

The FLAMING JEWEL

by ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

(Continued From Our Last Issue.)

EPISODE ELEVEN.

The Place of Pines.

CHAPTER I

THE last sound that Mike Clinch heard on earth was the detonation of his own rifle. Probably it was an agreeable sound to him. He lay there with a pleasant expression on his massive features. His watch had fallen out of his pocket.

Quintana shined him with an electric torch; picked up the watch. Then, holding the torch in one hand, he went through the dead man's pockets very thoroughly.

When Quintana had finished, both trays of the flat morocco case were full of jewels. And Quintana was full of wonder and suspicion.

Unquietly he looked upon the dead—upon the glittering contents of the jewel-box—but always his gaze reverted to the dead. The faintest shadow of a smile edged Clinch's lips. Quintana's lips grew graver. He said slowly, like one who does his thinking aloud:

"What is it you have done to me, Mike Clinch? Are there truly then two sets of precious stones?—two Flaming Jewels?—two gems of Broste like there never has been in all these world except only two more? Or is one set false? . . . I have here one set of paste jewels. . . . My friend Clinch, why do you lie there an' smile at me so very funny? . . . Like you are amuse? . . . I am wondering what you have done to me, my friend Clinch. . . ."

For a while he remained kneeling beside the dead. Then: "Ah, ha!" he said, pocketing the morocco case and getting to his feet.

He moved a little way toward the open trail, stopped, came back, stood his rifle against a tree.

For a while he sat busy with his sharp Spanish clasp knife, whittling and fitting together two peeled twigs. A cross was the ultimate result. Then he placed Clinch's hands palm to palm upon his chest, laid the cross on his breast, and shined the result with complicity.

Then Quintana took off his hat.

"Lami Mike," he said, "you were a man! . . . Adios!"

The night had turned frosty. Quintana, wet to the knees and very tired, moved slowly, not daring to leave the trail behind him.

What he had to have was a fire; he realized that. Somewhere off the trail, in big timber if possible, he must build a fire and master this deadly chill that was slowly paralyzing all power of movement.

At last he came to a place of pines, first growth giants towering into night, and, looking up, saw stars infinitely distant. . . . where perhaps those things called souls drifted like wisps of vapor.

When the first look, Quintana's thin dark hands had become nearly useless from cold. He could not have crooked finger to trigger.

For a long time he sat close to the blaze, slowly massaging his torpid limbs, but did not dare strip off his foot-gear.

Later he ate and drank languidly, looking up at the stars, speculating as to the possible presence of Mike Clinch up there.

What a chase Clinch had led him! After the Flaming Jewel. And now Clinch lay dead in the forest—faintly smiling. At what?

In a very low, passionless voice, Quintana cursed monotonously as he passed into the fire. In Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian, he cursed Clinch. After a little while he remembered Clinch's daughter, and he cursed her, elaborately, thoroughly, wishing her black mischance awake and asleep, living or dead.

Presently Quintana slept after his own fashion—that is to say, looking slooosly at him one could discover a glimmer under his lowered eyelids. And he listened always in that kind of sleep. As though a shadowy part of him were detached from his body, and mounted guard over it.

The inaudible movement of a wood-poussie venturing into the firelit circle awoke Quintana. Again a dropping leaf amid distant birches awoke him. Such things. And so he slept with wet feet to the fire and his rifle across his knees, and dreamed of Eve and of murder, and that the Flaming Jewel was but a mass of glass.

At that moment the girl of whose white throat Quintana was dreaming, and winning faintly in his dreams, stood alone outside Clinch's Dump, rifle in hand, listening, fighting the creeping dread that touched her slender body at times—seemed to touch her very heart with frost.

Clinch's men had gone on to Ghost Lake with their wounded and dead, where there was fitter shelter for both. All had gone on; nobody remained to await Clinch's home-coming except Eve Strayer.

It was not yet dawn, but the girl could endure the stars no longer.

With electric torch and rifle she started for the forest, almost running at first; then, among the first trees, moving with caution and in silence along the trail over which Clinch should long since have journeyed homeward.

But nowhere could she discover any impression resembling her step-father's—that great, firm stride and solid imprint which so often she had tracked through moss and swale and which she knew so well.

Once when she got up from her knees after close examination of the muddy trail, she became aware of the slightest taint in the night air—stood with delicate nostrils quivering—advanced, still conscious of the taint, listening, wary, every stealthy instinct alert.

She had not been mistaken: somewhere in the forest there was smoke. Somewhere a fire was burning. It might not be very far away; it might be distant. Whose fire? Her father's? Would a hunter of men build a fire?

The girl stood shivering in the darkness. There was not a sound. Now, keeping her cautious feet in the trail by sense of touch alone, she moved on. Gradually, as she advanced, the odor of smoke became more distinct. She heard nothing, saw nothing; but there was a near, rest-of-smoke-in her nostrils and

she stopped short.

In the faint, pale luster she saw a tiny rivulet flowing westward from a spring, and, beside it, in the mud, imprints of a man's feet.

The tracks were small, narrow, slimmer than imprints made by any man she could think of. Under the glimmer of her torch they seemed quite fresh; contours were still sharp, some ready to crumble, and water stood in the heels.

As she stole along, dimly shining the tracks, lifting her head incessantly to listen and peer into the darkness, her quick eye caught something ahead—something very slightly different from the wall of black obscurity—a vague hint of color—the very vaguest that scarcely perceptible at all.

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Cynthia Grey's

MAIL BOX

WANTS CORRESPONDENTS.

Dear Boxites.—This is my second letter to your page. I did not see my other letter in print, but likely it was, as I didn't read every paper. I did not get any correspondents before, so I am still asking for them. I would like the other Boxites to write first. I started to high school this fall, and like it pretty well. I have to board in the town where I go to school, as we live four miles out in the country. They do not take The Advertiser where I board, so I do not get a chance to read the letters. I miss them very much.

Well, how is the fund getting along? I suppose it won't take long before you will have the total. Find enclosed a wee mite. Wishing the Boxites and Miss Grey the best of good luck.

STAR OF THE GOLDEN WEST.

It seems rather foolish to answer your letter through the column when you don't get the paper where you board. But maybe someone at home will see your letter and forward it to you. Thank you for the wee mite. The total is now \$755. Isn't that splendid? I have placed your name on the family tree, and anyone wishing to correspond with you may have it.

A 1914 BOXITE.

Dear Miss Grey,—I have not written to our page for nearly a year; just too much work to do, I guess. Sorry there are so many needy ones. I know what it is to be scarce of clothing for the

children, but somehow I have always managed to keep three neat and clean for school. It will only be a few years till I will have only one boy going. While one is handy with sewing one can manage so much better. Sometimes, I think girls are sent to school and college too much, and then when they marry they can't sew or cook. For one thing every girl should learn cooking and ordinary sewing. They never know how soon after they leave home they may need to know how. Even if they get good men, they should be able to make a good meal for just as they might like to. So, girls, learn to make the best of everything you have, and when they marry they will have a good man who has never had a coat bought for her yet, and she is dressed as nice as her chums.

I do all my own laundry for six. My husband has only bought two pairs of overalls in 18 years, and never a shirt. These are very good. I don't think I have ever been cut out. I can make one in an hour and a quarter. I may be a little slow, but I am sure later. Miss Grey, will you please send me "Snow Apple's" address in the stamped envelope enclosed? Will you explain the "cut" in your answer? A friend wants to know why it takes \$1,000 for a cot, and if it is just the cot alone or room when finished, that will be my answer. A friend wants to know why it takes \$1,000 for a cot, and if it is just the cot alone or room when finished, that will be my answer. A friend wants to know why it takes \$1,000 for a cot, and if it is just the cot alone or room when finished, that will be my answer.

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Dear Miss Grey,—I have not written to our page for nearly a year; just too much work to do, I guess. Sorry there are so many needy ones. I know what it is to be scarce of clothing for the

children, but somehow I have always managed to keep three neat and clean for school. It will only be a few years till I will have only one boy going. While one is handy with sewing one can manage so much better. Sometimes, I think girls are sent to school and college too much, and then when they marry they can't sew or cook. For one thing every girl should learn cooking and ordinary sewing. They never know how soon after they leave home they may need to know how. Even if they get good men, they should be able to make a good meal for just as they might like to. So, girls, learn to make the best of everything you have, and when they marry they will have a good man who has never had a coat bought for her yet, and she is dressed as nice as her chums.

I do all