

The Lamp in the Valley

BY ARTHUR STRINGER

W. N. U. Service

Carol Coburn, Alaska born teacher, is annoyed by Eric (the Red) Ericson, an agitator. She is rescued by a young engineer, Sidney Lander. He is working for the Trumbull company which is contesting her father's claim. He is engaged to Trumbull's

daughter. But a new romantic spark is kindled. Carol, however, is on guard against her own emotions. Carol and Kate O'Connell, nurse, set out to find an Indian baby reported abandoned by its parents. Sockeye Schlupp, an old

sourdough pal of Carol's dad, leads them to his shack, where Lander is nursing the missing baby. It has been found by his dog. When Lander tells her he won't be long with the Trumbull company she asks "Why not?"

THE STORY SO FAR

INSTALLMENT IV

"Because you happen to be Klondike Coburn's daughter. And I don't relish the thought of working against you. It's your father's claim they're trying to swallow up on a clouded title."

"But I'm not sure that claim was ever established."

And it was equally obvious that his right either to champion my cause or control my destiny had never been established. But, for all that, an absurd little robin of happiness stood up on the tip of my heart and started to sing.

"We can't go into that now," Lander said as old Schlupp came in with an armful of stovewood. And Katie, a moment later, was announcing that you couldn't kill some children with a club. All this little papoose needed, she called out to us, was food.

"Then she ain't a-goin' to kick the bucket?" questioned Sock-eye.

"Of course she isn't," said Katie. "But if I could lay hands on her fool redskin father I'd have him drawn and quartered."

The old fire-eater's face brightened up with a new eagerness.

"I'll do it for you, lady," he said with a large and rounded oath. "Sam Bryson was a-tellin' me that no-account Injin's hidin' out in a hill camp up above the Happy Day Mine. And I'd sure relish roundin' him up and ventilatin' his good-for-nothin' carcass."

"No," Katie said, "that's a luxury we can't afford. But he's going to be made an example of by due process of law. And if either of you men will take Miss Coburn and the baby back to Toklutna in the truck I'll get help and push on to the Happy Day and see that this baby killer is put where he belongs."

Sidney Lander, who had been looking down at the blanket-wrapped papoose, lifted his head and caught my eye.

"I'll take Miss Coburn through to Toklutna," he quietly announced. And I could feel my pulse skip a beat, casual as I tried to appear about it all.

It was Sock-eye who crossed to the door and looked out.

"There's sure a small o' snow in the air," he warned. "We'd best fix up that truck more comfortable and stick a shovel in between the blankets and grub bags."

CHAPTER IV

Before we were an hour out on the road snow began to fall.

By the time we were up in the hills we had drifts to buck. When it was necessary for Lander to stop and get busy with his shovel, I'd give my Indian baby its needed attention and nest it down in its cocoon of blanket-wool again, with only its pinched little yellow face showing like a seal's at the bottom of a blow-hole. Then we'd fight our way on for another hundred yards or two.

So we ploughed on, feeling out our way in the uncertain light. Twice, when we slowed perilously close to the ravine that yawned at our car wheels, I thought the end had come. And twice, where the trail wound so vaguely about the upper slopes, we had to cut our way through drifts, with the help of the shovel. We did very little talking. But I could breathe more easily when we were over the hump and dropping down into the next valley.

Yet even there the drifts and darkness were too much for us. We got off the road and bumped heads into a spruce stump. The old truck, with indignation boiling from its radiator cap, refused to go farther. I could see Lander's grim smile as I sat there staring out at the flailing snow. There wasn't a shack or settler, I felt sure, within ten miles of us.

"What'll we do?" I asked with a gulp.

"I suppose we'll have to sleep out here," he casually announced.

"I suppose so," I agreed. But I wasn't as placid-minded about it as I pretended. Lander, in fact, stared into my face for a moment or two before swinging down from his driver's seat. Then he lighted the primus stove and hung a lantern from one of the bows of our little covered-wagon truck-tent. And then, after shutting out the snow and wind by closing the end flaps of the tarpaulin, he announced that he was going to have a look ahead along the trail.

He stayed away longer than I expected. By the time he got back, in fact, I'd melted snow and had our coffee boiling on the primus stove. The smell of that coffee made our little canvas-covered cave seem rather homelike. And my cave mate watched me with a ruminative eye as I warmed milk and fed the quietly complaining Indian baby. When our papoose was back in its blanket-muffled basket, and we sat eating, with the primus stove between us, it seemed oddly palatial to be squatting there on a bundle of hay, dining on bacon and beans and sourdough bread.

Lander helped me pack things when the meal was over.

"You're facing this like an old-timer," he said.

"I used to go out on the trail with my father," I reminded him.

"That's what I want to talk to you about," he said. "Can you remember his camp on the Chakitanas?"

"I was never there," I had to admit.

"Then it won't be easy to explain what I want to," he went on. "Your father had a real mine there. And he must have known it."

"Of course he did," I said, recalling ghostly scraps of talk from my childhood.

"Well, so does the Trumbull outfit," proclaimed my companion.

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"I'll be down up in the driver's seat," he casually remarked. And in a few minutes I could feel the tremor of the truck as he climbed aboard, up in front. I could hear him, a moment later, as he nestled himself under his double blankets.

He wouldn't, I knew, be very comfortable there. I even wondered, as I stretched out on the hay next to my blanket-swathed little papoose, if wind and cold wouldn't drive him back under cover, where he had a perfect right to be.

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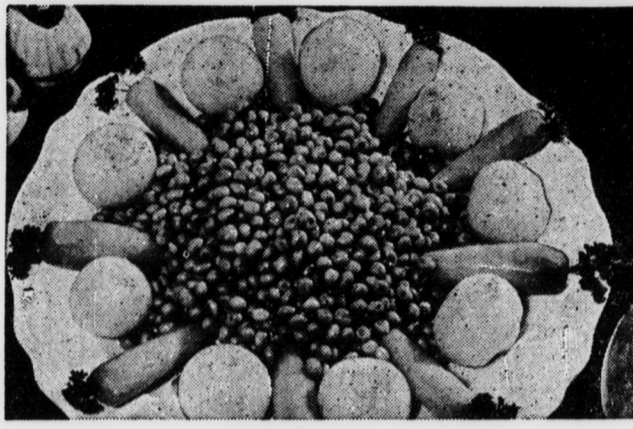
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Household News

By Eleanor Howe



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