

ROYAL RANGER RALPH:

The Waif of the Western Prairies

BY WELDON J. COBB.

CHAPTER XII.

INZEZ.

The appearance of Darrel Grey at the camp of the Indians was a theme of considerable wonderment to Ranger Ralph.

To the young scout, however, it had resulted most naturally, and he was amazed and delighted at his success in the imposition he had undertaken.

When he had knocked the savage at the river insensible, he had boldly determined to assume his identity temporarily, and penetrate to the camp of his enemies.

The venture was a perilous one, but it seemed as if fate favored its execution.

Darrel had soon donned the apparel of the unconscious savage, and his wainscoted enabled him to finally present the appearance of a genuine Medicine-warrior.

He had staggered to a spot where several savages were quarreling over a keg of liquor, and amid the excitement of the hour, no one seemed to notice him particularly.

Several times he was addressed in the Modoc language, but he feigned a mauldin drunkenness, and only responded with a few incoherent mutterings.

Thus it was that he entered the camp where Ranger Ralph was a prisoner.

His rescue of the scout has already been seen by the reader.

So far he was entirely successful in his movements; but Darrel saw that his imposture must sooner or later be discovered.

He did not, therefore, return to the same band of Indians from whom he had rescued Ranger Ralph.

Instead, he wandered into the main encampment and determined to locate, if possible, the tent in which Inez Tracey was held a captive.

He found that a large number of Indians and two of Darrel's band had gone south on the expedition against the emigrants.

It was when near a large tent that the sound of familiar tones awakened his immediate attention.

Instantly he recognized one voice as belonging to Dyke Darrel.

He was addressing his associate Vance, and he asked:

"Then Danton and the others have gone?"

"Yes," replied Vance. "They will attack the emigrant train, secure our share of the booty, meet the others of the band and come at once to Lone Gorge."

"Good. Now then, as to our movements?"

"Well?"

"We must leave here at once."

"For Lone Canyon?"

"Yes."

"And the girl?"

"Get trailing Fox to go to the wigwam for her."

"Then I will get the horses ready?"

"At the edge of the camp, yes. The Indians may be suspicious if they find us leaving them, but the Fox will aid us, as he is friendly to us."

"All right."

Darrel withdrew as Vance seemed about to leave the tent.

He knew that if he acted it must be at once.

He hurried in and out among the wigwams, and at last paused before one of them.

It was where an old squaw sat before a smoldering camp fire.

Glancing beyond her Darrel saw the form of a woman lying on some buffalo skins.

"It must be Inez," he murmured, I wonder if I can pass the old squaw unobserved."

The latter was nodding drowsily as he stepped toward the tent. She roused instantly at his advance.

Immediately Darrel resumed his role of drunkenness. He had a flask of liquor in his pocket and this he extended toward the woman. She seized it eagerly.

Darrel muttered some incoherent words about Shadow Snake. The squaw seemed to comprehend that the chief had sent him to the place, and this he extended toward her.

Upon the rude Indian couch lay Inez Tracey.

Her eyes were wet with tears, her face pale and alarmed. She started to her feet with a cry of terror as the pretended drunken Indian approached her.

"Ugh! pale face come with me!" he uttered.

She followed him from the place silently, despondingly.

He led her, not toward the center of the camp, but through its periphery, anxious to reach the open country beyond.

Every nerve thrilled with the intense emotion as he realized that the rescue was fairly assured.

The Indians whom they met paid no attention to them. Poor Inez, fearing some new captivity, seemed about to faint away.

As she walked unsteadily, Darrel approached her nearer.

She started at the fervent, unexpected word.

"Walk straight on," he breathed, hurriedly. "We are not yet safe."

A half-suppressed cry of joy broke from the girl's lips.

"Darrel!—Mr. Grey," she cried; "oh! can we escape?"

"Yes, yes. Follow me faster."

"Stop them!"

The words came from behind the scene, and she uttered a startled cry. Darrel seized her arm and made for a rear thicket.

Coming toward them were Darrel, Vance, and several savages.

"Discovered!" cried Darrel, despairingly.

Instantly he was surrounded.

"What are you doing with that girl?" demanded Darrel, gruffly.

"Ugh! Shadow Snake's orders," grunted Darrel.

"A lie!" shouted Darrel. "Here! Where is the Wolf? This man is no Indian, but a spy. He stole the Wolf's identity, and is spiritizing the girl away."

Angry, menacing faces confronted the young scout. One savage sprang before him with an uplifted tomahawk.

At a glance Darrel Grey recognized him as the Modoc warrior whose garb he had stolen at the river a few hours previously.

The young scout was in a position of terrible peril.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE STAKE

Inez Tracey uttered a frantic, frightened cry as she saw the tomahawk of the Indian uplifted over the head of the disguised Darrel Grey.

The latter, overcome completely with chagrin and dismay, seemed for the moment bewildered at the disaster that had appeared at the time of apparent success.

"Spare him! Do not kill him! He is my only protector—my friend!" she cried, wildly.

Inez endeavored to spring forward and intercept the blow of the irate

Trailing Wolf, but Darrel caught her roughly.

"Hai! I begin to understand this," he muttered, a jealous light coming into his evil eyes.

"The young fellow who ran away with her, eh?" ejaculated Vance, Darrel's companion.

"Yes. Hold!" cried the outlaw leader to the savage. "The Wolf shall have his revenge at the stake—at the torture. Seize him and bring him to the chief's tent," ordered Darrel.

With a sullen, lowering brow, the Indian whose identity Darrel had stolen cast aside the tomahawk.

At the same moment Darrel had restored his position and recovered from all his swoon.

He comprehended that to remain longer in the camp had been made that of the savages, meant certain death amid their revengeful companion.

Inez's frantic endeavor to save him thrilled his very soul with joy and courage as he recognized her love and devotion.

It inspired him to think beyond the present. A prisoner, he would be helpless to assist her. Free, he might yet outwit his foes.

He surprised savages and renegades alike by a sudden movement. They adjudged him a thoroughly baffled and defeated victim. They were therefore totally unprepared for the desperate rush he abruptly made.

"Courage, Inez! you shall yet be rescued," he shouted.

Then he sprang forward, overturning two of the savages and darting straight in the direction of the horses of the camp.

The outlaws did not follow him, but the group of excited, yelling Indians started in hot pursuit.

"Oh! they will capture and kill him," she cried.

Darrel laughed hoarsely.

"Hai! In love, eh?"

She flushed in indignation at Darrel's coarse tones.

"Coward! Assassin!" she breathed, her eyes flashing abhorrence and a erosion upon her dreaded captor.

"There will be one less lover in a few moments," continued Darrel.

"They are wasting valuable time here."

"They are trying to get us now at once. We can take advantage of the confusion to leave the camp."

"Shall I get the horses?"

"Yes; and bring them to the river beyond the camp. Go ahead; I'll meet you there. You come with me."

Dyke Darrel made no pretense of gentleness as he seized Inez's arm roughly. He forced her to accompany him away from the Modoc camp.

At a ticklet near the river he paused to await the arrival of his accomplice, Vance. His eyes glowed with the malice and triumph of a villain as he noted Inez's deep distress.

He was angry and jealous at his discovery of her evident preference for a rival.

"Girl," he hissed, as he bent toward her, "if you are listening for some token of your lover's escape, abandon the search."

"Get trailing Fox to go to the wigwam for her."

"Then I will get the horses ready?"

"At the edge of the camp, yes. The Indians may be suspicious if they find us leaving them, but the Fox will aid us, as he is friendly to us."

"All right."

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The heartless Vance had indeed told the truth when he affirmed that Darrel Grey was again a prisoner of the Modocs.

When the young scout had dashed away from his savage foes, he hurried toward the horses. He felt assured if he reached there he could secure a steel and escape.

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