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## The Wives of Pine Flat

A New Version of an Old Roman Legend  
By F. A. MITCHEL

There were two settlements among the Nevada silver mines in which from the first was a rivalry. These were the Quartz Gulch and the Pine Flat people. Both were a bad lot. The Quartz Gulchers had one good man among them, while the Pine Flaters were all bad. The good man at Quartz Gulch wasn't good because he was naturally inclined that way, but because he owned property in the Gulch that he would like to make valuable, and he was prevented from doing so by the reputation of the town. No one would invest money there, no one would even come there to investigate.

Pete Wilkins, this so-called good man of Quartz Gulch, sat down one day for a job of thinking with a view to finding some way to better the morals of his fellow citizens. He considered the feasibility of shutting off their liquor supply, or corraling all the weapons in the settlement under lock and key, of inducing an evangelist to come among them and impregnate them with religious principles. It didn't seem to Mr. Wilkins that any of these plans were feasible.

At last Wilkins got down to the fountain head of all refinement—woman. If he could only get some respectable women in the camp he believed they would act as a palliative upon the men and eventually bring about a better state of morals. The first difficulty was to find the women, the second to get them to the Gulch and the third to keep them there long enough to penetrate the outside coating of villainy and get a hold on the men's better nature. He didn't mind the disappointment the women would experience in expecting to secure husbands and homes, but he didn't like to be put in for a failure. It occurred to him to interest the men in his project. There would be no difficulty in securing their approval of bringing in the women. The trouble would be to induce them to behave in such a fashion as to induce their more delicate partners to remain. He called a meeting of the citizens and thus addressed them:

"Gents, I been thinkin' of some way of gittin' the better of them 'gooks' down on the flat, and I think I've hit the nail square on the head. I'm goin' to send for a carload of the best lookin' and most respectable women to be found in the east to be sent out here to beautify the town."

There was a yell of approbation, and the orator continued:

"What we want is decent homes, and you can't make a home without a woman in it. All I'm afraid of is that if we induce good women to come in and start homes for us you fellows'll sneer 'em away."

"Cries on 'We won't! 'Try us! 'Bring 'em on and see!"

A collection was taken up, and a sufficient sum was raised for the purpose. The scheme was popular both because of the coming of the fair sex and topping the inhabitants of Pine Flat. Pete Wilkins was appointed a committee of one to carry out the project and at once opened up a correspondence with a society called the Helping Hand in an eastern city, and arrangements for a first shipment of young women who needed homes were made. If these reported favorably on their reception and the prospects before them another shipment was to follow.

The probability is that all would have worked well had it not been that certain citizens of the town were so puffed up with pride at their prospective outdoing of Pine Flat that they must needs crow over their rivals before their chickens were hatched. When it was learned by those of the Flat that the Gulchers were going to have a cargo of women sent out from the east there was a feeling among the latter that something must be done. Various propositions were made to see this invasion and go their rival one better, but they were either impracticable or absurd. One stupid churl suggested that they send for a cargo of monkeys; another that a number of wax figures be bought up and placed in the windows of the shanties, suggesting the presence of a housekeeper.

One suggestion was received with a howl of delight. Aaron Skinner, who before going to the bad had taught school, thus spoke to a crowd of his fellow citizens who were debating the question:

"It seems to me," he said, "that by blabbin' the Gulchers have given us an advantage over 'em. What we want to do is first to lay our plan and then shoot any one of our number we see heading for the Gulch, so that he can't give it away. There was once a lot of fellers who started a town they named Rome. Not far off was another town, the people of which were called Sabines. The Romans were so bad off for want of women as we or the Gulchers, but the Sabines had plenty of 'em. The Romans invited the Sabines with their wives and daughters to a banquet, and at a signal the Romans picked up the women and ran 'em off. Now, what I propose is to go out and meet these gals that's coming to the Gulchers before they get to the end of the journey and run 'em in here!"

Nothing from the city of opportunity that met this proposal, the schoolmaster had touched a responsive chord. A hundred pistols were furnished to shoot any man who gave the scheme away. The proposer agreed to get himself posted as to the route, and the time of arrival of the women in the neighborhood, and volunteers were forthcoming to watch the territory between the Flat and the Gulch to make sure that the secret was not transmitted.

Deadhead station—so called from the fact that no man who boarded a train there would pay his fare—was the point of junction between Quartz Gulch and the railroad. The station was fifteen miles from the Gulch and ten miles from the Flat. The schoolmaster rode over and learned from the telegraph operator the day and hour the women would arrive. Their train would reach the station at 6 o'clock in the morning.

At 3 o'clock the same morning a company marched from the Flat escorting several empty wagons to a station on the railroad six miles farther east than Deadhead. When the trains drew up at the platform a committee purporting to be Gulchers went aboard the train and politely invited the ladies to alight, stating that they had decided to take them off there instead of Deadhead. The women immediately gathered their belongings and left the train. There were twenty of them, and they filled the wagons that had been brought to carry them to Pine Flat, whither they were escorted by the citizens of that place.

When the trains arrived at Deadhead without their precious freight and the Gulchers learned how they had been tricked their fury was like that of a raging prairie fire. They held a conference, at which for half an hour all talked at once, thus losing half an hour. By the time they were ready to listen to reason it was evident that their property would arrive in the enemy's camp long before the Gulchers could get there and the Flaters would have abundant time to plan a defense. Wilkins, who saw that they had been outwitted beyond hope of recovery, counseled a return to their shanties and sending for another carload of the same kind of freight. He contrived to bring enough of the men to his way of thinking to render it impossible for the rest to recover the women by force. The disappointed men returned to the Gulch, some cursing the mismanagement of those in charge of the affair, some swearing vengeance on the Flaters, while one crusty old fellow who had been married, but had gone west to escape from a termagant wife, said they didn't know when they were well off.

Wilkins set himself energetically about getting a new shipment, but the eastern parties who had made the consignment would do nothing further till they had heard from the women who had already been sent. The reports they made were at first reassuring. At least the consignors looked upon the carrying off of the women by those for whom they were not intended as indicative of a very wild social condition and wrote Wilkins that they would take no further steps as to future consignments.

When this communication was received the men of Quartz Gulch, who were called together to hear it read, resolved, every one, to march against their enemies and either get the women or die. Six weeks had elapsed, and though the distribution of twenty women as partners for more than a hundred men came very near breaking up the settlement, it was finally left to the former to choose their mates, which they did, and soon the women were all married. They did not know till the last wedding had taken place that they were captured property. But this made no difference to them. Indeed they rather admired their husbands for their enterprise.

But one day a citizen of the Flat came galloping into town shouting, "The Gulchers are coming!" Every able-bodied man, some with rifles, the rest with revolvers, were marching on the town. The Flaters had at first looked for this invasion and prepared themselves for it, but after so long an interval it was unexpected. The long roll was beaten, or, rather, a big dinner bell was rung in the center of the town, the signal that had been agreed on six weeks before when the robbery had been perpetrated. On the arrival of the enemy the defenders of Pine Flat, or, rather, of the twenty wives within it, were drawn up in battle array, and as soon as the former were within shooting distance the fight began.

But a few had fallen, and they only wounded, when the wives ran out and, rushing in between the hostile lines, forced the contestants to cease firing. Then they told the men who had come for them that they were married, were already engaged in beautifying their homes and that nothing would induce them to leave their husbands. The Gulchers, they said, might as well go back home, for even if they conquered the women would not go with them. Wilkins said he thought he could draw off his men if the women would promise to write such accounts of their situation as would induce a new bevy to come out to Quartz Gulch. This the ladies agreed to do, and the enemy marched away.

In due time another consignment arrived tickets for the Gulchers, and, hearing another raid upon their property, the latter marched under cover of the night to a station where they were quite sure they would find their yet unsewed wives. But their enemies scorned to be plighted—indeed, they had no need to be, for they had arranged for a shipment on their own account. The Gulchers' load arrived safely, and both Quartz Gulch and Pine Flat are now extremely respectable places.

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