

THE IRON TRAIL

By REX BEACH

CHAPTER XIII
A New Crisis.

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WITH the completion of the railroad to the glacier crossing there came to it a certain amount of travel, consisting mainly of prospectors bound to and from the interior. The Cortez winter trail was open, and over it passed most of the traffic from the northward mining camps, but now and then a frost-rimmed stranger emerged from the canyon above O'Neil's terminus with tales of the gold country or a venture some sledge party snowed out of way from the end of the trail. Murray made a point of hauling these trailers on his construction train and of feeding them in his camps as freely as he did his own men. In time the waning line of sled tracks became fairly well broken, and scarcely a week passed without bringing several "mushers."

One day as O'Neil was picking his way through the outskirts of the camp he encountered one of his night foremen and was surprised to see that the fellow was leading a trail dog by a chain. Now these matamoras are as much a part of the northland as the winter snows, and they are a common sight in every community, but the man's patent embarrassment challenged Murray's attention; he acted as if he had been detected in a theft or a breach of duty.

"Hello, Walsh. Been buying some live stock?" O'Neil inquired.

"Yes, sir. I picked up this dog cheap."

"Harness, too, eh?" Murray noted that Walsh's arms were full of gear—enough, indeed, for a full team. Knowing that the foreman owned no dogs, he asked half banteringly:

"You're not getting ready for a trip, I hope?"

"No, sir. Not exactly, sir. The dog was cheap, so I just bought him."

As a matter of fact, dogs were not cheap, and Walsh should have been in bed at this hour. Murray walked on wondering what the fellow could be up to.

Later he came upon a laborer dicker-ing with a Kwak Indian over the price of a fur robe, and in front of a bunk-house he found other members of the night crew talking earnestly with two lately arrived strangers. They fell silent as he approached and responded to his greeting with a peculiar nervous eagerness, staring after him curiously as he passed on.

He expected Dr. Gray out from Omar, but as he neared the track he met Mellen. The bridge superintendent engaged him briefly upon some detail, then said:

"I don't know what's the matter with the men this morning. They're loafing."

"Loafing? Nonsense! You expect too much."

Mellen shook his head. "The minute my back is turned they begin to gossip. I've had to call them down."

"Perhaps they want a holiday."

"They're not that kind. There's something in the air."

While they were speaking the morning train pulled in, and O'Neil was surprised to see at least a dozen towns-people descending from it. They were loafers, saloon frequenters, for the most part, and, oddly enough, they had with them dogs and sleds and all the equipment for travel. He was prevented from making inquiry, however, by a shout from Dr. Gray, who cried:

"Hey, chief! Look who's here!"

O'Neil hastened forward with a greeting upon his lips, for Stanley was helping Eliza and Natalie down from the caboose which served as a passenger coach.

The young women, becomingly clad in their warm winter furs, made a picture good to look upon. Natalie had ripened wonderfully since her marriage, and added to her rich dark beauty there was now an elusive sweetness, a warmth and womanliness which had been lacking before. As for Eliza, she had never appeared more sparkling, more freshly wholesome and sunny than on this morning.

"We came to take pictures," she announced. "We want to see if the bridge suits us."

"Don't you believe her, Mr. O'Neil," said Natalie. "Dan told us you were working too hard, so Eliza insisted on taking you in hand. I'm here merely in the office of chaperon and common-sense. You have been overdoing. You're positively haggard."

Gray nodded. "He won't mind me.



"We came to take pictures," she announced.

will check things for a day or two. If they ever start for the interior we're lost, but the catarract isn't frozen over and there's only one sled trail past it. We don't need more than six good men to do the trick."

"We can't stop a stampede that way."

Dr. Gray's face fell into harsh lines. "I'll bend a Winchester over the first man who tries to pass. Appleton held the place last summer; I'll guarantee to do it now."

"No. The men have a right to quit, Stanley. We can't force them to work. We can't build this bridge with a chain gang."

"Humph! I can beat up these two prospectors and ship 'em in to the hospital until things cool down."

"That won't do, either. I'll talk with them and if their story is right—well, I'll throw open the commissary and outfit every one."

Eliza gasped; Gray stammered.

"You're crazy!" exclaimed the doctor. "If it's a real stampede they'll go anyhow, so we may as well take our medicine with a good grace. The loss of even a hundred men would cripple us."

"The camp is seething. It's all Mellen can do to keep the day shift at work. If you talk to 'em maybe they'll listen to you."

"Argument won't sway them. This isn't a strike; it's a gold rush." He turned toward the town.

Eliza was speechless with dismay as she hurried along beside him; Gray was scowling darkly and muttering anathemas; O'Neil himself was lost in thought. The gravity of this final catastrophe left nothing to be said.

Stanley lost little time in bringing the two miners to the office, and there for a half hour Murray talked with them. When they perceived that he was disposed to treat them courteously they told their story in detail and answered his questions with apparent honesty. They willingly showed him their quartz samples and retailed the hardships they had suffered.

Gray listened impatiently and once or twice undertook to interpolate some question, but at a glance from his chief he desisted. Nevertheless his long fingers itched to lay hold of the strangers and put an end to this tale which threatened ruin. His anger grew when Murray dismissed them with every evidence of a full belief in their words.

"Now that the news is out and my men are determined to quit I want everybody to have an equal chance," O'Neil announced as they rose to go. "There's bound to be a great rush and a lot of suffering, maybe some deaths, so I'm going to call the boys together and have you talk to them."

Thorn and Baker agreed and departed. As the door closed behind them Gray exploded, but Murray checked him quickly, saying with an abrupt change of manner: "Wait! Those fellows are lying!"

Seizing the telephone, he rang up Dan Appleton and swiftly made known the situation. Stanley could hear the engineer's startled exclamation.

"Get the cable to Cortez as quickly as you can," O'Neil was saying. "You have friends there, haven't you? Good! He's just the man, for he'll have Gordon's payroll. Find out if Joe Thorn and Henry Baker are known and, if so, who they are and what they've been doing lately. Get it quick, understand. Then phone me." He slammed the receiver upon his hook. "That's not Alaskan quartz," he said shortly. "It came from Nevada, or I'm greatly mistaken. Every hard rock miner carries specimens like those in his kit."

"You think Gordon?"

"I don't know. But we've got rock men on this job who'll recognize one out of any mine they ever worked in. Go find them, then come back here and hold the line open for Dan."

"Suppose he can't locate these fellows in Cortez?"

"Then—let's not think about that." The news of O'Neil's attitude spread quickly, and excitement grew among the workmen. Up through the chill darkness of early evening they came charging. They were noisy and eager, and when the gong summoned them to supper they rushed the messhouse in boisterous good humor.

These men, be it said, were not those who had struck earlier in the season at the behest of Gordon's emissary, Linn, but fellows whose loyalty and industry were unquestioned. Their refusal to stampede at the first news was proof of their devotion, yet any one who has lived in a mining community knows that no loyalty of employee to employer is strong enough to withstand for long the feverish excitement of a gold rush.

Long before the hour when O'Neil appeared the low roofed messhouse was crowded.

Natalie and Eliza, knowing the importance of this crisis, refused to go home and begged Murray to let them attend the meeting. Mr. Blaine, who also felt the keenest concern in the outcome, offered to escort them, and at last with some difficulty he managed to wedge them inside the door, where they apprehensively scanned the gathering.

Murray had no skill as a public speaker in the ordinary sense; he attempted no oratorical tricks and addressed his workmen in a matter of fact tone.

"Boys," he began, "there has been a gold strike at the head of the White river and you want to go. I don't blame you; I'd like to go myself if there's any chance to make money."

"You're all right, boss!" shouted some one, and a general laugh attested the crowd's relief at this acceptance of the inevitable. They had expected argument, despite the contrary assurances they had received.

"Now we all want an even break. We want to know all there is to know, so that a few fellows won't have the advantage of the rest. The strike is

300 miles away. It's winter and you know what that means. I talked with Baker and Thorn this afternoon. I want them to tell you just what they told me."

(Continued next Saturday.)

Special Taxation Notice.

GEN. NO. 396.

Notice is hereby given to all persons interested, that the city council of Rock Island, Ill., having ordered that Railroad avenue from Forty-sixth to Forty-fifth streets and Forty-fifth street from Railroad avenue to Tenth avenue, and Tenth avenue from Forty-fifth to Forty-fourth street, be improved by paving with brick blocks, and the ordinance for the same being on file in the office of the city clerk of said city, and said city having applied to the county court of Rock Island county, Illinois, for an assessment of the cost of said improvement according to benefits, said assessment being payable in eight installments, each bearing interest at the rate of five per cent per annum, and an assessment therefor having been made and returned to said court, the final hearing thereon will be had on the 31st day of July A. D. 1916, at the hour of 9 o'clock a. m., or as soon thereafter as the business of the court will permit.

All persons desiring, may file objections in said court, before said day, and may appear on the hearing and make their defense.

Dated Rock Island, Ill., July 15, 1916.

WILLIAM L. GAULEY,
Commissioner appointed to make said assessment.

Special Taxation Notice.

GEN. NO. 397.

Notice is hereby given to all persons interested, that the city council of Rock Island, Ill., having ordered that Twenty-sixth street be paved with asphalt from Seventeenth to Eighteenth avenue and the ordinance for the same being on file in the office of the city clerk of said city, and said city having applied to the county court of Rock Island county, Illinois, for an assessment of the cost of said improvement according to benefits, said assessment being payable in nine installments, each bearing interest at the rate of five per cent per annum, and an assessment therefor having been made and returned to said court, the final hearing thereon will be had on the 31st day of July A. D. 1916, at the hour of 9 o'clock a. m., or as soon thereafter as the business of the court will permit.

All persons desiring, may file objections in said court, before said day, and may appear on the hearing and make their defense.

Dated Rock Island, Ill., July 15, 1916.

WILLIAM L. A. NORRIS,
Commissioner appointed to make said assessment.

Road Notice.

Sealed proposals for state-aid road improvement in Rock Island county, known as section C, on route (s) 9, will be received at the office of the state highway commission, Springfield, Illinois, until 11 o'clock a. m. on July 19, 1916, and then publicly opened.

Proposals shall be made on forms furnished by the state highway department and shall be enclosed in an envelope addressed State Highway Commission, with the following note thereon: "Proposal for State-Aid Work, County of Rock Island, Section C, Route No. 9."

The engineer's estimate for this work is \$5,322.

Length of improvement, 5,300 feet.

Pavement, Type, gravel.

Width, 15 feet.

Nearest railroad passenger station, Milan.

Detailed information of the work to be done may be had by an examination of the plans, specifications and estimates on file in the offices of the county clerk and the county superintendent of highways of said county, and in the office of the state highway commission.

By order of the state highway commission

WILLIAM W. MARR,
Chief State Highway Engineer.

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With a Scream of Terror I Turned and Rushed Wildly Down the Path

Condemnation Notice.

General, No. 372.

State of Illinois, County of Rock Island—ss.

In the county court, June term, A. D. 1916.

In the matter of the petition of the city of Rock Island, Illinois, to ascertain the compensation for private property to be taken or damaged by the local improvement, viz: "An ordinance providing for the improvement of certain streets and avenues by constructing sewers therein and constructing a sewage treatment plant in the territory from Eighteenth avenue to Twenty-third avenue and extending from Twenty-fourth street west to the cen-

ter line of section two (2), township seventeen (17), north range (12) west of the fourth P. M.; also providing for the acquiring or condemnation of certain tracts of land for right-of-way or easement for constructing said sewers therein located in the city of Rock Island and providing for the levying and collection of a special assessment for the payment of the costs and expenses thereof."

Notice is hereby given to all persons interested, that the city of Rock Island has heretofore on the 11th day of February, 1916, filed its petition in the county court of Rock Island county, Illinois, praying that steps be taken to ascertain the just compensation to be made for private property to be taken or damaged for the above described improvement, as well as the property receiving special benefits therefrom and the amount of such benefits, in accordance with the terms of the ordinance providing for said improvement,

passed Jan. 31, 1916, that the report and assessment roll of the commissioners appointed by the court to make the same were filed herein on the 14th of July, 1916.

The summons in said cause is made returnable on the seventh day of August, A. D. 1916, to said court at a term thereof to be held in the court house in the city of Rock Island, Rock Island county, Illinois, commencing on said date when and where you may appear and defend if you see fit so to do.

WILLIAM MC CONOCHIE,
JOHN G. SCHEUERMAN,
H. C. SCHAFFER,
Commissioners appointed to make the assessment.

JOHN K. SCOTT, City Attorney.

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