

The Girl, a Horse and a Dog

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CHAPTER XVI.—Continued

Now the presence of a wagon on our bench at this early hour in the morning might mean either one of two diametrically opposite things: Our deliverance; or the upcoming of reinforcements for the raiders. We were not left long in doubt. Shortly after the rack-rack of the wagon wheels stopped we heard footsteps, and the hair stiffened on Barney's back. Next we heard Bullerton's voice, just outside and apparently under our window openings.

"Broughton!" the voice called; "can you hear me?"

"So well that you'd better keep out of range!" I snapped back.

"All right—listen. You've got to get out, Broughton—that's flat. I haven't wanted to go to extremes. For perfectly obvious and commonplace reasons I don't want to have to kill you to get rid of you. But we are not going to gentle you any more. You've already hurt four of my men, and two of the four are crippled. The next time we hit you, it'll be for a finish."

"Yes," said I. "You brought the new club up in a wagon, didn't you?"

He ignored this.

"We could starve you out if we chose to take the time. I know pretty well what you've got to eat—or rather what you haven't got. It's your privilege to take your life in your own hands, Broughton; that's up to you. But how about the old man?"

"The old man's a plenty good and able to speak for himself!" yapped Daddy. "You do your durndest, Charley Bullerton!"

"All right, once more. You'll hear from us directly, now; and as I said before, we've quit gentling you. That's my last word."

For a time after this the silence, and the darkness, since it was the hour before dawn, were thick enough to be cut with an ax. But the dog was more restless than ever, and we knew that something we could neither see nor hear must be going on. After a while I asked the question that had been worrying me ever since I had heard the wagon wheels.

"What did they bring up in that wagon, Daddy—a Gatling?"

"The Lord only knows, Stannie—and he won't tell," was the old prospector's reply, made with no touch of irreverence; and the words were scarcely out of his mouth before a thunderbolt struck the shaft-house.

CHAPTER XVII.

Tit for Tat.

That word "thunderbolt" is hardly a figure of speech. The thing that hit us couldn't be compared to anything milder than thunder and lightning. There was a flash, a rending, rippling roar as if the solid earth were splitting in two, and the air was filled with flying fragments and splinters. Air, I say, but the acrid, choking gas which filled the shaft-house could scarcely be called air.

"Dynamite—that's what they fetched in that wagon!" gurgled the old man at my side, and I could have shouted for joy at the mere sound of his voice, since it was an assurance that he hadn't been killed outright.

"It's only a question of a little time, now, Daddy," I prophesied. "What you said yesterday—that Bullerton would try to get possession without destroying the property—no longer holds good. He has evidently decided that we've got to be ousted, even at the expense of building a new shaft-house and installing new machinery. Why has he changed his mind, when he knows that he could starve us out in a few days?"

"I been thinkin' about that, right p'inted, Stannie. Shouldn't wonder if somethin' in the wind—somethin' we don't know about."

"Then there's another thing," I put in. "Supposing, just for the sake of argument, that our first guess was right: that he did take Jeanie to Angels three days ago and that they were married there. You know your daughter, Daddy, and I know her, a little. Nobody but an idiot would suppose that she'd live with Bullerton as his wife for a single minute if he makes himself your murderer."

"It sure does look that-away to a man up a tree," admitted the stout old fighter.

"I'm hanging on to the little hope like a dog to a root, Daddy," I confessed. "If I can only keep on believing that they're not married, I can put up a better fight, or be snuffed out—if I have to be—with a good few less heart-burnings."

But at this the old man, who, no longer ago than the yesterday, had seemed to lean definitely toward the no-marriage hypothesis, suddenly changed front.

"Don't you go to bankin' on anything like that, Stannie, son," he said in a tone of deep discouragement. "Charley Bullerton's a liar, from the place where they make liars for a livin', and 'tain't goin' to be no trick a-tall for him to make Jeanie, and a lot o' other folks, b'lieve that we blowed ourselves up with our own dynamite. No, sir; don't you go to bankin' on that."

"Then you do believe that Jeanie went with Bullerton?"

"Looks like there ain't nothing else left to believe," he asserted dolefully. "Look at it for yourself, son: she's been gone three whole days. If she hadn't gone with him—and the good Lord only knows where else she could have gone—don't you reckon she'd've been back here long afore this? No, Stannie; we been lettin' the 'wish it was' run away with the 'had to be.' I reckon we just got to grit our teeth, son, and tough it out the best we can."

During this waiting interval, which seemed like hours and was probably only a few minutes, we were momentarily expecting another crash. It did not come; but in due course of time we heard a stir outside and then voices, and one of the voices, which was not Bullerton's said: "I'll bet that ca'tridge smoked 'em out good an' plenty, cap'n. Gimme th' ax, Tom, till we bust 'em open the door an' have a squint at 'em."

Just at that moment a submerging wave of depression surged over me and shoved me down so deep that I think possibly if Bullerton had called out and demanded our surrender I should have been tempted to tell him that I was not so much of a hog as not to know when I had enough. But the old man squeezed in beside me under the arched boiler plate was made of better fiber; he was game to the last hair in his beard. With a wild Indian yell, he hunched his Winchester into position and fired once, twice, thrice, at the door, as rapidly as he could pump the reloading lever.

A spattering fusillade was the reply to this, but the aim was bad and the only result was to set the air of our prison fortress to buzzing as if a swarm of angry bees had been turned loose on us. After this, the raiders withdrew, so we judged; at all events, the silence of the dark hour before daybreak shut down upon us again, and once more we had space in which to "gather our minds," as Daddy put it.

It may be a dastardly confession of weakness to admit it, but I am free to say that the prolonged struggle was gradually undermining my nerve. If Bullerton had made up his mind to write off the loss of the mine buildings and machinery, it was a battle lost for us. It could be only a question of a little time, and enough daylight to enable the bombers to throw straight, until we should be buried in the wreck of the shaft-house and hoist—and without the privilege of dying in a good, old-fashioned, stand-up fight.

All of this I hastily pointed out to Daddy Hiram, adding that, for Jeanie's sake, if for no better reason, he ought to take his chance of staying upon earth. As long as I live I shall always have a high respect for the wrath of a mild-mannered man. The old prospector was fairly Berserk, mad, foaming at the mouth, and short of dragging him out by main strength there was no way of making him let go.

"No, sir; I done promised your gran'paw 'at I'd stand by for him, and he paid me money for doin' it. When them hellions get this here mine, they're goin' to dig a hole somewhere and bury me afterward," was all I could get out of him.

We were not given very much more time for discussion, or for anything else. The first faint gray dawn was coming, and with the partial lighting of the inner gloom, we craned our necks—like a double-headed turtle peering out of its shell—and got a glimpse of the damage done by the initial thunderbolt. We saw it without any trouble; a great hole torn in the sheetiron roof directly over the hoist and shaft mouth. Knowing the use and effect of explosives pretty well, Daddy said that the bomb had gone off prematurely; had exploded before it had fairly lit upon the roof.

"If it hadn't—if it had been layin' on the roof when it went off—we wouldn't be lookin' up at that hole right now, Stannie, my son. We'd be moggin' up the golden stair and a-wonderin' how much farther it was to the New Jerusalem, and what kind o' harps they was goin' to give us when we got there. We sure would."

We didn't keep our heads out very long. While we were staring up at the hole and at the patch of sky beyond it, a small dark object with a smoke-blue comet's tail trailing behind it crossed our line of sight, and we ducked and held our breath—or at least, I held mine. The crash came almost immediately, and it was followed in swift succession by a second and a third. Luckily, none of the three hit the shaft-house, nor, indeed, fell very near to it; and this uncertainty of aim told us where the attack was coming from. The bomb throwers were posted somewhere on the steep slope of the mountain above us; the slope which I have described as running up from the brink of the abrupt cliff overlooking the mine plant.

"They'll get the range, after a while," Daddy grunted. "And when they do, I reckon it'll be good-by, fair world, for a couple of us and one mighty good dog. I'm a-tellin' you, Stannie, son, the shot that comes

down through that hole fixes us a plenty. Sufferin' Methusalem! what-all is the folks down yonder at 'Tropia a-dreamin' about, to let all this bangin' and whangin' go on up here without comin' up to find out what's makin' it?"

The Atropa that I remembered was so nearly moribund that I didn't wonder it wasn't making any stir in our behalf; so, when a few pattering rifle shots which seemed to originate on the great bench below began to sift in among the bomb echoes, I took it that Bullerton had divided his force and was trying to rattle us two ways at once. As for that, however, the bigger bombardment kept us from speculating very curiously upon anything else. Two more of the giant crackers had fallen to the right of us, one of them into the wreck of the blacksmith shop, to send up a spouting volcano of scrap which fell a second or so later in a thunderous rain; and then.

For a flitting instant it seemed as if it must drop squarely in front of the iron shield under which we were jammed—in which case even the undertaker wouldn't have been needed—not a whitsoever, as Daddy Hiram would have said. But at the critical point in its flight the hurtling thing "ticked" the top of the hoist frame and its downward course was deflected the needed hair's-breadth, causing it to come down beyond the machinery, and not on our side of things. Nevertheless, we were covering in anticipation of a blast which would most likely heave the entire machinery aggregation over bodily upon us when the explosion came.

We saw the belching column of flame and gas going skyward beyond the machinery barrier, taking a full half of the roof with it, as if the blast had come from the mouth of a giant cannon. We were dazed and deafened by the shock, and half choked by the fumes, but neither of us was so far gone as not to hear distinctly a prolonged and rumbling crash like the thunder of a small Niagara, coming after the smash!

"The shaft!" shrieked Daddy Hiram, in a thin, choked voice; "it went off down in the shaft! And, say!—what-all's that we're a-listenin' to now?"

If there had been a dozen of the bombs raining down I don't believe the threat of them would have kept us from bursting out of our dodge-hole to go and see what had happened in the mine shaft. But before we could determine anything more than that the mouth of the shaft was completely hidden under a mass of wreckage, and that the mysterious Niagara roar, dwindled somewhat, but yet hollowly audible, was still going on under the concealing mass of broken timbers and sheet-iron, there was a masterful interruption. Shots, yells, shoutings and hot curses told us that a fierce battle of some kind was staging itself just outside of our wrecked fortress; whereupon Daddy Hiram began pawing his way to the door, yelling like a man suddenly gone dotty.

"That there's old Ike Beasley—dad-blame his old hide!" he chattered. "There ain't nary 'nother man in the Timanyons' 'at can cuss like that. He's come with a posse, and they're layin' out Charley Bullerton's crowd!"

There was a fine little tableau spreading itself out for us when we had clambered over the wreckage and



The Crash Came Almost Immediately.

had withdrawn the wooden bar and hung the door wide. Daddy Hiram had called the turn and named the trump. The large, desperado-looking man who had once interviewed me at Angels, and a little later had paused in his combing of the mountains in search of me to usurp my place at the Twombly's breakfast table, this bewhiskered giant, with a goodish bunch of followers—hard-

boiled to a man, they looked to be—had surrounded a fair half of the would-be "jumpers" and were handcuffing them with a celerity that was truly admirable. And Beasley, himself, square-jawed and peremptory, was shoving Bullerton up against the side of the shaft-house, snapping the irons upon his wrists and counseling him, with choice epithets intermingled, to save up his troubles and tell them to the judge.

As we emerged from our wrecked fortress, other members of the posse were scattering to round up the outlying bomb-throwers, who had apparently taken to the tall timber in a panic-stricken effort to escape. Down on the bench below there were horses and horse-holders; and among the horses one whose boyish-looking rider was just slipping from the saddle. While I was wondering vaguely why the Angels town marshal had let a mere boy come along on such a battle errand, the boyish figure ran up the road and darted in among us to fling itself into Daddy Hiram's arms, gurgling and half crying and begging to be told if he was hurt.

I didn't know at the time how much or how little the big marshal knew of the various and muddled involvements which were climaxing right there in the early morning sunshine on the old Cinnabar dump head; but I do know that he quickly turned his captures over to some of his deputies and had them promptly hustled down stage and off scene. While this was going on I was merely waiting for my cue, and I got it, or thought I got it when the boy who wasn't a boy slipped from Daddy's arms and faced me.

"I'm not hurt, either," I ventured to say, hoping that the brain storm had subsided sufficiently to make me visible. "Welcome home, Miss Twombly—or should I say Mrs. Bullerton?"

The look she gave me was just plain deadly; you wouldn't think that violet-blue eyes could do it, but they can. Then she drew a folded paper from somewhere inside of her clothes and held it out to me.

"There is the deed to your mine, Mr. Broughton," she said nippingly, and with a fairly tragical emphasis on the courtesy title. "You wouldn't take the trouble to go to Copah and get it recorded, so I thought I'd better do it. I hope you'll pardon me for being so forward and meddlesome."

It was the super-climax of the entire Arabian-Nights business, and because my feelings would no longer be denied their rightful fling, I sat down on the shaft-house doorstep and shouted and laughed like a fool. But after all, it was Mr. Isaac Beasley, deputy sheriff and marshal of Angels, who put the weather-vane, so to speak, upon the fantastic structure.

"I been lookin' 'round for you a right smart while," he told me gruffly. "When you get plum' over your laugh and feel that you're needin' a little sashay over the hills f'r exercise, you can come along with me and go to jail f'r stealin' that railroad car."

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Hold-Up.

Beasley left me sitting on the doorstep—I've a notion he had run out of handcuffs, else he might have clapped a pair of them on me—while he started his posse down to Atropa with the captured raiders and their leader. When he came back we took time, Daddy and I and the big marshal, to size up the damage that had been wrought, and beyond that, to dig into the mystery of the continuous grumbling roar which was still ascending out of the wreck-covered mine shaft.

Beasley stayed with us, waiting, as I took it, to get his breakfast before he ran me off to jail, and the three of us fell to work clearing away the fallen timbers and roofing iron, Daddy Hiram leading the attack and being the first to stick his head through what remained of the tangle and hang it over the edge of the shaft's mouth.

"Hooray!" he yelled, his voice sounding as if it came from the inside of a barrel; and then again, "Hooray, Stannie, son!—by the ghosts of old Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Charley Bullerton's done gone and done eggs-zactly what he said he could do—dreened your mine for ye! Climb in here and take a look at her. She's empty—empty as a gourd—but, at that, she ain't goin' to be, very long!"

A few more minutes of the strenuous toil cleared the pit mouth so that we could all see. The bomb which had exploded in the shaft had wrought a complete transformation. The standing flood, which all of our pumping attacks had failed to lower by so much as a fraction of an inch, was gone, and with it had vanished the two big centrifugals, the platform upon which they had stood, and their pipe connections. Gone, likewise, was the greater part of the heavy wooden shaft-lining. A little of this remained in the upper part of the shaft, but from a point possibly twenty-five feet down, there was nothing but the bare rock sides of the square pit swept by the receding flood.

As for the hollow roaring noise which had followed the crash of the explosion, and which still continued,

there was a good and sufficient reason plainly visible from the pit's mouth. Some twenty feet down, and on the eastern side of the shaft, a stream of water big enough to run a good-sized hydro-electric plant was pouring into the perpendicular cavern, and it was its plunging descent into the bowels of the earth which was making the mimic thunder.

Beasley was the first to find speech. "Where the blazes is all that water comin' from?" he exploded.

"That's just what we're going to find out!" I barked. "Can you and Daddy handle my weight in a rope sling?"

They both protested that they could handle two of me if necessary, and a sling was quickly rigged and I was lowered into the pit. At the nearer view thus obtained, some of the mysteries were instantly made clear. The reason why the wooden boxing disappeared below a certain point in the shaft was that it had never extended any farther down. It had been merely a box with a bottom!—and all those pipe-dream impressions which had tried to register themselves on the day when I had my struggle with the



"Hooray!" He Yelled. "Charley Bullerton's Dreened Your Mine for Ye!"

suction-pipe octopus were instantly translated into facts. I could have sworn, then, that there was a bottom in the box, and there was a bottom. And that other impression—that I had encountered an rushing stream of ice-cold water in the chilling depths; here was the stream; a foot-thick, never-failing cataract, pouring in through a perfectly good and substantial conduit of twelve-inch iron pipe!

In a flash the whole criminal mystery involving the ostensibly flooded mine was illuminated for me. "Haul away!" I called to the two above; and when they had drawn me up to the pit's mouth and I could get upon my feet, I yipped at Daddy and the marshal to come on, and led them in an out-door race along the mine ledge to the eastward; a hundred-yards dash which brought us to the banks of the swift little mountain torrent in the right-hand gulch.

A brief search revealed precisely what I was expecting to find; what anyone in possession of the facts precedent would have expected to find. In the middle of a small pool slightly upstream from the path level—a pocketed bit of water neatly screened and half hidden by a growth of low-branching spruces—we saw a cone-shaped whirlpool swirl into which a good third of the stream flow was vanishing. Below this pool an apparently accidental heaping of rocks formed a small dam which kept the little reservoir full.

Without a word, Daddy Hiram and the Angelic marshal plunged recklessly into the stream and with their bare hands tore away the loose-rock dam. With the removal of the slight barrier and the consequent clearing of the course of the stream, the pocket reservoir immediately sucked dry, the inlet of the cataracting pipe was exposed, and the secret of the flooded Cinnabar was a secret no longer.

The scheme which had been elaborated and set in motion to "soak" Grandfather Jasper was a premeditated "holdup." The Cinnabar, in operation and producing to its capacity, was worth, so Beasley asserted, all that my grandfather had paid for it, and more. But with the branch railroad built to its very door, its value would be doubled. Two alternatives had thus presented themselves to the owners, who were Cripple Creek mining speculators who had bought in the stock at a low figure while the main vein was as yet unexploited: they could go on mining the ore and storing it against the time when the railroad, with its cost-reducing advantages, should come along; or they could suspend operations for the same

length of time, setting the losses of a shut-down over against the increased profits when they should start up again.

With our discoveries of the morning the plan of the robbery became perfectly plain. Some glint of finance among the speculators had evolved a scheme by which the mine not only might be shut down during the interval of waiting for the railroad to build over the bench, but at the same time be made to yield a bumper crop of profits.

Taking its various steps in their order, the first move in the game was to sell the mine to Grandfather Jasper while it was still a going proposition; and this was done. But one of the conditions of the sale (Beasley told us this) was that the selling corporation should continue to operate the mine, not as a lessee, but under a contract by which the operating company should receive a certain percentage of the output; an arrangement which gave the holdup artists ample opportunity to prepare for the coup de main.

How these preparations were made, and the secret of them kept from leaking out, still remained one of the unsolved mysteries, though Beasley suggested that probably imported workmen were employed, and that the work had been done under jealous supervision with all the needful precautions taken against publicity. The tight wooden box—which would figure as a part of the shaft lining—had been built, and into the box the creek had been diverted by means of the small dam and the underground conduit. With the water admitted, to rise in the box to the level of its intake in the creek reservoir, the trap was set and was ready to be sprung.

Beyond this point there was a gap we were obliged to bridge by conjecture, but the inferences were all plausible enough. Doubtless the plotters had notified my grandfather that his mine was flooded and was no longer workable. Doubtless, again, he had authorized them to buy the needful pumping machinery and to install it—which they did.

In this barefaced imposture the plotters had conceivably builded something upon Grandfather Jasper's advanced age as an insurance against any too-searching investigation; but beyond this they had carefully disarmed any suspicion that he might otherwise have harbored by encouraging him—in the actual purchase of the property—to take expert advice, and by craftily priming him, by understatement of the facts, to trust them.

Only rumors of what had occurred at this visit reached Angels; but Beasley could testify that my grandfather had come and returned alone, and that after the pumping demonstration had been made he had seemed disposed to pocket his huge loss and to call it a bad day's work.

The later developments were not hard to figure out. Beasley was able to tell us that the proposed railroad branch to run to the new copper properties in Little Cinnabar gulch was now a certainty for the very near future. Hence the time was fully ripe for the recovery of the Cinnabar by the plotters. No doubt they had confidently assumed that a repurchase of the property—not directly by themselves, of course, but by an agent who would figure as a disinterested third party—would be easy. Beasley said that there had been some talk of an underrunning drainage tunnel, such as Daddy and I had figured upon—this at the time of the springing of the flood trap—and that the cost had been estimated at half a million. Unquestionably the robbers had assumed that an old man who had already charged his venture up to profit and loss would sell for a song rather than to venture again; and in this they were probably well within the truth.

But at the moment when they were ready to complete the circle of imposture, death—the death of Grandfather Jasper—had stepped in to complicate matters. Somebody—possibly Cousin Percy—had corresponded with whoever was representing the robber syndicate, and by this means the plotters had learned that they would now have to reckon with an heir. How Bullerton came to be employed by them almost at the instant of his return from South America we did not know; but we could easily understand that with the new complication which had arisen by reason of Grandfather Jasper's death, it was highly necessary for some emissary of the syndicate to get on the ground quickly, prepared to forestall by purchase, guile, or, in the last resort by force, any attempt of the Dudley heirs to pry into things they were not to be permitted to know.

The pushing of the fight for possession to the final and property-destroying extremity was another matter that Beasley was able to explain.

"Ye see, it was a case o' fish 'r cut-bait, and do it quick," the marshal explained. "If he could run you folks out, pronto, and get possession afore anybody come along to ask a lot o' p'inted questions, he stood about any chance in a dozen to lie out of it some way. If you-all got killed in the scrimmage, he'd scatter his men in the woods and try to make me b'lieve that you'd got done up trying to run him off."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A Freak Dinner.

Freak dinners, says London Sketch, are no new invention; they are as old as the first rich and greedy men. One that took place some generations ago was held at Carlton house, Pall Mall. There were over 2,000 guests, and the two chief features of the occasion were Big Sam, a porter eight feet high, and a marble canal down the center of the high table filled with living gold and silver fish.