



(Continued From Our Last Issue) THE night was chill; she longed for the comfort of the fire. The actual labor of building it might take her mind from her fears for a while. Besides, it might be a beacon light for Ben. She turned at once to the pile of kindling Ben had prepared.

But before she could build a really satisfactory fire, one that would endure the rain, she must cut fuel from some of the logs Ben had hewn down and dragged to the cave. She lighted a short piece of pitchy wood, intending to locate the heavy camp ax. Then, putting on her heavy coat—the same garment of lustrous fur which Ben had sent her back for the day of her abduction—she ventured into the storm.

The rain splashed in vain at her torch. The pitch burned with a fierce flame. But her eyes sought in vain for the ax.

Ben had taken it; he had plainly gone forth after fuel. Trees stood all about the little glade; he couldn't have gone far.

Holding her torch high, she went to the edge of the glade and called into the gloom.

She turned at once to the cave, and piling up her kindling, built a fire just at the mouth of the cave. This fire would serve to keep her direction and lead her back to the cave.

Then she hunted for pine knots taken from the scrub pines that grew in scattering clumps among the spruce and which were laden with pitch.

One of these knots she put in the iron pan they used for frying, then lighted it. Then she pushed into the timber.



WRENCHING WITH ALL HER FINE YOUNG STRENGTH, SHE LIFTED HIM UPON HER SHOULDER.

Holding her light high, she began to encircle the glade clear to the barrier of the cliffs.

With courage and strength such as she had not dreamed she possessed, she launched forward. But fatigue was breaking her now. The tree roots tripped her faltering feet, the branches clutched at her as she passed. It was hard to tell what territory she had searched, or how far she had gone.

The flickering light revealed a tree, freshly cut, its naked stump gleaming and its tall form lying prone. Yet beneath it the shadows were of strange, unearthly shape, and something showed stark white through the green foliage. Great branches stretched over it, like bars over a prison window.

Her strength wilted and for an instant she could only stand and gaze with fixed, unbelieving eyes. But almost at once the unquenchable fires of her spirit blazed up anew.

Instantly she was beside the form of her comrade and enemy, struggling with the cruel limbs that pinned him to the earth.

CHAPTER XV

The Conspirators Disagree

The pine knots flickered feebly; and by their light she looked about for Ben's ax. Her eyes rested on the broken gun first; then she saw the blade, shining in the rain, protruding from beneath a broken bough. She drew it out and swung him.

The trail was long and steep into Back There for Jeffery Nelson and his men.

They had counted on slow travel, but the weeks grew into the months before they even neared the obscure home of Back There where they thought Ben and Beatrice might be hidden.

The days passed, June and July, ever they moved at a slower pace.

The food stores brought for the journey were rapidly depleted.

No experience of their individual lives had ever presented such a daily ordeal of physical distress; none had ever been so devastating to hope and spirit.

Jeffery Nelson had almost forgotten the issue of the claim by now. He had told the truth, those weary weeks before, when he had wished he had never seen it. His only thought was of his daughter. Yet he dared not turn back. She might yet live, held prisoner in some far-off cave.

At first all three agreed on this point; that they must not turn back until either Ben was crushed under their heels or they had made sure of his death.

They were still partners in their effort to rescue the girl and slay her abductor; otherwise they were at swords points.

If mental distress and physical discomfort can constitute vengeance, Ben was already avenged.

One rainy, disagreeable morning, as they camped beside the river near the mouth of a small creek, affairs reached their crisis. They had caught and saddled the horses; Ray was pulling tight the last hitch. Chan stood beside him, speaking in an undertone. When he had finished Ray cursed explosively in the silence.

Nelson turned. He seemed to sense impending developments. "What now?" he asked.

"I'm not going on, that's what it is," Ray replied. "Nelson, it's two against one—if you want to go you can, but Ray and I are going back."

"You're going back, eh—scared out?" Nelson commented coldly.

"I'm going back—and don't say too much about being scared out, either."

"And you too, Chan? You're against me, too?"

Chan cursed. "I'd gone a week ago if it'd been me. We know the home, at least."

The old man looked a long time into the river depths.

"Then turn the horses around, you cowards," he answered. "I can't go on alone."

For once neither Ray nor Chan

was, the stain imprint of Ben's canoe as they had landed, and the tracks of both the man and the girl as they had turned into the forest.

The dawn that crept so gray and mysterious over the frosty green of spruce brought no hope to Beatrice, sitting beside the unconscious form of Ben in the cave fronting the glade.

(Continued in Our Next Issue)

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Clear and unmistakable in the mud

of the shore.

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