

WHISPERING SMITH

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN.

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SYNOPSIS.

Murray Sinclair and his gang of wreckers were called on to clear the railroad tracks at Smoky Creek. McCloud, a young road superintendent, caught Sinclair and his men in the act of looting the wrecked train. Sinclair pleaded innocence, declaring it only amounted to a small sum—a treat for the men. McCloud discharged the whole outfit and ordered the wreckage burned. McCloud became acquainted with Dickie Dunning, a girl of the west, who came to look at the wreck. She gave him a message for Sinclair. "Whispering" Gordon Smith told President Backs of the railroad, of McCloud's brave fight against a gang of crazed miners and that was the reason for the superintendent's appointment to his high office. McCloud arranged to board at the boarding house of Mrs. Sinclair, the ex-foreman's deserted wife. Dickie Dunning was the daughter of the late Richard Dunning, who had died of a broken heart shortly after his wife's demise, which occurred after one year of married life. Sinclair visited Marion Sinclair's shop and a fight between him and McCloud was narrowly averted. Smoky Creek bridge was mysteriously burned. Superintendent McCloud overheard Dickie's criticisms of his methods, to Marion Sinclair. A stock train was wrecked by an open switch. Later a passenger train was held up and the express car robbed. Two men of a posse pursuing the bandits were killed. Whispering Smith was to hunt the desperadoes. Bill Dancin, a road hound, proposed that Sinclair and his gang be sent to hunt the bandits. A stranger, apparently with authority, told him to go ahead. Dancin was told the stranger was "Whispering Smith." Smith approached Sinclair. He tried to buy him off, but failed. He warned McCloud that his life was in danger. McCloud was carried forcibly into Lance Dunning's presence. Dunning refused the railroad a right-of-way, he had already signed for. Dickie interfered to prevent a shooting affray. Dickie met McCloud on a lonely trail to warn him his life was in danger. On his way home a shot passed through his hat. Whispering Smith reported that Du Sang, one of Sinclair's men, had been assigned to kill McCloud. He and Smith saw Du Sang. Whispering Smith taunted Du Sang and told him to get out of Medicine Bend or suffer. Du Sang seemed to succumb to the bluff. McCloud's big construction job was taken from him because of an injunction issued by the United States court. A sudden rise of the Crawling Stone river created consternation. Dickie and Marion appealed to McCloud for help. Whispering Smith joined the group. He and Dickie spent the night in conversation, Smith giving the girl an outline of his life. In the morning McCloud took his men to fight the river. Lance Dunning welcomed them cordially. McCloud succeeded in halting the flood. He accepted Dunning's hospitality. Dickie and Marion visited Sinclair at his ranch. He tried to persuade his deserted wife to return to him. She refused. He accused Whispering Smith of having stolen her love from him. A train was held up and robbed, the bandits escaping. Smith and McCloud started in pursuit.

CHAPTER XXIV.—Continued.

Whispering Smith's brows rose protestingly, but he spoke with perfect amiability as he raised his finger to bring the good eye his way. "You ought to change your hat when you change your mind. I saw you driving a bunch of horses up that canyon a few minutes ago. Now, Rockstro, do you still drag your left leg?"

The rancher looked steadily at his new inquisitor, but blinked like a sopher at the sudden onslaught. "Which of you fellows is Whispering Smith?" he demanded.

"The man with the dough is Whispering Smith every time," was the answer from Smith himself. "You have about seven years to serve, Rockstro, haven't you? Seven, I think. Now what have I ever done to you that you should turn a trick like this on me? I knew you were here, and I call this a pretty country; a little smooth fight around here, like the people, but pretty. Have I ever bothered you? Now tell me one thing—what did you get for covering this trail? I stand to give you two dollars for every one you got last night for the job, if you'll put us right on the game. Which way did they go?"

"What are you talking about?" "Get off your horse a minute," suggested Smith, dismounting, "and step over here toward the creek." The man, afraid to refuse and unwilling to go, walked haltingly after Smith.

"What is it, Rockstro?" asked his tormentor. "Don't you like this country? What do you want to go back to the penitentiary for? Aren't you happy here? Now tell me one thing—will you give up the trail?"

"I don't know the trail." "I believe you; we shouldn't follow it anyway. Were you paid last night or this morning?"

"I ain't seen a man hereabouts for a week." "Then you can't tell me whether here were five men or six?"

"You've got one eye as good as mine, and one a whole lot better." "So it was fixed up for cash a week ago?"

"Everything is cash in this country." "Well, Rockstro, I'm sorry, but we'll have to take you back with us."

The rancher whipped out a revolver. Whispering Smith caught his wrist. The struggle lasted only an instant. Rockstro writhed, and the pistol fell to the ground.

"Now, shall I break your arm?" asked Smith, as the man cursed and resisted. "Or will you behave? We are going right back and you'll have to come with us. We'll send some one down to round up your horses and sell them, and you can serve out your time—with allowances, of course, for good conduct, which will cut it down. If I had ever done you a mean turn I would not say a word. If you could name a friend of yours I had ever done a mean turn to I would not say a word. Can you name one? I guess not. I have left you as free as the wind here,

making only the rule I make for everybody—to let the railroad alone. This is my thanks. Now, I'll ask you just one question. I haven't killed you, as I had a perfect right to when you pulled; I haven't broken your arm, as I would have done if there had been a doctor within 25 miles; and I haven't started you for the pen—not yet. Now I ask you one fair question only: Did you need the money?"

"Yes, I did need it." Whispering Smith dropped the man's wrist. "Then I don't say a word. If you needed the money, I'm not going to send you back—not for mine."

"How can a man make a living in this country," asked the rancher, with a bitter oath, "unless he picks up everything that's going?"

"Pick up your gun, man! I'm not saying anything, am I?"

"But I'm damned if I can give a double-cross to any man," added Rockstro, stooping for his revolver.

"I should think less of you, Rockstro, if you did. You don't need money anyway now, but sometime you may need a friend. I'm going to leave you here. You'll hear no more of this, and I'm going to ask you a question: Why did you go against this when you

is my judgment. And aren't we five able-bodied jays, gentlemen? Five strong-arm suckers? It is an inelegant word; it is an inelegant feeling. No matter, we know a few things. There are five good men and a led horse; we can get out of here by Goose river, find out when we cross the railroad how much they got, and pick them up somewhere around the Saddle peaks if they've gone north. That's only a guess, and every man's guess is good now. What do you think, all of you?"

"If it's the crowd we think it is, would they go straight home? That doesn't look reasonable, does it?" asked Brill Young.

"If they could put one day between them and pursuit, wouldn't they be safer at home than anywhere else? And haven't they laid out one day's work for us, good and plenty? Farrell, remember one thing: There is sometimes a disadvantage in knowing too much about the men you are after. We'll try Goose river."

It was noon when they struck the railroad. They halted long enough to stop a freight train, send some telegrams, and ask for news. They got orders from Rooney Lee, had an empty box car set behind the engine for a special, and, loading their horses at

rode that evening from Tower W through the south pass; the fifth man had already left the party. The four men were headed for Williams Cache and had reason to believe, until they sighted Banks' men, that their path was open.

They halted to take counsel on the suspicious-looking posse far below them, and while their cruelly exhausted horses rested, Du Sang, always in Sinclair's absence the brains of the gang, planned the escape over Deep creek at Baggs' crossing. At dusk they divided; two men lurking in the brush along the creek rode as close as they could, unobserved, toward the crossing, while Du Sang and the cowboy Karg, known as Flat Nose, rode down to Baggs' ranch at the foot of the pass.

At that point Dan Baggs, an old locomotive engineer, had taken a homestead, got together a little bunch of cattle, and was living alone with his son, a boy of ten years. It was a hard country and too close to Williams Cache for comfort, but Dan got on with everybody because the toughest man in the Cache country could get a meal, a feed for his horse, and a place to sleep at Baggs', without charge, when he needed it.

Ed Banks, by hard riding, got to the crossing at five o'clock, and told Baggs of the hold-up and the shooting of Oliver Sollers. The news stirred the old engineer, and his excitement threw him off his guard. Banks rode straight on for the middle pass, leaving word that two of his men would be along within half an hour to watch the pass and the ranch crossing, and asked Baggs to put up some kind of a fight for the crossing until more of the posse came up—at the least, to make sure that nobody got any fresh horses.

The boy was cooking supper in the kitchen, and Baggs had done his milking and gone back to the corral, when two men rode around the corner of the barn and asked if they could get something to eat. Poor Baggs sold his life in six words: "Why, yes; be you Banks' men?"

Du Sang answered: "No; we're from Sheriff Coon's office at Oroville, looking up a bunch of Duck Bar steers that's been run somewhere up Deep creek. Can we stay here all night?"

They dismounted and disarmed Baggs' suspicions, though the condition of their horses might have warned him had he had his senses. The unfortunate man had probably fixed it in his mind that a ride from Tower W to Deep creek in 16 hours was a physical impossibility.

"Stay here? Sure! I want you to stay," said Baggs, bluffly. "Looks to me like I seen you down at Crawling Stone, ain't it?" he asked of Karg.

Karg was lighting a cigarette. "I used to mark at the Dunning ranch," he answered, throwing away his match.

"That's hit. Good! The boy's cooking supper. Step up to the kitchen and tell him to cut ham for four more."

"Four?" "Two of Ed Banks' men will be here by six o'clock. Heard about the hold-up? They stopped Number Three at Tower W last night and shot Ollie Sollers, as white a boy as ever pulled a throttle. Boys, a man that'll kill a locomotive engineer is worse'n an Indian; I'd help skin him."

"The hell you would!" cried Du Sang. "Well, don't you want to start in on me? I killed Sollers. Look at me; ain't I handsome? What you going to do about it?"

Before Baggs could think Du Sang was shooting him down. It was wanted. Du Sang stood in no need of the butchery; the escape could have been made without it. His victim had pulled an engine throttle too long to show the white feather, but he was dying by the time he had dragged a revolver from his pocket. Du Sang did the killing alone. At least, Flat Nose, who alone saw all of the murder, afterward maintained that he did not draw because he had no occasion to, and that Baggs was dead before he, Karg, had finished his cigarette. With his right arm broken and two bullets through his chest, Baggs fell on his face. That, however, did not check his murderer. Rising to his knees, Baggs begged for his life. "For God's sake! I'm helpless, gentlemen. I'm helpless. Don't kill me like a dog!" But Du Sang, emptying his pistol, threw his rifle to his shoulder and sent bullet after bullet crashing through the shapeless form writhing and twitching before him until he had beaten it in the dust soft and flat and still.

Banks' men came up within an hour to find the ranchhouse deserted. They saw a lantern in the yard below, and near the corral gate they found the little boy in the darkness, screaming beside his father's body. The sheriff's men carried the old engineer to the house; others of the posse crossed the creek during the evening, and at 11 o'clock Whispering Smith rode down from the south pass to find that four of the men they were after had taken fresh horses, after killing Baggs, and passed safely through the cordon Banks had drawn around the pass and along Deep creek. Bill Dancin, who had ridden with Banks' men, was at

the house when Whispering Smith arrived. He found some supper in the kitchen, and the tired man and the giant ate together.

Whispering Smith was too experienced a campaigner to complain. His party had struck a trail 50 miles north of Sleepy Cat and followed it to the Missions. He knew now who he was after, and knew that they were bottled up in the Cache for the night. The sheriff's men were sleeping on the floor of the living room when Smith came in from the kitchen. He sat down before the fire. At intervals sobs came from the bedroom where the body lay, and after listening a moment, Whispering Smith got stiffly up, and, tiptoeing to still the jingle of his



"The Hell You Would!" Cried Du Sang.

spurs, took the candle from the table, pushed aside the curtain, and entered the bedroom.

The little boy was lying on his face, with his arm around his father's neck, talking to him. Whispering Smith bent a moment over the bed, and, setting the candle on the table, put his hand on the boy's shoulder. He disengaged the hand from the cold neck, and sitting down took it in his own. Talking low to the little fellow, he got his attention after much patient effort and got him to speak. He made him, though struggling with terror, to understand that he had come to be his friend, and after the child had sobbed his grief into a strange heart he ceased to tremble, and told his name and his story, and described the two horsemen, and the horses they had left. Smith listened quietly. "Have you had any supper, Dannie? No? You must have something to eat. Can't you eat anything? But there is a nice pan of fresh milk in the kitchen."

A burst of tears interrupted him. "Daddy just brought in the milk, and I was frying the ham, and I heard them shooting."

"See how he took care of you till the last minute, and left something for you after he was gone. Suppose he could speak now, don't you think he would want you to do as I say? I am your next friend now, for you are going to be a railroad man and have a big engine."

Dannie looked up. "Dad wasn't afraid of those men?" "Wasn't he, Dannie?"

"He said we would be all right and not to be afraid." "Did he?"

"He said Whispering Smith was coming." "My poor boy."

"He is coming, don't be afraid. Do you know Whispering Smith? He is coming. The men to-night all said he was coming."

The little fellow for a long time could not be coaxed away from his father, but his companion at length got him to the kitchen. When they came back to the bedroom the strange man was talking to him once more about his father. "We must try to think how he would like things done now, mustn't we? All of us felt so bad when we rode in and had so much to do we couldn't attend to taking care of your father. Did you know there are two men out at the crossing now, guarding it with rifles? But if you and I keep real quiet we can do something for him while the men are asleep; they have to ride all day to-morrow. We must wash his face and hands, don't you think so? And brush his hair and his beard. If you could just find the basin and some water and a towel—you couldn't find a brush, could you? Could you honestly? Well! I call that a good boy—we shall have to have you on the railroad, sure. We must try to find some fresh clothes—these are cut and stained; then I will change his clothes, and we shall all feel better. Don't disturb the men; they are tired."

They worked together by the candlelight. When they had done, the boy had a violent crying spell, but Whispering Smith got him to lie down beside him on a blanket spread on the floor, where Smith got his back against the sod wall and took the boy's head in his arm. He waited patiently for the boy to go to sleep, but Dan was afraid the murderers would come back. Once he

lifted his head in a confidence. "Did you know my daddy used to run an engine?"

"No, I did not; but in the morning you must tell me all about it."

Whenever there was a noise in the next room the child roared. After some time a new voice was heard; Kennedy had come and was asking questions. "Wake up here, somebody! Where is Whispering Smith?"

Dancin answered: "He's right there in the bedroom, Farrel, staying with the boy."

There was some stirring. Kennedy talked a little and at length stretched himself on the floor. When all was still again, Dannie's hand crept slowly from the breast of his companion up to his chin, and the little hand, feeling softly every feature, stole over the strange face.

"What is it, Dannie?" "Are you Whispering Smith?"

"Yes, Dannie. Shut your eyes."

At three o'clock, when Kennedy lighted a candle and looked in, Smith was sitting with his back against the wall. The boy lay on his arm. Both were fast asleep. On the bed the dead man lay with a handkerchief over his face.

CHAPTER XXV.

Williams Cache.

Ed Banks had been recalled before daybreak from the middle pass. Two of the men wanted were now known to have crossed the creek, which meant they must work out of the country through Williams Cache.

"If you will take your best two men, Ed," said Whispering Smith, sitting down with Banks at breakfast, "and strike straight for Canadian pass to help Gene and Bob Johnson, I'll undertake to ride in and talk to Rebstock while Kennedy and Bob Scott watch Deep creek. The boy gives a good description, and the two men that did the job here are Du Sang and Flat Nose. Did I tell you how we picked up the trail yesterday? Maggies. They shot a scrub horse that gave out on them and skinned the brand. It hastened the banquet, but we got there before the birds were all seated. Great luck, wasn't it? And it gave us a beautiful trail. One of the party, crossed the Goose river at American fork, and Brill Young and Reed followed him. Four came through the Mission mountains; that is a cinch and they are in the Cache—and if they get out it is our fault personally, Ed, and not the Lord's."

Williams Cache lies in the form of a great horn, with a narrow entrance at the lower end known as the Door, and a rock fissure at the upper end leading into Canadian pass; but this fissure is so narrow that a man with a rifle could withstand a regiment. For 100 miles east and west rise the granite walls of the Mission range, broken nowhere save by the formation known as the Cache. Even this does not penetrate the range; it is a pocket, and runs not over half-way into it and out again. But no man really knows the Cache; the most that may be said is that the main valley is known, and it is known as the roughest mountain fissure between the Spanish sinks and the Mantrap country. Williams Cache lies between walls 2,000 feet high, and within it is a small labyrinth of canyons. A generation ago, when Medicine Bend for one winter was the terminus of the overland railroad, vigilantes mercilessly cleaned out the town, and the few outlaws that escaped the shotgun and the noose at Medicine Bend found refuge in a far-away and unknown mountain gorge, once named by French trappers the Cache. Years after these outcasts had come to infest it came one desperado more ferocious than all that had gone before. He made a frontier retreat of the Cache, and left to it the legacy of his evil name, Williams. Since his day it has served, as it served before, for the haunt of outlawed men. No honest man lives in Williams Cache, and few men of any sort live there long, since their lives are lives of violence; neither the law nor a woman crosses Deep creek. But from the day of Williams to this day the Cache has had its ruler, and when Whispering Smith rode with a little party through the Door into the Cache the morning after the murder in Mission valley he sent an envoy to Rebstock, whose success as a cattle thief had brought its inevitable penalty. It had made Rebstock a man of consequence and of property and a man subject to the anxieties and annoyances of such responsibility.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Had Taken Notice.

It was while H. H. Rogers, the Standard Oil magnate, was working at his first job, delivering the village newspaper, that his inborn capacity became evident. He brought in the name of a new subscriber, Isaiab west. Mr. Anthony, the publisher, wrote down the name. Then he turned to the boy: "How do you spell Isaiab, Henry?" he asked. "Is-a-l-a-b," said Henry. "You'll do," said Mr. Anthony, with a chuckle. He told the story to a skeptical neighbor. "But how did you know how to spell it, Henry?" asked the neighbor. "I saw him write it down," said Henry.



"Now Shall I Break Your Arm?"

knew you'd have to square yourself with me?" "They told me you'd be taken care of before it was pulled off."

"They lied to you, didn't they? No matter, you've got their stuff. Now I am going to ask you one question that I don't know the answer to; it's a fair question, too. Was Du Sang in the penitentiary with you at Fort City? Answer fair."

"Yes." "Thank you. Behave yourself and keep your mouth shut. I say nothing this time. Hereafter leave railroad matters alone, and if the woman should fall sick or you have to have a little money, come and see me." Smith led the way back to the horses.

"Look here!" muttered Rockstro, following, with his good eye glued on his companion. "I pulled on you too quick, I guess—quicker'n I'd ought to."

"Don't mention it. You didn't pull quick enough; it is humiliating to have a man that's as slow as you are pull on me. People that pull on me usually pull and shoot at the same time. Two distinct movements, Rockstro, should be avoided; they are fatal to success. Come down to the Bend sometime, and I'll get you a decent gun and give you a few lessons."

Whispering Smith drew his handkerchief as the one-eyed man rode away and he rejoined his companions. He was resigned, after a sickly fashion. "I like to play blind-man's-buff," he said, wiping his forehead, "but not so far from good water. They have pulled us half-way to the Grosse Terre mountains on a beautiful trail, too beautiful to be true, Farrell—too beautiful to be true. They have been having fun with us, and they've doubled back through the Topah Topahs toward the Mission mountains and Williams Cache—that

the chute, made a helter-skelter run for Sleepy Cat. At three o'clock they struck north for the Mission mountains.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Sunday Murder.

Banks' posse, leaving Medicine Bend before daybreak, headed northwest. Their instructions were explicit: To scatter after crossing the Frenchman, watch the trails from the Goose river country and through the Mission mountains, and intercept everybody riding north until the posse from Sleepy Cat or Whispering Smith should communicate with them from the southwest. Nine men rode in the party that crossed the Crawling Stone Sunday morning at sunrise with Ed Banks.

After leaving the river the three white-capped Saddles of the Mission range afforded a landmark for more than 100 miles, and toward these the party pressed steadily all day. The southern pass of the Missions opens on the north slope of the range into a pretty valley known as Mission Springs valley, and the springs are the headwaters of Deep creek. The posse did not quite obey the instructions, and following a natural instinct of safety five of them, after Banks and his three deputies had scattered, bunched again, and at dark crossed Deep creek at some distance below the springs. It was afterward known that these five men had been seen entering the valley from the east at sundown just as four of the men they wanted rode down South Mission pass toward the springs. That they knew they would soon be cut off, or must cut their way through the line which Ed Banks, ahead of them, was posting at every gateway to Williams Cache, was probably clear to them. Four men