

Young People

A Toll-Bridge Incident

By Franklin Welles Calkins

They came periodically out of the indefinite mountains in central Idaho, traded a few skins and Indian wares, and fished and loafed for a few days in the vicinity of Bay Horse and Clayton—sullen, dour-faced Bannocks, incorrigibly set against all the uses of civilization. Since the Indian war which had finally subdued them, they had seldom committed overt acts of hostility. Nor were they much feared by even the timid in the sparsely settled valleys of the Snake River Mountains.

So when three of the wild fellows, with their women, came riding out on the Gordons' toll-bridge, Tracy Gordon, who was alone that forenoon, went indifferently down to see if she might collect some bits of silver; if not, to do as her father had often done, open the gate and let the vagabonds go free.

Gordon had failed to make a competence at mining, which was the chief industry of the region; so he had taken up a little ranch and had built his toll-bridge across the Snake, at a point which considerably shortened the freight and stage roads between several mining hamlets and the distant railway.

The bridge was a center-pier structure, with stone abutments and with top bents bracing its two spans. Its upper side was railed by a flume, which carried water from Bay Horse Creek out on Gordon's irrigated fields. On the other side there was no railing, except at the top bracings.

The toll-gate was framed of steel rods, swung on its hinges, and shut with a spring lock.

As Tracy faced expectantly its center opening,—a "collection window" not often used,—an Indian with a flushed

face rode forward from the group, and approached her with an imperious gesture of command.

"Open! Open!" he exclaimed, roughly, and defiantly pointing to the gate.

"Four bits, please," Tracy replied, smiling pleasantly. This was but one-third the regular price for six horsemen.

Her pleasant demand, however, was met with scorn. "Open! Open!" he shouted, angrily this time. But for this demonstration Tracy would willingly enough have opened the gate. As it was, she felt indignant at the Bannock's imperious manner, and shook her head decisively.

With a fierce grunt and a gesture of disgust, the Indian turned his pony's head across the bridge, and with quirt and spur, forced the snorting animal to the very edge. The pony settled to its haunches, looking down fearfully, while the savage remorselessly lashed its flanks.

"Stop that, you cruel thing," shouted Tracy. "Here! Here! I'll let you through!" She moved to turn the lock, but too late. The tortured pony, having apparently measured the distance, took the leap of twenty feet, and the deep current closed over horse and rider.

Tracy sprang to the end of the toll-gate and peered down, to see both Indian and pony come to the surface none the worse for their plunge. She heard the other Indians laugh unpleasantly as the man climbed into his saddle and his pony swam easily away to the opposite shore, where a gravel bar and a low bank awaited its landing.

The girl was glad of the ledge bank on her side, a bank which had made the toll-bridge a possible source of profit. Indignant at the Bannock's behavior, she turned away and took a path to the house.

As she mounted the higher ground to the door yard she felt lonely, and wished heartily that she could have gone with her father and mother to Bay Horse, whither

they had driven, some miles away, to do necessary trading. Her riding pony, La Salle, was picketed some rods in the rear of the house. She went out to him and put her arms round his neck, talking to him in her affectionate way—a way which he seemed in a measure to understand.

She turned her eyes to the other side of the river presently, and saw the group of Bannocks halted and engaged in an animated and, judging from their gestures, indignant council.

In a revulsion of feeling she now wished heartily that she had thrown open the gate at once and let them pass toll-free. After all, she reflected, Indians should have a right to the public highways, after having given up so much to the white people.

She was minded to go down, open the gate and hail them, when she saw two of the men ride alongside, one on each hand of the man who had jumped his horse off the bridge; saw one of them take a gun from his saddle fastenings, evidently under protest. And then the two, with their women, rode away, taking a trail down the river which would give them crossing some way below.

The man they had deprived of a gun sat looking after them in silence for two or three minutes. Tracy, uneasy at what she had seen, watched him steadily, until suddenly he wheeled, jumped his pony across the irrigation ditch, rode down into Bay Horse Creek, and plunged through.

When his pony had labored up the rather difficult bank, the Bannock rode straight across a sage-bush flat, toward a bunch of horses feeding near an opposite foot-hill.

Those horses, nine of them, were a band of half-breed or "American horses," as they are called in that country, belonging to her father. She divined instantly that the Indian intended running off one or more of them in a spirit of revenge, and that his companions had tried to dissuade him from doing so. They had taken away his gun, that was one good thing, and Tracy's courage, when she

saw the Bannock really riding to gather the scattered herd, mounted to meet the emergency.

She rushed into the house, changed her skirt for a divided one, slipped a short-barreled ".44," which her father had taught her to use, into a pocket, got out her saddle and bridle, and ran for her pony. By the time she had mounted La Salle, the Bannock was pushing the whole Gordon range herd at a gallop up toward the Bay Horse ford.

Tracy dashed down to the bridge, unlocked the toll-gate without dismounting, backing her pony away to swing it open, then clattered across the bridge and up the road along the flume and irrigation ditch.

As she passed the spot where she had seen the Indians bunched, she saw a whisky bottle, evidently just emptied, lying in the middle of the road. She should have taken warning at this, but sure that the Bannock had no firearms, excited and determined, she dashed ahead.

The Indian saw her and rushed the herd into a stampeding run. He followed upon their heels, yelling fiercely, and swinging his picket rope in wide circles. Tracy saw his intent was to reach the first mountain slope, across the Bay Horse, in advance of pursuit. Then he would be between her and the herd, and could frighten or chase the white squaw off. Once well into the mountain, he could outrun till dark any pursuit that could be put upon his trail, and when night fell he would make sure of getting away with his booty.

The girl set her teeth grimly. He should see how easily she was frightened! She saw that he was driving the horses at a whirlwind gait, and when they had splashed across the ford, that he would beat her to the slope of the hill and over its rise.

She had reached the point of this high hill, at the edge of the river valley, and with a double strategy in mind, she turned suddenly to the right, taking a trail down

This Magnificent Combination DINNER and TEA SET FREE to Our Subscribers



The above illustration only begins to do justice to this handsome combination Dinner and Tea Set, which we have decided to give away **Free** to our readers.

The Combination Dinner and Tea Set consists of 47 pieces and is made of the best English Semi-Porcelain. The design is one of the most popular patterns we have ever seen. The floral decoration is printed under the glaze in a rich flow color, soft

and velvety in tone. A neat, embossed design follows the edge of every piece. All handles and edges are traced with gold. Each set is guaranteed by The Western Home Monthly and by Messrs Robinson & Co., the well-known Pioneer Winnipeg merchants. All that you have to do in order to get this set is to send us seven new subscriptions to The Western Home Monthly at one dollar apiece. Surely a magnificent reward for such a little labor.

The Western Home Monthly, Winnipeg, Canada