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Fight for the Musselshell Millions.

BY LEON LEWIS.

CHAPTER I

FIRTLING NEWS FROM THE MUSSELSHELL.
Hiram Skidder, for many years a
prominent merchant of Chicago, sat in grant Skidder, for many years a Hiram Skidder, for many years at pominent merchant of Chleage, sat in pominent merchant of Chleage, sat in pominent merchant of Chleage, sat in pominent merchant of the private office one afternoon, debaths private office of the property of the property

and anno. ing.

"Duns, threats, and reproaches—this is the burden of their whole song," he muttered, suspending operations a most ment "I'll see if I can t get together a few additional thousands and vanish." perking up another letter, the mer-thant opened it. The handwriting be-ing unfamiliar and singular, he glanced ing unlaminiar and at the signature.

From (of. Harvey Whipsaw, of Rat
Wiveselshell, Montana,"

the nake Ranch. Musselshell, Montana," he read, smiling involuntarily. What could such a man have to say to

He began reading the missive, display-He began reading the missive, displayman interests which rapidly increased to adiation and wonder. By the time held reached the signature again tha sher fairly rustled in his grasp, and he looked startled and bewildered. "How strange!" he ejaculated. "Evidently there is some good in those wild lads on the Musselshell. after all. What a pity I sold them!" He read the letter a second time with here deliberation, his excitement increasing.

fres defiberation, his exercise in crassing.

—tyes, the Colonel wants to buy an interest in those lands and become resident manager. The muttered. "What can be the secret of his deep and sudden desire to purchase? Is it another case of striking it rich?" His language suggist it, and, on the face of things, nothing is more likely. The richness of Munana in all sorts of mineral is prostroial."

He secured the letter of Col. Whipsaw

arefully in an inner pocket.

His clear that some great discovery has been made," he added. "I musn't sea moment in recovering possession of those lands.

He touched 'a call-bell on his desk, in sower to which a clerk made his apestance.
"Send Mr. Wynans here," ordered the

erchant.

Berchant. The clerk withdrew, to be succeeded promptly by a young gentleman who had been in the emilloy of—Hiram Skidder a dozen years, at first as clerk, then as a bookkeeper, and finally as cashier.

"Sit down, Mr. Wynans," greeted the Berchant affably, indicating a chair. "I wish to talk with you about the Mussel-shell property I sold you two or three years ago."

The cashier inclined his handsome figbregracefully, accepting the profilered thair, while a curious sort of smile Tayersed his face. He was about seven-and-twenty years

the was about seven-and-twenty years age with a form of the finest proportions. He had the strength and agility of an athlete, without having any especial consciousness of the fact, so completely had his thoughts been absorbed in a state of the fact of the fact of the state of the sorbed in study and science. He was arounnenly good-looking, with his shooth, regular features, his shapely ked and curly hair, his mild blue eyes, and his genial, sunny aspect.

Fith h s blandest voice, "do you remember how I became the owner of the

With is blandest voice, "do you remember how I became the owner of the property in question?"

"Of course," replied Wynans. "Your early brother. Jeremiah Skidder, went cut there for urteeu years ago and bought transh. Later he wrote you and your bother-in-faw, the late Charles Tower of Inglehelm, that he had a grand than eto invest \$10,000 in land near him, and you and Tower sent out the money, taking joint deeds of the Property."

"Why, Jerry Skidder wrote that he

Why, Jerry Skidder wrote that he had been deceived, that the acquisition with the practically worthless; and he considered to write in this strain for years, this both Tower and yourself grow sick of the whole transaction, and finally add the property."

with whole transaction, and many with the property."

"True again," commented Skidder. And you have cared so little about your parchase that you have not yet had the steed recorded?"

ynans assented.
othat Tower and I are still on red
as the owners?"

and as the owners?"

The cashler nodded again, and, in the same was shown by the application the merchant had received from colobel Whipsaw, of Rattlesanke Ranch.

The as ea, " said Skidder again, after thoughtful and shister pause, "how and shister pause," for my lift in the same had you give me, Perry, for my lift interest in that Musseisheit property?"

You have been at no exper on have been at no expense in reto it. I presume?"
t very little, sir. \*

have never even fenced the paid the taxes?"
sir." acknowledged Wynans.

acknowledged Wynans. You had left your brother and in possession, charging him to he taxes, and I haturally adjourned then until such time as I could ap-there in person.

The Assessat bedded understand-

The second understandingly.

Well, I'd to be y that property back from you learly, he announced, with assumed relessness, "and of course I'll frankly are you my reasons."

The cashler again intimated by an inclination that he was all attention, and Hiram Skidder continued:

'I desire to send my son ear there, not mercely to establish him in an independent position but to get him out of the dangerous path he is now following. "As you may have heard, or even read in the papers, he has been in a number of disreputable affairs, and I fear another face. Before he could speak, however, the aperture widened, and a scenard person entered the merchant's presence. The newcomer way the niece who had just been so rudely repudiated.

What a rare, witching girl she was.'

She had the wild free grace of a fawn; a siender, swaying figure: a sweet, pure, girlish face, framed in flowing hair, and a pair of lovely brown eyes, innocent, truthful and unconciously appealing eyes from which looked a woman's thoughful soul that had learned too early the bitterness of life.

She approached the merchant, extend-ing her hand, as the clerk hastily re-

"Are you my uncle Hiram?" she asked.
"I am Elfie Tower, your sister's only

ughter."
"Elfie Tower?" repeated the merchant,
th a stare of surprise. "The daughter "Elfie Tower?" repeated the merchant, with a stare of surprise. "The daughter of my only sister Mary?"
"The same, uncle."
The merchant shook her -hand feebly a single instant, and invited her by gest-

single Instant, and invited her by gesture to be seated.

"This is a great surprise," he said, resuming his seat. "What brings you to
Chicago? Come on a little visit, eh?

"I am come to stay. "Uncle Hiram,"
announced the girl quietly. "I am alone
in the world—"

announced the girl quietly. "I am alone in the world—"
"Alone? How's that?"
"My father died last year, as mother wrote you," explained Effie. "Mamma has followed him," and her voice grew broken. "She died last week. Uncle Hiram, and when she was dying she told me to come to you. She sent you her dearest love, regretting keenly—""Humph!" said the merchant. "Of course I'm sorry she's dead, but it's years since I saw her, and the loss doesn't come on me as keenly as on you. Mary was a good woman, a little sentimental, perhaps, and always talking about affection, honor, truthfulness, and that sort of thing, but she meant well, I don't doubt. How many children did your parents leave?"
"I was their only child, Uncle Hiram,

your parents leave?"
"I was their only child, Uncle Hiram, save the one who died."
"Ah, yes," and the merchant yawned.
"I have lost sight of my sister during the past few years. It is true. I received a letter in which she said her husband was dead, but I never found time to answer it. My business cares have always been heavy. I visited your parents in Ingleheim ten years ago, when you were a mere child. They were very prosperous in those days—owned a grocery store, with houses and lots, horses, and so Jorth. Your father had few expenses in that little village. I suppose, Elife, you have inherited a handsome property?"
"Quite the centerry, uncle. My father made some investments which turned out badly, including his joint purchase with you of those wild lands on the Musselshell River, in Montana. He was also burned out, and failed in business three months before he died."
"Ah, failed, did he?" said the merchant, cheerfully. "Was it a bad failure?"
"It swamped us completely, nicle—left us in poverty."
Hiram Skidder stared amazed. My business cares have alway

"It swamped us completely, Encie—left us in poverty."

Hiram Skidder stared amazed.

"What! Eh?" he gasped. "Poverty?"

"When the debts were paid we had no home and only five hundred dollars in

"The debts paid?" Yes, uncle. Every debt was paid

My father taken ill, lingered three
months, then died, but when he died h
owed no man a cent, "said Elifo proudly
"No widow or orphem, no trusting
tradesman, no one whomsoever, can sa) that my father every cheated him or her of their rightful dues."

"But, God bless my soul!" ejaculated Hiram Skidder: "Was the man mad?"

Elfie looked surprised.

My father was an honest man, sir-

was all." and your mother was left in pos

"And your mother was left in poverty?"

"Yes, sir; but it was an honorable poverty. She had a little money left after father died. We hired two rooms, and I got work to do. I had received a good education at the village academy—I mean good for my years," said Effic modestly—"and I became a clerk in the village book store. I managed to provide for my mother while she lived. After her burial I had only \$20 remaining."

"A beggar!" muttered the merchant.
"A regular beggar!"
Effic failed to catch this comment.
"The bookseller had no further need of my services," she resumed, "his son being about to become a partner with. him. And mother, when dying, told me to come to you, Uncle Hiram—"
"Very convenient for you, no doubt. But I have a large and expensive family iof my own—especially a son and daughter who would bankrupt the biggest millionsire on earth if left to their own devices. Poor people have a singular fondness, Ive noticed, for saddling their, offspring upon somebody else. I don't, see that I can do anything for you. It's absurd for a girl of your size and education to think of settling yourself as a pauper relation on me. It can't be done, my dear young woman!"
The girl's fanc flushed helt.
"You are mistaken, sir," she said, with.

You are mistaken, sir," she said, with a dignity beyond her rears. "I want to par my man...I want work....I came to ask a situation as a clerk in your store."

ask a situation as a clerk'in your store."
"If I took in everybody who asks me
for a clerkship," returned the merchant
testily, "I should soon be in the poor.
house. There is no, vacancy in my establishment. 'My clerks are used to my
ways, and I can't tifn them off even to
make an opening for you."

The girls face looked tillsk.
"Do you refuse to receive me intoyour services, Uncle Hiram?" she asked."
I do not want any favor, only a chance

to earn my fiving. I will work just as

"You are very condescending," sneered the merchant. "But the long and short of the whole matter is, I have no place for you!"

of the whole matter is, 1 have no place for you?

"No place for me in your house? No place for me in your store?"

"You seem to understand me. I have no place for me in your store?"

"You seem to understand me. I have no place say where for you."

The gir's countenance plainly expressed her surprise, indignation, and wounded feeling.

"Wouldn't cousin Hilda like me for a companion?" she asked.

"No: and if she would I couldn't consent to anything of the kind. She has no many 'companions' already. Besides, she's going out of town."

"Will you at least give me money enough to take me out to Montana to my other uncle, Jeremiah Skidder." pursued Elfie.

my other uncle, Jeremiah Skidder." pursued Elifie, and that would be a very bad move for you. Your father and I sold our lands on the Musselshell to Perry Wynans, my cashier, for almost nothing, because they were reported worthless, and hence you have no resources in that direction. Your 'other uncle' is a lazy, shiftless, lying vaga-

year or two in the midst of his present surroundings will prove his utter ruin." These plausible statements of Skidder's motives did not decive Perry Wynans. He knew them to be untrue.

He knew them to be untrue.

"I suppose you'll want something for
the use of your money," pursued the
merchant, with an insinuating smile.
"You gave four hundred dollars, I believe, for the half interest of my late
brother-in-law, Charles Tower, in this
property." property?

Property?"

"Quite richt, sir. Just four hundred."

"Then the eight thousand acres." continued the merchant, with a smile of anticipated triumph, "hare cost you just eleven hundred dollars?"

Perry assented, and Skidder proceeded:

"What shall we say, therefore, for your entire interest? Will fitteen hundred dollars be a fair figure?"

The strange smile of Perry Wynans deepened.

The strange smile of Perry Wynans deepened.

"Hardly," he answered. "I have taken the trouble to give those lands a personal inspection, and—"

"You?" exclaimed the merchant, with a start of astonishment.

"Certainly—I."

"When, may I ask?"

"Almost three years ago.

"Naturally." And Perry smiled again.
"I went out there during one of my brief vacations."

The merchant lost color. He even

The merchant lost color. He even looked startled, and his mien grew reproachful and injured, as if he had been

"And I have also been at the and a nave also been at the expense of sending a mining expert to Montana to report upon the property," added Wynans.

"And your expert has reported?"
"He has, sir I may add I am in receipt of very surprising information."
The merchant stirred uneasily, an in-

tense flush replacing the pallor which had mantled his face. "Such information, in fact," explained Perry, "that I do not care to part with my Mussel-hell property on any terms

He arose quietly, as if he had nothing

He arose quietly, as if he had nothing more to say on the subject.

"Oh, well, seeing it's you, Perry." declared the merchant, with a wheedling sort of tone, "I will be liberal. I want by give my son a new home far from his present temptations and have fully decided to send him to Montana. Suppose we say a couple of thousands for the property?"

"I am very sorry, Mr. Skidder," responded Perry, "but I have decided not to sell the lands in question—certainly not before I have again visited Montana

not before I have again visited Montana in person."
Hiram Skidder drew his breath hard, his countenance Josing color again.
"Then you won't put a price on them?"
"Not at present—no. sir."
"Can't Lempt you?" queried the merchant, forcing a smile.
"I don't believe you can, sir. But you should remember there are plenty of wild lands for sale near mine. I expect to go out that way soon, so that your son can have me for a neighbor. I—"
"I will give you Sco00, Perry," interrupted the merchant, with an abruptness which attested how eager he was to carry his point.

"Indeed? You must have had good news from the Musselshell!" to carry his point.

"In any case, I must decline your,

offer."

The words seemed to plunge the merchant into a veritable consternation.

"You can't mean it," he protested. "I told my son he should have these lands, and so I must make you another and final offer. Let us say \$10,000."

Perry shock his head emphatically.

"Ten thousand dollars or 10 cents—it's all the same to me, Mr. Skidder." hed declared. "Money won't buy them!"

"What! not \$20,000, all in cash, within five minutes?" cried the merchant.

"No, sit!"

"Not fifty thousand?" "No. nor twice fifty thousand," assured Perry, with the same quiet smile
as before. "I have no intention of seliing those lands. Mr. Skidder, and must
decline to entertain any proposition looking to their purchase!"

Hiram Skidder tecame deathly pale
with the rage and vexation these declarations caused him. A flood of furt

proaches and threats trembled upon his lips. But he controlled himself, "I—I am very sorry," he faltered, with averted face. "I'll have to be content averted (ace. "I'll have to be content with sending my son out there to beyour neighbor, as you have suggested." That's all, sir."

Perry Wynans again inclined his hand me figure gracefully and vanished.
What a grance of hate and wrath wa

What a grants of inate and wrath was that the merchant sent after him!

"The thieving villain!" he cjaculated:
"To talk in that way about a piece of property I sold him for almost nothing:
But of course he has received extraor; dinary reports from his special agent. What can be the secret?"

Springing to his fact, he strode to and

Springing to his seet, he strode to and to excitedly, knitting his brows in an intense study as to the ways and means of recovering possession of the lands,

with which he had so lightly paried.

"I see what to do," he finally decided.
"I must start for the Musselshell this very night. At the best I'm on the verge of failure. I am tired of these vain attempts to get on my feet again. All is lost here, and I have all to gain there if I can get out there ahead of Perry. Winans, and catch him in some quiet corner, with no one looking and with those deeds on his person, before they've been recorded, I'll soon be master of the situation."

With the seek and returning to his own chair. "How have you been and ittle pale, with lost one looking and with their good dealth, I hope?"

Excellent, Jerry How's your family?

"I've only Daisy left, Hiram, her mother having died several years ago.

The look upon his face attested that he meant it, all things evil being written thereon—hate and greed, and even violence and robbery.

TURNED OUT TO PERISH. A knock was heard at the door at this moment, and one of the merchant's clerks stepped hesitatingly into his pres-

ence.
"If you please, Mr. Skidder," he announced, "here's a young woman, who wishes to see you."

The merchant glared at his dependent

wishes to see you."

The merchant glared at his dependent sangrily that he retreated involuntarily a step of two.

"How dare you come to me with messages from such creatures?" he demand: ed. "The second offense will cost you your place. If you had been longer in my service, sir, you would know that I never see beggars."

He waved his hand imperatively, but the cerk stood his ground.

He waved his hand imperatively, but the cerk stood his ground, with the re-mark:

The young woman is no beggar, sir.

mark.

"The young woman is no beggar, sir. She's your own niece."

"It's false!" roared he merchant. "I have no niece. She's an impostor: Call the police."

The clerk withdrew, but the door had scarcely closed when it opened again, and he reappeared with an agitated bond, and one of the meanest men I'verever encountered."

"Then you refuse to interest yourself in any way for me, uncle Hiram?" inquired Elfie.

"I can't do otherwise." replied the merchant. "It was your father's place

quired Eline.
"I-can't do otherwise," replied the merchant. "It was your father's place to provide for you. I don't wish to comment upon his failure in business and neglecting to provide for his family; but that he could expect me to repair his neglect is incredible."
The girl arrose sadily sternly.

but that he could expect me to repair his neglect is incredible.

The girl arose sally, sternly.

"We shall not agree, uncle Hiram, in regard to my father's course," she said.

"He left his name to me spotiess and honorable—an inheritance a thousand times more precious than all the money in the world. I would not exchange his reputation for all your wealth, sir."

"You are impertinent," returned Skidder, angrily, arising.

"I have obeyed my mother's command, sir, and asked of you work and protection," added Effic, with deep agriation, "I am all alone in the world, uncle Hiram—friendless, and, to a very great extent, helpless, as a girl of seventeer must necessarily be. If you turn me away I have nowhere to go. I have but ten dollars remaining."

"Many a man and woman has begun life on less than that," said Skidder. "I cannot help you. You ought to have too much pride to thrust yourself upon me as a pauper to be cared for——"

"Stop there, Unels Hiram! I am no pauper. I asked, for work, not for alms," And the young girl's eyes flashed fire, and her pale young face grow sternly reproachful. You send me away as if I were some importunate beggar. You revile my parents. You taunt me. You haye said enough. I'll relieve you of my presence!"

She moved to the door, where she turned and faced him, her great eyes eloquent with her sadness and desolation.

oquent with her sadness and desola-

m.
"But before I go," she added, "let me
y a word more. We shall meet again,
bela Hiram, but not as now! Now I But before I go," she added, "let me say a word more. We shall meet again, Uncle Hiram, but not as now: Now I am a poor, weak girl, without money or friends, but I shall some day be rich and powerful: Some day, and perhaps at an early day, I believe as surely as God lives, we shall meet again upon a changed footing! Until then, adieu!" She bowed and withdrew, traversing the outer store and gaining the street, where she mingled with the throng. Rejected by her kinsman, a stranger in a strange city, what was she to do, and where was she to go? She wandered on desolately, the world all before her, the making of her whole

all before her, the making of her whole future in her own girlish hands. She walked barely a block, hardly conscious of the direction she had taken. then a hand touched her gently on the

arm from behind arm from behind.

Turning quickly and halting, she found herself face to face with a man whose life was destined to be associated with her own thenceforward and for-

ever.
That man was, Perry Wynans.

CHAPTER IIL

WELL WORTHY OF EARN OTHER.

As had as he was, Hiram Skidder felt ashamed of the meanness and brutality with which he had treated his niece.

"Of course I should have been glad to give her a night's lodging, or anything of that sort, under other circumstances," he said to himself, when she had vanished. "But it was her misfortune to come here at the most awkward moment possible—"just as I am preparing to leave these scenes forever! Perhaps—"

Ho was interrupted by voices near his door.

door.

"What! You are Mr. Skidder's brother?" one of his clerks was saying.

"You jest bet I am—his own and only heather all the way from Montany." er?" one of his cierks was saying.
"You jest bet I am—his own and only brother, all the way from Montany," was the reply, "and you jest hustle and hump, will ye, 'young man) and let Hiram know that Jerry Skidder is waiting to see him!"

The merchant stupped briskly to the door, not without great surprise and curiestry, but also with an intense satisfaction at the prospect, of further, information from the Musschshell.

"Oh, it's you, Jerry?" he cried, with his most affable voice and manner, grasping the hand of his relative. "I am equally astonished and delighted as seeing you' Come in!"

Jeremiah Skidder hastened to comply, and the merchant closed the door behind hith steers warning frown at saveral

and the merchant closed the door behind clerks who were staring after the new

"How rugged and hearty you look,

"I've only Daisy left, Hiram, her mother having died several years ago. Perhaps 'vou don't remember Daisy? She's a great girl of one-and-twenty."
"Is she here with you?"
"I's she here with you?"
"Yes. She has long-been wanting to come to town to see the sights, and I couldn't refuse no longer. No, she's not waiting outside." he continued, as the werchant looked from a little window into the store. "She's at our hotel on Madison street. And how's your wife and the children?"
"I lost Mrs. Skidder years ago." replied the merchant, "but the 'children'—a son of twenty-five and a girl of twenty-three—are unite well.

a son of twenty-five and a girl of twenty-tree—are quite well.

Jerry wagged his jaws nervously upon a huge quid of tobacco, and bestowed a keen glance of appreciation upon his surroundings, while Hiram looked him over with a rurious and searching serv-

over with a curious and searching scrutiny.

The contrast between the brothers was rather striking, Jerry being at least ten years the oldest, and having a thin, weazeny frame, a pair of deeply sunken eyes, and a bony, angular visage. The old man was active and wiry, however, as became his bronzed and weather-beaten appearance, and could have readily "handled" his younger and bigger brother.

"You seem to be well fixed here, "You seem to be well fixed here."

brother.

"You seem to be well fixed here.

HIram," he remarked, his gaze coming back to his brother's face. "Must have made an awful pile of money! How does it happen that you've never been out to Wontan to see me?"

Montany to see me?"

"I couldn't get the time, Jerry."

"I conduded that such was the case," said the visitor, with increased nervousness, "and that's why I yielded to Daisy about coming. The fact is, I want to buy those Musselshell lands of you and Tower!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A Floral Curio.

One of the greatest curiosities is the snow flower that become in the northern portion of Siberia, where the earth is continually covered with a coating of snow and frost. This wonderful plant shoots forth from the frozen soil on the first day of the year, and reaches the height of about three feet; it blooms on the third day, remains open twenty-four hours and then returns to its orig-inal elements. It shines for a single day, then the stem, leaves and flower are converted into snow. The leaves are three in number. The flower is star-shaped, its petals about as long as the leaves and about half an inch wide. On the third day the extremities of the On the third day the extremites specks, leaves show little glistening specks, like diamonds, about the size of the like diamonds, about the size of the head of a pin. These are the seeds of this queer flower. On one occasion some of these seeds were gathered and hastiby transported to St. Petersburg. They were then placed in a bed of snow, where they were kept until the first of the following year, when the snow flower burst forth and was greatly admired and wondered at by all who

Clinging to Old Methods

The peons of Mexico are a queer set.
Their ignorance and stupidity are
equaled, perhaps, by no other race of
people in the world. They are too stupid even to be instructed. I was down in the mining regions of Mexico for some time and had a good chance to observe their habits. They still per-sist in carrying the ore from the mines in bags on their backs. I knew a case where a contractor secured a number of wheelbarrows, thinking to help their inbors. They accepted barrows all right, but would not use them as they were intended to be used. Instead of wheeling them they would fill them up and carry the barrows with their contents on their backs, as they had done with their bags. Another amusing case of their stupidity was shown when an American living down there, pur-American living down there, pur-chased a stove for his servants, who were peons, to cook on. They would not touch the stove, but persisted in adhering to their old custom of sitting in front of a charcoal fire, fan in hand and waving it to make the pot boil. Their ignorance and density of understanding is deplorable.—Baltimore Herald.

They Don't Like Corn. It is truly a maizing thing, this Eu-ropean indifference to corn. The peo-ple eat some such queer things over there that one would think that corn would seem a mighty blessing. In the course of two long journeys over vari-ous parts of Europe we have never but once found the cereal, and that was at a hotel almost entirely patronized by Americans and kept by a man who had lived in America, in Paris. We were talking of corn to an Englishman

this summe "And," said he, "do you really eat it In the States?

"We only feed it to animals." "Well, then, you treat your anima

better than yourselves. He paneed for a minute.

"Tell me," sold he, "in what way do you eat it?

"On the ear-"The ear! Oh, fancy. How strange!" And he looked quite ester l'ost-Express.

Professor Swift, of Rochester, has discovered another new comet has no tail. Times are pretty hard afford at least one tail.