

The Free Traders

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

WNU SERVICE

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CHAPTER XVI—Continued

The cave grew narrower; then, just when Lee thought that they had reached the end, it suddenly vaulted out and up into a large chamber.

The roaring of the waterfall immediately became accentuated as the sounds echoed from wall to wall. By the light of the candle they could now see what looked like a sheer drop into darkness immediately in front of them.

They drew back from the edge hastily. But the next moment they perceived that what they had taken for a precipice was a river, inky black, a swift and perfectly soundless stream rushing through the cavern from side to side of the mountain.

It emerged through a low tunnel in the rock and disappeared through another, barely two feet in height, upon the other side. And the roaring that they heard was not caused by this stream within the cave, but by some distant cataract, either beyond the mountain or deep within the bowels of the earth.

There were evidences, in the shape of rusty pots and kettles, and disintegrating tins strewn about the place, that this had been Pelly's headquarters, while on the opposite side of the cavern there was a deep sand tunnel extending into a smaller cavern under the wall, showing that Pelly had worked this part for gold. And the whole interior was piled high with wood ashes and remains of charred logs.

This seemed, in fact, to be the heart of Pelly's gold mine.

Suddenly Rathway, who had been wandering apparently aimlessly about the interior, uttered a shout and leaped toward the obscurity of the opposite wall. In another moment he had returned, dragging with him a large sack, from whose mouth tiny yellow particles exuded.

As if unconscious of the presence of Lee and Joyce, he knelt down, and, muttering feverishly, began untying the cord about the sack's mouth. The gapping sides disclosed a pit of gold.

Gold in fine dust, gold in nuggets, Rathway plunged his arms within the sack up to the elbows, chuckling and tumbling. There was a fortune in that bag, the accumulation of old Pelly's years of nocturnal labors. It was impossible to estimate it, but it would make its possessor a very rich man for life.

"Well, I'm glad you've got it," said Lee.

But he was thinking bitterly of Joyce's loss.

He turned away. Suddenly some instinct caused him to duck and spin around. The flash of flame spurred almost into his face. He heard Joyce's cry ring through the cavern.

Rathway had pulled a second pistol from his clothes and fired at Lee at five or six feet distance.

The bullet chipped a silver of granite from the wall behind his head. At the same instant Lee saw Joyce aim her automatic and fire deliberately at Rathway.

But of course no discharge followed the pulling of the trigger. Lee had known the automatic was empty, though it had not seemed necessary to warn Joyce.

As he sprang forward, Rathway brought the butt of the weapon smashing down upon Lee's forehead.

Lee dropped foolishly upon his knees; he saw Rathway's face, convulsed with fury, over him; Rathway's arm, yellow with gold dust, raised to strike again. Lee leaned backward, overbalanced, fell into the stream.

He saw Joyce run forward and grasp at him as he was swept past, saw Rathway grappling with her—then he was in the whirling current, and Joyce and Rathway and the cavern vanished as swiftly as a picture on the screen.

Lee was only dimly conscious of what was happening to him, for his senses reeled under Rathway's blow, and it was only an intense effort of the will that enabled him to keep his face above the water. He had a vague consciousness that he was being whirled through the depths of the mountain in complete darkness. The rock roof swept his hair, and the rock walls on his two sides formed a sort of hydraulic tube against which the stream tossed and buffeted him, hurling him from side to side in its fury.

And ever the stream grew swifter, and ever that ominous roaring sounded louder in his ears.

The river was carrying him toward some subterranean waterfall. Half-conscious, Lee visualized death among the grinding rocks—death in that viscous blackness that no ray of sunlight had ever illuminated.

He knew in a dim way that this was the end, and resistance being impossible, resigned himself to the rush of the waters, gasping in a few mouthfuls of air whenever it was possible.

The tunnel was growing still narrower, and now the roaring sounded in his ears like thunder. The rock roof dipped to the water. Lee drew in one last breath. He went under. He flung up his arms, and his fingers

scraped the roof—then touched only emptiness. The current hurled him to the surface again. He opened his eyes.

Starlight overhead, appearing between high, precipitous walls, that seemed to scrape the sky. A narrow gorge, through which the current whirled him still more furiously. In the distance a line of white, the boiling of the torrent about the rocks of the falls.

Involuntarily a great cry of anguish broke from Lee's throat. Again and again it broke forth, the spontaneous protest of the body against inevitable destruction.

Upon the brink of the gorge, which had a tiny ledge of rock or undercliff beside the water, a beacon fire leaped into view, far away. Silhouetted against it was the black figure of a man. Lee fancied that he shouted in answer. His head was growing clearer now.

The gorge had become as narrow as a hall bedroom, and the rush of the black torrent toward the falls terrific. It whirled Lee around and around like a ball. The line of white was coming nearer with awful rapidity. Lee saw the figure on the edge of it, tossing its arms as it raced along the brink, but if it was shouting now, its voice was indistinguishable in the roar of the torrent.

Great fallen rocks lined the banks. Lee grasped at them as he was swept by, but they always eluded him, always the current carried him away. Now he seemed poised upon the brink of the tumbling cataract. He grasped at a rock projecting out of mid-stream, missed it.

Something descended over his head, checking him. He seemed to float still in the current, which boiled about and past him. He reached out to the rock, found it, clung there. He reached up one arm and found that he was enveloped in the folds of a long fishing net. He saw Leboeuf upon the brink, not ten feet distant. The man was shouting, but Lee could not distinguish a word. He was pointing toward the shore, to the rock. Lee let himself go.

The great shoulders and arms strained themselves upon the net against the torrent. Completely emmeshed, Lee felt himself being slowly drawn, like a gigantic fish, toward the bank. There was one instant when the force of the current seemed to be pulling old Leboeuf into the stream. The huge body bent like a bow, there was an instant of suspense, then



He Saw Joyce Run Forward and Grasp at Him as He Swept Past.

slowly the great shoulders swung back, and Lee grasped the rocky ledge through the folds of the net. He felt himself raised to the rock rim, felt Leboeuf's arms about him, and collapsed into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XVII

Rathway Takes Thought of His Spoils

Rathway laughed like a hyena as he saw Lee disappear in the swift waters of the torrent. He spun about and struck the pistol from Joyce's hands, pulled the girl to him, and crushed her brutally against his breast.

And Joyce, overcome by this climax of the night's work, suddenly relaxed in his arms and fainted.

Rathway laid her down on the sand and looked at her in perplexity.

He discovered that he was somewhat in the same situation as the fox with the sack of corn and the goose.

If he carried the girl through the tunnel and left her while he went back for the gold she might escape him.

On the other hand, if he left her in the cave while he carried the gold away, she might fling herself into the stream in her despair. And some one might take the gold.

The only thing for Rathway to do was to remove the gold and the girl simultaneously. He carried the bag of gold to the cave's mouth, but in spite of his great strength, the weight was terrific. He reconciled himself to his labors, however, by the reflection that the bag contained a fortune.

Then, returning to Joyce, he carried her to the bag and set her down beside it.

It was fortunate for him that Joyce remained unconscious, or he would have been impossibly handicapped in his maneuvers. Cursing and struggling, first with the bag and then with the girl, Rathway at last got them to the rock at the foot of the tunnel which Lee had so indiscreetly pointed out to him.

Then arose the most difficult problem of all. Either the girl or the gold would have to be left on the upper side of the tunnel while he went back for the other. And during his absence—Rathway shuddered at the thought of any prowler coming along and making off with the treasure.

He was not convinced in his mind that his aides had not followed him.

Rathway chose to leave the gold in safety. It was the greater of his two passions. Gathering Joyce in his arms, he essayed the ascent of the cliff.

How he got to the tunnel's entrance he hardly knew afterward. It was a feat which only the spur of triumph enabled him to accomplish. He had to hold on with both hands while gripping the girl with the insides of his arms.

At length, however, he did succeed in reaching the tunnel's mouth, dragging himself through, and pulling Joyce through after him. The ascent of the rock ladder was trifling in comparison.

He looked at Joyce. She was still in a condition of profound unconsciousness. Breathing an unvoiced prayer to whatever gods controlled his soul, that she would not awake, Rathway laid her down between the monolith and the rocking stone, and went back for the gold.

This job of hoisting the heavy bag up the side of the cliff, required less dexterity, but every ounce of strength that he possessed, inch by inch, straining and scrambling up the rocky wall, Rathway pushed it before him until, bruised by the impact of the treasure, he got it safely within the tunnel, and thence to the rocking stone above.

He stopped to breathe. He wiped the sweat from his face. It was not very far from dawn. He must have spent hours on that hideous task.

Then, carrying the bag and the girl alternately, he pushed on toward the house. He awakened his aides with a yell. They came staggering out, drunk and half asleep.

"Start up the engine, Kramer," he shouted. "We'll have to be on our way by daylight. Gimme a drink!"

He gulped down half a bottle of his own liquor. The reaction after his incredible labors, the possession of the gold, the supreme triumph of that night exalted him. But he was anxious to get away as soon as possible.

At Siston lake, which was only a few hours' journey by motor boat, he would be in his own retreat. He could wait till then to enjoy success. He glouted as he looked down at the unconscious girl.

Something had gone wrong with the engine, and Rathway fussed and fumed while Kramer, the mechanic, was repairing it. The packs were got together, the engine overhauled. Rathway placed the bag of gold dust in the middle of the boat, and carried Joyce to it. He laid her down, and they pushed off.

Joyce had fallen into a profound sleep of exhaustion. She began to stir, stretched out her arms.

"Lee, dear," she murmured.

She opened her eyes and looked into Rathway's vulpine face. She screamed. She struggled. She remembered.

She fought like a mad woman, and Rathway was forced to call for a rope. He tied her ankles together and fastened her arms to her sides. He passed the rope around one of the cleats. In spite of her bonds she struggled so that it was all Rathway could do to keep her from tilting the boat over. She screamed continually and tried to throw herself over the side.

At last she stopped, however, and lay still from exhaustion. She never renewed her struggles. She lay in the bottom of the boat with her eyes closed, drawing in convulsive breaths. Despite his triumph and his anticipations, Rathway was afraid of her. He wondered what was going on inside her mind.

It was about noon when they reached the promontory.

Rathway, preceded by Pierre and Shorty with the gold—he would not leave it in the motor boat—carried the girl across the neck of land to an isolated hut about three hundred yards away, following a secret passage among the reeds. He laid her down upon the camp bed. Joyce lay rigid, looking at him with dilated pupils, and still drawing in those shuddering breaths. Rathway went out with a

sigh of relief; he was still more afraid of her in that condition.

Another person he feared was Estelle, and it was with relief he learned that she was not at the promontory. Estelle had odd ways of wandering alone about the country. Rathway was glad of this temporary respite. Going to the stables, a shanty with two stalls close by, where he kept two horses and fodder for use in unexpected emergency, he saw that one of the animals was missing. No doubt Estelle had gone out riding.

Estelle's personality was a stronger one than Rathway's. He could never cow her by violence, as he cowed his men; on the contrary, he feared her lashing tongue when she was aroused.

He had seen Pierre, Shorty, and Kramer gloating over the gold, and he knew that he would have short shrift if once his men suspected that he was unable to keep it against them, or if they trusted each other sufficiently to combine against him. That was why he had removed it to the hut in the swamp, approachable only by a single narrow track.

There were six other men at the promontory, one of them, the man whom Lee had shot through the hand, being still disabled. Rathway set the whole lot on various jobs, to keep them busy during the remainder of the day. He knew that they would be talking about the gold at night, but he was making his own plans. And, left alone, he paced the track, now glancing over the gold, now over Joyce who still lay silent on the bed, her lips compressed, and that awful look in her eyes.

He went to her side and cut the bonds that bound her. There was no need to guard her; she could not escape him. Joyce sat up slowly, still looking at him in that terrible way. He could not face her eyes. He felt helpless before her. He needed two allies—night and whisky.

"Come, dearie," he began, in a voice that was meant to be placable, "you know everything I've done has been out of love for you—"

"Murderer!" Rathway trembled before her outstretched finger. He had thought to have her at his mercy; she seemed to have him at hers.

"Come, now, my dear, if I had to treat you rough—"

"Murderer!"

"He was pulling a gun on me. He fell into the stream himself. I didn't hit him."

"You—murderer!"

Rathway beat a retreat. Her eyes were blazing like a panther's. He couldn't understand his fear of her. He crossed the neck, went into his hut, and began drinking. His mind was muddled, and worse, his will was wavering. That girl was bad enough—then there would be Estelle to face.

Curse those women! The mental picture of Joyce rose up before his eyes. She had never seemed so desirable. He saw her unconscious in the mine again, with her short, fair hair hanging about her neck, her eyes closed, helpless. Curse her! Why had he only been thinking of the gold? He had had her at his mercy then.

He looked cautiously into the hut again. Joyce was still sitting on the bed, still as a carved statue. Rathway was beginning to be afraid that she was going mad. If she would only give him the chance, he wanted to tell her that he would share the gold with her. Why couldn't she be reasonable? It was that d—d Anderson! How long would she be thinking of him? Weeks, perhaps.

His suspicions of Joyce and Anderson lashed him, and he raged all the afternoon, abusing his men, and giving them unheard of tasks. He had the boats cleaned, the engine overhauled, a drum of gasoline placed in the motor boat. He sent some food to Joyce. The men grumbled and went about their work sullenly. Rathway fancied he saw looks passing between them, as if they had some secret understanding. He believed they were conspiring against him. And where the devil was Estelle?

In spite of the hate that he now felt for her, he turned to her in his thoughts in time of difficulty. Curse the woman! She was getting too strong a hold on him! He must send her packing.

His desire for Joyce was a constant goad to him. But he was still afraid of her. He must give her time to weaken. It was not dark enough. And he had not drunk enough.

At nightfall the men began a carousal, gathering in a hollow between the huts, protected by a skin roof and sides, but open in front, where a huge fire was kindled. Usually Rathway kept liquor from them, except when on long journeys and for the weekly debauch which he permitted, but now they were openly defying his rigid rule. The possession of the gold had disintegrated everything.

For Rathway, too. He cared no longer. The drinker his followers became, the better for the plans that were condensing in his mind.

As he passed, one of the men defiantly held up a bottle, an act that would have brought swift physical retribution under other circumstances. A man at his side dashed it out of his hand, whispering in his ear. The bottle smashed, and the spirit ran out on the ground. Rathway affected not to notice the incident.

Another man, staggering out of a hut, lurched past him with a mumbled gibe. Rathway affected not to notice that either. Let the fools weave their halter!

He went into his own hut and swallowed a cupful of whisky. It helped to steady his nerves. He crossed the neck and made his way to the hut where Joyce was. It was nearly dark now, and through the darkness he could see her sitting where he had

left her, her hands folded in her lap. Fear of her sprang up in him again, and with the fear unreasoning fury. Hate and love left him neutral for the moment, so strongly they contested within him.

The girl did not turn her head, and he steered a wide course of the bed, edging sidewise toward the sack of gold dust. Picking it up, he made his way quickly outside. With a great effort he managed to hoist it upon his back, and, staggering along, almost bent double by his burden, he made his way among the reeds until he reached the shore of the lake, a few yards from where the motor boat lay beached at the end of the broken parapet.

He laid the bag down in the swamp growth. He felt more at ease now. No one would think of looking for it



Rathway Laid the Bag Down in the Swamp Growth.

there, and to hoist it into the motor boat would be a matter of only a minute or two.

Looking into the boat, he saw that Kramer had placed the drum of gasoline in it, as he had ordered.

Rathway chuckled. Joyce, the boat and the gold—and Estelle away! What more was needed?

A few hours' delay, until the men were stupefied with whisky, then—

One minute's start was all he needed. Then he was safe. He could make Lake Misquash in three days. There, in the far north, at the last outpost of the Free Traders, he would remain with Joyce, safe against pursuit through the long winter. In any event it was not likely that the gang would have the enterprise to follow him.

In spring Joyce and he would move south by other trails. By spring the girl would have forgotten Anderson.

It was beginning to snow again. Clouds would cover the moon that night. Things could not have turned out more favorably. Best of all was Estelle's absence.

But then, through the fading twilight, Rathway saw Estelle coming toward him along the path through the reeds.

And a fury of resentment rose in his breast at the sight of her. He had never hated her more. Why had he tolerated this woman so long after she had ceased to mean anything to him? There was murder in his heart as he advanced to meet her.

CHAPTER XVIII

Lee Is Given a Powerful Tool

It was dawn in the gorge when Lee opened his eyes. At first his memories were confused so that he could carry them no further forward than the moment when he turned away from the log house, leaving Joyce with Rathway.

He had meant to kill him then—and here he must have fallen asleep in the forest, for it was daylight. And Joyce had been all night in Rathway's power!

Murder filled his heart; and again everything else was blotted out of his mind but the insensate desire to slay, a primal instinct that swamped every other part of the man's being.

He started up. But this was not the forest! He was amazed to see the walls of the gorge on either side of him, dwindling away in the distance into open country, with a vista of trees beyond, and splashes of sunshine, interspersed with long waves of shadow, showing that the sun had already risen.

Almost immediately beneath the ledge on which he lay was a cataract, but not deep—a roaring stream of water rushing among the rocks.

And not far away was old Leboeuf, placidly frying bacon in a skillet over a wood fire.

Then all the events of the night flashed into Lee's mind. He uttered a cry, got on his legs.

"Leboeuf!"

At Lee's cry the old Indian turned and came toward him, the skillet in his hand.

"Monstieur!"

"We must go back, Joyce—" And he began to tell the old man of the events of the night, that Joyce and he were married—but it was all incoherent, and he was not sure that he succeeded in making Leboeuf understand.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

HOW TO KEEP WELL

DR. FREDERICK R. GREEN
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UNNECESSARY NOISES

COMING down the boulevard this morning, I was stopped at the street crossing by a parade. The police, of course, halted the traffic on both sides of the crossing. In a few minutes, a long line of autos, trucks and busses were standing on each of the cross streets.

The procession was a short one and did not require more than eight or ten minutes to pass. But even this short delay was too much of a strain on the nerves of the automobile drivers. Some of them began honking their horns and, at once, like a lot of frogs in a pond, every driver turned loose his siren. The result was that for five minutes, every one within hearing had his nerves tortured with an infernal, ear-splitting and entirely unnecessary racket.

One can understand, even though he may not entirely sympathize with or enjoy, the noise made by a small boy who urges a stick along a picket fence or lets off cannon crackers under one's window. This is simply the irresistible impulse of the average boy to make a noise. But why did two or three hundred grown and supposedly sensible men keep up this awful and unnecessary din for full five minutes? Did they think it would shorten the procession or make it go faster? Not one of the cars could move until the way was clear, and the police were certainly not going to allow them to proceed until the parade had passed. What possible good did it do any of them to keep their horns going?

There were probably two reasons: the first was the nervous inability to sit still and keep quiet for a few minutes, and the other was the nervous impulse of each driver to do something to show his displeasure. Certainly none of these men, if he stopped to think, would have believed for a moment that making a noise did any good.

On the contrary, it did harm both to the men who made it and to the helpless bystanders. Sound is heard in the brain. Loud, long-continued and unnecessary noises are just as tiring to the body as are too-bright or too-glaring lights, or long-continued mental or physical exertion.

Unnecessary noises are not only a waste of energy, but they are also a needless strain on the nerves. We have enough noise in present-day life that cannot be avoided. In the city, the rattle and crash of street cars, elevated trains and trucks, in the country, the noises of animal life. You can't muffle every cow or dog, or put maxim silencers on all the roosters. Every locality has its own necessary noise and, with few exceptions, they are enough. Don't add to the wear-and-tear on your own and others' nerves and brains by making any that are unnecessary.

VACATION PRECAUTIONS

AS SOON as warm weather comes all sensible people begin to plan for some kind of a vacation. The vacation habit is growing every year, and rightly. No matter what one's work may be or how interesting, or how hard it may be to get away from it, the mind and the body need and should have a few days or a few weeks of change.

Probably the automobile is doing more to develop the vacation habit among American people than any other one thing. A vacation always means a change of location. This requires some kind of transportation. The family flivver makes it possible for a few days, without having to buy railroad tickets or to engage rooms at a hotel. In the car or on the running board can be packed tents, beds, provisions, cooking utensils, guns, fishing tackle and all the other things needed for a few days of outdoor life.

Most people going on such a trip need no advice as to clothing, bedding or food. Their own desire for comfort will lead them to look after these things. But few think seriously about protecting their health.

Living outdoors, there is not as much liability to colds or other respiratory diseases as at home. The percentage of accidents is probably not as great as in driving at home. The principal dangers on a summer camping trip are from bad water and waste.

Water is, of course, a daily, almost hourly necessity. You are used to getting your water from your own well or hydrant. But you can't take them along with you. You must use such water as you can get.

On short trips you can take a sufficient amount of pure water with you. Otherwise, unless you know where it comes from and know that it is pure, the only safe rule is to boil the water. It is not safe to use unboiled water from any spring, well, brook or creek along the way. It may look clear and clean, it may be cold and refreshing and taste fine, but it may also be full of typhoid germs. The more thickly settled the country the greater the danger.

Much of our typhoid today is summer or vacation typhoid. What shall it profit a man to take two weeks away from his business to get rested and then take six weeks from his business to get over an attack of typhoid? For any water that you are not sure of there is only one safe rule—boil it!