

Dalosa Bonbright's Christmas Gift

By Grace MacGowan Cooke

Author of "A Psyche of the Mountains," Etc.

Outside, the storm roared down the narrow gulch in cosmic fury. The wind stooped and tried mightily at the eaves of the cabin, as though to lift and hurl it into the dry bed of Lost Creek. Within, the old man's sombre eyes were on the coals. The sinister pictures he saw were a dozen deserted cabins set here and there in the gashes and grooves of Little Turkey Track Mountain, their sagging doors swinging wide, their Bonbright owners driven out by the Rench feud.

Across the hearth, his wife carded wool into bats, a strange employment for Christmas Eve. But the disordered room told that all the household gear was packed, and her flying brown fingers added that she was anxious to put this last shearing into marketable shape, against the time they should pass the store at Hepzibah on their way to Garyville, the railway station, and Texas.

"Hark to that!" murmured the watcher by the fire when the gale struck upon the balsams of the summit as upon a harp and combed from their needles a strain of wild melody. "Ain't no human gwine to come out in such, withouten he's 'bleeged tharto."

"Well, well, honey," his wife replied, "ef the weather keeps Cousin Gaitley Bloom's boys away—an' ye know none o' the Shackletts could git over from the Gap to he'p ye—maybe hit'll keep the Rences from pesterin' us, too."

Homer Bonbright shook his head. "I dunno"—doubtfully. "Hate's a heap hotter'n just plain good-will. With Christmas to keep, Shackletts an' the Bloom boys mought give up an' stay at home. The Rences don't ask no better Christmas than to come here an'—"

He spoke in guarded tones, broke off, and glanced uneasily across his shoulder at the other two occupants of the room, a young man and woman who were packing a chest. His Benjamin had wedded a daughter of Heth—a Rench; distrust of her fretted the old man in the midst of his troubles.

Mother Bonbright went on with her carding. Her husband knew that her anxiety was no less than his own, and her courage might be even greater, though her blue eyes would twinkle, and she never failed to see the humor in any situation, whatever its danger. Floyd was of her timber, with the same insouciance, the same cool, reckless courage, covered by good nature and ready laugh. And then that he, the sole remaining prop of the house—his brothers fled to Texas, and his father striving vainly to join them in an exodus which should not be too much like a flight—that he should have wed Dalosa Rench, in the face of all objection!—it was bitter on that father's tongue.

Gnawed by anxiety, he bent forward to resume the murmured conversation with his wife. He was a tall, thin old man, a typical mountaineer, with the poor digestion and good aim, the scantiness of speech and keenness of perception, which mark the elders of his race.

"A Bonbright has run a mill on Lost Crick since the beginnin'," he brooded. "Bonbright's mill ground co'n fer the Injuns; an' now—"

He fell silent, and his companion began a little humming song, one of the curious, plaintive, minor hymns of the mountains that are found in no book.

"I reckon them Rences have a use fer so much meal in their blockaded still that they thort hit'd be good business to turn Lost Crick outen hits bed, carry hit through the Rench land an' over their bluff to turn a Rench mill. Lord, ef my daddy had lived to see this day!"

The old woman raised her thin treble to drown the latter part of this speech, and looked significantly toward their daughter-in-law.

"Uh-huh," agreed her husband, nodding almost imperceptibly. Then, leaning closer: "This hyer rain is bound to try the dam, whar they turned the crick. Ef it busts, hit may keep 'em busy, an' we'll git away without a interruption."

But with Christmas—an' that gal in the house, an' them that I trusted to stand by me a-failin' me this-a-way—I'm pestered, S'lome, mighty pestered!"

"Dally's a good gal," whispered Dally's mother-in-law, glancing affectionately at the silent, dark young creature whom her son loved. "She hain't gwine to harm nobody; but mebbe we ort not to 'a' stayed to sell the farm."

"Ef we git to Texas an' the boys—with our two bare hands—we're lucky," pursued the old man, as though she had not spoken. "Every time I see a Rench—I taste Lead."

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Suddenly, in a lull of the storm, a yelping broke forth among the hounds that sheltered under the floor.

"Hello!" came the deep-voiced challenge high above the roaring of the wind.

"Thar's Gaitley's boys now—or Bud Shacklett," cried the old woman, in relief. "Let 'em in, pap—let 'em in quick! It's a awful night fer a body to ride."

Before any one in the cabin could reach the door it was swung back, and Gaffin Rench, streaming with rain, stood laughing at them.

"Christmas gif!" he roared, with a sort of ferocious geniality.

They had looked to welcome friends, and this was the arch enemy; they had hoped for life, and here was death. But they would meet it unflinchingly.

It was a piece of swaggering bravado for the head of the Rench clan to come thus, in apparent friendliness, when the feud was active and he had just struck a bitter blow for it by the theft of the creek. But no face in the fire-lit room told him so; not even the countenance of his daughter, who stood back and stared at him in her silent fashion, as though he were a stranger. Homer Bonbright was on his feet at the first call; now he placed a chair for the newcomer.

"Set down," he urged with impassive face. "Set down an' dry yo'self."

This hyer is fallin' weather for a man to be out in."

It went grimly through his mind that Dally must in some way have signalled to her father their unprotected state; and the old man's air of confidence did much to confirm the suspicion. Gaffin sprawled before the bright warmth which filled the big stone chimney.

"You-all mind I got yo' Christmas gif," he laughed. "Take yo' time for to pay me, but don't forgit I spoke fust."

He seemed to find enjoyment in the dismay his appearance must spread in the aversion he read in his daughter's face. As is characteristic of the mountaineers, he made no comment upon the evident preparations for departure.

"Yo' workin' late at yo' cyardin'," he chuckled, touching Mother Bonbright's pile of wood with his wet boot.

"I 'lowed fer to trade it at the sto' an' buy yo' Christmas gif," she retorted, with her audacious smile.

"I come by the sto' myse'f to-night," announced Rench abruptly. "Dally!" sharply. "I fotched ye a Christmas gif." And he flung into the lap of his daughter a bundle of calico, glaring red where the paper had been partly torn from it, as though it had been unwrapped after leaving the clerk's hand and repackaged by inept fingers.

Dalosa regarded her parent from under lowering brows. Either she regretted his appearance there or she was determined to make her new relatives believe that she did.

"Huh! You never did give me a gift befo', in all yo' bawn days," she said bluntly.

"An' mebbe I never will ag'in," grunted the father. "Take mighty good keer o' that 'un. Make the best use on it that you-know-how; hyer me? 'Ca'se hit's apt to be my fust an' my last."

With those hunter's eyes of his which seemed not to dwell on it at all, Homer Bonbright had weighed and measured

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Organized Farmers' Case

The following are the Resolutions presented to the Dominion Government by the Canadian Council of Agriculture on December 16th, in Premier Borden's office at Ottawa

"Whereas the progress and development of the agricultural industry is of vital importance to the general welfare of the state, all other industries being largely dependent on its success, and as the government has the interest and welfare of the country at heart and is desirous of improving conditions, and whereas the cost of the production of all farm products is materially enhanced and the development of our agricultural resources retarded by the excessive cost of agricultural implements and other commodities, due to customs duties; and whereas an import tax on food stuffs increases the cost of living to the extent of the tax imposed, and enables dealers and manufacturers to form combines and create artificial restrictions in the distribution of commercial commodities;

British Preference

"Whereas the best interests of the people of Canada and our loyalty to the British Crown demand that the tariff barriers of trade with the motherland be removed and thus cheapen the cost to Canadian consumers of goods manufactured in Great Britain, and,

"Whereas the free interchange of all natural products between Canada and the United States would tend to reduce the cost of living to town and country people alike; and

"Whereas the United States congress has passed an act which is still in force, offering free interchange of natural products between the two countries.

The Resolutions

"Therefore, be it resolved:

"1. That we urge the government to

recommend to parliament at its next session a reduction in the tariff on imports from Great Britain to one-half the general tariff, and to provide for a further gradual reduction until there is free trade with Great Britain in five years.

"2. That parliament accept the offer of the United States of free interchange of all agricultural and animal products between the two countries.

"3. That all food stuffs not provided for in the above referred to offer of the United States be transferred to the free list.

"4. That agricultural implements, lumber and cement be transferred to the free list.

"5. That pending the passage of legislation asked for herein, any duties now imposed under the Canadian customs tariff which are the cause of countervailing duties being imposed against any food products of this country by any foreign country be immediately removed.

"6. That any tariffs or trade concessions granted to any other country be immediately extended to Great Britain.

Weigh Scales

"That the government be requested to amend the Canada Grain act and the Weights and Measures act, so that the inspection and control of all scales in use in all grain elevators and warehouses in Canada be transferred from the department of inland revenue and placed under the administration of the department of trade and commerce, under the jurisdiction of the board of grain commissioners for Canada.

"Whereas it is to the interest of the farmers of Canada that the question of

co-operation should be discussed at the forthcoming conventions of the associations affiliated with this council, and whereas it is desirable that any co-operative action should be uniform, so that a general policy may be followed in all provinces, therefore, be it resolved, that we do request the government to introduce at the next session of parliament a comprehensive co-operative act which will permit the establishment of co-operative societies of all kinds, whether for purposes of credit or of trade.

Railway Claims Agent

"That the government be requested to appoint a general utility agent, who shall have full power to adjust claims between shippers and railway, elevator and commission companies relative to shortages on grain shipments, leakages from grain cars and overcharges on freight on grain shipments and similar matters.

Stencilling of Cars

"That the government be requested to provide that all cars used for shipping grain in bulk be stencilled to show height to which grain is loaded, and thus provide an additional means of determining shortages in bulk grain shipments.

Ocean and Lake Freight Rates

"Whereas the cost of transporting grain and flour from Fort William to Liverpool has almost doubled during the past three years, due to mergers and combines in lake and ocean shipping, and whereas such increases in freight charges mean an equal decrease in the price which the

producer receives for his grain, therefore, be it resolved, that the government be urged to investigate lake and ocean freight charges on grain and flour, and take whatever steps may be found necessary to bring relief to Canadian producers and millers."

Sample Markets

On the question of a sample market at Winnipeg: "We request that the Dominion government acquire and operate as a public utility under an independent commission the terminal facilities and conditions at the Pacific coast and provide same at Hudson Bay when necessary, also such transfer and other elevators necessary to safeguard the quality of export grain, and

"Whereas the above conditions have not been fully met, and whereas we are convinced after investigation that the establishment of a sample market under existing conditions will not be in the interest of the producers of grain, but will tend to bring about conditions that will destroy the integrity of our present grading system, and will not bring about the desire of the farmers as is contained in the above quoted resolution, but will be injurious to the farmers of Western Canada.

"Therefore be it resolved that we do hereby protest against the introduction of the said sample market and do urge that no further steps be taken towards bringing the sample market into operation until those who are most interested, the grain producers, are agreed that the time has arrived when same could be safely and properly operated for the benefit of both producer and consumer."