

Yellow Hair Conquests

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finale would come for the big bison, and I was sure of being the hero of the day, with all the girls looking on.

The Chance to Make His Hit

THE next day took us past Fort Harker out into the buffalo country, and the country of the prairie dog as well. About two o'clock in the afternoon we spied buffalo, and my heart heaved with pride; for soon I should be the envy of every man in the outfit. I watched for my chance as I rode on ahead—and it soon came. I started into the herd, and after awhile got one cut out and headed for the train. The teams were stopped, and everyone was interested in the chase.

I worked him all right, brought him in about where I wanted him, and raised my gun. I fired, but instead of one shot there came a succession of them. I had greased that confounded revolver so much that one cap exploded after another, until lead was flying in all directions. One bullet took my horse in the ear. Down went one of his feet into a prairie dog's hole. And the next thing I knew I was standing on my head somewhere about thirty feet beyond him—and it was a question as to which was higher in the air, my high heeled boots, or his tail and hoofs.

It was a sudden stop. As I tried to sit up, I saw my horse doing the same trick. I cast my eyes toward the buffalo, and he was loping off unharmed. Then all was a blank to me for sometime. I did not want to look at those girls for a week, and had I made the attempt I should have been obliged to turn clear round and look sideways; for I nearly broke my neck. Of course, they sympathized with me, but I could see a smile behind their compassion.

I attributed my failure entirely to the gun, and have never owned a similar one since.

Before the trip was over I redeemed my promise to the girls and supplied all with plenty of buffalo meat; but somehow I did not derive the satisfaction from it that I had anticipated.

Down Into Arkansas

IN the fall of 1866 the idea dawned upon me that it was a good thing for the buffalo to go south, it might prove equally so for me. I had suffered severely from exposure the previous winter, and my health was somewhat impaired by it. So I purchased at once two pack mules, a good saddle horse, and the necessary camping outfit for an extended trip.

I started from Fort Harker across country to the Little Arkansas River, on which, at the crossing of the old Santa Fé Trail, was located Greenway's ranch. Thence I "took" down the Little Arkansas until I reached the point where the town of Wichita was afterward located.

Back from the confluence of the Big and Little Arkansas Rivers, about two miles, is a small stream called Chisholms Creek. Here I found encamped a typical trapper and hunter who gave me a hearty welcome and invited me to camp with him.

Together we rode over the country for several days, while he looked after his traps, wolf bane, and a small band of horses he owned.

Daily I was more delighted with the country, so entirely different was it from the rolling prairie of the Smoky Hill. Here, instead of coarse weeds and short buffalo grass, grew the tall luxuriant grasses of a more fertile region. The streams were well timbered, and the water was almost entirely free from alkali, the curse of the prairie. It seemed so bountiful a land that I decided to go back to Fort Harker, where some people in whom I was greatly interested were waiting until spring to join an outfit going to Oregon under my guidance. I am bound to confess that my interest centered mainly in a family one member of which was a very pretty girl who had been at the fort long enough for a youth of my susceptible years to become attached to, especially as girls were scarce. I hoped that I might induce her father to come down and look this country over with a view to settlement.

I was so far successful that he and several others returned with me and located on land now the site of Wichita. I think that if the records of real estate transfers were examined to-day they would show that all deeds for the three hundred and twenty acres of land upon which the city is built run back to two men named Waterman and Minger, whom I located there at that time.

So far my plans were working to my entire satisfaction. I remained with them until they had their log houses completed, and then we all went on a general hunt.

Nine miles south of the Arkansas, on a stream since named Cowskin Creek, we found buffalo plentiful, and in a few days returned with two wagons loaded with humps and hind quarters,—meat enough to last the party till spring, and all choice cuts. Wild turkey, prairie chickens, quail, deer, and antelope were abundant and easily obtained by the hunter. So I left them well provisioned for the winter, to proceed on my trip south; for if the country improved so much in one hundred and ten miles, what might I not find still farther south? I was determined to see.

While crossing the high divide between the Canadian and Washita Rivers I had seen through my field glasses some high mountains off to the southwest, which I determined to explore, judging them to be about thirty-five miles from the Washita.

First Meeting with Comanches

I CAMPED at the foot of them for several days, and climbed what seemed to be the highest point. From the summit I could see

stretching in all directions a vast country abounding in buffalo and other game. I also saw many "smokes," indicating Indians. The next day I met some of them, who proved to be Comanches.

They seemed friendly and looked upon me apparently as something of a curiosity, owing I thought, to my youthful appearance and blond hair. They were familiar with white traders from the north and Mexicans from the south; but seemed unable to classify me. They would repeatedly point to me, saying, "Tehan" (Texas), and then point south. Thinking they were inquiring if I went south, I nodded yes, but I soon discovered that they wished to know where I came from, and I pointed north.

This seemed to place me upon a good footing at once; for all friendly agents, traders, and white men usually came from the north and east, while from the south came the hated Tehans or Texans with whom they were always at war, and anyone from the south was looked upon as their legitimate prey.

I had a slight knowledge of the universal Indian belief in a "Messiah" or "Big Medicine Man" whom they were always expecting from the north. One of them pointed at me and said, "Medicine good you." I nodded my head and replied, "Me Messiah papoose." My astounding claim seemed to please them very much, and all showed great interest in me and were greatly attracted by my yellow hair.

I had seen the sign language used, and asked them in it as well as I could to eat with me. To my chagrin they did eat until my supplies were nearly exhausted. It was my first experience with an Indian dinner party; but not the last by any means. This, however, did not trouble me; for I still had salt and matches, and there was no danger of starvation where game was so plentiful. Providing they did not rob me of my rifle and ammunition, I still had a show-down for food.

What Became of His Sweetheart

THEY finally rode away, and I at once broke camp and started back toward the Washita. I rode all night, to put as much country between myself and the Indians as possible, not feeling by any means sure that their friendly mood would continue.

Learning that cattle were remarkably cheap in Texas, I went through, and bought four hundred head of yearlings at fifty cents a head and started back for Wichita to become a cattle king and see "the girl I left behind me." I bought more saddle horses and pack animals and hired a man to help herd them.

I reached my destination safely, and to my surprise found quite a settlement. But, alas! I found that the black eyed girl who had inspired all this effort on my part, had been married to another man!

Discouraged and, as I thought, heartbroken, I drove my cattle north to the line of the Kansas Pacific road and sold them for eight dollars a head. This good profit on my first deal in cattle healed my broken heart wonderfully, and I found my thoughts dwelling on two-year-old steers, rather than on the fair sex.

Becoming an Interpreter

RETURNING to Fort Harker, I resumed my position as guide for General Hazen, who was at this time appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Indian Territory, taking charge of his expedition. Fort Cobb was our destination, and there I met Colonel Boone, one of the best Indian agents ever employed by our Government, and also my Comanche friends of the Washita Mountains.

They greeted me cordially as "Good Medicine," and I saw a great deal of them. I soon picked up enough of their language to enable me to understand it and interpret it fairly well. I taught them the value of our different coins, and was often called upon to help them dispose of their robes and furs to the white traders, for a fair value. In fact, it reached a point where nearly all my time was demanded by them in their different transactions.

General Hazen suggested that for the winter I put in my entire time with them, for the purpose of perfecting myself in their language, in order to become an interpreter for the Government. To this I agreed, and studied hard to become proficient, and in that way earn the money I received, for my pay was the same as when acting as guide. There were other interpreters, but many of them could neither read nor write, and in none of them did the Indians have the confidence they appeared to have in me.

Such being the case, the General thought they might express their ideas more fully to me. It was ever the aim of General Hazen to learn an-2 to heed, so far as possible, the desires of the Indians, and this was an impossibility without the aid of a competent interpreter who would be honest with both parties.

I was a favorite with the old men of the tribe on account of my assistance to them in their trading, and with the younger ones because I enjoyed equally with them our hunting expeditions. They were a good lot as Indians go, and I spent many pleasant days with them. Thus, having the confidence of both old and young, I learned many of their tribal secrets, and found out that, had I not been blessed with yellow hair and come from the north, thereby claiming relationship with the big "Medicine Man," the chances were that I should not have survived the first meeting—and this tale would never have been told. That presumptuous fable of mine they never disputed; but always looked upon me as in some way belonging to them, calling me their "Good Medicine."

Another of Captain Hart's stories will appear Sunday after next.

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