

"Shorty Long is one of the leaders."
"I thought so, and his coach was due in the road to-day," and with these words, he thrust his pistols back into his pockets, and held up his hands.

The pursuing party were closing in rapidly, and Shorty was already very near the men.

"What do you want with us?" cried Black Bill.

"Where did you get those horses?"

"Found them."

"Yes, and I suppose you also found the money and watches you have?"

"I suppose we did."

"It was a sorry find for you. You might know better than to bother a woman."

The men were gathered about their prisoners now, and the latter were told to hand over their pistols, knives, and what they had taken from the strangers. This done, they were securely bound and placed on the stolen horses, and the party then started northward.

It was a long ride, and the storm was growing. The rain no longer came in flurries, but beat them with a rapid and continuous down-pour, and the wind surged against them with a fury that made them bend low in their saddles.

The darkness grew deeper, and they were forced to let their horses pick the road. They had taken the precaution to fasten both their prisoners, and the horses on which they were mounted, to some of their own party, so that any movement would be known.

Thus they plodded on, and at last the glimmer of a light came shimmering through the gloom, guiding them down the slope to Pender's. A half-hour later, they were standing by the bar in the Grand Washington, partaking of the hot whisky, whose flavor was a secret with Lincoln.

"One drink only, boys, and then for supper. After that we will have the trial," said Bruce.

Justice was speedy in her workings through the mining district, and delay was not allowed to dishearten a man.

She prisoners had been given their share of the warm liquor, and mining hospitality also accorded them a place at the supper-table. This meal attended to, the prisoners, their captors, and the entire male population of Bender's adjourned to the parlor; for as there was to be a woman witness, it had been decided that the trial should be held there instead of in the bar-room, the usual place.

Sam Bruce and Shorty were chosen judges, and the prisoners were seated before them. The young woman was sent for, and a chair was placed beside those of the judges for her use.

When she came, and had been installed in the seat provided for her, Shorty, who, from his more extended acquaintance, had been chosen spokesman, asked if she recognized the prisoners in the men who had shot at and robbed her father and herself.

"Yes," she answered; "they are the men."

"Then the case against them is clear."

"And what will be their punishment?"

"There are three counts," said Shorty; "horse-stealing, shooting and robbery of valuables. Either of the three is enough for death."

"What?" cried the woman, starting to her feet. "Death? Why, they have committed no murder!"

"No, not now, perhaps; but the score against them is a long one."

"And are you trying them for the old score, or for what they did to-day?"

"For to-day."

"Then you have no right to murder them, for it would be murder, as they do not merit death."

"What would you have us do?" asked Shorty.

"If you have no prison to punish them in, then, let them go."

"Would your father agree to this?"

"My father will agree to anything that I say."

Shorty turned to the men about him.

"You hear what she says, boys. The quarrel is hers, and I don't see but what we have had our ride for nothing."

There was a little grumbling, but the decision that Shorty had voiced seem to rule.

"Are they to go free?" asked the woman.

"If you say so," answered Shorty.

"Then I say so. Stand up!" she cried, turning to the prisoners.

Black Bill and his companion obeyed her.

"Hold up your right hands, and repeat what I say," and with a clear, resonant voice, she continued, "We do solemnly swear by all that earth holds sacred, and from this time out no crime shall be done by us. As we keep our word, may the Great Father reward us."

The men followed her in strangely moved tones, and the rough miners about her stood with bowed and uncovered heads, silent as death until her last words faded away.

Then Shorty turned to the prisoners.

"You can go," he said; "but remember, luck does not always strike like this."

"I shall remember," said Black Bill, and stepping quickly forward, he grasped the hand of the woman, and raised it to his lips. His companion followed his action, and then they passed out through the pathway made for them, and went their way, no one knew whither, only they were not seen in Bender's afterwards.

This was in March, and when he returned to Marysville that trip, Shorty gave up his place, and again sought the mines.

"My luck will come to me there," he said, "if it comes at all."

He did not return to Sandy Gulch, but roamed restlessly along the foot-hills about Lander's and Whistling Canon; he was a frequent visitor at the cabin of the superintendent at Lander's, for the clear voice of Margery Sands, the superintendent's daughter, was very sweet to him.

That he had her favor was very easy to be seen, for her eyes grew brighter, and her face beamed with pleasure when he came. Margery was too honest and fearless to hide a feeling of which she was proud.

And Shorty was a strong, forceful man, quick in thought, ready in act, and with a notable store of common sense. He was more intelligent than the general run of the men who sought the mines, and though his rough life at sea, and his rougher life among the foot-hills, had not been a very refining school, he had still clung to some far-away memory of his youth, and no book or paper went from his reach unread.

He was not given to dissipation; he used no rough language except when deeply moved, and he was helpful and generous—too much so, his friends said; but Shorty averred he would never be the loser by any such course.

He was good-looking, too, though under the average height, and compact and muscular. Altogether, he was one of those kind, yet determined characters, that win love and hold it.

All through the year Shorty kept roaming among the gulches and canons, prospecting, or, as he said, "seeking his luck."

"It is bound to come," he would say, but Spring gave place to Summer, Summer faded into Autumn, and Autumn had been succeeded by Winter, and still Shorty's luck had not arrived.

It was the day before Christmas, and Shorty was stopping at Bender's Flat, waiting to run over to Lander's in the morning.

There was no sun.

Up in the pines that frowned heavy and thick along the crags overhanging the canon, the wind was surging, rending branches and trunks with a fierce display of its gigantic power. The cones came hurtling down among the cabins clustered at the foot of the rocks, and the torn boughs swirled along the wind. Far up, sweeping onward with the blast, an eagle went winging southward, a dark fleck among the sombre, leaden hue of the clouds.

The rain had ceased. It had fallen in sheeted masses for two days, and had torn huge pathways through the snow that lay white and chill on the higher peaks.

And now word came that a new danger threatened the camp, though Bender's was too high to share in this.

Torn from their rooting on the cliff, two great pines had been flung across the canon at its narrowest part. Their branches had locked and formed a dam, and against this other drift had floated, building a structure, back of which the water grew in volume. The sand from the hills had been washed in among it, and formed a heavy bar, and the flood massed itself in the narrow way, and spread backward, at last reaching the flats lying before the Black Gulch, as this narrow place was called.

The matter of a rush was only to be a question of time, ruled by the strength of the dam. Should the pines give way, and open an escape-vent for the flood, the valley would be devastated.

The men talked the matter over, clustered about the bar of the Grand Washington. A new-comer opened the door, and, as he did so, the noise of a loud crash came sounding through the air.

The dam had given way. They could hear the roar of the water as it rushed down the canon.

"It will sweep Lander's like a broom," said Ben Lincoln. "The people should be warned."

Shorty had been seated by the stove, smoking. He sprang to his feet, dashed the pipe from his mouth, and rushed to the door. Seeing a horse standing there, he flung himself into the saddle.

Lander's was on the bank of the creek, just over the spur of a hill, five miles below. It lay between a steep cliff and the stream, and a flood would totally annihilate it.

Shorty knew this, and with his body bent low, so that it would not hold the wind and impede his horse, he sped forward. He could hear the sound of the water as it came on, and knew that it was near him, but he did not falter.

On! on! and behind him he could hear the crash and rush, as the flood poured through the narrow way, and spread out on the flats below Bender's.

Soon he saw the cabins of Lander's show from behind the hill.

On! on! with the raging mass close at his heels, and the first cabin at hand.

With a loud shout he flew by it, making for the home of the superintendent.

But the water was gaining, and the house he sought was still more than a mile away, standing at the further end of the place, on the opposite end of the flat.

He could not reach it before the flood would come; he knew this, but he would save Margery Sands, or die with her.

His horse was strong and fleet, and went forward with a swift, sure pace, but the roar of the water was now close behind him.

Just as it came sweeping by he reached the house, and saw Margery standing in the door.

"Come!" he said, "come!" and she sprang towards him.

Grasping her light form, he drew her up to the saddle, heading his horse through the water toward the westward rising hills.

The foaming mass was rushing down the valley, and bearing with it the drift of the wreck it had made. Slowly, yet surely, the noble animal that Shorty rode made his way towards the hills, but the current was swift, and the load was heavy, and the rider saw that he would be exhausted before he could reach the solid ground.

He patted him encouragingly, and then, as a knoll that rose in the level showed above water, made for this.

He can rest here, he thought, but just as he reached this, and placed Margery on the earth, springing after her with the bridle in his hand, a sudden rush sent the horse swiftly around, wrenched the bridle from his grasp, and the next moment he saw the horse, the only hope, making his way towards the westward hills.

He could do nothing but seek the highest part of the knoll, which was still some distance out of the water, but he could see that the flood was rising.

"Our only hope is to get a large piece of drift," he said, "and try for the shore. It may catch on a spur and give us a chance."

He turned to watch the wreckage sweeping by, and saw, coming down with the flood, a small boat, guided by a single person.

He shouted for aid, and the man waved his hand in reply.

"Be ready to jump in with the woman," cried the man, "for it will not be safe to try to land."

"Ay! ay!" answered Shorty, and grasping Margery in his arms, he moved close down to the water on the side of the knoll that the boat was nearing.

In a moment it was alongside of the knoll, and he gave a spring. The boat rocked with his weight, but the man steadied it, as it rushed on.

Shorty saw an oar, and grasped it, his former life having made him an adept in its use. As he gave his assistance to the man, he glanced up at his face, and a strange feeling of recognition came to him.

He had seen the face, but where?

He noticed too, that the man's eyes often sought Margery's face, but the glances were only for a second, the boat requiring all his care.

For the flood was at its height now, and ran roaring along, and it took all of their combined strength and skill to make a safe way through the drift.

They had run diagonally westward, and were now nearing a narrow part of the valley, where the rocks closed in, and the flood went surging and whirling between them.

"Be ready to jump ashore with the girl, said the man. "Jump as soon as we reach that bend. I will head the boat in."

Shorty looked towards the point indicated, and saw that if the man should do this, he would have to go with the boat through the narrow pass, for at the rate they were going should he jump, the boat would be in the gorge as soon as he landed, and if the man guided her, his chance to escape was gone.

"And you?" he called.

"Never mind me."

"I cannot," said Shorty.

"Man, I tell you to take the girl and jump. You love her and life is bright. Quick! I say!" There was command in his voice, and Shorty sprang up, grasped Margery in his arms, and stood ready.

The boat rushed on. In another instant she reached the shore, and Shorty jumped, landing a few inches above the water.

He turned to look at the boat.

As he did so, she swound round. The man in her stood looking at Margery, and then Shorty recognized him.

"Black Bill!" he cried.

As he spoke the words, the boat struck a tree-trunk that was rushing by, turned, whirled over, and the next instant he saw the man go down the gorge clinging to his oar, the boat far from him.

With a cry he rushed to the cliff, but when he reached it there was nothing to be seen save the foaming mass of water.

Margery was by his side.

"Can we do nothing?" she asked.

"Nothing. You gave him his life, and he has paid the debt."

She clung to him, trembling, and they slowly went back to the spot where they had reached the land.

As they neared it, Shorty started.

"Was it fate, or did he put us here because he knew of this?" he said.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

He pointed to the bank where they had stood when the boat disappeared, and there, washed clear by the water, lay a mass of gleaming nuggets, the drift of a greater flood that had swept the valley ages before.

"It is my luck," cried Shorty. "No, it is our luck. Will you share it with me, Margery?"

She turned her face to meet his look.

"I belong to you," she said, "for I love you."

"And your love is my greatest treasure, better far than all of this gold," and he drew her to him, kissing the sweet lips that were so ready to reply.

"We must go back now," she said; "father will be searching and sorrowing for me."

"Where is he? My anxiety for you made me forget him."

"He went to the upper mine this morning. The flood will call him back."

"I will stake this claim and go with you. The water is falling, and I had better cover the gold."

He did so, and then they went slowly back along the course of the flood.

"Can we not be married soon—to-morrow, in fact?" asked Shorty. "Then you will be a Christmas-gift, and it is a long time since I received one."

"If you wish it, I have no objection, as there are no friends to wait for," she replied.

"I do wish it."

VARIETIES.

THE National Skating Association, of which the Prince of Wales, the King of the Belgians, the King of the Netherlands, and the Duke of Edinburgh are the patrons, has issued its yearly statement, one item of which is curious enough, namely, that the association hopes at length to make skaters independent of the seasons by providing artificial ice. The special object of the association is to promote, ascertain, and reward speed in skating, by the establishment and management of Amateur and open Skating Championships of England; by stimulating and supplementing local action in holding of skating matches; by establishing an order of merit for speed skaters, and awarding badges for the same; by assisting in providing facilities for skating by the shallow flooding of land in each locality where local branches exist; and by collecting through corresponding members information of the existence of ice on which skating is practicable, and the supplying of such information to its members; and to promote and encourage figure skating by the establishment of standards at which figure skaters may aim, by bestowing badges of merit on those who attain these standards, and by promoting and assisting in the formation of skating clubs. Also to promote the establishment of international skating contests in various countries under the direction of an international council.

THE California millionaire, Mr. Mackey, gave a dinner to Booth, the actor. The host, to do honor to so distinguished a guest, produced a bottle of rare old wine, covered with cobwebs, and costly enough for a Crusus. "What do you think of that?" asked the host, in a tone that showed gratification that he was able to do honor to the palate of his distinguished guest. Mr. Booth held up his glass to the light, sipped at it like a connoisseur, held it up to the light again, and then with classic originality remarked, "This a nectar fit for the gods!" A few nights after Mr. Mackey had home to dine with him an old chum of his from the mines. It occurred to him that it would be a clever thing to paralyze this rough from the coasts with a liquid with which he was totally unfamiliar. Another bottle of the "old particular" was ordered up. "Now just you tell me, old boy, what you think of that," said Mr. Mackey. Utterly regardless of the conventional canons of society, but with a sincerity of compliment that could not be mistaken, the ex-'49-er placed the mouth of the bottle to his lips and did not set it down until the last drop had been drained. Mr. Mackey knew from past experience that the performance was not one of which he could take offence; and, as his friend leaned back, smacking his lips with evident satisfaction, he repeated, "Well, old boy, what do you say to that?" "Pretty fair quality of booze, I call it." "Pretty fair quality of booze!" Why, do you know what Booth said of it when he dined here?" "What, Booth the actor fellow?" "Yes, Booth the actor." "I reckon he might have allowed as how he was bang up for a lush." "Bang up for a lush! Why, Booth said it was 'a necktie fit for the gods!'"

HERE is "a little story," from Manitoba. There are two mad men in Milwaukee. One is a bald-headed man and the other is a druggist. The bald man told a doctor that his hair was falling out, and asked him if he did not know of something that would stop it. The doctor said he would "fix" him; so he wrote out a prescription, which was as follows:—"Chloride of sodium one ounce, aqua pura eight ounces. Shake well, and rub on the scalp every morning." The bald man went to a druggist and had the prescription made up, paying one dollar for it. He asked the druggist if he was not a little "high," but felt ashamed when the druggist inquired if he knew how much aqua pura cost a gallon. He said he did not, but supposed it came "high." The druggist told him aqua pura was one of the most penetrating drugs in the store, and, as for chloride of sodium, there was nothing like it, and the war in Peru had sent it up "kiting." He said if the trouble in Chili kept on there was no knowing how high it would be. The bald man used the medicine, and felt as though it was doing him good. His wife noticed little new hairs coming out, and he felt good; so, when the stuff was gone, he took the bottle to the store and had it filled again. The assistant who filled it this time was another man, and when the bald-headed man threw down a dollar, the druggist said, "Oh, never mind; we won't charge you anything for that!" The bald man asked how that was, when the druggist said, "Why, it's only salt and water any way! The salt is only two cents a pound and the water is pretty cheap this year." The bald man gave one gasp and said, "I paid one dollar for filling that bottle before, and I want my money back! It's a bald-headed swindle! I thought that Peruvian story didn't look plausible." The druggist had to give the man a box of cigars to keep still about it.