

The SKY PILOT

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

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CHAPTER VIII. THE PILOT'S GRIP.

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 vocabulary 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 devil 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's," said Bruce soberly. "I could have sworn it was my aunt's in Baltimore," 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 wait 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 of 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 overdue, 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.

When the gray of the morning was coming in at the window the Duke rose up, gave himself a little shake and said:

"I am not of any service here. I shall come back in the evening."

He went and stood for a few moments looking down upon the hot, fevered face; then, turning to me, he asked:

"What do you think?"

"Can't say! The bromide is holding him down just now. His blood is bad for that wound."

"Can I get anything?" I knew him well enough to recognize the anxiety under his indifferent manner.

"The Fort doctor ought to be got." He nodded and went out.

"Have breakfast?" called out Moore from the door.

I said, for I thought Moore a little hard.

"Did I say anything untrue?"

"Well, not untrue, perhaps; but truth is like medicine—not always good to take." At which Moore was silent till his patient needed him again.

It was a weary day. The intense pain from the wound and the high fever from the poison in his blood kept the poor fellow in delirium till evening, when the Duke rode up with the Fort doctor. Jingo appeared as a nearly played out as a horse of his spirit ever allowed himself to become.

"Seventy miles," said the Duke, swinging himself off the saddle. "The doctor was ten miles off. How is he?"

I shook my head, and he led away his horse to give him a rub and a feed. Meantime the doctor, who was of the army and had seen service, was examining his patient. He grew more and more puzzled as he noted the various symptoms. Finally he broke out:

"What have you been doing to him? Why is he in this condition? This flea bite doesn't account for all," pointing to the wound.

We stood like children reproved. Then the Duke said hesitatingly:

"I fear, doctor, the life has been a little too hard for him. He had a severe nervous attack—seeing things, you know."

"Yes, I know," stormed the old doctor. "I know you well enough, with your head of cast iron and no nerves to speak of. I know the crowd and how you lead them. Infernal fool! You'll get your turn some day. I've warned you before."

The Duke was standing up before the doctor during this storm smiling slightly. All at once the smile faded out, and he pointed to the bed. Bruce was sitting up, quiet and steady. He stretched out his hand to the Duke.

"Don't mind the old fool," he said, holding the Duke's hand and looking up at him as fondly as if he were a girl. "It's my own funeral—funeral!"

He paused. "Perhaps it may be—remember, Duke, it's my own fault. Don't listen to those bally fools, looking toward Moore and the doctor. 'My own fault'—his voice died down into a whisper.

"My own fault,"

The Duke bent over him and laid his hand on the pillow, saying: "Thanks, old chap. You're good stuff. I'll not forget. Just keep quiet and you'll be all right." He passed his cool, firm hand over the hot brow of the man looking up at him with love in his eyes, and in a few moments Bruce fell asleep. Then the Duke lifted himself up and, facing the doctor, said in his coolest tone:

"Your words are more true than opportune, doctor. Your patient will need all your attention. As for my morals, Mr. Moore kindly trusts himself with the care of them." This with a bow toward the Pilot.

"I wish him joy of his charge," snorted the doctor, turning again to the bed where Bruce had already passed into delirium.

The memory of that night was like a horrible nightmare for months. Moore lay on the floor and slept. The Duke rode off somewhere. The old doctor and I kept watch. All night long Bruce lay in the wildest delirium, singing now psalms, now songs, swearing

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 him 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 to 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 sworn enemy.

"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 Jingo come swinging round the bluff. Bruce heard the beat of his hoofs, 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 caress 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, put 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 head. 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. GIVEN.

GIVEN.

IT was not many days after my arrival in the foothill country that I began to hear of Given.

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?"

"Yeh! But she ain't like nothing." 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!"

"Gitt 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."

Bill 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 blue 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; ain'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.

"Nothing!" retorted Bill. "Pretty big nothing!"

"What was it?" I urged.

"Oh, Bill, here I 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 proceeding on to that fact," said Bill dispassionately, and he loyally realized, 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 from under the hoofs of a mad steer, and that little Given, in the coolest possible manner, "balled" 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 Given was that her temper could blaze if the occasion demanded.

Member young Bill, Bill?

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

"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 Given's most devoted slave.

"Oh, she ain't no refrigerator."

"Yes," assented Bill. "She's a little 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, quite, 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 Given. She might be a princess for 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."

"And how does her father stand her?"

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 red-



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, glistening 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 to pass through this black walled, crazy, glistening 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 his 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-sand 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 heady caprice, and, 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 anxiously, 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 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 reins of my pony.

"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?"

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

"Dearly!" 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 clogging upon the prairie. Her mate paused, looked back and gave up the chase. But dire vengeance overtook them, for, like one

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