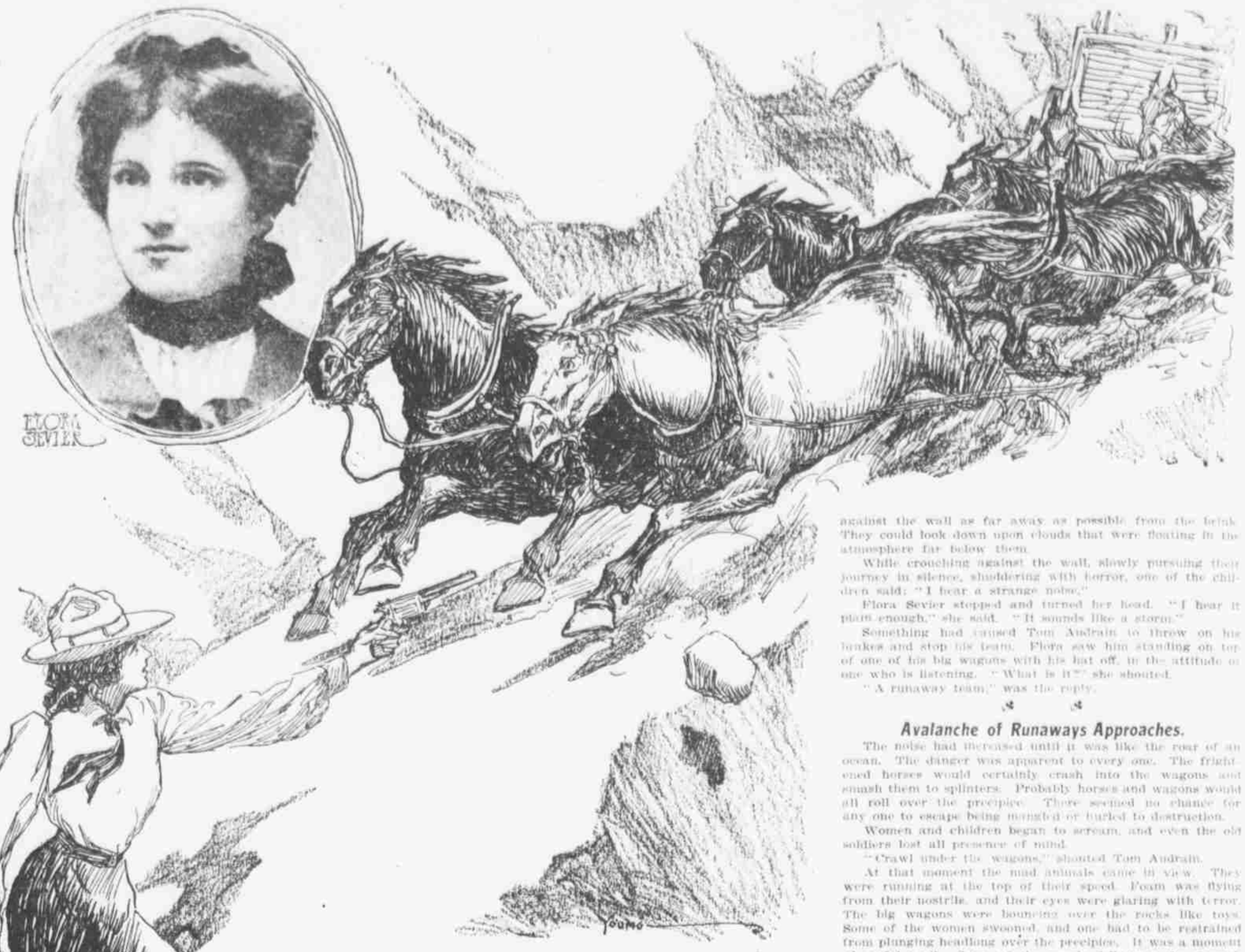
HEROINE of SIERRAS
Saves Scores of Lives



FLORA SEVIER'S daring feat occurred where scenery and environment were well calculated to inspire a being willing to risk her own life in an effort to save others from being crushed and mangled beneath the hoofs of twenty frightened horses and a half a dozen loaded freight wagons.

An incident recently connected with a meeting of the old pioneers of Nevada caused the name of the heroine of the Sierra Nevadas to be recalled, and one who was familiar with the story presented his brother pioneers with a picture of the brave girl. Nearly all the old Virginia City miners know Flora Sevier well, and few of them can look upon the pretty face that will hereafter adorn the walls of their hall without recalling pleasant memories.

Perilous Trail Over Sierras.

The old Van Horn trail, barely wide enough to be called a "grade," was the worst in the world. It was a shortcut from California to the great silver mines at Virginia City, Nev. Prospectors and freighters who dared to venture along the dizzy heights saved several days in making the journey. The old route followed the summit of the snow covered Sierras to the old emigrant trail at the head of Woodford's cañon. After descending this ragged gorge the traveler had to pull through the hot sands of Carson valley along the shores of the river until the new mines were reached.

Van Horn conceived the idea of making a practicable route of his cutoff for freight trains and the overland stage line. An engineer of high reputation laughed at the old Mormon. "It would take a barrel of gold and an army of laborers," said he.

Old Van Horn soon had both of these factors at his command. Mount Davidson was covered with tents, and over every trail constant streams of emigrants and argonauts were pouring into the valley. He cut valley grass and sold it, and he hired every tramp that came in sight. Men with picks in their hands were suspended from the summits of the mountains to dig out footholds and make narrow trails along the sides of them. Other laborers lay flat against the slopes, digging away rocks and dropping them to the bottom of the gorge, 4,000 feet below.

Gaze Into Gorge from Dizzy Heights.

One could stand and look down upon the backs of eagles and the tops of tall pines into a dark, forbidding abyss, the bottom of which had never been pressed by the foot of man. There were long reaches of the grade winding along the sides of stupendous slopes that were barely wide enough for a single team. There were "passing places," but the freighters were not always cautious or sober, and sometimes big freight trains met where it was impossible for them to pass. Such misfortunes were frequently followed by bloody tragedies, and often one or both of the trains were wrecked.

Passengers who were so unlucky as to get seats on the cañon side of the big Concord coach suffered terrors unspeakable in following the dangerous grade. A glance from the window of the coach as it was passing along the edge of an appalling precipice would send a thrill of horror through the frame of the strongest and bravest. One looked from the coach window down, down through space into a gloomy vault, apparently miles away. At short intervals the cañon was narrow and one could hear torrents of water roaring through the dark gorge. At other points the coach appeared to hang against the side of the mountain and actually lean over.

Harvest of Death and Gold.

Though several frightful accidents happened soon after the famous grade was thrown open, freighters and prospectors, eager to reach the new mines, struggled with each other in trying to crowd ahead on the dangerous route. No one thought of abandoning the short trail.

Old Van Horn was harvesting a fortune in tolls. You had to pay well for risking your life on the Van Horn grade.

While valuable mules and big freight wagons loaded with costly merchandise were crashing in a tangled mass from the narrow, hurriedly constructed grade into the bottomless abyss far beyond human reach, old Van was carelessly tossing bottles of gold dust and sacks of golden nuggets into a flour barrel behind his cabin door. The people were money mad. All were eager to gather great fortunes while the precious mineral was lying thick in the Nevada mountains. Men and women were willing to risk their lives and struggle with the most appalling perils on the road that led to the newly discovered bonanza.

Flora Starts to Find Brother.

Flora Sevier, an orphan girl, who lived at Placerville, Cal., wanted to join an only brother who was engaged in mining in the famous Comstock district in Nevada. The Van Horn grade was finished about the time that this young woman was making preparations for her journey.

Jack Sevier had crossed the Sierras, following the old Van Horn trail, and it made him shudder to think of the yawning cañons, the stupendous precipices, and the dizzy summits. He wrote his sister to avoid the dangerous route and to follow the old emigrant road through Woodford's cañon. The ambitious young man believed that he was about to harvest a magnificent fortune, and he wanted his sister to live and help him to enjoy it. He had been among the first to reach the new mines, and, falling in with an old comrade named Frank Gaylord, they located several good claims.

Sevier and Gaylord became partners, and, while they were reaping a harvest of gold, Jack suddenly concluded that but one thing was necessary to complete his happiness. He had heard that his sister was not well contented, and he wrote her to come and keep house for him "and cook flapjacks for me and my partner," he added, "at $20 a flap."

Quite naturally the bright young girl was eager to get under the protection of her brother and live in a land where gold was so abundant. "Yes, I am going," she said to a friend, "where dimes do not circulate and quarters are the smallest coins ever seen." All of this was pleasing to Frank Gaylord, for he had read scraps of Flora's letter, and he had looked upon her picture, and he began to regard her as altogether the smartest and the prettiest young girl in the whole world.

Finds Herself on Forbidden Trail.

Flora Sevier set out to join her brother in company with two families of good people and several brave men. Capt. Slack had fought the Modocs and the Piutes, and "was covered with scars and glory." Col. McLane had led his regiment in action on many bloody fields, and deserved all the credit that had been bestowed upon him for gallantry under fire. He had two sons who were both graduates of a military school, and they were as brave as lions.

The families traveled in two wagons, crowded with women, boys, and girls.

At Strawberry Springs Flora got a delayed letter from her brother, warning her not to venture upon the Van Horn grade. Startled, she looked hurriedly around, and then asked her companions about it. The answer was: "The mules are on the Van Horn grade now." The frightened young girl had read blood curdling stories of the appalling disasters that had occurred along this terrible mountain route, but it was now too late to make a change. Strawberry lake was on the summit of the Sierra Nevadas—far above the clouds—in a region of perpetual snow. The temptation to risk the dangerous grade and be transported to the warm valley in a few short hours was irresistible.

Famous Freighter Promises Aid.

Tom Audrain, a famous freighter, stopped at the spring to get a drink of water. Flora knew the man well. He was fearless, and true to his friends. Remembering the tragedies and disasters that had occurred on the grade, she felt glad to be in company with such a man. While Audrain was talking to Miss Sevier and telling her of her brother's "strike" on the Comstock, two other freighters came to the spring. They commanded teams of ten horses, each drawing a train of three big wagons. Both of the freighters drank of the cold waters as if their throats were parched. One fell upon the ground and buried his face in the cool grass, the other washed his hot face, and then his forehead, slowly descended upon his knees, and he began to snore. Audrain looked at them and shook his head. "They have been making a fight of it at the station," he said. Danger was lurking there, but no one scented it.

Audrain popped his whip, and, while his long train of sixteen mules were straightening the chains, he turned to Flora and said: "Follow my train of wagons, and if you fall I will catch you."

The smile that accompanied her words of thanks was forced, but the presentiment of disaster in her mind and the shudder that possessed her body was real.

Trapped on Narrow Ledge.

About a mile from Strawberry lake the grade passes along the brink of a perpendicular precipice at an appalling distance from the bottom of the gloomy gorge. Here the women and children, sickened by looking from the dizzy heights, begged to get out of the wagons. Trembling with terror when they stood upon the narrow trail, they crowded against the wall as far away as possible from the brink. They could look down upon clouds that were floating in the atmosphere far below them.

While crouching against the wall, slowly pursuing their journey in silence, shuddering with horror, one of the children said: "I hear a strange noise."

Flora Sevier stopped and turned her head. "I hear it plain enough," she said. "It sounds like a storm."

Something had caused Tom Audrain to throw on his brakes and stop his team. Flora saw him standing on top of one of his big wagons with his hat off, in the attitude of one who is listening. "What is it?" she shouted.

"A runaway team," was the reply.

Avalanche of Runaways Approaches.

The noise had increased until it was like the roar of an ocean. The danger was apparent to every one. The frightened horses would certainly crash into the wagons and smash them to splinters. Probably horses and wagons would all roll over the precipice. There seemed no chance for any one to escape being mangled or hurled to destruction.

Women and children began to scream, and even the old soldiers lost all presence of mind.

"Crawl under the wagons," shouted Tom Audrain.

At that moment the mad animals came in view. They were running at the top of their speed. Foam was flying from their nostrils, and their eyes were glaring with terror. The big wagons were bouncing over the rocks like toys. Some of the women swooned, and one had to be restrained from plunging headlong over the precipice. It was a moment of awful peril. Some of the people fell upon the ground, praying, and others crawled under the wagons.

Twenty great draft horses, mad with terror, and six big freight wagons were only a few yards away, and just ready to fall upon the shrieking women and a group of men who were wringing their hands in helpless cowardice.

Flora Saves Score of Lives.

Flora Sevier had been thinking hard, and, at the last moment, a happy inspiration possessed her. She sprang into one of the hacks, and, seizing a revolver, she threw herself upon the grade and ran straight toward the approaching avalanche of horses and wagons. Realizing that success depended upon a cool head and steady nerves, she did not attempt to fire until she could almost touch the plunging leader with the muzzle of her weapon. Her friends thought that she was purposely courting death. She was almost under the forefeet of the mad leader when a blaze of flame poured from her revolver and he fell to his knees. Of heroic mold, she ran to extreme peril in order to make sure work. Another shot brought the other horse to his side, and the animals behind began to pile up on the pair that was floundering in a death struggle upon the narrow grade. Suddenly one of the struggling animals rolled over the brink of the precipice, where it hung for a moment suspended by the gear chains.

Then followed one of the most appalling scenes ever witnessed by human beings. The poor mad brutes, neighing, bellowing, and groaning like dying men and women, rolled in pairs into the gloomy abyss, dragging the long strings of big freight wagons after them. Both teams, twenty horses and six wagons, disappeared in a few seconds.

Wins Applause and a Husband.

When Flora reached Virginia City she discovered that the newspapers had announced her coming while telling the story of her strange adventure, and she found that the miners in the camps regarded her as a heroine. "Why, it was nothing," she said. "Anybody could have done it." "But 'anybody' didn't think of it," said Mr. Gaylord, "and you alone of all the crowd had the nerve to do it."

Flora became the cook, assistant, and business adviser of the Gaylord-Sevier partnership. Soon she proved that her business judgment equaled that shown on the Van Horn grade. Gaylord, falling in love with her beauty, wisdom, and courage, succeeded in getting her consent to a life partnership with him.

TOYS OF A GENERATION AGO AND THOSE OF TODAY

TOY making seems to have reached about as near the zenith of its possibilities as have any of the practical arts. In fact, it appears that in a large measure the inventor of the modern mechanical toy has outdone the original purpose of the toy to amuse and keep quiet the small progeny of the family. This modern intricate mechanism in almost every way tends to discourage the imagination of the child until when "the wheels have gone round" half a dozen times the elaborate toy becomes a commonplace bore. It is one of the expressions of childishness which prompts the small girl to paroxysms of tears because her old doll of soiled rags was destroyed on the eve of her acceptance of the elaborate creature which in miniature cries, talks, and closes its eyes in sleep.

Today, as much as ever in the evolution of the toy, the thing desired is to hold childish attentions largely through the stimulation of the imagination. A real locomotive on a steel track, carrying its fireman and engineer by steam exertion, does not leave much to the imagination of the small boy. The greatest success in that line was a locomotive with a pine box cab, a salt barrel boiler, a stovepipe smokestack, all running on abandoned handcar wheels upon a plank track, going down the incline by force of gravity and returning under the pressure of several pairs of boyish hands.

Aboriginal Toy Probably Rattled.

The first toy of the aboriginal baby doubtless was a something that caught the infant eye and which rattled acceptably to the infant ear. After 5,000 years there have been few improvements in principle and form of the toy attracting the infant. Perhaps in our own backwoods America in an early day one of the cleverest makeshifts was brought about by the overburdened mother who sought relief from baby's tyrannies by appealing to its gormandizing capacities. For this purpose a stout bit of tape was tied securely around a piece of firm, fat pork, with the other end of the tape at the distance of a foot, made fast to the baby's wrist.

Under these conditions the youngster could suck at the pork with gusto, with no fear of dropping it out of his reach, while more than all else, in case the meat was drawn into the child's throat there was no danger of his choking, for the reason that at the first choking sensation the arms would be involuntarily thrown outward, the tape jerking the meat again to a safe distance, yet leaving it in reach at the same time.

The effect of the infantile world as a stimulant to the inventive faculties in all peoples probably never has been fully appreciated. Except in those races where in primitive states the young of a people were swathed and bound in bands to the working mother, no aboriginal types were free of the necessity of some form of amusement for their young. The maternity instinct in the female offspring probably made the doll one of the earliest diverting things for children, especially as in much of the early superstitions of religion some figure of the human being was used and naturally would have attracted the eye of the female child. The mechanical toy for the male child had its inception in the disposition of the child to anticipate maturity and to play at hunting, shooting with primitive weapons, and in other ways imitating the ways of the father of the household.

In some of the lower types of humanity there is a marked precocity in the infant and small child. In competition with the white child in the learning of books some of these races lower in the scale, show marked adaptability in the infant years, but suddenly reach the limit of their capacities a few years later and thereafter are hopelessly outstripped by the Aryan peoples.

Toy Making Involves Genius.

But this precocity in the youth far down the scale has had its influences upon the imaginations and inventiveness of the lower orders of men and women. The same spirit and incentive have come right up with man to the present when the perfection of a toy that in miniature will do all that the practical, useful machine accomplishes for the adult may may involve a higher inventive and constructive ability. For instance, a stationary engine and boiler weighing 700 pounds would be easy of construction, whereas a smooth running miniature engine weighing 700 grains, built proportionately, would involve a much higher order of mechanical execution.

In all times the one appealing quality in the toy, after its possessor has reached an observing age, is that it enables the little one to play the grown up. Before a small bit of humanity can desire to play at some real activity in the life of his parents, his imagination will have had to be stimulated; and once stimulated to the thought, there are evidences that a too nearly perfect mechanical device to that end is robbing the youngster of some of the most pleasurable possibilities in the game of make believe.

Toys Increase in Cost.

The changes that have come about in the last generation have been in keeping only with the general disposition toward extravagance. As men and women have demanded more of luxury in realities, so the young have been imitative in their demands in the toy world. Thirty years ago, when a daily newspaper sold universally for 5 cents, a doll that cost $1 was regarded as worth a society note; today with the daily paper selling for 1 or 2 cents, a doll that costs $15 or $20 is commonplace in the larger cities.

For boys' toys thirty years ago a tin horse costing a quarter to be drawn across the sitting room floor or a hobby horse of dappled sides mounted upon rockers, to cost $1.50 were things to stir a whole neighborhood. Today there are locomotives, stationary engines, dynamos, and the like that spoil a $100 bill in the purchase. And yet they are as matter of fact stock for a toy department at Christmas time as if in the running of them dividends were to be paid upon common and preferred stocks in the playroom.

Nothing illustrates the evolution of the toy in the last generation better than does the cannon firecracker of the modern fourth of July celebration. Thirty years ago the Chinese importation of the comparatively harmless small cracker made joy for thousands; today the terrible cannon cracker makes tears for the multitudes.

It is to be doubted if the active influences of the juveniles have been exerted widely toward this elaboration of the toy. Rather it has been the influence of the inventive elder person who has anticipated a market for the more intricate, larger, and more costly production. In doing so he has appealed to the adult buyer who, having passed his imaginative stage of existence, is almost universally likely to be attracted to the material accomplishments of the man who makes toys for children after a man's own ideas of what children should covet and conserve.

The best end to be served by the toy will not be reached until in one way or another the toy is relegated to that first great end of stimulating a healthy imagination in the child.