then. You don't need worry none about that. Wait a minute till I see who the shaggy could hear blanket from the room, and jerk the blanket off the bodies. The fellow gave utterance to an oath of astonishment at the sight revealed."

"My God! Did you ever see anything like that? Locked together like two stags. H—! Sam was shot, but he got the white guy even after he was dead. D—n me, if it ain't Hank Slag! Now, what does that mean? I reckon Hanky sent the riot in here. That comes from spiritism! When yer drunk. Say, you an' I have got to get out of here. I'll tell you about it as quick as I can. It's plain enough Hanky's got his eyes on an' an' will double-cross me if he once gets a chance."

"What is it you mean? I do no understand."

"Naturally yer don't, 'seem I ain't told yer nothin'. But now that I know yer ain't plin' away over that fellow Shelby, I reckon the sensible thing fer me to do is ter talk straight. There's 'John' ter be—! to pay in this valley before long, and the sooner we get out o' here the better. I run across a soldier 'bout half way ter Gerlasche, an' he gives me a pointer that made me wheel about, an' ride back."

"The Indian outbreak?"

"Sure; the troops got in, an' round-ed most of the Sioux up. They had a fight at Wounded Knee, over the river, an' killed a lot of the reds. Some of 'em got away though, an' come trailin' west—mostly young ones. I reckon—an' now they're sendin' cavalry after ter ride 'em a bunch to come scoutin' in through here."

"Here? Wolves' hole?"

"More likely; he's got yer nothin' 'bout that. But they're still a-huntin' ter kill 'em, while the wolf's gone. That's what I come back for—to get you, and skip."

"To—get you?"

"Of course. I'll tell yer what it now, an' you'll go all right. I reckon you never thought I run off with you 'cause I loved you."

"No—you loved me?"

"That's the way of it. I saw you long before the first time I went to Ponca; but this guy Shelby, 'horned in' fore I was ready to act. You didn't care nothin' for him. So I says to myself, 'I'll have her; I'll take her whether she wants me or not. I'll love her as she don't love him. I'll make her love me—see? Course I didn't aim to do no killing; that was just an' accident like an' I didn't do it now. It was Sam here who got her, an' beamed Shelby."

"But what would you do with me, if—if he had been alive?"

"There ain't no use discussin' that fer he ain't alive. If he'd been alive I would have done what I wanted to do. I had a plan then, an' maybe I did. But now I got it all planned up proper. I'm a goner ter marry you. An' that goes whether yer willin' or not. I ain't even askin' you."

"The expression of her face must have brought the fellow a realization that perhaps he was going altogether too fast, for he broke in with an explanation."

"See here now, don't get huffy. I ain't no Western rube; I belong down East in 'Virginia, an' we got money to burn. That's straight goods. My real name ain't Macklin at all; it's Churchill. I mean business an' just as soon as Indian Joe gets down here with some horse, we're a goner ter start."

"For where?" her voice trembling in spite of every effort at self-control.

"To Gerlasche first; there's a preacher there, an' then on to God's country just as fast as the train will take us. That's my program, an' I'll take it. I'll tell you, I'll take it away from Indian Joe, an' the rest of this rotten outfit. No, you wait; that will be Indian Joe's comin' now."

The door between the two rooms had closed partially, yielding doubtless to some faint draught of air, so that Shelby ventured to survey the scene through the narrow crack near the hinges. Matters were becoming so complicated he was at his wits end. He had delayed too long, and perhaps, it had been a mistake to advise the girl to thus appear friendly to this brute. Now, instead of being thus, she was being carried away the second time. The situation had become desperate.

He could see the girl standing

depressed close to the wall, the light from the broken window on her face, her eyes anxiously watchful of the movements of Macklin, who had turned and was fringing the outer door, hand resting in relief on the butt of his gun. Then that opening was shadowed, and the bulky figure of the squawman suddenly appeared. His first utterance was full of ill-humored, "Well, I got your message, and am here," he said roughly. "What the hell is up, Macklin?"

"Everything is from all I hear," was the short reply. "You Indians are already, ain't they?"

"Yes; I expected that; I told them how it would be."

"To be sure you did, but you never thought every runaway buck would make for this place. But they have, and you know what that means, I reckon. They will be smoked out sooner or later. Do you want to stay, and be smoked out with 'em? I'm for getting out of here now—tonight, Joe."

"I don't intend being caught in this act; an' you are a d—d fool if you don't feel in the same way. There is a chance now to make it, but tomorrow may be too late. How about your plan?"

"I sent them into the bad lands," Macklin laughed.

"That proves what you think about it. All right then; we'll ride out together. Got three horses out there?"

"Yes, and a pack; that's what the Indian told me to bring. The woman going alone?"

"Sure she is. H—! we've fed things all day. We're goin' to get married out at Gerlasche. I'm aimin' ter take you after for best man."

Laud evidenced his surprise and incredulity with a grunt, and a swift glance at the silent girl shrinking back against the wall.

"What about, Pancha?" he asked dryly.

"That little Devil! Pancha when she hears about it, I'll be east of the Missouri. She's a right girl for a Mex, but this time I mean business, Joe. Don't you forget it. I'm playin' for big stakes, an' there don't no Pancha stand in my way. That's the matter with you!"

"Well, I ain't so sure you're right ter sit off so; see free," returned Laud slowly. "There's a fellow been in here bustin' around, an' I reckon he'd be here yet—tonight! I don't know how the cuss could have got out."

"A man hanta me?" you're dreamin'."

"No! I ain't. The fellow joined my outfit up on the mesa yesterday—sorter big fellow with light hair, an' a smooth face. He put up quite a spile, an' claimed his name was Churchill, an' he said he believed him. I don't know what was up. I let the cuss drift in along with me. I aimed to see you as soon as we got in; but

"What the hell is up, Macklin?"

"—I, you had skipped, while Shelby, who might have known something, was up at the eye. I sent Jann away from here, for by that time I was sure the guy was some d—n spy. The boss he was ridin' had the same brand of them cattle I drove."

"The same brand? What brand?"

"The Three Stars; they come from Shelby's ranch up on the Cottonwood."

"H—! A few fellows, you said with light hair, an' smooth face?"

"That's him; grayish eyes, an' rides like a cavalryman. I never saw the galoot before, but I won't go out to face a chance, so I got my gun, an' locked him up."

"Where?"

"In that cell room in Villanoria's cabin."

"No, he ain't that?" the trouble. Somehow he got hold of a knife; must have it hid on him, I see. An' how he cut them bars at the window, an' wigged through."

"And he hasn't been at all?"

"Ain't seen him since he got out of him. Some guy helped him escape—there was prints of two kinds of boots plain enough under the window; but after that they might just as well have got up in the air."

"Two of 'em. The other couldn't have been Hanky—or Shiga, could it?"

"How the hell do I know? I never caught sight of 'em!" he hit the print of that boot. I scouted to the creek; then that first bunch of Indians come trailin' in, an' I had no time to think about anything since, an' gettin' my cut out of here."

"For a while, anyhow. I reckon there ain't nothin' to do; then soldiers is bound to get here."

"And the sooner we're off the better. You ready?"

"He wheeled and confronted the shrieking, frightened girl, who made no reply."

"Well, I got your better. Get the horses, Joe; I'll fetch her along, all right."

Shelby straightened up. In spite of the odds, he must act now, or never. Yet, before he could take a step, he heard a single shot rang out sharply. He saw Macklin fling up his arms, and reel backward, his body striking the half-open door, before it crashed to the floor, and lay motionless.

The impact of Macklin's body had flung the door wide open, leaving Shelby fully exposed to view. For an instant, however, the startled and bewildered Laud failed to note his position against the darkness of that interior. He had leaped back instinctively to the protection of the wall, and gun in hand, crouched there with eyes fixed on the broken window opening.

Shelby was swift to take advantage of his surprise. Wherever the shot had come from, whoever had fired it, his concealment was no longer possible. There must be no hesitation, so he leaped across the room, his motionless body, with weapon clutched grimly forward.

"Hands up, Joe! Put them up first before you turn around. Stop that! Don't try any tricks on me. Now stand there—Oiga."

"Take that gun out of his hand; there is another in his belt; get over his place at the silent girl, now come over here, you understand, firman."

"Yes, of course," wonderingly, "I know how to shoot."

"I imagined so; Calkins would have taught you. Keep the fellow before you, let him have it if he makes any effort to break away. Which him closely, while I rip up that blanket, and tie him up."

He left her with the gun steadily pointed at Laud, and, the other cursing, with hands up, his angry eyes following every movement. He was desperate, undimmed by sudden helplessness, with the shaking, ferocious, yet even yet was apparently held in check by the deadly peer. Shelby stripped the ragged blanket from off the dead bodies under the bench, and began hastily to rip it apart.

The black, blood-stained face of Slaglin stared upward, and Indian Joe saw it for the first time, a sudden spasm of terror causing him to burst forth:

"My God! That's Hank Slaglin!"

"Sure, it is he; he got his an' you'll get yours if you drop those hands, you cur. Turn around now, an' stop."

Laud obeyed, his face ugly and threatening, and Shelby took a step closer, the strip of blanket to his hands, his revolver thrust back into his belt. What Indian Joe saw will never be known; perhaps a slight wavering in the eyes of the girl, perhaps an instant-doubling of her gun. But it was enough. All his hate and treachery drove him to a desperate chance. With the maddened leap of a wild beast, he sprang upon Shelby, gripped him fiercely by the throat, and the two went headlong to the floor. Oiga fired, but without aim, missing them both, and dare not pull the trigger again, so tightly were the men grappled, as they rolled back and forth in frenzied effort to obtain mastery. Shelby, taken completely by surprise, was at a disadvantage, his throat crushed by sinewy hands, his loosened revolver flung half across the room. He could only struggle to break the hold of his antagonist, rolling over and over, and forcing the fellow's head back with every ounce of strength he could bring to bear. They were not unevenly matched, the two, but Shelby the younger, and perhaps the stronger; but Laud a skilled fighter, hard as nails, and ready to resort to every trick. Moreover, he had set out to accomplish, and went every effort to prevent the frightened girl from getting a shot at him. He hung on, his straining hands, like a vice, twisting, twisting, twisting, until he felt himself so that he kept the body of the latter in protection between him and Oiga's revolver. Yet, with every move, even when he was winning, he gained an advantage over the open door. He fought like an animal, sinking his teeth into Shelby's flesh, and driving his knees into his body. His sinewy muscles strained to the utmost, and the squaw man yawn. She knooched over the bench, and crashed out through the partially open door, rolling down the steps, step into the street. Laud landed on Shelby's throat, the latter half unconscious. Crazed,

maddened as he was, the one desire to escape overcame his eagerness to kill, and Indian Joe, cursing, struck once at the open door, leaped to the weeds. St. J. gasping painfully for breath, scarcely realizing what had occurred, lay motionless but for the quivering of his limbs.

Indeed, he had scarcely forced open his eyes when Oiga was beside him. "You—you are alive? He did not kill you?"

"He endeavored to smite, lifting himself upon one elbow."

"No, no; I am all right," he gasped. The fellow, got up, throat, and I couldn't break his hold. The treacherous hand got me that time. I was

his finger still clutched on Shelby's throat.

a fool, and off my guard; it is no fault of yours; I should have taken my chances with the dog. Where did he go?"

"Down there, through the weeds to the creek; he had a horse down below."

"And rode away?"

"I think so; I am not sure. I cared for nothing but you; I thought perhaps he had killed you."

Shelby struggled to his feet, his strength returning, although he scarcely could swallow, and every word he uttered pained him.

"That devil will be back; the hole is full of Indians. Our only chance is to get away before he can gather a bunch of his kind together."

"Get away? Where?"

"Up the bluff; the place in which I hid last night. But wait; my revolver is inside the cabin."

He started back, and Oiga followed closely. Standing upon the step, and looking down the valley, his head now above the level of the surrounding weeds, Shelby's eyes clinched tightly to keep back his oath, and his eyes darkened.

"There's no one left," he said grimly, pointing. "Laud has got his gun; already, we're sure up against it now."

Even as she stood beside him, straining her back to see, the cadence of a wild whoop came echoing to the ears from the distance; Laud and the Indians were coming across the first, riding straight for the cabin, and rushing their poles as they came.

"Are they after us?" she sobbed, grasping his arm. "Are—are you sure?"

"No doubt of it; that's Laud a leadin' 'em. Then Oiga will do what he says. Oiga is in luck; we got to fight it out here. I reckon there ain't much chance, but I'm likely to get some o' that vitt' (Hurry, Oiga; there ain't no time to lose.)"

He crashed the door shut, and flung the bar into place; then dragged forward the heavy lever and braced it as best he could. He had up feel along the floor, and recovered his lost weapon, and before he could straighten up, again, the wild chorus of yells rang out close at hand, mingled with the sound of horses crashing recklessly through the mass of weeds, almost to the very door. He was the fighting man now, cool and eager. He looked straight into her eyes.

"You are not frightened, little girl?"

"Oh, yes I am, but I am not going to let them do it—no, you keep a shot in me."

"I'm not; I know the real thing when I see it. You'll stay till I find out just how these devils are up to their eyes in it."

"Slag Indians, ain't they?"

"Ay, and the worst of the tribe; outcasts, hell hounds, and the white man with 'em is no better. They ain't goin' to be no mercy in this fight. Whatever happens, don't you let 'em take you. Maybe they'll get me first, but if they do, you keep a shot in me."

The lines about her mouth hardened; there was a semblance of the old soldier left in her eyes.

"I know," Tom Shelby's wife said. "Don't Calkins used to tell me that before I ever met you. I ain't goin' to be made prisoner."

He cupped in his throat, his lips grim and hard, "Shake hands!"

"Shake hands?" "Seems to me I'd asked like it if you did."

"Of course I will," and she thrust

out both hands to him in sudden eagerness. "Why shouldn't I, Tom Shelby? I like you."

In the darkness she could scarcely see his face, but she felt the grip of his fingers and caught the eager tremor in his voice.

"I sure am glad you said that," he admitted, as helpless to express himself as a child. "I sorter wanted you to for—for a long while. H—! That's Laud out there now."

He stepped over beside the door, whipping both revolvers from his belt and holding one in each hand. A small round hole had been dug through the adobe plaster between the logs and he beat down with his eye to the opening. A tall, rangy white man, with a dirty skin and scraggling red beard was nearest at hand; and beyond him crouched an Indian naked to the waist, his face blackened and chest discolored with gaudy paint. There were others behind these scattered out in fan shape, but he could only make them out indistinctly. Laud stood so close to the door his face could not be seen, but he held a rifle in his hands, pointing with the stock on the wood, as he angrily demanded admittance.

"Come on out of there, yer big fool," he roared, maddened by the silence. "We saw yer go back inside an' we've got yer this time. Come on, now; I want you again!"

"On what terms?"

Shelby asked this more to prolong delay than anything else. The fellows knew they were there, and it was useless to demand otherwise.

"Terms—!—!" and Indian Joe burst out into a loud laugh. "Hear the cock crow, Hanky. We'll make terms when we get hands on yer, yer got it? It's harder if yer hang on after we do get yer—an' by God! we'll get yer, sooner or later."

"Well, take chances, Laud, and the fun is not going to be on one side."

"It won't be! So yer goin' ter fight?"

All right; but there's more of this outfit comin', an' yer a blamed idiot; if we can get yer no other way I reckon we can burn yer out. Come on, now; as time and open up!"

He struck hard and angrily with his gunstock, but the stout wood held. Shelby made no answer, arm bending low and peering out through the narrow opening. The obstinate attitude had hardened the fellow, for he suddenly reversed his weapon and fired. The ball crashed through the wood, leaving a jagged hole, and imbedded itself in the solid log of the back wall. Before the smoke blew away Shelby replied, sighting out through the small aperture, determined to make every shot count. The nearest white man flung up his arm which dripped blood, and he ran; the crouching Indian behind, crumpled up all though crushed by sudden weight and never moved. Laud sprang backward, startled by the swift response from within, the smoke swirling up between his fingers, and Shelby let drive. Whether the speeding bullet struck or missed he never knew, but the squawman gave up and started leaping into the concealment of the weeds, led headlong, and then went scrambling down to the bank of the stream. It was all so swiftly accomplished to seem like a single picture. When the smoke cloud rolled away not a figure was to be seen. Shelby stood up, grimly smiling, and replaced the cartridges in his weapon. The door was not yet shut, but he had taught them a lesson in caution.

For a moment, blinded by gazing out into the sunlight, he could see nothing clearly about him, not even the figure of Oiga. "Where are you?" he asked.

"Here, by the other door. What has happened?"

He laughed, put at ease by the quick response of her voice.

"Oh, I took pot shot out through a hole in the wall. I thought we might as well start the ball; Joe was getting so guy. Touched up two of them; now they'll go back and talk it over."

"Sure; the Indians will be for waitin' till night, an' that ain't fair. What are you doing to do with the surprise in her voice."

"Why, this is strange! I—I hadn't noticed before; I was too frightened, perhaps. But you quick! Macklin's body is here! It—it is gone!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

She Had a Remedy.

The young mother was worried over her youngster. "Sometimes I think there is something the matter with his ears," she said, "for he does not answer me when I speak to him; and when he doesn't seem to understand that I've given him my directions. I wonder if I should take him to an ear specialist."

The mother of four grinned. "I've found just such deafness among my children," she said, "but I didn't let it worry me any."

"What did you do for it?" inquired the young mother, anxiously.

"Why, I just spanked 'em all around," was the reply, "and they heard beautifully for several months after that."—Springfield Union.

"French Lesson."

The familiar expression "to take French leave" arose in the early part of the eighteenth century, through certain pieces in the saloons of France, not aware of the higher acts of courtesy, leaving without saying good-bye to the host or hostess. The practice spread to society in other countries. Therefore, if a man left without saying good-bye to his host it was said he took "French leave."

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