

# COMRADES OF PERIL

By RANDALL PARRISH

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## "I'LL MARRY YOU."

Synopsis.—Tom Shelby, a rancher, rides into the frontier town of Ponca looking for a good time after a long spell of hard work and loneliness on the ranch. Instead, he runs into a funeral—that of Dad Calkins, a retired army man of whom little is known. A girl, still in her teens, survives Calkins. McCarthy, a saloon keeper and Ponca's leading citizen, decides that the girl, now alone in the world, should marry. Shelby starts a hunt for eligible husbands and the minister goes to confer with the girl. She agrees to pick a husband from the score of men lined up in her home. To his consternation, she selects Shelby, who had gone along merely as a spectator. He declines the honor. Indignant, the girl dismisses the assemblage.

## CHAPTER III—Continued.

"Straight ter h—l, I hope," the Buffalo Gap J. P. burst out, forgetting his clerical role in a sudden expression of feeling. "Whatever caused the fool to butt in?"

"Oh, he didn't intend nuthin'. Tom ain't that kind. He just drifted 'long ter see the fun. Yer can't blame him 'cause the girl took a shine his way."

The two disappeared, their voices still grumbling, and Shelby got to his feet and moved along the edge of the tent to where he could view the shack better. Through the window on that side an unobstructed blaze of light poured forth, but even as he stood staring at it the girl appeared fully revealed in the glare and drew down the curtain. He saw her clearly, like a picture in a frame, one round arm uplifted to grasp the shade. He drew a quick breath, almost of astonishment, conscious of the rapid beating of his heart. By heaven, she was actually pretty! He had never thought that before; but then, in that ruddy light, the strange impression took possession as something entirely new. And it served to strengthen his purpose. He would not play the part of a coward; he would go in and explain; he would make her understand exactly how matters were with him and why he acted as he had.

Yet this was accomplished hesitatingly and in doubt. He was at the door twice before he found sufficient courage to knock lightly. There was no response and he used his knuckles a trifle louder, intensely conscious of a desire to turn and run away. But there was no opportunity. The latch clicked sharply and the light streamed directly into his face, fairly blinding him.

"Oh, so it is you back again?" she asked coldly. "What did you want?"

"Just—just to have a word with you—privately," he explained lamely, blinking his eyes. "I—I thought maybe I could explain."

"Explain what?"

"Why—why how this thing happened, Miss. His confusion rendered him almost incoherent. "You see, I—I don't want you to think I'm that sort."

"Oh, you don't? Well, I'm not that sort, either. Come along in, if you want to; I'll hear what you have to say."

Shelby never felt quite so awkward and impotent before in all his life, as he did standing there, fiddling with the hat in his hand, while the girl carefully closed the door behind him. Her own appearance of ease, even of enjoyment, only added to his deep embarrassment.

For the first time he really took notice of the room, how plainly it was furnished; a deal table, two chairs, the stove, a few books on a shelf, with a small clock between. Everything looked cheap, but immaculately clean, and, as his eyes wandered back to the girl, that was what impressed him most about her—cleanliness. It was evidenced in face and hands, in the dark skirt and white waist, in the smooth strands of hair.

"Well," she said pleasantly, "I reckon you might as well sit down, as long as you are here."

He found a chair and dropped into it, and she took the only other one, her hands clasped in her lap and her serious eyes watching him with undiminished curiosity.

that's why, if you really want to know."

"Then you did know me?"

"No, I didn't. I saw you at the funeral an' I knew you wa'n't no Ponca man. I didn't care who you was or where you came from, just so you gave me a chance to get out o' this hole. I would marry an Indian to get out."

"Then that was why you took me—so as to get out o' here?"

She nodded.

"That's 'bout the size of it. I didn't take no stock in what the preacher said, for I ain't no weeping willow, Tom Shelby, an' I don't need nobody to take care of me."

Shelby laughed.

"You made a mighty poor guess, at that," he said cheerfully, "when you picked me. I'd a took you to a worse place than Ponca."

"There ain't none," positively.

"Where is it you live, anyhow?"

"Over on the Cottonwood; 'bout sixty miles north, up near the reservation. H—l! But it's lonely up there; not another white man in thirty miles."

"You are ranching?"

"Just startin', you might say; runnin' a few head on a free range."

"But you've got a house, a place to live in?"

"Sorter shack—yes; a corral an' a sod stable; that's 'bout all. I'd be a dandy, wouldn't I, ter ask a girl to go

out there an' live? No, sir; that ain't my style; it wouldn't be decent."

She did not speak for some time, her eyes roving about the room and then returning to rest on his face. There was no smile on her lips, yet somehow she did not look sullen or indifferent.

"And that was why you said no? You came back to explain? It wasn't because you disliked me, then? Because you despised me for doing such a thing?"

"What, me? I should say not. There wa'n't nothing done that wa'n't all right. I don't blame you a mite. You ought to git married."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes, I do; this ain't no place for a single woman who wants to be decent, to live in. Besides, you're old enough."

"How old am I?"

"Seventeen, maybe; I ain't much on guessing ages—specially women."

"I am nineteen," she paused, her teeth gleaming as she smiled. "I wish you would tell me about yourself."

He glanced up at her surprised and twisting his hat about in his hands.

"That won't take long," he said soberly. "I ain't got much history, so to speak. I was born in Kentucky an' ran away when I was seventeen. Been out in this country ever since, soldiering most of the time, and then punching cattle for the Six Stars. Saved a little money and started in to go it alone. That's about all the story."

"With a lot left out. Why did you leave home?"

"Oh, they wanted me to go on in school and be a lawyer."

"You finished high school?"

"Sure; what made you think that?"

fled out I put my head down on the table there and laughed until I had tears in my eyes. The expressions on those faces when I picked you out would have made a dog laugh."

Shelby wanted to say something, but his mind seemed to be utterly blank. He could just stare at her dumbly. The silence became so embarrassing that he finally got awkwardly to his feet.

"I'm—I'm awfully glad you took it that way," he stammered. "You see, I don't know much about girls and so I was afraid you might be mad. I'll have to go now, I think, Miss."

"I'm very sorry, but I'm glad you came. Good-bye, Mr. Shelby."

He took the outstretched hand, conscious of the warm pressure even as he fumbled at the latch of the door. His eyes were downcast and his face flamed; nor did he breathe easily until he was again outside, alone in the darkness of the night.

## CHAPTER IV.

### The Proposal.

He stared back at the closed door, still dazed but capable of swearing at himself for being such a blame fool. He felt a vague suspicion that he had acted foolishly and that the girl was amused at his awkward embarrassment.

The interview had proven altogether different from what he had anticipated; the tears he had come to wipe away were conspicuous by their absence, and instead of bringing comfort and courage to an extremely mortified young lady, he had found her filled with merriment over the affair and quite indifferent as to its outcome.

She was different from anything he had previously conceived. He had confidently expected to encounter a rather ordinary young woman of the commonplace frontier type—the kind he had known for years.

She had proven herself nothing like what he had conceived. She had been smiling and self-possessed, mocking him with her good humor and treating the whole affair as a joke. He was the victim, rather than she, evidently, in her estimation; and he had actually felt like a raw boy in her presence, unable to think of a word to say or what to do with either hands or feet.

How immaculately clean she was and ready of speech. He saw again the picture of her, sitting there facing him, her eyes meeting him frankly. Yes, she had made a fool of him, all right, and he turned and strode up the path, oblivious to all else but his gloomy thoughts.

There were numerous people on the main street, although the principal groups were before the dance hall and McCarthy's saloon. Shelby stopped in the glare of the former to consider what he had better do, his mind vibrating between joining the others at the bar or seeking his bed at the hotel. He was still undecided when two men suddenly bumped into him and he recognized Cowan and "Red" Kelly, both drunk enough to be ugly and insulting. The first stared into his face with a sneer.

"H—l, 'Red,' if here ain't the bridegroom," he exclaimed insolently. "Say, where you been all this time?"

Shelby drew back slightly, but held his temper, his brain instantly clearing.

"I don't hold that to be any of your business," he replied coldly.

"Well, by thunder, it is, just the same. You butted into this game without no warrant, an' yer playin' us fer a parcel of fools. Fer one, I don't stand fer it. It was a put-up job. You an' her are in cahoots for that money. She didn't never look at one o' us. Your prettiness! To be surprised was too darn thin. H—l! I bet yer just come over from beln' with her an' laughin' at us—yer d—n skunk!"

Shelby's face hardened and his teeth set grimly.

"Don't go too far, Cowan," he warned sternly. "I got some reputation as a fightin' man myself an' I don't take everything peaceably. Now, listen to me, you drunken brute, and keep a civil tongue in your head. I have seen the girl, but we didn't talk none about marriage and, what's more, I wouldn't touch that money, not a cent of it, even if I was to marry her—she ain't that kind, ner I ain't!"

"Gosh, you must think I'm a sucker, Tom Shelby. What the h—l you got to git married on? I'll bet yer never seed two thousand before in all your life. Tell that to the marines—there ain't nobody goin' to marry her except for the cash."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, she's homely as a hedge fence. 'Red' was just sayin' that if she'd a picked him, he'd have jumped the reservation, money or no money. Yer can't string me!"

"You say she's homely?"

"I sure do, an' as damn mean as she looks, I reckon."

Shelby's face was like flint and his right fist crashed square into Cowan's sneering lips. The fellow went toppling over and before he even knew what had happened the ranchman was upon him, holding him flat to the earth and pommeling with both hands. It was soon over with, Shelby giving his opponent no chance to break away. Interpersing his blows with a frank expression of feeling.

"You meanly bound! Goin' to marry her for money, am I? Maybe you'd like to say that ag'in, d—n you! That's 'bout the size o' your soul, Cowan. Take that, you whelp! You won't be so d—n beautiful yourself when I get through. There now! Perhaps you'll lay quiet awhile!"

He got to his feet and glared about into the ring of interested faces defiantly.

"Any more of yer want to say what he did?" he demanded. "Here, you, Kelly; you laughed when that dirty pup said she was homely as a hedge fence! Come here, you red-headed terrier," and he gripped him by the throat shaking the fellow helplessly back and forth in his mind rage. "I'm goin' ter marry that girl, if she'll have me, an' there ain't nobody goin' to slam the looks o' my wife, either. You get that, you coyote? What do yer think of it now—hey? Spit it out; what do you think of her now?"

Kelly had to spit it out; it was all he could do with those fingers gripping him.

"Let go—d—n it—let go! H—l! She's—she's the handsomest woman I ever saw; you—you let go o' me!"

Shelby flung him to one side in utter disgust, hurling an oath after him as he reeled dizzily into the protection of the crowd. He cast his eyes once in contempt about the circle, seeking some other antagonist and finding none.

"To h—l with all of you!" he declared. "Get out of the way there!"

They fell back to give him safe passage and he strode straight on past the dance hall and turned down the dark path leading back to Calkins' shack. He had but one thought now, one purpose; he had burned his bridges behind him. After what he had said and done only a single course remained. Without a pause or a regret he went straight to the door and rapped. It was no timid touch of the knuckles this time; he was still too angry to either hesitate or doubt. And there was no sign of embarrassment in word or act when the door opened and she stood there looking at him in wonderment.

"I've come back to say another word to you," he announced simply. "I'd like to come in."

"Something has happened?"

"It has; I've just had to lick two pups who got too 'bout you. They said some things an' I said some things. Now I'm aimin' to make good. You said you'd marry me awhile ago; does that hold?"

She was leaning against the table, staring at him; her face seemed to go white and her hands toyed nervously with a knife she had picked up.

"You—you had trouble with two men, over me?" she asked, her voice trembling slightly. "What men?"

"'Red' Kelly and a gazabo named Cowan; they was both here."

"Oh; they were angry at you for that?"

"Sure; not because you didn't take no notice of them; then they got drunk an' undertook to ride me; said it was a put-up job between us ter get away with that money."

"What money?"

"The twenty-five hundred you was goin' to get. The preacher told you about that, didn't he?"

She shook her head, evidently bewildered.

"Where was I going to get all that money?"

"Why, McCarthy was puttin' it up; he and some other bucks, so as to give you a start after you was married."

She drew a deep breath, looking straight into his eyes.

"You mean those men came here for that?" indignantly. "They were willing to marry me so as to get that money? Good God! I was to be sold!"

He grinned good-humoredly.

"I reckon there may be some things you'll discover about me, fer the matter o' that. Maybe it's 'bout as fair one way as another."

"Yes, I suppose it is. You really mean what you have said?"

"I sure do."

"When? How soon?"

"Tomorrow morning. I aim to get out o' here as soon as I can. How is it—will you take a chance?"

His voice was strangely earnest, and his eyes, as she ventured to glance up, were honest and kindly.

"Yes," she said slowly, "I will, Tom Shelby."

He looked at her for a moment, then he turned and strode out of the door, leaving her staring after him.

what was it those two men said, the men you had the trouble with?"

"Well, you see, Cowan was drunk an' naturally all worked up. He's a sort o' good-lookin' chap an' thinks he cuts quite a swale with women."

"But what did he say?"

"Well, he run into me up there on the street just now, him and 'Red' Kelly, an' said I was after you for that money. I told him he was a liar an' then he sorter let loose a remark I didn't take kindly."

"What remark?"

"He—he sorter insinuated that I'd never marry you for any other reason."

"He did—why?"

"Well," he blurted out desperately, finding no possible way of escape, "he sorter said you wasn't awful good lookin' an' then I patted him. That's all."

Her lips parted, her eyes opening wide in astonished amusement.

"That I wasn't good looking!" she laughed. "And you actually hit him for that?"

"I sure did; the other pup laughed an' he got his dose about the same time. I didn't hurt 'Red' Kelly none;



"Will You Take a Chance?"

just shook a little sense into him, but I reckon it'll be a week before Cowan gets out much. Then I come down here."

"To ask me to marry you?"

"That's the idea. I told 'em I'd do it. 'Tain't likely you'll feel now the same way you did at first, but if you do, then I'm in the game. I ain't got much; I told you all 'bout that, but if you're a mind to rough it up on the Cottonwood, I'm here to go shares with you."

The girl gazed at him in silence, her breath coming quickly, almost in sobs, a strange, misty light in her eyes.

"You—actually want me to marry you?"

"Sure; that's what I come back for."

"Are—are you after that twenty-five hundred dollars?"

"H—l, no!" emphatically. "I forgot to tell you 'bout that. I won't take a d—n cent of it. That's what I told them hounds an' I'll tell McCarthy the same thing. I ain't that kind to marry no girl cause she's got coin. The five hundred is yours, fair an' square, but there don't none o' that two thousand go into my jeans. That's got to be part o' the bargain."

"But you don't know anything about me?"

"I reckon there may be some things you'll discover about me, fer the matter o' that. Maybe it's 'bout as fair one way as another."

"Yes, I suppose it is. You really mean what you have said?"

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IMPROVED UNIFORM INTERNATIONAL

# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

(By REV. P. B. FITZWATER, D. D., Teacher of English Bible in the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.)

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## LESSON FOR DECEMBER 19

### THE BIRTH OF JESUS.

LESSON TEXT—Luke 2:1-20.

GOLDEN TEXT—For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.—Luke 2:11.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL—Matt. 1 and 2.

PRIMARY TOPIC—The Gift of the Baby Jesus.

JUNIOR TOPIC—The Shepherd and the Angels.

INTERMEDIATE AND SENIOR TOPIC—A Savior Born.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULT TOPIC—The Significance of the Incarnation.

#### I. The Birth of the Savior (vv. 1-7).

1. The time of (vv. 1, 2). It was at a time when the Jews were coming under control of the Roman power. In the providence of God, the birth of Christ occurred at a time when all the systems of religion and morality were tottering upon their foundations. It was at a time, indeed, when a new force was needed to be brought into the world. Furthermore, it occurred at a time which was the most suitable for the introduction of the gospel. The whole world being under one rule made it possible for ministers to move from city to city and from country to country without molestation.

2. The place of (vv. 3, 4). It took place at Bethlehem as the prophet had foretold some seven hundred years before (Micah 5:2). A little while previous to this it seemed very unlikely that the words of Micah would come true. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was in Galilee, miles away from Jerusalem. God moved the emperor to enforce the decree of taxation just at the time to cause Mary to be at Bethlehem at the proper time. Little did the emperor realize that he was an instrument in the hands of God to carry this out.

3. The circumstances of His birth (v. 7). The surroundings were the most humble sort. The Almighty Creator condescended to take upon Himself humanity—to be born in a manger, becoming the poorest of the poor, that none might be hindered from coming to Him.

#### II. The Birth of the Savior Announced (vv. 8-14).

1. To whom (v. 8). His birth was announced to the shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks by night. The glorious gospel message was first sounded forth to them. This shows that poverty is no barrier to the reception of the blessed gospel. God does not reveal Himself mainly to the princes and great men of the earth, but oftentimes these things are concealed from such, and disclosed to the poor. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him?" (James 2:5). Their being busy with the duties of this life did not prevent them from being favored with this glorious message from God. Moses, Gideon, Amos and Elisha were called by the Lord from the busy activities of life. The Lord never calls the idle; he has no use for the lazy man.

2. By whom (v. 9). The first gospel sermon was preached by the angel of the Lord. This exalted being has part in the announcement of the plan of salvation. No doubt angels earnestly sympathize with poor, fallen, sin-cursed men.

3. The nature of the message (vv. 10-14). It was good tidings of great joy. Surely this was a gladsome message. It was good tidings because the darkness of heathendom which had for so long covered the earth was beginning to vanish. The casting out of Satan, the prince of the world, was about to take place. Liberty was now soon to be proclaimed to those who were in bondage. The way of salvation was now about to be opened to all. No longer was the knowledge of God to be confined to the Jews, but offered to the whole world. So glorious was this good news that a multitude of the heavenly hosts appeared, joining in the song of praise.

#### III. The Prompt Investigation of the Shepherds (vv. 15, 16).

They did not stop to argue or question, though no doubt these things seemed passing strange to them, but they hastily went to Bethlehem where they found everything just as represented. They had the privilege of first gazing upon the world's Savior, the Lord of glory. They returned with gratitude in their hearts, praising God for all these wonderful things which He had revealed to them.

#### IV. The Shepherds Witnessing (vv. 17-20).

They could not remain silent. They were impelled to tell the good news. All who have truly heard the good tidings of salvation through Jesus Christ must tell it to others. These shepherds went back to their work praising God.

#### Christian Faith.

Christian faith is a grand cathedral, with divinely pictured windows—standing without you can see no glory, nor can imagine any, but standing within every ray of light reveals a harmony of unspeakable splendors.

#### Praying.

No one will pray for the perfect heart earnestly, perseveringly, believingly, until he accepts God's Word fully that it is a positive command and an immediate duty to be perfect.—Rev. Andrew Murray.

#### A desolate home-coming.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

#### Grateful Carlo.

In Kentucky three men were shot to death in a fight about a dog which one of them had killed. Some men never live long enough to learn that when a dog becomes personal property the tie of pride and affection makes the animal a serious proposition to be trifled with, and that many men were born to love dogs. This reminds us that in the happy days of boyhood our most faithful and devoted friend was an old pointer named Carlo. Never did we eat a lunch out of doors without sharing it with the devoted Carlo, and that noble and loving dog invariably manifested his gratitude by shaking himself vigorously and letting us in a reciprocal way have about 50 per cent of his most active fleas.—New Orleans States.

#### Easy Part.

Chorus Girl—What am I to do in the new revue?

Stage Director—Nothing! You'll have nothing to sing, nothing to say, and almost nothing to wear.

#### The Fellow Went Toppling Over.

Is that actually true? Nobody ever hinted such a shameful thing to me."

"Well, I reckon they didn't mean no harm by that," he tried to explain.

"You don't just see it right. They figured that Old Calkins had died an' left you without a cent, sorter helpless out here, an' that the town owed you a decent chance ter git married an' settle down. That's what the money was given for."

"But those fellows all knew it. That was what made them agree?"

"I reckon maybe it was—mostly, at least."

She twisted her hands together, a hot, red flush coming into each cheek.