

THE FURNACE OF GOLD

By PHILIP VERRILL MIGHELS

CHAPTER XXX.

Beth's One Expedient

BOSTWICK had told Beth partial truths. His journey had been hard. His car had been twice disabled on the desert. Lawrence had been difficult to find. Delays had confronted him at every turn, and not until midnight of the day before this had he come with his quarry to Goldite—barely in time to save the situation, with the reservation opening less than forty-eight hours away.

He had not seen Glen, nor approached the town of Starlight closer than fifteen miles. He had not yet expended Beth's money, which only that morning had been practically placed at McCoppet's disposal. But, having finally landed the ex-deputy surveyor in the camp, he had achieved the first desirable end in the game they were playing, and matters were moving at last with a speed to suit the most exacting.

During the interim between Searle's departure and return, affairs had been a trifle complicated in another direction, affairs that lay between the gambler and his friend, the lumberman, big Trimmer.

Trimmer had been paid only one thousand dollars of the sum agreed upon when he gave the name of Culver to the halfbreed Indian, Cayuse. He had since spent his money, demanded the balance due, and threatened McCoppet with exposure, only to be met with a counter threat of prison for life as the halfbreed's accomplice in the crime. McCoppet meant to pay the creature's price; but intended to get it from Bostwick. Indeed, to-day he had the money; but was far too much engrossed with Lawrence to give the lumberman a thought.

TRIMMER, waxing greedily through the ease with which he had blackmailed McCoppet, had developed a cunning of his own. Convinced that the gambler was accustomed to incubating plans in his private office, the lumberman made shift to excavate a hole beneath the floor of that particular den of privacy, and, after having spent half a night in vain in this place of concealment, was at last being duly rewarded as he listened to McCoppet and Lawrence.

With his ear to a knothole, he gathered everything essential to a knowledge of the plot. He became aware that Lawrence fell for twenty thousand dollars; he overheard the details of the survey about to be made; but to save his very life he could not have fathomed the means that were about to be employed to pump the mining property belonging to Van Buren and his partners.

Equipped with this latest means of sneaking McCoppet, the creature emerged from his hole in time to meet the gambler at the bar during a moment of Bostwick's temporary absence.

"Opal," he said significantly, "I need to see you for a minute. It won't be no healthier to refuse me now than it was the first time I come."

The gambler looked at him coldly. "I haven't got time to talk now, Larry; but your money is at your order any time you want it, in gold, or poker chips, or gin."

Trimmer was staggered. "All right," he said, and he cunningly resolved, on the spot, to keep his latest secret on the ice.

Lawrence had already disappeared to hasten arrangements for getting out upon his work.

BOSTWICK had waited half an hour in the utmost impatience. With a hundred things to increase his restlessness of mind and body, he had finally gone to the postoffice, and there discovered a letter from Beth's brother Glen.

It was short, and now no longer fresh. It had been composed just after the young man's accident, and, after relating how he had received a not inconsiderable injury, requested Searle to come to Starlight at once, if possible, and not to divulge to

Beth any facts not necessary for her to know. "I'm broke, and this puts me down and out," the letter concluded. "Come down, like a good old chap, and cheer me up."

Bostwick destroyed the letter promptly, lest it fall by some accident into other hands than his own. Not without a slight feeling of guilt, the man shut out all thought, for the present, of deserting Goldite and the plot. That Beth would learn nothing from himself as to Glen's condition, was a certainty. He was glad of this wisdom in the boy, this show of courage whereby he had wished his sister spared.

But the more he thought upon Beth's attitude toward himself, and the mystifying confessions old Billy Stitts had made concerning the errands he was running for the girl, the more Bostwick fretted and warmed with exasperation, suspicion, and jealousy. He returned to McCoppet's. The door to the den was still barred. Impatiently he started again for Mrs. Dick's. He was not in the least certain as to what he meant to do or say; but he had to do something.

MEANTIME, Beth had written to her brother. Bostwick's evasions and lies had aroused more than merely vague alarm in her breast. She had begun to feel, perhaps partially by intuition, that something was altogether wrong. Searle's anxiety to assure her she need not write to Glen, that he was coming to Goldite, had provided the one required element to excite a new trend in her thought. She knew that Glen would not come soon to town. She knew she must get him word, and have a trustworthy reply. She had thought of one way only to insure herself and Glen against deceit,—ask Van to go in person with her letter and bring her Glen's reply.

Had she felt the affair to be in the slightest degree unimportant, she might have hesitated to think of making this request; but the more she dwelt upon it the more essential it seemed to become. Her brother's very life might be dependent upon this prompt-

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

BETH KENT, a remarkably beautiful young woman from New York, with her maid Elsa, was being driven in an automobile from the railroad to Goldite, Nevada, by her fiancée, J. Searle Bostwick, whither she was going to join her half-brother, Glenville Kent.

When at a roadside station in the Nauwish Valley, a horseman called Van appeared and advised the party not to proceed. Bostwick, a cowardly blusterer, insolently told the stranger to mind his own business; but the latter, displaying a gun, ordered Bostwick to depart, which he did, leaving the women.

Van secured broncos for Beth and Elsa, and the three started through the mountains. Van's pony fell over the edge of a tremendous chasm, and the horseman escaped death only by clinging to a rotten shrub twenty-five feet below. Beth threw him the end of a rope, up which he climbed to safety just as his support fell into the depths.

The party, from their eminence, saw Bostwick held up by escaped convicts in the distant valley, against whom Van had vainly tried to warn him.

The three arrived at the stranger's Monte Cristo mine, a worthless property, and, after Van in a terrific battle subdued an outlaw horse, proceeded to Goldite, where Van got a good boarding place for them at an old friend's, Mrs. Dick.

Van boldly informed Beth that she was going to marry him.

The See Saw quartz claim Van acquired proved to have been salted; but it was rich in placer.

Bostwick arrived in convict's clothing the highwaymen compelled him to don, and Beth felt a repulsion toward him. He learned that McCoppet, his Goldite partner, had sent Beth's brother away on a wild goose chase, and between them they fixed up a plot to have Van's claim falsely surveyed into the reservation boundaries, so they could jump it when the reserve was opened. As part of this plan, Beth was persuaded to contribute thirty thousand dollars, on the plea that it was for her brother.

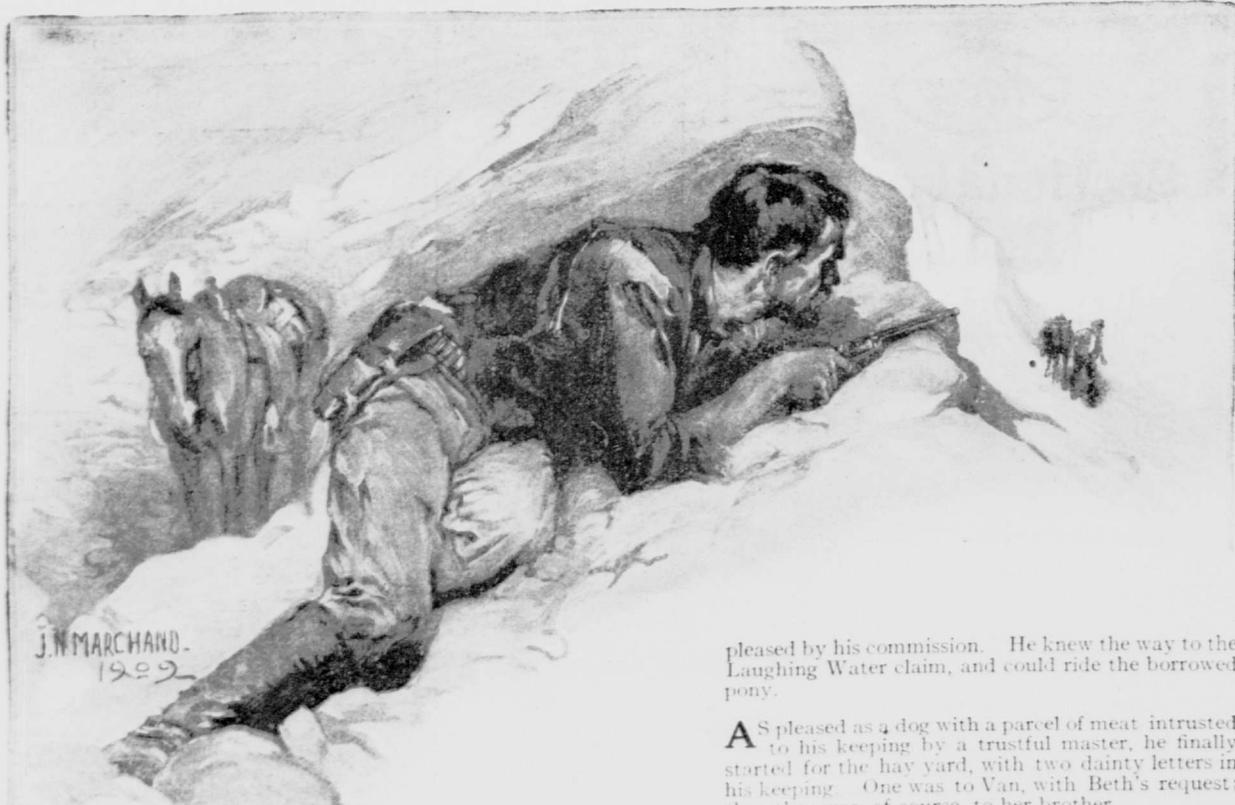
Van knocked down Culver, the official surveyor, for speaking slightly of Beth. Learning this, McCoppet offered Culver thirty thousand dollars if he would alter the Indian reservation line so as to include Van's claim, so it could be jumped; but the surveyor spurned the proposal. Culver was murdered by an Indian, and Van narrowly escaped being lynched for the crime.

Queeny, a mining camp habitué, committed suicide because Van refused to marry her.

Beth received letters from her brother which caused her to suspect Bostwick's integrity, and, as the latter was away to get Lawrence, the deputy, to take Culver's place in the plot to defraud Van, she made up as a man and rode toward Starlight to her brother. She lost her bearings and her horse in a sandstorm; but was rescued by Van, who mistook her for Glenville, and assisted her back to Goldite.

asked,—how to get her request and the letter to Glen across the hills to Van at the Laughing Water claim.

Three letters she wrote and tore to scraps, before one was finally composed to express all she felt, in the way that she wished it expressed. Old Billy went off to wait and returned there duly, enormously



Van Was in Sight, and the Convict's Breath Came Quickly as He Waited.

pleased by his commission. He knew the way to the Laughing Water claim, and could ride the borrowed pony.

AS pleased as a dog with a parcel of meat intrusted to his keeping by a trustful master, he finally started for the hay yard, with two dainty letters in his keeping. One was to Van, with Beth's request; the other was, of course, to her brother.

Bostwick met the proud old beau at the corner of the street.

"Say, Uncle, what did I tell you?" said Billy at once. "This time it's the biggest errand yet."

Bostwick had wondered if he might not catch Stitts in some such service as he boasted now, and his wit was worthy of his nature.

"Yes," he said readily, "Miss Kent was saying she thought perhaps she could get you to carry a note to Mr. Van Buren." It was a hazardous coup; but he dared it with the utmost show of pleasure in his smile. For a second, however, as he watched the old man's face, he feared he had overshot the mark.

Old Billy was pleased and disappointed together. However, his wish to prove his importance greatly

ness of action. A very large sum of money was certainly involved in some sort of business, of which, she felt, both she and Glen were in ignorance. Bostwick had certainly not seen Glen at all. His deceptions might mean anything, the gravest dangers to them all!

It had taken her the briefest time only to resolve upon her course. And then old Billy came upon the scene, as if in answer to a question she had