

THE BANK OF CALIFORNIA

BY PRENTICE MULFORD.

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"Second the motion," cried a third. "Then there won't be enough to go around before she's down here!"

"Motion moved and seconded," said a self-constituted chairman. "All in favor, say 'aye.' Contrary minded 'no.' The ayes have it. The chair rules the next peep for itself."

"No you don't," remarked the "Cap," coming forward and capturing his glass. "This glass is private property, and not pro bono publico, except as I give the ship news."

The assembly growled, and one alluded to Cap as an "Old Turk."

"She's a lady," said the captain. "Stylish quiet and genteel. Broad brim straw hat, veil. No loud trappings. Nothing Bowersy. Cabin passenger. Boys, tuck in your shirts!"

For convenience and comfort the minor of that period generally wore his red, or gray shirt as a blouse, omitting the formality of stowing its extremity under the trousers waistband.

The captain's order was obeyed. Mr. Rankin made his appearance, having been employed in buttoning himself into starched linen. A "boarder" reminded him that he had forgotten his kids, and another, hastily cutting a gigantic collar from a sheet of white paper, arrayed himself therein, remarking as he did so that "his tailor was always delinquent with his dress suit when it was most wanted," adding reflectively: "However, if a man's head was only well dressed no sensible woman would look any further."

"Swipes" produced the tin horn used to call the boarders to their meals, and asked the captain if he should "hail her."

"Oh, you're all a lot of smartys now, ain't you?" said Rankin. "How do you know what that lady may be? She may be some of you fool's mother or sister or wife, come to hunt you to your holes. At all events, whoever she is, I suppose we'll all act as nice gentlemen as we know how. Those who can't better trot off to work."

Mr. Rankin's sentiments made a speedy change in the humor of this before reckless crowd. As the lady drew nearer the faces of all present assumed a more serious expression. They were recalled to themselves and drawn to their old eastern homes by the sight of that one female figure long ere she reached the store.

All present knew that she was an "eastern woman" and the city bred boys declared her a city woman. She sat her horse easily. Her face was partly concealed by her broad brimmed straw hat.

To the store, of course, she must come. Everything coming to Bull Bar must first come to the store. The road down the hill ended at the store door. The store was, in effect, the entrance and exit gate of Bull Bar. Mr. Rankin kept the gate. Anyone visiting Bull Bar on business, or any one there coming to make inquiry would be naturally directed to Rankin. In such connection he figuratively kept the keys of the Bar. He knew where every miner lived within a radius of three miles. He knew how they "were doing." He banked their dust for them in his safe, and in many cases their confidence and social secrets in his breast.

The lady was riding toward a staring, gaping, curious crowd, of which I suddenly recalled to myself I was one. As she came nearer I turned away and went in the store, not desiring to play the lion. Many others of the "boys" seemed influenced by a similar feeling, and stole off to work, still, however, keeping so much as possible one eye over their shoulders. Nor did they walk very fast. It was a hard conflict between curiosity and respect. A few lounged about the store door, seating themselves on the bench.

She had stopped in front of the door. I saw only the extremity of a riding habit and the tip of a small foot in the stirrup. I heard then a clear, well-toned voice asking Mr. Rankin if "anyone knew a Mr. Jedediah Pratt in the neighborhood." I heard Blanche Setton's voice, and walking out, saw Blanche. Rankin was giving her directions to Pratt's. He turned toward me.

"This man will show you where he lives," were his concluding words as I made my appearance. "That is, he's generally able to tell, when he's woken up."

Her eyes met mine. There was no friendly recognition in them. I said: "Why, Blanche?"—she maintained the same look—"Miss Setton—what's you here?" What else I said I know not—a jumble of unmeaning words, tumbling over each other, for her look made me sick at heart.

She turned to Rankin, who, with the others, had been startled and interested in this unlooked for recognition. Still more startled were they as they saw Blanche, bending low in the saddle, say something to me in a tone too low for them to hear, but at which I recoiled.

Those words were: "No; not you, John Holder! Not my uncle's murderer! I do not wish your assistance."

"Perhaps I can find my way to my uncle's house alone if some of you gentlemen will direct me," she said aloud to the wondering group.



All present knew she was an eastern woman.

"I'll show you, ma'am. I'm going right that way myself," said Setton. Mr. Setton bore off the prize.

Even in all my misery and stupor of mind as she rode off, I, or a part of myself, was afforded a gleam of amusement as she mounted.

"I would prefer not to see you under the present circumstances." "BLANCHE SETTON."

No matters went on for eight or ten days. Brooner continued absent. Did I find any consolation in the thought that he might be miserable in not finding Blanche at Marysville? But what Blanche! His or—mine, I was about to say. The man had been so reticent on the subject, and Blanche herself being hermetically sealed against me, I was still in doubt whether the woman next door was the one I had seen in the play or not.

I could not visit the store. That was no place for me. My work at the "Bank" was quite done. I kept at work on the river claim, making six or eight dollars per day, to which I was perfectly indifferent. Worse, my position while at work gave me frequent glimpses of Blanche as she flitted in her neat morning dress between her own house and Pratt's. She was a rare spectacle to the miners, whose claims commanded a view of the situation. I saw them at times peeping at her from sundry vantage points, as she tripped about, displaying at times a slipped foot and neat ankle, which caused many a heavy sigh.

Why not write her? I did write her—page on page, telling the whole story, detailing all the misery of my situation, upbraiding her for her injustice and cruelty, and beseeching her for a personal interview. But there was no local postoffice delivery on Bull Bar. Rankin was the only one to whom I could intrust these letters. That would reveal me to him too much the suppliant. So I would keep the letters. I re-read them. I found, then, one too harsh. I threw it in the fire. The next was too humble, too supplicating. I threw that in the fire. Within twenty-four hours after writing, and the mood I composed in had cooled off, I could not find one of the right tone and temper. There seemed no hitting the "golden mean." So they all went in the fire. On the whole, I am disposed to think that as good a destination as any for copious and exuberant love letters—and, like mine, before delivery. If you don't think so read your own, say three years old, and look the self that wrote them at that time straight in the face, and tell me your deliberate opinion of him.

From Rankin I ascertained that Pratt had most of the time in a condition bordering on unconsciousness. "He had, he said, 'hit my' a little on Blanche's arrival. She, he added, was a 'bully nurse.'"

"What does the doctor say of him?" I asked.

"Oh, something scientific," he answered. "Something he's learned out of his books that nobody can make head nor tail of. Looks profound to match, especially when he takes his witsky. It's biz—oz, you know."

It was a gleam of sunshine that Rankin had resumed this vein of talk with me.

One morning I found myself at my door a note without signature, bearing these words: "Don't leave Bull Bar. Trouble brewing for you."

I felt that this was a friendly warning from Rankin. I felt, also, it portended some secret "vigilante" business regarding myself.

What to do I know not. This was a newer blackness to the crowd. I was greatly disturbed. I was, I own, terribly afraid of the trouble hanging over me. I realized fully the temper of the time. I knew how men were dragged from their beds and either hung outright or hung up until they confessed. So had they done to Joe Hatch the year before, because Joe, a poor, whisky-soaked wretch, was seen out of the robbery of a store safe in which sundry miners kept their dust by favor of the storekeeper. Joe would not confess despite this horrible torture, and a few months afterward the real plunderers were revealed.

I could not get away. My obligations to Brooner forbade it. There was in the house at least twenty thousand dollars' worth of quartz. Not knowing what might happen I buried this under the floor. Next day it occurred to me that "under the floor" had become too common a lurking spot for treasure, and was, of all places, the first to be sought for by any posse, so I knew not what might happen, or how long Brooner might be absent. So I dug it up and buried it at night in a nook without the cabin. Then I left a note for Brooner, intimating that in case of my absence I would resort to him personally for whatever he might find missing. What I did not choose to say, I did not trust the sacredness of a sealed note to all in Bull Bar.

CHAPTER XVII. WARNING.

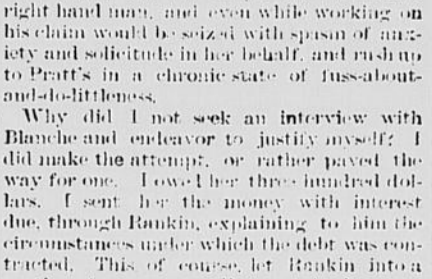
I was roughly shaken by the shoulder and ordered to get up. They had stolen into the house in the dead of night. A slit through the cloth side was all the actual "blinking fit" necessary. There were six of them—masked. They said nothing.

I was ordered to get up.

In two minutes I was outside the house in the hands of my captors. They took me to a deeply shaded hollow in the hills about half a mile distant going east from Sarah mountain. Had the captives been long settled it would have been embellished by some abominably profane application, with just enough dash of infernal theory to give it a spice. But there had been no time at Bull Bar for such delicate shadings in expression. They went directly to the point and called it "Hole's Hollow." Roughly described it was a hole, perhaps half an acre in area, the wall on three of its irregular sides being of overhanging rock. Their summits, thirty or forty feet in height, were thickly screened by bushes. Save in the direction by which it was entered, there was no sign of the sudden depression until one came to the verge of the cliff overlooking it.

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CHAPTER XVII. RESCUE.

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I stood leaning white on the wall motionless. Any appeal for justice or humanity, I thought then, would be as futile on men who were thus taking the law in their own hands, more to gratify their own brutality than aught else.

Call a dog mad, raise a hue and cry after him, and you furnish rare sport for a class glad of any excuse for stomping to death any dog, mad or not mad.

That portion of Bull Bar represented by my six midnight judges and jurors were hungry for a "little fun." A man had been called, if not mad, dangerous. They were about the good work of relieving their community of the terror, and having some needed recreation beside.

How? By an outrage and disgrace, they proposed putting on me, worse than death itself.

Their first act on arriving at the Hollow was to kindle a fire. The effect of the glare on rock, brush and masked men was decidedly dramatic. I think the "committee" were alive to such impressions also, in their own crude way, as gathered from gore-bespattered novels or blood-stained plays, for their proceedings were marked by a certain deliberation and grotesque formality. They intended making a night of it also. Of this the surest evidence was the gallon denjehon carried by one of the "committee."

A kettle was placed over the fire. Shortly a resinous odor pervaded the air. Their intent then flashed on me.

Tar and feathers!

It seems as if the spirit of an event and its results for a year in advance can be felt by one in a single moment. So, as if by a flash of lightning, did I see myself thus disgraced, set adrift, wandering in that wretched, humiliating plight over the land, not daring to enter village or town out of pure shame, possibly compelled at last from physical exhaustion to throw myself on the mercy of some one and in the end to be pointed at ever afterward as one so disgraced, and liable, go where I might, to be revealed by some meddlesome tattler. As I saw this, one instinct and emotion pervaded me—revenge on these villains.

I said: "Now, men, if you do to me what I see you mean to do you'd better kill me first, for as sure as you disgrace me in that way, and leave me alive, just so sure will I spend the rest of my life in getting even with you. Maybe I don't know you; but I'll try and find out, and if I do I'll have your heart's blood, every one of you. Now be careful for it's not such a light matter to start a man out for life with blood on his brain, as you'll start me if you do this thing to me!"

There was but one reply from the evasive master of ceremonies. That was, "Gag!" A wad of cloth was thrust in my mouth. I guessed at the leader, from his height, despite an assumed bend of the shoulders. I took him for "Long Mac."

The party then ranged themselves in line, fronting me, and one, in a thick muzzling voice, proceeded to inform me that "The committee of Mighty High Binders had thought it best for the good of Bull Bar to start John Holder out of it, and also that for the young man's good, and as a token of remembrance, the committee, in behalf of the Bar, would present the aforesaid John Holder with an entire new suit, which they trusted he would long wear."

"So mote it be!" cried all, simultaneously. The next order was:

"Refreshments!" And the denjehon again traveled about the line.

The next word was "Business!" I was ordered to take off my clothes.

"What are you going to do with that mar?" The voice was that of a woman. I was irritated now at being "saved" by Blanche Setton.

But I had soon to do something. I noticed that Blanche was unsteady on her feet. She caught at a sapling, stood there a moment, and then sat down.

She was suffering from the ordeal she had undergone and the nervous relaxation that must follow such extreme tension.

I gained the cliff summit. As my weakness almost made me stand, and said on my proffer of assistance: "You must see my home, I believe."

NEW BRIDGE AT LOUISVILLE.

A new bridge has just been built over the Ohio river, at Louisville, which is unique in architecture, in some respects. Over it the trains of the Louisville, New Albany and Chicago railway will cross the Ohio on their way to the south.

This is the second bridge across the river at Louisville. It is on the cantilever plan, the central idea of which is the balancing of bridge spans upon upright pillars. The spans are fixed in the center, and anchored and chained fast at the shore ends. The Louisville structure is unique because it is at present the longest system of connected cantilevers in the world.

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The bridge proper, exclusive of the approaches, is nearly half a mile long. The longest span measured 180 feet, and extends from an island in the river to the Kentucky shore. This is over the steamboat channel. From low water mark to the lowest timber of the bridge the distance is 100 feet.

The structure is built of cast and wrought iron and steel. Twenty-seven thousand tons of these, altogether, were used in the building, and it cost \$1,250,000. It has a double railway track, two roads for wagons, two for street cars, and two for foot passengers. The scenery, both on the Kentucky and Indiana sides of the river, here is extremely picturesque and attractive.

Long cantilever bridges are quite the vogue now with engineers. There is that one over the Niagara river, and another one over the Frazier river on the Canada Pacific railway. This build of bridge has been made possible by the invention of cast steel.

said she. "I think I can handle this pistol well enough for that. They called me a good shot at the gallery in New York, and I had smaller targets and much farther off than those I have now."

"By—she's got the drop on us, an' she'll do as she says," muttered one of the committee, who now seems to feel uncomfortable: "It's in her eye."

As the party stood with the fire burning behind them, their figures were thrown in bold relief against its light, and the least movement was visible to Blanche.

"Now, gentlemen," she continued, "business, you know. I suppose you think this is all very wrong for a woman. But as there seems no man here to take a defenseless man's part, why, a woman had to do it. Whatever John Holder has done, whether he is guilty or not of the charges against him, is not to be found out by taking him from his bed at night and carrying him into these woods to maltreat and torture him. That's neither justice, fairness, nor decency, and you gentlemen know it now that you take a moment to think it over. Would you do what you propose to do to him before his mother? Would you do it before your own mothers? You have forgotten yourselves, gentlemen. Kick over that kettle of tar and go home, and you will feel more like men to-morrow."

The committee were irresolute. Blanche stood there rigid, her eye upon them and her pistol ready.

The tension was becoming painful. No jury's verdict was ever more eagerly awaited.

"Come, gentlemen, you will take the gag from that man's mouth and then leave him," she said, in accents more winning than those in which she had first spoken. "You will, I'm sure."

"Let the gal have her own way," said one. This expression of opinion was as the first crack in the dam to be a lifeline.

"Don't believe in 'em' humbugged by a woman," was the remark from the committee, who had previously broached his rigorous views as to marital and family discipline.

"Won't she rouse the whole Bar whether we go or not? Anyway, I've got enough for one night," was the reply.

She did not stir from her post or uncock her pistol. Evidently she held herself in readiness either for war or persuasion.

Some one pulled the gag from my mouth. The committee filed slowly out of the hollow. One hastily returned, remarking as he glanced up at Blanche, "Sense me, miss, but we forgot this." He seized the denjehon and tore it off.

"Mr. Setton! Mr. Setton!" called out Blanche.

Setton forgot his disguise and stopped. "Why, it is really you, Mr. Setton," said Blanche. Setton pulled himself up for another start, as if he was anxious to get away from the locality of so many blundering self-revelations. "Mr. Setton, when next you organize a conspiracy remember that the walls of cloth houses near together have very large ears—that is, when a woman's inside eye is open," was Blanche's parting remark.

"Yes'm," answered Setton, in the tone of a corrected child, as he went standing off with the denjehon.

They were gone. Blanche and myself stood facing each other. The situation was embarrassing. Perhaps some lingering hint of like spirit with the committee propelled into my head the thought: Should I now exclaim in the gush of the old-fashioned novel, "My preserver! How can I thank you?" etc. I was irritated now at being "saved" by Blanche Setton.

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