

ROYAL RANGER RALPH;

The Waif of the Western Prairies.

BY WELDON J. COBB.

CHAPTER XXVI.—Continued.

It was fully two hours before the bandit band reached the ravine. The rain was now falling in torrents; the situation was a most gloomy and uncomfortable one. Before them ran the river, broad and deep, and with a swift current.

"Ha! What is this?" Danton's words announced that he had reached the river. He was quite large, and evidently belonged to the Indians. Here it lay there were marks on the bank as if a second canoe had recently been there.

"The girl must have escaped by way of the river," remarked Despard. "Yes, she had help. Somewhere 'How do you know that?' 'There are the footprints of two persons here,'

"Ha!" "Both small and apparently those of women."

"Then she had a companion?" "Undoubtedly. One of them wore moccasins."

"An Indian?" "The Modoc princess." "Impossible!" "It must be White Fawn."

Despard turned pale. He dreaded the vengeance of Shadow Snake and his daughter.

"Let us hasten," he said. "And take the canoe?" "Yes."

"It will not hold more than half of us."

"Then let the others cross over and get away from the Indians as best they can."

This plan was consummated. A portion of the band were rowed across the river. Despard, Danton and the others then directed the canoe to midstream and allowed it to proceed down the stream.

They passed the cliff and the ravine in safety and soon left it far behind. Apparently they were safe from pursuit, and would not be followed in time to be overtaken. The Modocs, in the ravine beyond their foe in the fort, had not witnessed their departure. They were down the river in advance of them, they theorized, was the canoe containing the Modoc princess and their escaped captive, Inez Tracey.

CHAPTER XXVII. THE MODOC.

The plots and movements of Dyke Despard, the bandit leader, were fast approaching a climax, as he was soon to learn in a tragic and unexpected manner.

The Indians whom his spy had discovered in the ravine were indeed members of Shadow Snake's tribe, and he had avoided a deadly conflict by his timely escape. The savages had located his recent camp, had trailed him to the ravine, and later explored the cliff, but found no trace of him.

Darrel Grey had remained faithfully at his post in the fort.

When the rain and mist obscured the outlooks he did not retreat from the intrenchment, but endeavored to watch the cliff as best he could. Thus hidden by the gloom, the outlaws escaped without his knowledge. He was amazed when at last the mists were dispersed and he saw no trace of his enemies in the vicinity.

Instead, a score of dusky warriors were ascending the winding mountain paths.

What did it mean? He was perplexed and somewhat alarmed at the discovery. The savages seemed to be following a trail and were coming directly to the summit of the cliff. Sooner or later he must be discovered, and resistance against such superior numbers would be folly. Besides, by this time White Fawn and Inez must have effected their escape.

He could not explain the mysterious disappearance of the bandits, but he observed that there was a possibility of leaving the fort and retreating before the Indians reached the summit of the cliff.

Darrel began to creep behind the rocks in the direction the Modoc princess and Inez had gone. He saw, some distance away, a place where he might essay a descent to the valley, and hastened to reach it.

Suddenly he started in dismay. As if by magic, two stalwart savages had darted across his path. Before he could retreat or advance they had seized him securely.

They gave utterance to a triumphant yell and began to lead him toward the ravine where their chief was. Darrel faced his enemies boldly as they gathered around him.

Shadow Snake listened to the rapid words of Darrel's captors, in explanation of their rescues. Then he turned to the prisoner.

"Light!" he ejaculated; "who is the pale-face?"

Shadow Snake did not evidently recognize Darrel as the man he had liberated at White Fawn's request at the outlaws' stronghold in the ravine. In his new disguise, the Modoc chief did not suppose his present prisoner and his daughter's friend to be the same person.

"I am the friend of the White Fawn," he said, simply.

The chief started.

"Light! The pale-face knows the princess?"

"Yes."

"You have seen her of late?" "A few hours since."

Whereas Despard related how he had met the White Fawn. He told the Snake that he had once saved his daughter's life. He related how he had rescued Inez from Despard, and detailed the pursuit at the attack on the mountain hut. The old chief's eyes blazed fiercely as Darrel spoke Despard's name.

"Light!" he uttered savagely. "The Black Crow shall be trailed. Whether has he gone?"

"I do not know."

"And the Fawn?"

"Escaped by the ravine to the river," Shadow Snake held a brief conference with his braves.

"The Eagle shall be the friend of the Snake," said the Modoc chief to Darrel. "Together we will find and punish the Crow."

paddles were used at the side to aid its progress. The Crow has gone in pursuit. Some of his men were taken across the river."

"Why?" "Because there was not room enough for them in the canoe."

Shadow Snake gave rapid orders as he uttered the last conclusion. He divided his band, and sent half of them in pursuit of the outlaws who had crossed the river. With the others and Darrel Grey he started down the banks of the stream.

Meanwhile the objects of Darrel's solicitude, White Fawn and Inez, had met with some exciting adventures. The Indian maiden and her charge had managed to reach the ravine in safety after leaving Darrel Grey. They had observed the canoes, and White Fawn selected one of them. She knew that the river led to some settlements, and for the present her only thought was to place Inez in a position of safety.

The rain made their situation extremely uncomfortable, but White Fawn resolutely plied the paddles, and they made swift progress. It was not until after noon that any incident occurred that in any way tended to alarm them.

At a point where the river divided, as she looked back, the Fawn saw a canoe coming down the stream about a mile distant. This caused her to hasten the progress of their own boat. An hour later, in the distance, she heard the sound of shooting, and she determined to abandon the canoe.

Then followed a weary tramp through the forests. At last, towards nightfall, they reached what looked like a mining settlement. Then a small village came into view, and on its outskirts they came across a rather pretentious inn, designated by a large sign-board as the Fair Play Tavern.

"We have reached a place of safety," said the Modoc princess, as she designated the tavern. "You are wearied and pale. See, yonder is a white squaw. Speak to her."

A woman, apparently the landlord's wife, was visible at the rear door of the inn. Inez approached and addressed her.

She told her briefly that she and her companion had lost their way, met with bandits, and wished to remain at the inn all night. The sight of money influenced the woman to agree to give them shelter.

A sigh of relief escaped the lips of Inez as she found herself with White Fawn in a comfortable room of the tavern. She, however, expressed a deep anxiety for her lover's safety.

White Fawn assured her that the morning she would return to the scene of their recent adventures.

A meal was served in their room, and Inez sat at the window gazing out at the front of the tavern.

She uttered a cry of dread as the lights from the bar-room showed two new arrivals. At a glance she recognized them as Danton and Dyke Despard.

CHAPTER XXVIII. AT THE TAVERN.

The two men who had just entered the Fair Play Tavern were indeed Dyke Despard and his evil accomplice, Danton. At the sight of them new terror and apprehension seized Inez, and even White Fawn looked anxious and concerned.

Had they, however, known the true condition of affairs with the outlaws they would have been less fearful of their appearance. In the morning, swift and terrible, seemed to have followed the bandits, and the arrival of their leaders at the tavern was in the nature of a flight from their enemies.

The canoe containing the outlaws had nearly overtaken the fugitives. The Modocs had pursued the bandits, Despard and his men had been attacked by the Indians at a bend in the river.

Shadow Snake was their leader and Darrel Grey was among them. Before they started out they had prepared for a defense, a deadly hail of leaden bullets was poured into their midst.

Instantly the river became the scene of the greatest confusion and excitement. The canoe, penetrated by the bullets, was in a perilous position, and those not killed or wounded tried to swim to the opposite shore.

Of their number only two escaped—Despard and Danton—and they were both slightly wounded. Of the others not a trace was seen.

The bandit leaders gained the shore, evaded pursuit, and, as has been seen, reached the Fair Play Tavern shortly after the arrival of the fugitives.

They entered the bar-room, seeking to evade notice, and passed into a room behind the bar. The landlord, who was the banker, merchant and magistrate of the place, followed them with no sign of recognition on his face.

"Well, gentlemen—," he began. "What! you don't know us?" said Danton.

"Despard!" he finally ejaculated, after staring at them for some moments. "Exactly, and in trouble. See here, Marvin, we're in a bad box, and we've got to leave this country."

"How is that?" "Close the door and we will tell you."

The landlord did so, and Despard began speaking in a rapid, confidential tone. His words indicated that in the past the two men had been respectable landowners of the tavern had been a man as unprincipled and criminal as himself.

He narrated his recent adventures, and informed Marvin that he must shelter them for a day or two, and then provide them with horses to leave the country.

"It's lucky you were disgusted when you came in here," said Marvin, "for the community are terribly aroused about your helping the Modocs in the attack on the wagon train."

"Well, well," he said, impatiently, "can you stow us away in a place of safety?"

"Yes."

"Where?" "There's a room yonder that no one can get to except through here."

"But if the vigilantes knew we were here and should search for us?" "There's a trap in the floor leading to the cellar and thence to the stables. How the vigilantes going to know it?"

"Because we have many enemies on our trail, and will undoubtedly be closely pursued. Bring us something to eat and drink, will you? We are nearly famished."

Despard and Danton retired to the room beyond the one they were in. "We're safe enough here," remarked the latter with a complacent glance at their comfortable surroundings.

Despard surveyed the apartment critically.

"Not if Ranger Ralph and that young scout Grey trace us," replied Despard. "Where does this door lead to?"

"To the outside hall, I suppose. But it's bolted heavily on this side."

"In going to see."

Despard was some time operating the bolt, which apparently had not been used for years. He finally slid it back in its socket and opened it cautiously. It led, as Danton had suggested, to a hall that ran from the upper to the rear portion of the house.

Despard seemed determined to understand his surroundings, and to be prepared for an escape under all contingencies. He stepped into the hall, which was in complete darkness, and he saw the shadow of a man. He saw that to attempt to leave by the rear of the

house would be folly if the place was surrounded. He cautiously ascended the stairs to a few steps.

"If it comes to the worst we can retreat," he muttered. "Ha! What was that?"

Distinctly from the hall above he caught the sound of voices. He thrilled wildly as he recognized them, for they were those of Inez and White Fawn.

"Return to the room," the latter was saying. "But every moment we delay is fatal, with that man in the house."

The Black Crow can not know that we are here," responded the Indian maiden.

"He will soon learn of it. Let us fly."

"And be pursued and overtaken by him? No, we are safer here. Return to the room, and I will find out our true peril."

"Then see the landlady," urged Inez. "If she will provide us with horses we will leave at once."

"Be it so. I will return soon."

The eyes of the outlaw chief gleamed through the darkness. The fugitives he had abandoned as effectually escaped were under the same roof. He must devise a plan to secure Inez and the diamonds at once.

The Modoc princess was about to descend the stairs. She must not discover him yet. Despard silently retreated and cautiously re-entered the room where Danton was. He started as he did so. Danton stood by a table pale and alarmed. Confronting him with drawn revolver were two men.

Their backs were to Despard, and they had not noticed his entrance. The outlaw stood spellbound as he recognized one of them as Darrel Grey. The other revealed himself by speaking at that moment.

"Jim Danton," he was saying, in a low, determined tone, "if you do not instantly tell us where Dyke Despard is I will kill you!"

It was the outlaw's bitterest enemy who spoke—Ranger Ralph.

CHAPTER XXIX. A VILLAIN'S TRIUMPH.

The tolls were fast closing in upon the heartless persecutors of the beautiful and innocent Inez Tracey, and in a flash Dyke Despard realized that a vital moment in all his plots had arrived.

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of White Fawn, despite her perilous situation.

"No, then," spoke Despard quickly to the shrinking Inez. "I have only a few words to speak to you."

"Miscreant! Will your evil plots and persecutions never cease?"

"Not until you are my wife."

"We shall see."

"We shall see."

"We shall see."

"We shall see."

"We shall see."

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BY POST AND WIRES

COMES THIS BATCH OF INDIVIDUALS.

A Catalogue of the Week's Important Occurrences Throughout the State—Fires, Accidents, Crimes, Suicides, Etc.

Minor State News.

LEE WEIR, an Air-line brakeman, fell dead with heart disease at Huntington.

MARY DENNISON of Evansville, has brought suit against Henry Ellsinger for \$5,000 to keep his promise to marry.

From every city, town, and village in the State comes the information the la grippe is prevailing to an alarming extent.

It is claimed that White Caps, near Madison, are preparing for another raid on several families that are furnishing food for kossips.

JEFF RALSTON of Brazil, was fatally injured in the Nickel Plate mine, belonging to the Watson Coal Company, by the falling of a heavy block of coal.

HERMAN RADKE, a bachelor, 54 years of age, was found dead, hanging from a ladder in the rear room of his residence in La Porte. He was a gardener.

NORTH VERNON is now in the midst of the greatest temperance revival ever known in the history of that city. William J. Murphy is conducting the meetings.

THE body of Granville Caywood, an old farmer, was found in White River, near Washington. Foot play is suspected and an investigation is in progress.

At a meeting of the many newspaper men of Anderson, steps were taken toward forming the Anderson Press Club. It will consist of about thirty-five active and fifty honorary members.

LUTHER MATTHEW of Greenhill, Warren County, shot at his wife with a revolver. The bullet missed her, and then placing the weapon to his own head Matthew committed suicide. They had quarrelled over their child.

THE Trustees of Montgomery County have decided to give \$75 in prizes to pupils of the county schools, to be contested for at a declamatory contest in April. It will be divided equally between boys and girls.

FRANKLIN CRISTY of Brazil, was divorced from his wife seven years ago. Each was subsequently remarried, but later both were divorced again, and have now made up their old quarrel, being married again the other night.

A FARMER at Yorktown got stuck with a load of straw on a railroad crossing as the through passenger train was approaching. The driver jumped down and unhooked his team while a crowd of men yanked the wagon off the track just in time.

At John Roll's cabin in Great Hollow, near Madison, a row occurred during a dance, in which Jim Wells, after having his head cut open with a blow from a brass-bitted banjo, slashed his uncle, of the same name, twenty-six times and his brother eleven times with a long knife.

At the annual meeting of the bituminous coal operators of the State, J. Smith Talley of Terre Haute, was re-elected President; George C. Richards of Sullivan County, Vice President, and W. E. Eppert of Terre Haute, Secretary and Treasurer. The Old Executive Board was re-elected.

FOX & ROBINSON, attorneys for Sadie E. Black, whose father, mother and sister were killed in the Panhandle accident at Harvey's Crossing last September, has instituted a suit at Richmond for \$100,000 damages for the injuries she received at the same time.

Danton drew the box from his coat. Then suddenly he flung it far over the edge of the cliff.

"Kill me if you will. I have robbed you of half your triumph," cried Danton. "With a cry of triumph, Darrel saw the horse drag him a few feet, and then send him crashing over the edge of the precipice."

Danton had met his doom in the rock-choked river below.

A sort of shroud some distance ahead warned Darrel that his friend, Ranger Ralph, had probably met Despard. A few minutes later he came upon them.

The ranger had indeed overtaken Despard, had torn his grasp from the bridge-rope, and then a deadly conflict had ensued.

They had emptied their revolvers at short range. Neither had been seriously injured. Just as Darrel reached the spot, the outlaw had darted up a steep incline.

"You get up again!" he cried. "You have triumphed this time—help!"

The word gurgled in his throat. As he reached the summit of the eminence, a deafening detonation rang forth. Perched by a hundred bullets, Dyke Despard fell dead.

He had run directly into an ambush of the very Indians who had accompanied Darrel to the vicinity of Fair Play. A moment later Shadow Snake appeared. His vengeance was complete—his foe was dead, and the outlaw band of Despard was swept from the face of the earth.

Two hours later affairs had resumed a quiet aspect. Inez, enraptured at again meeting Darrel, was conveyed by the Modocs to a settlement farther down the river.

Here White Fawn met her father, and here there was a tearful parting, for she started forth with her father's tribe to find some trace of the husband of her possession.

The landlord's eyes gleamed aversely as Despard unfolded his plan. Marvin was to act in immediate collusion with them.

"The men in the cellar will be insensible till we are away," said Despard. "You get your wife to pretend to befriend the girls."

"I'll fix all that, only I must not appear as being in your plot. It would hurt me among my customers."

"We'll manage all that."

Thus it was when, half an hour later, Inez and White Fawn slipped from the tavern. The landlady had pretended to aid them, but was only acting under orders from her husband. She told them to go to an old hut a few rods from the house, where she would bring them horses to leave the country.

She had left a lantern with them, and the two girls stood silent and alone, watching its flickering rays and anxiously awaiting the woman's return.

A wild cry of dismay arose from Inez Tracey's lips, as the doorway suddenly framed two forms. In a moment Despard and Danton came into view. The latter seized the Indian girl. Despite her struggles, her arms were quickly bound behind her.

"You have not escaped us yet," hissed Despard, as he grasped Inez's arm. "Make no outcry if you value your safety."

Paralyzed with terror, poor Inez stood pale and mute, shrinking in horror from the triumphant face of her enemy.

Danton, spoke the outlaw chief, "you know your part. Search the Indian girl for the diamonds."

White Fawn did not speak, but her dark eyes flashed fiercely on the man who had so wronged her. Danton uttered a cry of delight as he drew from the dress of the Indian girl a small box, which he examined with care.

"The jewels?" asked Despard, eagerly. "Yes."

"Very well. Secure them safely and watch your captive."

There was a mocking smile on the face

THE LONDON CABBY.

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