

**THE  
PONY EXPRESS**

**BY HENRY JAMES FORMAN  
and WALTER WOODS**

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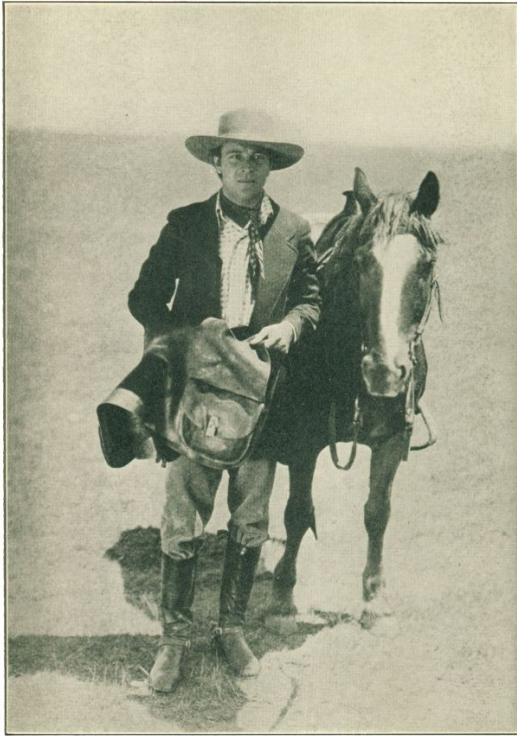
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*A Paramount Picture.*

*The Pony Express*

**RICARDO CORTEZ AS A PONY EXPRESS  
RIDER.**

THE  
PONY EXPRESS

*A ROMANCE*

By  
HENRY JAMES FORMAN

ILLUSTRATED WITH SCENES  
FROM THE PHOTOPLAY  
A JAMES CRUZE PRODUCTION  
A PARAMOUNT PICTURE

GROSSET & DUNLAP  
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To

JAMES CRUZE

WITH ADMIRATION AND AFFECTION

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## PROLOGUE

THOUGH my lifelong friend, and during many years my partner in fortune and misfortune, Jack Weston has always been something of an enigma to me. Is it a kind of unconquerable pride, or is it the unbreachable modesty of the man that has kept him almost willfully silent concerning himself and some of the most colorful episodes of his earlier days? I have never been able to determine. So simple, I suppose, is great courage, that to lesser mortals there is always a certain mystery about it.

Who now hears of Jack Weston? Owing to his long residence abroad, his very name is virtually forgotten, even among his one-time neighbors and friends. I wonder if it is I alone of the few survivors of those bygone days who still cherish vivid and priceless memories of the superb daring of the man, of his all but superhuman courage, that was like a law of nature? It seems unbelievable that the man who saved California and possibly the whole Western half of the Continent for the nation; who quite certainly, to my mind, changed the course of American history; whose insight, keenness and daring seemed a match for every emergency; whose tremendous ride over the Plains in the pony express days will yet come to be regarded as at least as great and historic as the ride of Paul Revere—it seems incredible, I say, that this man should be forgotten.

Much of the blame, however, I know rests upon his own reticence and silence. Great courage and prowess frequently need as much heralding as great mediocrity. Mediocrity often knows better how to contrive its own fame. In my long life I have seen much of such contriving. But I have yet to see another like Jack Weston. There was a time in those crude eventful days of the late fifties and early sixties when danger and risk to him were a more regular fare than food. Yet in all circumstances, in the midst of whatever might appear fortuitous and strange, he invariably appeared as something solid and massive, like an inherent feature of the scene.

I often wonder whether the fact that he was called a gambler in those days has had something to do with his extraordinary reticence. As though we weren't all gamblers then! Some of the ablest men of the time were gamblers. What else were we, who sought gold in California, who crossed the plains and desert by ox-team or stage, who faced uncertainty, certain only of its hostility and dangers—what were we but gamblers with Fate, life

and death being the stakes? I myself saw men and women and children dying of the cholera out on the Plains, while the ox-team moved on at the same old monotonous pace, and paused at dusk to bury its dead in unmarked graves by the trail. The next morning men and oxen moved on as before to the ever-luring destination.

It was then I first saw Jack Weston, a slim sixteen-year old boy with tragic determined eyes, pushing on alone with his yoke, after burying both his mother and father, within two days of each other, east of Laramie. And the yoke was the appropriate symbol. He had started for California and to California he went.

Recently, when I saw him in Rome after some twenty-odd years of separation, I was startled afresh, by the sheer fitness for life of the man in any and all circumstances, that has always appeared to me as some rare gift of nature.

The palace of the Monteleoni on the Pincian Hill is not his. It belongs to his granddaughter, the young Princess of Monteleone, though my guess is that it is Weston's money which keeps that palace going. In his faultless evening coat he was standing, still erect as always, at the top of the grand staircase with his granddaughter Lucia and her aunt the Marchesa Colleoni, receiving his granddaughter's guests. The gold lace and the epaulets, the silks and the jewels, seemed as natural a setting for Jack Weston's fine figure, for his calm, friendly, yet serious face, as the old frontier background of California's mining days, as the crudeness of Sacramento, as the rough shacks and cabins of Hangtown, of Julesburg, of the whole Overland Trail, where we two were friends and comrades together sixty years ago and more.

"So it's really you, Sam," he said, pressing my hand. "Your coming means a lot to me. I counted on you, you see—it's a habit I've never lost."

"Have I ever failed you, Jack?" I asked him. "Though you know evening parties are not for me any longer. I came here because you have a way of getting your wishes obeyed. I'll have to go back to my hotel soon."

"Nonsense," he smiled, his old slow clear smile. "You are as hearty as ever. Just wait a minute until the dancing begins. You don't want to dance, do you?" And he laughed. "Well, then we'll go off by ourselves to my wing—be boys again, make a night of it."

At this moment a young man in uniform bowed very low over Lucia's hand, kissed the hand of the Marchesa and saluted Jack with great courtesy.

“Good evening, Signor Vestone,” and he smiled one of those glittering smiles that only foreign men or actors on the stage are able to produce. Jack introduced him to me as the Count di Castrello. His chest was covered with medals like a shop window. As the young fellow spoke English I ventured to remark:

“You carry the record of a brave man on your chest, Count. Where was your hottest fight in the Great War?”

“In the bureau of the General Staff, Signor,” he laughed mischievously. Then with engaging frankness he added:

“Had I actually been in action, it would have required a porter to bring in my medals. You see, Signor, the Commander-in-Chief was my uncle!”

We all laughed together—we old boys and the young one. In Jack Weston’s presence somehow everything turns friendly and natural. Yet I could see that he scrutinized the young man carefully, for the eyes of the young girl Lucia seemed to rest involuntarily upon the Count di Castrello.

“Too bad that boy is a gambler,” said Jack to me afterwards. “Plays very high, I’m told. And the devil of it is, Lucia likes him.”

It was my turn to shake with an old man’s chuckling laughter.

“That from you, Jack? Do you forget the hand at poker you used to play in San Francisco, or at Sacramento, or at Julesburg?”

He smiled, twinkling:

“No—I haven’t forgotten,” he murmured, motioning me to a deep chair before the crackling fire in his sitting room. “But do you know, Sam—those days seem so far away, so unreal to me, that almost they belong to somebody else. I picture them sometimes in my mind—but with a queer sense of wonder. Was that fellow really I? Yet, he must have been—some of his past still hurts so much—and is so delightful!”

“Must have been!” I protested. “Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten Glen and Slade and—Rhode Island Red—and the pony express days—your riding and shooting. Why that boy with the medals now, downstairs—at his rate you would have had to have a drayman to carry yours.”

“No, Sam,” he shook his head slowly. “No, life doesn’t give medals. It’s only General Staffs that do. But you—your visit here brings it all back to me. Lord, Sam—do you remember Molly—my Molly—how beautiful she was, planted there in a shack near the blacksmith shop in the middle of the Plains, at Julesburg? Was any woman ever finer than Molly? Look at them

all down there with their titles and their silks and the jewels in their hair. Lucia beats them all—because she has some of my Molly’s good looks. Ah, Molly ought to be here with me now. Nothing means so very much to me, Sam—since Molly went. Perhaps that is why I don’t like to say or think much of the days you speak of—brings it all back to me.”

After all those years, this loyalty of Jack’s to his wife’s memory—it touched me more than I can say. It was that as much as anything that moved me, an old man, to set down this portion of Jack’s life before it passes from memory,—for myself, if for no one else—those unforgettable days of romance that can never more return.

For many men loved Molly Jones, myself among the rest—I may as well confess it now, though she never knew it. But from the moment Jack appeared upon the scene—there was no one else for Molly. I am, heaven knows, no writer, but in touching upon those early pioneer days, I seem to taste of a fresher rejuvenation than that which they write about in the newspapers these days.

“You know,” remarked Weston as we settled before the fire, “this Monteleone, who got the title of Prince sometime in the fifteen-hundreds, must have been a rare bird. He was what they called a *condottiere*—that is, he used to hire himself, and a little army of rapsallions he had, to any king or duke who would pay the best price, and fight at so much the job. He was a smooth young devil, I guess. They called him Gazzo Monteleone, which is short for *ragazzo*, ‘boy,’ as you might say ‘Kid Monteleone.’”

“You seem to have forgotten when you were called ‘Fancy Jack’,” I reminded him. “And do you remember why? Remember when Slade nicked a weather-cock on the roof of the saloon at Julesburg and you answered his pleasantry by keeping the same little tin rooster spinning with several successive shots from your Colts?—But you kept the two remaining bullets for Slade in case he should want them! It was Slade himself called you ‘Fancy Jack’—don’t forget that!”

“I remember, now you speak of it,” he laughed heartily. “How strange and far away it all seems! But it was very real then.”

“Far away! Not to me, Jack, not to me! So don’t let your granddaughter waste all her pride on this Gazzo Monteleone. No, not by a dam’ sight!”

“You are trying to make me vain, Sam.” He laid a hand upon my knee. “Almost, now you bring it all back, I wish I could live those days over—for

Molly's sake—you know, even that business of the shooting was for Molly's sake." And his gaze seemed fixed within the depths of the fire.

So it was really that which started dried up memories playing like a fountain. I should like, before I cross the divide, to give old Jack a lift in living those days of his over—if I can set them down in time—and, incidentally, to feel myself young again.

I know his story as perhaps no living man knows it. Nor do I mean the story of his later mining success in Montana, or of his great wealth, that years ago found its way into print.

But who has ever told of John Weston, the most fearless human being of his generation—the gambler, the lover, the rider, the dead shot, who carried his life in his hands like a beaker, caring seemingly nothing whether he spilled it to the ground?

To the youngsters today, after the Great War, the business of slavery and anti-slavery, secession and unionism, things that tore a nation asunder, are dead words read in a history book. Who remembers or cares when Dave Broderick was shot by Terry because he wanted California to be free and to stick to the Union? Who recalls Senator McDougal Glen, who did all that in him lay to make California a separate Empire, to tear itself free of the Union? And who now thinks of that epic of American growth, the overland pony express, that did so much in saving both California and the Union? And Weston, the silent yet eloquent Jack Weston of those days, had a hand in all of those things.

Almost I feel impelled to write a history of those eventful years. But I am no historian. My story is of Weston, and to him I shall cling—even though all the rest of that epic past grows vivid like a colorful picture.

# THE PONY EXPRESS

## BOOK I

# CHAPTER I

## SENATOR GLEN LAYS HIS PLANS

SACRAMENTO in 1860—what a metropolis we thought it then!

The miners who came in from outlying regions, from Folsom, Placerville, Washington, from Sonora, Coloma, and Angel's Camp, were overawed by the vastness of the geometrically spread-out city.

"They say there's three thousand buildings in the place," they commented with naïve wonder. And there actually were—low wooden buildings mostly, of one and two stories, though some were of brick and stone, iron-shuttered. The town prided itself upon two theatres and a melodeon, several distilleries, hotels, banks, gambling halls, factories—even a pickle-factory—to say nothing of the handsome State Capitol with its cupola. From the river sounded the shrill whistles of the paddle-wheel steamers, even as today. And the embarcadero, fringed with pepper, oak and willow trees, where several of the boats lay "at anchor," that is, tied up with ropes like horses, was a thing of mystery and romance. Gas lamps lighted the streets dimly with their watery rays, and Second Street, with its stores and hotels, was more brilliant than present-day Broadway to the simple eyes, now mostly darkened forever, of the miners and rancheros come to trade, to drink, to gamble and to see the sights.

Women were few in the streets at dusk, and these few mostly ultra-modish and of the painted variety. Masculinity largely prevailed. Tall bearded men with checked or red flannel shirts, with stiff dingy trousers of dirty browns and blues tucked halfway into boots, at every belt an arsenal of knives and pistols—these were numerous. From every State in the Union, from all over the world, indeed, these miners and seekers after fortune, crowded the streets, notably the regions of the stores and saloons of Sacramento. It was they who created romance, but they imagined, poor souls, that romance resided in the scene of bustle, in the buildings crowded together, in the astonishing presence and proximity of the Wells-Fargo office, the stage-coaches leaving for the east on a daily schedule, hotels like the Orleans, the Union, the Verandah, the stores glittering with merchandise, saloons bright with lights—and people, people everywhere! With mild



wondering eyes they gazed about them, drinking in civilization, in more senses than one, after weeks and months in the solitude of the wilderness.

Business and professional men, more urbanely apparelled, showed the stovepipe hats and the white collars, with high black stocks, of civilized society. Their black coats and tight well-fitting gray trousers appeared particularly decorous against the background of the miners' roughness.

Here and there was visible a more dandiacal figure still, white-handed, exquisite, with rings on fingers and a bunch of seals at the watch chain, with much ruffled shirt-fronts showing the low-cut buff vest, and smooth buff-colored trousers descending into polished high-heeled top-boots. The gold buttons of his blue broadcloth coat glittered as he walked, and the wide-brimmed soft hat or the gray beaver topped all this elegance with a distinctive air of defiance.

"That," would remark one miner to another, "is Jim McCoy, who deals faro at the Indian Queen."

The gambler was a prominent figure of the community life and often an office-holder, a politician and a public-spirited citizen. The business man naturally looked down upon him, but he was too frequent to be anything but normal.

Before the Orleans Hotel in Second Street, between J and K Streets, was standing the Overland Mail Coach, ready to start across the Continent to Atchison. The stage office was at the Union opposite, but the coach was waiting here for a distinguished passenger. The departure of a coach was a sight no amount of custom could stale, for home to so many of those argonauts still lay toward the rising sun. Some of the miners looked longingly at the equipage, with its six horses and a hostler standing at their head. Those horses, fortunate beasts, were going Eastward.

"Wouldn't you like to get aboard and take a look at the Boston State House," remarked one bearded young miner to another,—“or go to the Harvard Commencement?”

"Wouldn't I!" the other replied. "But until I bag a little more of this thing they call dust, I shall not gaze upon the Boston State House, nor yet on Harvard Hall. Perhaps we shall have to move to British Columbia. Things are petering out here in California."

The careful, even meticulous language they used guardedly was for each other, for no one else. As they were joined by two or three of their acquaintances, they promptly fell into the peculiar Doric speech of the Far

West, made familiar by Bret Harte. Many kinds and conditions of men made up that throng of gold seekers, for gold, next to death, is the greatest of levelers.

“Where be you driftin’ to?” queried one of the newcomers.

“To the Golden Slug, pard,” answered one of the Bostonians. “They say a young feller there lambastes the ‘chivalry’ every evenin’—gives ’em hell for tryin’ to make California a slave state.”

“Yah! Mudsills they call us!” grunted the miner. “Mudsills! ’Cause our hands is calloused! I’d like to get them calloused hands on some o’ their guzzlin’ throats. Let’s go give this feller a hand.”

As they drifted forward, talking politics, slavery, secession and anti-slavery, the crowd of passers grew perceptibly more dense, and thickened just beyond the corner of K street.

The Golden Slug was one of the older, less pretentious saloons of Sacramento, devoid of teak and rosewood, that lived up to the brief legend on its windows, “Honest Liquor.” Over its door hung an octagonal wooden disk, gilded and carved in imitation of one of the many coins then privately minted and circulating in California, as a ready means of trading gold dust and bullion. The octagonal coin had a nominal value of fifty dollars.

Near the Golden Slug a young man, smooth shaven, handsome, somewhat pale, not over twenty-seven, was standing with singular ease of bearing upon a soap-box, but little raised above his audience. In a clear level voice he was addressing perhaps less than a hundred people pressed round his platform. The miners were surprised to see him in the unmistakable dress of the dandy,—buff-colored pantaloons, ruffled shirt-front, gold buttons and all.

“Why, he’s a gambler!” murmured a miner from Missouri.

“Don’t make no difference,” growled one of the young Bostonians truculently. “He’s got the truth in him. Listen to what he’s sayin’!” The crowd appeared more than ordinarily attentive.

“Let me remind you, gentlemen,” pursued the speaker, evidently at the close of his speech, “let me remind you what Mr. Lincoln of Illinois has said upon the subject of slavery. ‘A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this Government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free.’”

“No, fellow-citizens, it cannot, and neither can California. California is made up of freemen. Our workingmen have been called ‘mudsills’ by the ‘chivalry’ from the South, because their clothes are rough and their hands are hard and calloused with toil. But it is those same hands that have given California her motto, ‘Eureka!’ For they have found the wealth of the world, and toil is what we came here for. And free we must and will remain. No taint of slavery, of holding other human beings in bondage and subjection, shall ever fasten upon free California—not if we can prevent it. Nor do we want to separate ourselves from the Union.”—A crackle of applause rewarded the words. “California,” he concluded, “must stick to the Union. She must remain forever a free state of the great United States.”

He folded his arms lightly upon his chest and gazed about him for a moment, persuasive, yet defiant.

“And I tell you, gentlemen, we can and must prevent any other outcome!” he uttered as a last hammer-stroke.

A cheer and a burst of handclapping went up from the crowd. The speaker bowed and stepped from the box, his arms still carelessly folded upon his breast. Here and there was heard a hoarse laugh or a yell of derision.

“Calls himself a toiler, eh?”

“How do you keep your hands so clean, Jack?”

“Which is harder toil, poker or faro?”

“Who’s that?” asked a tall, buckskin-clad ranchero of a grizzled miner.

“That’s Jack Weston, a gambler, from Frisco, stranger,” said the miner. And thinking he detected a trace of Southern accent in the ranchero, he added with relish: “He lambastes the ‘chivalry’ like that most everyday—gives ’em hell.”

“Wonder they don’t plug him,” commented the cattleman under his bushy mustache.

“Maybe they would,” returned the miner, ejecting a spurt of red tobacco juice into the gutter. “But I guess he can shoot quicker an’ straighter than any of ’em.”

The ranchero was evidently not then bent upon a quarrel, and, in any case, something of a diversion was created by Ben Crocker’s team.

Ben Crocker was one of the rich men of Sacramento, and his team of trained horses was famous throughout the State. Hitched to a magnificent trap, the four sleek bays came clattering down K Street and, without any sign of reins, obeying only words of command issued by their sharp-voiced owner, who sat with crossed arms on the box, the horses wheeled and turned into Second Street to the left. The traffic melted before them magically. The sparks flew from their hoofs as they curvetted like so many circus horses. The crowd cheered. Miners and ranchers came all the way from Placerville, Sonora and Chinese Camp to see Ben Crocker driving without reins. It was a mobile light-hearted crowd.

The speaker of a few moments earlier had disappeared.

## CHAPTER II

### RUMORS OF A PONY EXPRESS

THE "chivalry" to which Weston had alluded was the southern pro-slavery faction in California and Senator Glen was its prophet.

His was a powerful personality, even for California. A Kentuckian by birth, he had held office under Andrew Jackson in the South even before he had emigrated to California. His services to the new state on the Pacific were many, and he rose by rapid steps to the dignity of being Senator Glen. In politics he had that small regard for scruple often characteristic of those days anywhere, but notably in California. Partisanship at that time was a ferocity that frequently led to bloodshed. Because Senator David Broderick, though a colleague and a fellow Democrat, had opposed him in his slavery ideas, Glen was commonly held responsible for the shooting of Broderick in a duel by Terry, a judge of California's Supreme Court and a devoted henchman of Glen's. Broderick had died of his wounds, yet Terry had never even been brought to trial.

Dominant, commanding in stature and spirit, cast somewhat in the mould of Webster and Calhoun, Glen was undoubtedly the ablest politician of his time on the Pacific coast. So determined was he that his plans for California must not go awry, that during January of 1860 he had made a hurried mysterious journey across the Continent by coach to Sacramento for a few days' converse with his political henchmen before renewing the struggle that was approaching.

In his room at the Orleans Hotel in Sacramento that afternoon of February, 1860, dear Senator Glen, as the ladies called him, was holding conferences with his partisans. Ostensibly his preoccupation was with the approaching State conventions for the choice of delegates to the national convention to be held the coming summer at Charleston, South Carolina. The Democratic party had an anti-slavery faction, of course. But it was Glen's aim that no anti-slavery delegates should go from California to that convention.

Beneath this object of his presence in California, however, when he should have been in Washington, was still another purpose. Skilled and

daring as he was, he was preparing for all emergencies. In Washington, in the Senate chamber, a few weeks earlier, he had announced:

“I believe that the slave-holding states of this confederacy can establish a separate and independent government that will be impregnable to the assaults of foreign enemies. And California,” he concluded ominously, “will be found with the South.” It was then, too, that he threatened a separate Pacific republic that would embrace the whole western coast of America. And, juggler that he was, once he had produced his effect, he had the statements stricken from the *Record*, so that he could deny them if charged with their utterance. That was one phase of his more desperate policies. Here in Sacramento was another.

The last visitors to his room before his departure for the East were the leaders of a secret organization he had fathered, known as the Knights of the Golden Circle. And his instructions to this dozen or so of determined men were of a far more sinister cast even than those he had given to his party leaders concerning delegates.

“At any cost,” he told them significantly, “men who seem formidable in the cause of abolitionism and anti-slavery must be removed to other spheres.”

He retained the rounded oratorical language of politics, but his eyes were flashing fire, and the leaders of the Knights did not mistake his meaning.

“It’s the first quick action that counts in these things,” he emphasized. “In case of a split, which is almost certain to come, create an atmosphere of adhesion to the slave states, and California will fall into that column. And, gentlemen,” he lowered his voice, and made his words incisively significant, “after the election—no matter who is elected—I’ll see to it that California shall get early news of a Democratic victory—our kind of Democratic!”

“Do you take me, gentlemen? Even if it is corrected afterwards, your work will have been done. You and the early news together will have swung California to our cause. I shall have means of getting the news to you some days ahead of the stage mails, never fear.”

“The pony express!” someone in the room murmured hoarsely, as at the breaking of a long-expected light.

“Yes—the Pony Express!” he flashed triumphant. “Do you believe I’m asleep? It is not for nothing I have labored upon this idea. I have long wanted a swift mail service for California. But only of late it has dawned

upon me what such a service, eight to ten days from Missouri to California, might do for our cause! So in sixty days the project will be a reality.”

He held up his hand warningly, for almost the Knights of the Golden Circle had broken into a cheer. To them he appeared redolent of power, almost omnipotent. What was there that he could not accomplish? Was not Broderick, his worst enemy, safely dead, and was not he, Glen, still the senior Senator from California, daily wielding a greater power?

“We follow you, Senator, and we understand,” nodded the leader of the Knights, in outward life a prosperous business man. “The orders are to break up all anti-slavery meetings, and to deal with their advocates as we think best. We are to make the most of news of a Democratic victory—which is sure to come, no matter what happens.”

“Exactly!” flashed Glen from under his heavy eyebrows. “Summary, forceful measures, in short.”

At this moment the first ripple of handclapping from across the way, where Jack Weston was speaking, reached the men crowded about Glen on the second story of the Orleans Hotel. Glen’s attention, like an actor’s was arrested by the sound of applause. He rose, approached the window and opened it. For a moment it flashed through his mind that some of his admirers had come to see him off by the coach. There was something kingly in the man—he always expected adoration. But as he glanced at the motley crowd surging about a soap-box orator, he realized he was mistaken. This applause was not for him. His ear just caught the closing words of the speaker, whom he could not discern:

“California must stick to the Union. She must remain anti-slavery forever.”

“What is this?” he turned to the room frowning darkly. He gave the effect of an emperor scenting treason under his very nose.

“That,” explained the chief of the Knights, “is one Jack Weston—a gambler from San Francisco. He’s making it his business of late to talk anti-slavery. That is all they have on their side—Senator—milksops or gamblers. Not much damage he can do.”

“Much or little—why can he not do damage?” flared Glen. “Everyone can do damage. And I believe I’ve heard that he’s no fool. He must not be allowed to continue. Begin now, gentlemen. There is your task, directly at hand. Cannot anyone pick a quarrel with a gambler? Surely California could shift with one gambler the less?”

The leader of the Knights nodded grimly.

“We understand you, Senator. There’s spheres he could better adorn.”

“Ah—yes,” Glen caught him up—“a lamp-post, for example.” Some of the men rose in their eagerness to serve.

“Well, I must go, gentlemen.” Glen had not resumed his chair. “The coach is waiting for me below. Don’t forget my instructions—my advice. We have a great cause, and we have organization—the winner of causes.”

As he moved forward to the door and someone opened it for him, a burly shabby nondescript of a man almost stumbled forward, and gasped out.

“Your bags, Senator, if you please.” He smiled at the great man in engaging confusion, and with a great air of clumsy, solicitous bustle he seized Glen’s portmanteau from the hand of the nearest of the henchmen and bore it clattering down the stairs to the coach. A coach passenger was allowed twenty-five pounds of baggage. Glen’s bag appeared heavier, but no one was likely to weigh it. He was Glen. Upon a strap over his shoulder, he also carried a small black leather satchel. Together with his followers he descended the wooden stairway like a chieftain at the head of his clan.

The landlord at the door of the Orleans shook his distinguished guest’s hand obsequiously and bowed him out with a murmured hope that “the Senator had found everything satisfactory.”

“Admirable, admirable, landlord,” Glen smiled urbanely. “The Capitol Hotel at Washington could do no better. My secretary will settle the score.”

It was almost quite dark when he emerged. The coach was belated by his delay. He sniffed the crisp winter air of his State, almost as though he had created both air and State.

Out on the pavement a troop of his friends were assembled to bid their leader farewell. He shook hands with all of them cordially, like a prince, giving to each some word meant especially for that individual. The art of leadership appeared as ingrained and natural in him as the color of his eyes.

“Remember,” he would remark to one, “a strong aggressive policy is half the battle.” “Quick action is what we need,” he would murmur to another, or, “bear in mind, opposition is made to be overcome.” The men gathered about seemed fairly to crackle in his presence—certain that nothing could fail with so peerless and confident a leader.

At this moment the tall thin figure of Hank Monk, the driver, swung lithely up into the box of the coach and majestically unwound the reins from



about the silver-bound whip-stock. His slouch hat entirely hid his forehead and seemed to rest upon his eyebrows. The crowd on the pavement, gathered to see the coach depart eastward, looked with a sort of affectionate awe upon the driver. Any single journey might cost him his life. To them he represented romance. Senator Glen almost involuntarily glanced up at the figure on the box. There, too, seemed royalty of a sort. Wrapped in his long great coat from his head to his boots, the driver seemed mysterious, regal, not quite mortal.

“I know,” remarked Glen in his rolling oratorical voice, “when my marching orders are given me. From this moment on, gentlemen, if I linger, I am impeding the course of the United States mails,” and he smiled up with quizzical geniality at the driver, as though to say:

“Even I am willing to placate you.”

“Then—shall we start, Senator?” a deferential man, who was standing near him, put in somewhat anxiously.

“Yes, Mr. Russell—thank you, sir. Let’s not delay a moment longer.” And, the Senator preceding, both men climbed in at the side of the coach, and joined their fellow-passengers, two men and a young woman. The conductor climbed up last beside Hank on the box.

Just then the Concord from the East, covered with alkali dust, thundered by on the way to the stage office, after its long journey across the Plains. The only salute of the two coaches as they passed was a flick of the whips of their drivers toward each other, scarcely shifting their eyes from the lead horses.

The crowd on the pavement, with its occupation gone, hung for a moment indeterminate, gazing in silence after the departing coach with the wistfulness that they accorded all things and persons departing east. But only for a moment. It was a mercurial crowd, and almost with one accord they hurried up toward the postoffice in Fourth Street, in the hope of letters from the east, dropped there by the incoming stage.

Letters there were, for some, and newspapers, too, from small and large towns, from New England, New York, from all the Atlantic Seaboard and the Ohio Valley, from England and from Germany, from all over the world. California, then as now, was a cosmos in little, and since the discovery of gold by James Marshall at Sutter’s Mill, it had become a magic name, outranking in significance such symbols of ancient renown as Ophir and Golconda. The four corners of the globe contributed to its population, and

the mailbag brought by the coach across the desert and the Plains radiated, as by so many invisible threads, from all these distant places.

“Look at this!” cried one middle-aged miner. “Eight weeks for a newspaper from Springfield, Massachusetts—don’t that beat the Dutch!” But there were tears in his eyes at the mere sight of the familiar title and the headlines of the sheet from his native place.

“Zat is nossing,” laughed a tall bearded Norman from Rouen. “’Ere is a lett’ she ’ave take seven months to come from France!” His lips clung to the monosyllable “France” as though he were savoring a dainty.

“My wife’s been dead two months, and I didn’t know it,” one man kept muttering to himself, as he leaned against the wall, gazing at a sheet of writing with unseeing eyes. “Two months—and I didn’t know it,—Sally!” Men respectfully left him for a few moments alone with his sorrow.

Some of the men suddenly nudged one another and nodded in the direction of a gray-bearded miner with mild, patient eyes edging his way along the crowd toward the window.

“Who’s that?” someone asked.

“That’s Simpson,” was the whispered reply, “from down Alabamy. He’s been comin’ here for five years askin’ for a letter, and he never gets a thing.”

“Howdy!” said Simpson cheerily to Jimmy Queen, the letter clerk, who was everybody’s friend. “Anythin’ for me, Jimmy?”

“No, not this time,” replied the man at the window kindly. “Better luck next time, Mr. Simpson.”

“Wall—wall!” Simpson returned in his invariable formula, and his old innocently wondering eyes shone mistily as he turned away.

“Never mind, boys,” cried one young fellow gaily, with a southern drawl, “we’ll have quicker mails here befoah you all can say guns!”

“How d’ you know that?” someone demanded.

“Oh, there’s a rumor about.—Glen is the boy to fix that—see if he don’t. We’ll soon be havin’ a pony express—sort of flyin’ horse-men—will do it in seven, maybe six, days from St. Joe.”

“You Southerners,” laughed one of the Bostonians with good-humored raillery, “think Glen can do durn near everything—fly across! Six days—pew!”

“Wall, he durn near can,” drawled the Southerner, with the faint underlying challenge in his voice that seemed to distinguish even the lightest words of the men from south of Mason and Dixon’s line. “He’ll have a railroad here from the Atlantic one fine day—see if he don’t.”

The anxiety to read and examine every scrap of paper received in the mail was too great, however, to lead into lengthy argument. Singly or in groups of two, they seemed to drift apart into corners where there were lights, even under the noisily flaring street lamps, to read and to con and read again their precious missives.

Only those who had received nothing laughed and talked loudly for a space in front of the postoffice, before they moved away to their favorite saloons, to submerge their very genuine chagrin and disappointment.

## CHAPTER III

JACK WESTON

THE burly shabby man who had trundled Glen's portmanteau from his room to the coach did not form a part of the crowd that had moved to the postoffice. No sooner had the coach departed than he hurried back into the hotel, and through the passages to the stables. Almost immediately afterward he slipped out of a back door through the stable-yard and unobtrusively made his way to the Golden Slug.

The interior of this refectory was not as sumptuous as many others. The floor was carefully strewn with sawdust. The bar and tables were of oak and, save for two reflector lamps behind the bar, the place, of only moderate dimensions, was lighted by a cluster of four lamps depending from the somewhat low ceiling. The room was warm and rather close. On the broad mirror behind the bar was emblazoned a repetition of the slogan painted on the windows without; "Honest Liquor." A few miners and habitués were scattered at the tables. One party of five on the left of the door was cheerfully engaged in playing poker, their glasses within convenient reach.

In the rear of the room, near one of the three wooden pillars that supported the ceiling, at a table somewhat obscured by the shadows, Jack Weston, the soap-box orator of a few minutes earlier, was sitting alone before a smaller round table, his hat low over his forehead, moodily laying out a deck of cards in a game of solitaire.

His eyebrows were drawn together in an expression of absorption so intense that the game obviously was merely a mechanical device to hide his thinking—an exercise unusual and to be concealed in that environment.

The burly man of the Orleans at this moment entered, nonchalantly gazing straight before him. But whether he had seen Weston or not was problematical, for he turned suddenly toward the bar and ordered a drink. "All right, Red," the bartender put down the glass he was polishing and mechanically poured out the brown liquid.

Three of the men who had been with Glen at the Orleans just prior to his departure now entered the room. The burly man called Red recognized them and on a sudden he seemed oblivious of his drink.

Carelessly he strode over toward Weston as though he had just perceived him, leaned forward with the pretense of handing him a newspaper, and whispered breathily:

“Glen has as good as ordered the Knights to string you up to a lamp-post. Some of ’em are here now.”

Weston, without looking up, made a slight playful gesture with his fingers, as though too absorbed in the game to listen to him, or to bother about newspapers, and went on shifting the cards.

Red, straightening, drew back like a guilty child rebuked and glanced over his shoulder at the door.

Three more of Glen’s men had just entered. They nodded a greeting here and there and ranged themselves in careless attitudes near the bar, not, however, losing sight of Weston.

Weston himself appeared wholly unconscious of this increment in the population. From his pocket he took a gold coin and laid it on the table. Pointing at it with his finger and with something of a frown, as though making a reluctant loan to Red, he whispered:

“Gerry’s stable—bring my horse over to yours. Put an old saddle on him—” and he nodded a good-natured dismissal to Red. Again he seemed absorbed in his game of solitaire.

As he reached the door, Red brushed against three more men straggling in. With a startled glance over them, he hurried away. All these men, in careless lounging attitudes, laughing and chatting, somehow seemed to fall naturally into a sort of semicircle in front of the apparently oblivious Weston.

Abruptly he leaned back with a sigh and pushed the cards away with a look of disappointment. He rose wearily and, making as though about to approach the bar, the semicircle widened automatically, but formed behind him anew with as unstudied and fluid a movement as a ring of smoke. He folded his arms nonchalantly and on a sudden a series of shots, incredibly rapid, that seemed to merge into one crepitating detonation, mingled with the splintering of glass, filled the room, and abruptly the place was in total darkness. The acrid smell of gunpowder stung the nostrils of the men. The curtains at the window shut out even the street light. Dead silence reigned for a space that seemed long to the men in the saloon.

The bartender, with an oath and pistol in hand, struck a sulphur match beneath his counter and lighted a candle in a sconce behind the bar. The

room in that dim light seemed precisely as it was before, except for the floating wreaths of blue smoke. One of the lamps shattered on the floor sputtered up, and some of the oil spilled was catching fire from a smouldering wick. The bartender seized the candle in his left hand and hurried to stamp it out.

“Who the hell is the smart Alec now?” he shouted with rising anger. “I’ll drill the skunk that done that!”

His shock of fiery hair seemed to have risen on his head over the red forehead. Belligerently he gazed about, holding his candle high. No one moved or replied, except that every man’s hand was on his pistol. So absolutely the same was the room as he glared about, even to the postures and positions of the men, he was completely baffled. Finally, however, his gaze rested upon the chair and table previously occupied by Weston. The solitaire deck lay spread out as before in perfect geometric evenness. The chair was empty. A glance about the room and at the faces of the men failed to reveal Weston’s presence anywhere.

“Well, by Heck!” the red bartender almost chanted in chagrined fury and stupefaction. “I didn’t think that of him—no, by God!—not of that feller! He never touched a drop of strong licker—not sence he’s been here! I couldn’t of believed it!”

The men at the tables now arose and all drew about the bartender, talking, shouting, gesticulating, laughing loudly with the releasing tension of nerves—all explaining their views at once. The men of the recent semicircle merged unobtrusively with the crowd. The bartender went on hardily expostulating, and threatening emptily, as he kept lighting more candles.

The men of the recent crescent, however, were no longer interested. At the earliest opportunity they moved away and slipped out of the saloon.

## CHAPTER IV

### FUGITIVE OR PURSUER?

OUT of doors surged the same cheerful city of Sacramento, disturbed not at all by the upset of the Golden Slug, or of Pale Hanrahan, as the bartender was called, owing to the brick-red tint of his complexion.

Passers-by who had heard the shots made it a point to remove themselves some distance before making enquiry as to the cause of the disturbance. As lights began to reappear and as men began to leave the saloon, the news gradually trickled out that some smart Aleck had shot out the lights, either in jest or out of sheer irrepressible exuberance of spirit. While not of frequent occurrence, such things did occasionally happen in Sacramento, since always and everywhere boys will be boys. As fortunately there had been no casualties, the moment of the matter was deemed light. Two constables shouldered importantly into the door, and for a time that evening the Golden Slug became increasingly popular.

Behind the Orleans Hotel, in the stable where a few horses were placidly munching, Rhode Island Red, as he was sometimes called, the burly porter, hostler, and stableman of the inn, all in one, was holding subdued and rapid conversation with the cause of all the disturbance at the Golden Slug. Weston, however, was not in the least excited. He seemed to share some of the placidity of the tranquil beasts at the mangers.

“Give me a suit of your clothes, Red,” he murmured, beginning to strip his own finery.

“If I do,” said Red with breathy excitement, “it’ll have to come off my back.”

“So much the better,” said Weston with a subdued chuckle. “You’ll look right handsome in mine.”

The picture Red saw of himself in a ruffled shirt and collar, with close-fitting, buff colored pantaloons, sent a quiver through his frame and made him pause for an instant.

“Hell!” he finally uttered, “What do I care? You’ve got to get—and get quick.” And with somewhat tremulous, clumsy fingers he began to strip his

greasy buckskin jacket, his flannel shirt, checked black and what was once white, and his heavy blue denim trousers.

“What about the boots?” he muttered with choked excitement.

“Boots, too,” murmured Weston, swiftly, yet, somehow, with an air of leisure, donning the heavy garments shed by Red, that were stiff and strongly impregnated with stable and perspiration.

“Gosh, I’ll have a sweet time walking on those high heels of yours!” breathed Red. And for a moment the agony of the picture he saw unnerved poor Red far more than any threatening danger from the Knights of the Golden Circle. In the darkness of the box-stall that was his bedroom the burly man stood for an instant upon the wad of hay that was his bed, petrified, hardly able to stir a muscle.

“Let’s move, Red,” murmured Weston, as he continued to pull on his new outfit.

“Sh! Wait a minute!” Red whispered hoarsely. Someone was passing in the yard.

“Sing, Red,” whispered Weston, “hum a tune or something. Make it natural.” Weston was always able to think.

With a shake of his solid body Red put a control upon himself and began feverishly to don the somewhat tight, foppish apparel, that made chills creep down his spine, as though he were tricking himself out in peacock feathers.

And in a low hoarse murmur he began to chant lugubriously the one song whose words he knew:

“My name it is Joe Bowers,  
I have a brother Ike,  
I come from old Mizzoura,  
Come all the way from Pike.

“I’ll tell yah why I left thar,  
An’ how I come to roam,  
An’ left my poor old mammy,  
So far away at home—”

The end of that epic, which was all but endless, Weston did not wait to hear. Besides, he knew it, for it was audible at every stable, in every saloon and camp, on every wagon and stage between St. Joe and Sacramento.



“I’m ready,” whispered Weston. “I’ve got some money, but I can’t give you much, Red. I don’t know what I’ll need.”

“Don’t need any,” muttered Red. “Where you goin’,” he demanded, “to Frisco?”

“Not any,” said Weston, “I’m goin’ after that coach, I’ve got to settle this matter with Glen.”

“What!” gasped Red in consternation. “Get into trouble with a Senator?—Say, Jack!—”

“I know, Red,” Weston laid a reassuring hand upon his arm. “Me—a gambler, against a Senator—I know. But I’m a free citizen, don’t forget—not a Mississippi slave. I want to know whether I’m to be murdered every time I express a political opinion different from Mr. Glen’s.”

Red suddenly grinned in an access of joyous admiration for his friend.



*A Paramount Picture.*

*The Pony Express.*

SHOULD CALIFORNIA SECEDE FROM THE  
UNION? SACRAMENTO DEBATED THE QUESTION  
HOTLY IN THE STREETS.

“One thing’s sure,” he reflected. “They won’t look for you there.”

“Maybe not,” said Weston with a calm that seemed like indifference, and carefully he strapped on the belt with his pistols under the buckskin jacket, one under each armpit. “I’m off,” he added, advancing to his horse, that was already saddled. “Ride out at the front gate—what d’you say, Red?”

“Not on your life!” spluttered the other with fierce emotion. “Think they’re not watchin’ this place? They’re most likely lookin’ for you in the gamblin’ houses. But trust them not to do things by halves. Didn’t I tell you Glen has given the word? No!—it’s the back gate for you.—I’ve got the key. What did I bring your horse over here for? I put my old saddle on the cayuse. They won’t see your Mexican silver flashin’ under the lights.”

Weston was touched. He looked upon the burly man with affection. “You, Red,” he whispered, “you are the ace of the deck.” He wrung the large rough hand of his friend and turned away toward the horse.

“Pete,” he murmured as the black horse nuzzled against his shoulder, “now you and I must travel a piece.”

A few minutes later, by way of the back streets and empty sand lots along the river edge, a roughly clad hostler or miner might have been seen leaving Sacramento leisurely behind him at a gentle canter, and making for the Overland Trail eastward. But there was none to see him. People here kept mostly indoors. Gas lamps had not yet reached this region. Yellow lights were glimmering in the ruder shacks and cabins lying on the outskirts of the town, and here and there a dog was dismally baying.

## CHAPTER V

### THE HOLDUP

THE crisp moonless night was glittering with myriads of pin-point stars as Weston cantered along what is now Auburn Boulevard, and was then the old Overland Trail, upon which the coach had preceded him. He was not pressing his horse, for he knew he could overtake the stage whenever it pleased him. Russell and Glen being aboard, however, he believed the station-keepers along the route would lay themselves out to make for speed. Infallibly, therefore, like a good horseman, he communicated to his mount the impulse toward a steady energy rather than for any spectacular bursts.

Suddenly he felt the sting of an acute appetite, and he remembered that he had eaten no supper that evening. He smiled faintly to himself and reflected that he was glad he had never made his body his master. Heat and cold, hunger and fulness, poverty and affluence—he had experienced them all. Such things did not matter much. They were all in a lifetime. Just then only two things mattered—Glen and Glen's scheming. Glen was bent upon making an oligarchy or a despotism of a country designed to be free.

His country! He could hardly understand, and he did not care to question, why he was so thrilled with love at the thought of it. California, the Union!—these words held magic for him. All the thought and toil and blood that had been expended in their foundation! All the mortal effort, all the human endeavor and suffering! And Glen and his kind were seeking to undo these things—wantonly, as it seemed to him. And because he had opposed them, Glen had virtually decreed his execution. How many more men were to die because Glen disapproved their views? Well, as for him, if he, Weston, was to die, then Glen must go on first.

With a sudden revulsion of feeling from the crest of his anger he experienced an almost tender wistfulness, a peculiar ardent longing to look upon the melancholy features of Abraham Lincoln. There was a man to love, to die for. That incult middle-western backwoodsman and country lawyer appeared, by his speeches and sayings, to be not a maddened partisan, but a humane and large-hearted statesman. He understood everybody, condemned none, but he loved freedom and hated slavery for America. To serve such a man—if only he could!—

But himself he held to be of small account, a bit of flotsam in the rushing whirlpool of life. He considered himself a failure—but fortunately there was no one living to suffer by his failure. On a sudden his face turned grim and hard.

Before him came floating the picture of the sixteen-year old boy that once was he, burying his father and his mother in the Plains with the help of poor uncouth Red, but little older than himself. Red was a failure, too. His heart was of better gold than any he had found in California. His poor father, lawyer Weston, the dreamer—out on the Plains! He saw himself with the hot tears dropping on his hands as he labored piling cairns of stone upon the rude graves against the wolf and coyote.

Black Pete suddenly stumbled and awoke him out of his reverie.

“Easy there, Pete,” he murmured, stroking the glossy neck. “No reason for you to go stumbling. You appeared to be having a meal before we started. We’ve got to go a ways yet before we—hesitate!”

“Folsom!” he exclaimed to himself as he caught the few glimmering lights of the first important town on the trail. Twenty-two miles! So short a distance travelled, and yet his whole life seemed to have passed in review before him. He held his horse down to a slow canter through the town in order to pass it as unobtrusively as possible. He knew people here and did not desire to halt or to answer questions.

All this country was familiar to him. In his gold-mining days he had tramped it all, from Placerville to Coloma, to Sonora, Angel’s Camp, Sacramento—and East to the summit of the Sierras. The years of meaningless toil—how the gold had eluded him! Only the storekeepers and the bankers were getting rich. The miners carried their little pouches of dust, that to most yielded barely enough for sustenance—and to some not even that. But the Crockers and the Millses in Sacramento, whose signs read “Highest Price Paid For Gold Dust,” were becoming millionaires. Well, every man to his trade. It had been a sort of final boyish despondency that had driven him to gambling. He *could* play poker. But he was through with that, thank Heaven. He had embraced a cause worth giving his life for.

Out of Folsom the land began to rise in magnificent flowing hills covered with scrub oak and pine. Weston settled down to a persistent trot that would, according to his calculation, bring him up with the coach between Placerville and Sportsman’s Hall. El Dorado, Shingle, Deer Creek, Forty Mile, Diamond—all were sunk in darkness and in sleep as he passed

them through the chilling starlight, never halting, still combating the recurring pangs of hunger.

A fire was flaring at a dozen yards to the right of the trail ahead of him. As he approached, he saw half a dozen men lying or sitting around it, singing the eternal "Joe Bowers." Black masses of cattle grazing shadowed the bottom land beyond them. Drovers, he thought, bringing cattle across the Plains, or from the Mormon country, to fatten on California grass, before being sold at the Sacramento and San Francisco markets.

"Evenin' stranger!" shouted the drovers. "Jine us by the fire?"

"No, thanks, boys," Weston answered them cheerily. "Got to hurry."

"It's shorely livelier at Hangtown!" returned the drovers gaily. "Good luck to ye, stranger."

"Same to you, boys," he waved back to them and soon he was screened by the night and the wayside trees.

The lights of Hangtown, as Placerville was still familiarly called, soon showed like lanterns gleaming from the oddly scattered miners' cabins, that seemed suspended on the hills among the trees.

Clattering across the planking over Hangtown Creek, he passed the now silent stage office and drew up before the El Dorado Restaurant. The liveliness of Hangtown was confined to two or three saloons, but the El Dorado prided itself upon being always open.

"Howdy, stranger," the combined cook, watchman and waiter came forward bluffly, with top-boots, a revolver at his belt and a red flannel shirt showing at his hairy throat. "What'll it be?"

"Some feed for the horse and grub for me," Weston answered as succinctly.

"Don't feed no hosses," the man brusquely informed him. "But I reckon I can fill you up."

"Got to look out for the horse first, pard," Weston began to turn away. "Where can I get some feed?"

"Placerville Hotel, I reckon," growled the waiter—"but looky here, stranger, thar's my own hoss a-eatin' his head off in the stable. Hang your hoss up by him. I reckon he'll eat three dollars' worth soon as you will?"

"That goes," accepted Weston, for he had no desire to knock up a sleepy stableman at the hotel.

The almost illegibly greasy bill of fare he found on his table must have been precisely the same as one he remembered five years earlier.

“Is there any other place on earth like California?” he thought, smiling to himself as he read:

#### ROAST

Beef, Mexican (prime cut).....	\$1.50
Beef, up along.....	1.50
Beef, tame, from the States.....	1.50

#### VEGETABLES

Baked Beans, plain.....	.75
Baked Beans, greased.....	1.00
Two potatoes, medium size.....	.50
Two potatoes, peeled.....	.75

#### ENTREES

Sauerkraut.....	1.00
Bacon, fried.....	1.00
Hash, low grade.....	.75
Hash, 18 carats.....	1.00

#### GAME

Codfish balls, per pair.....	.75
Jackass rabbit, whole.....	1.00

A square meal with dessert was three dollars, all payable in advance, and there was a note in small type to the effect that the gold scales were at the end of the bar.

Weston elected the square meal and, though still thinking of the coach and Glen, he lingered over his repast in order to give Black Pete a chance at a sound three dollars worth.

How long since the stage had passed here? That was what he was eager to ask, but thought it wiser to refrain. Time was pressing. He called for his bill.

“Goin’ fur, stranger?” the waiter queried nonchalantly.

“Just a piece—up along,” he added, quoting the bill of fare. He paid his score and departed.

And though the trail began to climb sharply toward the Sierras, the solitary rider steadily kept urging his horse onward, talking to and gentling him as he urged.

“Now, then, Pete,” he kept up a flow of conversation as with a friend, “You can’t say you didn’t have as good a square meal as I did myself—better likely—and a good siesta, too. That coach has changed horses four or five times by now. But Hank is no longer drivin’ her. I know everything you’ve got a mind to say, Pete. Don’t think I don’t. But we’ve just got to come up with that coach ’fore she gets much further. Ain’t that reasonable, Pete?”

The horse seemed to respond as though he understood every word spoken to him. Upon every level he would fall into a gallop of his own initiative, and even upon the climbs he would leg it up with a sure-footed briskness that showed he was completely imbued with his master’s will.

The chill of night grew sharper toward dawn, but suddenly it seemed to relax, like a spring, as horse and rider passed the station at Webster’s. Lights were showing in the windows.

“That’s better,” murmured Weston, “Means the coach has passed here only a little while ago. But they sure did get a change of horses here, I know that. Well, Pete, pretend you’re a changed horse and let’s get up with ’em.”

The first graying of the dawn, accounting for the lessening chill, cut the horizon as with an edge beyond Webster’s, and Weston had not ridden more than two or three miles farther when the ears of Pete going sharply forward indicated that someone was on the road ahead of him.

“Very well,” said Weston. “Then let’s get on and get it over.”

And as Black Pete darted ahead, the forest-shaded trail suddenly appeared to his rider intensely mysterious, strange, a huge sinuous question mark.

Just what was he going to do when he reached the coach? Hold it up like a road agent? Hardly. Wake up Glen and argue with him through the window? Neither the other passengers nor the driver of the coach were likely to tolerate such a procedure. He was not minded for that sort of adventure. No, he would have to accompany the coach until Strawberry Valley, the next station, or until she stopped for breakfast—possibly at

Summit Sierra. Then he might reasonably, and more or less conveniently, have his few words with Glen.

The winding trail took a sharp turn upward and as Black Pete perforce sank from a trot into an energetic walk, Weston suddenly reined him into a standstill. He thought he heard human voices coming faintly through the woods from up ahead. He descended, left Pete standing where he was, walked softly forward peering round the bend up the trail.

The red disk of the sun showed like the edge of a coin above the horizon. The trees by the roadside stood motionless in the morning calm. He saw the yellow coach, heading upward at an angle of almost forty-five degrees.

She was at a standstill.

Three or four men, he was not sure then, handkerchiefs shrouding the lower part of their faces, were about the coach with drawn revolvers. The driver had applied his brakes and was expostulating with them. The conductor was sitting bolt upright, his hands held aloft.

“You fellers must be the damnedest amatoors,” the driver spat out in gross contempt, “not to know that we ain’t carryin’ anything of valoo this trip. What’s the sense of stoppin’ a innocent coach that’s late anyhow?”

The bandit nearest, however, silently motioned to him with his pistol to dig under the seat and throw out the express box.

Another was pointing a blue navy revolver into the coach interior on the right, and a third held the door open on the left and was calling to the sleepy passengers to come out.

“Three of them,” murmured Weston to himself, “Ought to be able to stop those.”

He was thrilled with the joy of danger and of action. All his problems and perplexities were forgotten. His veins seemed to run strong wine.

“Now then Pete,” he murmured, as he stole back to his horse, “here’s a job. Let’s run at ’em!”

He was in the saddle again in an instant, and despite the steepness of the hill, he urged the horse with knees and heels into a furious gallop.

As he rounded the curve the bandits wheeled sharply about. The passengers, with their hands high, were now huddled closely with their backs against the wheels and body of the coach. The girl passenger was discernible innocently pointing a finger toward Pete and his rider.



“Damn!” muttered Weston in anger, “why couldn’t she stand still for a second longer?”

And, automatically dropping the bridle reins, he grasped the pistols under his jacket and spurred his horse onward. Simultaneously, as though his actions moved them by wires, the road agents moved a step backward and began firing at him as he came.

Suddenly Black Pete stumbled and rolled over on his side with a thin cloud of dust rising from his scraping hoofs, pinning his rider’s left leg under him. A dart of pain shot through Weston’s heart. Pete, poor old Pete, had been hit.

Without trying to extricate himself, but still keeping his eyes unswervingly upon the people of the coach, Weston fired, aiming point blank at the handkerchief of the nearest bandit. The rag blew off the dark features as by a sudden gust of wind. The breathless passengers saw an irregular smear of blood streak the bandit’s face and the lobe of his ear began to trickle crimson drops. Weston’s horse was still struggling and his aim was uncertain.

All at once he saw the two bandits making a run for it into the brush to the left, still firing at him as they ran. His pistols followed them as on a swivel. At the same instant he heard the clatter of horses’ hoofs behind him and the third bandit, the one who had engaged the driver and conductor, was running round the horses in front to join his comrades.

Instantly the driver from his box opened fire upon the fleeing man and at the same moment the horseman from behind hurtled by, seeming to leap over Weston and firing after the bandits as he went.

The third man farther up, however, paused to return the driver’s fire. The off lead mule suddenly fell struggling in the traces, and the driver sank back in his seat against the coach top, his pistol dropping from his hand. The strange horseman, however, pressed his horse forward into the brush, still firing at the bandits. The conductor, in terror of his life, still sat with his arms raised.

This entire action, the disappearance of the bandits down the slope among the vegetation, the flashing by of the unknown horseman, as well as the sudden start of the male passengers toward the entangled Weston, appeared like one composite act of a game, of a drilled and rehearsed evolution.

Weston, still pinned, bent forward from his hips toward the muzzle of his horse and, with pain in his eyes, whispered a word of farewell. A thin stream of blood was running out of Black Pete's mouth and already he was stiffening with the rigor of death.

"Poor old Pete," whispered Weston with dry tremulous lips. "We did what we could, didn't we?"

The entire duration of the episode could have been only a matter of seconds. The two foremost among the passengers were still approaching him as he glanced up, and behind them the red rim of the sun appeared of almost precisely the same size as before any of this had begun.

"Are you hit?" cried the foremost of the men, fussily and somewhat authoritatively bending toward Weston.

"No, I reckon not," he murmured, his hand still upon Pete's head.

"Then, up you come!" and the elderly passenger and the man nearest him seized Weston under the arms and half dragging, half lifting, they raised him to a standing posture. The stirrup upon which the side of the horse was resting had probably saved Weston's leg from being crushed into splinters. He reeled somewhat as he stood up, shifted his right hand pistol to his left, and yielded his own to the outstretched hand of the passenger.

"Young man," began the elder with energy, "I am Russell—W. H. Russell of the Overland. They very nearly shook us down—but for you—in my own coach, too—ought to be exterminated—" Then suddenly checking his garrulity, he added impressively as he turned to the man beside him:

"And this is Senator Glen."

Glen, smiling urbanely, held forth both his hands. Weston's eyes turned slowly and gazed steadily into Glen's for a space. The other passengers, coming down, hung back for a moment out of deference to Glen.

"Senator Glen," began Weston, with calm incisive deliberation, but without lifting his head, "my name is Jack—" at that instant, however, the face of the girl passenger coming forward from behind Glen's shoulder, caught his gaze like some sudden arresting vision that checks all utterance.

Weston paused without completing his name. The girl and he were gazing at each other with a sort of spellbound intimacy and naturalness entirely oblivious of their surroundings. Something like the hush in their spirits seemed to fall upon all the other bystanders, upon the dawning morning itself. Glen, with his hands still outstretched, glanced about and

saw the young woman almost brushing his sleeve. With a courtly movement he took her arm and moved her forward.

“Miss Molly Jones—Mr. Jack,” he announced sonorously.

“Oh, Mr. Jack—” and with sudden impulsiveness the girl seized both his wrists, “how can we ever thank you for what you’ve done—you were splendid and—and your poor horse—” her voice broke and tears started from her eyes.

The two pistols fell from his hand and clattered to the ground. The girl stepped back with a sudden access of shyness and stood for an instant, flushing, uncertain, confused by her own emotion. Weston, however, now lifted her hands in his and without even the pretense of shaking them gazed silently for a space into her eyes. She lowered them, drew her hands away finally and with a sort of April radiance in her smile turned from him in the direction of the coach.

At that moment the other unknown rider, who had followed in pursuit of the road agents, came scrambling up the slope and some of the male passengers now boldly faced the horseman with their pistols.

“They got away!” shouted the newcomer, breathless, “got away! Had horses down there. But I think you winged one of them, Jack. Hello, old pal!” he called out, and he leaped from his horse in joyous excitement. He had eyes then for no one else.

A broad smile, like a sunburst, seemed suddenly to overspread the features of everyone. For before them was the oddest spectacle they had ever seen. A burly man, with face and hands darkened with grime and dust, was tricked out in a costume of bedraggled and ill-fitting elegance—a ruffled shirt, buff breeches and waistcoat and a dust-covered hat of blue with gold buttons gleaming. A grey beaver hat was rammed over his ears, and his boots were high-heeled and well turned. His saddle was of the costly Mexican variety, its edgings flashing with chased silver. It is certain that never before had any of them looked upon so comically assembled a figure.

“How did you get here, Red?” laughed Weston in astonishment, gripping the man’s hot paw.

“Oh, I just thought I’d come along after you,” grinned the apparition, “Sacramento seemed a right dull town after you left.”

“And you came just in time, too, old man,” said Weston. “This, gentlemen, is Mr. Redruth.”

But the other passengers, realizing that here was a reunion of two friends, edged away somewhat after shaking Red's hand and gazed with interest down the slope where their assailants had disappeared.

Russell and Glen, nodding affably, turned away toward the coach.

"There is your kind of man!" Glen was heard saying, with a nod over his shoulder toward Weston. "We create them in California. There is the material for your riders."

Near the coach Molly stood, leaning against its back and surveying them all with a sort of shy wistfulness. In her buff colored traveling dress and blue bonnet she appeared like some quietly tinted flower planted against the dusty leather apron of the package compartment at the rear of the yellow Concord.

Weston and Red, leading his horse, were also sauntering upward. Red looked quizzically at Jack with a mingling of surprise and honest admiration for his friend's astounding coolness.

"You beat the Dutch, Jack," he growled. "What you goin' to do now?"

"Whatever I do, or say, Red," answered Weston in the same low murmur, "just keep your wits handy and stay quiet. There will always be a cue for you. You can help me a lot, Red—as you've always done."

Glen and Russell, with a word to Molly, moved up forward to the driver's box and began to converse with the wounded driver, to whom the conductor was now solicitously giving first aid. Weston, with Red and his horse slightly behind him, paused before Molly. Their eyes unconsciously hung together for a space.

"You from Sacramento, Miss Molly?" queried Weston, and his voice softened as though speaking tenderly to a child.

"Yes, Mr. Jack," she returned gently, still somewhat shaken. "I was visiting relatives there—an aunt and uncle. But I have still quite a way to travel—before I reach home—at Julesburg."

"Julesburg?" repeated Weston meditatively.

"Yes, ever been there?" eagerly queried Molly.

"No," said Weston thoughtfully—"no, never, Miss Molly. But I reckon I'll be there now—I was riding east anyway," he added after an imperceptible pause.

Molly lowered her eyes for a moment and then raised them again; and the two smiled at each other like old friends. In a sudden flash of youthful happiness, they laughed aloud.

“Oh,” said Weston with sudden contrition, apology in his tone, “this gentleman, Miss Molly, proves to be my friend, Mr. Redruth, from Sacramento. His coming was right timely, don’t you think, Miss Molly?”

“Think so!” cried Molly, holding out her hand toward Red’s great begrimed fist. Red, as always in such circumstances, looked shamefaced, glanced at his hand and took Molly’s in his grip like something very small and very fragile, and then dropped it hastily, as one in fear.

“You’ll both have to ride with us now,” Molly laughed happily. “Someone ought to give you each a medal for what you’ve done for us. Maybe Senator Glen will—he’s very powerful they say.” Red covertly searched Weston’s face, but found no expression in it.

Some of the other passengers were still working at the tangled harness of the off lead mule that had been shot, and it was obvious the wounded animal would have to be left there.

“Gentlemen,” called out Russell in his managerial tone, “would you kindly give us a hand with this poor beast? I believe his run is ended.”

Weston and Red, with a nod at Molly, hastened forward. Red’s horse began to follow his master, but Molly approached him, and, patting his muzzle, began to talk to him in soft soothing tones.

The driver, Enoch Cummins, from his box, gave terse directions for the disentangling of the mule.

“You there, with the ruffles!” he cried out with the exasperation of pain and impatience in his voice: “I see you know about harness. No need of cutting anything. Make ’em pull on that right trace and you unhitch it.”

Red, suddenly recalled to consciousness of his fancy apparel, flushed purple under his grime and fell to work with a fury upon the harness.

“All right, Enoch,” Russell laughed up at the driver apologetically. “You’re the skipper.” It was Russell who had proposed cutting the harness. In a few moments it had all been loosened. Enoch with his one good arm threw a rope down from under the seat, and the men, fastening it, began to drag the poor still faintly struggling animal to the edge of the slope.

A streak of low-voiced profanity, which the others pretended not to hear, shot out of the driver’s mouth as an expression of his heartfelt emotion.

As he turned toward the coach, wiping the sweat from his forehead, Weston saw Russell and Glen engaged in earnest colloquy, still glancing toward him as they talked. A shot rang out beneath the road, where someone was putting the stricken mule out of his misery. Molly turned toward the door of the coach with a shudder.

“Young man”—Russell advanced a step toward Weston—“I would like to make a proposition to you—right here!”

He was interrupted, however, by the sudden shout of Enoch, the driver, from the box, calling his name. Enoch had a proposal that in the circumstances required the sanction of Russell. He demanded that Red’s horse take the place of his off leader and that Red drive the team under his direction to the next station at Strawberry, and thence to Summit Sierra, the end of the run. As for the conductor, Enoch was too furious even to notice him. He had his right arm now depending against his breast in a soiled bandanna sling, and it twitched agitatedly against him as he talked.

“All right, all right, Enoch,” Russell shouted back. “That goes. You’re the skipper, you know.”

So well did the imperious Enoch know this that Red’s horse was already in the traces and Red’s saddle as well as Weston’s were upon the top of the coach. The passengers were taking their places. Weston glanced inside and saw that the interior of the coach was full enough without him, so he clambered up and took a seat beside the conductor, behind Enoch and Red, on the baggage. Russell put his head out and shouted up that there was room for him, but that, in any case, one passenger was only going as far as Carson, and there would be more room later. Then he slammed the coach door to. Molly’s blue bonnet peered out from the rear window and her eyes caught the glance of the forward-bending Weston atop the coach.

He waved his hat to her joyously.

The coach was already moving toward the crest of the Sierras and the sun was brilliantly gilding the peaks and treetops.

## CHAPTER VI

### JACK WESTON FINDS OCCUPATION

ONE of the most difficult things in the world is to see in an older man the reputed and legendary prowess of his youth. Time is the great disenchanter.

Yet, I swear, even today I can still perceive in John Weston, in the palace of the Monteleoni, that peculiar American buoyancy and courage, the unfaltering nerve with which he faced and met a series of adventures, events and obstacles, unforeseen and incalculable, like the great heroes of old. I can still see him waving his hat to Molly from the coach roof as though he had not a care in the world, except to be grateful to Fortune.

When love came to him, as it did, out of the danger and risk of that overland stage incident—came, too, with the strong impact with which his powerful personality would receive such an event, the strength of his will and purpose seemed only to gain in intensity. He had embraced a cause before he had looked into the eyes of Molly Jones. But Molly did not lead him to abandon it. Only he knew that now he had two causes—to win Molly, and to do all that in him lay to defend California against secession and disintegration—to defend the Union. Somehow he knew he would manage to serve both causes.

For the moment his quarrel with Glen was in abeyance. All very well, but that was not final. He knew how to accept the decrees of Destiny—and how to wait.

After passing Virginia City, Weston moved into the interior of the coach. He desired to be as near as possible to the girl who had bewitched him. But that was not all. Since Fate was bent upon postponing his quarrel with Glen, he desired to look upon the man more closely, to see, as nearly as he might, what manner of man was this enemy of his and of the Union.

For Weston knew, as every Californian knew, of the speech that Glen had made in the Senate threatening secession and a separate republic on the Pacific, and then having his words expunged from the record, so that he could deny them if need arose. To Weston that had seemed like treason to the State he represented.

Now, in the coach, he found it difficult to reconcile acts like that or the verbal order for his, Weston's, execution with the astonishing fervor of patriotism and zeal that Glen displayed in conversation.

The Pony Express, the link that was to unite the East and the West, as no stage had ever done, he claimed as his own peculiar idea, his project, his particular monument. The Pony Express, indeed, was the constant topic of conversation among the men in the coach.

"It may surprise you gentlemen," announced Glen in his rolling oratorical manner, "that the idea for such a service, such a link of Government and commerce between the East and our beloved State of California, first came to me in '54. I had the temerity that year, gentlemen, to ride on horseback from Sacramento to Washington, by Gad—all the way—to prove to myself that it could be done. And I collected mileage on it, too, gentlemen, I promise you."

"Then why hasn't it been done before?" mildly queried one of the male passengers.

"Ah, now, sir, you trench upon the mysteries of statesmanship," replied Glen with a motion of the eyebrows that was almost a wink. "In China they did it dozens of centuries ago. New York newspapers did it half a century ago. But a great Government like ours, ruling a vast territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific, moves perforce very slowly. I am not sure our country is not already overgrown for one central government so far away as Washington. However, that is by the way. Besides, you see, sir, at that time I had not met this admirable gentleman, Mr. Russell, here by my side. He is making our lightning service possible by his zeal and his enthusiasm."

"Yes, and do you know what this 'admirable' gentleman discovered when he proposed the scheme to his partners?" began Russell, smiling ruefully. "My partner, Alexander Majors—no mathematician, to be sure, but an experienced freighter and stage man—promptly informed me that we would lose two hundred thousand dollars a year on the venture."

"Two hundred thousand dollars," put in a passenger a shade cynically, "what is that in the cause of patriotism?"

"Yes, sir," ran on Russell, bent upon his own problem. "And Will Waddell went so far as to believe that the enterprise would bankrupt us."

"You are very brave, Mr. Russell, to go ahead," Molly ventured timidly.

"Ay, Miss Molly—my partners are brave men. Once I told them I had given my word to Senator Glen, do you know what they did? Alec Majors



said: 'If he has given his word, then, boys, we have all given our word.' And Will Waddell merely added: 'Then the thing is settled. Let's organize the service at once!'

"Magnificent!" shouted Glen, clapping Russell on the shoulder. "Trust me, sir. I'll see to it that your firm doesn't lose by this splendid courage. There are such things as mail contracts. In the halls of Congress I shall proclaim in no uncertain words the courage and daring and integrity of these, our American business men."

"I sincerely hope so—I'm sure you will, Senator,—quite sure," almost whispered Russell fervently.

To Jack Weston, silently listening to this conversation, there arose something like a vague, dimly shaping question mark.

Why was Glen so intensely interested in the lightning service, as he called it? Was it pure patriotism? Knowing Glen as he had reason to know him, was it not certain that this arch-politician had some secret of his own to be served by such an enterprise? More than ever he resolved to watch and study this "dear Senator Glen," as California ladies called him. Weston had an instinctive feeling which amounted to certainty that somehow the new enterprise was bound up with Glen's secessionist plans for California.

"What is to be the route of this pony mail?" he inquired, turning to Russell.

"It's all mapped out—all settled, my boy," Russell responded briskly. "From St. Joe to Kearney and along the South Platte to Julesburg. From Julesburg to Latham and Little Laramie through Bridger Pass, to Fort Bridger—to Salt Lake. Across the desert to Carson, Placerville and Sacramento—pretty exactly the route of this stagecoach. You see, Mr. Jack, we have to use the stage stations wherever we can. A station every ten or twelve miles for fresh ponies, mind you," he ran on in his absorption. "Do you realize what that means? Did you notice some stone and 'dobe buildings going up in the desert? Those are our new stations—none here—had to be built. The expense—" and he waved his hand deprecatingly.

"Not a Southern route, then," thought Weston. Either Glen was very sure of success in his far-reaching plans, or he was even deeper than people suspected. For in case of a clash between North and South this mail route appeared distinctly advantageous for the North.

Across the desert to Salt Lake there was little conversation upon the part of the passengers. The coach was plowing on through the ashy desert sand,

often sunk to the hubs, and the alkali dust was as pervasive as the air, finding lodgment in nostrils, throat and ears, coating the lips with a sort of hot dryness, parching all the membranes, until passengers could scarcely keep open the roughened lids of their eyes. Cloth covered canteens were passed round like charity, and the cracked lips of those unprovided could barely whisper “thanks” for the tepid water. The mules plowed on with dejected heads, resting now and then and sneezing in the clouds of dust they raised. The hoarse voice of the driver was alone audible for stretches of hours.

Salt Lake was a vast relief. As the mules with a show of prodded energy drew up at the stage station in Main Street, the passengers bundled out with a delicious sense of relaxation at the sight of green trees and the aroma of fresh fruit held out for sale by boys and women. The great Mormon store, an emporium of general merchandise, was only two or three hundred yards ahead of them, and opposite loomed that monument of civilization in the desert, the dome of the Tabernacle.

“These Mormons are surely making good their boast,” observed Senator Glen sententiously. “They are making the wilderness to blossom like the rose.”

“They once talked of a separate republic here,” remarked one of the passengers innocently.

Weston watched the senator closely.

“Ah, mere talk—mere talk,” Glen dismissed the remark with a gesture. It was not a subject he desired to pursue.

Glen and Russell and the other passengers all made for the Salt Lake House to enjoy a good meal once again and to change clothes that much needed changing. None, as it happened, were stopping over here, because all were pressed—Glen to return to Washington, Russell to confer with his partners, and Molly to rejoin her father. Weston and Red therefore were also going on.

Weston and Molly had their midday meal together at the hotel and seemed absorbed in each other’s company to the exclusion of all else. Red lingered at the stage station and hoped in solitude to work out his problem of clothes. But when it came to the point he was too shy to move away from the station at all.

“Is Julesburg anything like this, Miss Molly?” inquired Weston.

“Wait till you see,” she pealed with laughter. “Why this is a city—almost like Sacramento. Julesburg is just a small town—a station, a few buildings, a store, a saloon and a blacksmith shop.”

Weston nodded. “And what,” he said, “could you find to do in a place like that?”

“I am the blacksmith, Mr. Jack,” and again her voice trilled with laughter. Weston joined in her laugh with a boyish abandon.

“If you are the blacksmith,” he said, “I’ll be your apprentice and pump the bellows.”

“No, Mr. Jack,” she said more soberly. “That is really my job. My father is the blacksmith. I keep house for him. Poor dear—what has he done without me?”

“That can hardly be thought of,” murmured Weston. “I know how ’twould be if I were he.” A certain gallantry of speech was still deemed incumbent upon any man conversing with a pretty woman.



*A Paramount Picture.*

*The Pony Express.*

**JACK WESTON, GAMBLING MAN FROM SAN FRANCISCO, PLUNGED INTO THE SACRAMENTO BRAWLS.**

“You mustn’t make fun of me,” she pouted. “To father I mean a good deal.”

“Fun!” echoed Weston. “In punishment for such a charge, I shall make Julesburg my home.” Again Molly laughed deliciously, the other passengers

looking on with pleasure at the romance they saw budding before their eyes.

Glen, who had had some business in the town, now came bustling back, his eyes seeking for Russell. He caught his man at the stage office.

“The Mormons are filled with enthusiasm over your project,” he announced. “The pony express thrills them, they inform me. Brigham Young declares himself to be well content. It pleases his people.”

“And why should it not, Senator?” crackled Russell in his bustling voice. “They will be within six days’ post from Missouri and they will sell us more hay and fodder than ever—with the added horses. The Mormons are merchants, sir—very good merchants, too.”

“Is not your station-keeper a Mormon?” Glen inquired in a lowered tone, with a nod in the direction of a tall bearded man bustling about among the horses and stablemen.

“Yes, sir,” said Russell. “That is Major Howard Egan. He was one of Brigham Young’s captains upon their march from Nauvoo.”

“And led Mormon troops, I take it, against Colonel Johnson in the late Mormon war?”

“Very likely, sir, very likely—but that is happily all settled. I wish to know nothing about that. We must recruit the best men along the route—men who understand work and understand responsibility. And Major Egan, believe me, Senator, is of the highest integrity.”

“Ah, Russell, you are a statesman,” Glen clapped him on the shoulder. “You have the statesman’s view. The end justifies the means.”

The two men looked upon each other for a moment with mutual admiration.

Russell called to Egan and the two, aside, held some hurried conversation in which the pony express figured as the chief topic. Egan led him to the stables to show him the new cayuses, told him of the men he was hiring, and “If need be,” he said, “my own sons could man the route west of Salt Lake.”

Molly and Weston, as well as some of the other passengers, were about to stroll over toward the Tabernacle and to look upon what seemed the titanic foundations of the Mormon Temple then in process of building. But Howard Egan called them back.

“Stage will start directly,” he announced. The harnessed mules were already being hitched to the coach, and the driver, with a sort of detached imperiousness, called out:

“We are late already!” and began clambering up to his box.

Red, still in his fantastic outfit, his toes trickling out through two slits he had cut in each of his tight boots, took his seat upon the top of the coach. He could not bring himself to go inside. The stableman turned away laughing. Red seemed to possess the power of making everyone laugh at his mere approach. He too smiled, and yet he was writhing inwardly like a self-conscious schoolboy.

They were in the coach again, swaying along upon the great leather thoroughbraces, as the vehicle wound among the passes of the Wasatch. Now they were under the frowning face of a beetling mass, like Overhang, or Needle Rock, now in dim gorges of an overpowering steepness, like Echo Canyon, with four hundred feet of rock above them. At times the coach seemed to be moving upon a winding ribbon of trail, that meandered willfully upon the edge of eternity. The Weber and the Bear rivers had been crossed and recrossed. Drivers and horses had changed, the horses many times, but the passengers were virtually the same, adapting themselves to every new discomfort, to the heat of desert, to the chill of mountains, to hovering upon the edges of precipices that appeared to make life a game of chance.

Yet such is the power of habit, they began to feel that the coach was home, that it held a certain friendly warmth of habitation, and almost they felt sorry for the lonely stations and station-keepers left behind. Kimball’s, Echo Canyon, Quaking Asp, Muddy—the very names seemed desolate and forlorn, and there was a secret exhilaration in moving away from them.

Fort Bridger they passed at night and Glen deplored the next morning that he had missed seeing his excellent friend, Judge Carter, the post trader.

“I have just hired his stables to serve for the express ponies,” put in Russell irrelevantly.

“I am glad he contributes to our venture,” boomed Glen grandiloquently. “Judge Carter, sir, is the finest gentleman between Virginia and California. He is the very flower of courtesy—every inch a gentleman.”

Judge Carter, however, who continued the fame of Fort Bridger, though in another key, after the decline and passing of Jim Bridger, had not been so eager for Glen’s company since the shooting of Broderick. His high

character, as well as his hospitality, had made him the friend of everyone in the Plains, red and white. The rumors that had reached him of Glen's methods, southerner though Glen was, did not appeal to this fine Virginian.

Russell chimed in eagerly in praise of Judge Carter, and quoted him as authority for the feasibility of that flying park of daredevil horsemen that would constitute the pony express.

"And what Carter doesn't know about the Plains," he declared, as though to give himself courage, "is not worth knowing. Do you know, sirs, that recently he paid us twenty-three thousand dollars for one shipment of freight? Where does he sell it, you ask. Right here in the Plains!"

Snow lay thick upon the uplands east of Bridger, toward Laramie. The trail was heavy and the coach was laboring through ruts deep in snow and mud. The mules were steaming in the chill air and the passengers' clothes felt cold and damp. The driver, the conductor and Red on top of the coach, were wrapped in blankets so as to be hardly discernible as human beings. Within the coach itself the passengers swathed themselves in every bit of wrapping they could lay hands upon, and even used mail bags as bulwarks against the cold.

"Where," asked one of the passengers, turning from the window to Russell, "where, sir, are you going to get those centaurs, those dauntless horsemen who will defy snow and cold, desert and Indians, and span the Continent in eight or ten days? Are there such men?"

"Yes, sir!" cried Russell forcefully. "There are such men, and we're finding them. We have found many already among our own force. Our venture is a great thing for America. American young men are still brave. There, sir, is one!" he announced with a sudden decision in his voice, bending forward to Weston, who was facing him. "Young man"—he laid a hand upon Weston's knee—"I would like to engage you here and now to ride the Pony Express for my firm. What do you say?"

It was only the intense absorbed earnestness of Russell that prevented Weston from shouting with laughter. He had won and lost in a night ten times or more what such a messenger could conceivably receive as a month's pay. He had won a house and lot from a man in Sacramento at the Indian Queen, returned them as a gift to the man's wife and children, and saw a reputable citizen named Morrell win them again from the same inveterate player. He, an express rider—a messenger!—he smiled broadly at Russell.

Russell, however, obsessed by his great undertaking, interpreted that smile as a response to the compliment of his offer. This Mr. Jack was a stranger to him and just a shade mysterious. But he, Russell, flattered himself he knew men and could judge them at a glance. He had seen Jack's conduct in the Sierras with road agents. Besides, his need was great. For the Julesburg division, then a notoriously dangerous section of the route, it was not so easy to find the kind of man he discerned in this Jack. There were other men upon his payroll who had even less formal names.

"You look to me," went on Russell with energy, laying a hand upon his knee, "exactly the type of daring, fearless fellow I should like to have ride the Julesburg Division. Slade is the right manager there, but, mind, he's got to have the right man. What do you say, Jack? The salary there is good—very good—" he nodded his head with re-enforcing emphasis. "I can tell you what it is—" and he leaned more closely toward Weston.

"Julesburg, did you say, sir?" Weston quietly interrupted him. Whereupon Russell, stiffening, prepared to meet the usual objections to that stronghold of outlawry and toughness, and even to Slade, its ruler and terror. But Weston, as it happened, had never heard of Slade.

"Yes, Julesburg, my boy—but let me tell you—" Weston, however, was now looking at Molly, whose face, framed in her bonnet, was suffused with a delicate flush of color, a sparkle of excitement dancing in her eyes.

"Very good," put in Weston. "I accept your offer, Mr. Russell."

"Splendid!" cried Russell, pumping his hand and simultaneously clapping his shoulder. "I seldom make a mistake. For twenty-four years now—eh?"—and he peered out as the brakes began to grind and the coach came to a standstill. They were at Dug Springs station. The station-keeper was shouting to Bob Hodge, the new driver, that the snow was "powful heavy in Bridger's pass, and he didn't know but Bob might have trouble thar." Bob's reply was a shout from leather lungs, which proved to be the tune of "Get Out of the Wilderness," and he jumped from the box, stamping and swinging his arms to warm them as he sang. As the mules were being changed the passengers also bundled out for a moment's exercise, to accumulate some warmth for their journey.

Upon the trodden snow before the station-buildings, as Weston was promenading swiftly with Molly, the two other male passengers, as they crossed, were conversing in low tones of Julesburg and Slade.

“Slade—the most notorious cutthroat west of the Mississippi,” said one of them—“he’s the division agent—but I suppose business is business. Set a Slade to catch the cutthroats.”

Weston glanced at Molly. The sparkle had gone out of her face and, as she averted it, he was surprised to see it swept by a sudden pallor.



## CHAPTER VII

### JULESBURG

THEY were approaching Julesburg.

So warm had grown the interest in Molly in that coach, that Julesburg, her destination, almost seemed to be everyone's destination. By her simple charm and radiant, independent girlhood, she had bewitched all that varied assortment of men. The phrase was "Wait till we get to Julesburg." Yet Russell was going to Leavenworth, his firm's headquarters. Glen was bound for Washington, and the other passengers for points East. Molly and Weston alone were to leave the coach at Julesburg, with Red as a sort of attendant circumstance upon Weston.

When they had stopped for supper at Latham, with a night's journey still ahead of them, Molly had scarcely been able to eat for excitement at the thought of seeing her father again. From the slumgullion, as the station beverage was universally called, she turned away with a wry smile of distaste. She had felt she was already home and could not tolerate the stuff she had theretofore drunk without a murmur.

Some of the stations they had passed—Eagle's Nest, Beaver Creek, Antelope—had brought a sort of chill to Weston when he thought of Julesburg as resembling these. He had gazed at Molly as she drowsed in her seat and, at moments, felt a kind of awe at the power of her attraction over him. He had been attracted by women before, but never as he felt himself drawn to this gentle yet fearless and natural girl of the plains.

And poor Red! he thought. What was Red going to do in a spot like Julesburg? For all his failure and disgruntlement, Red was a California product and belonged in California. Russell had already informed Red that he had given orders for his horse to be shuttled forward to Julesburg and that, if he so desired, the company would give him a new horse and employment as well. As for Weston himself, his decision had already been taken. He would stay long enough at Julesburg, in or out of the employ of Russell, Majors and Waddell, until he could win Molly and return to California. Then he would surely find ways and opportunities of fighting Glen.

One way and one opportunity, however, presented themselves to him sooner than he had expected.

At Rocky Ridge it became necessary to transfer all the mail and baggage and all the passengers from their comparatively comfortable coach to a mud-wagon—so called, because of its peculiar high light construction and broad wheels that enable it to cross the Platte. Spring was early that year and the Platte was said to be “up.” The coach might have sunk into its quicksands or in the soft holes hidden by the rushing, though shallow, waters.

The while the change was in progress, Glen suavely beckoned to Jack to step aside with him for a moment’s chat.

A look of surprise came into the younger man’s eyes, but he quickly controlled it behind a mask of indifference.

“Chat with me? Certainly, Senator,” he answered lightly and together with the towering Glen moved a few paces away from the station.

“You are to be a part,” began Glen, in the silken voice of the cajoling politician, “you are to be a part of that magnificent enterprise, the Pony Express—at Julesburg.”

“Yes, sir—do you object to me?”

“Far from it, my dear young friend,” protested Glen, tapping him on the arm. “On the contrary. I myself urged upon Russell the choice of so daring and courageous a young Californian as yourself. California is very dear to me—and all its men. My love for California is above party and beyond partisanship. It is my love for California that bids me speak to you thus. Our destiny is a great one.

“The time may come when I need help to control that destiny—help at Julesburg, as at many another place. You are a young man, not of courage alone, but of a certain worldly experience.” Glen warmed more and more to his task. “You love California, I am sure. Without trying to scrutinize my plans and motives, which I assure you are of the highest, I want you, quite simply, to do me a service at Julesburg, if I ask it. It will, I assure you, be to the advantage of California and, incidentally, to you—to the extent of, say”—and his eyes narrowed shrewdly—“a thousand dollars. What d’you say?”

For one moment the primitive fighting instinct that was in Weston surged—but only for a moment. In an instant he had it in control. For a dawning light broke in upon his mind suddenly that soon became a field of illumination. He looked away toward the West.

Glen was trying to buy him, to hire him as a mercenary for his plans. He was taking him for a low unscrupulous adventurer, who could be bought by anyone for a thousand dollars. But this poor opinion Glen had of him carried a rich compensation. Glen, by taking this desperate chance was virtually admitting him into his secret plans. It was the chance he could not even have hoped for. He would serve California. Oh, yes—California and the Union too, though possibly not in the way Glen desired.

His silence, as these thoughts coursed rapidly through his brain, were taken by Glen for conventional deliberation. So that when Weston turned toward him finally and, with a calm smile, said:

“Very well, I accept your offer, Senator,” Glen prided himself upon his astuteness in reading men.

“Of course,” said Glen, smiling broadly now and clapping him amicably upon the shoulder, “of course the honorarium is merely an earnest of my good will, you know. I never forget my friends and helpers in the destinies of California. A young man of marked abilities is always valuable to one in my position. You understand me, I am sure?”

“I think I understand you, Senator,” murmured Jack, now in complete control of himself. “I am at your service—I can say no more.”

“And that is enough, my dear boy. This is an agreement. And remember this, Mr. Jack. My motto as a statesman is, ‘The end justifies the means’.”

“It will be mine, too, from now on, Senator,” announced Weston, and both men laughed in unison. Weston’s interpretation, however, of this notable Macchiavellian motto would have upset the adroit Senator McDougal Glen, had he then been able to read its content.

They were summoned by a shout to take their places in the mud-wagon, and the horses, here substituted as better swimmers than the mules, darted forward.

The driver, with the absorbed skill of a surgeon operating, tooled his six horses in and out among the small islands through the yellow waters, that at times swirled in over the feet of the passengers. The vehicle swayed from side to side, dipping and careening. The more seasoned travellers, however, held to their places in full confidence of the driver’s mastery of the situation. Glen and Weston now sat close together and even seemed to have much intimate conversation. The river was soon crossed, however, and the old mud-wagon, with its driver looking fiercely triumphant, as though he had

just won another naval victory, thundered forward to the Julesburg stage office.

“Julesburg!”

“An hour for eating and changing coaches!” shouted the conductor, leaning down from his perch, and no one heeded him.

This was Julesburg!

Molly’s heart was fluttering like a caged bird as she gazed down the brief perspective of the “street.” Including the stage office and stables, that street consisted of about a dozen sod and wooden buildings, ranged upon both sides of the road, with the usual store, saloon, blacksmith shop and cabins among them. To Weston it brought a momentary sinking of the heart, which he instantly suppressed as he took in Molly’s look of radiant happiness. Red looked down at him from his perch behind the driver and, with a broad grin, winked sympathetically.

The coach came to an abrupt halt before the station. Hostlers were already unhitching the horses, and the driver, like an admiral descending the bridge, was clambering down from his seat as Weston leaped out and held the door open for the others. Russell and Glen followed briskly and Weston, with eager solicitude, helped Molly to descend.

Molly was chattering with gay incoherency as they turned their faces toward the station and saw Russell and Glen shaking hands with a stocky, well-built man of perhaps thirty-five, with a look of benignant suavity upon his smooth, hard features. His cheekbones, Weston noticed, were more than ordinarily high and somehow he gave the impression of a genial humorist.

“All well, Slade?” Russell was addressing this humorist with a sort of fatherly admiration.

“Very fine!” returned the smiling agent, in a voice that was gentle as might be a tutor’s reporting to a father upon his charge.

So this was the notorious Slade, whom people called the greatest cutthroat west of the Mississippi! Something like a physical shock seemed to smite Weston across the chest. He had an instant and intuitive realization that in the suave Slade and the towering Glen together he beheld the only two deadly enemies he had on earth. Yet, so far no single word had passed between Slade and himself.

Slade’s attentive gaze at this moment detached itself abruptly from Russell and Glen and fell upon Molly and Weston as they moved forward

together. The smiling lips of Slade for one fleeting instant straightened into a line so thin and hard and cruel, that a child would have cried out at the sight in spontaneous, reflexive terror. But only for an instant. A fraction of a second more and he was smiling with a warm, paternal glow.

“If there isn’t Miss Molly!” he murmured to Russell and Glen without looking at them, and turned, advancing to Molly with hand outstretched. Molly nodded hurriedly, allowed her hand to be shaken, and then rushed forward beyond him to a tall, bearded man with sunken ascetic eyes and a great leather apron covering him from chest to below his boot tops. The old man’s arms lifted heavily in a gesture of welcome toward the girl.

“Father!” she gasped as she rushed into the embrace of old Ascension Jones, as he was called, the blacksmith of Julesburg. “Oh, father,” she murmured against his heart, “I’m so happy—to see you again!”

The old man’s lips were working uncertainly as he murmured endearments over her.

“Molly, girl,” he stammered, “it’s been long—this while—”

Slade’s gaze took in this picture with the snap of a camera shutter and then rested with a vague, cold smile upon Weston. Weston smiled at Slade in his turn, but something like the crackle and spark of lightning seemed to pass between the two men—a brief charged flash—and Weston heard the name he was known by on the journey called out.

“Oh, Mr. Jack!” Molly called in a flutter of tears and excitement and laughter. “This is my father.” Weston moved swiftly forward. “Mr. Jack, father—who saved all our lives in a hold-up in California.”

The old man, slow in all his movements, broad of back and shoulder, seemed for a space unable to move as he stared from those direct, ascetic eyes of his. Then his great arms came forward and he grasped the younger man’s hand in both his grimy paws.

“Mr. Jack—” he began, but as though formalities were foreign to him, he paused there, still gripping the hand he held.

“Now I must run and cook breakfast, father,” Molly sparkled up to them, as she bent toward her valise on the ground. “Mr. Jack will join us—he’s going to stay here, you know.”

Weston quickly bent down and reached the old valise before her. She glanced at him and laughed with the irresponsible joy of youth. She appeared too happy for speech. The three of them then walked swiftly

toward the blacksmith shop, set somewhat back of the line made by the stage office and stables.

Slade, losing nothing of this scene of meeting, appeared now all attention again to his distinguished interlocutors, Russell and Glen. Upon his still faintly smiling lips, there was an expression of hardness, of cruelty even, that Russell delighted in as unswerving efficiency.

“You see, Slade,” Russell was saying, “the earliest moment we can begin to carry that pony mail across the continent is the moment to begin. Horses and men are eating, and men are drawing pay.”

“Don’t I know, sir,” interjected Slade, “if I had my way—”

“Yes, yes, Slade, of course,” Russell caught him up. “If all divisions were like yours!—but we’re building stations west of Salt Lake. Bolivar Roberts told me they might be ready in a month, but he’ll promise nothing under six weeks. And Bol Roberts’ word is good as gold. Give you an idea of that boy—he’s going to corduroy a piece of road in the Sink of Carson—save miles of riding around. He’s even got the Go-Shutes working for him—the laziest red critters on God’s green footstool.”

Slade, though composed and attentive in the presence of his superior, still at moments cast furtive glances in the direction of the blacksmith shop. The careless disregard for him of the group that had gone there stung him like a whiplash.

“Let’s not forget your breakfast, gentlemen,” Slade suavely remarked to Russell and Glen. “Real coffee beans today in your honor, and fresh-killed pork chops.”

“Ah!” Russell smacked his lips in anticipation. “True to the name of your division, Slade. This,” he explained, “is called the Sweetwater Division, Senator—as far as Rocky Ridge. The Lodge Pole region here used to be a den of thieves and robbers. Slade has made it safe as a lady’s parlor, Senator—yes, sir!—safe as a lady’s parlor.”

“Ah, Russell, it is a rare gift—rare, indeed—to be able to choose men. With satraps like this one”—and he clapped Slade warmly upon the shoulder, “satraps like this all along the line, you could sleep in peace.”

In high good humor they adjourned to breakfast.

At the heavy, roughly-made cedar table in the station house, the men sat down upon three-legged stools, the tin plate, tin cup, and bone-handled knife and fork awaiting them at each place. The other passengers were already

seated, but deferentially awaiting the Senator and the owner before beginning to eat. The smell of frying bacon pervaded the room and a tall rawboned cook in boots, in his red-flanneled shirt-sleeves, was handling the skillet. A boy of perhaps fourteen with an eager face, but in dress a replica of the station hands, was hovering round the table in the capacity of waiter.

Russell grasped the boy by the arm and drew him toward him.

“Well, Billy Cody!” he cried out, “what are you doing here?”

“I been here a week,” answered the lad, grinning with pleasure at the notice taken of him. “I’ve got your letter here, Mr. Russell,” he said, tapping the breast of his buckskin jacket. “Waitin’ fer Mr. Slade to give me a chance to ride pony express for you.”

“How d’you get here?” demanded Russell, still holding the boy’s arm.

“With a freight train. Mr. Majors put me on as an extry driver.”

“Resigned your job and left the train flat!” exclaimed Russell humorously. Then, turning to Slade, “Think there’s a chance for him, Slade?”

Slade nodded benignantly and glanced at the boy with a look at once paternal and encouraging, that impressed the others at the table as almost saintly. Here, thought some of the passengers, is either an extraordinary human anomaly—a man who can look like that with twenty-odd killings to his credit—or one of the most maligned human beings in the world.

The functions of waiter were soon over, and Billy Cody, the future “Buffalo Bill,” unable to contain his joy within doors, murmured a word to the cook and slipped out of the station.

“There’s a case—our American pioneering blood,” commented Russell. “That boy’s father was killed by Indians four years ago. From the age of ten, that boy’s been helping his mother support a family of five. A typical little plainsman. I think we first used him as an extra driver three years ago. Anyway, he wasn’t over twelve. And I can vouch for his grit, Slade, I assure you.”

Slade nodded. Senator Glen’s eyes, however, were glistening with manly moisture.

“That—that, Russell,” he began—“that should be chronicled. That is Spartan, epic. I should like to do something for that boy.”

“Don’t you worry, Senator,” smiled Russell, “and don’t spoil him. We shall make a man of him if he stays with us—won’t we, Slade, eh?” Slade smiled and nodded genially. Russell rose and went out of doors. Slade was about to follow him, but Glen laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

“A word with you privately,” he murmured, and Slade remained seated. The other passengers arose, hastily nodded and went out. The cook gathered up the clanging tableware and carried it to the pump outdoors.

No sooner were the two men, Slade and Glen, alone than they smiled broadly at each other, like old acquaintances in possession of a common joke or secret.

“I see you are flourishing as ever, Slade, like the proverbial green bay tree.”

“Why shouldn’t I, Senator?” queried Slade, with a faint crackle of defiance under the suavity of his tone.

“Why, indeed?” coughed Glen. “*Integer vitæ scelerisque purus,*’ as Horace says—a man of blameless life and spotless of sin—ah, well, let us see. You live where no laws run, and you are the law. Well and good. But, this is American domain, my good Slade, and the army sometimes penetrates here. Your fellow citizens fear you. But a company of troops could hang you with ease. Do you know—just a bit of information—complaints against you are so numerous that twice the Secretary of War has given orders for your apprehension?—No?—You are charged with twenty-one murders, Slade. You would fare ill in a trial of any sort.”

“They never touched me—never heard of it!” cried Slade in anger, the cold sweat suddenly beading his forehead.

“No—no, of course not!” hastily put in Glen. “You’ve never heard of it, because the orders were rescinded.”

“Rescinded!” gasped Slade, himself astonished.

“Yes—rescinded. *I had them rescinded.* The Secretary of War is a friend of mine. I pointed out to him that a man like you, who can keep the mails moving to California through a lawless country, is a necessity. Little accidents do happen, when you are functioning in your capacity—but, to make an omelet eggs must be broken. I pointed out that you have cleared the Lodge Pole region of road agents and of—er—unpleasant characters.”

“Thank you, Senator,” Slade put out his hand.



“Wait—wait a moment, Slade.” Glen waved his hand aside. “There is something else—of importance—something you can do for me.”

“You need only name it, Senator Glen.”

“Good! Then here it is!” And swiftly Glen put before Slade enough of his own ambitions for California to acquaint him with his personal desires rather than the facts. “California,” he explained, “is a mercurial State and a young State—and must not be stampeded, either toward abolitionism or any other way. The election of a Republican in November—too suddenly announced—might so stampede my State. We are far away, you see—and news from the East tends to be magnified.”

“But what can I do about it?” queried Slade, tensely.

“This,” said Glen, producing with dramatic suddenness a bundle of letters from his breast pocket. “The pony express will be a reality by then. In case of—er—political misadventure on election day, I shall mark the mail pouch starting from St. Joe for California in a way you can identify. I shall paste a label with the motto of my state upon the pouch—the single word, ‘Eureka.’ Remember that, Slade—‘Eureka!’ If I cannot manage the label, the rider will whisper it to you, as he comes along. Make no mistake. If you see or hear ‘Eureka’ that day in connection with the pony mail from the East, substitute these letters I give you and let them go on to California. That is all, Slade. Simple, is it not? The details I leave to you.”

Slade’s body seemed to relax for a moment from the tense absorption, as though he had been listening with every muscle as well as with his ears. Then quickly he grasped the bundle of letters on the table between them and slipped them into his own breast pocket.

On a sudden he heard voices, like the living sounds of day breaking in upon the tumult of a busy dream, and he wheeled about on his stool. The head and shoulders of Weston were outlined against the small window of the stage office, and automatically Slade’s hand fell upon the huge navy revolver at his belt. Glen in alarm let his own hand fall heavily upon Slade’s and his look was a grave caution against impulsive folly.

Slade allowed his weapon to slide back into its sheath and he rose and approached the window.

Weston, he saw, was leaning negligently against the building, holding his right arm aloft toward Billy Cody, who was facing him some ten yards distant. Billy was alternately coiling and throwing a leather lariat, and at every cast the loop fell true over Weston’s extended arm. Red, still clad in

his bedraggled finery, with his high-heeled boots gaping where he had cut them like a pair of some curious crawling beasts. Red was laughing hilariously.

“A pony express rider,” Billy in a high state of glee was explaining, “will have to know how to lasso any kind of critter.” Whereupon the trio playing in the sun all laughed in unison. Slade turned to Senator Glen, murmuring:

“He didn’t hear us.” And he tapped upon the grimy window pane. Weston turned, still smiling, and Slade motioned him to come in.

“It doesn’t matter, my dear Slade,” explained the Senator. “He knows. He is with us in this. I managed to secure his services as we travelled together.”

As Jack entered the room, Glen motioned that he sit beside him, facing Slade. The old politician glanced from one to the other of his strangely assorted henchmen and smiled genially.

“So here we are a happy band,” he began, “all serving the same cause. You must be friends after I leave you. I have explained to each of you my desire. Here is the link where the chain breaks—if it prove necessary to break it. Remember the watchword—Eureka!—That means that the regular mail does not go through—only the mail I have prepared and you, Slade, will substitute.”

“But what is the use,” protested Slade, not without a lingering rancor, “of having so many in on this?”

“Many?” said Glen,—“only two, my good Slade—you and Jack here—principally because you’re such a fighter, you may conceivably be killed by then. Some men might pledge more—but for me you two, to my thinking, are enough. Is all now clear?”

“Perfectly,” answered Weston, and rose to go.

At the door, he met Russell coming from the stable-yard ruminatively chewing a straw.

“Oh, there you are!” said Russell, taking his arm. “Want you to meet Slade before I leave. Slade,” he cried, as they entered, “this is Mr. Jack, who helped us so much against the road agents in the Sierras. A man after your own heart, Slade—doesn’t understand fear. He’ll take the run for the west of Julesburg. We owe him a horse, too.”

Slade, with a smile of the blandest geniality, extended his hand as though meeting Weston for the first time. Weston nodded absently, and through his mind was drifting a vague suspicion that Russell was joking. Russell's features, however, conveyed at that instant a sincerity so absolute that a sort of weariness swept through Weston's members. He had already heard the language of the stage-drivers and the hostlers. He had heard of Slade's reputation. As always, people saw merely what they wished to see and Russell was no exception.

"Better administer the oath right now," ran on Russell. And solemnly he asked Jack to swear that he would drink no liquor while on duty, use no profane language, protect the company's property and defend the mail with his life. "And here is this"—he added, taking a small sheep-bound book from his pocket—"this is a Bible. We give a Bible to every one of our employees. Russell, Majors and Waddell are a God-fearing firm." Weston took the volume and bowed.

Billy Cody ran in at this moment and hurriedly whispered to Weston that Molly had sent for him to come in to breakfast.

"I am invited to breakfast by a lady," Weston cheerfully announced to Russell. He shook hands with his employer, grasped the cordially extended hand of Glen and went out. The two elder men smiled pleasantly toward each other, as they followed Weston out of doors. Slade, however, coming behind them, was not smiling.

The stage was waiting, and the driver was already on the box.

"If human effort can do it," Russell's parting word to his agent was, "the pony mail will leave St. Joe by April first."

Glen also cordially shook hands with Slade. Aloud he said, "Say good-bye for me to Miss Molly." But, inaudibly to anyone else, he murmured, "Remember the word—'Eureka'—the pouch and the word—after Election Day."

Slade nodded with his usual easy urbanity. The stage door slammed shut. The hostlers at the heads of the mules stepped aside. Buck Emery's whip cracked like a pistol shot and the mules leaped forward on their journey.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BLACKSMITH'S CABIN

THE cabin at the rear of the blacksmith shop was pervaded by the smell of breakfast bacon and an air of life and busyness. The return of Molly had seemed to revivify the place from a bleak rude untidiness into something, at all events, no longer bleak.

Old Abraham Jones, who had drifted westward with his family because there, he felt, in the lawless country, the word of God was more urgently needed than in more populous Missouri, was a painstaking, but not a successful housekeeper. Gaunt and heavy-handed, he moved about slowly when alone, "tidying up," but somehow the cabin appeared a little less tidy every time he moved through it. Since the death of his wife, six years earlier, all earthly things appeared more and more things of vanity to him. Molly at twelve had become his housekeeper, and his sole care was that she learn the Scriptures thoroughly before the end. For this world was a wicked world, and would soon, he believed, be razed by the wrath of Heaven, as Sodom and Gomorrah had been razed.

"Repent!" he would cry out with tears in his eyes to an imaginary audience, looking imploringly into space, "repent, my people, for how else can you hope for forgiveness when you face your Maker?"

And his lips would tremble with emotion and the scalding tears run down the dark furrows of his cheeks. Ascension Jones they called him, and even the rude lawless men of the Plains stood somewhat in awe of him. The Indians believed him mad.

Two years earlier he had come from Kearney as the blacksmith to Julesburg and, upon his knees, he thanked God for sending him to that barren outpost.

"For, surely," he told Molly, "no spot since Sodom was ever more corrupt and Godless." And meekly forgetting himself, he prayed that at least one righteous man might appear in Julesburg and thus save the city, as he called it, from the destruction that he felt impending. He was a self-appointed missionary whom, if no one heeded, at least no one molested. And though he believed Molly's condemnation to live in such a spot to be a sign of spiritual grace, he had nevertheless embraced eagerly the opportunity that

had come to her of visiting relatives in Sacramento. Her youth and need of change had figured in his mind as only one reason for this. The character of the population, and notably the interest of Slade in her, made even more solid reasons. Slade had never uttered a disrespectful word to either Molly or her father. Yet never had the simple old man distrusted anyone more than this suave agent. Before he had known him two hours he had bidden Slade repent.

“For your sins,” he told him, “make all the air about you as scarlet.”

Slade had merely laughed and said:

“Never mind me, blacksmith. Shoe these mules. That’s what you are here for.”

And Jones had meekly obeyed.

His hope had been that Molly might marry in Sacramento and never return to this wicked town of the Plains, or that she might bring back a husband. In her nineteenth year, she was now in his eyes a full-grown woman, ripe to nurture children at her breast, and not to spend herself ministering to such as he, the least worthy of God’s creatures. But what men were there in Julesburg? Gamblers, ruffians, lawless men, teamsters, stagehands, quarrelsome fellows, who idolized Slade because his hands were reeking of human blood. Surely no wicked assembly had ever flourished under the sun. The arrival of Weston, therefore, in the company of his beloved Molly, suddenly seemed to transform the old man like a sign from on high.

“This is Mr. Jack,” Molly again recalled the name to her father with a radiance that he could not mistake. “Mr. Jack is a miner in California. He is going to stay here now.” And the young man was well-favored and gentle. Surely his, Jones’s, blessings were greater than he deserved!

“It is possible, my boy,” Jones began as he took off his leather apron in honor of the visitor come to breakfast, “that you are the one righteous man who will save the city.”

“I fear I am not righteous enough,” smiled Weston, glancing about for Molly. But Molly was in the kitchen hovering over the small stove.

“Mr. Jones,” said Weston quietly in the brief pause, “I—I want to ask your permission to marry your daughter—if she’ll have me.”

The blacksmith gazed at him searchingly for a space out of his sunken eyes and then, seemingly satisfied with his scrutiny, he laid his hand heavily

upon the young man's shoulder.

“Go ahead my boy. If you can win her—I could wish nothing better for Molly than a good man's love. But—” he added in a low, urgent whisper, “look out for Slade. That unregenerate man, though he can't have her, has made life a burden to her with his attentions. That's why she went to Sacramento. He makes men and women alike fear him. He's possessed of a devil—”

“What are you two whispering about?” Molly called out gaily, appearing from the kitchen at that moment and looking from one to the other. In her hands was a platter of bacon and eggs, steaming aromatically.

The old man looked mysterious and smiled somberly as he turned away. Weston laughed in high good humor.

“Your father was hoping I was the righteous man who might save Julesburg,” he told her. “But no such luck.”

“Oh,” said Molly, “that's what he's been telling you? If you do as well as you did at that hold-up, why—”

“I hope to do better!” Weston caught her up and they laughed cheerfully together. Jones was already seated and he motioned Weston to take his place at the table.

“But where is Mr. Red?” cried Molly.

“Did you mean him too?” queried Weston eagerly.

“Of course I did! Where is he?” And suddenly recalling Red's grotesque figure, she rippled with laughter as Weston hastened to the door to call him. He whistled a bar of “Joe Bowers” and Red came all but running to the cabin.

“The fact that Red has already had breakfast will make no difference whatever,” said Jack as they both drew near the table. Red grinned sheepishly as Molly introduced him to her father and they took their places at table. With the innate courtesy that was in him, old Ascension endeavored not to frown at the odd bedraggled finery of this new guest of his daughter's. He bowed his head, uttered a simple grace and concluded with a prayer to his Maker “to spare the city even though her wickedness and corruption smelt to Heaven.”

To Red, who had so long been homeless, with a stable for his home, this small cabin, with its rude furnishings and Christian mottoes in dim sampler work upon the walls, gave an intimate thrill of pleasure, mingled with a

nameless wistfulness. As often in these rude cabins, some one piece of cherished furniture, an heirloom doubtless, occupied a place of honor. In this case it was a gilded French chair that stood aloof in a corner like a shrine. Where had it come from? What woman had cherished it, moved it tenderly across the prairies—her proudest possession? Old Jones ate his meal in silence. Molly and Weston were chatting and bantering gaily. But Red's eyes roved about the somewhat smoky coziness and domesticity, and his heart was touched so he could not speak.

This was life! He glanced down at his raffish scarecrow attire and a sudden violence of revolt possessed him. He half rose from his stool.

"Where are you going?" demanded Weston, watching his friend. The play of Red's features was so intimately familiar to him.

"Got to get some clothes," muttered Red.

"I think we both need clothes," Weston instantly understanding, soothed him. "No hurry. After breakfast we'll see what they've got."

"At Thompson and Chrisman's store—" put in Molly,—"it's not as stylish as Sacramento, but you'll find about everything you want there."

"Stylish!" muttered Red in his misery, and with sudden violence he ripped off the ruffle of his shirt, tearing some of the bosom with it. His face turned purple as he hastily buttoned up his coat over his rent garment.

They all laughed together. Old Ascension rose slowly, but motioned them to remain seated. He walked heavily to the bureau and brought a massive family Bible to the table.

"It is no wonder you rend your garments, my friend," he said, peering over his spectacles, which he had taken from among the pages of the book, and adjusted on his temples. "Listen to this:—the nineteenth chapter of Genesis.

"'And there came two angels to Sodom at even,' " he began, "'and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and bowed himself with his face toward the ground.'" In sonorous tones he read out the grim impressive story of the destruction of the wicked cities of the plain.

Molly, though attentive to her father's reading, gently and noiselessly was gathering together and stacking up the dishes at her end of the table. The two men sat spellbound by the quaint, direct, Biblical language. It was long since either of them had heard it. Slowly Weston's hand stole to his

pocket and brought forth the small sheep-bound Bible Russell had given him at parting. He turned to the nineteenth chapter and followed with his eyes the words that always woke echoes and a strange reverberant reverence in all who have ever heard them. Molly glanced at Weston quizzically to see whether he was mocking her father. But so absorbed was he that she could not suspect him of levity. She lowered her eyes and fell into a brown study. She was somewhat overawed by the mystery of human nature. Weston and his Bible puzzled her.

Ascension paused at the twenty-ninth verse, and with the words "He overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt," he closed the great book, lifted his spectacles to his forehead and took the small volume from Weston's hand.

"My son," he said, "I am glad to see this book in your hands. I care not how it came there. You are welcome in this house." He was about to speak to Red, but a glance at Red's clothes was sufficient to silence him. Molly bit her lip and smiled to herself. Red in his misery resolved that before the sun had set those wretched clothes should be ashes.



## CHAPTER IX

### SLADE AND WESTON MEASURE UP

THE late February sun was shining warm and genial out of doors, and the two men, Redruth and Weston, emerging from the cabin, paused to look upon the town it illumined.

After Hangtown and the California camps they were well accustomed to the temporary, hastily put together pioneer settlement. But this aggregation of buildings in the flat plain, with no protecting hills overhanging, gave the place a sense of nudity that startled them. Automatically they looked toward the Platte, where at least a few willows, still russet-colored and leafless, broke the monotony of the Plains. To the east there was a faint rise in the roll of the brown prairie, and northwestward, at some distance, were the sand hills of the Lodge Pole. Otherwise they were surrounded by the emptiness which so oppresses dwellers of mountainous country.

“God!” exclaimed Red fervently. “How do you reckon we’re going to live here?” Weston laughed.

“Not in one of those dirty buildings or sod huts, anyway, Red,” he answered. “I’m sorry for you. But no call for you to stay here, pard. This is my funeral.”

“That’s just it, Jack—your funeral,” muttered Red. “Have you heard the things they tell about this Slade? He’s a killer, sure. Funerals must be common here as blackberries in Rhode Island.”

“Well, now, Red,” Weston smiled quizzically into his eyes, “d’you think Slade, or any two-legged beast, is going to scare me away if I want to stay here? And I’ve just plain got to stay here.”

“The girl!” growled Red. “Why don’t you marry her right off and light out—for Sacramento, or ’Frisco?”

“No, Red,” Weston answered him soberly, looking off toward the Platte. “I’d like to, but that isn’t the way. First I want to find out a little more about Glen’s schemes. Then—I can’t marry the girl now. She’s got to know me better. It wouldn’t be fair. How would she know the kind of a man she’s marrying—even if she’d have me?”

“What! you haven’t asked her yet?” cried Red in astonishment.

“Certainly not,” quietly answered Weston. “How can she be sure in a few days, like that? Think it’s like matching a ribbon? I’m sure about her. But she’s got to have time to feel sure about me. Got to be square with her.”

“You beat the Dutch, Jack—that you do!” Red repeated his usual aphorism.

“Oh, well—let’s go look for clothes, Red. Ought to get a tent, too. It’s nearly March. Winter’s over. You and me can mess round better in a tent than over that saloon, maybe.”

Thompson and Chrisman’s emporium was of that crowded general variety that sold everything (with certain omissions) from axle-grease to ipecac, and from pickles to boots.

“You go ahead in,” proposed Weston to Red. “You need clothes worse than I do. You get first choice. I’ll take your leavings.”

“Is this some game?” demanded Red, skeptically.

“No, I mean it. I’ll wait a bit outside—till you get suited. Join you soon. I want to look at this busy town.” Red entered the emporium without further protest.

As he stood gazing into the window of the store, Weston was suddenly conscious of someone leisurely approaching him. He did not turn, but from the tail of his eye he perceived that it was Slade.

His attitude before the window remained one of deep absorption in heavily constructed trousers, some with buckskin lining on the inner or saddle side, and thick flannel shirts, that must have demanded carpentry rather than sewing to build them. In the bottom of the window was a row of cooking utensils, a stack of whips and quirts, and a row of unguent jars and pomade.

“Howdy!” called out Slade as he approached. Weston, with his arms negligently folded over his breast, turned toward him with a smile and responded with a “Howdy.”

“They’ve got about everything going in this store,” he added lightly.

“Yes, this is a right progressive town for its size,” laughed Slade. “Only things we haven’t got is a jail or a church.”

“Well, now, that’s too bad,” said Weston. “Has anybody enquired for those articles?”

“No—not yet, I reckon,” chuckled Slade. “Don’t need the jail while I’m here, and our blacksmith here, old Jones, is worse than several parsons rolled together. He just can’t stop preaching. Don’t seem to need a church.”

Weston frowned slightly. He did not care to encourage reflections on, or even discussion of, his recent host.

“His daughter, though, Molly,” went on Slade with a hardening undertone to his voice, “makes up for the old man.” Weston’s eyes narrowed somewhat, but otherwise his expression, as well as his attitude, remained unchanged. He had no comment to offer upon Slade’s last remark. Slade, however, was not yet ready to abandon the topic.

“A right fine girl is Molly,” he went on with the same cool suavity. “I’ve taken a sort of interest in her, because her old man ain’t fit to look after her. Got some plans for her. I don’t ever allow nobody here to come bothering Molly.” Weston’s frown deepened somewhat, but though he nodded slightly, he still made no audible reply. There was momentary silence between them.

Weston’s eyes rested upon the suave high-boned face of Slade in a calm, roving scrutiny, and a faint chill seemed to creep through his frame. In a sort of momentary illumination he felt he was seeing Slade for the first time. The words he had heard concerning him, “cutthroat,” “killer,” reverberated in his memory with a somber bell-like clearness, and he saw that they proclaimed the true character of the man before him like the tollings of death. Every gesture and aspect of the man was a cloak to a soulless, chilling cruelty, such as he had never perceived in a human being before. Slade had turned and was gazing off toward the saloon diagonally across the road.

Slumped with his back against the saloon was sitting Pedro, a Mexican half-breed, who occasionally found employment at the Overland stables, in the saloon, or at Thompson and Chrisman’s. Like all Mexicans, he could do many things badly, excepting the direction of burros, of which there was none at Julesburg.

With a certain cunning, Pedro, when in funds, never bought alcoholic drinks singly. A quart in an earthen jug gave him more for his money and enabled him to be progressively drunk for days.

At that particular moment Fate had seated Pedro in Slade’s line of vision. Upon his hunched up knees was his precious brown jug. A cigar, the tip of which was almost touching the broad brim of his pointed felt hat, was firmly clenched in his teeth. Pedro was drowsily, blissfully happy.

“That half-breed Mex now,” murmured Slade in a slow ruminative tone, as though he had long since forgotten his last remark to Weston—“Pedro—he looks right happy where he sits—not a care in the world. Only thing, if lightning, or something, should strike his jug, he’d cross himself and wonder why.”

Slowly, lazily, as though he were conjuring the lightning, Slade brought forth the navy revolver from his belt and aimed deliberately at arm’s length. Weston watched him narrowly, his lips parted in a faint absorbed smile.

A shot disturbed the crisp stillness of the morning.

The brown jug shattered into fragments about the half-breed’s feet and its brown contents lay wantonly spilt like water on the ground.

With a sudden impulse the Mexican sat up and crossed himself. He gazed about in frightened incredulity, with the stupid bewildered look of a toper awakened from semi-consciousness.

“This ain’t the happy world he thought it was,” gently murmured Slade, his lips straightening in a thin faint smile.

“No, that it isn’t,” Weston assented readily. “Shame to waste his liquor, though. A cigar, now—that don’t cost much.” With a sudden movement his arms were unfolded and in each of his extended hands was a long blue revolver. Another shot—and Pedro’s cigar flew out into space.

“I’ll buy him a new cigar for that,” Weston smiled ruefully, as though he had been forced to an act distasteful to him. And refolding his arms, the revolvers quickly disappeared from view.

The drowsy Mexican, now thoroughly awakened and alarmed, leaped up with considerable alacrity and ran off unsteadily headlong round the corner of the building.

Slade’s eyes narrowed perceptibly and his eyebrows drew closer together. He appeared dissatisfied, still intent.

“The weather-cock on that saloon,” he said slowly gazing toward the roof of the building, “There’s times I like to make it spin.”

His arm seemed to move forward automatically. A single shot reverberated, nicked the thin metal of the weather-vane, and it spun round once or twice from the impact of the bullet.

“That sure is a right cocky little rooster,” agreed Weston and paused for an instant as though meditating. Then swiftly his two revolvers spoke a

number of times, nine to be exact. The weather-vane appeared nicked on the edges in several places and it kept spinning madly for some time.

“No trouble to make him dance,” Weston genially observed as he refolded his arms.

“Well, well!” exclaimed Slade in startled admiration. “That’s quite pretty—a very pretty trick, now.” And as he turned his gaze again toward Weston, he saw him smiling calmly, the revolvers just showing in their sockets under his folded arms.

“I reckon,” said Weston, “Pedro’ll think the world right miserable till the damage is made good to him. Wouldn’t you say so?”

And he turned to enter the store. Facing him, however, were Thompson and Chrisman and Red, gazing with open mouths at the still rotating weather-vane. They grinned strangely, and upon the expressive features of Red was written open terror, that spasmodically gave way to relief. Men were now tumbling out of the saloon and from the stage stables, and from the blacksmith shop Molly, with a blue denim apron still about her, came running in alarm.

“What’s happened, Slade?” cried one of the gamblers, an ardent devotee of Slade’s, almost leaping toward him.

“Nothin’ at all!” laughed Slade. “Just a little gun practice on Pedro’s quart jug and his seegar. Asleep against the saloon, was Pedro. Had to wake him up. Then there was that pore little tin rooster. Mr. Jack here is a right smart hand with a gun.”

Weston hastily entered the store in the company of Red and the storekeepers.

“What did he hit?” someone demanded of Slade.

“Hit Pedro’s seegar after I smashed his jug,” laughed Slade mirthlessly. “Then we took a shot or two at the weather-cock. He’s a right fancy shot—if he keeps at it.” The men roared with laughter, as they always did at any attempted humor of Slade’s.

“You mean if he lives,” one of his henchmen whispered in his ear.

Slade grinned and turned to observe Molly gazing anxiously into the faces of the men.

“Too bad you missed the fun, Molly,” he said with a chill glint in his eyes. “Mr. Jack and I were having a bit of gun practice.” But as she still

continued to search the crowd with a look of concealed anxiety in her eyes, he added:

“I reckon he’s buying a shirt in there.”

And surrounded by his friends, Slade strode over toward the saloon.



*A Paramount Picture.*

*The Pony Express.*

“THEY ALWAYS PASS IN THEIR CHIPS AROUND  
THE HALF HOUR.”

# CHAPTER X

## THE SINEWS OF THE PONY EXPRESS

“WAGONS! WAGONS! WAGONS!” muttered Red as he stood idly by the stage-stables counting the freight teams as they moved by. “Can you believe it?” he observed to another stableman, “I have counted over four hundred bull wagons today passing through Julesburg.”

“That’s nuthin’ at all,” spat the stableman. “I counted nine hundred here one day last year. I’ll be shot if I didn’t.”

The bull wagons, indeed, were so numerous, that on certain days the landscape was never quite empty of them. And those who had seen the Government provision trains in ’57, during the abortive war with the Mormons, when General Albert Sidney Johnston’s troops were being supplied, told of thirty-five hundred wagons passing westward in almost one continuous stream.

The oxen with their slow antediluvian gait, the tall, gaunt, bearded bull-whackers, either on the wagons or trudging along, with their hee-haws, their cracking whips, and their incredible, almost metrical profanity, the dusty white hoods of the vehicles—all of these presented an unforgettable picture. No one who has not seen them can ever quite conjure up the vision. The vast country of America did everything on a vast scale, even in the fifties and sixties. And just as long trains of steel Pullmans now go hurtling by, or interminable trains of freight cars, so these wagons were always moving, crawling, winding across the Plains.

There were many great freighting firms that caused those ox-teams to move—Dennison and Brown; Hockaday, Burr and Company; Roper and Nesbit; Russell, Majors and Waddell, and many another. But none was better known than Russell, Majors and Waddell. By the time Johnston’s footless expedition against the Mormons was taking place, in 1857, Alexander Majors was perhaps the most experienced freighter on the Plains. The Quartermaster-General of the Army had awarded him the largest of the contracts for carrying supplies. Now, early in 1860, with their Overland Stage route to Salt Lake, their recently acquired Chorpensing Line from Salt Lake to Sacramento, and the amazing project of the Pony Express, there was

no firm in America more widely known in the domain of overland transportation than Russell, Majors and Waddell.

Within something like three months, over four hundred horses were bought, one hundred and ninety stations were either built or re-equipped, four hundred station men and eighty riders hired, and the great enterprise of carrying mail by horse-power and man-power was ready to begin. It was an enterprise for a government, but that firm of plainsmen from Leavenworth undertook it with courage and address. In a way, except for limited resources, they were a government.

Their huge organization, extending over nearly two thousand miles, suddenly became quick and stirring, like heated blood. Miller at Leavenworth, Ficklin at Salt Lake, and Bolivar Roberts at Carson City, were buying, hiring, driving men and horses, as though a new world were about to be created. To carry mail across a continent in ten days—*daily*—could that be done? These men declared it could be done—and drove forward. But at the company's office at Leavenworth there were still sporadic misgivings, notwithstanding the decision.

William Waddell, one of the partners, with a deep sense of the dignity of his firm, wondered whether it was heading for a fiasco. But Alexander Majors, backwoodsman and plainsman, ordinarily the coolest of the trio, and the most conservative, calmly informed him,

“I know from experience that it can be done, Will—I am certain of it.”

“Experience!” exclaimed Waddell. “What experience? You surely are not referring to Senator Glen's riding to Washington on horseback, taking his time, riding in the company of stages and freight trains, resting whenever he chose—call that experience?”

“No,” said Majors, “I'm not referring to that. Did I ever tell you about Aubery of Santa Fé?—No?—Well, I knew Aubery well. On a bet that Frenchman made for a thousand dollars, he rode,—a single man, mind you,—from Santa Fé to Independence, Mo., in five days and thirteen hours—eight hundred miles!”

“Oh, yes!” cried Waddell. “I've heard about that lunatic—never stopped to rest—came in half dead—a trick a strong man might try.”

“Just so,” chuckled Majors. “But our men will be forty going each way, instead of one. They will change horses every ten or twelve miles. Aubery changed about every two hundred miles. No man will ride more than a



hundred and twenty miles or so at a stretch. Aubery rode eight hundred. It's simple by comparison."

"But daily, Alec, *daily!*" insisted Waddell. "Can they keep it up?"

"Why not? With a staff such as ours—did you see Bol Roberts' letter? I have it here somewhere. Anyway, he and some young fellows named Kelley and Haslam have been making corduroy roads in the Sink of Carson, for short cuts. Carrying bundles of willows two and three hundred yards in their arms, says Bol, 'while the mosquitoes are so thick on our arms, faces and necks, I couldn't tell whether Kelley was black or white.' That's the sort of men we've got.

"And another thing. Building 'dobe stations in the Sink, they've had to tread the mud with their bare feet for a week. The mud was so full of alkali their feet swelled to the size of hams. Haslam, from Salt Lake, was helping them. Never could get his boots on again," chuckled Majors. "Had to get new ones. Anyway you look at it, it's a great thing. Imagine those young fellows galloping all across country, hell-for-leather, as you might say, sparing neither horses nor themselves, binding the far West to the East—every day and everywhere—a great thing!"

"Yes, but how many such men are there?" protested Waddell.

"Must be a good chance of them," Majors responded soberly, in the old backwoods phrase. "You've heard Russell tell of engaging a rider for Slade who stopped a band of road agents, the gang that held up our coach at Strawberry—a dead shot—stopped them single-handed—Jack, I think, is his name. Russell carried twenty thousand dollars with him that time, too," he smiled. "Would have been a haul for the bandits. If you speak of profits, Will, I agree with you. There will be no profits unless the Government gives us a subsidy. But as to men—we've got them and will get them—never fear."

All division agents were on the alert and preoccupied with the new venture and Slade was among the number. Either accompanied by one of his admiring friends or employees, or alone, he was tireless in his riding, day and night, sparing himself as little as his horse, bent upon the perfect functioning of his division.

At Antelope he was impressing the station-keeper with the imperative alertness, the hair-trigger readiness necessary to have the ponies saddled and

waiting, ready to be leaped upon by the riders east and west, with their mail bags, for instant continuance of their journeys.

“And supposin’ the bags is late?” put in the station-keeper mildly.

“You will wait for them and be ready just the same, Mike,” said Slade, with the glint of steel in his eyes.

“Then when do we sleep, Jack,” laughed Mike ruefully—“what with the stage and that thar pony express?”

“I don’t care if you never sleep!” smiled Slade. “Let me catch the man who delays the mail by being asleep at his post! As sure’s my name’s Slade, he’ll start his eternal sleep the minute I reach him. What are those boys doing there? Keep ’em busy so they won’t forget how to work.” Upon that he rode away.

And Mike was certain that Slade was not joking.

Spring Hill, Dennison’s, Kelley’s, Beaver Creek, Bijou—at every station in his division Slade appeared with his suave sunny smile, his friendly words and his tone, that chilled to something sharp and icy when he was impressing his orders. Leaky stable roofs became magically repaired. A frown from Slade transformed stables positively Augean into salubrious places for stock. Dirt vanished, slovenliness straightened into apple-pie order.

“Slade’s on the way!” the station-keepers sent one another word. “Jack’s riding the division.”

For part of his route Slade had the company of an abject admirer of his, a half-breed—Charlie Bent. Charlie’s position was one of the many anomalies then common in the west. Traders, trappers, habitants, even army officers long stationed in the West, had given paternity to those unfortunate offspring of miscegenation who, like mulattoes, were never quite at home with either race.

Charlie was said to be the son of an army officer and a Sioux squaw. He possessed a superior education. But though prepared for the career and quality of a white man, a something of bitterness at the cool reception accorded him by the whites, drove him to consort with the red. In the Lodge Pole region he was known variously as a guide, a scout, a hunter and even as a chief. His chieftainship was obscure, but he was known to visit at times a small band of Sioux in the region, who moved their lodges about with suspicious frequency and great rapidity. Certain it was, however, that since the coming of Slade to the Julesburg division, Indian depredations upon the

company's live-stock had summarily ceased. Slade, it was reported, had ridden alone into the camp of that band of Indians and when he emerged he had said, grimly:

“They’ll steal no more of our horses or mules, the dirty cowards.”

That was all excepting that Charlie had become an intimate and dog-like friend of Slade’s.

Rumor said that Charlie Bent appeared as an American only among Americans. Among his band, it was said, he donned the eagle feathers and moccasins of his mother’s tribe, and streaked his face and body with the most savage of war paint. Whenever Slade heard these rumors, he merely laughed.

“Who—Charlie a chief?” he would grin pleasantly. “I crack chiefs like him between my thumb and forefinger.”

# CHAPTER XI

## MOLLY AND JACK RIDE OUT

SAVE that leisure was a condition, like an atmosphere, which overhung those scattered stations of plain and desert under the sun, there was no idleness in Slade's absence at Julesburg.

Men moved about with a certain lumbering deliberate shambling, that always seemed half jocular, half earnest. But Slade had left behind him definite orders for work to be accomplished before his return. All the new ponies, some of them quite wild, were to be broken and shod, and trained for their work of swift and breakneck spurts.

Stablemen and riders were constantly busy, yet with an amused laughing playfulness in their work. Even the powerful muscles of Ascension Jones could not cope with them unaided.

"Here," the station-keeper would say, "rope them two cayuses in the corral and help the blacksmith shoe them." And all the stable-hands turned out to the work. The horses in turn were roped and led or driven toward the blacksmith shop. There the savage frightened cayuse, snorting with alarm, would rear and plunge, endeavoring to charge his captors and stamp them to pulp. Eventually, however, by skillfully directed casts of the lariat, he would be thrown and his legs bound. Ropes held each leg to a stake. The men sitting upon his head and body would feel the dynamic terrified quiver of his frame with every stroke of the blacksmith's hammer upon the pony's hoof.

"Here you, Jack," the stable-boss, as a sort of master of ceremonies, would command, "you put your weight on his body—don't just set on him—hold him down. And you, Little Yank! Never mind his squealing. You hold his head down."

"But he is biting me!" would retort that young rider.

"Never mind. He can't bite hard. That devil's got to be shod."

"How d'you know he can't bite hard?" Yank would mutter ruefully, and the process of shoeing the horse would go on. Often it took a day to shoe one animal. No horses or mules had ever been shod with such care before. Every action and hammer stroke seemed to say: "The business of a continent depends on this perfection, upon the fleetness and sureness of this beast—"

the cohesion of an empire hangs on it, to say nothing of the lives of the riders.”

For Molly and Weston this was a halcyon season. The absence of Slade seemed to have lifted a shadow from their lives. Though inwardly defiant of him, and proudly ignoring him when he was there, they felt somehow a warmer sunlight upon the Plains now that he was gone. Their pleasure in each other’s company was freer, less hampered. Though at the dawning of an empire in the wilderness, they felt they were at the very peak of events—of a whole civilization. They walked and rode together in the flat country about Julesburg, or across the river toward the Lodge Pole. Their topics of conversation were endless.

With the subtlety of a woman, notwithstanding her youth, Molly endeavored to draw him out concerning his past. He told her of his coming across the Plains with his parents, of the terrible ravages of the cholera in that and many other caravans. Tears ran down her cheeks when he told her of the death of his father and mother and of their hurried burial in graves he could not even hope to find. He spoke of his long roaming among the California hills as a miner. Despite the hardships, with which she sympathized, she was secretly pleased, nevertheless, that this man, to whom she felt so warmly drawn, had been all his life a toiler, not as some of those at Julesburg.

“You can’t guess how thrilling that sounds to me,” she said one day, as they rode beside the Platte. “Most of the men who stop at Julesburg at all are either gamblers or discharged teamsters, ready for any deviltry. The only thing they won’t do is work. They hang round Slade. To them he is a hero—because of his awful record of killings. Yet the company has to have him here—just to keep the place safe against such as they.”

“A gambler may have a good heart,” he told her, with a certain sinking of his own. “I have known some that weren’t bad.”

“Ugh!” she shuddered. “You know what people say about a gambler’s oath. And father says he would sooner see me dead at his feet than to be m—.” Confusion overcame her so she could not finish her sentence. “What,” she suddenly asked, “do you suppose that cloud of dust over there is—can it be the stage coming?”

Her exquisite coloring, her confusion and her youth stirred him from his momentary despondency like wine. More than ever he was resolved that Molly should be his and, furthermore, that he would not marry her until she knew all the truth about him.

“I think the strangest thing of all,” she exclaimed more brightly, “is that you should be staying on here at Julesburg.”

“It is my love for Jack Slade that keeps me here,” he answered, looking into her eyes, and they both laughed in youthful abandon.

Molly seldom spoke of Slade. Now that Weston had mentioned him, she said:

“Love—can anyone love that man, with all the blood on his hands? He’s always been kind to me,” she hastened to add. “There are a lot of rough men about here—and he’s told them that if anyone as much as speaks to me uncivilly he will—oh, how I wish father would move to some other place—a city—like Sacramento!”

“Well, so far as the rough men are concerned,” Weston spoke quietly, “Slade’s job is ended. I’ll take care now that they don’t bother you—unless, of course, you prefer his interest—”

“I shudder when he comes near me!” she cried, actually shuddering.

“And as for cities,” he went on, “why, I think that might be managed. If you—if we—”

But shyness overcoming her at that moment, she straightened up with a sudden grave young dignity. She raced her pony on, interrupting his speech.

“She is not yet ready to listen to me,” he told himself sadly. “She doesn’t know me well enough. I must wait.”

The moodiness and depression that overcame Weston after this last ride with Molly fired Red to anger. To Red, Weston was the best man in the world, and one whom no woman, of whatever degree, had a right to scorn. After watching him for a few minutes in silence Red suddenly proposed:

“What d’you say if we quit this rotten hole?” Weston shook his head.

“And go where?” He smiled sadly. “To Rhode Island?”

“Well—might go back to Sacramento,” Red spluttered, “or to ’Frisco.”

“No,” said Weston with decision. “I reckon you know, Red, I can’t quit like that.”

“No,” muttered Red between his teeth. “If you could, you’d be a richer man today.”

Weston’s eyes suddenly snapped with bitter irritation.

“If there’s one thing I never want to hear mentioned anywhere near me, it’s gambling or any reference to it. Understand that, Red!” Then in a somewhat gentler voice he added: “You know, she hates gamblers.”

“That’s where the sting of the rattler sticks,” thought Red. Aloud he said: “Will you let me lie you out of it, Jack?”

“No!” shouted Weston with a look of misery in his eyes. “I don’t want any more lies!”

## CHAPTER XII

### A GAME OF CHANCE

IT was Slade's method to arrive at a station unexpectedly.

As the work of preparation was going on, innumerable wild rumors were flying along the Overland Stage Route. The Pony Express would never start at all, was one rumor, because it would cost too much. Old Majors had finally and flatly refused to start it because mail would have to be carried on Sunday, and he was opposed to Sabbath-day labor. There was a huge lobby in Washington bent upon extracting five million dollars from the Government, and the Government declined to have anything to do with it. President Buchanan was fearing an attempt upon the part of Wall Street to raid the United States Treasury, and he flatly refused so much as a dollar for a subsidy of the lightning mail service. These were only some of the rumors current along the trail. Meanwhile the work of preparation was going relentlessly on.

By way of diversion the stablemen in the absence of Slade staged a mule race, and the gamblers and hangers-on at the saloon put up large sums upon a mule that Little Yank was backing to win against the field. The only difficulty was the lack of contenders.

Red, the new stableman, however, had made a discovery. He came running to Weston with it early one morning in the tent.

"Listen, Jack," he whispered in breathy excitement, "I've got a mule there that can run faster'n anything on hoofs. Only thing is, he hates a saddle. I can beat Little Yank's favorite if I ride him without a saddle. Will you back me—will you cover the bets of that lot of gamblers over there?"

"No," Weston answered briefly.

"Why not?" Red almost sobbed. "Can't you take my word?"

"Yes, Red. But I'm through with gambling. You know why."

"Will you lend me the money to back my mule?"

"Yes," Weston answered after a pause. "But—if you ever want to get back to Rhode Island, is betting on a mule race the way to do it? Besides I haven't got so very much."



Red's blood, however, was too much heated to listen to reason. He was ready by that time to stake everything he had ever possessed, or ever hoped to possess, upon his prodigy of a mule. No one had ever tried to ride that mule without a saddle. As a mount he was known to be balky and recalcitrant. Red by consequence demanded and received heavy odds. The race was started. To the astonishment of all, Red, riding his mule without a saddle or blanket, his long legs tied almost in a knot beneath the belly of the mule, darted past Little Yank's grey with the speed of lightning.

"Look at him run!" They yelled. "He don't touch the ground! What did he give him? Gosh! He's a mile ahead and still going! He's goin' fer the Pacific Ocean! He won't stop till he gets there! Shoo! Look at 'im go!"

For some moments Red actually had fears that his mule was going straight for the Pacific. He could not bring him to a halt. Finally he hit upon the expedient of making him run in a wide circle until he swung round and gradually brought up in the vicinity of the stables. Once there, the mule's speed suddenly stopped like a watch. The gamblers in their chagrin had turned their faces to the saloon and went in dismally. The prospect of paying swept them like a withering wind.

Jack and Molly, and all who had witnessed the race, were excited. As for Red, he was all but beside himself with gusty triumph.

"Jack!" he cried, as he threw himself from his mule. "Come on along in with me and help me collect those bets. Come in and have a drink anyway."

Weston shook his head.

"Somethin' new to me," spluttered Red. "You goin' back on a friend. Those short-horned sports in there—thought I'd let them see I've got a friend. I thought I had one," he ran on incoherently. "Always used to think so, but—"

Weston suddenly realized that Red's chagrin was genuine, that it was one of those moments when excitement or emotion makes a man like a child.

"All right, Red," he announced with sudden decision. "I'll go with you."

He nodded with a smile to Molly and the two men walked across the road to the saloon.

The sun was shining brightly upon the brown plains grass. The very air was sparkling with a keen zestful tang. The excitement of the race, the laughter and hilarity, had brought a vivid high coloring to Molly's cheeks.

But as she turned to retrace her steps to the cabin behind the blacksmith shop, some of the color in her cheeks vanished. Her head no longer sat quite so proudly upon her shoulders. She hummed a tune as she went, but it was pure affectation. She was not feeling gay. The one man who to her was different from all others, now suddenly appeared like all the others. He could not resist the saloon and that clique of gamblers, whose presence in the town was hateful to her, who alone gave Slade an excuse for his so-called protective interest in her.

As luck would have it, Slade himself came riding up to the blacksmith shop just as she was about to enter the cabin.

“Well, well, Molly!” he called out cheerily, “why so sad this morning? But I don’t wonder. If that’s our friend Jack disappearing into the saloon yonder, why, it’s a disappointment, Molly. Has he taken to ways we don’t approve? Have to see about it. How are you, Molly?”

“All right, thank you.” She made an effort to smile bravely. “Did you get up to Horseshoe Creek? How is Mrs. Slade?” Slade ignored the query after his lady.

“Spaniard here has cast a shoe,” he said, slapping his horse’s glossy neck affectionately as he dismounted. “Want your dad to shoe him. Can I sit with you a minute while this boy is shod?”

“Some other time, Mr. Slade. I haven’t washed the breakfast dishes yet.”

“Oh, I don’t mind,” laughed Slade genially. “I’ll sit in the kitchen.”

“Oh, no,” she laughed in turn. “I can’t work with a man around.”

“Well, now, that’s queer,” retorted Slade, lifting his eyebrows in mock wonder. “For if that’s so, then you couldn’t have done any work for weeks past.”

This ironic reference to Weston Molly ignored as though she had not heard it. She lifted the latch and hurried into the cabin. For a moment Slade was about to follow her. But thinking better of it, he decided to postpone the shoeing of Spaniard until after he had been fed and he rode the horse to the stables.

In the saloon in the meanwhile Red was going about with a slip of dirty paper upon which his bets had been entered, collecting what he had won. With a stubby bit of pencil he was prepared to cross off every liquidated account from his list. The five or six men heavily indebted to Red behaved variously in their responses to him.

“Bet?” one would say. “What bet? Ain’t you got me mixed up with someone else?” Another would frown and reply: “Stranger, what you say is right interestin’. But I ain’t never seen you before. Now about this race you tell of—let’s hear all about it.” Still another would simply laugh, as though Red had uttered the funniest joke in the world. In the end they all paid, however, and Red in a flushed exuberance, commanded drinks for everyone present. Weston refused to drink and Red, in a sudden flash of good sense, thrust his bag of gold and silver coin into Weston’s hands, shouting:

“Here, Jack—If you’re goin’ to stay sober, you hold the dust and do the payin’. I reckon it’ll save me money!”

“Now, what do you mean by that?” snapped the bartender, and one or two of the gamblers growled at the imputation.

“Nothin’ at all,” cried Red. “I owe him money.” They all drank, and their faces relaxed somewhat.

“Here’s how!” they cried. “Next time we’ll know what mule to back! Dang that old mule! That sure’s all kinds of a mule!” and so on.

The room was filled with a blue haze of smoke, and the men crowding at the roughly-made bar seemed now to be wallowing in good cheer. The floor was covered with sawdust, irregularly trodden by their huge hob-nailed boots, and somewhat more like a stable than a room. Decoration for the walls was supplied by sheets of illustrations from “Harper’s Magazine,” “Frank Leslie’s Weekly” and the “New York Illustrated News.”

Weston held out the pouch of coin toward Red. “I’ve got to go now,” he told him.

“No,—no!” shouted Red. “You keep it for me, Jack. Come on—I want another drink.”

The men who had lost on the race eyed the buckskin pouch in Weston’s hand hungrily. One of them appeared abruptly inspired. He put down his glass.

“How—” he began, passing his tongue lickerishly over his lips, “how about a little game of poker, eh?”

“Yep! Yep! Yep!” they all shouted in unison, like a stage-driver nearing a station. “That’s the idee! That’s all sorts of an idee. A little game!”

“No!” cried Red. “I can’t play poker. Besides, I’ve had too much of this red juice.”

“You’ve got to play!” They crowded about him belligerently. “We’ve all had some drink. And you’ve won too much not to give us satisfaction!”

“Ain’t I telling you, I can’t play cards?” protested Red.

“We’ll show you—we’ll learn you how—” They crowded about him more closely. “Got to give us revenge. Or”—one of them had an inspiring idea—“why not let your friend play for you, eh?” The rough, bearded optimists saw the chance of possibly an even more innocent victim.

At the sudden irruption of this idea into his head, Red was struck into an incandescent speechlessness. Open-mouthed he stood glowing and grinning at Jack. If only his friend could be persuaded to play with them! From urgency the men with the mountain dew, as the red liquor was called, working in them, passed to sulkiness and even to anger.

“You’ve got to play,” they pushed about Red, “that’s all there’s to it—or we’ll know the reason why.” It is to Red’s credit that he uttered no single word to Weston, albeit he watched him narrowly for a flicker of relenting. The men were becoming abusive, spoke of “short sports” and cowards, and said they’d make him play.

“All right,” said Red sullenly, “if you want to take away the money you lost in fair play,—all right. It’s as good as robbing me, when I don’t know one card from another.”

He allowed himself to be drawn toward the table. “Where’s that money?” He turned toward Weston. “Making a man play cards who don’t know one card from another!”

Weston handed him the bag in silence. Red threw him one piteous look and moved toward the table.

“That’s the ticket!” cried one of the men. “We’ll learn ye. You know what they say about fool’s luck!”

Weston glanced toward the door. He had never promised anyone not to play again, but Molly, out there, had said she hated gamblers. Nevertheless, he could not bring himself to see his friend stripped of every penny. He turned toward the table and watched the first hand played. Red had lost, as of course he was bound to lose. The gamblers were being restored to good humor. The second hand was being dealt.

“Come on! Sit in!” invited the gamblers. “Prove you’re a man!”

“A man!” repeated Jack. “What’s the use of proving that here?” Then with a sudden decision he laid a hand upon Red’s shoulder. “Get up, Red—

get out of this. I'll take your hand. They'll take your eyeteeth away."

Red leaped up with alacrity and yielded his place and his hand to Weston. The bag of coin remained for Weston to play with.

"That's the ticket!" shouted the men. "Sit in with us!"

"Did you count the money?" Weston asked Red.

"No!" exploded Red with a shout of laughter, "and I don't want to count it! I'm goin' to have another drink." He laughed so that he toppled over some glasses on the bar in his helplessness.

"They made him play!" he spluttered to the bartender. "They dragged him into it—you saw that, didn't you?"

The bartender, occupied with his own business, paid little attention to Red's seemingly maudlin talk. "Well, that's his lookout," he growled. At the card table the players continued tense and silent. Gold and silver clinked like counters, and the men became more and more absorbedly tense. The little piles of coin before the gamblers gradually diminished, dwindled, and Weston's bag kept growing perceptibly fatter. Onlookers crowded round the table. Red looked on with frank delight. The news of the game even trickled outside the saloon, to the stables, to Chrisman and Thompson's store, to the blacksmith shop. A stable-boy passing Molly grinned and twitched his head toward the saloon:

"They've got Jack into a poker game in there."

Molly stood still, making no audible reply. But within her she felt as if a heavy weight had suddenly been dropped upon her heart. She had a wild impulse to rush over to the saloon and interfere—to rescue the man for whom her feeling suddenly flared up in a protective maternal blaze, in spite of her youth. He had fallen into a wolves' den.

Then anger at his weakness overcame her. Why should he have gone in there at all? Why are even the best of men so weak? But, woman-like, she readily found an excuse for the man with whom her heart was engaged. It was that friend of his, Red, who had dragged him there—among those ruffians. She had heard of men losing everything, including their pay for months to come. He must be rescued from their clutches. To whom could she turn? To Slade? With her intuitive sensitiveness she knew that Slade disliked him, resented her interest in him, and would be only too delighted at his discomfiture. She entered the blacksmith shop. Old Ascension had just finished a horseshoe he had been fashioning and had thrown it into the tank of water to cool. The black water was still gently sizzling about it.

Ascension, leaning against the handle of his hammer, was already plunged in meditation, upon some sacred text, possibly, or upon the approaching end of the world.

“Father,” said Molly as she entered, but he scarcely heard her. He was muttering to himself inaudible words, and his eyes were fixed in an ecstatic stare at some ineffable vision.

“Father!” she called more loudly and laid a hand upon his huge arm. He started from his reverie.

“What is it, Molly-girl?” he murmured.

“They’ve got Mr. Jack in a card game over there in the saloon. They dragged him into it—those vultures. Someone ought to get him out.” Even as she spoke, despite her vehemence, she was dubious. Her father, she knew, regarded the saloon as the very temple of iniquity. He had never set foot in it.

“I will go,” returned the old man solemnly. “To corrupt honesty, to spread iniquity—what other purpose have these misguided men? I’ll go.” And shouldering his hammer absently, with his burnt leather apron rattling stiffly against his thighs, he strode like another Thor out of the shop toward the one spot that was to him the very shrine of vice and corruption—the saloon.

The sun shone warmly upon the Plains and upon the ribbon of rutted road. The early spring had already brought forth stirrings of emigrants moving westward. Beyond the stage stables was a small party of them that must have passed through the town after dark and encamped for the night, or possibly they had stopped for their midday meal. Three or four prairie schooners were drawn up abreast, the wagon-tongues pointing westward, their horses and oxen grazing peacefully near by. Slade, mounted upon Spaniard, was conversing with the men of the expedition, evidently giving them advice.

Emigrants always aroused the old blacksmith’s sympathy. They were bound from the known to the unknown—something all the world would soon be experiencing. He would have liked to go and greet them, possibly to say a prayer with them. But stern duty called him into the house of debauch and wickedness, which he abhorred.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ASCENSION TO THE RESCUE

His entrance into the saloon produced a peculiar effect upon the denizens. So startling was it, they even forgot to grin. The jaws of some dropped suddenly, and they paused in their speech, in their laughter, in whatever they were doing, their eyes fixed in an open-mouthed stare. Those who were drinking put down their glasses. Others simply glared in amazement. The gamblers alone went on playing tensely, too much absorbed in their game even to appear surprised. Weston, sitting with his back to the door, had not seen the blacksmith enter.

The old man gazed about the room slowly, as though taking in the entire scene for the first time. In his eyes was the tragic look of one who cannot fathom why mortal men are so commonly, so easily drawn to evil. He shook his head sadly, his deep eyes rolling with sorrow.

“Woe unto them,” he began mournfully, “that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink.”

The sound of his voice seemed to snap the momentary tension of the men and they burst forth in a guffaw of laughter.

“Wine is a mocker,” cried Ascension, bringing his hammer down to the floor with a thud by way of emphasis, “strong drink is raging. Behold men gluttonous and unbelievers”—and again his hammer struck the floor. By now, however, the men had recovered their former attitudes and they were roaring with laughter.

“This wicked city will be destroyed,” cried the blacksmith louder and yet more loud, “even as the cities of the Plain were destroyed with fire and brimstone.” His eyes becoming more accustomed to the dim interior of the room, he discerned Weston and, approaching him, he laid a hand upon his shoulder.

“Depart, I pray you, my son,” he began, “from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed as Korah, Dathan and Abiram were consumed—lest the earth open and swallow you with them.”

“Here!” shouted one of the irate gamblers, who had been losing heavily. “Clear out o’ this, blacksmith—git out. Talk about touchin’ nothin’ of ours

—he’s durn near got it all!”

“That’s right!” yelled some of the others. “Put him out! Throw him outside. He don’t belong here!”

Two or three of the bystanders laid hands upon the old man and, though still laughing good-naturedly, began to hustle him toward the door.

“Gentlemen!” Weston suddenly jumped from his chair and snapped out the single word with a mixture of so much scorn, contempt and wrath, that all were arrested by the sound as by some preternaturally loud report of a firearm. They looked at him vaguely, foolishly, searchingly—had anyone laid a hand upon him? No one had, as a matter of fact.

With his arms folded, he was standing squarely near the card table, the buckskin bag close to him, but he was not regarding it. The chair which had overturned as he rose lay on its back at his feet.

“Take your hands away from Mr. Jones,” were his next words. Still he stood there moveless and square, with a certain austerity in his smile—a smile faint and far off, like the touch of irony. For a moment the men did not move. They still surrounded the blacksmith, who was not regarding them. His eyes were now closed and his lips were moving in silent prayer.

The scene was grotesque, absurd, and any one of those rough men could have broken the spell of its laughable solemnity. Any one of them could have shattered it by an act or word, as the silence of night is sometimes shattered by the fall of some hollow vessel or the sudden outcry of pain in man or animal. But no one disturbed that silence.

Somehow each of those rude men had the sensation of death stalking about that room like a naked presence, mocking and imminent, apt to strike at any instant. There was no longer any sense to their holding on to the large gaunt frame of old Ascension. Their arms fell away unostentatiously.

“Look who’s giving us orders,” grinned one of the teamsters, but no one answered him. For just then, as though he had heard nothing, Weston said to the men he had been playing with:

“Get up, gentlemen! Can’t you see Mr. Jones is praying?” They rose quickly, with the seriousness of worshippers. Then they grinned emptily at each other, as though consenting to enter some strange game. “This is something new,” their smiles seemed to say to one another. “Let’s see what he’s driving at.”



With a gesture Weston bade them remove their hats. They obeyed automatically. In the farce they were playing out that was of no consequence. Somehow they had the idea that Jack Weston was a humorist, a practical joker, preparing a great laugh for them. The bartender was hanging over the bar with set jaws and a noncommittal expression, prepared to laugh with his clients when the time came, or to call for Slade if there was trouble.

And Charlie Bent, the half-breed Sioux, who entered the saloon at that moment, allowed the flicker of a smile to cross his brown, somewhat bitter features, in contempt at this form of fooling. He moved toward the bar, near to where Weston was now standing, and rapped for a drink with the edge of a coin.

“Take off your hat,” Weston spoke clearly, incisively, yet without rancor. “Can’t you see Mr. Jones is praying?”

Bent muttered an oath and turned again to the bar. His large-brimmed hat dropped onto the bar beside him. With a fearful curse he snatched his hat and whirled about, his free hand upon his gun. But he did not raise it from its sheath. He felt something hard pressing against his chest, and Weston was standing very close to him. As his gaze travelled downward, to the point of their contact, Bent saw that the hard object pressing against him was the blue muzzle of a navy revolver. A kind of ashen greyness swept over his face beneath the copper hue, and mechanically his hands began to rise.

“Hell!” he finally muttered with ill-controlled lips, that gave his face a peculiar twisted expression. “Are you all crazy?” The others snickered with relief. This, at all events, was part of the joke. On a sudden Charlie, with his hands still uplifted, as though in a gesture of despair at human folly, began backing away and with a swift movement flung out of the saloon.

Ascension Jones emerged from his prayer at this moment and tears were trickling down his beard. To him there had been no joke and no folly. In his devout soul he had really been praying for these unregenerate men, praying that when the hour of doom came upon them, they might meet their Maker in a spirit not wholly unrepentant.

“Do you want us to sing a hymn, Mr. Jones?” Weston spoke to him gently, so gently that for a moment the old man was touched by a flash of hope for this entire congregation.

“Ah—yes—yes,” he spoke softly, as though coming to himself out of a dream. “That is what we sinners must do.” He gazed about him dreamily, as

though out of the air must come the inspiration for the appropriate hymn to be sung in this place.

“Start something!” snapped Weston, with sharp suddenness, as though his nerves were momentarily slipping out of his control. His gaze swung quickly round the entire assembly. Red, who had been keyed up with excitement to fever pitch, could control himself no longer. He was literally in an ecstasy, though it was hardly religious. His friend Jack had dominated the scene to his complete satisfaction. Joy crackled in his heart like a leaping flame. Almost beside himself, he abruptly broke forth with the only thing he knew:

“My name it is Joe Bowers,  
I’ve got a brother Ike—”

They all knew that. And before it was possible for anyone to interfere, they joined in lustily out of leather lungs:

“I come from old Mizzoura,  
Come all the way from Pike!”

A roar of laughter followed the stanza. This must have been the joke they were waiting for. They were not absolutely sure it was a joke. But they were intensely bent upon making it appear so. Weston was smiling in spite of himself.

“Never you mind, Ascension!” shouted one of the bull-whackers in the assembly. “We’ll build you a church here yet!”

“You done us good, blacksmith!” roared another. “Durned if you didn’t. Didn’t know you had so much sport in you!”

Weston realized that old Ascension had better leave the place at that moment. Not himself religious, Weston nevertheless dimly felt that there was something grand and tragic about the figure of this old man, out of his simple soul crying in the wilderness.

“Come on, Mr. Jones, let’s go.” He took the blacksmith’s arm gently.

Ascension still somewhat dazed, took his hammer that had been leaning against the bar, shouldered it, and together with Weston stalked out of the saloon.

As the gamblers returned to their places, the realization overtook them suddenly that Weston, whom they had pressed into play, had won nearly all

their money.

Out of doors the noonday sun was blazing warmly down upon the grey-brown land and upon the white tops of the covered wagons beyond the corral. Ascension, seeing them, was moved to go toward them, perhaps to offer a prayer for their safety against the perils of the march. But the oxen and horses were yoked. Whips were cracking. They were just starting off. The women in the wagons, and among them a little golden-haired child, were waving good-bye to all who were near them.

## CHAPTER XIV

### RED BECOMES A FATHER

THE story of Jack's prayer meeting, as it was called, was filling the town. Everyone was laughing. The gamblers were laughing loudest of all, allowing it to be understood that they, as sportsmen, had entered valiantly into the joke and kept up their reputation for gay, light-hearted dogs, ready for anything.

"Say," they would buttonhole Weston in the roadway, "that thing you staged—funniest thing ever happened in Julesburg. We have been here now goin' on three years. And believe me, since Slade killed Jules and nailed his ears to the barn, nothin' funnier's happened at this crossin'—nothin's ever happened on the trail like it! You come on have a drink. We might think up somethin' more."

Weston smiled, and left them to their delusion. But he did not accompany them.

"But, mind you," put in one of the gamblers, "we're goin' to win all that money back some day!"

"Not from me," smiled Weston pleasantly. "I told you I don't play."

The gamblers were mystified by his attitude. Was it really fool's luck? If he could play like that, perhaps it was as well not to press him? But, on the other hand, no man who could play like that would willfully stay out of the game. Some mystery behind that. Conjectures were being made freely. Slade, who, oddly enough, never played cards, merely laughed at them.

"You let a sharper man than you do you to a turn," he said, with emphasis upon "sharper," "and you're fools enough to think it was fool's luck."

Their haunting unformed doubt burst into flames of eager curiosity.

"You know something about it, Jack," they turned upon him. "Now out with it—let's have it." Slade merely grinned. "Still if he's a gambler," protested one, "could he stay out of the game? Don't stand to reason." And even as Slade was saying, "He's cleaned you out. Why should he bother with you?" he knew in a flash of intuition that Weston was precisely that—a

gambler—and that his not playing was owing to Molly’s influence. It is to Slade’s credit that he never mentioned the name of Molly in these conversations with the rough men of Julesburg, but a nameless twinge of jealousy shot through him. His wife at Horseshoe Bend—he thought of her fierce devotion and fidelity. No—none of that for him. But the fact that Molly appeared to be falling in love with Weston gnawed at his heart like a canker.

For the moment, however, all such things were forgotten in the wild excitement that possessed the town the evening following the episode in the saloon.

Charlie Bent, driving a team out of the train of prairie schooners that had departed that day, with his clothes partly torn, brought the news that Indians had attacked the small caravan on the trail northwest of Julesburg, had killed all the emigrants, burned the wagons and driven off the stock. Single-handed, he had defended them so far as he was able, and this wagon alone remained. All that he had been able to rescue was one child, the little girl of the party, who had been hidden under blankets in the wagon.

Red, whose emotions were at boiling pitch, leaped into the wagon and brought forth the softly wailing little girl.

“Was it Spotted Tail and his band?” demanded Slade tensely.

“No,” said Bent, “it was a strange band of Sioux. They were heading northwest with the stock.”

“Let’s go after them!” proposed Weston. “If they’re driving stock we ought to be able to catch them.”

“No chance at night,” said Bent. “The sandhills of the Lodge Pole are like a maze. We could never find them now.” Red, pressing the child to his breast, came shouldering up to Bent.

“All the same, it’s a damn shame to let ’em get away,” he cried. “We might go to where this happened and follow them in the morning.”

“We can do that in the morning,” said Slade brusquely, resenting any leadership but his own. “But it’s no use. They’ll make tracks pretty fast. Got to think that over.”

For a moment all looked at him in silence. This was an alien Slade—but there was no telling what Slade might or might not do. Slade was gazing off into space. Then suddenly he turned toward the child in Red’s arms.

“What I can’t understand,” he said slowly to Bent, “is how this child escaped death.”

“Hidden under the blankets, I tell you,” cried Bent in exasperation. “When I began to shoot at the devils they felt they had enough without this scalp, and rode off. They could have killed me easy if they’d turned round. They didn’t want to follow me. I couldn’t follow them.”

“Well, we can!” announced Weston with decision to the throng about them. “What d’you say, men?”

Slade suddenly became alert, active belligerent.

“We surely must,” he cried. “Get your horses, boys!” And no sooner had he given the word than all ran for their horses. “You lead us to the spot.” He turned to Charlie Bent. “How far is it? Take lanterns, men,” he shouted. “But don’t light ’em.”

The town, planted like a warren in the midst of the Plains, was a scene of dark commotion for a space, stirring and heaving in the opaque night, under the overhanging shadow of menace.

Slade in his office was questioning Charlie Bent.

Men with their horses were appearing out of the dim shadows all about the stage office and within, by lamplight, could be seen Slade and the half-breed in earnest discussion. On a sudden, as Weston galloped up to the window and dismounted, he could see Slade as he stood facing Bent over his table, bursting into laughter. Something cold and malignant seemed to pierce Weston’s heart at that minute. Could Slade and the half-breed be in league, and this attack planned—but then, why did the half-breed bring in the child? No—Slade’s reputation did not include treachery against his own race in favor of the reds. Perhaps it was only his, Weston’s, dislike of Slade that aroused such thought?

Before Slade and Bent emerged from the station house, the cry of “yep! yep! yep!” suddenly broke the hush that hung over Julesburg, and Bob Emery came driving in the westbound coach.

Almost all the population immediately clustered about the stage. Slade appeared magisterially and shook hands with the driver almost absently.

“Why you late, Bob?” he queried.

“Had wheel trouble,” gruffly answered the driver. “Tire came off. Blacksmith!” he called, looking over the crowd. “Where’s Ascension? I’ve got to have a new wheel, if this wagon’s to go on.”

A hubbub of excitement broke out. A shower of questions, answers, announcements, followed.

Old Ascension, with a lantern, was heavily examining the loosened iron tire of the off rear wheel. Stable-hands ran for blocks so that the wheel could be removed. Passengers bundled out of the coach and looked with blinking eyes upon the motley assortment of men and horses. And Bob Emery, in his casual oracular manner, brought forth the news that the Pony Express had by then already started from St. Joe, and that horsemen were to be sent from every station west of Julesburg—to each succeeding station—with orders that riders and horses were to hold themselves in readiness to relay the lightning express.

The attack upon the caravan of a few hours back was almost forgotten. The great venture was already in operation. A few of the men rode out with Bent ahead of the westward coach. But as Bent predicted, the traces of the Indians were lost in the sandhills of the Lodge Pole. Weston, as an express rider, was forbidden by Slade to accompany Bent's party.

Red, in the meanwhile, in the tent which he and Weston occupied, was singing and crooning over the little girl rescued by Bent, endeavoring with a strange, warm, paternal emotion, to expel the fear from her terrified little heart.

Her name, she said, was "Baby," and that was all the name Red required of her. With his great rough hands and with strange emotions burning in his heart he was endeavoring to soothe the child that had already seen and suffered too much for its years, to replace the mother the little girl still softly wailed for, and the caresses that he violently felt the world owed her.

Molly came over to the tent and outside the flap called to Red:

"Please, Mr. Redruth, let me take the baby. I can take care of her—won't you?"

For a moment a chill heavy weight, like cold iron, settled upon Red's heart. Women!—They had power over babies! By tacit agreement, babies were in their domain. This girl—Molly! If she insisted, he would have to give the baby up to her! But—no, no! He could not—not this baby, with her golden curls and little pink fingers that seemed to hold and twine about his very heartstrings.

He covered the child snugly upon his couch of blankets and came forth to Molly.

“I been giving her milk,” he began sheepishly, irrelevantly. “Don’t you bother about her, Miss Molly. You got plenty to do takin’ care of your father. I’ll look after her.”

“Nonsense, Mr. Redruth,” laughed Molly tearfully, touched by Red’s voice and devotion, “what will you be doing with a baby here in the tent? This is a woman’s work. Let me take her, Mr. Red. You can see her all you want to—and maybe spoil her more than is good for her—poor little motherless thing!”

Molly’s sympathy, however, was too much for the suddenly awakened paternal instincts of Red.

“I—I can’t—I can’t, Miss Molly,” he stammered in passionate quivering tones. “I can’t give her up to you tonight, anyway. I found her, you see—in the wagon—the poor lone lil thing. I’ll take care of her good—you bet! I’ll lend her to you sometimes, Miss Molly—lend her to you any day, I will—when I’m busy and you ain’t! But, now—just give her away—I can’t!”

Molly stood for a moment overawed by the mystery before her. She was touched and moved by this strange spectacle of emotion in male man. She had seen religious and paternal emotion in her own father, but her father was a man apart, different from all other men. This volcano of passion, however, uncovered in the uncouth Red—it cast a strange spell upon her that seemed to age her suddenly, to change her from girlhood to eternal womanhood. She understood men better now.

“All right,” she murmured falteringly. “You take care of her tonight, Mr. Red. We’ll both take care of her.”

“Thank you, thank you kindly, Miss Molly,” Red exploded, gripping her hand and almost crushing it. A cold sweat poured out over his body. He was wildly, violently happy!

Jack, who had been hastily dressing behind the flap since he heard Molly’s voice, now came forth and gave her good evening. He had heard the colloquy between them and he too was moved.

“Don’t you be afraid, Miss Molly,” he said softly. “Red here will take good care of her. A regular wet-nurse is Red, but if he don’t take good care of her, why, I will—or I’ll take her away from him and give her all to you. We’ll keep her happy, that baby. But she’ll sure keep us happy, too.”

Molly gazed at him in the starlight, and her heart seemed to melt like water. Men! she thought. They were so harsh, and so rough and so cruel, some of them. Yet how kind they could be!



“All right!” she finally said. “Good night, then,” and she turned to go.

Weston, however, insisted upon accompanying her to the blacksmith’s shop.

Red, now in a glow of radiant happiness, was left alone with the strangest passion that had ever fallen to his hands—a little foster daughter.

Once removed from the softening influence of the child, however, Molly would hardly speak to Weston at all. With her head erect she walked swiftly a little in advance of him.

“What’s the matter, Molly?” he queried tensely. She refused to answer at first, but his insistent pressing finally elicited a reply that was like a sob.

“I thought you hated gambling,” she broke forth. “But I see you are like all the rest of them!”

“But I only did it to save Red from being trimmed,” he protested, chagrined.

“Anyone who can beat those gamblers at their own game is no greenhorn!” almost sobbed out this wise young woman. Weston miserably walked beside her for a space in tense silence.

“No, Molly,” he finally said in tones of sad contrition.

“You are right. I’m no greenhorn. I’ll tell you all there is to tell about this some day before very long.”

Though relieved by his frankness, she was nevertheless too dejected and hurt for further speech.

“Good night,” she murmured bitterly, entered the cabin and shut the door.

# BOOK II

## CHAPTER XV

### THE PONY EXPRESS STARTS OVERLAND

THE town of St. Joe was excited and stirred to its depths.

The Pony Express!

April third was the magic date.

A few—very few—of the oldest inhabitants of St. Joseph, Missouri, still bear in their memories the vivid exciting picture of the first start of the Pony Express.

They have forgotten the first telephone, the first electric light, and the beginnings of the aboriginal trolley car are dim in their minds. The earliest automobile, and the first news of actual airplanes, form a confusion of gossip, rumor and reality.

But the first Pony Express ride—how lively and thrilling is the memory of it! Their old nerves still quiver with a stir of febrile excitement, with a reminiscent glow that quickens slow pulses more sharply than any event of today could possibly do.



*A Paramount Picture.*

*The Pony Express.*

“THIS STRANGER, ‘FRISCO JACK,’ MAY BECOME  
VERY POPULAR—IF HE LIVES.”

St. Joe in the spring of 1860—what an up and coming town it was then—the gateway to the romantic West—to what geographies called the Great American Desert! For a year past through trains had been running from Hannibal to St. Joe, thus making of that city of eleven thousand a metropolis. For twelve years before that nearly all the westward emigrants from all parts of the country had passed through St. Joe.

They had brought growth to that little settlement on the Missouri. It had become a city with a railway station, hotels, business houses, a City Hall, a market hall and a police department of seven paid men—no less!—a marshal and six constables. Patee House in Penn Street had cost nearly two hundred thousand dollars to build and equip. The *Free Democrat* was very naturally “pointing with pride” at the growth and magnitude of St. Joe. A few log cabins still lingered about the outskirts of the city, but such business houses as those of Milton Tootles, such a civic region as Pateetown, about the railway station—Eighth Street, Olive Street, Tenth Street, Lafayette—these were the purlieus of a thriving prosperous city.

Wonders gravitated naturally to so enterprising a town, in the flush of civilization. Did not the great railway bridge fall under the weight of the train, with terrific loss and damage, only six months earlier? Yes, events cluster thick in the path of progress.

April third was the magic date.

Everybody had to see the start of the lightning pony service. Cripples got up from their beds. Men, women, children, all left their work, their occupations, their houses. The town was crowded. From outlying hamlets, villages, settlements, farms, they drove and walked in their Sunday best to see the great event. It was a civic holiday. Not even for the first through train had the town been more decorated. Bunting, flags, streamers were everywhere. It was like a fair. Some of the visiting settlers actually took the opportunity to arrange deals, to transact horse-trades—to enjoy life, in short.

The crowd clustered first about the Patee House, where these centaurs, the riders of the Pony Express were housed, and then, hearing that the actual start would be from the post office, they drifted quickly to that section of Pateetown.

“Who is going to start this ride today?” was the most frequent question. Nobody quite knew. Some said a St. Joe boy named Johnny Fry was to be the first rider.

“Why, bless you,” protested one citizen. “He’s the son of a neighbor—and he’s no older than our boy John. That can’t be, surely.”

Someone announced it was to be Billy Richardson, another St. Joe boy. Well, so long as a St. Joe boy would have the honor.—Still, rumors were current that Harry Russell, of Russell, Majors and Waddell, had imported some marvelous rider from the romantic West to carry the first mail from St. Joe.

“Well, dog-gone it,” commented one citizen, “they’ve got the right to do what they like. But ’twould be a shame if it wasn’t a St. Joe boy made the start. We got boys here can ride with the best of them.”

A crash of martial music resounded through the thronged streets.

“The band, the band!” they cried, and all other questions were forgotten in the thrilling volume of the noise.

A magnificent drum major in a gorgeous uniform and shako was leading a small wind orchestra with sparkling instruments, and the great drum bore the legend:

“Rosenblatt’s Famous Brass Band.”

Famous indeed! It was tremendous; the note of the big bassoon, sent forth by a purple German blower, surrounded one with sound like a mighty organ. People shouted and cheered. Hurray! Hurray! This country of ours—what a country! How it grew visibly under your eyes—grew as it were to the strains of music!

Behind the musicians were marching citizens—in their best Sunday attire. The Mayor led and with him was Russell, of the enterprising firm. Then came the aldermen, the marshal and other officials. Behind the marshal came a youth upon horseback, who took every eye.

Billy Richardson! So it was Billy Richardson after all! But how he was dressed! A new buckskin suit with shiny buttons. Buckskin pantaloons descending into boots that shone with oiling. About his slim middle was a red silken sash, and over his shoulder, slung by a new cowhide strap, was a sawed-off gun, and his saddle shone with silver.

The horse, too, was caparisoned to an unusual degree.

“Tricked out like a circus horse!” exclaimed people in the crowds lining the streets. But they were moved—moved almost to tears. For after all it was not a tawdry show, like a cheap circus.

There was a significance behind it all, something big and epic, magnificent!

Across the entire country this rider and others like him would ride—across the prairies they knew, upon the other side of the river—but how much further beyond!

Beyond the prairies by the pathless Plains—full of dangers and savage Indians, and evil, lurking road agents. Then there were the wild mountains covered with eternal snow. Beyond these was the hot empty desert, the thought of which made you dry and thirsty. Bleaching horses and white sun-baked skeletons swam into your vision at the mere mental image of the Plains and the desert. Beyond the desert were again the snow-peaked Sierras. The very fancy of these things made the brain reel!

And this boy, and others like him, upon similar thin-legged, wiry ponies, would be crossing that vast extent of savage no-man's land in both directions, every day!

The band blared on. The procession moved toward the express office in Pateetown and halted before the one-story brick building on Third Street, between Felix and Edmond Streets. The crowd surged after it and massed about the buildings.

In that dense crowd before the express office solid citizens and mature, no longer astonished at anything, wagged their heads in delighted amazement.

"I reckon," observed Mr. Milton Tootles to Major James Vaughn, the courtly, florid host of the Occidental Hotel, "I reckon this means a lot more than it looks."

"Yes, suh, I reckon it does," murmured the genial Virginian hotel-keeper. "Though why those boys are not staying at the Occidental, is more than I understand—yes, suh!"

"I meant," smiled Mr. Tootles, "it probably means a railroad across the continent, and a telegraph from ocean to ocean—the settlement of all that country—a great empire in place of the wilderness, Major. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, suh," emphatically nodded Major Vaughn, "I surely agree with you, Mr. Tootles. It means great things for this country of ours. But why they chose the Patee House, when there's room for all those boys in the Occidental—that passes my comprehension, Mr. Tootles—yes, suh."

“Who are those boys, Major? Are there many of them?”

“Well, suh, there’s Johnny Fry, there’s Billy Richardson, Jack Burnett, Jack Keetley and the Cliff boys, Charlie and Gus,—six of ’em here, suh—and all quartered at the Patee House.”

Mr. Tootles decided that this was a sore point with the Major, and adroitly changed the subject.

“They say Charlie Cliff is only seventeen,” he remarked.

No further rejoinder came from Major Vaughn, for the whistle of the train was heard. The train was bringing the last mail for the Pony Express. But even trains were still young at St. Joe. It took time to get the mail from the train, to bring it to the postoffice and to prepare it for the first pony transmission.

The letters were written on thinnest tissue paper—for the rate of postage was high—five dollars for half an ounce. The packages were wrapped in thin but durable oiled silk wrappings.

The train had brought a new load of people to witness the great event. These, crowding into the space before the post office, made the throng even more dense. A shout went up as the newcomers beheld horse and rider. The Famous Brass Band was for a few moments silenced.

Then for perhaps a minute or so a tense interval of stillness. The *mochila*, or leather saddle bag, with its four locked compartments, two to fit in front and two behind the rider’s thighs, was solemnly brought forth by the postmaster. In a trice the young rider had snatched it, swung it over the saddle, and himself after it. A great cheer went up from the dense crowd.

This slender youth, erect of figure, decorated like a show rider, upon a horse bedizened with furnishings that flashed and shone, was making no cheap exhibition of himself. Beneath his trappings seemed to throb an iron will that communicated itself to his mount. Horse and horseman were one—a symbol of indomitable energy and power. In them appeared to be symbolized the power of our new, vast land, America. Hats flew from all masculine heads.

“Hurray! Huzza! Hurray!”

A cannon boomed out somewhere in the distance.

“Make way! Make way!” The crowd magically parted and the rider, like a sudden streak, dashed down to the wharf.

There another crowd, more sparse, awaited him. Again they shouted and waved their hats cheering!

“Hurray! Hurray!”

The *Polar Star*, a famous river boat, with a record of two days twenty hours between St. Louis and St. Joseph, was lying at the wharf with a full head of steam, waiting to see the start. Not far away, was the ferry-boat, ready to carry horse and rider across to the Kansas side. A light breeze was blowing with just sufficient force to spread out the *Polar Star's* white pennant, that bore in lilac letters the legend,

“Beat Our Time and Take Our Horns.”

The horse thundered across the gangplank of the ferry as though he had been rehearsed for a year past, and his skillful young rider reined him in sharply upon the ferry-boat's deck!

“Hurrah!” A new outburst of cheering. But ere it died down, the gangplank was in and already the ferry was moving to the Kansas side. Long and loud the cheers continued.

People were moved by a strange unknown emotion. This was like war—a peculiar kind of peaceful war. It meant conquest, growth, expansion—a new link in the chain that bound West and East into one solid continent.

No sooner had the young rider boarded the boat, however, than he proceeded swiftly to divest himself of all of his finery. Willing deckhands and colored stewards helped him. From a locked closet upon deck he took out a more sober and workaday costume. Blue cloth trousers, a small-brimmed felt hat, and a less sumptuous saddle and bridle for his horse. Over his buckskin shirt he put on a fleece-lined sheepskin jacket. The gala attire was locked in the closet and the key turned over to the captain. By the time the boat had reached the Kansas side, Billy and his mount were ready to dash over the gangplank and to begin their long, lonely ride to the end of that run at Seneca.



# CHAPTER XVI

## THE FIRST RUN

JULESBURG, on Thursday the fifth of April, 1860, was in a state of excitement so intense that everything and everybody was more or less abnormal.

The Pony Express had started from St. Joseph on Tuesday, therefore it had to reach Julesburg in, roughly, about fifty hours.

Julesburg was teeming with a swarm of visitors arrived by ox-team, on horseback and by the stages from all the outlying country, from so far away as Denver. That enterprising newspaper, the *Rocky Mountain News*, then about one year old, sent its famous pioneer reporter, Professor O. J. Goldrick, to see the passage across the landscape of the lightning express. But few of the visitors were as dignified as Professor Goldrick, with his broadcloth frock coat, his high hat and auburn side-whiskers. Some of the miners, gamblers, and adventurers about Denver forsook their occupations and came on to Julesburg. "Spanish monte," a gambling game peculiar to Denver, was being played in the saloon at Julesburg with all the zest of novelty, and many a sightseer was reeling and hilarious under the spell of the grilling whiskey known as "Taos lightning." Teams and horses were tethered along the roadway, or grazing on the prairie beyond the corrals, as their bearded owners swaggered through the town, or bought dry goods at Thompson and Chrisman's and wet goods at the saloon, feeling they were honoring Julesburg by their presence.

Slade, who was called a vigilance committee in himself, based on his reputation for killing Jules, the founder of Julesburg, and so many other victims, walked alert through the town, his pistols prominently displayed at his sides, awaiting the coming of the express.

People were speculating where the horse and rider from the Missouri was likely to be at a given time.

"If old Mose Sydenham didn't talk him to death at Kearney," suggested someone, "he ought to be along most any time." Moses Sydenham was postmaster at Fort Kearney and famous throughout the Plains.

“Kearney!—they’ve forgotten it by this time. Why, that mail must be at O’Fallon’s Bluffs by now.”

For the tenth time Slade again scanned the company’s notice as it appeared in the *Missouri Republican*, previously brought by the stage coach.

“The first courier of the Pony Express will leave the Missouri River on Tuesday, April 3, at five o’clock.”

With unerring instinct regarding the habits of men and horses, he figured that it had doubtless been a little late in leaving, and that, April being April, the trails were somewhat soft and heavy.

Nevertheless, his calculation was that the rider would reach Julesburg about dusk on Thursday. Yet, in the event of miracles, horses and riders have been held in readiness all along the line, and the greater part of the afternoon Jack Weston had been holding his pony saddled and bridled against the coming of the mail.

What with the approach of the Express and his continued possession of the little girl “Baby,” saved from the caravan, Red was excited to such a pitch of enthusiasm that he kept singing all the innumerable verses of “Joe Bowers” and, at times, he danced for the amusement of the child like a wild Comanche filled with liquor. At moments he would even bellow forth a few bars of that gloomy ditty:

“Oh, bury me not in the lone pra-a-airie,  
Where the wild coyote will howl o’er me!”

A useless prayer, for never did Red appear so full of energy and life. The baby girl seemed to have brought to a focus all his vagrant interests and all his energies. Thompson and Chrisman’s store did not carry much in the way of adornment for baby girls. But whatever they had, of dresses, ribbons, stockings and shoes, Red had bought. In clothing her he evinced all the care, patience and zeal of a vain mother. Again and again his great clumsy fingers would tie a ribbon in her golden curls only to undo it and change for a better effect. Then, thinking he had dallied too long, he would throw the child up to his shoulder and rush out of the tent-house to see whether the rider was coming.

At last a great shout went up. Billy Cody, who had climbed up to the roof of the stage office, saw a horseman tearing madly toward Julesburg in the dip to the eastward, and he uttered an unearthly yell, with the magical words,

“He’s coming! He’s coming!”

The crowd lined the roadway with a burly excitement. Men piled out from the store, the saloon and other buildings in the fever of anticipation. Professor Goldrick, with his notebook in one hand and a heavy Swiss watch in the other, took careful note of the exact time at which the rider was arriving at Julesburg. Red lifted the little girl high above his own head and the heads of the crowd, so that she might miss nothing of the excitement. Molly and Ascension, standing close to Red, smiled and waved to the child above their heads.

A loud cheer went up suddenly as the eastern rider, foam-flecked, mud-bespattered, dashed in among the opening crowd and spectacularly threw his pony to its haunches, as he stopped before the stage office.

Simultaneously Weston drew up his pony beside him. Swiftly the *mochila* or pouch, passed from Little Yank’s hand to Jack’s. Slade, with his official key in readiness, majestically opened one compartment of the pouch and drew out the mail for Julesburg and Denver. He had scarcely relocked the pouch, when already Weston was upon it, and like an arrow he shot westward through the crowd.

A tense fierce silence momentarily clutched that crowd by the throat. It was like a spell. Then—“Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!” They cheered again wildly, as particles of dry mud flew in their faces from the heels of the evanescent pony.

“So that’s how it’s done!” cried someone. “Gone before you had time to sneeze!” said another. It was all natural enough, yet somehow it seemed to them like a conjuror’s trick, so smooth and swift and efficient.

Rough men and bearded bull-whackers stared, open-mouthed, after the galloping horseman, feeling that liquid was necessary to down the lumps in their throats. They were suddenly filled with a strange emotional pride in their country, in their lives as part of it, in the rude bleak wilderness that was their orbit. That wilderness had produced those men and these horses, capable of annihilating distance at all hazards.

For the last time Molly and Red and the little girl upon his shoulders waved their hands in the direction of Weston, and the crowd spontaneously burst forth into another cheer.

“Time to have a drink!” someone shouted, and a roar of laughter followed, as though the remark were a brilliant witticism.

Molly was moved by a strange nameless emotion, so that her heart was full of tears which she was endeavoring to suppress. She looked up at the little orphaned child clinging to Red's neck.

"Give her to me!" she murmured hoarsely and Red suddenly saw her eyes swimming in tears. He was ready to argue with Molly, but the sight of tears, as always, somewhat unmanned him.

"All right, Miss Molly," he stammered, frightened, and he lowered the child to his breast. "Here, I'll lend her to you," he said, holding her out, as though making the most difficult sacrifice in his power. "I'll give you the loan of her for a time."

Molly seized the child fiercely in her arms and covered her little face with kisses.

"Strange queer things they are," thought Red, feeling that he was pronouncing the final philosophy about women. Aloud he said nothing, and with an awkward nod he merged into the crowd surging in the roadway.

Old Ascension from his towering height looked down at his daughter with the baby in her arms, smiled tenderly, and murmured an inaudible prayer as he walked with them toward the blacksmith shop.

Weston, by this time, had plunged amid the cottonwoods into the South Fork of the Platte, splashed through it swiftly and followed the Lodge Pole towards Thirty Mile Ridge.

The long-standing feud between Indian and white received a new access of fuel by this last diabolic scheme of the whites. More and more emigrants from the East, ever greater numbers of ox-teams, were invading the West, and now this new park of flying horsemen was prepared to make the red man's domain a mere thoroughfare for the whites. Trapping was virtually at an end, and buffalo, the chief sustenance of the Plains tribes, were being more and more frightened away to inaccessible places. The very coyotes were drawing farther away from these fevered highways the white man was cutting through the wilderness. The Indians felt their anger rise against the new invaders. Sioux, and Bannocks and Cheyennes were not yet on the warpath against them, but they were angry and hostile. West of the Lodge Pole Jack Weston suddenly felt some arrows whirring about him.

"Damn them!" He laughed to himself mirthlessly. "I reckon that music we'll have to face all the time." His pony swerved sharply and he let it run out of the path to the left, to put a greater distance between himself and the

arrows. But in a few moments he turned right again, once more rejoined the trail and galloped on. He regarded it as an incident hardly worth noticing.

The night was fortunately clear and starlit, with a young moon in the heavens; the crisp, frosty air seemed to lend wings to the ponies as they raced headlong in pursuit of the sun. At station after station the expectant hostlers led the fresh ponies out a mile or more toward the oncoming rider, and no sooner did they hear his blood-stirring yell, “Yep! Yep! Yep!” than they would gallop forward, leading the new pony to meet the tired one. More than once Weston threw the *mochila* with its mail over the fresh pony’s saddle, threw himself from his mount after it, and left his weary, discarded pony to run loose until the hostler caught it and took it to the station corral.

Many of those station men were experienced riders. They had seen that trick done before. But now, when they beheld a rider making a flying leap from one galloping horse to another, they thrilled from head to foot. This was different. It was in the line of duty. These centaur-like playboys of the West were now putting their prowess in the service of country and civilization. “Flying—that’s what those boys do,” repeated the station men with awe.

“Any news?” would shout these hostlers, coming like phantoms out of the night, to this other phantom of the Plains. Since he was coming from the magic, populous, governing East, the rider was expected to deliver some weighty message, to give some news of the great world where things were happening and newspapers were a daily event.

“No news!” would shout the rider, “except the South’s getting its back up—talking secession!” And his voice would die away on the breeze, like some oracle from vague places on high.

The hostler, if he knew anything, probably knew that already. But coming from the lips of the Eastern rider, the words possessed a magical meaning, grave, weighty, almost mystically portentous.

To Weston himself, as he galloped through the night repeating those words, they presently assumed an ever increasing weight and significance.

Secession! That was the direction of events, and that was at the bottom of Glen’s schemes and machinations. Secession for the South if possible and secession for California to a certainty, if Glen could have his way. What did Glen want? Why was he so bent upon cutting California off from the Union? To make himself emperor of the West? Why did some men crave power and

titles and dignities so greatly? A union, one and indivisible, one nation for this mighty land—to him, Jack Weston, that seemed the peak of aspiration for a loyal American. But Glen—such a thing meant seemingly nothing to him. If only he could gain power, make himself ruler of a nation formed by his own hand and brain,—that meant more to Glen than any other consideration. Weston could not understand this deep self-centered egoism that ruled and swayed this politician. To that one his own place and elevation in the world meant more than the destinies of millions of people.

Well, he, Weston, meant to do all that in him lay to prevent such egotism from triumphing under the sun. Strange, he thought, that Fate had laid upon him the charge and business of circumventing Glen. But that Fate had actually done so, he had at that time no doubt. Then it suddenly struck him that he too was as self-centered as Glen, to believe himself thus elected by Fate. He chuckled at the obsessions and weaknesses of men. But at least, his graver thought told him, he was craving nothing for himself—but all for that nation, to be a part of which thrilled him with pride. Yes, he was more than ready to lay down his life for America and the Union!

The night seemed to pass quickly as, with unappealing speed, he galloped on, and the literally rosy-fingered dawn of the early spring was now radiant behind him, and made all earth fresh and pure before him as he clattered into Mud Springs, the end of his run, some eighty miles from Julesburg.

Without straining his horses, he had done the distance in seven and one-half hours.

“Hurray!” cried out the hostlers and the station-keeper who had been watchful all night. “Tired?” they demanded of Weston.

“I could do it all over again,” he answered placidly, as he slid from his horse, “that is, if you’d give me a cup of coffee.”

“So I will!” laughed the station-keeper, unlocking and locking the mail-pouch, already placed upon the fresh horse, mounted by Hagan the relieving rider. There were no letters for Mud Springs. The station-keeper lifted his hand in farewell, and with the well-known “coyote” yell Hagan sped away toward Chimney Rock, Scott’s Bluffs and Fort Laramie. The change of horses and men had occupied less than sixty seconds.

In six days from St. Joseph those men and horses had traversed the prairies, the Plains, innumerable streams, forests, mountains, crossed the Rocky Mountains through the South Pass, to Fort Bridger, and thundered

into Salt Lake City, to the station at Salt Lake House, where Brigham Young was waiting to receive them.

Two days earlier, April 7th, the rider from the West had already passed through Salt Lake. That had seemed to have something of fantasy in it—the uniqueness of an isolated episode. The appearance of the eastern rider seemed to confirm the enterprise as an institution.

Howard Egan, the Salt Lake agent, unlocked the pouch and handed a slim bundle of thin letters to Brigham Young, as though paying homage to a king.

“We are well content—well content,” said the Mormon leader regally, and he turned to his elders, who beamed their approval and gladness at every word he uttered.

“A telegraph is a great thing,” said Young sententiously, “but until that comes we are well content with this.”

The surrounding crowd raised a respectful cheer for the rider. Brigham Young looked sternly benignant approval upon this manifestation of enthusiasm. Then, surrounded by his elders, he stalked away, like a tree walking.

Less than four days later, after the echoes of the brass band and the celebration that had sped Harry Roff and his milk-white steed on their eastward journey, a stalwart, weather-bronzed rider drew up before the Union Hotel at Sacramento with the mail that had left St. Joe exactly two hundred and thirty-two hours earlier!

Sacramento became wild with delight again. Again the bands blared and the crowds swarmed—the citizens streaming with flags and bunting. People in Second Street, in Fourth Street, in J Street, cheered as though a great victory had been won. Harry Roff ten days earlier had started gaily indeed upon his white mustang, with every wish for good luck,—but he had started into the Unknown. This rider had arrived from that very Unknown. The enterprise was a complete success!

Men crowded round to wring his hand. Modish women dressed in their best, actually appareled in the new crinolines, billowed toward him to embrace him, frightening the mustang not a little. Men passed their hats about for gifts for the rider. The town was in an uproar. The rider, however, lingered but little at this terminal. Before they knew it he was galloping again to the Embarcadero, where a boat was waiting to carry the mail to San Francisco.

The continent had been spanned in less than ten days. Incredible speed!  
Californians now felt themselves dizzily close to the distant East!



# CHAPTER XVII

## INTRIGUE

WHEN the Pony Express had been in existence for about six weeks, in May 1860, Jack Weston, at Julesburg, received a letter from a gentleman who chose to call himself Sonora Junior, in San Francisco.

Junior had been Weston's closest friend in his San Francisco days, and in the spring of 1860, this same Junior conducted one of the most popular gambling rooms in the city of the Golden Gate.

Junior was a man of senatorial, almost episcopal, gravity, and, except for his dress, he might have been taken at any time for a bishop. The usual garb of the gambler was upon him enhanced to an exaggerated point by frequent changes and novelties, in the way of stocks, ruffles and resplendent silk waistcoats. He was somewhat stout, smooth-shaven and preternaturally pale, and jewels flashed from various points of his person, so that they often dazzled the players under the brilliant lights in his gaming room. He was almost as good a shot as Weston himself, and he prided himself upon never having had any trouble whatsoever at the Nugget, as his establishment was called. The reason for that, he explained, was that his place was frequented by gentlemen only. And, indeed, some of the most prominent men of San Francisco were among his patrons in Fremont Street—as well as some of the shadiest, toughest characters on the West coast. Junior's grave, dignified personality and demeanor, however, seemed to be a natural solvent for all of these elements. And it was quite true that under his calm benevolent gaze no serious disturbance ever developed at the Nugget.

Yet this man, Sonora Junior, was a patriot, an austere devotee of the Union, and as single-hearted an opponent of Glen and secession and a Pacific Republic as Weston himself. It was owing to his encouragement that Weston had gone from San Francisco to Sacramento to speak against secession. And now, that Weston had chosen Julesburg as a point of vantage from which to watch Glen, he had written briefly and meaningly to Sonora Junior of his choice, and enquired for any news regarding the direction of events on the coast. In the middle of May, Weston received the following letter from Junior:

DEAR OLD JACK,

As you know I always watch the weather and the way the wind blows hereabout. I am a crank on that subject. Well, I can tell you it blows right smart—you judge the direction. We are well protected and taken care of here by the Golden Gate. Our Secretary of War, over there in Washington, loves us a heap and is always thinking about us. He, you see, is a friend of our friend, Mr. Glen.

So what does he do but transfer from the arsenal at Springfield, Massachusetts, my native State and almost yours, some one hundred and thirty-five thousand firearms to these parts. Yes—he did. You see, Mr. Glen’s State must be right well protected in case of trouble. And seventy-five thousand of those same weapons are right here at the Presidio and on Alcatraz Island. In a pinch Mr. Glen might need them.

How do I know, you ask? How do I know anything? Lots of army officers and soldiers come to my place—and sea-captains, and gentlemen, and riff-raff. You may stake your shirt I know what I’m talking about. Now wasn’t that thoughtful of Mr. Glen and his friend, the Secretary?

Here’s a howdy to you, and keep your feet dry.

JUNIOR.

That was not the only word Weston received from his old friend, Sonora Junior. Soon after this a woman passing in the stagecoach, on the way from San Francisco eastward, paused for breakfast at Julesburg. Slade, gallant and courteous as ever to the sex, made himself exceedingly agreeable to her. She was perhaps thirty, not ill-looking and modishly dressed for the time, in San Francisco’s best. Once she had made her impression upon Slade, however, an art in which, seemingly, she was no novice, she enquired politely after Mr. Jack, said to be attached to this station. Slade, with courteous geniality put her off, and with suave boldness asked whether he would not do as well as Mr. Jack. As the lady insisted, he laughingly pointed out to her Jack and Red’s joint abode, the tent-house, where, as luck would have it, the little girl was playing at the door.

“Ah, his family with him,” she smiled charmingly, but without hesitation or embarrassment she walked over to the tent-house and entered.

Jack, sitting upon a camp-bed and mending a bridle, jumped up in amazement.

“What, Tessie—you here!” he cried, “Who would ever have thought of seeing you in this place?”

“Nobody, Jack, I reckon,” she said. “But I’ll do anything for Junior, you know. And Junior wants to send a message to Washington, without writing any letters. So who’s to take it for him but me?”

“Sit down,” he invited her cordially, but she refused.

“No, that might reflect on your character,” she laughed. “But I have a message for you, too—from Junior. It’s this,” she went on hurriedly, laying a hand on his arm: “When the time comes, Glen’s men mean to use all those rifles, guns and muskets you know about, to take the Presidio, the forts in Alcatraz, the Custom House, The Mint, the Post Office. After that they’ll take Sonora, in Mexico, and there you are—Republic, all complete.”

Weston, in consternation, glanced about him hurriedly. No one was near. In the distance, however, he could see Molly passing and quickly averting her gaze. She had evidently seen the picture of the woman in intimate colloquy with him, had been stung by it, and was now pretending not to see him. He sighed heavily.

The woman, thinking his sigh due wholly to patriotic concern, smiled kindly.

“Never mind, Jack. Junior says if you keep your eyes and ears open, why he’ll do the same. Now, good-bye. Don’t come with me,” she added as he made to accompany her.

And she moved swiftly away.

Slade, some distance off, was gazing at the scene intently, with a peculiar thin grim smile upon his lips.

Weston for a moment stood irresolute, lost in a brown study. The news he had received from San Francisco tallied so clearly with his own knowledge and beliefs as to Glen’s plans, that the secession of California, the success of Glen’s schemes, appeared suddenly near and looming and imminent. But at any cost that conspiracy for disunion must not come to pass. He had not yet communicated any of his own knowledge to Sonora Junior. He had feared to put it in writing. But now he felt he must somehow convey Glen’s plan, so far as he knew it, to the suave San Francisco gambler and patriot. There was one way of avoiding writing—Junior’s way. Junior, who also feared writing, was sending his sweetheart, Tessie Rockland, as a secret messenger. He, Weston, must use the same means.

Quickly he followed the young woman almost at a run. She was already near the stage office when he caught up with her.

“Tessie,” he murmured hurriedly, “Tessie!” She looked about startled. She did not desire to be conspicuous at that moment, but she paused.

“You’ll be coming back this way, won’t you?” he asked.

“I think so, Jack,” was the answer, “unless Glen’s friends should make it impossible.”

“Do they know—?” he queried.

“No—but if you—and others—make me too public they might know.”

Weston smiled admiringly at the girl.

“All right, all right, Tessie,” he said quickly. “But I’ll have a message for Junior when you’re on your way back. You see, Tessie, for the present,” he added meaningly, “I’m a part of Glen’s plans, too. Tell Junior that, anyway. I’m in the plans—until they happen!”

She stared at him speechless for an instant and then suddenly waved her gloved hand in a gesture of farewell.

Slade, approaching them, was now within earshot.

“Sorry to interrupt, madam,” and he bowed in his most courteous manner, “but the coach is about to start.”

At Weston he looked out of the corner of his eye with a ribald, significant smile.

Weston, however, was now preoccupied chiefly with the impression this meeting had left upon Molly. He turned and walked hastily in the direction of the blacksmith shop.

Molly appeared intently engaged in the little fringe of garden she had created before the small windows of Ascension’s cabin, behind the blacksmith shop. The chief of her floral riches was one tenderly nurtured hydrangea bush. For the rest, she had some hardy specimens of lupine, wild tulip, primroses and a few stalks of larkspur. This spring, too, she was nursing a single hollyhock planted the previous year.

Weston’s heart melted as he watched her busily stooping over her cherished flowers—even though her face appeared set and unresponsive. She was suffering and he knew it. He knew, too, the reason.

The strange, fashionably dressed woman who had come from the coach and sought him out—he was sufficiently experienced and sympathetic enough to understand how such a scene would affect the simple young girl of the Plains, who, after all, knew so little about him. Yet—what could he tell her? Surely not the purport of the message. Nor did he desire to lie about it.

“Good-morning, Molly!” he called out delightedly. “A fine morning, isn’t it?”

Molly straightened up in some confusion with simulated surprise, as though she were seeing him for the first time that day. He smiled tenderly. Even that simple girl of the Plains had guile enough for those little feminine tricks that never seemingly have to be learned, that come by instinct. Boldly he took the bull by the horns.

“I feel right cheery this morning,” he went on with an effort at natural serenity. “A friend of mine I haven’t seen for a long time sent me a message by one of the passengers in the eastward stage.”

Instantly Molly felt that he was playing a part and at once she stiffened against the deception. She wanted to remain silent, or else, to say something that would convey her supreme and cutting indifference. But her inward pain compelled her to speak.

“Can’t she write, your friend, so she’s got to send messengers?”

“Oh, it isn’t a she,” he laughed. “It’s a man, an old pal of mine in ’Frisco. This lady’s a friend of his. She was going East, and he asked her to look me up and give me a ‘howdy’ as she passed.”

Molly brightened perceptibly, as her heart grew strangely lighter. Still, though she felt a little ashamed of her jealous suspicions, enough of the nameless soreness was left within her to urge retaliation.

“He chooses—” she began, and paused. She was going to say something about the type of messengers chosen by Weston’s friend, but she checked herself sharply.

Slade in his leisurely manner, with a faint malicious smile upon his thin lips, was strolling toward them.

“I’ve got to go in now,” Molly suddenly announced, and turned toward the door of the cabin.



*A Paramount Picture.*

*The Pony Express.*

MOLLY TOOK TURNS WITH "RHODE  
ISLAND RED" IN MOTHERING THE SOLE  
SURVIVOR OF THE EMIGRANT TRAIN.

"That was a very pretty lady come to see you," Slade called out cheerily, intending his words for Molly rather than for Jack, to whom they were addressed. "Wonder is, with friends like that out on the coast, you can afford to honor us with your company in this place, eh?" Molly swiftly closed the door behind her. She heard no more of Slade's calculated banter. But she had heard enough to spoil that day and many others for her.

The following week, Molly, in common with others of the inhabitants of Julesburg, was standing by and observing the work in progress upon a new building that was going up in the town. It was surely the strangest phenomenon that had yet greeted the eyes of that unregenerate place of many names.

A church was actually being built at Julesburg!

A crude box-like little building it was, with a steep roof sloping up to an embryo steeple. The labor upon it was entirely voluntary. Old Ascension Jones used every moment of his spare time, and most of his sleeping time, in working upon the building. Weston and Red and others—stablemen, hostlers, and even some of the gamblers—in a sort of derisive good humor lent a hand. A church in Julesburg!

The mere repetition of the phrase brought forth loud and ribald laughter.

“A church in Julesburg!” the bull-whackers would cry as they arrived with overland freight teams. “Why, say—ain’t that goin’ to be the eighth wonder of the world?”

“But why does Ascension want a church here or anywhere?” another would ask. “Hasn’t he been tellin’ us the world was comin’ to an end this year? What difference is one more church going to make?” And so on.

Nevertheless, even those men would sometimes work upon the building for an hour or two, nailing, hoisting boards, lending a hand with a beam, or a log—

“So’s they can say I helped build a church,” they would explain with a wink.

“But who gave the money for a church at Julesburg?” one stage-driver curiously inquired. “Could it have been Jack Slade?”

“I did!” shouted one of the gamblers of the saloon standing by. “Didn’t I, now, Jack?” he shouted up to Weston, who was hammering upon the roof.

Weston nodded and laughed.

It was largely true. The money Weston had won in his only poker game at Julesburg, when he had taken Red’s place, he had contributed in its entirety to enable Ascension to build a church if he desired. And Ascension desired a church, not only for the brief days of earthly life left for the people of Julesburg, but also as a more fitting place in which to meet their doom at the hour when the world was to end.

For that the end of the world was coming in the autumn, Ascension was certain. All the portents and signs confirmed it. Unregenerate and sinful men were contributing to the works of God. Rude, irreligious bull-whackers were lending a hand at the building of God’s house. Surely a miracle!

They might laugh and rail while in the very act of helping, but something in their bosoms, a spirit of foreboding, prompted them to some good deeds the while time yet existed, before the stars fell out of their places and the heavens rolled up like a scroll.

Ladders were propped against the nascent building. Jones and Red and Weston were hammering upon the pious edifice with varying degrees of alacrity. Red was undoubtedly the most cheerful of the workmen. With every passer-by or onlooker he would exchange humorous greeting. When Weston hit his finger with a hammer, Red with a wink to one of the gamblers standing below would call out,

“I’ve seen you work better with lighter instruments.” And to Ascension he would say,

“Remember, Mr. Jones, this is a board, not a three-inch iron axle.” He could joke even with Ascension. Again and again he would invite Molly to come up on the ladder, assuring her that the church would be incomplete unless she had a hand in its building. Now and then, in sheer exuberance of spirit, he would bellow forth a stanza of “Joe Bowers,” or of the haunting, heart-sinking classic,

“Oh, bury me not in the lone pra-a-airie,  
Where the wild coyote will howl o’er me-ee!”

“For God’s sake!” someone would interrupt him, “that wild coyote will be sweet music compared to you!”

Nothing, however, seemed to ruffle Red’s high spirits, excepting only Charlie Bent, the half-breed.

It was a gorgeous morning in May and the little unpainted church going up appeared preternaturally white against the gray little town and the greening of the empty Plains. The air was ozone itself, and not only Red was crooning, but even Jack was humming, and Ascension himself was droning a hymn in an undertone.

The appearance of Charlie Bent was sufficient to bring a cloud to the features of Red. The little girl was playing below upon the ground with shavings, and now and then Red, like a careful nurse, would warn her not to come too near the building.

Charlie Bent, who seemed for some reason intent upon amiability, approached the child with his grin, that even at its most amiable, somehow turned evil, and held out his arms to her. Red, whose eyes never strayed far



from the little girl, even when he was busiest, perceived the half-breed's action and saw the child shrink away from him. Suddenly a small block of wood struck Bent's hand sharply. He stifled an oath and looked about. Red, with anger suffusing his features, was gesticulating to him and shouting:

“Keep away from that child, you!”

“I only wanted to play with her,” the half-breed grinned up ruefully.

“She don't want you for a playmate—can't you see?” cried Red. For no reason that he could then divine, but which he afterwards amply confirmed, Red intuitively felt that the half-breed intended evil to the child, whom he now regretted having saved from the massacred caravan.

Molly approaching at that moment took the little girl by the hand and held her close. With speculative eyes she gazed at Jack Weston at work upon the church, intently desirous of knowing what was in his mind. He had become strangely near and dear to her, with his appealing personality, his warm generosity, his bright spirit of courage and daring—yet he made her afraid.

She was afraid, not because she knew so little about him, but because she wished to know so little. Yet no sooner did her instincts settle down to a calm security than something occurred to shake her—to startle her.

That strange woman, who had come the other day from the coach! She had come actually from that dim aura of his past life of which she knew or could imagine so little! And now—at that moment—he was working with zeal upon the church, her father's pet project. Was he doing that out of religious motives, out of regard for her father, or out of sheer good nature?

Molly was no psychologist. She was a young girl with few opportunities for reading or thinking. But she had, in a manner, brought herself up, and her woman's heart and mind had had many problems to face. At that moment, she realized, she was facing the most serious problem of her life. She knew now that she loved Weston—a man come out of the void, a man of whom she knew almost nothing. He had but to approach her, with his frank boyish smile, to send all her pulses fluttering. Yet—tears stood in her eyes as she reflected dolefully:

“Why isn't my mother living now?”

Jack on a sudden impulse descended from his ladder and approached her.

“It's a long time, Molly,” he began with that smile and appeal in his eyes, “it's a long time since you and I had a ride together.”

She remembered, however, that she was still completely in the dark as to the strange woman, still in the dark as to so many things.

“A right long time,” she agreed somewhat stiffly.

“What do you say we take a ride today? The Plains are just turning green. The air is like wine. The skies seem to be just plain begging us to come out.” Molly smiled faintly.

“I reckon,” she said slowly, “there’s too much to do round the cabin today. I’m not done yet with my spring cleaning.”

“Cleaning!” he laughed. “There’s all summer before you. Clean when I’m away. What d’you say?” She shook her head dubiously.

Before she could reply in words, however, Slade, their constant Nemesis, came forward and loudly called Jack’s name. A wave of irritation passed over Weston’s features.

“What’s up now?” he demanded.

“This,” said Slade, with his narrow-eyed, unwavering smile. And in a tone audible to Molly, but to no one else besides, he murmured to Weston:

“Got a letter here from Senator Glen. And there’s a message for you in it. Better come to the office and I’ll show it to you.”

Weston nodded to Molly, meaning to indicate that he would soon return and, reluctantly, almost angrily, he followed Slade.

“Glen!” The name reverberated with a sudden hollow foreboding in Molly’s heart. Glen, according to vague rumor, was a plotter, a secessionist, a schemer—no friend of the Union. Was Weston, too, involved in his plots? She was suddenly terrified by the thought that she knew less about Weston than even she had supposed.

When Weston reappeared Molly was no longer there. They did not ride that day, nor for many days to come.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### WAR ON THE PONY EXPRESS

FOR some time Molly held steadfastly aloof from Jack Weston.

Heartache was written in her eyes, but proudly she kept it to herself. Only when Weston's turn to ride with the express came would she emerge from the cabin, walk to the store, or along the road, carrying her head high, returning greetings graciously, but encouraging no conversation.

Repeated efforts upon the part of Weston to see her ended in failure. Her heart was burning with doubt and indignation, and young girl-like, she was at a loss to find a way out of her difficulties, or to resolve her perplexities. And because she loved Jack and could not help loving him, she almost hated him. This stranger, who had come into her ken in a burst of romantic heroism, had completely captured her imagination first, then her heart. Now she feared his mysterious background, his past. And every day seemed to add something to the mystery.

At the same time, such was her paradoxical condition, she hated Slade more than ever, because Slade was visibly rejoicing in the coldness between Weston and herself, and because she was cold to Weston, she looked with deeper aversion upon Slade.

"What's the matter, Molly?" Slade barred her way with the query one morning. "Anything worrying you?"

"Nothing at all, Mr. Slade."

"Anything disagree with you?" he pressed, attempting humor.

"Julesburg disagrees with me, Mr. Slade."

"That's too bad, now, Molly," he went on more soberly. "What's wrong with Julesburg? Ain't I cleaned it up for you—so's a decent woman can feel safe here? Now, say, haven't I?"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Slade," she returned impatiently. "It isn't that. I'm just sick of the place. Teamsters, bull-whackers, gamblers, express riders—what life is there here for a girl!" Her tears suddenly welled up in a mingling of anger and self-pity. "I wish," she added fiercely, turning away from him, "I had never seen this place!"

Slade looked grave. He was experienced enough in the ways of women to know that Molly was in love. He felt sorry for the girl, but even more he felt a cold jealous fury against Weston, who had won her heart. Seldom did he speak of Mrs. Slade, but this time he walked a few paces after Molly, calling to her:

“How would you like to go up to Horseshoe and stay a piece with Mrs. Slade?”

“No, thank you,” she retorted, still angry with herself for her exhibition. “I couldn’t leave father again.” And she hurried back to the seclusion of her cabin.

Early in June, the Pony Express, just two months old, on a sudden suspended operations.

The Sioux Indians, who had been looking with growing resentment upon this new invasion of their demesne, had definitely decided to go upon the warpath.

Their chiefs, who had seen a menace in the immigrant trains of covered wagons, in the regular transit of stage-coaches and freight-wagon trains across the continent, finally came to the conclusion that the Pony Express was the most dangerous of all these portents boding ill to their territorial rights.

Within less than half a century, ever since the Lewis and Clarke expedition, the white nation had virtually exterminated the beaver, and had trapped most of the fur-bearing animals the Indian had always regarded as his own property. But now, while there were few animals for the red man to trap, there were as few for the white man.

The trains of covered wagons and the eternally moving stage-coaches had frightened away the buffalo, so that now a red nation had to seek it hundreds of miles away from its normal and ancient grazing grounds and watering places. The fierce anger of the chiefs rose at the thought of how far a village or a tribe of the red men was now compelled to rove, in quest of its legitimate supply of meat and buffalo robes.

But at least the wagons and the stages moved always westward, ever westward, to the great waters beyond the mountains in the sunset. Few settlers had yet attempted to people the great Plains.

The fleet mustangs and their riders, however, were menacing the Plains themselves. With their terrible fleetness and speed, riding daily, always riding, they were bound to bring white settlers. They carried news and

messages, these riders, with the speed of the wind itself. And for some reason the white man stood always in need of exchanging messages. Wherever the messengers travelled there would the settlers come. The whole white nation would yet people those Plains—their ancient heritage, the buffalo lands!

Accordingly they resolved upon action.

War suddenly broke out along the line chiefly west of Julesburg—a war of extermination. Billy Cody, whom Slade had temporarily assigned to ride the Sweetwater run, from Red Buttes to Three Crossings, was fired upon by Sioux armed with revolvers and mounted on the fleetest ponies they could command. Weston on his return run eastward thundered into Julesburg one afternoon with the news of the attack.

“Where did it happen?” was Slade’s query, and a grim look of anger settled upon his features, as though the news were a reflection upon his credit.

“Nine miles west of Horseshoe Creek,” said Weston. “There’s a sand ravine there and as Billy passed by they leaped out of the ravine and fired at him with pistols.”

“Did they get him?”

“No, Billy got away. He lay down flat on his pony, gave him the spurs and rode hell-for-leather until he got to Sweetwater.”

“Good job,” nodded Slade. “Did the Sweetwater station hands go out after the red devils?”

“Not any,” answered Weston. “The Sioux had raided the station that morning, killed the stock-herder, shot two other men and drove off all the stock.”

A white fury seemed to sweep the features of Slade. Foam showed faintly at his lips, as he lost himself for a moment in a jet of profanity that made all the air blue. His hands twitched spasmodically as his fingers seemed of themselves to play convulsively over his revolver butts.

“Hell and fury!” he shouted. “What’d they do at Ploutz’s, and the other stations? Are those white-livered curs made o’ putty?”

“They are waitin’ for orders,” Weston informed him. “That’s not the only trouble—that at Sweetwater. There’s trouble west of Laramie as far as Bridger. And there’s worse trouble west of Salt Lake. The Sioux are only raiding. But west of Salt Lake the Bannocks, Piutes and Shoshones are on

the warpath for sure. The mail from Sacramento's two days late. Some of the 'dobe stations in Utah are nuthin' but forts now. Stock driven off—some of the boys killed—hell broke loose. Nelson, the trapper, says the red nation's out on the warpath—to stop the Pony Express. Message for you from Salt Lake.”

Slade excitedly tore open the envelope.

“Pony Express is temporarily stopped,” he read. “Send all the men you can, well mounted, to recover the stock and give the red vermin the filthiest drubbing they ever had.”

The message was signed by B. F. Ficklin, Superintendent at Salt Lake.

Slade was fuming afresh.

“Send men!” he quoted. “Doesn't want me to go, eh? And I could kill more of the red devils than all the rest of those dunderheads combined!” He walked round in a circle for perhaps a minute, as though unable to decide whether or not to obey Ficklin's order. Finally, his mouth thin with wrath, he shouted.

“You—Jack! Take all the men except the stock-herder and one stableman. Pack enough provisions to last you. Take your rifles—and the best horses. Think you can lead these boys?”

“Why do you ask me to lead them,” quietly demanded Weston, “if you have any doubts on that subject?”

Slade was silent for a moment.

“Doubts?” he repeated with a grim chuckle. “No. I haven't got any doubts. I'd give my shirt to lead 'em myself. But Ficklin wants me here. You've never been exactly friendly to me, Jack. But I'd sooner send you to lead men than any other o' these galoots. Get a move on,” he added brusquely. “Send me Charlie Bent, if you see him.”

A sense of justifiable triumph pervaded Weston. Slade could think of no one else to lead the men. If Slade disliked, he also respected him. Though possibly, came the modest after-thought, Slade would be glad if a bullet or an arrow were to remove him, Weston, from this particular sphere of activity.

Less than two hours later, Jack and his little troop of six riders and stablemen were starting off.

Red, holding the little girl in his arms, stood with tears in his eyes, watching the cavalcade depart. He was grief-stricken to remain behind. But such was his love for the child, that he could not, dared not leave her alone behind him. Not even Molly's promise of tenderest care could sway him. He was the one stableman left behind.

"Pick up all the men you can between here and Sweetwater," were Slade's last words. "Those are my orders."

With a shrill "yep! yep! yep!" and a wave of their hats, the armed men galloped toward the crossing. Even after the willows and cottonwoods along the South Platte hid them, their jubilant yells could still be heard reverberating across the Plains.

Molly had not even emerged to see them depart. But an observer might have seen her somewhat pallid face disappearing from the window as the horsemen left the station.

On the troop rode toward Sweetwater, and all along the route, from Antelope, westward, they picked up two men here, one man there, two or three at another station, pony riders, stablemen, stock-herders, ranchmen, and even some stage-drivers. The cavalcade that galloped into Sweetwater station consisted of more than thirty men, shouting, hallooing, yelling, at the top of their lungs.

Their Spencer rifles waving in the air, their saddle irons clanging amid the thunder of their hoof-beats, they clattered up to the station greeted by a wild answering cheer.

A dozen or so of men were awaiting them. Amid shouts and laughter they dismounted, greeting old friends and demanding "what was in the wind?"

"The orders is," someone announced, "to go after the red devils."

"Who's a-goin' to lead us?" another demanded.

"De we need to be led?" enquired a deep-voiced, quiet-spoken man,—clear-faced, with a long, drooping black mustache, a sash about his middle and extraordinarily long, shining top-boots.

"Let Billy Cody lead us!" shouted Little Yank, and all the men roared with laughter. Billy Cody, standing beside the tall man, seemed to reach just above the flashing top-boots.

"Bill Hickock!" someone cried. "Wild Bill! Wild Bill will lead us! Yep! Yep! Yep!" many yelled in unison. "Wild Bill!"

The stranger in the long boots nodded succinctly. "All right, boys," he said. "If you want me I'll lead you." Again they shouted all the yells, from Comanche to Sioux and Arapahoe in an unearthly chorus.

"You bring the boys from Julesburg?" he turned toward Weston. "Very good. You ride with me. And you, Billy," he turned to the boy. "You are the scout. May want a grasshopper to look-see ahead."

Billy crackled with pride, even though the men laughed loudly at his expense.

Weston gazed at this blond giant, this stranger whom he knew only by reputation. So this was Wild Bill, said to be the most daring fighter, next to Slade, on the line. He was the quietest man in that assortment. His eyes were so gentle, you felt he would protest at roughness to a kitten.

"When do we go?" enquired Weston of the newly elected leader.

"Sometime between now and dawn, when you've rested your stock," gently murmured Hickock. "You boys better get a sleep, too. Ficklin's sent for soldiers. There's four posts between St. Joe and Carson. A fat chance for those soldiers to do any good by the time they get here. We won't wait for no soldiers."

Weston found himself suddenly lost in admiration for the newly chosen leader. His quiet tone seemed to possess a peculiar oracular quality. Everything he said had the air of being final and clear and definite. Yet, he was only a stage-driver in the employ of the company.

"All you say goes with us," he declared and extended his hand. Wild Bill grasped it. Another savage shout of assurance, and the men dispersed to care for their horses.



## CHAPTER XIX

### SLADE MAKES A MISTAKE

THAT evening Hickock, like a general surrounded by his staff, was sitting cross-legged on the floor of the station house and laying his plan of campaign.

“Let’s look at this straight,” he began. “This is not the big war. That’s goin’ on between Salt Lake and Carson. It’s the Bannocks and the Piutes and Shoshones that are giving the most trouble. That’s being taken care of by Ficklin and Bol Roberts. This here is just raidin’ by the sneaky Sioux hereabout. They heard there was trouble there, so they thought they’d do what they could here. Question is, where are they headed for?”

Nelson the trapper thought the “varmint” were headed for the Powder River.

“Why d’you think so?” queried Hickock.

“ ’Cause I came down that a-way,” declared Nelson, “only five days ago. In the distance, some ways near the head o’ the river, I could see Sioux lodges set out. And there was no braves in ’em.”

“How’d you know that?” someone asked.

“I could see only old men, boys and squaws. They was all busy and workin’. There warn’t any lazy galoots lyin’ round the fires or the tepees. That, I reckon, means the braves was away.”

The men laughed, but the old trapper was not attempting to be humorous.

The station-keeper, too, thought the Powder River was the likeliest place.

“Very good,” announced Hickock, with decision. “Then it’s the Powder River we start for—about dawn tomorrow.”

Hickock was like those mute, inglorious Miltons, dowered with talents they never have an opportunity to employ. He might have been a general. The highest office he subsequently achieved, however, was that of sheriff of

Abilene, where he killed or captured more desperadoes single-handed than perhaps any other man.

Actually the band started well before dawn. All the men were too much excited to sleep. By two o'clock in the morning they were on the move. By the time the summer sun was well established in the speckless heavens, and they were some twenty miles from Sweetwater Bridge, Nelson and Billy Cody had nosed out a trail near Horse Creek that led clearly in the direction of the Powder River.

“Look!” cried Billy suddenly in exultant glee. “The horses that passed here had new shoes on. Our ponies!” More experienced scouts than Billy was, at that time, confirmed the conclusion. Hickock smiled kindly upon his boyish scout, and remarked, “You’ll beat us all at this business yet, Billy.”

The Powder River, which empties into the Yellowstone far up in Montana, forks at its headwaters in Wyoming like a snake’s tongue. One of those divisions is known as Crazy Woman’s Fork, and toward this the trail was leading. Simultaneously both young Cody and Nelson noted that the band that had driven off the stock had, less than twenty-four hours earlier, been joined by a fresh band—that had probably raided elsewhere.

“Easy and quiet, men,” continued Hickock. “Or we may find more red devils than we’ve lost.” He ordered four men to ride ahead—Nelson, Billy, Weston, and a station-keeper named Curly. Within sight of Clear Creek the advance guard spurred back and reported a large herd of horses grazing upon the other side of the creek. Hickock then drew his men back some hundreds of yards, in order to avoid detection, and held a council of war.

“They’re not expectin’ us, that’s one sure thing,” he advanced, “or they would have had scouts out long before this. It’s soldiers they may be expectin’ and they know, the devils, the soldiers will be busier elsewhere, and anyway, soldiers take a long time comin’. Now this is my idea,” continued the quiet-spoken Wild Bill:

“We wait here until it’s nearly dark, then we creep up on ’em. Then we yell like hell and make a dash through their camp, shoot ’em up and stampede the ponies.”

No one for a moment even thought of contradicting him. That plan appeared to all as satisfactory as any other. If the Indians were in great force, it was possible that not one of the small band of white men would ever return alive. Yet they sat by their horses until dark, joking and swapping

tales, as though they were resting placidly after an ordinary day's work, with another ordinary day in store for the morrow.

It was the beginning of summer. The grasses were already thick and luxuriant and, towards the Creek, a dense fringe of underbrush was already in full leaf. Hardly any sounds reached them from the Indian camp. The braves, wearied by the expedition, were now replete and resting. Faint plumes of smoke rose upward and drifted lazily in the direction of the white men. What breeze there was, was clearly in their favor. It brought sound to them, but would not carry theirs to the enemy.

"I'd say," declared Hickock, "that they outnumber us three to one. So the more surprise we give 'em the better for us."

Then he gave the word to advance.

Leading their ponies—those silent, self-contained ponies of the West, that never neigh to their fellows, never stumble, but follow their masters like so many soft-padded dogs—the men under Hickock advanced cautiously to within less than a hundred yards of the encampment.

Then, still noiselessly, they mounted, leaped across the Creek, and with a savage yell that sounded like the noise of an army, dashed into the midst of the unsuspecting camp.

"Yep! Yep! Yep! Skin the redskins! Wipe 'em out!" The cries crackled out in unearthly discord as they attacked.

So completely were the reds taken by surprise that before they had time to recover the whites, yelling, shouting, shooting, had ridden like a small cyclone through the Indian camp, stampeded all the horses, and begun to circle them toward the south.

The experienced stock-herders in Hickock's company herded the ponies to the number of nearly two hundred, driving in a dense mass across Clear Creek and moving southward almost before they knew it. The Indians, now entirely horseless, were unable to pursue. A few of the braves, however, had sufficiently recovered to send some rifle shots and arrows after the riders.

"You, Jack!" Hickock, his clear face flushed with excitement, commanded. "Take twenty men and go back and give 'em a keepsake of our visit. Do some execution—so they'll have some funerals to keep 'em busy."

The last rays of the sunset were just dying out of the western sky, when Weston and those twenty sharpshooters galloped back across the creek and poured a very accurate volley at the now distracted braves. There was hardly

a return shot, and the reds, as Hickock desired, were now equipped with material for funerals. Retreating, still yelling, the white men would turn in their saddles and continue to fire at the Indian encampment. In a few minutes, however, they rejoined the party driving the horses and, with all the joyous excitement of their foray, marched their stock toward Sweetwater Bridge.

Already the station-keepers and some of the hostlers were busy counting the ponies.

“Better count the men,” commanded Hickock. “See if we lost any.” Except for some unimportant wounds, there was not a single casualty. And again those men, so spendthrift of their lives, fell absorbedly to counting the moving horses.

“There’s over a hundred ponies belonging to the dirty reds,” announced Curly, the station-keeper. “I say we divide ’em up. What do you say, Bill Hickock? Who gets the most?”

“Nobody,” answered Hickock briefly. “One man’s life’s as good as another’s. Share and share alike.” The excited men cheered. And everyone, even young Cody, found himself in possession of three Indian ponies. The stablemen and station-keepers, whose wages seldom survived until next payday, suddenly felt themselves to be millionaires. They chattered joyously, like schoolboys, of what they would do with their great possessions. Slowly and undisturbed, they proceeded to drive their herd homeward and arrived at Sweetwater Bridge on the fourth day at dusk.

Wild shouting and hallooing preceded them in a tumult, and the storekeeper of Sweetwater’s only general store braced himself for business after a week of idleness.

“Leave us have a drink!” they shouted. “Let’s see anything that isn’t water—” and the celebration began.

“Now,” cried Little Yank, “let’s see who’s goin’ to have the most ponies. Here’s the cards!” And then gambling began.

“I’ll bet two ponies! I’ll bet three—a pony to see you!” The cries of the card players mingled with the singing and shouting of the others. “Joe Bowers,” rang out over the din, and the dismal notes of “Oh, bury me not in the Lone Prairie.” There was no limit to the jubilation. A stableman would suddenly find himself in possession of fifty ponies and stake them all upon a throw of the dice.

For three days the celebration continued without respite.

“What’s the use of worryin’?” was the spoken philosophy. “The Pony Express is stopped. We got to wait till the soldiers lick the Piutes and the Snakes as we licked the Sioux.” Some even proposed that they march to Salt Lake and thence to an attack upon the warring Indians to the westward. Weston and Billy Cody alone abstained from gambling or drinking.

“Someone’s got to watch the stock,” Jack told Hickock, “and it might’s well be Billy and me.”

Hickock smiled agreeably. “Glad,” he said, “someone in this crowd can stay sober.”

Upon the third day, Slade, who could bear it no longer, galloped up to Sweetwater.

“Jack Slade!” they yelled, some in consternation, some in sheer joy. “Slade’s come to lead us! We’ll go back’n wipe out the Sioux and the hull red nation. Slade!”

“I’ve come to sober you up, you drunken galoots!” shouted Slade, grinning. “What’s the meaning of this? Bill Hickock, I’m ashamed o’ you! Couldn’t you keep a parcel o’ fools sober for a few days?” Hickock smiled and waved his hand at the motley roistering crew, as though saying:

“You keep them sober if you can!”

“One drink, Jack Slade—have just one drink with us—and we’ll sober up after that.”

Slade declined at first, but finally prevailed upon himself to take one drink. Hickock shook his head. He knew how that would end. With Slade “one drink” led to many. And Slade with drink in him was a menace to all immediate humanity.

“Hurray!” shouted the maudlin ones, “Jack Slade’s drinkin’ again! Now watch the fun!”

“He’ll lead us!” hoarsely cried an old weather-beaten stage-driver named Dan Smith. “And if he don’t, why I’ll go back alone and wipe out the hull red nation single-handed.”

Slade became more and more somber as he drank. Then passing through the somber stage, he turned hilarious. His pistols came forth from their holsters, and he began to amuse the company with fancy shooting.

A stage-driver, who protested against this practice as dangerous, aroused Slade’s grinning displeasure.

“Think—I can’t—shoot?” he hiccupped. “Watch me—the first thing that passes the window!” and he leveled his gun at the open window. Hickock standing near him, suddenly perceived Jack Weston approaching.

Had Slade also seen him? He could not tell from his angle of vision.

Sharply Hickock threw Slade’s hand aside, just as the shot exploded. Slade missed Weston, but the stage-driver, Dan Smith, with a heavy groan, collapsed in a heap upon the floor.

Slade gazed drunkenly with bloodshot eyes, first at the man on the floor, then at the window which now framed the head and torso of Weston.

“Queer—how I never get that fellow,” Slade ruminated in maudlin meditation. “Charmed life—you, Jack!—sharmed life”—He was raising his pistol again. But Bill Hickock and the now somewhat sobered gamblers again caught his arm, and pushed him down into a chair. They plied him with drink until he was senseless.

“Boys!” shouted Curly. “This man,” pointing to the dying stage-driver, “was hit by the redskins—understand? He died here after we brought him home.” The men all nodded. That was the best way.

When Slade sobered up he ordered Weston to remain as a rider at Sweetwater. It was his chance to remove Jack from Julesburg and he seized it.

“I was hired for Julesburg,” protested Weston. “Russell himself hired me for Julesburg.”

“It is me who hires and fires here,” Slade answered him tersely. “D’you want to quit?”

“No,” said Weston. For in his mind he was already forming a plan. If not even Russell could control Slade, Weston knew of one man who could control him—Glen!

Weston desired only one thing—to be at Julesburg near to Molly. And Glen, as it happened, also desired Weston to be at Julesburg.

Glen would decide the issue.

Early the following month, when the Indians had been quieted, some of the stations rebuilt and restocked, and the Pony Express had resumed operation, Weston wrote a brief letter to Glen, then still at Washington. He never doubted but it would produce the desired effect.

## CHAPTER XX

### “LINCOLN’S ELECTED!”

OCTOBER found Weston at Julesburg again.

It was clear that Slade, the reckless, daring, the fearless, had found his Nemesis in Senator Glen. Glen was seemingly the only human being whom Slade feared. At virtually any time Glen could put a halter round Slade’s neck.

The question agitating the service now, however, was whether or not the Pony Express would be continued. Aside from deaths and the warfare, the Indian depredations had cost the firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell more than seventy-five thousand dollars in new stock and in new stations. During June not a single letter had been carried by the service, and during July the Sacramento office had forwarded only eighty-three letters, all told, and had received no more than twenty-seven. The *Sacramento Union* had announced in its columns early in August that the Pony Express would be definitely discontinued if the operating firm failed to obtain a government contract. Unaided private enterprise could not cope with the expense. The firm did obtain a contract for \$67,000 a year, but it was ambiguous and applied to the stage-line no less than to the Pony Express. In recognition of this the firm promptly lowered the rate of postage to two dollars and fifty cents for a quarter ounce, and its directors passed a resolution to continue until January first.

Weston smiled to himself when he heard of this. Glen, he knew, would leave no stone unturned to have the Pony Express in operation at election time. The one thing he could not neglect was his plans for California. And, doubtless, Glen’s promises of Government subsidies to Russell, Majors and Waddell, were no less glittering than his dreams of a California empire, of which he was to be the emperor.

There were two Democratic nominees in the field, Breckinridge and Douglas. A dreadful presentiment constantly haunted Glen that the strange uncouth Republican nominee, the backwoodsman, the rail-splitter, Abraham Lincoln, might win the election.

Lincoln!—An avowed anti-slavery man! What was the country coming to, when such men could be even considered for the Presidency? Now, if it

had been Mr. Seward, of New York—a gentleman—one could treat with Mr. Seward. But this Lincoln—he was not a gentleman, possessed no subtlety or finesse, was not, in short, a statesman at all. At any cost his election must be fought. And should he be elected the South would certainly secede and California must be made safe for itself and for its future ruler—Glen!

In those days before the telephone, with the telegraph still limited to only a fraction of the continent's area, election news was not flashed on screens by newspapers two or three hours after the closing of the polls. It took three full days—to count and to assemble the vote.

On the 8th of November it was known that Lincoln was elected. Out of four and a half million votes, Lincoln had received less than two million—a minority. But the presence of three candidates in the field and the disposition of Lincoln's vote gave the backwoodsman the electoral college.

Glen, who, though hoping against hope, had more or less foreseen this, made it his business to be in St. Joseph the day the election news would be definitely known and started westward. Now, at last, his long and desperate scheming should bear fruit—must bear fruit. The Pony Express, he felt certain, would carry the news in at most eight days, by at least four days faster than any other conveyance could reach California. His henchmen in California, the Knights of the Golden Circle, and the ring he had formed throughout the State, would know how to act when the news reached them. The men were ready, the firearms were ready. He would now light the match to the train. He would send them intelligence of a Democratic victory by the regular pony mail, news they could placard and display. In three days they should be able to rally all their forces, stampede California and take possession of the government.

Glen, of course, was an honored guest at St. Joseph. He had letters he desired to dispatch personally from St. Joseph to California. The election was news of the most important event yet to be carried by the Pony Express. Russell was there, too, innocently honoring the scheming politician of senatorial rank, his best friend, as Russell regarded him, upon the floor of the Senate, when it came to a discussion of subsidies and mail contracts.

At Julesburg Glen had Slade and Weston, and the letters prepared long in advance to take the place of the real news. Once the thing was accomplished, any investigation of the substitution would be long and difficult, and California would be an independent country by that time.

The mail clerks at St. Joseph were excitedly preparing the pouch of mail for the Pony Express. The clerk especially in charge of the pony mail was



stirred by excitement at the momentous event, the news of which he was despatching to the Golden Gate. Swiftly he caught up his pen, and upon the top letter of every package he wrote in a clear hand: "Election News:—Lincoln Elected."

In that way, he thought, even those who handled the letters on the way would know at the earliest moment what he considered the greatest event in American history since the Revolution. He was an anti-slavery man, a devoted reader of Abolitionist papers, and in his mind ran the thought: "Slavery and Abe Lincoln cannot go on together."

Glen, accompanied by Russell, approached the clerk, who received them with the marked deference due them as prominent men.

"The Senator here," remarked Russell, "has some letters to mail at the last moment."

With deferential alacrity the clerk undid one of the thin packages, stamped Glen's missives with the official dating stamp and invited the Senator to place the letters himself upon the top of the package. The one upon which he had written "Lincoln Elected," he had regretfully placed beneath the others. At the last moment, however, when he was retying the bundle, he adroitly moved it again to the top. It was addressed to A. Benham, Esq., Julesburg, for the *Rocky Mountain News*, Denver. It could do no harm to flash the news in this way to riders and station keepers who would see it along the way. He had written similar inscriptions upon letters to Salt Lake, Carson and Sacramento.

"It's better, I think," said Russell to the rider, as the locked pouch was being placed upon the saddle, "that you say nothing of the election results on the way. Give the poor newspapers a chance to announce the news. Let people find it out for themselves—they like it better."

"No," said Glen smiling, "just shout 'Eureka!' to the next rider—pass it along from rider to rider. That will be mysterious and interesting to them. Keep 'em excited! God speed you, my boy!"

Russell smiled benevolently. Eureka, he knew, was the motto of the Senator's State. Senator Glen was ever the patriot.

"Stand back!" some one shouted. The crowd at the post office cleared a pathway. With a wave from the rider, a loud cheer from the crowd, the courier with his great news dashed off to the ferry, with a kind of halo about his head to the eyes of the bystanders, starting the message upon the first leg of its long two-thousand mile journey.

Lincoln was elected!

## CHAPTER XXI

### MOLLY AND JACK

THE service was by now thoroughly restored and more efficient than ever.

Though only seven months old, it was one of those significant epic events in the life of a people that quickly accumulates a cluster of traditions. Drawing, as it did, to its personnel a body of widely diversified, daring, courageous men, all sorts of tales and legends, had begun to gather about it.

No one could beat a pony express rider, it was said, except a Goshute Indian. Those wretched redskins of the Utah and Nevada desert, who were so poor they had no ponies (and when they had them they ate them) were compelled to develop wind and leg muscles. To such a degree did some of them develop, it was told, they could catch a rabbit running or keep up with a pony rider for miles.

At Eight-Mile, between Deep and Shell Creeks, one story ran, the station was kept by two boys of piteous antecedents. An emigrant westward, whose wife had died of the cholera on the way, had left his team, five hundred dollars and his two boys, of twelve and fourteen, in charge of the station-keeper. The emigrant himself had been stricken and begged the station-keeper to send his boys back East after his death. When the Indian troubles had come, the station-keeper, terrified, had taken the five hundred dollars and unobtrusively fled eastward himself. All through the Indian raids the two boys had held the station and survived until the soldiers from Camp Floyd had relieved them.

There were stories current of famous rides by Pony Bob Haslam, by Billy Cody, by Weston, and others—rides totalling three hundred miles and more, owing to failure or death of relieving riders. Like members of celebrated legions in history, the riders came to look upon themselves as leading charmed lives, proof against the elements, against death himself. To be a member of this romantic body was by now almost a patent of nobility. The whole country knew of the exploits, the deeds, the riding of the Pony Express. The subsequent description of him by Mark Twain, in "Roughing It," as a phantom of the desert, "a shout and a hail and a cloud of dust," as

he whisked by, was the whole country's notion of the express rider. Notably after the Indian warfare, he was a figure of romance.

When Jack Weston returned to Julesburg in the autumn he was determined at any cost to marry Molly directly after the election. Sonora Junior's messenger never did come through again upon her return journey, but Weston had managed to acquaint his friend in San Francisco with the fact that he would be vigilant on the route, and do all he could to prevent Glen's plans from succeeding.

Upon his arrival at Julesburg, he sought out Molly at once and greeted her with tenderness, as though no coolness had ever been between them. He found her, strangely attired in buckskin small-clothes and leather apron, hammering a piece of hot iron upon the anvil in her father's blacksmith shop.

"Molly!" Weston uttered the single word, and for a moment they peered at each other like two strayed ghosts, met in some dim nether region, illumined only by the lurid glow of the forge. Evidently Slade had kept his own counsel relating to his order for Weston's return. Molly, with her hammer uplifted and the rude poker she was shaping resting upon the anvil, gazed at him with searching, questioning eyes, surprised, delighted, yet sorrow-haunted.

"Molly, darling!" he murmured with passionate tenderness, "I have come back to you. Aren't you glad to see me?" And he made a sudden impulsive movement as though to embrace her.

In a sort of involuntary defensiveness she waved the hammer and the white-hot iron toward him and uttered a laugh, half wild, half rueful—that sounded rather like a sob. Then she dropped both iron and hammer and burst into tears.

She had not desired Jack to see her in the guise she was in, and anger at his defection, at his long absence, flashed up in her. Yet her heart, in spite of itself, was singing with joy at the sight of him. Her father's obsession, what with his church and his growing conviction that the end of the world was at hand, had thrown her much upon herself, even to working at the forge, as she was now doing. Jack's disappearance had added the last shadow to her lonely, darkening world.

His restoration there, in bodily presence, seemed to relieve all her longing and suffering of the dead forlorn months that coincided with his absence. Her world seemed suddenly full and bright again. Before she knew

it, she was in his arms, sobbing against his breast, quivering with agitated but sweet relief through all her body.

Passionately yet tenderly he was kissing her hair, her face, her tear-wet eyes, and crooning over her as over a lost child restored. After a few moments she somewhat regained control of herself and, with one hand against his breast, gently pushed him from her, and herself moved back a step.

The dying fire in the undisturbed forge glowed dim and dark red, illuminating their faces shadowily, like some eerie trial, intent upon making them search each other's eyes with difficulty.

"I understand, Molly," he murmured gently. "I know right well how you feel. I can see every word of the questions you have to ask me, and I mean to answer them all—more than you'll ever ask me. Only trust me, Molly darling, for a little bit longer. Only trust me. Things are not always the way they look to us. Say that you'll marry me after I tell you all there is to tell. What do you say, little girl?"

She shook her head sadly.

"Why," she stammered half-confusedly, "why can't—everything be said—now?"

"Because, child," he explained, "my secrets, what there's of them, aren't all my own. There are big things at stake and great causes, my Molly—and I'm sworn not to give them away to a soul till the right time."

"Sworn—to whom?" she murmured bitterly. "To Slade?" Weston stifled an oath.

"No!" he breathed angrily. "No! That man! Why, he is—but, what's the use," he moaned in despair. "I can't tell you now. Don't you want the man who loves you to be honest?"

She paused for a moment before replying.

"That's just the trouble," she murmured. "How do I know—" and more passionately and despondently—"oh, how do I know? I can't help my love—but I can help listening to a man until—until—" she could not finish and once again the tears gushed from her eyes.

Weston could not restrain himself from again embracing her, pressing her to his heart once more. Quickly, however, he controlled himself and laid his hands tenderly upon her shoulders. So slight and pathetic she seemed to him in that dim shadowy air—almost a child.

“Listen, Molly darling,” he spoke quickly. “I’ll do this—I’ll ask for nothing until I can tell you everything. Give me a little time—only a little time—say until after election. Then I can clear everything up. And if you’ll have me we’ll be married and all our troubles will be over.”

She was almost sorry he had mentioned election. For in her mind was the vague fear that Slade and Glen had some underhand treasonable game regarding the election. And if Weston, too, was part of it, the man whom she could not help loving, who drew her very soul as no other man had drawn it, then her lot was dark indeed.

“Is it—honest,” she breathed, “this thing you’re keeping back?”

“So honest, Molly,” he smiled sadly, “that if you don’t approve of it with all your heart and soul, you need never look at me again. I’ll take myself out of your life like a pest.”

She remained silent for a moment, torn by doubts. Suppose he should be wrong? Suppose that what he considered a thing she would approve of should be a horror and an offense to her very blood—treachery, treason, what not? She closed her eyes and a little shudder passed over her frame.

“Are we at least good friends until then?” he pressed tensely.

“Yes,” she murmured as though emerging from a dream—“until then.” To give any other answer now was beyond her powers.

## CHAPTER XXII

### CHARLIE BENT PLANS REVENGE

At about the time the riders from the East were speeding their momentous news of Lincoln's election westward, troops from Fort Leavenworth, long since sent to help against some renewed Indian outbreaks, were now in leisurely progress returning Kansas-ward. They had rested for two days outside of Julesburg, to the great delectation of the little town.

The order to protect the mails had brought small bodies of troops to various portions of the Overland Trail during the summer, to the joy of the scattered inhabitants. Now, however, with the chilling advent of autumn, the companies were being drawn back to their home posts.

The boys in blue, as everyone spoke of them, had brought a breeze of life and gaiety to the town, and the saloon, the general store and the stage office were flying flags in their honor. Both the saloon and the store had been doing a roaring trade and they were sorry to see the soldiers going. Everyone was sorry to see the soldiers going.

A few friendly Indians were always attracted by the marching troops. The red men came to trade, to barter, or merely to stare, in their silent way, at the equipment and soldierly precision of the drilled men. A military camp kitchen, for instance, was a source of endless wonder to the Indians, and a fieldpiece, whenever they saw it, filled them with awe and envy.

A few such staring Indians had drifted in from beyond the Lodge Pole to the north of Julesburg, from Ogallala to the west and even from the region of Denver. Most of them had already departed, but a few, less than half a dozen, still lingered on to watch the soldiers striking camp. Charlie Bent was in town and, in his guise of a white man, he often superciliously explained to some of the red men in their own tongue, the elaborate, mysterious movements of the soldiers.

Everyone was now intent upon the soldiers. People were absorbed in watching them almost to the neglect of all business. Red's little foster daughter, Baby, was to such an extent fascinated by them that even when Red was preoccupied with his work at the stables she begged other people to take her to the "sojers."

Molly and Jack, now in a state of happiness beyond anything they had yet experienced, found in the little girl's demands an excuse for being together more frequently than in that transparent town was otherwise possible.

"I want to see the sojers," the child would beg of Molly. Molly would comply, laughing, and lead her beyond the corrals at a proper distance. Weston, watching for his opportunity, would emerge, take the child's other hand and, with his protective masculine presence, a much nearer approach to the fascinating boys in blue at once became possible.

The child, cunningly discovering that singular difference, soon made it a practice to seek out Molly first and then to find Jack. In that way she could be made completely happy—unless, of course, she was carried in the arms of Red, which was not always possible. For as it was, Slade frequently growled that Red spent more time in playing wet nurse to the little orphan than he was giving to his work at the stables.

That uncertain Saturday morning in November, when the sun was playing hide-and-seek as in April, and the soldiers were bustling with the preliminaries of departure, Molly and Jack, with the child between them, were gazing at the soldiers, and chatting in that breathless mood of happiness that was now characteristic of all their meetings. It was a sort of God's truce between them, each of the two lovers fervently hoping for a happy outcome of the conflict between circumstances and themselves. Searchingly they scanned each other's eyes, and for the very reason that they had implicitly agreed not to talk of love until a certain date they hungered for looks and signs of love with an avidity and a craving that was hourly becoming more poignantly acute.

"Don't those soldiers look splendid!" commented Molly. "If I were a man I think I'd want to be a soldier, at least for a while."

"I'm glad you are not a man," Weston informed her thoughtfully, "but if you think the soldiers look splendid, I'd give years of my life to be a soldier this minute."

"If that is the only reason," sighed Molly, "why, no one has ever said anything against your looks, Mr. Vanity."

"It is not the only reason," he protested hotly. "But as to vanity, I'm just plain eaten up with it this minute—and for only one reason—because I'm standing here beside you, Molly." Molly in happy confusion, quickly changed the subject.



“Look, Baby,” she bent down to the child, but the child was no longer looking at the soldiers. Her gaze had been attracted by Charlie Bent, some thirty feet away, conversing in low tones with one of the so-called friendly Indians in the town.

“It’s funny,” murmured Molly in an undertone to Weston. “That half-breed saved the child’s life, yet she has a horror of him that I can’t explain. She stares at him sometimes for the longest time, then covers her eyes. I’ve asked her time and again why she does that and all she’d say is ‘bad man.’”

And at that moment, indeed, the tiny girl put up her little arm across her eyes in a quaint gesture, and murmured the words, “bad man.”

“They say children have an instinct about people,” Weston almost whispered to Molly, “and whether that’s true or not, I believe it’s true in this case.”

Red, in his roughest clothes and smelling of stables, at this moment came shouldering his way, with anxiety in his eyes, which, however, lighted up the minute he espied Molly and Jack and the child.

“Oh, there you are, Baby!” he cried exultant. “I have been looking for her everywhere.”

Molly laughed.

“You’re almost a baby yourself, Red,” she tapped his great arm affectionately. “D’you think we’d neglect her just because you don’t happen to be round?”

“I know,” he said with gruff relief. “But there are a lot of people around here just now—and some of ’em,” he added with a dark glance in Bent’s direction, “I don’t like.”

Both the child’s and Red’s instincts were at that moment truer than anyone could then have guessed. Bent, always in fear of Slade, by now hated him more than any other human being. Bent considered that Slade had enslaved him for his own purposes and now, that he had no further use for him, had incontinently discarded him. Strange as it may seem, it had been one of Bent’s dreams that one day, with the aid of Slade, he, Bent, would marry Molly! The time was when he used to bring Molly presents of moccasins and Indian beadwork, leave them abruptly and turn away with a sort of shamefaced crooked grin upon his dark features. This hangdog mode of wooing gave Slade endless amusement and, laughingly, he was wont to encourage Bent. But if ever the half-breed so much as touched her hand, Slade warned him, he would certainly kill him. Now, however, since the

Indian depredations, Slade had completely discarded the half-breed like so much refuse and called him a “red idiot.”

Naturally, therefore, a craving for revenge had reached the boiling point in the half-breed’s heart. He would show Slade that he had the brains of a white man, brains enough to outwit him. By cunning observation and ferreting, Bent had learned that the first shipment of gold on the Overland, since the Indian troubles, was now upon its way eastward.



*A Paramount Picture.*

*The Pony Express.*

### JULESBURG ATTACKED AND BURNED BY INDIANS—BUT THE PONY EXPRESS FOUGHT ITS WAY THROUGH.

The instructions of the company were to remove the package at certain of the Overland stations, leave it in the safe for a day or two, then to put a fresh wrapper round it, and again to put it on the stage, as though the package were merchandise originating at the last station. By that strategy the office at Leavenworth believed road agents or Indians would be thrown off the scent. If they had any knowledge of the shipment and should hold up a stage, it was more than likely to be the wrong one. The scheme was confided to only the most trusted division agents, of whom Slade was one.

This package, it was, that Bent was determined to obtain, to kill Slade into the bargain, and to shake from his feet the dust of Julesburg for good. If he could seize Molly and carry her off to the Black Hills, among his Sioux, so much the better. But, anyway, this time he must put an end to Slade.

The one thing that had worried Bent was the inopportune arrival of the troops. Now, however, the troops were preparing to leave, and they were

infantry. Moreover, they were heading southeast, away from his territory. And once they were sufficiently far away, his Sioux horsemen could raid the town, get the package, kill those it was necessary to kill, and make their way northward.

To the so-called friendly Indian, to whom Bent was compelled to entrust a very important part of his plans, he was now meticulously explaining exactly how to proceed.

“I must go back to the council of the chiefs,” Bent explained to the Indian. “I cannot wait until these soldiers leave. But you stay here. And when they have been gone twenty-four hours, one sun, you nail a white cloth upon some high place. Leave it there and make your way toward the sand hills of the Lodge Pole. There you will see our signal smokes, and you will know what to do.”

Bent also explained to him that a white cloth would be less noticeable to the inhabitants than any other color, and gave him a piece of white muslin he had earlier bought at Thompson and Chrisman’s.

The Indian grunted his comprehension and Bent unobtrusively rode out of the town.

The soldiers continued their preparations for some time after Bent’s departure, the Indian idly watching them. By noon they had not yet departed and the commanding officer ordered rations served out for dinner. By two o’clock it began to rain and hastily, partly as a matter of drill, the camp that was all but packed up for marching order, was again pitched for an overnight stay, to the delight of soldiers and inhabitants alike.

“One more night at Julesburg!” they shouted, and the tradesmen and the saloon were preparing for another freshet of business. The commanding officer, however, a military enthusiast, who believed in constant training for warlike conditions, gave the word that all men must be in their tents at an early hour against a start at dawn on the morrow.

Thus, as fate would have it, Charlie Bent miscalculated the departure of the troops by some sixteen or seventeen hours, which subsequently resulted in far-reaching effects. His stolid Indian, however, scrupulously obedient to his instructions, was lounging about in seeming idleness, awaiting the troop’s departure and the twenty-four hours that must elapse before he should give his signal.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE SIGNAL

HOURLY, minute by minute, indeed, the great news that had left St. Joseph, the news of Lincoln's election, was drawing nearer to Julesburg upon its terrific flight westward. Riders spared neither themselves nor their horses as they sped across the flat prairies and plains, racing with time, hailing their reliefs with the enigmatic shout of "Eureka!"—and with only a laugh to explain the mysterious word, for already the fresh rider was speeding westward.

When Julesburg arose that Sunday morning, a fresh April sun was shining, but the troops were gone. Far in the distance the column could be seen, like some gray snake, winding along toward Kansas. People stared at one another and uttered seemingly meaningless laughter. But they were moved by both regret and admiration for the swift, silent precision of the vanished soldiers. Their presence now seemed like a dream. The town appeared dead without them.

"Never mind," said one gambler to another on the way for their matutinal refreshment in the saloon. "Never you mind. Today, they say, the election news is comin' through. I lay you five to three it'll be Abe Lincoln," he added, by way of taking up his true interests in life.

"Got yah!" responded the other mechanically, "and I lay yah ten to seven it's Douglas!"

"Done!" was the prompt reply. "Now we got something to drink on." And sustained by this cheerful philosophy, they entered the saloon.

Some of their company were already there at the bar and in their very center was leaning the figure of Slade. The tension of the gold in his safe, of waiting for the crucial election mail, and the excitement of the soldiers' presence had proved too much for him.

With grimaces of alert interest the men exchanged glances and nodded in Slade's direction. No words were spoken, but every glance said,

"Slade's drinking today. Watch out."

Slade's drinking bouts were not frequent. But when they came, every inhabitant of Julesburg, or whatever the place, felt a little less secure in his tenure of life, and every man's hand nervously, stealthily twitched at his belt and shooting iron, as a kind of futile automatic insurance. The fun of watching Slade in action was priceless, but what insurance men call the ratio of risk suddenly became alarming. One need have no quarrel with Slade drunk to come abruptly within the shadow of death. Even with Slade sober life seemed an uncertain possession. With Slade drunk men in his neighbourhood had much the feeling of denizens of a beleaguered garrison, with shells of the besieger falling at random.

Slade himself was still in cheerful mood with a half-humorous, half-mocking smile upon his face.

"Whatever it is you're givin' me," he was saying to the bartender, "you haven't yet brought out the best of our 'mountain dew.'"

"Honest, Jack," was protesting the bartender, "this is the best in the house. We're a little low just now, that's true—because the soldier boys've been here. But this is the best there is. Think I'd give *you* poor stuff?"

"Well, no, I wouldn't think that, Jim," Slade frowned thoughtfully, "not hardly—considerin' the risk you'd run."

The men laughed, but they were becoming a shade more uneasy. The change from a smile to a frown was a well-known stage in Slade's progress from comparative safety to a far lesser degree of safety. Men, even gay dogs, who spoke of seeing the fun, were devising excuses for leaving the saloon unobtrusively.

In the meanwhile, by one of those crude, glaring contrasts characteristic of frontier life, another scene, markedly different, was simultaneously being enacted in Julesburg.

Old Ascension Jones, by dint of vigil and prayer and fasting, by long calculation of biblical dates, drawn from Revelations, the Apocrypha and almost every other book in the Bible, had seen in a vision a fiery sword stretched over Julesburg, and he knew that the mystical day of wrath was at hand. Passionately, how passionately, he had prayed all night to the avenging Angel of the sword for the salvation of mankind! Yet with an intuition that to him was certainty, he knew that no poor prayers of his could save so much as a blade of grass. Destruction was imminent like that which had turned the wicked cities of another plain, Sodom and Gomorrah, into a desert of salt. Would any favored Lot and his family escape ere they were all

engulfed? He knew not. But for wicked men, of whom he counted himself the humblest, there was nought left but prayer and repentance.

“Oh, Lord,” he murmured prayerfully, “give me the tongue of the learned, as thou hadst given it to thy servant Isaiah, that I might know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary! They are weary of sin, and they know it not. They would fain repent in their spirits, but their flesh is gross. A word in season—a word in season!”—he went on murmuring, and tears ran from his eyes for untractable, unteachable human nature.

That Sunday morning in November he felt within himself the zeal of the crusader, the apostle. “I must go into the highway and seek them,” he muttered to himself. And suiting his actions to his thought, he actually went out upon the main thoroughfare, the bit of the Overland Trail that ran through Julesburg, and begged men to enter his newly erected, scarcely-finished tabernacle, the strangely anomalous church he had built at Julesburg.

“Come, stranger,” he would say with gentle vehemence, “come into the house of God. The day of wrath is at hand. Come in and pray. Destruction hangs over us. Let us repent ere it is too late.”

A few people, those who loved the old man, had already entered the church. He stopped teamsters as they drove by, but they only laughed. He even laid hands upon the bridle of a rancher as he rode past, but to no purpose.

Presently, however, a curious thing happened. The first man to emerge from the saloon with the intelligence that “Slade was drunk,” seemed to have a remarkable effect upon the stiff-necked populace. One after another the unregenerate men appeared to change their minds, to give heed to the exhortations of Ascension and half shamefacedly to glide into the church.

Tradesmen, it was noticed, without haste, but also without loss of time, were closing their shops early and putting up the heavy shutters, in some cases of iron, over doors and windows. “Slade’s drunk!” ran the whisper. And more men emerged from the saloon and more and more appeared to drift, half smiling, into the portal of the church.

Ascension’s heart began to swell with gratitude. Were his prayers being answered after all? His church was filling up rapidly. A grizzled ex-trapper and now a gambler, to the shame of his venerable gray hair, called Rattlesnake Ike—even he made his way into the church. Several of the gamblers, whose exit from the saloon had coincided with Slade’s drawing of

his revolvers and flourishing them playfully about the room, now half reluctantly, yet with an inner compulsion, also entered the church. Some of the inhabitants sought their cabins and barred the doors. The little church, however, had filled up amazingly. Molly and Jack came almost among the last. Ascension welcomed them with a gesture of happiness. In his pious old heart was joy at the light that was tardily streaming into the souls of Julesburg's inhabitants.

So momentous was the occasion to the old blacksmith, that he decided to make this day of all days solemnly impressive. He cared not for rituals, nor for any bowings in the house of Rimmon. But believing, as he did, that the Day of Judgment was close at hand, he mounted his pulpit, took from under his rudely made lectern a vast white garment and donned it over his tall gaunt body. That garment he had long held in readiness.

Then he began to pray. He prayed not for safety, but for the salvation of the souls of his congregation, of all mankind, indeed, when the hour of reckoning came to pass, when the heavens rolled up like a scroll and time was no more—he prayed that all the children of men might appear before the Throne with due humility and repentance, and thus be saved.

Pistol shots in rapid succession suddenly detonated outside.

Jones paused for a moment with an anxious frown. Again the crepitating shots.

"Slade's drunk," men in the congregation whispered to one another.

Weston, overhearing this, looked grave and eyed the door. Suddenly he rose and as unobtrusively as possible tiptoed out of the church.

The shots troubled poor Ascension. Wicked men, still outside the church, were desecrating the Lord's day. In the rude belfry made of four beams leaning to a point, hung a rough iron triangle he had fashioned in lieu of a bell. A ladder led up to the belfry, by way of a trapdoor, from the church. All at once he decided to climb the ladder and to ring his triangle, a last thundering warning to the wicked.

A strange figure he made, in his white robe, heavily climbing up the ladder, and stranger still, when, once up there, he struck upon the triangle solemnly with a hammer. The sounds were somewhat like the clang of a hammer upon an anvil in a smithy.

The draught set up by a rushing current of air through the trapdoor belfry-ward, suddenly blew Ascension's loose white shroud up about him and, as he hammered his triangle zestfully, the garment blew out and

fluttered like a white ensign from the skeleton steeple of the church—plainly visible far and wide, visible all over the town, very distinctly visible so far as the distant hills toward the Lodge Pole—like an ensign of peace and hope.

Brown alert eyes in copper colored faces discerned it far away.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### TUG OF WAR

SLADE emerged from the saloon distinctly annoyed by the disappearance of the men. Where had they gone to, his maudlin brain kept wondering? Didn't those galoots want any fun at all? Queer! He rolled somewhat in his gait as he walked along the street, and his eyes also rolled from side to side. His revolvers hung limply in his hands and he cursed the emptiness of Julesburg.

The ringing of old Ascension's crazy triangle—that suddenly displeased him.

“Stop that noise,” he murmured to the street in general; then more angrily, “Stop it!”

As the ringing, however, continued, he raised his revolvers toward the belfry and his hands turned strangely steady.

Jack Weston, who had just then emerged from the church and was following Slade cautiously, touched him upon the shoulder. The drunken man wheeled about, as though a galvanic current had shot through him.

Weston, heedless of the revolvers, held to Slade's arm and pointed eastward.

“Look, Slade,” he said, his every nerve and muscle tense, “look! There is the pony rider coming from the east. Must be at least six hours ahead of time.” Slade stared eastward, his eyes rolling unsteadily.

“Don't see anything,” he muttered with a sigh. But the words had made their impression on the muddled brain of the agent.

“You know our job,” Weston pursued his advantage cajolingly. “This is the big day—the election news. Remember Glen's instructions, we've got to carry them out.”

Again Slade peered to the eastward along the trail. He thought he discerned a faint cloud of dust in the distance.

“Here, you galoots!” he shouted raucously in sudden anger and alarm. “Why ain't there a pony waiting? Where are those damned stable-hands?”

Don't lemme catch anybody drunk—day like this!” And again he shouted toward the stables.

“Never mind, Slade, we'll be ready,” Weston gaily assured him and ran off in the direction of the stables to give an order. It had been arranged that at this station no one was to go out to meet the rider. Glen's plan of changing the mail was here to be executed without a slip. The hostlers tumbled out from their hiding places and with feverish alacrity brought forth a pony already saddled, tightening the girths as they came.

In an instant Weston rejoined Slade, standing very close to him, though Slade had by now replaced his revolvers in their holsters. The rider grew momentarily more distinct as he came galloping at breakneck speed. It was indeed the pony express rider, covered with dust and mud, hatless, his face distorted with excitement.

“Eureka!” he gasped and laughed, as he reined in his horse and threw himself weakly from the saddle. He was, however, surprised to perceive the air of deliberation about Slade and Weston as they glanced at one another. “Better don't lose no time,” he spoke from wind-stiffened lips. “Everybody 'long the trail's been makin' time.”

“That's all right,” snarled Slade, removing the loosened *mochila* from the panting horse. “Lots of mail for this station. Got to take it inside. Start in two minutes.”

“Come along, Jack!” he growled at Weston and carried the pouch into his office.

Molly, unable to contain herself in the church, had stolen out and was silently watching the proceedings. The two men were carrying the pouch into the office—on a day, too, when all the service was bent upon making time. Her heart sank within her. She had never trusted Slade. But was Jack, too, dishonest? In heart-choking silence she walked toward the stage office as if about to enter, then paused and stood irresolutely with her back against the building, endeavoring to simulate a look of carelessness, as though she were merely watching the proceedings of the hostlers outside.

In the office Slade pulled his key-ring from his pocket and unlocked the way-compartment of the shiny leather pouch. Uppermost in the bundle was the letter addressed to “A. Benham, Esq., Denver,” with its legend in the upper left hand corner, “Election News—Lincoln Elected.”

Slade laughed with dry mirthlessness.

“That’s the news Glen don’t want to get to California.” And again he made to take the pouch.

“Wait!” Weston seized it suddenly and drew it toward him upon the table.

“Eh?” breathed Slade in a sort of stupefied amazement.

“This is the mail that’s going to California, Slade,” announced Weston with a sudden smiling calm, though all his faculties were tense and singularly alive.

“You got it wrong,” murmured Slade with a dim, benign look, the liquor he had absorbed still working in his brain. “It’s Glen’s stuff that’s goin’! You ain’t drunk, are you?”

“No,” smiled Weston calmly. “But—*I’m* not for Glen, Slade! I’m for California and the Union, Slade!” He struck his fist upon the table. “That’s why I took this job. This *is* the job. This mail goes through, Slade—through—all the way! D’you hear? It goes—through!”

Both men stood tense, moveless, now watching each other like two game-cocks. A sort of maudlin smile suddenly overspread Slade’s features and he nodded, as though dimly confirming an ancient suspicion.

“So, you’ve tricked Glen,” he grinned. “You’re a spy and a traitor—both ways.”

“This is war, Slade,” returned Weston—“and all’s fair in war, you know.”

Suddenly Slade’s right hand shot from the table before him to his side and he gripped the butt of his revolver.

“Don’t shoot him, Red—not yet;” Weston, his own hand upon his revolver, was speaking seemingly to someone outside the window. “Don’t shoot him unless he moves or turns his head. If he does, let him have it. Hands up, Slade!”

“Spies and bandits, both of you,” Slade muttered with a weary sigh, and slowly his hands moved upward over his head.

“No”—Weston shook his head toward the window—“only if he moves, Red—then, take no chances!” And with a nod toward the window, the mail-pouch under his arm, Weston walked out of the room.

Slade remained for a few moments with hands elevated, but otherwise motionless, save for a slight swaying of his body.

Once outside, Weston dashed toward the saddled pony, flung the *mochila* over the saddle and leaped upon it.

“Yep! Yep! Yep!” he cried like a boy triumphant. “Lincoln’s elected! Lincoln’s elected!”

Already his pony was flinging the dirt up, dashing westward. The hostlers stared at one another.

“So Abe’s elected!” they murmured. “It’s funny Jim didn’t say nothin’ when he came in.” And they went to seek the newly arrived rider, to have it out with him.

Molly, in the meanwhile, whom Weston had not perceived, standing as she was close to the building, waved after him with tears in her eyes, but with a strange new singing joy in her heart. She had heard some of the conversation between Slade and Jack and now she was seeing the result. Her world appeared suddenly young and irradiated and filled with music. The man she loved was loyal as well as brave and fearless. Jack, her Jack, was like the great heroes of old. She thought of Paul Revere and her heart choked with tears and happiness.

In his office, baffled, motionless, though raging inwardly, Slade was still standing, his arms elevated but sinking slowly.

“Needn’t to worry about me, Red,” he spoke without turning his head. “What’s done is done. No dog in the manger ’bout me. You go ahead. I’ll give you time to get a pony and vamoose.”

No answer, however, came in response to this benevolent speech.

“Got to be fair, Red,” pursued Slade. “I can’t stand like this all day. Denver mail’s got to go.”

Still there was no answer.

Slade’s arms sank lower and lower. Slowly, cautiously, his head turned as on a pivot. The corner of his eye caught the window behind him. He turned sharply and stared.

*There was no one at the window!*

The street, however, was already filling with men. They were talking eagerly. But no sign of Red. Foam suddenly flecked the thin lips of Slade. His face was contorted with wild rage. He seized both his revolvers and poured out a volley of shots at the roof, walls and ceiling of his office as an outlet for his frenetic rage. Then he dashed out of the door and looked

wildly about. No trace of Red. Some of the men, however, frightened by his mien, stopped suddenly in terrified expectance.

“So Abe’s elected!” one of them ventured, grinning with the horror of fear.

“Hell, yes!” shouted Slade. “Who said one of Jules’s men was around here lookin’ for me?” His brain was clearing fast. And this query came to him as an inspiration, to cover his savage aspect.

“Jules’ men!” repeated someone. “We ain’t seen anybody. Think if we did we wouldn’t tell you, Jack?”

On a sudden he heard a stentorian bass voice singing behind him:

“My name it is Joe Bowers,  
I’ve got a brother Ike—”

He wheeled about, his hands still grasping his pistols.

Calmly and in happy mood, Red was coming towards him, carrying the baby girl in his arms. With a wry grin Slade walked toward him.

“Where you been all this time?” he asked through set teeth.

“Been?” Red repeated, mystified. “In my tent—dressing the greatest baby girl in the world.” Red had been nowhere near the window of the office.

He, Slade, had been tricked!

“Ain’t you heard Lincoln’s elected?” he all but mumbled.

“Yeah, so the boys say,” Red responded cheerily. “Hear that, Baby?” to the little girl—“Abe’s going to be President.”

Slade, with a sickly smile, began playing with the child’s tender, rosy fingers.

He, Slade, had been tricked!

# CHAPTER XXV

## THE ATTACK

THE autumn haze of the Plains had definitely and finally lifted. Clouds still lay banked in broken masses upon the eastern horizon, but to the north, west and south the sky had cleared. The sharp autumnal crispness was in the air, portending winter, but the sun shone coolly bright, and three quarters of the sky was blue, flecked only here and there by light fleecy puffs of silver.

The white robe of Ascension blowing out from the belfry had been easily visible to anyone looking for it. And in the sandhills toward the Lodge Pole a column of thick smoke rose up lazily, bowing to the eastward.

The Sioux scouts, whom Charlie Bent had held in readiness for that purpose, were signalling to the main body of the Indians farther north that the time for attack had come. The signal had been given.

The troops were only a few hours away. The Indian spy, left by Bent at Julesburg, was preparing to wait for some eighteen or nineteen hours longer, and had rolled up to sleep in his blankets behind the far end of the corrals. The departure of the troops at dawn had been a piece of sheer good luck to the red man. By nailing up his signal at that early morning hour tomorrow he was certain completely to escape detection.

Ascension Jones, however, moved only by his missionary zeal and piety, had unwittingly forestalled the spy. His white shroud had been mistaken for the sign and from the north and northwest, the Indian band of braves stretched out in a wide semicircle, began to move forward to close in upon the doomed town of Julesburg.

Louder and more vehemently Ascension was beating upon his triangle, gazing down into the street, gazing with his farsighted eyes all round the horizon. Possibly riders, emigrants, or freight wagons might be approaching, so the unsuspecting men might come into the church, pray for forgiveness and repent of their sins ere it was too late. For destruction was hanging over the world.

On a sudden he paused in his labor, his hammer upraised in midstroke. The column of smoke upon the sandhills there in the distance—that was strange. All of his later life had been spent in the vicinity of Indians. That

smoke, surely, was a signal. An ordinary camp-fire produced no such smoke. And almost simultaneously he saw dimly and far away two answering columns of similar smoke.

He saw Weston dash away in the street below, he saw Slade and the others running about, Red with the little girl in his arms, but the smoke columns held his eye. Surely—yes—he saw forms running at the first smoke—horsemen outlined dimly against the horizon.

The Indians!

He neither doubted, nor questioned, nor speculated. He knew. The departure of the soldiers—he had scarcely heeded all that in his absorption and prayer. But now it all came back to him in a rush. The troops were gone and the wicked devils, the scourge of God, were moving to attack the town.

“The finger of the Lord!” he muttered. Perhaps these were the very instruments chosen to bring to pass the destruction he had so long foreseen?

“Ay,” he muttered, “the Finger of God!”

Nevertheless he did not remain long lost in his reverent wonder at the workings of Providence. His human heart bounded with alarm. Here was his daughter, and here the pitifully unseeing people with doom descending upon them. Perhaps by the will of Providence they might yet be saved?

Hastily, moved by a febrile excitement, he descended the ladder. An old man fond of giving testimony had been telling the congregation, the while Ascension had been aloft, how he had been saved. The descent of Ascension did not disconcert him. Without pause he went on speaking.

Silently Ascension moved to the door, and once outside, sought Slade.

“Destruction is at hand,” he cried piteously, “the end is coming. Indians are about to attack the town!”

Slade and the men about him roared with laughter. Ascension provided a diversion from the tension of Slade’s previous drunken wrath.

“How d’you know, blacksmith?” demanded someone.

“I saw them from the steeple when I was tolling the bell,” he answered simply. “You can still see their signal smokes. I saw their ponies coming.”

Slade looked sober for a moment.

“Shin up there, someone,” he pointed to the roof of the saloon, “and take a look-see.”

Quickly one of the myrmidons detached himself from the group and disappeared in the rear of the saloon. For a moment they watched the figure of the man upon the roof, whither he had ascended. The man was shading his eyes and gazing northward.

“Anything in it?” shouted Slade. The man turned and nodded.

“Yep,” he cried, “I see ’em comin’!”

“Hell and damnation!” blustered Slade. “I thought—here you,” he cried to Billy Cody, who happened to be at the station as an extra at that time, “get your pony, Billy, and ride like hell after the soldiers. Tell ’em to come back. Get!”

“Tell them,” cried Jones, “destruction is upon us, but they may yet save the city.”

“Get your guns, men!” thundered Slade raucously—“and every cartridge you’ve got! What are you gaping at? Think this is goin’ to be a fair?”

The men suddenly scattered in precipitate haste. Shutters were being closed wherever there were any to close. They sought out their Spencer rifles and sawed-off shotguns, sought out their caches of cartridges. To Jones Slade said: “Better tell that flock o’ sheep of yours to get busy and get. This is going to be a hell of a time.”

“God’s house is founded upon a rock,” responded the blacksmith. “They can be safer nowhere else. Come into the church yourself, oh, stiff-necked sinner. Where is there a better place to meet your Maker?”

Slade laughed harshly and moved into his office.

Red, in a fear of alarm for his small foster daughter, ran to his tent-house and searched wildly about that narrow habitation for a safe hiding place. It offered none, so, in his anxiety, he pulled the blankets from a cot, made a nest for her and covered her over, leaving only a trifling opening for breathing.

“Now you stay there, Baby,” he urged her with one of his broadest smiles, though his heart was quaking. “This is a game. Bad men coming. They mustn’t find Baby. If Baby keeps still, like a good girl, till bad men go away again, I’ll buy her all the rock-candy in the store.”

The rock-candy was a particular favorite of the child’s, one of the few confections obtainable at Thompson and Chrisman’s. Red always carried a reserve of it about his person, though he was warned it would spoil her teeth.



Now, however, he gave her a little string of it out of a paper, and she composed herself with a chuckle to enjoy it.

With an inward groan Red turned from her and carefully examined his rifle.

Jones, in the meanwhile, had gone back to his church lost in perplexity. What was he to do? Would any be saved? The people, nevertheless, must be warned. He opened the door and, though his face was many shades paler, his voice, steady and firm as ever, made the announcement:

“Sisters and Brethren in the Lord, we are about to be attacked by Indians. The men may go for their weapons. Perhaps the Lord will prosper them. But women and children remain in God’s house. There is no place safer in Julesburg or on this earth.”

The men made a rush for the door.

“Ascension’s right!” cried the old trapper called Rattlesnake Ike. “This place is safest. They’ll think it’s only our medicine lodge we’re defending. They wouldn’t likely think women and children’s in here.”

Again Jones exhorted them as the men hastily made their way out, and Molly, who had now reëntered the church, went about among the rude benches and begged the women to be calm and to remain within.

The Indians, who had been closing in upon Julesburg, soon came dashing down the street in their fullest war paint, yelling savagely and shooting right and left. They were the advance guard, intent upon drawing the first volley.

A scattering of shots met them, but only one or two were unseated as they galloped through the town. Behind them came a denser troop with pine and greasewood torches, to set fire to the buildings. Slade and other experienced Indian fighters, directing the defense, however, knew of this custom, had expected it, and now poured their volley at the torch bearers with signal execution.

A number of the Indians fell dead or wounded, perhaps a dozen. The survivors, however, managed to set fire to certain of the shacks and then wildly rode on, to prepare for a return assault.

Ascension Jones, wearing his white shroud once more, as one about to meet death, stood with his arms crossed before the closed church, with eyes calm in defiance, but with lips murmuring prayers. The redskins, however,

warned one another, that this man was mad, and not to be molested. They galloped by him, yelling, but thus far both he and the church were safe.

The firing continued like an irregular explosion of fireworks, as small clumps of Indians came dashing through and shooting.

Then, believing that much of the white men's fire had been drawn, the main body came thundering into the town, yelling wildly, shooting at windows and loopholes, the while others were applying torches to the buildings.

In the saloon, in the stage office, in some of the larger shacks, men were crouching at windows and loopholes, pouring out a deadly fire, then dropping to the floor to reload. With the exception of Jones, no single white man was in the street. All were under cover. Virtually all the casualties thus far were Indians. Their numbers, however, were beginning to tell. There were at least two hundred of them well armed. Some of the advance guard, who had ridden through the town, were now returning at a gallop. A number had crept in the rear of buildings and houses, the while others were firing the fronts and drawing the fire of the defenders. Two or three of the houses burst into flames.

"Give it to 'em!" cried the defenders maddened by the sight of smoke and flames. "Make every shot count!" Some of the men were already hit, but not many.

Inside the church Molly was doing her utmost to quiet the fears of the few women and children. But for the most part those tried frontier-women, long accustomed to danger, were meeting the crisis in grim-visaged silence, endeavoring only to keep the children quiet. The church, at all events, was remaining unmolested.

The Overland Stage office, it appeared, was drawing the brunt of the attack. Hostlers, stablemen and riders, directed by Slade, were defending the office with a deadly fire. Except for the saddled pony that had been brought into the building, in case it survived to carry the mail eastward, when it came, the live stock in the corral had been abandoned to fate. All the Overland men were defending the station and the safe.

"Make every shot kill a Charlie Bent!" cried Slade. "Every bullet must hit a red devil. You've sworn to defend the company's property—now show you'll do it!"

The reference to Charlie Bent showed that the half-breed was in Slade's mind, that he connected his dupe and one-time friend with this assault—an

attempt, doubtless, on the gold in his safe.

Red in the meanwhile was in his tent lying on his belly under the flap, determined only upon one thing! He would defend the child with his last drop of blood and with his last cartridge. Steadily, patiently, he took careful aim and hit his target with almost every shot he fired. At times he would turn and speak to the invisible child under the blankets.

“Now be quiet, Baby. This is a game. Pretty soon all red men will be gone. Suck your rock-candy, and I’ll get you heaps more.” Poor tortured Red went on loading and firing.

Upon the opposite side of the tent, however, a young brave was crawling toward the flap. Carefully, with one slash of his knife, he ripped open the flap and began to pull at the blankets of the cot near by. He felt a human head.

He started with astonishment, as he pulled back the edge of the flap to see a small blond child peering at him and still busily sucking at a piece of rock-candy.

He seized the child, covering her mouth, dragged her forth stealthily and ran. A muffled wail, however, caught Red’s ear just as he was reloading.

With an answering cry, poor Red leaped to his feet in the tent and sought the baby’s hiding place. The tent was slit. The blankets empty. She was gone!

With a blood-stirring oath, in a frenzy of anger and despair, hardly knowing what he was doing, the big man, with a sob, threw down his gun and dashed out through the opening in the tent.

Like a madman, cursing and crying out, wild-eyed, hatless, he bounded toward the first clump of Indians he could see, savagely hurled them about, as though they were so many manikins, seized one of them and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat, demanding over and over:

“Where’s the kid—papoose—where’s the papoose?” Receiving no answer, Red glared at him for an instant, flung him aside like a spoiled vegetable and dashed on.

“He’s mad!” The braves muttered to one another. So stupefied were they by this conduct they did not even shoot after him.

Another brave was applying a torch to the corner of the roof of a shack. Red, with a blaze of fire in his eyes, leaped upon him, seized him by the throat, demanding,

“Where’s papoose—the kid?”

The Indian, as surprised as the others had been, shook his head. Red threw him also aside and rushed on. Shots and arrows were now flying after him, but he was heedless. He seemed to be leading a charmed life. Still he ran headlong about, demanding, “The kid—the papoose!” His heart was full to bursting of sorrow and blind suffering, and he cared not for a thousand deaths or torments, if only he could find the child!

# CHAPTER XXVI

## JACK WESTON'S RIDE

THE elation in Weston's heart at his victory, his triumph over Slade, and notably his defeat of Glen's diabolical scheme for disunion, filled his soul and blood with a current so heady, that he could scarce contain himself. Often had he ridden with all his nerves and energy at full tide, but never before as with this mail that carried the news of Lincoln's election.

"At this rate," he told himself, "the boys at Sacramento will get the news—the right news—in little over seven days!" He imagined the chagrin of the Knights of the Golden Circle, all of Glen's henchmen and plotters, when the rider clattered up to the post office in Fourth Street with the astonishing news, "Lincoln's elected!" That surprise in itself should be sufficient to throw them into irredeemable confusion. On he urged his mustang, like a jockey, talking to him in gasping phrases as he rode—

"This is your day, Pinto! I'd hate to lose you—but if you break your heart today—you died for your country—you'll know that. Grand thing for a horse—die for his country—or for a man, either!"



*A Paramount Picture.*

*The Pony Express.*

THEN CAME THE TIME FOR "RED" TO PART WITH HIS ONLY TWO FRIENDS IN THE WORLD—"FRISCO JACK" AND THE LITTLE ORPHAN GIRL.

With the alertness of the express rider, that was by now second nature, he scanned the horizon automatically for any signs toward or untoward, automatically bending forward for better vision.

All at once he sat bolt upright. Some six or seven miles out of Julesburg, he saw a widely-flung line moving toward him. He reigned in his horse for a steadier sight. Yes! Those were Indians, Indians in full war dress, charging toward him! Could Slade have arranged that, by some diabolical means of his own, to intercept the mail and him, to cut him off—after all? Slade's drunkenness that morning—Slade usually broke out under strain. But—impossible! In any case, he must think quickly.

Obviously, those Indians were moving to attack Julesburg.—Molly!—That was the first thought that occurred to him in association with “attack,” and the name of Molly quivered like an arrow in his heart. Molly was there exposed to the blood-maddened savages, to say nothing of Red, the child, Ascension, and all the rest of the town. Were he to turn back now he could still outstrip the Indians and return to Julesburg in time to give at least a few minutes' warning. And he could defend Molly.

His oath, however—his oath bound him to go on. But that was not all. The gravity and importance of this particular mail, the importance to California, to the Union! No—this was war. He could not turn back! This mail, of all mails, must at least have the stubbornest possible attempt of being taken through.

All these thoughts raced through his brain with singular cogency and clarity in a few seconds. His face was working with the anguish of the inner struggle.

“Now, Pinto!” he leaned forward along the mustang's neck and brought forth his revolvers, “This is where we may both go for good, but we can't turn back. Let's try it, Pinto. People will say a kind word about us if we do!” And suddenly applying the spurs, he dashed headlong toward the advancing far-spread line.

The Indians now yelling as they came, did not even attempt to close in upon him. They felt sure of getting him. Besides, to them, he was a greater menace if he turned back and rode toward Julesburg. Indeed, they seemed to spread out more thinly before him, though shots and arrows were now flying in his direction from the curves of the semicircle of riders.

Weston saved his fire until he was close enough to have some chance of effect, and kept spurring his pony onward.

Suddenly his revolvers spoke. He fired six shots and five men directly before him dropped from their ponies. This drew a volley of shots from the others, and those nearest the fallen ones began to close in upon him. Again he fired right and left, his head now close to that of the flying beast. Bullets and arrows grazed him, but none even drew blood. He rode through them as through a cloud. Some turned to pursue him. But a shout, possibly from a chief, called off the pursuers, and they turned back. Their business was with Julesburg.

It was some time before Weston turned his head. His heart working like a piston, he lay half stretched out over his pony's neck, urging the fleet little beast on with all the words and exclamations known to a rider.

"Well—Pinto!" he gasped, "we saved our necks that time—don't know how we did it, but looks as if we have. Keep it up, little horse! Now—if we don't meet any more of the red devils—we'll go through! Come on, Pinto—keep going, bless your little hoofs! Go on!"

It was a miracle, he knew, but he had got through. It was one of the many miracles for which the Pony Express was now famous. For in all its existence only one rider lost his life and his mail at the same time. Some had died of wounds afterwards. But their mail they had brought in, on foot in some cases, and delivered it to other hands with their last gasping breath.

Safety, or apparent safety, seemed to cloud Weston's senses for a moment, in a sort of waking swoon. As the pony raced on he seemed to see, as in a sort of swimming vision, the attack of the reds upon Julesburg, surrounding it, burning—Molly—

"Molly!" he suddenly cried as his mind's eye saw the Indians savagely drawing in upon her—and a cold sweat poured out over his body. His face was contorted with anguish. The price he was paying for doing his obvious duty was the highest, the most painful, he had ever been called upon to pay.

On a sudden he heard and saw at the same instant a rider coming towards him. He sat bolt upright and levelled his pistols simultaneously. Only one unexploded cartridge remained in them, and he did not remember in which pistol it was. But—it was needless. It was the rider eastward with the western mail. With a sharp automatic movement he reined in his astonished pony and stopped abruptly, barring the road. The other rider came up and also stopped.

"What's the idea, Jack?" he shouted. "Why this loss of time?"

Hastily Weston explained what had occurred and made a singular proposal to the man.

“Give me your pouch, Gilson, and you take mine. I’ve got to be there—back in Julesburg—if there’s any Julesburg left.”

“But see here, Jack—how can I? Slade will eat me up. They’ll all think I was scared. You’ve had your wallop at the red devils. Now lemme take my chances.”

“No, Gilson, I can’t. You see—my girl is there. I had to ride with the mail. But now you can take mine, I’ll take yours. Nothing’s stopped. The mail goes on just the same.” In Gilson’s ears reverberated only one word,—

“Your girl! You mean Molly?”

“Yep—Molly!” shouted Weston. The other youth hesitated for a fraction of a second, then cried:

“All right, Jack, have it your way.” Already he was loosening the leather thongs of the *mochila* from the pommel. With almost a single movement they swapped pouches.

“Tell ’em Lincoln’s elected!” cried Weston, “and tell ’em Julesburg’s attacked.” With a wave of their hands they were already galloping off, Gilson retracing his way westward and Jack returning to the doomed town of Julesburg, where his heart was. His brain reeled for a moment in a reaction from its acute tension.

“We’re going back to Molly, Pinto!” he cried. “Hard on you—but we don’t want to get there too late, do we?”

He had sent the precious mail past the reach of Slade now, he felt sure—and breathlessly he raced his horse toward Julesburg.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE RELIEF

THE smoke coming from various buildings in the town, brought Weston to a halt some two miles from Julesburg, to reload his pistols and to give his pony a brief breathing space. In a few moments, however, he was on his way again.

As he plunged into the South Platte half a dozen mounted Indians, evidently stationed there to intercept riders and to act as scouts, dashed out from behind the willows and cottonwoods with a fiendish yell and opened fire upon him.

Almost of themselves his pistols began to speak. His pony's ears had twitched forward before he had seen the Indians and automatically, upon that unerring signal, his hands had grasped his weapons. He dropped four of the reds and dashed on.

In the town the Indians were still pursuing their usual tactics of riding madly back and forth to kill any person that showed himself, the while others of their number were setting fire to buildings in the effort to drive out the occupants. One or two shacks had already disgorged their white inhabitants, who had nearly all fallen victims to the butchery. Red was still madly running about seizing Indians, demanding "the papoose," and flinging them aside. The man had gone mad, the Indians were convinced, and hesitated to kill him.

Still a large number of them clustered about the Overland Stage office. Slade and the gold in his safe were obviously the chief objective of the attack. The riders and stablemen, however, directed by Slade, were able to keep them at bay.

"If only those damn soldiers would come," muttered Slade, over and over, "give 'em what for."

The soldiers were not coming, but a man at a loophole suddenly reported:

"There comes Gilson through hell—and he's shootin' like hell!"

“If he gets here alive,” shouted Slade, “open the door and cover him with a volley at the devils. Don’t let ’em get the mail—even if they get him!”

The men silently attended to their reloading.

“Watch out!” cried Slade to the man at the loophole. “Tell us when he’s within fifty feet of the building. Somebody be ready to open the door.”

“Here he comes!” almost simultaneously called the man at the loophole.

“Open,” all but screamed Slade, “and give it to ’em!”

The heavy door was already unbarred and as it opened the defenders made a rush for it. Some eight or nine rifles fired at once, and almost as many Indians dropped when the rider, crouching low upon his pony, swept into the stage office. It was not Gilson at all, but Weston!

Instantly the heavy door closed behind him.

“Now, to the loopholes!” shouted Slade, “and give it to ’em again, before they recover their senses.” A crepitating volley followed.

“You!” he now exclaimed, turning upon Weston. “What did you do with your own mail?”

For one instant Slade had a wild notion that Weston might have thought better of what he termed his “treachery,” and had returned with the mail he had wrenched away from him by trickery. Slade’s voice sounded almost hopeful as he spoke.

“I changed with Gilson on the way,” came the even reply. “He’s carrying my mail west. I’ve brought his. I came back to help defend Julesburg.”

Slade stared at him for an instant with mounting wrath.

“And by whose orders did you do that?” he finally muttered.

“Nobody’s,” answered Weston. “This was no time to wait for orders.”

“I’ve a good mind to kill you for that,” said Slade, his fingers twitching upon his revolver butt.

“Better not,” murmured Weston, in a low, tone, “or I’ll sing out the reason. As it is, I’ll say nothing if you don’t.”

“How about it?” demanded Little Yank coming up to Slade at this moment with a grin. “Do I start now with this mail he’s brought for Fort Kearney?”

“You damn fool!” cried Slade, venting all his anger upon Little Yank. “D’you think you could live through that hell of devils out there? D’you want to lose the mail?”

“If Jack could go through ’em, why can’t I?” persisted that brave little rider doggedly.

“All right!” shouted Slade in a sudden fury of decision. “You start if you want to. We’ll cover you as we did Jack, but not beyond the door. You take your chances out there!”

“That goes!” cried Little Yank, and the men gave a cheer.

The Indians outside, hearing this, interpreted it as an impending sally from the defenders of the station and they thinned away.

“Now’s the time!” shouted a man at a loophole. “They heard us, and they’re scared.”

In a second’s time Little Yank and his *mochila* were in the saddle. The door was flung open and the men rushed out and fired at every Indian within sight. At the same instant Little Yank dashed out upon his roan mustang crouching low and firing warningly. Beside him for a few paces ran Weston shooting right and left.

Little Yank was gone, to what fate none could guess. In a moment the men were back in the station building. Weston, however, had not returned.

Slade smiled grimly as he barred the door. Perhaps the Indians would end the career of this Jack, for good and all, and save him the trouble?

Weston, however, was far from giving at that moment any thought to Slade. He was back in Julesburg, and the one word thundering in his brain was the name of Molly. The one image flooding his mind and vision was that of Molly. Shooting almost absently at any Indians in sight, he made his way to the cabin behind the blacksmith shop, one wall of which was smouldering. The door was ajar, and all was in disorder. The Indians had evidently been there. He searched the rooms frantically. They were empty. In the kitchen he remained standing stupefied for a moment, at a loss what to do next.

“Molly! Molly!” he seemed within himself to cry out in anguish. But his lips were voiceless.

A spasm of wild anger, like a tempest, suddenly shook him and his eyes were suffused as with a film of red. If Molly—if anything had happened to Molly, he would not care to live. He flung out of the empty cabin, and

paused as one abruptly awakened. A faint, muffled cheer reached his ears. Again—yes!—to the eastward—he heard a cheer!

Running stealthily now behind the cabin, he saw horsemen approaching and behind them a dim cloud of dust.

Troops? Yes! Those were the troops coming, coming back to Julesburg, at a run!

He could now see the officers galloping and the artillery boys lashing with both hands the mules harnessed to the light fieldpieces. Behind them was the column of foot advancing at double quick.

The Indians had already spread themselves out round the town on the prairie, bent upon escape, a few galloping and shouting through the streets calling off the rest of their number with warning cries of danger. Houses were smouldering or flaming. The Indians had been all but victorious, but now they were fleeing in a panic.

From the Overland Station, from the saloon, from other buildings, the defenders were pouring out and picking them off.

For one instant a troop of Indian braves charged into the town again yelling and shooting, to cover the retreat of their marauders, but already the mounted officers, with Billy Cody among them, were riding to meet them and joining in the fusillade of the inhabitants. Swiftly the Indians turned and fled toward the Platte, leaving their dead and wounded behind them.

Cheer after cheer greeted the soldiers as they came up, and frightened women now began to pour out of the church. The church, with old Ascension, like some biblical hero of old, posted before it, had actually remained unmolested. Men now rushed forward to embrace their dear ones. Women wept. Children laughed. Jubilation filled the air.

Molly, emerging with the others, and seeing her father alive and unharmed, flung her arms about him and sobbed out her relief and gratitude.

Weston espied her at a distance and his heart gave a wild leap. Clearing bodies of slain Indians, and whatever other obstacles were in his path, he seemed to fly toward her as on air, and, heedless of all, he seized her hungrily in his arms, covering her wet face with kisses.

“Molly!” was all he could say. “Molly! You are alive!” and again he pressed her to his heart.

A detachment of troops was ordered to pursue the flying Indians, who had come so near destroying Julesburg, and some of the officers were

organizing a fire brigade to save what buildings it was possible to save.

Slade came forward to the commanding officer, nodding:

“That was a narrow shave, Major. Did you happen to meet our rider?”

“You mean Billy?” responded the Major, “Why, he brought us the news.”

“No, I mean Gilson,” said Slade. They had not met him, but Billy now recalled seeing what appeared like a rider far to the southward. He believed that to have been Gilson, making a wide detour. It was the truth. Gilson, as was subsequently learned, carried his mail to his destination without further mishap.

“Red—have you seen Red lately?” was the first question Weston asked of Molly and Ascension. Molly had not seen him at all. Jones declared he had seen him running wildly about among the Indians like one demented. But that was some time before. They shook their heads sadly, fearing the worst.

On a sudden, Red in person, grimy and bleeding, appeared before the stage office carrying his little foster daughter with terror and excitement upon her face, and dragging an Indian in war paint by the collar of his buckskin shirt.

“Here he is, the fiend!” cried Red in all but choking excitement. “Just caught him! He was going to scalp the baby, the damned half-breed—scalp this child! What shall we do with him, men—scalp the child—the devil!—” Red became inarticulate with fury.

The people of Julesburg were astonished to perceive in the painted Indian the half-breed Charlie Bent!

“Gimme a chance to speak!” he choked as Red held him. “They were goin’ to kill the kid. I wanted to save her. This way I thought I could save her.”

“Do you know this Indian, dearie?” Red like a judge turned to the little girl.

“Bad man—” said the little girl gazing at the painted features and clutching Red’s shirt in her terror. “He killed my mamma.”

Bent in a frenzy of terror cried out that the child was mistaken—that he had tried to save her.

“String him up!” Slade snapped shortly.

The half-breed now began to scream accusations against Slade.

“He did all that—he’s at the bottom of it—he staged the attack on the caravan—he’s got rich by it—now he shifts it on to me—”

Without the movement of so much as a muscle, however, Slade made a gesture to the men to take the half-breed away.

Then, with the same cold composure Slade turned toward the group composed of Jones, Molly and Jack.

“You failed to carry your mail to its destination, Jack. You were safe, yet you came back here without orders. You are discharged from the employment of the company.”

One hand was resting upon his revolver. Perhaps at the last minute he could provoke this Jack to a quarrel?

Jack, however, merely uttered a laugh.

“You couldn’t give me anything I want more than my discharge,” he said, turning with a joyous light to Molly.

The citizens and the soldiers, fighting the smouldering flames through the town, had gained the upper hand. Some of the soldiers who had pursued the Indians were returning, since they were not then equipped to pursue them any great distance.

Jones and Molly, Jack, Red and the little girl were on their way to the blacksmith’s cabin. Hastily Jack and Red ran forward, got pails of water, and began to drench the smouldering corner of the cabin that was afire. Jones himself scarcely heeded their efforts. He was merely waiting their return. When they came in, excited and triumphant, he commanded:

“Down on our knees, all of us, and let us offer thanksgiving for the mercy shown us! The Lord was bent upon destroying the city. Yet He has saved us once again in His infinite mercy. Peradventure one among you is the righteous man that saved the city? Let us give thanks and prayer for the miracle!”

Outside were still reverberating the happy exultant shouts of the inhabitants at their miraculous escape.

“But Old Ascension said Julesburg would be destroyed!” laughed one of the gamblers. “We’re still here, ain’t we?”

It was only later they learned of the singular rôle the blacksmith’s white robe had played in the saving, if not the salvation, of the town.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### RED STARTS FOR RHODE ISLAND

OLD ASCENSION JONES was right. It was a miracle that day that had saved old Julesburg from destruction. Had it not been for the timely aid of the troops, it is probable that the town would have ended its history then and there.

As it was, it survived a little over four years longer, when it was razed to the ground by those same savages and others, so that today not even the oldest inhabitant of the modern Julesburg, upon the Union Pacific Railway, is certain of the site of the old frontier town. The Plains swept over the spot once again. And it is only the American pioneering spirit that has combated the fate predicted for it by Ascension. In place of a desert of brimstone and salt, broad western farms cover its ancient site.

The days immediately following that attack were full of excitement and activity in Julesburg.

Russell of the Overland upon hearing of the raid came post-haste to Julesburg to learn the extent of the new depredations. Could the company stand any more depredations? As events proved, it could not. All but bankrupt, because of its losses, the Overland and Pike's Peak Express Company passed into other hands and was subsequently taken over by the Wells-Fargo Express Company. Its days in any case were numbered. The following October, the transcontinental telegraph completed, ended its existence. With it terminated the great pioneering epoch of the West. The telegraph and, nine years later, the railway, ushered in the modern era.

That month of November, 1860, however, the fame of the Pony Express rang throughout the country. The little ponies had carried the news of Lincoln's election to California in seven days, seventeen hours.

Sacramento was again wild with excitement.

"Lincoln's elected!" had shouted the express rider hoarsely, five days after Weston had turned over his mail to Gilson, west of Julesburg, "Lincoln's elected!"—and the rider thundered up to the Union Hotel in Second Street.

A terrific cheer went up. Anti-Glenites and Unionists cheered to the verge of apoplexy. Women, and men too, fell upon their knees and prayed in thanksgiving for the pony rider and the news he had brought. Men embraced each other in the public streets and wept with joy.

“California is safe!” they sobbed. “The Union will stand!”

Glen’s henchmen, stupefied by the turn of events, endeavored to rally the Knights of the Golden Circle and to raise the cry of separation, insurrection. But it proved not even a half-hearted attempt. The victorious emotion of the Republicans was too great, and the chagrin of the Glenites too deep. So deep, indeed, was it, that some of them, disgusted with the failure of Glen’s assurances, promptly and openly went over to the other side.

Henceforward and forever California remained an integral part of the Union. During the Civil War that broke out the following year, Glen nevertheless continued his efforts for separation. Fleeing from California to the South, he engaged even the interest of the Emperor Maximilian in a scheme for the colonization of Sonora province in Mexico by settlers of his own choosing from California and elsewhere. It won him the sobriquet of “the Duke of Sonora,” but nothing else. Twice he was arrested by the orders of Seward, Lincoln’s Secretary of State, and once he was held in prison for eight months. But he lived to die, a broken man, in California as part of the United States.

The arrival of Russell at Julesburg after the Indian attack had served in a way to put a truce into the private quarrels of Slade and Weston, and a new zest into the enterprise of the Pony Express.

Ignorant as he was of Glen’s desperate scheme for the substitution of a false mail, Russell could dwell only upon the truly heroic work of the service and of Slade.

He endeavored to patch up the quarrel between Slade and Jack Weston and to have the latter reinstated as a rider.

“No, thank you, Mr. Russell,” Weston smiled gently. “I’ve accepted my discharge. Mr. Slade is right. I committed a breach of discipline in failing to ride my section. I’m discharged—and satisfied. The service owes me nothing.”

“Very well, young man,” Russell answered sternly. “You are passing up an opportunity of serving under a very brave, I may say, a great man. Slade,” he turned to the great man, “you are now promoted, with the thanks of the



company, for your defense of Julesburg and for sending the mails through without a hitch or the loss of a single trip or a single letter. Here is a small check from the company to prove its gratitude.”

Jack and Red, who were present at this speech, which Russell aimed to make as public as possible, twinkled at each other, but said nothing.

Jack Weston’s interests, in truth, were now centered elsewhere. After that dreadful day in November, when he had publicly embraced and kissed Molly, he had taken the first opportunity to tell her all of his past, his defeat at gold-mining, his bitter despondency that had driven him to gambling, his espousal of the cause of California and the Union, that made him forswear gambling forever—with the sole exception that had occurred in the Julesburg saloon, when he had taken Red’s place.

But that which had once loomed so large to her, now appeared as less than nothing in face of his courage and daring, in braving death over and over, in his effort to defeat the plot of Glen and Slade against California and the Union. And when she learned that his change of places with Gilson was wholly upon her account, that he rode a second time through the inflamed savages and returned to Julesburg to be at her side, she wept softly and hid her face in shame.

“I’m not worth all that, Jack,” she murmured. “Oh, believe me, I am not. Though I loved you with all my heart, I doubted you all the time. And yet, oh, how I went on loving you!”

It is probable that Weston was successful in resolving her perplexity. For a week later Molly, Jack and Ascension booked passage in the coach to Sacramento, where the two lovers were to be married.

The few days of waiting for that event were the most intensely miserable poor Rhode Island Red had ever spent in his life. Promptly he had announced his resignation from the company’s service. But where was he to go? Theoretically he was but a sojourner at Julesburg, tarrying on his way to his new England home, in Rhode Island. But—his little girl—was he to take her with him? Molly and Jack promptly offered to adopt her or to take her temporarily, until he could send for her. But could he ever send? In his heart he knew he was a rolling stone.

If he gave up the child now he feared he would never see her again, nor yet Jack or Molly. His heart seemed to him to dissolve like water. All his life was breaking to pieces. Now he said they could take her, now he cried back and declared he could not part from the child. All his past and any future

seemed blotted out in the inward tears this strong man was constantly shedding. Finally, however, after a fever of cogitation and sleepless nights, he agreed that the child had best go to Sacramento with Molly and Jack.

The day they took their places in the westbound stagecoach appeared to him like the day of his dissolution. The world was dissolving into chaos like mist before his eyes. He did not then foresee his future days with Weston during the bitter rigors of the Civil War, their subsequent years of close association in mining and other business, their long-continued friendship. The future simply appeared to him as of an awful darkness, like the nethermost pit of Sheol.

The time for good-byes had arrived. All Julesburg was there to bid farewell to Molly, Ascension and Jack. Slade genially shook hands with all, as though he had been their warmest lifelong friend.

“Good-bye, Molly! Good-bye, Jack! Good-bye, Red. Let us hear from you from Rhode Island—the minute you get there!”

“Good-bye, Uncle Red!” from the little girl. Again and again he kissed her, and hugged her to his shattered bosom. It was heartbreaking torture. Flesh and blood could hardly bear it. Yet Red had borne it.

For full five minutes Red had borne it, after the departure of the coach and all he held dear on earth. The tears gushed from his eyes like a torrent, as he turned away weeping in public—and unashamed.

Slade, the tender-hearted, alone chuckled with laughter.

“So this is where you start for Rhode Island, is it, Red?” he said. “Well, I wish you luck.”

Suddenly a feverish energy seemed to galvanize Red’s dejected frame and muscles. With the fleetness of a deer he ran to his tent, seized the bundle of his effects all made up, and then shot like a bolt toward the corral. There he seized the horse the company had given him in place of his own former one, upon which he had ridden out of Sacramento, and he saddled him with quivering fingers. He strapped the bundle to the saddle, mounted and clattered up to the stage office.

“What d’you want?” said Slade.

“My pay!” snapped Red, as though quicksilver were quivering in his legs. Slade glanced at the book and counted out the money owing to stableman Red.

“Is this where you start for Rhode Island?” smiled Slade.

“No!” cried Red leaping into the saddle. “I’m goin’ West, to Sacramento!”

All the hostlers and stablemen outside heard him!

“Durn’ if he hasn’t got some sense at last!” someone cried, and they all raised a raucous cheer. “After her, Red! Ye’ll overtake the coach in ten minutes!”

“Yep! Yep! Yep!” cried Red from exultant lungs as he hit the trail westward and disappeared like a young tornado.

I knew then and I know now that this blind impulse of his heart was better than the wisest decision Samuel Redruth, or Rhode Island Red, as he was called, ever lived to make. Only recently, in the dim splendor of the Monteleone palace in Rome, two old men, lifelong friends, again wholeheartedly confirmed Red in his impulsive action of that day. John Weston was one of those old men, and I was the other.

For—I was Rhode Island Red.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Pony Express* by Henry James Forman and Walter Woods]