

# The Free Traders

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

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WNU SERVICE

## DELIRIUM

**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. There he finds his companion of the day before, and Rathway, with a girl, Estelle, a former sweetheart of Anderson's, who had abused his confidence and almost wrecked his life. Rathway strikes Estelle, and after a fight Anderson, with Estelle's help, escapes with the girl. Anderson's companion's mind is clouded and she is suffering with a dislocated knee. Anderson sets the knee.

## CHAPTER VI—Continued

The joint slipped into position, the tortured body ceased its protest, and Lee rose, the perspiration streaming down his face.

Trembling in the nervous reaction from the struggle, Lee listened to the increasing noise of the motor boat again.

It rose to a roar as it passed again along the channel immediately in front of his hiding place, and gradually dwindled away.

Leaving the girl where she had fallen back into unconsciousness, Lee ascended one of the spruce trees and scanned the channel. The motor boat was moving up the shore of the island along the edge of the reeds. It contained Rathway and two other men.

Another York boat was coming from the direction of the promontory. This contained three men also.

Six on the trail; and Lee guessed that they would leave no nook unsearched in their determination to locate himself and the girl.

The island appeared to be about a mile in length by a third wide. Lee, seeing that discovery was only a matter of time, decided that it would be better to abandon the boat and take refuge somewhere in the underbrush. If the York boat had not been found by nightfall, he could return with the girl and try to escape to the mainland. If it were discovered, their situation would be no worse.

He strapped one of the packs about his back, picked up the girl, and, thus encumbered, proceeded through the thick brush, making for the opposite shore, where he put the girl down in a small declivity where the growth was thickest. Removing the tin pannikin from the outside of the pack, he obtained water and poured some down the girl's throat. He noted that the swallowing reflex was present, a favorable sign in unconsciousness, as he had learned at the front.

Toward the middle of the afternoon the sun, which had shone brilliantly throughout the morning, went permanently behind the clouds. Another snowstorm was beating up. A few soft flakes began to fall.

Suddenly a distant hubbub broke out and continued. There was no mistaking what was meant. The York boat had been discovered.

The Free Traders began to beat across the island, calling to one another. Their voices gradually sounded nearer. Crouching beside the girl in the thick of the brush, Lee waited. At a distance he saw two of them pass through the trees and disappear. The shouting died away.

As soon as they had passed him, leaving the girl where she lay, Lee slipped softly through the undergrowth, making his way back to the sandy spit. His expectations were confirmed. The York boat had disappeared.

Rescending the spruce tree, he saw the two York boats moored to the motor boat in mid-channel, a man with a rifle seated in it on guard.

They were trapped on the island. Lee made his way back, and waited while the afternoon wore away. The snow fell thicker. He took off his mackinaw and placed it over the girl.

Lee was no longer in a coma, but semi-conscious, and unaware of her surroundings. She muttered and tossed; sometimes it was all Lee could do to quiet her. And the disjointed fragments of speech that fell from her lips indicated the same mental anguish that she had revealed to him during their ride through the range.

He shuddered to think of her mental agony if she had awakened to find

herself a prisoner in Rathway's power at the promontory.

And even in the darkness of their desperate situation, he drew new hope from his resolution. And gradually his plans formed in his mind.

Then night began to fall, and Lee breathed a vast sigh of relief. Unless his plans miscarried, they should be safe upon the mainland well before midnight.

These depended, of course, upon his being able to capture one of the boats. The best plan for the Free Traders would have been to have withdrawn them to the promontory, knowing that Lee could not swim with the girl across that stretch of ice-cold water. Lee felt sure that, in their eagerness, feeling secure in their numbers, they would encamp upon the shore, either beaching the boats or leaving them anchored under the single guard in the middle channel.

About half an hour after dark he set out on his investigations. He moved through the brush as softly as any Indian, and, booted though he was, hardly a twig cracked under his feet.

Making his way toward the central portion, where the trees were sparser and the ground undulating, he soon discovered what he was looking for, the distant glow of a camp fire.

Four men were seated around the fire, drinking and conversing loudly. It was impossible to make out their faces in the darkness, but Lee waited patiently until the light of the fire fell upon each, and ascertained that none of them was bearded.

Rathway, then, was either in charge of the motor boat, with the sixth man, or had been forced to return to his headquarters, owing to his condition.

Lee circled the camp, and discovered to his joy, the York boat, beached on the shore about twenty-five yards distant. The men had not troubled to draw it up on birch rollers, where it would have been a matter of time and labor to float it again; it lay with its keel in the mud, careening to the lap of the little waves.

Lee cogitated. If the men got drunk that night it might be possible to make off with the boat without arousing them. On the other hand the probabilities were that through fear of Rathway they would stay sober enough to guard it effectively. And the delay was telling upon his nerves.

He decided that at all cost it was necessary to make the attempt as quickly as possible.

He made his way back to the girl, strapped the pack on his back, and, taking her in his arms, began to approach the encampment by a circuitous route through the trees.

In the darkness, staggering over the uneven ground, and loaded as he was, the task was an all but impossible one. But, added to this, the girl awakened and began talking disjointedly, sometimes crying out in fear. It was almost impossible to quiet her.

She clung to him, moaning. For a whole hour he tried to assuage her terrors, until at last she dropped asleep again from weakness and weariness.

Now more Lee took up his task. Now the campfire came into view. The four men were still visible about it, shouting and quarreling; they were drunk, but not drunk enough to render escape without a fight possible.

Creeping, almost inch by inch, to the extension of raspberry brambles, Lee followed it down to the water's edge and laid the girl down. He looked at her apprehensively for a moment, but her eyes were closed in sleep and her breathing was soft and regular.

Then coolly Lee stepped out into the open space and made his way toward the group.

He was within five and twenty yards of them before they perceived him, and then they seemed to take him for one of their party. Lee's impressions were so confused shouting and challenging. His coolness disconcerted and bewildered them; he was almost upon them before Pierre recognized him.

"By gar, it's dat d-n four-flusher!" he shouted.

And on the instant Lee was into the thick of them. A tall ruffian grasped a rifle and rushed at him. Lee fired. The man, shot through the hand, dropped the rifle, and, uttering a howl of pain, took to his heels in the undergrowth.

A second man was aiming at him. Lee brought the butt of his pistol down upon his head, and the man, collapsing in a mumbering heap, lay face upward upon the ground. Shorty was pulling desperately at a gun. Lee swung at him, missed his skull, but knocked him sideways with a blow that laid his cheek open to the bone. Shorty dropped and lay still.

Pierre, who had made no movement of aggression, was staring at Lee stupidly.

"Hands up, d-n you!" Lee shouted. Pierre's arms went up to their full height. Lee frisked him, took his gun, took Shorty's and the third man's, and tossed them into the undergrowth as far as he could fling them. He stooped and picked up the rifle that the first man had dropped. And, within a few seconds of the opening melee, Lee found himself, by virtue of the surprise, master of the situation.

But there was no time to be lost, for the tall ruffian who had fled was howling somewhere along the shore, and all depended upon the nearness of the motor boat. Lee, covering Pierre, backed quietly to the place where he had laid the girl. He picked her up and ran toward the boat with her.

Instantly Pierre's figure was blotted out in the darkness.

Lee had set down the rifle when he picked up the girl; he placed her in the bottom of the boat, ran back and found it and threw it inside, together with the pack from his shoulders. He raised the heavy anchor. He threw all his weight against the boat, which receded in a trail of viscous mud until it was afloat. Lee leaped in, seized the oars, fired another shot in warning. All the while the wounded man was howling along the shore.

Lee pushed desperately with the oars till he was in deeper water. He pulled furiously for mid-channel. As he did so there came a sound that for one instant almost unnerved him, what with the psychological effect of that all-day listening to it—the chugging of the engine. Then, as he reached open water, he saw by the light of the pallid moon that issued for a moment through the storm-clouds, the black speck of the motor boat trailing the second York boat dimly.

But suddenly the rattling of the engine died in a splutter. The motor boat was about a hundred yards distant. The next instant the bang of a rifle confirmed Lee's hopes. The engine had either run out of gasoline or had become out of order.

Instantly Lee was pulling as he had never pulled before. Again the rifle sounded. Twice more. Now the motor boat was almost invisible in the darkness.

Then, simultaneously with another discharge, something struck Lee a violent blow in the side that knocked him on his back.

He was up in a moment, and pulling with all his might, though he knew he



Lee Had Set Down the Rifle When He Picked Up the Girl. He Placed Her in the Boat, Ran Back and Found it and Threw it Inside, Together With the Pack From His Shoulders.

was wounded. But at all cost he must reach that nearing, welcome shore. He felt the wet blood trickling down him. His breath was coming in short gasps.

He bent to the oars with all his resolution set upon the completion of that journey. At last the shore seemed to reach out to him, the forests parted, the distant shouts died away. He ran the boat aground.

Lee's brain seemed preternaturally acute. In that moment he did not forget the pack, but, snatching it from the boat, leaped ashore, and, running some fifty yards, placed it carefully in the brush at the base of a tall pine. He ran back, picked up the girl, and, carrying her in his arms, began to make his way into the thick of the forest.

And all the while he ran, he was weighing everything. The Free Traders would not know that he was wounded, they would certainly abandon the pursuit as hopeless; he must carry the girl a mile into the forest, where the light of their fire would not betray them, returning for the pack in the morning. He suffered no pain, and seemed momentarily endowed with some extraordinary vitality, but there was a numbness in his side which seemed to be spreading upward.

He had no idea how serious the wound was; everything that was himself was set upon the completion of the last phase of his task, so that, if he died, the girl should at least come back to consciousness in the forest and not in Rathway's hands.

He struggled on, felt himself weakening, felt himself choking, and set down the girl in order to draw breath. But as he raised her again, he felt

a sudden stab of agonizing pain, and something grated beneath his heart. He realized then that the rifle bullet had split one of his ribs, probably glancing off again, and that the bone had given way under the strain of the girl's weight.

In a way this reassured him, for a glancing wound of that kind was not likely to be a serious one. On the other hand, the agony was growing unendurable. Every step was now torture. Three or four times, when it seemed impossible to proceed, Lee was forced to set the girl down and, leaning against a tree, to gasp for breath.

Eternities seemed to be passing. All his left side was now a flaming hell of pain, which radiated from the wound throughout his body, and this was becoming an automaton, driven by the will. He was no longer conscious of muscular control over it. A hundred times he felt that the next step must be his last. And yet some monitor in the back of his consciousness kept insisting that he must complete the mile he had set himself, and would not let him drop in his tracks.

And as he staggered on, he was surprised to hear himself talking to himself, and he listened with mild interest, as if he were overhearing the remarks of a third person.

He heard himself solemnly addressing Estelle, thanking her for having relieved him of the last vestige of the love that he had once felt toward her.

He had thought he loved her once, and that love, although unworthily bestowed, had not been wholly folly. Estelle had had many good qualities of heart; she was reckless and passionate, but there was nothing petty or mean about her. She was the daughter of a well-to-do lumberman, and she had been well educated; but there was some taint in her blood, some atavistic tendency that drove her upon wild and erratic courses.

For a while she had been on the stage, and had earned some reputation as a clever mimic.

For a long time Lee had known nothing of the stories that were being circulated by all the gossips of the town, nor that her name was associated with that of a man named Kean, whom he had never met. Kean was one of a gang selling liquor to the Indians, and he had a wife in Chicago. When, burning with anger, he went to confront Estelle, it was to find that she had been warned of his discovery, and had fled from the place—to Kean, the gossips said.

Lee never made any inquiries. As soon as possible he secured a transfer to another post; then he was sent to France, and his life had no room for feminine interests.

About ten months previously, however, while in the trenches, he had had a letter from Mrs. Kean, enclosing a copy of a marriage certificate. She was thinking of a divorce, and wanted to know whether he could give her any information about the couple. Lee knew nothing of either.

But the letter had shaken him a good deal, as had the meeting with Estelle that day as well. What an end for her!

It was a queer personality that talked, the fragments of the man whom he had once been, and Lee discovered that this lost portion of his personality was recalling to mind all sorts of queer things, quite trivial and unimportant episodes of that unhappy entanglement.

And so one part of him held colloquy with the shade of the woman who was now nothing to him, while the other held the unconscious girl, and drove the lagging body onward.

And to his horror, in that dim light the girl clasped seemed to take on the aspect of Estelle, and he found it was to her that he was talking.

But then he heard her moan slightly, and pulled himself together. This was not Estelle, it was his comrade of the range whom he was carrying. The phantom disappeared into the past, and once more Lee was aware of that odd sense of tender companionship. He rested her head more gently against his shoulder.

At last, when he was satisfied that he had gone the mile he had set himself, he laid the girl down gently on the ground, and, breaking off some spruce branches, he made a bed for her and wrapped her in his mackinaw again.

And with that it was all he could do to hold himself together while he examined his own wound as best he could.

He saw that it was a mere flesh wound. The bone had taken the force of the bullet, which had glanced off, and one broken end was working into the flesh.

He tore some strips from his shirt, and having brought the ends into position, bound them tightly. And then he dropped to the ground at the girl's feet and lapsed immediately into a delirious slumber.

## CHAPTER VII

### The Girl Awakens

And all that night it was the will that sustained the worn-out body in that fight up through the darkness.

and the knowledge that he must retain intact the thread of consciousness if he was to save the girl from the alternative between death in the forest and recapture.

At earliest dawn he must retrieve the pack, in case Rathway's men should decide to beat about the shore and so, perhaps, might find it. Beyond that point he would not let his anticipations carry him.

It was some time before the dawn when Lee heard the girl cry out suddenly, a moan of pain and of surprise as the body, heavy with its coma, struggled to convey the sense of distress to the dazed mind.

That cry drove the phantoms of delirium from Lee's mind, pulling him back to consciousness, and in an instant Lee was at the girl's side, perfectly master of himself, and, as she stirred and murmured, he raised her, put his arms about her, and took her head upon his shoulder, as tenderly as if she were some boy comrade, wounded upon patrol.

But as he listened to her broken utterances Lee realized that it was more than physical pain that was tormenting her.

"I cannot go on. It was too heavy a price. I must go back. If you won't kill him, save me and take me away. It is not that I didn't trust you, only you didn't understand."

"No, I'm not sure that I trust him. He looks honest, but who knows that he is? He isn't a prospector, he hasn't a pick or a pan. What should he be doing in the range? Yes, I'll go through with it. I'll go with you when he's asleep, only don't harm him. You must promise me not to harm him."

"Yes, he means well and wants to help me. He doesn't know who you are. You must swear that no harm shall come to him—"

She was living over again the events of the past. Her utterances became more broken, she moaned—suddenly she lay quiet, relapsing into the sleep of profound exhaustion.

And Lee staggered to his feet and lay down once more.

But this time it was neither to sleep nor to fall back into the nether depths of delirium. He saw that a titanic conflict had been going on within the girl, and it seemed to him now that she had been going up to Rathway. Something in the conversation between Rathway and Estelle—what had it been?

He pondered over it all in a disconnected way as he lay there, still aware that another part of him was living over those days of long ago. Then at last the first light of dawn came creeping through the trees, and slowly this pain-racked, thirst-tormented being settled down into himself again.

As soon as it was half-light he was on his feet. After looking at the girl, and convincing himself that she was not likely to awake for several hours, he set off, aching in every limb, toward the shore of the lake, in order to retrieve the pack.

In less than half an hour he emerged out of the forest, and, after a careful survey of the lake had convinced him that neither the Free Traders nor their boats were in evidence he struggled down to the river, and bathed in the ice-cold waters, lapping them up and feeling new life flow into his veins.

He adjusted and tightened the bandages. The broken rib was snugly held, and Lee felt that he had gone through the worst of it.

He found the pack. It contained a blanket and waterproof sheet, tea, sugar, bacon, flour, cream of tartar, salt, corn meal, some dried apricots, matches, and nails; there were a pot, a pannikin, plate, knife, fork, and spoon, an axe and a small saw.

His wound made it impossible to carry this on his back, but with the axe in one hand Lee sliced off a number of pine branches, out of which he constructed a rough framework on which to haul the pack. An hour's work and an hour's struggle through the woods brought him back to the girl.

She was sleeping naturally, and there was a faint tinge of color in her cheeks. After a short rest Lee set about the task of making camp. He gathered brushwood and built a fire, he put on to boil the pot which he had brought back full of water. And, having on the return journey discovered a small, clear stream near by, he decided that that would be a safe camping place until they could proceed, and accordingly bent down some saplings and proceeded to thatch them with branches, to make a shelter for them.

He had just begun when he heard a low call behind him. The girl was awake and conscious at last. She was looking at him in wonder, but not in fear.

Of course the girl's delirious utterances mean nothing. What will the forlorn couple do next?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

### Inconvenient "Currency"

Economists tell learnedly why money makes the commercial world go round, but a Parisian opera singer of a decade ago learned the lesson in one classic experience. She was determined to tour the world thoroughly and she stopped over in the Society Islands, where her manager contracted to have her sing for one-third the receipts. Her share of "the box office" was 3 pigs, 22 turkeys, 44 chickens, 5,000 coconuts and an uncomputed quantity of bananas and oranges. She couldn't convert her proceeds; the natives had no money. She fed the fruit to the animals and donated her barnyard to the community when she sailed away.

## HOW TO KEEP WELL

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### STOMACH ULCERS AND BAD TEETH

ULCER of the stomach is comparatively common. This is partly due to the fact that more cases are recognized today than formerly. Many cases of what used to be called "chronic dyspepsia," regarded as a typical American disease, are now known to be ulcers of the stomach or duodenum.

In many cases the early symptoms are so mild and the ulcerations develop so slowly that the patient pays little attention to them or tries to relieve them by taking all sorts of "dyspepsia cures." Under any treatment or no treatment at all, the patient improves at times and then relapses. Finally, the pain, especially after eating, becomes so severe that it cannot be endured and the patient becomes alarmed. Sometimes a hemorrhage is the first sign of serious trouble.

In most cases, the patient is otherwise healthy, has a good appetite and eats well, but notices a pain or discomfort two or three hours after eating. This pain is a peculiar gnawing feeling. There may also be nausea, gas and vomiting. Soon the pain becomes constant, with soreness. It is relieved somewhat by eating but comes back in two or three hours. There is pain during the night and there is apt to be constipation and loss of weight, although some persons lose but little, if any.

Gradually the patient learns that some foods cause more pain than others. He learns that soda after meals makes him more comfortable and that milk and eggs cause less pain than acid foods. So he often goes on for years in a condition of misery and semi-invalidism, sometimes better, sometimes worse, never able to eat much of any kind of food without pain and consequently weak, irritable, undernourished and miserable.

This is the chronic case. In some, hemorrhage, perforation or obstruction caused by the scar tissue from the ulcer closing the opening from the stomach, may send the patient to the hospital for an emergency operation or cause sudden death in neglected cases.

Improved methods of examination, especially the X-ray, make it possible today to recognize ulcer of the stomach more easily than formerly. Better methods of treatment have relieved many sufferers that were without hope in earlier days.

But what is the cause of these ulcers? There are many explanations, no one of which has as yet been accepted. Certain it is that an ulcer of the stomach, like a sore on the skin, cannot occur until the lining of the stomach is injured or broken and until some kind of infection comes in contact with the broken membrane. Ulcers are more common in those who have tonsillitis and other infections of the mouth and throat. Particularly are they apt to occur in persons having bad teeth or abscesses around the roots of the teeth.

### DEATH RATE IN COUNTRY

THE country is the best place to raise children. In spite of the so-called advantages of city life, a child born in the country has a better chance of living than one born in the city. Statistics of large life insurance companies show that a boy born in the country will live on the average seven and three-quarters years longer than a boy born in the city, or, as insurance actuaries say, the country boy has a life expectancy that is seven and three-quarters years longer than a city boy, while the country girl can figure on living six years longer than she would if she were born in the city.

So the country child gets a running start on the city child. If the advantage could be kept up through life, there would be no question of the supremacy of the country over the city.

Unfortunately, it isn't kept up. In some very important diseases, the death rate in the country is much higher than in the city. What's the use of being born in the country and having a longer life ahead of you at birth, if you are going to lose this advantage as soon as you come up against the diseases of childhood?

The death rate for whooping cough, for instance, is higher among country than among city children. On the other hand, the country child death rate for measles, scarlet fever and diphtheria is lower than the city child death rate.

The tuberculosis death rate shows a curious fact. The only treatment for tuberculosis that is of any value consists of fresh air, sunshine, rest and nourishing food. All these are found easier and more abundantly in the country than in the city. Yet the country tuberculosis death rate is higher than the city rate.

Smallpox kills more people in the country than in the city, probably on account of the neglect of vaccination. Influenza is also more fatal in the country. But heart disease (except angina), Bright's disease and all other kidney diseases, are much more common in the city than in the country.

Suicide and murder are much more common in the cities, but deaths by drowning, burning, gunshot wounds, railroad accidents, lightning and excessive cold are all more common in the country.