

Desert Dust

By Edwin L. Sabin

Author of "How Are You Feeling?" etc.

Therefore I caught up with her. She faced me with a ready smile.

"You are rather slow in action, sir," she lightly accused. "We might have breakfasted together; but it was the conductor again, after all."

"I plead guilty, madam," I admitted. "The trainmen have an advantage over me in anticipating events. But the next meal shall be my privilege. We stop again before reaching Benton."

"For dinner, yes; at Cheyenne."

"And after that you will be home."

"Home?" she queried, with a little pucker between her brows.

"Yes. At Benton."

"Of course." She laughed shortly. "Benton is now home. We have moved so frequently that I have grown to call almost no place home."

"I judge then that you are connected, as may happen, with a flexible business," I hazarded. "If you are in the army I can understand."

"No, I am not any army woman; but there is money in following the railroad, and that is our present life," she said frankly. "A town springs up, you know, at each terminus, booms as long as the freight and passengers pile up—and all of a sudden the go-ahead business and professional men pull stakes for the next terminus as soon as located. That has been the custom, all the way from North Platte to Benton."

"Which accounts for your acquaintance along the line. The trainmen seem to know you."

"Trainmen and others; oh, yes. It is to be expected. I have no objections to that. I am quite able to take care of myself, sir."

We were interrupted. A neatly drunken rowdy (upon whom I had kept any uneasy corner of an eye) had been careening over the platform, with a whiskey bottle protruding from the hip pocket of his sagging jeans, a large revolver dangling at his thigh, his slouch hat cocked rakishly upon his touselled head. His language was extremely offensive—he had an ugly mood, but nobody interfered. The crowd stood aside—the natives laughing, the tourists like myself viewing him askance, and several Indians watching only gravely.

He sighted us, and staggered in. "Howdy!" he uttered with an oath. "Shay—hell, stranger. Have a smile. Take two, one for the lady. He!" And he thrust his bottle at me.

My lady drew back. I civilly declined the "smile."

"Thank you. I do not drink."

"What?" He stared blankly. His tone stiffened.

"The hell you say. Too tony eh? Too—'ie! Have a smile, I ask you, one gent to 'nother. Have a smile, you (unmentionable) pilgrim; fer if you don't—"

"Train's starting, Jim," she interposed sharply.

"If you want to get abroad you'd better hurry."

The engine tooted, the bell was ringing, the passengers were hurrying, incited by the conductor's shout: "All board!" Without another word she tripped for the car steps. I gave the fellow one firm look as he stood stupidly scratching thatch as if to harrow his ideas; and preface left him. By the cheers he undoubtedly made in the same direction. I was barely in time myself. The train moved as I planted foot upon the steps of the nearest car—the foremost of the two. The train continued; halted again abruptly, while cheers rang riotous; and when I crossed the passageway between this car and ours the conductor and brakeman were hauling the tipsy Jim into safety.

My lady was ensconced.

"Did they get him?" she inquired, when I paused.

"By the scuff of the neck. The drunken fellow, you mean."

"Yes, Jim!"

"You know him?"

"He's from Benton. I suppose he's been down here on a little pas-car, as they say."

"If you think he will annoy you—I made bold to suggest, for I greatly coveted the half of her seat.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of Jim. But yes, do sit down. You can put these things back in your seat. Then we can talk."

I had no more than settled triumphantly, when the brakeman ambled through, his face in a broad grin. He also paused, to perch upon the seat end, his arm extended friendly along the back.

"Well, we got him scralled," he proclaimed needlessly. "That 't'rantular juice nigh broke his neck for him."

"Did you take his bottle away, Jerry?" she asked.

"Sure thing. He'll be peaceable directly. Souled to the guards. Reekson he's inclined to be a trifle ugly when he's on a tear, ain't he? They'd shipped him out of Benton on a down train. Now he's going back up."

"He's safe, you think?"

"Sewed tight. He'll sleep it off and be ready for night."

The brakeman winked at her. "You needn't fear. He'll be on deck, right side up with care."

"I've told this gentleman that I'm not afraid," she answered quickly.

"Of course. And he knows what's best for him, himself."

The brakeman slapped me on the shoulder and good-naturedly straightened. "So does this young gentleman, I rather suspicion. I can see his fortune's made. You bet, if he works it right. I told him if you cottened to him—"

"Now you're talking too much, Jerry," she reproved. "The gentleman and I are only traveling acquaintances."

"Yes, ma'am. To Benton. Let'er roar. Cheyenne's the closest I can get, myself, and Cheyenne's a dead one—bowed up, busted worse'n a galvanized yank with a pocket full of Confed wall-paper." He yawned.

"Guess I'll take forty winks. Was up all night, and a man can stand jest so much, Injuns or no Injuns."

"Did you expect to meet with Indians, sir, along the route?" I asked.

"Hell, yes. Always expect to meet 'em between Kearney and Julesburg. It's about time they were wrecking another train. Well, so long. Be good to each other." With this parting piece of impertinence he stumped out.

"A friendly individual, evidently," I hazarded, to tide her over possible embarrassment.

Her laugh assured me that she was not embarrassed at all, which proved her good sense and elevated her even farther in my esteem.

"Oh, Jerry's all right. I don't mind Jerry, except that his tongue is hung in the middle. He probably has been telling you some tall yarns."

"He? No, I don't think so. He may have tried it, but his Western expressions are beyond me as yet. In fact, what he was driving at on the rear platform I haven't the slightest idea."

"He referred to the green in the eye and in the moon, as I recall; and to a mysterious 'system'; and gratuitously offered me a 'steer.'"

Her face hardened remarkably, so that her chin set as if taunted by iron bands. Those eyes glinted with real menace.

"He did, did he? Along that line of talk! The clapper-jaw! He's altogether too free." She surveyed me keenly. "And naturally you couldn't understand such lingo."

"I was not curious enough to try, my dear madam. He talked rather at random; likely enjoyed bantering me. But," I hastily placated in his behalf, "he recommended Benton as a lively place, and you as a friend of value in case that you honored me with your patronage."

"My patronage, for you?" she exclaimed. "Indeed? To what extent? Are you going into business, too? As one of—us?"

"If I should become a Bentonite, as I hope," I gallantly replied, "then of course I should look to permanent investment of some nature. And before my traveling funds run out I shall be glad of light employment. The brakeman gave me to understand merely that by your kindly interest you might be disposed to assist me."

"Oh!" Her face lightened. "I dare say Jerry means well. But when you spoke of 'patron-

age'—that is a current term certain import along the railroad." She leaned to me; a glow emanated from her. "Tell me of yourself. You have red blood? Do you ever game? For if you are not afraid to test your luck and back it, there is money to be made very easily at Benton, and in a genteel way." She smiled bewitchingly. "Or are you a Quaker, to whom life is deadly serious?"

"No Quaker, madam." How could I respond otherwise to that pair of dancing blue eyes, to that pair of derisive lips? "As for gaming—if you mean cards, why, I have played at piquet and romp, in a social way, for small stakes; and my father brought Old Sledge back from the army, to the family table."

"You are lucky, I can see it," she alleged.

"I am, on this journey," I asserted.

She blushed. "Very well, sir. And if you choose to make use of your luck, in Benton, by all means—"

Whether she would have shaped her import clearly I did not know. There was a commotion in the forward part of the car. That same drunken wretch Jim had appeared; his bottle (somehow restored to him) in hand, his hat pushed back from his flushed greasy forehead.

"Have a smile, ladies and gents," he was bellowing thickly. "Hooray! Have a smile on me. Great an' glorjus 'casion—'ie! Ever body smile. Drink to 'op'nin' glorjus Pacific—'ie—Railway. That is, hooray!" Thus he came reeling down the aisle, thrusting his bottle right and left, to be denied with shrillings of with bluff excuses. It seemed inevitable that he should reach us. I heard My Lady utter a little gasp, as she sat more erect; and here he was, espying us readily enough with that uncanny precision of a drunken man, his bottle to the fore.

"Have a smile, you two. Wouldn't smile at station; gotto smile now. Yep. He! 'Ray for Benton! All goin' to Benton. Lesh be good fellers."

"You go back to your seat, Jim," she ordered tensely. "Go back, if you know what's good for you."

"Whash that? Who your dog last year? Shay! You can't come no mighty-tighty over me. Who your new friend? Shay!" He reeled and gripped the seat, flooding me with his vile breath. "By Gawd, I got the dead-wood on you, you—" and he had loosed such a torrent of low epithets that they are inconceivable.

"For that I'd kill you in any other place, Jim," she said. "You know I'm not afraid of you. Now get, you wolf!" Her voice snapped like a whip-lash at the close; she had made sudden movement of hand—it was extended and I saw almost under my nose the smallest pistol imaginable; nickeled, of two barrels, and not above three inches long; projecting from her palm, the twin hammers cocked; and it was as steady as a die.

Assuredly My Lady did know how to take care of herself. Still, that was not necessary now.

"No!" I warned. "No matter. I'll attend to him."

The fellow's face had convulsed with a snarl of redder rage, his mouth opened as if for fresh abuse—and half rising I landed upon it with my fist.

"Go where you belong, you drunken whelp!"

I had struck and spoken at the same time, with a rush of wrath that surprised me; and this result surprised me more, for while I was not conscious of having exerted much force he toppled backward clear across the aisle, crashed down in a heap under the opposite seat. His bottle shattered against the ceiling. The whiskey splattered in a sickening shower over the alarmed passengers.

"Look out! Look out!" she cried, starting quickly. Up he scrambled, cursing, and wrenching at his revolver. I sprang to smother him, but there was a flurry, a chorus of shouts, men leaped between us, and the brakeman and the conductor both had arrived, in a jiffy he was being hustled forward, swearing and blubbing. And I sank back, breathless, a degree ashamed, a degree rather satisfied with my action and my barked knuckles.

Congratulations echoed dully. "The right spirit!"

"That'll larn him to insult a lady."

"You sartainly rattled him up, stranger. Squar' on the twitter!"

"Shake Mister."

"For a pilgrim you're consid-

er'ble of a hos... "If he'd drawn you'd have give him a pill, I reckon, lady I know yore kind. But he won't bother you ag'in; not he."

"Oh, what a terrible scene!" To all this I paid scant attention. I heard her, as she sat composedly, scarcely panting. The little pistol had disappeared.

"The play has been made, ladies and gentlemen," she said. And to me: "Thank you. Yes," she continued, with a flash of lucent eyes and a dimpling smile, "Jim has lost his whiskey and has a chance to sober up. He'll have forgotten all about this before we reach Benton. But I thank you for your promptness."

"I didn't want you to shoot him," I stammered.

"I was quite able to tend to him myself. Your pistol is loaded?"

"To be sure it is." And she laughed gaily. Her lips tightened, her eyes darkened. "And I'd kill him like a dog if he presumed farther. In this country wemen protect ourselves from insult. I always carry my derringer, sir."

(Continued next week.)

Now, in the dusk at 6 o'clock I watch the rapid flow of people going home from work. Through twilight's early glow; I watch them hurry eagerly. And see some quickening thing Touch each with joy and wonder That day's gloom seems to bring. Like birds that seek the home brought, Where rest and quiet breathe, The thoughts of weary work hours They now rejoicing leave.

And such one has a vision Of home, whatever it be; Where waits a wife, a mother, Or children wild with glee. Perhaps some are a-dreaming Of kind and needed rest; A room overlooking skies where The sunset paints the west; Where pined up splendors quiver In gold and lilac glow; Awakening old sweet memories Of dream days long ago. Streets never so enchant me As when the twilight falls; And up and down the highways The home lure softly calls; When street lamps faintly glimmer Through mists of gold and gray, And people hurry homeward. With day's cares put away, A. B. Leigh, in the Kansas City Star.

The Main Question From the Philadelphia Bulletin "My dear friend, this world is full of trials. I know that. But it ain't the trials I mind. It is the verdict." Unanimous From Sans Gene, Paris. "About your divorce. You say you have been to lawyers and this opinion is the same?" "Yes. They both want \$600 fee in advance."

Plenty of Time Then. From London Answers Bachelor—"You're a pretty busy man. How is it that you're always so well informed on current events, contemporary literature, and nearly everything else?" Benedict—"I always read while waiting for my wife to finish dressing."

A pocket electrical device for measuring the depth of water in wells has been invented in Australia. Eighty per cent. of the farmers of Oregon have telephones. Of about 2,000 kinds of bacteria, only about 100 are believed to be harmful.

The first modern steel frame office building in Japan was constructed in 1920. Silver was first coined in Rome in 269 B. C., when Fabius Pictor set up a mint.

On July 1 this year the registration of motor cars and trucks in the United States totaled 13,002,427. Teapot Dome naval oil reserve is so called because of a great cork shaped in the form of a teapot.

Mrs. Archie McLean, of near Montreal, planted a golf course, got a squirrel carrying a golf ball to his nest. She followed and found 68 balls, which she replaced with nuts.

The cocklebur troublesome as a weed because of its stiffly armed burrs, has been definitely demonstrated to be poisonous to livestock in the early stages of its growth.

Two new tunnels are to be driven through Mount Blanc for about nine miles. Four tunnels will be run under the Vosges, connecting the Alston and French railways.

Modern methods of killing whales threaten extinction of the great sea mammals in southern waters. They have nearly disappeared from the waters of the north.

Financing of power lines by farmers as the quickest and most practical way of giving such power extensive use in the rural sections is being urged in many parts of the country.

Alfalfa work from Michigan, hog types from Minnesota and a corn exhibit from North Dakota will be featured at the 24th annual International Live Stock Exposition to be held in Chicago from December 1 to 3 this year.

One dram of sodium chloride (common salt), one ounce of water and two ounces of glycerine mixed together will make a solution, a little of which placed on a gauze and wiped over a windshield in a thin layer with a downward stroke will keep the glass clear in wet weather.

The state of Kentucky is urging a \$50,000,000 bond issue to be used \$10,000,000 a year for five years to complete a big road building program. The piecemeal methods of road building which have so far been employed are deplored by the Kentucky Good Roads association, urging this new system.

An agreement recently signed by a Chicago man and his wife has brought about a reconciliation after a divorce seemed probable. The husband pledges that he will be diligent in his work, will pay over to his wife the total sum of his net earnings and will refrain from the use of intoxicating liquors and will remain home every night. The wife agrees she will "care for her children in a true and diligent manner, be economical in the operation of the home, furnish true and correct accounts of all her expenditures and remain at home, or be in the company of her husband and family every night."

Looks That Way From Life "There's a man outside, sir, that wants to see you about a bill you owe him. He wouldn't give his name." "What does he look like?" "Well," he looks like you'd better pay it."

The Challenge From the New York Sun and 1917 "Mrs. (dead of night)—Did you put the cat out?" "Mr.—Surp. Mrs.—I don't believe you. Mr.—Well, get up and put it out yourself this time."

"Ye in town honey!"



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"DANDELION BUTTER COLOR" A harmless vegetable butter color used by millions for 50 years. Drug stores and general stores sell bottles of "Dandelion" for 35 cents.—Adv.

Hilda, Abbess of Whitby. In 1915 the world held its breath with horror. Zeppelins had swooped down on Whitby, on the coast of Yorkshire. A cry for vengeance went up when it was found that half of the ancient abbey of Whitby had been destroyed. Founded in the Seventh century, it was Hilda's abbey. She was a princess of the blood royal, but early dedicated herself to the religious life. The king gave her a grant of land and she erected the celebrated abbey, or convent of Whitby.

"CASCARETS" FOR LIVER AND BOWELS—10c A BOX Cures Bilioessness, Constipation, Sick Headache, Indigestion, Drug stores. Adv.

Yes, Indeed. "Gentlemen, our distinguished guest needs no introduction. His is a name to conjecture with."

Pulling the Wrong Shirt. "My husband had brought a friend home to dinner and I was anxious to make as good an impression as possible," a Washington hostess relates. "I prepared the dinner with the greatest care and then, feeling that my husband needed some special instructions regarding the serving of it, I rushed to the bathroom where I thought he had gone to get ready. "Just at that instant he was in the act of drawing a clean shirt over his head and in a split of a second over the lovely dinner we were about to have, I seized the tail of the shirt and giving a vigorous tug exclaimed proudly: "Tingaling; dinner's ready!" "My stock of self pride took quite a slump when not the head of my husband, but that of his friend, came through the shirt."—Los Angeles Times.

Nothing Better for Constipation than one or two Brandreth Pills at bed time. They cleanse the system, purify the blood and keep you well.—Adv.

His Reply. "Oh, Gee!" ejaculated Heloise, the waitress of the Rapid-fire restaurant, who had accidentally spilled the ketchup on the trousers of a customer. "I didn't go to do it, I'm sorry, mister!" "Aw, that's all right, mom!" courteously answered Sandstorm Smith of Rampage, who was dining there. "You see, these ain't my other pants."—Country Gentleman.

Others Find Relief In Alcock's Plasters from local aches and pains. So can you. One trial will convince you of their merits.—Adv.

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