

THE FREE TRADERS

JIM RATHWAY

SYNOPSIS—Lee Anderson, Royal Canadian Mounted Police sergeant, is sent to Stony range to arrest a man named Pelly for murder. He is also instructed to look after Jim Rathway, reputed head of the "Free Traders," illicit liquor runners. At Little Falls he finds Pelly is credited with having found a gold mine, and is missing. At the hotel appears a girl, obviously out of place in the rough surroundings. A half-breed, Pierre, and a companion, "Shorty," annoy the girl. Anderson interferes in her behalf. The girl sets out for Siston Lake, which is also Anderson's objective. He overtakes her and the two men with whom he had trouble the night before. She is suspicious of him and the two men are hostile. Pierre and Shorty ride on, Anderson and the girl following. In the hills the road is blown up, before and behind the two. Anderson, with his horse, is hurled down the mountain side, senseless. Recovering consciousness, Anderson finds the girl has disappeared, but he concludes she is alive and probably in the power of Pierre and Shorty. On foot he makes his way to Siston Lake.

CHAPTER V—Continued

Satisfying himself that there was no way of approach except by water, unless there existed some trail across the swamps, which there was no time to find, Lee waded into the lake, then swam.

The current ran strong; the shock of the icy water at first numbed, then invigorated him. It cleared the doubts and fears of night from his brain. Swimming diagonally against the current, in a few minutes Lee had reached the flat terrain at the base of the promontory.

He waded ashore, shaking himself like a dog. On the terrain were heaped great mounds of waste and garbage from the encampment above; piles of disintegrating cans, rotting cases, innumerable bottles partly covered with the silt and protruding from it the accumulation of a long period.

Looking through the mist, Lee perceived a small York boat, of the kind used universally between Hudson's bay and the Mackenzie, riding moored against the rocky edge of the promontory some distance away.

The elevation, long, low, and flat, formed an ideal fortress; with the only approach apparently by water. It was evident that it would be a formidable proposition for any body of the police to attack, in the event of defense.

Lee began to make his way across the terrain, keeping under the shelter of the cliff to escape observation from the huts above. It was growing light now, and he could see the surroundings clearly. He reached the end of the patch of ground without coming upon any place by which it might be possible to ascend to the summit of the promontory.

He hurried back, doubling on his tracks, examining the cliff in the other direction. He reached the other side of the flat terrain, only to find that the elevation presented the same insurmountable flank to him everywhere.

But then of a sudden he realized that the York boat must be drawn up at the point of entrance. And it was with this that he must make his flight with the girl, heading the boat across the water somewhere, taking to the forests.

And without hesitation he took to the water again and swam with steady strokes toward it. In two or three minutes he had gained its side.

The kidnapers must have left their horses at some refuge or rendezvous in the forest and brought the girl by boat to Siston lake.

And it was evident that they could not have arrived so much as an hour before.

The York boat was moored opposite a cleft in the great dome of the promontory, which offered easy access to the summit. Lee waded ashore once more. But before attempting the ascent he drew his automatic from its holster and examined it. The holster was lined with waterproof, and only a few drops glistened upon the surface of the weapon.

Scrambling up the acclivity, Lee saw the two huts among the trees immediately overhead. He scrambled up the low wall of rocks, and was about to step on to the elevation when of a sudden a man came out of the farther hut and made his way toward the nearer one.

Lee ducked his head down just in time to escape detection, and through the interstices between the bowlders he watched the man until he had entered the hut immediately above him. He looked about forty years of age. He was shorter than Lee, but apparently of great strength. He had an untrimmed black beard, he walked with hunched shoulders, and there was a look of singular ferocity and cunning on his face.

A dangerous, treacherous customer, Lee thought. Rathway!

When he had disappeared within the hut Lee stood up. Craning over the rocks, he could just catch a glimpse of the interior. He saw the man standing over what looked like a camp bed, on which he could distinguish the head and shoulders of a girl, lying perfectly still.

Lee's heart leaped. He gripped his automatic, leveled it.

A single shot from where he stood, well aimed, would be sufficient.

And at that moment instinct and desire struggled with discipline as never before, with the maxim inculcated during his eight years of service, never to take life except when life is in immediate danger.

Then discipline won. Lee let the muzzle drop.

And at that moment he heard the growling voice of the man, and the answer of a third person inside the hut—a woman.

The words were inaudible, and now, hesitating no longer, Lee scrambled over the rocky ridge and made his way toward the door obliquely, so as to remain concealed from the sight of those within.

The man's voice rose in a falsetto snarl.

"What do I mean to do with her? What would I do with her? She's mine, ain't she?"

"And what about me?" Low as the voice was, restrained, yet passionate, something about it sent a sudden shiver through Lee, and for a few moments he could only remain a helpless listener.

"You?" he laughed. "You can stay on here's long as you want to, I guess. There's Pierre and Shorty if you want a man—"

"You coward!" Her voice was vibrant with indignation. "I tell you you've made a mistake in bringing that girl here. You'll regret it. That mine doesn't exist. And when she finds you've fooled her, what are you going to do?"

"So we're jealous, are we? Well, I've been tired of you for a long time," he jeered.

"Jim— There was desperate pleading in the woman's tones—"I gave up all for you. Let her go. Don't cast me off. I love you, Jim—"

And now Lee knew. A mist trembled before his eyes, and, gripping his automatic, he sprang forward to the door.

He must have shouted, though he was unconscious of everything but the desire to get Rathway by the throat.

Wheeling, Rathway swore, and then, heedless of Lee's pistol, leaped.

But in the moment before they closed, Lee saw the woman's face and knew her for his dead love, who had broken his life and changed it utterly—Estelle.

Lee did not shoot. Instinctively he obeyed that unwritten law of the police tradition not to take life save in the last extremity.

But the sight of this sinister figure, the wholly incredible presence there of Estelle, the woman who had wrecked his life, and the girl lying unconscious on the bed in this man's power, aroused in Lee's heart a sleeping devil of whose existence he had hardly been aware at any time in his life before.

He was conscious only of a mad desire to kill, but to kill with nature's own weapons. In obedience to man's instinctive law.

Clubbing his automatic, Lee leaped to meet Rathway's charge, and breast to breast they met, rebounding like balls of rubber. Rathway's hand shot out and grasped Lee's wrist before the weapon descended. Then, interlocked, they stood almost motionless, matched so evenly that neither budged an inch before the other for a full minute.

Rathway's sneering face was upturned to Lee's. Malice and hate gleamed from his bloodshot eyes. Beside them stood Estelle, with her hands

still clasped in the gesture that she had made at the moment of Lee's intervention, struck dumb and motionless with terror and amazement.

Rathway was proving himself the stronger. Malice and hate became triumph, derision. Lee's pistol hand was being bent back. Lee adapted himself with quick instinct to the discovery that he was the weaker in arm and shoulder muscles. As Rathway's body slowly assumed a forward tilt, shifting his center of gravity, Lee suddenly drove his knee into the back of Rathway, causing the man to stumble forward. The impetus of the body projected against him sent the pistol flying out of Lee's hand; but Lee, in the moment of Rathway's loss of equipoise, drove his fist home into his face, splitting his lips and sending him reeling.

In an instant they were together again, delivering and receiving a suc-

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cession of pile-driver blows that fell like flails upon each other's faces and bodies. They clinched, rebounded, clinched again; then of a sudden Rathway got home a furious kick to the groin that sent Lee stumbling.

For the first time Estelle screamed, and that aroused Lee to the consciousness that he must finish his enemy almost immediately, before aid arrived. He shook away the film that was creeping over his eyes, and, sick and nauseated from the kick, he closed with Rathway again. They went to the floor of the hut together, and struggled there like two dogs in the dirt.

There was no longer any attempt at fistfights. The primitive instinct to rend and tear possessed both of them equally. They scrambled about the floor of the hut, clawing at each other's throats. Lee got Rathway's beard in his right hand, and with his left began smashing at his nose and lips. Rathway bellowed, his hands closed on Lee's throat, clung there, worrying him like a bulldog. Lee felt that he was fainting. He was slowly forced over; Rathway's fingers closed on his neck.

The two tightened, and the walls of the hut began to waver. Lee's trachea flattened, his lungs felt as if they would burst. Rathway grinned diabolically into his face; his beard like some foul fungus swept it. Lee flung his arms out instinctively to breathe. One of his hands encountered something. It was the pistol.

Lee's fingers closed on it. And, as if he concentrated all that was left of himself in his left hand, he raised the weapon and brought it crashing down upon Rathway's skull.

Instantly Rathway's clutch relaxed, his eyes glazed, as chicken's eyes glaze at the moment of death. The man's head dropped foolishly forward on Lee's breast. A stream of curses was cut off in foolish mutterings.

Lee struggled to his feet and stood gasping for breath, while Rathway, mumbering stupidly, swayed to and fro upon his knees on the floor of the hut.

Suddenly Estelle appeared to be galvanized into life. With a low cry she ran to Rathway's side, knelt down by him, and put her arms about him. She drew his head down on her knees and began chafing his hands. She looked at Lee in bitter hate.

"Haven't you done me wrong enough in the past, that you should come here to kill my man?" she cried. "Do you think you can arrest him? You couldn't get a mile from here before you would be captured!"

But Lee, without paying any attention to her, hurried to the bedside, and looked down at the captured girl. She lay there, an unconscious, huddled heap, one knee bent under her. Her face was deathly white, and there was a scarp wound at the back of her head which had been bleeding freely. She breathed faintly. Her hair was cut short and jagged about her head, making her look more than ever like a boy.

Estelle laid Rathway gently down and came toward Lee with sudden comprehension. "It's for her!" she whispered earnestly, laying her hand upon his arm. "You came here to rescue her?"

She read the answer in his eyes. "Oh, I'll help you, I'll help you, then!" she cried wildly. "You'll take her away! Trust me, then, and listen to me. There's no time for explanations now. It's only a miracle of luck you found him alone. Some men are due at any moment in the motor boat. Two more have gone to meet them with a message. They're coming from down the lake. There may be just time to escape them. You must take the York boat. You can't pull it alone against the stream. Keep to the left channel past the island, then run ashore, and you'll be safe in the forest, wherever you are going. Hurry, hurry!"

Lee made no audible reply, but his mind automatically registered Estelle's instructions. He bent over the girl again, raised her in his arms so that her face rested against his shoulder, and carried her out of the hut.

As he turned at the entrance he saw that Rathway had risen to his knees again.

Blood was dripping from the wound in his scalp, and he was staring about him in the eager effort to remember.

Lee crossed the open space at a run, scrambled down the descent, placed the girl in the bottom of the boat, and, seizing a pair of oars, began to pull furiously for midstream. The current caught him and sent him whirling along toward the long, flat, wooded island in the middle of the lake that came into view.

In a minute or two, however, the flow of the river, diffused over the whole of the lake, ceased to afford him any appreciable assistance. The heavy York boat responded only slightly to the pull of the single oarsman, seeming to creep on by inches.

Suddenly Rathway appeared upon the promontory, Estelle beside him, clinging to him. He pushed her from him, shaking his fist at Lee, and his hoarse, furious bellows came across the water like the roaring of an enraged beast of the forest. For a few moments he stood thus outlined against the rising sun; then he disappeared.

Lee struggled at the oars. From

time to time he strained his ears to catch the sounds of the oncoming motor boat. Although the new arrivals would know nothing of his activities at the promontory, he was pretty sure that any solitary oarsman appearing in that region would be stopped by them; then he would be at their mercy, for Pierre and Shorty would be members of their party.

If once he could round the point of the island, where he would be out of sight both of the promontory and of the motor boat coming up the channel, he could pull straight for the lake shore, take to the woods, make for the mission, where he meant to leave the girl for safe-keeping.

Lee felt his spirits rise. It was a matter only of a half hour. And there were two packs in the boat. With one of these they could live in the forest till she was able to continue the journey. And, looking down at the unconscious girl, he felt again that odd sense of tender companionship in his heart for her, fed, perhaps, by the realization that the one thing he had dreaded had not come to pass.

He had feared that if ever again he met Estelle the old passion for her would flare up in him. Now they had met, and that love of the past filled him only with wonder, and a vast pity for her, that she should have come to this—to be the discarded companion of an outlaw. He no longer condemned her.

It was as if a cleansing sponge had been passed over all that had happened.

The left channel between the island and the shore was almost blocked, in places, with reeds and water growth. It was a huge water morass of dead vegetation, nearly half a mile wide. A few more strokes, and he meant to pull toward the lake's shore.

The pulling had grown to be an enormous effort. Lee was again conscious of fatigue. He felt drowsy in the increasing warmth of the sun. He could have fallen asleep in a moment.

But suddenly his senses leaped into activity. From far away he had caught the urgent warning of imminent danger, the faint put-putting of the motor boat.

CHAPTER VI

Trapped on the Island

And instantly he began straining at the oars again, redoubling his efforts to gain the shore before the motor boat rounded the point.

And of a sudden his attention was attracted by something creeping along the opposite shore. It was a small canoe and a single man in it—Rathway!

It was impossible not to admire the courage that inspired the man after the drubbing he had received. Rathway was, of course, on his way to warn the expected party.

Lee roved hard for the left middle channel of the lake. The main body of Siston lake came into view, a vast expanse of shining water, the shores receding into the hazy distance, out of which a small, black object began to be visible, like a bug skimming the surface.

Now the canoe containing Rathway was almost abreast of him.

A few more furious pulls—ten, fifteen; now canoe and motor boat and promontory were all hidden behind the oars, turning the York boat's head toward the bank. Once there, they would be safe. But his strength was failing him. Curse the clumsy boat, which hardly seemed to move!

The putting of the motor engine had grown infernally loud. It added a horror of its own to that sense of pursuit which makes the bravest man something of a coward, the added horror of the fugitive who hears the distant bay of bloodhounds.

Then suddenly the motor stopped. That meant that the canoe had come abreast of it. Rathway was passing the intelligence. And the shore was still a hundred yards distant.

There was no chance of reaching it unobserved. It would be neck and neck for it, and it was doubtful whether Lee could have escaped alone, much less with the girl and the pack to carry. He swung the boat's blunt nose toward the nearest patch of reeds. Twenty yards! He put all his strength into that last effort. Now the reeds were closing about him. In front of him a little open channel appeared. Using one shortened oar as a paddle, he drove vigorously, and found himself in temporary safety. A thick wall of reeds extended between himself and open water, rendering the York boat invisible.

Then the motor began to roar. The shouts of its occupants became audible. The motor boat had rounded the point. Lee had escaped discovery by the skin of his teeth.

And very cautiously, so as not to betray his whereabouts by any undue agitation of the reeds, Lee pushed the boat toward the island. His plan must now be to drive ashore, trusting to escape detection until nightfall and to make the wooded shore of the lake in the darkness.

Through the reeds the marshy foreground began to be visible, and a sandy spit projecting to the water's edge. Above it was a hummock overgrown with birch and red spruce, with a tangle of sheep laurel and birch and poplar behind it.

Lee worked his heavy boat noiselessly toward this spit. But suddenly he stopped. The motor boat was com-

ing up the open channel hardly a stone's throw distant. He could hear Rathway in it, bellowing commands to his companions. He could hear the reeds rustling against the boat's side as she forced her passage through them.

"They're not in here!" he heard Rathway say with an oath. "Get into the channel and beat up the island!"

Lee, crouching in the stern of the York boat with his pistol in his hand, breathed a sigh of relief as the motor boat withdrew. The roar of her engine began to grow fainter. In a few minutes it had died away.

Lee forced the York boat ashore upon the spit of sand, and stooping, raised the girl in his arms and carried her into the shelter of the spruce thicket, where he laid her gently down.

For the first time since her injury, he had the opportunity of examining



Lee Forced the York Boat Ashore Upon the Spit of Sand, and Stooping, Raised the Girl in His Arms and Carried Her into the Shelter of Spruce Thicket, Where He Laid Her Gently Down.

her. Her prolonged unconsciousness alarmed him.

But she was beginning to revive at last, and, after assuring himself that the pulse beat fairly strong, he proceeded to make as thorough an examination as possible of her injuries.

He turned his examination first to the cut in her head. He tore strips from his shirt, went down to the water and cleansed them thoroughly; then, returning, he proceeded to wash and bandage it. It was a bad gash from a rock, and she had bled a good deal, which was a good thing, relieving the concussion which had no doubt been the cause of the prolonged insensibility. Having ascertained that she seemed to have received no bodily injuries beyond contusions, Lee examined her limbs. He saw that one knee hung awry. In a moment he had the gaiter off, and discovered that the joint had been dislocated.

Short of the setting of a broken bone, there are few operations more painful than the restoration of a joint into position, and Lee prayed fervently that the girl's unconsciousness would last until he had put to her service the knowledge which he had acquired with the Canadian army medical corps upon the western front.

It was unnerving, holding that white knee between his hands, so instinct with life, so fragile, delicate, so wonderful when viewed as a piece of mechanism which he was to manipulate like some clumsy journeyman, called in to repair the work of a master.

Fortunately Lee had assisted at precisely that same operation several times in the field; and, trying to disregard the moans of pain that came from the girl's lips as he proceeded, he fumbled with the displaced bone.

But that struggle was terrible, for the body of itself knows no dignity. Conscious, Lee knew that the girl would neither have flinched nor moaned; but unconscious she could not control the protests of the body, which had to be restrained by something almost brutal in its frank violence.

But Lee struggled on, feeling the shaft head of the bone scour the edges of the socket under the cap. A final struggle, the weight of his whole body and shoulders thrown to his task—and suddenly it was accomplished.

Anderson faces a pretty tough proposition. What on earth is he going to do with this helpless girl?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Ancient Use of Copper

Copper and copper-alloy objects are found in the prehistoric remains of Egypt, dating back to the fourth dynasty, 3800 to 4700 B. C. It was found in Asia Minor dating probably to 3000 B. C., and in China to about 2500 B. C. The remains of the Mycenaean, Phoenician, Babylonian and Assyrian civilizations (1150 to 500 B. C.) have yielded a variety of copper and bronze objects.

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