

COMRADES OF PERIL

By RANDALL PARRISH

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A PINK RIBBON.

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. She agrees to pick out 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. Shelby runs into two of the rejected suitors, and in a fight wounds them both. Angered at their remarks, he returns to the girl, determined to marry her, if she will have him. After his explanation she agrees to marry him. The wedding takes place and the couple set out for Shelby's ranch. With them is "Kid" Macklin, whom Shelby has hired as a helper. On the way the girl tells her husband her name is Olga Carlyn, and also tells him something of her peculiar circumstances of her life.

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

She made herself say these words calmly, looking him frankly in the face, yet as he went outside, closing the door behind him, seemingly quite satisfied with her readiness to abide the situation, she bowed her head on the dirty table, and her body shook with sobs which could no longer be restrained. So this was what she had come to—this! She had kept herself up all day with dreams; and this was the realization. She lifted her face and looked about, the tears still misting in her eyes; then she suddenly laughed, and stood up with cheeks glowing, and lips firmly set. It was a horrible mess, to be sure, yet the place itself was not so bad; she had lived in far worse; and once put in some degree of order and cleanliness it might prove fairly comfortable indeed. She surveyed the scene, as revealed by the yellow flame of the lamp, her heart beating faster. This was to be her home. She had come here as mistress. It mattered not so much what it was now, but what she should make of it. Her slender form straightened with new determination. There was yet another door, and she looked out through it into a small lean-to, the lamp held high over her head. This was evidently the kitchen, containing, as it did, a small cook-stove, a sort of roughly built closet, and sink, the latter stacked with unwashed dishes. An armful of split wood lay on the floor, and a half slab of bacon hung to a nail.

Olga gave vent to another laugh, but this time there was no hint of hysteria in it. She had found herself. Dressed still in the long duster, she set down the lamp on a small table, and dropping upon her knees, swiftly kindled a fire in the stove. As the wood began to crackle cheerfully, she searched the closet for materials, rejoicing to discover some dishes yet unused, together with remnants of food sufficient for her purpose. There was sugar, condensed milk, a few knarly potatoes, a small sack of flour, and a half can of coffee. She dumped these out on the table, and began humming a tune, as she added the slab of bacon to these treasures. She was too busy by now to give another thought to the dirt and disorder about her.

Shelby was kept outside considerably longer than he had anticipated. The buckskin, in spite of a sixty-mile journey, retained viciousness enough to kick the lantern out of the Kid's hand and smash it into smithereens, thus compelling the two to work in darkness. Macklin, unacquainted with the surroundings, was of little use, and most of the work had to be done by Shelby in person. When it was all over with both men were sweating profusely, tired and angry, the Kid cursing everything from the creation of the world. Shelby, suddenly remembering the girl left alone in the house all this time, lost the last grip on his temper.

"Shut up!" he barked savagely. "I've had just enough of that. What did you expect anyway—a reception committee and a banquet? Come on in, now; we'll hustle up some grub. Here, you might as well tote a few of those things along with you."

Both men loaded up with packages from the buckboard, the Kid still swearing under his breath, but Shelby grimly silent. He was remembering what that interior looked like, and wondering how she was taking such a home-coming. He could not but contrast the dirt and disorder to which he had brought her with the immaculate cleanliness of the shack where she lived in Ponca. The memory made him half afraid to go in and face her eyes. He lifted the latch hesitatingly, the bundles on the other arm piled to his chin, and stepped across the threshold. Then he stopped suddenly, with his mouth wide open, the Kid pushing in behind him, even more heavily laden. She stood in the middle of the floor, with cheeks flushed, and eyes smiling.

"You boys can pile that stuff on the table," she announced brightly. "I've scraped those papers up in one corner,

so there's plenty of room. Never mind about bringing the rest in now; supper's ready."

Shelby put his bundles down without a word, his eyes quick to perceive the chairs cleared of their debris, the floor swept, the ashes back in the stove. He could hardly comprehend the miracle.

She led the way gayly, leaving her broom in a corner, and carrying the lamp. The lean-to kitchen had been transfigured, and actually presented a homelike appearance. The dirty dishes were shoved out of sight, the floor swept, the fire in the stove blazed cheerfully, and the table was covered with the essentials of a truly appetizing meal. She set the lamp down in the center, fully rewarded by the expression on the faces of the two.

"You boys wash up there in the sink," she commanded; "use that piece of sacking for a towel; it was all I could find. Then we'll get busy."

If Shelby was to live a thousand years he would never lose memory of that meal. The grateful warmth of the stove, the neatness of the table, the good fellowship with which she served, all coupled with the wonderful surprise, left upon him an impression never afterward to be blotted out. She talked about what she was going to do; about what she had purchased in town; about anything which came into her mind that she could manufacture conversation from. He told of their adventures outside, and made her laugh heartily over the struggle of getting the Kid's pony safely into the corral. The Kid himself said little, eating heartily but in silence, only occasionally lifting his eyes from the plate. This pretense at modesty did not seem like the Kid, and Shelby found himself observing the fellow with some wonderment. His looks were not at all prepossessing, now that he saw him more plainly revealed in the lamplight, and he was some years older than he had supposed. The fellow had a hard, dissipated face, and his lips were thin, with a distinctly cruel twist to them. Shelby had intended putting the man in that bunk in the front room, but now decided the stable was good enough for his use.

As soon as they were through he hunted up a second lantern.

"Take the rest of that stuff off the buckboard, Macklin," he said shortly, "and stow it away in the cellar-cave just to the right of the house. I'll be out presently, and we'll fix things up for the night."

As the fellow disappeared Shelby's eyes encountered those of his wife across the table.

"And what are you going to do?" she asked directly.

"Why, help you with these things, and then clean the shack up a bit; it is in worse shape than I realized."

She shook her head positively.

"Oh, no, mister man. This is my house, and I am going to take care of it—all alone. I have seen your style of housekeeping, and I prefer my own. You go on, and finish the work outside; when you come back it will look better in here."

Shelby went out, Macklin was seemingly busy at the task assigned him, the lantern hung to the broken branch of a convenient tree, lighting his path. Without even speaking, the ranchman passed by down the steep path leading toward the stream below. He was some time in completing his task, and when he finally emerged once more from the stable, the only gleam of light he could perceive above came through the log chinks of the cabin. He wondered what had become of Macklin, yet gave the matter no special thought as he toiled slowly up the path, his mind more deeply interested in the reception awaiting him within.

He passed close enough to the buckboard to assure himself that his orders had been executed, and, believing the fellow had probably re-entered the house for some purpose, passed on directly to the front door. No one was in the main room, nor in the chamber behind. They remained exactly as he had left them. The silence startled him, and he advanced swiftly toward the kitchen, where the light still burned, visible through the open door. It also was deserted, the dirty dishes yet setting on the table untouched. Good God! what was the meaning of this? What had occurred? The outer door stood ajar, and he sprang anxiously forward, peering in to the blackness. There was no sound, no movement; the blaze of light had blinded him, and he stepped outside so as to see better. He had taken but one step beyond the protection of the partially open door, when something struck him, and he went staggering down, as though his skull was crushed by the savage blow.

With a supreme effort he drew himself into a sitting posture, and stared rather blankly about at the objects revealed in the gray dawn.

The sight as instantly restored his memory; the cabin door stood wide open, just as he left it, and within the lamp still burned on the table, in the midst of the dirtied dishes. She had not returned, then; he had been lying there alone all night. The realization maddened him to effort, and, by grasping at the door for support he attained his feet, and stood there for a moment, swaying dizzily. Exactly what had occurred he could not determine; the whole affair seemed more like a dream than a reality. He had left her there apparently cheerful and happy, the laughter in her eyes a memory to linger with him; he had not been absent to exceed thirty minutes, and not so far away but what any cry would surely have reached his ears. Yet when he returned she had vanished utterly, leaving everything untouched. Whatever occurred must have been brought to pass almost immediately upon his departure, before she even began the work of cleaning up. But how could such a thing happen without any alarm? Why, the Kid was working within ten feet of the house, and must have heard the slightest sound of a struggle. The Kid! where was he anyway? What had become of the fellow all this time? He was nowhere in sight when Shelby retraced his steps up the path. Could it be that the Kid was the one guilty of this deed? If so, what was his object? Not robbery, surely, for the place had not been ransacked, or anything removed from his pockets. Yet surely this was not Indian work; it bore no resemblance to a savage raid. The questions were unanswerable; no mental effort gave him any clue, yet his strength was rapidly coming back, and with it a grim, determined anger, which urged him into action.

First he went through the deserted house, room by room, seeking for the slightest sign of guidance, but finding none. Everything remained precisely as he remembered seeing it the night before. He blew out the light, took down one of the rifles from the wall, loaded it, and then, feeling his old strength returning, cautiously stepped out through the front door. The buckboard stood there, gaunt and stripped, except for the box between the rear wheels. He peered into this, and found it still half filled with bundles.

With this once settled in his mind, and his plan of pursuit outlined, Shelby threw off his depression, and became cool and resolute. First he searched over every foot of ground within a quarter of a mile of the house, seeking to discover just how Macklin had operated, and whether or not, he was alone. The result was only partially successful. The hard packed earth revealed little of value. Down below the cabin on the sloping side of the hill, he found the mark of a high-heeled boot such as the Kid wore, and a foot or so beyond, the plain impression of a moccasin. A hundred yards to the north the impressions were again visible, making it clear to his mind that the fugitives were then making for the lower ford. The girl was evidently being carried, and two men must have been engaged on the job, one of them possibly an Indian. He passed straight on to the ford to verify this theory, and here the mud exhibited clearly the movements of both the fellows, while close at the water's edge he came upon a narrow pink ribbon, which the girl had evidently hurriedly dropped in guidance.

It was clearly manifest now the direction in which they had disappeared, but Shelby remained unsatisfied. He could not believe that they would attempt to escape thus on foot with their burden. If Macklin had one assistant, it was highly probable there would be others also engaged in the affair. The opposite shore was deserted, and he crossed over, wading to his thighs in the swift water, with rifle flung forward, and eyes intently searching the further bank. The trail was plain at this point; he could easily trace the steps of both men passing up a narrow gully into the first line of bluffs, and there, in a little open glade, he found where horses had been tethered and tramped the turf. They had evidently been held for some time; had entered from the north down a slight coulee, and departed westward along a shelving bank. There were five animals, all mounted, to judge from the deep impress of hoofs, and he followed their passage as far as the crest of the bluff. They were well beyond view, of course by this time, across that rough, broken country, but he satisfied himself that they were heading straight for the Bad Lands.

Shelby knew now something of what he must contend with. The act of abduction, and attempted murder, was no sudden temptation assailing Macklin, but undoubtedly part of a well-organized plot. Whatever their object, five men were concerned in the outrage, their intention probably the making of the girl a prisoner. In Shelby's judgment she was probably in no immediate danger. If the fellows had intended taking her life, she would never have thus been spared and carried away, apparently uninjured. Their purpose evidently re-

quired that she be kept alive, but helpless in their hands.

He was cool now; grimly determined, but intent on preparing himself for a long and dangerous quest. He was to be one man pitted against five, and every instinct of long experience on the plains, warned him against being rash. He recrossed the stream, built a fire in the stove, and, after washing the blood from his head, ate heartily; then packed a leather haversack with food, and was ready. He took this time in which to plan out his course, and then went forward unhesitatingly, filling his pockets with rifle cartridges, and flinging the haversack over his shoulder, before starting for the corral. He decided upon the buckskin as being the better animal for his purpose—a vicious brute, harder to handle, but tireless, and able to exist where either of the others would starve. It required a good half-hour to rope and saddle the beast, but he had plenty of time. Once on the trail he could easily outstride the party he was following, and he had no desire to approach them closely until well after dark.

Once firm in the saddle, however, rifle under the flap, with haversack strapped on the opposite side, and blanket-roll behind, he gave the plunging, bucking demon between his legs

little mercy. The man was in no mood for play of any sort, and set himself to conquering the brute in the quickest possible way. It was a rough, hard struggle, but the human won, and, under the merciless sting of the quirt, the maddened but subdued animal, nostrils distended, and eyes vicious as ever, yielded final obedience to the rein.

CHAPTER VII. An Hour Behind. There was no marked trail, but the instincts of a plainsman kept Shelby's course directly to the northwest. The bronco, now thoroughly tamed, and obedient to the slightest pressure of the rider's leg, kept a tireless gait, picking out unaided the easiest paths. From the general direction of the trail left by the raiders he had decided they were heading for a certain portion of the Bad Lands, and, if this theory was correct, he ought easily to outcross their tracks again late in the afternoon. Sitting upright in the deep saddle, with the straight back of the cavalryman, his eyes watchful, his lips grimly set, he rode steadily on hour after hour, thinking, planning, beginning now to realize the depth of his own interest in this effort at rescue. He had hardly comprehended before that this girl was really his wife—that her life had become his to guard. The affair between them had occurred so swiftly, so unexpectedly, he had not before awakened to its true meaning. But now it became very real, and he was positively surprised to learn the strength of hold she already had upon him.

His mind would linger over a thousand little womanly peculiarities which somehow had unconsciously impressed him—the soft glow in her eyes, the wistfulness of her smile; the slight dimple in her chin; the pulsing of blood in her cheeks; the round firmness of the white neck; the peculiar gracefulness of her walk; the nameless attractiveness of pose, all came back now in odd fascination. He was not aware before that he had even noticed these things, but now their memory dominated him, caused his pulses to quicken. He had known little of women since boyhood, and never before had he encountered on terms of intimacy this type of a woman. She had been a revelation to him even in his blindness, but now, under the spell of memory, she had suddenly changed to an inspiration. His wife, Olga Carlyn, his wife! He said the words over, as though he recalled a dream, the sound of the words causing the startled buckskin to cast back an evil eye at his unconscious rider.

He followed their passage.

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What's the idea of stealin' the girl?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Before asking a favor of a man a wise woman gives him a good dinner—with a little flattery on the side.

IMPROVED UNIFORM INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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

(60, 1920, Western Newspaper Union.)

LESSON FOR JANUARY 2

THE CHILD AND THE KINGDOM.

LESSON TEXT—Matt. 18:1-14. GOLDEN TEXT—Whoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same shall be greatest in the kingdom of heaven.—Matt. 18:4. REFERENCE MATERIAL—Mark 9:33; Luke 9:26-48; 17:1-2. PRIMARY TOPIC—God's Care for Little Children. JUNIOR TOPIC—God's Care for Us. INTERMEDIATE AND SENIOR TOPIC—Responsibility for the Younger and Weaker. YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULT TOPIC—Our Responsibility for Childhood.

I. The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven (vv. 1-4).

1. The disciples' question (v. 1). The promise given to Peter in connection with the announcement of his purpose to build the church, and the paying of tribute with the money in the fish's mouth, provoked jealousy on the part of the other disciples. The transfiguration scene revealed the divine person and the program of the kingdom. Seeing that the kingdom was to come to realization, despite the tragedy of the cross, the disciples thought it best to have settled the place of rank in the kingdom. Their behavior betrayed their sad state of heart. Instead of entering into sympathy with Jesus in the dark hour of his passion, they were superficially concerned with the dignities to be conferred upon themselves.

2. Jesus' answer (vv. 2-4). He taught them concretely by placing a little child in their midst. (1) Condition of entrance into kingdom (v. 3). He showed them that the great question which concerned them is as to whether they are really in the kingdom. Their behavior revealed the fact that they needed conversion before they could enter into the kingdom. Before they could even see, much less enter into the kingdom, they must be born from above (John 3:3, 5). Entrance into the kingdom is infinitely more important than rank therein. (2) Whosoever possesses childlike humility is the greatest (v. 4). The child is dependent, lowly, and modest. Those who have been born again—converted, have these characteristics. The principle which determines rank in the kingdom is lowliness of heart. In the kingdom we rise by sinking. The way is down. The more one realizes his own unworthiness, the more worthy he is of the divine favor and trust.

II. The Lord's Identification With His Believing Ones (vv. 5-9).

1. Receiving the believer in Christ's name is receiving Christ (v. 5). Through conversion we become God's children, and so completely is our life interwoven with His that He regards treatment of us as treatment of Himself. Those who welcome into fellowship the lowly believer welcome Christ. If this were fully realized it would sanctify our relationship with believers in Christ. Reception of believers includes all forms of sympathy and aid. To do this in Christ's name is to open our hearts to receive Him.

2. The awful peril of causing a believer to stumble (vv. 6-9). To stumble means to give occasion for a moral fall. The particular reference was to the carnality and selfishness which was expressing itself in their contention for pre-eminence. Such spirit and behavior would stifle the tender life of a babe in Christ. Their behavior was not only self-injury, but a stumbling block to others. Every Christian should solemnly inquire as to whether his life would help or hinder his fellow-believers. Am I helping someone to a higher level, or am I pulling him down to a lower? To so sin against Christ's own is to meet a sure and awful fate. His doom will be worse than drowning in the sea with a millstone around his neck; it will be eternal fire (v. 8).

III. Believers Are Especially Cared For by the Heavenly Father (vv. 10-14).

1. They are under angelic guardianship (v. 10). So precious is the believer in God's sight that angelic messengers have access to the very throne of God, even beholding his face. So high is the honor bestowed upon believers that the highest angels are sent to guard them.

2. The Son came especially to save such from their lost condition (vv. 11-14). The Heavenly Father does not will that any one of these should perish. They are the objects of the Father's seeking love. The salvation of the humble believer has been secured by the incarnation and the sacrifice of the Good Shepherd. Since God sets such value upon even the lowest believer, we should be most careful in our manner of life before them and in our treatment of them.

Worship and Culture.

Worship and culture, of necessity, go hand in hand. There can be no such thing as true culture apart from the religion of our dear Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The fundamental principles of true culture are enshrined forever in the Sermon on the Mount, the ten beatitudes of the Lord Jesus. Society, apart from the Fountainhead of Grace, can display to the world nothing better than a refinement which is, at best, a veneer.—Rev. Henry Lowndes Drew.