

Man of the Forest
22

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Beginning the OLD MAN CRABTREE Stories

THE MAN OF THE FOREST

By Zane Grey, Author of *Wildfire*

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK TENNEY JOHNSON

SYNOPSIS—Milt Dale, the Man of the Forest, a lone hunter in the mountains of Southern Arizona in pioneer days, overhears the plot of Beasley, a rich rancher, with Snake Anson's gang of outlaws to kidnap Helen Rayner when she comes West to take care of her uncle, Al Auchincloss, who is dying. Beasley plans to get possession of Auchincloss' property. Dale determines to outwit the outlaws, but he is forced to act on his own responsibility, for old Al is not friendly to the hunter. Meantime Helen, with her younger sister Bo, has left her home and is traveling on the slow trains of early days. On the same train, evidently with the intention of forcing his unwelcome attentions on Helen, is Harve Riggs, a would-be bad man.

AT MAGDALENA there was no kindly brakeman to help Helen and Bo with their luggage. Helen bade Bo take her share; and thus burdened they made an awkward and laborious shift to get off the train.

Upon the platform of the car a strong hand seized Helen's heavy bag with which she was straining and a loud voice called out:

"Girls, we're here—sure out in the wild an' woolly West!"

The speaker was Riggs, and he had possessed himself of part of Helen's baggage with action and speech meant more to impress the curious crowd than to be really kind. In the excitement of arriving Helen had forgotten him. The manner of sudden reminder—the insincerity of it—made her temper flash. She almost fell, encumbered as she was, in her hurry to descend the steps. She saw the tall hunter in gray step forward close to her as she reached for the bag Riggs held.

"Mr. Riggs, I'll carry my bag," she said. "Let me lug this. You help Bo with hers," he replied familiarly.

"But I want it," she rejoined quietly, with sharp determination. No little force was needed to pull the bag away from Riggs.

"See here, Helen, you ain't goin' any further with that joke, are you?" he queried deprecatingly, and he still spoke quite loud.

"It's no joke to me," replied Helen. "I told you I didn't want your attention."

"Sure. But that was temper. I'm your friend—from your home town. An' I ain't goin' to let a quarrel keep me from lookin' after you till you're safe at your uncle's."

Helen turned her back upon him. The tall hunter had just helped Bo off the car. Then Helen looked up into a smooth bronzed face and piercing gray eyes.

"Are you Helen Rayner?" he asked.

"Yes."

"My name's Dale. I've come to meet you."

"Ah! My uncle sent you?" added Helen in quick relief.

"No. I can't say Al sent me," began the man, "but I reckon —"

He was interrupted by Riggs, who, grasping Helen by the arm, pulled her back a step.

"Say, mister, did Auchincloss send you to meet my young friends here?" he demanded arrogantly.

Dale's glance turned from Helen to Riggs. She could not read this quiet gray gaze, but it thrilled her.

"No. I come on my own hook," he answered.

"You'll understand, then, they're in my charge," added Riggs.

This time the steady, light-gray eyes met Helen's, and if there was not a smile in them or behind them she was still further baffled.

"Helen, I reckon you said you didn't want this fellow's attention?"



"I Seen Him Way Back. He Slowed Up Goin' Past Us. Now He's Runnin' Again"

"I certainly said that," replied Helen quickly. Just then Bo slipped close to her and gave her arm a little squeeze. Probably Bo's thought was like hers—here was a real Western man. That was her first impression, and following swiftly upon it was a sensation of eased nerves.

Riggs swaggered closer to Dale.

"Say, Buckskin, I hail from Texas —"

"You're wastin' our time an' we've need to hurry," interrupted Dale. His tone seemed friendly. "An' if you ever lived long in Texas you wouldn't pester a lady, an' you sure wouldn't talk like you do."

"What!" shouted Riggs hotly. He dropped his right hand significantly to his hip.

"Don't throw your gun. It might go off," said Dale.

Whatever Riggs' intention had been—and it was probably just what Dale evidently had read—he now flushed an angry red and jerked at his gun.

Dale's hand flashed too swiftly for Helen's eye to follow. But she heard the thud as it struck. The gun went flying to the platform and scattered a group of Indians and Mexicans.

"You'll hurt yourself some day," said Dale.

Helen had never heard a slow, cool voice like this hunter's. Without excitement or emotion or hurry it seemed full and significant of things the words did not mean. Bo uttered a strange little exultant cry.

Riggs' arm had dropped limp. No doubt it was numb. He stared, and his predominating expression was surprise. As the shuffling crowd began to snicker and whisper Riggs gave Dale a malignant glance, shifted it to Helen, and then lurched away in the direction of his gun.

Dale did not pay any more attention to him. Gathering up Helen's baggage he said "Come on," and shouldered a lane through the gaping crowd. The girls followed close at his heels.

"Nell! What'd I tell you?" whispered Bo. "Oh, you're all atremble!"

Helen was aware of her unsteadiness; anger and fear and relief in quick succession

had left her rather weak. Once through the motley crowd of loungers she saw an old gray stagecoach and four lean horses. A grizzled, sunburned man sat on the driver's seat, whip and reins in hand. Beside him was a younger man with a rifle across his knees. Another man—young, tall, lean, dark—stood holding the coach door open. He touched his sombrero to the girls. His eyes were sharp as he addressed Dale:

"Milt, wasn't you held up?"

"No. But some long-haired galoot was tryin' to hold up the girls. Wanted to throw his gun on me. I was sure scared," replied Dale as he deposited the luggage.

Bo laughed. Her eyes, resting upon Dale, were warm and bright. The young man at the coach door took a second look at her and then a smile changed the dark hardness of his face.

Dale helped the girls up the high step into the stage, and then, placing the lighter luggage in with them, he threw the heavier pieces on top.

"Joe, climb up," he said. "Wal, Milt," drawled the driver. "Let's ooze along."

Dale hesitated, with his hand on the door. He glanced at the crowd, now edging close, then at Helen.

"I reckon I ought to tell you," he said, and indecision appeared to concern him.

"What?" exclaimed Helen.

"Bad news. But talkin' takes time. An' we mustn't lose any."

"There's need of hurry?" queried Helen, sitting up sharply.

"I reckon."

"Is this the stage to Snowdrop?"

"No. That leaves in the mornin'. We rustled this old trap to get a start to-night."

"The sooner the better. But I—I don't understand," said Helen, bewildered.

"It'll not be safe for you to ride on the mornin' stage," returned Dale.

"Safe! Oh, what do you mean?" exclaimed Helen. Apprehensively she gazed at him and then back at Bo.

"Explainin' will take time. An' facts may change your mind. But if you can't trust me —"

"Trust you!" interposed Helen blankly.

"You mean to take us to Snowdrop?"

"I reckon we'd better go roundabout an' not hit Snowdrop," he replied shortly.

"Then to Pine—to my uncle—Al Auchincloss?"

"Yes, I'm goin' to try hard."

Helen caught her breath. She divined that some peril menaced her. She looked steadily, with all a woman's keenness, into the man's face. The moment was one of the fateful decisions she knew the West had in store for her. Her future and that of Bo were now to be dependent upon her judgment. It was a hard moment, and though she shivered inwardly she welcomed the initial and inevitable step. This man Dale, by his dress of buckskin, must be either scout or hunter. His size, his action, the tone of his voice had been reassuring. But Helen must decide from what she saw in his face whether or not to trust him. And that face was clear bronze, unlined, unshadowed, like a tranquil mask, clean-cut, strong-jawed, with eyes of wonderful transparent gray.

"Yes, I'll trust you," she said. "Get in and let us hurry. Then you can explain."

"Send 'em along, Bill," called Dale.

He had to stoop to enter the stage, and once in he appeared to fill that side upon which he sat. Then the driver cracked his whip; the stage lurched and began to roll; the motley crowd was left behind. Helen awakened to the reality, as she saw Bo staring with big eyes at the hunter, that a stranger adventure than she had ever dreamed of had begun with the rattling roll of that old stagecoach.

Dale laid off his sombrero and leaned forward, holding his rifle between his knees. The light shone better upon his features now that he was bareheaded. Helen had never seen a face like that, which at first glance appeared darkly bronzed and hard, and then became clear, cold, aloof, still, intense. She wished she might see a smile



upon it. And now that the die was cast she could not tell why she had trusted it. There was singular force in it, but she did not recognize what kind of force. One instant she thought it was stern, and the next that it was sweet, and again that it was neither.

"I'm glad you've got your sister," he said presently.

"How did you know she's my sister?"

"I reckon she looks like you."

"No one else ever thought so," replied Helen, trying to smile.

Bo had no difficulty in smiling as she said: "Wish I was half as pretty as Nell."

"Nell. Isn't your name Helen?" queried Dale.

"Yes. But my—some few call me Nell."

"I like Nell better than Helen. An' what's yours?" went on Dale, looking at Bo.

"Mine's Bo. Just plain B-O. Isn't it silly? But I wasn't asked when they gave it to me," she replied.

"Bo. It's nice an' short. Never heard it before. But I haven't met many people for years."

"Oh! We've left the town!" cried Bo. "Look, Nell! How bare! It's just like desert."

"It is desert. We've forty miles of that before we come to a hill or a tree."

Helen glanced out. A flat, dull-green expanse waved away from the road on and on to a bright, dark, horizon line where the sun was setting rayless in a clear sky. Open, desolate and lonely, the scene gave her a cold thrill.

"Did your Uncle Al ever write anythin' about a man named Beasley?" asked Dale.

"Indeed he did," replied Helen with a start of surprise. "Beasley! That name is familiar to us—and detestable. My uncle complained of this man for years. Then he grew bitter—accused Beasley. But the last year or so not a word!"

"Well, now," began the hunter earnestly. "Let's get the bad news over. I'm sorry you must be worried. But you must learn to take the West as it is. There's good an' bad, maybe more bad. That's because the country's young. . . . So to come right out with it—this Beasley hired a gang of outlaws to meet the stage you was goin' in to Snowdrop to-morrow—an' to make off with you."

"Make off with me?" ejaculated Helen, bewildered.

"Kidnap you! Which in that gang would be worse than killing you!" declared Dale grimly, and he closed a huge fist on his knee.

Helen was utterly astounded. "How horrible!" she gasped out. "Make off with me! . . . What for?"

Bo gave vent to a fierce little utterance. "For reasons you ought to guess," replied Dale, and he leaned forward again.

Neither his voice nor his face changed in the least, but there was a something about him that fascinated Helen. "I'm a hunter. I live in the woods. A few nights ago I happened to be caught out in a storm, an' I took

to an old log cabin. Soon as I got there I heard horses. I hid up in the loft. Some men rode up an' come in. It was dark. They couldn't see me. An' they talked. It turned out they were Snake Anson an' his gang of sheep thieves. They expected to meet Beasley there.

"Pretty soon he came. He told Anson how old Al, your uncle, was on his last legs—how he had sent for you to have his property when he died. Beasley swore he had claims on Al. An' he made a deal with Anson to get you out of the way. He named the day you were to reach Magdalena. With Al dead an' you not there Beasley could get the property. An' then he wouldn't care if you did come to claim it. It'd be too late.

"Well, they rode away that night. An' next day I rustled down to Pine. They're all my friends at Pine, except old Al. But they think I'm queer. I didn't want to confide in many people. Beasley is strong in Pine, an' for that matter I suspect Snake Anson has other friends there besides Beasley. So I went to see your uncle. He never had any use for me because he thought I was lazy like an Indian. Old Al hates lazy men. Then we fell out—or he fell out—because he believed a tame lion of mine had killed some of his sheep. An' now I reckon that Tom might have done it.

"I tried to lead up to this deal of Beasley's about you, but old Al wouldn't listen. He's cross—very cross. An' when I tried to tell him—why, he went right out of his head. Sent me off the ranch.

"Now I reckon you begin to see what a pickle I was in. Finally I went to four friends I could trust. They're Mormon boys—brothers. That's Joe out on top with the driver. I told them all about Beasley's deal an' asked them to help me. So we planned to beat Anson an' his gang to Magdalena. It happens that Beasley is as strong in Magdalena as he is in Pine. An' we had to go careful. But the boys had a couple of friends here—Mormons, too—who agreed to help us. They had this old stage. . . . An' here you are."

Dale spread out his big hands and looked gravely at Helen and then at Bo. "You're perfectly splendid!" cried Bo, ringingly. She was white; her fingers were clenched; her eyes blazed.

Dale appeared startled out of his gravity, and surprised, then pleased. A smile made his face like a boy's.

Helen felt her body all rigid, yet slightly trembling. Her hands were cold. The horror of this revelation held her speechless. But in her heart she echoed Bo's exclamation of admiration and gratitude.

"So far then," resumed Dale with a heavy breath of relief. "No wonder you're upset. I've a blunt way of talkin'. Now we've about thirty miles to ride on this Snowdrop road before we can turn off. To-day sometime the rest of the boys—Roy, John an' Hal—were to leave Show Down, which's a town farther on from Snowdrop. They have my horses an' packs besides their own. Somewhere on the road we'll meet them—to-night maybe—or to-morrow. I hope not to-night, because that'd mean Anson's gang was ridin' in to Magdalena."

Helen wrung her hands helplessly.

"Oh, have I no courage!" she whispered.

"Nell, I'm as scared as you are," said Bo consolingly, embracing her sister.

"I reckon that's natural," said Dale, as if excusing them. "But scared or not, you both brace up. It's a bad job. But I've done my best. An' you'll be safer with me an' the Beeman boys than you'd be in Magdalena, or anywhere else, except your uncle's."

"Mr.—Mr. Dale," faltered Helen with her tears falling, "don't think me a coward or—or ungrateful. I'm neither. It's only I'm so—so shocked. After all we hoped and expected, this—this is such a—terrible surprise."

"Never mind, Nell dear. Let's take what comes," murmured Bo.

"That's the talk," said Dale. "You see I've come right out with the worst. Maybe we'll get through easy. When we meet the boys we'll take to the horses an' the trails. Can you ride?"

"Bo has been used to horses all her life, and I ride fairly well," responded Helen. The idea of riding quickened her spirit.

"Good! We may have some hard ridin' before I get you up to Pine. Hello, what's that?"

Above the creaking, rattling, rolling roar of the stage Helen heard a rapid beat of hoofs. A horse flashed by, galloping hard.

Dale opened the door and peered out. The stage rolled to a halt. He stepped down and gazed ahead.

"Joe, who was that?" he queried.

"Nary me. An' Bill didn't know him either," replied Joe. "I seen him way back. He was ridin' some. An' he slowed up goin' past us. Now he's runnin' again."

Dale shook his head, as if he did not like the circumstances.

"Milt, he'll never get by Roy on this road," said Joe.

"Maybe he'll get by before Roy strikes in on the road."

"It ain't likely."

Helen could not restrain her fears. "Mr. Dale, you think he was a messenger—going ahead to post that—that Anson gang?"

"He might be," replied Dale simply.

Then the young man called Joe leaned out from the seat above and called: "Miss Helen, don't you worry. That feller is more liable to stop lead than anythin' else."

His words, meant to be kind and reassuring, were almost as sinister to Helen as the menace to her own life. Long had she known how cheap life was held in the West, but she had known it only abstractly, and she had never let the fact remain before her consciousness. This cheerful young man spoke calmly of spilling blood in her behalf. The thought it roused was tragic, for bloodshed was insupportable to her; and the thrills that followed were so new, strange, bold and tingling that they were revolting. Helen grew conscious of unplumbed depths, of instincts at which she was amazed and ashamed.

"Joe, hand down that basket of grub—the small one with the canteen," said Dale,

reaching out a long arm. Presently he placed a cloth-covered basket inside the stage. "Girls, eat all you want, an' then some."

"We have a basket half full yet," replied Helen.

"You'll need it all before we get to Pine. . . . Now I'll ride up on top with the boys an' eat my supper. It'll be dark presently, an' we'll stop often to listen. But don't be scared."

With that he took his rifle, and closing the door clambered up to the driver's seat. Then the stage lurched again and began to roll along.

Not the least thing to wonder at of this eventful evening was the way Bo reached for the basket of food. Helen simply stared at her.

"Bo, you can't eat!" she exclaimed.

"I should smile I can," replied that practical young lady. "And you're going to if I have to stuff things into your mouth. Where are your wits, Nell? He said we must eat. That means our strength is going to have some pretty severe trials."

Gee, it's all great—just like a story! The unexpected—why, he looks like a prince turned hunter! A long dark stage journey—hold-up—fight—escape—wild ride on horses—woods and camps and wild places—pursued—hidden in the forest—more hard rides—then safe at the ranch. And of course he falls madly in love with me—no, you, for I'll be true to my Los Vegas lover—"

"Hush, silly! Bo, tell me, aren't you scared?"

"Scared! I'm scared stiff. But if Western girls stand such things, we can. No Western girl is going to beat me!"

That brought Helen to a realization of the brave place she had given herself in

dreams, and she was at once ashamed of herself and wildly proud of this little sister.

"Bo, thank goodness I brought you with me!" exclaimed Helen fervently. "I'll eat if it chokes me."

Whereupon she found herself actually hungry, and while she ate she glanced out of the stage, first from one side and then from the other. The windows had no glass and they let the cool night air blow in. The sun had long since sunk. Out to the west, where a black horizon line swept away endlessly, the sky was clear gold, shading to yellow and blue above. Stars were out, pale and wan, but growing brighter. The earth appeared bare and heaving, like a calm sea. The wind bore a fragrance new to Helen, acridly sweet and clean, and it was so cold it made her fingers numb.

"I heard some animal yelp," said Bo suddenly, and she listened with head poised.

But Helen heard nothing save the steady clip-clop of hoofs, the clink of chains, the creak and rattle of the old stage, and occasionally the low voices of the men above.

When the girls had satisfied hunger and thirst night had settled down black. They pulled the cloaks up over them and close together leaned back in a corner of the seat and talked in whispers. Helen did not have much to say, but Bo was talkative.

"This beats me!" she said once, after an interval. "Where are we, Nell? Those men up there are Mormons. Maybe they are abducting us!"

"Mr. Dale isn't a Mormon," replied Helen.

"How do you know?"

"I could tell by the way he spoke of his friends."

"Well, I wish it wasn't so dark. I'm not afraid of men in daylight. . . . Nell, did you ever see such a wonderful-looking fellow? What'd they call him? Milt—Milt Dale. He said he lived in the woods. If I hadn't fallen in love with that cowboy who called me—well, I'd be a goner now."

After an interval of silence Bo whispered startlingly: "Wonder if Harve Riggs is following us now?"

"Of course he is," replied Helen hopelessly.

"He'd better look out. Why, Nell, he never saw—he never—what did Uncle Al used to call it?—sav—savvied, that's it. Riggs never savvied that hunter. But I did, you bet."

"Savvied! What do you mean, Bo?"

"I mean that long-haired galoot never saw his real danger. But I felt it. Something went light inside me. Dale never took him seriously at all."

"Riggs will turn up at Uncle Al's sure as I'm born," said Helen.

"Let him turn," replied Bo contemptuously. "Nell, don't you ever bother your head again about him. I'll bet they're all men out here. And I wouldn't be in Harve Riggs' boots for a lot."

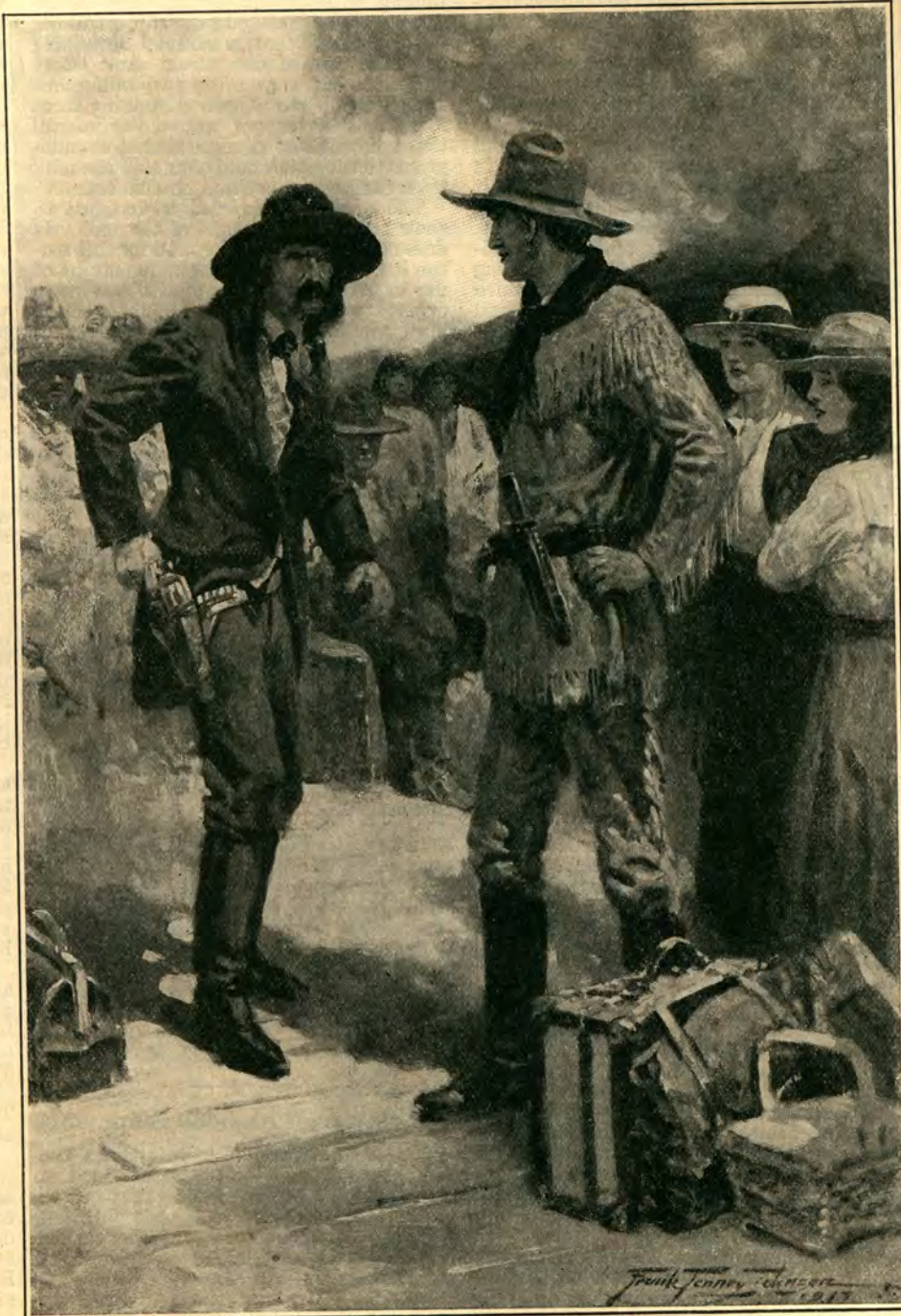
After that Bo talked of her uncle and his fatal illness, and from that she drifted back to the loved ones at home, now seemingly at the other side of the world, and then she broke down and cried, after which she fell asleep on Helen's shoulder.

But Helen could not have fallen asleep if she had wanted to. Always she had longed for a moving, active life. And now it struck her grimly that, if these first few hours of her advent in the West were forecasts of the future, she was destined to have her longings more than fulfilled.

Presently the stage rolled slower and slower until it came to a halt. Then the horses heaved, the harnesses clinked, the men whispered. Otherwise there was an intense quiet. She looked out, expecting to find it pitch dark. It was black, yet a transparent blackness. To her surprise she could see a long way. A shooting star electrified her. The men were listening. She listened, too, but beyond the slight sounds about the stage she heard nothing. Presently the driver clucked to his horses and travel was resumed.

For a while the stage rolled on rapidly, evidently downhill, swaying from side to side and rattling as if about to fall to pieces. Then it slowed on a level, and again it halted for a few moments; and once more in motion it began a labor-some climb. Helen imagined miles had been covered. The desert appeared to heave into billows, growing rougher, and dark round bushes stood out dimly.

(Continued on Page 46)



"Don't Throw Your Gun. It Might Go Off," Said Dale

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The Man of the Forest

(Continued from Page 23)

The road grew uneven and rocky, and when the stage began another descent its violent rocking jolted Bo out of her sleep, and in fact almost out of Helen's arms.

"Where am I?" asked Bo dazedly.
"Bo, you're having your heart's desire, but I can't tell you where you are," replied Helen.

Bo awakened thoroughly, which fact was now no wonder, considering the jostling of the old stage.

"Hold on to me, Nell! . . . Is it a runaway?"

"We've come about a thousand miles like this, I think," replied Helen. "I've not a whole bone in my body."

Bo peered out of the window. "Oh, how dark and lonesome! But it'd be nice if it wasn't so cold. I'm freezing."

"I thought you loved cold air," taunted Helen.

"Say, Nell, you begin to talk like yourself," responded Bo.

It was difficult to hold on to the stage and each other and the cloak all at once, but they succeeded, except in the roughest places, when from time to time they were bounced round. Bo sustained a sharp rap on the head.

"Oo-oo-oo!" she moaned. "Nell Rayner, I'll never forgive you for fetching me on this awful trip."

"Just think of your handsome Los Vegas cowboy," replied Helen.

Either this remark subdued Bo or the suggestion sufficed to reconcile her to the hardships of the ride.

Meanwhile as they talked and maintained silence and tried to sleep, the driver of the stage kept at his task after the manner of Western men, who know how to get the best out of horses and bad roads and distance.

By and by the stage halted again and remained at a standstill for so long, with the men whispering on top, that Helen and Bo were roused to apprehension.

Suddenly a sharp whistle came from the darkness ahead.

"That's Roy," said Joe Beeman in a low voice.

"I reckon. An' meetin' us so quick looks bad," replied Dale. "Drive on, Bill."

"Mebbe it seems quick to you," muttered the driver. "But if we hain't come thirty mile, an' if thet ridge thar hain't your turnin'-off place, why, I don't know nothin'."

The stage rolled on a little farther, while Helen and Bo sat clasping each other tight, wondering with bated breath what was to be the next thing to happen.

Then once more they were at a standstill. Helen heard the thud of boots striking the ground and the snorts of horses.

"Nell, I see horses," whispered Bo excitedly. "There, to the side of the road. And here comes a man. . . . Oh, if he shouldn't be the one they're expecting!"

Helen peered out to see a tall dark form, moving silently, and beyond it a vague outline of horses, and then pale gleams of what must have been pack loads.

Dale loomed up and met the stranger in the road.

"Howdy, Milt. You got the girl sure or you wouldn't be here," said a low voice.

"Roy, I've got two girls—sisters," replied Dale.

The man Roy whistled softly under his breath. Then another lean, rangy form strode out of the darkness and was met by Dale.

"Now, boys, how about Anson's gang?" queried Dale.

"At Snowdrop, drinkin' an' quarrelin'. Reckon they'll leave there about day-break," replied Roy.

"How long have you been here?"

"Mebbe a couple of hours."

"Any horse go by?"

"No."

"Roy, a strange rider passed us before dark. He was hittin' the road. An' he's got by here before you came."

"I don't like thet news," replied Roy tersely. "Let's rustle. With girls on hoss-back you'll need all the start you can get. Hey, John?"

"Snake Anson shore can foller hoss tracks," replied the third man.

"Milt, say the word," went on Roy as he looked up at the stars. "Daylight's not far away. Here's the forks of the road an' your hosses, an' our outfit. You can be in the pines by sunup."

In the silence that ensued Helen heard the throbs of her heart and the panting little breaths of her sister. They both peered out, hands clenched together, watching and listening in strained attention.

"It's possible that rider last night wasn't a messenger to Anson," said Dale. "In that case Anson won't make anythin' of our wheel tracks or horse tracks. He'll go right on to meet the regular stage. Bill, can you go back an' meet the stage comin' before Anson does?"

"Wal, I reckon so—an' take it easy at thet," replied Bill.

"All right," continued Dale instantly.

"John, you an' Joe an' Hal ride back to meet the regular stage. An' when you meet it get on an' be on it when Anson holds it up."

"Thet's shore agreeable to me," drawled John.

"I'd like to be on it too," said Roy grimly.

"No. I'll need you till I'm safe in the woods. Bill, hand down the bags. An' you, Roy, help me pack them. Did you get all the supplies I wanted?"

"Shore did. If the young ladies ain't powerful particular you can feed them well for a couple of months."

Dale wheeled and, striding to the stage, he opened the door. "Girls, you're not asleep? Come," he called.

Bo stepped down first. "I was asleep, till this—this vehicle fell off the road back a ways," she replied.

Roy Beeman's low laugh was significant. He took off his sombrero and stood silent. The old driver smothered a loud guffaw.

"Veehicle! Wal, I'll be dog-goned! Joe, did you hear thet? All the spunky gurls ain't born out West."

As Helen followed with cloak and bag Roy assisted her, and she encountered keen eyes upon her face. He seemed both gentle and respectful, and she felt his solicitude. His heavy gun, swinging low, caught her eye as she stepped down.

Dale reached into the stage and hauled out baskets and bags. These he set down on the ground.

"Turn round, Bill, an' go along with you. John an' Hal will follow presently," ordered Dale.

"Wal, gurls," said Bill, looking down upon them. "I was shore powerful glad to meet you-all. An' I'm ashamed of my country—offerin' two sich purty gurls insults an' low-down tricks. But shore you'll go through safe now. You couldn't be in better company for ridin' or huntin' or marryin' or gittin' religion—"

"Shut up, you old grizzly," broke in Dale sharply.

"Haw! Haw! Good-by, gurls, an' good luck!" ended Bill as he began to whip the reins.

Bo said good-by quite distinctly, but Helen could only murmur hers. The old driver seemed a friend.

Then the horses wheeled and stamped, the stage careened and creaked, presently to roll out of sight in the gloom.

"You're shiverin'," said Dale suddenly, looking down upon Helen. She felt his big hard hand clasp hers. "Cold as ice!"

"I am c-cold," replied Helen. "I guess we're not warmly dressed."

"Nell, we roasted all day, and now we're freezing," declared Bo. "I didn't know it was winter at night out here."

"Miss, haven't you some warm gloves an' a coat?" asked Roy anxiously. "It ain't begun to get cold yet."

"Nell, we've heavy gloves, riding suits and boots—all fine and new—in this black bag," said Bo, enthusiastically kicking a bag at her feet.

"Yes, so we have. But a lot of good they'll do us to-night," returned Helen.

"Miss, you'd do well to change right here," said Roy earnestly. "It'll save time in the long run an' a lot of sufferin' before sunup."

Helen stared at the young man, absolutely amazed with his simplicity. She was advised to change her traveling dress for a riding suit—out somewhere in a cold, windy desert, in the middle of the night, among strange young men!

"Bo, which bag is it?" asked Dale as if she were his sister. And when she indicated the one, he picked it up. "Come off the road."

Bo followed him and Helen found herself mechanically at their heels. Dale led them



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a few paces off the road behind some low bushes.

"Hurry an' change here," he said. "We'll make a pack of your outfit an' leave room for this bag."

Then he stalked away and in a few strides disappeared.

Bo sat down to begin unlacing her shoes. Helen could just see her pale pretty face and big gleaming eyes by the light of the stars. It struck her then that Bo was going to make eminently more of a success of Western life than she was.

"Nell, those fellows are n-nice," said Bo reflectively. "Aren't you c-cold? Say, he said hurry!"

It was beyond Helen's comprehension how she ever began to disrobe out there in that open windy desert, but after she had gotten launched on the task she found that it required more fortitude than courage. The cold wind pierced right through her. Almost she could have laughed at the way Bo made things fly.

"G-g-g-gee!" chattered Bo. "I n-never w-was so c-c-cold in all my life."

Helen was too intent on her own troubles to take breath to talk. She was a strong, healthy girl, swift and efficient with her hands; yet this, the hardest physical ordeal she had ever experienced, almost overcame her. Bo outdistanced her by moments, helped her with buttons, and laced one whole boot for her. Then with hands that stung Helen packed the traveling suits in the bag.

"There! But what an awful mess!" exclaimed Helen. "Oh, Bo, our pretty traveling dresses!"

"We'll press them t-to-morrow on a l-log," replied Bo, and she giggled.

They started for the road. Bo, strange to note, did not carry her share of the burden, and she seemed unsteady on her feet.

The men were waiting beside a group of horses, one of which carried a pack.

"Nothin' slow about you," said Dale, relieving Helen of the grip. "Roy, put them up while I sling on this bag."

Roy led out two of the horses.

"Get up," he said, indicating Bo. "The stirrups are short on this saddle."

Bo was an adept at mounting, but she made so awkward and slow work of it in this instance that Helen could not believe her eyes.

"How're the stirrups?" asked Roy. "Stand in them. Guess they're about

right. . . . Careful now! Thet hoss is skittish. Hold him in."

Bo was not living up to the reputation with which Helen had credited her.

"Now, miss, you get up," said Roy to Helen. And in another instant she found herself astride a black, spirited horse. Numb with cold as she was she yet felt the coursing thrills along her veins.

Roy was at the stirrups with swift hands. "You're taller'n I guessed," he said. "Stay up, but lift your foot. . . . shore now I'm glad you have them thick soft boots. Mebbe we'll ride all over the White Mountains."

"Bo, do you hear that?" called Helen.

But Bo did not answer. She was leaning rather unnaturally in her saddle. Helen became anxious. Just then Dale strode back to them.

"All cinched up, Roy?"

"Jest ready," replied Roy.

Then Dale stood beside Helen. How tall he was! His wide shoulders seemed on a level with the pommel of her saddle. He put an affectionate hand on the horse.

"His name's Ranger an' he's the fastest an' finest horse in this country."

"I reckon he shore is—along with my bay," corroborated Roy.

"Roy, if you rode Ranger he'd beat your pet," said Dale. "We can start now. Roy, you drive the pack horses."

He took another look at Helen's saddle and then moved to do likewise with Bo's.

"Are you—all right?" he asked quickly. Bo reeled in her seat. "I'm n-near froze," she replied in a faint voice. Her face shone white in the starlight. Helen recognized that Bo was more than cold.

"Oh, Bo!" she called in distress.

"Nell, don't you worry now."

"Let me carry you," suggested Dale.

"No. I'll s-s-stick on this horse or d-die," fiercely retorted Bo.

The two men looked up at her white face and then at each other. Then Roy walked away toward the dark bunch of horses off the road and Dale swung astride the one horse left.

"Keep close to me," he said. Bo fell in line and Helen brought up the rear.

Helen imagined she was near the end of a dream. Presently she would awaken with a start and see the pale walls of her little room at home, and hear the cherry branches brushing her window and the old clarion-voiced cock proclaim the hour of dawn.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Are You a Pioneer?

(Concluded from Page 9)

well, and anyone could see that some day there would be five again. They were pioneers.

Every family that makes good in a new land must possess courage in time of adversity. Many of the fondest dreams of the country will be shattered, but the settlers must be strong enough to stand the shock.

No pioneer can expect to realize all the advantages he had hoped. He must go prepared to find all the uncomfortable little realities he encountered back at home, with more added to them. He must expect that sickness will come to him and his. He must know that a toothache will not abate the more because he is on a prairie forty miles from a dentist. He must not expect that the joy of getting up in a log cabin when the thermometer refuses to register because of the pure shame of it will be materially greater than the joy of poking round on the cold floors of a tenant house in Southern Michigan. Insurance will fall due among the thickest stumps, and a house is just as likely to burn on a cold winter's night as if it were nestled within twenty rods of a kind neighbor. There are taxes to be paid even in the newest country, and sometimes it is surprising how heavy they can be.

The pioneer should weigh his capacity for battling against adversity. And still more carefully should he weigh all the conditions he is going to impose upon his family by moving to the land of Canaan. Will it be a Canaan for the wife or will it be a slow-fired hell which will ultimately eat out her heart?

The man who is dreaming the dream of being a pioneer should weigh all these things. This does not mean that one wishing to buy a farm should buy a poor run-down farm in his old stamping grounds and not venture where the brave ones seem to be winning. The gist of the whole matter is

not the land; it is the man. The rich land is waiting through the years. It will be conquered, and will produce fortunes for the conquerors. On the other hand, much good land in the old sections is crying out to be nursed back to productiveness.

No man should hurry to the new land and plunge his family and his resources into it. If the proposition is worth while it is worth investigating. Provide for the dependent ones, then go to the promised land not to buy, but to work for a year. Work and keep to yourself the knowledge that you are a potential buyer. In that way you will learn much you would not otherwise find out.

At the end of one year you can answer the question, "Am I a pioneer to live profitably and happily with my family upon this land?" If you decide to move back to the old land after such a private interview with yourself it will be only for a short visit—just long enough to tell the friends modestly how great the new land is.

A Blistering Blessing

AT AMERICAN LAKE Cantonment a soldier recently received a pair of socks knitted by his sweetheart. Ordered out at once on a long hike, he put on the new socks and started. After a few miles he began to have foot trouble, but managed to limp along a short distance farther, when the pain grew so severe that he was compelled to drop out.

The surgeon examined the foot, and could not see what had caused the trouble. The sock felt all right too. At last he turned the sock inside out and found a small wad of paper. When it was smoothed out he found written on the paper:

"God bless your poor tired feet—SUSIE."

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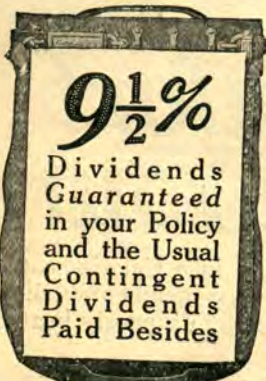
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Training Recruits for the Farm Game

(Concluded from Page 7)

declared his 'hat was off' to the farmerettes. They had beaten any other helpers he had ever had. They didn't stop to light pipes every half hour. They didn't gaze on space and slack up the minute his back was turned. They didn't smash machinery. It has been strenuous, of course; but we didn't set them to the hardest work at first."

"How long does it usually take to stiffen up the soft muscles?"

I was thinking of many of my own camp and canoe trips, when soft muscles had toothache for a week, and knees wobbled after the first ten or fifteen mile hike, and one needed a steam derrick at night to turn over. At the end of a month the toothache went out of your heels. One forgot knees and tired feet, and slept like a log, ready to rise at the first peep of dawn.

"Usually, the hardening takes about three weeks—the same as in golf or horseback—when it all seems to come naturally without extra tiredness."

As the director spoke, a motor honked and came up the driveway with a load of workers from the Converse estate, in Connecticut, where they had been picking peaches and pears. There were girls in blue-jean overalls, and girls in national service khaki, and girls in tennis sneakers with silk stockings—every variety of dress, every variety of girl, all brown as berries, happy as campers on a holiday and not exhausted, but singing and full of the day's adventures. Each day of the camp had been a day's adventure seeking happiness in the great outdoors; and though the workers were tired and mused and hungry, they were glad, and there was not a sign of that dragged look that goes to your heart when you see a great factory or office building in town pour out its thousands of fagged workers at six o'clock.

No wonder some of the girls ask "How will we ever endure to go back to our city jobs?" They tumbled indoors to their shower baths, and after supper—served in plainer style than farm hands get—they would set the gramophone going for dancing.

One of the great objections of the farm managers round was that they would have "to be considerate because these were girls." They don't say that now. They acknowledge the girls have set a pace that puts more work over in eight hours than is usually done in ten. One big estate was so doubtful of the experiment that it would take only two girls on trial. By September it was using twenty a day and wanted more. A big rose greenhouse reluctantly tried out nine. Instantly it wanted eighteen regulars; but the girls were not keen on the indoor life of the hothouse. It resembled too much the hothouse life from which they were seeking to escape.

Farmers Must Have Good Help

Farm help is to-day commanding wages as big as those paid in towns, but farmers cannot pay such wages to men who are barely ten per cent efficient workers; and farmers must have good help, or the world will starve, though you howl your head off about the high cost of living. Howling doesn't hoe the row on a hot day. The agricultural camp does. Also, doesn't the agricultural camp open a door of egress for those workers who wish to escape from the city and learn the farm game?

For the first time, farm man and city man are working together for the same

end—to increase the world's food supply. May the Mt. Kisco experiment spread like wildfire!

I went to Mt. Kisco prejudiced. I am a really truly farmer; and I don't like freak women. Somehow, I didn't associate farmerettes with really big productive work. My mind's picture of them was of bloomers, hoeing back gardens because it was the moment's fad—but these workers were not posers for the limelight.

Somehow, I should like to have them round good horses, or pure-blood calves, or a clean dairy. They would be gentle and considerate. They would know a pure-blood cow or mare for a pedigreed lady that has to be handled as becomes a gentled creature. I should be quite sure no fly would ever plant a germ in a feed bucket and carry off by scours one of my best calves. I should be more than certain no dust would go in the milk pail.

A man seldom sees an animal ailing till it is nearly dead. A woman sees the droop before the animal is even sick. She is a born nurse; and young stock are like young humans. They have to be babied tenderly. I am sure my animals would love these girls; and I am sure these girls would love the animals; and when a girl loves animals, she loses peevish egoism and is a farmer for life; and that is what agriculture needs in this country to-day—the new blood of youth coming to the outdoors for security and peace and happiness.

What a Farm Is

A GEOLOGIST walks across a field and picks up a bit of fossil stone. "Here's a Favositid," he says to himself. "Might be my old friend *C. alveolata*, and he must have had warm sea water to live in, away back in the Silurian. And he came down here with the glacier drift—from Ontario, probably. The old moraines are disintegrating fast. How the ice did muck up this country!"

A botanist walks across the field. "Here's a stray *Enothyria*," he says to himself. "Wonder what DeVries would make of it. And a scrub of a *Crataegus* over in the corner. Primrose and thorn apple with their mutations. . . . Some anthracnose here, I see. Bet there's ten feet of Chara marl under the peat down there in the swamp. How things come and go with temperature!"

An antiquarian walks across the field. He picks up a fragment of arrowhead. "Beautiful fracturing," he says to himself. "That weight would mean fair-sized game, I take it. Deer or better, like enough. White flint might mean a chief's son, perhaps. You're a long way from home, arrowhead. They chipped you out down in the Ohio River quarries and traded you across country till you got up here. Wonder why you didn't get picked up again. Indian fighting Indian, or did you get shot at a goose and break in falling? What a story there is in you! How these humans come and go!"

The owner of the field comes out to look it over. "Blamed poor beans," he says to himself. "About half a crop and pod-spot all over. Frost'll catch 'em if they don't dry up first. Serve me right for not putting this into buckwheat. But they said they wanted beans. Poor beans you are—but beans just the same. I'll get my seed back anyway, and some over for the boys. She's a great game, farming is."

P. S. LOVEJOY.

Table of Contents for November 3, 1917

	PAGE		PAGE
Speaking of Prices—By Forrest Crissey	3	Blue Ribbon Men and Women (Picture Page)	20
Hybrid Fruits That Have Made Good—By Frank A. Waugh	5	Woolly Aristocrats of the Rockies (Picture Page)	21
Training Recruits for the Farm Game—By A. C. Lawt	6	The Man of the Forest—By Zane Grey	22
Are You a Pioneer?—By E. J. Winfield	8	Livestock and Dairy	24
Good Seed From Near-Ripe Corn—By L. F. Graber	10	Soil Pressure of Tractors—By G. P. Pearce	25
The Bacon Breeds—By H. T. Morgan	11	Washing the Show Bird—By H. A. Roberts	28
The Redirected Laziness of Andy Jones—By Bradshaw Howard	12	Cold-Frame Beets—By J. T. Rosa, Jr.	30
The Poultryman's Complaint—By H. Armstrong	13	Louisiana's Sugar Industry Revives—By Francis Williams	32
Shall We Let In the Chinaman?—By R. L. Adams	14	Practical Patriotism—By John B. Wallace	34
Editorial	16	Handy Farm Mechanics	36
No Trespassing!—By William Harper Dean	17	Future Trading in Wheat—By L. D. H. Weld	37
That Rich Bottom Land!—By Freeman Tilden	18	Chaff	48
		Building Up a Canning Business—By Miriam Birdseye	49
		My Kitchen Savings Fund—By Rachel F. Dahlgren	50
		Things That Help	51

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