

The SKY PILOT

By RALPH CONNOR

Author of "The Man From Glengarry" "Glengarry School Days" and "Black Rock"

Copyright, 1903, by FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

CHAPTER VIII THE PILOT'S GRAVE

THE situation was one of extreme danger—a madman with a Winchester rifle. Something must be done and quickly. But what? It would be death to any one appearing at the door.

"I'll speak. You keep your eyes on him," said the Duke.

"Hello, Bruce! What's the row?" shouted the Duke.

Instantly the singing stopped. A look of cunning delight came over his face as, without a word, he got his rifle ready pointed at the door.

"Come in!" he yelled, after waiting for some moments. "Come in! You're the biggest of all the devils. Come on; I'll send you down where you belong. Come, what's keeping you?"

Over the rifle barrel his eyes gleamed with frenzied delight. We consulted as to a plan.

"I don't relish a bullet much," I said. "There are pleasanter things," responded the Duke, "and he is a fairly good shot."

Meantime the singing had started again, and, looking through the chink, I saw that Bruce had got his eye on the stovepipe again. While I was looking the Pilot slipped away from us toward the door.

"Come back!" said the Duke. "Don't be a fool! Come back; he'll shoot you dead!"

Moore paid no heed to him, but stood waiting at the door. In a few moments Bruce blazed away again at the stovepipe. Immediately the Pilot burst in, calling out eagerly:

"Did you get him?"

"No!" said Bruce disappointedly. "He dodged like the devil, as of course he ought you know."

"I'll get him," said Moore; "smoke him out," proceeding to open the stove door.

"Stop!" screamed Bruce. "Don't open that door! It's full of tell you." Moore paused. "Besides," went on Bruce, "smoke won't touch 'em."

"Oh, that's all right," said Moore coolly and with admirable quickness. "Wood smoke, you know; they can't stand that."

"This was apparently a new idea in the strategy of Bruce, for he sank back, while Moore lit the fire and put on the teakettle. He looked round for the tea caddy.

"Up there," said Bruce, forgetting for the moment his devils and pointing to a quaint old fashioned tea caddy upon the shelf.

Moore took it down, turned it in his hands and looked at Bruce.

"Old country, eh?"

"My mother," said Bruce soberly. "I could have sworn it was my aunt's in Barrymen's," said Moore. "My aunt lived in a little stone cottage with roses all over the front of it. And on we went into an enthusiastic description of his early home. His voice was full of music, soft and soothing, and poor Bruce sank back and listened, the glitter fading from his eyes.

"The Duke and I looked at each other. "Not too bad, eh?" said the Duke after a few moments' silence.

"Let's put up the horses," I suggested. "They won't want us for half an hour."

When we came in, the room had been set in order, the teakettle was singing, the bedclothes were straightened out, and Moore had just finished washing the blood stains from Bruce's arms and neck.

"Just in time," he said. "I didn't like to tackle these," pointing to the bandages.

All night long Moore soothed and tended the sick man, now singing softly to him and again begging him with tales that meant nothing, but that had a strange power to quiet the nervous restlessness due partly to the pain of the wounded arm and partly to the nerve wracking from his months of dissipation. The Duke seemed uncomfortable enough. He spoke to Bruce once or twice, but the only answer was a groan or curse, with an increase of restlessness.

"He'll have a close squeak," said the Duke. The carelessness of the tone was a little overdone, but the Pilot was stirred up by it.

"He has not been fortunate in his friends," he said, looking straight into his eyes.

"A man ought to know himself when the pace is too swift," said the Duke, a little more, quickly than was his wont.

"You might have done anything with him. Why didn't you help him?" Moore's tones were stern and very steady, and he never moved his eyes from the other man's face, but the only reply he got was a shrug of the shoulders.

"You don't think he will not get better, doctor?" I asked, in answer to one of his outbursts.

"He ought to get over this," he answered impatiently. "But I believe," he added deliberately, "he'll have to go."

Everything stood still for a moment. It seemed impossible. Two days ago full of life, now on the way out. There crowded in upon me thoughts of his home; his mother, whose letters he used to show me full of anxious love; his wild life here, with all its generous impulses, its mistakes, its folly.

"How long will he last?" I asked, and my lips were dry and numb.

"Perhaps twenty-four hours, perhaps longer. He can't throw off the poison." The old doctor proved a true prophet. After another day of agonized delirium he sank into a stupor which lasted through the night.

Then the change came. As the light began to grow at the eastern rim of the prairie and tip the far mountains in the west, Bruce opened his eyes and looked about upon us. The doctor had gone; the Duke had not come back; Moore and I were alone. He gazed at

me steadily for some moments; read our faces. A look of wonder came into his eyes.

"Is it coming?" he asked in a faint, awed voice. "Do you really think I must go?"

The eager appeal in his voice and the wistful longing in the wide open, startled eyes were too much for Moore. He backed behind me and I could hear him weeping like a baby. Bruce heard him too.

"Is that the Pilot?" he asked. Instantly Moore pulled himself up, wiped his eyes and came round to the other side of the bed and looked down, smiling.

"Do you say I am dying?" The voice was strained in its earnestness. I felt a thrill of admiration go through me as the Pilot answered in a sweet, clear voice: "They say so, Bruce. But you are not afraid!"

Bruce kept his eyes on his face and answered with grave hesitation: "No—not afraid—but I'd like to live a little longer. I've made such a mess of it I'd like to try again." Then he paused and his lips quivered a little.

"There's my mother, you know," he added apologetically, "and Jim." Jim was his younger brother and swore chum.

"Yes, I know, Bruce, but it won't be very long for them, too, and it's a good place."

"Yes, I believe it all—always did—talked not—you'll forgive me that?"

"Don't, don't," said Moore quickly, with sharp pain in his voice, and Bruce smiled a little and closed his eyes, saying, "I'm tired." But he immediately opened them again and looked up.

"What is it?" asked Moore, smiling down into his eyes.

"The Duke," the poor lips whispered. "He is coming," said Moore confidently, though how he knew I could not tell. But even as he spoke, looking out of the window, I saw Jim come swinging round the bluff. Bruce heard the beat of his boots, smiled, opened his eyes and waited. The leap of joy in his eyes as the Duke came in, clean, cool and fresh as the morning, went to my heart.

Neither man said a word, but Bruce took hold of the Duke's hand in both of his. He was fast growing weaker. I gave him brandy and he recovered a little strength.

"I am dying, Duke," he said quietly. "Promise you won't blame yourself."

"I can't, old man," said the Duke, with a shudder. "Would to heaven I could."

"You were too strong for me and you didn't think, did you?" And the weak voice had a carass in it.

"No, no, God knows," said the Duke hurriedly.

There was a long silence, and again Bruce opened his eyes and whispered: "The Pilot."

Moore came to him.

"Read the Prodigal," he said faintly, and in Moore's clear, sweet voice the music of that matchless story fell upon our ears.

Again Bruce's eyes summoned me. I bent over him.

"My letter," he said faintly; "in my coat."

I brought to him the last letter from his mother. He held the envelope before his eyes, then handed it to me, whispering:

"Read."

I opened the letter and looked at the words "My darling Bruce." My tongue stuck and not a sound could I make. Moore put out his hand and took it from me. The Duke rose to go out, calling me with his eyes, but Bruce motioned him to stay, and he sat down and bowed his head while Moore read the letter.

His tones were clear and steady till he came to the last words, when his voice broke and ended in a sob:

"And, oh, Bruce, lad, if ever your heart turns home again remember the door is always open, and it's joy you'll bring with you to us all."

Bruce lay quite still and from his closed eyes big tears ran down his cheeks. It was his last farewell to her whose love had been to him the anchor to all things pure here and to heaven beyond.

He took the letter from Moore's hand, but it with difficulty to his lips, and then, touching the open Bible, he said between his breaths:

"It's—very like—there's really—no fear, is there?"

"No, no," said Moore, with cheerful, confident voice, though his tears were flowing. "No fear of your welcome."

His eyes met mine. I bent over him. "Tell her"—and his voice faded away.

"What shall I tell her?" I asked, trying to recall him. But the message was never given. He moved one hand slowly toward the Duke till it touched his hand. The Duke lifted his face and looked down at him, and then he did a beautiful thing for which I forgive him much. He stooped over and kissed the lips grown so white, and then the brow. The light came back into the eyes of the dying man, he smiled once more and smilingly faced toward the great beyond. And the morning air, fresh from the sun tipped mountains and sweet with the scent of the June roses, came blowing soft and cool through the open window upon the dead, smiling face. And it seemed fitting so. It came from the land of the morning.

Again the Duke did a beautiful thing; for, reaching across his dead friend, he offered his hand to the Pilot.

"Mr. Moore," he said with fine courtesy, "you are a brave man and a good man. I ask your forgiveness for much rudeness."

But Moore only shook his head while he took the outstretched hand and said brokenly, "Don't! I can't stand it!"

"The Company of the Noble Seven will meet no more," said the Duke with a faint smile.

They did meet, however; but when they did the Pilot was in the chair and it was not for poker.

The Pilot had "got his grip," as Bill said.

CHAPTER IX. GWEN.

IT was not many days after my arrival in the foothill country that I began to hear of Gwen. They all had stories of her. The details were not many, but the impression was vivid. She lived remote from that center of civilization known as Swan Creek in the postal guide, but locally as Old Latour's, far

up among the hills near the Devil's lake, and from her father's ranch she never ventured. "But some of the men had had glimpses of her and had come to definite opinions regarding her."

"What is she like?" I asked Bill one day, trying to pin him down to something like a descriptive account of her. "Like! She's a terror," he said, with slow emphasis, "a holy terror."

"But what is she like? What does she look like?" I asked impatiently. "Look like?" He considered a moment, looked slowly round as if searching for a simile, then answered, "I dunno."

"Don't know? What do you mean? Haven't you seen her?"

"Well, she ain't like nothin'." Bill was quite decided upon this point.

I tried again. "Well, what sort of hair has she got? She's got hair, I suppose?"

"Hayer! Well, a few!" said Bill, with some choice combinations of profanity in repudiation of my suggestion. "Yards of it! Red!"

"Git out!" contradicted Bill. "Red! Tain't no more red than mine!"

Bill regarded Bill's hair critically. "What color do you put on to your old brush?" he asked cautiously.

"Tain't no difference. Tain't red, anyhow."

"Red! Well, not quite exactly," and Bill went off into a low, long, choking chuckle, ejaculating now and then: "Red! Jee-may Ann! Red!"

"No, Bill," he went on, recovering himself with the same abruptness as he used with his bronco, and looking at his friend with a face even more than usually solemn, "your hayer ain't red, it's black."

He don't let any of your relatives persuade you to that. Tain't red, and he threatened to go off again, but pulled himself up with dangerous suddenness. "It may be blue, ceruleum or even purple, but red"—He paused, violently, looking at his friend as if he found him a new and interesting object of study upon which he could not trust himself to speak. Nor could he be induced to proceed with the description he had begun.

But Bill, paying no attention to Bill's oration, took up the subject with enthusiasm.

"She kin ride—she's a reg'lar buster to ride; ain't she, Bill?" Bill nodded.

"She kin bunch cattle 'an' cut out 'an' yank a steer up to any cowboy on the range."

"Why, how big is she?"

"Big? Why, she's just a kid! Tain't the bigness of her; it's the nerve. She's got the coldest kind of nerve you ever seen; hain't she, Bill?" And again Bill nodded.

"Remember the day she dropped that steer, Bill," went on Bill.

"What was that?" I asked, eager for a yarn.

"Oh, nothing," said Bill. "Nuthin'," retorted Bill. "Pretty big nuthin'!"

"What was it?" I urged.

"Oh, Bill here did some funny work at Old Meredith's round up, but he don't speak of it. He's shy, you see," and Bill grinned.

"Well, there ain't no occasion for your proceedin' on to that fact," said Bill dispassionately, and he loyally retraced, so I have never yet got the rights of the story. But from what I did hear I gathered that Bill, at the risk of his life, had pulled the Duke down under the hoofs of a mad steer, and that little Gwen, had in the coolest possible manner, sailed in on her bronco, and, by putting two bullets in to the steer's head, had saved them both from great danger, perhaps from death, for the rest of the cattle were crowding near. Of course Bill could never be persuaded to speak of the incident. A true western man will never hesitate to tell you what he can do, but of what he has done he does not readily speak.

The only other item that Bill contributed to the sketch of Gwen was that her temper could blaze if the occasion demanded.

"Member young Hill, Bill?"

Bill "membered."

"Didn't she cut into him sudden? Sarsapilla, right too?"

"What did she do?"

"Cut him across the face with her quirt in good style."

"What for?"

"Knockin' about her Indian Joe." Joe was, as I came to learn, Ponka's son and Gwen's most devoted slave.

"Oh, she ain't no refrigerator?"

"Yes," assented Bill. "She's a leetle swift."

Then, as if fearing he had been apologizing for her, he added, with the air of one settling the question: "But she's good stock! She suits me!"

The Duke helped me to another side of her character.

"She is a remarkable child," he said, one day; "wild and shy as a coyote, but fearless, quiet, and with a heart full of passions. Meredith—the Old Timer, you know—has kept her up there among the hills. She sees no one but himself and Ponka's Blackfoot relations, who treat her like a goddess and help to spoil her utterly. She knows their lingo and their ways—goes off with them for a week at a time."

"What! With the Blackfoot?"

"Ponka and Joe, of course, go along, but even without them she is as safe as if surrounded by the Coldstream guards. But she has given them up for some time now."

"And at home?" I asked. "Has she any education? Can she read or write?"

"Not she. She can make her own dresses, moccasins and leggings. She can cook and wash—that is, when she feels in the mood. And she knows all about the birds and beasts and flowers, and that sort of thing—but education! Why, she is hardly civilized!"

"What a shame!" I said. "How old is she?"

"Oh, a mere child—fourteen or fifteen, I imagine, but a woman in many things."

"And what does her father say to all this? Can he control her?"

"Control!" said the Duke in utter astonishment. "Why, bless your soul, nothing in heaven or earth could control her. Well, Bill you see her stand with her proud little head thrown back, giving orders to Joe, and you will never again connect the idea of control with the pride of her. I've seen some, too, in my day, but none to touch her for sheer, imperial pride. Little Lucifer that she is."

nonsense?" I asked, for I confess I was not much taken with the picture the Duke had drawn.

"Her father simply follows behind her and adores, as do all things that come near her, down or up, perhaps, to her two dogs, Wolf and Loo, for either of which she would readily die if need be. Still," he added after a pause, "it is a shame, as you say. She ought to know something of the redne-



Turning, I saw my pupil.

ments of civilization, to which, after all, she belongs, and from which none of us can hope to escape." The Duke was silent for a few moments and then added with some hesitation, "Then, too, she is quite a pagan—never saw a prayer book, you know."

And so it came about, chiefly through the Duke's influence, I imagine, that I was engaged by the Old Timer to go up to his ranch every week and teach his daughter something of the elements of a lady's education.

My introduction was ominous of the many things I was to suffer of that same young maiden before I had finished my course with her. The Old Timer had given careful directions as to the trail that would lead me to the canyon where he was to meet me. Up the Swan went the trail, winding ever downward into deeper and narrower coulees and up to higher open sunlit slopes, till suddenly it settled into a valley which began with great width and narrowed to a canyon whose rocky sides were dressed out with shrubs and trailing vines and wet with trickling rivulets from the numerous springs that oozed and gushed from the black, gleaming rocks. This canyon was an eerie place of which ghostly tales were told from the old Blackfoot times. And to this day no Blackfoot will dare pass through this black walled, oozing, gleaming canyon after the moon has passed the western lip. But in the warm light of broad day the canyon was a good enough place, cool and sweet, and I lingered through, waiting for the Old Timer, who failed to appear till the shadows began to darken its western black sides.

Out of the mouth of the canyon the trail climbed to a wide stretch of prairie that swept up over soft hills to the left and down to the bright, gleaming waters of the Devil's lake on the right. In the sunlight the lake lay like a gem radiant with many colors, the far side black in the shadow of the crowding pines, then, in the middle, deep, blue and purple, and, nearer, many shades of emerald that ran quite to the white-sandy beach. Right in front stood the ranch buildings, upon a slight rising ground and surrounded by a sturdy palisade of upright pointed poles. This was the castle of the princess. I rode up to the open gate, then turned and stood to look down upon the marvelous lake shining and shimmering with its many, radiant colors. Suddenly there was an awful roar, my pony shot round upon his hind legs after his bearded cayuse pinner, deposited me sitting upon the ground and fled down the trail, pursued by two huge dogs that barked past me as I fell. I was aroused from my amazement by a peal of laughter; shrill, but full of merriment. Turning, I saw my pupil, as I guessed, standing at the head of a most beautiful pinto (spotted) pony with a heavy cattle-quirt in her hand. I scrambled to my feet and said, somewhat snarling, I fear:

"What are you laughing at? Why don't you call back your dogs? They will chase my pony beyond all reach."

She lifted her little head, shook back her masses of brown red hair, looked at me as if I were quite beneath contempt and said, "No, they will kill him."

"Then," said I, for I was very angry, "I will kill them," pulling at the revolver in my belt.

"Then," she said, and for the first time I noticed her eyes blue black with gray rims, "I will kill you," and she whipped out an ugly looking revolver. From her face I had no doubt that she would not hesitate to do as she had said. I changed my tactics, for I was anxious about my pony, and said, with my best smile:

"Can't you call them back? Won't they obey you?"

Her face changed in a moment.

"Is it your pony? Do you love him very much?"

"Dear!" I said, persuading myself of a sudden affection for the cranky little brute.

She sprang upon her pinto and set off down the trail. The pony was now coursing up and down the slopes, doubling like a hare, instinctively avoiding the canyon, where he would be cornered. He was mad with terror at the huge brutes that were silently but with awful and sure swiftness running him down.

The girl on the pinto whistled shrilly and called to her dog: "Down, Wolf! Back, Loo!" But running low, with long, stretched bodies, they heeded not, but sped on, ever gaining upon the pony that now circled toward the pinto. As they drew near in their circling, the girl urged her pinto to meet them, loosening her lariat as she went. As the pony neared the pinto he slackened his speed; immediately the nearer dog gathered herself in two short jumps and sprang for the pony's throat. But, even as she sprang, the lariat whirled round the girl's head and fell swift and sure about the dog's neck, and next moment she lay choking upon the prairie. Her mate paused, looked back and gave up the chase. But dire vengeance overtook them, for, like one

Anniversary Clearing

Sale of Men's Trousers.

How about an extra pair of Trousers to finish out the season. Nothing is more genteel looking than a neat striped Trousers worn with a negligee shirt. Our Trousers will please you. They possess every requisite of the finest tailor made at just about one-half their price. They have belt loops—they fit over the hips, they set graceful over the instep, in fact the effect is ideal.

- \$8.00 Trousers selling at.....\$6.00
- \$7.00 Trousers selling at.....\$5.25
- \$6.00 Trousers selling at.....\$4.50
- \$5.00 Trousers selling at.....\$3.75
- \$4.00 Trousers selling at.....\$3.00
- \$3.00 Trousers selling at.....\$2.25

We clothe men and boys right.

Magee & Deemer

CLOTHIERS LINCOLN 1109 O ST.

possessed, the girl ten upon them with her quirt and beat them one after the other till, in pity for the brutes, I interposed.

"They shall do as I say or I shall kill them! I shall kill them!" she cried, raging and stamping.

"Better shoot them," I suggested, pulling out my pistol.

Immediately she flung herself upon the one that roared and whined at her feet, crying:

"If you dare! If you dare!" Then she burst into passionate sobbing. "You bad Loo! You bad, dear old Loo! But you were bad—you know you were bad!" And so she went on, with her arms about Loo's neck till Loo, whining and quivering with love and delight, threatened to go quite mad, and Wolf, standing majestically near, broke into short howls of impatience for his turn of caressing. They made a strange group, these three wild things, equally fierce and passionate in hate and in love.

Suddenly the girl remembered me, and standing up she said, half ashamed:

"They always obey me. They are mine, but they kill any strange thing that comes in through the gate. They are allowed to."

"What?"

"I mean, isn't that dangerous to strangers?"

"The Duke comes, does he?"

"Yes," and her eyes lit up. "He is my friend. He calls me his 'princess,' and he teaches me to talk and tells me stories—oh, such wonderful stories!"

I looked in wonder at the girl who so gentle, so girlish, and tried to think back to the picture of the girl who a few moments before had so coolly threatened to shoot me and had so furiously beaten her dogs.

I kept her talking of the Duke as we walked back to the gate, watching her face the while. It was not beautiful, it was too thin and the mouth was too large. But the teeth were good and the eyes, blue black with gray rims, looked straight at you—true eyes and brave, whether in love or in war. Her hair whether in love or in war. Her hair of her glory. Red it was, in spite of Bill's denial, but of such marvelous, indescribable shade that in certain lights, as she rode over the prairie, it streamed behind her like a purple banner—a most confusing and bewildering color, but quite in keeping with the nature of the owner.

She gave her pinto to Joe and, standing at the door, welcomed me with a dignity and graciousness that made me think that the Duke was not far wrong when he named her "Princess."

The door opened upon the main or living room. It was a long apartment, with low ceiling and walls of heavy logs chinked and plastered and all beautifully whitewashed and clean.

The tables, chairs and benches were all homemade. On the floor were magnificent skins of wolf, bear, musk ox and mountain goat. The walls were decorated with heads and horns of deer and mountain sheep, eagles' wings and a beautiful breast of a loon, which Gwen had shot and of which she was very proud. At one end of the room a huge stone fireplace stood radiant in its summer decoration of ferns and grasses and wild flowers. At the other end a door opened into another room, smaller and richly furnished with relics of former grandeur.

Everything was clean and well kept. Every nook, shelf and corner was decked with flowers and ferns from the canyon.

A strange house it was, full of curious contrasts, but it fitted this quaint child that welcomed me with such gracious courtesy.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Colorado in Summer

is the most delightful place in the country. The health and pleasure resorts of this wonderful state are best reached by the Colorado & Southern railway, which issues an elegant book, "Picturesque Colorado," a copy of which may be had by enclosing 3 cents in postage to T. E. Fisher, general passenger agent, Denver, Col.

BEST FOR THE BOWELS

If you have a regular, healthy movement of the bowels every day, you're all right. Keep your bowels open, and be well. For, in the shape of violent colic or pill poison, is dangerous. The smooth, steady flow of feces is the best way of keeping the bowels clear and clean is to take



EAT 'EM LIKE CANDY Pleasant, Palatable, Potent, Clean, Good, Do Good, Never Blacken, Weaken or Gripes, No Stomach or Bowel Trouble. Write for free sample, and booklet on health. Address: Sterling Remedy Company, Chicago or New York. KEEP YOUR BLOOD CLEAN

SADDLES HARNESS OR HORSE COLLARS

With this Brand on are the Best Made