

Molly McDonald

(Continued from page 10.)

his arms, he realized how a single false step would be fatal. The farther shore was invisible; he could perceive nothing but the slight gleam of water lapping the sand at his feet, as it flowed slowly, noiselessly past, and beyond, the dim outlines of a narrow sand ridge. Even this, however, was encouragement, proving the shallowness of the stream. He turned about, his face so close he could see her eyes.

"We shall have to try it, Miss McDonald; you must permit me to carry you."

"Yes."

"And whatever happens do not scream—just cling tight to me."

"Yes," a little catching in her throat. "Tell me first, please, just what it is you fear?"

"Quicksand principally; it is in all these western rivers, and the two of us together on one pair of feet will



Her Figure Trembled in His Arms and Her Eyes Opened.

make it harder to pull out of the suck. If I tell you to get down, do so quickly."

"Yes."

"Then there may be holes out there in the bottom. I don't mind those so much, although those cavalry boots are no help in swimming."

"I can swim."

"Hardly in your clothes; but I am glad to know it, nevertheless. You could keep afloat at least, and the holes are never very large. Are you ready now?"

She gave him her hands and stood up. The Sergeant drew in a long breath and transferred the haversack to her shoulder.

"We'll try and keep that from getting soaked, if we can," he explained.

"There is no hoist over in those sandhills. Now hold on tight."

He swung her easily to his broad shoulder, clasping her slender figure closely with one arm.

"That's it! Now get a firm grip. I'll carry you all right."

To the girl, that passage was never more than a dim memory. Still partially dazed from the severe blow on her head, she closed her eyes as Hamlin stepped cautiously down into the stream and clung to him desperately, expecting each moment to be flung forward into the water. But the Sergeant's mind was upon his work, and every detail of the struggle left its impress on his memory. He saw the dark sweep of the water, barely visible in the gleam of those few stars unobscured by cloud, and felt the sluggish flow against his legs as he moved. The bottom was soft, yet his feet did not sink deeply, although it was rather difficult wading. However, the clay gave him more confidence than sand underfoot, and there was less depth of

water even than he had anticipated. He was wet only to the thighs when he tumbled up to the low spit of sand, and put the girl down a moment to catch a fresh breath and examine the broader stretch of water ahead. They could see both shores now, that which they had just left, a black, lumpy, dim outline. Except for the lapping of the water at their feet, all was deathly still. Even the Indian fire had died out, and it was hard to conceive that savages were hidden behind that black veil, and that they two were actually fleeing for their lives. To the girl it was like some dreadful delirium of sleep, but the man felt the full struggle. There was a star well down in the south he chose to guide by, but beyond that he must trust to good fortune. Without a word he lifted her again to his shoulder, and pushed on.

The water ran deeper, shelving off rapidly, until it rose well above his knees, and with suppliant current ap

peared to be wading against it to maintain balance, scarcely venturing forward a foot at a time. Once he stumbled over some obstruction, barely averting a fall; he felt the swift clutch of her fingers at his throat, the quick adjustment of her body, but her lips gave no utterance of alarm. His groping feet touched the edge of a hole, and he turned, facing the current, tracing his way carefully until he found a passage on solid bottom. A bit of driftwood swirled down out of the night; a water-soaked limb, striking against him before it was even seen, bruised one arm, and then dodged past like a wild thing, leaving a glitter of foam behind. The sand-dunes grew darker, more distinct, the water began to grow shallow, the bottom changing from mud to sand. He slipped and staggered in the uncertain footing, his breath coming in quicker gasps, yet with no cessation of effort. Once he felt the dreaded suck about his ankles, and broke into a reckless run, splashing straight forward, falling at the water's edge, yet not before the girl was resting safely on the soft sand.

Strong as Hamlin was, his muscles trained by strenuous outdoor life, he lay there for a moment utterly helpless, more exhausted from the nervous strain indeed, than the physical exertion. He had realized fully the desperate nature of that passage, expecting every step to be engulfed, and the reaction, the knowledge that they had actually attained the shore safely, left him weak as a child, hardly able to comprehend the fact. The girl was upon her feet first, alarmed and solicitous, bending down to touch him with her hand.

"Sergeant, you are not hurt?" she questioned. "Tell me you are not hurt?"

"Oh, no," dragging himself up the bank, yet panting as he endeavored to speak cheerfully. "Only that was a rather hard pull, the last of it, and I am short of breath. I shall be all right in a moment."

There was a sand-dune just beyond, and he heaved himself and leaned against it.

"I am beginning to breathe easier already," he explained. "Sit down here, Miss McDonald. We are safe enough now in this darkness."

"You are all wet, soaking wet."

"That is nothing; the sand is warm yet from yesterday's sun, and my clothes will dry fast enough. It is beginning to grow light in the east."

The faces of both turned in that direction where appeared the first twilight approach of dawn. Already were visible the dark lines of the opposite shore, across the gleam of water, and beyond appeared the dim outline of the higher bluffs. The slope between river and hill, however, remained in impenetrable darkness. The minds of both fugitives reverted to the same scene—the wrecked stage with its dead passengers within, its savage watchers without. She lifted her head, and the soft light reflected on her face.

"I—I thank God we are not over there now," she said falteringly.

"Yes," he admitted. "They will be creeping in closer; they will not wait much longer. Hard as I have worked, I can't realize yet that we are out of those toils."

"You did not expect to succeed?"

"No; frankly I did not; all I could do was hope—take the one chance left. The slightest accident meant betrayal. I am ashamed of being so weak just now, but it was the strain. You see," he explained carefully, "I've been scouting through hostile Indian country mostly day and night for nearly a week, and then this thing happened. No matter how from a man is his nerve goes back on him after a while."

"I know."

"It wasn't myself," he went on doggedly, "but it was the knowledge of having to take care of you. That was what made me worry; that, and knowing a single mistake, the slightest noise, would bring those devils on us, where I couldn't fight, where there was just one thing I could do."

There was silence, her hands pressed to her face, her eyes fixed on him. Then she questioned him soberly.

"You mean, kill me?"

"Sure," he answered simply, without looking around; "I would have had to do it—just as though you were a sister of mine."

Her hands reached out and clasped his, and he glanced aside at her face, seeing it clearly.

"I—I thought you would," she said, her voice trembling. "I—I was going to ask you once before I was hurt, but—but I couldn't, and somehow I trusted you from the first, when you got in." She hesitated, and then asked: "How did you know I was Molly McDonald? You never asked."

The Sergeant's eyes smiled, turning away from her face to stare out across the river.

"Because I had seen your picture."

"My picture? But you told us you were from Fort Union?"

"Yes; that is my station, only I had been sent to the cantonment on the Cimarron with dispatches. Your father was in command there, and worried half to death about you. He could not leave the post, and the only officer remaining there with him was a disabled cavalry captain. Every man he could trust was out on scouting service. He took a chance on me. Maybe he liked my looks, I don't know; more probably, he judged I wouldn't be a sergeant and entrusted with those dispatches I'd just brought in, if I wasn't considered trustworthy. Anyhow I had barely fallen asleep when the orderly called me, and that was what was wanted—that I ride north and head you off."

"But you were not obliged to go?"

"No; I was not under your father's orders. I doubt if I would have con-

stantly if I hadn't been shown your picture. I couldn't very well refuse then."

She sat with hands clasped together, her eyes shadowed by long lashes.

"I should have thought there would have been some soldiers there—his own men."

"There were," dryly, "but the army just now is recruited out of pretty tough material. To be in the ranks is almost a confession of good-for-nothingness. You are an officer's daughter and understand this to be true."

"Yes," she answered doubtfully. "I have been brought up thinking so; only, of course, there are exceptions."

"No doubt, and I hope I am already counted one."

"You know you are. My father trusted you, and so do I."

"I have wondered sometimes," he said musingly, watching her face barely visible in the dawn, "whether those of your class actually considered us as being really human, as anything more valuable than mere food for powder. I came into the regular army at the close of the war from the volunteer service. I was accustomed to discipline and all that, and knew my place. But I never suspected then that a private soldier was considered a dog. Yet that was the first lesson I was compelled to learn. It has been pretty hard sometimes to hold in, for there was a time when I had some social standing and could resent an insult."

She was looking straight at him, surprised at the bitterness in his voice.

"They carry it altogether too far," she said. "I have often thought that—mostly the young officers, the West Pointers—and yet you know that the majority of enlisted men are—well, dragged from the slums. My father says it has been impossible to recruit a good class since the war closed, that the right kind had all the army they wanted."

"Which is true enough, but there are good men nevertheless, and every commander knows it. A little considerate treatment would make them better still."

She shook her head questioningly.

"I do not know," she admitted. "I suppose there are two viewpoints. You were in the volunteers, you said. Why did you enlist in the regulars?"

"Largely because I liked soldiering, or thought I did. I knew there would be plenty of fighting out here, and I believed, advancement."

"You mean to a commission?"

"Yes. You see, I did not understand then the impossibility, the great gulf fixed. I dreamed that good fortune might give me something to do worth while."

"And fate has been unkind?"

"In a way, yes," and he laughed rather grimly. "I had my chances—twice; honorable mention, and all that, but that ended it. There is no bridge across the chasm. An enlisted man is not held in for any higher position; if that was not sufficient to bar me, the fact that I had fought for the South would."

"You were in the Confederate army? You must have been young."

"Oh, no; little more than a boy, of course, but so were the majority of my comrades. I was in my senior college year when the war broke out. But, Miss McDonald, this will never do! See how light it is growing. There, they have begun firing already. We must get back out of sight behind the sand-dunes."

CHAPTER X.

The Ripening of Acquaintance.

They needed to retire but a few steps to be entirely concealed, yet so situated as to command a view across the muddy stream. The sun had not risen above the horizon, but the gray dawn gave misty revelation of the sluggish-flowing river, the brown slope opposite, and the darker shadow of bluffs beyond. The popping of those distant guns had ceased by the time they attained their new position, and they could distinguish the Indians—mere black dots against the brown slope—advancing in a semicircle toward the silent stage. Evidently they were puzzled, fearful of some trickery, for occasionally a gun would crack viciously, the brown smoke plainly visible, the advancing savages halting to observe the effect. Then a bright colored blanket was waved aloft as though in signal, and the entire body, converging toward the deserted coach, leaped forward with a wild yell, which echoed faintly across the water.

The girl hid her face in the sand, with a half-fitted sob, but the Sergeant watched grimly, his eyes barely above the ridge. What would they do when they discovered the dead bodies?—when they realized that others had eluded their vigilance during the night? Would they be able to trace them, or would his ruse succeed? Of course their savage cunning would track them as far as the river—there was no way in which he could have successfully concealed the trail made down the gully, or the marks left on the sandy bank. But would they imagine he had dared to cross the broad stream, burdened with the girl, confronting almost certain death in the quicksand? Would they not believe rather that he had waded along the water's edge headed west, hoping thus to escape to the bluffs, where some hiding-place might be found? Even if they suspected a crossing, would any warriors among them be reckless enough to follow? Would they not be more apt to believe that both fugitives had been sucked down into the treacherous stream? Almost breathless Hamlin watched, these thoughts coursing through his mind, realizing the deadly trap in which they were caught, if the Indians suspected the truth and assayed the passage. Behind them



Tell Me, Are You Hurt?

was said, "rings after rings, as far as the eye could discern, and every step they took in flight would leave its plain trail. And now the test was at hand.

He saw them crowd about the coach, leaping and yelling with fury; watched them jerk open the door, and drag forth the two dead bodies, dancing about them, like so many demons, brandishing their guns. A moment they were bunched thus, their wild yelling shrill with triumph; then some among them broke away, bending low as they circled in against the bluff. They knew already that there had been others in the stage, others who had escaped. They were seeking the trail. Suddenly one straightened up gesticulating, and the others rushed toward him—they had found the "sign!" They were silent now, those main trailers, two of them on hands and knees. Only back where the bodies lay some remained yelling and dancing furiously. Then they also, in response to a shout and the wave of a

blanketed arm, scattered, running west toward the gully. There was no hesitancy now; some savage instinct seemed to tell them where the fugitives had gone. They dragged the dead warrior from the ditch, screaming savagely at the discovery. A dozen scrambled for the river bank, others ran for the pony herd, while one or two remained beside the dead warrior. Even at that distance Hamlin could distinguish Roman Nose, and tell what were his orders by every gesture of his arm. The Sergeant grasped the girl's hand, his own eyes barely above the sand ridge, his lips whispering back.

"No, don't move; I'll tell you everything. The stage has been gutted and set on fire. Now they are coming with the ponies. Most of them are directly opposite studying the marks we left on the sand of the bank. Yes, they look across here, but the chief is sure we have gone the other way; he is waving his hand up the river now, and talking. Now he is getting on his horse; there are ten or twelve of them. One fellow is pointing across here, but no one agrees with him.

"Now Roman Nose is giving orders. Hear that yell! They're off now, riding up stream, lashing their ponies into a run. All of them? No; quite a bunch are going back to the coach. I don't believe they are going to hang around here long, though, for they are driving in all their ponies."

"But won't those others come back when they discover we have not gone up the river?"

"I wish I could answer that," he replied earnestly. "But it all depends on what those devils know of the whereabouts of troops. They are Northern Indians, and must have broken through the scouting details sent out from Wallace and Dodge. Some of the boys are bound to be after them, and there is more chance for them to get back safely along the mountains than in the other direction. I don't suppose an Indian in the bunch was ever south of the Arkansas. Wait! Those fellows are going to move now; going for good, too—they are taking the dead Indians with them."

They were little more than black dots at that distance, yet the sun was up by this time and his keen vision could distinguish every movement.

"Creep up here, and you can see also," he said quietly. "They are far enough away now so that it is safe."

There was a moment of breathless quiet, the two fugitives peering cautiously over the sand ridge. To the girl it was a confusion of figures rushing back and forth about the smoking ruins of the stage; occasionally a faint yell echoed across the river, and she could distinguish a savage on his pony gesticulating as he rode back and forth. But the Sergeant comprehended the scene. His eyes met hers and read her bewilderment.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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was said, "rings after rings, as far as the eye could discern, and every step they took in flight would leave its plain trail. And now the test was at hand.

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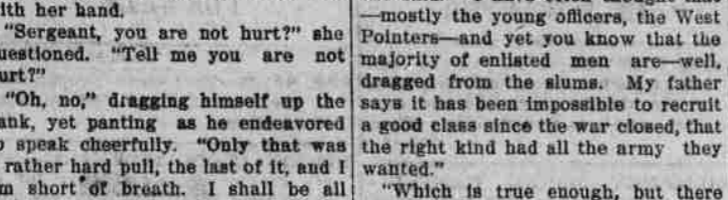
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He Saw the Crowd About the Coach Leaping and Yelling With Fury.

NOTICE.
North Carolina, Buncombe County.—
In the Superior Court.
Publication of Summons or Notice.
Haywood Parker
vs.
Frank A. Barber, B. George Barber, Mrs. Ione B. S. Moore, D. W. Williams, Jesse R. Law, J. T. Moore, Mattha Moss Moore, Johanna Dougherty, D. W. Harrison, H. H. Harrison, James E. Reed, T. J. Owenby, Mrs. E. E. Taylor, Cecil K. Brown, Eugenia Brown, Mrs. Louise Moore, J. P. Deal, Mrs. Harriett E. Rhea, Arthur Gudger, Jessie C. Gudger, his wife, T. J. Cordell, R. C. Cannon, S. A. Lynch, M. H. Kelly, M. J. Fedrie, C. A. Fair, E. M. Garner, J. H. Wynn, J. S. Basnight, C. C. Holland, Herbert P. Willie, Matt Elmore, A. T. Dill, A. H. Bangent, Mrs. L. M. McIlwain, M. Bowen, T. R. Rouse, C. H. Foy, Mrs. David S. Barnes, J. H. Darden, E. I. Herring, Mrs. W. B. Herring, Jane Reddick or Jane Reddick, Emma Michael, Sue B. Michael, A. T. Griffin, Geo. L. Hackney, L. Walker, S. R. Robeson, Samuel Huffman, D. B. Mull, trustees of Baptist church of Waynesville, Jessie Herring, Guilford Plaster Cement company, Mrs. Jessie B. Small, J. K. DeVore, L. B. Coggin, C. E. Gardner, O. W. Cooper, E. C. Anderson, J. C. Camp, J. R. Taylor, H. H. Eversmeyer, Mrs. Lillie Bagley, Dr. John R. Bagley, Geo. F. Cuttrel, Mrs. M. J. Crawford, H. G. Mayo, G. A. Wanchope, G. W. Long, G. A. Atkins, Bartemas Woolard, P. E. Sikes, J. F. West, H. W. Fitch, James Ottlinger, Merritt Owen, Noah R. Robinson, J. A. Robinson, M. A. Waters, Lallah Jones, Geo. F. Woodley, trustees of Church of Christ, Virginia F. Harrison, G. G. Cole, Luther W. Avery, B. F. Landis, C. Falk, Joseph E. Barrett, B. E. Harris.

The defendants, Mrs. Ione B. S. Moore, D. W. Williams, R. C. Cannon, M. J. Fedrie, C. A. Fair, B. E. Harris, Virginia F. Harrison, G. G. Cole, Luther W. Avery, E. M. Gardner, J. H. Wynn, J. S. Basnight, C. C. Holland, Herbert P. Willie, Matt Elmore, A. T. Dill, A. H. Bangent, Mrs. L. M. McIlwain, M. Bowen, T. R. Rouse, C. H. Foy, Mrs. David S. Barnes, J. H. Darden, E. I. Herring, Mrs. W. B. Herring, Jane Reddick or Jane Reddick, J. H. Quinn, Emma Michael, Sue B. Michael, A. T. Griffin, Geo. L. Walker, S. R. Robeson, Samuel Huffman, D. B. Mull, trustees of Baptist Church of Waynesville, Jessie Herring, Guilford Plaster Cement Company, Mrs. Jessie B. Small, J. K. DeVore, L. B. Coggin, C. E. Gardner, O. W. Cooper, E. C. Anderson, J. C. Camp, J. R. Taylor, H. H. Eversmeyer, Mrs. Lillie Bagley, Dr. John R. Bagley, Geo. F. Cuttrel, Mrs. M. J. Crawford, H. G. Mayo, G. A. Wanchope, G. W. Long, G. A. Atkins, Bartemas Woolard, P. E. Sikes, J. F. West, H. W. Fitch, James Ottlinger, Merritt Owen, Noah R. Robinson, J. A. Robinson, M. A. Waters.

Lallah Jones, Geo. F. Woodley, trustees of Church of Christ, will take notice that an action entitled as above has been commenced in the Superior Court of Buncombe County, North Carolina, by the plaintiff for the purpose of quieting title and removing cloud from title to the two tracts of land situated near Black Mountain, Buncombe county, N. C., which were formerly owned by J. C. Coggin, and later owned by the Holman Christian University, and now owned by the plaintiff, and for the purpose of excluding the defendants from any interest in said land the said defendant will further take notice that they are, and each of them is, required to appear at the term of the Superior Court of said county to be held on the 6th Monday before the first Monday in March, 1913, it being the 20th day of January, 1913, at the court house of said Buncombe county, in Asheville, North Carolina, and answer or demur to the complaint in said action which will be deposited in the office of the Clerk of the Superior Court of said county, within the first three days of said term; and let the said defendants take notice that if they fail to answer the said complaint within the time required by law, the plaintiff will apply to the court for relief demanded in the complaint.

This the 12th day of December, 1913.
MARCUS ERWIN,
Clerk of the Superior Court.

NOTICE OF ADMINISTRATION.

The undersigned having duly qualified as executor of the Last Will and Testament of Sarah C. McKinney, deceased, this is to notify all persons holding claims against the estate of the said Sarah C. McKinney, to present same to the undersigned on or before November 20th, 1913, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 20th day of November, 1912.
M. T. ARROWOOD,
Executor of the Last Will of Sarah C. McKinney, deceased. 1w-6v.

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