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11:05 am	3:00 pm	7:00 pm
7:45 am	1:00 pm	3:40 pm
10:45 am	4:00 pm	6:40 pm
Between Leonardtown and Scotland	Leave Leonardtown	Arrive Scotland
7:05 pm	8:30 pm	10:00 pm
7:40 am	9:10 am	10:40 am
Between Washington and Rock Point	Leave Washington	Arrive Rock Point
8:05 am	1:20 pm	4:00 pm
7:15 am	1:15 pm	3:15 pm
10:45 am	4:00 pm	6:40 pm
Between Washington and Indian Head	Leave Washington	Arrive Indian Head
8:00 pm	4:00 pm	6:40 pm
8:40 pm	4:40 pm	7:20 pm
10:45 am	4:45 pm	7:25 pm
Between Washington and Brandywine	Leave Washington	Arrive Brandywine
7:30 am	4:45 pm	6:00 pm
8:45 am	6:00 pm	7:15 pm
3:45 pm	6:45 pm	8:00 pm
6:00 pm	6:00 pm	6:00 pm
SUNDAYS	Leave Washington	Arrive Indian Head
8:30 am	10:00 am	4:45 pm
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7:45 am	4:45 pm	6:00 pm
9:00 am	6:00 pm	6:00 pm

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Arrive Washington

Leave Leonardtown

Arrive Washington

Leave Washington

Arrive Leonardtown

Leave Leonardtown

Arrive Washington

Leave Washington

Arrive Indian Head

Leave Indian Head

Arrive Washington

Leave Washington

Arrive Brandywine

Leave Brandywine

Arrive Washington

Leave Washington

Arrive Indian Head

Leave Indian Head

Arrive Washington

Leave Washington

Arrive Brandywine

Leave Brandywine

Arrive Washington

The Voice of the Pack

BY EDISON MARSHALL

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BOOK THREE—THE PAYMENT.

CHAPTER I.—Hildred's disappearance is unaccounted for until Dan finds his mutilated body and near it the evidence which will send Cranston to the gallows and break up the outfit. A record cold winter sets in. Cranston, suspecting that Hildred's evidence is in existence, visits the Lennox home in the absence of Dan and "Snowbird," to search for it. He fails to find it, and in his rage and disappointment sets fire to the house, Lennox being powerless to stop him. The almost helpless man drags himself outside.

Both of them breathed hard in the quiet room. Cranston was trembling now, shivering just a little in his arms and shoulders. "Don't get me wrong, Lennox," he warned. "And don't have any delusions in regard to me, either," Lennox replied. "I've stood worse pain from this accident than any man can give me while I yet live, no matter what he does. If you want to get on me and hammer me in the approved Cranston way, I can't defend myself—but you won't get a civil answer out of me. I'm not used to fawning to a coyote like you, and I can't stand it."

But Cranston hardly heard. An idea had flamed in his mind and cast a red glow over all the scene about him. It was instilling a poison in his nerves and a madness in his blood, and it was searing him, like fire, in his dark brain. Nothing seemed real. He suddenly bent forward, tense.

"That's all right about you," he said. "But you'd be a little more polite if it was Snowbird—and Dan—that would have to pay."

Perhaps the color faded slightly in Lennox's face; but his voice did not change. "They'll see your footprints before they come in and be ready," Lennox replied evenly. "They always come in by the back way. And even with a pistol, Snowbird's a match for you."

"Did you think that was what I meant?" Cranston scorned. "I know a way to destroy those letters, and I'll do it—in the four seconds that I stand, unless you tell me not even sure I'm going to give you a chance to tell now; it's too good a scheme. There won't be any witnesses then to yell around in the courts. What if I choose to set fire to this house?"

"It wouldn't surprise me a great deal. It's your own trade," Lennox shrugged once on his place on the floor. "I wouldn't have to worry about those letters then, would I? They are somewhere in the house, and they'd be burned to ashes. But that isn't all that would be burned. You could maybe crawl out, but you couldn't carry the gun, and you couldn't carry the pantry full of food. You're nearly eighty miles up here from the nearest occupied house, with two pair of snowshoes for the three of you and one dinky pistol. And you can't walk at all. It would be nice to pickie, wouldn't it? Wouldn't you have a fair chance of getting down to civilization?"

The voice no longer held steady. It trembled with passion. This was no idle threat. The brain had already set upon the scheme with every intention of carrying it out. The wilderness lay stark and bare, stripped of all delusion—not only in the snow world outside but in the hearts of these two men, its sons.

"I have only one hope," Lennox replied. "I hope, unknown to me, that Dan has already dispatched those letters. The arm of the law is long, Cranston. It's easy to forget that fact up here. It will reach you in the end."

Cranston turned through the door, into the kitchen. He was gone a long time. Lennox heard him at work; the crinkle of paper and then a pouring sound around the walls. Then he heard the sharp crack of a match. An instant later the first wisp of smoke came curling, pungent with burning oil, through the corridor.

"You crawled from your couch to reach that gun," Cranston told him when he came in. "Let's see you crawl out now."

Lennox's answer was a curse—the last, dread outpouring of an unbroken will. He didn't look again at the glittering eyes. He scarcely watched Cranston's further preparations: the oil poured on the rugs and furnishings, the kindling placed at the base of the curtains. Cranston was trained in this work. He was taking no chances on the fire being extinguished. And Lennox began to crawl toward the door.

He managed to grasp the corner of the blanket on the divan as he went, and he dragged it behind him. Pain wreathed him, and smoke half-blinded him. But he made it at last. And by the time he had crawled one hundred feet over the snow crust the whole structure was in flames. The red tongues spoke with a roar.

Neither of them would let themselves believe, became distinct past all denying. It was that menacing crackle of a great fire, that in the whole world of sounds is perhaps the most terrible. "The shout hoarse," Snowbird told him. "And father can't get out."

She spoke very quietly. Perhaps the most terrible truths of life are always spoken in that same quiet voice. Then both of them started across the snow as fast as their muffled snowshoes would permit.

"He can crawl a little," Dan called to her. "I don't give up, Snowbird. I think he'll be safe."

They mounted to the top of the ridge; and the long sweep of the forest was revealed to them. The house was a singular tall pillar of flame, already glowing that dreadful red from which flames, despairing, turn away. Then the first wisp of smoke came curling and danced about him in a mad crowd.

"He's alive!" she cried. "You can see him—just a dot on the snow. He crawled out to safety."

She turned and spoke at a breakneck pace down the ridge. Dan had to race to keep up with her. But it wasn't entirely wise to try to rush so fast. A dead log lay beneath the snow with a broken limb stretched almost to its surface, and it caught her snowshoe. The wood cracked sharply, and she fell forward in the snow. But she wasn't hurt, and the snowshoe itself, in spite of a small crack in the wood, was still serviceable.

"Haste makes waste," he told her. "Keep your feet on the ground, Snowbird. The house is gone already and your father is safe. Remember what lies before us."

"The thought comes," he said. "She glanced once at the house. It stood the strange light. Dan looked to her eyes. He couldn't have expected to see her with no cause except the fact that it has been the boast of the men that they looked through the fog. And this was the looking. A power is a sword from the darkness, and power that reaches out of the mystery, and cannot be classed with sights of human origin. It burns out the eyes of all but the strongest men. Yet Dan was looking at his fate now, and his eyes held straight.

"They walked together down to the ruined house, and the three of them sat silent while the fire burned red. Then Lennox turned to them with a half-smile.

"You're wasting time, you two," he said. "Remember, all our food is gone. If you start now, and walk hard, maybe you can make it out."

"There are several things to do first," Dan answered simply. "I don't know what they are. It isn't going to be any picnic, Dan. A man can travel only so far without food to keep up his strength, particularly over such ridges as you have to cross. It isn't easy to give up and die. It's the test, man: it's the test."

"And what about you?" his daughter asked.

"Oh, I'll be all right. Besides—it's the only thing that can be done. I can't walk, and you can't carry me on your back. What else remains? I'll stay here—and I'll scrape together enough wood to keep a fire. Then you can bring help."

He kept his eyes averted when he talked. He was afraid to look at them, knowing that he could read their minds.

"How do you expect to find wood—in this snow?" Dan asked him. "It will take four days to get out. You'll take your food to live here and battle with a fire for four days, and then four days more that it will take to come back? You'd have two choices: to burn green wood that I'd cut for you before I left, or the mis-cured dead-wood under the snow. You couldn't keep either one of them burning, and you'd die in a night. Besides—this is no time for an unarmed man to be alone in the hills."

Lennox's voice grew pleading. "Be sensible, Dan," he cried. "That Cranston's got us, and got us right. I've only one thing more I care about—and that is that you pay the debt! I can't hope to get out myself. I say that I can't even hope to. But if you bring my daughter through and what Cranston says, pay what we owe to Cranston—I'll be content. Heaven, Snowbird—I've lived my life. The old pack leader dies when his time comes, and so do I."

When I say I don't want to make the fight, Snowbird would never make it through alone. There are the wolves, and maybe Cranston too—the worst wolf of all. A woman can't rush across those ridges four days without food, without some one who loves her and forces her on. Neither can she stay here with me and try to make green branches burn in a fire. She's got three little pistol balls—and we'd all die for a whim. Oh, please, please."

But Dan leaped for his hand with glowing eyes. "Listen, man!" he cried. "I know another way yet. I know more than one way; but one, if we've got the strength, is almost sure. There is an ax in the kitchen, and the blade will still be good."

"Likely dulled with the fire—"

"I'll cut a limb with my jackknife for the handle. There will be nails in the ashed plenty of them. We'll make a rude sled, and we'll get you out fast."

Lennox seemed to be studying his wasted hands. "It's a chance, but it isn't worth it," he said at last. "You'll have fight enough without tugging at a heavy sled. It will take all night to build it, and it would cut down your chances of getting out by pretty near half. Remember the ridges, Dan—"

"But we'll climb every ridge—besides, it's slow, down grade most of the way. Snowbird—tell him he must do it."

Snowbird told him, overpowering him with her enthusiasm. And Dan shook his shoulders with rough hands. "You're hurting, boy!" Lennox said, holding a bag of broken bones.

"I have a plan. If I have an ax and a sled, I'll get you out. You'll have to bow to mine. Let you stay here and die, or let you go on your feet—and I'm going through."

What he said, if mortal pain would succeed, there was nothing in these words to suggest the physical weight that both of them had known a few months before. The eyes were earnest, the dark face intent, the determined voice did not waver at all.

"Dan falling speaks!" Lennox replied with glowing eyes. He was recalling another Dan falling of the dead years, a boyhood hero, and his remembered voice had never been more determined, more masterful than this he had just heard.

"And Cranston didn't get his purpose, after all." To prove his words, Dan thrust his hand into his inner coat pocket. He drew forth a little flat package, half as thick as a pack of cards. He held it up for them to see. "The thing Bert Cranston burned the house down to destroy," he explained. "I'm learning to know this mountain breed, Lennox. I kept it in my pocket where I could fight for it, at any minute."

Cranston had been mistaken, after all. In thinking that in fear of himself Dan would be afraid to keep the packet on his person, and would cowardly conceal it in the house, he had been even more surprised to know that Dan had lived in constant hope of meeting Cranston on the ridges, showing him what it contained, and fighting him for it, hands to hands. And even yet, perhaps the day would come when Cranston would know at last that Snowbird's words, after the light of long ago, were true.

The twilight was falling over the snow, so Snowbird and Dan turned to the toll of building a sled.

The snow was steel-gray in the moonlight when the little party made their start down the long trail. Their preparations, simple and crude as they were, had taken hours of ceaseless labor on the part of the three. The ax, its edge dulled by the flame and its handle burned away, had been cooled in the snow, and with one sound arm, Lennox had driven the hot nails that Snowbird gathered from the ashes of one of the outbuildings. The embers of the house itself still glowed red in the darkness.

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