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The IRON TRAIL

By REX BEACH

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SYNOPSIS

Murray O'Neil, railroad builder, on his way to Alaska, is a passenger on the Nebraska. The ship runs aground. O'Neil helps Captain Johnny Brennan to quell a panic among the passengers.

As the ship settles O'Neil is accosted by a beautiful girl, and he plunges overboard with her. They are picked up by Captain Brennan. She proves to be Natalie Gerard, whose mother is the friend of Curtis Gordon, O'Neil's unscrupulous business rival.

O'Neil and Natalie journey to Hope together. She tells him of her mother and Gordon. When they arrive at Hope Gordon meets them.

O'Neil is impressed with the magnetism of his rival, but is sure his plans are unshakable. Tom Slater quits Gordon for O'Neil. They go to Cortez in time to save Dan Appleton in a crooked card game.

Appleton, an engineer, had worked for Gordon. He casts his fortunes with O'Neil. O'Neil leads his men to a wild country, convinced he can build a railroad up the Salmon river.

Eliza Appleton is sent to Omar to expose the men who are trying to snatch control of an empire. She meets her brother and Natalie. Dan is worried over a possible newspaper attack by Eliza or O'Neil.

O'Neil meets his crew in Seattle, when a newspaper woman gets on the phone. She proves to be Dan Appleton's sister. O'Neil tells her his plans, but not for publication.

There's a scene when Curtis Gordon asks Gloria to be hostess to Miss Golden. Gloria says Miss Golden isn't a fit person to meet Natalie. Gordon says she has money and he needs her in his schemes.

In her extremity Mrs. Gerard listens to Natalie's plea to go to the Irish prince. O'Neil finds places for them in his new hotel. Gordon, thoroughly enraged, plans to cripple O'Neil.

Dan tells his sister he's desperately in love with Natalie and asks her to win O'Neil, as he considers him a rival. Dan goes out with a car of dynamite and holds a canyon threatened by Gordon's men.

O'Neil takes the girls on a trip to Jackson glacier. He decides to make a quick voyage in a skiff down the Salmon river. Eliza, despite his pleadings, accompanies him.

Dan Appleton accepts O'Neil's offer of \$1,000 to the man who'll cut a cable in the work done by Gordon. After cutting the cable Appleton is set upon by a crowd of Gordon's, but is rescued by O'Neil's men.



"I'm worse," he confessed, "I've just been shot through the heart."

her an altered outlook upon the railroad situation, but as yet she knew little of the coal problem. That, after all, was the more important subject, and she expected it to afford her the basis for a sensational exposure. She had come to Alaska sharing her newspaper's views upon questions of public policy, looking upon Murray O'Neil as a daring promoter bent upon seizing the means of transportation of a mighty realm for his own individual profit, upon Gordon as an unscrupulous adventurer and upon the copper trust as a greedy corporation reaching out to strangle competition and absorb the riches of the northland. But she had found O'Neil an honorably ambitious man, busied, like others, in the struggle for success and lacking his judgment with his last dollar. She had learned, moreover, to sympathize with his aims, and his splendid determination awoke her admiration. Her idea of the trust had changed, likewise, for it seemed to be a fair and dignified competitor. She had seen no signs of that conscienceless, grasping policy usually imputed to big business. In regard to Gordon alone her first conviction had remained unchanged. He was as evil as he had been reputed.

The readjustment of her ideas had been disappointing in a way, since it robbed her of a large part of her ammunition, but she consoled herself with the thought that she had not yet reached the big, vital story which most deeply concerned the welfare of the north.

The village of Kyak lay near the mouth of the most easterly outlet of the Salmon, and it was similar in most respects to Hope and to Omar, save that it looked out across a shallow, unprotected bay to the open reaches of the north Pacific. The shores were low; a pair of rocky islets afforded the only shelter to its shipping, and it was from these as a starting point that the copper trust had built its breakwater. A trestle across the tide flats connected the work with the mainland, and

along this rock trains crawled, adding their burdens to the strength of the barrier. Protected by this arm of steel and stone and timber lay the terminal buildings of the Alaska Northern, as the Heldemann line was called, and there also lay the terminus of the old McDermott enterprise into which Curtis Gordon had infused new life. Both places showed plenty of activity when O'Neil and his two companions arrived into one afternoon.

Kyak they found was inferior to Omar in its public accommodations, and Murray was at a loss to find shelter for the girls until his arrival was made known to the agents of the Alaska Northern. Then Mr. Trevor, the engineer in charge, looked him up and insisted upon sharing his quarters with the visitors. In Trevor's bearing was no suggestion of an enmity like Gordon's. He welcomed his rival warmly.

After dinner O'Neil took Natalie to see the sights, while Eliza profited by the opportunity to interview Trevor. In her numerous tilts with O'Neil she had not been over-successful from the point of view of her magazine articles, but here at her hand was the representative of the power best known and best hated for its activities in the northland, and he seemed perfectly willing to talk. Surely from him she would get information that would count.

"Understand, I'm on the side of your enemies," she warned him.

"So is everybody else," Mr. Trevor laughed, "but that's because we're misunderstood."

"The intentions of any trust warrant suspicion."

He shrugged. "The Heldemanns are just ordinary business men, like O'Neil, looking for investment. They heard of a great big copper field hidden away back yonder in the mountains, and they thought what they considered to be the best group of claims. They knew the region was difficult of access, but they figured that a railroad from tidewater would open up not only their own properties, but the rest of the copper belt and the whole interior country. They began to build a road from Cortez, when some 'shoe stringer' raised the cry that they had monopolized the world's greatest copper supply and had doubled clutched it by monopolizing transportation also. That started the fuss. They needed cheap coal, of course, just as everybody else needs it, but somebody discovered the danger of a monopoly of that and set up another shout. Ever since then the yellow press has been screaming. The government withdrew all coal lands from entry, and it now refuses to grant patents to that which had been properly located. We don't own a foot of Alaskan coal land, Miss Appleton. On the contrary, we haul our fuel from British Columbia, just like O'Neil and Gordon. Those who would like to sell local coal to us are prevented from doing so."

"It sounds well to hear you tell it," said Eliza. "But the minute the coal patents are issued you will buy what you want, then freeze out the other people. You expect to control the mines, the railroads and the steamship lines, but public necessities like coal and oil and timber and water power should belong to the people. There has been an awakening of the public conscience, and the day of monopolized necessities is past forever."

"As long as men own coal mines they will sell them. Here we are faced not by a question of what may happen, but of what has happened. If you agreed to buy a city lot from a real estate dealer and after you paid him his price he refused to give you a deed, you'd at least expect your money back, wouldn't you? Well, that's the case of Uncle Sam and the Alaskan miners. He not only refuses to deliver the lot, but keeps the money and forces them to pay more every year. I represent a body of rich men who, because of their power, are regarded with suspicion, but if they did anything so dishonest as what our government has done to its own people they would be jailed."

When O'Neil and Natalie returned they found the two still arguing. "Haven't you finished your tiresome discussions?" asked Natalie.

"Mr. Trevor has almost convinced me that the octopus is a noble creature, filled with high ideals and writhing at the thrusts of the muckrakers," Eliza told them.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Fruit of the Tempest.

NEITHER O'Neil nor his host was in sight when the girls came to breakfast. The men had risen early, it seemed, and were somewhere out in the storm. A wilder day would be hard to imagine; a hurricane was raging, the rain was whirled ahead of it like charges of shot. The mountains behind Kyak were invisible and to seaward was nothing but a dimly discernible smother of foam and spray, for the crests of the breakers were snatched up and carried by the wind. The town was sodden; the streets were running mud. Storefronts were down, tents lay flattened in the mire, and the board houses were shivering as if they might fly to pieces at any moment. The darkness was menacing, and the tempest seemed to be steadily growing in violence.

When an hour or two had passed with no word from the men Eliza announced her intention of looking them up. She had spent the time at a window, straining her eyes through the welter, while Natalie had curled up cozily with a book in one of Trevor's armchairs.

"But, dearie, you'll be drenched," Natalie looked up in surprise. "Mr. O'Neil is all right."

"Of course he is. I'm not going out to scold him and bring him in. I want to look at the storm."

"So do I, but it won't do any good. I can't make it flow any harder by getting my feet wet."

(Continued next week)

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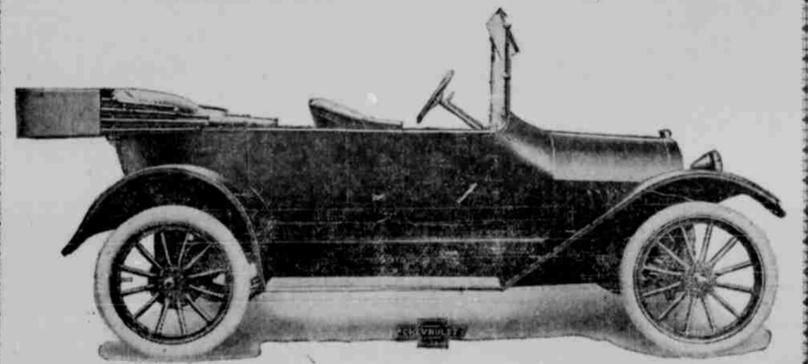
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