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WOLF MOON

A ROMANCE OF THE GREAT
SOUTHWEST

BY JOSEPH J. QUINN

CHAPTER VI.

The program featured a picture Jack had seen two years before. It was scratched, thumbprinted, broken and flickered from the first moment it was thrown on the screen. It caught fire twice and the time consumed in mending it was punctuated with a loud hand-clapping and ribald remarks.

"That's Sanders, our sheriff, sitting down there in the third row," Buster informed Jack, indicating a large, dark man with a round haircut. "Has more nerve than six white men." Buster called to Sanders who came over and joined them.

After introducing Jack, Buster spoke:

"By the way, Sanders, I hear the Dorados are back."

"They are and they ain't. Took out tonight for somewhere, but God only knows where. I'm scenting trouble. But you can't pin 'em down. I jes know they have bin gittin' cattle out of this heah country, but nobody has seen 'em. All they know is that the cattle go when the Dorados go. I guess if anybody did see 'em they wouldn't live to tell about it. The biggest Dorado boy is a terror. He's got notches on both sides of his gun and then under it. He showed it to me one day heah about two years ago and he winked at me when he said, 'Still got room for more.' I've a good mind to go over to the Gulch and see who they left behind."

"Well, if you do we'll go along. Let's go now this picture is a night-mare."

Twenty minutes later the trio turned in on the Trichell ranch just below Roundtop. Jack noticed Sanders had a gun strapped on either side. For the first time in his life he felt as if he were about to undergo an experience worth writing home about. He reached for his own gun and its touch brought a bit of comfort and protection.

The trio dismounted near the Gulch and tied their horses to the underbrush. Sanders crept on hands and knees toward the brink followed by Jack and Buster. The broad depression lay below them like a canyon, its sloping sides fading into the gloom of the abyss.

The three listened. The wind rustled in the blackjacks but there was no other sound.

"That's queer," Sander whispered, "the whole crowd must be out on a picnic. Wait! Is that a light over there?"

All three peered through the darkness. Down toward the west end of the Gulch a few sparks sprang into the air.

"Looks to me as if someone is kicking out a camp fire," declared Buster.

Sanders agreed. "Buster, you go follow the Gulch around to the left. I'll go the right and Corcoran, you stay here and watch the horses. Something's in the air as sure as you live. Putting out that fire is significant. Maybe they saw us."

As Sanders disappeared Jack lay flat on his stomach and glued his eyes to the spot where he imagined the fire lay. A little higher up a brood of sparrows lay scattered in the blue, color-firing the heavens. Far off the noises of the insect world composed a dirge. It was the summer song of heat and joy, of green leaves and grass and trees. The stunted oaks flung down their shadows into the Gulch, filling it with brooding, mystic forms. It was a fitting place to stage a tragedy for the wind and darkness alone to know. It could produce a myriad of winged creatures by peering down into its bottomless maw. Night had mantled it with Stygian darkness. The wind sang through the sage, stopped, then stirred.

Jack put his ear to the ground in Indian fashion. A queer sort of rumble as if a locomotive passing through a distant canyon struck his ear, faintly. He lifted his head to listen intently. There was no foreign sound. He repeated the procedure several times until he was certain he heard a deep rumbling noise as if the earth were quaking from within, or the far-off murmur of a cataract.

In a few moments the distant roar became greater. Corcoran neighed shrilly while the other horses pulled nervously at their bridles. Jack rose to his feet with the intention of running back to quiet them but he had no sooner started for the trees than he dropped flat.

In the distance a black mass of cattle was moving toward the Gulch. He could hear the noise from their hoofs, the mad bellowing, the clicking of horns one against the other, the wild shouting of men. In an instant Jack realized he could not cover the intervening distance to the trees. He turned and ran toward the Gulch. Over his shoulder came the sound of the panting and blowing leaders. With a quick leap Jack reached the side of the gorge and pulled himself under the rim. In a moment the cattle had come, bawling, snorting, sending showers of dust and dirt into the air, hiding the sky and stars. On by one they leaped down the incline, urged by those from behind. Hundreds of them rolled on and on, a never-ending

mass, falling, stumbling, uttering queer sounds from their panting throats. One rolled over the side and down, its hard hoofs pounding dangerously near Jack's body. The herd buckled, but plunged on, creating a grinding, grating uproar. Gradually they were wearing down the edge, sending big cakes of dust and dirt pattering down upon him. Riders followed them with loud curses, yelling and shouting to the hesitating and stumbling, their high pitched voices mingled with the raucous bellowing of the steers. Jack lay coiled under the ledge until the last rider disappeared. Then flashing like ignited powder in his face came the dread realization of it all. They were rustlers, driving cattle down the Gorge and out through the Southern end where there was no fence or boundary. From there they could cut back to the plains and through toward Texas. Jack felt that they were the Trichell cattle. The rustlers must have come upon them suddenly on the range and with loud whoops started them toward the Gulch. Jack looked down into the black gorge where the faint forms of the cattle were sending pillars and sheets of dust whirling up toward the western slope. The thought that the Trichell cattle were being rustled off made him spring to his feet eager to give the alarm. Jack reached for his gun and aimed it toward the sky.

A sharp, sudden pain shot through his shoulder, electrifying it with a million needles. Simultaneously he saw a spear of light dart from the ridge above. He swung to see who shot him. Silhouetted against the moon just peeping over the Trichell ranch he saw the familiar outline of Tulane Balsan. Jack dropped like a plummet just as a report came from Sander's gun over to the right. Another echo sounded from the left. Then the valley burst into flame. A dozen guns blazed forth, breaking the pitch blackness with daubs of sputtering fire. Before each flash the wild-eyed cattle tossed their horns and dashed on, stumbling and stamping.

Jack swung his gun in front of him. Tulane sat picturesque on his horse, his large Mexican hat blotting out the light of the moon. In his hand was grasped a smoking gun. To Jack it appeared as if he were about to shoot again. Jack aimed at Tulane and pulled the trigger.

His gun jerked like a nervous broncho, throwing his hand high in the air. A streak of fire three feet long shot from the barrel, while a puff of pungent, whitish smoke mingled with the night air and stood like a wall in front of him. Down through the pall of smoke crept the moon's rays and silvered it. Slowly it lifted as if carried up on the shoulders of the ages.

Jack couldn't believe his eyes.

CHAPTER VII

THE STUMBLING FIGURE

The large silver maples lining the walks of Fairmount Park always were a source of interest to John Corcoran, Senior. From his little rendezvous near the river bluffs he loved to watch the leaves expose their silver sheen under the evening breeze. At times it meant the coming of a storm from over the Jersey flats, at others the usual balmy breezes that go with early summer days. Here on his bench under the beeches and dogwoods he found a peace and quiet that brought on recollective moods. Nature nurtured the tranquillity, the clouds, the soothing wind, the green, green hills. Out upon the Schuylkill craft sped up and down under the high bridges spanning the river. Little children gathered wild flowers on the cliffs and wove them into wreaths. Nurses rolled their baby cabs along the walks growing dusty from the heat. Into this seclusion filtered no beasts from the city's heart that pounded and throbbed from morn till night. Noisy marts, steamboat and factory whistles, the grind and bustle of traffic, were hemmed in between grim walls of steel and stone. Nature was sacred here with notes and moods that modernism dare not rob.

But the dreams that the man fell into were not lengthy. They vanished with the mists that rose from the dark waters. Often they made him pull at his cigar nervously, again gaze into space as if searching for something that time had veiled. It was as mystical to him as the future that lay ahead. The mere he reflected in the event that had broken him in spirit the more he threw his thoughts into the future, hoping against hope, but relying upon the goodness of God.

"Just fifteen years ago this month Joey has been gone. Fifteen long years." His chin dropped and with eyes lowered he let memories come trooping back. Then he shook his head slowly as if to fling away the sentimental mood that obsessed him. A thousand times before he had done the same and a thousand times had risen and stridden out into the darkness to dispel the memory. But phantoms of the past haunted him, broke him down, yet, queerly, he clung to them tensely at times and at others dashed them aside with abandon. Under the weight he lay crushed, tortured, begging for a reprieve from the memory that burned by day and seared his brain by night. Since Jack had left for Oklahoma his father had become shaken by

moody spells. The death of his wife had left him lonely and saddened, with only the comfort of his son to bear up under the blistering blow. Year after year it laid his soul open on the anvil of torture, hammering it, for John Corcoran loved his wife with that tender and deep affection that sprang from the confidence he had reposed in her. Her death had been followed by the demise of his college chum, Lester Hathaway, and wife, in a railway wreck. The grief at the loss of his wife thus was supplemented by the blow. It was a double tragedy that stalked down each morning and evening of his life, taking possession of it, leaving him fit for nothing but dreary sadness and moods to which nature condemned him as a penance for dwelling so lengthily upon the misfortune.

John Corcoran felt it his bounden duty to care for the Hathaway children, Janet and Joey. He would have taken them both into his house but with his own wife dead, he feared the responsibility of raising two orphaned children. Had Mrs. Corcoran lived it would have been different. Keen delight and satisfaction would have come with the rearing of the lovely offspring of his college comrade. But it was impossible under the circumstances. Janet was turned over to the Gallagher who had no children of their own. Joey was adopted by John Tipton and his wife, a young couple who lived close to the Corcorans when in Georgia. But Tipton believed that fields were green far away and upon an offer from Chicago went West.

For one year Tipton corresponded with Corcoran who entertained a lively interest in both Janet and Joey. Then came a letter from Tipton telling of his intention to move to St. Louis. That was the last Corcoran ever heard from him. Whether he reached St. Louis or not he never knew. There followed months of anxiety on the part of Corcoran, days of solicitous thought for Joey. He bought Chicago and St. Louis papers in the hope of gaining a tidbit of news of them. He even advertised in the personal columns of western papers. But nothing came of it. His keen solicitude was not rewarded by even an inkling of information. Mr. and Mrs. Tipton had disappeared with Joey as if swallowed by some unrecorded earthquake. Corcoran's surmise was that they had struck a streak of misfortune but that sooner or later they would show up in the East. At present Joey should be big and strong and about eighteen years of age, perhaps attending college.

Fifteen years seemed a long time for Senior Corcoran. They had taken their toll of his sprightliness and cheer, had narrowed his wide horizon, drawn his life taut as if with steel bands. They were filled with prayer and resignation, hope and despair. His only recourse for consolation had been to the little shrine in the Northern part of the city. For years he had prayed at St. John's church in the heart of Philadelphia. Every evening he recited his beads before the tabernacle where faith told him reposed the Holy of Holies. In storm and sunshine he had come and prayed, prayed for the repose of the soul of his beloved wife and for the return of Joey.

Often as he prayed large crowds came to adoration at some evening service. The candles blinked upon the altar, the incense rose in perfumed clouds from the censer while sacred music sounded from the choir; the chanting of verses, the footfalls in the aisles and the striking of chimes as a hush came down over the congregation did not distract the bent figure near the statue of the Blessed Virgin. Sometimes he joined in prayer, at others, apart he bent his head, clasped his hands before him and struck an attitude of devotion that came only from a contrite and suppliant mortal communing with his Maker.

As years went by and no wisp or word of news came from the Tiptons or Joey, John Corcoran faltered not. He prayed the harder. He had been taught that God in His Wisdom knew best, that perhaps some unrecognized form of grace had descended upon his life, some unseen hand delivered him from tribulation. But he would continue his prayers for Joey. Some day the veil of mystery would be rent.

TO BE CONTINUED

HIS WISH GRANTED

The First Communion classes for working boys were being formed one evening in the schoolhouse of one parish. I was watching the lads as they were placed in divisions according to their intelligence, when, suddenly, a scuffle was heard at the door.

Every head was turned, as a boy was pushed forward. He fell, but quickly regained his feet, and tried to make his exit, but two other boys were behind him, barring the way. He stood at bay like a small wild animal, his terrified eyes taking in the windows, vainly trying to see if escape were possible.

"What does this mean?" I said sternly.

"Father, this fellow has been hangin' round the buildin' for an hour? He wants in, but he's afraid!"

"What are you afraid of, my son?"

No answer came from the boy, who certainly looked frightened to

death. He was ill-clad, small and pale.

"What is your name? Don't be afraid? Speak up like a man!"

"Will," in a husky voice, twirling his cap.

"Will what?"

"Father, he ain't got any other name. He hasn't got any parents, nor brothers, nor nothin'," said the boys who seemed to know him.

"One of life's waifs, I thought, thrown on the stream of humanity, wanted by nobody, cared for by nobody, and yet a soul for whom Christ died."

"Will, are you a Catholic?"

"Yes, Father."

"Do you want to make your First Communion?"

"Yes, Father."

"Well, come here and sit down, and I'll teach you all you have to know."

Will looked furtively around, and seeing I smiled, and yet was in earnest took the seat I gave him, and his presence was soon forgotten. He looked and listened in silence all evening.

I thought it better to say nothing to him that evening. If he came again it would be time enough. When the other boys left I found out from one of the boys that Will was a new boy, lived under steps in summer and in ash-pits in winter; always said he was a Catholic, but until now never came near a Catholic school, and he was twelve years old! He had heard other boys talk about night instruction, and came with the crowd, but lacked courage to enter until forcibly landed in the room by his chums, who would have "no foolin' where the priest was."

Next evening Will was on hand. Face clean, better clothes, though sadly threadbare, and respectful and attentive. He could not read, so instructions proceeded laboriously. However, he grew more and more earnest, mastered the chapters of catechism, and ere long was the most devoted chap in the room. His big brown eyes never left my face when I spoke to the class. He helped to put the room in order after dismissal, and always lingered until I said, "Good-night; God bless you, Willie!"

He learned his prayers and I gave him a rosary, and as the time drew near for First Communion and Confirmation, he became, if possible, more attentive and earnest. Often I spoke to the boys about the saints of God, little anecdotes of charity, devotion and prayer. Once when I had told the story of the early martyrs Willie's eyes (ever fixed on me) glowed, and that night he said to me: "Father, I'd like to die a martyr!"

"Well, my boy, you might, although not by fire or sword."

"How then, Father?"

"By loving others better than yourself—by giving your life to help others. There are many martyrs in this world, Willie."

He said nothing and I forgot the circumstance.

First Communion time came. Will passed the examination and made his general confession. I had grown greatly interested in him, and had spoken to some charitable ladies who provided him with suitable clothing and had given him work. He was now a respectable looking lad, a messenger boy. But although I had provided him with a home, he left it to live with an old apple woman who took him in her warm heart and gave him a little corner in her humble lodgings, and grew fonder of him every day.

And he responded to Granny's love by giving her all his earnings. After Will had been confirmed and made his First Communion he still came to see me, and I noticed with some anxiety he had a hard, hacking cough. I mentioned it, but he only laughed; said it was nothing—"he didn't mind it. But Granny came to see me greatly worried over her boy."

"Father," she said, "I wish you would bid him not to pray so long in the cold. I do be listening for him to go to bed, but he is on his knees till all hours, with his beads in his hands, and the room do be cold, for we can't have fires at night."

Will's purity and piety had begun to make a deep impression on my mind. He is a chosen soul, I thought, and often he looked to me like a young saint, with his steady brown eyes fixed rapturously on me when I talked of the martyrs and holy ones of God.

One bitter cold February night Will came to see me. I noticed his cough was worse, and spoke to him about taking more care of his self. When he was leaving through the doorway, nearly taking me off my feet.

"Will," I said, "you must take the care home. Have you the change?" I asked.

"Well, I declare," said Will, feeling in his pockets; "I guess I left my money in my other suit. But I'll run, Father."

"No, you'd freeze a night like this. Here is car fare." And I handed him a new quarter.

"Thank you, Father; I'll borrow it and pay it back," said he with a smile.

"Go off then," I said. Good-night!"

"But the blessing?"

"God bless you! God bless you!" and I hastily closed the door.

I thought no more of Will for a day or two. The weather grew bitter cold. No one left the house

unless he had to do so. But one afternoon the telephone rang and a strange voice asked me could I go to such a house to see a poor person who was dying. I took the address and started. I met her at the door her apron up to her eyes and the tears streaming down.

"Oh, Father," she wept, he's never stopped calling for you!"

"Who?" I exclaimed.

"My poor Willie. He's borrowed something from you, and it's worritin' him!"

I asked to be conducted to him at once.

She led me to the little room, and there on a cot was Willie, delirious, calling out he wanted to return the quarter:

"Have you had a doctor?" I said.

"No, Father; sure it's the priest he's calling for; he only got mad today."

I went at once to a telephone near by and called up a physician I knew, who was soon at the house. He looked at Willie, shook his head and began to work with him. I went into the next room, and by degrees got the story out of the bewildered Granny.

The night Will left me he was later than usual coming home, and Granny was distressed, she said, it was so bitter cold. At last about midnight two men came to the door with Willie between them. They found him lying in the snow, with blood coming from his mouth, not far from home. He had almost frozen, but gave his address faintly. She had put him to bed, and he didn't seem better in the morning, and suddenly he grew delirious and raved at telling home and borrowing money from me. Strange, I thought; why didn't he ride in the cars? He was overcome by that bitter night, but why did he walk? What did he do with the money?

"Granny, had he any money when he came in?" I said.

"Not a cent, your reverence. When I asked him why he didn't ride he said his money was in his other suit, and when he took had he was raving that I was to pay you back a quarter. Sure, if he had a quarter, why didn't he take the cars?"

"Sure enough," I thought. "I told him to ride."

I felt uneasy. Where was that quarter? But then the thought occurred to me that he might have dropped it in the snow.

"The men told me," said Granny, "that they found him senseless, with the blood coming out of his mouth, just yonder, almost in sight of the door. It was a bitter cold wind he faced, comin' over the bridge!" she wailed.

Just then the doctor called me and said quietly: "This is a case of pneumonia and exhaustion. The hemorrhages must have been severe. I don't think he will pull through. Father, but he will be conscious in an hour. I will send some medicine and a nurse."

The nurse called softly: "Father!" I went into the inner room.

"Will," I said, "do you know me?"

Willie was conscious, weak, but smiling.

"I'm so glad, Father," he faltered. "I think I'm pretty sick but I'm so glad you came."

I motioned them to leave and I heard Willie's confession. He wanted to receive Holy Communion. So I left and returned soon with the Blessed Sacrament and the holy oils. He received Holy Viaticum and I anointed him. Then he lay peaceful and quiet till his eyes closed. The door of the next room was open and long crimson gleams of light came through and lay on the white counterpane and on the pillow where the little head rested. There was utter silence except his difficult breathing. The nurse moved about noiselessly. Her look was one of one who felt that their ministrations were useless, although she smiled at Willie.

"Father," he whispered, "did Granny return your quarter?"

"That's all right, Willie. If she hasn't, she will do so. You are going to heaven soon; don't bother about anything but the thought of our Lord, who you will soon see." Then a thought struck me. "Willie, what did you do with the quarter I gave you?"

He looked squarely into my face. "Father," he said with difficulty: "I gave it to somebody who needed to ride in the cars more than I did. You know, you told me by loving others better than yourself, by giving your life to help others you could be a martyr. Father, that night I nearly froze. I was so cold walking home, and when the icy air stopped my breath and the blood came I prayed God would make me a martyr, but I only fainted."

Something rose up in my throat and choked me. Here, then, was the secret of the money. The boy had given his car fare to somebody, and tried to walk home over the frozen river and his weak lungs had given out. He was dying now from the effects of his charity. Yes, the blood-red sunset foretold the death of the martyr.

He died that night in his innocence and self-consecration, the last look of the big brown eyes was on the crucifix I held in my hand.

I had High Mass over the remains, and at the funeral I spoke of the noble act that caused his death. There were many in the church, for

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