

# PINE CREEK RANCH

HAROLD BINDLOSS

## CHAPTER XXVI The First Fruits

A light wind dried the dew and the oats shone like silver in the rising sun. Sometimes the tall stalks bent and where the slow ripple crossed the field the color changed and the feathery heads went yellow and gray. Across the chocolate brown fallow, the stiff wheat glimmered like red gold. The sky was calm and blue.

Helen mechanically noted the glowing color, but she would sooner be useful, and when Spiers fixed the spool of twine she held the horses. The three big animals were harnessed to a new binder and stamped impatiently. Another team and binder waited a few yards back and Lawrence got into the iron saddle. Helen wondered why he did not start, particularly since Heath and an Ontario harvester loafed about.

The men's clothes were scanty. One saw their brown skin, red throats, and muscular arms. They were like athletes stripped for a race, and all knew they must use some speed. Autumn is short, the crop was large, and before the frost began the last sheaf must be thrashed. By and by Spiers pulled a lever, and lifting her to the saddle gave her the reins.

"All's ready, ma'am," he said, swinging up his hand as if he saluted an officer. "We wait for you to lead us round the field."

Helen smiled, for she liked his joke. "But I have not driven a binder, Geoff. I might keep you back."

"The horses know you. All you have got to do is to steer them straight along the edge and use the full sweep of the knife," sweep of the knife," Spiers replied. "The crop is yours, my lady. But for you, I doubt if it would have been sown, and we want you to cut the first swath."

He let the team go and the noisy machine rolled ahead. Dust blew from the horses' feet, the knife sparkled, and the tall stalks bent and fell. The singing wooden arms revolved like paddle wheels in breaking yellow waves, and strewed the binder's wake with silver tipped sheaves. For a time Helen concentrated, but the horses went steadily and at the corner of the oblong she risked a glance about.

Twenty yards off, Lawrence's machine crashed through the falling grain; Helen saw his athletic figure sway behind the horses' heads. Farther back, Heath seized the sheaves. His short, thick body and legs were bent, and lurched about awkwardly in the tall stubble, for the western wheat grower does not cut much straw. His mouth was firm and his face shone with sweat. Helen thought him marked by something of a bulldog's clumsiness and tenacity. The Lancashire man was slow and raw, but he meant to hold on. Sometimes the lean Ontario harvester took the sheaves Heath seized, and built them, for a model, in a compact stock. For a moment Heath studied the neat pile, and then frowned and plunged ahead.

The clash of the knives was musical, the horses' feet and the binders' revolving arms beat a measured rhythm. The sky was blue, the wheat was ruddy gold, and bracing wind and glowing color fired Helen's blood. Besides, Spiers' remark had moved her. She felt she triumphed and her mood was emotional.

Helen's habit was not to philosophize, but facing the splendid crop, she reviewed her rash adventure, of which the wheat was perhaps the consequence. To some extent, she was frankly primitive, and she believed a woman's business was to help

her mate and build a home. She obeyed instinctive impulses, and since nobody in the old country wanted her, she took the plunge. Now she knew the risk she had run was daunting, but it looked as if the risk were gone. Her husband at length was really hers. She had not weakly humored him; where firmness was needed she had been firm. Yet she had conquered. Perhaps it was strange, but Geoff respected her. She liked his bantering title, "My Lady."

Then she recaptured words and smiles that on the Canadian harvest field carried a significance she had not felt in smoky Lancashire. One reaped where one had sowed; perhaps one was forced to reap all one sowed! At Pine Creek she had not sowed carelessly; she had used thought and effort, and effort, and although sometimes the effort was not wisely planned, and was steadily vanquishing Geoff's drawbacks and hers. Anyhow, the material rewards was generous, and for a few moments Helen indulged a queer emotional thrill. A phrase about the first fruits haunted her and when she looked up her eyes were wet.

Ten yards behind her binder, Lawrence held his team. Heath stretched his arms and the Ontario man rubbed the sweat and dust from his eyes. Helen saw that while she brooded she had kept them back, and at the corner she got down from the machine.

"Harvest has begun, Geoff, and until you carry the last sheaf I hope our luck will stand," she said. "Well, I am not a harvester; my business is to cook for the men in the field, but you declared the crop was mine. Suppose I ask you for all my machine can cut on the first day?"

"It is yours," said Geoffrey, smiling. "If you claimed all both machines could cut, I would not grumble, and I expect Lawrence will agree. Well, I'll note my debt. How much do you reckon it stands for, Larry?"

Lawrence cauculated and named a sum.

"I'm rather Geoff's partner than his creditor, Mrs. Spiers, and I hope you will take the lot. It might perhaps help you fix your house."

"Thank you," said Helen. "But you must make a note. I must not be generous with money that is not really ours, and I want nothing for the house." She turned to Spiers and her voice was not altogether steady she resumed: "We will send the money to a hospital, Geoff; if possible somewhere they help sick strangers and emigrants. Not long ago I was a stranger and it's hard to be alone."

Lawrence said he liked the plan, and when Geoffrey sent the check he hoped Mrs. Spiers would let him know. He had come across in order to try the machine, and now he was glad his going justified his lifting his hat. He hated to be theatrical, but Geoffrey's wife commanded his respect. When he went for his horse Helen called the Ontario man to take her binder.

"You must cut all a good team and machine can cut in a day, Sam."

"I certainly will, and then some," said the fellow, and signed Heath. "Get to it, Lancashire. This job is Mrs. Spiers' job and you have got to sweat!" He started the horses and waved his battered hat. "We'll give you a square deal, ma'am. You watch us go!"

The horses strained, the noisy machines rolled forward, and Helen went happily to the house. Obstacles that she had feared were vanishing and Geoffrey's extravagance was not the handicap she had thought. He had queer, attractive qualities; the

men he hired were rather his friends than servants. Helen admitted she was happy, but she must get busy. She had four men to cook for and harvesters must be fed.

A day or two after Spiers began his harvest, Margaret, one hot morning, occupied a shady spot behind a stook in Ogilvie's field. Ogilvie was not generous about engaging domestic help, and although Mrs. Ogilvie labored pluckily, Margaret was tired. Flies swarmed about the hot kitchen, she had been baking since sunrise, and for half an hour she meant to rest.

A row of binders followed the edge of the wheat, and Ogilvie, in his light buggy, watched their progress. Margaret wondered whether he was satisfied, for although the machines and teams were the best one could get, the men who piled the sheaves rather obviously were not. Two wagon-loads of emigrants and broken men from the cities had not long since arrived. Several, finding they were something like black-legs, went off, but others stopped and Ogilvie had got the inexpert gang to work. But for the men who drove the binders, it looked as if nobody knew his job and, for the most part, the men were frankly sullen. Margaret studying them, saw lined faces, but shoulders, shabby clothes, and broken boots.

Yet she knew her father, and she imagined the harvesters would earn their pay. In a sense, he was not a bully; he was ruthlessly logical, and reckoning by economic rules, used the power they gave, but his foreman drove his raw helpers as a lumber boss drives an unwilling gang. Sometimes when his remark, carried, Margaret's face got hot. Thinking about Spiers and Lawrence, she blushed for her father.

The noisy binders clattered by, and gasping men whose heads were bent and legs spread wide crashed through the tall stubble. None had long boots or leggings, and the stiff, sharp stalks pierced their ragged overalls. Their arms were scratched, and Margaret thought the fresh pink color of their skin significant. They had obviously not labored in the fields, and she imagined they did not know all they undertook when they engaged for harvesters. Stooking the sheaves clumsily, they pushed on behind the machines.

The last binder slowed and the driver looked up.

"You are going to crowd us again," he shouted. "Pitch your blasted stooks where they won't block our track next round!"

"If you drive straight, you've got all the room a full size team can use," one rejoined. "The trouble is, you couldn't steer your horses along a wide dirt road."

The driver, perhaps unconsciously, let go the reins and clenched his fist.

"If I get down, I'll show you, you d—d city slob!"

He stopped, for the horses went ahead. One stumbled and jostled another, the machine rocked, and they plunged violently into the wheat. The teamster felt for his reins and swore, for the line he wanted had entangled the frightened animals' legs. A lad threw down the sheaf he carried and jumped for the horses' heads, but the team was alarmed and dragged him from his feet. He held on by the links, and when the driver joined him they forced back the struggling animals.

"Can't you hold a horse?" the driver inquired.

"Doesn't look as if you could show him," the harvester he had first addressed rejoined. "Get on your machine and quit yapping. You make us tired!"

For a few moments both let themselves go, and then the foreman advanced and the binder rolled ahead. The young fellow who had stopped the horses pulled up his torn overalls and examined his discolored leg.

"Another time I'm not going to meddle," he said firmly. "If went to the house, maybe they'd give me some liniment."

He limped across the stubble, and when another joined him

the foreman waved them back.

"Why in thunder are you slouches quitting?"

"I'm going to tie up my partner's leg," one rejoined. "We don't like that kind of talk and his arm's all right."

The foreman hesitated. The young fellow's look was resolute and Ogilvie's buggy was not far off. He might perhaps down the tenderfoot, but a fight would stop the others. He let them go and a few minutes afterwards Ogilvie pulled up his horses in front of Margaret.

"Taking a rest? Well, that's right," he said. "I expect all's up to schedule at the house."

"You ought to get mother proper help," Margaret replied. "I am young and an extra effort does not bother me, but harvest is tired. A hired girl is not very expensive and you are rich."

Ogilvie smiled. "Your mother does not want help. When she hustles around she's happy. If I sold out the farm, I might give her a smart house and servants at Montreal, but she'd pine for the washboard and baking pan, I'd be sick because I had to loaf. Some folks are like that. We don't work because we're forced; we get the habit—" He turned and indicated the harvesters. "There's the other sort!"

Margaret, on the whole, agreed, but her glance followed the mutinous gang.

"Men who feel they're entitled to grumble will not work properly. Perhaps to satisfy your helpers pays."

"You cannot satisfy mean trash; they have got to be driven," Ogilvie rejoined. "Sentimental generosity is not good business and an easy boss gets stung. You pay for as much as you think you'll get."

Margaret's eyes sparkled. Her father seized all he claimed was his; Lawrence and Helen Spiers gave. Their harvesters labored willingly. One heard them joke and sing, and the comparison was painful. In fact, when Margaret thought about Helen, she was moved by a strange jealousy.

"The wheat must be thrashed while Indian summer lasts, and if the frost came soon, to cut your wages bill might not be economical. I don't think our men will use much effort."

"That is so," Ogilvie agreed and knitted his brows. I had. They were a better bunch than this—" He stopped and his glance was keen when he resumed: "Mrs. Spiers called my bluff. She is boss at Pine Creek and her word goes at the Elliot farm. Looks as if Hart took a shine to her and Larry's her man. Well, I allow the milliner has some qualities."

Margaret turned her head, for she felt the blood come to her skin. Ogilvie had struck the jarring note before and she speculated about his object. All the same when he implied that Larry was Helen's lover Margaret rebelled. But for her father's stubbornness and greed, she knew Larry was hers. Well, she had tried to be stanch and for her mother's sake she had stayed at the Crossing, but her mother did not really need her, and she had borne enough.

"When harvest is over, I think I'll visit with my friends at Montreal," she said. "They have a large new house and Florence wants me to stay for the winter." Ogilvie nodded. "After the freeze up not much is doing and I guess you'd like the snowshoe clubs, skating rinks, and toboggan slides. If your mother is willing, I'll let you go."

He started his horse and Margaret, rather moodily, went to the house.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Q. How are wrecks of ships at sea carried out for the movies? L. H.

A. Wrecks of ocean liners are enacted in a small tank in the studio. Howling gales are provided by mechanical wind machines. The "ocean" is lashed to fury by paddles, and the toy liner, perhaps 10 inches in length, is tossed about on the waves by wires in the hands of studio assistants. If the story calls for an explosion to sink the boat, a dynamite cap aboard is exploded at the proper time and the miniature craft sinks beneath the waves with exciting realism.

many years it was a mystery why this building should from time to time burst into sweet song. It finally fell to the lot of an American engineer to solve the mystery. He found that the material used in the structure was cork stone, a porous stone of very light weight. In fact, every niche in its exterior is a sort of pipe designed to draw in the passing current of air. The wind playing upon the various openings acts as if upon reeds.

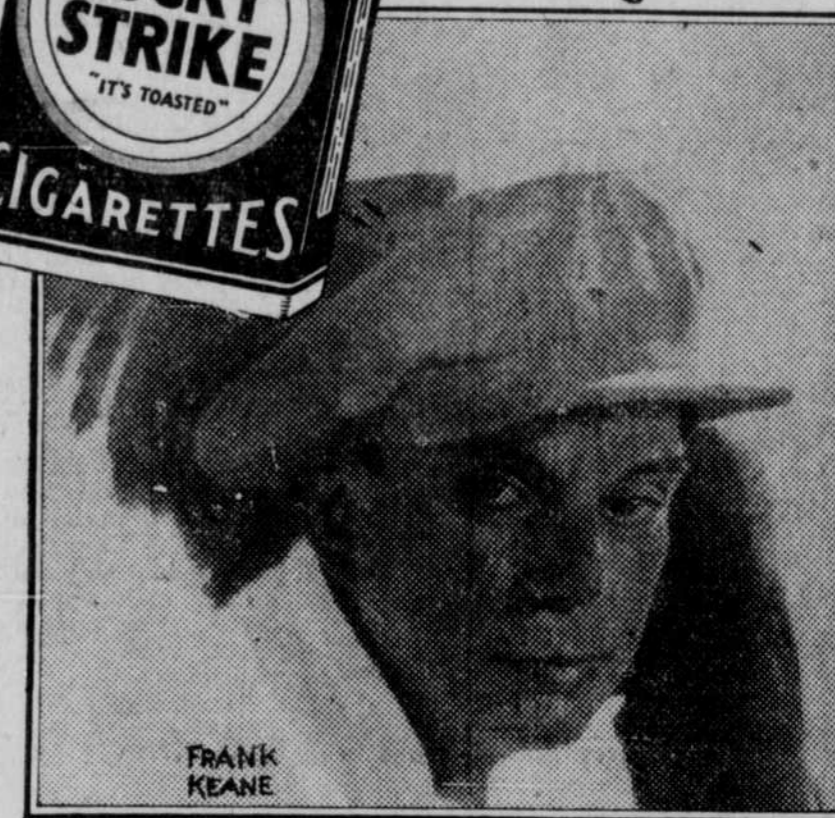
A "preventorium" has been established at the hospital of the University of Virginia, where Virginia school teachers can get preventive medical treatment.

# JAMES CRUZE

Director of Feature Photoplays, writes:

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James Cruze



FRANK KEANE

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## NEW COMET MAY BE OLD FRIEND, EXPERT OPINION

Berkley, Cal.—The newly discovered Skjellerup comet may not be a new visitor after all. Perhaps it is the same comet that came at least once before, in 1846, when it was known as de Vico's comet, after its discoverer. This was the fourth comet observed in that year.

Immediately following the an-

nouncement of Skjellerup's discovery, Dr. A. C. Crommelin, of the British Royal Observatory at Greenwich, made the suggestion through the International Astronomical Bureau at Copenhagen that the two comets might be identical. In this case the perihelion, or point when the comet is nearest the sun, would be December 15, he said. Actually, it has been shown that the perihelion was December 18, very close to that suggested.

According to Dr. Armin O. Leuschner, of the Student's Observatory of the University of California here, it

is quite probable that the two comets are the same. He is now working on computations to determine it, he said, though it might prove necessary to wait for further accurate observations of the comet.

Jeypore's Musical House.

From the Pathfinder.

What is said to be one of the strangest houses in all the world is situated in the city of Jeypore, India. Besides its peculiar architectural appearance, it boasts of being a huge musical instrument. When the wind is blowing in certain directions it produces beautiful notes said to resemble one of the human voice. For