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**WOLF MOON**

A ROMANCE OF THE GREAT  
SOUTHWEST

BY JOSEPH J. QUINN

**CHAPTER I.—CONTINUED**

The night of her marriage had come. The great day of dread was here. It had been looming long on the horizon of her life; now it overspread it like a net. The web that the spider had spun around her was as fine as gossamer, strong as adamant, inevitable as fate. It was narrowing subtly and surely. There could be no escape.

Sinister shadows crept down through the trees. Water dripped from the cottonwood leaves, dropped from the rim of the tents and ran in streams along the guy ropes to the ground. Red logs, spitting at each dash of rain, sent steam hurtling from the large iron kettle that contained food for the entire camp. One by one, boys struggled in from their depositions of the day and passed boisterously into the tents. A girl was gathering blankets hung from a rusty wire stretched between two wagons. Barefooted children pattered from one place to another, ran around the wagon wheels and screeched to one another as they dodged between the taut ropes of the tents. Supper was waiting upon Pemella who was due on the evening train from Tucumcari. The gypsy men had gone to meet him. Bluebonnet watched them as they silently led the horse that only Pemella mounted. His silvered saddle, too, was gone.

A desperate resolve came to Bluebonnet. Why should she await the stroke of fate that lay before her? Something from within urged her to flee. But she recalled when little Nadina had attempted to escape close to Denver a few months before. Nava had almost beaten her to death. Nadina's broken arm would always be a lesson. But the terror of the coming of Pemella, the realization that she would be forced to marry him, made her sink her face between her hands. She ran from her tent into the open only to see figures moving near the fire. Back near the wagons she heard a sound. She turned. Nava was gazing at her, a puzzled expression on her lowered face. Bluebonnet plunged back into her tent and staggered as if swooning. It would be impossible. She could not lift her hand without being seen.

Far off in the distance sounded the whistle of the oncoming train. It echoed in her ears as if it were bearing down on her at full speed. Bluebonnet started, looked up through the gloom of the tent. She felt that the same God who was sending the rain would bring deliverance from this fate. She could not wait much longer. Pemella would return in a few moments. From experience she knew that he would come to her tent a minute after his arrival, take her in his arms and kiss her upon the lips. A blind fury at the thought drenched her soul with disgust. But the actuality of the marriage itself would leave her broken as a wounded bird is left by the gunner.

Bluebonnet slipped to the front of the tent and peeped out. Near the fire several gypsies were merrily talking. Voices mingled with the falling raindrops from the trees. She watched for a moment. A spectre showed itself in the gloom near a clump of trees off to the left. Bluebonnet observed it move. It passed from one tree to the other, came nearer, receded and was swallowed up in the gloom. Could it be Nava? Did she surmise her intention? Had she the power of divination that she claimed? Bluebonnet thought not, for had she seen the picture of her frenzied brain she would have grasped her by the throat, her dark fingers would have sunk deeper and deeper. Bluebonnet dropped to the ground under the vividness of such a vision. Her short, sharp cry escaped her throat. Forced imagination was driving her desperate.

Another long-drawn blast announced that the train was coasting into the station. In an agony of shame she sprang to her feet. She must go now. She could stay no longer. Whatever the consequences they must be accepted. If death, then death would come as a sweet victory to her tired body and soul. Despair and abandon were driven against her in a mad rush. Gypsy life with its wandering from post to pillar and pillar to post must end. Hounded by the law, driven like disease and pestilence from the cities, she felt that gypsies were the scum of the earth, the jetsam of humanity that floated with the tides of adversity.

The crisis came and demanded its answer. Must she face the love-frenzied gypsy or escape? Must she flee now or marry him and live there with the gypsies until she broke down and died. The night under and beyond the trees looked dark but her soul was filled with a million distorted apparitions, pitch black, now grovelling, again winging through space. The chains of her bondage were about to be broken. The nomadic life, not one mood of which she had ever assented, was to be thrown off. She was to be free, free to glide away and live out there somewhere in the

trackless, treeless country. A strange stimulus gripped her, stiffened her will until she stood erect. She would not face martyrdom. She would live.

Indistinct voices of women and children blended. At times they arose to a crescendo and died away to a whisper. Bluebonnet peered out to where the gypsies were moving. She heard someone stir back of the tent. Perhaps it was only the rising wind brushing the trees. Cautiously she dropped back to the center. A huge shadow of a man passed along the side of the canvas. It looked familiar. She crept to the flap and pulled it aside. A sweep of rain was driven against her face. Not two feet away from her was Pemella. He was standing watching intently something near the fire. So close was he that she could have touched his shoulder. Then he recoiled a step and started towards the main tent. Bluebonnet watched him until the firelight flickered on a silver spangle of his hat. A guttural sound of surprise came from the distance, a discordant note, high pitched now, again low, mumbling.

All of the power that she had summoned from within seemed to vanish. She felt her face with her fingers that were as long icy strands, chilled to the bone and stiff with fear. Like a covering frightened animal before a beating storm she huddled in a heap near the opening, her body shaken with sobs. She closed her eyes for a moment. In the darkness instead of finding despair she was given quiet and peace, alluring inspiration. An inner voice was whispering to her softly but with persuasive blandishment. She rose and gripped her throat in desperation.

A loud curse from Nava was followed by a string of oaths. It was Pemella's tirade. A streak of light flashed through Bluebonnet's mind. It seemed to insulate her from the fear that gripped her heart. Before she knew it she had slipped out into the rain to meet the mysteries of the night.

**CHAPTER II.**  
THE PALMIST'S WORDS

Far out against a skyline of lightning-splashed clouds the Menhaden fishing boats dreamed lazily on their course. From off the sea came puffs of salty air filled with moisture. Great cotton-capped waves broke here and there, leaving a trace of silver on the water. It was summer and summer at the seashore means loveliness.

This was to be Jack Corcoran's last day in sight of the old Atlantic. Through two short months he had disported at Cape May, had danced, swum, ridden horseback, played tennis, golf, whiled away hours as if time were his own, and now he was to leave. His father had sent him to Cape May late in June to rest after a strenuous year at college. It was not altogether the realization of the work accomplished and the needed rest that made John Corcoran, Senior, decide to send Jack to the shore as usual but the remembered picture of him that evening when he gracefully bowed to the audience in recognition of the applause accorded him when he received his sheepskin.

After all there had not been many pleasures in the elder Corcoran's life. He had had his allotted share of trouble. The bitter pang of losing his wife had been supplemented by early financial failures. Some great tornado of trouble that rushed across his soul uprooting all the tender fibres of hope in worldly happiness had caused him to move from Georgia to Philadelphia some years before.

He had looked forward to the graduation of his son from college as the great ambition of his life. Talking about it, dreaming about it, he thought was uppermost in his mind. It never left him. To close associates he unfolded his plans for his only son. He had always insisted, in a rather boastful way, that Jack must face the world, must become acquainted with its turbulent spirit, receive some of its knocks and scrape bottom on adversity for a year or two before he would send him back to the University for his profession. Jack has never quite understood his father. He was aware that he had been moulded in the crucible of experience but the product ground in the mortar of hard knocks by the pestle of later ways of the world seemed too soft, too pliant. He had the gentle nature of a woman with all her piety. Yet at times he threw off his mantle of suave gentleness and displayed the inner fires that had sent him hurtling to success in younger days. At these times he became transformed. It was as if he had tried to replace for Jack the mother who had died and the burden had become too great. But he had done his best. With a form of mother instinct he had shielded the growing boy, had formed him on the anvil of his own experience and given him the benefit of the wisdom that was his.

Even on nights when the elder Corcoran had stormed into bed, the old being reasserting itself, Jack knew that on the morrow he would be as plastic as a child. Each morning before seven he watched his father slipping away to a little closely church to pray before the Holy Tabernacle. Down in his heart Jack wondered what was the compelling petition that his father laid before the Supreme Being. There was some great favor that God in

His wisdom had never granted to his father, some desire that forced him each day to sunshine and storm to visit the little church. Could it be prayers for the departed soul of Jack's mother? Or was it that great event in his life that had driven him from Georgia to the North?

Jack had often watched the restless spirit of his father when in recollective mood. Before the giant fireplace in winter or on the cool veranda in summer he saw the disturbance of some great memory as it swooped down on him from out of the past. A hasty stirring of his chair, a nervous clearing of throat were sure to be followed by a pacing to and fro, into the hallway and back to the room, only to end with retiring from sight to his chamber. In all these seizures with the past his lips moved as if in prayer, words were formed but never uttered.

Jack regretted that summer had drawn to a close. Not only because it forced the severing of college friendships for the time being but because it meant parting for a while from Janet Hathaway.

Janet had been Jack's playmate ever since he could remember. They had sojourned each summer season at Cape May, had played together on the beach with tiny buckets and later experienced childhood companionship give way to youthful affection. For the last summer or two an infatuation had developed, one that the elder Corcoran had observed with curiosity mingled with pride. Jack had selected Janet from the usual bevy of seashore girls for the simple reason that Janet had chosen him from the crowd of college youths. With the knowledge that Jack was about to leave on a long absence Janet found herself growing deeply in love.

The summer seashore colony was in the midst of breaking in September. That accounts for the hastily arranged party one evening on the eve of Jack's departure for the west. The farewell party turned out to be a mass of toasting marshmallows surrounded by a score of boys and girls, among whom Janet chose herself chief toaster.

"Jack, do you know what's rumored about you?" began Dave Thornburn who usually started and ended most party conversation. "I heard that you believed implicitly in everything that fortune teller told you on the boardwalk last night."

"Not a chance," responded Jack, his face lighting into smiles.

"Oh, this is news. What did she say, Jack?" cried Angela Boylan more eager than the rest.

"That poor critter was just guessing. I never would have gone in there if it hadn't been for Dave. We tossed up and, of course, I had to lose. But those gypsies don't know any more about the future than a toadstool about astronomy."

"Well, what did she say anyway?" the party chorused.

"Oh, she just said that I liked music. Anybody could have said that and that I was going out West and starve to death and a whole lot of balderdash on that order."

"No, she didn't," protested Dave.

"She told him that he was going to strike oil rich, clean up on the game, marry and—oh you tell 'em Jack."

"You continue, you're getting along famously."

"Whom did she say you were going to marry?" queried Angela, throwing a sidelong glance at Janet.

"Oh, no one in particular. I believe she said a girl with blue eyes, red hair and an Amazonian swaggar."

"Jack, you're fibbing. If you don't tell the stuff straight I'll pitch in and do it for you," offered Dave.

"Go ahead, don't stop for me."

Dave hesitated as if about to surrender a secret.

"Well, she said Jack was to marry a girl born in the East but that he would marry in the West and during the Moon of Wolves."

"Moon of Wolves. How romantic! But what does it mean?" asked Angela.

"Dog days," suggested Dave, with a laugh. "Sort of late June bride and bridegroom I should say. But I'm wondering who this East and West girl is going to be. Probably some redskin maiden with a loud warwhoop."

"Oh, lets cut out this talk about the old hag. That palimistry is the bunk, pure and simple. They can't see farther than their noses unless it's into your pocket." Jack was evidently embarrassed.

"I think it's rather nice to talk about sweet romance, and warwhooping maidens of the West. Don't you boys? Lets talk about it all evening," continued Dave with the intention of riling Jack.

"Dave's off as usual," countered Jack slowly. "What do you say about taking a swim? Last man to the water is a jellyfish."

With a rush the seated circle broke.

Jack and Janet swam together toward the moss-covered log that heaved with every wave. They rounded it and raced for the shore. The other bathers preceded them down toward the cottages that lay scattered along the Southern end of the cape. Jack walked slowly and with purpose for he intended his words to fall only on Janet's ears.

"My! Isn't this a perfectly glorious night? I wish you didn't

have to leave tomorrow," began Janet. "Can you really postpone it just for a few days?" She was pleading into Jack's face.

"Not now Janet. My ticket's bought for Tulsa. Father wants me to show my worth, as he says. You know I'll do my best in the oil lands. I may strike some money and then again I may strike only experience. That's the chance I'm taking."

"But you must be careful in the oil fields. I once read an article that said these oil towns are the most horrible places imaginable. They shoot and kill. And they attract people from all over the world. They must be lawless, too. You must promise me to be real careful Jack, will you?"

"I'll be careful. I suppose it's like any other place, if you mind your own business they won't molest you," Jack replied.

"But Jack, suppose you meet that girl whom the gypsy fortune teller told you about?"

The thought had been troubling Janet.

TO BE CONTINUED

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