

A Forest Free Lance

A NOVELETTE

By ALBERT M. TREYNOR

Synopsis of Previous Chapters

Gerald Peyton, a lumberman, has an option on 75,000 acres of timber land and has invested all his capital in a mill and logging road. The bank has promised to lend him the money which he requires to take up the option, but at the last minute, thru the influence of Grimes and Gottschalk, otherwise the lumber trust, the loan is held up for a few days. Peyton's only hope is to get the option extended and wires his daughter Glendora to find James Kernan, the owner of the land, and arrange the extension. Kernan, however, has been taken into the woods by Grimes, but Glendora falls in with Caldwell Chivington, a surveyor, who has just been discharged by Grimes and Gottschalk because he refused to swear to a false survey, and together they board a workmen's train for the camp. They are given a hostile reception, and after a desperate fight between Chivington and Deems, the woods boss, they discovered that Kernan and Grimes have left the camp by wagon. They are threatened with violence if they attempt to leave the camp by train, and Glendora suggests that they walk the 15 miles to town.

CHAPTER IV.

Prisoners

Chivington regarded the girl with an admiration he could not conceal.

"Capital!" he cried. "You certainly have pluck! Why, we can't help winning! It will take us five hours or more over the railroad ties, but we'll make it in time!"

Glendora matched his glance of frank admiration with a steady look of confidence, and Mrs. Potter smiled softly to herself at the wordless message she read in their eyes.

But Mrs. Potter decided to become more than a spectator at a pretty tableau. She was a practical woman,

and she had always liked Chivington.

"It's brave of you to walk, miss; but I've got a better plan," she said to Glendora. "Potter'll be back in an hour at the outside, and I'll make him drive you over to Hattiesburg."

She shot a dark look at Deems, who was standing sullenly by the steps. "Mr. Deems, you can find another woman to do your washin'. I wouldn't touch your shirts agin for five dollars apiece," said she.

Glendora clasped the woman's work-worn fingers with a sudden impulse of gratitude.

"You are so good," she breathed. "I'll never, never forget!"

Chivington and Glendora turned their backs on Deems and followed Mrs. Potter along a little path that twisted among the stumps and finally led them into the sweet-scented woods. A short walk thru the silent forest brought them to the clearing where Potter had built his cabin.

Mrs. Potter conducted them thru a little patch of sweet corn to the house while a drove of razor-back hogs scampered into the woods at their approach.

"I'll bring out some chairs," said the woman. "Mr. Potter ought to be back pretty soon now."

"Where's your little girl?" inquired Chivington.

"She drove over to the junction with Mr. Kernan and her pap."

"Did Kernan mention anything about selling his property here?"

"He said he'd come out to look over some land with Mr. Deems. He in-

tended to stay all night, but got a telephone call from the Grimes offices in Hattiesburg and decided to hurry back."

Chivington frowned thoughtfully. "We'll have to get to town in a rush," he mused. "I wish Potter would get here."

They waited in front of the cabin, chatting idly with Mrs. Potter. Nearly half an hour passed, and Chivington finally arose impatiently and sauntered across the corn patch to the opening of a rough, narrow wagon-trail which slanted off into the woods. He stood listening for a moment in hope of catching the sound of Potter's wagon wheels.

Suddenly he heard a woman scream. He wheeled and gazed fearfully back in the direction of the cabin. With a furious exclamation he broke his way through the corn-stalks. When he emerged into the open he saw Miss Peyton struggling in the grasp of several negroes, while Mrs. Potter was beating them frantically with her fists.

"Help! Oh, hurry!" cried Glendora. Chivington was quickly at her side.

He seized a chair and beat two of the negroes to the ground. The chair shattered over the head of the third, but the man dropped. With a growl Chivington seized a fourth man by the throat and flung him against the cabin wall.

Glendora broke away from the other two negroes and fled into the cabin. Chivington and Mrs. Potter followed, slamming the door and barring it after them.

Outside there rose a hoarse-voiced clamor.

"Get a log! Smash in the door!" someone shouted.

Chivington ran to the window and peered out.

"It's Deems!" he cried. "He intends to hold us!"

There was a brief silence while the two women waited gaspingly together

in the corner. Chivington picked up a long piece of firewood and stationed himself in front of them.

Something struck the door with a force which jarred the cabin, and one of the hinges broke away from the frame. A second and third blow followed, and the heavy wooden bar split from end to end.

"Once more, now!" came a triumphant yell from without. "Heave-oh!"

Again the heavy log was swung forward, and the door was torn from the frame and fell into the cabin.

Chivington sprang forward to meet the rush of negroes, but before he could use his club he was arrested by a warning scream from behind. He whirled just as two men smashed the rear window and leaped into the room.

Chivington fought desperately, but his club was wrenched from his grasp and he was driven across the room. There the men rushed him and pinned him against the wall. Further resistance was out of the question. Chivington straightened in the grasp of the three negroes who had him by the arms, and ceased struggling. No attempt had been made to lay hands on the two women.

Deems entered the cabin. He looked at Chivington and laughed boisterously.

"I guess maybe you won't go back to town tonight," he chuckled.

Chivington confronted him hotly.

"You'll hear from this later, Deems!" he blazed. "This is a pretty high-handed proceeding for a civilized state."

"Don't trouble yourself about that," said Deems. "It happened on the company's land; you're trespassers."

"It happened on Potter's homestead," corrected Chivington. "And I'll make it my business to see that Potter's ownership is legally established!"

"All right," retorted Deems, "But at present you're going to do as I say. Bring him along, boys, and don't let the girl get away. Let Potter's woman stay here if she wants to."

The negroes jerked Chivington across the room while a couple of others started for Glendora.

"Hold on, Deems!" expostulated Chivington. "There's no use being rough with Miss Peyton. Let her walk alone, and I'll promise to go peaceable."

Deems motioned to the girl, and she stepped fearlessly to the doorway.

"Give me your word you won't try to run," he demanded.

"Yes," she agreed. "I'll remain with Mr. Chivington."

He nodded his head. "All right, boys!" he called. "Let 'em both come with me, but you follow along close behind."

The party left the cabin, and Mrs. Potter came to the door with anxious eyes.

"When Potter starts to yelling about his door," Deems called back, "you can tell him for me that it doesn't pay to monkey with the G. & G. Company."

The woods boss guided his prisoners by a short cut thru the forest to the railroad track.

"We're going down to Masters' shack," he informed them. "If you behave you won't get hurt."

Glendora walked at Chivington's side, and felt unaccountably comforted by his nearness. Once he gently pressed her fingers and smiled down at her reassuringly.

"Don't worry," he whispered. "We've loads of time yet. Somehow, I'm confident that we'll get the best of this crowd."

"I believe you'll find a way," she answered. He thrilled beneath the glance she gave him.

Masters, the superintendent, came to meet them as they entered the yards of the G. & G. Railway.

"Got 'em, did you, Deems?" he said with a grin. "What'll we do with 'em?"

"Keep 'em here all night," returned the woods boss. "I don't care where they go after six in the morning. How'll your shack do for a jail?"

"All right. There's a strong lock on the door, and we can put out a couple of niggers for guards."

"Great!" exclaimed Deems. "Only—" He hesitated. "Say, there's

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