

A Deal in Wild Lands

Fight for the Musselshell Millions.

BY LEON LEWIS.

CHAPTER V.

VERY STRANGELY REPHRASED.

How the shadow lifted from Elsie's face at her encounter with her uncle's cashier.

"Oh, Mr. Wynans," she cried, after a single instant of wild incredulity. "How glad I am to see you! Where did you come from so suddenly?"

"I followed you, Elsie, from your uncle's store," replied Perry, shaking hands warmly. "Accept my arm, please, and we'll take a little walk. I've something to say to you."

Elsie complied without hesitation, as she murmured archly, radiant with her new gladness, which she did not seek to conceal.

"None the less say you there," responded Perry. "My desk was close beside your uncle's office, so that I saw you when you came in and when you went out."

"Did you hear all uncle said to me?" "Not all—no, but enough to give me a just idea of what he was saying and doing."

"Then you heard him tell me—?" "Yes, the heartless monster! Need I say how deeply I was grieved and shocked by his conduct?"

Elsie locked up with the gratitude these declarations were so well calculated to awaken, as also with the keen relief the new situation of affairs had given her.

"You are very kind, Mr. Wynans," were the simple words which escaped her, but with what tender joyousness were they uttered!

"You can never know how impatiently I have waited to see you again," continued Perry. "Since I first went to Ingelheim, almost three years ago, to talk with your father about his lands on the Musselshell, I have had the extreme happiness of being acquainted with you, but our meetings have been alike too few and too brief, you were away so much—at school, at your bookseller's, and elsewhere."

How shyly and sweetly Elsie looked up again into his face.

"I am glad you comprehend why I have not seen more of you," she said with delightful frankness. "I can never tell you how much I have prized your acquaintance."

"Many thanks for the assurance, Elsie. I became quite intimate with your parents very soon after my first visit to Ingelheim, and I cannot err in saying that they valued and esteemed me as highly as I did them."

"How often they have said as much," exclaimed Elsie. "I shall never forget how warmly mamma spoke of you the day before she died, and how grateful she was for your last visit. For myself, how can I ever forget what a consolation it was to me to see you at the funeral? Your kindness and sympathy on that occasion went to my heart."

"I am glad that, Elsie," returned Perry, "for it was from my heart that they came. As to what has since taken place, our mutual friend, Mr. Bush, the house agent, has kept me posted. He wrote me yesterday that you would call upon your uncle to-day, or I should have come to Ingelheim to see you."

Elsie bowed gratefully, her eyes shining like stars through a mist of tears. "I hope you realize, Elsie, how often I have been in Ingelheim and how much I have strolled around its hills and valleys with your father, and especially how much I admired and loved him. As an outcome of that friendship, I have known some very important and surprising facts to communicate to you. If you will step into Jackson's, a popular restaurant for ladies and gentlemen in the next block, we'll call for a few refreshments and I'll tell you a number of things I want you to know."

"Certainly," returned Elsie. Little more was said until they had seated themselves in the restaurant in question and given their orders, and then Perry resumed:

"About three years ago your Uncle Hiram visited your parents at Ingelheim, and it was on that occasion that your father and uncle sold ten thousand dollars to Montana, to your uncle Jerry, in consequence of the latter's representations, to invest in wild lands on the Musselshell River."

"I remember the transaction," returned Elsie. "I also remember that Uncle Jerry's investment turned out a very poor one."

"So he reported, Elsie," pursued Wynans, "but I at length became suspicious that he was not acting in good faith. This suspicion eventually became so strong that I visited myself of a summer vacation to pay a secret visit to the Musselshell about three years ago, and with the most astonishing results. Not only did you in suspense, I hasten to say that Uncle Jerry had been lying from the very date of the purchase. The lands were well worth all they cost, it only as a range for cattle. But gold had been found on them in paying quantities, and certain old prospectors prospected great discoveries. I came back with the idea that the property was far more valuable than Uncle Jerry pretended, and I lost no time in buying it."

"Did father know, when he sold you his half-interest, all you had learned by your secret visit to Montana?" asked Elsie.

"He was replying, 'He was my friend, and I was obliged to tell him. He comprehended perfectly what he was selling. Realizing that he was stricken with death, and that your uncles would not hesitate to rob you, Elsie, and knowing that it takes a strong hand to hold its own in the wilds of Montana, he decided me the lands, with the understanding that I would hold them as a sacred trust for you, and that you should share with me any good which might come of them.'"

"But you didn't tell Uncle Hiram—?" "Certainly not," answered Perry. "I was under no obligations to do so. He asked me no questions, and I didn't even tell him I had been to Montana. He deemed himself smart, and thought he was unloading upon me property which was practically worthless. I was not his friend, nor in his confidence, nor in any way his debtor."

"I see," breathed Elsie. "So we are now the joint owners of that entire Musselshell property?"

"Yes, Elsie, as you will see by a letter your mother wrote you a month ago," declared Wynans, drawing a handful of valuable papers from his pocket and proceeding to detach from them the mislaid question. "Read this."

Starting in glad surprise, as she recognized her mother's handwriting, Elsie pressed the letter repeatedly to her lips, and then broke the seal and read as follows:

MY DARLING DAUGHTER—Mr. Wynans says your uncles will not do anything for you after I am gone, but it is only rights that you should apply to them, especially to your uncle Hiram. Your father furnished him with the capital which gave him his first start as a merchant. Should he prove a broken reed to lean upon, such will not be the case with Perry Wynans. We have not known this dear friend long, but we have known him intimately. He is honest, kindly, and generous—all things good and noble. How much it comforts me to know that I leave you such a friend and protector, is only known to that God in whose bosom I shall soon be at rest from my trials. Trust this man, darling, as you would trust me. The Musselshell lands it seems are becoming very valuable, and Perry—I call him so because he seems to me to know will give you half they produce. Consult with him whenever you need advice, and remember that my last blessing will always rest upon you both. Heaven be with you both now and ever. MOTHER.

Elsie had not read this epistle without many a pause, as also with emotions which found repeated expression in tears. It seemed to her almost like a message from another world.

"This letter confirms all you have told me, Mr. Wynans," she said at length, handing it to him and inviting him by a gesture to read it. "You will see how much mamma thought of you."

Perry read the letter in silence, tears gathering in his eyes.

"She was only too appreciative of the little I have done, or could do," he said, handing the letter back to Elsie, who again pressed it to her lips and secured it tenderly in her bosom. "At the moment it was written I was not as fully enlightened about the Musselshell property as I am now, but enough had become known to render it certain that we were on the road to fortune."

Elsie looked so pleased at this assurance that he hastened to add:

"The reports I have received during the past week from the Musselshell read like a fairy tale. I hardly dare give you their substance, and so will let you look them over for yourself in the course of the evening or to-morrow. It is enough to say that we have on our land two of the richest gold mines which have ever been found in America."

With what intensity the girl's glances came back to his face!

"How nice!" she murmured, with the sweet simplicity of her years. "And how like a fairy tale, as you say! I suppose you will not remain in Uncle Hiram's service a moment longer?"

"No, Elsie. In fact, I am not going back to the store. I left a brief note on my desk to that effect. I remained until to-day merely on your account. My idea was that your uncle would refuse to do anything for you, and I deemed it my duty to resume my acquaintance with you at the very point where your uncle's dealings ended."

"How good of you! Oh, if I hadn't met you at that sad, gloomy moment! I was quite in despair. And now that you have quit uncle's service and he has cast me off?"

"We'll go to Montana together, if you think well of the suggestion," declared Perry. "No father was ever kinder to a daughter than I will be to you, should you desire to bear me company to these wonderful mines."

Elsie sighed with a gladness that was too intense for utterance.

"Oh, it has been the dream of my life to go out to the mountains and valleys of the great West!"

"I foresaw how you would welcome my proposition," said Perry, "and so I have engaged a life-long friend of your mother and yourself to go out there with us—in fact, your dear old nurse, Mrs. Rankle."

"Really? How delightful! Where is she?"

"She's at my hotel waiting for us."

"How thoughtful you are. I don't know what mamma and I would have done without dear Mrs. Rankle."

"You will go with me to Montana, then?"

"As if I could refuse!" exclaimed Elsie.

"I think we shall be able to start this very afternoon," announced Wynans. "The truth is, your Uncle Jerry is still in possession of our lands and mines, and is robbing us of a fortune daily, so that I am resolved to put in an appearance there at the earliest moment possible."

"And shall we say anything to Uncle Hiram about our intentions?"

"Certainly not, Elsie. What is Uncle Hiram to you? But he'll not be far behind us, I think. He's in danger of falling and losing everything he has in the world, and his intention is to start for Montana this very day. He has realized all the cash he could by all sorts of shifts and expedients—many of them grossly dishonest—and is going to run away, taking his son and daughter with him."

"Then we may see them all in Montana?"

"It's only too probable. But when you do he will be the bigger and you will be rolling in your millions."

How Elsie's heart fluttered at the thought! What a true prophesy she had been in warning Hiram Skidder of such a change in their respective situations!

"And for all this I have to, thank you, Mr. Wynans," she murmured, her eyes misty with her exquisite joy; "you who, until to-day, have been so rarely an hour in my presence! You have toiled and thought for me while I slept! Surely it is the hand of God which has brought us together, and is leading me out of my desolation to a path wherein I shall find radiance and sunshine forever!"

With a smile as gentle as his speech and mien had been, Perry arose with her, offering her his arm again, and they went forth to their destiny together.

CHAPTER VI.

A SINGULAR ENCOUNTER.

The silence to which we left Elsie and Wynans was broken by the latter with the inquiry:

"How have you left things in Ingelheim? Are you expected there to-night?"

"Oh, no," replied Elsie. "I have left the place definitely, storing my furniture with Mr. Bush, who will keep it safe until further orders."

"She reflected a few moments earnestly, and then added:

"I was so sure Uncle Hiram would ask me to remain a few days—at least with cousin Hilda that I brought with me a trunk, in which I have placed all my personal effects."

"Where is that trunk now?"

"At the Kansas City, Harrison street."

"That is just as it should be," commented Perry. "We shall start from there on our journey, and need only exchange one check for another."

They walked on a little while in silence, and then Perry asked:

"Do you wish to go anywhere? Would you like to make a call or go shopping?"

The girl sighed deeply.

"In all this great city," she replied, "I haven't a single friend, Mr. Wynans, save yourself, and consequently no calls to make, nowhere to go."

"Then we will go direct to the quiet little hotel on Madison street, where I have long had my quarters," proposed Wynans. "We shall have barely time to get our supper and lay in a few supplies before it will be time to drive to the station."

They proceeded to the hotel in question.

"I will show you to the ladies' parlor," remarked Wynans, as the couple reached the entrance of the hotel. "If we should encounter Mrs. Long, the landlady, I will mention that you are waiting for a train, and will only be here to supper."

Didn't your mother tell you, not long before she died, that you were to see me, in case your visit to your uncle should not be satisfactory?"

"I was to see you in any case," declared Elsie. "Mamma often said that I was not to lose sight of you, as she knew you would befriend me, the occasion arising."

A step resounded on the adjacent staircase at this moment, and a young woman of singular appearance came striding into the parlor, with her head tossed aloft inquiringly. She was not without beauty of a vigorous, original type, but she was rudely and even wildly rustic in both garb and manners.

"Have you seen my pa, miss?" she demanded, in a voice as strident as her walk, as she halted near the couple.

"No, miss," replied Elsie. "But we have only been here a few moments."

"Well, I think it's a shame that he don't return and give me a chance to see something before dark. I'm so tired of being shut up here like a bear in a trap."

"Who is your pa?" asked Wynans, with the kindly intention of interesting the fair stranger, and so shortening her interval of waiting.

"He's Jeremiah Skidder, of Musselshell, Montana," was the reply, "and I am Daisy, his only daughter."

—What a surprise for Elsie! —This rustic creature was her own cousin!

Ere another word could be said, however, a series of rapid and heavy footsteps resounded in the stairway, and Daisy bounded toward the door, exclaiming:

"Oh, I'm so glad! Here he is!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE PLANS OF THE SKIDDERS.

Darting through the doorway, Daisy Skidder caught the newcomer by the hand and literally dragged him into the parlor.

"You haven't showed up a minute too soon, pa," she assured him. "I should have had a fit and stepped into it, if you had delayed coming another minute. But what is the matter, pa? Are you sick?"

"That infernal brother of mine has robbed me of two hundred thousand dollars," growled Jerry Skidder, with such deep internal convulsions that his voice seemed to be ground out of his throat. "I'm sorry I didn't shoot him dead in his tracks."

"Hush, pa, this is a public parlor," enjoined Daisy, placing her hand over his mouth. "They'll hear you."

"Well, I don't care who hears me! It's true," blurted out Jerry, dropping into a chair, and glaring at Wynans and Elsie from behind the figure of his daughter. "But bless my soul! I'll put him where he won't get out till the ants carry him through the keyhole!"

"How did he rob you?" asked Daisy, comprehending by long experience that the only way to silence him was to give vent to his wrath.

"How?" roared Jerry. "I bought the Musselshell mines for \$200,000, and he pretended to give me a deed of them, but he told me, after I had parted with my money, that he sold them three years ago to a man named Perry Wynans, and the deed he gave me turned out to be a deed of a bit of wild land in Idaho, curse him!"

"A fine brother, I should think!" commented Daisy, with the air of being up to her eyes in her father's revelations. "Why didn't you take back your money?"

"He had slipped it into his desk."

"Then why didn't you take other measures?"

"I couldn't do a thing, child! He had given me a deed for my money, and he would have been quite willing to go into court and swear that the money was paid for the Idaho land, on account of its being supposed to be a gold field."

"But about the other half interest, pa—that of Uncle Charles Tower?"

"Oh, Tower and his wife are both dead, after selling their interest to the Perry Wynans aforesaid," wailed Jerry. "You see what luck I've had by this trip to town! It's enough to drive a man crazy!"

GANDER PULLING.

A Strange Sport of the Early Days of Missouri.

Ex-Governor Fletcher, of Missouri, formed the center of a little group the other day who were discussing old times.

"When I was a boy," he said, "I lived among the pioneers in Missouri. They were a fine class of people: all in all, the best people I ever knew. They drove back the Indians and made bear and deer their meat, as the saying goes. It was before the days of the schoolmaster. Occasionally we had a three months subscription school, but the master was employed more for his physical qualifications to discipline the big boys than for his learning. It was before the days of baseball and football, and the sport that stood at the head of the list was a 'gander pulling.' The men met," continued the governor, "at some suitable cross roads store, and they pooled in \$1 each, say twenty or twenty-five of them. That was a big purse in those days. Then they got the oldest and toughest gander that roamed that circuit. The feathers were carefully plucked from his neck and the neck was covered with grease and soap. After these preliminaries Mr. Gander was securely tied to a swinging limb of a tree, head hanging downward. This done, the men would mount their horses, a circle was drawn, the master of ceremonies took his place in the center of the ring, whip in hand, and kept every horse on a lively run as the riders tried to catch the gander's neck. The man who succeeded in pulling off the gander's neck raked in the pot. If he held on until he was pulled off his horse, it counted for the gander and the rider was out. It was a little tough on the fowl, but as a feat of strength and horsemanship it was worth seeing, and the knights of old never put lance in rest or rode in tournament to greater applause among the spectators than was showered upon them by the throng at a gander pulling. I was once an eye witness of this strange sport. Of course, it wound up with a dance, and the hero who pulled off the gander's head danced with the prettiest girl."

Gibraltar and its Defense.

Experiments at Shoeburyness have shown that an Armstrong shell can be thrown 9,176 yards—about five and one-third miles—says a writer in Temple Bar. It is therefore absolutely clear that if all the fleet were temporarily absent from the port of Gibraltar, either on some special mission or dispersed by a storm, hostile ironclads taking up a position within four miles of the eastward of Europa point might with impunity send shot and shell into the outlying parts of the fortress and cause much destruction of life and property. On the other hand, the governor of the fortress would not be idle, and the experiences of the late civil war in America have abundantly proved that the cannon in fortresses, if they strike a ship of war with their projectiles, even at long range, may do considerable mischief; while, on the other hand, many shot and shell may strike a fort and only do trifling damage. It is practically impossible to throw shot or shell over the high part of the rock, near Spain, and the cannon ensconced in the unique rock galleries, with their royal artillery gun detachments, would be absolutely safe. Even if the neutral ground between Gibraltar and Spain were occupied by a hostile foe comparatively little damage would be the result. During the writer's stay at Gibraltar it was considered desirable to try the experiment of firing upward from the plain on the Spanish side into the galleries, dummies being placed to represent the necessary gun detachments. A regiment several hundred strong was accordingly placed in position and supplied with ball cartridges. The range, however, was unknown and the fire being directed upward, it was fully an hour before any of the dummies were hit, after the expenditure of much ammunition. In actual warfare, of course, the British rifle sharpshooters must have picked out their foes by firing downward from the galleries. Bomb proof barracks and hospitals are potent factors against the horrors of bombardment, and there is little doubt that there is ample room at Gibraltar for some amendment on this head.

Seven Years Disappeared.

Seven years ago Miss Jennie Morgan disappeared from her home in Pittsburgh, Penna., and nothing was known by her family of her whereabouts.

Five months ago her father went into court and asked to be appointed administrator of her estate, as it was known that she had about \$1,000 in a local savings bank. The other day there was a hearing in the matter, but further proceedings were stopped by the appearance in court of the young lady herself. During these seven years she had been employed as a dressmaker in an East end family and had kept her identity concealed. She gave as a reason for her action that her father had ill-treated her.