

Second Time West

by
T. C. BRIDGES

CHAPTER XXVI THE FATE AND NUMBER

Sunrise brought welcome warmth to the two shivering prisoners on the ledge. For hours they had sat huddled together, speaking only in whispers. Ab, bold climber, had volunteered to try to scale the cliff behind them but Jim had made him admit that he had never been to the top and that it was, most of it, sheer as a wall. Feeling that it was suicide, Jim had put his foot down and told the boy he wouldn't have it.

"Ward will send help," he told Ab. "He can't do it," said Ab flatly. "Long afore this Farnie has blocked the road both ways. We're in a tight, Andrews." It was true. Jim knew it was true. He had never been in a tighter place, not even when he lay on that shed roof, earlier in the night. They had no food or water, the sun shone full on this cliff face and, though its rays at present were only pleasantly warm, in a couple of hours the rock would be almost red hot and there was no shadow or shelter. A voice from below—Farnie's.

"You fellows, you can't get away and you know it. Come on down and you shall have a fair trial. There won't be any lynching, even if you deserve it. I give you my word on that."

"Answer him," Jim whispered to Ab. "Tell him to go to hades."

"You can talk better'n me," Ab objected.

"But he knows my voice, Ab, and I don't want him to recognize me. There's more to this than I can tell you at present." Ab gave Jim a quick glance. "I'll do it," he said.

"Don't show yourself more than you can help," Jim warned him. "Farnie's a treacherous dog." Ab nodded and crawled over. He sheltered behind one of the loose boulders.

"Come and get us if you want us," he called harshly to Farnie. Farnie laughed.

"Don't be a fool, boy. The sun 'll get you without our bothering. Before mid-day you'll both be crazy with thirst."

"Both! There ain't only one here, and that's myself," Ab answered. Farnie laughed again.

"I might swallow that yarn if it hadn't been for the rock. Takes two or more to shift that. Tell Andrews to come to the edge and talk to me."

"Andrews was back at S. Bar S. hours ago," Ab lied valiantly. "He drove on with Carson."

"All right," said Farnie. "Well, there's nothing serious against you except assaulting the Sheriff and raising Cain in the town. Likely, you'll get off with thirty days. So come on down."

"Not me, Farnie. I ain't trusting myself with any Kettle Drum killers."

"Then stay and burn," snapped Farnie. He fired as he spoke but that was exactly what Ab was expecting and the drew back as the bullet spanged on the rock just beneath him. Ab crept back to Jim.

"You heard what he said, Andrews?" Jim grinned.

"You told a god lie, Ab, but he didn't swallow it. He knows I'm up here. Now listen. He's right about our burning and without shade we'll both be dead by night. I've been looking round and it seems to me there's enough rocks here to build some sort of shelter. If we can last out till night we're all right, for tonight Dave and Ward are tackling the Kettle Drum and Farnie will have something else to do than watch us."

"It might be done," Ab said. "But I don't reckon Farnie will wait. He'll send some of his chaps up the cliff to pick us off. There's other ledges besides this one."

"All the more reason for us to build a shelter," Jim argued. Ab shrugged.

"We'll try it if you say so," he answered, and he and Jim began to move stones. There were plenty of stones but mostly small. The two had been at work for some time, and had a parapet about three feet high when a rifle cracked and a bullet clipped past so close that Jim felt the wind of it. Both flung themselves flat.

"Told you," Ab said briefly. "And once they get higher than us we haven't a hope. Our short guns ain't no good for that distance."

It was true that Jim began to feel that their last hope was gone. He and Ab lay as flat as they could behind their wall but both knew it would not protect them if Farnie's man reached a higher ledge. Each moment they expected another shot, but none came. Ab pointed. Now they could see a man climbing with his rifle slung over his shoulders, but he was far out of revolver range.

"Looks like our finish," Ab said calmly. The boy was plucky as they make them. The words were hardly out of his mouth before there was a dull crash from far above.

"Look!" yelled Ab pointing to a huge stone which came thundering down from the summit of the cliff. The gunman saw it coming. He made a leap to one side to escape it, failed to reach the projection for which he was aiming and fell backwards. He screamed once, then came the thud as his body dropped on the road far beneath.

"It's Ward," said Ab. Ward it was or some of his men, for suddenly rocks began to pour off the top of the cliff and there were yells of terror as Farnie's men ran for their lives. Then shots, the reports crashing along the cliff face, the sound of horses galloping, and presently silence.

"Watch out for a rope," came a shout from the heights, and a length of stout rope came snaking down. "Quicker to come up this way," shouted Ross Carson.

Ab went up first, then Jim. Lucky for him that he had a good head for heights for, even with the rope, it was a tough scramble. At the top was Carson with half a dozen of the S. Bar S. men and a couple of spare horses.

"We'd have been here sooner," Carson apologized, "but we had to ride round to get here."

"You were in time. That's all that matters," Jim said. "Did you get any of Farnie's lot besides the man that fell?"

"I don't reckon we did. It's hard shooting downhill. But we scared the guts out of 'em. Now we'll ride. I reckon you and Ab are needing your breakfast."

"Did Luiz reach you?" asked Jim. "Sure he did. And started right back with word from Ward that we'd be at the head of the pass by Slaughter Creek at midnight. Ward's all for it. Says if we can whip the Kettle Drum crowd he reckons the trouble will be over."

"There's ten of us, and maybe a couple more will come in. All I hope is that Farnie himself is at the Kettle Drum. If we get him there's no one else counts."

Jim liked Carson's confidence. All his men were equally keen. They were a hard-bitten lot, and Jim felt fairly certain if they could only surprise the Kettle Drum killers, they would wipe them out.

As Carson had said, it was a long way round. It was ten before they reached the ranch house, where Ward Haskell was waiting for them.

"I'm sure glad to see you," was all he said, but the look in his eyes and his powerful grip spoke more strongly than words. He led Jim into the dining room and set him down to steaks, fried eggs, hot bread and coffee.

"Don't say a word till you've eaten," Ward ordered. "Then I want the whole story."

Jim made an enormous breakfast, and afterwards he and Ward talked. Jim described his adventures of the previous night, and Ward chuckled when Jim told of jumping off the roof on top of Shadley. Then he turned grave.

"Jim, you've had all the luck in the world. Not that you ain't deserved it, because you have. All I hope is that it will hold for another 24 hours. If it does and we can bust the Kettle Drum outfit we're on velvet. Now I reckon you better go and catch up on some sleep. It's one sure thing you won't get a lot to-night."

Jim slept till five and woke feeling quite fresh. Outside, the best horses in the corral had been caught and saddled, men were cleaning revolvers and rifles and filling cartridge belts. Everyone was quietly busy. Ward, Carson and Jim had supper together in the house and while they ate two more men rode up. They were Lance Capson and Dirk Major, owners of small outfits east of the S. Bar S. Like Haskell, they were threatened by Farnie and had thrown in against him.

"That makes thirteen," said Ward cheerfully.

It came to Jim that this was an unlucky number but he was careful not to say so. At ten they started. The night was like the previous one, the sky clouded, a soggy feel in the air and sheet lightning flickering pink and white over the mountains. But there was no rain or even the faintest mutter of thunder. Orders were that no one was to smoke that they were to keep together and ride quietly. These orders were strictly obeyed.

It was just after half-past eleven when they reached the head of the pass where they were to meet the Painted Cross outfit. There was no one there but that was not surprising for Ward's party were early.

The Kettle Drum ranch house lay in a bowl-shaped valley into which Slaughter Creek broke through a cut in the hills. The road, a rough wagon track, ran beside the Creek with low cliffs on either side. The pass was a death trap if the enemy had been warned, for they could line the heights and shoot down on the invaders. Ward, however, had no idea of running blindly into danger and one of his men, Ben Cottle, who had formerly been in the Texas Rangers, and was a first-rate scout, had agreed to go forward and spy out the land.

He started at once while the rest picketed their horses among a cluster of rocks at a little distance from the head of the pass and each stood by his animal, ready to pinch its nose in case it started to whinny at the approach of the Painted Cross party. Jim was alongside Ward and the two talked in whispers.

"Ward, if anything happens to me in this show," said Jim, "I've left a letter at your place, addressed to Bill Beverly. He has a power of attorney and I've asked him to take care that Joan is properly provided for. You'll see he gets it."

"I'll see to it," Ward answered, "but don't go getting fool ideas in your head, Jim. You got your luck with you, and it's Farnie better be making his will."

He glanced at his wristwatch. "Nearly 12," he added. "Time Dave's boys were coming." The others were thinking the same.

"Hope nothing ain't gone wrong," Jim heard Carson mutter uneasily.

Minutes dragged by and still no sound or sign of the Painted Cross people. Ben Cottle came slipping back, soundless as a ghost. He came up to Ward.

"All's quiet at Farnie's place. No lights in the bunk-house or in the house itself. Looks like they was all

asleep." Carson stepped closer. "Let's go, boss. The boys is raring to fight."

"No!" Ward's tone was firm. "There ain't enough of us to clean up and we can't afford to lose men. It's plain to me as Luiz ain't got through with that message I give him."

"But Dave said he'd be here anyhow," Jim put in. "Hanged if I can understand it."

"We'll wait a while longer," Ward said. "But if they don't show up pretty soon we'll go home." Carson stiffened.

"They're a coming, I hear 'em." An instant later they all heard them, then out of the night to westward horses came cantering, spaced out in wide line.

"They're making a sight too much noise," Ward grumbled, and as he spoke, the advancing line pulled up. Next instant the darkness was cut by flashes of flame, guns crashed and a gust of lead beat upon Ward and his men.

(To be Continued)

Sometimes Must Choose Between Mines and Fish

(From Globe and Mail)

Mining men who have followed the development of the smelting industry on this continent may have noticed that, apparently through some remark-

able mistakes of location engineers, practically every plant has been constructed in what later turned out to be one of the most valuable agricultural areas thereabouts. At any rate, most of them have been attacked in the courts as juggernauts of destructions, bringing blight upon a smiling land.

Our memory goes back to plants in the Wasatch Valley of Utah, to the belchin smokestacks at East Helena and Bunker Hill, out in flat Montana and in the timbered reaches of northern Idaho, main supports of the districts, and in Canada, to another great hive of employment, where scraggy land along a great river suddenly took on enormous values. Since that particular case has raised an international question and is now, so to speak, sub judice, we will not express our own opinion of the litigation.

In Ontario there seems to be a disposition in some quarters to interfere with milling operations in a very laudable effort to preserve the lives of a few pickerel and pike. Now, while we are strongly against cruelty to animals or fish, in fact have never wantonly killed anything since we were a boy, we nevertheless believe that in view of the fact that there are more lakes than one may shake a stick at in Ontario, since fish are more numerous than mines, and since fish do not enter much into the employment question in this Province, it would be better to give milling operations a free hand, even if the fishermen sports have to buy their catches at the fishmonger's. Besides, that might prevent a lot of unnecessary lying.

The thought is forced by the experience of one of the most promising new mining projects in the Province, on the shore of a lake that has been lying outdoors since the year one without exciting much public attention, and which has suddenly become a piscatorial shrine that must remain uncontamin-

ated for the trolling proclivities of a few disciples of Isaak Walton, who now and then visit it in the summer months. The Department of Mines, we understand, has raised no objection to use of an arm of the lake as a dumping ground for tailings, but objection has been lodged with the Provincial Health Department, and experts are now poking around to find out just what is what.

Since tailings will find the lowest level and as in this Province it would be difficult to locate a mine very far from a lake, we suggest that it might be better for all of us if mining operations were given the right-of-way, subject, of course, to restrictions upon unnecessary vandalism or pollution. In other words, it would be well to decide provincially whether fish and a handful of sportsmen are more important than a good mine, offering employment to a large force of men and contributing to the general prosperity of Province and Dominion. We may be prejudiced, but we are all for the mines, though we have nothing against the poor fish.

Dominion Life Shows Big Increase in Year

Gratifying Results for 1937. Very Pleasing Annual Statement.

The annual statement of the Dominion Life Assurance Company released today, indicates gratifying progress for the year 1937. The report covering the company's operations in its 49th year reveals an increase in assets of over \$3,000,000, making a total in excess of \$26,700,000.

Mr. Ford S. Kumpf, president and managing director of the company, drew attention to the fact that insur-

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ance issued and revived, including deferred annuities, reached a total of \$23,207,536, which, exclusive of group insurance, is an increase of \$1,595,240 over 1936.

Over 70% of payments fulfilling the company's contracts — \$2,725,434 — was paid to living policyholders, indicating that an increasing total of life insurance funds is being dispensed in the form of endowments or retirement income plans.

Income for the year was \$8,354,117, while receipts exceeded disbursements by a sum of \$3,832,689.

The increase of business in force of over \$8,900,000, bringing the total up to \$172,936,447, was a source of gratification to the board of directors, and a testimony to the ability of the company's field organization.

An exchange says:—"An amateur string quartet played Brahms here last evening. Brahms lost."

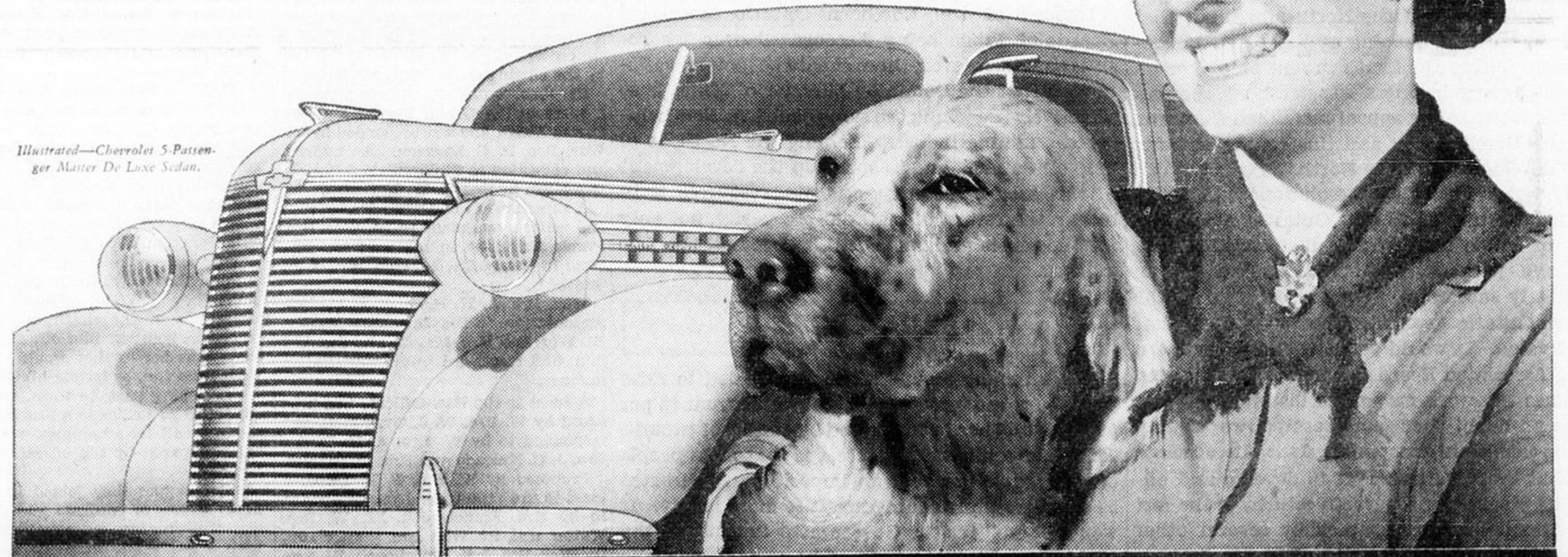
United Press: When firemen responded to an alarm of fire from the city dump at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, they were charged by hundreds of rats. The rodents severed hose lines, ran up the firemen's trouser legs, and hindered the work of extinguishing the fire.

Orillia News-Letter: Sam Rogalie, keeper of shoe store in Oak Park, Ill., boasted to customer he had fooled hold-up man by keeping his money in shoebox, not in a till. In a few minutes the customer came back with a pistol and demanded and got the shoebox.



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