

THE PIONEER

BY GERALDINE BONNER

FOR ONE INSTANT OF HOPE HE FEELLED ON THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS, THEN WENT BACKWARD AND DOWN

Geraldine Bonner's novel, "The Pioneer," will be concluded in next Sunday's Call and will be followed on Sunday, March 11, by the first installment of an equally interesting story—"Mr. Hill"—by Albert E. Lyons. In this latter production Mr. Lyons has taken his characters through of men and women and produced a simple and refreshing tale of everyday life in a simple and vigorous way—life in the East and West, that is cleverly depicted in the principal character of the story—"Mr. Hill—a man."

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The colonel was silent, looking at the ash tray from beneath down-drawn, bushy brows. Allen close at his elbow continued with fevered intensity: "Rosamund's wrapped up, body and soul, in that man. What's she going to do if he backs out? And you know him; you've seen the kind he is, daft about his family and his ancient, honorable name. Even if he doesn't want money with her do you think he'll let his ancestors' portraits hanging on the walls, wants to marry a girl whose father's a busted mining speculator—in debt all round, who hasn't got the means to buy his daughter a decent dress to get married in? Look at June! Are the futures of both my daughters going to be ruined because I'm broke? Good God, Parrish, you care for them! You can't now, when you see what June's been brought to, stand in the way of Rosamund's happiness."

The colonel sat looking at the ash tray for a frowning moment, then he said: "What have you done with the spring? If there had been no mineral on the land the spring would have brought you an income for years."

"I sold the land with the spring on it, after the Crown Point collapse. Bluke, the hotel man in San Jose, bought it, and is building a hotel up there now. That's the past. I'm not defending it, nor my life between then and now. I'm talking of my children. Put me, and what I am, out of the question. It's my two girls that count just now."

The colonel rose and walking to the fireplace stood there with his elbow on the mantel-piece, looking down at the small fire that glowed in the grate. Allen by the table watched him with anxious, waiting eyes. "I've got chances in Virginia," he said. "Living on the spot there's a different proposition running back and forth like this. The Maybough properties that I'm interested in are looking pretty promising. Inside of a year, if they turn out as we expect, I may be able to pay you the whole sum back."

The colonel gave a suppressed sound, short and scornful, but did not raise his head. The other went on: "Fifteen thousand will carry us to Virginia, and over the wedding. Harrower's to be back in the spring and they'll be married as soon as he comes. Spencer wants the house in January or February. That will just about fit in. We can go to Virginia as soon as the winter is over, and have everything ready and in shape by the time Harrower gets here. And it will be better for June, too, better to get her out of all this. She feels pretty bad, poor little girl! One of the reasons that makes me so keen about selling the place and leaving is to get her away from all this talk about Barclay and that Gracey girl."

The colonel, without raising his eyes, said: "You'll want the whole twenty-five thousand?" "No—no—" said Allen with undisguised eagerness, hope illuminating his face, "fifteen will do, though, of course, twenty would be better. Fifteen ought to carry us well along into the summer, and by that time the Maybough should be paying. There'll be the wedding and the trousseau. Of course, twenty would be better, but if you'll let me have the fifteen I can do it. I'll invest the other ten any way you may say and—"

He stopped as the colonel turned from the fire with a short laugh. "Sell the house," he said, "and take it all." "What?" Allen did not quite dare to believe it. "Sell the house. See Spencer as soon as you can, and I'll give you satisfaction in the mortgage."

"Jim!" the other ejaculated, and held out a shaking hand. But the colonel brushed by it and passed into the hall, where his hat and coat hung. Allen followed him, trying to talk, but he stopped the feeble words of gratitude. Standing under the hall lamp, the light falling on his white hair, he said: "There's no thanks between you and me. If it wasn't for your daughters I'd see you standing on the corner begging for nickels and not drop one in your tin cup. And you know it. You know, too, what I feel about them, and why I feel it. You know I'd do it again if I had the money. But I haven't. There's not much more to be got out of me. You've about sucked me dry."



TO-NIGHT, THE EVANESCENT BEAUTY THAT WAS NOW AND THEN HERE, REVISITED HER

culitous route of cross-streets. At first he paced onward in an absorbed reverie, his eyes down, striking the cracks in the pavement with the tip of his cane. Presently he looked up above the housetops, at the widths of sky sown with great, calm stars. It was early night; only the larger stars were visible. Once or twice as he walked up above the housetops, a short, dry laugh, at himself and the follies he had committed. When he reached his own room in the Traveler's Hotel he found Rion's answer to his letter. Standing under the feeble light that fell from the sitting-room chandelier he read it. It was short, for Rion was but a poor correspondent. The position of assistant secretary of the Cresta Plata would be vacant on January 1. The Gracey boys would be flattered if one of James Parrish's reputation and position would care to fill it. The salary would be \$500 a month.

BOOK III.
The Desert.
CHAPTER I.
Nevada.
The mountain wall of the Sierra bounds California on its eastern side. It is a rampart, towering and impregnable, between the garden and the desert. From its crest, brooded over by cloud, glittering with crusted snows, the traveler can look over crag and precipice, mounting files of pines and ravines swimming in un-fathomable shadow, to where, vast, pale, far-fung in its dreamy adolescence, lies California, the garden. On the other side—gaunt, hostile, gray—is Nevada, the desert.

in other lanes nature and man have ended their struggle for supremacy. Man has conquered and nature, after long years of service, is glad to work for him, to quicken the seed he sows, to swell the fruit on the branch, and ripen the heads of grain. She laps him round with comfort, whispers her secrets to him, reveals herself in sweet, sylvan intercourse. And he, cozily content, knows her as his loving slave, no more rebellious, happy to serve.

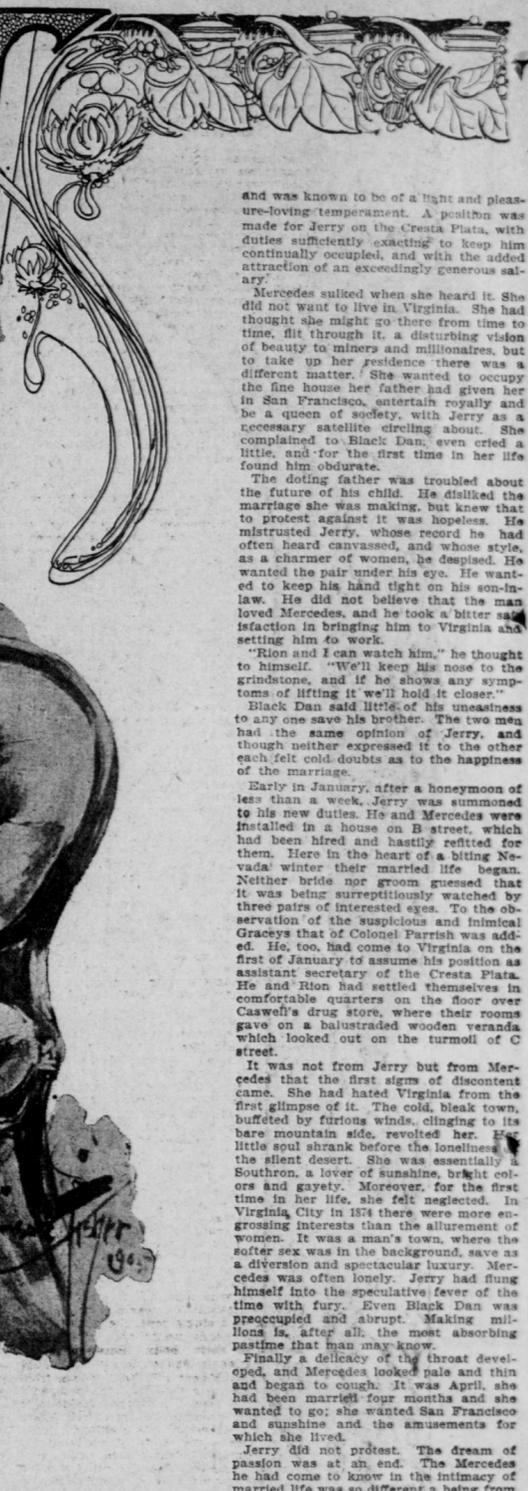
But in Nevada nature is still unconquered, savage and supreme. It is the primordial world, with man a shivering stranger amid its grim aloofness. When the voice of God went out into the darkness and said, "Let there be light," the startled life, covering in caves and beneath rocks, may have looked out on such a land—an unwatereated waste, treeless, flowerless, held in an immemorial silence. Man as we know him has no place here. He is a speck moving between the dome of sky and the floor of earth. Nature scorns him, has watched him die and whitened his bones in a few blazing weeks. The seed he plants withers in its kernel, the earth he turns up, frosted with alkali, drops apart in livid flakes. The rare rivers by which he pitches his tent are stuck into the soil, as though grudging him the few drops with which he cools his burning throat. An outcast from a later age he is an intruder here. These solemn wastes and eternal hills have not yet learned to call him master. When the pioneers trailed across it Nevada was to them only "the desert," a place where the horrors of heat and thirst culminated. They knew it as a sterile, gray expanse, breeding here and there into parched barrenness, and with lines of lilac-blue or reddish purple hills seeming to march with them as they moved. From high places they saw it outspread like a map, its surface stippled with sage and the long green ribbon of a tree-fringed river looping across its grim aridity. At evening it took on limpid, gem-like colors. The hills turned transparent sapphire and amethyst, the sky burned a thin, clear red. An unbroken stillness lay upon it and struck chill on the hearts of the little bands who, oppressed by its vast indifference, cowered beneath its remote, unfamiliar stars.

As they passed across it they mined a little; here and there they scraped the surface, clustered round a stream bed for a day or two and sent the water circling in their pans. But California, the land of promise, was their goal. With the western sun in their eyes they looked at the mountain wall and spoke of the Eldorado beyond where the gold lay yellow in the sluice box, and flicked with glittering flakes the prospector's pan. That was in forty-nine. Ten years later they were hurrying backward over the mountains to the streams that drain Mount Davidson. Nevada had its wealth too, a hidden, rock-ribbed wealth, jealously buried. They tore it out, built a city of tents and shacks as they delved, and in ten years more were gone again, dispersed over the far West, like the embers of fire which a wind scatters.

Then once again the barren State drew them back. Deep in the roots of Mount Davidson one of the greatest ore-bodies in the world lay buried. This time they gathered in their might. Miner, engineer, assayer, stock-jobber, manipulator, manager and millionaire poured over the mountain wall, bringing in their train the birds of prey that follow in the wake of the mining army. The city of tents and cabins grew into a city of streets and buildings and spread, climbing the mountain side in terraces. A railroad crawled perilously to it, looping over the mountain flanks. In a cleared nook by a river the smoke of its mills blackened the sky. Isolated from the rest of the world, encircled by desolation, the town seethed and boiled with an abnormal activity, a volcano of life in the midst of a dead land. About it the desert brooded, pressing in upon it, watching and waiting. To the little city was an outside thing, hostile, alien, unwelcome. It scorned the pigmy passions of its men and women, had no sympathy with the extravagances of their money madness. When they had been brushed away like an ant-hill by a passing foot, it would sweep over their town, obliterate their traces, reclaim its own. And once again the silence of the landscape where there is neither ripple of water nor murmur of leaf would resettle in crystal quietude.

Confined within their own walls, with no outlet for the pressure under which they lived, the inhabitants of Virginia burned with a wild activity and energy. The conditions of life were so unusual, so fiercely stimulating to effort and achievement, that average human beings were lifted from their places and became creatures of dauntless initiative. They conquered the unconquerable, accomplished triumphs of daring and ingenuity where under ordinary circumstances they would have recoiled before insuperable obstacles. They were outside themselves, larger for good or evil than they had ever been before or would be again. Nature had dared them to her vanquishing and they had risen to the challenge.

In the spring of 1874 Joe ferment crebody that has gone down in history as the "big bonanza" began to bubble toward boiling point. Month by month stocks had steadily risen, and month by month the huge treasure chamber, filled with silver as a nut is with kernel, developed in ever increasing richness. The city was packed close as a hive with bees with twenty-five thousand souls all quivering to the increasing momentum of the excitement. The mines were a dynamo whence electric vibrations spread it to the world outside. The dwellers in huts among the sage were shaken by them. They thrilled along the Pacific slope. In New York and London men felt them and their pulses quickened. The Bonanza times were nearly at the flood. The city grew with astonishing rapidity, breathlessly climbed the side of Mount Davidson in ascending tiers of streets. There was no time for grading or paving. Two stories in the front meant four in the back, the kitchens of B street looked over the shingled roofs of the shops on C street. It was a gray town, clinging to a desolate mountain side, in a gray country. At its base, appearing to force it by the slope, were the hoisting works of the mines, dotted so close along the ledge they nearly touched. Every mine in this line was a mighty name in the world of finance. New York, London and Paris waited each morning to hear news from the town in the wilderness. And as the ant-hill swarmed and trembled with



the fury of its concentrated life, the desert looked on, serene, incurious, still.

CHAPTER II.
Old Friends With New Faces.
The Allen girls moved to Virginia City in April. Their father had gone there early in the year and taken a house which would be a proper and fitting place from which to marry Rosamund. He had found what he thought suitable in the mansion, as they called it in Virginia City, of one Murchison, a mining superintendent, who, in the heyday of sudden riches, had built him a comfortable home and then died.

The Murchison mansion had some on the market just at the right moment. Allen told people. Men wondered where his money came from, as the current talk among his kind was that "the bottom had fallen out of the Barranca and Allen was bust." He himself spread the story that successful speculations had once again set him on his feet. That something had done so was proved by his renting of the Murchison mansion, a furnished house in the Virginia City of that period being an expensive luxury.

It stood at the south end of B street, perched high on the top of two sloping terraces which were bulkheaded by a wooden wall, surmounted by an ornamental balustrade. Small fruit trees and flowering shrubs clothed the terraces in a thin, flickering foliage, just showing its first, faint tips of green when the girls arrived. A long line of steps ran up to a balcony, which rounded out about the front corner, and upon which one seemed to be mounted high in the air, looking down over a dropping series of flat and peaked roofs to where the dark red walls and tall chimneys of the hoisting works distended about the city's feet. Beyond this uprolled the wild, bare landscape, undulating line of mountain beyond mountain, cut clear as cameo against the blue Nevada sky. The vivid green streak made by the Carson River gleamed to the right. At the limit of sight, fitted into a gap between the hills, was the Carson Desert, a patch of stark, yellow sand. The girls were not surprised at the style of the house. They knew vaguely that their father's affairs were not as satisfactory as they had been, but of their truly desperate nature they had no suspicion. There were delays in the sale of the Folsom-street property, and it was not till March that the new tenant appeared from Sacramento to take possession. In response to their father's orders they obediently gathered together their belongings, closed the house and made the move to Virginia without assistance from him. Events had fallen together in an unexpected way, but one that in the end spared June those glimpses of her lover's happiness that she had told the colonel would be unbearable. It is true that she had to see the carriages drive to Jerry's marriage and hear the sound of his wedding bells. But before that event circumstances had developed which made radical changes in the plans of the bride and groom. Black Dan had discovered that Jerry's business had dwindled to nothing, his private fortune vanished in the Crown Point collapse. The bonanza kink, with his rapidly accumulating millions, had a sturdy, American objection to an idle man, especially when that man was to be the husband of his only child. and was known to be of a light and pleasure-loving temperament. A positive was made for Jerry on the Cresta Plata, with duties sufficiently exacting to keep him continually occupied, and with the added attraction of an exceedingly generous salary. Mercedes suited when she heard it. She did not want to live in Virginia. She had thought she might go there from time to time, fit through it, a disturbing vision of beauty to miners and millionaires, but to take up her residence there was a different matter. She wanted to occupy the fine house her father had given her in San Francisco, entertain royally and be a queen of society, with Jerry as a necessary satellite circling about. She complained to Black Dan, even cried a little, and for the first time in her life found him obdurate. The doting father was troubled about the future of his child. He disliked the marriage she was making, but knew that to protest against it was hopeless. He mistrusted Jerry, whose record he had often heard canvassed, and whose style, as a charmer of women, he despised. He wanted the pair under his eye. He wanted to keep his hand tight on his son-in-law. He did not believe that the man loved Mercedes, and he took a bitter satisfaction in bringing him to Virginia and setting him to work. "Rion and I can watch him," he thought to himself. "We'll keep his nose to the grindstone, and if he shows any symptoms of lifting it we'll hold it closer."

Black Dan said little of his uneasiness to any one save his brother. The two men had the same opinion of Jerry, and though neither expressed it to the other each felt cold doubts as to the happiness of the marriage. Early in January, after a honeymoon of less than a week, Jerry was summoned to his new duties. He and Mercedes were installed in a house on B street, which had been hired and hastily refitted for them. Here in the heart of a biting Nevada winter their married life began. Neither bride nor groom guessed that it was being surreptitiously watched by three pairs of interested eyes. To the observation of the suspicious and inimical Gracys that Colonel Parrish was added. He, too, had come to Virginia on the first of January to assume his position as assistant secretary of the Cresta Plata. He and Rion had settled themselves in comfortable quarters on the floor over Caswell's drug store, where their rooms gave on a balustraded wooden veranda which looked out on the turmoil of C street. It was not from Jerry but from Mercedes that the first signs of discontent came. She had hated Virginia from the first glimpse of it. The cold, bleak town, buffeted by furious winds, clinging to its bare mountain side, revolted her. Her little soul shrank before the loneliness of the silent desert. She was essentially a Southerner, a lover of sunshine, bright colors and gaiety. Moreover, for the first time in her life, she felt neglected. In Virginia City in 1874 there were more engrossing interests than the allurements of a woman. It was a man's world, where the softer sex was in the background, save as a diversion and spectacular luxury. Mercedes was often lonely. Jerry had flung himself into the speculative fever of the time with Jerry. Even Black Dan was preoccupied and abrupt. Making millions is, after all, the most absorbing pastime that man may know. Finally a delicacy of the throat developed, and Mercedes looked pale and thin and began to cough. It was April, she had been married four months and she wanted to go; she wanted San Francisco and sunshine and the amusements for which she lived. Jerry did not protest. The dream of passion was at an end. The Mercedes he had come to know in the intimacy of married life was so different a being from the Mercedes who had beguiled him in the summer that he was not sorry to have her leave him. His pride was hurt and he felt angry and bitter against her, but he had no poignant regrets. Neither had loved. The ignoble instincts that had drawn them together were satisfied. Her woman's spite had worked itself out. His lust for her wealth, his desire for her possessions, were satisfied. They were willing to part. She left in April, it being understood that Jerry was to "go below" to see her every two weeks. The story that her health had been impaired by a climate which had proved too severe for many before her was given out as the reason for her departure. Black Dan even was made to believe it. He also believed her assurance that she would return in the summer. He thought the few years she shed were grief at parting with a husband whom he supposed she loved. He determined to watch Jerry closer than ever, and for this purpose moved into the house on B street, where the husband now left alone. Thus it fell out for June that she was spared the sight of Jerry as a joyous bridegroom. Almost simultaneously with the Allen's move to Virginia, Mercedes left it. June and Rosamund were arranging the Murchison mansion on B street when Mrs. Jerome Barclay was beginning those extensive purchases in San Francisco which were to render her home on Van Ness avenue a truly "palatial residence."