

COMRADES



CHAPTER XI—Continued.

"Yes," she admitted, "that was about all."
 "So, now he's dead; he don't cut no ice anymore."
 "But are you sure he's dead?"

"Sure?" sneeringly. "I don't know how I could be no surer. I turned the cuss over an' he was cold then. You don't need worry none about that. Wait a minute till I see who the guy was what tried to break in here."

Shelby could hear Macklin cross the room, and jerk the blanket from off the bodies. The fellow gave utterance to an oath of astonishment at the sight revealed.

"My God! Did you ever see anything like that? Locked together like two stags. H—! Sam was shot, but he got the white guy even after he was dead. D—n me, if it ain't Hank Slagin! Now, what does that mean? I reckon Hanley sent the galoot in here. That comes from spillin' things when yer drunk. Say, you an' I have got to get out of here. I'll tell you about it as quick as I can. It's plain enough Hanley's got his eyes on you, an' will double-cross me if he once gets a chance."

"What is it you mean? I do not understand."

"Naturally yer don't see'n I ain't told yer nothin'. But now that I know yer ain't pinin' away over that feller Shelby, I reckon the sensible thing fer me to do is ter talk straight. There's goin' ter be h—l to pay in this valley before long, and the sooner we get out o' here the better. I run across a soldier 'bout half way ter Gerlasche, an' he give me a pointer that made me wheel about, an' ride back."

"The Indian outbreak?"

"Sure; the troops got in, an' rounded most of the Sioux up. They had a fight at Wounded Knee, over yonder, an' licked h—l out of the reds. Some of 'em got away though, an' come trallin' west—mostly young ones. I reckon—an' now they're sendin' cavalry out ter ride 'em down. That's what he was after, a bunch to come south'n in through here."

"Here? Wolves' hole?"

"Mor'n likely; he didn't say nothin' 'bout that. But they're mighty liable ter call. I'm ter rittin' out, while the goin's good. That's what I come back for—to get you, and skip."

"To—to get me?"

"Of course. I'll tell yer about it now, an' you'll go all right. I reckon you never thought I run off with you 'cause I loved you?"

"No—you—you loved me?"

"That's the way of it. I saw you long before that funeral down to Ponca; but this guy Shelby horned in 'fore I was ready to act. You didn't care nothin' for him. So I says to myself, then, I'll take her; I'll take her whether she wants me or not. Long as she don't love him, I'll make her love me—see? Course I didn't aim to do no killing; that was just an accident like, an' I didn't do it now. It was Sam here who got gay, and beamed Shelby."

"But what would you do with me, if—if he had been alive?"

"There ain't no use discussin' that, fer he ain't alive. It's what I want ter do now that counts. Maybe I had a plan then, an' maybe I didn't. But now I got it all planned up proper. I'm a goin' ter marry you. An' that goes whether yer're willin' or not. I ain't even askin' you."

The expression of her face must have brought the fellow a realization that perhaps he was going altogether too fast, for he broke in with an explanation.

"See here now, don't get huffy. I ain't no Western rough-neck for you to be ashamed of. I belong down East in of Virginia, an' we got money to burn. That's straight goods. My real name ain't Macklin at all; it's Churchill. I mean business an' just as soon as Indian Joe gets down here with some horses, we're a goin' ter start."

"For where?" her voice trembling in spite of every effort at self-control.

"To Gerlasche first; there's a preacher there, an' then on to God's country just as fast as the train will take us. That's my program, an' let me tell you, I'll be d—n glad ter git away from Injuns, Mexs, an' the rest of this rotten outfit. No, you wait; that will be Indian Joe comin' now."

The door between the two rooms had closed partially, yielding doubtless to some faint draught of air, so that Shelby ventured to survey the scene through the narrow crack near the hinges. Matters were becoming so complicated he was at his wits end. He had delayed too long, and perhaps it had been a mistake to advise the girl to thus appear friendly to this brute. Now, instead of being confronted by the Kia alone, he must also face Laud, if he would prevent her being carried away the second time. The situation had become desperate. He could see the girl standing

pressed close to the wall, the light from the broken window on her face, her eyes anxiously watchful of the movements of Macklin, who had turned and was fronting the outer door, one hand resting in readiness on the butt of his "45." Then that opening was shadowed, and the bulky figure of the squaw-man suddenly appeared. His first utterance was full of ill-humor.

"Well, I got your message, and am here," he said roughly. "What the h—l is up, Macklin?"

"Everything is, from all I hear," was the short reply. "Your Indians are licked already, ain't they?"

"Yes; I expected that; I told them how it would be."

"To be sure you did, but you never thought every runaway buck would make for this Hole. But they have; and you know what that means, I reckon. They will be smoked out sooner or later. Do you want to stay, and be smoked out with 'em? I'm for getting out of here now—tonight, Joe. I don't intend being caught in this net; an' you are a d—d fool if you don't feel in the same way. There is a chance now to make it, but tomorrow may be too late. How about your cattle?"

"I sent them into the Bad Lands," Macklin laughed.

"That proves what you think about it. All right then; we'll ride out together. Got three horses out there?"

"Yes, and a pack; that's what the Indian told me to bring. The woman going along?"

"Sure she is. H—l, we've fixed things all up. We're goin' to get married over at Gerlasche. I'm aimin' ter take you along for best man."

Laud evidenced his surprise and incredulity with a grunt, and a swift glance at the silent girl, shrinking back against the wall.

"What about Pancha?" he asked dryly.

"That little Devil! Poo! when she hears about it, I'll be east of the Missouri. She's all right for a Mex, but this time I mean business, Joe. Don't you forget it, I'm playin' for big stakes, an' there don't no Pancha stand in my way. What's the matter with you?"

"Well, I ain't so sure you're goin' ter git off so scot free," returned Laud slowly. "There's a fellow been in here huntin' you; an' I reckon he must be here yet—leastways I don't know how the cuss could have got out."

"A man huntin' me? You're dreamin'."

"No I ain't. The fellow joined my outfit up on the mesa yesterday—sorter big fellow with light hair, an' a smooth face. He put up quite a spiel, and claimed his name was Churchill. I didn't mor'n half believe him, but not knowin' what was up, I let the cuss drift in along with us. I aimed to see you as soon as we got in; but

Laud obeyed, his face ugly and threatening, and Shelby took a step closer, the strip of blanket in his hands, his revolver thrust back into his belt. What Indian Joe saw will never be known; perhaps a slight wavering in the eyes of the girl, perhaps an instant lowering of her gun. But it was enough. All his hate and treachery drove him to a desperate chance. With the maddened leap of a wild beast, he sprang upon Shelby, gripped him fiercely by the throat, and the two went headlong to the floor. Olga fired, but without aim, missing them both, and dare not pull the trigger again, so tightly were the men grappled, as they rolled back and forth in frenzied effort to obtain mastery. Shelby, taken completely by surprise, was at a disadvantage, his throat crushed by sinewy hands, his loosened revolver flung half across the room. He could only struggle to break the hold of his antagonist, rolling over and over, and forcing the fellow's head back with every ounce of strength he could bring into play. They were not unevenly matched, the two—Shelby the younger, and perhaps the stronger; but Laud a skilled fighter, hard as nails, and ready to resort to any trick. Moreover, he knew what he had set out to accomplish, and bent every effort to prevent the frightened girl from getting a shot at him. He hung on, his straining hands, like a vise, twisting tighter and tighter Shelby's shirt band, careless of any injury to himself so that he kept the body of the latter in protection between him and Olga's revolver. Yet, with every move, every straining whirl of their bodies, he gained an inch nearer the open door. He fought like an animal, sinking his teeth into Shelby's flesh, and driving his knees into his body. It was silent, bitter fighting, every muscle strained to the utmost, and the squaw man won. They knocked over the bench, and crashed through the partially open door, rolling down the single step into the weeds. Laud landed on top, his fingers still clutched on Shelby's throat, the latter half unconscious. Crased,



"What the h—l is up, Macklin?"

h—l, you had skipped, while Hanley, who might have known something, was up at the cove. I sent Juan after him, for by that time I was sure the guy was some d—n spy. The boss he was ridin' had the same brand of them cattle I drove in."

"The same brand? What brand?"

"The Three Stars; they come from Shelby's ranch up on the Cottonwood."

"H—l! A big fellow, you said with light hair, and smooth face?"

"That's him; grayish eyes, an' rides like a cavalryman. I never saw the galoot before, but I want goin' to take no chances, so I got his gun, and locked him up."

"Where?"

"In that cell room in Villemonte's cabin."

"And he's there yet?"

"No, he ain't; that's the trouble. Somehow he got hold of a knife; must have hid on him, I reckon. Enyhow he cut them bars at the window, an' wiggled through."

"And he hasn't been caught?"

"Ain't seen hide ner hair o' him. Some guy helped him outside—there was prints of two kinds of boots plain enough under the window; but after that they might just as well have gone up in the air."

"Two o' 'em. The other couldn't have been Hanley, or Slagin, could it?"

"How the h—l do I know? I never caught sight o' nothin' but the print of that boot. I scouted up the creek; then that first bunch o' Indians come trallin' in, an' I had no time to think about anything since, only gettin' my cattle out o' here."

"But you'll go with us now?"

"For a ways, anyhow; I reckon there ain't nothin' else to do; them soldiers is bound to get here."

"And the sooner we're off the better. You ready?"

He wheeled and confronted the shrinking, frightened girl, who made no reply.

"Well, by God! you better be. Get the horses, Joe; I'll fetch her along, all right."

Shelby straightened up. In spite of the odds, he must act now, or never. Yet, before he could take a step forward, a single shot rang out sharply. He saw Macklin fling up his arms, reel backward, his body striking the half-open door, before it crashed to the floor, and lay motionless.

The impact of Macklin's body had flung the door wide open, leaving Shelby fully exposed to view. For an instant, however, the startled and bewildered Laud failed to note his revelation against the darkness of that interior. He had leaped back instantly to the protection of the wall, and gun in hand, crouched there with eyes fixed on the broken window opposite. Shelby was swift to take advantage of his surprise. Wherever the shot had come from, whoever had fired it, his concealment was no longer possible. There must be no hesitancy, no delay. He stepped across the motionless body, with weapon flung grimly forward.

"Hands up, Joe! Put them up first before you turn around. Stop that! Don't try any tricks on me. Now stand there—Olga."

"Yes."

"Take that gun out of his hand; there is another in his belt; get that also. That's right; now come over here; you understand firearms?"

"Yes, of course" wonderingly, "I know how to shoot."

"I imagined so; Calkins would have taught you. Keep this fellow covered, and let him have it if he makes any effort to break away. Watch him closely, while I rip up that blanket, and tie him up."

He left her with the gun steadily pointed at Laud's head, the fellow cursing, with hands up, his angry eyes following every movement. He was desperate, maddened by sudden helplessness, with the sneaking ferocity of a wolf, yet was temporarily held motionless by the deadly peril. Shelby stripped the ragged blanket from off the dead bodies under the bench, and began hastily to rip it apart. The black, bloated face of Slagin stared upward, and Indian Joe saw it for the first time, a sudden spasm of terror causing him to burst forth:

"My God! That's Hank Slagin!"

"Sure it is; he got his, an' you'll get yours if you drop those hands, you cur. Turn around now, and stop."

Laud obeyed, his face ugly and threatening, and Shelby took a step closer, the strip of blanket in his hands, his revolver thrust back into his belt. What Indian Joe saw will never be known; perhaps a slight wavering in the eyes of the girl, perhaps an instant lowering of her gun. But it was enough. All his hate and treachery drove him to a desperate chance. With the maddened leap of a wild beast, he sprang upon Shelby, gripped him fiercely by the throat, and the two went headlong to the floor. Olga fired, but without aim, missing them both, and dare not pull the trigger again, so tightly were the men grappled, as they rolled back and forth in frenzied effort to obtain mastery. Shelby, taken completely by surprise, was at a disadvantage, his throat crushed by sinewy hands, his loosened revolver flung half across the room. He could only struggle to break the hold of his antagonist, rolling over and over, and forcing the fellow's head back with every ounce of strength he could bring into play. They were not unevenly matched, the two—Shelby the younger, and perhaps the stronger; but Laud a skilled fighter, hard as nails, and ready to resort to any trick. Moreover, he knew what he had set out to accomplish, and bent every effort to prevent the frightened girl from getting a shot at him. He hung on, his straining hands, like a vise, twisting tighter and tighter Shelby's shirt band, careless of any injury to himself so that he kept the body of the latter in protection between him and Olga's revolver. Yet, with every move, every straining whirl of their bodies, he gained an inch nearer the open door. He fought like an animal, sinking his teeth into Shelby's flesh, and driving his knees into his body. It was silent, bitter fighting, every muscle strained to the utmost, and the squaw man won. They knocked over the bench, and crashed through the partially open door, rolling down the single step into the weeds. Laud landed on top, his fingers still clutched on Shelby's throat, the latter half unconscious. Crased,

maddened as he was, the one desire to escape overcame his eagerness to kill, and Indian Joe, cursing, struck once at the upturned face, leaped to his feet and plunged into the shelter of the weeds. Shelby, gasping painfully for breath, scarcely yet fully realizing what had occurred, lay motionless but for the quivering of his limbs.

Indeed, he had scarcely forced open his eyes when Olga was beside him. "You—you are alive? He did not kill you?"

He endeavored to smile, lifting himself upon one elbow. "No, no; I am all right," he gasped. "The fellow got my throat, and I couldn't break his hold. The treacherous hound got me that time. I was

out both hands to him in sudden eagerness. "Why shouldn't I, Tom Shelby? I like you."

In the darkness she could scarcely see his face, but she felt the grip of his fingers and caught the eager tremor in his voice.

"I sure am glad you said that," he admitted, as helpless to express himself as a child. "I sorter wanted you to for—for a long while. H—! That's Laud out there now."

He stepped over beside the door, whipping both revolvers from his belt and holding one in each hand. A small, round hole had been dug through the adobe plaster between the logs and he bent down with his eye to the opening. A tall, rangy white man, with a dirty skin and scraggling red beard was nearest at hand; and beyond him crouched an Indian naked to the waist, his face blackened and chest disfigured with gaudy paint. There were others behind these scattered out in fan shape, but he could only make them out indefinitely. Laud stood so close to the door his face could not be seen, but he held a rifle in his hands, pounding with the stock on the wood, as he angrily demanded admittance.

"Come on out of there, yer big fool," he roared, maddened by the silence. "We saw yer go back inside an' we've got yer this time. Come on, now; I won't ask you again!"

"On what terms?"

Shelby asked this more to prolong delay than anything else. The fellows knew they were there, and it was useless to pretend otherwise.

"Terms—h—l!" and Indian Joe burst out into a loud laugh. "Hear the cock crow, Hanley. We'll make terms when we get hands on yer, yer darn sneaking spy. Only I'll say this: yer'll get it harder if yer hang on after we do get yer—an', by God! we'll get yer, sooner or later."

"We'll take chances, Laud, and the fun is not going to be all on one side."

"It won't, hey! So yer gon' ter fight? All right; but there's more o' this outfit comin', an' yer a blamed idiot; if we can get yer no other way I reckon we can burn yer out. Come on, now; save time and open up!"

He struck hard and angrily with his gunstock, but the stout wolf held. Shelby made no answer, again bending low and peering out through the narrow opening. The obstinate silence must have maddened the fellow, for he suddenly reversed his weapon and fired. The ball crashed through the wood, leaving a jagged hole, and imbedded itself in the solid log of a back wall. Before the smoke blew away Shelby replied, sighting out through the small aperture, determined to make every shot count. The nearest white man flung up his arm which dripped blood, grabbed it and ran; the crouching Indian behind, crumpled up as though crushed by some sudden weight and never moved. Laud sprang backward, startled by the swift response from within, the smoke swirling up between his fingers, and Shelby let drive. Whether the speeding bullet struck or missed he never knew, but the squaw-man gave one startled leap into the concealment of the weeds, fell headlong, and then went scrambling down to the bank of the stream. It was all so swiftly accomplished as to seem like a flashlight picture. When the smoke cloud rolled away not a figure was to be seen. Shelby stood up, grimly smiling, and replaced the cartridges in his weapon. The end was not yet, but he had taught them a lesson in caution.

For a moment, blinded by gazing out into the sunlight, he could see nothing clearly about him, not even the figure of Olga. "Where are you?" he asked.

"Here, by the other door. What has happened?"

He laughed, put at ease by the quick response of her voice.

"Oh, I took pot shot out through a hole in the wall. I thought we might as well start the ball; Joe was getting so gay. Touched up two of them; now they'll go back and talk it over."

"Sure; the Indians will be for waiting till night, an' that ain't far off. What are you doing down there?"

There was a note of startled surprise in her voice.

"Why, this is strange! I—I hadn't noticed before; I was too frightened, perhaps—but, come quick; Macklin's body is not here! It—it is gone!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

She Had a Remedy.

The young mother was worried over her youngster. "Sometimes I think there is something the matter with his ears," she said, "for he does not answer me when I speak to him; and often he doesn't seem to understand that I've given him any directions. I wonder if I should take him to an ear specialist."

"The mother of four grinned. "I've found just such deafness among my children," she said, "but I didn't let it worry me any."

"What did you do for it?" inquired the young mother, anxiously.

"Why, I just spanked 'em all around," was the reply, "and they heard beautifully for several months after that."—Springfield Union.

"French Leave."

The familiar expression "to take French leave" arose in the early part of the Eighteenth century, through certain guests in the salons of France, not aware of the higher acts of courtesy, leaving without saying good-bye to the host or hostess. The practice spread to society in other countries. Therefore, if a man left without saying good-bye to his host it was said he took "French leave."

The first problem that confronts a baby is how to make crying pay.

"Of course I will," and she thrust



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