

The Lamp in the Valley

By ARTHUR STRINGER

W. N. U. Service

Sidney Lander rescued Carol Coburn from the annoyances of Eric (the Red) Ericson. She is returning to her native Alaska to teach. Her father, a sordough, died with an unproven mine claim. Lander, an engineer for the Trumbull Co., which is

fighting the Coburn claim, breaks with Trumbull. But he remains engaged to Trumbull's daughter, Barbara. Salaria Bryson, an outdoors girl, is also in love with Lander. Lander becomes field manager for the Matanuska Valley project. He takes

CHAPTER XIV

Matanuska was now on the map. The colonists had arrived.

But that Promised Land, apparently, didn't live up to their expectations. For all they found were unfinished roads and harried officials and lumber piles and an impromptu city of tents along the valley flats, army tents in rows as regular as a wooden floor and boarded side walls and a smoke pipe going up from its roof.

There was no teaching for the chalk-wrangler yesterday when word went round that the first trainload of the colonists was on its way up from Seward, and Katie O'Connell was hurried over from Toklutna to look after the women and children. And since I was detailed to stand right-hand man to Katie, I was there to help make boilers of coffee and watch the disembarking of the disheveled and sea-worn army.

But the note they struck was not always epic.

I could see women still petulant over their weeks of homelessness, surrounded like ship-wrecked sailors by what they could salvage from their long-traveled belongings. I doled out coffee and sandwiches to toil-hardened tillers of the plains and drouth-wizened cattle-raisers from valley farms and Mackinawed ax-wielders from wooded slopes. I tried to give them a welcoming word or two as they stared gloomily about at their Arctic El Dorado and herded their children up to the grub tables. The fact they were to live in tents, it was plain, didn't appeal to them.

It was the young people, to whom Alaska meant excitement and Matanuska spelled romance, who crowded about the cameras—lanky youths and laughing girls, not in the slatted sunbonnets of earlier free-soilers, but in the sweaters and slacks of their own blithe generation. And there were children, slathers of children, with tousled heads and toys in their hands, staring wide-eyed at the white peaks of the Talkeetnas and lustily proclaiming to the world they were hungry.

"You belong in these parts?" a petulant voice inquired of me as I refilled the coffepots. I found myself confronted by a rotund matron with a terrace of chins and eight obstreperous children.

I said that Matanuska was now my home.

"Can't say you look like a girl who'd been brought up on whale blubber," observed my new friend, who asserted that her name was Betsy Sebeck. "But them cock-eyed bureaucrats, of course, ain't got anything ready. There ain't even water, they tell me, in them two-by-four tents. And they ain't got lamps—when they told us we was to be steam-heated and lit by electricity!"

"Things will straighten out," I said as I caught sight of Lander haranguing a group of grumbling free-soilers.

"But there ain't even blankets enough to go round," persisted Betsy. "And if I don't get at a wash-tub before the week's out them kids o' mine will have to go naked."

The bureaucrats, I discovered, had declined to bring in a piano for her, had lost two of her trunks, and were now trying to stow her away in a back-row tent which her man wouldn't accept. They'd even failed to stock the Commissary up properly, she lamented, and that'd mean, of course, going without grapefruit and ice cream.

But even in the midst of all that confusion and complaining I wanted to cling to the claim there was something epic about the migration.

That fact came home to me more than ever when I stood under an azure Alaskan sky that arched above the blue-ravined slopes of mountains towering up to stately peaks of white and watched the two hundred family heads draw lots for their farm plots. For fate, of course, reposed in that little wooden box that held the plot numbers, since a few of the farm sites were already cleared and fenced and blessed with cabins, while others were swampy and unbroken forest. And as the lucky and the unlucky crowded about a big map of the valley, to determine the position and state of their tracts, there was much cheering and grumbling and groaning.

Salaria, deep-bosomed and Indian-brown, drifted up to my table and viewed the scene with a lip curl of contempt. There she was joined by Sock-Eye, waiting and watchful for the first open jeer from one of those rookpoked cheechakos.

"Looks like a potlatch 't me," observed Salaria. "A potlatch with Uncle Sam passin' out forty-acre farms instead o' two-bit knives. And most o' these poor coots don't even know what they're gittin'."

Sock-Eye spat dourly into the road dust.

"They think they're gittin' something for nothing," he averred. "But them gilcoots'll be about as happy

in this valley as blacksnake on an ice block."

"Lander says there's a shortage of axes and work tools," I was prompted to explain.

"Of course there is," exulted Salaria. "They've got grand electric coffee-grinders but no power 't run 'em. They've got a string o' threshin' machines, but no crops in 't thresh."

"And stoves over there rustin' in the rain," added Sock-Eye, "but no wheres 't put 'em. And a mountain o' them new-fangled enamel sinks and no kitchens 't set 'em up in. And a carload o' harness, by gad, and no workhorses 't buckle it on."

The tumult had subsided and the shadows were growing longer and I could see smoke going up from the unbroken line of smoke pipes before Katie was able to join me at my alfresco coffee table.

"They're pretty well settled," she said as she munched a sandwich between her strong white teeth. "But I wish Ruddy was here."

I asked her why. She postponed her answer until she had polished off her sandwich and reached for her second cup of coffee.

"There's a baby over there I don't like the looks of," she finally announced.

"What's wrong with it?" I questioned.

"I don't know, yet," she said as she bit into a sandwich. Then her eyes became ruminative. "Wouldn't it be sweet if measles got into this little family circle. Or scarletina! Or even whooping cough." Her tired



"They're pretty well settled," she said.

looking eyes surveyed the row of white-walled tents. "There's six hundred kids in that camp, in one mad huddle, and not a roof over their head if a bug or two got into their blood!"

I asked if they all hadn't had medical inspection.

"They're supposed to," admitted Katie. "But if I know my onions there's a father of seven over in that line-up who won't last long. He's plainly tubercular. And there's a Michigan woman who's been having labor pains all the way up from Seward."

"What does that mean?" I asked with a quail of dismay.

"It means," said the weary-eyed Katie, "that we can't sit here enjoying the scenery. You'll have to scrub up, old-timer, and help me with the delivery."

Two hours later I heard the first faint wail of the first baby born in the Matanuska Colony.

CHAPTER XV

If I'm the lamp in the valley I've got to burn with a brighter wick. Colonel Hart called me into Headquarters and told me I was to have a schoolhouse as soon as they could find a building that would suit the purpose. The real school, he explained, couldn't go up until next year. But if the Colony children could be grouped into classes of some sort, and a teacher rotated among them, there might be less grumbling from the parents and less hell-raising by the youngsters.

So for two or three weeks, he proceeded, I'd have to do the best I could as a circuit-rider teacher. The first call on the workers, of course, was to get homes built.

I suggested that a portable blackboard would be a help, since a blackboard was to a teacher what a throne was to a king, the seat and symbol of his power.

"All right," the man at the desk answered across his mountain of blueprints. "Tell that bunch of transient workers out there to make your board and make it pronto. Tell them I said so."

So I sallied forth to where six flannel-shirted CCC workers were languidly piling lumber at the track side. I ignored a quite audible,

Carol to a camp dance and he tells her of his love. She reminds him of Barbara. Truly, their paths have crossed many times by now, but Barbara still remains a barrier to their romance. Their future seems far from clear.

"Pipe the peach!" as I approached them. I merely informed them of the Administrator's order for the concoction of a four-by-six portable blackboard.

"You can have anything we've got, baby-eyes," said one. And still another coyly observed that his own schooling wasn't all it should have been and it seemed about time to be starting over.

It wasn't, of course, as bad as it sounded, being carried on with that half-respectful and heavy-jointed jocularity peculiar to the regions where life is rough and chivalry is apt to stay in its shirt-sleeves. And, for all their banter, they assured me I'd have my board, neatly nailed together and ebonized with a flat coat of lampblack. They even promised to have it at my cabin the next day.

I rather overlooked their eagerness to know just where that cabin was. And it would all have worked out better, I imagine, if they hadn't first gone over to Wasilla where flourishes the valley's only open bar, and where they were joined by a dozen or two other transients. There, at any rate, they plainly drank more moose-milk than was good for them. I could hear them as they came in a body toward my cabin clearing, singing as they came:

"Oh, then, my Booska,
Don't you cry for me,
For I'm off to Matanuska
With the teacher on my knee."

Someone with an accordion was leading them in that familiar old pioneer tune. But I didn't find the newer wording altogether to my liking.

I closed and fastened my door.

I pretended to be writing at my table end, sitting there, rather anxiously, as they worked pole ends under the sill logs and tried to impart a ship-at-sea motion to my small cabin. But they soon tired of that, finding the shack too heavy to be converted into a rocking chair. So they proceeded to serenade me, more noisily than ever. And to the general din they added a salvo or two of revolver shots. When I realized that one of the faces peering in at the window was that of the fire-eating Eric Ericson I found the last of my patience ebbing away.

When they started to pound on the door again, this time with one of their heavier poles, I could see that it would soon go down under their blows. And that not only brought the light of battle into my eye but prompted me to cross to the dish shelf and reach for Sock-Eye's old revolver. Then I lifted away the crossbar and swung the door open.

But instead of shrinking back they began to laugh at me and my threatening firearm. They could see hesitation, I suppose, in the very way I held that old six-gun.

It was Eric the Red who swayed closest to me.

"Mightn't it go off, angel-eyes?" he taunted.

"It will," I warned him, "unless you stand back."

I could even feel an impulse to resent his mockery stiffen my finger on the trigger. But he was too quick for me.

With an unexpected upsweet of his hand he knocked my arm above my head. The shock of that blow made the revolver go off, high in the air, and before the smoke cleared away they were crowding in closer, pretending to be fighting for its possession. I could see, by their laughing faces, that they rather liked my struggles. But they made it a point to keep my right hand pinioned above my head.

"It mustn't lose its temper," said Ericson, with his face close to mine. He even passed mockingly admiring fingers across my tumbled forehead. And as I shrank back from that odious touch a motor truck of battle-shipy gray came clattering across the clearing.

It wasn't until I saw him pushing in through the crowd that I realized the newcomer was Lander. He scattered the startled transients right and left as he came. A heavier-bodied man, who tried to block his way, went suddenly flat on the doorway soil as my rescuer's fist thudded against his jaw. The crowd was no longer laughing.

Ericson, close to me in the doorway, half-turned to fathom the reason for the sudden silence. And I could see Lander's mouth harden into a grimmer line as he saw and recognized that half-turned face. The mallet-like fist, swinging for the second time, sent my tormentor sprawling in across the cabin floor. He lay there, face-down, as Lander turned on the resentful group behind him.

They fell back a little, milling and shouting as they went. But they at least fell back. Lander, stooping down from his towering height, lifted Ericson from the floor and flung him out through the open door. Then he reached for the revolver still clutched in my hand and took it away from me.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

FIRST-AID to the AILING HOUSE

by Roger B. Whitman

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House Construction

A CORRESPONDENT is planning to build a small house in a suburban district. Although he has had no experience in the work, he wants to do it all himself. He asks for a book giving "all details in mixing cement for the brick facing of the house, making up the plaster and applying the same, installation of plumbing, heating and hot water systems, drainage system, electric wiring and fixture installation. In other words, a book dealing with all details of house construction." He also asks whether permits will be necessary and where to get them; whether licensed men must install any or all of the work, and whether the house must be built by a licensed contractor.

Answer: No one book covers all of this information; many books will be needed. In building a house, one error may be enough to weaken the entire structure and to make it all useless. For this reason I strongly recommend that he give up his idea. All developed communities require the licensing of many of the trades, and plans and specifications must be approved by a building department. I greatly appreciate his desire for a house, but strongly advise him to put his construction in the hands of experienced people.

Bathroom in the Cellar

Question: I wish to construct a bathroom in the cellar. The room will be situated in the center of the cellar and is to receive light from one window. I intend using imitation tile which comes in sheets. These would come about 30 inches from the ceiling. Would it be possible to have the top 30 inches closed in by using frosted glass? If the glass were used, would noises be heard through it? Would it be better to have a tile or wood floor?

Answer: Two sheets of glass separated by at least one inch of air space would be better for cutting down sound transmission. For the floor use either asphalt tile or ceramic tile. Either one of these materials can be used on basement floors. Before going ahead with this idea make sure that the soil pipe line to the sewer will be below the level of the bathroom fixture outlets.

Counter Tops

Question: I have just made cabinets for my kitchen, and am puzzled at what to use for the top of the drain boards around the sink and for the counter tops. What do you advise?

Answer: The material that is in most general use for work tables and drain boards is battleship linoleum. This is cut to size, secured to the under surface with waterproof cement, and the edges bound with specially formed metal strips that make the edges waterproof, and also protect them against chafing. Experienced linoleum layers are familiar with the work. If you want to do it yourself, you should be able to get the strips at a well equipped hardware store, where you can also learn of the method of application. Cement for securing the linoleum can be roofing cement, liquefied by heating.

Old Brass Warming-Pan

Question: Is there some way to shine up an old brass warming-pan, and then put something on it to prevent tarnishing?

Answer: If the brass is badly tarnished, wash with ordinary vinegar in which salt has been dissolved—as much salt as will be taken up. Follow by rinsing with clear water and then wipe dry. If necessary, follow by a good metal polish. After polishing, wipe the surface with benzine, being extremely careful of fire, and then apply a coat of clear lacquer. A plating shop could probably do a much better job for you, and at no great cost. Inquire at our nearby garage.

Shingles Over Old Roof

Question: What is the cheapest and best shingle to use on a roof? Can it be put right over old shingles? Do they come in green?

Answer: Asphalt or wood shingles are probably the least expensive. Either type of shingle can be laid over the old shingles; in fact, most re-roofing jobs are done over old shingles. Green is a popular color in all types of roofing materials, and you should have no difficulty in getting the shade that you want.

Moths in a Mattress

Question: I have a hair mattress with moths in it. It was once demothed, but the moths came back after a year. How can we get rid of them?

Answer: Put the mattress outdoors, preferably on an overcast day to reduce the fire hazard, and soak it with naphtha or clear gasoline. This will destroy every stage of insect life.

Silverfish

Question: In the downstairs room of a very old house the wallpaper above the baseboard is being eaten off in some places as far up as the window sill. The damage seems to be the work of insects, although we have never seen any. Can you explain?

Answer: That is undoubtedly the work of silverfish, which eat starch and find it in wallpaper paste. I have written a leaflet on the control of silverfish, a copy of which is being mailed to you. This will answer your question, I am sure.

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Two Escapes

At each minute we are obliterated by the idea and the sensation of time. And there are only two ways of escape from this nightmare, of forgetting it: pleasure and work. Pleasure amuses us. Work fortifies us. Let us choose.—Baudelaire.



Good Are Few
The good, alas! are few: they are scarcely as many as the gates of the Thebes or the mouths of the Nile.—Juvenal.

FEET CAN BEAT HEAT

Give feet wings of coolness. Sprinkle Mexican Heat Powder in shoes. Relieves tiredness. Little cost. Lots of comfort.

Dreaming vs. Reality
Some people merely dream of being something; others keep awake and are something.



Don't keep honey in the refrigerator. It keeps better in the cupboard.

To remove chocolate stains from table linen, sprinkle the spot with borax and then pour boiling water through the cloth.

Painting the top and bottom cellar steps white may save many falls.

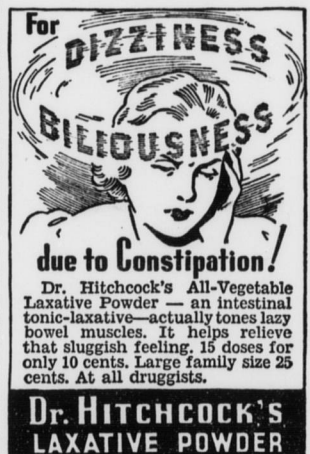
Make an oilcloth cover for your ironing board. Put over cover on ironing board when brushing and sponging garments.

When buying tea, before putting it in the caddy, spread it on a sheet of strong paper and place in a warm (not hot) oven for 10 to 15 minutes. The tea will go much farther and the flavor will be greatly improved.

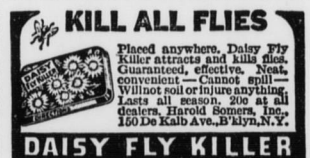
Always use bread crumbs to cover articles to be fried. Cracker crumbs absorb the grease.

Cotton corduroys look best after laundering if they are not ironed, but are merely brushed along the direction of the ribs while still slightly damp.

Most silk lamp shades may be successfully washed with lukewarm soapsuds. Dissolve soap flakes thoroughly before adding them to the water and use a very soft brush to apply the suds to the shade.



Self-Powered
A good intention clothes itself with sudden power.—Emerson.



Peace With Reason
Peace rules the day, where reason rules the mind.—Collins.



Error's Realm
Obscurity is the realm of error.—Vauvenargues.

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