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Hands Up!

By RALPH BEACH WALL
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There was wild, unbridled fire in her eyes. By the way she threw back her head and shouted to her mount, a sleek cayuse, one could tell at a glance that she was a girl of spirit, who did things.

Bess was not accustomed to riding alone through the gorge trail, covered only by a stage from Silverhead, a neighboring mining town. Usually Phil rode with her.

It was half in anger toward him that she had chosen the lonesome, some said dangerous, route.

She had seen Phil two hours before, and, as usual, had shouted an invitation for him to ride with her.

"Can't! I'm busy today. See you later," he answered, waving his hat to her and galloping on.

There was something in his eyes that bothered the girl, when she remembered it. It was for that reason, half an hour later, Bess had chosen the lonely gorge road.

She wanted to be alone, to think about Phil, and weigh her father's doubts about the young fellow, who seemed to do nothing save idle his time away, and who had never been caught working since he had struck town two months before.

Why did he occasionally go off on his horse alone, and not come back till the next day? Who were the city men he often met at the daily train, and sometimes went on with for a day or two?

He had never explained his business to Bess.

The night before he had asked her to marry him. The thought had come to her so suddenly that all she could do was ask for time.

"I will answer you tomorrow evening," she had said.

She could not understand his urgency, the eagerness in his voice.

"But I have many things to think of," she protested. "You know how father is opposed to you. It's partly because you look city-bred, and still know horses and mining so well. He seems to be almost suspicious of you."

"I can easily clear up any suspicion," he had answered confidently. "But I want my answer now. Tomorrow may be too late."

Why had he repeated that ominous warning? Had he planned anything for today? Was he in danger of any kind?

At that moment the rumble of wheels behind her caused Bess to turn. She had already reached a lonely spot in the gorge, some miles from town.

It was the stage from Silverhead, carrying its cargo of silver and passengers, winding through the gully, cut sharply between high cliffs. The four horses were straining at their load, and coming along at a smart clip.

Bess whipped up her horse to gain a wider part of the road, where the coach could pass her.

The passage was uneven and full of rocks. Riding being difficult, the girl bent all her attention on the steed.

At a sharp turn in the road something scared the skittish cayuse. A second later the animal shied at a big bowlder confronting them, and Bess was hurled through the air, over his head, landing in a jut in the wall.

Her revolver flew from her belt with the jolt, and the frightened cayuse galloped on alone.

When the girl pulled herself together she found that the horse had thrown her into an opening, a little pocket in the natural stone wall at the turning which commanded a view of the road on both sides of the sharp corner.

She glanced out, and found the stage drawing near at a rapid rate; then, looking in the opposite direction, Bess saw her cayuse galloping madly, already half a mile away.

The revolver that had jolted loose was the next thing to attract her attention, and she was about to slide down and recover it from the ledge, two feet below, when a quick movement attracted her in the direction her horse had taken.

The girl's eyes dilated and she seemed frozen to the spot, as she watched three masked horsemen nearing the gully road through a narrow defile down one side.

In a moment Bess realized. The stage was thundering on.

She slipped forward to get the gun. The stage was not a hundred yards off.

Bess glanced apprehensively at the three grim horsemen, partly concealed behind a bowlder at the roadside.

The hand reaching for the revolver drew back sharply. She caught in her breath with a convulsive gasp.

Bess had recognized in that instant the leader of the bandits.

It was Phil.

Around his neck was the very handkerchief she had spent weeks embroidering for him, every stitch an expression of love and faith.

Then her eyes glinted like blue steel. Her teeth snapped together, and she made a quick grasp for the revolver.

With it secure in her hand, she hesitated but a moment; then, her cheeks white and lips drawn, she steadily aimed the revolver at her unsuspect-

ing lover, who, with his men, awaited the stage.

There was the love of a savage and the hate of a savage in her expression. She had found out her lover at last, and had instinctively pointed the gun at him.

Bess' left hand clenched so that the tendons showed white through the skin, and the forefinger of her right hand twitched on the trigger.

Before she realized the trembling finger gave a jerk and pulled the trigger. There came a slight click, but nothing more.

The hammer had become jammed by the jolting received when it fell from her belt.

Glancing up, her wits scattered by this sudden discovery, she saw the stage rolling past the gap.

It was too late. The gun had fallen, and the stage had passed before she could give the warning.

"Hands up!"

The gruff growl made Bess grow faint, and her eyes awam. For in it she recognized the same tone that she knew so well in Phil's voice, but it was so brutal, so different.

She watched, with a stifling throat and heaving bosom, as a shot rang out from Phil's gun and the driver, who had not obeyed the summons quickly enough, tumbled from his seat and flopped onto his back in the road.

Bess sprang to her feet, aghast with madness. Her wits worked rapidly; she must do something to cope with his brutality.

The bandits stopped the dashing horses, and in a moment a trembling party of travelers filed slowly from the stage.

They lined up in a row, their hands high above their heads.

Bess gave a strangled gasp, a sudden impulse seized her, and she leaped to the road, her revolver clubbed and clutched tensely.

With blind fury she flew to the hold-up scene, her nostrils dilated, her eyes red-rimmed.

The leader evidently saw her coming. He darted forward, and a minute later Bess found herself struggling and fighting in his strong arms. He knocked the revolver from her hand and tried to explain something in eager words.

But she would not listen. She screamed with rage and tore at him; his very touch was the blight. His hands seared her wherever they rested.

In the meantime his companions continued their work and paid no attention to him.

With a wild gleam in his eyes, Phil suddenly forced her back and held her tightly explaining to her, trying to get the girl to listen to his defense.

Through sheer weakness Bess finally had to listen. Then the words had their effect. Her eyes gleamed, she looked at him squarely and became more quiet.

"Wait here!" he cried suddenly. "I'll go back and get the stuff. Wait here for me."

As he dashed off Bess sank to the ground, utterly spent, and she lay sobbing weakly, while her lover rushed back to the frightened group of travelers, swooped up the valuables, tied them in a wide handkerchief, mounted his horse, fired several shots in the air, and swung down the trail to where Bess sat in a heap, wondering trying to reassure herself that all he had said was true.

Half a mile from the holdup scene he drew rein abruptly and turned to Bess with a reassuring smile.

"I had to go this far," he explained. "They need a slide in the picture of the bandits getting away, and I guess mine was some picturesque getaway."

"Your butting in helped the picture a good deal, Bess. They'll change the idea and label this part: 'Wire-Plending With Bandit Chief.'"

"Phil," she said, looking up with yearning eyes, in which the slightest suggestion of a smile was beginning to glow, "is it really true? I know it must be. But the thing seemed so real at the time. I never saw a moving picture taken before."

"Well, it won't be the last one you'll see taken, I hope," the man smiled, wiping her tear-stained face with the handkerchief she had made for him.

"That's my business. The people in the stage-coach and my confederates are all actors; the man who did the stage-fall from the driver's seat is my brother. We're in partnership in the business."

"But why didn't you explain all this before?" queried the girl, the smile succeeding in erasing some of the tragic tenseness of her features.

"Well, people are curious about moving pictures; they want to butt in and see them taken. That spoils the whole thing, and I didn't want to be bothered."

"Haven't I bothered you, Phil, just a little?" she asked, the smile asserting itself boldly for the first time.

"You've bothered me more than anything has for a long time," he cried, reaching toward her eagerly.

"Well," she said, having recovered her natural spirit, entirely. "I guess I'll fix it up with you and a justice of the peace, so I can have the exclusive privilege of bothering you all the rest of your life."

"So you've made up your mind at last," he cried, inclining her in a tender embrace.

She threw off his arms playfully and spurred the horse into action; they galloped back to the moving-picture party and announced their engagement.

Then Bess told of how she had almost tried to kill the bandit chief, assuring them, however, that even if the hammer hadn't been jammed, she couldn't have hit him with such a trembly hand.

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7 p. m.—Senior Endeavor Service
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The New - Nebraska Federation

THE NEW NEBRASKA FEDERATION was formed for the purpose of preserving the REPRESENTATIVE institutions established by the founders of this Republic and reflected in all the great principles embodied in the Constitution of Nebraska.

The broad and general objects of this Association are:

1. To inform the people of the danger of CLASS legislation and the impending threat toward such class legislation fostered by socialistic leadership organized outside the boundaries of the state; to arouse the people to opposition to such class legislation; to oppose the unnecessary and unwise extension of public functions outside the realm of government; to oppose the costly and dangerous multiplication of public offices to administer experimental business enterprises financed by the treasury of the state with capital extracted from the pockets of the taxpayers; to oppose the exploitation of private property—from the humblest home to the largest business enterprise—by political agencies, and its dissipation and distribution for class advantage.
2. To condemn revengeful and unwarranted oppression of legitimate business enterprises; to substitute for oppression the rules of reason, of intelligent regulation wherever found necessary; to stand for "Equality Before the Law" and equality of opportunity for laborer, farmer, merchant, mechanic, wage-earner, business and professional man. To oppose the introduction into our governmental system of ideas and experiments which past experience has tested and repudiated.
3. To foster the dissemination of knowledge regarding theories of government and their PRACTICAL EFFECT on the security, happiness and prosperity of the people and in extending a comprehension and understanding of the vital principles upon which our political institutions are founded and upon which they have survived and prospered beyond those of all other peoples of the world.
4. To search out the defects in the administration of law and propose their safe and wise correction without jeopardizing the foundations of our institutions; by substituting state socialism in the form of state-owned industry; therefore; to promote the means by which social justice and efficiency may be more promptly and certainly realized in full harmony with the principles of justice, equity and equality of opportunity upon which our government is based and upon which alone it can live and be preserved to our posterity.
5. To preserve the fruits of labor in the form of private property to the lawful owner thereof, whether represented by the humblest village or farm home, shop or store, or the legitimate business institutions of our cities; and to oppose its confiscation under any form of law devised by political philosophers who proclaim a millennium to be gained through destruction of property rights and the substitution of state socialism for private initiative and endeavor.

To these plain propositions the New-Nebraska Federation dedicates its most sincere convictions, its untiring endeavors and appeals for the support and co-operation of all the citizenship of Nebraska.

The immediate problem confronting the thinking people of Nebraska is the writing of a new constitution for the state. This must be done at a time when unrest is general and radicalism is rampant.

The constitution that is written in 1920 will stand for our children and grandchildren. It is important that men of poise and vision sit in that convention; we can not afford to trust the destiny of the state to hair-brained theorists, socialists and bolsheviks.

We need the active interest of the good citizens of Nebraska, irrespective of politics, of religion, of language, occupation or financial worth.

Please let us have your membership in any of the three classes, \$1, \$5 or \$25.

The New-Nebraska Federation

Midwest Bldg., 126 So. 11th, Lincoln, Neb.

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