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Title: Grace Harlowe's Overland Riders on the Old Apache Trail

Author: Josephine Chase

Release date: October 1, 2015 [EBook #50105]

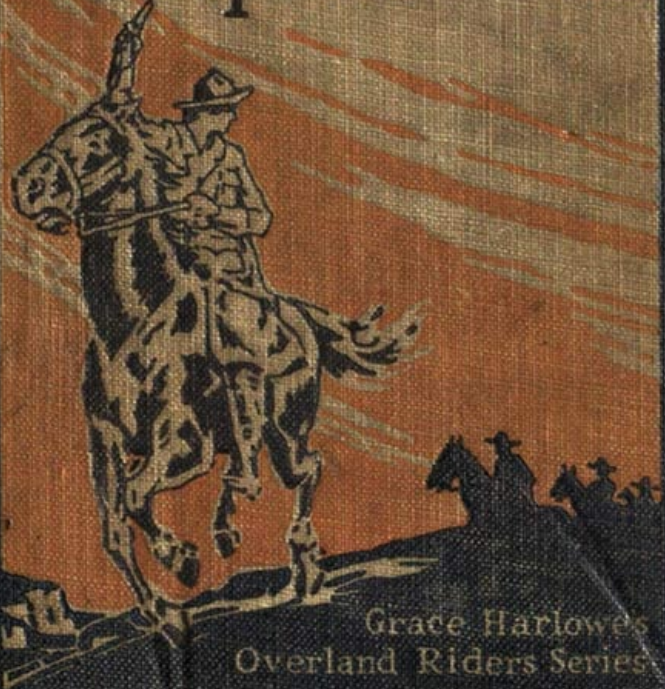
Language: English

Credits: Produced by Stephen Hutcheson, Rick Morris and the Online
Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

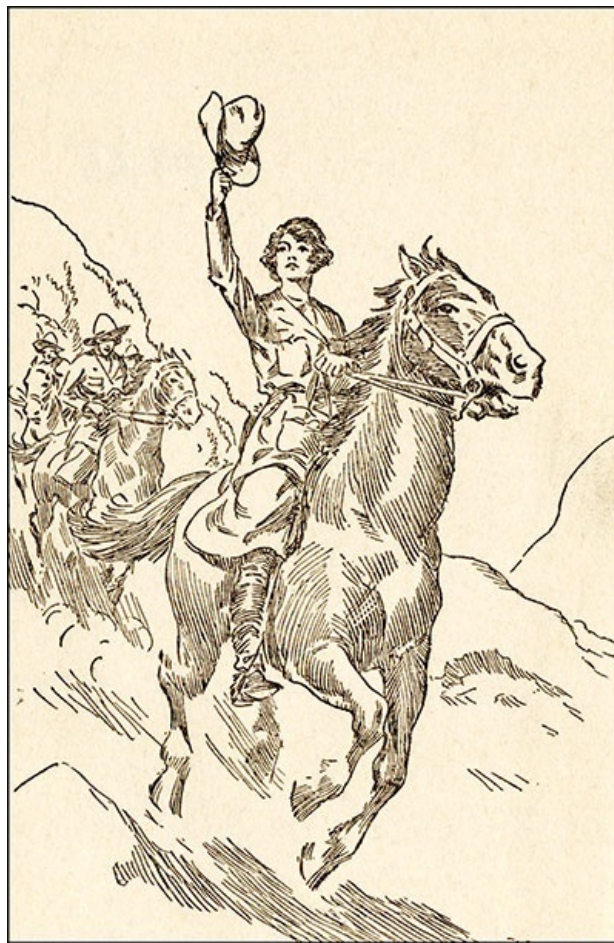
*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS
ON THE OLD APACHE TRAIL ***

**Grace Harlowe's Overland
Riders on the Old
Apache Trail**

Grace Harlowe's
Overland Riders,
on the
Old Apache Trail



Grace Harlowe's
Overland Riders Series
Jessie Graham Flower, A.M.



Grace Harlowe's Overland Riders.
Frontispiece.

Grace Harlowe's Overland Riders on the Old Apache Trail

By
JESSIE GRAHAM FLOWER, A.M.

Author of The Grace Harlowe High School Series, The Grace Harlowe College Girls Series, Grace Harlowe's Problem, Grace Harlowe's Golden Summer, Grace Harlowe Overseas, Grace Harlowe with the Red Cross in France, Grace Harlowe with the U. S. Troops in the Argonne, Grace Harlowe with the Marines at Chateau Thierry, Grace Harlowe with the Yankee Shock Boys at St. Quentin, Grace Harlowe with the American Army on the Rhine, etc., etc.

Illustrated

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GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS ON THE OLD APACHE TRAIL

CHAPTER I

THE CALL OF THE WILD

"I HAVE asked you to visit me for a twofold reason," announced Grace Harlowe to her friends of the Overton Unit. "In other words, I have a vacation proposal to make to you."

"Which, translated into plain English, means that you wish to lead us into new fields of adventure," interjected Emma Dean.

"Perhaps," smiled Grace.

"I suspected as much when I received your invitation to come here," nodded Elfreda Briggs.

"Curiosity has taken full possession of me, Grace. What is the big idea?" urged Anne Nesbit eagerly.

"So far as I am concerned, no plans have been made," replied Grace. "The original suggestion may have been mine—that is, the suggestion that we get together for a real outing. From that nucleus, Hippy says he has worked out a plan that promises entertainment, health and adventure for the jaded Overton girls after their strenuous war service. Hippy and Nora will be here in a few moments. He will tell you all about it."

"Dark mystery," murmured Emma.

"Let me ask you girls something," resumed Grace. "Since we returned from France, where we all did our bit, has each of you been perfectly contented with the simple life, well content to remain at home without feeling one little moment's yearning to see something stirring? Search your innermost consciousness and tell me what you find there in answer to my question."

For a moment no one essayed an answer; then Elfreda spoke up.

"To be frank with you, Loyalheart, I have been perfectly miserable," declared Miss Briggs thoughtfully.

Grace nodded and smiled.

"In France, amid the activity and excitement of war, not to speak of the peril, I was positive that once out of it, once back in my peaceful home, I never again should feel the slightest inclination to wander," continued Elfreda. "For a few months, following my return from the war zone, I really was contented, delightfully so, luxuriously so, I might say, for I was 'living the lazy life of Reilley,' as the doughboys say."

"Well, finally I awakened from my dream. I was restless, ill at ease. While away to war my law practice of course had gone to smash. It had not met me at the train upon my return, either, and the way I felt I didn't care; but upon awakening I realized that what I needed was activity. However, the sort of activity that my particular ailment demanded was not at hand, and I was on the verge of doing something desperate when your letter came asking me to join our friends at your home to talk over a vacation trip. Grace Harlowe, you are a life saver. That is the honest-to-goodness truth and the whole truth," finished Elfreda amid laughter.

"That is what I say, or rather what I probably should have said had I the eloquence of our legal friend, Elfreda Briggs," bubbled Emma. "Give me excitement or I die!"

Grace glanced at Anne, who nodded and smiled.

"I follow where you lead, Loyalheart," said Anne. "Too bad that the rest of the Unit are unable to be with us, but those not otherwise engaged are mostly roaming over the face of the earth, just as we are proposing to do. By the way, what are we to do—where are we to go and how?"

"We are all suffering a reaction from the war, but a strenuous few weeks in the open surely will settle us down," said Grace. "There come Hippy and Nora. Now you will know all about it," she added, stepping to the veranda to greet the newcomers. "Welcome, Nora Wingate. How are you, Lieutenant?"

"All present or accounted for," answered Hippy jovially. "Happy to meet you, ladies," he greeted, bowing profoundly as he entered the house. "I haven't been so pleased over anything since I downed my first Boche plane in France. There, there, Nora darling, don't monopolize the girls. Give your hero husband a chance. I take it that you are to join out with us in our big mid-summer vacation?" questioned Hippy, addressing himself to Emma Dean.

"Are you going to lead the party?" demanded Emma.

"I may have that honor." Hippy bowed humbly.

"Count me out!" emphasized Emma.

"No, no, no," protested Anne and Elfreda laughingly.

"Before jumping at conclusions perhaps it would be as well for us to listen to Lieutenant Wingate's plan," suggested Grace, rising. "Dinner is being served. Come! We can talk while we eat," she added, leading the way to the dining room whose windows overlooked the sloping green lawns of Grace Harlowe's much-loved home.

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Elfreda, Anne and Emma had, within the hour, arrived at Haven Home where Grace had been living quietly and restfully since her return from France, in which country she and her friends of the Overton Unit had been serving with the Red Cross during the closing year of the war.

Grace's husband, Captain Tom Gray, was still in Russia where he had been sent from France on a military mission, and Yvonne, her adopted daughter, was a pupil in a private school in New England, so she felt free to invite the girls of her Unit to join with her in a summer's outing that would offer both recreation and adventure.

Anne Nesbit, Elfreda Briggs and Emma Dean were the only members of the Unit who had not already made their plans for the summer.

While Grace would have been pleased to have all the girls of the Overton Unit join in her proposed outing, she was just as well pleased that her invitation had not been more generally accepted. The present party was of about the right size, as she reasoned it. Then again, the members of the party had been close associates for many years; they had shared their girlhood joys and sorrows; they had suffered together in those desperate days in France when it seemed to them that the very universe were rending itself asunder, and from all this had been born a better understanding of each other and a greater love and respect.

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It was, therefore, a happy gathering that sat down to dinner in Grace Harlowe's Oakdale home on that balmy mid-summer afternoon. For a time there was chatter and laughter, the reviving of old college and war memories, intermingled with occasional chaffing of Hippy Wingate, always a shining mark for the Overton girls' teasing.

"Girls," finally announced Grace, "Hippy has a dark secret locked in his heart, to be brought to light only when we girls are present."

"I could see the moment he came in that he had," interrupted Elfreda. "Hippy always was a poor dissembler."

"Yes, that's what Nora says," replied Hippy sheepishly.

"I believe that you girls are not all aware of the fact that Hippy is now a man of affairs," resumed Grace. "Therefore, his words must be given weight accordingly. Hippy, being too modest to tell you about it himself, I would have you all know that, upon his return from the war, he found himself a rich man, following the death of a wealthy uncle who was so proud of our Flying Lieutenant's great achievements in the war that he left Hippy all his worldly possessions. Our Hippy, it is rumored, is now lying awake nights trying to devise new ways to spend his fortune."

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"No, no, nothing like that," protested Hippy Wingate, with a disapproving shake of the head. "What I really am trying to figure out is how *not* to spend it—that is, not all at once. Of course, so far as my dear friends are concerned, that is another matter," added Hippy quite seriously.

"My ancestors originated in Missouri. You will have to demonstrate," observed Emma Dean amid much laughter.

"What we are at the moment most interested in is the dark secret. You have something to say to us," reminded Miss Briggs.

"Yes, Hippy, do not keep us in suspense," urged Grace.

"Go on, darling. They will walk out and leave you if you don't start pretty soon," warned Nora.

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"Ahem!" began Lieutenant Wingate.

"Are you going to make a speech?" demanded Emma apprehensively.

"What I am about to say will answer your question. Grace has been suggesting that this outfit get together and spend the latter part of the summer in the open. That set my brain in operation."

"Your what?" interrupted Emma.

Grace laughed merrily, and then begged Hippy's pardon.

"Upon my return from the war," resumed Hippy, unheeding the interruption, "my friend, Captain Jamieson, of the State Constabulary, asked me to volunteer to serve in the troop with him on strike duty. I did so. Girls, you have no idea of the joy I found in 'packing leather,' as the horsemen call it—horseback riding. After that experience with the troop, when Grace was speaking about an outing in the open, it occurred to me that the Overton Unit might work off its surplus energy in the saddle, and at the same time have a glorious outing. Brown Eyes, tell them of your experience in the saddle."

Grace related how, after having been made an honorary member of the troop, she had taken up horseback riding and what a wonderful revelation it had been to her.

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"Take my word for it, too, Brown Eyes already is as fine a rider as there is in the troop. The captain says she is a natural born horsewoman," declared Hippy with enthusiasm. "Even my Nora promises that, hereafter, riding horseback is to be her own principal recreation. How many of you girls ride?"

Elfreda and Anne said they had ridden some when younger, but not recently. Emma Dean owned a pony, she said, but had not been on its back in more than two years.

"Good!" exclaimed Lieutenant Wingate. "You all at least know how to stick on leather, so we will proceed to the next stage of the journey. My great secret is no longer a secret. You already know what I am about to propose. Do you girls wish to join out with us for a month or so in the saddle?"

"To go where?" questioned Elfreda.

"That is for us girls to decide upon," interjected Grace. "The first question to be settled is, who will go?"

"All in favor of taking a horseback trip say 'aye'; contrary 'no,'" cried Hippy.

The answer was a chorus of ayes.

"The ayes have it! We go," announced the lieutenant, smiling his pleasure at the decision.

"Have you a suggestion to offer as to where we might go?" asked Anne.

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"It was my thought that we might tour New England," answered the lieutenant.

"New England!" cried Emma Dean. "There isn't any fun in doing that. When I go out for adventure I wish the real thing. Adventure in New England! Huh! It hasn't existed in New England since the Indians put down an arrow barrage on the Pilgrim Fathers. You will have to think of something more exciting than New England if you expect me to go with you."

"Where do we get the saddle horses?" was Elfreda's query.

"Hippy will arrange for that," Grace informed her. "I agree with Emma that, so long as we are going out for adventure, we should get as far from the beaten paths as possible. Roughing it in the real meaning of the term is what we girls need."

"That is what I say," cried Emma. "No weak lemonade trips for me. Give me a wild west or give me an automobile."

"I am certain that Loyalheart has a suggestion to offer," said Miss Briggs, nodding in Grace's direction.

"Yes, I have," admitted Grace. "My advice is that we adopt Emma's suggestion and go west. Speaking for myself, there is one place out there that always has held a great fascination for me. I refer to the Old Apache Trail in Arizona. From what I have read of that part of the country, one should be able to find adventure in a horseback journey over the old trail. Going so far by train, before we start with horses, will make it rather an expensive trip, but I do not believe it will be beyond our means."

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Emma's eyes widened.

"Indians? Are there Indians there?"

"Every bush hides a lurking Apache," Lieutenant Wingate gravely informed her.

"Oh!" exclaimed Emma under her breath.

"I do not believe it is quite so alarming as that," laughed Grace. "Even though there are Indians, we probably shall not be troubled by them. Are there any further suggestions, girls?"

"The Apache Trail sounds interesting to me," admitted Anne.

"Both interesting and alarming," averred Elfreda. "However, we know from past experiences that trouble always goes hand in hand with Grace Harlowe, so we are fully prepared in advance for whatever may come to us. What do we take with us, and how are we to dress?"

"It has occurred to me that we can wear our old army uniforms, without insignia," replied Grace. "They will be appropriate for riding, but we should wear campaign hats in place of our overseas caps. Such changes of clothing as we shall require can be carried in our steamer trunks which we will send ahead by express. My advice is not to carry any finery. Let us keep in the simple atmosphere at all times, bearing in mind that this will not be a Pullman car outing after we reach our starting point. How soon can you girls be ready?"

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Elfreda said she would be prepared to leave in about ten days, having some office legal matters to clear up before going away. The others said they could be ready in even less time than that, so it was decided that they should meet at Oakdale for the start for the west on August first. Hippy, in the meantime, would, so far as possible, arrange by correspondence for the horses they were to ride, and for such equipment as had to do with his part in the preparations.

The following few days were busy ones for all, between riding horseback, taking short gallops out into the country on such mounts as they could find at livery stables, and planning for their vacation in the saddle. On these rides, Hippy and Grace taught the others such riding points as they had learned in their riding experiences, all save Emma quickly adapting themselves to the saddle, so that the week's vacation at Haven Home lengthened to twelve days before Elfreda and Emma entrained for home. Anne remained with Grace, there being no reason why she should return home, as her husband, still in the service of his country, was on the other side of the Atlantic.

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In the intervening days before the start for the west, Hippy corresponded by wire and letter, with the postmaster at Globe, Arizona, who informed the lieutenant that there were two stock farms near that place, where mounts suitable for the Overton girls' needs might be purchased or hired at reasonable prices. It was decided, however, that no definite arrangement for horses should be made until Hippy had had opportunity to look them over, with all the girls present to approve of his selection.

Grace, having completed most of her preparations for their outing, now made a brief journey to the city to visit Yvonne at her school, returning home in time to welcome Elfreda and Emma, who arrived at Oakdale looking trim and pretty in their new tailor-made serge traveling suits. Grace looked her two friends over critically on their arrival.

"Becoming, but not quite suitable for horseback riding," she observed, referring to their costumes.

"Our riding suits are in our steamer trunks," explained Elfreda. "I know—you said we were not to take any finery along, but surely, while traveling on a train we should wear something other than our uniforms."

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Grace admitted that perhaps this would be advisable, and decided that the party would be less conspicuous in traveling clothes.

It was a merry company at Haven Home that evening, the eve of the Overton girls' departure for the west on what, each one instinctively felt, was destined to be an eventful journey. Several neighbors came in and there was music, with Irish songs by Nora, a characteristic speech from the lips of Lieutenant Wingate, followed by dancing, refreshments and much chatter, until a late hour.

After the neighbors had said their good-byes the Overton girls put the finishing touches to their packing and closed their trunks.

"To be opened when we reach Arizona," announced Grace, placing her trunk key in her purse, smiling at her friends with that rare smile that so attracted people to her.

Quite a party was at the station to see the outfit off next morning, though naturally the crowd was neither so great nor so boisterous as when, upon her arrival home from the war, Grace Harlowe had been literally carried from the train to her home, a heroine, not in theory, but in fact, as the crosses of war of two nations, pinned to her blouse, bore evidence.

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Farewells were waved from car windows, the tall maples and spreading elms of Haven Home melted into the distance as the journey toward the setting sun was begun.

"Somehow I have a feeling that this vacation of ours is not to be an unalloyed sweet summer's dream," sighed Elfreda Briggs, settling herself resignedly for the journey.

CHAPTER II

ON THE OVERLAND COACH

“OH, girls, I’ve made a perfectly marvelous discovery,” cried Grace Harlowe as she burst into the parlor of the hotel at Globe, Arizona, on the morning following their arrival from the east.

“Which means, watch your step, Overton Unit,” reminded Elfreda Briggs. “What is the nature of your discovery, a long lost brother or something of that sort?”

“My discovery is a genuine old Deadwood stagecoach,” Grace informed her companions.

Elfreda regarded her narrowly.

“Our Flying Lieutenant, Hippy Wingate, is examining it now to see if it is really fit for use,” continued Grace with no abatement of her enthusiasm.

“A Deadwood stagecoach?” wondered Emma Dean.

“That is the kind of coach they used in the old stagecoach days of the early west,” Elfreda Briggs explained.

“Eh? The kind that the bandits used to hold up, and rob the passengers? That husband of mine used to read all about it when he was a youngster. He declares that had the war not come along when it did, he might have been a bandit himself,” asserted Nora Wingate. “What does he want to look over that old stagecoach for?” she demanded suspiciously.

“Hippy is thinking of taking a ride in it,” smiled Grace. “Listen to me, girls! I will tell you what Hippy and I have to suggest.”

“It is about time,” muttered Elfreda.

“The suggestion is,” resumed Grace, “that we girls take a trip in the Deadwood coach, say out as far as the Apache Lodge on the trail. There is no reason why we should not, at least, make a night drive, say up to about midnight, go into camp for a few hours’ sleep, and then drive back to Globe in the early morning. Should we like the coaching well enough we can go on and do the entire hundred and twenty miles of the Old Apache Trail in that way.”

“This is all very well, but what about the ponies that the lieutenant has hired for the ride over the trail?” questioned Anne.

“We can have the ponies led through to Phoenix and ride them back, camping along the way back for the rest of our vacation,” replied Grace. “Hippy will arrange that matter, and make a deal with the stagecoach owner after he has carefully looked the old wagon over to make certain that it will go through the trip without falling apart.”

“You think it will be a perfectly safe thing to do, do you, Grace?” questioned Elfreda Briggs.

“Yes, if the stagecoach holds together,” answered Grace smilingly.

“If!” muttered J. Elfreda under her breath.

“But, Grace, suppose a band of bad men hold us up and rob us?” urged Emma apprehensively.

“No danger whatever, my dear. Those days have passed in the great west, as have the savage Apaches of olden time, though the trip will take us over the ground on which they fought many fierce battles. Ah! Here comes Hippy now. How about it, Lieutenant?”

“All set, Brown Eyes. The owner of the stagecoach says he has a new set of wheels that he will put on, as the old ones would not stand up under the load we shall have. Otherwise, the old rattler is good for many a journey over the trail. I think the owner got a good idea from us, and that he will make the Deadwood stagecoach trip a regular attraction for tourists. What do you say, girls?”

“Grace is the one to say,” averred Elfreda. “On our journey out here you will remember that we decided she should be our captain. I may have my doubts about the advisability of the proposed coaching trip, but I will agree to it with a certain mental reservation. *Alors!* Let’s go!”

“Have you seen the owner of the ponies?” asked Grace, turning to Lieutenant Wingate.

Hippy nodded.

“He doesn’t care what we do, so long as he gets his money.”

“When will the stagecoach be ready?” questioned Grace.

"Within an hour, if you decide to make the trip."

"That is all very well, so far as it goes," observed Nora Wingate. "What I wish to ask is how are we going to sleep and eat?"

"We shall take with us twenty-four hours' rations and a small tent, which can be carried on the roof of the stagecoach. Hippy can sleep on the floor of the coach and we girls will sleep in the tent," Grace informed her companions.

"Any old place is good enough for Hippy," complained Lieutenant Wingate.

"A man like yourself, who has slept on a cloud, hovering over the German lines on the French front, ought not to complain about having to sleep on nice, soft blankets on the floor of a stagecoach," teased Grace.

"Who's complaining?" retorted Hippy. "What is the verdict?"

"Unless there are objections which argument cannot overcome, I shall decide for taking the stagecoach," announced Grace.

"Ladies, please give voice to your preferences, and be quick about it," urged Hippy.

The vote was unanimous for the stagecoach.

"Brown Eyes, will you attend to getting the food?" he asked.

"Yes, with Nora's assistance. We will go shopping at once, Nora dear. Hippy, please tell the stagecoach man that we will take the coach, and that we shall be ready to leave at four o'clock this afternoon. Please see that the A tent is shipped aboard our craft. By the way, what does he propose to charge us for the trip out and back?"

"Twenty dollars," replied Hippy. Lieutenant Wingate added, that, if Grace would give him a memorandum of exactly what she wished to carry along, he would get the equipment together at once.

"I will do that now," replied Grace. "Upon reflection, I would suggest that you tell the man who owns the ponies we have hired, to hold the animals here, as we shall be back here to-morrow. I have about decided that one night with the stagecoach will give us all the thrills we are looking for in that direction. Anyway, we are out here to ride horseback, so you girls must not look too hard for comfort in your surroundings. Riding in this part of the country is work, and you will discover that it is not at all like galloping about a ring in a riding academy or pleasant jaunts through shady country lanes."

"Or a trip in a luxurious automobile," suggested Elfreda.

"Or a flight into the blue in a plane," added Hippy. "Give me the air every time, the freedom of the skies, the azure and the birds and the—"

"Look out! Your motor is going to stall," warned Emma Dean amid general laughter.

"I agree with you," nodded Elfreda.

Lieutenant Wingate went out laughing and chuckling to himself, and after his departure Grace assigned their duties to each of the girls, then herself started out with Nora to purchase supplies. These consisted of a small quantity of canned goods, potatoes, bacon, coffee, and salt and pepper, with a few other odds and ends, all of which Grace ordered done up in a large package and delivered to the stagecoach man. The purchases were quickly made and within a very short time Grace and Nora were back at the hotel.

"Does the drosky drive up to the hotel for us?" greeted Emma Dean, as the two girls entered.

"It does not. I should not care to make our outfit so conspicuous as that," rebuked Grace.

"Oh, fiddlesticks! What is the use of making a splurge when there is no one to see it?" grumbled Emma.

"Wurra, child!" cried Irish Nora. "This is no traveling show for the benefit of the natives."

"Nora is perfectly right," agreed Grace. "We are here for our own enjoyment, and, though perhaps we may be a show in ourselves, we do not propose to perform for the edification of the public if we can avoid it."

"What is this I hear about a show?" cried J. Elfreda, at that moment entering the hotel parlor with Anne.

Nora explained that Emma wished to drive away in style.

"Wait! Just wait, Emma, until we return from this trip of ours. If we do not show the Globites something new in styles after we have passed through the refining influences of the Apache Trail,

I shall admit that I am not a prophetess," laughed Elfreda. "I just now saw Hippy with his coat off working on that old ark, that he calls a stagecoach, before an admiring audience of natives. He was making himself conspicuous. Are we expected to trust life and limb to that ancient craft, Grace Harlowe?"

"We are and we shall," answered Grace.

"Then I think those of you who have property had better make your wills before embarking. Nora, this applies especially to you and Hippy who so recently have come into a fortune. Grace made her will before going overseas to drive an ambulance on the French front, but Emma, having spent all her money on finery, had no need to make a will."

"How about yourself?" questioned Grace teasingly.

"I am merely a struggling young lawyeress who isn't supposed to have money to will, and who most assuredly has no clients to pay her any. Isn't it about time for luncheon?"

Grace said it was, but that they were waiting for Hippy so that all might sit down together.

Lieutenant Wingate came in shortly after that, covered with dirt, and a beauty spot on one cheek.

"You are a sight, Hippy Wingate," chided Grace. "How did you get yourself in such a condition?"

"Helping the man grease the wagon."

"You go right up to our room and make yourself fit to sit down with civilized persons," ordered Nora. "I am ashamed to own you as my husband."

"Isn't that a fine way to order around a fellow who has fought the Boche on high, and who will go down in history as a brave air fighter?" teased Anne.

"Some husbands have to be ordered. Mine is one of them," answered Nora, giving Hippy's ear a tweak. "Now run along, little man."

Hippy kissed Nora and ran upstairs laughing to himself. Nora's scolding did not even penetrate skin deep with Lieutenant Wingate, nor did she intend that it should.

Soon after that the Overton College girls filed into the dining room where a number of tourists were having luncheon. The girls, in their overseas uniforms, attracted attention at once, many of the guests having been told who the young women, with the tanned faces and familiar uniforms, were. The guests also had been informed that the man with the party was Lieutenant Wingate, a noted American air fighter who stood high up in the list of those who had downed more than twenty enemy planes.

As she took her seat at the table, Grace bowed smilingly to two ladies who had come in on the train with them that morning.

"Girls, what shall we eat?" she asked.

"Speaking for myself as a modest person, I think I shall begin at the top of the menu and eat my way all the way down to the bottom," observed Hippy solemnly amid the laughter of the others.

Luncheon finished, the party went out sight-seeing, and for a look at the ponies that Hippy had hired for the trip over the Old Apache Trail, on which journey they would have started on the following morning had Grace not chanced to discover the old Deadwood stagecoach.

At three o'clock that afternoon the party of Overton girls loaded their belongings, such as would be needed for a twenty-four hour jaunt, into an automobile, and drove to the stable where the stage driver, Ike Fairweather by name, was preparing to harness up the four horses that were to draw the coach.

Hippy removed his coat and assisted in the operations, while the girls inspected the stagecoach and stowed away their belongings.

Emma's nose went up ever so little when she peered into the interior of the vehicle, observing the old rickety wooden seats, the tattered curtains and the cracks in the warped flooring.

"If this old ark lasts until we get out of town, I am no prophet," she declared. "What if it breaks down?"

"We can walk, just as some of us have had to do in France when an ambulance went out of commission," answered Grace laughingly. She then placed blankets on the hardwood seats and packed their provisions underneath.

By this time Ike was hooking up the four horses. That he was an experienced man Grace saw after observing him critically for a few moments, and she was certain that they could safely trust

themselves to his driving.

"I have a lurking idea that the girls of this outfit are in for a ride that they will not soon forget, even though things look favorable," she thought, smiling to herself.

"Grace Harlowe, what are you laughing at?" demanded Anne.

"I was thinking of something very, very funny," replied Grace.

"Let me in on the joke, please," begged Emma.

"Not now. Perhaps later on."

Elfreda regarded her frowningly.

"If you play any tricks on us, Loyalheart, you will be sorry," warned Miss Briggs.

"How can you even suggest such a thing?" cried Grace. "Did you ever know me to play pranks on my friends?"

"There have been occasions when suspicions assumed real shapes in my mind," retorted Elfreda.

"See to it that this is not one of those occasions. I believe we are about ready to make our start. Mr. Fairweather, where is there a good place for us to make camp to-night? I do not think we should try to make the Lodge this evening. All we desire is to take the coach into the mountains, make camp, and come back in the early morning. It doesn't matter whether or not we go so far as the Lodge."

"Squaw Valley or just beyond I reckon is as good as any place on the trail," observed the driver, reflectively stroking his whiskers.

"How far is that from here—I mean Squaw Valley?"

"Nigh onto thirty mile, I reckon."

"That, I think, will be about as much of a trip as my companions can stand, so we will say Squaw Valley, or the next available point. I leave the selection of the camping place to your judgment. What time do you think we shall reach the Valley?"

"'Bout ten o'clock. Have to go slow when we get into the hills, an' we bump 'em right smart after leavin' Globe. Sharp turns and narrow trail in spots, but it ain't much like the days when I driv a coach an' four in the hills an' carried the mail an' kep' a weather eye out for bandits. Since then them buzz wagons has took all the starch out of livin'. Ever drive one?"

"I drove an ambulance at the front for nearly a year of the war," answered Grace quietly.

"You don't say?" Ike regarded the slender figure of the young Overton girl, his gaze finally coming to rest on her well-tanned face. "Come to look you over, you've got a mighty steady eye an' a good jaw. I've seen that kind before an' sometimes behind a gun. That kind is fine till you get them riled, then look out for the lightnin'. Where you goin' to ride?"

"Outside with you until we reach Squaw Valley, if I may," answered Grace smilingly.

"Glad to have you. All aboard that's goin'!"

"Please get in with the girls, Hippy. Later on you and I will change seats, if that will suit you," said Grace.

The lieutenant stood aside until the four girls were safely stowed away in the stagecoach, Grace, in the meantime, having swung herself up to the front seat with the driver. The door slammed, Ike cracked his whip, and the coach started with a jolt that brought strong protest from the passengers down below.

"Hey there, you!" shouted Hippy, thrusting his head out. "I haven't got my safety belt on, so don't take off like that again or you will throw me out."

"Hang on, Lieutenant!" urged Grace, her laughing eyes peering over the edge of the coach into the red, perspiring face of Hippy Wingate. "That is the way I had to do when I went flying with you in France. If you will recall, you said yesterday that you must have excitement. I am simply providing it for you, and I have an idea you will get all you wish by the time we have done with this journey."

The lieutenant drew in his head and they heard nothing more from him for some time.

The Deadwood stagecoach swept out with a rattle and a clatter and a groaning in every joint, that aroused the apprehension, not only of its passengers, but of persons on the streets who paused to see the outfit wheel past them, the four horses at a brisk trot.

Leaving the town quickly behind them, the stagecoach swept out into the open. The smoke of the Old Dominion and Inquisition smelting furnaces hung gray against the sky, but the Overton girls were soon past the tall black buildings of cooling copper, riding away toward the west at a pace that caused the stagecoach to complain even more bitterly than before.

It was to be a mere outing, a jaunt in an historic old stagecoach, over an equally historic trail, but that was all, so far as Grace Harlowe and her friends had planned it. What the "jaunt" developed into was an exciting adventure, which had in it all the elements of a real tragedy. Grace already was glorying in the fresh air, the roll of the vehicle under her, and the uncertainty of what the next moment held for her.

"Will our wagon stand a lively run down the grade?" she questioned, as they topped a rise and she saw a stretch of about half a mile of trail falling away and disappearing in the valley below them.

"I reckon it will," grinned the driver.

"How about the horses?"

"Thet's all right. Don't you worry 'bout the nags, Miss."

"Then shake them out. Let's stir up those people in the coach and show them what riding in a Deadwood stagecoach really means," eagerly urged Grace Harlowe.

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Ike did. He gave the reins a shake and cracked the long-lashed whip that sounded to Grace like the report of a pistol.

The horses responded instantly, starting down the steep grade at a lively gallop, accompanied by encouraging yelps from Ike Fairweather.

"Thet's the way we driv when we thought the Redskins was after us," he called to Grace without turning his head.

Twenty seconds later the coach was rolling like a ship in a heavy sea, accompanied by a medley of shrieks and shouts of protest from the jumbled cargo of passengers inside.

"Faster! Faster, Mr. Fairweather," urged Grace.

Ike's yelps grew louder and closer together, and the gallop of the four-horse team became a run. About this time the occupants on the inside of the coach, having reached the limit of their endurance, registered a violent protest.

CHAPTER III

41

A THRILLING HALT

"**H**I, up there! Cut the gun!" bellowed the voice of Hippy Wingate, using an aviator's term for shutting off the power. "Stop it, I say! You will have us all in the ditch!"

Grace grinned at Ike and Ike grinned at his team. Neither made any reply to Hippy's wail of distress. Grace's hat was now off, her hair was blowing in the wind, and her eyes were snapping.

"Oh, that *was* glorious, Mr. Fairweather," she cried as the stagecoach reached the bottom of the grade and lurched around a sharp curve on two wheels, a proceeding that brought another series of shrieks from the occupants of the coach.

Hippy was still protesting and threatening, then suddenly Grace and Ike were startled at hearing the lieutenant's voice close behind them, right at their ears, it seemed.

Grace turned and found herself looking into the flushed face of Hippy Wingate whose head and shoulders were above the top of the coach. He was standing on the window sill of the door and clinging to the edge of the roof of the stagecoach.

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"Get down, Hippy! You will be thrown off and hurt," begged Grace.

"I can't be any worse injured than I am now after being played football with inside of this old box. What's the matter? Isn't there a brake on this bundle of junk?"

"I don't know. Sorry, but I thought you might enjoy a few sideslips to remind you of France. Please stop, Mr. Fairweather. He will break his neck if he tries to get down while we are in motion."

Ike applied the brake and pulled up the horses, whereupon Hippy sprang down to the trail and

swung aboard again.

"If you do that again I'll walk," was his parting threat.

"How'd you like it, Miss?" grinned the driver.

"Splendid! I have not had such an exciting ride since one time when I was racing with my ambulance in France to clear a cross-roads ahead of a shell that was on the way there," declared Grace.

"I was goin' to ask you 'bout the war. You must have seen some big ones—big shells?"

"Many of them."

"Never got hit, did you!"

"I was wounded three times."

"You don't say!" Ike gazed at her with new interest. "Was he in the war, too?" referring to Hippy.

"Yes, as an aviator, and fought many battles in the air. All the young women who are with us on this drive also saw service in the war zone in France. They were a part of the Overton College Unit that went overseas for the Red Cross."

"Must have been purty bad business, thet."

"It was, but I would not have missed it for anything. Did many men from your city go to the war?"

Ike nodded.

"Some didn't come back, neither. S'pose your ambulance got hit once, anyway?"

"I lost four cars during the time I was driving. Two were blown up and the others were wrecked in accidents," Grace informed her companion on the driver's seat. "My husband is still in the service. He is now in Russia where he was sent after the armistice was signed."

"Your husband? You don't say! I wouldn't think it. Why, you don't look like more'n a school girl. I'll bet he'd like to be here right this minute."

"And I'll bet I should like to have him here, too," answered Grace smilingly. "Do you think we shall be able to stir up any excitement on the trail? We propose to do the entire journey on our ponies, you know, starting the day after to-morrow."

"Mebby, mebbly," reflected Ike.

"Are there any Apaches left in the mountains?" questioned Grace.

"Yes. Too many of 'em."

"Friendly?"

"Sometimes when they want to beg or steal somethin' from you. Don't trust 'em, Miss. An Indian's an Indian, 'specially when he's an Apache. They'd do a heap lot more than they do if they dared. Can you shoot?"

"Some," admitted Grace.

"I'll bet you're a dead shot. If them eyes was behind a gun thet was pinte at me, I'd put up my hands without bein' asked a second time."

"Were you ever held up by bandits?" asked Grace, eager to get the old stagecoach driver started talking of his experiences.

"Regular thing in the old days."

"What did you do in those emergencies?"

"Ginerally put up my paws when I was invited to. Such fellows can shoot and most always does."

"But, Mr. Fairweather, did your passengers never venture to defend themselves!"

"Once a man did. He's down there now, near where we're goin' to stop for chuck—in Squaw Valley."

"He was not quick enough! Is that it, sir!"

"You said it. Was the Germans quick on the trigger?"

"Their sharpshooters were very quick. Good shots, too, all of them, but our sharpshooters could beat them at stalking. You know our boys like to fight Indian style, while the German fights by rule and orders."

The driver nodded his understanding, and began admonishing the off-wheel horse who was using his heels rather too freely.

"The critter would run away if I give him half a show," grinned Ike.

"Of course if he were to do that and turn the coach over, you could not help yourself, could you, Mr. Fairweather?" questioned Grace innocently.

Ike gave her a quick sidelong glance, but Grace Harlowe's face was guileless.

"I b'lieve you'd like to have him run away," he chuckled.

"Oh, no, nothing like that, sir. My friends might get hurt. Otherwise, I should not mind it at all."

"You shore are a queer one," muttered Ike. "Over beyond the rise you see ahead is Squaw Valley. Good water there and fine place to have chuck. How much further do you reckon on goin'?"

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"I was about to suggest that you decide that. If we ride until ten o'clock it will be late enough. I imagine, too, that our friends in the coach will have had enough of it by then. After leaving the Valley, if we decide to go further, I will go inside, giving Lieutenant Wingate an opportunity to ride outside with you. Perhaps you may be able to induce him to tell you how he fought the Huns above the clouds. I know you will enjoy hearing of it from a man who has fought that way."

"Shore, I would. Never was a prisoner over there, was you?" asked Ike.

"Yes, the Boches got me once and sent me to a prison camp, but I made my escape. They came near getting me twice after that."

"Huh! Got a family?" Ike was determined to get all the information he could. He had been doing it for years from the passengers who rode with him on top of the stage.

"If you mean children, I have a daughter, an adopted French girl. I found her in a deserted French village one night, the village at the time being under heavy artillery fire. I adopted the little one later, and she is now at school back east. Isn't that Squaw Valley?" asked Grace, pointing.

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"Thet's her."

A few moments later the stagecoach drew out to one side of the trail and stopped.

"All out for mess," cried Grace, springing to the ground. "How do you folks feel after that delightful ride?"

"Ride, did you call it?" demanded Hippy Wingate, getting out laboriously and limping about to take the kinks out of his legs. "It's worse than hitting one of those bumpy white clouds with an airplane."

"Grace Harlowe, I believe you gave us that shaking up on purpose," accused Elfreda Briggs.

The others voiced their protests in no uncertain manner.

"You will forget all about it after we have made tea and cooked our bacon," comforted Grace, neither admitting nor denying the accusation. "There is nothing like a good shaking up to accelerate one's appetite."

Under Grace Harlowe's skillful hands a little fire was soon flickering beside the trail, the driver eyeing the blaze with approval; then the Overton girls got briskly to work preparing the supper.

"Where'd you learn to make an Indian cook-fire?" demanded Ike.

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"My husband taught me. He is a forester, you know," replied Grace.

"Know how to make a lean-to?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"You'll do. No tenderfoot 'bout you. Reckon I'll fetch water for the folks and horses now."

The party ate sitting on the ground, Ike's interest during the meal being divided between Grace Harlowe and Lieutenant Wingate. They were the first real heroes that he had ever known, and he proposed to make the most of his opportunity.

"Well, Mr. Fairweather, shall we go on?" asked Grace after they had finished the meal.

"Reckon so. Better camping ground further on."

Equipment was quickly packed away and Ike hooked up for the start, but before leaving, Hippy Wingate and Elfreda issued a solemn warning that there was to be no more speeding.

The night, now upon them, was moonless, but the stars shed a faint light on the trail causing it to stand out dimly for a short distance ahead of them, save here and there, where overhanging rocks threw it into a deep shadow. It was an ideal night for traveling, cool but invigorating, with the breath of mountain and canyon heavy on the still evening air.

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Lieutenant Wingate was riding with the driver, Grace now being inside the coach with the other girls. To protect themselves from the chill mountain air, Elfreda, Anne, Emma and Nora had wrapped themselves in blankets and were dozing off to sleep.

Grace was not sleepy, though the slow movement of the stagecoach as the horses climbed the steep grade was monotonous. She was too keenly alive to the wonders of the mountains to think of sleep, anyway. Grace leaned well out, with head down, watching the white trail that had echoed to the scuff of the moccasin of the savage redmen so many times in the past, and that was slipping slowly from under her, now and then gazing ahead along the narrow way with wondering eyes. The distant conversation of Lieutenant Wingate and Ike Fairweather drifted down in undistinguishable murmurs.

"Hippy is filling Ike with war stories, and he is drawing the long bow too, I'll venture to say. What's that?" Grace drew a sharp breath and her heart gave a thump.

The Overton girl thought she had seen a figure dart to the side of the road and into the shadow of the rocks as the coach swung around a sharp bend on the mountain trail.

"Yes, there is another! Something is going on here!"

50

Grace opened the coach door on the opposite side. There was a long, sloping bank on that side, the right side, leading down, she did not know how far, for the bottom was in deep shadow.

"Perhaps there are Indians on the trail," muttered Grace, slipping out to the trail, and closing the coach door behind her as she trotted along beside the slowly moving stagecoach. She then hopped to the step where she crouched, clinging to the door frame with one hand. Grace could still hear Hippy and Ike Fairweather speaking, and so interested were they in their conversation that they failed to see what Grace Harlowe's keen eyes had discovered.

"After all, what I saw may be simply prowlers," reflected Grace, though her intuition told her that the figures she had discovered on the trail ahead meant something more than mere prowling.

Grace Harlowe's intuition, in this instance, was not at fault.

Two rifle reports close at hand broke the mountain stillness, and the coach stopped with a sudden jolt as Ike Fairweather brought his horses to their haunches, so quickly did he pull them up.

A cry, which Grace recognized as having been uttered by Emma Dean, was heard in the coach.

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"Flat down on the floor, every one of you, and not another sound!" commanded Grace in a low voice, dropping on all fours to the trail, and in that position crawling under the coach on hands and feet.

Before ducking under, a quick upward glance had shown Grace that Lieutenant Wingate's hands were thrust above his head, and that Ike Fairweather was holding his as high as possible.

"All out, and keep your hands above your heads!" commanded a stern voice on the mountain side of the coach. "Quick!"

Grace Harlowe unlimbered her little automatic revolver from its holster under her blouse, the weapon that she had carried through the war.

Four frightened girls, crouching on the floor of the Deadwood coach, had not uttered a sound since the command to step out was uttered, nor had they made a movement to obey that command.

"Come out of that on the jump!" ordered the same stern voice that Grace had first heard, but this time in a new and more menacing tone.

A pair of booted legs appeared before Grace at the side of the coach, and she heard the coach door jerked open, followed by a scream from Emma.

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Without an instant's hesitation, Grace thrust her revolver forward until its muzzle was close to one of the booted legs, and pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE WITH THE BANDITS

THE highwayman uttered a yell, and leaped clear of the ground, dropping his rifle, which clattered to the trail within easy reach of the Overton girl's hand.

Bang! Bang!

Two rifle bullets ripped through the roof of the old stagecoach.

"The cowards!" fumed Grace under her breath.

Snatching up the rifle that the highwayman had dropped, she crawled out from under the coach, and ran around behind it just as two more bandit shots rang out.

Grace threw the rifle to her shoulder and fired at a shadowy figure that she could barely see, and, in the next second, Lieutenant Wingate's heavy army revolver cracked spitefully from the front seat of the coach. With Grace Harlowe's first shot Hippy had unlimbered, and his revolver was now banging away to good purpose, as Grace realized when she heard another yell of pain.

"Look out, Grace, I'm coming!" warned Hippy as he leaped from the top of the coach to the trail.

"Disarm this fellow, please! He is wounded only in the leg, and he's dangerous. I will take care of the others while you are doing that," said Grace, starting to creep forward with rifle ready to fire.

Bang!

A revolver flashed from behind a jutting shelf of rock.

Bang!

The rifle in Grace Harlowe's hands answered the revolver shot. She heard her bullet smack against the shale rock and pieces of stone patter on the trail.

"Ouch!" grunted the bandit who had fired at her.

Grace was certain that she had not hit the man, but she believed that a splinter of rock had accomplished what her bullet had missed doing.

While all of this was going on, Hippy was removing the weapons from the bandit through whose leg Grace had fired a bullet from her automatic revolver.

The Overton girl was still cautiously creeping forward.

"If any of you highwaymen fires another shot it will be your last," she warned.

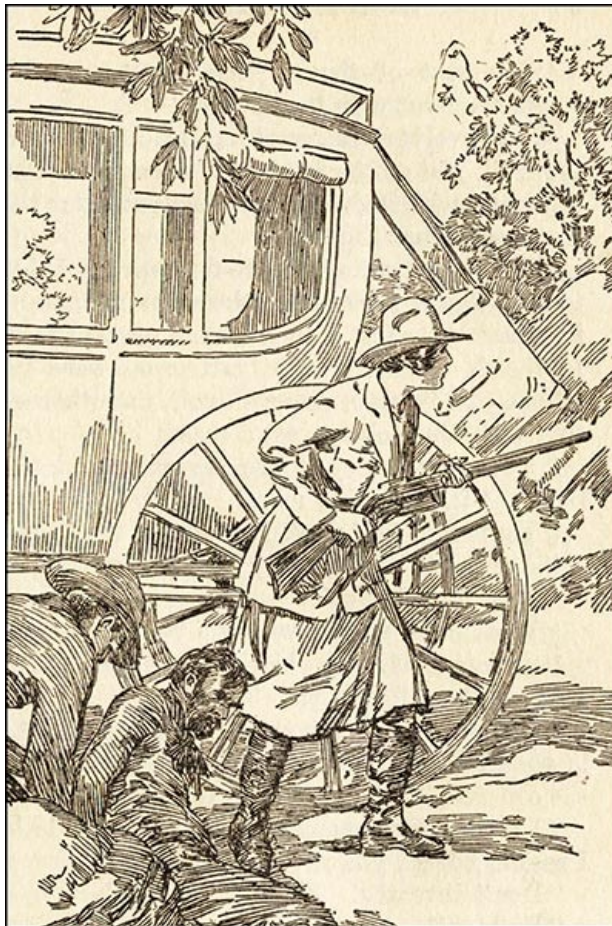
"Look out, Mrs. Gray! I reckon there's another of them critters behind that pint of rock," drawled the calm voice of Ike Fairweather, who sat holding his horses, observing the fight with fascinated eyes. Ike, eager as he was to get into the fight, dared not leave his team, knowing that, if he did so, they would promptly run away with the coach and outfit.

"I have my eye on him, Mr. Fairweather," replied Grace in a voice that was without a trace of excitement. "You heard what I said, fellow!" she added, addressing the bandit lurking behind the rock. "Toss your weapons into the road! Toss them out!"

Bang!

Again Grace Harlowe had fired at the same rock, and again she heard a scattering rain of shale that her bullet dislodged.

The highwayman hiding there threw his rifle away. She heard it fall on the trail, but was certain that the man still possessed at least one revolver, and perhaps two.



“Disarm This Fellow.”

“The rest of them! You have two more weapons. Out with them, quick!”

Two revolvers followed the rifle and fell on the trail, just as she was about to emphasize her command with another shot, as a reminder that she meant what she said.

With rifle at ready, Grace now sprang boldly to the ledge of rock where she saw a man standing leaning against a tree, a hand pressed to his forehead. A few yards further on were two others, one lying beside the trail, the other sitting with his back against a rock.

“How many of you are there?” demanded Grace of the standing man.

“Three others,” weakly answered the bandit.

“Are the two here badly hurt?”

“I—I don’t know.”

“What’s the matter with you?”

“Splinter of rock hit me on the head,” groaned the fellow.

“You stand where you are if you know what is good for you,” directed Grace. “Get up!” she ordered, stepping over to the sitting bandit.

“I can’t. Got smacked in the laig an’ haid. I reckon I’ll git you yet fer this bizness.”

“Don’t threaten. Hippy!”

“Righto!”

“When you can leave your patient, please come here.”

Lieutenant Wingate approached at a brisk trot. By now the rest of the Overton girls, having found their courage, had crept from the stagecoach and were hiding behind it, peering out through troubled eyes. Elfreda finally stepped out and walked slowly toward the scene of activity, but halted a little distance from it, not wishing to detract Grace’s attention from her work.

“Please search the fellow sitting here and remove his weapons, Hippy. Also, please see if I have killed the one on the ground there. I can’t quite bring myself to touch either of them,” said Grace.

The man referred to was not dead, but he was unconscious.

"He will be out of his trance soon, I think," announced Hippy after a brief diagnosis. "He has a dandy scalp wound. Good work, Brown Eyes. Any more of his kind looking for trouble?"

"I think not. Have you searched each one, Hippy?"

"Yes." Lieutenant Wingate was still working over the unconscious bandit. "He is coming around now."

"Elfreda!"

"Yes, Grace."

"Where are the girls?"

"Hiding behind the coach until the smoke of battle has cleared."

"Please tell them to watch the fellow that I winged first, and to shout if he tries to crawl away. You ask Mr. Fairweather if he has any rope. When we get these fellows in condition to move we shall have to tie them."

Elfreda walked back to the coach, returning a few moments later with a coil of clothesline.

"Is there anything more that I can do to assist you, Grace?" she asked.

"Yes. Tell Mr. Fairweather to turn the coach around, for we must return to Globe as quickly as possible. The prisoners must have attention, and then—"

"Jail," suggested Elfreda.

Grace nodded.

"The driver says he will have to unhook the horses and turn the coach around by hand," Miss Briggs reported.

"Tell him to do so. What will he do with the horses while turning the vehicle?"

"He says he must stake them down," replied Elfreda, "because the team will run away the instant his back is turned."

Grace made no reply, but stepped over to Lieutenant Wingate.

"How is your man?" she questioned.

"He will be ready for jail by the time Ike is ready to start. That's all right, old pard," he added, speaking to the man he was working over. "Don't struggle, for I can't spare the time just now to clout you over the head. You thought this wagonload of girls would be an easy mark to rob, didn't you? I reckon you have several other guesses coming. Of course you couldn't be expected to know that this crowd is right out of the war zone in France, every mother's daughter of them just eager for trouble. The matter with you amateurs is that you don't know how to start a real mix-up."

"Please don't nag the man, Lieutenant," admonished Grace.

"I'm not. I'm giving him brotherly advice for the good of his physiognomy. How is the bird there by the coach?"

Grace said the girls were watching that bandit. She handed the clothesline to Hippy.

"You must tie his feet. He promises to be troublesome," she warned, referring to the man that Hippy had restored to consciousness. "Be humane about it, and do not hurt him unless you have to. Should that be necessary make a quick, clean job of it." This was said principally for the benefit of the prisoner.

"Leave him to me," growled Lieutenant Wingate.

"When the patient is able to be moved, please carry him to the coach. Mr. Fairweather will help you, if you need him. While you are doing that I will keep watch over the fellow with the damaged head."

"I don't need any assistance, thank you," returned Hippy, who, after tying the feet of his prisoner, grasped the bandit under the arms and dragged him to the coach, where he dumped the man on the ground.

"Here's two of the birds, Isaac," chuckled the lieutenant. "Two more over there are being guarded by Mrs. Gray. Think we girls are able to take care of a cheap bunch of highwaymen, such as these fellows?" he demanded.

Ike stroked his whiskers.

"Between you and that little woman over there, I shore reckon you could clean up 'bout three times your weight in mountain lions. Never did see anythin' like the way she lit into 'em. Bah!" growled Ike, giving the man whom Grace had shot in the leg a prod with the toe of his boot.

"Lucky for you, you sneak, that the woman banged you in the leg. She could just as easy put that lead through your head. She's the little lady that can put 'em where she wants 'em to go, any old time," finished the driver.

"How soon will you be ready?" questioned Lieutenant Wingate. "We'll be on our way right smart, I reckon. Where do you figger on putting 'em?"

"Two on the floor on blankets, so it will not be so hard on them. The other two bandits can sit up and I will do the watching. There will be room for myself and three women inside. The other two passengers can squeeze in on top of the coach with you. That all right, Ike?" "Shore. Have it any way you like. Mebby they won't be surprised back in Globe when we come crackin' in with these birds. I'll bet a stockin' full of marbles that the sheriff'll be glad to get his hands on 'em. Mebby these are the fellows that have been stealin' things at both ends of the trail."

"There!" exclaimed Hippy, straightening up. "I think you two will now stay tied until I get ready to untie you. Nora, will you watch them? If one of them so much as speaks to you, you yell for me."

Ike, having staked down his horses at the edge of the trail, now began turning the coach around. Lieutenant Wingate, in the meantime, had rejoined Grace.

"Are they behaving themselves?" he asked.

"Perfectly, Lieutenant. I can't help feeling that it was unsportsmanlike in me to shoot that fellow through the leg without even giving him a chance to defend himself."

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared Hippy. "I shall have to repeat that to Nora. Listen to these words of wisdom from a man of wisdom. When you set out to finish a poisonous snake, wallop him! Do not wait for him to coil, nor strike from a letter S position. Get him! That is the method I followed in fighting Boches in the air. If I hadn't, I wouldn't be here, but some other fellows would be there still. Hulloo! What is going on back yonder? Run, Grace! I believe the prisoners are trying to get away."

They could hear the girls uttering cries of alarm.

Grace wheeled like a flash, but she did not run. Instead, she uttered a peal of laughter.

"Oh, that is too bad," she cried, suddenly changing her tone.

"What is it? What is it?" demanded Hippy.

"Nothing worth worrying about. The old stagecoach got away from Mr. Fairweather while he was turning it, and it went over the edge of the trail into the canyon, that's all. Listen! You will hear it strike the bottom in a few seconds."

"There she goes! Good-bye, old Deadwood," added Grace as a distant crash was borne faintly to their ears.

"Now we surely are in a fix," groaned Lieutenant Wingate.

CHAPTER V

WANTED BY THE SHERIFF

"WATCH the prisoners, Hippy! Anybody hurt?" called Grace as she came running to the scene of the disaster.

"No, but Mr. Fairweather's feelings are considerably ruffled," replied Miss Briggs.

Ike, after having been dragged to the very edge of the trail by the coach, had picked himself up and was brushing the dirt from his clothes, for he had been dragged right across the trail, but let go just in time to save himself.

"Why, Mr. Fairweather, what in the world has happened?" begged Grace solicitously.

"Don't ask me, woman, or I'll say somethin'. I'm mad clean through."

"I do not blame you," answered Grace sympathetically. "How did it occur?"

"The blamed thing got away from me while I was backin' it around by hand, thet's all. Ought to have known better'n to tackle it alone."

"How long will it take to get the coach back on the trail so that we may go on?" questioned Emma Dean innocently.

"Get it on the trail?" Ike Fairweather groaned hopelessly. "We'll never get it up, Miss. She shore is a basket of kindlin' wood now, an' I don't know what we're goin' to do."

"We can walk," answered Grace confidently. "How far are we from Globe?"

"Nigh onto thirty mile, I reckon."

"Walk thirty miles?" cried Emma. "I should simply expire."

"I reckon you'll have to walk if you want to get back," grumbled Ike.

"Walking is most excellent exercise, and I am certain that it will do all of us good. I have a plan, Mr. Fairweather," spoke up Grace.

"Thought you would have."

At this juncture, Lieutenant Wingate came up leading the two wounded men who had been left down the trail. He too wished to know what the plan was for getting back to town.

"I was about to suggest something to Mr. Fairweather," replied Grace. "We shall have to use the coach horses to help carry us."

"Do not forget our prisoners in your calculations," reminded Hippy Wingate. "Surely, you do not propose to let them go?"

"I have not forgotten. No, sir, we are not going to release them after all the bother they have put us to. Let me see, there are four prisoners and five girls."

"And two men," interjected Hippy.

"By placing two bandits on a horse, that will leave two horses to carry the rest of us. The girls can ride two on a horse, which will take care of Nora, Anne, Elfreda and Emma. You two men and myself will walk. Should we walkers get foot weary, we can change places with the girls who are riding. Does that meet with your approval, Mr. Fairweather?"

"It shore does."

Hippy suggested, instead, that he be permitted to ride back to town for assistance, but Grace objected to this.

"The prisoners need medical attention, and we shall have to go on short rations as it is, so we have no time to lose. We will tie the four men on two horses and tie the pair of horses together; Mr. Fairweather can lead the animals; you, Hippy, will walk alongside of them and I will bring up the rear."

"What if one of the bandits drops off and gives us the slip?" questioned Hippy.

"I shall see to it that he doesn't get far," answered Grace significantly.

"Huh!" grunted Ike. "I thought the lieutenant was givin' me a fairy story 'bout your doin's in the war. Jedgin' from what I've seen to-night I reckon he hasn't told the half of what there is to tell. Why, lady, if you was to live out here you'd be sheriff of the county at the next election. I reckon I know of one vote you'd get."

"Thank you. Then you approve of my plan?" asked Grace.

"From the ground up."

"And you folks?" she questioned, turning to her companions.

All nodded their heads in approval.

"I wish I had an airplane," grumbled Hippy Wingate. "I never did like to walk when I had to."

"We will take the rifles and revolvers of the highwaymen with us. I do not believe they will have use for their weapons. We may need them ourselves. Mr. Fairweather, if you will get the horses ready we will load up and start."

Ike removed his sombrero and wiped his forehead on his sleeve.

"Yes, I'll get 'em ready, but what Ike Fairweather wants to say, he can't, 'cause somehow it sticks in his crop an' won't come out. You're the real thing, all of you is, an' any galoot that says you ain't—well, Ike Fairweather will take care of thet critter."

"You fellows, I have a word for you," announced Grace, turning to the prisoners. "I warn you that if you try to get away I shall shoot."

"Which, altogether an' in partic'lar means thet the everlastin' daylight's will be blown out of the critter thet tries to get away," reminded Ike. "Fair warnin's fair warnin'."

"But not Fairweather," chuckled Hippy Wingate, which brought a groan of disapproval from the Overton girls.

Placing the prisoners on the horses and tying them securely was a proceeding that took some little time, so that it was fully an hour later before the procession started out, Elfreda, Anne, Emma and Nora riding on the two leading horses, Ike leading the prisoners' mounts, Hippy in the middle of the procession, and Grace Harlowe, with a bandit's rifle slung in the crook of her right arm, bringing up the rear.

The highwaymen were sullen, not uttering a word, so far as Grace had heard, though she had no doubt that they had quietly exchanged confidences. The one who was most severely wounded was the man whose scalp a bullet had raked, but he apparently was in no danger, though still weak from loss of blood.

"Is there a place where we can get breakfast, if still on the trail in the morning?" called Anne.

"Narry a place," answered Ike Fairweather.

They plodded on, Grace, if anything, being the most cheerful and contented member of the party. At break of day they halted, having made about ten miles of the thirty. From the little kit pack in which each one carried emergency rations, they eked out a slender breakfast, though they had neither coffee nor tea, that part of the food supply being at the bottom of the canyon in the wreckage of the old Deadwood coach. The prisoners, however, refused to eat, maintaining a sullen silence as they watched their captors partaking of breakfast.

At the noon halt, Grace and Elfreda dressed the prisoners' wounds, binding them up with skillful hands with pieces of cloth torn from skirts. It was not the first time that either Grace Harlowe or Elfreda Briggs had dressed bullet wounds, both having been called upon to do so in numerous instances on the western front in France. The prisoners watched the dressing operations without uttering a word of comment, but the expressions on their faces were not pleasant to look upon.

Ike, who had been regarding the wound-dressing with interest, turned, as the girls finished their work, and walked away running his fingers through his whiskers.

The prisoners were placed on the horses and secured, after which the party started on again.

"Horses comin' up the trail," announced Ike, a few moments later, holding up a hand for the party to stop.

Grace ran forward to halt the two horses carrying the four girls.

"Some one is coming, girls. Go back and get out of the way in case there should be trouble," she directed.

Grace joined Ike after the girls had taken up a safe position, Hippy standing expectantly by the prisoners, the outfit, with rifles in hand, ready to meet whatever trouble might be in store for them.

Three horsemen swept around a bend in the trail, and the instant they hove in sight, Ike Fairweather uttered a shout.

"It's Deputy Sheriff Wheelock," he cried. "Now we're all right. Howdy, Wheelock!"

The deputy, upon recognizing Ike, swung down from his horse, doffed his hat to Grace, and turned to Mr. Fairweather.

"What do you reckon you've got here!" demanded the deputy.

Ike explained who and what his outfit was, relating briefly the story of the loss of the stagecoach and the capture of the bandits.

"This little woman did the business. Deputy Sheriff Wheelock, Mrs. Gray," introduced Ike.

"Do you know the prisoners, sir?" she asked.

After looking the bandits over closely, the deputy shook his head. He asked Ike if he needed any assistance to get the prisoners in. Grace answered the question by saying that they did not.

"We're going out after a fellow who lives in the mountains and who has been shooting game out of season, but I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll send one of my men to Globe in a hurry and have him ride out to the sheriff's ranch and get him," offered the deputy. "That will save you waiting for

the sheriff when you get in. I reckon maybe these are fellows that Sheriff Collins has been looking for. Take your men right to the jail, Ike, and Collins will do the rest."

After starting one of his men back toward Globe, Mr. Wheelock, mounted, waved a hand, and, with his assistant, galloped on. The Overton party assumed its former formation and plodded on, weary, but encouraged by the realization that only a few hours now separated them from their goal.

It was half past three o'clock in the afternoon when the weary, dust-covered Overton party reached the Arizona town from which it had made its start the day before. The four girls, on two horses, decided that they would dismount before entering the town, even Emma Dean declaring that this was one time when she was not seeking publicity.

71

The news of the plucky fight that Grace and Hippy had made, and their capture of four highwaymen, had been carried to town by the deputy's assistant, and throngs stood on the main street awaiting the arrival of the party. Occasionally there was a cheer from a group of enthusiasts, but generally the townspeople were silent, curiosity being their leading emotion.

"Girls, I think it might be advisable for you to go on to the hotel! You look all fagged out," suggested Grace. "Run along, and I will be over there as soon as we have disposed of our prisoners."

Elfreda, Nora, Anne and Emma quickly separated themselves from the outfit, Ike Fairweather, accompanied by Grace and Hippy, heading for the jail. The sheriff came out to meet them as they rounded up their horses before the jail entrance. He strode straight to the bandit that Grace, while crouching under the stagecoach, had shot in the leg.

"Hulloa, Con," greeted the officer. "I can't tell you how glad I am to see you. I've got a nice little room ready for you. You may find it a bit cramped, but it is the best we have in the house today."

"Ah! I see you have some familiar faces with you," added the sheriff, directing a swift, appraising glance at the other prisoners. "A fine bunch of brave men you are to let yourselves get caught by a party of women. Who are *you*?" he demanded, wheeling on Hippy.

72

"I am Lieutenant Wingate, Sheriff. This is Mrs. Grace Harlowe Gray who got the drop on these fellows when all the rest of us were helpless."

"Glad to meet you, Mrs. Gray," greeted the sheriff, removing his hat and stepping forward to shake hands with the Overton girl. "I'm Jim Collins, sheriff of this county. So you did this little job, eh? You don't look it for a little bit, but you've delivered the goods, and that's the answer. My hat is off to you. Do you know who you have here?" he questioned, pointing to the bandit with the wounded leg.

"No, sir, I do not."

"He is Con Bates, one of the few real bandit leaders left in this part of the west. He's a bad man, Miss, and I couldn't begin to express to you how pleased I am to get my paws on him."

"Who are the others?" asked Grace.

The sheriff named them and Grace fixed the names in her mind.

"Con is the most dangerous of the lot," Sheriff Collins informed her. "This isn't all of the outfit by any means. The rest are in the hills somewhere. What do you reckon on doing now?"

73

"I hope that we may be able to get out on the trail with our ponies some time to-morrow."

"Don't plan to leave until the late afternoon. I shall need you to appear against these men to-morrow. Going over the trail, eh? You'll need to keep your eyes peeled when you get up in the mountains again. Some of the critters still at large may take it into their heads to even up with you for this job you've done. Then, too, there's some roving bands of trouble-hunting Apaches up there who are out with the excuse that they're waiting for the hunting season to open. I'll talk with you about that later."

"Thank you, Sheriff. I leave the prisoners in your hands, but I should like to have their rifles, if you do not object."

"Sure thing. You may need them, too. I'll see you in the morning."

Grace shook hands with Ike Fairweather and whispered to him that she would give him a check for whatever he considered the Deadwood stagecoach worth.

"Nothin' doin'," growled Ike. "Thet old coach wa'n't worth ten dollars, an' I've had about a million dollars' worth of excitement out of this here trip. Wish I was goin' to be with you on your pony journey, for I know you folks now. You'll be stirrin' up things the whole length of the Old Apache Trail, or my name ain't Ike Fairweather."

74

Promising to see Ike later on, Grace and Hippy hurried to the Dominion Hotel where Hippy's wife and the other girls were anxiously awaiting them.

All hands then went to their rooms, bathed, and went to bed for a few hours' sleep.

CHAPTER VI

A SHOT WELL PLACED

GRACE started out early the next morning for a call on Ike Fairweather. The whole party slept the late afternoon and night through, without even awakening for supper. She found Ike grooming his horses.

"Good morning, Mr. Fairweather. I hope you are none the worse for your trip," greeted Grace smilingly.

"I shore ain't," grinned Ike. "How's yourself?"

"I feel fit. What I wished to see you about was to ask if you can recommend some one to provide and drive our supply wagon."

Ike stroked his whiskers and regarded her quizzically.

"How will I do?" he asked.

"Do you mean it? Would you really like to drive for us?" questioned Grace, brightening.

"I shore would, an' it won't cost you a cent 'cept for the feed for the hosses. Tell me 'bout it."

"Not supposing that you would care for such work, we did not even think of you in that connection. If, however, you really wish to go with us we shall be very glad to have you."

"I'm your man."

"That is fine. Of course, you understand that we shall pay you, and before we start we must decide upon a price that will be perfectly satisfactory to you. I would suggest that you get under way about two o'clock this afternoon, and we will follow you a couple of hours later. Make camp at Squaw Valley. There is plenty of room there for a camp. Two horses should be enough to draw the wagon. Our camping outfit is at the railroad station. Have you a wagon?"

"Yes, a covered one that will be just the thing for you. Can sleep in it if you like."

"We shall sleep in our tents. All provisions and the like we shall send to you some time before you leave."

The hearing that afternoon, attended by the entire Overton outfit, was of short duration. Grace gave her testimony briefly and to the point. What she was most concerned about was whether or not it would be necessary for her to return for the trial of the bandits, and she was relieved to learn that it would not, and that Ike Fairweather would be the witness who would appear against the prisoners at the trial at the fall term of court.

Before leaving the court, Grace was complimented by the judge for her part in capturing Con Bates and his fellow highwaymen. Sheriff Collins accompanied her from the court room.

"I'll have an eye on you while your party is in this neck of the woods," he volunteered. "What shall I do with the rifles I promised you?"

"If not too much trouble, please send them to Mr. Fairweather's stable before two o'clock this afternoon. He is to drive our wagon for us and will pack the rifles with the other equipment. Is there ammunition for the rifles or shall I purchase some?"

"Get fifty rounds for each rifle, and, Miss, it's my hunch that you will do well not to pack the rifles away so deep that you can't reach them in a hurry," advised Mr. Collins.

After thanking the sheriff for his courtesy, Grace hurried back to the hotel. The rest of the day was devoted to preparations for the journey. Ike Fairweather, now fully informed as to the immediate plans of his party, got away with the wagon on time, and two hours later the Overton girls started on their second journey into the gorgeous mountains that stand sentinel along the Old Apache Trail. The ponies they were riding were a bit lively at the start, especially the one ridden by Grace, as the party galloped out of the town. Emma Dean was making heavy weather of it, bobbing up and down like a chip on the sea, until Grace, fearful that Emma would fall off, rode up beside her for a word of caution.

"Sit your saddle firmly, and do not try to resist the motion of your horse. Move with him, or, rather, permit your body to follow his movements," advised Grace. "There! You see you *can* ride."

"I know, but it bumps me almost to death. How far do we have to ride? This beast isn't a bit like my pony."

"Thirty miles or thereabouts."

"Oh—h—h!" wailed Emma. "Look at Hippy!"

They had barely cleared the town and emerged into the open country when Hippy Wingate's apparently docile pony suddenly came to life. The animal whirled and started back toward Globe, whereupon Hippy used his crop vigorously. Instantly, the pony began to buck in the most approved western broncho style, and Hippy was more often in the air than on the saddle.

78

The Overton girls reined in and watched the lieutenant's battle, offering suggestions and advice that might have been helpful had the lieutenant had time to listen.

Hippy had had no experience with bucking ponies, and, as a result, he was becoming more and more confused from the terrible jolting he was getting.

"Hang on, Hippy, my darling," encouraged Nora in a shrill voice.

"There he goes!" gasped J. Elfreda Briggs.

Hippy made a long, ungraceful dive over the lowered head of the native pony. At the side of the road there was a ditch with a full twelve inches of water flowing over a bottom of soft mud. Lieutenant Wingate landed on head and shoulders in the ditch. His feet pawed the air for a few seconds, then Hippy flopped over, with face down in the water and mud.

It was Elfreda Briggs who checked Hippy's pony at the psychological moment, for the little fellow already had whirled preparatory to racing for home. As it was he dragged Elfreda along with him until Grace sprang to her assistance and threw her weight on the bit, at the same time talking soothingly to the animal whose stubborn resentment slowly melted. Elfreda led him back without help and stood holding the pony, waiting for Hippy to take charge of him.

79

Lieutenant Wingate was plastered with mud, which Nora was solicitously mopping from his face with her handkerchief.

"Let it dry on, then roll him on the grass when we find some," suggested Emma.

"Yes, who coddled you when you fell out of a cloud and crashed down on the French front?" laughed Grace.

"I didn't fall out," protested Hippy indignantly, though a little thickly, for there was still mud in his mouth. "It was the other fellow who fell and crashed."

"Come, take your pony," urged Elfreda. "I have my own to look after. I would suggest, too, that if you will treat him right you will have little trouble with him."

"You don't have to take the brute's part. I reckon I know how to handle a horse."

"And you have a horse that knows how to handle you, if my observation is not at fault," interjected Grace Harlowe.

Hippy acted upon Elfreda's advice, however, petted the pony and offered it some candy, which the animal refused, and finally swung himself into the saddle.

80

The party then moved off at a brisk gallop. The sun was behind the mountains when they reached Squaw Valley for the second time. Down on the level below the trail they saw their tents pitched and ready for them. The wagon team was staked down, a fire was burning in front of the tents, and Ike Fairweather was observed working about the camp. The girls shouted and Ike waved a hand.

Without leaving their saddles, the entire party slid their ponies down the steep bank without a single rider coming a cropper, though Emma lost her stirrups and was clinging to the pommel of her saddle, bouncing up and down perilously as the party trotted into camp. When her pony stopped, which it did abruptly, Emma fell off in a heap. About the same instant Lieutenant Wingate's pony stepped in a hole and Hippy went off over the pony's head, but this time he clung to the bridle rein and held the animal.

"Good work," complimented Grace when Hippy, very red of face, struggled to his feet. "You surely are a graceful animal, Lieutenant. Pinal Creek is a little way beyond this camp, and I suppose you will be falling into that next."

"That's right. Abuse a fellow when he is down," growled the lieutenant.

81

Grace, with her bridle rein thrown over one arm, walked over to Ike Fairweather.

"Now that Lieutenant Wingate has finished his performance, I wish to say that it is very fine of you to get our supper started."

The bacon was in the frying pan, and the potatoes, baked in hot ashes, were ready to be served, as Grace discovered upon testing them with a fork; the coffee was done, and the tin plates were already on the folding table that had been included with the equipment. Oilcloth spread over the table made it look quite attractive.

Folding camp stools had been placed by Ike, and Hippy promptly took a seat at the head of the table.

"Being the only male member of this party, proper, my place is at the head of the table," he declared. "Be seated, ladies, I beg of you. Kellner—Garçon, I mean, bring on the food and—"

"Please eat and be silent," urged Grace laughingly, as she began serving the food. "In my childhood days I was taught that children, while at table, should be seen and not heard. Come, Mr. Fairweather, sit down. We are all one family now."

"Had my grub," answered the driver gruffly. "Never did like to eat at fashionable hours."

82

Darkness had enveloped mountain and canyon by the time the evening meal was finished. It was the deep, mysterious darkness of the mountains. The girls could hear the faint, musical murmur of Pinal Creek, a few hundred yards below them, music that accentuated the romance of the mysterious mountain night. Hippy Wingate, finally, having eaten all he could conveniently stow away, stood up and rapped on a tin plate for order.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, raising the plate above his head where it reflected the light from the campfire. "We are now in the former haunts of the murderous Apaches. We have fallen willing victims to the irresistible charm and the magic power of the waters of Pinal Creek."

"Some one has been reading a guide book," observed Anne mischievously.

"Please be silent when your superiors are speaking. Where was I?"

"Up Pinal Creek, I believe," reminded Elfreda dryly.

"Exactly. We have penetrated far into the labyrinth of the red men of other days, the place where the savages crept with stealthy tread until their primitive language came to know it as the Apache Trail. Along this weird and amazing pathway—"

83

Pock!

The tin plate was whisked from Hippy's hand and fell clattering to the ground.

Bang! came the belated report of a rifle.

Emma Dean uttered a stifled little cry of alarm.

"It is nothing but a bullet, my dear young woman, a chance shot from somewhere up in the mountains. Kindly pass me another plate that I may continue with my narration."

Grace Harlowe's face reflected sudden concern, then she smiled, but her companions plainly were nervous.

"Where was I?" again asked Hippy.

"I believe you were laboring along on the amazing pathway," Anne informed him.

"Thank you," bowed the lieutenant as Grace offered him another plate. "Along this weird and amazing pathway, as already remarked, are crowded, in bewildering succession, scenes that grip the imagination like phantom photo plays of the world's creation. It was on this pathway, this weird and amazing trail that—"

The second plate left Hippy Wingate's hand as if by magic, again followed by the report of a rifle. Hippy sank down on his campstool, holding the hand that had held the plate.

"The campfire, Mr. Fairweather!" urged Grace calmly, with a note of incisiveness in her tone.

84

Ike sprang up and kicked the burning embers away, stamping out the little flickering flames, leaving only a scattered bed of glowing coals.

A bullet whistled over the heads of the Overton girls, but the shooter's aim was not so good this time.

"Some critter shore is tryin' to shoot up this outfit," growled Ike Fairweather.

CHAPTER VII

A LIVELY NIGHT IN CAMP

“ARE you hit, Lieutenant?” questioned Grace, stepping over to Hippy.

“Yes, on my right thumb. Don’t get excited, Nora,” begged Hippy as his wife ran to him. “The bullet merely broke the skin.”

“This is what comes of your nonsense, Hippy Wingate,” rebuked Nora. “It was the shiny tin plate that did it.”

Grace nodded.

“Shall I pour water on the coals?” asked Ike, his voice trembling with anger.

“Not now, Mr. Fairweather. We will first see what develops,” replied Grace.

“What do you reckon on doin’ ’bout this shootin’, Miss?” persisted the driver.

“We must protect ourselves, of course, but just how, we shall have to consider carefully. Is the creek fordable along here?”

“I reckon so. No difficulty ’bout anyone gettin’ over that wants to. Why, Miss?”

“I was wondering if the man who shot at us could easily cross to this side of the stream,” murmured Grace reflectively.

“He could.”

“Then we shall have to take turns at guarding the camp to-night. I will watch it until midnight; Lieutenant Wingate will relieve me then and remain on watch until four in the morning, which is the hour you turn out, Mr. Fairweather,” suggested Grace.

Ike insisted that he could keep watch all night, but Grace shook her head, declaring that such an arrangement would not be fair to him.

“I really believe, Mr. Fairweather, that you would be willing to go without sleep during the entire journey, just for the sake of getting sight of the man who shot at us,” averred Grace.

“I would thet,” rumbled Ike.

“Please don’t let the incident worry you. We girls have been under fire too often to be greatly disturbed by a few rifle shots. Of course, it isn’t comfortable to be shot at by a man who knows how to use a rifle as well as that fellow apparently does, but so long as he doesn’t hit one of us why worry?” laughed Grace.

Ike stroked his whiskers and shook his head. At this juncture, Elfreda, who had taken upon herself the task of dressing Lieutenant Wingate’s wound, announced that it was completed.

“I’m mighty glad it was the thumb instead of the trigger finger,” said Hippy. “I may have use for that trigger finger before reaching the other end of the Apache Trail.”

“Yes, and the opportunity may come to-night,” added Grace. She then told him of her plan for guarding the camp, rather expecting that the lieutenant would protest against being called in the middle of the night to do guard duty.

On the contrary, Hippy eagerly seconded the suggestion, and promptly got out his rifle, which he began to clean and oil.

“I’m ready. Bring on your bad men,” he cried dramatically.

An hour later the camp was in silence, all, save Grace, being asleep in their tents. Her watch passed without incident. At midnight she made a tour of the camp and its immediate vicinity, and, finding the ponies quiet, returned to camp and awakened Lieutenant Wingate. The wagon team being staked down close to the camp, just to the rear of the little pup-tent in which the driver slept, needed no watching, for Ike could hear their every move.

“Nothing of a disturbing nature has occurred,” Grace informed Lieutenant Wingate who came out with rifle in hand, yawning and stretching himself. “Please keep a sharp lookout and have your rifle within reach at all times. That is no more than common prudence.”

“Now, Brown Eyes, I know what to do. Just you turn in for a night of sweet dreams, leaving all the rest to Hippy Wingate.”

Reaching her tent, Grace paused, and stood looking out until she saw Hippy stroll away and

disappear in the darkness. She then undressed, crept in between the blankets and immediately went to sleep.

It seemed to Grace that she had been asleep but a few moments, when, dreaming of the war, she was awakened by what, in her dream, sounded like the explosion of a shell. Grace sprang up and ran to the door of her tent.

Two heavy rifle reports told her that trouble was afoot, and she surmised that Lieutenant Wingate was in the thick of it, but hearing the lieutenant calling to Ike in an effort to locate him, Grace began to wonder.

The Apache Trail lay a short distance above the Overton camp; the creek, near which the ponies were tethered, being about an equal distance below the camp. The shooting, she discovered, was occurring somewhere between the camp and the trail.

88

Grace stepped out into the open, facing the trail, just in time to hear a bullet whistle over her head. She ducked instinctively.

"You watch the camp, Lieutenant," she heard Ike Fairweather call.

"No, I'm going with you," answered Hippy.

"Are we attacked?" called Elfreda Briggs from her tent. "Grace! Are you there?"

"I don't know what the trouble is, Elfreda, but—" She broke off abruptly as a sudden thought came to her. "Look out for the camp, Elfreda!" Without a word of explanation, Grace whirled and sped toward the spot where the horses were staked. To her rear, somewhere in the vicinity of the Apache Trail, she heard two more rifle reports, but whether from the weapons in the hands of Ike Fairweather and Lieutenant Wingate, or from other sources, she was unable to determine.

Nearing the tethering ground Grace proceeded with more caution, not knowing what new menace she might find confronting her there, but the murmur of Pinal Creek was the only sound that interrupted the mountain stillness, a stillness that, on this occasion, seemed heavy with significance.

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At the edge of the tethering ground, Grace halted sharply and peered about her.

"Gone! Every one of them gone!" she gasped. "I suspected this very thing. This is too bad." Grace started to return to camp and tripped over a tethering stake, measuring her length on the ground. Before rising she fingered the stake and the short piece of rope still attached to it. She finally untied the rope, and, with it, started for the camp at a brisk trot. As Grace neared the tents, Ike and Hippy came in from the trail side.

"I winged one critter," cried Ike as he espied Grace. "He was sneakin' towards the camp when I discovered him. You see I kinder thought somethin' was wrong, so I picked up a rifle an' went out scoutin' for trouble. Well, I s'prised the critter an' let him have it hot, that's all."

"We gave him the run, Brown Eyes," boasted Lieutenant Wingate.

"Di—di—did you hit him?" stammered Emma.

"I reckon I hit the critter once, for I heard him grunt. We're all right now, though. I don't reckon he'll be comin' back this night."

"Having accomplished his purpose, I do not think he will return," replied Grace dryly.

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"Eh? What's thet you say, Mrs. Gray?" demanded Ike, sensing a deeper meaning behind Grace Harlowe's remark.

"The ponies have disappeared, Mr. Fairweather!"

"What?" Ike's whiskers visibly bristled.

"I said the ponies have disappeared. Look at this, will you?" she requested, extending the section of rope that she had removed from the tethering stake. "What do you make of it, sir?"

Ike Fairweather, recognizing the rope, held it close to his eyes and regarded it critically, while stroking his whiskers with his other hand.

"Thet rope has been cut!" he declared after an instant of hesitation.

"Yes, I think so," agreed Grace. "Before it is too late let's see if we can find the ponies. I will go with you. Lieutenant, will you please stay here and watch the camp?"

"Yes, but what are you going to do, Brown Eyes?" questioned Hippy.

"I am going with Mr. Fairweather," flung back Grace, who already was running to catch up with Ike, he having strode away too excited for words. Not a word was exchanged between them until they reached the tethering ground, when Grace suggested that he use her flash lamp, which

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she handed to him.

For the following few minutes, Ike Fairweather uttered nothing but grunts, now and then pointing to the ground as he followed the faintly discernible hoof-prints of their ponies down to the creek. There the trail turned and followed along the bank of the stream for a short distance, whence it took a turn toward the Apache Trail, which Grace and Ike reached shortly afterwards.

"There! See that!" Ike pointed down to the Apache Trail, on which a beam from the flash lamp was resting.

"I see horse tracks, if that is what you mean, sir. I suppose they are the tracks of our ponies, and if so, they appear to be headed towards Globe."

"They shore are, Miss. Listen! While I was chasin' the fellow that was prowlin' 'bout the camp, three other galoots was stealin' the ponies. I found the men's tracks back there, an' you can see 'em right here on the trail. What them critters have done is to start your ponies towards home, an' the horses prob'ly are a long ways from here this very minute. We shore are in a fix. What do you reckon on doin' 'bout it?" demanded Ike, caressing his whiskers and regarding his companion questioningly.

"Suppose we return to camp and talk it over," suggested Grace.

Ike nodded, and they started back toward the camp. Reaching there, Grace quickly explained to her companions what had occurred, and asked if any one had a suggestion to offer as to what should be done in the emergency.

"Do you think the ponies will go all the way to Globe?" asked Lieutenant Wingate.

"They shore will."

"What leads you to believe that the robbers who took the animals did not go away with them?" interjected Miss Briggs.

"The tracks of the men, Miss. After they reached the Apache Trail the horses started on alone at a gallop, as you can see by the hoof-prints. The two-legged critters went over the edge of the trail an' hit it up for the hills, that's how I know."

"I see only one way out of our difficulty," spoke up Grace, who had been pondering over the problem. "We have your wagon team, Mr. Fairweather. That much is saved to us, so I would suggest that you take one of the wagon horses and start at once for Globe to fetch our ponies back."

Hippy said he would accompany Mr. Fairweather, but Grace negatived his proposal with an emphatic shake of the head.

"You may be needed here, Lieutenant," she said. "Should Mr. Fairweather find that he needs assistance in leading the ponies back to camp he will hire a man to ride out with him. Will you do all this for us, Mr. Fairweather?"

"I reckon. But first I'd like to get the critter that teased me out of camp while the others stole the ponies," the old driver fumed under his breath. "I'm off."

Ike saddled up in a hurry, Grace in the meantime filling a kit bag with food, which she handed to the driver.

"Now, Hippy, I believe you have something to say to me," reminded Grace as Ike disappeared in the darkness.

"Brown Eyes, I was asleep when this thing started," Lieutenant Wingate confessed.

"Hippy Wingate!" rebuked Nora.

"Yes, I was, but only for a few minutes. It was right after I had made my trip to inspect the camp, after Grace turned in. Everything was snug and quiet, so I leaned my rifle against a tree and sat down. Well, I lost myself, that's all. I ought to be shot."

"You said it," approved Emma Dean.

"I promise you, on my honor, that it will not occur again," protested Hippy.

"What woke you up?" asked Grace.

"Ike's first shot."

"I thought so," nodded Grace. "He must have known you were asleep, but Ike never mentioned it to me. Please listen to me, Lieutenant! We are really in a serious situation at this moment. The thieves who took our horses probably had a further plan in mind at the time, and I should not be at all surprised if they attempted to carry it out this very night."

"Just what are we to infer from that remark, Loyalheart?" asked Miss Briggs a bit anxiously.

"I mean that this camp may be attacked before morning—that in all probability it will be!" declared Grace Harlowe.

CHAPTER VIII

HIPPY CALLS TO ARMS

EMMA DEAN uttered a cry of alarm.

"Be an Overton girl," admonished Elfreda Briggs.

"I—I can't help it. I—I'm afraid," wailed Emma, starting for her tent where she threw herself on her cot and gave way to tears.

Grace, in the meantime, was making suggestions to Hippy as to how the camp should be guarded during the rest of the night. After he had faithfully promised that he would never again nap, Grace turned toward her own tent.

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It was fully an hour later before Grace succeeded in quieting her nerves sufficiently to permit her to go to sleep. She awakened with a start a few moments later. After listening and hearing nothing, Grace decided that hers was wholly a case of nerves, and again tried to sleep.

It was useless. She could not make her eyelids stay closed.

A figure darkened the tent opening.

"Grace!" called Lieutenant Wingate in a low, guarded voice.

"Yes? What is it?" she demanded.

"There's a bunch of prowlers near where the ponies were, but what they are doing I can't make out without going down there. I thought best to call you first."

"Go away while I dress! I will be with you in a moment. Don't awaken the girls just yet."

"Where are they?" she whispered, stepping up beside him.

Hippy pointed towards the creek.

"I don't see them now, but I did just before you came out," he said.

"Hold your place, please, and keep a sharp lookout. I want to take a look from the other side of the camp." Grace crept away in the darkness, but in a few moments came back.

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"They are up near the trail now, and I think they are mounted, for I heard a horse whinney," declared Grace. Running to the tents she awakened her companions. Elfreda was directed to take her place out in front, with Lieutenant Wingate and Grace, to assist in defending the camp.

The three defenders were armed with rifles, in addition to which Hippy and Grace each carried a revolver.

"What is the plan?" questioned Hippy, seeking final directions.

"Should we be shot at we will shoot back. That's all I can say in advance," replied Grace.

"Can they see us, Loyalheart?" whispered Miss Briggs.

"No, I think not. The camp lies in a deep shadow and we have no fire burning. Hark!"

"I hear it," muttered Lieutenant Wingate. "I hear horses trotting."

"Hold your fire and await developments. We must not make the mistake of shooting at some one who doesn't deserve it," cautioned Grace.

"Merciful heaven! What is that?" cried J. Elfreda.

A shrill, weird yell, which Grace instantly recognized as an Indian war whoop, split the stillness of mountain and canyon. Many had been the time in the forest depths that Grace Harlowe's husband had uttered this thrilling war cry for her benefit, in fact he had taught Grace herself to do it.

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"A war whoop," she answered.

"Steady, girls! We're going to get it," warned Hippy.

"Down flat, everybody!" called Grace.

The hoof-beats of the galloping horses of the night marauders were now plainly heard by each member of the Overton party. Another yell, then a rattling rifle fire swept the camp.

"Shall we shoot?" questioned Elfreda anxiously.

"No, not yet," answered Grace briefly.

"I think they are going to circle the camp," volunteered Lieutenant Wingate.

"We will wait until they have made the circuit, then let them have it, unless you have a better plan, Lieutenant. Every one keep down as low as possible and take no chances," she called to Nora, Anne and Emma. The three defenders assumed a crouching attitude and waited.

The attackers were howling and shooting at the same time, their bullets being fired so low that Grace feared some of her party would be hit. Horses and men out there in the valley were dim shadows, unreal to the little group of defenders, but real enough when it came to the rifles that were sending out darting flashes of fire and whistling bullets.

As the riders completed their first circuit of the camp and drew in closer, Lieutenant Wingate, without waiting for further orders, threw the rifle to his shoulder and fired. A few seconds later, Grace followed with a shot, then Miss Briggs pulled the trigger of her weapon.

"Keep it up!" urged Hippy. "Follow them all the way around with your fire, and take advantage of all the cover you can find."

The Overton outfit was in the fight in deadly earnest now. Darting here and there to keep the attackers in view, the two girls and Lieutenant Wingate continued to fire their rifles until at least two shoulders were aching from the kick of the weapons.

The spirited defense of the three plucky campers must have amazed their assailants, for the men drew off a little and cut a wider circle on the next circuit of the camp, but still keeping up and receiving a rapid fire all the way around.

"Look out! They've changed their tactics," warned Hippy. "They're charging us, the fools! Hold fire till they're in easy reach, then give it to 'em! Just let it slowly peter out now. Don't cut it off all at once."

The Overton fire was permitted to die out by degrees, finally ceasing altogether. The strategy of Grace and Hippy had accomplished what they wished it to do—it had made the attackers careless, they evidently surmising from the way the firing died away, that the defenders either had been killed or wounded.

Uttering shrill yells, and shooting, it seemed, with every jump of their horses, the night riders swept down on the little camp in Squaw Valley, determined to put a speedy finish to their work.

"Ready! Fire!" commanded Lieutenant Wingate.

The defenders opened up on the advancing horsemen, firing as rapidly as they could pull the triggers of their rifles. A moment or so of this, apparently, was enough for the attackers, who suddenly whirled and raced their horses further out, where they again began shooting, with bullets from the camp still following them.

"We have 'em on the run! Keep 'em going!" urged Hippy, trying to locate their assailants, whose rifles, at that instant, had suddenly ceased firing. Now and then one or another of the defenders, discovering a movement among the marauders, would shoot, but such shots elicited no reply.

Hippy finally advised that the defenders divide their force, and each take a side of the camp to avoid a surprise, which was done.

"Is it all over?" cried Emma Dean from her hiding place.

"We hope so, but keep down close to the ground for the present," advised Miss Briggs. "Are you girls all right?"

"Yes, but not riotously happy," returned Anne.

"The attackers, I should say, are less so; therefore, don't worry," answered Elfreda.

To the great relief of the campers, not another shot was fired in Squaw Valley that night, the attackers having disappeared as mysteriously as they came, nor did the Overton party know whether they had been attacked by white men or Indians.

"All over but the shouting," cried Hippy, as the day began to dawn, laying his rifle aside. "Hey!

What's that out there?" he demanded, pointing to an object that lay some two hundred yards from the camp.

"I believe it is a horse! Hippy Wingate, we have killed a horse!" exclaimed Grace Harlowe in amazement. "Oh, that is too bad!"

"Burning shame!" chortled Hippy.

"Yes, and there is another one down near the creek," added Miss Briggs excitedly.

"I did it with my trusty rifle," cried Hippy boastfully.

"You are welcome to all the glory there is," answered Grace. "Shall we have a look at the animals? Perhaps we may learn something. Come! We will take our rifles with us."

The Overton defenders had succeeded better than they knew. Not only had they driven off a superior number of desperate men, but they had shot from under their attackers two horses, and possibly downed as many riders.

CHAPTER IX

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

"IT is my opinion that this is an Indian pony," announced Lieutenant Wingate, bending over the dead horse nearest to the camp.

"How do you know?" questioned Grace, giving Hippy a swift glance to learn if he were in earnest.

"Because it looks like pictures of Indian ponies that I have seen."

Grace smiled, but made no comment.

"Here is a rifle under the critter, too," he added. "I wonder what happened to the rider?"

"Is it an Indian rifle?" asked Miss Briggs in all seriousness.

Hippy confessed that he did not know.

"I don't believe you would qualify as an expert on things Indian," laughed Grace, starting on with her companions toward the creek to look at the second victim of the Overton girls' shooting. They found nothing on that pony except saddle and bridle.

"Please remove the equipment from them, Lieutenant," Grace requested. "I will take the rifle. I wish Mr. Fairweather to examine the equipment."

"I sincerely hope he knows more about Indians than Hippy does," observed Elfreda dryly.

"Do you think those scoundrels will come back?" questioned Elfreda as they were returning to camp.

"Not in the daytime. If you mean will they bother us in future, I will say yes, and, being a prudent person, I shall try to be prepared for them this evening."

"You are a queer girl, Loyalheart. The longer I know you the less I understand you. You are the gentlest, sweetest woman I have ever known, but under the surface you have an armor of steel," declared Miss Briggs.

"This mountain air surely is making you light-headed, Elfreda dear," laughingly retorted Grace Harlowe. "I am a woman like yourself, no different, and, like yourself, I have fairly good control over my nervous system. Youth and years of outdoor activity have given me the qualities you have in mind."

"Perhaps that is it. It has given you something else, too—it has given you beauty of face and figure, given you a better understanding and a greater love for your friends, and mankind in general."

Grace nodded over the latter sentiment.

"If all young women could come to understand what outdoor life means to one, I do not believe they would cling to the town, to their late hours, late suppers and nerve-breaking rounds of social pleasures. It is no especial credit to a woman to be beautiful; it is her duty to be so. Any woman whom nature has endowed with a substantial physical foundation may be beautiful, but not from

wearing fashionable clothes or the use of cosmetics. Right here in the open is the remedy free to all. The open spots, Elfreda; God's free air; healthful, wholesome exercise, and right thinking and right doing. Pardon me, dear. I do not often open my heart like this, though I think of these things every day of my life."

"I call yours a pretty good religion," declared Elfreda with emphasis.

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"I do not call it my religion," objected Grace. "Rather, is it my rule of practice. One might call it the application of the greater principle."

"We are wading into deep water. Suppose we have breakfast," twinkled Miss Briggs.

"Yes. Some time to-day I propose that we go for a tramp along the creek and up the nearby canyons, and practice a little of what I am preaching to you. We will all go and have the best kind of a time. Ah! Nora and Anne are getting breakfast."

"Have plenty of food," cried Hippy as he came in a few moments later with the saddles and bridles of the dead horses. "A night in the Overton trenches does give one an appetite."

Throwing the equipment down, Hippy told Nora, Emma and Anne about the fight of the previous night, not forgetting to give himself all the credit to which he considered himself entitled.

"This is terrible," wailed Emma. "I'm afraid of somebody or something."

"Fiddlesticks!" rebuked Elfreda. "After going through a great war one should not have nerves. Let's eat."

After breakfast the defenders turned in for a few hours' sleep, Nora and Anne in the meantime standing guard over the camp. No trouble was looked for during the day, but Grace fully expected that they would have plenty of it, in one form or another, when darkness had settled over the valley.

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This apprehension was not permitted to interfere with their enjoyment of the day, so, after the sleepers had finished their naps, mess kits were packed and the party started toward the creek for an old-fashioned picnic.

Grace had a twofold reason for wishing to go to the creek and up the canyons. First, she hoped to put her companions in a better frame of mind, and for herself she wished to satisfy her curiosity as to the direction that the night raiders took after the Overton party drove them off.

Hippy Wingate was left to watch the camp—and to sleep, as Grace suspected that he would do.

Grace Harlowe, with rifle under her arm, led her party, singing college songs as she tripped along, just as she and her companions were wont to do when picnicking in the Overton hills.

Reaching Pinal Creek, the party followed it along for a short distance, then turned off into a high-walled canyon, where they finally camped and spread their luncheon on the ground by the side of a rippling mountain stream. There they ate and chatted.

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Grace had studied the ground along creek and canyon for indications of the course taken by the night raiders after the battle. The hoof-prints, however, seemed to end at the bank of Pinal Creek, and she was unable to pick them up again.

The other girls, following the luncheon, amused themselves with lying flat on their backs, gazing up the sheer walls of the canyon at the ribbon of blue sky lined out by the tops of the canyon walls. Later on they strolled off singly and in pairs in search of wild flowers.

"I'm going up this canyon," called Grace, who had risen and picked her way along the little stream that joined Pinal Creek some distance below them. "If any one of you gets into difficulties give the Overton yell."

"Same to you," called Nora.

It was more than an hour later when Grace came sauntering downstream, humming happily, for the vastness of the mountains and the grandeur of the scenery had thrilled and entranced her. Anne was waiting for her at the point where the girls had taken their luncheon.

"Where are the girls?" called Grace as she espied her companion.

"Downstream somewhere. They said not to worry, as they might keep on going until they reached the valley."

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"It is getting late, and I think it advisable for all to return to camp at once. Come along, Anne dear. I stirred up something up there that I believe to be a large wild animal. That is, I heard it, but could not see it. Should we still be in camp in the valley to-morrow, I hope to go hunting for it."

"Provided you yourself are not hunted," suggested Anne.

Grace laughed.

"Don't you think I am quite able to take care of myself?" she asked.

"Up to a certain point, yes. Beyond that I am apprehensive."

"Merely another case of nerves, Anne dear, so forget it and enjoy the scenery. Yonder is where we turn to take the trail for home. The girls must have tired of wandering in this wonderful place."

Arm in arm the two girls strolled back towards the camp, chatting, laughing and enjoying the bracing mountain air.

"The girls are at the camp," said Anne, pointing.

"I have an idea that they did not feel wholly safe in the mountains," replied Grace. "I really believe that I could spend the rest of my life here and without ever knowing a moment of loneliness."

"Tenderfeet!" chided Anne laughingly, as she and Grace entered the camp.

Grace's alert eyes instantly missed one of the Overton girls.

"Where is Emma? Has she gone to bed?" she demanded.

"Emma?" wondered Miss Briggs.

"We left her with Anne," Nora informed them.

"Yes, and Emma went downstream a few moments after you girls went away. She said she would go back to camp, gathering flowers on the way," interjected Anne.

"How long was this before I joined you, Anne?" questioned Grace, turning to her companion.

"I should say about three-quarters of an hour," answered Anne, a worried look creeping into her eyes.

"What's this?" demanded Lieutenant Wingate. "Emma missing?"

"Don't worry. She will turn up all right," comforted Nora. "You can't lose Emma Dean so easily."

"Elfreda, please get a rifle and come with me," directed Grace incisively. "Hippy, I should like to have you go with us, but it is more important that you remain here to look after the camp. Should we not find Emma soon, I will fire three interval shots for assistance. You will then hurry to me, but in that event, bring Nora and Anne with you. In no circumstances leave them here alone."

Grace issued her directions calmly, but there was that in her tone that brought a worried look to four pairs of eyes. That she suspected more than appeared on the surface was apparent to all.

"You—you don't think that anything ha—as happened to Emma, do you?" begged Anne.

"Girls, something serious surely has happened to Emma Dean!" gravely responded Grace Harlowe. "Come, Elfreda! We must not lose an instant. You people be alert for rifle signals."

CHAPTER X

A DOUBLE CAPTURE

GRACE started away at a brisk trot, followed by Elfreda Briggs, until they reached the bank of the creek.

"My gracious, Loyalheart, but you can race," gasped J. Elfreda.

"Please work downstream, Elfreda. Watch carefully for footprints and broken twigs. I shall proceed upstream. About a quarter of a mile above here several deep canyons branch off, and it is possible that Emma may have taken one of these in search of flowers and lost her way," said Grace.

"How far shall I go?" questioned Miss Briggs.

"Meet me here in an hour. Should you need me in the meantime, or, should you find Emma, fire three signal shots, with an interval between each shot. If in need of assistance I will do the same, and, should you hear three interval shots, answer them by the same signal with your rifle. That will be a warning to the camp as well. Hippy understands that, in case we give such a signal, he is to come on the run, and bring the girls with him, so that they may not be left alone in the camp. Good-bye and the best of luck."

Grace turned and hurried up the stream, Elfreda proceeding in the opposite direction. Grace ran on until she reached the point where the narrow canyons radiated out from the one the girls had first taken on their way to the picnic ground.

A stream of clear, sparkling mountain water was rippling down each radiating canyon, and fragrant wild flowers gently nodded their greeting along the bank of the stream, from the crevices of rocks and from little patches of dirt that clung precariously to the mountainside.

"I do not believe Emma Dean could resist these flowers," murmured Grace.

In order to observe both banks, Grace stepped into the stream that flowed from the larger of the canyons, and waded along it, regardless of the fact that the icy-cold water instantly took all feeling from her feet, her whole attention being centered on the flower-bordered banks of the stream. Grace was peering at the wild flowers, looking for plucked stems.

The Overton girl suddenly uttered an exclamation and sank down on her knees at the edge of the creek.

"Ah! Plucked flowers. Some one has picked them within a few hours, for the stems are still bleeding."

Grace began examining the ground with infinite care, but though she found flowers that had been crushed down, she failed to find a single distinct footprint. Further up the stream, however, she came upon that for which she had been searching—the imprint of a human foot, a small, slender foot.

Reasonably certain that she had at last come upon the trail of her missing companion, Grace sprang up and ran as rapidly as the rough going would permit, plunging deeper and deeper into the canyon that was now dimmed with the gloom of the approaching mountain night.

The Overton girl's first impression was that she should fire her rifle, but believing that Emma could not be far away, unless she had wandered into still another canyon and become wholly lost in the maze, Grace decided first to search a little further. At several such canyon intersections Grace herself became confused, but careful examination of a few yards of her own trail to the rear soon set her straight.

From time to time she would pause and raise her voice in a long-drawn call that must have reached far up the canyon and up the mountainside as well.

"I shall have to signal for assistance," finally decided Grace, the gloom now having become so deep that she was no longer able to distinguish the tell-tale marks left by Emma Dean's shoes.

"When Hippy and the girls come, we will build fires, and, with torches, follow the trail until we find her."

Grace decided to signal for assistance, and pointing her rifle into the air she fired three times at intervals. She waited, listening intently. There was no response that she could hear, so she fired three more signal shots.

This time three faint reports were borne to her ears, but whether they were the echoes of her own shots or the answer to her signals, Grace did not know.

When about to move forward again, Grace's nerves gave a tremendous jump as a human voice sounded close at hand.

"What do you all reckon you're shootin' at?" demanded the voice. It was a woman's voice, which, in the circumstances, was a welcome thing to Grace Harlowe, even though it was a voice that she did not know.

Grace whirled and brought her rifle to bear on the owner of the voice. She peered into the darkness and was barely able to make out the form of the speaker.

"Who are you?" demanded Grace.

"I reckon you'd better say somethin' for yourself," answered the woman.

"Very well. I am looking for a young woman who is missing from my party, and who, I believe, came up this canyon."

"Is her name Dean?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Grace. "You have found her?"

"I reckon so. The kid fell down and hurt herself a little. She's up the canyon a piece. I'll show you."

"Oh, thank you."

The woman turned and strode away, Grace following, her anxiety for Emma banishing all thoughts from mind of the strangeness of this woman's presence in the dark canyon.

With the rifle still tucked under her arm, Grace stumbled along over the rough ground, managing to keep up with her guide, at the expense of several falls. Grace knew that she was proceeding in the direction which she believed Emma had followed, and she was, therefore, eager to get ahead as rapidly as possible.

"Is Miss Dean badly hurt?" she questioned anxiously, stepping up beside her companion.

"Hurt her ankle, that's all," was the brief reply.

"Oh, that is too bad. How much further have we to go?"

"Reckon we're there now. Miss Dean!"

"Emma! Are you there?" cried Grace.

"Grace! Oh, Grace! Save me!" wailed Emma Dean.

Grace Harlowe sprang forward, ahead of her companion, but she did not reach Emma. A pair of wiry arms were suddenly thrown about her, pinioning the Overton girl's arms to her sides. Grace wriggled and struggled desperately, using every trick she knew to free herself, and appeared to be getting the best of the struggle, when an unlooked-for interruption occurred.

"Bud!" cried the woman sharply.

A man sprang forward in response to the call.

"Take her gun!" panted the woman. "She's a terror."

The rifle was wrenched from Grace's hand, then the man jerked her hands behind her back and tied them there.

"Thar! I don't reckon as you'll do much more fightin' right smart," declared the woman, releasing her grip and stepping back, breathing heavily.

Grace, too, was breathing hard, but more from resentment than from exhaustion. She now swiftly began to reason out the meaning of what had occurred, and in a moment it became clear to her that she was in the hands of the band that had been harassing the Overton girls on the Apache Trail.

"Emma, are you hurt?" called Grace.

"Only my feelings. They're wrecked," answered Emma with a touch of her old-time humor. "Come here, Grace."

"Stay where you be!" commanded the woman.

"You are not otherwise hurt?" begged Grace.

"No," answered Emma.

"Now, woman, if you do not mind explaining the meaning of this high-handed affair, I am quite ready to listen," announced Grace Harlowe evenly, at the same time facing her captor, whose face she had not yet been able to see in the darkness.

"Shut up!" ordered the man. "We got to git out of here on the jump. Belle, you rustle her along, an' if she gits balky, hit her a clip over the haid. You owe her one anyhow."

"I demand that you release us both instantly!" answered Grace.

Without replying, the woman roughly grasped Grace by an arm and propelled her along at a swift pace, Grace stumbling over nearly every step of the way, until they came up with two men who were guarding several horses. At this juncture, the man addressed as "Bud" came hurrying up to them, leading Emma Dean. Her hands, also, were securely bound behind her, and Emma was abusing and threatening her conductor at every step of the way.

"Oh, Grace!" she cried plaintively when she was halted close by her friend.

"Keep quiet, Emma, please," warned Grace. "Are your hands tied?"

"Yes. The brutes tied the rope so tight that it hurts awfully."

"If we untie your hands will you promise not to try to get away?" questioned Belle, addressing both girls.

"No!" answered Grace with emphasis.

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"Cut them loose," she ordered. "They can't ride that way without fallin' off. You women! If you try to run away, you'll be shot, that's all," warned Belle as Bud severed the ropes that held the hands of the two girls.

"Git up! Both of you. Be lively 'bout it, too," he ordered, pointing to one of the horses.

Grace took all the time in mounting that she dared, and Emma crowded into the saddle behind her.

"Give the critter his haid. He knows where to go better'n you do, I reckon," advised Bud, swinging into his own saddle.

The woman rode up and took the lead, Bud falling in behind Grace and Emma. Grace saw one man ride forward and join Belle, while still another remained behind, standing by his horse. Evidently he was not going with them.

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The party then started up the canyon, the ponies now and then breaking into a trot, as the footing permitted. Soon after the start, they began climbing the mountain side, along what Grace realized was a narrow trail, too narrow for safety, and on which the ordinarily sure-footed ponies slipped and stumbled perilously.

"Tell me what occurred," whispered Grace to her companion.

"I was picking flowers when that woman caught hold of me. I never heard her approach, and she nearly scared me out of my wits when she grabbed me and clapped a hand over my mouth. Grace, I overheard the woman and that fellow Bud talking, and I learned some things. You can't guess why they have stolen us."

"In revenge, I presume, for what we did to Con Bates and his fellows. This, undoubtedly, is the gang that has been harassing us."

"Yes, that is one reason. The other is that they hope to get some money for us."

"You mean ransom?" asked Grace in a guarded whisper.

"Yes. Isn't it silly? It's romantic, too."

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"So, that is it, eh? They will have a fine time getting it. I still have my revolver inside my waist, Emma Dean, and, if necessary, I shall use it. I don't think they will dare to really harm us, but we must be on the alert every minute for an opportunity to escape. Leave all that to me, for I shall know when the time is opportune for such a move on our part."

"What if they search you and find the revolver?" questioned Emma.

"They had better not try it," muttered Grace.

She told Emma that the Overton outfit were no doubt, even then, searching for them, though she said she doubted the ability of the searchers to pick up and follow the trail.

"Should Mr. Fairweather get back in time, he can and will follow it, and I shall expect him to do that very thing. Above all, keep your head, Emma dear, and do not talk too much. The less they know about us the better. I don't believe they know who I am, and I sincerely hope they do not find out."

"Yes, they do know. How, I can't even guess, but one of the men came up and reported to that ruffian, Bud, that you were coming up the trail with Belle. He referred to you as the 'Harlowe woman.'"

"Hm-m-m-m-m," mused Grace. "They are sharper than I thought. Hold tight to me, Emma. It won't do at all for either of us to slip off. We are liable to be shot if we do."

120

As they worked their way up the mountain trail, Grace tore bits of linen from her handkerchief and cautiously allowed them to drift to the ground, hoping thereby to so mark the trail that their friends would see and understand.

The captors did not speak a word to the girls, slipping hoofs, creaking leather and the heavy breathing of the ponies being the only sounds accompanying the journey.

Some time near morning a halt was made, and for a few minutes Bud and the woman sat on their ponies listening. Grace surmised that they had heard something. Either this or they were

expecting to hear something. A few minutes later the man who had been left down in the canyon came jogging up to them, giving a signal whistle while still some distance to the rear.

The woman rode out a few yards to meet the newcomer, and was joined by Bud, whereupon an animated, but low-toned conversation between the three ensued.

"Hang on! There's goin' to be some rough ridin'," warned Belle as she galloped up to the two girls, following the conference. "We've got to make a certain place before sun-up. No funny business, neither," she added warningly.

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It was a grilling ride that the Overton girls experienced during the next two hours. A halt finally was called to enable two of the men to go back and mask the trail of the ponies, but just how it was done Grace was unable to see, owing to the darkness that still enshrouded the mountains.

Day dawned slowly, finding the party threading its way through rocky defiles, now well at the top of the ridge of mountains. Gray, rolling hills and rocky towers were all about them, and in the east the grayness of the skies was gradually giving way to pale rose and silver that lengthened and brightened along a horizon broken by many mountain peaks.

The party finally came to a halt in an open space, well screened by rocks from view of any roving eyes that might be observing from near or distant mountain tops.

There the captors made a hurried breakfast. Grace and Emma were directed to help themselves to food, which they did, then sat down by themselves to eat, under the observant eyes of their captors.

The men plainly were ill at ease, and it was evident that they still were listening expectantly. Finally, one of the men saddled his horse and rode back, he soon being lost to sight among the rocks.

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"Those ruffians really fear that they are being followed," muttered Grace, barely loud enough for Emma, for whose ears the words were intended, to hear. "They have sent that fellow back to take an observation. I wonder if they have good reason for thinking that they *are* being followed?"

"Why can't we cut and run?" suggested Emma.

"There is nothing to hinder our doing so, except that we probably should be shot before we reached yonder rocks."

"There comes Belle now!" whispered Emma excitedly.

"Keep quiet, please, and let me do the talking," advised Grace.

The woman was approaching the two girls at a rapid step, an expression in her eyes that Grace Harlowe did not like. In repose, Belle's face, while regular, and rather attractive at first glance, showed hard lines, particularly about the mouth, indicating that, when occasion demanded, she could be hard and merciless. The expression that the face of their captor wore as she came towards them gave promise that the present might be such an occasion.

Belle halted before the Overton girls and stood regarding them through narrowed eyelids. Then she spoke, and what she had to say brought a pallor to Emma Dean's face, and stirred the fighting instincts of Grace Harlowe to the danger point.

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CHAPTER XI

FOLLOWING A COLD TRAIL

"TELL you I heard Grace's signal shots!" protested Elfreda Briggs, in reply to Hippy's declaration that he had heard no shots except the three fired by Elfreda.

"Listening, as I was, I surely would have heard the signal had she given it," averred the lieutenant. "It's too dark to see anything, but of course, if you girls have anything to suggest, I am ready to act."

"Hippy Wingate! You don't mean that you're going to sit down and leave Grace and Emma in that terrible canyon all night?" protested Nora, indignantly.

"No, not without an effort to find them. I didn't mean that I should sit by the campfire and wait for daylight. I'm going now." Hippy slung his rifle under his arm and strode off toward the creek. "Should anything break loose, shoot," he called back.

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Reaching the creek, the lieutenant trudged along it to the canyon, Elfreda having told him that

Grace had gone in that direction. He examined the bank of the creek with a pocket lamp that Anne had handed to him, as Grace had done before him, but failed to find footprints. When he arrived at the point from which other canyons radiated, the lieutenant took the wrong one and wandered along its course for half a mile. Finding nothing of what he sought, he returned to the creek and searched along a second canyon, and so on until finally reaching the dark ravine through which Grace really had gone in search of Emma. Hippy, on the contrary, failed to find a trail.

It was long past midnight when finally he gave up his search and started back to the camp. As he neared it, he discovered, by the light of the campfire, that a string of ponies was being led down from the Apache Trail.

"There comes Ike! Now we'll see what can be done," cried the lieutenant in a relieved tone. Hippy started on a run for the camp. By the time he reached there Ike had arrived and the Overton girls were gathered about him, all speaking at once, trying to tell him of the disaster that had befallen them.

"Them critters got Miss Dean and Mrs. Gray?" demanded Ike.

"We do not know. We know that they are missing," replied Elfreda. "Hippy, did you discover anything?"

"Not a thing."

"Come here, Western. Folks, this is Western Jones that came along with me to help lead the string of ponies. Glad now that I fetched him. West, please stake down the ponies. Now you folks tell me every little thing that's happened, so I can get a line on this business."

The girls told the old stagecoach driver of the occurrences of the night when he left for Globe, of the picnic, of Emma's disappearance and of Grace's having gone in search of her.

"We've got to find 'em, that's all," declared Ike, after a moment's thought. "Tell you what we'll do. The lieutenant and I'll take two ponies and lead 'em until we pick up the trail, then we'll ride as far up the canyon as we can an' walk the rest of the way. We'll send the ponies back if we have to. They'll come right back so long as the others are staked here."

"What about guarding the camp?" questioned Lieutenant Wingate.

"Western Jones can do that. West, how'd you like a little brush with some of that Con Bates gang?" demanded Ike, grinning.

"Sweeter'n wild honey," grinned Western. "Is it them as has done this trick?"

"I reckon mebbly it is. We don't know for shore. Mebbly Apaches, for all I know."

"Leave 'em to me," grinned Western Jones.

"Then you keep these gals right here in this camp, an' don't you let a one of 'em get away till I come back. Got the makin's of a light, Lieutenant, or have I got to carry a torch to light the way?"

"I have a flash lamp."

"Saddle up an' we'll be off right smart, an' we'll bring back the missin' girls. I don't reckon as that gang will have more'n a mouthful of success with them two little ladies. They better look out that they don't rile that sweet, smilin' Grace Harlowe too much or they'll discover, when it's too late, that they barked agin' the wrong cottonwood. Look for us when we get back."

"Darling, be careful! Don't get shot," begged Nora, giving her husband a good-bye kiss.

Hippy hurried along and joined Mr. Fairweather, and together they saddled and bridled, and then strode down to the creek leading their mounts. Ike took the flash lamp and, soon after reaching the stream, he picked up the trail of the Overton party on their way to the picnic grounds. He found Lieutenant Wingate's footprints also.

Reaching the point where other trails radiated out from the main canyon, Ike bade his companion hold the horses. Then began a painstaking examination of the ground, along the little mountain stream, a proceeding that excited Lieutenant Wingate's admiration. After a time Mr. Fairweather's light disappeared and Hippy was left in the somber canyon to pass the time as best he might.

Ike was gone an hour. He returned without showing a light. Hippy heard him when he was almost upon him, and challenged.

"It's Ike," was the brief answer.

"What luck?" questioned Hippy.

"Struck the trail. Stands out like a boulevard in a big city. Found somethin' else, too."

"What was it?"

"Found where some woman met one of ours an' went with her up the canyon. It wa'n't a regular white girl's footprint thet the woman made. Reckon it was an Indian or some mountain woman, 'cause she had on moccasins. There was three or four men a little further upstream an' they had horses. I found this up there. Reco'nize it?" Ike held out something white and turned the ray of the flash lamp on it.

"E. D." muttered Hippy. "I should say this is Miss Dean's handkerchief. Well, what next?"

"All hands got on the horses and went on up the canyon. I come back from that pint."

"Ike, you are a wonder! How do you do it? I couldn't read the story of a trail the way you do, if I was to practice it all the rest of my life."

"An' I reckon thet if I tried to sail one of them flyin' machines my name would be Dennis, right smart," replied Ike. "Get aboard! We're goin' right up thet trail and we're goin' to keep goin' till either we lose it for good, or find the gals, or get shot doin' one or t'other. We can't pull off an' wait till mornin'. Mornin' may be too late."

Hippy swung into his saddle, Ike being but a few seconds behind him in mounting, Mr. Fairweather taking the lead at a slow jog trot.

"Right here's where they took to the ponies," announced Ike finally. How he knew that in the darkness, Hippy was unable to imagine, but then, Hippy Wingate had not followed mountain trails at any stage of his career, and knew nothing of them.

Ike now began to flash his light against the mountain, first on one side, then on the other.

"Whoa!" The command came out sharp and incisive. "Hold my nag, Lieutenant." The old driver dismounted, and, handing his bridle rein to his companion, began climbing up along the mountainside, keeping the ray of his light directly on the ground at his feet.

Ike returned in a few minutes.

"I reckon we've got to do some tall climbin' ourselves. Party went up the mountain here." Ike mounted and started up a twisting, narrow trail, his light now in almost continuous use, for the going was extremely perilous.

"See them bits of white cloth alongside the trail?" Ike called back.

"I had not noticed them. I see them now," answered Hippy.

"Them's markers that Mrs. Gray prob'bly dropped to show us the way. Thet's a real gal, Lieutenant."

Hippy marveled in silence.

Day was breaking when they reached the top, and, looking back, Hippy found himself wondering how they ever made it, for the mountain they had climbed looked to Lieutenant Wingate to be straight up and down.

Ike Fairweather again dismounted, was searching the ground, running back and forth, covering wider and wider stretches of rock and earth, continuously combing his whiskers with his fingers, and perspiring freely. Ike finally returned to his companion, his chagrin reflected in his face.

"What's the matter, Ike?" asked Hippy in a cheerful voice, a tone that, at the moment, did not reflect his real feelings.

"Matter? I'm plumb locoed, Lieutenant. I've lost the trail, an' I don't know where to look for it. It's a mighty big place up here, an' mebbly we find the track an' mebbly we don't. Leastwise, I'm sorry for the gals who, I'll bet, are lookin' their eyes out for us."

"You are excited, Ike. Sit down, consult your whiskers and perhaps you may find an idea or something in them," suggested Hippy gravely.

Ike promptly adopted his companion's suggestion, and for the next several minutes gave himself up to reflection, punctuated with an occasional throaty growl.

"I've got it! I've got it, Lieutenant!" cried Ike, springing up. "It's a cold trail."

"A trail with snow or something on it?" questioned Hippy innocently. "I haven't seen snow in these mountains, but I presume there is plenty of it."

"No, no, Lieutenant. A cold trail's a fixed trail—doctored so as to mislead a trailer, or covered up altogether so he can't find it. I reckon Ike Fairweather ain't goin' to be fooled by no cheap mountain trick like thet. Lieutenant, you work to the right, while I go to the left. Take a wide circle along the top of the mountain an' come up with me by thet monument you can see the top

of over to the north'ard. Watch the ground like sixty, an' watch out for broken twigs an' crushed clumps of grass. If you find any, sit still an' wait for me."

Hippy Wingate wheeled his pony and trotted off to the right, peering at the ground, a puzzled expression in his eyes.

"I shouldn't know a frozen trail, or whatever you call it, if I saw one," he muttered helplessly.

CHAPTER XII

AN INTERRUPTED INTERVIEW

"YOU come with me, Mrs. Gray!" commanded the woman who had lured Grace to capture. "I reckon you and me got somethin' to settle."

"I do not know what you mean, but I am ready," announced Grace, rising. "Come, Emma!"

"You set where you be!" ordered Belle savagely.

Emma's eyes flashed her resentment, and, for a few seconds, Grace feared that her little companion was about to do something rash. Miss Dean, who had started to rise, now settled back, face flushed, her whole body a-tremble, but more from anger than from fear.

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"When I want you I'll call you," was the woman's parting admonition as she turned away, nodding to Grace to follow her.

Belle led her captive off behind some rocks, within easy calling distance of the group of bandits who were still munching at their breakfast and at the same time keeping an eye on Emma Dean.

The instant that Grace could do so without being observed by the men, she thrust her hand inside her tunic and quickly transferred her automatic revolver to the right hand pocket. She was now walking along with both hands in her pockets, feeling more confidence in herself now that a means of defense lay within her right hand.

The mountain woman halted behind a wall of rock, and, leaning against it, surveyed Grace with malignant eyes.

"You Harlowe woman, what do you reckon I ought to do to you?" she demanded.

"I don't reckon you'd better do anything to me, except to permit myself and companion to return to our camp," answered Grace, lounging carelessly, scuffing the dirt with the toe of her boot, but not permitting her gaze to leave the face of the mountain woman for a second.

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"What if I do?" Belle's eyes blazed.

"I have friends who never will cease their efforts until you have paid in full, bitterly so, for what you may have done to me or to my companion, Miss Dean."

"You threaten me?" demanded the woman, her hand slipping to the revolver that swung in its holster from her hip.

"No. I am simply stating a fact, and you know it," calmly replied Grace.

"Why did you shoot my husband?" snapped Belle.

"Why did I wha—at?" gasped Grace.

"You heard what I said."

"Who is your husband?"

"Con Bates. I'm Belle Bates, an' I'm goin' to see to it that you settle for that little job you did."

"So, you are the wife of that highwayman, eh? I begin to understand. What is it you wish me to do?"

"Settle up right smart."

"How?" questioned Grace, now smilingly.

"I reckon you got money or you wouldn't be out on a trip like you be. You will write a letter to your friends, telling them to shell out all the money they have, to leave it in a certain place that I'll tell you 'bout, then to get back to Globe as fast as hoss flesh will carry 'em, and then you all get out of the country, an' stay out."

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"Do you believe they will be foolish enough to leave money for one of your gang to go and help himself to? I don't believe you know my friends. Why, your messenger never could get away with anything so simple as that. Let us consider this matter. Suppose I do write the sort of letter you demand, and further, that, by this childish subterfuge, you get such money as our outfit has with it, what will be your next move? What do you then propose to do with Miss Dean and myself?"

"I reckon mebby I'll let you go."

"Mebby, eh? That is too indefinite, but I presume it is as good as the word of an outlaw like yourself can be," replied Grace boldly. "Suppose I refuse to do as you request? What then, Mrs. Bandit?"

"I'll serve you as you served Con, only more so."

"How do you know my name?" questioned Grace, more for the sake of gaining time to further plan to outwit this woman, whom Grace fully believed meant to do something desperate, than because she cared to know. She saw, too, that Belle Bates was working herself into a high pitch of excitement and anger that might result in greater peril for her captives.

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"Thet's none of your business," retorted Belle in reply to the Overton girl's question.

"Let me suggest another plan. If you will send Miss Dean with the letter to my friends, I will write to them that they are to deposit, if they wish, a certain amount of money in whatever place you may designate."

"See anything green in my eyes?" jeered the bandit's wife.

"My plan is no more foolish than yours. I suggested it merely to prove to you that yours will not stand the test. Why, Belle Bates, if such a thing as ransom for me were suggested to them, my friends would throw your messenger out of camp and probably into Pinal Creek. They would then nose out your trail and they would follow you until yourself and every member of your thieving band were in jail or worse. You can expect nothing less, for you are as bad as the worst of your miserable outfit," added Grace.

Belle Bates' face was not pleasant to look upon at that moment, and her rage was rapidly getting the better of what little judgment she possessed.

This was exactly what Grace Harlowe was seeking to accomplish, to get her captor in such a rage that she would do something that would give Grace an advantage, nor did the Overton girl overlook the possibility that Belle Bates' rage might lead to the woman's using her revolver on her tantalizer.

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Fortunately for Grace, the situation did not develop that way. With a cry of rage, Belle sprang at Grace Harlowe with clenched fists.

"I'll fix that purty face of yours!" she cried, and launched a swift blow at her captive.

The Overton girl, smiling aggravatingly, had stood calmly awaiting the rush, and easily dodged the blow that the Bates woman struck at her.

At that point Grace Harlowe got into action. Her left hand shot out and was as swiftly withdrawn, holding in it the heavy revolver which she had snatched from Belle Bates' holster. Grace instantly sprang back out of reach of those wiry arms, whose strength she already had felt, and pointed the weapon at her adversary.

"Put your hands over your head!" she commanded sternly. "Quick! Don't utter a sound or I'll shoot. Now back up against the rock behind you."

"I'll kill you for this!" fumed the woman. Belle Bates had been trained in the hard school of the mountains; she had faced weapons before, and she had seen others face them, as well as some who went down before them. One glance into the brown eyes that were looking along the barrel of her own revolver told Belle that Grace Harlowe meant what she had said and that she possessed the nerve to carry out her threat.

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"Turn around facing the rock and rest your hands against it as high above your head as you can reach!" commanded Grace.

The woman obeyed sullenly.

"You will now call to Miss Dean to come here. Be careful how you do it, too, and remember what is behind you. I hope there is nothing behind *me*," added Grace to herself.

Belle hesitated. Grace uttered another warning, a more insistent one, whereupon the mountain woman called to Emma Dean to come to her.

"Drop that gun, an' do it quick!" came the sharp command in a man's voice behind Grace Harlowe.

The Overton girl's heart seemed to leap into her throat. She felt a suffocating sensation there, her breath coming only with great effort, and she could feel herself going cold all over.

CHAPTER XIII

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

“OH, Grace, what is it?” cried Emma, who at this juncture arrived on the scene.

Grace Harlowe's reaction came with Emma's words. Whirling in a flash, Grace dropped to her knees just as the revolver of the bandit was fired at her. How the fellow had managed to get behind her without her knowing it, Grace was at a loss to understand.

A cry behind her now told Grace that the bullet intended for her had hit Belle Bates instead. It was now a question of fight or be killed, or both, so far as Grace was concerned, and, coming close on the discharge of the bandit's revolver, she took a quick shot at the fellow, following it up with a second shot, as the bandit again fired.

The man staggered under the Overton girl's second shot, and collapsed on the ground.

“Run!” cried Grace. “Run, Emma!”

Emma Dean paused hesitatingly, then darted away, but the instant she was out of sight of the bandits, Emma stopped short to wait for her companion.

Grace was still in the thick of trouble, but, though the wounded bandit, lying flat on his back, continued to shoot, the Overton girl was thankful that Belle Bates had no weapon to use on her.

Though the fight had been under way less than twenty seconds, the bandits were already running to the scene. Grace, following her second shot, had darted away, calling to Emma as she ran.

“Run! They're after us!” admonished Grace as she came up with Emma.

A scattering fire of revolver bullets spattered on the rocks about them, but, by lively sprinting, they soon succeeded in placing substantial barriers of rock between them and their pursuers. The bandits, of course, possessed the advantage of long experience in this sort of warfare, but Grace's mind was an alert one, quick to receive impressions and quick to react.

“I hear horses coming!” panted Emma.

“Yes. They've taken to the ponies. We must get where the ponies cannot conveniently go, and do it quick. Run on your toes. Be careful not to leave a footprint anywhere,” cautioned Grace.

It was soon apparent from the sounds, however, that the horsemen were overtaking the girls, though Grace felt reasonably certain that the bandits did not know where she and Emma at that moment were. In the circumstances there appeared only one way to avoid discovery, and that was to do some skillful dodging, which the two girls promptly did when the pursuers drew closer to them. Grace and Emma hid behind a rock, and, as the riders swept down toward them, moved step by step around it, so that the rock should always be between them and the bandits.

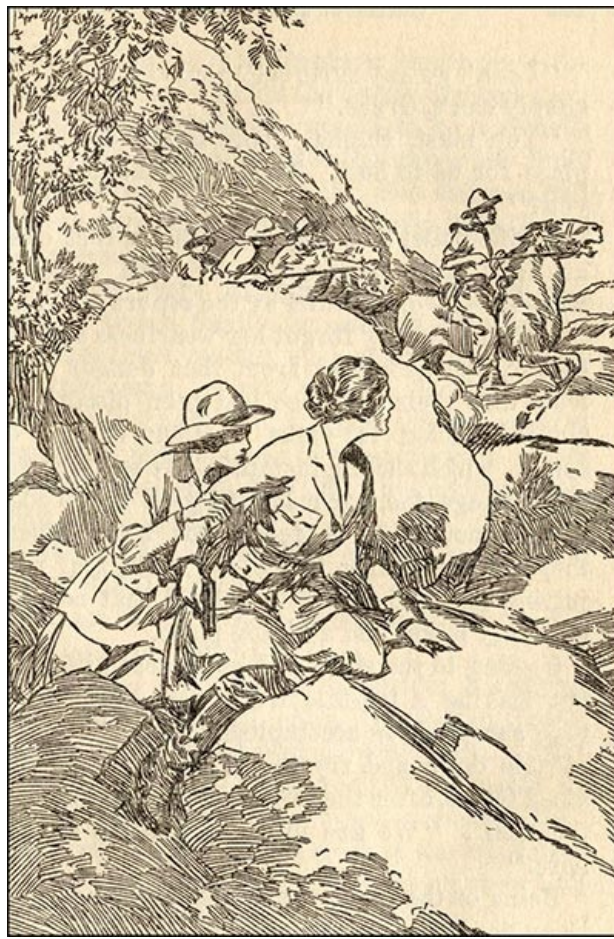
The outlaws swung by at a brisk gallop which left Grace and Emma to the rear of their pursuers.

“Run! We must find a hiding place,” urged Grace.

“Grace Harlowe, there is blood on your face!” cried Emma as they ran. “Were you hit?”

“I got a scratch on the head. A bullet scratched my scalp when I started to run away from the fight,” grinned Grace.

The way was now becoming more rugged, but the girls did not lessen their pace, and for nearly an hour they continued their plunging, stumbling sprint, at the expense of many falls and bruises, thankful that, thus far, they had succeeded in eluding their pursuers.



The Outlaws Swung By.

"I can't go any further!" wailed Emma. "I simply can't, Grace."

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"You must, Emma. This is too exposed a place for us to halt. There! What did I tell you?"

A rifle bullet had *pinged* against a rock close at hand, and ricocheted off with a weird *zing—g—g—g*, followed by the report of a rifle.

Emma suddenly forgot her weariness and, together, the girls fled from that danger spot. Now that their presence had been discovered, Grace decided to make another change of course, which she did instantly. It was a fortunate change, too, for it led the girls to the edge of the mountain. A few yards below where they were standing, Grace saw a shelf of rock jutting out, and rightly surmised that beneath that they might find a hiding place.

Getting to the shelf and underneath it, without leaving a tell-tale trail, was difficult, but they succeeded in accomplishing it.

"Lie down and try to get some sleep," advised Grace, after the two had squeezed in under the shelf. "We are in no immediate danger here."

Being on the verge of utter exhaustion, Emma Dean needed no urging, and almost immediately sank into a deep sleep, while Grace lay back with closed eyes, getting what rest she could, and reflecting over the exciting incidents of the last few hours. As for the bandit she had shot, she did not believe his wound to be a serious one. Grace had aimed for the upper left limb, and believed she had hit it. She had not had time to turn to see how seriously Belle Bates was wounded.

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Nothing more having been heard of the bandits, Grace finally turned her attention to the important matter of getting back to the Overton camp. First, she got her points of compass from the sun, but this did not greatly assist her, not knowing to a certainty in which direction the camp lay. Not a familiar landmark could she find.

"Wake up! We must be going," said Grace, gently shaking her companion.

"Grace dear, I'm so lame and stiff that I don't believe I can walk."

"Perhaps you prefer to remain here and starve or be captured again," suggested Grace.

Emma got up, and said she was ready.

The two girls then started off as briskly as Miss Dean's sore joints would permit. They continued on until four o'clock in the afternoon without finding the trail over which they had ridden to the mountain top.

"I fear we shall not find it, dear," Grace finally admitted.

"Then what are we to do!" pleaded Emma. "I'm so hungry, so thirsty and so weary."

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"I have been thinking of that, and looking over the landscape at the same time. It seems to me that the second canyon over there should lead us somewhere near our camp. Look to your right and you will observe that the second canyon appears to merge into the one immediately in our foreground, so we will try to get down the mountain and work our way toward the point of intersection.

"We shall find water to drink in the canyon, and we must watch sharply for berries, of which I saw many when out picnicking. Other than a few berries, we cannot hope to get much of anything to eat until we reach camp."

Emma groaned. They then began a cautious descent of the mountain, creeping from rock to rock, slipping and sliding, now and then at the imminent peril of being dashed to death on the rocks far below them.

"Here is a bush of mountain berries. Come and get them, but be careful not to fall," Grace called to her companion.

Emma, upon reaching the bush, threw herself down beside it and ate ravenously, then suddenly realizing that her companion had not had a taste of the berries, she shamefacedly begged Grace's pardon for her greediness.

The bottom of the canyon was in deep shadow when the girls finally reached it, though it was still daylight on the mountain top. A rippling stream of water at their feet, for the moment, put all other thoughts out of the minds of Grace Harlowe and Emma Dean, and they drank and choked until they could drink no more, and, after bathing their faces in the cold mountain stream, they arose from the brook greatly refreshed.

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"That was almost as good as a meal," declared Grace. "It will have to answer for my meal, because I failed to find more berries."

Emma made no reply to this, but she thought volumes of uncomplimentary things about herself.

Now that the chill night air was settling over the mountains, the wound in Grace's scalp began to stiffen and give her considerable pain, but she kept her suffering to herself, and, taking Emma by the hand, began trudging down the canyon, that already was in impenetrable darkness. They stumbled on for hours, until finally Emma gave out entirely.

"Grace, I simply cannot go another step," she wailed.

Lighting a match, Grace peered into the face of her little companion, and she saw that Emma really was suffering from exhaustion.

"All right, little pard, we will camp right here. I wish I had a light. I lost my pocket lamp yesterday, but I am going to try to make a fire. You sit down and do the best you can while I feel about for the makings."

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After accumulating a few handfuls of twigs that would burn, Grace placed them beside Emma, and began feeling about for a suitable camping place. She found one under a projection of rock that had been worn out, perhaps by the high waters of centuries. There was shale and dirt under the rocky shelf, which Grace partly scooped out with her hands, and a few moments later a cheerful little fire was burning. By its light Grace cleared away as much more of the dirt and shale as possible, piling in green boughs in their place.

"Is it safe to have a fire?" questioned Emma apprehensively.

"No. We must have warmth or we shall freeze, chilled through as we already are. Get in under the rock and you will soon feel quite comfortable, I know."

"Aren't you coming in, too?" asked Emma.

"Yes, after I have laid in sufficient fuel for the night," replied Grace. "As for the fire, you see I have laid it close to the rock, and I doubt if it could be seen from the top of the mountain."

"I wish I could do things as you do, Loyalheart."

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"You could if you had to. There! I think we are fixed for the night, and now I will join you. Are you comfortable?" she asked, snuggling down beside Emma.

"I should be were we not in such a mess, dear."

"Be thankful for small things, Emma. This really is quite comfy. All we need to complete our comfort are a few slices of bacon and a hot cup of coffee apiece," chuckled Grace.

"Grace Harlowe, you are positively cruel to speak of it," rebuked Emma. "For the moment I had

forgotten that I was hungry, then you had to remind me of it. I could almost faint at thought of how hungry I am. Never, never again will I make fun of Hippy Wingate's appetite. I never knew what a terrible thing an appetite could be."

"I agree with you that it can be, in some circumstances," admitted Grace. "Suppose you go to sleep now."

"Oh, I can't. I am too frightened," protested Emma. "Isn't it still, and isn't the stillness in this canyon the noisiest thing you ever heard?"

Grace laughed merrily.

"You have expressed it exactly, little woman. Please get to sleep. I shall not answer another question, so do not ask any."

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Grace kept her word, and preserved a stony silence to all of her companion's questions. Emma, soon tiring of asking questions that elicited no reply, ceased asking them and finally dozed off to sleep.

Grace Harlowe poked the fire and put on fresh fuel from time to time, keeping her lonely vigil, listening and wondering whether or not she would ever be able to find her way back to the camp of the Overton outfit.

Lulled by the warmth of the fire, and worn out from her trying experience, Grace's head finally drooped until it rested on Emma Dean's shoulder.

Grace awakened with a start, then sank back into a sound sleep, which lasted but a few moments. The support of Emma's shoulder was suddenly withdrawn, as Emma, uttering a piercing shriek, leaped to her feet. Grace toppled over sideways, but was upright, wide awake in an instant.

In the light of the fire that was now burning low, she saw Emma, half standing, half crouching, her face ghastly pale, her body shaking as from a heavy chill.

"What is it?" demanded Grace sharply.

"I—I didn't see, I heard," gasped Miss Dean. "Oh, Grace, it was awful."

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"Tell me what frightened you!" insisted Grace in a severe tone of voice.

"Something screamed and wailed. It sounded like the wail of a lost soul. You know what I mean."

"Never having heard a lost soul wail, I don't. The mountain silence must have 'got your wind up,' as the soldiers say of a man who is frightened. Lie down and go to sleep—"

Grace got no further. The silent, surcharged air split to a piercing scream, followed by a frightful, blood-chilling wail of agony. It was with an effort that Grace restrained herself from leaping to her feet, as Emma Dean again screamed, but the cold chills were racing up and down her spine, her nerves partly out of control.

"I can't stand it! Oh, Grace, Grace, save me!" Emma, weeping hysterically, threw herself into her companion's arms as that nerve-racking wail of agony again woke the echoes of the canyon, this time seeming to be directly over their heads.

CHAPTER XIV

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A NIGHT OF TERROR

GRACE HARLOWE was frightened. At least, for a moment, she felt her nerves giving way under the strain, and she feared she too was going to scream. Instead, she gave Emma Dean a severe shaking.

"Stop it, I tell you! You will have the bandits down on us next. Goodness knows we have trouble enough on our hands without again having to deal with those ruffians."

"I don't care. I prefer bandits rather than to have that terrible thing in the air over me," cried Emma.

"It is an animal, though I must admit that the wail did sound like the voice of a woman in mortal agony. There it goes again. Steady yourself, Emma! Be an Overton girl!"

Emma Dean buried her head in Grace's lap and again gave way to a storm of tears. Her whole

body was jerking nervously, but Grace petted and coddled, and talked to her, until finally Miss Dean, in a measure, recovered her composure.

The wild, haunting, mournful wail was repeated. Emma shivered and so did Grace, despite her self-control, but both girls immediately recovered their composure.

The wail burst suddenly, appallingly close, seeming, to their overstrained nerves, to be right under the shelter that covered the Overton girls.

Emma Dean leaped to her feet, and was about to dash out into the canyon when Grace caught and hauled her back. At that instant, the heavy thud of padded feet striking the ground in front of the camping place was heard by both girls.

Peering over the little fire, Grace saw two yellow, ball-like eyes out there in the darkness. Emma discovered them at about the same time, but she made no sound, save a faint gurgle in her throat.

Here was something tangible, something to give battle to, and a peril that one could see and face had few terrors for Grace Harlowe.

The bandit revolver that Grace had taken from Belle Bates was cautiously drawn from its holster. Grace took steady aim and pulled the trigger. A heavy report crashed out, echoing and buffeting the canyon walls far up the dark mountain gorge.

Grace fired again, and, this time, a scream of rage or pain, neither girl could decide which, again set the echoes screaming up the canyon, but the yellow eyes were no longer there when Grace got a clear view of the scene.

"There! Your friend, the lost soul, has at least one bullet in his body. You see how foolish you were to be so frightened," rebuked Grace, forgetful for the moment that she too had been on the verge of giving way to the terror inspired by those agonizing wails. "I am going to see what I can discover."

"Please, please don't leave me alone," begged Emma. "I can't stand it."

"I am not going away, just out front. Remain where you are. That beast may still be lurking about."

Grace stepped out cautiously, carrying a flickering firebrand in her left hand, the bandit woman's revolver in her right, ready for instant action. Upon examining the rocks for traces of their terrifying visitor, she found fresh blood stains. A trail of drops led up the canyon from that point, but the Overton girl did not follow it, knowing that peril might lurk on that trail.

"Don't ever say that I cannot shoot straight," cried Grace as she returned to her companion. "I hit the beast."

"What was it?" questioned Emma, still pale and disturbed.

"I can't say for certain. I know I never heard anything so blood-curdling as that frightful wail. I have been thinking, and it seems to me I have heard that the mountain lion, or cougar, has the wildest, most agonized scream of anything in the western mountains."

"Do you think he will come back?"

"I do not believe so. Were I in his place I shouldn't. I will keep awake and watch. That is the prudent thing to do, so you lie down and sleep for the rest of the night."

Once more Grace took up her vigil, and after a time Emma again dropped off to sleep. The excitement had set Grace's head aching, and the scalp wound pained her frightfully. She tried to lie back and doze, but did not succeed. Suddenly three shots, revolver shots, she decided, aroused Grace to instant alertness.

Listening intently, she heard three answering shots.

"A signal! Emma, wake up!"

"Wha—at is it?" cried Miss Dean, starting up heavy-eyed, swaying a little as she got wearily to her feet.

"Shots up the canyon. They were signal shots, too. We must put out the fire and get away from here. Help me fetch water from the stream to douse the fire. Take your hat. Be lively!"

The fire being low, only a few hatfuls were necessary to extinguish it. This done, Grace threw boughs from their bed over the heap of ashes, then grabbing Emma by a hand fairly dragged her across the stream and on a few yards to the opposite base of the mountain.

"Climb, but be careful!" directed Grace.

The two girls scrambled up the mountainside until it grew so steep that they could go no further.

"Lie down!" directed Grace. Both were breathing heavily from exertion and excitement.

"I hear them!" whispered Emma.

"Yes. There appear to be several of them, judging from the voices," answered Grace.

The approaching party halted a little way up the canyon, but the halt was brief, and the horsemen, as such they proved to be, moved on down, as it seemed to Grace, with greater caution, for she could no longer hear voices, only the soft hoof thuds of horses feeling their way in the black night of the canyon.

"They have stopped at our little camp," whispered Grace. "I felt certain that they would smell the dead fire. Keep very quiet, and be careful that you do not dislodge a stone. If you do, we're lost."

A match was lighted down there, and for a few seconds the dim outlines of horses were visible to the watching, listening girls.

A low-toned conference followed, more matches were lighted, flickering here and there like scattered fireflies. Grace felt, rather than saw, that the men were examining the ground for trail signs. If so, they failed to discover the direction that the Overton girls had taken in their scramble up the mountainside.

"Aren't they going?" questioned Emma.

"I think so. Keep quiet until we are certain. It may be a trick to lure us back."

A few moments later the horses of the party were heard thudding down the canyon, and the two girls breathed with less restraint.

"Emma, I think those men were our bandits. I wonder!"

"Wonder what?"

"I wonder if they are not on their way to the Overton camp? Emma Dean, I believe we are in our own canyon, or near it!" cried Grace, a trace of excitement in her tone.

"Even if we are, we cannot find our way out in the darkness," answered Emma helplessly.

"Yes we can. At least we cannot get far out of our way unless we climb a mountain, and that we shall not do. Let's get down, but be as quiet as possible, for we must not be caught again. It will go hard with us if we are."

"Suppose they *should* catch us?" questioned Emma anxiously.

"Those men are desperate, but if they get us again it will be after I have no shells left in my weapons."

Grace began cautiously scrambling down the mountainside, followed by her companion, who exhibited less caution. The critical moment for the girls was when they reached the bottom, and for several moments after setting their feet on solid ground, they stood listening.

"Come! They have gone," decided Grace, slipping a hand into her companion's. "We will follow the canyon until we land somewhere."

They picked their way as carefully as was possible in the darkness, but the going was so rough that Grace finally took to the little mountain stream, and plodded on down it, until the sound of a greater volume of water ahead caught her ears. She thereupon immediately stepped from the stream, proceeding with caution, and in a few moments they came to the stream that Grace had heard. There, the Overton girl felt about with her hands for a time, then lighted a match.

"Emma!" she cried, "do you know where we are?"

"No."

"We are on Pinal Creek. We are almost home, little one, and our troubles are nearly at an end. Oh, I am so happy—and so hungry," added Grace, laughing a little hysterically.

"I can't believe it. Let's run," urged Miss Dean.

"Don't forget that the bandits are somewhere ahead of us. I suspect that they are in the vicinity of our camp."

Grace was anxious for her friends. No shots, so far as she had heard, had been fired by them, and she began to fear that perhaps all was not well in the Overton camp. They pressed on more rapidly now, finally reaching the creek side of Squaw Valley. No fire burned in the camp, nor

could the girls see the tents, which was not surprising, for the night in the valley was almost as dark as in the mountain canyon that they had just left.

"The silence here seems charged with possibilities," whispered Grace. "Keep alert, Emma."

"I am, but it doesn't seem to do any good. I feel wretched and frightened."

"There they go!" cried Grace.

A sudden scattering fire of rifle shots somewhere out in the field made the girls' nerves jump.

"There go our rifles, too," added Grace, as a spirited fire sprang up at the point where the two girls believed their camp to be located.

"Oh, what shall we do?" cried Emma.

"Get into a safe place. We have no rifles and can do nothing to assist our friends." Grasping Emma's hand again, Grace ran back to the creek.

"Down!" she ordered as bullets began to rustle the leaves over their heads.

Both girls threw themselves down, and, with heads slightly raised, watched the flashes from the rifles. The outlaws were not riding this time, but were skulking, fighting Indian fashion, and Grace was now certain that the bandits that had been harassing the Overton outfit had returned for another attack.

The battle was being savagely waged on both sides, but who of her companions were taking part in it, Grace of course did not know. The first intimation she had that the fight was ended was when she saw four horsemen gallop down to the creek and head up the canyon.

"There they go," announced Grace Harlowe in a relieved tone. "Hurry! Some one may have been hurt."

Hand in hand the girls dragged their weary feet across the valley and up toward the camp.

"Do—do you think our people will shoo—oot at us?" stammered Emma.

"They may at that. I will signal them." Grace fired three interval shots into the air, following it with the Overton hail, which was so weak that it barely carried to the camp.

"O-v-e-r-t-o-n!" came an answering shout from the camp.

Grace and Emma soon discovered the figures of two men approaching them at a run.

"Who's there?" called the voice of Hippy Wingate. "Speak or I'll shoot."

"Harlowe!" answered Grace weakly. "Oh, Emma, I'm going to faint!" she cried, and collapsed.

When Grace recovered consciousness she was in her own camp. A camp fire was blazing, and a group of anxious faces were bending over her. Grace smiled and closed her eyes.

"She has fallen asleep, don't disturb her," said Elfreda Briggs. "The poor child is utterly exhausted. It is a wonder that she is alive after what she plainly has gone through."

CHAPTER XV

IKE DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF

GRACE and Emma, following Grace's faint, had been carried into camp by Lieutenant Wingate and Ike Fairweather. Emma, giving way to the reaction, after her trying experience, had immediately sunk into a profound sleep, from which they had not awakened her. The two girls had been put to bed, neither awakening until long after daylight.

Miss Briggs had examined the bullet wound on Grace's scalp and decided that it should have attention as soon as she awakened.

No one was in her tent when finally Grace opened her eyes. After a few minutes of blissful resting, the Overton girl got up and dressed. She was a little dizzy at first, but the sensation quickly passed, and she walked out just as luncheon was being prepared.

There was a shout of welcome as Grace appeared, and the girls of the party ran to her, fairly overwhelming her with their joyous embraces. Emma, who had awakened and dressed, came out a few minutes after Grace.

"We are famished. Please give us something to eat," begged Grace. "While we are eating you may tell us what has been going on here."

"I reckon we'd like to hear 'bout you first," spoke up Ike.

Grace thereupon related the story of the experiences of herself and Emma, touching briefly on her own part in it.

"I reckon the woman thet got shot is goin' to die," observed Ike.

"How do you know?" questioned Grace, bending a keen glance on the driver.

"Heard the bandits talkin' about it up in the mountains."

Ike then told of the search that Hippy and himself had made for the missing girls, of their losing the trail and not finding it again, and finally of having discovered the bandits, spied on them, and from their conversation learned that Grace Harlowe and Emma Dean had escaped.

Ike said he learned, too, that the bandits were about to start for the Overton camp, at the direction of Belle Bates, "and shoot the place up for keeps," as Ike put it. Hearing that, and knowing that the two girls had escaped, Ike and Hippy started for home as fast as their horses could travel, fully expecting to find Grace and Emma at the camp. They had arrived at camp about an hour before the bandits.

"The battle you know 'bout, I reckon. Western Jones here shot two of the critters off their horses, but the galoots gathered up their wounded and rode away with 'em. I'll bet there ain't a one of 'em that hasn't a bullet hole in his carcass followin' thet raid. You fixed one in the leg up on the mountain. I heard 'em say so. Reckon you must have shot high on purpose, 'cause you hit him nigh the hip."

"I am glad it was no worse," observed Grace gravely.

"Hope they keep on comin' 'long, so, by the time we get to the end of the trail, they'll be purty well shot off."

"By the way, I shot at and hit an animal that I think must have been a cougar," Grace informed them. After she had described the terrifying scream of the animal, Ike nodded.

"Thet's cougar. Must have hit him hard or he'd jumped you. They're bad medicine when wounded. Reckon he crawled off an' died. What are you goin' to do now?"

"I think the first thing to be done is to sew up Mrs. Gray's scalp wound," suggested Elfreda. "Do you wish me to do it, Grace?"

"Yes. I was going to ask you to do that for me. Suppose you do it now."

Elfreda got her first-aid kit and her needles and silk, selected what she wished from the kit and handed the rest to Emma to hold.

"It might be wise to have some one else assist you. Remember, Emma has never worked in a hospital," suggested Grace, seating herself in the camp chair that Anne had placed for her.

"Time she began," answered Elfreda briefly. "Emma, you will be present, but not heard, during this proceeding."

Ike Fairweather had drawn up a soapbox and sat down on it just outside of the circle that had gathered about the scene. His eyes were filled with curiosity. Ike did not fully understand what was "coming off," as he later described it, but felt certain that he was about to witness something interesting.

Steeling herself to resist the pain, Grace talked as Miss Briggs inserted the needle and began stitching the scalp together, but the lines of her face showed the strain under which Grace was laboring.

"Elfreda, haven't you nearly finished with that patchwork?" she finally asked in a queer, strained voice.

"One more stitch and I am done. There! It is *fini*, as the Frenchmen would say. Thank you, Emma. I will take the kit."

The kit dropped from Miss Dean's nerveless fingers, and, uttering a little moan, she collapsed.

"Emma has fainted. Throw a pail of water on her face," directed Elfreda, calmly proceeding to place a bandage over Grace's head.

Nora ran for water, while Anne, who had sprung forward, turned the fainting girl over on her back and fanned her with a sombrero.

Emma's faint was the crowning climax for Ike Fairweather. Ike went over backward with his

soapbox, landing on his back in a dead faint.

Hippy grabbed the old coach driver, the veteran of many a hold-up and thrilling battle in the mountains, and twisted him about so his head might be higher than his feet.

"Nora darling, fetch *two* pails of water," called Hippy. "What ails this bunch of tenderfeet, anyway?"

Grace smiled in spite of her suffering, as Elfreda assisted her to a cot that had been placed for her. In the meantime Ike and Emma were regaining consciousness.

"Well, I swan!" gasped Ike Fairweather after Hippy had laughingly assisted him to a sitting position, Anne having performed a similar service for Emma. "Never did nothin' like thet before."

"I hope you never do it again if you continue to pilot this outfit," rebuked the lieutenant.

"I won't," promised Mr. Fairweather. "Next time I shore'll look t'other way," he added, amid laughter.

Grace beckoned to him to come to her.

"Did Mr. Jones return to Globe?" she asked.

"Yes, and the young women gave him a right nice present beside what he asked for helpin' me to get the ponies out here."

"I want to thank you for all the trouble you had in looking for Miss Dean and myself. That is what I wished to say to you," added Grace smilingly. "When do you think we should strike camp and go on?"

"Whenever you feel fit, Miss."

"I think it will be advisable to wait until morning, even though the bandits attack us here again."

"Reckon they got enough for a day or so," observed Ike dryly. "To-morrow mornin', then, is it?"

"Yes. Make camp to-morrow afternoon wherever you think best, only do not let us get past your camping place. Thank you so much. I do not know what we should have done without you, but I sincerely hope our more serious troubles are now at an end," added Grace.

"Mebby, mebbly," observed Ike Fairweather, thoughtfully stroking his whiskers. "Between you an' me, I don't reckon they be."

CHAPTER XVI

A GLIMPSE INTO FAIRYLAND

THE Overton girls' equipment wagon, as was customary, went ahead of the outfit next morning, and had been gone for nearly two hours when the party decided to start on their way.

Hippy Wingate saddled their horses for them, and gallantly assisted them to mount.

"That husband of mine must have learned how to assist ladies to their saddles when I wasn't looking," frowned Nora.

Grace shook her head.

"It is the thought of how near he has come to losing us all in the battles with the bandits that has softened Hippy's heart," corrected Grace Harlowe.

"I wish I could believe it," muttered Nora Wingate.

The outfit started out, led by Lieutenant Wingate, who took a circuitous route to reach the Apache Trail, in order to avoid the steep ascent that they would have encountered had they taken a more direct course to the trail.

The eyes of the Overton girls were sparkling. For the moment they had forgotten their troubles, forgotten the peril-laden mysteries of the Apache Mountains, forgotten all but the glorious morning, and the wonders that lay all about them.

The first halt made was at the Great Forest of Sahuaro, a forest of giant cacti which flourishes all through the Apache and other mountain regions in that immediate section. Some of these

great, awkward plants are all of fifty feet high, and from their spiny, fluted trunks issue branches which almost equal the trunks in diameter.

Crowning this weird, ungainly invention of nature is a brilliant red waxen flower of great beauty.

"That is the state flower of Arizona," Grace informed her companions, pointing to the sea of red that stretched away for a long distance. "I propose that we dismount, have our luncheon here and chat for an hour or so."

"Motion carried," cried Emma, slipping from her saddle.

Ponies were tethered, and while Hippy was seeking water "for man and beast," as he expressed it, the girls got out their mess kits and rations. Grace built a little cook fire, and, in remarkably short time, the mess call was heard at the edge of the cactus forest, while the ponies nibbled at what they found.

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"I've been thinking," began Hippy, "that—"

"Marvellous," murmured Emma.

"That only weaklings faint away," finished the lieutenant.

"Is that all you had in your mind beside thought of food?" Emma came back spiritedly.

"No, not all. What I really was about to say, was that this outfit should have a name."

"Perhaps we already have a name among certain persons who have smelled our powder," twinkled Grace Harlowe.

"I too have been thinking that we, as an organization, should call ourselves something," agreed Elfreda.

"Aren't we the Overseas Girls?" questioned Nora.

"Not now. We may be all at sea, but we are not overseas," answered Grace.

"I move we call ourselves the Rough Rider Patrol," suggested Hippy.

"Awful!" objected Emma. "This is not a part of the State Constabulary."

"I have it!" cried Hippy. "You'll say it's a stroke of genius when you hear it. I have the name that fits this outfit from the ground up. 'The Automobile Girls on Horseback,' that's the name for you children," glowed Hippy.

A chorus of laughs greeted the suggestion.

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"Instead of being a stroke of genius, I should call that a stroke of paralysis," declared Nora.

"Such is the support that Hippy Wingate gets from his wife," complained the lieutenant.

"Can you blame her?" teased Grace. "Anne, Elfreda, we have not heard from you."

"While you people have been making sport of Hippy's suggestions, I wish to say that he has made an excellent one," asserted Elfreda.

"Oh, Elfreda!" cried Anne and Nora in one voice.

"I will give you to understand that I am no automobile girl on horseback," asserted Emma indignantly. "I won't ride under any such name, either. I—I'll faint away first. There now!"

"Save the heroics, Emma. Nothing is further from my mind than to call our outfit by that name," replied Elfreda.

"I call that downright mean," objected Hippy, with mock indignation. "You raise my hopes to the skies, shower me with compliments, calculated to prove that I am not a paralytic, then you drop me over the edge. I leave it to Nora if that isn't cruelty to animals."

"It is," agreed Nora gravely, whereat the Overton girls broke into a peal of merry laughter.

"You are both wrong and right, Hippy Wingate. I stand on what I said a few moments ago, that you made an excellent suggestion," declared Miss Briggs. "I did not mean that your title was wholly good, for it isn't."

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"Awful," interjected Emma Dean.

"For the love of goodness, give our legal talent a chance," begged Hippy, frowning at Emma.

"Hippy mentioned the Rough Rider Patrol, which gave me the idea for a name that I think will

grow upon you as you sleep over it.”

“Not on Hippy. Only snores follow in the wake of Morpheus when he’s headed in my direction,” retorted the lieutenant.

“Elfreda, what is your suggestion?” asked Grace.

“My suggestion is that we be known as *Grace Harlowe’s Overland Riders!*”

“No, no!” protested Grace. “Give some one else a chance. Why not as well call us Lieutenant Wingate’s Overland Chasers?”

“Grace Harlowe’s Overland Riders! That’s the name. Yip, yip, yeow!” shrilled Emma Dean.

“Look out, she’s going to do the fainting act again,” warned Hippy sharply, whereat Emma subsided.

“We are all agreed on the question of the name suggested by Elfreda,” announced Anne. “It is a fine name, and cannot be improved upon.”

“Neither can the Overland Riders,” interjected Emma.

“Of course, if you girls wish it that way, I have no objection, but it does seem to me that the name ‘Overland Riders’ should be sufficient without having to hook my name ahead. ‘Overland’ sounds like Overton and is a good word for us, a lucky word.”

“Grace Harlowe’s Overland Riders it is, now, always and forever,” announced Elfreda.

“So long as the unearthly, ghostly, weird *sahuaro* shall flourish and grow red flowers,” added Hippy Wingate amid the laughter of his companions.

“Overland Riders, boots and saddles!” called Grace, springing up.

The Riders followed her, each running to her pony, quickly coiling the lead rope about the pommel of her saddle and mounting.

“That was well done, girls. Only Lieutenant Wingate bungled,” called Captain Grace as she started away at a gallop.

“I missed my stirrup,” answered Hippy lamely, but no one heeded, if she heard.

“We make camp at Summit, do we not?” asked Elfreda, riding up beside Grace.

“That was the word that Mr. Fairweather left for us. He says we shall have a wonderful view there, and that an excellent camping site is to be had just off the trail. I hope we shall not be visited by the trouble-makers to-night.”

“So do I, but I actually believe you would be in the dumps, in a regular blue funk, were we to be allowed to move along peaceably without excitement or thrills,” averred Miss Briggs.

Grace smiled and clucked to her pony.

It was four o’clock in the afternoon, when, after a day of toiling up steep grades, along precipitous cliffs, scattered mesas and buttes, they rode out on a level stretch of trail with a view spread before them such as none of those joyous, happy girls ever before had gazed upon.

“The Summit!” shouted Grace. “Did you ever see anything so perfectly gorgeous?” Grace removed her sombrero and sat gazing in silent enjoyment of the scene.

Roosevelt Lake, an emerald gem set in the vari-colored mountains, lay twenty-seven miles below them. To their left, against the skies, loomed the famous Four Peaks Mountains, and, to the right and below them, the Sierra Ancha Range, all a mass of gorgeous colors in the light of the late afternoon sun.

Hippy could repress his bubbling spirits no longer. He cleared his throat loudly.

“Hippy is going to make another speech,” said Anne.

“If he does I’ll run,” wailed Emma.

“Ladies and gentlemen—that includes myself—you are gazing on the largest artificial body of water in the world—Roosevelt Lake—a body of water completely walled in by mountains, thirty miles long and four miles across at its widest part. Set in the—”

“Please defer your oration until it is too dark to see,” begged Grace laughingly. “I prefer to enjoy the view now.”

“Hippy being wound up, you can’t stop him. I know, for I have tried many, many times,” whispered Nora.

"Set in the sapphire rocks of the great colorful mountains, held back by the dam, like Hoppi, the Nile God, at whose magic touch the mighty Egyptian River brings forth such abundance, our prosaic Uncle Sam is causing the desert—Whoa! Wha—"

Lieutenant Wingate's pony, left to its own devices while its master was lost in the glory of his own oratory, had nosed off the trail to browse, and stepped on a rounded rock. The pony, in trying to recover its balance, went down violently on its knees. Hippy went over the animal's head, landing on his back in the dirt at the side of the trail.

Hippy uttered a grunt when he struck the ground.

"He's killed! He's killed!" cried Nora. "Serve him right if he is."

"Oh, Nora, don't say that," begged Grace, restraining her laughter.

Hippy sat up slowly and picked up his sombrero.

"As I was saying when, for the moment checked by this trifling brute-interruption," spoke Hippy, "our prosaic Uncle Sam is causing the desert to bloom as the rose. The dam is two hundred and eighty feet high. That is the distance through which the overflow falls into Salt River Canyon. Ladies and gentlemen—that includes myself—I have finished." Hippy got up and began brushing the dirt from his clothes.

"The kind Fates be thanked," murmured Elfreda Briggs.

"Hippy must have been studying a new guide book," observed Anne mischievously.

"He has not painted the picture a stroke too gorgeously," averred Grace. "This truly is a glimpse right into fairyland."

Hippy Wingate's chest swelled with pride.

CHAPTER XVII

GOING TO BED IN THE CLOUDS

THE Overland Riders did not turn from the scene until the "sapphire rocks," described in Lieutenant Wingate's colorful oratory, had turned a dull gray as the sun moved over behind the mountains to the west.

"Forward for a quick gallop to the camping site!" called Grace, who led the way alone. "Column of two's!"

In this formation they presented a spirited appearance.

Ike Fairweather heard them pounding along the trail, and stepped out to watch the troop come on. They swept down on him in a cloud of dust, and in answer to an enthusiastic wave of his sombrero, Grace spun her own sombrero as high in the air as she could hurl it, drove her pony forward to meet it, and deftly caught it as it came spinning back.

"Whoo—oo—oope!" shouted Ike.

"Woo—oo—oo—oo!" howled Hippy, trying to imitate an Indian war whoop, but failing miserably.

Not to be outdone by Grace Harlowe, the lieutenant too spun his sombrero into the air, but instead of spinning it on its rim he spun it flat.

The sombrero floated gracefully off in the direction of Roosevelt Lake, sinking lower and lower into the shadows of the chasm hundreds of feet below them, until it finally disappeared altogether.

"My hat! My hat!" howled Hippy.

The Overland Riders were almost hysterical with laughter when they brought their ponies down to a quick stop, after Grace, in her merriment, had nearly ridden down Ike Fairweather. Ike had only saved himself from disaster by hastily throwing himself into the roadside ditch.

Nora Wingate was laughing so much that she forgot to scold her husband, and Hippy kept them laughing for as much longer as possible, so that Nora might not remember to give him the good-natured grilling that he knew he deserved.

It came, however, when Ike teased him about letting a woman outdo him in riding and hat

tossing.

"You wouldn't imagine that my husband ever was a bird of the air, flying above the clouds as gracefully as a wild duck on its way to a new home in the sunny south. Now would you, Mr. Fairweather?"

"Well, seein' as you have put the question up to me pintedly, I don't reckon as I would," was Ike's conclusion, after a brief stroking of his whiskers. 177

There followed another merry laugh at Hippy's expense, then the outfit dismounted and led their ponies to the tethering ground that had been selected for the purpose.

"You folks'll find it a little crowded, but the camp is high and fine," volunteered Mr. Fairweather.

"Where is your wagon?" asked Lieutenant Wingate.

"'Bout a hundred yards further along the trail. Not room enough for it hereabouts, an' I can't drag it up the hill where the horses are. I reckon thet after this I'll have the horses in pistol shot of me all the time."

"Either that or we shall have to post a guard over the animals every night," said Grace. "Please show us where to take our ponies," she requested.

A "tote path," a narrow path used principally by foot travelers, led up the mountain side, winding through cacti and scrub cottonwoods for more than a hundred yards, and up this narrow, crooked path the Overland Riders led their saddle ponies, finally emerging on a narrow mesa or tableland, bordered with scraggly cottonwoods that found their moisture in a nearby mountain stream. 178

The camp of the Overton girls had been pitched by this stream, fresh water close at hand being a vital thing to outdoor camps.

Hippy Wingate tied his pony to a tree, and, stepping to the edge of the mesa, waved a hand toward the black abyss beyond and below them.

"The yawning chasm!" he exclaimed, and sat down.

"That is the most fascinating speech you ever made, Lieutenant Wingate," observed Miss Briggs.

"Eh? That so? Why?"

"Because there were only three words in it," interjected Emma Dean.

Hippy sniffed, and, getting up, went over and untied his pony.

While the men were staking down the horses and fetching water for them from the stream, the girls were busily engaged in preparing supper. Ike not only had pitched the tents, but had placed the luggage of his charges in its proper place and set the camp in order in advance of the arrival of the party.

The campfire was still low, purposely kept so for cooking purposes, but a heap of wood nearby promised a cheerful blaze later on.

Pork and beans, bread without butter, canned soup and cake, that Hippy Wingate declared had been baked on a cactus plant, together with a large pot of coffee, formed the principal part of the evening's bill of fare. 179

"Not a prize winner in variety, but great chow," approved Hippy, which was high praise for Lieutenant Wingate.

Following the meal, Elfreda questioned the old stagecoach driver about the country where they were encamped.

"All Apache ground," answered Ike with a comprehensive wave of the hand. "They've fit over every inch of it. You'll see some of them folks to-morrow or next day. How long do you reckon on stayin' at the Lodge?"

"What is there to keep us busy there?" asked Grace.

"The lake, the cliff dwellers' homes, Apaches, an' huntin' in the Sierra Anchas, if you folks care for thet. There's great fishin' in the lake too."

"It sounds interesting," agreed Grace, "but of course you know we do not care to camp where there are people. What we are out for is to get away from people. What is there in the way of game in the Sierra Ancha Range?"

"Deer, bear an' cougar is the big game. Plenty of smaller stuff."

"I will talk with our party about the hunting, but I hardly think they will care for it. Is it possible to visit the cliff dwellings?" questioned Grace.

"Some of 'em. Others can't be reached."

Elfreda glanced quickly at Grace and frowned to herself.

"You mean that no one has been able to get to them, Mr. Fairweather?"

"Yes, Mrs. Gray."

"Why not?"

"Sharp cliffs hundreds of feet up or down."

"One can get above them, I suppose?" persisted Grace.

"Yes, by takin' a trail 'round the mountain."

"I'll take a try at exploring them," observed Hippy as if he really meant it.

"You will not if you keep on eating," declared Nora.

"Are there other trails that lead to the top—I should say that lead to the mountain where these cliff dwellers lived?" questioned Grace.

"From other directions, yes."

"So that one could get there without following the route we have taken thus far?"

"Oh, yes."

"What *are* you driving at, Grace?" demanded Anne.

"Information, Anne dear. Remember, one never can know too much about anything."

"Yes he can," differed Hippy. "One can know too much about overland riding. I know so much about it already that it pains me to think about how much I do know, and the journey isn't half over. At this rate I shall acquire so much information that my brain surely will blow up one day."

"Your what?" asked Emma innocently.

Even Ike Fairweather joined in the laugh, that followed. Nora nodded, and smiled her approval at Emma.

"I should prefer to blow up from an oversupply of brains than to faint because of short measure," retorted Hippy heatedly.

"Brakes on!" ordered Grace, trying hard not to laugh. "That was real mean of you, Hippy Wingate. I think you should apologize to Emma."

"All right, let's go. I do apologize, Miss Dean. My seeming rudeness was not rudeness at all, it was merely an effort on my part to make conversation and to maintain my reputation for making myself agreeable. I'll go further with my apology and assure you that I know that it wasn't because you are sometimes brainless that you fainted, but because—"

"Hippy Wingate!" rebuked Nora sharply. "I shall never, never speak to you again unless you tell Emma you are sorry."

"Whether I mean it or not?"

"Please do as I ask you to."

"Ike, have you another hat in the wagon that I can wear to town to-morrow?"

Mr. Fairweather said he had not.

"I am sorry, Miss Dean, and I hope you will forgive me for my rude—my seeming rudeness," corrected Hippy.

Emma's face broke out into smiles, indicating that the clouds had passed.

"You are forgiven, Hippy," she nodded.

"Whether I mean it or not?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. I will think it over and let you know to-morrow whether or not I do mean it." Hippy

lifted his head and inhaled a long breath.

"Fog! We are rapidly being enveloped in it," exclaimed Anne who had observed the lieutenant's action.

"That is what you call it. I call it a cloud. I ought to know, for many is the time that I have smelled clouds," declared Hippy.

"Yep, them's clouds," confirmed the old coach driver.

The Overland Riders uttered exclamations of amazement, for being above the clouds was a new experience to all except Grace Harlowe, who had once made a thrilling flight with Lieutenant Wingate on the French front. Emma Dean, however, declared that she could see nothing about fog to rave over, and it was difficult to convince her that they really were enveloped in clouds such as she had seen drifting above the mountain tops all that afternoon.

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Grace proposed that they turn in early that night in order to be up with the sun and get the benefit of the early morning view, which Ike Fairweather said was well worth seeing.

"Going to bed in the clouds! How romantic," murmured Anne.

"Yes, but why get sentimental over it?" grinned Hippy.

"Wouldn't it be awful were we to fall out of bed?" suggested Emma.

Ike Fairweather and Lieutenant Wingate took more than ordinary pains in staking down the horses for the night, even though the animals were tethered so close to the camp that their every move might be heard by the campers. Ike distinctly objected to making a second trip to Globe for a bunch of runaway ponies.

While the men were engaged with the ponies, the Overton girls were chatting in Grace Harlowe's tent, and Elfreda Briggs was dressing the wound on Grace's head.

"It is really wonderful how rapidly a wound heals with you," marvelled Miss Briggs.

"I am well and strong, so why should it not be so?" replied Grace. "I hope you take the bandage from my wound soon, because I wish to look nice when we reach the hotel at Roosevelt Lake."

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"All is secure, sir," announced Hippy from without.

"Thank you, Lieutenant," acknowledged Grace. "You will find food in the tin box in the store-tent, provided you get hungry in the night."

"Pleasant dreams, and do not fall out of bed," piped Emma.

"If I do, you will hear me," retorted Hippy.

"Yes, we surely shall feel the mountain shake when *you* land," chuckled Anne.

"Good-night, all," called Hippy, and strode off laughing to himself, a chorus of good-nights following him. For an hour or more intermittent chattering was heard in the girls' tents. Through the open tent flaps they could see the cloud fog swirling about, and the damp, musty odor of the sky-mist was strong in their nostrils.

"The glory of the mountains! How I should love to spend all summer right on this wonderful spot," murmured Grace, and, turning over, went quickly to sleep.

Shortly after midnight Grace awakened, and lay gazing out at the drifting gray fog.

"What was that?" Grace sat up suddenly, listening for a repetition of the sound that had disturbed her.

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What Grace had heard sounded to her like the rattle of a wagon, followed by a loud squeak, but the sound was not repeated.

The Overton girl sprang up, dressed hurriedly and buckled on her revolver holster. She then ran over to Lieutenant Wingate's tent and softly called his name. There was no reply from within, nor could Grace hear breathing there.

Thrusting a flash lamp through the tent opening, she swept the interior with a brief ray of light. The tent was unoccupied, and the blankets lay on the ground in a confused heap, indicating to her that Lieutenant Wingate had taken a hurried departure.

"Something surely is going on, and Hippy has gone to investigate," muttered Grace. "That young man surely is improving."

Without an instant's hesitation, Grace ran out and down the tote path, proceeding cautiously as she neared the trail, her step giving off no sound that could be heard a few yards away.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HARDEST BLOW OF ALL

REACHING the trail, Grace crept toward the point where the equipment wagon had been parked.

She now understood the meaning of the sound that she had heard from her tent. The wagon was being turned, and again she heard what she recognized now as the squeal of a wagon's king-bolt, accompanied by a low, guttural grunt.

"Look out!" The command was low, but incisive.

A jar and a crash followed, then something went thundering down the mountainside.

"Some one has run the wagon off the trail into the canyon!" gasped Grace Harlowe.

Bang! A revolver shot caused Grace to duck. She had faintly seen the flash in the fog-cloud ahead of her, and the flash seemed to indicate that the weapon had been fired at her.

Bang! Bang! came two answering shots.

"Hippy fired the first shot! I must get in," cried Grace, pressing close to the rocks on the upper side of the trail, and creeping forward.

The firing on both sides was increasing in rapidity, and it was apparent that a hot fight was in progress.

Four men suddenly ran past her, one being supported by a companion on either side, but she could barely discern the figures in the fog.

"Halt!" commanded Grace sternly, bringing her weapon up in readiness to enforce her command.

The answer to her challenge was a shot, which Grace answered with a bullet from her bandit revolver, but in the mist all objects were distorted and her aim was bad.

Another bullet, this time from the right, whistled over Grace Harlowe's head, fired from Lieutenant Wingate's weapon. Hippy had seen, and was firing at her.

"Overland!" shouted the girl.

"Grace!"

"Yes. Hurry! We can get them. Don't shoot till you catch up with me. Hurry, hurry!"

"I winged one," gloated Hippy. "Give it to 'em, Grace! They've dumped the wagon."

"Don't talk. Run, and keep your eyes open!" she admonished. "Take the outside of the trail. I'll hug the bank."

The two started on at a fast, but cautious sprint. Ahead, they could hear voices.

"We have you! Surrender!" shouted Lieutenant Wingate.

Grace grinned as she ducked. She had ducked in good time, too, for two bullets answered Hippy's challenge. Both Hippy and Grace then opened up on their adversaries.

The revolver reports had awakened the entire camp. Ike Fairweather had tumbled out of bed and sprang to Lieutenant Wingate's tent. Finding it unoccupied, he reasoned that Hippy was in trouble down on the trail. The girls, by this time, had run from their tents, calling out to know what was wrong.

"Don't know. Stay here an' look out for yerselves," flung back Ike as he dashed down the slope toward the Apache Trail.

"Awaken Grace," called Anne excitedly.

"I venture to say that Grace Harlowe is already very much awake and down there in the thick of it," replied Miss Briggs calmly.

"She's gone!" wailed Emma, who had run to Grace's tent to give the alarm. "Oh, I am so afraid something will happen to her."

"My Hippy has gone, too," cried Nora Wingate. "They'll be killed, both of them! I wish I never

had come to this terrible place.”

“Did you stew like that when your husband was fighting Boches in France?” rebuked Elfreda.

“No, but he isn’t fighting Boches now.”

“There they go at it again!” cried Anne. “This is almost as exciting as France. All one needs to make her believe she is back on the battle front is the explosion of a Hun shell.”

Down on the Apache Trail the battle was being waged with honors a little in favor of the Overlanders. Hippy had hit at least one of the prowlers. That he knew, but, so far, he and Grace had escaped without a bullet coming close enough to endanger them. One man was still working his revolver somewhere ahead of Hippy and Grace.

“Let them have it before they get away,” she urged, whereupon Hippy began shooting into the fog with renewed vigor.

“There they go!” cried Grace. “I heard them sliding down the bank. Come on! We may yet catch them.”

Hippy turned his revolver in the direction that Grace was pointing, and blazed away.

“Overland!” shouted a voice behind them in the new rallying cry of the outfit.

“Here!” answered Hippy. “You are too late, Ike. The fun is all over.”

“What happened, Lieutenant?” demanded the driver as he sprinted up to them. “I heard the shootin’ and lit out for the wagon, which I couldn’t find hide nor hair of.”

“You have lost your wagon, Mr. Fairweather,” Grace informed him.

“What’s that you say?”

“They have dumped the wagon down into the canyon, and a good part of our equipment is with it,” replied Grace.

Ike, for the moment, was unable to find words appropriate to express his emotion, then, recovering his voice, he launched into a torrent of threats as he stamped about, shaking his clenched fists.

“You will have to catch them before you carry out all those threats, Mr. Fairweather,” reminded Grace. “Lieutenant, the scoundrels have a wounded man with them, and cannot move rapidly. Shall we go after them?”

“Yes,” answered Hippy. “Ike and I will go. You go back and reassure the girls, Brown Eyes.”

“Very good. Yours is the better judgment.”

“I thought you would look at it that way,” observed Hippy.

The two men quickly were swallowed up in the mist, and Grace turned toward the camp, more disturbed in mind than she cared to admit to herself. Should their assailants persist in their attacks on the outfit, it was reasonably certain that one or more of the Overton party sooner or later would be wounded, or worse.

“Overland!” called Grace. The call was promptly answered from the camp, and Grace was met at the upper end of the tote path by a group of worried girls. She explained that Hippy, who had gone out to intercept the work of the night prowlers, had continued on with Ike Fairweather in pursuit of them.

“What were those ruffians trying to do this time?” questioned Miss Briggs.

“They not only tried, but they did,” answered Grace. “Girls, those rascals ran our equipment wagon off the trail and into the canyon.”

A chorus of “ohs” greeted the announcement.

“Does this mean that we shall have to abandon our trip?” anxiously asked Elfreda.

“It does not, J. Elfreda. Did you ever know of an Overton girl to confess herself beaten?”

“No. That is the last thing I should look for you to do.”

“Your question is answered. We are going to get that band of ruffians before the end of the Apache Trail is reached, or they will get us,” declared Grace. “Please stir the fire and make coffee for our men. I am going down the tote trail to see that we are not surprised.”

Crouching beside the trail, Grace finally heard Hippy and Ike returning.

"They got away, but we exchanged shots with them," called Hippy in reply to Grace's hail. "They went down into the canyon, but Ike said there was no use wasting time following them, for they know the ground better than we do. Sorry, but we did the best we could."

"You surely did all that any one could have done," agreed Grace. "We might as well go back to camp, as Nora probably is worrying about you. The girls will have coffee for you when you get in."

"I smell it, an' it smells mighty good," exclaimed Ike.

The coffee was ready for them when they arrived, and Anne was down on her knees toasting bread before a bed of coals. All hands immediately sat down before the fire to take refreshment and to discuss their situation.

"Right here, I wish to say to you, my friends, that we should recompense Mr. Fairweather for the loss of his wagon," declared Grace.

"Don't want no recompense," growled the old stagecoach driver.

"Yes!" shouted the girls, and Hippy came along with a deep bass "yes."

Sudden concern appeared in the face of Emma Dean at this juncture.

"Where is my black silk dress that was in the wagon?" she asked, half fearfully.

"Deep, deep down at the bottom of the canyon," rumbled Lieutenant Wingate.

Emma uttered a dismal wail.

"Who's going to pay me for my black silk? Who, I ask you, Grace Harlowe? Who is going to recompense *me*?"

The Overton girls burst out laughing.

"Each of us has lost clothing, Emma," comforted Grace. "We have two changes right here with us, however, so why worry? Mr. Fairweather, is there a possibility of getting to the bottom of the canyon to salvage our clothing?"

"No use tryin' it. Apaches will have it before you can get it."

"Apaches?" questioned Lieutenant Wingate. "We haven't seen one since we started, Mr. Fairweather."

"Mebby not, but the Redskins have seen you folks."

"Kiss your belongings good-bye, girls," advised Elfreda Briggs. "When next you see your raiment it perhaps will be beautifying some dusky maiden of the mountains."

"Don't s'pose you'll need me any more now that the wagon's gone," suggested Ike gloomily.

"On the contrary, we wish you to continue through with us, Mr. Fairweather," said Grace. "When we settle with you at Phoenix, we shall make up to you any loss that you may have sustained."

Ike's face brightened, not because of the promise to pay, but because the outfit did not intend to send him home.

"Thank you, folks. You make me right happy, you shore do. What do you reckon on doin'?"

"Let me see. We must be about thirty miles from Roosevelt Lake now," reflected Grace.

"'Bout three mile short of that," nodded Ike.

"Do you think we can pack what stuff we have left on your wagon horses and our ponies?" questioned Grace.

"Reckon so."

"Of course we don't care to carry much extra weight on the saddle animals, just light equipment, and if you cannot get through to Roosevelt to-day, we will make camp to-night and ride in to-morrow morning."

Ike shook his head.

"Nope. I can't make it in a day, but you folks better ride right on in an' stay at the Lodge. It's a good tavern for these parts and it ain't ever too full to hold some more. I'll be 'long 'bout eleven o'clock in the mornin' the day after, an' make camp for you all there."

"Thank you. That difficulty is overcome. I propose that we now turn in. Girls, we have time for a

beauty sleep before the rising of the sun, when I hope each of you will come out and enjoy the scene with me," nodded Grace smilingly.

The rest of the night passed without incident, and Ike sounded the getting-up call a few minutes before sun-up. There followed a hurried dressing, some grumbling, and finally much laughter because Emma Dean, in her attempt at haste, got all tangled up in her garments.

The Overland Riders, however, found themselves well paid for their early rising. A scene, such as they had never dreamed existed, lay before them. A sea of clouds hid the valley and the lake, white, billowy, lazy clouds that were drifting slowly under the warmth of the rising sun.

Above this white sea loomed the Four Peaks of the Apache Range, turned to red and gold by the morning sun, and, on beyond the Peaks, here and there a sapphire rock thrust its sharp point through the white billows.

"How beautiful!" murmured Elfreda Briggs.

"Beyond the power of words to express," replied Grace Harlowe, barely above a whisper.

Anne linked arms with Grace and patted her hand, but spoke no word. Even the bare-headed, irrepressible Hippy seemed lost in silent admiration. Perhaps it was the beauty of the scene, or perhaps it was that those billowing clouds carried him back in memory to the bitter days when Lieutenant Wingate was fighting for life above just such clouds as these, high over the German lines in France.

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Grace finally sat down, chin in hand, lost in wonder, her whole being filled with an exultation that she had known but once before, and then in a far different environment, when caught in a barrage at Chateau Thierry, when all the tremendous elements of the universe seemed to have joined in a mad medley. That was war, bitter, soul-racking war. This was peace, and she wondered that each should arouse in her emotions that were so much alike.

"Ahem!" began Hippy Wingate impressively, and the spell was broken. "We are now standing _"

"You are mistaken. Some of us are sitting," corrected Emma Dean.

"On the pinnacle of the Apache Trail, the most ancient trail on our continent. Well may this be called Oldest America, for men have traversed this route since remotest time, where the silence of eternity broods over the mesas and the canyons and the peaks. And where, with this wonderful scene that comes with the dawning of the day, all the mystery of the world seems brought together. Ahem!"

A painful silence of several seconds was broken by the judicial voice of Elfreda Briggs.

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"I sentence the prisoner to ten years' hard labor," she announced.

Shouts of laughter, and a cry from Emma that he should be sent up for life, put the Overlanders in a merry mood. Even Ike Fairweather, whose eyes had grown large under the spell of Hippy's oratory, permitted himself to indulge in a loud guffaw.

After a rather hurried breakfast, the outfit began packing up for the start. It was not an easy task to pack the tents and equipment on the backs of the horses, in view of the fact that each animal, except the wagon horses, must also carry a rider. The work was finally accomplished, however, each rider placing a pack of small stuff on her own back, in addition to the pack already lashed to the back of her pony.

Before starting out, Grace induced Elfreda to remove the bandage from her head. The wound was found to be healed, much to the relief of both.

Ike had made an early start, and two hours later the Overlanders galloped away, and then began the downward ride that would take them to the great artificial waterway, where both entertainment and adventure awaited them.

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CHAPTER XIX

HEROINES OF THE TRAIL

ON the way to Roosevelt, before the Overland girls caught up with him, Ike Fairweather had met a deputy sheriff and posse, who had been in the mountains looking for a horse thief, but were now returning to the place for which the Overlanders were headed.

From Ike the deputy learned of the attacks on the Overland girls, and of their plucky defense. Ike, furthermore, became loquacious, told the officer all he knew about Grace Harlowe and her

friends, not forgetting the redoubtable Hippy Wingate who had "shot down more German airplanes than any other man in the Allied armies."

When the deputy reached Roosevelt, he repeated Ike's story at the Lodge, as the hotel at Roosevelt Lake was called, so, without their knowledge, the Overlanders' praises were sung there some hours in advance of their arrival. When the girls came up with Ike just before noon that day, and took luncheon with him, Mr. Fairweather discreetly neglected to mention what he had told the deputy sheriff about them.

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Three hours later the Overland Riders reached the bottom of the grade to Roosevelt, rounded the "painted rocks" that stood sentinel over the trail there, and walked their horses across the great spillway of Roosevelt Dam, more than three hundred yards in length, this spillway releasing the surplus water from Lake Roosevelt, which is formed by the waters held in check and backed up by Roosevelt Dam. The water in its nearly three hundred feet fall from the top of the spillway roared into Salt River Canyon, a miniature Niagara, sending up clouds of rainbow spray, the thunder of its fall echoing down the canyon for miles.

Elfreda Briggs, who was riding by Grace's side, leaned over and shouted into her companion's ear:

"Hippy can indulge in as much oratory as he pleases here. No one will hear him above the roar of the waterfall, for which much thanks."

Grace nodded and grinned.

After crossing the spillway, the party turned to the right and followed a shining white trail along the edge of the lake to the Apache Lodge, which was located, they found, between the east and west arms of the lake.

Some difficulty was experienced in finding a place where they could stake down their ponies, but finally succeeding in tethering the animals, they quickly removed the packs from the backs of "man, woman and beast," as Miss Briggs characterized it.

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"Lieutenant, if you do not mind going bare-headed, we will all walk over to the Lodge and see if they will let us in," said Grace.

It was a dust-covered, brown-faced, bright-eyed party of girls who mounted the steps of the veranda of the Lodge, where a group of tourists were enjoying the cool mountain air of the late afternoon. All eyes were turned on the newcomers.

"The one with the brown hair is Grace Harlowe. The man is the great American Ace," Grace heard one of the tourists confide to a companion.

The Overton girl gave the speaker a brief, steady look.

"I will see if I can arrange for accommodations for us here," said Grace, turning to the young women of her party. "Perhaps it will be as well for you to wait on the veranda."

"Ask the proprietor if he has any old hats for sale," suggested Hippy Wingate as Grace was entering the Lodge, at which there was an audible titter from several of the women guests of the place.

"Have you room, sir, for a party of six not very presentable persons?" questioned Grace, smiling at the clerk.

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"For you, yes. I believe you are Mrs. Grace Harlowe Gray, are you not?"

The Overton girl looked her amazement.

"May I ask how you know my name, sir?"

"The deputy sheriff told me that you and your party were on the way here. How many rooms do you require?"

"Three with baths. I do not know how long we shall remain, but probably not longer than some time to-morrow. We shall go into camp when what is left of our equipment arrives."

"Yes, I understand that you ladies have had a mishap," volunteered the clerk.

"Is there anything that this man doesn't know about us?" she wondered. To the clerk she said: "We shall need a reliable man to watch our horses to-night. Will you be so kind as to send some one to us, some person who is to be depended upon?"

The clerk said he would, and that the rooms for the party would be ready whenever they desired to take possession.

Grace returned to the veranda, and, as she stepped out, she halted and gazed in amazement. Elfreda, Hippy and the others of her party were speaking with a tall, bronzed man of

distinguished appearance. With him were a gentleman and three ladies. Grace recognized him of the distinguished bearing instantly.

"General Gordon! How do you do!" she greeted, flushing with pleasure.

The general strode forward and grasped both her hands.

"My dear Mrs. Gray, I am happy beyond words to see you again. This is my wife; and Colonel Cartwright, the colonel's sister, and Mrs. Cartwright. The colonel served with us in France, but I believe you never met him, which was a misfortune for both."

"This young woman," announced the general to his friends, but in a tone of voice loud enough to be heard by most persons on the veranda, "saved my life on the battlefield in the Argonne. Had it not been for her, I should not be here. I have already told Mrs. Gordon the story."

"Please, General," begged Grace, flushing with embarrassment, but the general went on unheeding.

"Mrs. Gray dragged me into a deserted German machine-gun nest after I had been wounded on the field, manned a machine gun and held the Boches off until she could flash Morse signals to our lines that night. We were, at that time, being fired upon by both armies. A braver woman does not live."

"Suppose we speak of the beauties of the Old Apache Trail," suggested Grace, which brought a hearty laugh from all, and relieved the tension under which she was suffering.

"When I heard that Grace Harlowe Gray and her friends of the Overton Unit had proved themselves the heroines of the trail, I said, 'That's our Grace Harlowe, the doughboys' Grace Harlowe,' and I was glad. You must join our party this evening and we will talk war," he urged.

"Grace, here is an Indian who wishes to speak with you," interrupted Hippy.

"Me take care ponies," said the Indian. "Me Joe Smoky Face."

"Do you work about the Lodge?" questioned Grace.

"Yes."

"I will see the clerk about you. Please excuse me for a moment." Grace stepped briskly into the Lodge, followed by Lieutenant Wingate and the Indian. During her absence, the general briefly related the story, as he knew it, of the work of the Overton Unit in France.

"I think the man understands what is required of him. The clerk says he is dependable," announced Grace upon her return to the veranda. "The horses being arranged for, I think we will go to our quarters now, if you will excuse us, General."

"You will join us at dinner, Mrs. Gray?" questioned the general.

"Yes, thank you."

The Overton girls went to their rooms, not to appear again until just before dinner time. Wearing fresh uniforms, well groomed, eyes sparkling, cheeks tinged with faint flushes, they elicited a murmur of approval from the tourists as they stepped out on the veranda to join General Gordon and his party.

"Mess is served," announced the general.

"Yes, but oh, so different," laughingly replied Grace Harlowe.

At the general's request, one table had been set to accommodate the two parties, and the dinner proved to be a happy occasion for all. At the general's suggestion, it was decided that the two parties should take a launch trip the length of Lake Roosevelt on the following morning. The general said he would charter a launch, that they would take their luncheons with them and have a real picnic at the mouth of Tonto Creek at the upper end of the lake, thirty miles away.

A delightful evening was passed at the Lodge where Grace and the general exchanged war reminiscences, after which the girls went to their quarters for the night. Hippy strolled out to look over the ponies and to give Joe Smoky Face final instructions, then returned to the Lodge and went to bed.

The Overton girls were sound asleep by then. It was the first night, since they started over the Apache Trail, that they had been free from nerve-strain, but there were other nights coming, nights that they felt would hold a full measure of excitement and adventure for them, and none realized this possibility better than did Grace Harlowe herself.

CHAPTER XX

THE MYSTERIOUS ARROW

“THE end of a perfect day,” breathed Elfreda Briggs, as the launch bearing the Overland Riders and General Gordon’s party rounded a point of land, and the Lodge, for which they were now heading, stood out white against its dark background of mountains.

The voyage over the blue waters of Lake Roosevelt, and the picnic at the upper end of the lake, had been most enjoyable. Nothing had occurred to mar the pleasure of the sixty-mile voyage, through enchanting scenery.

“I think Miss Briggs has echoed the sentiments of all of us,” spoke up Anne.

“It would have been just our luck to have had the old boat sink under us,” differed Emma, amid much laughter.

“There’s our camp,” Hippy informed them. “Ike has arrived and is ready for us.”

All eyes were turned toward the shore, where the little white tents of the Overland Riders nestled at the base of the mountains, close to the water’s edge, the camp having been pitched a short quarter of a mile up the lake from the Lodge.

“It looks good to me,” declared the general. “I envy you young women the life you are leading out here, and wish I might be so fortunate as to belong to your outfit.”

“You’d regret it,” chuckled Emma Dean.

“Try me and see,” the general came back quickly.

“Very well, we will take you at your word, General,” answered Grace. “This evening you shall have mess with the Overland Riders in their camp. We shall undoubtedly be on short rations still, but that is a part of the life.”

“Good! I accept,” nodded the general.

“The invitation includes all of your party, of course,” said Grace, glancing inquiringly at the smiling faces around the cockpit of the launch.

“I know it will be a delightful experience,” declared Mrs. Cartwright.

“Wonderful!” added Miss Cartwright.

“I, for one, already have accepted, in my own mind,” nodded the general’s wife.

“Having lost our wagon with most of our table ware, we cannot offer you any luxuries. We have only our mess kits, and the plates in them will barely go around. It may be necessary for two persons to eat from the same plate,” added Grace mischievously.

“May we sleep at the camp to-night? I should so dearly love to sleep in a tent in the open,” declared Miss Cartwright.

“I fear it will be too cold for you. We will speak of it later, however. After you have spent a few hours in camp and partaken of our fare, you may not wish to remain over night.”

“Of course you are desirous of visiting the ancient homes of the cliff dwellers up yonder?” questioned Mrs. Gordon, pointing to the mountains.

“Yes, indeed. I hope to do some exploring there, too,” answered Grace. “When we land at the Lodge, if you good people will wait on the veranda for me, I will run over to the camp and see what shape we are in, then call for you later,” suggested Grace as they neared the landing place.

Grace and Hippy left their party at the Lodge pier and hurried to the camp.

“We are to have company for mess this evening, Mr. Fairweather. How well are we supplied with provisions?” she asked.

The old stagecoach driver said they had bacon, canned beans and coffee, but not much of anything else.

“See if you can purchase something more at the Lodge, especially potatoes. Did you find an Indian here taking care of the ponies?”

“Joe Smoky Face, as he called himself, was here lookin’ after the ponies, but when I came he went away. Don’t like them Apaches. Bad medicine, every one of ‘em.”

"Joe is said to be trustworthy," said Grace.

"Good Indians wear white men's dress. This Redskin dresses like what he is—an Apache—an' he lives with his tribe up the mountain," growled Ike.

"Why worry about Indians?" interjected Lieutenant Wingate. "Food and more food is the burning question of the hour."

Grace directed the driver to take one of the horses and fetch some potatoes and some few other necessaries from the Lodge.

"It is quite probable that we shall be here for a few days, so nothing in the way of food need be left behind," she told him.

Following Ike's departure, Grace and Hippy began putting the finishing touches to the camp. Blankets were neatly rolled and placed on the folding cots; a fancy paper spread was laid over the rough table that Ike had constructed for them, and paper napkins laid at each plate. A bunch of wild asters, set between two stones, to keep them from toppling over, completed the table decorations.

"There!" announced Grace, surveying the result of her labors. "We may not be strong on food, but we have decorations. Perhaps the guests may overlook the mere matter of food," she added laughingly.

By the time the camp was in order, Ike came trotting up with his pack animal. He had a bushel of potatoes, and some fresh vegetables from which Grace prepared a salad, and while she was doing this, Ike thrust the potatoes into hot ashes to bake.

"The young ladies will be here to help to finish getting the supper ready, Mr. Fairweather. I shall return at seven with our company. One of the guests is General Gordon, a brave soldier whom I met on the battlefield in the Argonne. The other is Colonel Cartwright, another valiant soldier of the late war. I thought you might be interested in knowing something about these men, for they *are* real men."

"Just like myself," added Hippy.

"Yes, Hippy, I agree with you there. Shall you go to the Lodge with me? I think you had best do so as the ladies may need assistance over the rough ground between here and the Lodge. Mr. Fairweather, our guests may conclude that they wish to stay all night. If so, we ladies will sleep in one tent, giving the guests the cots and most of the blankets. What is your opinion of the weather?"

"Might rain."

"I am of the same opinion. However, what's the odds? Come, Hippy!"

Reaching the Lodge, Grace directed the girls to go to camp and have the supper ready to be served at seven o'clock sharp, telling them of the preparations that already had been made.

She then sat down to wait for her friends, who were still in their rooms. There were any number of persons who welcomed the opportunity to engage the Overland Rider in conversation, which at once turned to war subjects. What Grace had to say about the war, however, did not concern herself, but had to do with General Gordon's achievements on the western front.

"Won't you please tell us, Mrs. Gray, how you won the French war cross and the distinguished service medal?" begged a lady courteously.

"General Gordon evidently has been talking out of meetin'," laughed Grace. "Please excuse me from speaking of myself. Surely, you realize that it would be most embarrassing to me to speak of myself."

The lady begged her pardon, and declared that it was rude of her to have asked the question. Grace smiled and began telling her questioner of the work of the Overton Unit, and of Lieutenant Wingate's valiant services in the army flying corps. This led to stories of the war, and when General Gordon and his party came down he found nearly all the guests of the Lodge gathered about the Overton College girl, listening to her praise, not only of the Overton girls, but of the young men of America, who had fought the great fight.

"Are we late?" asked Mrs. Gordon, extending her hand.

"No, you are in good time, but I think we should start now. Where is Lieutenant Wingate? I have not seen him since we reached the hotel."

"Some one said he was seen trying to borrow a hat from the chef to wear to supper," answered a male voice.

"That is the army spirit of freedom," nodded Grace. "Incidentally it is like Lieutenant Wingate. He lost his hat on the way in, and the wagon that carried most of our wearing apparel lies at the

bottom of a canyon. We will be going. If you ladies and gentlemen care to visit our camp we shall be glad to have you do so to-morrow," added Grace courteously, turning to the guests to whom she had been telling war stories.

"Here comes the lieutenant," informed the man who had told Grace where he had last seen Hippy. The lieutenant wore a derby hat, a full size too small for him, and this, crowning his army uniform, made him look ridiculous.

A laugh greeted his appearance.

Hippy's face wore a severe expression. He offered his arm to Miss Cartwright with grace and dignity. At least that was what he intended it to be, but Grace thanked the kind fates that Emma Dean was not present to express her opinion of Hippy's appearance before all the guests of the hotel.

"Have you decided to remain with us to-night, General?" asked Grace.

"Mrs. Gordon and myself and Miss Cartwright will accept your hospitality, if you are certain that we shall not be crowding you."

"There is plenty of room in the mountains," answered Grace with a wave of the hand. "You are used to campaigning, General, but I hope the ladies will not regret their decision."

They assured Grace that they would not; so the party started out full of anticipation for the new experience that lay before them.

The general, when they reached the camp, turned to Grace with eyes twinkling.

"I would know, even did I not know that this was your camp, that some one who had been with the forces, had laid it out," he said.

"Old Mr. Fairweather, our driver, laid it out," answered Grace mischievously.

"He is an apt pupil," returned the general.

"You win, General," laughed Grace.

"Isn't this delightful?" cried Miss Cartwright. "And look at the table. Pardon my ill manners, but this is so different from what I expected to find in—in—"

"In a traveling circus," finished Emma amid laughter.

"Oh, the worst is yet to come," observed Hippy.

Grace introduced Mr. Fairweather to their guests, who shook hands cordially with the old stagecoach driver.

"Are the potatoes done?" whispered Grace.

Ike nodded.

Odors of frying bacon and the aroma of coffee were in the air, and, when Grace announced that the guests were to be seated, the summons was quickly answered. Grace had brought a pound of butter with her from the Lodge, a luxury that the Overland girls themselves had not enjoyed since the first day out from Globe.

"I haven't had such an appetite since I left France," declared the general.

"Perhaps you have not had so much exercise and fresh air in any one day since then," suggested Elfreda.

"Possibly that explains it," replied the officer dryly.

The supper went along merrily, the stock of bacon being considerably depleted when finally the guests refused another helping, and, at Grace's invitation, rose and strolled over to the cheerful campfire, where they sat down, the men to smoke their pipes and the women to chat.

It was ten o'clock when Colonel Cartwright said he must be getting back to the Lodge. He added that there was dancing there, and invited the Overland girls to go over and dance, but Grace declined for her party, saying that they had a strenuous day ahead of them, as they wished to explore the cliff dwellers' homes on the morrow. Grace had further plans in mind regarding the explorations, but she said nothing to her guests about it.

"General," said Grace, calling the officer aside before the colonel and his wife took their leave. "It looks like a storm to-night. I wish you and Mrs. Gordon to remain if you desire to do so, but we may have a wet time of it."

"An old campaigner like myself doesn't mind a little thing like a wetting. You should know that."

"I am not thinking of you, but of Mrs. Gordon and Miss Cartwright."

"Both good scouts," answered the general.

"Campers' fare will be yours then, sir. Good-night, Colonel and Mrs. Cartwright. We shall be happy to have you join us for mess at any time."

Before leaving, the colonel invited the Overland girls to have dinner with him at the Lodge on the following evening and remain for the dance.

Grace said they could not think of it, so far as the dinner was concerned, but that, if they were not too tired, they would go over for the dance.

The Gordons and Miss Cartwright resumed their positions by the campfire after the colonel and his wife, escorted by Hippy, still wearing his derby hat, started towards the Lodge.

The fire was blazing up cheerfully, and before it the girls of the Overton Unit sat and talked with the guests of their campaigning days in France.

Something whistled down from the air, and every person in the outfit heard the thud when it struck the ground.

"A stone from the mountain," said the general.

"I think not," replied Grace, getting up.

"It fell right near where you're standin'," called Ike Fairweather as Grace began looking about her alertly. "Looked like a stick."

"Ah! I see it." Grace sprang forward, followed by General Gordon, and, with her pocket lamp, examined the object that had so mysteriously fallen among them.

"An arrow!" exclaimed the general. "Probably a spent arrow from the Indian camp."

"The Indian camp is too far away for that, sir," replied Grace.

"Broken, isn't it, Mrs. Gray?" questioned the officer, stooping over to pluck the missile from the ground.

"Wait!" warned the Overton girl. She examined the arrow as it stood doubled over at the break, which was about midway of the shaft, then withdrew the point and carried the whole to the campfire for further examination.

CHAPTER XXI

A NIGHT OF THRILLS

AFTER a careful scrutiny of the arrow, Grace glanced up at the general, who was regarding her inquiringly.

"What do you find?" he asked.

"That the arrow has been weakened in the middle by a cut with a knife. It appears to have been the intention of the person who shot it, that it should break on striking the ground. You can see that the cut is a fresh one, probably made only a little while ago."

"Yes, so I observe. What does that signify?"

"I am not well posted on Indian lore, but I do know that, with the Chinese, a broken stick or twig cast before one is a warning. Mr. Fairweather, will you please come here?"

Ike stepped over and stood frowningly regarding the shaft that Grace was holding up for his inspection.

"This is an Indian arrow, is it not, Mr. Fairweather?" she asked.

"Yes."

"What does it mean when an Indian shoots an arrow with such a break as this in it?"

"Trouble!" answered the stagecoach driver without hesitation. "It's a warning, Mrs. Gray."

"Then it must have come from an Indian who feels kindly toward us. What I do not understand is, why, if he wished to give us warning of something, he did not come to us with it."

"Indians is queer critters," observed Ike wisely. "There's no accountin' for Indians, and 'specially Apaches."

"I think I agree with you," answered Grace, rewarding the old man with a smile. "Please see to it that the ponies are well staked. Nothing more, Mr. Fairweather."

After the driver had walked away, Grace leaned back and laughed.

"I have a feeling, General, that before this night ends you will be wishing that you had remained at the Lodge," chuckled Grace.

"Oh, no, nothing like that, Mrs. Gray. I should enjoy a little excitement. It has been a long time since the armistice was signed, and with it the real joy of trying to live, passed."

"Yes, I agree with you." Excusing herself, as Hippy came up and sat down to chat with the general while the girls were entertaining Mrs. Gordon and Miss Cartwright, Grace walked over to Ike who was restaking the horses.

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"We hope to do some mountain climbing to-morrow, and if we do so I shall require several hundred feet of light, strong rope. Please see if you can get it for me. What do you think?" asked Grace, nodding toward the sky.

"Mountain squall, I reckon."

"More than a squall, I should say. However, you know more about the mountain weather than I do. And, confidentially, Mr. Fairweather, that broken arrow leads me to believe that it would be good judgment for you to take a rifle to bed with you to-night," suggested Grace.

Ike grinned and nodded.

Returning to her guests, Grace suggested to them that it might be well to turn in, as a busy day was before them for the morrow.

"General, you and the lieutenant will occupy the small tent to the right; the ladies will take the middle one, and we girls will occupy the large outside tent. I hope you will sleep well. Lieutenant, please show the general to his sleeping place."

Half an hour later the Overland girls were chattering in low tones in their own tent. Hippy and the general were already snoring in theirs, while the two women guests were having some difficulty in getting to sleep in their strange surroundings.

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Grace had thrown herself down on her cot where she lay pondering on the mystery of the broken arrow. After half an hour of this she got up to have a look at the weather before turning in for the night, observing that the campfire, fanned by a breeze from the mountains, was flickering and snapping as if in protest at being disturbed.

Shading her eyes with a hand and gazing up to the mountains, Grace saw dark clouds swirling about the Four Peaks in the distance, and heard a deep-throated, far away roar of thunder. A dull red flash on the opposite side of the range of mountains reminded her of flashes from the big guns on the battle front.

"I think we are going to catch it," observed the Overland girl. "Can it be that the arrow was a storm warning?" Grace dismissed the thought as improbable, and, returning to her tent, laid aside her clothes and got into bed. She was awakened some two hours later by tremendous gusts of wind, accompanied by flapping canvas and a heavy downpour of rain.

Lightning flashes were outlining the black clouds, and crashes of thunder reverberated from peak to peak, seeming finally to lose themselves in the black depths of the canyons.

Grace got up and dressed, and, putting on her slicker, stepped out. The raindrops beat on her face, stinging like tiny hailstones.

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The ponies were whinneying and rearing, so Grace stepped over and tried to quiet them, and there Ike Fairweather found her as she stood revealed when a flash of lightning deluged the camp with a blinding light.

"That you, Mrs. Gray?" he called, uncertain just which one of the outfit it was that he saw.

"Yes." Grace had to shout to make herself heard above the roar of the gale. "Where is the lieutenant?"

"Sleepin'. Think the tents will hold?" questioned Ike anxiously.

"I hope so. Please look after the horses. I will rout out the lieutenant and see what we can do to keep the tents down, especially the one occupied by General Gordon's wife and companion."

Grace ran back and called Hippy. The general heard the call and answered first.

"Heavy storm, sir," Grace informed him. "Hippy, please hurry out. I need you."

"Wha—at is it? Is Jerry coming?" answered Hippy Wingate sleepily.

The general laughed.

"It is bad, isn't it? What do you wish me to do, Mrs. Gray?" he asked.

"We must try to hold down Mrs. Gordon's tent, but I fear we shall lose some of our canvas."

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"There goes one already!" cried the general, as the tent he and Lieutenant Wingate had occupied puffed out like a balloon and disappeared in the darkness. The lieutenant made no effort to recover it, but ran calling to Grace to know where she was.

"Sit on the stakes. Hold the guests' tent down at all hazards," she cried.

Elfreda had taken charge of the tent occupied by the Overland girls, and was hurrying her companions with their dressing. They had barely finished dressing, when the tent pulled its stakes and toppled over.

"Grab it! Don't let it get away!" shouted Miss Briggs.

"What was that?" cried General Gordon, when, during a brief lull in the storm, his ears caught a familiar whistling sound.

"A bullet, sir," answered Grace promptly. "Watch out for the next gust of wind. It's going to be a severe one."

"There they come again!" exclaimed the general, as bullets began spraying the camp.

Grace sprang to the tent occupied by Mrs. Gordon, which Hippy was doing his best to hold down.

"Lie flat on the ground, Mrs. Gordon!" she shouted. "We're under fire."

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At about the same instant Elfreda Briggs was uttering a similar warning to the girls in her charge.

The gun-fire grew hotter, continued so for a few moments, then suddenly ceased as a fresh blast of storm swept down on the camp from the mountains, and then, despite all their efforts, the tent that Grace and the two men were now holding, gave way under the tremendous power of the wind.

Mrs. Gordon and Miss Cartwright, while thoroughly frightened, were too plucky to make any outcry, and, after a few moments of lively work, the general and Hippy, with some assistance from Grace, succeeded in saving the tent.

About that time the rain dwindled to a sprinkle, and bullets again began to spatter about the camp. Uttering an exclamation, Grace ran for her rifle, which she thrust into Hippy Wingate's hand.

"Look!" Grace pointed up at a spot on the mountains. "Look closely and you will see the flashes of the rifles that are shooting at us. Every time you see a flash, shoot at it!"

Hippy located the flashes instantly, and began firing at them, Grace observing and offering suggestions.

"What is he shooting at?" questioned the general.

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"At the flashes of the guns up yonder on the mountain. If your eye is quick enough you can see them."

General Gordon, who had reassured Mrs. Gordon and her companion by telling them that the storm had about blown itself out, at the same time cautioning both to keep down close to the ground so long as the shooting lasted, watched Lieutenant Wingate's work with the rifle with interest.

After Hippy had twice emptied the magazine of the rifle, the fog clouds blotted out the peaks of the mountains and slowly settled down, drawing a mantle over the point from which the bullets had been coming, whereupon the fire from the mountains ceased and Lieutenant Wingate laid down his rifle.

"I hope that ends it for to-night," said Grace. "I think the fog will hold pretty much as it is, so the next thing is a campfire if we can find enough fuel to start one."

Ike was already engaged in this task. General Gordon, in the meantime, was assisting Mrs. Gordon and Miss Cartwright over to the fire which Ike was fanning into life with his sombrero.

"I am so sorry, Mrs. Gordon," sympathized Grace, as the general's wife began shaking out her

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wet, wrinkled skirt.

Mrs. Gordon laughed.

"I am quite willing to suffer such slight discomfort for the privilege of seeing this outfit at work in an emergency," she declared.

Grace suggested to the general that it might be advisable to take the ladies back to the Lodge for the rest of the night.

"No, no, no!" protested Miss Cartwright. "I, for one, propose to see it through."

"So do I," approved Mrs. Gordon.

Elfreda, who had found the makings, was brewing tea over the fire and Anne was toasting crackers on the other side of it.

"Storm, bullets, then tea and crackers! Isn't this romantic?" cried Miss Cartwright. "You young ladies surely do know how to do things."

The warmth of the campfire, and the refreshments, put new spirits into the party, and they were now able to laugh over their plight. The guests, however, were at a loss to understand why any one should wish to shoot at the camp of the Overland Riders.

"I cannot comprehend how they were able to place their bullets right in the camp in all that darkness and storm," wondered Mrs. Gordon.

"Their rifles undoubtedly were aimed and set before dark," answered Lieutenant Wingate.

"The broken arrow, General," reminded Grace, nodding to General Gordon.

"Hm—m—m—m!" mused the World-war veteran.

The rest of the night was passed by the campers with some discomfort, but without further disturbance, the tops of the mountains being hidden from sight by the cloud fog until the morning sun cleared away the mists, when a glorious day was in prospect.

"No cliff-dwelling explorations to-day, girls!" cried Elfreda next morning. "We shall have to do our family washing and ironing this morning."

"If we do I know of one who will have to stay in bed during the process," piped Emma. "I haven't been able to find my everyday skirt, and I suppose that too has been blown off into the canyon, perhaps to keep my black silk company."

Soon after breakfast, Colonel and Mrs. Cartwright came over, they having been much concerned for their friends upon learning that a severe mountain storm had swept the valley in the night. The colonel urged all hands to have dinner with him at the Lodge, but the girls declined, saying that they had work for every minute of the day, so their guests left after obtaining a promise from Grace that she and her friends would attend the dance at the Lodge that evening.

"I have an idea, and to-morrow I shall try to put it to the test," murmured Grace, using her glasses in a long, searching study of the mountains to the rear of the camp.

It was a hard day's work that the Overland girls did, but when night came they were ready for the entertainment at the Lodge, and were as well groomed as though they had but just come from their own dressing rooms at home.

"I do not know how you do it. It is wonderful," exclaimed Miss Cartwright in greeting to the Overlanders upon their arrival at the Lodge.

The dance lasted until half after eleven o'clock, and the girls declared that they had not had such a delightful evening since their last hop at Overton College.

"Come out and get shotted with us," urged Emma Dean as they were about to take their departure for the camp.

That night the Overland party was treated to another deluge of bullets, but the firing did no damage, beyond putting a hole through the pup-tent occupied by Ike Fairweather. All hands, despite their loss of sleep, were up early on the following morning making preparation for their journey to the homes of the ancient Cliff Dwellers where an exciting day awaited them.

RELICS OF AN ANCIENT RACE

THE Gordons and Cartwrights had engaged a conveyance to take them to the point on the Apache Trail where they must turn off and walk about a mile to reach the homes of the Cliff Dwellers. The Overland Riders preferred to ride their ponies, Ike taking his team to carry himself and the rations for the day.

Tucked away with the equipment was a strong rope several hundred feet in length, Ike, at Grace's request, having provided this and other equipment without asking too many questions.

An early start was made, both parties reaching the turning-off place at about the same time, and shortly thereafter a merry company, carrying picnic baskets, was ascending the steep, narrow trail that led to the Tonto Cliff Dwellings.

They found the first of the two main groups of prehistoric community dwellings free of tourists, and the Overton College girls stood in awe as they gazed on the massive masonry of this relic of an unknown past.

"Are you familiar with the history of these cliff dwellings, Mrs. Gray?" asked the general. 229

"I must confess that I am not wholly familiar with the subject, sir. Will you tell us what you know about them?"

"No one knows of their beginning, nor of the people who inhabited them. We do know that Coronado's Scouts discovered them nearly four hundred years ago. The Coronado Scouts, it is said, believed that they found the frontier fortresses of that rich kingdom of Tontontec, which was one of the seven they sought."

"The dwellings were not then occupied, were they?" asked Anne.

"Oh, no," responded the general. "They were in ruins as you see them now, so you can form some idea of the antiquity of the dwellings."

"Do you know whether or not the Cliff Dwellers were here ahead of the Indians, sir?" asked Grace.

"It is supposed that they were, for the Indians of the present day do not even know of them in legend. The dwellers must have had enemies, man or beast, for you see they built their castles in out-of-reach spots. They builded them well, too, high under leaning walls of rock, of blocked stone, set with strong adobe mortar. They were architects, and they were builders, were those ancients," declared the general. 230

"A peculiar feature of their homes is that each community lived in a community house, said to have included sixty to seventy rooms. The three dwellings that are accessible do not show what the inner arrangements were, but a fourth one, that has never been explored, is believed to be in a better state of preservation."

"That is the one I propose to have a look at," declared Grace.

"I suspected as much," nodded the general. "Don't try it, is my advice. You don't know what kind of a precipice one would have to pass over to get there."

"I know the precipice, for I have examined it through my glasses, but I am not convinced that there is no other entrance to the place."

"What makes you think that?"

"The formation of the sheer wall that falls away from their front dooryard shows that it has been in that same condition for perhaps thousands of years, and probably was in the same condition in the days of the Cliff Dwellers. Suppose we have our luncheon here and then have a look at the top of this unknown cliff home."

All through the luncheon that was eaten in an ancient community house, with the magnificent view of mountain and canyon spread out before them, General Gordon was regarding Grace perplexedly. 231

"I believe she really intends to try it," he muttered. "How, I do not know. She does, though, and I have no doubt the plan is already clearly outlined under that head of fair brown hair."

"So you do not believe I can do it, eh?" chided Grace, favoring the officer with a brilliant smile.

"Do not believe—Mrs. Gray, are you a mind reader?" demanded the general.

"When a mental process is reflected in a face as it has been in yours for the last five minutes, the reading is easy."

The general shrugged his shoulders in true French form.

"I give up," he exclaimed.

"I wish the walls of this ancient place might be read as easily," added Grace. "Do you think the ladies can stand a climb to the top of the mountain?"

"Oh, yes; it is not a long nor a very hard climb, I should judge from the looks of it," replied the general.

It was decided to leave the hampers at the lunching place, but to carry their mess kits. Grace told Ike Fairweather to take the rope with him, as it might be needed. In her own kit she carried a ball of stout twine, ammunition for her rifle and for the automatic that swung in its holster.

"All is ready. Please take your time, ladies, and if you tire, you must say so," she directed.

"We follow where you lead, Mrs. Gray," promised Miss Cartwright dramatically.

"Don't make rash promises, Miss Cartwright," warned the general. "You don't know what you are promising. I think *I* do."

"Just wait and see," teased the young woman.

It was a hard hike to the brow of the mountain, taking nearly two hours, at the rate they traveled. The party finally came out on a broad table of rock, from which the mountain sloped away a short distance, then took a sheer drop of a thousand feet.

None of the party ventured to look over the brink until Grace finally did so, then turned laughingly to Miss Cartwright.

"Are you following?"

"Yes." Miss Cartwright stepped up beside Grace and gazed off over the great precipice.



Grace Disappeared Over the Edge.

Suddenly the army officer's sister swayed dizzily, and, had Grace lost her head for a second, a disaster probably would have resulted. Grace's arm quickly encircled the waist of Miss Cartwright and drew her back, now in a fainting condition. The dizzy height had been too much for the young woman's nerves. Grace gravely handed her over to Colonel Cartwright.

"I am sorry, sir, that I encouraged her. It was not prudent of me at all," she said.

Grace, after studying the face of the cliff for a few moments, stepped back and spoke to Ike Fairweather, pointing to a projecting tower of rock that crowned the tableland like a monument.

"You can snub the rope around that," she said.

"Mrs. Gray, surely you are not going to try that desperate descent?" begged General Gordon.

"Try is the word, General. If you think it advisable, take Mrs. Gordon and Miss Cartwright for a walk. To see me go over may upset them. The descent is perfectly safe, provided the rope doesn't break. I have my reasons, other than mere curiosity, for attempting to get to the Community House down there."

"Very good, Mrs. Gray. Depend upon me for whatever I may be able to do. I think I understand your real motive. Do not worry about the ladies; if they cannot stand it to see you go over they can turn their backs on you."

Preparations were quickly made, Miss Cartwright observing wide-eyed and a little pale. Ike had made a sling with a board bottom for Grace to sit in. In addition to this, she slipped a loop of the rope under her shoulders. Grace then produced the ball of strong twine from her kit, and made an end fast to the "monument." She directed that some one keep hold of the twine at all times for signals.

"One pull will mean that I have a message to send up; two pulls will advise you that I am to be hauled up," Grace informed them. "Are you ready?"

"Ready!" announced the four men in chorus. General Gordon added that he would stand at the upper edge of the slope and watch Grace over its lower edge, from which point she would have a sheer drop of what he estimated to be about three hundred feet to the cliff dwelling.

"Loyalheart! Do be careful," admonished Elfreda anxiously. "I know there is no use trying to dissuade you from attempting this foolish thing, so we can do nothing except to wish you luck."

"Yes you can—you can hold fast to the rope," corrected Grace. Smiling and nodding to her companions, she took a final look about, then crept cautiously down to the edge of the slope, where the sheer drop began, waved a hand and disappeared over the edge of the precipice.

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CHAPTER XXIII

BETWEEN EARTH AND SKY

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BEFORE starting on her perilous venture, Grace had directed that the rope be paid out slowly, so as not to set up so much friction that the rope would be in danger of burning.

As she went over, Grace took one look below her and closed her eyes, but after a few moments she summoned her courage, opened her eyes and looked down. She could see, directly beneath her, the ledge under which the Cliff Dwellers' Community House had been constructed. Out in front of the ledge were the white stone walls and part of the roof of the ancient structure, which she was on her way to explore.

"Getting down is easy. It is getting back that is going to be the big problem," muttered the plucky girl. "It is worth the risk. Think of it, Grace Harlowe, you possibly will be the first human being to set foot on that shelf of rock in ten centuries, perhaps ten times ten centuries."

Grace wriggled and twisted herself into position for a suitable landing, and, as it was, she grazed the wall of the cliff dwelling, slipping down the side of it, kicking out vigorously to keep from tearing her clothing on the protruding points of stone, until her feet touched the ground.

"Down! Harlowe luck is with me thus far." Grace hastily penciled a note, reading:

"Arrived safely. Send the string back with a small stone to weight it. Fine view down here. I start exploring. Don't worry if you don't hear from me for an hour or so."

One tug on the line, and the Overton girl was rewarded by seeing her message slowly rising at the end of the twine.

Grace thereupon took account of her surroundings. With her glass she picked up the Lodge, then the tiny dots that she knew were the Overland Riders' tents. It was a clear view to the camp, and, as Grace described it to herself, a good shooting range.

Now began her explorations. There were heaps of rotted stone and adobe mortar all about, but taking it all in all, the community house appeared to be in an excellent state of preservation. Grace took her time, and moved slowly, using extreme caution, not knowing what emergency she might have to meet at any moment. Over heaps of stone and rubbish she climbed to such

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chambers as she could reach. The ceilings in the Community House were so low that she was obliged to stoop; window apertures were no more than six inches across and of equal height, but the light shed by these was sufficient to enable her to pick her way about.

The mustiness of centuries hung heavy on the air despite the ventilation, and birds, disturbed by her entrance, gave Grace a start as they winged their way toward the light. Not a relic, however, did the Overton girl find in her search of the chambers.

On coming out of the cliff dwelling, Grace suddenly halted and sniffed the air.

"That smells like a dead fire," she muttered. "Perhaps I have company here." Picking her way cautiously in under the ledge that formed a partial roof for the ancient Community House, Grace found herself in a vast, tunnel-like opening. Black darkness lay ahead of her, but the odor of a dead fire grew stronger in her nostrils as she proceeded.

Grace now brought her flash lamp from her pocket, passing it to her left hand, and, holding the automatic in a firm grip in her right, she advanced, prepared for emergencies.

She examined the walls briefly. From their smoothness, it occurred to Grace that water had once flowed through the tunnel. How far back the tunnel led into the mountain she could not even guess, but it was reasonable to suppose that it was not a waterway when the Cliff Dwellers lived there.

"I am getting near it! The dead fire odor is growing stronger!" Grace told herself in a whisper. "I believe my surmises are correct. How I wish one of the men were with me. However, I'm in it and must go through with it," she muttered.

Using her flash lamp to guard against stepping into a pitfall, the Overton girl picked her way cautiously along. Here and there were huge crevices in the wall of the tunnel, which, as Grace described it to herself, was in reality "the rear yard of the ancient Cliff Dwellers."

The crevices, as she shot rays of light into them, were dark and forbidding, but, looking back, the white towers of the Community House stood out reassuringly.

"Ah!"

Grace had stepped into a heap of ashes and they felt warm under her feet. Stooping over and running her hand into the mass she found that the ashes, at the bottom, really were warm.

"There has been a recent fire here, but the ashes are several hours old. I wish Tom were here. He could tell me, within half an hour, just how long ago this heap was a blazing fire. Let me reason this out." Grace leaned against the wall and reflected.

"Some one has been in this place within a dozen hours or so. It is reasonable to assume, too, that they did not come over the precipice; hence there must be some other entrance, some other way, and perhaps an easier one. I am going on."

Grace started ahead resolutely, now and then flashing a ribbon of light to the floor directly ahead of her. Her keenness was rewarded a few moments later, and the Overton girl, dropping to her knees, examined the rocky floor with great care.

What Grace had discovered was the imprint of a heavy-soled boot, faint but clearly defined. Her next discovery was a frying pan, some tin plates and a heap of bones that looked as if they might be beef bones.

"They surely live well up here. I—"

Grace jumped. That is, her nerves did; her body did not move at all, but she heard her heart beat, and it was pounding fast and hard. What had disturbed and startled her was a groan, a distinctly human groan, and then deep silence settled over the tunnel, broken only by the faint, repressed breathing of Grace herself.

The natural impulse was to turn on her light, but Grace Harlowe was too prudent to do that just yet. She preferred to wait and listen. This policy produced results. A second groan, more prolonged than before, followed.

It was a human groan of distress that she had heard, though whether real or feigned the girl was unable to decide in her own mind, but she now realized that she must make the advance herself. Arriving at this decision, Grace turned on her light, and, with the automatic revolver thrust ahead of her, ready for instant use, she began a cautious search for the source of the voice.

"Groan again, so I may know where you are," she called softly. "If you are hoping to play a trick on me I shall shoot on sight!"

The response came back almost at once, the voice sounding ahead of her and to the right side of the tunnel. She moved forward with renewed caution, and, a few steps further on, as she flashed her ribbon of light into a niche in the wall of the tunnel, she saw him.

Grace approached cautiously, still holding her weapon at ready, for, though she was looking down on a man, apparently hound and gagged, she proposed to take no more than the absolutely necessary chances.

Leaning over, with the revolver pointed down at him, Grace turned the light of her lamp into the face of the owner of the voice. As she did so she uttered an exclamation of amazement.

CHAPTER XXIV

GRACE SOLVES THE MOUNTAIN MYSTERY

“**J**OE SMOKY FACE!” cried Grace Harlowe. “What does this mean?”

“Me kill um!” raged the Indian who had guarded their ponies on the night of the Overland Riders’ arrival, after Grace had removed the gag from his mouth.

“Kill whom?”

“Con Bates and Ben Jackson.”

Grace freed the man from his bonds.

“Are there rifles here?”

“Yes.”

“Get two, quick, if you know where they are. Is any one else here in this place?”

“All gone. Not come back till moonrise. When come back mebbly kill white girls. Catch Joe Smoky Face and fetch here.”

“Joe, did you shoot that arrow into our camp to warn us?” demanded Grace, a sudden light flooding her mentality.

“Me shoot arrow.” Joe ran down the tunnel a few yards and returned with two rifles, both loaded.

“Now we are all right, if you are certain that no one will come here. Tell me as quickly as you can, what happened to you.”

From the Indian’s monosyllables, and, using her imagination freely, Grace inferred that Joe had overheard the bandits when they were spying on the Overland Riders’ camp, and, after the men had gone away as Joe supposed, he had fired the arrow into the camp to warn Grace Harlowe and her friends. The bandits, however, had not gone away, and when they saw what Joe had done, they suddenly fell upon him, bound and gagged him and carried him to their lair in the ancient Community House of the Cliff Dwellers.

“Was Con Bates one of those men?” she asked.

“Him come along.”

“Who is Ben Jackson?”

“Bad man who follow white girls till Bates make escape at Globe and come along to help. Much bad men. Steal much. Plenty here. You find. Joe Smoky Face know where.”

“You say they have gone to Globe. Con Bates would not dare to go there. How did he get out of jail?”

“Not know. Mebbly he not go Globe to-day. Ben Jackson he go. Mebbly Con he stay in bushes.”

“How many men come here?”

Joe counted six on his fingers.

“Show me the way out,” demanded Grace.

“Hole in mountain. Joe show. Joe show other things.”

The Indian did. He led the Overton girl into dark recesses in the wall of the tunnel, where, by the light of her lamp, she saw plunder that made her eyes widen. It was mostly small merchandise, but valuable. There were gold and silver articles and some precious stones, but not many, that Grace, in her hasty examination, thought were of considerable value.

In another cache there were silks, carefully wrapped, and a regular arsenal of rifles, revolvers and ammunition, all probably stolen. Grace Harlowe's eyes glowed.

"Were those men here last night—I mean did they shoot from out there?" pointing to the mouth of the cave of the Cliff Dwellers.

"Yes, shoot at white girls' camp."

"I thought so. When I saw the flashes from their rifles, and this morning looked at this place with my glasses, I made up my mind that the shots had been fired from here. Joe, we must catch these men, every one of them. Do you think you can get back to your people without being seen, provided any of the bandits should still be about your camp?"

"Joe get back."

"Very good. Go back to your camp on the mountain side and send a trustworthy Indian to get the sheriff. I will send a letter by you to the clerk at the Lodge, and he can telephone for the sheriff. When the sheriff and his party are found, have them led here, but do not try to get here until dark. Do the bandits keep a guard on the outside of this place at night?"

"Joe not know."

The Indian was trotting ahead, Grace lighting the way with her lamp. She observed that the instinct of the Indian enabled him to follow the outward trail with as little difficulty as if he had been over it many times.

"Come end now," finally announced Joe, the trail having narrowed down so that they were obliged to go in single file. It was dark as night where they were, but Joe knew how to reach the light. She saw him put a shoulder to the low roof and lift from a narrow opening a slab of rock, which he cautiously shoved an inch or so to one side, and for several minutes stood with eyes at the crack he had made.

"All gone," said Joe, pushing the slab of rock aside.

Following her guide, Grace crawled out and looked about her. The opening through which she had emerged was on the sloping side of the mountain, well screened by cactus. The Indian replaced the slab of stone, which then looked to be a part of the cavern wall.

"Very simple," muttered Grace, gazing about her and fixing every detail of the surroundings in her mind. The Overton girl then wrote a note to the clerk of the Lodge, telling him exactly what was to be done, and that she would remain on watch awaiting the arrival of the officers after dark. She handed the note to Joe Smoky Face.

"Joe, you will come back with the sheriff, so he will not miss the place. I have written that you will. Go, now!"

The Indian trotted away and Grace saw him secrete the rifle he had brought out with him. Following his departure Grace got her bearings and started around the mountain to rejoin her friends whom she knew were anxiously awaiting a signal from her.

The amazement of the Overland Riders and their friends when Grace came walking in among them was too great for words for a few seconds; then the Overlanders gave a shout.

"We must pack up at once and the party must return to the Lodge. I've made a great discovery and solved the mystery of the Apache Trail," she announced.

Grace then briefly related the story of her adventure and told the party what she wished them to do.

"Above all, say nothing to any person outside of our circle. Do not even discuss our discovery among yourselves where possibly you may be overheard, for those men probably have confederates. I wish them to come back so we may capture them. Miss Cartwright, will you ride my pony back to camp?"

"Yes. Why?"

"So that the same number of persons may return on horseback. Go directly to the camp, then walk back to the Lodge. I shall remain on the mountain to watch the tunnel entrance."

"Not alone, Mrs. Gray. Surely, we cannot permit you to do that," objected General Gordon. "I shall remain there with you."

Grace shook her head.

"It won't do. Your absence would cause comment, which is exactly what I do not wish. Having rifle and revolver I shall be able to take care of myself. All that I shall attempt to do is to watch for the return of the bandits and make certain that they do not post a sentry outside. You must be going now, but for goodness sake pull up that rope and string, and leave me some food to carry in

my kit. It is probable that I shall not be back until late to-night."

Ike hurriedly packed up, and after good-byes had been said the party started down the mountain side on their way to the point where their horses were tethered. Grace soon lost sight of them, then, tucking the rifle under her arm, she walked slowly around the mountain, and down, until she came within sight of the opening through which she had made her exit from the tunnel.

After watching for some time, Grace sought a hiding place, which she found in a slight depression behind a shelf of shale rock. She knew that there were long, weary hours of waiting ahead of her, but Grace was determined, now that the opportunity was hers, to turn the tables for good on the men who had tormented the Overland Riders.

Con Bates had escaped; how, she could not imagine, and Ben Jackson had assumed to himself the task of revenging the bandits' grudge against the Overland outfit that had objected to being held up and robbed.

Grace passed most of the time resting, lying back gazing at the sky and the mountains that stretched away for many miles. At dusk she nibbled at her luncheon, then settled down in earnest to her vigil. A new moon hung high in the west, which she knew would shed a faint light on her elevated position until well into the evening.

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Ten o'clock came, but still no bandits. A few moments after ten o'clock, however, Grace's patience was rewarded. She discovered a crouching figure, which at first she took to be an Indian, but a moment later saw that it was a white man. He was followed at intervals by five others, all cautiously approaching the tunnel entrance. After a careful scrutiny of the entrance, and, apparently finding nothing wrong there, the six men entered, after one had removed the stone. After the six men had crawled in, the tunnel opening was closed behind them.

Grace waited a few moments, then, springing up, ran to the scene, and began piling rocks on the entrance slab, some being so heavy that she was obliged to roll them. This she continued until her hands were blistered and her back was aching desperately.

"There! I'd like to see a bandit get out now," emphasized the Overland Rider, drawing off a little way, and sitting down with rifle at ready in her lap.

Not a sound was heard from the tunnel entrance for nearly an hour, then a faint tapping there indicated to her that the bandits were trying to break their way out, the prisoner's escape, no doubt, having been discovered.

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Grace fired her rifle into the pile of rocks, whereupon the tapping ceased, but her vigil became an anxious one from that moment on. Shortly after midnight the Overton girl discovered a shadowy figure creeping toward her over the rocks. Grace eyed it keenly, then levelled her rifle at it.

"Hands up!" she commanded sharply.

Joe Smoky Face rose and waved a hand.

"All right! I know you," called Grace in a relieved tone of voice. "Where is the sheriff?"

"Him come." Joe uttered a whistle, whereupon Jim Collins, with his deputy, Wheaton, and a posse of ten men, including General Gordon and Lieutenant Wingate, clambered up the rocks.

"Your men are over there, Sheriff. I have blocked the entrance, and believe they are near it now," Grace informed the sheriff as he came up to her.

"Is there no other way by which they can get out, Miss?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"You know the lay of the land; what do you suggest?"

"Remove the rocks that I have piled up until you come to the slab. Tell the men—there are six in there—to lay down their arms and come out, one at a time. Should they refuse, you might tell them you will keep them bottled up until they surrender, even if it takes a month."

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The loose stones were immediately removed, as Grace had suggested; whereupon the sheriff delivered his ultimatum to the bandits. Lieutenant Wingate, in the meantime, had formed the posse on the upper side of the tunnel opening.

Several minutes elapsed without a sound being heard from the tunnel, then a voice called to Sheriff Collins.

"We surrender! Don't shoot!"

"Look out for tricks!" warned Grace Harlowe. "I think that is Con Bates speaking."

The bandits pushed the slab from the opening and came out singly and apparently unarmed.

"Look out!" cried Grace sharply.

Almost in the same instant a revolver in the hands of Con Bates was fired. The five other bandits instantly began banging away at the posse, at the same time scattering and starting to run.

"Let 'em have it low! Don't kill them, please," begged Grace.

Sheriff Collins downed Con Bates with a bullet in his shoulder.

Grace took no part in the battle, but sat crouched, chin in hands, narrowly watching the fight while bullets whined over her head and ricocheted from the rocks on either side of her.

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The five bandits remaining after their leader had been downed were tumbled over with bullets in their legs in almost that many seconds. But the five were plucky. They struggled to their feet and again began firing. Two volleys from the posse put them down a second time, and this time they stayed down.

"That is what I call good shooting!" declared Grace Harlowe, standing up.

"Great work! Great work!" approved the general.

"A fine bunch of critters, you are!" raged the sheriff, addressing the defeated bandits. "Ought to finish you right here. Thank this woman that I don't do that very thing. I'll do it anyhow if any one of you galoots so much as bats an eyelash. Throw those guns away!" roared Mr. Collins.

The Bates gang gave up and were quickly manacled and searched for further weapons. The prisoners secured, Sheriff Collins strode over to Grace.

"Shake, Pard!" he cried, thrusting out a wiry brown hand. "Bet you'd face an old she bear with cubs, an' laugh at her when she made murder faces at you. We won't have any more trouble with these critters. I reckon we've got the whole gang now, an' the trail is clear, thanks to you an' your friends."

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At Grace's suggestion, Joe led the sheriff and some of his men to the tunnel, where a large amount of valuable plunder was recovered. That night the prisoners were bound to horses and started for the jail at Globe where, this time, they remained until eventually sentenced to long terms in prison. Of Belle Bates, no trace was found. The guests of the Lodge next day gave a dance in honor of the Overlanders, to whom belonged the honor of ridding the Apache Trail of the last band of desperate men that had preyed upon it.

General Gordon and his party left a day later, after good-byes had been regretfully said. At Grace's suggestion a purse was made up by the girls for Joe Smoky Face, after he had assisted Ike Fairweather to pack the equipment in readiness for moving next day, and early on the following morning the Overland Riders set out in their saddles for the long journey to Phoenix, where they arrived a week later, tanned by sun and weather, eyes sparkling and spirits effervescing.

That day they bade farewell to the faithful old stagecoach driver, who had already shipped their ponies by rail, and was to follow the animals on to Globe that night.

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In the evening, the Overland Riders held a meeting at the hotel, at which they discussed their future plans. It was decided to make the organization a permanent one, and to seek recreation and adventure in the saddle each season, until they tired of it.

It had been a wonderful vacation, with just enough excitement to make it interesting, as Grace expressed it, leaving the girls of the old Overton Unit better physically and mentally, with a new beauty in face and figure, each better equipped to meet life's responsibilities through the coming year.

"We have not decided where we shall go on our next journey," reminded Elfreda Briggs next day, after the Overlanders had settled themselves in a Pullman car for the homeward journey.

"I was just thinking of a suggestion offered by Mr. Fairweather," said Grace. "In telling me of the adventures of a cousin of his on the American Desert, he casually mentioned that some time we should try to make the journey across it in the saddle."

"What is there there?" questioned Anne.

"Principally sand and terrific heat. Crossing the desert on horseback really is a tremendous undertaking, but, if not strenuous enough to satisfy us, we might even essay Death Valley. Mr. Fairweather said we could get his cousin to act as our guide. I am rather inclined toward the Great American Desert.

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"*Alors!* Let's go," urged Elfreda Briggs.

"Other things being equal, what do you say, folks?" questioned Grace smilingly.

"Yes!" answered the Overlanders enthusiastically.

Grace chuckled.

"You do not know it, of course, but, now that you have decided, I am going to say that you Overlanders are headed straight for an adventure that will satisfy even Hippy Wingate. I have no doubt the desert is yawning for us at this very moment," declared Grace.

As later events proved, Grace Harlowe was not a false prophet, and, in a following volume, entitled "GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS ON THE GREAT AMERICAN DESERT," will be related the experiences of these adventure-loving girls amid scenes new to them, and in facing trials that called for sheer pluck and clear heads while riding the trackless alkali desert of the Great West.

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Transcriber's Note:

Page 42

- while we are in motion. *changed to* while we are in [motion](#)."

Page 221

- General Gordon's wife and companion. *changed to* General Gordon's wife and [companion](#)."

Page 224

- who had reassured Mrs. Gordon *changed to* who had **reassured** Mrs. Gordon

Page 241

- search for the source of the voice *changed to* **search** for the source of the voice

Boys of the Army Series

- 6, 7 and 8 have been respectively *changed to* **5, 6 and 7**

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS ON
THE OLD APACHE TRAIL ***

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