

# COMRADES OF PERIL

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**"INDIAN JOE!"**

Synopsis—Tom Shelby, a rancher, rides into the frontier town of Ponca, looking for a good time after a long spell of hard work and loneliness on the ranch. Instead, he runs into a funeral—that of Dad Calkins, a retired army man of whom little is known. A girl, still in her teens, survives Calkins. McCarthy, a saloon keeper and Ponca's leading citizen, decides that the girl, now alone in the world, should marry. She agrees to pick out a husband from the score of men lined up in her home. To his consternation, she selects Shelby, who had gone along merely as a spectator. He declines the honor. Indignant, the girl dismisses the assemblage. Shelby runs into two of the rejected suitors, and in a fight wounds them both. Angered at their remarks, he returns to the girl, determined to marry her, if she will have him. After his explanation she agrees to marry him. The wedding takes place and the couple set out for Shelby's ranch. With them is "Kid" Macklin, whom Shelby has hired as a helper. On the way the girl tells her husband her name is Olga Carlyn, and also tells him something of the peculiar circumstances of her life. Upon arrival at the ranch Shelby is struck down from behind and left for dead. He recovers consciousness to find that Macklin and his wife have gone. He starts in pursuit. He learns his wife is an heiress, that her abduction has been carefully planned and that she has been taken to Wolves' Hole, a stronghold of bandits and bad Indians.

curiously about. He dismounted, and, after a few moments' scrutiny of the ground, decided that he was still safely on the trail of those traveling ahead. There were two traces sufficiently defined to indicate the passage within a few hours of both Macklin's party, and the two others. Neither outfit had made any effort at concealment, but Shelby, fearing the latter might be camped for breakfast, left his horse to crop on the short grass, while he advanced on foot. The trail was obscure, but not difficult to follow when once discovered. Hanley and his companion had not ventured the passage until dawn, the marks of their horses' hoofs so fresh as to convince their trailer they were scarcely beyond the sound of his voice. He even found where they had dismounted, waiting for daylight, the ground littered with the ends of burnt cigarettes.

Shelby loitered an hour before venturing to follow. There was no other way out, and so he munched at a cold meal, and permitted the buckskin to browse along the bank of the stream, well concealed by a fringe of willows. Then, both horse and man refreshed, he went forward on foot, leading the animal, and began the upward climb. In places it was not unlike a cave, and Shelby had no idea how far he had gone, when he suddenly emerged out from the gloom into the sunlight of the summit, with a clear view across the level plateau.

Shelby stopped, holding the horse back below the summit and gazed anxiously about. The soil left no trail and, with the naked eye, Shelby was unable to distinguish a sign of life within the radius of vision. Everything had the appearance of death—the death of ages. He stood upright and swept the circle with his field glasses. He was barely in time; for far off there to the left, scarcely discernible even then against the black, overhanging ridges of rock, he made out two slowly moving objects. They were not distinct, he could not have sworn what they were, but there was no doubt in his mind as to their identity. He studied them eagerly until they disappeared down a coulee, and then carefully marked the course, his point of guidance a high pinnacle of rock standing out against the sky.

He was an hour reaching this objective, but once there he found the trail plainly traced along the edge of the bank. It led in and out amid the intricacies of the hills, taking, of nec-



He Suddenly Emerged Out From the Gloom.

essity, so winding a course as to give Shelby no view ahead and soon confused him in point of direction. He could only move forward cautiously, fearful lest they might have baited for some purpose, and watchful of every trace of their passage, as other ravines were constantly uniting with this through which he was blindly feeling his way. He came to sand and lost all signs of the trail instantly, searching for it in vain for nearly an hour before confessing himself at fault. Then, leaving the horse below, he climbed the nearest hill for a view of his surroundings.

The sun gave him the proper directions, but all about stretched the same dreary, bare ridges of rock, offering no guidance. There was no life visible anywhere and although he waited for some time, sweeping his glasses back and forth, he gained no glimpse of the two he endeavored to follow. They had vanished as though swallowed up by the earth. The sun was already in the west and desperately he

determined to try the level. Even this, amid the intricacies of those branching passages between the round hills, was difficult to achieve, yet he finally discovered an exit and ventured toward the north, confident that the Cottonwood would surely lie somewhere in that direction.

He came upon it so suddenly and unexpectedly as to almost daze his faculties. Almost without warning he stood at the very edge of a yawning hole and stared in amazement down into those depths below. Again and again he had heard this scene described, yet had never before comprehended its reality. A huge cut straight down, fully a mile wide, cleft the plain in two, with no visible signs of its presence until one stood at the very crater's edge. At night he would have ridden off without the slightest warning of danger. And below! Feeling sick, dizzy, Shelby swung himself from the saddle, crept cautiously to the edge and looked down. He had no conception of the depth, for it already was hazy down there, as though he gazed through a blue fog, but how small those trees appeared, mere toy trees, and the silvery stream running through the center seemed scarcely a yard wide. A yard, why, if it was actually the Cottonwood, it must be a hundred feet from bank to bank! God! What a hole! What a freak of nature! What a wilderness hiding place!

He lay motionless, with eyes searching up and down the valley. To the right he could not determine how far it extended, but to the left he could discern the silver shield of water where the Cottonwood came tumbling over a precipice. One of the two possible entrances was there; the other must be along some one of those numerous side ravines, whose black entrances he could dimly perceive. It was all so serene, so peaceful, the truth seemed impossible—that he was actually gazing down into a veritable hell on earth, a rendezvous of white thieves and Indian murderers, a border fortress for all the nameless deviltry of the frontier.

And he must invade the Hole, alone, if he would be of service to this woman captive! By sheer recklessness he must pierce the thing to the heart. Yet how was it to be done? Not even a mountain goat could find passage down those rocks even by daylight and in another hour all would be darkness. He could not remain there; before night made the search impossible he must at least find water and a place in which to camp. He stared down into those deepening mists below, already beginning to blot out the features of the valley.

"God, what a hole," he breathed; "it is like looking straight into hell. The only way down must be somewhere to the left. Case told me they passed in under that waterfall."

He got to his feet, with the pony trailing behind, moved backward away from the edge of the chasm into the open plain. Suddenly, as his glance wandered searchingly toward the chain of rock hills, the man stopped, his heart pounding. What was that moving yonder, just emerging from out the mouth of that ravine and becoming clearly outlined against the gray alkali? He knew almost instantly—the advance of a drove of cattle, debouching through the narrow defile and spreading out as they attained the wider open space. There must be a hundred head and even as he comprehended, horsemen appeared in their rear, spurring forward to turn them to the left down a shallow gulch.

There was no way he could escape observation; no possibility of hiding on that bare plain. Shelby's brain worked like lightning. There were five riders; he could count them now; Indians mostly, although one was surely white. There was nothing left him but audacity and lies. He must take the chance, the one chance, mad, desperate, yet yielding a possibility of success. He swung the field glasses to his eyes—yes, one rider was white, a squat figure with a red beard, and another, the fellow at this end, appeared to be a Mexican. Then he laughed grimly; the vortex of his glass rested on the exposed flank of the nearest steer and he saw the brand. By all the gods, they were his own cattle! The humor of it flashed in his eyes, but the jaw of the man set sternly. The d—d thieves! He strode forward, the pony trailing at his heels, and then the Mexican saw him, throwing up one hand in a swift signal and spurring his horse recklessly across the gray plain. They met half way, Shelby still aloft, the other sweeping up at full speed, his horse brought fairly to its haunches by the cruel pressure of a Spanish bit.

The fellow was a handsome devil but for the evil in his eyes and a disfiguring scar down one cheek. The eyes of the two met and the rider's hand dropped instantly upon the exposed butt of a revolver.

"Buena dias, señor," he said harshly, staring. "What is the meaning of this?"

Shelby smiled, coolly returning his glance.

"The meaning of what, señor?" he questioned shortly.

"Your being here—alone! I have not seen you before. You are not of the Wolves' den."

"Oh, is that it, señor?" indifferently. "Then maybe you will tell me how I am to find a way into this den of wolves? I have looked down yonder," he waved his hand.

"You seek it, then?"

"Sure; otherwise why should I be here? You will guide me?"

"Caramba! It depends," suspiciously, yet somewhat disconcerted by the other's quiet manner. "I would know more first. You are lost?"

"Old Matt—I know him." "Good; then I have met a friend. We were there, back in those hills, when my girl broke—see, where I have fixed it. I fell behind and they rode on. I thought to follow easily, but, you must know those hills, the trail was lost; perhaps I took a wrong turn, for suddenly I found myself on this plain."

The Mexican sat motionless, his eyes as suspicious as ever, but his fingers no longer gripped on the revolver. The last of the cattle had disappeared down the coulee and the red-bearded white man was riding toward them across the alkali. Neither changed position until he came up, a lump of a fellow, with staring eyes and complexion the color of parchment.

"What the h—l is all this, Juan?" he questioned roughly. "Who is the fellow?"

"He travel with Matt Hanley an' get lost; so he say."

"Hanley, hey! That's some recommendation. Who else was with your party?"

"A man called Hank." "Slaglin. Well, the story sounds straight so far; them two left here together; I happen to know that. What's your name?"

Shelby looked him squarely in the eye. "Churchill."

"What! Matt talked to me about that. Fellow named Macklin stalkin' a girl down Ponca way."

"He's got her; so Hanley says, an' that's what I'm here for—see?"

"But you ain't Ol' Churchill. The way I heard it he was sixty anyhow, an' a down-easter."

"Virginia; he's my father." "Oh, h—l, an' where you been?"

"Soldierin' mostly." "I see," his eyes wandered. "Sounds kinder fishy, young feller, but I ain't in no shape to tell. I reckon Matt Hanley kin straighten it out, an' if he is down that, the best thing we kin do is to take yer 'long. If yer lyn' ye'll be d—n sorry 'fore yer get out ag'in. I'll tell yer that to begin with, but if yer game to ride along, we'll see if yer get that all right. Let's hit her up, Juan; them Injuns will need us 'fore long. Come on, stranger."

He wheeled his horse and rode off on a sharp trot and the Mexican followed. Neither man so much as glanced back toward Shelby, seemingly indifferent as to what he chose to do. Yet he knew the customs of the West and that if he faltered then now no future falsehood would ever regain their confidence. He swung into the saddle and rode silently forward behind Juan. The cattle were still out of sight ahead, but they could hear the calls of the drivers. Shelby pressed his bronco up closer to the Mexican, who had lit a cigarette.

"Is it far, Juan?" he asked. "Nom de Dios! I heard you not. To the Hole you mean? Not far, but tough, señor; yet there is no other way to get cattle in."

"The man with you; who is he?" Juan emitted a cloud of blue smoke in the air, smiling pleasantly. "Senor Laud."

"Laud!" in undisguised astonishment. "What Laud? Not 'Indian Joe'?"

"Sl, señor; they call heem that," confidently. "He verra bad man. You know heem, what?"

Shelby gripped himself tightly. "I've heard of him, that's all. He's a Sioux squawman, but I never know what he looked like before."

His pony, no longer urged, fell back, trailing at the rear of the others. Juan rode on, unconscious and indifferent, blowing spirals of smoke into the air, and humming the strain of some Spanish melody, but Shelby was staring beyond him at the red-bearded white man slouched down in his saddle. So that fellow was "Indian Joe" Laud! As never before he realized to the full the danger into which he advanced.

"Indian Joe" Laud! When hadn't he heard of him? For years certainly, ever since he had been in this north country, yet in appearance the fellow was not at all what he previously had imagined that desperado to be. Laud was gross, bearded, dirty, coarse-featured; to all appearances a mere barnyard tough, yet no man on the frontier had a worse record or was more dreading and despised. Why was he here stealing cattle on the very verge of Indian war? True, he was

not a Sioux in blood, yet it was well known that he had been adopted into the tribe and never failed to have a hand in their deviltry. Army officers claimed he possessed more influence over them for evil than any chief, and Shelby had heard him mentioned with Sitting Bull as leaders in the ghost-dance. If true, then he must know how far to venture, and just when to draw aside so as to save himself. That must be it—to him war meant only an opportunity to plunder. The final result was clearly Indian defeat; he would keep out, but in the meanwhile profit all he could.

The trail led downward at a rather steep grade, in spite of continual curving. The sure-footed horses moved faster than the cattle, and before the outfit reached the level of the valley the three riders had closed in on the Indian drivers. Shelby knew them at once as young Sioux warriors, and was again able to distinguish plainly the brand on the flank of the steers bringing up the rear of the herd. They were unquestionably his own stock, and, in spite of his rage, he could not be entirely indifferent to the grim humor of the situation—he was being guided into Wolves' hole by the very men who had robbed him.

Yet his thoughts did not dwell upon this so much just then, as on the mad chance he had assumed in this adventure. What could he accomplish? What hope was there that he would ever emerge again alive? He was going forward blindly, led by fate, with not even a plan of guidance. He must work alone, in the midst of enemies, desperate men to whom human life was valueless, and where any incautious word or act would instantly expose him to discovery. In spite of the fact that he was believed dead, Macklin would recognize him at a glance, and the very claim that he was a friend of Hanley's exposed him to discovery. In some way he must avoid them both, and yet no plan presented itself to promise escape. He could only drift helplessly, becoming more despondent of success with every step of advance.

It was already dusk when they attained the level of the valley, and the overshadowing bluffs rose high on either hand, leaving them plodding through the gloom. Yet even here they had not attained the full depression of the Hole, which required another sharp descent along the border of the stream, where a ledge of rock had evidently been blasted out. This passage abruptly ended in a wide, stone causeway, turning sharply to the left, and running beneath a waterfall, where the broad stream leaped over a ledge of high rock. It was a task to get the cattle through, yet once started, they plunged forward, following each other with fright, never pausing until they scattered out over the plain below.

Laud drew up his horse in front of a small log structure, so concealed at the edge of a straggly grove, that, in the gloom, Shelby was not even aware of its existence until voices greeted them. "Back again, Joe! Where'd yer pick up that bunch?"

"Up on the Cottonwood; easy pickin' in," and Laud flung one leg over his saddle in a posture of rest. "Where's Kelly? Oh, ban; bring me out a drink. Anything new?"

The tall, raw-boned frontiersman who responded, puffed at his pipe, and out through the open door of the cabin there suddenly streamed a light revealing his features, and the indistinct outlines of others idling near by. "Well, not much, Joe," he answered drawlingly. "most o' the Injuns have struck out; ain't no'n a dozen bucks left, I reckon. They tell me they're raisin' h—l already over Ponca way; maybe yer heard about it?"

Laud nodded, wiping his lips with the back of his hand. "Whar's Matt Hanley?"

"Oh, he an' Slaglin cum' in 'bout five hours ago, I reckon, an' went on up to the cove."

"Have anything with 'em?" "Not that I see—they didn't, did they, Jim?—just travellin' light."

"Didn't say anything about another gasho?" "Not that I know about. They acted like they was both plum tired out, and wanted ter go asleep. Just took a drink apiece, and mosed along."

Laud let fall an oath. "All right then, but d—d if I'll ride down to the cove tonight. We'll go up to your shack, Juan, and bunk down. Come on, both o' yer."

"Because you are a woman, I guess, and because I think you are straight."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Bower-Bird's Wooing.

A cynical method of enticing a hesitating partner into the bonds of matrimony is furnished by the bower-bird, which builds a structure of sticks formed into a kind of passage or avenue and beautifully ornamented with feathers and shells. On its completion the would-be bridegroom brings the bird, of his choice to inspect his fine establishment and entices her to share it.

Queer Gradles for Babies.

An infant in Guatemala is usually hurred in sand up to its waist whenever the mother is busy, and this is the only cradle it ever knows. The little Lapp on the other hand, fares most luxuriously in its mother's shoe. These Lapp shoes are his affairs of skin stuffed with soft moss, and can be hung on a peg or tree branch safely out of the way.

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"How like you!" said Whistler, lolly.

"Hardly five minutes later, Whistler, usually the deftest, surest of men, dropped a copper plate himself. He stooped and picked it up. Then he murmured:

"How unlike me!"

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A Clean Send-Away.

A country farmer had was writing a letter to a city friend. Having no other envelope than a very dirty one that he had carried in his pocket for quite a while, he used it, but annexed at the end of his letter:

"P. S.—Please excuse the envelope. It was clean when it left my hands."

Different.

"Savages used to paint their faces." "It's different with civilized man," commented Mr. Chuggins. "He crawls under his car and gets his face smeared with automobile grease."

The Time is Ripe.

"I want to do something really great in music."

"Try a jazz symphony."

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