

# A Man in the Open

by Roger Roock

Illustrations by Ellsworth Young



"Now that's what you're dead wrong." He threw a log of cedar upon our camp altar, making fresh incense to the wild gods. "The landlord's a silver-tip fat as butter. Down in the low country, whar feed is mean, and Britsers around, the bars is poor, and called grizzlies. I'd be ashamed to have a grizzly on my ranch."

"Why is the landlord called Eph?" "Christian name. Most bars is Ephraim, but he's Ephraim which means 'be open.' I tried to get him to be open with me instead of stealing chickens. That's when the bar year come."

"Were you in difficulties?" "Eph was. Them cameries down to salt water, had fished the Fraser out, and the hatchery didn't get to its work until the fourth year, when the new spaw come back to their home river. Yes, and the sarvis berries failed. So when the salmon and berries went back on him, he sort of petered out. He come to the cabin and said, plain as talk, he was nigh quitting business."

"But, Jesse! A starving gr—I mean bar. Weren't you afraid even then?" "Why for? My pardner attends to his business, and don't interfere with my hawss ranch. He owns the grub, berries, salmon, wild honey and fixings. I owns the grass, stock, chickens, and garden sass. When we disagreed about them cabbages, I shot holes in his ears until he allowed they was mine. His ears is still sort of untidy. As to his eating Sarah well, I warned her not to tempt poor Eph too much."

"Sarah?" "Jones' fool. Being a fool runs in her family. Well, Sarah died, and cabbages was gettin' seldom, and Eph was losing confidence in my aim, although I told him I'm tough as sea beef."

"He did attack you then?" "Not exactly. His acts might have been misunderstood, though. Seemed



Each Night He Would Set Up a Little Tent for Me.

to me it was time to survey the pasture, and see how much in the way of grub could be spared to a poor widower. These people eats meat, but they like it butchered for em, and ripened. Down at the south end, I spared Eph a family of wolverines, one at a time, to make the rations hold out. He began to get encouraged. Then this place was just humming with rattlesnakes, so Eph and me just went around together so long as the hunting was worth the trouble. I doubt if there's any left."

"At that I breathed a sigh of relief. Then Eph gets sassy, wanting squirts and chipmunks. Now that I was firm. Every striped varmint of 'em may rob my oat sacks, every squirt may set up and cuss all day, but they won't get hurt. Though they has enemies—foxes, mink, skunk, weasel. I fed that lot to Eph, saying the foxes. Tell you, Kate, the landlord began to get so proud he wouldn't know me."

"Your great eagles, Jesse; they kill squirrels, too." "That's a fact. If I shot the eagles, them squirrels would get too joyful. Eagles acts as a sort of religion to squirrels, or they'd forget their prayers. The next proposition was cougars. "Oh, I'm glad you killed them. At the old ranch I was so terrified I'd be awake all night."

"I'm sort of sorry. Many's the time, camped on your beach land, which I own is a good place for cougars. I'd set up half the night to listen. They sang love songs, big war songs, and all kinds of music. Fancy you bein' scared!"

"Kill them? They're hard to see as ghosts, and every time you fire they just get absent. That ain't the reason, though, for if the landlord wanted cat's meat, I'd like to see the fight."

"The'd never dare to fight that giant bear!" "I dunno. Eph ain't lost no cougars. He treats them as total strangers. "But the real reason I fed no mountain lions to Eph is mostly connected

with sheep. Cougars does a right smart business in sheep, specially Surly Brown's Sheep is meaner'n snakes, sheepmen is meaner'n sheep, and if the herders disagrees with the cougars' give me the cougars. Sheepmen is dirt."

"There spoke the unregenerate cowboy!"

"But, Jesse dear, are you sure that Eph won't expect me to be spared next time he's hungry?"

"Why, no. He was raised respectable, and there's a proper etiquette for bars on meeting a lady. It's sort of first dance-movements—general slide, pass the cloak-room, and whar's my little home?"

### Jesse's Note.

N. B.—Kate and me agrees that the next chapter has to be cut out, being dull. It's all about the barn-raising after we got home to the ranch. The neighbors put us up a fine big cabin connecting to the old one by a covered porch of cedar shakes. That's where the firewood lives, the water-butt, the grindstone, which Kate says is exactly like my singing voice, likewise the ax and saw."

Of course our house-raising was a celebration, with a dance, camp-fire water-butt full of punch, and head-aches. I bet five dollars I was the only semaphore signaler in our district, and lost it to Iron Dale, who learned signaling five years ago during the Riel rebellion. Cap Taylor put up a signal system for our use, of fires by night or big smokes by day. One means a celebration, two means help, and three means war."

After the celebration we settled for the winter, and I put all the ponies except Jones and the sleigh team down in the canyon pasture. That made the ranch sort of lonesome, but we're short of hay on account of the wedding-trip. We're broke."

### CHAPTER V.

#### The Illustrious Salvator.

Jesse's Letter. "Mother, I'm married. I thought I'd got bites by the horns, but seems I've not roped what I thought. I wish you weren't in Heaven, which feels kind of cold and distant when a fellow's lonesome. Nobody loves me, and the mosquitoes has mistook me for a greenhorn."

I can't smoke in the lady's home, and when it's forty below zero outside, a pipe clogs with ice from your breath. Chewing is worse, because she cried. She don't need my guns, saddles, and me, or any sort of litter whar she beds down, and my table manners belongs under the table. Men, she says, feeds sitting down, so they won't be mistook for animals, which stand up."

I just moved back into the old cabin with Mick,—he's wagging himself by the tail between my legs to say as this writing habit is a vice. If I'd only a bottle of whisky now I'd be good, but as it's eighty miles to refreshments, he's got to put up with vice."

Mrs. Trevor's husband was an opera singer which mislaid his vocal cords, so settled here to be on his romantic lonesome, and spite his wife. He went loco, and mistook her for a bear; she look an interest, he shooting me up considerable until he met with an accident. Then his widow married me, and I'm plumb disheartened."

II. I was cooking slappacks, which gives quick satisfaction for the time invested, when Iron Dale rolled in on his way home. Says my high-grade slappacks is such stuff as dreams are made of. With him quoting Scripture like that, I got suspicious about his coming around by this ranch, instead of hitting straight for Sky-line. On that he owns up to something dam curious and disturbing to my fur. That's a stranger at Hundred Mile House, claiming he's come from London, England, to find my wife."

On the stage sleigh from Ashcroft this person got froze, which mostly happens to a tenderfoot, who'd rather freeze like a man than run behind like a dog. So of course he comes in handy for poor Doc McGee. He's got a sort of puppy piano along, which grieves me to think our settlers must be getting out of date with such late improvements, and other settlements liable to throw dirt in our face. Seems it's called harpsecord, and this person plays it night and day, so that the ranch hands is quitting money for board. I wonder what he wants for board. I wonder the missus wants me to take the sleigh and collect him. I dunno but seems to my dim intellects that would be meeting trouble half-way, besides robbing the doctor and Capt. Taylor who done me no harm."

III. This morning, after rigging a life line to the stable because of this continuing blizzard, I went to the

lady's home. She showed me a letter Dale brought, in cyrillic, which says the swine proposes to kiss her feet and wallow in divine song, etc. His name is Salvator, so he's a dago. She being white, can't have any truck with such, so that's all right. Seems the puppy piano is for her from her beloved maestro, another swine from the same litter. She's singing now, and it goes through my bones. Her voice is deep as a man's, strong as



I Twisted Him by the Ear into My Cabin.

Fraser Rapids, and I own that puppy piano appeals to my best instincts. As for me, my name's loud, and strays it."

### IV.

The wind went chasing after the sun, leaving peace and clear stars so this morning it must be sixty or less zero by the way the logs are splitting. At noon Tearful George transpires, dumping the puppy piano and the swine with his nose in a muff. Tearful had capized the sleigh over stumps to make his passenger run instead of arriving here like don on meat, but appears it hadn't done the harpsecord no good. He said he'd roll his tail before any more music broke out, so didn't stay dinner."

Kate's pleased all to pieces. Seems this gent in the paper collar has wrote an opera, and there's a party goes by the name of Impressario, song and dance artist, putting it on the stage at London, England. The leading woman sings base, and that's why Kate is wanted. To the only woman on earth who sings base enough, they send this dingo and the organ-grinder. She says it's a business proposition with money in it, and wants me to come along to the Old Country. She'd have me in a collar and chain with a pink bow at my off ear, promenading in Strand Street."

She's been having a rough time here, mostly living on wild meat, with out money or servants. I'd like well to see her happier; I know her music belongs to the whole world, and I've no right to hold her for any selfishness. If it's up to her to go, it's again me to look pleased, and she shall go the day I believe in her call."

V. I made the dago bed down in here, but he toppled over to breakfast and ever since. "Tinkle tankie ping ping, pee-chee-ree-ho! Oh! Oh! me catamou-ow-yew." Cougars is kit tens to it, but I'm durned ignorant, and I noticed that the signor looked on while she washed up."

I didn't sorrow with Kate persuading me to drive them as far as Hundred Mile. The sound of her voice stampered me every time, but when the dago tries to stroke my ears, he was too numerous, so I held his head in the bucket until he began to sob. I don't take to him a whole lot. From when I'd finished the horses, till nigh on sundown, the music tattered off, and I got more and more rattled. At last I walked right in."

She'd a black dress, indecent round the shoulders, and a bright star on her brow. She stood with the swine's arms around her, until at the sight of me he shrunk off, guilty as hell. There was nary a flicker of shame or fear to her, but she just stood there looking so grand and beautiful that my breath caught in my throat. "Why, Jesse," she said, her voice all soft with joy. "I'm so glad you've come to see. It's the great scene, the renunciation. Come, Salvator, from 'Thy people shall be of me.'"

I twisted him by the ear into my cabin, he talking along like a gramophone. I set him down on the stool, myself on the bunk, inspecting him while I cut baccy, and had a pipe. If I let him fight me with guns, she'd make a hero of him. If I hooped him into the cold or otherwise waited him to the dago paradise, she'd make a villain of me."

"You wrote an op'ry," says I. He explains with his tongue, his eyes, and both paws waving around for the time it takes to boil eggs. I'm not an egg."

"You give the leading woman a base voice?" He balled over some more. "So you got an excuse for coming." He spread out over the landscape. "Thinkin'," sez I, "that she'd nothin more than Trevor to guard her honor." More talk. "But you found her married with a man."

He wanted to go alone to civilization. "You stay here," I says, "and Salvator, you're going to earn your board."

VI. I ain't claiming that this Salvator actually earned his grub this month. He can clean stables now without being kicked into a curry hash; he can chop water boies through ice, and has only parted with one big toe up to

date; he can back fire-wood if I lend him with spers and quirt; but his dish-washing needs more soap, and he ain't word perfect yet at scrubbing floors. He's less fractious and slothful since he was up-ended and spanked in presence of a lady, but on the other hand, there's a lack of joy, cheerfulness, and application."

I sent a cable message by Tearful George to the song and dance artist who's running the swines' op'ry, just inquiring if he'd remitted Salvator to collect my wife. The reply is indignant to say that the swine is a liar. Likewise there's a paragraph in the Vancouver papers about the illustrious young composer, Salvator Milani, who's disappeared, it seems, into the wilds. His wife is desolated, his kids is frantic, the Salvator, a musical society, is offering rewards, which may come in useful, and the rest of mankind throws fits. This paper owns up that the departed is careless and absent-minded, and I just pause to observe that he hasn't made my bed. He'll have some quirt for supper."

As to my wife, she'd never believe that the swine wasn't sent to fetch her, or that he's deserted his wife and family. She thinks he's a little cock angel, and me a cock devil. She'll have to find him out for herself."

### VII.

My wife has run away with him. I could pick stars like apples. Here's me with my pipe and dog in my home, and my dear wife content. The Dook of London has no more, except frills. I hardly know whar to begin, 'cept whar I left off without mentioning how they run away. The illustrious didn't have the nerve, so it was my lady who stole over to stable in the dead of night, and harnessed the team so silent I never woke. She drove off with her trunks, the puppy piano, and her swine, on a bitter night with eighty mile ahead before she'd get any help if things went wrong. She has the pure grit, my great thoroughbred lady, and it makes me feel real good to think of the way she followed her conscience along that unholy trail through the black pines."

By dawn she put up for breakfast at O'Flynn's. The widow had broke her leg reproaching a cow, and sent her son to the carpenter at Hundred and Fifty Mile House to get the same repaired. Her bed was beside the stove, with cord-wood, water, and grub all within reach. It was real awkward though that the stove had petered out, and the water bucket froze solid while she slept, so she was expecting to be waited before her son got home, when Kate arrived in time to save her from Heaven. The signor volunteers to make fire and cook grub while Kate fed and watered the team, so my wife has the pleasure of chopping out a five-foot well at Bent Creek, while this unselfish cavaliero stayed in the house and got warm. Naturally he didn't know enough to light the stove, until the widow threw things, and he got the coal-oil. Then he remembered how to soak the kindlings before he struck a match, so he lit the fuel first, then stood over pouring oil from the five-gallon can. When the fire le'p' up into the can, of course he had to let go, and when he seen the cabin all in flames, he galloped off to the woods, leaving the Widow O'Flynn to burn comfy all by herself."

By the time Kate reaches the cabin, the open door is all flames; but, having the ice ax, she runs to the gate end, and hacks in through the window. The bed's burning quite brisk by then, but the widow has quit out, climbed to the smoke, so that Kate climbs in and alights on top of her sudden. The fire catches hold of my wife, but she swings the widow through the window, climbs out, lights on top of her again then takes a roll in the snow. When the illustrious comes out of the woods to explain, d'ye think she'd listen? I can just see him explaining with dago English, paws, shoulders, and eyes. She leaves him explaining in front of the burning cabin."

My wife bumped this widow to the trunk, and got warm clothes from her trunks for both of them. She fired out her baggage and the puppy piano, bedded down the widow in clean hay, hitched up the team, and hit the trail for home. She hadn't a mile to go before she met me, and what with the smoke from O'Flynn's, the widow in the rig, and the complete absence of the swine I'd added up before she reined her team. She would want to cry in my arms."

So she's in bed here, her burns dressed with oil from a bear who held me up once on the Sky-line trail. It's good oil. The widow's asleep in my cabin, and I'm right to home with this letter wrote to you, Mother. I guess you know, Mummy, why me and my pipe and my dog are welcome now which you've lived in your time and loved."

So hoping you're in Heaven, as this leaves me at present. Yr. affect. son, JESSE."

### CHAPTER VI.

Robbery-Under-Arms. Kate's Narrative. We have started a visitor's book I opens with press cuttings of interviews with Professor Bohns, the famous archaeologist, who came to examine the paleolithic deposits at South Cave. Next are papers relating to a summons for assault, brought by the late Mr. Trevor against J. Smith. But the gem of our collection is a letter of lengthy explanation from an eminent Italian cur, who spent a whole month at the ranch last winter. Nobody is more hospitable, or more hungry for popularity than my dear man, but I think that special prayers should be offered for his visitors. He has a motto now—"Love me: love my bear,

not my missus."

My jealous hero has told the story of an old admirer, once my fellow-student, who brought me a dumpy piano for which I so starved, told me the news, talked shop, and would make me a prima donna—my life's ambition. The trap was well baited. Lonely, and terrified by the dread majesty of winter, I craved for the lights, for the crowds, for my home, for my people, for my art. And there are little things besides which mean so much to a woman."

Salvator turned out to be a cur, his mission despicable, and yet no woman born can ever be without some little tenderness for one whose love misleads him. And I who sought to read a lesson to poor Jesse, learned one for myself. I am no longer free, but fettered, and proud of the chains, Love's chains, worth more to me than that lost world."

One morning, it must have been the twenty-sixth, I think, we had a caller, destined, I fear to entry in our visitor's book. Jesse had ridden off to see how his ponies thrive on the new grass, Mrs. O'Flynn was redding up after breakfast, and finding myself in the way, I took my water colors down to Apex Rock, to see if one sketch would hold winter, spring, summer, as viewed from the center of wonderland."

Now our house being in full view from the apex, and sound traveling magically in this clear atmosphere, I heard voices. Mrs. O'Flynn had a visitor, and I was in such a jealous hurry to share the gossip, that my sketch went over the cliff as I rose to run. A rather handsome man, in the splendid cow-boy dress, stood by a chestnut gelding, such a horse aristocrat that I made sure he must sport a coat of arms. Moreover, in a gingerly and reluctant way, as though under orders, he was kissing Mrs. O'Flynn. She beamed, bless her silly old heart!"

Mrs. O'Flynn looks on her truthfulness as a quality too precious for everyday use, and so carefully has it been preserved that in her fifty-fourth year it shows no sign of wear. Hence on reaching the house I was not surprised to find that her visitor was a total stranger."

Judge by signs—chivalry, reticence, courtesy—Mrs. O'Flynn's manners were not a cow-boy. His florid manners exaggerated politeness, and imitation of our middle-class English speech stamped him as a boonder, but not of the British breed. Later, in moments of excitement, he spoke New York with a twang of music-hall. Even in so lonely a place it is curious to remember that such a person should appeal to me. Still in his common way the man had beauty, carried his clothes well, moved with grace. So much the artist in me saw and liked, but I think no woman could have seen these tragic eyes without being influenced."

"Ah! Mrs. Smith, I believe?" He stood uncovered. "May I venture to ask if your husband is at home? I think I had the pleasur of knowing him years ago down in Texas." "He'll be back by noon." "Thank you, madam. Fact is, we were very much surprised to see your chimney smoke. We thought this exquisite place was quite unoccupied indeed!"

"Who's 'we'?" "Oh, we're the outfit riding for General Schmidt. We've come in search of the spring feed. We were informed



She Swings the Widow Through the Window.

that Ponder's place was unoccupied open to all. Am I mistaken in supposing that this is Ponder's place?" "It is." "Er—may I venture to ask if your husband holds squatter's rights, or has the homestead and pre-emption?" "You may ask my husband." "Thank you, madam. Our foreman instructed me to say that if the place proved to be occupied, I was to ask terms for pasturage. We've only two hundred head."

"Mr. Smith will consider the matter."

"We're camped in a little cave at the south end of the bench, douced comfortable." Of course I know I'm a fool, and expect to be treated as such. But this man claimed to have camped at the South Cave without passing this house, which was impossible. "Camped at South Cave?" said I. "In that event I need not detain you. Mr. Smith no doubt will call on you after dinner. Good morning, sir."

But this was not to his mind, and I gathered vaguely that my husband was not really wanted at the Bay Y camp. I even suspected that this visitor would rather deal with me than see my husband. It required more than a hint to secure his departure."

(To be continued.)

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