

"THE FIGHTING TRAIL"

NOW SHOWING AT THE HAPPY HOUR

(Continued)

"When I returned I brought Joe with me. He confided, on the way, that Frances cried continually with Lawton. She did not love him. Upon arriving again at Lost Mine, I learned that Lawton had taken no steps. He confessed that he had lost all the money gambling. I was disgusted with him, and insisted that we return to Chihuahua. I refused to let him drink on the way, and he became enraged. Then, he told me that Frances would have nothing to do with me because, I quote his own words: 'I told her you offered to buy her because you didn't care to marry her—and she believed me.' His statement infuriated me. My errands, was suddenly boiling with Spanish blood, cooled through generations, was suddenly boiling with me. It was a matter of honor, challenged him to a duel with knives, and we fought. I know not how long, on the brink of a precipice. We struggled like maniacs; I do not remember all, but I do know that I was suddenly horrified as I realized that we were hurtling through space. We had rolled over the edge and were falling into the valley below. Lawton was killed by that fall. Through some miracle—it was nothing short of a miracle—I was saved. Joe revived me from unconsciousness, and that night we buried Lawton within a few feet of the scene of the struggle. Just as we finished covering over the body, Joe heard something moving in the bushes behind us. He hurried to the spot, and found nothing. A moment later we were startled by the sound of hoof-beats going down the trail. I was haunted by the thought that perhaps someone had seen us, but in time managed to drive it from my mind.

"When we reached home Frances asked for her husband. I could not tell her the truth, but when I was not near, Joe told her all. He also told her the reason, which vindicated me in her eyes and brought me back her respect. She understood, thank God; and she forgave me! That night you were born, and your mother died. With her last words she begged me to care for you and bring you up to be happy."

"Very soon after your mother's death I received a visit from two men whom I had never known. They were a degraded looking pair, their attire rough, and their faces scarred from a hard life in the hills. They spoke well, however, which surprised me; they must have been fairly well educated and, I judged, had sunk to degradation in their early manhood. Their names you have heard since. They were Drant and Rawls. They were the men who had seen us bury Lawton, and, as a reward had been offered by the authorities for the conviction of the murderer, they claimed blackmail, which I was forced to pay. They continued their demands for money until I could meet them no longer, and fled secretly to this little abode in the hills, bringing only you and Joe with me. We dug the shaft which leads to the mine, and developed it only enough to yield a living. It is as rich to-day as if it had never been touched. And it is yours when you read this, for I shall have passed away. One-half of the chart is in an envelope that lies near this. The other half, which we took from Lawton's body, is in the main part of the chest. Together they will serve to locate the mine alone, no other can help. But Yaqui can also take you there. He is the only one alive, after I pass away, who knows the location. That is all.

"Your mother knew this story up to the point of her death. She forgave me. Can you, Nan, dear daughter of my heart if not of my body? I ask you, Nan, though I can never hear your answer. I may only live and die in hope.

"Don Carlos Ybarra De Cordoba." Gwyn looked up from the manuscript as he finished reading. He saw that Nan's eyes were filled with tears, but she brushed them away and forced a smile. Gwyn gazed at her, almost mechanically opening the other envelope as he did so. From it he drew a folded sheet of paper as old and yellow and brittle from age as the envelope which had enclosed it. Carefully, so as not to tear it, he unfolded the sheet, until there lay spread open on his lap, the chart. All of the lines and writing that seemed to lead to one side, stopped abruptly as they came to the edge of the paper. It was plain that as Don Carlos had stated in his letter, it was but a half of the map.

"This is what they wanted," Gwyn said thoughtfully. "It is the chart. They must have learned of its existence in some way."

"Yes," replied Nan, "and they must have gotten the other half. Do you remember when Joe ran to the chest after they had left, he shouted: 'They got it, but not all!' He meant the chart. They got a half. This is the rest. He went out to find their trail. He should be back by now

Do you suppose that anything could have happened to him? If they ever get him? If they ever get him and make him well—" Her face grew suddenly pale as the thought of what they would do to the Indian. Gwyn rushed from the room and out through the door. Nan stood, as if she were dazed. The dawn was beginning to cast a thin, gray light in the sky, and shone as a mist through the tops of the trees. Around the hut, and in the thick stretch of trees it still was dark. As Gwyn threw himself upon a horse, ready saddled, and prepared to ride out to the trail, Nan rushed from the hacienda and mounted another. They did not speak a word, but clattered off toward the trail at top speed.

Meantime, Yaqui Joe, faithful to his trust, had ridden bravely after the brigands and, as it transpired, into the very jaws of death. When he mounted his pony and started after the gang it was easy for him to pick up and follow their trail. He rode rapidly for nearly five miles and then, his practiced eye noting that the others had stopped their horses, apparently to hold a conference, he suddenly dismounted, tethered his horse and began cautiously to advance on foot.

The Indian had gone only a sparse one hundred yards when suddenly the huge form of Shoestring Drant came hurtling from the bush on a rising at the right hand side of the road. He landed squarely on Joe's shoulders, bearing him to the ground and knocking his rifle from his hand. Von Bleck, Cut-Deep and two other men quickly joined Drant. Joe struggled manfully, but in vain. The odds were too great for him and it was a matter of only a few seconds for the outlaws to make him a captive.

Then began the torture that showed the depths of ferdinanness that lay in Cut-Deep Rawls and Shoestring Drant. Joe was bound fast to the trunk of a tree, his bonds cutting into his flesh so that he yelped from the pain. But he made no outcry. Rawls demanded that Joe, as the price of his liberty, reveal the location of the mine. The Indian made no sign. Rawls struck the man a blow in the face. Again Joe made his demand. Again Joe was silent and Rawls, his anger welling up like a torrent, showered even the rugged Yaqui felled under the brutal attack and he passed into unconsciousness, his body sagging limply.

Rawls turned away. To Drant he said: "You and the others stay here and see what you can get out of this bull-headed coyote—Von Bleck and I will return to Ybarra's and hunt for the other half of this infernal map."

He and Von Bleck mounted and rode away and Shoestring gave his attention to Joe, who, weakened though he was revived in a few moments.

Shoestring took up the torture where Cut-Deep had stopped, but boating still failed to make the Indian betray his master's secret. Enraged, Shoestring drew his revolver and deliberately shot off the lobe of the Indian's right ear. Still Joe remained silent. Drant then drew forth a long-bladed hunting knife and, with cruelty unbelievable, began plunging it into the flesh of Ybarra's faithful servant, and soon blood was streaming from a score of wounds in Joe's arms, legs, neck and chest. When this failed to unseat his lips, Drant ordered his men to build a fire beneath the feet of their victim.

Joe by this time was almost beyond feeling and nothing that Shoestring could do now would add any more to his suffering. He was fast sinking into unconsciousness from loss of blood.

But the malignant Drant was determined and he personally applied the torch to the pyre that was to make Joe divulge his secret. The latter had slipped into unconsciousness again, but Drant depended on the fire to bring him back to life and confession. The outlaw had just lifted a burning brand and was letting the flames play on the soles of Joe's feet when a shot rang out. Startled, he swept the valley in a quick, all-embracing look, then leaped to his feet. He started to the trail, where he had left a man on guard and his other followed with him, leaving the dying Yaqui alone.

Arriving on the trail, Drant and his companion discovered their sentinel in a death grip with Gwyn. He and Nan had descended into the canyon on his farthest side by means of a rope which Gwyn took from a well on the side of the trail. Flying one end to the pommel of his saddle and taking Nan's rifle he had descended to the bottom of the canyon and she, remaining to be left alone, had followed. They crossed the bed of the canyon unobserved by

Drant's sentry and climbed up the other side to the trail. Gwyn was almost upon the guard before the latter saw him and fired. He missed and Gwyn leaped on him, Nan taking a short cut to the point where Joe had been left to die.

Drant and his companion lost not a moment in going to the rescue of Gwyn's antagonist. Each tried to bring their weapons into play, but could not. The struggling pair moved so rapidly they dared not take a chance of killing their friend. The pair leaped on Gwyn, but he fought like a tiger. He engaged the three singly and together. A dozen times they swayed to the edge of the trail and it seemed as though all must plunge to death. But they did not. Finally, catching the guard around the waist, Gwyn hurled him over the brink and to death. The other man leaped down soon afterward, breaking his neck as he struck the rocks below.

Fearful of a similar fate, Drant fled down the trail, intending to return and finish Joe before Gwyn could rescue him. As he approached, Joe who had been released by Nan, rose from the ground and fired. Nan did likewise. Drant, his fury turned on the girl, fired at her. But Joe had anticipated him and he leaped in front of Nan, taking in his own heart the bullet that was intended for her. Drant disappeared in the brush as Joe fell, dying to earth. Nan was quickly bending over the mortally wounded servant and raised his head to her lap as Gwyn came running up. They realized that Joe's valiant life was near its end.

Suddenly the old, wrinkled face of the faithful Yaqui brightened. His eyes lighted for an instant, his lips parted, a whisper came forth. They bent low to hear. He spoke: "Joe no tell."

They were his last words. His head fell back, his face relaxed. He was dead.

Tenderly, Gwyn raised the poor, blood-run body in his arms. Followed by Nan he carried his burden to a point deep in the canyon and hid it in a rocky grave, piling rocks high over it so that coyotes or vultures should not get to it. Then they began to ascend the cliff. Nan satly weeping as they went. Half way up the trail, Gwyn halted, his eyes riveted on something deep down the valley. It was Drant, riding like mad. Taking careful aim, Gwyn fired one shot from the rifle and an instant later Drant's white pony went to earth, shot through the head, and his rider went flying through the air. Nan restrained Gwyn as he raised his rifle to fire at Drant.

Now Gwyn and Nan moved hurriedly toward the point where they had descended into the canyon. Drant, who had by now reached the upper trail where their horses stood, mounted Nan's horse and rode swiftly off, seeking Von Bleck and Rawls.

When Gwyn and Nan reached the dangling rope that had borne them to the canyon bed, they were confronted by the problem of getting to the top again. Gwyn thought first of climbing up himself and then pulling Nan up, but the danger of battering her against the rocky walls of the canyon caused him to dismiss the plan. He had a sudden inspiration. Tying the rope securely about the middle of Nan's rifle, he ordered her to sit on one side of it and he sat upon the other. Then he tugged at the rope until the strain put her into his horse and the frightened beast started on a mad gallop along the trail. As he ran, he pulled Gwyn and Nan to the top of the canyon.

When they reached the top, Gwyn replaced the rope in the well and he and Nan went in search of their mounts. Only Gwyn's was to be found and then they realized how Drant had got away. Lifting Nan into the saddle, Gwyn then got on back of her and they started for the hacienda.

Dusk was beginning to unfold its thin, blue veil over the solemn peaks of the Sierras. The shadowy outlines of the mountains looked like a thousand tombstones in the growing darkness. The thick silence about the little house that had been Don Carlos' home seemed to emphasize the vastness and solitude of the hills. It was just fourteen hours from the windows of the hacienda that low, flickering, nervous rays of candle-light cast their yellow brightness into the darkness inside, lounging comfortably in the living room, where three men, conversing excitedly in low, scarcely audible voices. They were Karl Von Bleck, Shoestring Drant, and Cut-Deep Rawls. Von Bleck was leaning forward in his chair, a worried, unquiet expression on his countenance. Drant was talking, and as he spoke he mopped the perspiration from his forehead with a filthy handkerchief. It was evident



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ent that he had entered but a moment before, and his excited tones as words fairly tumbled from his lips, denoted that he was reporting news of weighty importance. Drant's eyes were fixed upon Von Bleck.

"Where's the Indian?" Von Bleck fairly shouted. "I don't care a hang how long you fought, I want to know where the Indian is. We didn't find the chart here and he knows where it is. That's all I care about where is he?"

(Continued next week)

NEW ROAD RULE NOT YET IN FORCE

The new Highway Act, under which the rule of the road is changed is not yet in force, and it is not yet proper to turn to the right. The regulation will be changed on order-in-council and the public will have ample notice. It is not likely the rule of the road will be changed till after next January, when the County Councils will have an opportunity of passing upon it.

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