

## Desert Dust

By Edwin L. Sabin

Author of "How Are You Feeling?" etc.

"You would take her in, Rachael?" the Captain rumbled. "Have you not heard what I said?"

"We are commanded to feed the hungry and shelter the homeless, Hyrum."

"Verily that is so. Take her. I trust you with her till the morning. The Lord will direct us further. But in God's name clothe her for the daylight in decency. She shall not advertise her flesh to men's eyes."

"Quick!" I whispered, with a push. Rachael, however, had crossed for us, and with eyes brimming extended her hand.

"Will you come with me, please?" she invited.

"You are not afraid of me?"

"If No. You are a woman, are you not?" The intonation was gentle, and sweet to hear—as sweet as her rosy face to see.

"Yes," sighed My Lady, wearily. "Good-night, sir." She fleetingly smiled upon me. "I thank you; and Mr. Jenks."

They went, Rachael's arm about her; other women closed in; we heard exclamations, and next they were supporting her in their midst, for she had crumpled in a faint.

Captain Adams walked out a piece as if musing. Daniel pressed beside him, talking eagerly. His voice reached me.

"She's powerful purty, ain't she, paw! Gosh, I never seen a woman in britches before. Did yu! Paw! she kin ride in my wagon, Paw. Be yu goin' to take her on, paw? If yu be, I got room."

"Go. Tend to your stock and think of other things," boomed his father. "Remember that the Scriptures say, beware of the scarlet woman."

Daniel galloped away, whooping like an idiot.

"Wall, there she is," my friend Jenks remarked non-committally. "What next'll happen, we'll see in the mornin'. Either she goes on or she goes back. I don't claim to read Mormon sign, myself. But she had me jumpin' sideways, for a spell. So did that young whelp."

There was some talk, idle yet not offensive. The men appeared rather in a judicial frame of mind: laid a few bets upon whether her husband would turn up, in sober fashion nodded their heads over the hope that he had been "properly pinked," all in all sided with her, while admiring her pluck roundly denied responsibility for women in general, and genially but cautiously twitted Mr. Jenks and me upon our alleged implication in the affair.

Darkness, still and chill, had settled over the desert—the only discernible horizon the glow of Benton, down the railroad track. The ashes of final pipes were rapped out upon our boot soles. Our group dispersed, each man to his blanket under the wagons or in the open.

"Wall," friend Jenks again broadly uttered, in last words as he turned over with a grunt, for easier posture, near me, "hooray! If it simmers down to you and Dan'l, I'll be there."

With that enigmatical comment he was silent save for stertorous breathing. Vaguely cogitating over his promise, I lay toes and face up, staring at the bright stars; perplexed more and more over the immediate events of the future, warmly conscious of her astonishing proximity in this very train, prickled by the hope that she would continue with us, irritated by the various assumptions of Daniel, and somehow not at all adverse to the memory of her in "britches."

That phase of the matter seemed to have affected Daniel and me similarly. Under his hide he was human.

### CHAPTER XII

#### Daniel Takes Possession

I was more than ever convinced of her wisdom in choice of garb when in early morning I glimpsed her with the two other women at the Adams fire; for bright-haired and small, she had been scornfully dilled by the plain ill-fitting waist and long shapeless skirt in one garment, as adopted by the feminine contingent of the train. In her particular case these were worse fitting and longer than common—an artifice that certainly annulled a portion of her charms for Gentile and Mormon eyes alike.

What further disposition was to be made of her we might not yet know. We all kept to our own tasks and our own fires, with the exception that Daniel gawked and strutted in a manner of a silly gander, and made frequent errands to his father's household.

It was after the red sun-up and the initial signaling by dust cloud to dust cloud announcing the commencement of another day's desert traffic, and in response to the orders "Ketch up!" we were putting animals to wagons (My Lady still in evidence forward), when a horseman bored in at a gallop, over the road from the east.

"Montoyo, by Gawd!" Jenks pronounced, in a grumble of disgust rather than with any note of alarm. "Look aliye." And "He don't hang up my pelt; no, nor yourn if I can help it."

I saw him give a twitch to his holster and slightly loosen the Colt's. But I was unburdened by guilt in past events, and I conceived no reason for fearing the future—other than that now I was likely to lose her. Heaven pity her! Probably she would have to go, even if she managed later to kill him. The delay in our start had been unfortunate.

It was dollars to doughnuts that every man in the company had had his eye out for Montoyo, since daylight; and the odds were that every man had sighted him as quickly as we. Notwithstanding, save by an occasional quick glance none appeared to pay attention to his rapid approach. We ourselves went right along hooking up, like the others.

As chanced, our outfit was the first upon his way in. I heard him rein sharply beside us and his horse fidget, panting. Not until he spoke did we lift eyes.

"Howdy, gentlemen?"

"Howdy yourself, sir," answered Mr. Jenks, straightening up and meeting his gaze. I paused, to gaze also. Montoyo was pale as death, his lips hard set, his peculiar gray eyes and his black moustache the only vivifying features in his coldly menacing countenance.

He was in white linen shirt, his left arm slung; fine riding boots encased his legs above the knees and Spanish spurs at their heels—his horse's flanks reddened by their jabs. The pearl butt of a six-shooter jutted from his belt holster. He sat jauntily, excepting for his lips and eyes.

He looked upon me with a trace of recognition less to be seen than felt. His glance leaped to the wagon—traveled swiftly and surely and returned to Mr. Jenks. "You're pulling out, I believe."

"Yes, you bet yuh."

"This is the Adams train?"

"It is."

"I'm looking for my wife, gentlemen. May I ask whether you've seen her?"

"You can."

"You have seen her?"

"Yes, sir. We'll not beat around any bush over that."

He meditated, frowning a bit, eyeing us narrowly.

"I had the notion," he said. "If you have staked her to shelter I thank you; but now I aim to play the hand myself. This is a strictly private game. Where is she?"

"I call yuh, Pedro," my friend answered. "We ain't keepin' cases on her, or on you. You don't find her in my outfit, that's flat. She spent the night with the Adams woman. You'll find her waitin' for you on ahead."

He grinned. "She'll be powerful glad to see you." He sobered. "And I'll say this: I'm kinder sorry I ain't got her, for she'd be interestin' company on the road."

"The road to hell, yes," Montoyo coolly remarked. "I'd guarantee you quick passage. Good-day."

With sudden steely glare that embraced us both he jumped his mount into a gallop and tore past the team, for the front. He must have inquired, once or twice, as to the whereabouts of the Captain's party; I saw fingers pointing.

"Here! You've swapped collars on your lead span, boy," Mr. Jenks reproved—but he likewise fumbled while he gazed. I could hold back no longer.

"Just a minute, if you please,"

I pleaded; and hastened on up, half running in my anxiety to face the worst; to help, if I might, for the best.

A little knot of people had formed, constantly increased by newcomers like myself and friend Jenks who had lumbered behind me. Montoyo's horse stood heaving on the outskirts; and ruthlessly pushing through I found him inside, with My Lady at bay before him—her eyes brilliant, her cheeks hot, her two hands clenched tightly, her slim figure dangerously tense within her absurd garment, and the arm of the brightly flushed but calm Rachael resting restaintfully around her. The circling faces peered.

Captain Adams, at one side apart, was replying to the gambler. His small china-blue eyes had begun to glint; otherwise he maintained an air of stolidity as if immune to the outcome.

"You see her," he said. "She has had the care of my own household, for I turn nobody away. She came against my will, and she shall go of her will. I am not her keeper."

"You Mormons have the advantage of us white men, sir," Montoyo sneered. "No one of the sex seem to be denied bed and board in your establishment."

"By the help of the Lord we of the elect can manage our establishments much better than you do yours," big Hyrum responded; and his face sombered. "Who are you? A panderer to the devil, a thief with painted cardboard, a despoiler of the ignorant, and a feeder to hell—yes a striker of women and a trafficker in flesh! Who are you, to think the name of the Lord's anointed? There she is, your chattel. Take her, or leave her. The train starts on in ten minutes."

"I'll take her or kill her," Montoyo snarled. "You call me a feeder, but she shall not be fed to your mill, Adams. You'll get on that horse pronto, madam," he added stepping forward (no one could question his nerve). "and we'll discuss our affairs in private."

She cast about with swift beseeching look, as if for a friendly face or sign of rescue. And that agonized quest was enough. Whether she saw me or not, here I was. With a spring I had burst in.

But somebody already had drawn fresh attention. Daniel Adams was standing between her and her husband.

"Say, Mister, will yu fight?" he drawled, breathing hard, his broad nostrils quivering.

A silence fell. Singularly, the circle parted right and left in a jostle and a scramble.

Montoyo surveyed him.

"Why?"

"For her, o' course."

The gambler smiled—a slow, contemptuous smile while his grey eyes focused watchfully.

"It's case where I have nothing to gain," said he. "And you've nothing to lose. I never bet in the teeth of a pat hand. Sabe? Besides, my young Mormon cub, when did you enter this game? Where's your ante? For the sport of it, now, what do you think of putting up, to make it interesting? one of your mam-mies! Tut, tut!"

Daniel's freckled bovine face flushed muddy red; in the midst of it his faulty eyes were more pronounced than ever—beady, twinkling, and so at cross purposes that they apparently did not center upon the gambler at all. But his right hand had stiffened at his side—extended there flat and tremulous like the vibrant tail of a rattlesnake. He blurted harshly:

"I laow to kill yu for that. Draw, yu—!"

We caught breath. Montoyo's hand had darted down, and up, with motion too smooth and elusive for the eye, particularly when our eyes had to be upon both. His revolver poised halfway out of the scabbard, held there rigidly, frozen in mid course; for Daniel had laughed loudly over leveled barrel.

How he had achieved so quickly no man of us knew. Yet there it was—his Colt's, out, cocked, wicked and yearning and ready.

He whirled it with tempting carelessness, butt first, muzzle first, his discolored teeth set in a yellow grin. The breath of the spectators vented in a sigh.

"Haow'll yu take it, Mister?" He gibed. I could I'arn an old caow to beat yu on the draw. Aw, shucks! I laow yu'd better go back to yore paste-boards. Naow git!"

Montoyo, his eyes steady, scarcely changed expression. He let his revolver slip down into

its scabbard. Then he smiled.

"You have a pretty trick," he commented, relaxing. "Some day I'd like to test it out again. Just now I pass. Madam, are you coming?"

"You know I'm not," she uttered clearly.

"Your choice of company is hardly to your credit," he sneered. "Or, I should say to your education. Saintliness does not set well upon you, madam. Your clothes are ill-fitting already. Of your two champions—"

And here I realized that I was standing out, one foot advanced, my fists foolishly doubled, my presence a useless factor.

"—I recommend the gentleman from New York as more to your tastes. But you are going of your own free will. You will always be my wife. You can't get away from that, you devil. I shall expect you in Benton, for I have the hunch that your little flight will fetch you back pretty well tamed, to the place where damaged goods are not so heavily discounted."

He ignored Daniel and turned upon me. "As for you," he said, "I warn you you are playing against a marked deck. You will find fists a poor hand. Ladies and gentlemen, good-morning." With that he strode straight for his horse, climbed aboard (a trifle awkwardly by reason of his one arm disabled) and galloped, granting not another glance.

Card shark and desperado that he was, his consummate aplomb nobody could deny, except Daniel, now capering and swaggering and twirling his revolver.

"I showed him. I made him take water. I laow I'm 'bout the best man with a six-shooter in these hyar parts."

"Ketch up and stretch out," Captain Adams ordered, disregarding. "We've no more time for foolery."

My eyes met My Lady's. She smiled a little ruefully, and I responded, shamed by the poor role I had borne. With that still jubilating lout to the fore, certainly I cut small figure.

This night we made camp at Rawlin's springs, some twelve miles on. The day's march had been, so to speak, rather pensive; for while there were the rough jokes and the talking back and forth, it seemed as though the scene of early morning lingered in our vista. The words of Montoyo had scored deeply, and the presence of our supernumerary laid a kind of incubus, like an omen of ill-luck upon us. Indeed the prophecies darkly uttered showed the current of thought.

(To be Continued.)

For the first time in many years a condor, the giant bird that lives in the Andes mountains of South America, but is almost extinct in North America, has been seen in the San Joaquin valley of the Sierra Nevada mountains of California.

### ORGANIZE SOCIETY FOR BETTER HEALTH AND LONGEVITY

Chicago.—Better health and longevity is the slogan of the Illinois Association for the Promotion of Periodic Health Examinations, recently organized here.

"Americans have the best teeth in the world," said Dr. Edward H. Ochsen, president of the Illinois State Medical society and one of the organizers. "They have them because they have the best dentists and have been taught to have their teeth examined at regular intervals."

"Our new association will sponsor physical and dental examinations for every adult in Illinois, at least once a year. Sickness and contagion will be greatly decreased, we believe, and millions of dollars will be saved to the laboring man, the employers and casualty companies," he declared.

"If we can reduce the average day's illness three, two or even one year, millions of dollars will be saved," said Dr. Ochsen.

### Big Quid of Tobacco Exposes Fake "Lady"

San Francisco.—A quid of tobacco slightly protruding from the rounded lips of a stylish young person, who is said to have been "a quiet and refined young lady" resulted in identification of John Reed Erskine, self-styled "female impersonator of stage and screen stars," and his arrest for disguising himself with intent to deceive.

After examination at police headquarters where his drug store complexion, beaded eyelashes and expensive garb caused a mild sensation, Erskine was said by the authorities to be suffering apparently from a mental malady. Circumstantial evidence of this was given, according to arresting officers, when the prisoner recognized Chief of Police Bernard McShane, as "the business manager of my friend, Douglas Fairbanks."

### CARE FOR DRUG ADDICTS

Santiago, Chile.—Because of the increased in the number of drug addicts, a public sanatorium is to be built in connection with the asylum for the mentally defective.

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### He Sputified All Right

A Southern negro minister who was given to the use of big words and complicated discourse was waited upon by the church committee and told that his style of preaching was not all that could be desired.

"Don't I argify and sputify?" inquired the minister.

"Yes, yo' done argify and sputify," responded a member of the committee, "but yo' don't show wherein."—Boston Evening Transcript.

### The Cuticura Toilet Trio.

Having cleared your skin keep it clear by making Cuticura your everyday toilet preparations. The Soap to cleanse and purify, the Ointment to soothe and heal, the Talcum to powder and perfume. No toilet table is complete without them.—Advertisement.

### Largest Lens Snaps Stars

One of the world's largest cameras was made recently by the United States bureau of standards to photograph astronomical observations. It is six feet long, four feet wide and two and one-half feet high. It uses plates eleven by fourteen inches. The lens is said to be the largest photographic lens ever manufactured in the United States.—Popular Science Monthly.

### Only the Best Ingredients.

are used in Brandreth Pills. For constipation they have no equal. Take one or two at bed time.—Adv.

### Cheaper

Johnny—Mamma, do they sell babies by the pound?

Mother—Yes, precious.

Johnny—I suppose that is why people buy 'em when they're little.

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Cures Biliousness, Constipation, Sick Headache, Indigestion, Drug stores, Adv.

A penny saved is a penny earned, and a dollar saved is one you didn't loan.

### King Renounces All but One of His 3,333 Wives

King Kwaka Dua III of Ashanti, in Africa's darkest wilderness, has become a Christian, and as first token of his new faith has renounced all but one of his 3,333 wives.

It is said that human sacrifices ran into the tens of thousands during the latter part of his reign. On the outskirts of Coomassie, the jungle capital, stood the "crucifixion grove," to whose giant trees the victims were nailed to die in lingering agony, while the walls of the royal palace were built with piles of skulls.

The British government told the king to take down the palace because the odor of decaying flesh putrid the neighborhood. The king then went to the chaplain and told him he wanted to become a Christian, but he was told that his harem was an objection.—St. Paul Pioneer Press.

### "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.

### Dangerous

The Honolulu Star-Bulletin publishes what is hailed as the first genuine mah-jongg story. "There has just come to Honolulu the story of a maid who went to the lady of the house and said she feared she would have to find another place. 'But why?' her alarmed employer asked. 'Because,' the maid replied, 'I fear your husband is losing his mind. I found him on his hands and knees in the living room, and when I asked him what he was doing, he said he was looking for the East Wind!'"

When You Buy a Plaster always ask for "Allcock's"—the original and genuine porous plaster—a standard external remedy.—Adv.

Try living on 15 cents a day if you are troubled with dyspepsia.

In after years a man wishes that he was half as smart as he used to think he was.

## Children Cry for



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