



SYNOPSIS

**CHAPTER I.**—In the California sierra Mark King, prospector, is a witness of the murder of Andy Parker by Swen Brodie, Parker's companion, both known to King. He buries Parker and continues his way to the summer home of an old friend, Ben Gaynor, a friend of King's. King's knowledge of a vast store of gold—Gus Ingle's treasure—hidden in the sierra years before. A doddering old prospector, "Looney" Honeycutt, is believed to know the hiding place.

**CHAPTER II.**—King meets Mrs. Gaynor and is impressed by Gloria's youthful beauty. Among Gaynor's guests is Gratton, San Francisco capitalist, apparently a favored suitor for Gloria's hand. With Gloria King rides to the village of Coloma, intending to "sound" Honeycutt. He finds Brodie with the old prospector, and anxiously warns Brodie leaving after threatening King.

**CHAPTER III.**—Their ride to Coloma and their companionship for a day, draw King closer to Gloria.

**CHAPTER IV.**—Gloria and her mother return to San Francisco. King, it of advent, accompanies Gratton on a "business" trip. At Coloma she finds her father badly hurt. He gives her a message and a package for King. King goes to the hotel to him at once. Gloria realizes, too late, how she has compromised herself by her journey with Gratton, he having actually registered them at the hotel as husband and wife, but she is powerless. With him she goes to the Gaynor mountain home. There Gratton, feeling he has her in his power, proposes marriage, and Gloria, having heard from her mother that her adventure is the talk of San Francisco, apparently accepts him.

**CHAPTER V.**—Gratton arranges for the marriage by a country "judge." King comes to the house, unseen by Gloria. Informed of the coming ceremony, he watches it from a window. At the last moment Gloria refuses to utter the requisite "yes." In the resultant confusion King enters the room and Gloria appeals to him for protection. Gratton dismisses her, revealing his knowledge of the gold treasure, and makes threats. With his departure King, heartened by Gloria's appeal to him, urges her to go with him, really more than a little in love with her, and seeing a way out of her dilemma, the girl consents. Gratton's message to King reveals the approximate location of the treasure. Honeycutt is dead, and Gaynor urges King to go at once and secure it.

**CHAPTER VI.**—After the ceremony, Gloria asserting the necessity for rest after her trying experience, King leaves her and prepares for his trip. Next morning Gloria insists on going with him. With some misgiving, he consents. On the journey the party get lost. Gloria, her overwrought nerves give way, in hysteria, she admits to King that she married him only to "save her name from gossip." King, making no allowance for her condition, renounces all claim on her but refuses to take her home, declaring he is under promise to her father to lose no time seeking the gold. She, unable to find her way home alone, has perforce to follow him.

**CHAPTER VII.**—Gloria's horse, through her unskillfulness, goes lame and they have to abandon it, but King keeps on. They reach what King believes to be Ingle's cave.

**CHAPTER VIII.**—King finds the gold. Gloria, having rested, sends his giving her orders. She has seen smoke from a campfire and threatens to make her way to it. King knows the party must be Brodie's, and of course forbids it. With all the gold he can carry he arranges to start back, but finds his horse, left at the base of the cliffs, has broken away. They are forced to return to the cave, Gloria close to complete exhaustion.

**CHAPTER IX.**—Next morning Gloria is better, thanks to King's efforts. Their food is almost gone and King tells her they must start home on foot, despite a raging storm, if he can't find the horse.

CHAPTER X

King awoke filled with resolve and definite purpose. It was still snowing heavily, steadily, implacably. "The biggest storm in twenty years," he told himself.

He must seek immediately to locate his horse; one could not horseflesh if driven to it. He must try to get game of some sort. He went to Gloria's bed. "You'd better get up," he said briefly. "Time to start the day. While we eat I want to talk with you. I never saw a storm worse than this. We have enough food for a few days. After that, if we stuck on here and did not find more somehow, we'd die like dogs. Therefore we are going to get ready to beat it out the first chance we get. Gloria, I am going to do all that I can for both of us. You are going to do all that you can. That is final."

She bit her lips and gave him her scornful silence. She ignored him when he called crisply that breakfast was ready. There were limits to her obedience, she thought rebelliously. To be told to do this, do that, was intolerable. King looked at her and had the understanding to grasp something of her thought. So he explained:

"I want you to come outside with me. You'll find it hard work. It would be a first-rate idea if you'd fortify your strength by the little bit of nourishment which we can afford to take. No? Well, I'm sorry.—Here." He offered her the pieces of a sack he had cut in two for her. "Tie those about your feet to keep them from freezing."

"When I want your advice, I'll ask for it," she retorted icily.

"Very well," he answered. "And I can't make you eat if you don't want to. After all, perhaps you are not hungry." He set aside her portion.

Her heart seemed scarcely to stir in her breast; then slowly it began to beat, swifter and swifter, hammering wildly. Her reason fled before the flood of the passionate wilfulness of the old Gloria, and she cried shrilly: "I won't! I won't! I am not your slave and I am not going to jump at your bidding! You can't make me; you shan't make me. I won't!" "I will make you," he said harshly. "So help me God, Gloria, I will make you. It is a question of life and death. If to let you have your way were anything other than suicide, I'd let you have it. But as things are, I've got nothing left me but tell you what to do; and you've got to do as I say."

"My life is my own, to do with it as I please. I do not please to obey your commands." Her tortured heart surged up in wild triumph as he turned; it sank sickly as he came back. He had a piece of rope in his hand. "You would tie me!" she gasped. "No," he said tersely. "As though you were any other fractious animal refusing discipline when refusal means death, I am going to whip you!" "G—d!" screamed Gloria. "Oh, my G—d!"

For again he but said simply the thing which he meant to do. And she knew. "While I count three," said King. And steadily, though there was a pallor on his own face, which should have told her the terrible relentlessness of his intention, he counted: "One, two, three."

She willed to move, to obey, at this tardy second, but something within her, stronger than herself, held her back. "I won't!" she screamed. The blow fell swiftly. The pain was immediate, hot and searing, and Gloria shrieked—once only—and grew still. She dropped her hands and looked at him, her face as white as a dead girl's, her eyes as unfathomable as a maniac's. A flash of white fire flared through her brain. Something had been killed within her—or something had been born. A blow at a man's hand had seemed to cut through her being; it had separated body and spirit.

"I won't go with you," she cried. "You may beat me; you may kill me if you like, unthinkable brute that you are. I will not follow you now; I will never follow one step ever."

"You will do what I tell you to do," he said thickly. "It is the only way. I will make you."

Blazing eyes burning in a death-white face gave him his only answer. His own face now was no less white; iron-bodied as he was, he was trembling. Yet he lifted the rope. To strike the second blow. She could not restrain a shudder of her flesh. But she meant what she had said, or what some reborn Gloria had said for her, get back the shortest, quickest way to civilization, and send other men, trustworthy men, in for her. That would mean several days alone for Gloria; but what else was there? And even that solution depended upon the consideration which by now was the elemental, all-essential thing; first he must find some sort of provisions with which to eke out their small supply. He must get fish in plenty or a bear or a deer.

In a distressed mental condition in which the only solid ground beneath him was his determination to do to the uttermost that lay within him for Gloria, he broke into mutterings. "I've got to leave her. . . . She won't go with me. That means I've got to leave with her every scrap of food we have—between us. I can go two days without eating. . . . I can! . . . Her one danger is Brodie. Otherwise she would be safe enough for four or five days. She's got to stick close to the cave; she must not dare to set foot outside. . . . I can get out in two days; back in two days. Somehow. Allow five days to cover accidents. Five days; she can stick it out five days. If I don't take a scrap of her food away from her. . . . Oh, I can make it; it is up to me to make it. I'll get a fish sooner or later—or a rabbit. . . . A man can eat his boots."

After a long time he went back to the cave. Gloria faced him as he came in. Her head was up, there were spots of color in her cheeks; in her eyes was a new look. She had found herself. Or she was finding herself. Her spirit had risen undaunted in a crisis; in a clash of wills hers had not gone down before his. Rather it had been hers that had triumphed. With head erect she awaited his speech.

He began, saying very simply what he had decided must be said. "The first thing in the morning," he told her, "I am going over the ridge and to the headwaters of the other fork. I've got a hunch a bear's in there. It will probably be dark before I get back. I may even be gone all night. If I am it will be because I am playing the last card. If I don't get back tomorrow night it will be because I am trying to break through to civilization. I'll outfit a party and send them in for you. You have food here to keep you alive a week, if you spin it out."

Long before he had gotten to the end of his slow speech her heart was beating wildly. To be left here alone four or five days—and nights! It was unendurable! She would be dead. "You threatened once to go to those other men; no matter what happens, you must not do that. You don't quite understand what some men are. You would be better dead than in their hands. Never forget that."

"If the worst should happen and they came here, still you could hide. I'll show you the place, far back in the cave. I'll bring you plenty of wood; I am going to make a pair of snowshoes of a sort for me; I'll make a pair for you. I hope you won't need them." He ran his hand across his brow but continued in a moment, his voice unchanged: "I'll go out before daylight in the morning; it will take me all that is left of today to do what must be done first."

He turned then and went about his work. She went back to the place by the fire, terribly moved, agitated by the depths of her soul, torn this way and that. But one steady fire burned in her bosom, the newly kindled white flame of her resentment.

He brought fragments of rock to the cave's mouth, the biggest he could find, and in time, after hours of labor, he had hidden the great hole as best he could, leaving only at the side a way to pass in and out which could hardly be seen from below.

"If you will come with me, I will show you your hiding place."

She lifted her head and looked at him. Again, she thought swiftly, he was seeking to command, to dictate. Doubtless, in the end she would have arisen and gone with him, since to refuse were madness. But he had not waited. He had gone alone into the depths of the cavern; she heard his slow, measured steps receding; she heard them again, slow and measured, as he came back.

"It's only about thirty paces, straight back," he was saying. "There I have made a little pile of rocks; you can't miss it. That marks the place, just at the side of the rock pile. That's where I found the gold. There's air down there, that comes up from below. And it's a better place to be than here—if anyone should come."

She shuddered. But he had not seen. There remained much to do and the hours fled so swiftly. He set to work making the clumsy snowshoes.

They had made their scanty suppers; after it both were hungry. They had been hungry thus for four days. Tomorrow they would be a great deal hungrier, the next day they would begin to starve. . . . King got up and went out, down the cliffs in the dark, for a last load of wood. When he came back she was lying on her bed, her face from the light. He stood a moment looking at her. Then for the last time he spoke to her:

"If I am long gone, you understand why. There is not a chance in a thousand now that those men will find this place; if they do, there is not a chance in another thousand that they will find the middle cave. You will be safe enough. . . . And, if I do not get back tomorrow, you will know that within three days more, or four at most, there will be a party in here to bring you out."

CHAPTER XI

Gloria awoke. She had not heard that she was alive.

By now Mark King was far away. She sprang up and built a fire. Less for the warmth, though she was cold to the bone, than for the sense of companionship. She came close to the fire and for a long time would not move from it.

She went to the wall King had built and stood there a long time. A dead hush lay over the world. Endlessly long were the minutes. Hours were eternities.

The morning wore on. She was vaguely aware of a difference; it was as though a presence, though what sort she could not tell, had approached, were near her, all about her. She turned and a little glad cry broke from her lips. A streak of sunshine lay across the rocks at the cave's mouth. It was like the visit of an angel. More than that, like the face of a beloved friend. She ran to the front and looked out. There was a rift in the somber roofing of clouds; she saw a strip of clear blue sky through which a splendid sun shone. She watched that little strip of heaven's blue eagerly and anxiously; was it widening? Or were the clouds crowding over it again?

But though this seemed the one consideration of importance in all the world for her just now, in another instant it was swept from her mind, forgotten. Far below her, down in the gorge, she saw something moving! And that something, plowing laboriously through depths and drifts of loose stuffy snow, was a man. Her thoughts raced. It was King. He was coming back to her. . . . No; it was not King; it was Swen Brodie! She began to tremble violently, but fascinated, she clung to the rocks and watched.

The man struggling weakly against the pitiless wilderness, wallowing in the snow, seemed to make his way along the gorge inch by inch. He carried something on his back; something to which he clung tenaciously. He stopped and looked about him—how her heart pounded then! He was looking for something, seeking something! Her!

She remained motionless, powerless to move though she remembered King's word of the hiding place where she would be safe; she peered out fascinated.

In time the man came closer and the first suspicion entered her mind that, after all, it might not be Brodie. Then, he looked up. It was Gratton! Gratton alone; Gratton looking back over his shoulder, more often than he quailed far ahead; Gratton in a mad attempt to make haste where haste was impossible. He was escaping from something. Then, what? He had left the other men; he was running away from them. A sudden spurt of pity for him entered her heart; he seemed so beaten and bewildered and frantic and terrified; who, better than she, could sympathize with one in Gratton's predicament? Then she forgot everything saving that they had been friends, that they were bound in a common fate. She leaned as far out as she could; he was just below now; she called to him. She called again. "You!" Had not the silence been so complete his gasping voice would have failed to reach her; as it was she barely heard it. "You? Gloria? Here? My G—d—have I gone mad?"

The man's villainy of so few days ago appeared now, in the biased light of circumstance, a pardonable, a forgettable offense. The ugliness of what he had done was chiefly ugly because it had lain against a background of commonplace and convention; here, at the time, when no considerations existed save the eternal and vital ones, all of Gratton's futile trickery was as though it had never been. She was calling to him again, urging him to clamber up the cliff, bidding him hurry before he was seen.

Her words cleared his bewilderment away; he glanced again over his shoulder. He looked back up at her. And then, before her eager eyes, he slumped down where he stood, lying in the snow. "I can't. I've gone through h—l already. I am—nearly dead. I couldn't climb up there. I— Oh, my G—d, why did I ever come into this inferno!" "But it is so easy," she cried to him, forgetful of her own terror at mounting up here, "I have done it."

"I can't," he said miserably. "It was all I could do to get this far. I—I think I am dying—"

Again and again she pleaded with him. But he had either reached the limit of his physical endurance or, shaken and unnerved, he had not the courage to attempt the steep climb. He lay still; his eyes were shut, and to Gloria, too, came the swift fear that the man might be dying.

"I am coming to you!" she called. She began making the hazardous descent. She did not take time to ask herself if she could make it; she knew only that she must. After a weary time she came to the base of the cliffs. Gratton was not a dozen paces from her. He did not move but looked at her in a strange, bewildered fashion. Seeing that he made no attempt to move, she made her way to him.

"It's you—Gloria Gaynor!" he muttered. "But I don't understand."

"I came with Mark King. The storm caught us. Just as it caught you. But you must come with me; if you lie here you will be chilled; you will freeze."

He shook his head. "I can't," he groaned. "I am more dead than alive. I tell you. I have been since before dawn getting here." He cast a bleak look up along the cliffs and shuddered. "I'd rather lie here and die than attempt it."

Once more Gloria was urging and in the end she gave up, seeing that Gratton was dead. And it was so clear

to her that he would perish if he lay here. "There's a hole in the cliffs just yonder," Gratton said dully. "I was going to crawl in there when you called."

Then Gloria saw for the first time the opening to that cave which in Gus Ingle's Bible had been set down as Calve number one. It was almost directly under King's cave, at the base of the cliffs.

"Come, then," she said. "Let's see if it's big enough for a shelter."

[Continued next week]

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The Pain Was Immediate, Hot and Searing—and Gloria Shrieked.

her; he might kill her, but she would not follow him.

And then Mark King, as he was about to strike, stayed his hand at the last moment and hurled the rope far from him, and whirled about and left her.

Some way he came to the base of the cliffs. He was conscious of but one fact in all the world; about it everything else turned and spun as sweep the bodies of the sky about the sun. He, Mark King, had struck a woman. He had struck Gloria. His friend's daughter—Ben's daughter. He, who had held himself a man, had struck a woman—a girl! A little, defenseless girl. He would have given ten years of the span of his life to have the deed of one mad moment wiped clean.

What could he do? She would perish without help; hence he must help her. But how? There was but one possible answer. He must leave

Gloria awoke. She had not heard that she was alive.

