

Whispering Smith

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Chapter 1

The Wrecking Boss

News of the wreck at Smoky Creek reached Medicine Bend from Point of Rocks at five o'clock. Sinclair, in person, was overseeing the making up of his wrecking train, and the yard, usually quiet at that hour of the morning, was alive with the hurry of men and engines.

In the trainmaster's room of the weather-beaten headquarters building, nicknamed by railroad men "The Wickiup," early comers---sleepy-faced, keen-eyed train-men---lounged on the tables and in chairs discussing the reports from Point of Rocks, and among them crew-callers and messengers moved in and out.

From the door of the big operator's room, pushed at intervals abruptly open, burst a blaze of light and the current crash of many keys; within, behind glass screens, alert, smooth-faced boys in shirt sleeves rained calls over the wires or bent with flying pens above clips, taking incoming messages.

At one end of the room, heedless of the strain on the division, press dispatches and cablegrams clicked in monotonous

relay over commercial wires; while at the other, operators were taking from the dispatchers' room the train orders and the hurried dispositions made for the wreck emergency by Anderson, the assistant superintendent.

At a table in the alcove the chief operator was trying to reach the division superintendent, McCloud, at Sleepy Cat; at his elbow, his best man was ringing the insistent calls of the dispatcher and clearing the line for Sinclair and the wrecking gang.

Two minutes after the wrecking train reported ready they had their orders and were pulling out of the upper yard, with right of way over everything to Point of Rocks.

The wreck had occurred just west of the creek. A fast east-bound freight train, double-headed, had left the track on the long curve around the hill, and when the wrecking train backed through Ten Shed Cut the sun streamed over the heaps of jammed and twisted cars strung all the way from the point of the curve to the foot of Smoky Hill.

The crew of the train that lay in the ditch walked slowly up the track to where the wreckers had pulled up, and the freight conductor asked for Sinclair. Men rigging the derrick pointed to the hind car. The conductor, swinging up the caboose steps, made his way inside among the men that were passing out tools.

The air within was bluish-thick with tobacco smoke, but through the haze the freightman saw facing him, in the far corner of the den-like interior, a man seated behind an old

dining car table, finishing his breakfast; one glimpse was enough to identify the dark beard of Sinclair, foreman of the bridges and boss of the wrecking gang.

Beside him stood a steaming coffee-tank, and in his right hand he held an enormous tin cup that he was about to raise to his mouth when he saw the freight conductor. With a laugh, Sinclair threw up his left hand and beckoned him over. Then he shook his hair just a little, tossed back his head, opened an unusual mouth, drained the cup at a gulp, and cursing the freightman fraternally, exclaimed, "How many cars have you ditched this time?"

The trainman, a sober-faced fellow, answered dryly, "All I had."

"Running too fast, eh?" glared Sinclair.

With the box cars piled forty feet high on the track, the conductor was too old a hand to begin a controversy. "Our time's fast," was all he said.

Sinclair rose and exclaimed, "Come on!" And the two, leaving the car, started up the track. The wrecking boss paid no attention to his companion as they forged ahead, but where the train had hit the curve he scanned the track as he would a blueprint. "They'll have your scalp for this," he declared abruptly.

"I reckon they will."

"What's your name?"

"Stevens."

"Looks like all day for you, doesn't it? No matter; I guess I can help you out."

Where the merchandise cars lay, below the switch, the train crew knew that a tramp had been caught. At intervals they heard groans under the wreckage, which was piled high there. Sinclair stopped at the derrick, and the freight conductor went on to where his brakeman had enlisted two of Sinclair's giants to help get out the tramp.

A brake beam had crushed the man's legs, and the pallor of his face showed that he was hurt internally, but he was conscious and moaned softly. The men had started to carry him to the way-car when Sinclair came up, asked what they were doing, and ordered them back to the wreck. They hastily laid the tramp down.

"But he wants water," protested a brakeman who was walking behind, carrying his arm in a sling.

"Water!" bawled Sinclair. "Have my men got nothing to do but carry a tramp to water? Get ahead there and help unload those refrigerators. He'll find water fast enough. Let the damned hobo crawl down to the creek after it."

The tramp was too far gone for resentment; he had fainted when they laid him down, and his half-glazed eyes, staring at the sky, gave no evidence that he heard anything.

The sun rose hot, for in the Red Desert sky there is rarely a cloud. Sinclair took the little hill nearest the switch to bellow his orders from, running down among the men whenever necessary to help carry them out. Within thirty minutes, though apparently no impression had been made on the great heaps of wrenched and splintered equipment, Sinclair had the job in hand.

Work such as this was the man's genius. In handling a wreck Sinclair was a marvel among mountain men. He was tall but not stout, with flashing brown eyes and a strength always equal to that of the best man in his crew.

But his inspiration lay in destruction, and the more complete the better. There were no futile moves under Sinclair's quick eyes, no useless pulling and hauling, no false grappling; but like a raven at a feast, every time his derrick-beak plucked at the wreck, he brought something worthwhile away.

Whether he was righting a tender, re-railing an engine, tearing out a car-body, or swinging a set of trucks into the clear, Sinclair, men said, had luck, and no confusion in day or night was great enough to drown his heavy tones or blur his rapid thinking.

Just below where the wrecking boss stood lay the tramp. The sun scorched his drawn face, but he made no effort to turn from it. Sometimes he opened his eyes, but Sinclair was not a promising source of help, and no one that might have helped dared venture within speaking distance of the injured man.

When the heat and the pain at last extorted a groan and an appeal, Sinclair turned.

"Damn you, ain't you dead yet? What? Water?" He pointed to a butt standing in the shade of a car that had been thrown out near the switch. "There's water; go get it!"

The cracking of a box car as the derrick wrenched it from the wreck was engaging the attention of the boss, and as he saw the grapple slip he yelled to his men and pointed to the chains.

The tramp lay still a long time. At last he began to drag himself toward the butt. In the glare of the sun timbers strained and snapped, and men with bars and axes chopped and wrenched at the massive frames and twisted iron on the track.

The wrecking gang moved like ants in and out of the shapeless *debris*; and at intervals, as the sun rose higher, the tramp dragged himself nearer the butt. He lay on the burning sand like a crippled insect, crawling, and waiting for strength to crawl.

To him there was no railroad and no wreck, but only the blinding sun, the hot sand, the torture of thirst, and somewhere water, if he could reach it.

The freight conductor, Stevens, afraid of no man, had come up to speak to Sinclair, and Sinclair, with a smile, laid a cordial hand on his shoulder. "Stevens, it's all right. I'll get you out of this. Come here."

He led the conductor down the track where they had walked in the morning. He pointed to flange-marks on the ties. "See there---there's where the first wheels left the track, and they left on the inside of the curve; a thin flange under the first refrigerator broke.

I've got the wheel itself back there for evidence. They can't talk fast running against that. Damn a private car-line, anyway!

Give me a cigar---haven't got any? Great guns, man, there's a case of Key Wests open up ahead; go fill your pockets and your grip. Don't be bashful; you've got friends on the division if you are Irish, eh?"

"Sure, only I don't smoke," said Stevens, with diplomacy.

"Well, you drink, don't you? There's a barrel of brandy open at the switch."

The brandy-cask stood up-ended near the water-butt, and the men dipped out of both with cups. They were working now half naked at the wreck.

The sun hung in a cloudless sky, the air was still, and along the right of way huge wrecking fires added to the scorching heat. Ten feet from the water-butt lay a flattened mass of rags. Crusted in smoke and blood and dirt, crushed by a vise of beams and wheels out of human semblances, and left now an aimless, twitching thing, the tramp clutched at Steven's foot as he passed.

"Water!"

"Hello, old boy, how the devil did you get here?" exclaimed Stevens, retreating in alarm.

"Water!"

Stevens stepped to the butt and filled a cup. The tramp's eyes were closed. Stevens poured the water over his face; then he lifted the man's head and put a cupful to his lips.

"Is that hobo alive yet?" asked Sinclair, coming back smoking a cigar. "What does he want now? Water? Don't waste any time on him."

"It's bad luck refusing water," muttered Stevens, holding the cup.

"He'll be dead in a minute," growled Sinclair.

The sound of his voice roused the failing man to a fury. He opened his bloodshot eyes, and with the dregs of an ebbing vitality cursed Sinclair with a frenzy that made Stevens draw back. If Sinclair was startled he gave no sign. "Go to hell!" he exclaimed harshly.

With a ghastly effort the man made his retort.

He held up his blood-soaked fingers. "I'm going all right---I know that," he gasped, with a curse, "but I'll come back for you!"

Sinclair, unshaken, stood his ground. He repeated his imprecation more violently; but Stevens, swallowing, stole out of hearing. As he disappeared, a train whistled in the west.

Chapter 2

At Smoky Creek

Karg, Sinclair's crew foreman, came running over to him from a pile of merchandise that had been set off the right of way on the wagon-road for loot. "That's the superintendent's car coming, ain't it, Murray?" he cried, looking across the creek at the approaching train.

"What of it?" returned Sinclair.

"Why, we're just loading the team."

The incoming train, an engine with a way car, two flats, and the Bear Dance derrick, slowed up at one end of the wreck while Sinclair and his foreman talked. Three men could be seen getting out of the way car---McCloud and Reed Young, the Scotch roadmaster, and Bill Dancing. A gang of trackmen filed slowly out after them.

The leaders of the party made their way down the curve, and Sinclair, with Karg, met them at the point. McCloud asked questions about the wreck and the chances of getting the track clear, and while they talked Sinclair sent Karg to get the new derrick into action.

Sinclair then asked McCloud to walk with him up the track to see where the cars had left the rail. The two men showed in contract as they stepped along the ties. McCloud was not alone younger and below Sinclair's height: his broad Stetson hat flattened him somewhat.

His movement was deliberate beside Sinclair's litheness, and his face, though burned by sun and wind, was boyish, while Sinclair's was strongly lined.

"Just a moment," suggested McCloud mildly, as Sinclair hastened past the goods piled in the wagon-road. "Whose team is that, Sinclair?" The road followed the right of way where they stood, and a four-horse team of heavy mules was pulling a loaded ranch-wagon up the grade when McCloud spoke.

Sinclair answered cordially. "That's my team from over on the Frenchman. I picked them up at Denver. Nice mules, McCloud, ain't they? Give me mules every time for heavy work. If I had just a hundred more of 'em the company could have my job---what?"

"Yes. What's that stuff they are hauling?"

"That's a little stuff mashed up in the merchandise car; there's some tobacco there and a little wine, I guess. The cases are all smashed."

"Let's look at it."

"Oh, there's nothing there that's any good, McCloud."

"Let's look at it."

As Bill Dancing and Young walked behind the two men toward the wagon, Dancing made extraordinary efforts to wink at the roadmaster. "That's a good story about the mules coming

from Denver, ain't it?" he muttered. Young, Unwilling to commit himself, stopped to light his pipe. When he and Dancing joined Sinclair and McCloud the talk between the superintendent and the wrecking boss had become animated.

"I always do something for my men out of a wreck when I can; Sinclair was saying. "A little stuff like this," he added, nodding toward the wagon, "comes in handy for presents, and the company wouldn't get any salvage out of it, anyway. I get the value a dozen times over in quick work. Look there!"

Sinclair pointed to where the naked men heaved and wrenched in the sun. "Where could you get men to work like that if you didn't jolly them along once in a while? What? You haven't been here long, McCloud," smiled Sinclair, laying a hand with heavy affection on the young man's shoulder. "Ask any man on the division who gets the work out of his men--- who gets the wrecks cleaned up and the track cleared. Ain't that what you want?"

"Certainly, Sinclair; no man that ever saw you handle a wreck would undertake to do it better."

"Then what's all this fuss about?"

"We've been over all this matter before, as you know. The claims department won't stand for this looting; that's the whole story. Here are ten or twelve cases of champagne on your wagon---soiled a little, but worth a lot of money."

"That was a mistake loading that up; I admit it; it was Karg's carelessness."

"Here is one whole case of cigars and part of another," continued McCloud, climbing from one wheel to another of the wagon. "There is a thousand dollars in this load! I know you've got good men, Sinclair. If they are not getting paid as they should be, give them time and a half or double time, but put it in the pay checks. The freight loss and damage account increased two hundred per cent last year. No railroad company can keep that rate up and last, Sinclair."

"Hang the company! The claim agents are a pack of thieves," cried Sinclair. "Look here, McCloud, what's a pay check to a man that's sick, compared with a bottle of good wine?"

"When one of your men is sick and needs wine, let me know," returned McCloud; "I'll see that he gets it. Your men don't wear silk dresses, do they?" he asked, pointing to another case of goods under the driver's seat. "Have that stuff all hauled back and loaded into a box car on track."

"Not by a damned sight!" exclaimed Sinclair. He turned to his ranch driver, Barney Rebstock.

"You haul that stuff where you were told to haul it, Barney." Then, "you and I may as well have an understanding right here," he said, as McCloud walked to the head of the mules.

"By all means, and I'll begin by countermanding that order right now. Take your load straight back to that car," directed McCloud, pointing up the track. Barney, a ranch hand with a cigarette face looked surly at McCloud.

Sinclair raised a finger at the boy. "You drive straight ahead where I told you to drive. I don't propose to have my affairs interfered with by you or anybody else, Mr. McCloud. You and I can settle this thing ourselves," he added, walking straight toward the superintendent.

"Get away from those mules!" yelled Barney at the same moment, cracking his whip.

McCloud's dull eyes hardly lightened as he looked at the driver. "Don't swing your whip this way, my boy," he said, laying hold quietly of the near bridle.

"Drop that bridle!" roared Sinclair.

"I'll drop your mules in their tracks if they move one foot forward. Dancing, unhook those traces," said McCloud sternly. "Dump the wine out of that wagon-box, Young." Then he turned to Sinclair and pointed to the wreck. "Get back to your work."

The sun marked the five men rooted for an instant on the hillside. Dancing jumped at the traces, Reed Yong clambered over the wheel, and Sinclair, livid, faced McCloud. With a bitter denunciation of interlopers, claim agents, and "fresh" railroad men generally, Sinclair swore he would not go back to work, and a case of wine crashing to the ground infuriated him.

He turned on his heel and started for the wreck. "Call off the men!" he yelled to Karg at the derrick. The foreman passed the word. The derrickmen, dropping their hooks and chains in

some surprise, moved out of the wreckage. The axemen and laborers gathered around the foreman and followed him toward Sinclair.

"Boys," cried Sinclair, "we've got a new superintendent, a college guy. You know what they are; the company has tried 'em before. They draw the salaries and we do the work. This one down here now is making his little kick about the few pickings we get out of our jobs. You can go back to your work or you can stand right her with me til' we get our rights. What?"

Half a dozen men began talking at once. The derrickman from below, a hatchet-faced wiper, with the visor of a greasy cap cocked over his ear, stuck his head between the uprights and called out shrilly, "What's er' matter, Murray?" and a few men laughed.

Barney had deserted the mules. Dancing and Young, with small regard for loss or damage, were emptying the wagon like deckhands, for in a fight such as now appeared imminent, possession of the goods even on the ground seemed vital to prestige.

McCloud waited only long enough to assure the emptying of the wagon, and then followed Sinclair to where he had assembled his men. "Sinclair, put your men back to work."

"Not till we know just how we stand," Sinclair answered insolently. He continued to speak, but McCloud turned to the men. "Boys, go back to your work. Your boss and I can"

"settle our own differences. I'll see that you lose nothing by working hard."

"And you'll see we make nothing, won't you?" suggested Karg.

"I'll see that every man in the crew gets twice what is coming to him---all except you, Karg. I discharge you now. Sinclair, will you go back to work?"

"No!"

"Then, take your time. Any men that want to go back to work may step over to the switch," added McCloud.

Not a man moved. Sinclair and Karg smiled at each other, and with no apparent embarrassment McCloud himself smiled. "I like to see men loyal to their bosses," he said good-naturedly.

"I wouldn't give much for a man that wouldn't stick to his boss if he thought him right. But a question has come up here, boys, that must be settled once and for all. This wreck-
looting on the mountain division is going to stop---right here---
at this particular wreck. On that point there is no room for discussion."

"Now, any man that agrees with me on that matter may step over here and I'll discuss with him any other grievance. If what I say about looting is a grievance, it can't be discussed. Is there any man that wants to come over?" No man stirred.

"Sinclair glared in high humor. "Oh, I couldn't do that! I'm discharged!" he protested, bowing low.

"I don't want to be over-hasty, "returned McCloud. "This is a serious business, as you know better than they do, and there will never be as good a time to fix it up as now. There is a chance for you, I say, Sinclair, to take hold if you want to now."

"Why, I'll take hold if you'll take your nose out of my business and agree to keep it out."

"Is there *any* man here that wants to go back to work for the company?" continued McCloud evenly.

It was one man against thirty; McCloud saw there was not the shadow of a chance to win the strikers over. "This lets all of you out, you understand, boys," he added; "and you can never work again for the company on this division if you don't take hold now."

"Boys," exclaimed Sinclair, better-humored every moment, "I'll guarantee you work on this division when all the fresh superintendents are run out of the country, and I'll lay this matter before Bucks himself, and don't you forget it!"

"You will have a chilly job of it," interposed McCloud.

"So will you, my hearty, before you get trains running past here," retorted the wrecking boss. "Come on, boys."

The disaffected men drew off. The emptied wagon, its load scattered on the ground, stood deserted on the hillside, and the mules drooped in the heat. Bill Dancing, a giant and a dangerous one, stood lone guard over the loot, and Young had been called over by McCloud. "

"How many men have you got with you, Reed?"

"Eleven."

"How long will it take them to clean up this mess with what help we can run in this afternoon?"

Young studies the prospect before replying.

"They're green at this sort of thing, of course; they might be fussing here till tomorrow noon, I'm afraid; perhaps till tomorrow night, Mr. McCloud.

"That won't do!" The two men stood for a moment in a study. "The merchandise is all unloaded, isn't it?" said McCloud reflectively. "Get your men here and bring a water bucket with you."

McCloud walked down to the engine of the wrecking train and gave orders to the train and engine crews. The best of the refrigerator cars had been re-railed, and they were pulled to a safe distance from the wreck.

Young brought the bucket, and McCloud pointed to the cask full of brandy.

"Throw that brandy over the wreckage, Reed."

The roadmaster started. "Burn the whole thing up, eh?"

"Everything on the track."

"Bully! It's a shame to waste the liquor, but it's Sinclair's fault. Here, boys, scatter this stuff where it will catch good, and touch her off. Everything goes---the whole pile. Burn up everything; that's orders. If you can get a few rails here, now, I'll give you a track by sundown, Mr. McCloud, in spite of Sinclair and the devil."

The remains of many cars lay in heaps along the curve, and the trackmen like firebugs ran in and out of them. A tongue of flame leaped from the middle of a pile of stock cars. In five minutes the wreck was burning; in ten minutes the flames were crackling fiercely; then in another instant the wreck burst into a conflagration that rose hissing and seething a hundred feet straight up in the air.

From where they stood, Sinclair's men looked on. They were nonplussed, but their boss had not lost his nerve. He walked back to McCloud.

"You're going to send us back to Medicine Bend with the car, I suppose?"

McCloud spoke amiably. "Not on your life. Take your personal stuff out of the car and tell your men to take theirs; then get off the train and off the right of way."

"Going to turn us loose on Red Desert, are you?" asked Sinclair steadily.

"You turned yourselves loose."

"Wouldn't give a man a tie-pass, would you?"

"Come to my office in Medicine Bend and I'll talk to you about it," returned McCloud impassively.

"Well, boys," roared Sinclair, going back to his followers, "we can't ride on this road now! But I want to tell you there's something to eat for every one of you over at my place on the Crawling Stone, and a place to sleep---and something to drink," he added, cursing McCloud once more.

The superintendent eyed him, but made no response. Sinclair led his men to the wagon, and they piled into it till the box was filled. Barney Rebstock had the reins again, and the mules groaned as the whip cracked. Those that could not climb into the wagon as it moved off straggled along behind, and the air was filled with cheers and curses.

The wreck burned furiously, and the column of black smoke shot straight up. Sinclair, as his cavalcade moved over the hill, followed on foot, grimly. He was last to cross the divide that shut the scene on the track away from the striking wreckers, and as he reached the crest he paused and looked back, standing for a moment like a statue outlined in the vivid sunshine.

For all his bravado, something told him he should never handle another wreck on the mountain division---that he stood a king dethroned.

Uninviting enough to many men, this had been his kingdom, and he loved the power it gave him. He had run it like many a reckless potentate, but no one could say he had not been royal in his work as well as in his looting.

It was impossible not to admire the man, his tremendous capacity, his extraordinary power as a leader; and no one liked his better traits more than McCloud himself. But Sinclair never loved McCloud.

Long afterward he told Whispering Smith that he made his first mistake in a long and desperate game in not killing McCloud when he laid his hand that morning on the bridle of the mules; it would have been easy then. Sinclair might have been thinking of it even as he stood looking back.

But he stood only for a moment, then turned and passed over the hill.

Chapter 3

Dicksie

The wreckers, drifting in the blaze of the sun across the broad alkali valley, saw the smoke of the wreck-fire behind them. No breath of wind stirred it. With the stillness of a signal column it rose, thin and black, and high in the air spread motionless, like a huge umbrella, above Smoky Creek.

Reed Young had gone with an engine to wire reinforcements, and McCloud, active among the trackmen until the conflagration spent itself, had retired to the shade of the hill.

Reclining against a rock with his legs crossed, he had clasped his hands behind his head and sat looking at the iron writhing in the dying heat of the fire. The sound of hoofs aroused him, and looking below he saw a horsewoman reining up near his men at the wreck.

She rode an American horse, thin and rangy, and the experienced way in which she checked him drew him back almost to his haunches. But McCloud's eyes were fixed on the slender figure of the rider. He was wholly at a loss to account, at such a time and in such a place, for a visitor in gauntleted gloves and a banded Panama hat.

He studied her with growing amazement. Her hair coiled low on her neck supported the very free roll of the hat-brim. Her black riding skirt clung to her waist to form its own girdle, and her white stock, rolled high on her neck, rose above a

heavy shirtwaist of white linen, and gave her an air of confident erectness.

The trackmen stopped work to look, but her attitude in their gaze was one of impatience rather than of embarrassment. Her boot flashed in the stirrup while she spoke to the nearest man, and her horse stretched his neck and nosed the brown alkali grass that spread thinly along the road.

To McCloud she was something like an apparition. He sat spellbound until the trackman indiscreetly pointed him out, and the eyes of the visitor, turning his way, caught him with his hands on the rock in an attitude openly curious.

She turned immediately away, but McCloud rose and started down the hill. The horse's head was pulled up, and there were signs of departure. He quickened his steps. Once he saw, or thought he saw, the rider's head so turned that her eyes might have commanded one approaching from his quarter; yet he could catch no further glimpse of her face.

A second surprise awaited him. Just as she seemed about to ride away, she dropped lightly from the horse to the ground, and he saw how confident in figure she was. As she began to try her saddle-girths, McCloud attempted a greeting. She could not ignore his hat, held rather high above his head as he approached, but she gave him the slightest nod in return---one that made no attempt to explain why she was there or where she had come from.

"Pardon me," ventured McCloud, "have you lost your way?"

He was immediately conscious that he had said the wrong thing. The expression of her eyes implied that it was foolish to suppose she was lost but she only answered, "I saw the smoke and feared the bridge was on fire."

Something in her voice made him almost sorry he had intervened; if she stood in need of help of any sort it was not apparent, and her gaze was confusing. He became conscious that he was at the worst for an inspection; his face felt streaky with smoke, his hat and shirt had suffered severely in directing the fire, and his hands were black.

He said to himself in revenge that she was not pretty, despite the fact that she seemed completely to take away his consequence. He felt, while she inspected him, like a brakeman.

"I presume Mr. Sinclair is here?" she said presently.

"I am sorry to say he is not."

"He usually has charge of the wrecks, I think. What a dreadful fire!" she murmured, looking down the track. She stood beside the horse with one hand resting on her girdle. Around the hand that held the bridle her quirt lay coiled in the folds of her glove, and, though seemingly undecided as to what to do, her composure did not lessen.

As she looked at the wreckage, a breath of wind lifted the hair that curled around her ear. The mountain wind playing on her neck had left it brown, and above, the pulse of her ride rose red in her cheek.

"Was it a passenger wreck?" She turned abruptly on McCloud to ask the question. Her eyes were brown, too, he saw, and a doubt assailed him. Was she pretty?

"Only a freight wreck," he answered.

"I thought if there were passengers hurt I could send help from the ranch. Were you the conductor?"

"Fortunately not."

"And no one was hurt?"

"Only a tramp. We are burning the wreck to clear the track."

"From the divide it looked like a mountain on fire. I'm sorry Mr. Sinclair is not here."

"Why, indeed, yes, so am I."

"Because I know him. You are one of his men, I presume."

"Not exactly; but is there anything I can do-----"

"Oh, thank you, nothing, except that you might tell him the pretty bay colt he sent over to us has sprung his shoulder."

"He will be sorry to hear it, I'm sure."

"But we are doing everything possible for him. He is going to make a perfectly lovely horse."

"And whom may I say the message is from?"

Though disconcerted, McCloud was regaining his wits. He felt perfectly certain there was no danger, if she knew Sinclair and lived in the mountains, but that she would sometime find out he was not a conductor. When he asked his question she appeared slightly surprised and answered easily, "Mr. Sinclair will know it is from Dicksie Dunning."

McCloud knew her then. Everyone knew Dicksie Dunning in the high country. This was Dicksie Dunning of the great Crawling Stone ranch, most widely known of all the mountain ranches. While his stupidity in not guessing her identity before overwhelmed him, he resolved to exhaust the last effort to win her interest.

"I don't know just when I shall see Mr. Sinclair," he answered gravely, "but he shall certainly have your message."

A doubt seemed to steal over Dicksie at the change in McCloud's manner. "Oh, pardon me---I thought you were working for the company."

"You are quite right, I am; but Mr. Sinclair is not."

Her eyebrows rose a little. "I think you are mistaken, aren't you?"

"It is possible I am; but if he is working for the company it is pretty certain that I am not," he continued, heaping mystification on her. "However, that will not prevent my

delivering the message. By the way, may I ask which shoulder?"

"Shoulder!"

"Which shoulder is sprung?"

"Oh, of course! The right shoulder, and it is sprung pretty badly, too, Cousin Lance says. How very stupid of me to ride over here for a freight wreck!"

McCloud felt humiliated at having nothing better worth while to offer. "It was a very bad one," he ventured.

"But not of the kind I can be of any help at, I fear."

McCloud smiled. "We are certainly short of help."

Dicksie brought her horse's head around. She felt again of the girth as she replied, "Not such as I can supply, I'm afraid." And with the words she stepped away, as if preparing to mount.

McCloud intervened. "I hope you won't go away without resting your horse. The sun is so hot. Mayn't I offer you some sort of refreshment!"

Dicksie Dunning thought not.

"The sun is very warm," persisted McCloud.

Dicksie smoothed her gauntlet in the assured manner natural to her. "I am pretty well used to it."

But McCloud held on. "Several cars of fruit were destroyed in the wreck. I can offer you any quantity of grapes---crates of them are spoiling over there---and pears."

"Thank you, I am just from luncheon."

"And I have cooled water in the car. I hope you won't refuse that, so far out in the desert."

Dicksie laughed a little. "Do you call this far? I don't; and I don't call this desert by any means. Thank you ever so much for the water, but I'm not in the least thirsty."

"It was kind of you even to think of extending help. I wish you would let me send some fruit over to your ranch. It is only spoiling here."

Dicksie stroked the neck of her horse. "It is about eighteen miles to the ranch house."

"I don't call that far."

"Oh, it isn't" she returned hastily, professing not to notice the look that went with the words, "except for perishable things!" Then, as if acknowledging her disadvantage, she added, swinging her bridle rein around, "I am under obligations for the offer, just the same."

"At least, won't you let your horse drink?" McCloud threw the force of an appeal into his words, and Dicksie stopped her preparations and appeared to waver.

"Jim *is* pretty thirsty, I suppose. Have you plenty of water?"

"A tender full. Had I better lead him down while you wait up on the hill in the shade?"

"Can't I ride him down?"

"It would be pretty tough riding."

"Oh, Jim goes anywhere," she said, with her attractive indifference to situations. "If you don't mind helping me mount."

"With pleasure."

She stood waiting for his hand, and McCloud stood, not knowing just what to do. She glanced at him expectantly. The sun grew intensely hot.

"You will have to show me how," he stammered at last.

"Don't you know?"

He mentally cursed the technical education that left him helpless at such a moment, but it was useless to pretend.

"Frankly, I don't!"

"Just give me your hand. Oh, not in that way! But never mind, I'll walk," she suggested, catching up her skirt.

"The rocks will cut your boots all to pieces. Suppose you tell me what to do this once," he said, assuming some confidence. "I'll never forget."

"Why, if you will just give me your hand for my foot, I can manage, you know."

He did not know, but she lifted her skirt graciously, and her crushed boot rested easily for a moment in his hand. She rose in the air above him before he could well comprehend. He felt the quick spring from his supporting hand, and it was an instant of exhilaration.

Then she balanced herself with a flushed laugh in the saddle, and he guided her ahead among the loose rocks, the horse nosing at his elbow as they picked their way.

Crossing the tracks, they gained better ground. As they reached the switch and passed a box car, Jim shied, and Dicksie spoke sharply to him. McCloud turned.

In the shade of the car lay the tramp.

"That man lying there frightened him," explained Dicksie. "Oh," she exclaimed suddenly, "he has been hurt!" She turned away her head. "Is that the man who was in the wreck?"

"Yes."

"Do something for him. He must be suffering terribly."

"The men gave him some water awhile ago, and when we moved him into the shade we thought he was dead."

"He isn't dead yet!" Dicksie's face, still averted, had grown white. "I saw him move. Can't you do something for him?"

She reined up at a little distance. McCloud bent over the man a moment and spoke to him. When he rose he called to the men on the track.

"You are right," he said, rejoining Dicksie; "he is very much alive. His name is Wickwire; he is a cowboy."

"A cowboy!"

"A tramp cowboy."

"What can you do with him?"

"I'll have the men put him in the caboose and send him to Barnhardt's hospital at Medicine Bend when the engine comes back. He may live yet. If he does, he can thank you for it."

Chapter 4

George McCloud

McCloud was an exception to every tradition that goes to make up a mountain railroad man. He was from New England, with a mild voice and a hand that roughened very slowly. McCloud was a classmate of Morris Blood's at the Boston "Tech".

The acquaintance begun there continued after the two left school, with a scattering fire of letters between the mountains and New England, as few and as far between as men's letters usually scatter after an ardent school acquaintance.

There were just two boys in the McCloud family---John and George. One had always been intended for the church, the other for science. Somehow the boys got mixed in their cradles, or, what is the same matter, in their assignments, and John got into the church.

For George, who ought to have been a clergyman, nothing was left but a long engineering course for which, after he got it, he appeared to have no use. However, it seemed a little late to shift the life alignments.

John had the pulpit and appeared disposed to keep it, and George was left, like a New England farm, to wonder what had become of himself.

It is, nevertheless, odd how matters come about. John McCloud, a prosperous young clergyman, stopped on a California trip at Medicine Bend to see brother George's classmate and something of a real Western town. He saw nothing sensational---it was there, but he did not see it---but he found both hospitality and gentlemen, and, if surprised, was too well bred to admit it.

His one day stop ran on to several days. He was a guest at the Medicine Bend Club, where he found men who had not forgotten the Harvard Greek plays. He rode in private cars and ate antelope steak grilled by Glover's own assistant, who had roasted buffalo hump for the Grand Duke Alexis as far back as 1871.

And still he hashed his browned potatoes in ragtime; and with the sun breaking clear over the frosty table-lands, a ravenous appetite, and a day's shooting in prospect, the rhythm had a particularly cheerful sound.

John was asked to occupy a Medicine Bend pulpit, and before Sunday the fame of his laugh and his marksmanship had spread so far that Henry Markover, the Yale cowboy, rode in thirty-two miles to hear him preach.

In leaving, John McCloud, in a seventh heaven of enthusiasm over the high country, asked Morris Blood why he could not find something for George out there; and Blood, not even knowing the boy wanted to come, wrote for him, and asked Bucks to give him a job.

Possibly, being over-solicitous, George was nervous when he talked to Bucks; possibly the impression left by his big, strong, bluff brother John made against the boy; at all events, Bucks, after he talked with George, shook his head.

"I could make a first class railroad man out of the preacher, Morris, but not out of the brother. Yes, I've talked with him. He can't do anything but figure elevations, and, by heaven, we can't feed our own engineers here now." So George found himself stranded in the mountains.

Morris Blood was cut up over it, but George McCloud took it quietly. "I'm no worse off here than I was back there, Morris." Blood, at that, plucked up courage to ask George to take a job in the Cold Springs mines, and George jumped at it.

It was impossible to get a man to live at Cold Springs after he could save money enough to get away, so George was welcomed as assistant superintendent at the Number Eight Mine, with no salary to speak of and all the work.

In one year everybody had forgotten him. Western men, on the average, show a higher heart temperature than Eastern men, but they are tolerably busy people and have their own troubles.

"Be patient," Morris Blood had said to him. "Sometimes there will be more railroad work in these mountains; then, perhaps, your darned engineering may come into play. I wish you knew how to sell cigars."

Meantime, McCloud stuck to the mine, and insensibly replaced his Eastern tissue with Western. In New England he had been carefully molded by several generations of gentlemen, but never baked hard. The mountains put the crust on him.

For one thing, the sun and wind, best of all hemlocks, tanned his white skin into a tough all American leather, seasoned his muscles into rawhide sinews, and, without burdening him with an extra ounce of flesh, sprinkled the red through his blood till, though thin, he looked apoplectic.

Insensibly, too, something else came about. George McCloud developed the rarest of all gifts of temperament, even among men of action--the ability to handle men. In Cold Springs, indeed, it was a case either of handling or of being handled. McCloud got along with his men and, with the tough element among them, usually through persuasion; but he proved, too, that he could inspire confidence even with a club.

One day, coming down "special" from Bear Dance, Gordon Smith, who bore the nickname Whispering Smith, rode with President Bucks in the privacy of his car. The day had been long, and the alkali lay light on the desert. The business in hand had been canvassed, and the troubles put aside for chicken, coffee, and cigars, when Smith, who did not smoke, told the story of something he had seen the day before at Cold Springs that pleased him.

The men in the Number Eight Mine had determined to get rid of some foreigners and after a good deal of rowing had

started in to catch one of them and hang him. They had chosen a time when McCloud, the assistant superintendent of the mine, was down with mountain fever. It was he who had put the foreigners into the mine. He had already defended them from injury, and would be likely, it was known, to do so again if he were able.

On this day a mob had been chasing the foreigners, and had at length captured one. They were running him down the street to a telegraph pole when the assistant superintendent appeared in scant attire and stopped them.

Taking advantage of the momentary confusion, he hustled their victim into the only place of refuge at hand, a billiard hall. The mob rushed the hall. In the back corner the unlucky man, bleeding like a bullock and insane with fright, knelt, clinging to McCloud's shaky knees. In trying to make the back door the two had been cut off, and the sick boss had got into a corner behind a pool table to make his stand.

In his pocket he had a pistol, knowing that to use it meant death to him as well as to the wretch he was trying to save. Fifty men were yelling in the room. They had rope, hatchets, a sprinkling of guns, and whiskey enough to burn the town, and in the corner behind a pool table stood the mining boss with mountain fever, the victim and a broken billiard cue.

Bucks took the cigar from his mouth, leaned forward in his chair, and stretched his heavy chin out of his neck as if the situation now promised a story. The leader, Smith continued, was the mine blacksmith, a strapping Welshman, from whom McCloud had taken the victim in the street.

The blacksmith had a revolver, and was crazy with liquor. McCloud singled him out in the crowd, pointed a finger at him, got the attention of the men, and lashed him across the table with his tongue until the blacksmith opened fire on him with his revolver, McCloud all the while shaking his finger at him and abusing him like a pickpocket.

"The crowd couldn't believe its eyes," Gordon Smith concluded, and McCloud was pushing for the blacksmith with his cue when Kennedy and I squirmed through to the front and relieved the tension. McCloud wasn't hit."

"What is that mining man's name?" asked Bucks, reaching for a message clip.

"McCloud."

"First name?" continued Bucks mechanically.

"George."

Bucks looked at his companion in surprise. Then he spoke, and a feeling of self-abasement was reflected in his words. "George McCloud," he echoed. "Did you say George? Why, I must know that man. I turned him down once for a job. He looked so peaceable I thought he was too soft for us."

The president laid down his cigar with a gesture of disgust. "And yet there really are people along this line that think I'm clever. I haven't judgment enough to operate a trolley car. It's a shame to take the money they give me for running this system, Gordon. Hanged if I didn't think that fellow was too

soft." He called the flagman over. "Tell Whitmyer we will stay at Cold Springs tonight."

"I thought you were going through to Medicine Bend," suggested Smith as the trainman disappeared.

"McCloud," repeated Bucks, taking up his cigar and throwing back his head in a cloud of smoke.

"Yes," assented his companion; "but I am going through to Medicine Bend, Mr. Bucks."

"Do."

"How am I to do it?"

"Take the car and send it back tomorrow on Number Three."

"Thank you, if you won't need it tonight."

"I won't. I am going to stay at Cold Springs tonight and hunt up McCloud."

"But that man is in bed in a very bad way; you can't see him. He is going to die."

"No, he isn't. I am going to hunt him up and have him taken care of."

That night Bucks, in the twilight, was sitting by McCloud's bed, smoking and looking him over. "Don't mind me," he said when he entered the room, lifted the ill smelling lamp

from the table, and, without taking time to blow it out, pitched it through the open window. "I heard you were sick, and just looked in to see how they were taking care of you. Wilcox," he added, turning to the nurse he had brought in---a barber who wanted to be a railroad man, and had agreed to step into the breach and nurse McCloud---"have a box of miner's candles sent up from the roundhouse. We have some down there; if not, buy a box and send me the bill."

McCloud, who after the rioting had crawled back to bed with a temperature of 105 degrees, knew the barber, but felt sure that a lunatic had wandered in with him, and immediately bent his feeble mental energies on plans for getting rid of a dangerous man.

When Bucks sat down by him and continued talking at the nurse, McCloud caught nothing of what was said until Bucks turned quietly toward him. "They tell me, McCloud, you have the fever."

The sick man, staring with sunken eyes, rose half on his elbow in astonishment to look again at his visitor, but Bucks eased him back with an admonition to guard his strength. McCloud's temperature had already risen with the excitement of seeing a man throw his lamp out of the window.

Bucks, meantime, working carefully to seem unconcerned and incensing McCloud with great clouds of smoke, tried to discuss his case with him as he had already done with the mine surgeon. McCloud, thinking it best to humor a crazy man, responded quietly. "The doctor said yesterday," he

explained, "it was mountain fever, and he wants to put me into an ice pack."

Bucks objected vigorously to the ice pack.

"The doctor tells me that it is the latest treatment for that class of fevers in the Prussian army," answered McCloud feebly, but getting interested in spite of himself.

"That's a good thing, no doubt, for the Prussian army," replied Bucks, "but, McCloud, in the first place, you are not a Dutchman; in the second, you have not got mountain fever--not in my judgment."

McCloud, confident now that he had an insane man on his hands, held his peace.

"Not a symptom of mountain fever," continued Bucks calmly; "you have what looks to me like gastritis, but the homeopaths," he added, "have a better name for it. Is it stomatitis, McCloud, I forget?"

The sick man, confounded by such learning, determined to try one question, and, if he was at fault, to drag his gun from under his pillow and sell his life as dearly as possible. Summoning his waning strength, he looked hard at Bucks. "Just let me ask you one question. I never saw you before. Are you a doctor?"

"No, I'm a railroad man; my name is Bucks." McCloud rose half up in bed with amazement.

"They'll kill you if you lie here a week," continued Bucks. "In just a week. Now, I'll tell you my plan. I'll take you down in the morning in my car to Medicine Bend; this barber will go with us. There in the hospital you can get everything you need, and I can make you comfortable. What do you say?"

McCloud looked at his benefactor solemnly, but if hope flickered for an instant in his eyes it soon died. Bucks said afterward that he looked like a cold storage squab, just pinfeathers and legs.

"Shave him clean," said he, "and you could have counted his teeth through his cheeks."

The sick man turned his face to the wall. "Its kind enough," he muttered, "but I guess it's too late."

Bucks did not speak for some time. Twilight had faded above the hills, and only the candle lit the room. Then the master of mountain men, grizzled and brown, turned his eyes again to the bed.

McCloud was staring at the ceiling. "We have a town of your name down on the plains, McCloud," said Bucks, blowing away the cigar smoke after the long silence. "It is one of our division points, and a good one."

"I know the town," responded McCloud. "It was named after one of our family."

"I guess not."

"It was, though," said McCloud wearily.

"I think," returned Bucks, "you must be mistaken. The man that town was named after belonged to the fighting McClouds."

"That is my family."

"Then where is your fight? When I propose to put you into my car and pull you out of this, why do you say it is too late? It is never too late."

McCloud made no answer, and Bucks ran on:

"For a man that worked out as well as you did yesterday in a trial heat with a billiard-cue, I should say you could turn a handspring or two yet if you had to. For that matter, if you don't want to be moved, I can run a spur in her to your door in three hours in the morning."

"By taking out the side-wall we can back the car right up to the bed. Why not? Or we can stick a few hydraulic jacks under the sills, raise the house, and push your bed right on the observation platform."

He got McCloud to laughing, and lit a fresh cigar. A framed photograph hung on one of the bare walls of the room, and it caught the eye of the railroad man. He walked close to it, disinfected it with smoke, brushed the dust from the glass, and examined the print. "That looks like old Van Dyne College campus, hanged if it doesn't!"

McCloud was watching him. "It is a photograph of the campus."

"McCloud, are you a Van Dyne man?"

"I did my college work there before I went to Boston."

Bucks stood motionless. "Poor little old Van Dyne! Why, my brother Sam taught at Van Dyne. No, you would not have known him; he's dead. Never before west of the Missouri River have I seen a Van Dyne man. You are the first."

He shook his head as he sat down again. "It is crowded out now: no money, no prestige, half-starved professors with their elbows out, the president working like a dog all the week and preaching somewhere every Sunday to earn five dollars. But, by Heaven, they turned out men! Did you know Bug Robinson?" he asked suddenly.

"He gave me my degree."

"Old Bug! He was Sam's closest friend, McCloud. It's good to see him getting the recognition he deserves, isn't it? Do you know, I send him an annual every year? Yes, sir! And one year I had the whole blooming faculty out here on a fossil expedition; but, by Heaven, McCloud, some of them looked more like megatheriums than what they dug up did."

"I heard about that expedition."

"I never got to college- had to hustle. I'll get out of here before I tire you. Wilcox will be here now, and my young"

"Chinese friend is making some broth for you now. You'll feel better in the morning."

Ten weeks later McCloud was sent from Medicine Bend up on the Short Line as trainmaster, and on the Short Line he learned railroading.

"That's how I came here," said George McCloud to Farrell Kennedy a long time afterward, at Medicine Bend. "I had shriveled and starved three years out there in the desert. I lived with those cattle underground till I had forgotten my own people, my own name, my own face---and Bucks came along one day with Whispering Smith and dragged me out of my coffin."

"They had it ordered, and it being a small size and 'on handy,' as the undertaker said, I paid for it and told him to store it for me. Well, do you think I ever could forget either of those men, Farrell?"

McCloud's fortunes thus threw him first into the operating department of the mountain lines, but his heart was in the grades and the curves. To him the interest in the train work was the work of the locomotives toiling with the heavy loads up the canyons and across the uneven plateaus and through the deep gorges of the inner range.

This is where the panting exhaust, choked between sheer granite walls, roared in a mighty protest against the burden put by the steep grades on the patient machines.

In all the group of young men then on the mountain division, obscure and unknown at the time, but destined within so few years to be scattered far and wide as constructionists with records made in the rebuilding operations through the Rocky Mountains, none was less likely to attract attention than McCloud.

Bucks, who, indeed, could hardly be reckoned so much of the company as its head, was a man of commanding proportions physically. Like Glover, Bucks was a giant in stature, and the two men, when together, could nowhere escape notice; they looked, in a word, their part, fitted to cope with the tremendous undertakings that had fallen to their lot.

Callahan, the chess player on the Overland lines, the man who could hold large combinations of traffic movements constantly in his head and by intuition reach the result of a given problem before other men could work it out, was, like Morris Blood, the master of tonnage, of middle age.

But McCloud, when he went to the mountain division, in youthfulness of features was boyish, and when he left he was still a boy, bronzed, but young of face in spite of a lifetime's pressure and worry crowded into three years. He himself counted this physical make-up as a disadvantage.

"It has embroiled me in no end of trouble, because I couldn't convince men I was in earnest until I made good in some hard way," he complained once to Whispering Smith. "I never could acquire even a successful habit of swearing, so I had to learn to fight."

When, one day in Boney Street in Medicine Bend, he threw open the door of Marion Sinclair's shop, flung his hat sailing along the showcase with his war-cry, and called to her in the back rooms, she thought he had merely run in to say he was in town.

"How do you do? What do you think? You're going to have an old boarder back," he cried. "I'm coming to Medicine Bend, superintendent of the division!"

"Mr. McCloud!" Marion Sinclair clasped her hands and dropped into a chair. "Have they made you superintendent already?"

"Well, I like that! Do you want them to wait till I'm gray-headed?"

Marion threw her hands to her own head.

"Oh, don't say anything about gray hairs. My head won't bear inspection. But I can't get over this promotion coming so soon---this whole big division! Well, I congratulate you very sincerely----"

"Oh, but that isn't it! I suppose anybody will congratulate me. But where am I to board? Have you a cook? You know how I went from bad to worse after you left Cold Springs. May I have my meals here with you as I used to there?"

"Why, I suppose you can, yes, if you can stand the cooking. I have an apprentice, Mr. Dancing's daughter, who does pretty well. She lives here with me, and is learning the

business. But I shan't take as much as you used to pay me, for I'm doing so much better down here."

"Let me run that end of it, will you? I shall be doing better down here myself."

They laughed as they bantered. Marion Sinclair wore gold spectacles, but they did not hide the delightful good nature in her eyes. On the third finger of her slender left hand she wore, too, a gold band that explained the gray in her hair at twenty-six.

This was the wife of Murray Sinclair, whom he had brought to the mountains from her far-away Wisconsin home. Within a year he had broken her heart so far as it lay in him to do it, but he could not break her charm nor her spirit.

She was too proud to go back, when forced to leave him, and had set about earning her own living in the country to which she had come as a bride. She put on spectacles, she mutilated her heavy brown hair and to escape notice and secure the obscurity that she craved, her name, Marion, became, over the door of her millinery shop and in her business, only "M. Sinclair."

Cold Springs, where Sinclair had first brought her when he had headquarters there as foreman of bridges, had proved a hopeless place for the millinery business---at least, in the way that Marion ran it. The women that had husbands had no money to buy hats with, and the women without husbands wore gaudy headgear, and were of the kind that made Marion's heart creep when they opened the shop door.

What was worse, they were inclined to joke with her, as if there must be a community of interest between a deserted woman and women who had deserted womanhood. To this business Marion would not cater, and in consequence her millinery affairs sometimes approached collapse.

She could, however, cook extraordinarily well, and, with the aid of a servant-maid, could always provide for a boarder or two---perhaps a railroad man or a mine superintendent to whom she could serve meals, and who, like all mountain men, were more than generous in their accounting with women.

Among these standbys of hers was McCloud. McCloud had always been her friend, and when she left Cold Springs and moved to Medicine Bend to set up her little shop in Boney Street near Fort, she had lost him. Yet, somehow, to compensate Marion for other cruel things in the mountains, Providence seemed to raise up a new friend for her wherever she went.

In Medicine Bend she did not know a soul, but almost the first customer that walked into her shop---and she was a customer worthwhile---was Dicksie Dunning of the Crawling Stone.

Chapter 5

The Crawling Stone

Where the mountain chains of North America have been flung up into a continental divide, the country in many of its aspects is still terrible. In extent alone this mountain empire is grandiose. The swiftest transcontinental trains approaching its boundaries at night find night falling again before they have fairly penetrated it.

Geologically severe, this region in geological store is the richest of the continent; physically forbidding beyond all other stretches of North America, the Barren Land alone except, in this region lie its gentlest valleys.

Here, the desert is most grotesque, and here are pastoral retreats of the most secluded. It is the home of the Archean granite, and its basins are of a fathomless dust. Under its sagebrush wastes the skeletons of earth's hugest mammals lie beside behemoths and the monsters of the deep.

The eternal snow, the granite peak, the sandstone butte, the lava-bed, the gray desert, the far horizon are familiar here. With the sunniest and bluest of skies, this is the range of the deadliest storms, and its delightful summers contrast with the most dreadful cold.

Here the desert of death simulates a field of cooling snow, green hills lie black in the dazzling light of day, limpid waters run green over arsenic stone, and sunset betricks the fantastic rock with column and capital and dome. Clouds

burst here above arid wastes, and where dew is precious the skies are most prodigal in their downpour. If the torrent bed is dry, distrust it.

This vast mountain shed parts rivers whose waters find two oceans, and their valleys are the natural highways up with railroads wind to the crest of the continent. To the mountain engineer the waterway is the sphinx that holds in its silence the riddle of his success; with him lies the problem of providing a railway across ranges which often defy the hoofs of a horse.

The construction engineer studies the course of the mountain water. The water is both his ally and his enemy---ally because it alone has made possible his undertakings; enemy because it fights to destroy his puny work, just as it fights to level the barriers that oppose him. Like acid spread on copperplate, water etches the canyons in the mountain slopes and spreads wide the valleys through the plains.

Among these scarcely known ranges of the Rocky Mountain chain the Western rivers have their beginnings. When white men crowded the Indian from the plains he retreated to the mountains, and in their valleys made his final stand against the aggressors.

The scroll of this invasion of the mountain West by the white man has been unrolled, read, and put away within a hundred years, and of the agencies that made possible the swiftness of the story transportation overshadows all others.

The first railroad put across those mountains cost twenty-five thousand miles of reconnaissance's and fifteen thousand miles of instrument surveys. Since the day of that undertaking a generation of men has passed, and in the interval the wilderness that those men penetrated has been transformed. The Indian no longer extorts terms from his foe: he is not.

Where the tepee stood the rodman drives his stakes, and the country of the great Indian rivers, save one, has been opened for years to the railroad. That one is the Crawling Stone. The valley of Crawling Stone River marked for more than a decade the dead line between the Overland Route of the white man and the last country of the Sioux.

It was long after the building of the first line before even an engineer's reconnaissance was made in the Crawling Stone country. Then, within ten years, three surveys were made, two on the north side of the river and one on the south side, by interests seeking a coast outlet.

Three reports made in this way gave varying estimates of the expense of putting a line up the valley, but the three coincided in this, that the cost would be prohibitive. Engineers of reputation had in this respect agreed.

But Glover, who looked after such work for Bucks, remained unconvinced, and before McCloud was put into the operating department on the Short Line he was asked by Glover to run a preliminary up Crawling Stone Valley. Before the date of his report the conclusions reached by other engineers had stood unchallenged.

The valley was not unknown to McCloud. His first year in the mountains, in which, fitted as thoroughly as he could fit himself for his profession, he had come West and found himself unable to get work, had been spent hunting, fishing, and wandering, often cold and often hungry, in the upper Crawling Stone country.

The valley in itself offers to a constructionist no insuperable obstacles; the difficulty is presented in the canyon where the river burst through the Elbow Mountains. South of this canyon, McCloud, one day on a hunting trip, found himself with two Indians pocketed in the rough country.

He was planning how to escape passing a night away from camp when his companions led him past a vertical wall of rock a thousand feet high, split into a narrow defile down which they rode, as it broadened out, for miles.

They emerged upon an open country that led without a break into the valley of the Crawling Stone below the canyon. Afterwards, when he had become a railroad man, McCloud, sitting at a campfire with Glover and Morris Blood, heard them discussing the coveted and impossible line up the valley.

He had been taken into the circle of constructionists and was told of the earlier reports against the line. He thought he knew something about the Elbow Mountains, and disputed the findings, offering in two days' ride to take the men before him to the pass called by the Indians Box, and to take them through it.

Glover called it a find, and a big one, and though more immediate matters in the strategy of territorial control than came before him, the preliminary was ordered and McCloud's findings were approved.

McCloud himself was soon afterward engrossed in the problems of operating the mountain division; but the dream of his life was to build the Crawling Stone Line with a maximum grade of eight tenths through The Box.

The prettiest stretch of Crawling Stone Valley lies within twenty miles of Medicine Bend. There it lies widest, and has the pick of water and grass between Medicine Bend and the Mission Mountains. Cattlemen went into the Crawling Stone country before the Indians had wholly left it.

The first house in the valley was the Stone Ranch, built by Richard Dunning, and it still stands overlooking the town of Dunning at the junction of the Frenchman Creek with the Crawling Stone.

The Frenchman is fed by unfailling springs, and when by summer sun and wind every smaller stream in the middle basin has been licked dry, the Frenchman runs cold and swift between its russet hills.

Richard Dunning, being on the border of the Indian country, built for his ranch-house a rambling stone fortress. He had chosen, it afterward proved, the choice spot in the valley, and he stocked it with cattle when yearlings could be picked up in Medicine Bend at ten dollars a head. He got together a great

body of valley land when it could be had for the asking, and became the rich man of the Long Range.

The Dunnings were Kentuckians. Richard was a bridge engineer and builder, and under Brodie built some of the first bridges on the mountain division, notably the great wooden bridge at Smoky Creek. Richard brought out his nephew, Lance Dunning.

He taught Lance bridge-building, and Murray Sinclair, who began as a cowboy on the Stone Ranch, learned bridge-building from Richard Dunning. The Dunnings both came west, though at different times, as young men and unmarried, and, as far as Western women were concerned, might always have remained so.

But a Kentucky cousin, Betty, one of the Fairfield Dunnings, related to Richard within the sixth or eighth degree, came to the mountains for her health. Betty's mother had brought Richard up as a boy, and Betty, when he left Fairfield, was a baby. But Dick---as they knew him at home---and the mother wrote back and forth, and he persuaded her to send Betty out for a trip, promising he would send her back in a year a well woman.

Betty came with only her black maid, old Sally Dunning, who had taken her from the nurse's arms when she was born and taken care of her ever since. The two---the tall Kentucky girl and the bent Sally---arrived at the Stone Ranch one day in June, and Richard, done then with bridges and looking after his ranch interests, had already fallen violently in love with Betty.

She was delicate, but, if those in Medicine Bend who remembered her said true, a lovely creature. Remaining in the mountains was the last thing Betty had ever thought of, but no one, man or woman, could withstand Dick Dunning.

She fell quite in love with him the first time she set eyes on him in Medicine Bend, for he was very handsome in the saddle, and Betty was fairly wild about horses. So, Dick Dunning wooed a fond mistress and married her and buried her, and all within hardly more than a year.

But in that year, they were very happy, never two happier, and when she slept away her suffering she left him, as a legacy, a tiny baby girl. Sally brought the mite of a creature in its swaddling clothes to the sick mother,---very, very sick then,---and poor Betty turned her dark eyes on it, kissed it, looked at her husband and whispered "Dick-sie" and died.

Dicksie had been Betty's pet name for her mountain lover, so the father said the child's name should be Dicksie and nothing else; and his health broke and soon he died. Nothing else, storm or flood, death or disaster, had ever moved Dick Dunning; then a single blow killed him.

He rode once in a while over the ranch, a great tract by that time of twenty thousand acres, all in one body, all under fence, up and down both sides of the big river, in part irrigated, swarming with cattle---none of it stirred Dick! And with little Dicksie in his arms he slept away *his* suffering.

So, Dicksie was left, as her mother had been, to Sally, while Lance looked after the ranch, swore at the price of cattle, and played cards at Medicine Bend. At ten, Dicksie, as the thoroughly spoiled as a pet baby could be by a fool nanny, a fond cousin, and a galaxy of devoted cowboys, was sent, in spite of crying and flinging, to a faraway convent.

Her father had planned everything---where in many tears she learned that there were other things in the world besides cattle and mountains and sunshine and tall, broad-hatted horsemen to swing from their stirrups and pick her hat from the ground---just to see little Dicksie laugh---when they swooped past the house to the corrals.

When she came back from Kentucky, her grandmother dead and her schooldays finished, all the land she could see in the valley was hers, and all the living creatures in the fields. It seemed perfectly natural, because since childhood even the distant mountains and their snows had been Dicksie's.

Chapter 6

The Final Appeal

Sinclair's discharge was a matter of comment for the whole country, from the ranch-house to the ranges. For a time Sinclair himself refused utterly to believe that McCloud could keep him off the division. His determination to get back led him to carry his appeal to the highest quarters, to Glover and to Bucks himself.

But Sinclair, able as he was, had passed the limit of endurance and had long been marked for an accounting. He had been a railroad man to whom the West spelled license, and, while a valuable man, had long been a source of demoralization to the forces of the division.

In the railroad life clearly defined plans are often too deeply laid to fathom, and it was impossible for even so acute a man as Sinclair to realize that he was not the victim of an accident, but that he must look to his own record for the real explanation of his undoing.

He was not the only man to suffer in the shake-out that took place under the new superintendent; but he seemed the only one unable to realize that Bucks, patient and long-suffering, had put McCloud into the mountain saddle expressly to deal with cases such as his.

In the West sympathy is quick but not always discerning. Medicine Bend took Sinclair's grievance as its own. No other man in the service had Sinclair's following, and within

a week petitions were being circulated through the town not asking merely but calling for his reinstatement. The sporting element of the community to a man were behind Sinclair because he was a sport; the range men were with him because his growing ranch on the Frenchman made him one of them; his own men were with him because he was a far-seeing pirate and divided liberally.

Among the railroad men, too, he had much sympathy. Sinclair had always been lavish with presents; brides were remembered by Sinclair, and babies were not forgotten. He could sit up all night with a railroad man that had been hurt, and he could play poker all night with one that was not afraid of getting hurt. In his way, he was a division autocrat, whose vices were varnished by virtues such as these.

His hold on the people was so strong that they could not believe the company would not reinstate him. In spite of the appointment of his successor, Phil Hailley, a mountain boy and the son of an old-time bridge foreman, rumor assigned again and again definite dates for Sinclair's return to work.

But, the dates never materialized. The bridge machinery of the big division moved on in even rhythm. A final and determined appeal from the deposed autocrat for a hearing at last brought Glover and Morris Blood, the general manager, to Medicine Bend for a final conference.

Callahan too was there with his pipe, and they talked quietly with Sinclair---reminded him of how often he had been warned, showed him how complete a record they had of his

plundering, and Glover gave to him Buck's final word that he could never again work on the mountain division.

A pride grown monstrous with prestige long undisputed broke under the final blow. The big fellow put his face in his hands and burst into tears, and the men before him sat confused and uncomfortable at his outburst of feeling.

It was only for a moment. Sinclair raised his hand, shook his long hair, and swore an oath against the company and the men that curled the very smoke in Callahan's pipe. Callahan, outraged at the insolence, sprang to his feet, resenting Sinclair's fury.

Choking with anger he warned him not to go too far. The two were ready to spring at each other's throat when Farrell Kennedy stepped between them. Sinclair, drunk with rage, called for McCloud; but he submitted quietly to Kennedy's reproof, and with a semblance of self-control begged that McCloud be sent for.

Kennedy, without complying, gradually pushed Sinclair out of the room and, without seeming officious, walked with him down the hall and quite out of the building.

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