

Illustrations
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Edwin LeGrand Sabin

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

Frank Beeson, from Albany, N. Y., reaches Benton, Wyoming, then—1868—western terminus of the Pacific Railroad. He had been ordered by physicians to seek a climate "high and dry." He is robbed of most of his money in his hotel and loses his last twenty dollars at monte in "The Big Tent," a dance hall and gambling resort in the "roaring" town of Benton.

Edna Montoyo, companion of a gambler, is believed by Frank to have cajoled him purposely into the game. Broke, disconsolate over his discovery that "the lady of the blue eyes," as he calls her, is what she is, and finally humiliated over his glaring "greenness," Frank repulses Edna when she begs him to go away with her, sobbingly telling him that she had made a mistake in letting him lose his money. He goes to take a job with

George Jenks, a teamster in a wagon train about to leave for Salt Lake City.

Capt. Adams, a mormon, is in charge of the wagon train.

Rachel Adams, an attractive young woman, one of his wives, is in the train, as is

Daniel Adams, his loutish son. When Edna, who has shot, but not killed the gambler, Montoyo, comes a fugitive in "britches" to join the train, Daniel tells his father that she is seeking Jenks and Beeson. Capt. Adams shouts, "No hussy in men's garments shall go with the train."

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR A WOMAN'S SMILE

Jenks stiffened, bristling. "Mind your words, Adams. I'm under a Mormon thumb. As for your brat on horseback, he's better hold his yawp."

I sprang forward. Defend her I must. She should not stand there—slight, lovely, brave, aflame with the helplessness of a woman alone and insulted.

"Wait!" I implored. "Give her a chance. You haven't heard her story. All she wants is protection. I know the cur she's getting away from. I saw him strike her. You've got women there who'll care for her!"

I felt her instant look. She spoke palpitant.

"You have one man among you all. But I am going. Good-night, gentlemen."

Captain Adams was frowning sternly, his heavy face unsoftened.

"Why come you here?"

"My husband has been abusing me, and I shot him!"

"You killed him, woman?"

"Not yet! He's likely fleeing the public at this very moment."

"And those garments!" Captain Adams accused. "You wish to show your shape, woman, to attempt men's eye with the flesh?"

She smiled.

"Would you have me jump from a train in skirts, sir? But to soothe your mind I will say that I wore these clothes under my proper attire and cloak until the last moment."

A new voice sounded.

"She shall stay, Hyrum? For the night, at least? I will look after her."

The Captain's younger wife, Rachel, had stepped to him. Pending reply I hastened directly to My Lady herself and detained her by her jacket sleeve.

"Wait," I bade.

"You would take her in, Rachael?" the Captain rumbled.

"We are commanded to feed the hungry and shelter the homeless, Hyrum."

"Verily that is so. Take her! But in God's name, clothe her for the daylight decency. She shall not advertise her flesh to men's eyes!"

Quick! I whispered with a push. Rachael, however, had crossed for us.

"Will you come with me, Please?" she invited.

"Yes," sighed My Lady, wearily.

"Good-night, sir" She fleetingly smiled upon me. "I thank you; said Mr. Jenks."

They went, Rachael's arm about her.

Daniel pressed beside Captain Adams, talking eagerly.

"She's powerful purty, ain't she, paw! Gosh, I never seen a woman in britches before! Did yu? Paw! She kin ride in my wagon, paw. Be yu goin' to take her on, paw? If yu be, I got room."

"Go! Tend to your stock and think of other things," boomed the father.

"Remember, that the Scripture says: 'Beware of the the scarlet woman!'"

Daniel galloped away, whooping like an idiot.

Our group dispersed, each man to

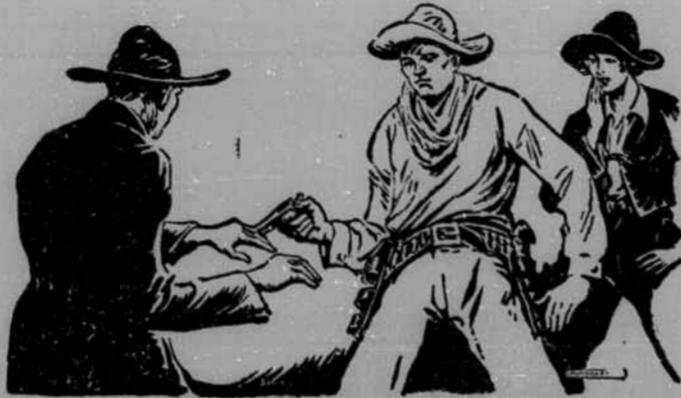
answered. "We ain't keepin' cases on her, or on you. You don't find her in my outfit, that's flat. She spent the night with the Adams women. You'll find her waitin' for you, on ahead." He grinned. She'll be powerful glad to see you." He sobered. "And I'll say this: I'm kinder sorry I ain't got her, for she'd be interestin' company on the road."

"The road to hell, yes," Montoyo coolly remarked. "I'll guarantee you quick passage. Good-day."

With sudden steely glare that embraced us both he jumped his mount into a gallop and tore past the team, for the front.

I could hold back no longer, and hastening on up, half running in my anxiety to face the worst; to help,

For Daniel had laughed loudly over the leveled barrel.



his blanket under the wagons or in the open.

"Wall," Jenks uttered, in last words as he turned over with a grunt "hooray!" If it simmers down to you and Dan'l, I'll be there."

With that enigmatical comment he was silent save for stertorous breathing.

Vaguely cogitating over his promise I lay, toes and face up, staring at the bright stars; perplexed more and more over the immediate events of the future, warmly conscious of her astonishing proximity in this very train, pricked by the hope that she would continue with us, irritated by the various assumptions of Daniel, and somehow not at all adverse to the memory of her in "britches."

That phase of the matter seemed to have affected Daniel and me similarly. Under his hide he was human.

It was after sun-up that a horseman bored in at a gallop, over the road from the east.

"Montoyo," Jenks pronounced, in a grumble of disgust rather than with any note of alarm.

I saw him give a twitch to his holster and slightly loosen the Colt's.

As it chanced, our outfit was the first upon the gambler's way.

"Howdy, gentlemen?"

"Howdy yourself, sir," answered Mr. Jenks. Montoyo was pale as death, his lips hard set, his peculiar gray eyes and his black moustache the only vivifying features in his coldly menacing countenance.

He looked upon me, with a trace of recognition less to be seen than felt. His glance leaped to the wagon—traveled swiftly and surely and turned to Mr. Jenks.

"I'm looking for my wife, gentlemen. Have you seen her?"

"Yes, sir. We'll not beat around any bush over that," replied Jenks. He meditated, frowning a bit, eyeing us narrowly.

"I had the notion," he said. "If you have staked her to shelter, I thank you; but now I aim to play the hand myself. This is strictly a private game. Where is she?"

"I call yuh, Pedro," my friend an-

if I might, for the best.

A little knot of people had formed constantly increasing by oncomers like myself and friend Jenks who had lumbered behind me.

Montoyo's horse stood heaving, on the outskirts; and ruthlessly pushing through I found him inside, with My Lady at bay before him—her eyes brilliant, her cheeks hot, her two hands clenched tightly, and the arm of the brightly flushed but calm Rachael resting restrainfully around her.

Captain Adams at one side apart, was talking to the gambler.

"You see here," he said, "She has had the care of my own house-hold for I turn nobody away. She came against my will, and she shall go of her will. I am not her keeper."

"You Mormons have the advantage of us white men sir," Montoyo sneered. "No one of the sex seems to be denied bed and board in your establishments."

"By the help of the Lord we of the elect can manage our establishments much better than you do yours," big Hyrum responded; and his face sombered. "Who are you? A panderer to the devil, a thief with painted card-boards, a despoiler of the ignorant, and a feeder to hell—yea, a striker of women and a traficker in flesh! Who are you to speak the name of the Lord's enointed? There she is, your chatel. Take her, or leave her. This train starts on in ten minutes."

"I'll take her or kill her," Montoyo snarled. "You call me a feeder, but she shall not be fed to your mill, Adams. You'll get on that horse pronto, Madam," he added, stepping forward (no one could question his nerve), "and we'll discuss our affairs private."

She cast about with swift beseeching look, as if for a friendly face or sign of rescue. With a spring I burst in.

But somebody already had drawn fresh attention. Daniel Adams was standing between her and her husband.

"Say, Mister, will yu fight?" he drawled.

Montoyo surveyed him.

"Why?"

"For her, o' course."

The gambler smiled—a slow, contemptuous smile while his gray eyes focused watchfully.

"It's a case where I have nothing to gain," said he. "And you've nothing to lose. I never bet in the teeth of a pat hand. Sabe? Besides, my young Mormon cub, where's your ante? For the sport of it, now, what do you think of putting up, make it interesting? One of your mummies? Tut, tut!"

Daniel's right hand stiffened at his side—extended there flat and tremulous like the vibrant trail of a rattlesnake. He blurted harshly:

"I 'laow to kill yu for that! Draw, yu—!"

We caught breath. Montoyo's revolver poised half-way out of the scabbard, held there rigidly, frozen in midcourse.

For Daniel had laughed loudly over leveled barrel.

How he had achieved so quickly no man of us knew. Yet there it was—his Colt, out, cocked, wicked and yearning and ready.

"Haow'll yu take it, Mister!" he gibed. "I could l'arn and old caow to beat yu on the draw. Aw, shucks! I 'laow yu'd better go back to yore pasteboards. Naow git!"

Montoyo, his eyes steady, scarcely changed expression. He let his revolver slip down into its scabbard. Then he smiled.

"You have a pretty trick," he commented, relaxing. "Some day I'd like to test it out again. Just now I pass. Madam, are you coming?"

"You know I'm not," she uttered clearly.

"Your choice of company is hardly to your credit," he sneered. "Gr, I should say, to your education. Saintliness does not fall well upon you, madam. Of your two champions—"

And here I realized that I was standing out, one foot advanced, my fists foolishly doubled, my presence a useful factor.

"I recommend the gentleman from New York as more to your taste. But you are going of your own free will. You will always be my wife. You can't get away from that, you devil. I shall expect you in Benton, for I have the hunch that your little flight will fetch you back pretty well tamed, to the place where damaged goods are not so heavily discounted."

With that he strode straight for his horse, climbed aboard (a trifle awkwardly by reason of his one arm disabled) and galloped, granting us not another glance.

Card shark and desperado that he was, his consummate aplomb nobody

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could deny, except Daniel, now capering and swaggering and twirling his revolver.

"I showed him. I made him take water. I 'laow I'm 'bout the best man with a zix-shooter in these hys parts."

"Ketch up and stretch out," Captain Adams ordered, disregarding. "We've no more time for foolery."

My eyes met My Lady's. She smiled a little ruefully, and I responded, shamed by the poor role I had borne. With that jubilating out to the fore, certainly I cut small figure!

(To be continued)

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