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WOLF MOON

A ROMANCE OF THE GREAT
SOUTHWEST

BY JOSEPH J. QUINN

CHAPTER XIII.
PRISON WALLS

The sunlight streaming through the rocky crevices enabled Louise to discern her prison. High walls reached to an arched roof of gray rock. Jutting pieces of stone bordered the ceiling, while a small locker cut by nature or man could be seen indented near the posterior end of the cavern. There was a damp smell to the place, even the rock on which she lay felt cold and clammy. Through the opening poured a strong current of oppressive air, heavy, as if coming off a lagoon.

Louise endeavored to untie her hands but they were fastened securely; she tried to raise to her feet only to find them bound with strips of cloth. After minutes of gnawing pain, in which she pulled and tugged in desperation, Louise despaired of forcing her hands or feet free.

When would Pemella return? Where was Jack and the boys? Had they missed her from the ranch? In any event they would never dream of searching for her on Roundtop. While she lay dreaming under the spell of her situation the long rays of sunlight that poured into the cavern receded. A sudden darkness from the interior chambers seemed to rush to the anterior cave so that she could hardly perceive the opposite wall. Had someone shut off the sunlight from the cavern? For a moment Louise surmised that Pemella was closing the cave, sealing her within.

Her thoughts were arrested by voices outside, but she could not distinguish the tones. A loud reverberation followed by further voices apprised her of the coming storm. Pemella must have returned with someone yet she could not divine who it could be. Suddenly, as one lowering a curtain, a shroud of black filled the doorway and blocked the opening.

Louise peered and saw the figure of an Indian crawling slowly toward her, his long braids trailing in the dust. She had seen him several times in the village wandering about listlessly but she had never inquired his name or who he was. Her first impression was that he must be in league with Pemella. The Indian advanced slowly and lifted his almost sightless eyes toward her. A shriek of fright echoed and re-echoed in the caverns beyond. Cringing, drawing her knees near her face she waited as the Indian advanced toward her, his form blotting out the feeble light. The noisy fusillade of thunder rumbled outside and came into the cave reverberating fiercely. It was followed by Jack's startled cry as if in surprise or alarm. An agonized groan, cut short by some stern force, mingled with Jack's voice.

"Jack! Jack!" Louise shouted ringing in paroxysm of joy. "Jack, I'm here," she tore at her fetters in a frenzy until her face grew purple under the strain. "Oh, Jack, this Indian!"

Singing-in-the-Rain, absorbed by her predicament, felt his way along the wall until he came to her side. Louise recoiled at his touch and turned as far as possible from the long bony fingers of the red man. "Jack, Jack, come quick!" "He come. Me help. No move now."

Louise felt his hand touch her throat, then move down upon her arm to grasp it firmly. She turned her face toward the wall, helpless. The Indian perceived in a moment that she was bound. Then he touched her fetters and slowly untied them. Immediately Louise loosened the band at her ankles. Looking up at her deliverer in gloom a flood of mingled paths and thanksgiving flooded her spirit. Without uttering a word she stumbled frightened toward the mouth of the cave.

What was there to be done? Had the rock's fall been delayed she could have been on the outside and in Jack's arms. She would have kissed him a thousand times. Under the torture of her position she now saw the folly of visiting the camp. It was her impetuous curiosity that had plunged her into this peril. Why in the name of Heaven had she approached the camp, walked into the hands of an enemy, a tyrant who would crush her, shame her before the world and flay her delicate soul? Why had God permitted such foolhardy intrusion? Upbraiding added bitterness to her retrospection but brought forth no deliverance. Suddenly she realized the Indian was grunting words into her ear.

"Huh, Thunderbird move rock. Singing-in-the-Rain no care. Me show way out."

Louise looked at him wide-eyed, fired to new hope and encouragement. The consciousness of being alone with him in the cave gripped her with fear. She thought of the Indian for a moment as a wicked, savage creature, the primitive man returning to his cannibal form.

"You know a way out?" She found herself repeating at his knees. How? Oh take me out now, now, before it's too late.

"Me know way. You come. Long time ago I go out." Abandonment to the direction of the Indian insulated her from further fear. She surrendered to his offer of escape, followed him as he led the way to the second chamber. Into a third and fourth room by narrow openings Louise crawled at his heels. He did not hesitate. Obviously he was finding his way along the wall, for Louise felt its clammy side against her arm. The Indian stopped and in the silence came caught save the steady drip, drip of water.

"Big hole over there. We go here." He turned, retraced his steps to the left and felt along the side.

"Here be place," he announced as he stooped and placed his hand in a small niche in the rock. Further he found another. He had discovered where they could cross into the other chamber. Singing-in-the-Rain climbed slowly, testing the niches. They seemed as strong as when years ago he had escaped the same way. He reached the top and dropped down on the other side. Louise heard him calling to her and his voice sounded deep and cavernous. She mounted the wall, reached the top and peered over. She was expecting to see an opening through which they could crawl to the outer world. Only a gulf of darkness met her eyes.

"Big drop, big drop," the Indian was cautioning her. Louise ran her fingers along the top of the wall and found that it was wide enough on which to turn. She lowered herself slowly to discover if she could touch the earth. But her feet swung free. She attempted to clamber back but the shocks of the day had weakened her, robbed her fingers of their strength. Her fingers lost their hold and she slid down. Louise alighted on her feet but she crumpled to her knees with the fall. A stinging pain ran through her ankles and she lay for a moment where she had fallen until the peril of her predicament aroused her.

Louise looked up at the Indian who gazed down upon her supplicating form. He, too, seemed to be communing with his Great Spirit. Immobile, filled with contemplation, with the ghost of a drawn smile upon his face he watched in close scrutiny his pale lips move in prayer. He spoke no word but he seemed conscious of the fallen benediction.

Louise did not realize the length of time she had spent in the cave until she glanced up at the sky. Twilight was coming down upon a world that despite its trials and sorrows was a sweet one for her. The storm was over and gone but back in the east the last colors of a rainbow were draining back into its pot of gold. The air was so clear and crystalline that one star magnificent in its dominance, throbbled in the sky like a diamond on the blue breast of a far-world goddess. Down below Louise could see sparks flying from the gypsies' campfire and mingling with the shadows of the trees.

must know his mind. Perhaps he was only digging a grave for both of them. The consideration of horrible, untimely death created a thirst that parched her throat and flushed her face with feverish blood. The sinister thoughts made Louise brain-fogged; the incidents of the day with their grueling, harrowing frights and circumstances had weakened her mentally and physically and before long she was claimed by sleep.

How long the Indian worked and slaved under the rock Louise never knew. But something awakened her, a shout of triumph. She must have slept long for her feet were buried in the dirt and sand, the pile had risen to an immense height as she was forced to kneel in order to reach the top.

"Does it open out?" Louise hurried to ask.

"Me find grass, roots, wet mud. Soon now we go."

In her eagerness Louise stooped and helped him. Side by side she was toiling with the Indian, pulling big handfuls of earth back toward the center. Without warning an avalanche of loose dirt fell in, seemingly undoing their work. Louise sat back disappointed but Singing-in-the-Rain only tolled the harder. He realized that the free earth meant that they were getting close to the outer crust. Singing-in-the-Rain grunted loudly and his breath grew heavy.

A ray of light shot into the cave for a moment only to be shut out. The Indian shouted in glee. Victory was theirs for it would not be long now until the surface was reached. Spurred on by the light which stole in as a ray of hope into a dark soul the pair bent to work and soon another blade of silver shot through the darkness. They dug and tore at the hole furiously until the opening grew larger—until it let the Indian through. Louise followed with an alacrity that showed her willingness to escape from the prison. With eyes bloodshot, her face wan, and streaked with grime, her cheeks wet with tears of joy, Louise knelt for a moment and thanked God for a deliverance. The moment was supreme. Out of the physical darkness where her eyes were tortured with a sea of black void, out of the spiritual pit indicted to the crushing weight of despair and blasted in hope she was delivered and as she knelt out in the open a Te Deum of gratitude sped upward from her soul. This was life, expansive, free, untrammelled; this was life to bow down under the stars and thank the Creator; this was life to feel the Godgiven sweep of air against her face, to draw it into her starving lungs. What manner of creature could escape this force driving her to obedience thanks? There was something hopeful and sublime to be able to rise again from the morass of abandon, especially when she had been born to suffer, to disaster, to despair, to die in the throes of hideous death. Out under the canopy of the sky she felt a magnificent rebuke to her morbid oppression. Why turn her back upon the panorama of the past, why not look out and beyond where nature told her to be calm and happy, to live, with that bird pouring out its soul to the evening air?

Through eyes flooded with tears Louise looked up at the Indian who gazed down upon her supplicating form. He, too, seemed to be communing with his Great Spirit. Immobile, filled with contemplation, with the ghost of a drawn smile upon his face he watched in close scrutiny his pale lips move in prayer. He spoke no word but he seemed conscious of the fallen benediction.

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They had come out upon the North side of the mountain. Only the river plain fading away into the brown bottom in the distance met their vision and stranded it out where dusk and earth and horizon blended. Louise drew in breathfuls of air cooled by the storm. The trees were still dripping water and the rocks washed free of sand and dust.

Without a word Singing-in-the-Rain started around the side of the hill toward the trail. Suddenly he stopped in his tracks, crouched low threw back a low "Hist" to the girl.

Louise stopped and listened but heard nothing but the mournful union of the insects' evening hymn. Shouts from below, staccato and far-off, told her the gypsies were sitting in camp. The Indian was bent in front of her as staccato bronze, his braids of hair tipping the wet rocks. He turned his head from side to side with listening intent and then crept forward a step or two. He had heard something close, perilously close, for he felt for the knife in his belt. A pebble loosed from its mooring rattled down the rocks. Someone was coming up the trail.

Louise and Singing-in-the-Rain, as silent as the stars that looked down from their blue bloom of twilight, crouched behind the rocks and waited with bated breath.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE GROWING TIME

It happened in the growing time, that time, when, if one stood in the scarcely perceptible night air, one could almost feel the gently rustling grass creeping upward and the leafy branches spreading outward.

When the swaying corn shot and stretched almost before one's eyes; when all around the air seemed full of God's vast, creative power; when one felt awed into standing still and breathless, a powerful force felt in the air around one.

Such a time it began—one glorious twilight in mid-July, if twilight it can then be called. She stood, a perfect picture in the slanting afterglow of the setting sun, leaning on a great tree-trunk, upward gazing, a huge overhanging branch half-hiding her face and form. That which was not hid was lovely enough.

Young, fresh, fair and glowing, and just at that time when girlhood was meeting with growing womanhood.

And perhaps because of this, she felt around her all the strange stirrings of growing nature with a marvelous sympathetic instinct. But she turned smiling to the man beside her, a young man, full of persuasion and force. "Don't spoil this lovely evening, Dan," she pleaded. "Hush! Listen! hear the corn growing!" She held up her hand and she stood tensely, her eyes roaming over the swaying corn bathed in sunlight before her. He listened a moment, then laughed and caught her hand eagerly. "But I cannot listen, Anne. I can only listen to you and look at you. I want you to speak. You must answer me tonight. You must say yes, you'll come?" Now she grew resty and full of trouble. "But—but—I am—a Catholic," she pleaded. "And—I am not—is that it?" he said flushing.

"And you—are—not," she repeated sadly. Then he began to persuade. In the deepening shadows—in the growing time—with nature rustling all around them—he pleaded and she consented.

And that night in her mother's cottage on the rocks above the sea, in wild, Atlantic-washed Donegal, there was deep grief and trouble. For Anne—their one, precious girl—was going away to marry, one quite outside their treasured faith! And Anne would neither wait nor listen to her mother. In spite of mother's tears and father's scoldings she went out from the sheltered humble home of her childhood. And only God and the mother knew what the mother suffered that morning, in the growing time, when the lilt of her child's voice left her aging ears.

"Only God knows what is good at all. May it some day bring Him glory!" she whispered to herself. "Grannie, grannie, do you not feel it? Come here and I know you will."

A girl's voice, young, rich and eager, calling back to the shadowed cottage, where the turf fire burned brightly on the hearth. "There!"—as an old woman came out to the doorstep, leaving a brown-smoked spinning wheel—"don't you feel it now?" the eager voice went on. "Stay still—quite still. Oh, I hear it!"—more eagerly still, her fair face flushing—"Growing, grannie, everything's growing. I can feel God's breath this evening, putting new life into everything. I can feel His Hands gently touching all!" "Aye, dearie, aye." There is a tired, drawn-out patience in the old voice.

a soul too." There was a wonderful yearning in the rich young voice.

"Aye, dear, aye. I never heard what came of him. Just all we can do is pray. I don't know why I've told you this—but there it is—it came to my heart and my lips tonight—and 'tis better you'd know it anyway."

They fell silent after that, and later, when the dusk was drawing down in the lush paddock, below the white cottage, a fair girl gave up a great love and sent a lad out into the loneliness, because, like her mother's woe of old, he was not of her Faith, and because God had given to her to make a supreme sacrifice for His own great cause.

Before the next crop went down the sickness that since that night held the old woman took her off. And with the care zone from her hands, the fair-haired girl, now grown very silent and earnest, bade farewell to the beautiful hills of Donegal, the cottage and the bay, and faced the Atlantic and the strangers in the grand cause of souls for God.

The dull, overpowering heat of a day in mid-July, in one of the throbbing cities of America's great States. A shadowed, cooler, but still intensely close atmosphere of a hospital ward, with white beds and silent sick, and gentle-faced sisters moving quietly about.

Stooping over one bed is a fair-faced sister, listening anxiously to the wanderings of a patient, a man well on in years, who has not been long in one of the many accident-cases of this great city. He had been injured on the quays as he was hurrying to catch a liner bound for Ireland—his home—but that, as yet, is not known.

Presently the Sister straightens herself and looks to the great open window in vain search for air. This she is thinking of—"A time—such a time, years ago—when she could stand on Donegal's wind-swept mountains and hear the rustling corn growing and the sycamore leaves spreading and swaying, and could feel, in the night wind, the Breath of God and see the vast sweep of His vaulted heavens glowing with the stars amid the free, wind-swept clouds.

Oh! for even one moment's breath of it now! Then she stoops again and perhaps she brushes away a tear. Then suddenly she flushes and pales again; for—listen—the sick man is wandering. Has he caught her thoughts? He is rambling of a day in mid-July when all the world was full of pulsing, stirring life, and a girl—in the growing time—trusted him entirely and fled with him from her happy mountain home. Now he is full of a terrible remorse and he grows wild as the gentle Sister tries to soothe him, the ravages of the young, wasted life, of his desertion and—here the Sister trembles—he calls on his child, and repents the day he lured his love from her religion and prays he may yet be a Catholic—that it was that which caused all the sorrow. His lack of the Great Faith. And it is great for he has watched all these lonely years and has found it so.

After much wandering ceases—the sister has him soothed to sleep. And then, in the dimness of the chapel, when her hours are over, the fair, young Sister prays that before the end God will accept the completing of her sacrifice, for she knows He has led to her that soul she has loved and suffered to save.

It came—and strangely—the answer to her prayer.

Early next day came a visitor to the sick man—no less than the young man who had saved him from the worst consequences of his accident the day before. And while he was there, consciousness returned and recognition of the Sister from the wilderness of beloved Donegal.

She turned, and sent quickly for a priest and then she came back, and, kneeling by the bedside, whispered to the dying man assurance of God's mercy, telling him all the story of how God's Providence, working ever, arranged all.

How her mother gave her her Faith; how her Grannie's story set her yearning for his soul; how she gave herself to God; how God had now used him to bring him, her father, to her. And here she wept and fell to thanking God for the miracle of his conversion.

Soon it was all over, and safe in the Faith she had brought him, his soul sped back to its Creator.

But that was not all, for a timid touch on her sleeve startled her later and the voice of her friend, earnest and full of sympathy—"Sister, put two souls down to your account; so great a Faith I cannot pass by. I'll become a Catholic."

Her beautiful smile of perfect gratitude was his reward in this world. For herself—as later she knelt before the still red lamp in her Creator's Presence—she was content with a great thankfulness and hope, that when they all met again they would be all able to understand together—in the vast halls of eternity, where the "growing-time" is always, and where God's great creation goes on forever.—The Cross.

When a man is freed from temptation, or any other distress, let him take great care to show fitting gratitude to God for the benefit he has received.

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