

Deal in Wild Lands

OR, THE
Musselshell Millions.

BY LEON LEWIS.

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

The driver mounted his box again, and pulled away into a darkness and solitude that was almost phenomenal, leaving the river far behind him. A quarter of an hour later, in a deep ravine, the travelers suddenly encountered a tree which had been felled across the road in such a way as to prevent their passage.

"What does this mean?" asked Perry. "It means that the stage was held up a day or two ago," replied the driver, "and that no one has cared to take the trouble of cutting away that tree. We shall have to go around it."

"Push on, then," he said. "It is easier said than done, the carriage having to back a score of yards before it could get out of the ravine, but at length, after a great deal of swearing and flourishing of his lantern, the driver cleared the difficulty, and drew out a curve almost at right angles with the previous one."

At the end of another quarter of an hour the travelers found themselves in the midst of a group of armed men who had taken possession of an open space in the center of a dense forest, and had kindled a huge fire, around which they were gathered.

"Why do you stop here, driver?" asked Perry, as the carriage came to a halt. "Because we are not going any farther in this direction," was the answer. "My name is Perry Wynans, is it not?"

"What has that to do with our journey?" asked Perry, after a moment's hesitation. "A great deal, sir. Are you not Mr. Wynans?"

"I am, if the matter concerns you," answered Perry in a tone of annoyance. "I am sure I could not be mistaken," declared the driver. "You came West in the same train with Jerry Skidder and his brother."

"This remark, under the circumstances, was in the highest degree suggestive. "What has all this to do with our journey to Musselshell?" asked Perry, looking anxiously upon the evil-looking faces by which the carriage was now surrounded.

"A great deal, Mr. Wynans," answered the driver. "Let me come to the point. You are Perry Wynans, and this young lady is Elsie Tower, the cousin of Daisy Skidder. You think you are on your way to the mines you bought some years ago of Hiram Skidder and Charles Tower."

"Well," avowed the driver, pushing back his hat from his forehead and unbuttoning his coat, "you are not on your way to Musselshell but you have fallen into the hands of a man who has the best of reasons for holding fast to you. Permit me to introduce myself, as you have doubtless heard of me. My name is Sam Gaddler, at your service."

The villain inclined himself with mock politeness, appearing to enjoy the suppressed scream of terror which came from Mrs. Rankle, the breathless stare of Elsie, and the violent start of Perry. "In a word, Mr. Wynans," added the villainous plotter, "I have been informed by telegraph of your proposed advent into our midst, and have taken my measures accordingly. You and Miss Tower, with the old woman, are now my prisoners."

"What are your intentions?" demanded Perry after a brief but painful silence. "My intentions are to take you to a secure place I have in readiness," answered Gaddler, "and these men will bear us company, taking care that you do not make your escape. This is all I need to say at present. We shall go into camp to-morrow and sleep in the morning, and I will then give you further information."

"Turning to his men he added: "Fellow-boys, watch out under way. No time was lost in complying with this order, and in another minute the carriage had resumed progress, with a new driver on the box and half a dozen armed ruffians on horseback around it. We need not say what were the feelings of the travelers. They realized that they were in a terrible situation."

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. MORROW.

Along a rude trail in Fergus County walked a man of striking aspect, who was leading a horse by the bridle. Any practiced eye could have fathomed the situation by a single glance at man or beast.

"They had made a long distance and were weary. The man with his cramped quarters in the saddle, and the horse with his burden. The traveler was generously allowing him to rest, to recuperate his forces, while he himself gave a necessary extension to his muscles."

The watchful glances of the pedestrian would have even suggested that he was conscious of being in a dangerous situation, or that he had recently made his escape from some deadly peril. As much was suggested, too, by the shining knife and revolver in the traveler's belt, and by the rifle slung across his shoulder.

The reader will doubtless divine his identity. He was Charley Baker, the young mining expert, who had been so closely pressed by Sam Gaddler and his minions. His path was that of a lone horseman, and he had been so closely followed by Sam Gaddler and his minions.

He looked around as keenly as though he were a stranger in a strange land. He looked around as keenly as though he were a stranger in a strange land. He looked around as keenly as though he were a stranger in a strange land.

"And Colonel Whipsaw," he added, "where can he be?" Did those rascals kill him?" The gloom on his face deepened, and attention to his surroundings became still more anxious and earnest. But suddenly he started and halted.

Despite the loneliness of the scene he was traversing, he had caught a glimpse of a dwelling. It stood on a bold, bare foothill, which towered several hundred feet above the level of the plain. It was big enough for a castle, and looked like one, yet it stood three miles from the trail, in a singularly isolated situation, and one that was practically inaccessible to travelers.

To reach it on horseback or with a wagon it was necessary to make a long ascent of one of the sloping sides of the foot-hill to the rear of it. The traveler was not only surprised at what he saw but puzzled.

"What can it be?" he asked himself, "the abode of some robber?" The retreat of some hermit? The headquarters of some new military post or Indian reservation?"

"There's only one way of arriving at the truth, old fellow," he said, again addressing his horse, "and we'll take it." Gaining his saddle, he rode toward the mysterious edifice.

As he neared the foot-hill he saw that long flights of steps had been built between its base and summit, and realized that a direct approach was quite in order. His resolve was soon taken. He would ride slowly to the foot of the declivity, keeping a good lookout.

If everything seemed right he could hitch his horse at the base of the hill and take his way up the incline to the mysterious dwelling. If he saw anything to arouse his apprehensions, he could beat a retreat. He had nearly reached the foot-hill in execution of this design, when he noticed a shed long enough to belong to a cavalry barracks, and several bits of shaded wall and earth—works suggestive of masked batteries.

The underpinning of the house was very high and contained a great number of small windows, bearing a strange resemblance to loopholes. In a word, the nearer the traveler came to the edifice the more suspicious did it appear to him.

At length he drew rein. Should he advance or retreat? Ere he had decided the question a woman appeared at one of the front windows and beckoned him to come nearer.

The next instant she emerged from the house, taking her way briskly toward the brow of the foot-hill, from which she again signalled him to resume progress. If she had been young and pretty he might have refused, for fear of some plot; but she was old enough to be his mother and as plain as a pickstaff.

Then, too, she was visibly in trouble, her every look and gesture displaying anxiety and excitement. Besides, what was to be feared from a lone woman? Nodding assent to her appeals, he hastened to ride nearer the long succession of terraces she was in the act of descending.

"I trust you will pardon me, sir," she said, as she came to a halt at the foot of the last flight of steps just as the horseman reached them. "I see you are a stranger in these parts and hope you will befriend me."

A quick, searching glance told the traveler that he had nothing to fear from being civil. "I am perfectly at your service, madam," he assured her. "You were not coming here to see Mr. Morrow?"

"Certainly not," was the reply. "Until this moment I was not aware of his existence, or even of the existence of this dwelling. Now, is it not?" "Just finished, sir."

"And the owner is Mr. Morrow?" The woman assented. "I've never heard of him before," said the traveler, "and my presence here has nothing to do with him. My name is Charley Baker. I am a mining expert, and have been sent to the Musselshell mine by the owner of the famous gold mine, Perry Wynans."

The woman interrupted him with a violent start. "I've heard of you," she said, lowering her voice instinctively. "Didn't you have a terrible fight yesterday with Sam Gaddler?"

"I did!" "The fellow who is superintendent for old Jerry Skidder, and who is in love with his daughter, Daisy?" "The very same."

"And you were nearly killed?" "I can't deny it." "And would have been done up altogether if Colonel Harvey Whipsaw, of Rattlesnake Ranch, had not come to your rescue?"

"You are quite right, madam." "Good! Now let me give you a little information in return for your confidences. Mr. Morrow has no Morrow at all, but is simply Sam Gaddler. He has built this place with the money he has stolen from old Skidder, and has also secured about ten thousand acres of land around it."

Charley Baker uttered his delight. He was never more pleased. The information that he had just received was a direct play into his hands. Perhaps he could yet get square with his enemy. "And where is Gaddler now?" he asked.

The same train with Wynans, and they telegraphed to Gaddler from time to time all the facts of the situation. Charley Baker looked startled. "And you think Gaddler will get hold of Mr. Wynans?" he asked.

"Oh, the thing was accomplished within a few minutes after the arrival of the train at Custer." The hearer seemed lost in horror. "All Gaddler had to do," pursued the woman, "was to disguise himself and appear at the station as a hack-driver, offering his services to the young couple, which were accepted. The moment they were seated in his carriage he drove them to a secret and solitary place, where he had a number of men in waiting, and the rest was easy."

"So that they are now prisoners?" "Exactly." "But how do you know this?" "Mr. Gaddler sent one of his men ahead to tell me, so that I would have everything in readiness. I am Mr. Gaddler's housekeeper. My name is Mrs. Cotter."

"Ah; then he is coming here with his prisoners?" queried Baker. Mrs. Cotter nodded. "And what time will he arrive?" "About 6 o'clock."

Baker looked at his watch with an air of suppressed jubilation. "It is half-past 5 now," he said, "so that your employer will soon be here. You are not alone, I suppose?"

"No, sir. There are eight or ten men at the stable; the most of them asleep, but two or three are playing cards." "But you are not the only woman on the premises?"

"For the present, yes, although there was a cook until this morning and a couple of chambermaids until yesterday." "Why did they leave?"

"Oh, the loneliness of the place, and the wild ways of Gaddler and his men!" Baker was more than interested. He was positively fascinated with the idea which had occurred to him of placing himself between Gaddler and his intended victims.

"And I should have gone with the girls, too, if they had been frank enough to give me the chance," added Mrs. Cotter. "As it is, I beckoned you here, sir, to ask you to take me away with you, I being afraid to travel alone through all the wild country between here and the nearest settlement."

"That's all right," returned Baker, his delight deepening. "Depend upon me!"

CHAPTER XIV.

TROUBLE DRAWING FOR GADDLER.

It did not take Charley Baker three seconds to decide upon his course. "You will realize, Mrs. Cotter, after what you have told me," he hastened to add, "that I cannot leave this place until Mr. Wynans and his betrothed have been freed from the hands of their enemy."

"Oh, certainly." "Then, too, I have a little account of my own to settle," pursued Baker. "After our terrible fight of yesterday, Colonel Whipsaw and I were pursued a score of miles by Sam Gaddler and his ruffians, and barely escaped with our lives. We were hunted so closely, in fact, that we got separated, and I have been looking several hours in vain hereabouts for the Colonel, it having been understood that he would make his way in this direction if he should succeed in throwing off his pursuers."

"Perhaps he's killed, sir." "It's only too likely," admitted Baker, "as they were close at his heels when I last saw him, but I will hope for the best. Can't you introduce me into this house without my being seen?"

"Certainly," answered the woman, after a sharp look around. "And what shall we do with the horse?"

"I'll take him to the stable and give some explanation of his presence. I can say that he has thrown his rider, or otherwise made his escape, or I can pretend to have picked him up on the prairie without knowing anything about him. Leave all that to me."

"Thank you, madam. And now contrive to smuggle me into the house." "This way, then."

There was no difficulty in the matter, as the event proved, and Baker soon found himself in possession of one of the front rooms of the dwelling, with an excellent supper before him.

He had barely made amends to his stomach for his privations during the day, when his kind entertainer came hurrying back to him. She was in a flutter of excitement. "Quick, Mr. Baker!" she cried. "You must go into hiding! Mr. Gaddler and his prisoners are coming!"

She waved her hand toward one of the windows, offering him a pocket glass, and Baker hastened to look out. "Sure enough!" he muttered, his gaze resting upon a considerable body of horsemen that were approaching, less than a mile distant. "I can make them out! There's barely time for me to beat a retreat to the room you have placed at my disposal. If I should have urgent need of your advice or assistance, for myself or my friends, I will hunt you up later."

"It is all understood, sir," said Mrs. Cotter, with a sigh of relief. "Permit me to make a last request, however. At whatever moment you may leave the house or in whatever way, I beg you to remember that I wish to depart with you."

"I won't forget you," assured Baker, with kindly respect. "You will of course keep an eye on the prisoners, helping them in any way you can, but you need say nothing about my presence."

Nodding understandingly, Mrs. Cotter hurried away in the direction from which she had come, while Baker proceeded to the quarters she had assigned him, and which were naturally at his suggestion—the very rooms which had been put in order for the expected arrivals.

door which seemed to invite attention, and looked into a large and airy room beyond, which was furnished with tasteful elegance. "And this," he concluded after a keen but rapid survey, "will be given to the ladies—for I see there are two of them."

He referred, of course, to Elsie Tower and Mrs. Rankle. After carefully noting his surroundings, he took an extended stroll through the palatial mansion, occasionally taking a glance at the newcomers from a window.

Returning in due course to the suite assigned him he waited with what patience he could for the developments of the drama in which he was figuring. His patience had become well-nigh exhausted, and he was even beginning to fear that something had gone wrong when footsteps and voices resounded on the principal staircase, and Sam Gaddler threw open the door leading into the suite and entered, followed by his prisoners.

He was covered with dust and travel-stained, as well as greatly fatigued, but in what a merry and jubilant mood he was! His entire visage was a picture of sinister jubilation.

"Well, well, Mr. Wynans," he was saying, "I consent to your remaining near the ladies, but you must comprehend that none of you are to leave these rooms without permission. To do so will be to run the risk of being shot by a couple of my men, who have already been posted on the landing. You understand the matter?"

"Perfectly," was Perry's quiet answer. "As to the ladies," pursued Gaddler, "they cannot fail to be pleased with the adjacent apartment. It is one I have had fitted up in the latest style for Miss Daisy Skidder, who is about to become my wife, and it is needless to say that I have not counted the dollars expended upon it."

He threw wide open the door of the room in which Charley Baker had so lately taken refuge, and even glanced within it to assure himself that his housekeeper had duly executed his orders.

Fortunately Baker was ready for such an emergency, having slipped into one of the capacious closets adjacent. How promptly Elsie and Mrs. Rankle took a look at the apartment assigned them, need not be stated.

"It seems to be an outer room," was the first remark of Elsie, as she turned away from the entrance. "It is an outer room," affirmed Gaddler, "but that fact won't help you. The sashes are manufactured from the best of steel, and a man with a rifle and buldgos will be on guard day and night under these windows until I have no further occasion to treat you as prisoners."

"That'll be a long time, I'm afraid," said Elsie, with scornful defiance. "You still persist in your purpose?"

"Naturally," was the ruffian's answer. "As I have said, I shall keep you here until you and Mr. Wynans have decided to me the mines of which I am in possession."

"You'll keep us here a long time, then," declared Elsie. "For the present, have you any objections to ridding us of your company?"

Gaddler gnawed his lips savagely, but did not make any answer. Instead he turned to Perry, with the remark: "It only remains for me to add, Mr. Wynans, that your meals will be served here for the present. As you and the ladies will probably suspect all foods and liquors of being drugged, I beg to mention that your jailors will have orders to taste them to any extent, and I have no doubt they will quickly stow away every drop and mouthful you may see fit to consign to them. I will look in upon you from time to time, at my convenience. For the present, good-by."

He stalked away in wrathful and gloomy silence, after closing and locking the door behind him.

CHAPTER XV.

IN A TICKLISH SITUATION.

The first proceeding of Elsie, after the withdrawal of Gaddler, was to advance to her lover and throw her arms around him. With the keen, thoughtful instincts of her sex, she comprehended only too well the agonies he was enduring at that moment—his burning self-reproaches, his regrets, his apprehensions.

"It will be all right, darling," she assured him, with a tenderness which attested how closely their loves had become knit during their long journey to Montana. "We shall be rescued by some heaven-sent deliverer or make our escape. Do not doubt it."

Perry groaned, caressing her. "It is not your fault, darling, that we are prisoners," insisted Elsie, her sweet face glowing with love and affection. "Do not fret at our situation."

"We ought to be thankful that things are no worse," said Mrs. Rankle. "That Gaddler is capable of burying us all alive in separate holes. It's something that we are together, and that there are three of us with stout hands."

"Four!" suggested a mysterious voice from the apartment which had been assigned to the ladies. Mrs. Rankle was ready to accept the idea of something supernatural. "Did you hear that, sir?" she asked, nervously. "Just as I was saying there are three of us, I distinctly heard the word—"

"Four!" came again from the adjoining apartment. "Is someone there?" asked Perry, after a moment of bewilderment. "I certainly heard the word four," affirmed Elsie Tower, sinking into a chair.

"It's only some of Gaddler's people who are trifling with us," suggested Mrs. Rankle. "Or it may be a parrot." If the occasion had not been so serious this suggestion would have probably produced an explosion of laughter. "It was certainly hard upon Charley Baker, as much as he strove to disguise his voice, to have it compared to a parrot's."

"And the fourth will now put in an appearance," added Baker. "Only—no noise! No excitement! Remember that all our lives are at stake."

In the strange and wondering hush that succeeded, Baker made his appearance in the doorway, calm and smiling, with his finger on his lips.

"Charley Baker!" exclaimed Perry, rushing toward him and seizing his hand. "What a pleasure and, especially, what a surprise!" Baker murmured an incoherent response, but did not fail to give the hand of his friend and employer a hearty shake.

"And this young lady is the one I announced to you by telegraph," Charley—Miss Tower, who is to be my wife," pursued the young millionaire proudly, facing about and advancing to his betrothed. "As a near friend of mine, darling," he added, "Charley knows who and what you are, and will be proud and happy to make your personal acquaintance."

A few pleasant words were exchanged. Mrs. Rankle coming in for her share of attention, and then Elsie exclaimed softly: "You are not a prisoner, Mr. Baker?"

"Not in the sense that you are, Miss Tower," replied the mining expert. "I mean by this that Gaddler is not aware of my presence."

"Bravo!" commented Perry. "Excuse me if I stare at you, Charley. It seems a sort of return from the dead. Gaddler has been telling us that he killed both you and Colonel Whipsaw yesterday!"

"It's not that villain's fault that I am alive," returned Baker. "He certainly did all he could to make true his declaration!"

"Tell me all," rejoined Perry, waving his friend to a chair and sitting down, while Elsie and Mrs. Rankle proceeded to explore their new quarters. "The villain got trace of your presence at the Musselshell?"

"He did—the very day of my arrival," replied Baker. "He also followed me to Colonel Whipsaw's, and seemed to divine at sight the business which had brought me here."

"And then tried to kill you?" "As you shall see."

It was a very stirring narration that succeeded, but we need not linger upon its details, they being covered by the facts which have already been given.

"And you, sir?" asked Baker, when he had concluded his revelations. In response to this suggestion, Perry hastened to relate the experiences he and Elsie had had with the Skidders before leaving Chicago, and to narrate how Gaddler had captured them on their arrival at Custer.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

For the present things will probably go on as they have been going. There is slight fear of revolution. The saving feature of the situation is the absence of any "man on horseback." The hour may come, but not the man. A Bourbon restoration, with the present pretender for king, is not to be dreamed of. Where Paris failed, Orleans will not succeed. For a year a wave of Napoleonism has deluged France. But there is no Bonaparte to ride to empire on its crest. The Napoleonic legend lives; the Napoleonic dynasty is worse than dead. Nor is there any new man to seize the opportunity, not even the pinchbeck Boulanger. And since the socialists are yet a small minority, the republic seems secure. Yet it is a security based on the weakness of its foes rather than upon the strength of its friends. Six months ago the Republicans had the fairest of prospects. They had a large and for the first time apparently stable majority, and they were backed by the tremendous popular feeling aroused by the murder of President Carnot. They have not improved their opportunity. They have not been profitable servants of the nation. And today they must pay the penalty of their unfaithfulness—they and all France.

The career of Mr. William Cook, of Oklahoma, makes gay reading. Thwarted in love, he gathered a band of devils around him and took to the mountains. Thence he descended at intervals upon the plain and robbed trains, banks and government paymasters. His "army" grew with his successes. He perfected an organization which levied toll on a great territory. His death was reported a number of times. Each time it turned out that it was not William, but the other man who died. To find this illustrious career brought to a sudden close by a commonplace deputy marshal, to read of William "throwing up his hands like a tenderfoot," is painful. It recalls the unseemly departure hence of Mr. Kipling's border desperado who perished under the weight of the terror-stricken babu. No doubt we shall hear of William later, arraigned before the hanging judge at Fort Smith and dispatched in a bunch of half-breeds and squaw men. So passes the little glory of the world.

William Garrett, of Joliet, having asserted in a recent lecture that wire nails are so cheap that if a carpenter drops one it is cheaper for him to use another than to stop and pick it up, the Iron Age tests his assertion by figures. The carpenter's time being worth 30 cents an hour, the dropped nail would cost him 0.083 of a cent if he took ten seconds picking it up. Sixpenny nails cost 1.55 cents per pound of 200, therefore each nail costs 0.0077. At this rate the carpenter could better stop to let the nail lie than to spend even one second recovering it. All of which is interesting as a study in comparative cheapness, but not of any particular economic purport—unless, indeed, it should occur to some thrifty employer of labor that if carpenters pay so high that they can better afford to waste nails than waste time he will reduce the pay.