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—BY—

CLIVE PHILLIPPS WOLLEY
 (AUTHOR OF "GOLD, GOLD IN CARIBOO," ETC.)

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CHAPTER I. A Bad Start

"I am afraid that you are a poet,
 Miss Clifford."
 "What do you mean, Mr. Anstruther?"

"To be polite to a young lady with
 an imagination. Did you not tell me
 when I was in Larkshire, that it never
 rained in British Columbia? Don't
 you remember how blue your skies
 were when you were six thousand
 miles away from them? May I be per-
 mitted to ask if this is a fair sample
 of your Eden?"

The speaker, a tall, slight man, of
 not more than twenty-three, stood be-
 side an up-country cart, the collar of
 his waterproof coat turned over his
 ears, a wet cigarette drooping from
 his lips, and a heavy storm driving
 into the back of his neck, in spite of
 his endeavors to keep it out.

Every line of his thin, well-bred face
 expressed discomfort and disgust,
 whilst the smartness of his get-up em-
 phasized the roughness of his sur-
 roundings. The ladies he was address-
 ing, in spite of the disadvantage of sex,
 seemed infinitely more in their el-
 ement than he did.

"Does it never rain in England, Mr.
 Anstruther?"

"Yes, but we admit it, though I
 never saw anything like this in that
 much-maligned country. I suppose
 this is what you call a blizzard, and
 he dug his heel irritably into his
 horse's ribs to turn that animal's quar-
 ters more emphatically upon the slant-
 ing deluge.

At this moment a man rode up on a
 ragged-looking cayuse, plain head and
 not too straight in the shoulder,
 but quick and handy as a cat.

This man looked at the speaker with
 a scarcely concealed sneer upon his
 weather-stained face.

"It's no good staying here, Mrs.
 Rolt," he said to the girl's companion.
 "This won't let up before dark, and
 it's going to turn cold. Shouldn't won-
 der if we got the blizzard that gentle-
 man talks about."

"How far is it to Brown's, Jim?"
 "Don't say exactly. Pretty Dick
 says we are off the trail. I guess he's
 right."

"What is this then that we have
 been following?"

"A watering trail seemingly. I've
 not been this way myself for years, but
 the tracks all break up different ways
 a bit farther on."

The month was early October, and
 in October the weather may be perfect
 upon the northern cattle lands or it
 may not. There is a whisper always,
 sometimes a threat of winter in the
 air. Even in summer, in spite of the
 glorious sunshine, you cannot quite for-
 get that winter reigns here at least
 half the year.

That morning, the long undulating
 uplands had been stretches of sunlit
 purple, royal in coloring, boundless in
 extent, with fair brooklets of pur-
 ple gold where the cottonwoods shed their
 leaves in the little wet gullies; now,
 in the grey of coming night, these up-
 lands were wild, colorless and desolate
 as a stormy sea, void and without
 shelter.

It was a dreary outlook for the two
 women in an open rig, drawn by two
 utterly worn out horses, but it was Mr.
 Anstruther who resented it.

"Do you mean to say, Combe, that
 you don't know where we are?" he
 asked impatiently.
 "We ain't in England, Mr. Anstruther,
 and we forgot to order milestones
 when we heard you were coming," re-
 torted the other, his color rising.

"No, we're not in England," Mrs.
 Rolt put in hastily, "we are in Jim's
 own country, and if we are off the
 trail for a moment, it does not matter
 a little bit. Which way, Jim?"
 Jim's face relaxed at once. Like a
 high-spirited horse he flinched at the
 least touch of the curb, but the light
 hands of his Boss's wife could do what
 they liked with Jim Combe, the iron-
 man of the Risky Ranche.

"I'm afraid we can't make camp to-
 night where we meant to. I got fooled
 by the weather myself. Didn't calcu-
 late on a rainstorm before morning,
 nor on its turning so plaguey dark, but
 I know you won't whine if you do
 get wet. You can't hunt and keep dry
 all the time. If you let the Indian drive
 and follow me, I'll get you to Riley's
 cow camp in no time. It's rough shel-
 ter and bad going, but it's better than
 this," and he shook his horse and
 moved on ahead of the cart.

"Do you mind very much, Kitty?"
 Mrs. Rolt asked her friend.
 "Not a bit, dear, if you can keep the
 peace between those two. They're just
 spooling for a row. What a vile tem-
 per Jim has developed since I went
 back to the Old Country. It's not like
 him."

Mrs. Rolt smiled mysteriously be-
 hind the folds of her hood, but she
 spoke only to the horses.

"Get up, mare. Keep close to Jim.
 He can see through anything."
 Kitty looked a question, but Mrs.
 Rolt's face was so innocent of any
 arrière-pensée that the girl said noth-
 ing, but just cuddled down into her
 wraps to endure, as well as might be,
 the long and dreary drive over un-
 broken prairie, into and out of ravines,
 which by daylight would have seemed
 to English people impossible for any
 wheeled vehicle.

However, rance horses and ranche
 rigs are used to such work, and the
 Rolt's pair scrambled safely through
 the ravines, though the cart sway'd at
 perilous angles sometimes, and the
 water slopped about on the floor of the
 cart making it impossible to keep her
 feet dry.

After an hour of this the horse be-
 gan to balk badly, and the cold in-
 creased, so that what had been a wet

became hair, stinging like the lash of
 a whip.

"Do you really think that it is any
 good to go on, Mrs. Rolt?" asked An-
 struther, speaking for the first time
 since his spar with Combe. He was
 wet to the bone by this time, had lost
 all confidence in an Aqua Scutum, and
 had been down two or three times, his
 big English hunter being as much at
 sea in this country as its rider.

"Do you think that it is any good to
 stop here, Mr. Anstruther?"
 The figure only half visible in the
 darkness ahead, reined in his horse and
 waited. He was too far in front to
 have heard, and yet Mrs. Rolt was
 afraid, Jim's hearing, like all his fac-
 ulties, was keen as that of a wild
 thing.

"I don't believe that that fellow
 knows a bit where he is," muttered
 Anstruther angrily.

"I don't suppose that he does ex-
 actly, but he will find his way if we let
 him alone. None of us could do that in
 this darkness."

"You trust him wonderfully, Mrs.
 Rolt."

"We have known him a long time.
 Haven't we, Kitty?"
 Perhaps her sympathy and her experi-
 ence were not at one. Anstruther
 growled something under his breath,
 and the procession moved on again at
 a foot's pace.

"Well, your horses seem to have had
 enough of it, if you have not, Mrs.
 Rolt," he said at last, as the pair
 balked resolutely at the foot of an ex-
 ceptionally steep pitch. "Get up, you
 brutes," and the angry man laid his
 whip savagely across the quarters of
 the nearest horse.

It rained but stood still.
 Again the whip fell, and the horses
 backed so that the cart nearly turned
 over.

"Stop that, Mr. Anstruther."
 There was an angry ring in the lady's
 voice, but he was too savage to notice
 it.

"Pardon me, Miss Kitty and your-
 self cannot stay here all night. The
 brutes must be made to go," and dis-
 mounting, he proceeded to make them.
 But it was hardly on his feet sooner
 than Mrs. Rolt was out of the cart,
 and as his hand rose with the whip in
 it, he was caught by the wrist, and
 held as firmly by those thin white
 fingers as if it had been a man who
 held him.

"You forget yourself, Mr. Anstruther.
 These are my horses, and I'll manag-
 them myself. Go on and ask Jim to
 wait for us. Kitty and I can do with-
 out your help, thank you."

Anstruther raised his hat with a
 muttered apology, and did as the
 lady was bidding. He swung himself
 back in England and
 pretty Mrs. Rolt at the devil.
 What, he asked himself, did women
 want in such a country? However,
 unless he was very much mistaken, she
 would be obliged to call him back
 those horses before he had gone very
 far. Such ill-bred brutes could not be
 made to understand anything but the
 whip. But Mr. Frank Anstruther was
 very much mistaken. Polly Rolt was
 not only a superb horsewoman—as
 good with cattle, her husband boasted,
 as any cow-boy—but she loved them
 and understood them. Understood
 them because she loved them. So she
 stood there in the deep mud and driv-
 ing hail, passing her fine, soft hands
 over the wealed flanks until some thrill
 of her gentle nature had soothed the
 poor beasts.

Then she stroked their drooping
 ears, and took the mare's muzzle into
 her arms, putting her face down be-
 side the beast's, and talking tender
 nonsense which beasts understand.

"Drop the reins altogether, Dick,"
 she commanded. "Now, old boy, come
 along, come on lassie, up there, up!"
 and with her hand on the mare's neck
 she led the way up the steep bank, the
 horses going with her where no whip
 could have driven them.

From the top of the bank a tiny
 speck of light showed ahead in the
 driven gloom.

"Jim has camped, I think."
 "Just in time to save my life," said
 a desolate voice from the box seat.
 "I say, Mary—"

"Yes?"
 "Let Mr. Anstruther down easily.
 You were pretty hard on him."
 "Not half as hard on him as he was
 on poor Bess," snapped the other.

"I know, dear, but he is in a strange
 country, and things are not going well
 for him. He isn't a muf, really, and
 yet everything has gone wrong for him
 so far."

What Polly Rolt answered, only the
 winds knew, but her face cleared as
 she drew up at the little log cabin, be-
 side which stood two dripping horses.
 "I made it, you see, Mr. Anstruther,"
 she called in the slang of the West,
 "so I will forgive you. Now come and
 help us out of the cart. Kitty is too
 waterlogged to move without assis-
 tance."

Anstruther hurried to the cart, and
 putting his waterproof over the wheel,
 helped Mrs. Rolt daintily to the
 ground, as if her skirt had not been
 one half alkali mud already.

But she tried not to laugh, and pretty
 Kitty, her face flushed rose pink, and
 her eyes bright with the weather, en-
 deavored, leaning a trifle more than was
 perhaps absolutely necessary on the
 supporting arm and whispering:
 "Never mind Polly. She doesn't
 mean it, but the Boss himself don't
 not flag the horses when she is near."

CHAPTER II.

Two Stages of Development

by a few antlers, he turned to unhar-
 ness the horses.

His fingers were numbed with cold,
 and none of the buckles were wher-
 his English experience had taught him
 that they should be, besides which, as
 a matter of fact, he had generally left
 the unharnessing to his groom.

"Not that strap, Mr. Anstruther.
 See, this is the way."

But before Mrs. Rolt could show
 him, the silent figure, which had just
 taken the saddles off the riding horses,
 took charge, the wet straps yielded as
 if by magic to the cow-boy's fingers,
 and the beasts were led off by the In-
 dian to some unseen corral.

"Where have you put Ruddygore?"
 Anstruther asked Combe.

"In the corral with the others. Why?
 do you want him inside?"
 On such a night Anstruther might
 have been forgiven for thinking that
 he had not a word of good for his well-
 worn hunter. It certainly was not as
 good as the loose box to which that
 valuable beast had been accustomed,
 but Anstruther saw that there was no
 help for it. Ruddygore would have
 lost his chance with the rest.

"Well, what can I do to help?"
 "You don't have to do anything.
 Just make yourself pleasant to the
 ladies. I'll be through in a minute."

"You might cut some wood for us,
 Mr. Anstruther," called Kitty from the
 doorway. "I should love a great roaring
 fire. I am just perished, aren't you,
 Mary?"

Anstruther picked up the axe a little
 doubtfully, and looked hopelessly
 around for something to chop.
 "There are some pines in that last
 gulley we passed through," suggested
 Mrs. Rolt.

Through the dark and not quite
 certain of his direction, the unhappy (the
 tobacco (tenderfoot) splashed his way,
 and once in the gully put his back into
 the work. It was not his fault that the
 axe never bit twice in the same place;
 it was to his credit that he kept on
 hammering, until at last a green pine,
 seven or eight inches in diameter,
 yielded to his perseverance.

With infinite toil he trimmed it, cut
 it into lengths, and then packed it
 back in three trips to the cabin.

Jim had been waiting for the last
 two trips, and as soon as Anstruther
 put his axe down, he took it up and
 disappeared for five minutes, bringing
 back a huge burnt "stick" on his shoul-
 der.

There was rather more wood in that
 burnt "stick" than Anstruther had
 brought in his three trips.
 With half a dozen fed strokes the
 cowboy cut two short lengths from
 Anstruther's green pine, for fire-logs,
 tossed all the rest of that gentleman's
 hard-earned loads out of the way,
 chopped, split, and kindled his own
 dry log, hung the billy on an im-
 proved gallows, and began to cut the
 bacon.

It was all so simple and so quickly
 done when you knew how to do it, but
 it was annoying to have worked for
 half an hour to no purpose.

"I don't seem to be much good," said
 Mr. Anstruther.
 Mrs. Rolt laughed and shook her
 head at the cowboy.

"Jim," she said, "you are an old
 bear. Why didn't you tell Mr. An-
 struther what kind of sticks to cut?"

Jim grinned. "I guessed he'd have
 known that much. He has not had to
 chop wood before."
 "You don't say! Is it all coal over
 there?"

Mrs. Rolt ignored the question.
 "You play fair, Jim. You've got to
 show Mr. Anstruther how to do things.
 If you don't, I'll go home."
 "Right away?"
 "Yes, right away."
 "Stop and have its dinner first," he
 said, with impudent coaxing, and
 handed her a dish of bacon, the rash-
 ers as thin and as daintily toasted
 as if they had been prepared by a
 professional cook.

"Won't you have some, Miss Cliff-
 ford?"
 Too the younger woman his manner
 was deferential, if not nervous, and,
 seeing her advantage, womanlike, Miss
 Kitty looked at the bacon and sniffed.
 "It's too greasy, Jim. I wonder if
 you would toast some of it a little
 more for me, Mr. Anstruther?"

Frank hurried to obey her, but the
 fire had been knocked together to
 make a blaze, and the little flames
 which shot out, burned his fingers and
 smoked the bacon, but would not toast
 it.

"Half a shake, partner. Let me fix
 that fire for you. Now go ahead."
 A couple of touches in the right place
 from Jim's toe had created a glowing
 hollow, over which the bacon curled
 and sizzled merrily, but again it was
 Jim's doing and not Frank's, so that
 Kitty's pretty brow was bent, and
 though she laughed, there was a strong
 under-current of annoyance in her
 laugh when Mrs. Rolt began innocently
 to hum that popular American air—

"You ain't no good,
 You caint cut wood,
 Just kiss yourself good-bye."
 The slight upward curl at the cor-
 ners of Jim's mouth did not offend mat-
 ters. He knew the air, though An-
 struther did not.

"Now, I'm going to be lazy and have
 a good time," declared Mrs. Rolt, put-
 ting away her plate. "I know that wo-
 men ought to wash up—"
 "I'll do that, Mrs. Rolt."
 "No, you won't, neither will you,
 Jim. Just put that plate down instant-
 ly. I know your idea of washing up.
 Do you know, Mr. Anstruther, when he
 bathed by alone, I mean, Jim had more
 crockery than all the other
 ranchers in the neighborhood put to-
 gether. Fifty plates I think he had.
 Kitty counted them one day when she
 was in short frocks, and we never
 knew what he wanted so many for
 until that poor young Webster took his
 shack for a winter shoot. Then I
 found out. Shall I tell, Jim?"
 "Makes no odds," laughed Jim, "so
 long as you ain't what Mr. Anstruther
 calls too poetic."

"Kitty knows it's true and you
 aren't contradicting her. What we went
 to see how Mr. Webster was getting
 along, we found his table was set
 off the kitchen table, and his food
 was piled up on the floor.
 "Hasn't Jim told you that before?"
 "You've asked me that question
 before."
 "Why three, Mrs. Rolt, that's the
 trouble. I've not had much chance to
 tackle them yet. They are all new
 fellows, and I don't know how to
 do it."

Continued on page 7.

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 deposit in urine and dr
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 back, weak sexually. He
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