

THE WESTERN HOME MONTHLY.

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Why the Hot Sulphur Mail was late.

A STORY FOR EVERYBODY.



BERTHOUD PASS is a mighty pass. It is the crest of a solid wave of granite two miles high, just at timber-line. Berthoud is a vertebra in the backbone of the continent. It is the gigantic aerial gateway to Middle Park, Colorado—a park one-fifth as large as all England. The mail for this empire is carried by one man, my friend Sullivan.

On Berthoud is a pebble. One summer a raindrop fell on that pebble, splashed in two, and each half rolled away; one down the Platte-Missouri-Mississippi, the longest river on the globe, to the Atlantic; the other down the Fraser, along the Grand, through the greatest of gorges, the Grand Cañon of the Colorado, where the stars shine by day, into the Pacific. Then from the two oceans the nebulized half-drops arose, sun-drawn, miles into the zen-

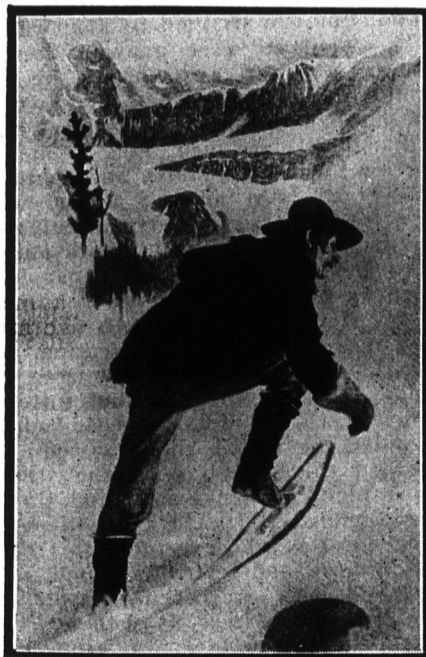
About them, in long, wavering lines and tiny whirls, the gritty snow blows like sugar. Shrub-like, the tops of pines bend under beards of alabaster moss, their trunks buried for seventy feet. Airy crystals float as on Polar fairies' breath; the sunlight is alive with blue sparkles; the twig splitting in the cold sends a puff of frosty feathers; in the gale white shot sings in level volleys. Nature on Berthoud in winter is not dead, but alive. She is congealed into a new life. The very air seems to snap. A mist, frozen to a transparent blue, quivers with its own chill. Water is not ice but glass. When the black, solid lakes burst and shatter in the awful cold, ice splinters fly like slivers of white-hot iron. Ice powder, hard, dry, and sharp, grinds the web snow-shoes like steel filings. On Berthoud at night the stars are near; they silently crackle and spit colors like electric sparks.

In the valley the morning star paled as if frozen and with a spiteful snap winked out. The line of sunlight, half-way down the Pass, met Sullivan, half-way up. The blue-gray cold melted to a flood of Heaven's

hands. Icicles hung from his eyelashes, yet his cheeks were burning. His nose was a blister, though his face was veiled as heavily as milady's on an escapade. In the sun the snow was mush; in the shadow it was marble. Such is light and shade on the southeastern snowbanks at timber-line. No wind. And the air was thin. Silence. The only sound was the carrier's labored breath, and the sock-rasp-splash of the shoes. And Sullivan came to the summit—and the shadow. There the mercury falls a degree in a minute when the sun goes down. A hundred and four at noon, an inch at dawn. The ground is frozen for five-hundred and forty feet. Such is the summer summit.

But this was winter. Up the south gorge like the burst of a volcano, so cold that the smoke was snow-dust, roared the storm. Sullivan saw it—looked with the indifferent interest of long experience, and put on his short fur coat. As he re-tied his snow-shoes he looked back—and down. Below him lay the west fork of Clear Creek, green in the coming spring. He stood on the rampart of

Sullivan whirled, his back to the flinty sleet, and the storm fell upon his sack. But no snow-storm can stop the United States mail. With a belly-jerk Sullivan wrenched a breath from the torrent. "Quite a Colorado zephyr," he yelled, but could not hear himself. There was almost perfect silence around him, because he could hear nothing—only a leaden roar. No slush there; the surface was sand-paper. Zip-zip-zip, with his head low, Sullivan butted down the gulch. Then it eased up. The wind dropped to a mile a minute and it cleared greatly. Sullivan could see ten feet ahead. Easier now, he loped over the crust, down, down, down, leaving no track; not even a whiff of snow was blown from the trail. The snow was hard, sharp, and glittered in the white night as the surface of broken steel. A blast of snow-sand caught the flying carrier full in the face. The ground ice cut like powdered glass shot from a battery. Sullivan, his arms before his head, ran into and leaned against a cracking pine like a guilty child.



"Sullivan began to climb."

ith, and rode the winds straight back to Berthoud Pass. There they united and crystallized into a snowflake. And then came the cold. Far above the Pass, the frosted spirit hung in Damoclean deadliness over a creeping speck below—Sullivan, the mail carrier. The rising sun glorified the snowflake; but away down in Clear Creek Cañon, where other waters gurgled and strangled under the ice, it was still a blue dark. Sullivan and the sun began to climb. The morning light started down Berthoud just as Sullivan started up. The snowflake watched the crawling atom, then blew across the Pass, and from all along the Range gathered unto itself the storm. On Berthoud was all the power of the Arctic. But the intelligent dot climbed on.

Eleven months of the year there is snow on Berthoud; only in June are the flowers safe. Even then, in shades that the sun cannot search—packed by the centuries—is snow that fell on the rocks before they were cold. How black, how sharp the shadows are in the heights—and how cold! In them for ages has lurked ice from the glaciers of the North. Silent Christmas finds Berthoud hung with avalanches. At Easter they come to life, and, leaning over the valleys, are so exquisitely held that they are launched even by an echo touch.

own warmth. It will be warmer soon, then hot, then blistering on the snow. Sullivan stopped to rest, panting steam; pulled off his coat and put on his veil.

To climb Berthoud in winter is the work of a man. It is too much for an engine. The man was at his work. Slowly up the east side, around the Big Bend, up to the now deserted mail barn, labored the mail carrier. The summit was a mile farther on and a quarter of a mile farther up. No arranged postal car, warm, light, and convenient, was the lot of Sullivan. The car was on his back, a bag of mail. Contrary to regulations, devised by easy-chair postal officials in far-off Washington, the papers and packages had to be left over at Empire. Only the letters went over.

"They'll keep," said the Empire postmaster, a man of vast commonsense, as he tore a chew off Sullivan's plug. Then he and Sullivan hid the bag of "second-class" under the hay in the manger of the mail team until the thaw was over. So Sullivan traveled light—only sixty-four pounds on his back and twenty pounds of wet snow on each web snow-shoe a foot beneath the surface.

By the bleak station labored Sullivan. "Only zero! Hot. Wheew-w!" gasped the carrier as he wiped the sweat from his eyes with the sleeve of his shirt. Sullivan meant it. Twelve feet of frigid white was between him and the earth; in the shadows the mercury was solid in the split tubes, yet in the sunlight the surface was slush. Sullivan was in his shirt-sleeves with fur mittens on

winter. On either side towered pinnacles of storm-eaten rock, bleak as the poles themselves. From their tops white powder gleamed in the wind like crests, and floured down on the pigmy at their feet. The carrier was taking a swift, silent goodbye to the infant summer. Straight to the south flamed the sun, so low in the clear sky that Sullivan, standing on Berthoud, felt that it was below him, that he stood alone on the tip of the universe. Behind him the swirling heavens were murky. The world was black, white, and thin blue—silent, motionless, and cold.

But the cold was creeping for Sullivan's heart, and he swung his arms. "Good for the legs," he remarked to a stump that in summer was a dead pine tree. "Track looks like a hobbled elephant. Well, here goes." And down into the gorge went Sullivan. The gale had started in Alaska and swept two-thirds of a continent to the southeast. In Montana it had torn the anemometer, the official whirligig, from the signal station, but had left the register; and the needle pointed to eighty-five miles an hour. It was stronger now. Caught by the wide mouth of the south fork of the Fraser and jammed into the rocky defile, the white fiend roared straight into the air and doubled back on its track. Into this walked Sullivan. A single snowflake, sharp as a bunch of needle-points, struck his forehead, but glanced away into the white tempest. Snow-sand cut his veil. Instantly his breath was sucked from his lungs and sent twenty-thousand feet—four miles above the sea. Sul-

Important Notice to Our Readers

As announced in our last issue, after September 1st, 1909, we are increasing the subscription price of the WESTERN HOME MONTHLY to 75 cents a year. Our subscribers, however, will get good value for the extra twenty-five cents. At the present time, we are publishing for 50 cents a magazine which is as good as any dollar publication on the Continent, but it is our intention to keep on adding new features and in every way catering to the taste of our readers so that by September the Western Home Monthly at 75 cents will be the equal of any \$1.50 magazine obtainable anywhere. We would draw attention to the fact that up to August 31st, 1909, our usual subscription rate of one year for 50 cents or three years for \$1.00 will hold good, thus a little foresight will make \$1.00 now go further than \$2.00 next year.



"He Stood on the Rampart of the Winter."

The pine straightened with a snap, quivering as if tired: Sullivan lowered his arms; all was still, quiet, pleasant. The snow was smiling, the sun was shining; there was no wind.

"Lovely, ain't it? Snowslide gone off wrong end up," said a voice.

Sullivan jumped. A quick sweep of the near distance showed nothing human but himself. "Did I say that?" he muttered. "This bucking snow is about as good on a man's savy as herding sheep. I'll be as locoed as a swelled-neck buck if I keep this up. Hello!"

"Howdy?" answered the voice, while from under a sheltering ledge, crusted over but filled soft and dry with icy down as if banked from a feather-bed, a sheeted figure appeared and shook itself. It fairly rattled. "Nice little blow, wasn't it? I had an idea that I was the only pack animal of the long-eared breed on the Range; but I see I have company, baggage and all. Glad to see you, though. By the way, sorry to trouble you, but I'll have to ask you for those shoes and that coat; also any spare change you've got, your ticker, and that mail-bag. Now don't go off half-cocked and empty, or we'll have trouble."

He of the voice had leveled a long six-shooter, white with frost and snow, at the mail carrier. Sullivan was not startled; what was the use?