

The VALLEY OF THE GIANTS

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CHAPTER XIV.
—15—

The dictograph which Shirley had asked Bryce to obtain for her in San Francisco arrived on the regular passenger steamer on Thursday morning and Bryce called her up to ask when she desired it sent over.

"Good morning, Mr. Cardigan," she greeted him cheerily. "How do you feel this morning? Any worse for having permitted yourself to be a human being last night?"

"Why, I feel pretty fine, Shirley. I think it did me a lot of good to crawl out of my shell last night."

"You feel encouraged to go on living, eh?"

"Yes."

"And fighting?"

"By all means."

"Then something has occurred of late to give you new courage?"

"Oh, many things. By the way, Shirley, you may inform your uncle at breakfast Friday morning about my connection with the N. C. O. In fact, I think it would be far better for you if you made it a point to do so."

"Why?"

"Because both Ogilvy and myself have a very strong suspicion that your uncle has a detective or two on our trail. I judge your uncle will learn today that you dined with Ogilvy, Motra and me last night."

"Oh, dear! That's terrible." He could sense her distress.

"Ashamed of having been seen in my company, eh?"

"Please don't. Are you quite serious in this matter?"

"Quite."

"Uncle Seth will think it so—so strange."

"He'll probably tell you about it. Better beat him to the issue by fessing up, Shirley. Doubtless his suspicions are already aroused, and if you inform him that you know I am the real builder of the N. C. O., he'll think you're a smart woman and that you've been doing a little private gum-shoe work of your own on behalf of the Laguna Grande Lumber Company."

"Which is exactly what I have been doing," she reminded him.

"I know. But then, I'm not afraid of you, Shirley—that is, any more. And after Friday morning I'll not be afraid of your uncle."

"I feel as if I were a conspirator."

"I believe you are one. Your dictograph has arrived. Shall I send George Sea Otter over with it? And have you somebody to install it?"

"Oh, bother! Does it have to be installed?"

"It does. You place the contraption—hide it, rather—in the room where the conspirators conspire; then you run wires from it into another room where the detectives listen in on the receivers."

"Could George Sea Otter install it?"

"I think he could. There is a printed card of instructions, and I dare say George would find the job no more baffling than the ignition system on the Napier."

"Will he tell anybody?"

"Not if you ask him not to."

"Very well, then. Please send him over. Thank you so much, Bryce Cardigan. You're an awful good old sort, after all. Really, it hurts me to have to oppose you. It would be so much nicer if we didn't have all those redwood trees to protect, wouldn't it?"

"Let us not argue the question, Shirley. I think I have my redwood trees protected. Good-by."

He had scarcely finished telephoning his home to instruct George Sea Otter to report with the express package to Shirley when Buck Ogilvy strolled into the office and tossed a document on his desk. "There's your little old temporary franchise, old thing," he announced; and with many a hearty laugh he related to Bryce the ingenious means by which he had obtained it. "And now if you will phone up to your logging camp and instruct the woods-boss to lay off about fifty men to rest for the day, pending a hard night's work, and arrange to send them down on the last log train today, I'll drop around after dinner and we'll fly to that jump-crossing."

"I'll telephone Colonel Pennington's manager and ask him to kick a switch-engine in on the Laurel creek spur and snake those flat cars with my rails aboard out to the junction with the main line," Bryce replied. And he called up the Laguna Grande Lumber company—only to be informed by no less a person than Colonel Pennington himself that it would be impossible to send the switch-engine in until the following afternoon. The Colonel was sorry, but the switch-engine was in the shop having the brick in her firebox reworked, while the mogul that hauled the log trains would not have time to attend to the matter, since the flats would have to be spotted on the sidetrack at Cardigan's log landing in the woods, and this could not be done un-

til the last loaded log train for the day had been hauled out to make room.

"Why not switch back with the mogul after the log train has been hauled out on the main line?" Bryce demanded pointedly.

Pennington, however, was not trapped. "My dear fellow," he replied patronizingly, "quite impossible, I assure you. That old trestle across the creek, my boy—it hasn't been looked at for years. While I'd send the light switch-engine over it and have no fears—"

"I happen to know, Colonel, that the big mogul kicked those flats in to load the rails!"

"I know it. And what happened? Why, that old trestle squeaked and shook and gave every evidence of being about to buckle in the center. My engineer threatened to quit if I sent him in again."

"Very well. I suppose I'll have to wait until the switch-engine comes out of the shop," Bryce replied resignedly, and hung up. He turned a troubled face to Ogilvy. "Check-mated!" he announced. "Whipped to a frazzle. The Colonel is lying, Buck, and I've caught him at it. As a matter of fact, the mogul didn't kick those flats in at all. The switch-engine did—and I know it. Now I'm going to send a man over to snoop around Pennington's roundhouse and verify his report about the switch-engine being in the shop."

He did so. Half an hour later the messenger returned with the information that not only was the switch-engine not in the shop but her firebox had been overhauled the week before and was reported to be in excellent condition.

"That settles it," Buck Ogilvy mourned. "The Colonel is as suspicious as a rhino. He doesn't know anything, but he smells danger just the same."

"Exactly, Buck. So he is delaying the game until he can learn something definite." He drummed idly on his desk for several minutes. Then:

"Buck, can you run a locomotive?"

"With one hand, old man."

"Fine business! Well, I guess we'll put in that crossing tomorrow night. The switch-engine will be in the roundhouse at Pennington's mill tomorrow night, so we can't steal that; but we can steal the mogul. I'll just send word up to my woods boss not to have his train loaded when the mogul comes up late tomorrow afternoon to haul it down to our log landing. Of course, the engine crew won't bother to run down to Sequoia for the night—that is, they won't run the mogul down. They'll just leave her at our log landing all night and put up for the night at our camp."

"But how do you know they will put up at your camp all night, Bryce?"

"My men will make them comfortable, and it means they can lie abed until seven o'clock instead of having to roll out at five o'clock, which would be the case if they spent the night at this end of the line. There is a slight grade at our log landing. I know that, because the air leaked out of the brakes on a log train I was on a short time ago, and the train ran away with me. Now, the engine crew will set the airbrakes on the mogul and leave her with steam up to throb all night; they'll not blow her down, for that would mean work firing her in the morning. Our task, Buck, will be to throw off the airbrakes and let her glide silently out of our log landing. About a mile down the road we'll stop, get up steam, run down to the junction with the main line, back in on the Laurel Creek spur, couple onto those flat cars and breeze merrily down to Sequoia with them. They'll be loaded waiting for us; our men will be congregated in our dry yard just off Water street near B, waiting for us to arrive with the rails—and bingo—we go to it. After we drop the flats, we'll run the engine back to the woods, leave it where we found it, return a-flying. You can get back in ample time to superintend the cutting of the crossing!"

"Spoken like a man!" quoth Buck Ogilvy. "You're the one man in this world for whom I'd steal a locomotive. 'At-a-boy!'"

Had either of the conspirators known of Pennington's plans to entertain Mayor Poundstone at dinner on Thursday night, it is probable they would not have cheered until those flat cars were out of the woods.

Mayor Poundstone and his wife arrived at the Pennington home in Redwood boulevard at six forty-five Thursday evening. It was with a profound feeling of relief that his honor lifted the lady from their modest little "silver," for once inside the Pennington house, he felt, he would be free from a peculiarly devilish brand of persecution inaugurated by his wife about three months previously. Mrs.

Poundstone wanted a new automobile. And she had entered upon a campaign of nagging and complaint, hoping to wear Poundstone's resistance down to the point where he would be willing to barter his hope of salvation in return for a guarantee of peace on earth.

"I feel like a perfect fool, calling upon these people in this filthy rattletrap," Mrs. Poundstone protested.

Mayor Poundstone paused. "In pity's name, woman," he growled, "talk about something else. Give me one night of peace. Let me enjoy my dinner and this visit."

"I can't help it," Mrs. P. retorted with asperity. She pointed to Shirley Sumner's car parked under the porte-cochere. "If I had a sedan like that, I could die happy. And it only cost thirty-two hundred and fifty dollars."

"I paid six hundred and fifty for the rattletrap, and I couldn't afford that," he almost whimpered. "You were happy with it until I was elected mayor."

"You forget our social position, my dear," she purred sweetly.

He could have struck her. "Hang your social position," he gritted savagely. "Shut up, will you? Social position in a sawmill town! Damn it, you'll drive me crazy yet." Poundstone gurgled, and subsided.

The Pennington butler, a very superior person, opened the door. The Poundstones entered. At the entrance to the living room the butler announced sonorously: "Mayor Poundstone and Mrs. Poundstone."

"Glad to see you aboard the ship," Colonel Pennington boomed with his best air of hearty expansiveness. "Well, well," he continued, leading Mrs. Poundstone to a divan in front of the fire, "this is certainly delightful. My niece will be down in two shakes of a lamb's tail. Have a cigarette, Mr. Poundstone."

In the midst of the commonplace chatter incident to such occasions, Shirley entered the room; and the Colonel leaving her to entertain the guests, went to a small sideboard in one corner and brought forth the "materials," as he jocularly termed them. James appeared like magic with a tray, glasses and tiny serviettes, and the Colonel's elixir was passed to the company.

"Dee-licious," murmured Mrs. Poundstone. "Perfectly dee-licious. And not strong!"

"Have another," her hospitable host suggested, and he poured it, quite oblivious of the frightened wink which the mayor telegraphed his wife. Poundstone prayed to his rather nebulous gods that Mrs. P. would not discuss automobiles during the dinner.

Alas! The Colonel's cocktails were not unduly fortified, but for all that, the two which Mrs. Poundstone had assimilated contained just sufficient "kick" to loosen the lady's tongue without thickening it. Consequently, about the time the "piece de resistance" made its appearance, she threw caution to the winds and adverted to the subject closest to her heart.

"I was telling Henry as we came up the walk how greatly I envied you that beautiful sedan, Miss Sumner," she gushed. "How an open car does blow one around, my dear!"

"Yes, indeed," said Shirley innocently.

"Heard the McKlunon people had a man killed up in their woods yesterday, Colonel," Poundstone remarked, hoping against hope to divert the conversation.

"Yes, The fellow's own fault," Pennington replied. "He was one of those employees who held to the opinion that every man is the captain of his own soul and the sole proprietor of his own body—hence, that it behooved him to look after both, in view of the high

cost of safety appliances. He was warned that the logging cable was weak at that old splice and liable to pull out of the becket—and sure enough it did. The free end of the cable snapped back like a whip, and—"

"I hold to the opinion," Mrs. Poundstone interrupted, "that if one wishes for a thing hard enough and just keeps on wishing, one is bound to get it."

"My dear," said Mr. Poundstone impressively, "if you would only confine yourself to wishing, I assure you your chances for success would be infinitely brighter."

There was no mistaking this rebuke; even two cocktails were powerless to render Mrs. Poundstone oblivious to it. With the nicest tact in the world, Shirley adroitly changed the subject to

some tailored shirtwaists she had observed in the window of a local dry goods emporium that day, and Mrs. Poundstone subsided.

About nine o'clock, Shirley, in response to a meaningful glance from her relative, tactfully conveyed Mrs. Poundstone upstairs, leaving her uncle alone with his prey. Instantly Pennington got down to business.

"Well," he queried, apropos of nothing, "what do you hear with reference to the Northern California-Oregon railroad?"

"Oh, the usual amount of wind, Colonel. Nobody knows what to make of that outfit."

Pennington studied the end of his cigar a moment.

"Have they made any move to get a franchise?" he asked bluntly. "If they have, I suppose you would be the first man to hear about it. I don't mean to be impertinent," he added with a gracious smile, "but the fact is I noticed that windbag Ogilvy entering your office in the city hall the other afternoon, and I couldn't help wondering whether his visit was social or official."

"Social—so far as I could observe," Poundstone replied truthfully, wondering just how much Pennington knew.

"Preliminary to the official visit, I dare say."

The Colonel puffed thoughtfully for a while—for which the mayor was grateful, since it provided time in which to organize himself. Suddenly, however, Pennington turned toward his guest and fixed the latter with a serious glance.

"I hadn't anticipated discussing this matter with you, Poundstone, and you must forgive me for it; but the fact is—I might as well be frank with you—I am very greatly interested in the operation of this proposed railroad. If it is built, it will have a very distinct effect on my finances."

"In just what way?"

"Disastrous."

"I am amazed, Colonel."

"You wouldn't be if you had given the subject very close consideration. Such a road as the N. C. O. contemplates will tap about one-third of the redwood belt only, while a line built from the south will tap two-thirds of it. The remaining third can be tapped by an extension of my own logging road; when my own timber is logged out, I will want other business for my road, and if the N. C. O. parallels it, I will be left with two streaks of rust on my hands."

"Ah, I perceive. So it will, so it will!"

"You agree with me, then, Poundstone, that the N. C. O. is not designed to foster the best interests of the community. Of course you do. I take it, therefore, that when the N. C. O. applies for its franchise to run through Sequoia, neither you nor your city council will consider the proposition at all."

"I cannot, of course, speak for the city council—"

"Poundstone began, but Pennington's cold, amused smile froze further utterance.

"Be frank with me, Poundstone. I am not a child. What I would like to know is this: will you exert every effort to block that franchise in the firm conviction that by so doing you will accomplish a laudable public service?"

Poundstone squirmed. "When I have had time to look into the matter more thoroughly—"

"Tut-tut, my dear man! Let us not straddle the fence. Business is a game, and so is politics. Neither knows any sentiment. Suppose you should favor this N. C. O. crowd in a mistaken idea that you were doing the right thing, and that subsequently numberless fellow-citizens developed the idea that you had not done your public duty. Would some of them not be likely to invoke a recall election and retire you and your city council—in disgrace?"

"I doubt if they could defeat me, Colonel."

"I have no such doubt," Pennington replied pointedly.

Poundstone looked up at him from under lowered lids. "Is that a threat?" he demanded tremulously.

"My dear fellow! Threaten my guest?" Pennington laughed patronizingly. "I am giving you advice, Poundstone—and rather good advice, it strikes me. However, while we're on the subject, I have no hesitancy in telling you that in the event of a disastrous decision on your part, I should not feel justified in supporting you."

He might, with equal frankness, have said: "I would smash you." To his guest his meaning was not obscure. Poundstone studied the pattern of the rug, and Pennington, watching him sharply, saw that the man was distressed. He resolved on a bold stroke.

"Let's not beat about the bush, Poundstone," he said with the air of a father patiently striving to induce his child to recant a lie, tell the truth, and save himself from the parental wrath. "You've been doing business with Ogilvy; I know it for a fact, and you might as well admit it."

Poundstone looked up, red and embarrassed. "If I had known—" he began.

"Certainly, certainly! I realize you acted in perfect good faith. You're like the majority of people in Sequoia. You're all so crazy for rail connection with the outside world that you jump at the first plan that seems to promise you one. Have you promised Ogilvy a franchise?"

There was no dodging that question. A denial, under the present circumstances, would be tantamount to an admission; Poundstone could not guess just how much the Colonel really knew, and it would not do to lie to him, since eventually the lie must be

FARMERS DO WELL

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Will Get Above 40 Cents Over the Fixed Scale Set—World Looking to the Dominion for its Grain.

It will be of interest to many readers to learn that their farmer friends in Canada will do so well out of the wheat they grew on western Canada's prairies last year.

There was a fixed price of \$2.15 per bushel paid for their wheat last season.

Not knowing the price at which it would be possible to market the crop, the Canadian grain board, which organization handled the whole of the crop last summer, fixed \$2.15 as a minimum price for No. 1 wheat, and arranged that each farmer should be given certificates for the quantity of wheat he delivered. The amount received over and above the fixed price which was paid to the farmers when selling their wheat was to be divided pro rata at the end of the season, and the holders of these certificates will, therefore, participate in the extra price received according to the quantity of wheat sold.

The latest advice is that the wheat board will pay at least 40 cents a bushel over the fixed rate of \$2.15 a bushel for their wheat of last season. This means that about 40,000,000 will be distributed among the farmers of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. This sum represents the difference in the price at which the wheat crop was sold and the price that was fixed for last season's crop.

Canadian Wheat in Demand.

A declaration that Canadian wheat would in all probability sell this year at between \$3 and \$5 per bushel, was made recently before a conference of western supporters of the government by Dr. Robert Magill, who was one of a deputation from the Winnipeg grain exchange. Dr. Magill argued in favor of open trading from the aspect of world conditions. He stated that no wheat could be exported from Russia owing to internal troubles.

Roumania would have absolutely none to export. India was prohibiting export, while Australia's acreage would fall from 12,000,000 to 7,000,000. The result would be that Australia would scarcely have enough to feed herself, and there would be absolutely no wheat for Europe, except from the Argentine and North America.

Dr. Magill, according to formal announcement, thought it would be impossible to secure as good a price for the producer by control as by the open market. The United States market was now open, and, according to present prospects, there would be mighty little to spare from that quarter. The net result would be that Canadian wheat would undoubtedly go to a record figure.—Advertisement.

Chickens and Chickens.

"Do your neighbor's chickens bother you any?" asked an East Side gentleman of his neighbor, who lived near a large family.

"No," replied the other, thinking that reference was made to the neighbor's three comely daughters. "They go down town every day, so we don't see much of them.—Columbus Dispatch.

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