

COMRADES OF PERIL

By RANDALL PARRISH

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"I'LL MARRY YOU."

Synopsis.—Tom Shelby, a rancher, rides into the frontier town of Ponca looking for a good time after a long spell of hard work and loneliness on the ranch. Instead, he runs into a funeral—that of Dad Calkins, a retired army man of whom little is known. A girl, still in her teens, survives Calkins. McCarthy, a saloon keeper and Ponca's leading citizen, decides that the girl, now alone in the world, should marry. Shelby starts a hunt for eligible husbands, and the minister goes to confer with the girl. She agrees to pick a husband from the score of men lined up in her home. To his consternation, she selects Shelby, who had gone along merely as a spectator. He declines the honor. In disgust, the girl dismisses the assemblage.

CHAPTER III—Continued.

"Straight ter h—, I hope," the Buffalo Gap J. P. burst out, forgetting his clerical role in a sudden expression of feeling. "Whatever caused the fool to butt in?"

"Oh, he didn't intend nudging," Tom said that kind. He just drifted long ter see the fun. Yer can't blame him 'cause the girl took a shine his way."

The two disappeared, their voices still grumbling, and Shelby got to his feet and moved along the edge of the tent where he could view the shack better. Through the window on that side an unobstructed blaze of light poured forth, but even as he stood staring at it the girl appeared suddenly, revealed in the glare and drew down the curtain. He saw her clearly, like a picture in a frame, one round arm uplifted to grasp the shade. He drew a quick breath, almost of astonishment, conscious of the rapid beating of his heart. By heaven, she was actually pretty! He had never thought that before; but then, in that ruddy light, the strange impression took possession as something entirely new. And it served to strengthen his purpose. He would not play the part of a coward; he would go in and explain; he would make her understand exactly how matters were with him and why he acted as he had.

Yet this was accomplished hesitatingly and in doubt. He was at the door twice before he found sufficient courage to knock lightly. There was no response and he used his knuckles a trifle louder, intensely conscious of a desire to turn and run away. But there was no opportunity. The latch clicked sharply and the light streamed directly into his face, fairly blinding him.

"Oh, so it is you back again?" she asked coldly. "What did you want?"

"Just—just to have a word with you—privately," he explained lamely, blinking his eyes. "I—I thought maybe I could explain."

"Explain what?"

"Why—why how this thing happened, Miss." His confusion rendered him almost incoherent. "You see, I—I don't want you to think I'm that sort."

"Oh, you don't?" Well, I'm not fully sort, either. Come along in, if you want to; I'll hear what you have to say."

Shelby never felt quite so awkward and impotent before in all his life, as he did standing there, fiddling with the hat in his hand, while the girl carefully closed the door behind him. Her own appearance of ease, even of enjoyment, only added to his deep embarrassment.

For the first time he really took notice of the room, how plainly it was furnished; a deal table, two chairs, the stove, a few books on a shelf, with a small clock between. Everything looked cheap, but immaculately clean, and, as his eyes wandered back to the girl, that was what impressed him most about her—cleanliness. It was evidenced in face and hands, in the dark skirt and white waist, in the smooth strands of hair.

"Well," she said pleasantly, "I reckon you might as well sit down, as long as you are here."

He found a chair and dropped into it, and she took the only other one, her hands clasped in her lap and her serious eyes watching him with undisguised curiosity.

"I didn't expect to see you again," she broke the silence which was becoming awkward. "What was it that brought you back?"

"Fact is I don't know," he explained, startled at the sound of his own voice. "You see I—I sorter got an idea you might be lonesome and—and a bit mad at me, an' so I thought maybe I better drop in an' tell you how it all happened. But it don't look like you was mad."

"Tom Shelby, an' I don't need nobody to take care of me," Shelby laughed.

"You made a mighty poor guess, at that," he said cheerfully. "when you picked me. I'd a took you to a worse place than Ponca."

"There ain't none," positively. "Where is it you live, anyhow?"

"Over on the Cottonwood; 'bout sixty miles north, up near the reservation. H—! But it's lonely up there; not another white man in thirty miles."

"You are ranching?"

"Just startin', you might say; runnin' a few head on a free range."

"But you've got a house, a place to live in?"

"Sorter shack—yes; a corral an' a sod stable; that's 'bout all. I'd be a dandy, wouldn't I, ter ask a girl to go

himself for being such a blame fool. He felt a vague suspicion that he had acted foolishly and that the girl was amused at his awkward embarrassment. The interview had proven altogether different from what he had anticipated; the tears he had come to wipe away were concealed by their absence, and instead of bringing comfort and courage to an extremely mortified young lady, he had found her filled with merriment over the affair and quite indifferent as to its outcome. She was different from anything he had previously conceived. He had confidently expected to encounter a rather ordinary young woman of the commonplace frontier type—the kind he had known for years.

She had proven herself nothing like what he had conceived. She had been smiling and self-possessed, mocking him with her good humor and treating the whole affair as a joke. He was the victim, rather than she, evidently, in her estimation; and he had actually felt like a raw boy in her presence, unable to think of a word to say or what to do with either hands or feet. How immaculately clean she was and ready of speech. He saw again the picture of her, sitting there facing him, her eyes meeting his frankly. Yes, she had made a fool of him, all right, and he turned and strode up the path, oblivious to all else but his gloomy thoughts.

There were numerous people on the main street, although the principal groups were before the dance hall and McCarthy's saloon. Shelby stopped in the glare of the former to consider what he had better do, his mind vibrating between joining the others at the bar or seeking his bed at the hotel. He was still undecided when two men suddenly bumped into him and he recognized Cowan and "Red" Kelly, both drunk enough to be ugly and insulting. The first started into his face with a sneer.

"H—! 'Red', if here ain't the bridegroom," he exclaimed insolently. "Say, where you been all this time?"

Shelby drew back slightly, but held his temper, his brain instantly clearing. "I don't hold that to be any of your business," he replied coldly.

"Well, by thunder, it is, just the same. You butted into this game without no warrant, an' yer playin' us fer a parcel of fools. 'Er one, I don't stand fer it. It was a put-up job. You an' her are in cahoots for that money. She didn't never look at one of us. Your prettiness! I bet yer just come over from bean' with her an' laughin' at us—yer d—n skunk!"

Shelby's face hardened and his teeth set grimly.

"Don't go too far, Cowan," he warned sternly. "I got some reputation as a fightin' man myself an' I don't take everything personally. Now, listen to me, you drunken brute, an' keep a civil tongue in your head. I have seen the girl, but we didn't talk none about marriage and, what's more, I wouldn't touch that money, not a cent of it, even if I was to marry her—she ain't that kind, ner I ain't."

"Gosh, you must think I'm a sucker, Tom Shelby. What the h—! you got to get married on? I'll bet yer never seed two thousand before in all your life. Tell that to the marines—there ain't nobody goin' to marry her except fer the cash."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, she's homely as a hedge fence. 'Red' was just sayin' that if she'd a picked him, he'd have jumped the reservation, money or no money. Yer can't string me."

"You say she's homely?"

"I sure do, an' as dammed mean as she looks, I reckon."

Shelby's face was like flint and his right fist crashed square into Cowan's sneering lips. The fellow went toppling over and before he even knew upon him, holding him flat to the earth and pommeling with both hands. It was soon over with, Shelby giving his opponent no chance to break away, interspersing his blows with a frank expression of feeling.

"You meanly bound! Go in' to marry her for money, am I? Maybe you'd like to say that ag'in. (—n you'd! That's 'bout the size o' your soul, Cowan. Take that, you whelp! You won't be so d—n beautiful yourself when I get through. There now! Perhaps you'll lay quiet awhile!"

He got to his feet and glared about into the ring of interested faces defiantly.

"Any more of yer want to say what he did?" he demanded. "Here, you, Kelly; you laughed when that dirty pup said she was homely as a hedge fence! Come here, you red-headed terrier, and he gripped him by the throat shaking the fellow helplessly on back and forth in his mad rage. "I'm goin' ter marry that girl, if she'll have me, an' there ain't nobody goin' to slam the looks o' my wife, either. You get that, you coyote? What do yer think of it now—hey? Spit it out; what do you think of her now?"

Kelly had to spit it out; it was all he could do through his fingers gripping him.

"Let go—d—n it—let go! H—! She's—she's the handsomest woman I ever saw; you—you let go o' me!"

Shelby flung him to one side in utter disgust, hurling an oath after him as he reeled dizzily into the protection of the crowd. He cast his eyes once in contempt about the circle, seeking some other antagonist and finding none.

"To h—! with all of you!" he declared. "Get out of the way there!" They fell back to give him safe passage and he strode straight on past the dance hall and turned down the dark path leading back to Calkins' shack. He had but one thought now, one purpose; he had burned his



"I Picked You Out Because You Didn't Live Here."

out there an' live? No, sir; that ain't my style; it wouldn't be decent."

She did not speak for some time, her eyes roving about the room and then returning to rest on his face. There was no smile on her lips, yet somehow she did not look sullen or indifferent.

"And that was why you said no? You came back to explain? It wasn't because you disliked me, then? Because you despised me for doing such a thing?"

"What, me? I should say not. There wa'n't nothing done that wa'n't all right. I don't blame you a mite. You ought to get married."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes, I do; this ain't no place for a single woman who wants to be decent, to live in. Besides, you're old enough."

"How old am I?"

"Seventeen, maybe; I ain't much on guessing ages—specially women."

"I am nineteen," she paused, her teeth gleaming as she smiled. "I wish you would tell me about yourself."

He glanced up at her surprised and twisting his hat about in his hands.

"That wa'n't take long," he said soberly. "I ain't got much history, so to speak. I was born in Kentucky an' run away when I was seventeen. Been out in this country ever since, soldiering most of the time, and then punching cattle for the Six Stars. Saved a little money and started in to set it alone. That's about all the story."

"With a lot left out. Why did you leave home?"

"Oh, they wanted me to go on in school and be a lawyer."

"You finished high school?"

"Sure; what made you think that?" She laughed.

"Oh, just a word or two; you've got into the habit of talking like these people out here. So have I, for the matter of that. When you live with them for years, it's bound to twist your tongue. I can speak good English when I try."

"An' the thing yer want to do most is to get away from Ponca?"

"Ter sure don't hold no grudge against me for what happened to-night?"

Her lips and eyes smiled.

"Why, of course not. It was too ridiculous for anything. After you had filed out I put my head down on the table there and laughed until I had tears in my eyes. The expressions on those faces when I picked you out would have made a dog laugh."

Shelby wanted to say something, but his mind seemed to be utterly blank. He could just stare at her dumbly. The silence became so embarrassing that he finally got awkwardly to his feet.

"I'm—'m awfully glad you took it that way," he stuttered. "You see, I don't know much about girls and so I was afraid you might be mad. I'll have to go now, I think, Miss."

"I'm very sorry, but I'm glad you came. Good-bye, Mr. Shelby."

He took the outstretched hand, conscious of the warm pressure even as he fumbled at the latch of the door. His eyes were downcast and his face flamed; nor did he breathe easily until he was again outside, alone in the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER IV.

The Proposal.

He stared back at the closed door, still dazed but capable of swearing at

bridges behind him. After what he had said and done only a single course remained. Without a pause or a regret he went straight to the door and rapped. It was no timid touch of the knuckles this time; he was still too angry to either hesitate or doubt. And there was no sign of embarrassment in word or act when the door opened and she stood there looking at him in wonderment.

"I've come back to say another word to you," he announced simply. "I'd like to come in."

"Something has happened?"

"It has; I've just had to lick two pups who got too gay 'bout you. They said some things an' I said some things. Now I'm ainin' to make good. You said you'd marry me awhile ago; does that hold?"

She was leaning against the table, staring at him; her face seemed to go white and her hands toyed nervously with a knife she had picked up.

"You—you had trouble with two men, over me?" she asked, her voice trembling slightly. "What men?"

"'Red' Kelly and gazabo named Cowan; they was both here."

"Oh; they were 'ery at you for that?"

"Sure; not because you didn't take no notice of them; then they got drunk an' undertook to ride me; said it was a put-up job between us ter get away with that money."

"What money?"

"The twenty-five hundred you was goin' to get. The preacher told you about that, didn't he?"

She shook her head, evidently bewildered.

"Where was I going to get all that money?"

"Why, McCarthy was puttin' it up; he and some other bucks, so as to give you a start after you was married."

She drew a deep breath, looking straight into his eyes.

"You mean those men came here for that?" indignantly. "They were willing to marry me so as to get that money? Good God! I was to be sold! Is that actually true? Nobody ever hinted such a shameful thing to me."

"Well, I reckon they didn't mean no harm by that," he tried to explain. "You don't just see it right. They figured that Old Calkins had died an' left you without a cent, sorter helpless out here, an' that the town owed you a decent chance ter git married an' settle down. That's what the money was given for."

"But those fellows all knew it. That was what made them agree?"

"I reckon maybe it was—mostly, at least."

She twisted her hands together, a hot, red flush coming into each cheek.

"Well, I'm glad to know that. Now what was it those two men said, the men you had the trouble with?"

"Well, you see, Cowan was drunk an' naturally all worked up. He's a sort o' good-lookin' chap an' thinks he cuts quite a swale with women."

"But what did he say?"

"Well, he run into me up there on the street, an' now, him an' 'Red' Kelly, they was after you for that money. I was after you for that money, too, but he was a liar an' he'd better get loose a remark I didn't take kindly."

"He—he sorter insinuated that I'd never marry you for any other reason."

"He did—why?"

"Well, he blurted out desperately, finding no possible way of escape, 'he sorter said you wasn't awful good lookin' an' then I pasted him. That's all.'"

Her lips parted, her eyes opening wide in astonished amazement.

"That I wasn't good looking?" she laughed. "And you actually hit him for that?"

"I sure did; the other pup laughed an' he got his dose about the same."

A desolate home-coming. (TO BE CONTINUED.)

EQUIPPED TO RULE OCEAN

Monster That Lived 100,000 Years Ago Must Have Been a Terror to Other Fishes.

In the National museum at Washington is exhibited the skeleton of a zeuglodon—a monster which in life was seventy feet long and which must have been ruler of the seas during a bygone epoch. There is good reason to believe that this alarming creature dates back fewer than 100,000 years, says a bulletin.

With an enormously long tail and powerful swimming paddles, the zeuglodon must have been able to swim at the speed of an express train, and its great alligator-like head was armed with huge carnivorous teeth.

It was manifestly a ferocious and predatory brute and presumably fed on fish and porpoise. The head was four feet long and in the front part of each jaw were eight teeth for seizing and tearing, which were supplemented by a series of saw edged cutting teeth at the back.

The zeuglodon was mammals, related to modern whales. They must in their time have been very numerous. Judging from the quantities of their bones dug up in Mississippi and Alabama, where in places there are so many as to interfere with plowing. Farm wares are built of them.

Apparently the creatures, which are denizens of warm seas, died and were washed up into shallow waters that afterward became dry land. Drifting sands covered their bones, preserving the latter to some extent. Their teeth (those in the jaws like those of alligators) are found scattered about in the neighborhood of the bones.

FLLOWERS HIDE GREAT GUNS

Monster Weapons of War at Gibraltar Covered by Beautiful Clusters of Acacia Blossoms.

While the rock of Gibraltar, viewed from the ocean, is impressive, strong, gloomy and forbidding, flowers grow about the steep walls, and the great Victoria batteries, occasionally fired, are screened and sheltered by acacia blossoms. Here are concealed 100-ton guns, sinister and threatening, marking the highest achievement in gun development by British engineers.

The north and northwest sides of the rock are honeycombed by fortifications. There is a town and harbor on the west protected by batteries and forts rising from the base to the summit of the rocks. Modern guns of the most formidable pattern frown from the heights. The town is inhabited by a British colony of about 25,000 persons, according to the 1911 census. Everything is under strict military regulations.

Attar of Roses.

The climatic conditions in the lower mountains of Bulgaria are favorable to the production of the best varieties of oil roses. The variety most grown is the red damask rose, a native of Persia, and in the times of our fathers, very popular in America.

Catharine de Medici, who was passionately fond of the odor of roses, selected the then called Valley de Var for their growth and small factories were established there. Today this little valley in the south of France leads not only in the production of roses, but of other odorous oil-bearing flowers. The chief town in the valley is Grasse, and is the center of the greatest flower-oil industry in the world.

Easy Part.

Chorus Girl—What am I to do in the new revue? Stage Director—Nothing! You'll have nothing to sing, nothing to say, and nothing to wear.

Juvenile Scorn.

Willie (proudly)—Me an' my brother are twins. Bobby—Huh! Fore I'd have only half a birthday!

send go into my jeans. That's got to be part o' the bargain." "But you don't know anything about me?" He grinned good-humoredly. "I reckon there may be some things

"We don't smell very sweet, but we're bright and gay and pretty," said the Pickereel-Weed flowers.

"But why have you such a strange name?" asked the Fairy Queen who had come to the pond to talk to the Pickereel-Weed family.

"Because," said one of the blossoms, "they say that the pickereels lay their eggs in our leaves. They like other water weeds, too, but we're among the ones they like, and somehow or other, the honor of the name was given to us alone. That is they haven't named any of the other wild water weeds or water wild weeds, or whatever you'd call us, after the pickereels."

"They could have named other flowers which grow in ponds after the pickereels, because of the fact that the pickereels lay their eggs in different plants."

"But they didn't want to do that. They wanted to give us the whole honor, so that folks would know that the pickereels laid their eggs in our leaves."

"If they lay them in other weeds, no one is the wiser. That is, no one is the wiser from the names."

"There are other fishes, too, who lay their eggs in weeds, but I don't know whether any of the others have given their names to the weeds or not. I don't know and it doesn't interest me. We don't smell very sweet, it is true, but we're gay and very graceful."

"We're tall and our long blue ragged blossoms above our rich-looking leaves look very handsome. We

"Will You Take a Chance?"

you'll discover about me, for the matter of that. Maybe it's 'bout as fair one way as another."

"Yes, I suppose it is. You really mean what you have said."

"I sure do."

"When? How soon?"

"Tomorrow morning, I aim to get out o' here as soon as I can. How is it—will you take a chance?"

His voice was strangely earnest, and his eyes, as she ventured to glance up, were honest and kindly.

"Yes," she said slowly, "I will, Tom Shelby."

"Sounds Rather Sad."

look most attractive in the ponds and brooks and small lakes, and we look, too, like flowers who have gone in wading."

"For we're not entirely in the water as creatures are who would go in swimming."

"But we're like creatures who go in wading. Part, perhaps, a little less than half of us is right in the water, and the rest is standing above that part. None of us last more than a day."

"Dear me," said the Fairy Queen, "that sounds rather sad."

"It isn't sad," said the blossom which had been talking to the Fairy Queen. "It isn't sad at all because we don't feel sad about it. If we did feel sad, then it would be different."

"But we don't! No, we're quite happy to have our one day of blossoming."

"Then we fade and wither. But there are always other blossoms to take our places. Oh, yes, there are plenty of us blooming all the time."

"When the humble bee comes to call on us he takes some of our pollen, which means the yellow dust we wear upon our plants, and spreads it over some of our relatives and drops it just where it will strengthen and help them."

"Isn't that smart of Mr. Bumble Bee?"

Daddy's Evening Fairy Tale

MARY GRAHAM BONNER

PICKEREL-WEED FLOWERS.

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TAKES CARE OF 5 CHILDREN