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WOLF MOON

A ROMANCE OF THE GREAT SOUTHWEST

BY JOSEPH J. QUINN

CHAPTER II.—CONTINUED

"Well, I'm going to give it a trial. There is more opportunity in the West. Or at least there are not one hundred persons ready to jump into one job. Then again a little time spent in the oil lands will broaden me."

"Maybe it'll flatten you. Those oil field towns are shifting affairs but the men who make them upset the pace for shiftness. You've got to stroke the canaries the right way out there or else they'll snap you quicker than a turtle. Jack, they'll take a tenderfoot like you and make you look like a greaser within a week."

"Nothing like seeing for yourself. The oil towns may not be as bad as painted."

"And by the way," added Dave, "give my regards to this young maid that the palmist spoke of. She might turn out to be a rip-snortin' beauty. You never can tell. How many flowers are born to blush unseen? It's a wonder Janet lets you go. I suppose you'll be sending for her within a month or two."

"Cut that foolish talk. I may be back within a month myself. The climate may not agree with me."

"Yes, the climate of those oil towns may not," laughed Dave. Down near the fishing boats a couple moved here and there. Ropes swayed back and forth in the breeze and threw gaunt, slim shadows on the sand. The smell of fish and salt made the air pungent. A dab of humanity, brightly colored under long capes, chatted gayly further up the boardwalk. Night air wet the benches and dampened clothing. Arc lights sputtered and shook in recurring breezes carrying mist off the ocean while small drops of moisture fell from the boardwalk rails.

Jack shouted a cheery "So Long" to Dave and plunged down a side avenue to his cottage. In the seclusion of his room he, too, felt the weirdness as experienced by Janet. He turned on the light, fumbled among some clothing and straightened as a long-drawn locomotive whistle fell upon his ear. Jack clicked out the light and drew his chair to the window. As a long, jointed reptile the train came in over the marshes and likewise long, deep thoughts came in to obsess him. He wondered what lay out there ahead of him in the uncharted future. Would it be filled with adventure, success, dissatisfaction, romance, what? A picture of the oil fields, the high derricks mounting into the sky, came to him. Then the familiar face of Janet like a phantom trailed over it all and smiled through the dream, her blue eyes beckoning. He found the prophecy of the palmist hard to dismiss. Who could this mysterious girl be, born in the East and living in the West? A myth he thought. Why should he worry about the empty presage of a gypsy?

Vague and nameless stirrings from within tortured Jack into a shallow confidence in the woman's words only to be supplanted by absolute repudiation. Yet how did she know he was going west to Oklahoma? If she possessed this knowledge why not surmise that her prediction of marriage was also true. Jack arose flinging the pursuing thoughts away. Yet they came crowding back like insects, tantalizing, inhuman, boring. To his mind Janet fulfilled the idealistic world in which he had often placed her. He would believe in Janet, accept her promise, pledge his faith in her.

After all it was disconcerting on the eve of his long trip to be told that he would meet a girl in Oklahoma whom he would marry, especially in view of his affection for Janet. He couldn't harmonize his visit to the oil fields with a meeting of his future fiancee. But the twinkle that came into the gypsy's eye when she grasped his hand and traced her fat forefinger over his palm in remembrance made Jack shudder. There was something strange about her, something of the occult in the gleam of her shifting eyes, as if she had gone into a future world and returned with prize particles of information. Of course she could not foretell the future. No human could. Dwelling upon it all aroused a new passion within him, a passion to see the woman again and fling back the words into her face, to stamp her as a liar and a fool. The engendered rancour made him arise and rush to the door. As he swung it open a flood of starlight, of chilled night air, rushed in upon him. It fanned his fever to abatement and throwing the door shut he fell across the bed. Janet was his own, his very own; no gypsy words, no smirking gag could rob him of his affection for her. He would live for her love and show the world that the gypsy's mummbling was childish, empty, visionary.

The symphony of frogs and night insects mingled with the pounding of surf which he couldn't quite distinguish from the thoughts that throbbed at the base of his brain. He closed his eyes for a moment and once more came the vision of oil fields with the flaring gas lights, the squeaking, rusty machinery,

the smell of oil, the towering rigging, and through it rose the face of Janet. This time it had a sad expression. He arose, crossed his room to the sea window and looked down the beach to where the ocean rolled in with its eternal swish. It showed up restless under a flash of skylight, as restless, he thought, as his own soul.

CHAPTER III. THE NIGHT RIDE

Number 62 closely follows the Golden State limited through Texoka. It pulls out of the mile siding soon after the red tail lights of the limited have been swallowed in the dust and dirt of the miniature cyclone trailing it and blows two longs and two shorts for the crossing down by the Haversall ranch. The long resounding blast is for Texoka.

Bluebonnet had not crossed half way through the grove before the draw-out wall of the locomotive transfixes her. It came from somewhere off on the left, over the roof of trees that swayed back and forth and threw their showers of leaves and raindrops down upon her. But it was as a siren call, a note of appeal that guided her blind footsteps in the darkness.

A brakeman with a lantern in hand was coming toward her from the engine. He must not see her. She could never explain her predicament. He could detect at a glance that she was a gypsy and this would defeat her purpose of escape. Yet tonight, soaked with rain, spattered with mud, dishevelled more than usual, she looked more a street urchin than a gypsy done up in brilliant colors. Her head-dress had been lost. She limped though she had forgotten the pain.

Bluebonnet started to cross under the train to escape observation on the other side. But fear that it might start while she was in the act deterred her. She contemplated retreat toward the station whose lights blinked dimly through the rain. But would not Pemella and the rider be there waiting for her? That would be stepping into failure itself. She must face the brakeman. Desperate under the situation Bluebonnet looked and spied an open car. She hesitated for a moment. The brakeman was approaching slowly — whistling. She stepped close to the car, caught hold of the floor, pulled herself up to it and rolled inside. She lay quiet, huddling, through fear of detection. The brakeman stopped for a moment near the car, the light of his lantern throwing shadows on the roof. Then he passed. Gloom filled the enclosure. Bluebonnet's heart, beating in triphammer throbs, softened under relaxation.

TO BE CONTINUED

STUFF O'DREAMS

By Jerome Hart Bosman in Rosary Magazine

Kate Wellington's pen stopped in the middle of a word; she stared at the page on which she had been writing. What an odd letter to send her father, when she had sat down only to write him New Year's greetings! She read over the last few scratchy phrases.

"Dreams! What are they? visions of the past, or prophecies of the future vouchsafed us by God while our souls are lightened in our bodies? If prophecies, warnings? —parents? —Or is it all nothing?"

She tore the page in two. "That's not a bit like me!" Jimmie said. "I'm not superstitious!" she told herself. "I ate something that did not agree with me! There's no such thing as a ghost!"

Maggie, a new acquisition to the household, came in with fresh logs for the fire. "Maggie," cried Mrs. Wellington, "do you believe in ghosts?"

"Sure, ma'am," returned Maggie, cheerfully. "My own mother said she made her resolve."

Kate turned back to the snow. Nonsense! She imagined it, Maggie imagined it, Maggie's mother imagined it.

Two days later, a telegram came when Kate and her young husband were at breakfast. "It's Uncle George!" cried she. "He's dead!"

"That's too bad," said Wellington, perfunctorily. "The old boy was about due to go, though, wasn't he?"

"I knew someone in my family was going to die this week!"

"Did you, indeed?" scoffed her husband. "What rot you talk!"

"But I dreamed it, Jimmie!" protested Kate. "Three nights ago, a white shadow came to my bedside and bent over me. It was inhumanly tall and wavering, and it leant over me with what seemed to be arms extended and shrouded. I thought, even in my sleep, that it was a moonbeam, but there was no moon, and the—thing spoke to me. It woke me. I sat up, and Jimmie! you can, smile like that, if you like, but it was still there! It just floated to the door and beckoned to me! Of course, it meant something, but what? I hate to see people die! Even if I'd known it was Uncle George, I—I wouldn't have gone there!"

The New Year season and her father's visit became past events; the winter snows melted; spring was coming up the ravine. Releas-

ing her grasp of the limb, Bluebonnet slid down, falling into a pool of water. She lifted her head to see two horsemen loping along the edge of the gully. The darkness prevented recognition, but she was certain she heard Pemella's characteristic oaths. In one glimpse she observed that the gully was skirted by the road from the camp and that the road lead to the station. Bluebonnet listened after the hoofbeats died away yet heard nothing but the falling rain beating steadily on leaf and ground. Now and then a branch broke from a tree and fell dangerously close to her. But no foreign sound reached her ears. Even the train seemed to have passed on. Had it really gone? It was this question that urged Bluebonnet to scale the wet sides of the gully. There, one hundred yards away, stood the long line of freight cars. Further up the track the escaping steam of the locomotive told her the train was headed towards the East.

Crouching low and running with all her summoned strength Bluebonnet crossed the short space between the ravine and the tracks and walked nervously along the sides of the cars. Then she stopped. A brakeman with a lantern in hand was coming toward her from the engine. He must not see her. She could never explain her predicament.

Her father stopped off to see them on his way back from the funeral. And the night he came, Kate had another nightmare. Even Maggie heard her scream out in her sleep, and Maggie slept in the attic story.

"Well! neither did Kate, any more. Nor in mourning, or things like that. You see, the world was Kate's oyster, too. She had grown to be a little like Jimmie. She thought life could be lovely always, that she could dodge unpleasant things just by — well, dodging!

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"My goodness!" said Kate, at breakfast. "I don't know what I shall do if I go on having these terrible dreams! It was Uncle George, again! We were in a frame house of many rooms, all clean but absolutely bare, with unpainted floors and heavy shutters on the windows that had no curtains. Every one of our family was there, the living and the dead! Poor Uncle George was going on a long journey, and he didn't want to start! No one had any sympathy for him. Anyways, he heard you say he made you tired, Jimmie! He was dreadfully bad."

"Well, he still makes me tired," mumbled her husband, behind his paper. Kate's father laughed. Jimmie was funny.

"Oh, Jimmie and Dad, it was such a queer dream! Our new car had come and was standing on a stone causeway that ran down from the house to the sea. The car faced the house, and the sea behind it was wild and black-looking, and it went up to meet the sky in the distance. I kept thinking the brakes on our new car must be very good or our car would run backwards into the sea! Then you and I were leaving, and of course there was no place to turn the car around, so we had to get in and back down. I stood up in the car to tell you how we were going, and the car began to go faster and faster, and oh! there was a sheer drop off the sea at the bottom of the causeway, and I screamed, and you couldn't make the brakes work!" Kate, in her nervousness, overturned her cup of coffee and the brown stream ran across the snowy cloth, toward Jimmie.

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