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THE UNTAMED

CHAPTER I

PAN OF THE DESERT

EVEN to a high-flying bird this was a country to be passed over quickly. It was burned and brown, littered with fragments of rock, whether vast or small, as if the refuse were tossed here after the making of the world. A passing shower drenched the bald knobs of a range of granite hills and the slant morning sun set the wet rocks aflame with light. In a short time the hills lost their halo and resumed their brown. The moisture evaporated. The sun rose higher and looked sternly across the desert as if he searched for any remaining life which still struggled for existence under his burning course.

And he found life. Hardy cattle moved singly or in small groups and browsed on the withered bunch grass. Summer scorched them, winter, humped their backs with cold and arched up their bellies with famine, but they were a breed schooled through generations for this fight against nature. In this junk-shop of the world, rattlesnakes were rulers of the soil. Overhead the buzzards, ominous black specks pendant against the white-hot sky, ruled the air.

It seemed impossible that human beings could live in this rock-wilderness. If so, they must be to other men what the lean, hardy cattle of the hills are to the corn-fed stabled beeves of the States.

Over the shoulder of a hill came a whistling which might have been attributed to the wind, had not this day been deathly calm. It was fit music for such a scene, for it seemed neither of heaven nor earth, but the soul of the great god Pan come back to earth to charm those nameless rocks with his wild, sweet piping. It changed to harmonious phrases loosely connected. Such might be the exultant improvisations of a master violinist.

A great wolf, or a dog as tall and rough coated as a wolf, trotted around the hillside. He paused with one foot lifted and lolling, crimson tongue, as he scanned the distance and then turned to look back in the direction from which he had come. The weird music changed to whistled notes as liquid as a flute. The sound drew closer. A horseman rode out on the shoulder and checked his mount. One could not choose him at first glance as a type of those who fight nature in a region where the thermometer moves through a scale of a hundred and sixty degrees in the year to an accompaniment of cold-stabbing winds and sweltering suns. A thin, handsome face with large brown eyes and black hair, a body tall but rather slenderly made—he might have been a descendant of some ancient family of Norman nobility; but could such proud gentry be found riding the desert in a tall-

"All his talk about manhandling her is bunk. He had some message for her. I saw him speak to her when she was struggling in his arms. Then she conveniently fainted."

Silent turned on Buck.

"Is that straight?"

"It is," said Daniels easily.

The outlaws started and their expectant grins died out.

"By God, Buck!" roared Silent, "if you're double crossin' me—but I ain't goin' to be hasty now. What happened? Tell it yourself! What did you say to her?"

"While she was fightin' with me," said Buck, "she hollered: 'Let me go!' I says: 'I'll see you in hell first!' Then she fainted."

The roar of laughter drowned Haines's further protest.

"You win, Buck," said Silent. "Take the job."

As Buck started for the door Haines called to him:

"Hold on, Buck, if you're aboveboard you won't mind giving your word to see that no one comes up the valley and that you'll be here in the morning?"

The words set a swirling blackness before Buck's eyes. He turned slowly.

"That's reasonable," said Silent. "Speak up, Daniels."

"All right," said Buck, his voice very low. "I'll be here in the morning, and I'll see that no one comes up the valley."

There was the slightest possible emphasis on the word "up."

On a rock directly in front of the shanty Buck took up his watch. The little house behind him was black. Presently he heard the soft call of Kate: "Is it time?"

His eyes wandered to the ranch house. He could catch the drone of many voices. He made no reply.

"Is it time?" she repeated.

Still he would not venture a reply, however guarded. She called a third time, and when he made no response he heard her voice break to a moan of hopelessness. And yet he waited, waited, until the light in the ranch house went out, and there was not a sound.

"Kate!" he said, gauging his voice carefully so that it could not possibly travel to the ranch house, which all the while he carefully scanned.

For answer the front door of the shanty squeaked.

"Back!" he called. "Go back!"

The door squeaked again.

"They're asleep in the ranch house," she said. "Aren't we safe?"

"S—sh!" he warned. "Talk low! They aren't all asleep. There's one in the ranch house who'll never take his eyes off me till morning."

"What can we do?"

"Go out the back way. You won't be seen if you're careful. Haines has his eyes on me, not you. Go for the stable. Saddle your horses. Then lead them out and take the path on the other side of the house.

Don't mount them until you're far below the house. Go slow all the way. Sounds travel far up this canyon."

"Aren't you coming with us?"

"No."

"But when they find us gone?"

"Think of Dan—not me!"

"God be merciful to you!"

In a moment the back door of the shanty creaked. They must be opening it by inches. When it was wide they would run for the stable. He wished now that he had warned Kate to walk, for a slow moving object catches the eye more seldom than one which travels fast. If Lee Haines was watching at that moment his attention must be held to Buck for one all important minute. He stood up, rolled a cigarette swiftly, and lighted it. The spurt and flare of the match would hold even the most suspicious eye for a short time, and in those few seconds Kate and her father might pass out of view behind the stable.

He sat down again. A muffled sneeze came from the ranch house and Buck felt his blood run cold. The forgotten cigarette between his fingers burned to a dull red and then went out. In the stable a horse stamped. He leaned back, locked his hands idly behind his head, and commenced to whistle. Now there was a snort, as of a horse when it leaves the shelter of a bam and takes the first breath of open air.

All these sounds were faint, but to Buck, straining his ears in an agony of suspense, each one came like the blast of a trumpet. Next there was a click like that of iron striking against rock. Evidently they were leading the horses around on the far side of the house. With a trembling hand he relighted his cigarette and waited, waited, waited. Then he saw them pass below the house! They were dimly stalking figures in the night, but to Buck it seemed as though they walked in the blaze of ten thousand searchlights. He held his breath in expectancy of that mocking laugh from the house—that sharp command to halt—that crack of the revolver.

Yet nothing happened. Now he caught the click of the horses' iron shoes against the rocks farther and farther down the valley. Still no sound from the ranch house. They were safe!

It was then that the great temptation seized on Buck.

It would be simple enough for him to break away. He could walk to the stable, saddle his horse, and tear past the ranch house as fast as his pony could gallop. By the time the outlaws were ready for the pursuit, he would be a mile or more away, and in the hills such a handicap was enough. One thing held him. It was frail and subtle like the invisible net of the enchanter—that word he had passed to Jim Silent, to see that nothing came up the valley and to appear in the ranch house at sunrise.

In the midst of his struggle, strangely enough, he began to whistle the music he had learned from Dan Barry, the song of The Untamed, those who hunt for ever, and are for ever hunted. When his whistling

died away he touched his hand to his lips where Kate had kissed him, and then smiled. The sun pushed up over the eastern hills.

When he entered the ranch house the big room was a scene of much arm stretching and yawning as the outlaws dressed. Lee Haines was already dressed. Buck smiled ironically.

"I say, Lee," he said, "you look sort of used up this mornin', eh?"

The long rider scowled.

"I'd make a guess you've not had much sleep, Haines," went on Buck. "Your eyes is sort of hollow."

"Not as hollow as your damned lying heart!"

"Drop that!" commanded Silent. "You hold a grudge like a woman, Lee! How was the watch, Buck? Are you all in?"

"Nothin' come up the valley, an' here I am at sunrise," said Buck. "I reckon that speaks for itself."

"It sure does," said Silent, "but the gal and her father are kind of slow this mornin'. The old man generally has a fire goin' before dawn is fairly come. There ain't no sign of smoke now."

"Maybe he's sleepin' late after the excitement of yesterday," said Bill Kilduff. "You must of thrown some sensation into the family, Buck."

The eyes of Haines had not moved from the face of Buck.

"I think I'll go over and see what's keeping them so late in bed," he said, and left the house.

"He takes it pretty hard," said Jordan, his scarred face twisted with Satanic mirth, "but don't go rubbin' it into him, Buck, or you'll be havin' a man-sized fight on your hands. I'd jest about as soon mix with the chief as cross Haines. When he starts the undertaker does the finishin'!"

"Thanks for remindin' me," said Buck drily. Through the window he saw Haines throw open the door of the shanty.

The outcry which Buck expected did not follow. For a long moment the long rider stood there without moving. Then he turned and walked slowly back to the house, his head bent, his forehead gathered in a puzzled frown.

"What's the matter, Lee?" called Silent as his lieutenant entered the room again. "You look sort of sick. Didn't she have a bright mornin' smile for you?"

Haines raised his head slowly. The frown was not yet gone.

"They aren't there," he announced.

His eyes shifted to Buck. Everyone followed his example, Silent cursing softly.

"As a joker, Lee," said Buck coldly, "you're some Little Eva. I s'pose they jest nacherally evaporated durin' the night, maybe?"

"Haines," said Silent sharply, "are you serious?"

The latter nodded.

"Then by God, Buck, you'll have to say a lot in a few words. Lee, you suspected him all the time, but I was a fool!"

Daniels felt the colour leaving his face, but help came from the quarter from which he least expected it.

“Jim, don’t draw!” cried Haines.

The eyes of the chief glittered like the hawk’s who sees the field-mouse scurrying over the ground far below.

“He ain’t your meat, Lee,” he said. “It’s me he’s double crossed.”

“Chief,” said Haines, “last night while he watched the shanty, I watched *him!*”

“Well?”

“I saw him keep his post in front of the cabin all night without moving. And he was wideawake all the time.”

“Then how in hell—”

“The back door of the cabin!” said Kilduff suddenly.

“By God, that’s it! They sneaked out there and then went down on the other side of the house.”

“If I had let them go,” interposed Buck, “do you suppose I’d be here?”

The keen glance of Silent moved from Buck to Haines, and then back again. He turned his back on them.

The quiet which had fallen on the room was now broken by the usual clatter of voices, cursing, and laughter. In the midst of it Haines stepped close to Buck and spoke in a guarded voice.

“Buck,” he said, “I don’t know how you did it, but I have an idea—”

“Did what?”

The eyes of Haines were sad.

“I was a clean man, once,” he said quietly, “and you’ve done a clean man’s work!”

He put out his hand and that of Buck’s advanced slowly to meet it.

“Was it for Dan or Kate that you did it?”

The glance of Buck roamed far away.

“I dunno,” he said softly. “I think it was to save my own rotten soul!”

On the other side of the room Silent beckoned to Purvis.

“What is it?” asked Hal, coming close.

“Speak low,” said Silent. “I’m talking to you, not to the crowd. I think Buck is crooked as hell. I want you to ride down to the neighbourhood of his house. Scout around it day and night. You may see something worth while.”

Meanwhile, in that utter blackness which precedes the dawn, Kate and her father reached the mouth of the canyon.

“Kate,” said old Joe in a tremulous voice, “if I was a prayin’ man I’d git down on my knees an’ thank God for deliverin’ you tonight.”

“Thank Buck Daniels, who’s left his life in pawn for us. I’ll go straight for Buck’s house. You must ride to Sheriff Morris and tell him that an honest man is up there in the power of Silent’s gang.”

“But—” he began.

She waved her hand to him, and spurring her horse to a furious gallop raced off into the night. Her father stared after her for a few moments, but then, as she had advised, rode for Gus Morris.

CHAPTER XXXII

THOSE WHO SEE IN THE DARK

IT was still early morning when Kate swung from her horse before the house of Buck Daniels. Instinct seemed to lead her to the sick-room, and when she reached it she paid not the slightest attention to the old man and his wife, who sat nodding beside the bed. They started up when they heard the challenging growl of Black Bart, which relapsed into an eager whine of welcome as he recognized Kate.

She saw nothing but the drawn white face of Dan and his blue pencilled eyelids. She ran to him. Old Sam, hardly awake, reached out to stop her. His wife held him back.

"It's Delilah!" she whispered. "I seen her face!"

Kate was murmuring soft, formless sounds which made the old man and his wife look to each other with awe. They retreated towards the door as if they had been found intruding where they had no right.

They saw the fever-bright eyes of Dan open. They heard him murmur petulantly, his glance wandering. Her hand passed across his forehead, and then her touch lingered on the bandage which surrounded his left shoulder. She cried out at that, and Dan's glance checked in its wandering and fixed upon the face which leaned above him. They saw his eyes brighten, widen, and a frown gradually contract his forehead. Then his hand went up slowly and found hers.

He whispered something.

"What did he say?" murmured Sam.

"I dunno," she answered. "I think it was 'Delilah!' See her shrink!"

"Shut up!" cautioned Sam. "Ma, he's comin' to his senses!"

There was no doubt of it now, for a meaning had come into his eyes.

"Shall I take her away?" queried Sam in a hasty whisper. "He may do the girl harm. Look at the yaller in his eyes!"

"No," said his wife softly, "it's time for us to leave 'em alone."

"But look at him now!" he muttered. "He's makin' a sound back in his throat like the growl of a wolf! I'm afeard for the gal, ma!"

"Sam, you're an old fool!"

He followed her reluctantly from the room.

"Now," said his wife, "we c'n leave the door a little open—jest a crack—an' you c'n look through and tell when she's in any reel danger."

Sam obeyed.

“Dan ain’t sayin’ a word,” he said. “He’s jest glarin’ at her.”

“An’ what’s she doin’?” asked Mrs. Daniels.

“She’s got her arm around his shoulders. I never knew they could be such a pile of music in a gal’s voice, ma!”

“Sam, you was always a fool!”

“He’s pushin’ her away to the length of his arm.”

“An’ she? An’ she?” whispered Mrs. Daniels.

“She’s talkin’ quick. The big wolf is standin’ close to them an’ turnin’ his head from one face to the other like he was wonderin’ which was right in the argyment.”

“The ways of lovers is as queer as the ways of the Lord, Sam!”

“Dan has caught an arm up before his face, an’ he’s sayin’ one word over an’ over. She’s dropped on her knees beside the bed. She’s talkin’. Why does she talk so low, ma?”

“She don’t dare speak loud for fear her silly heart would bust. Oh, I know, I know! What fools all men be! What fools! She’s askin’ him to forgive her.”

“An’ he’s tryin’ all his might not to,” whispered Mrs. Daniels in an awe-stricken voice.

“Black Bart has put his head on the lap of the gal. You c’n hear him whine! Dan looks at the wolf an’ then at the girl. He seems sort of dumb-founded. She’s got her one hand on the head of Bart. She’s got the other hand to her face, and she’s weepin’ into that hand. Martha, she’s give up tryin’ to persuade him.”

There was a moment of silence.

“He’s reachin’ out his hand for Black Bart. His fingers is on those of the girl. They’s both starin’.”

“Ay, ay!” she said. “An’ what now?”

But Sam closed the door and set his back to it, facing his wife.

“I reckon the rest of it’s jest like the endin’ of a book, ma,” he said.

“Men is all fools!” whispered Mrs. Daniels, but there were tears in her eyes.

Sam went out to put up Kate’s horse in the stable. Mrs. Daniels sat in the dining-room, her hands clasped in her lap while she watched the grey dawn come up the east. When Sam entered and spoke to her, she returned no answer. He shook his head as if her mood completely baffled him, and then, worn out by the long watching, he went to bed.

For along time Mrs. Daniels sat without moving, with the same strange smile transfiguring her. Then she heard a soft step pause at the entrance to the room, and turning saw Kate. There was something in their faces which made them strangely alike. A marvellous grace and dignity came to Mrs. Daniels as she rose.

“My dear!” she said.

“I’m so happy!” whispered Kate.

“Yes, dear! And Dan?”

“He’s sleeping like a child! Will you look at him? I think the fever’s gone!”

They went hand in hand—like two girls, and they leaned above the bed where Whistling Dan lay smiling as he slept. On the floor Black Bart growled faintly, opened one eye on them, and then relapsed into slumber. There was no longer anything to guard against in that house.

* * *

It was several days later that Hal Purvis, returning from his scouting expedition, met no less a person than Sheriff Gus Morris at the mouth of the canyon leading to the old Salton place.

“Lucky I met you, Hal,” said the genial sheriff. “I’ve saved you from a wild-goose chase.”

“How’s that?”

“Silent has jest moved.”

“Where?”

“He’s taken the trail up the canyon an’ cut across over the hills to that old shanty on Baldeagle Creek. It stands—”

“I know where it is,” said Purvis. “Why’d he move?”

“Things was gettin’ too hot. I rode over to tell him that the boys was talkin’ of huntin’ up the canyon to see if they could get any clue of him. They knowed from Joe Cumberland that the gang was once here.”

“Cumberland went to you when he got out of the valley?” queried Purvis with a grin.

“Straight.”

“And then where did Cumberland go?”

“I s’pose he went home an’ joined his gal.”

“He didn’t,” said Purvis drily.

“Then where is he? An’ who the hell cares where he is?”

“They’re both at Buck Daniels’s house.”

“Look here, Purvis, ain’t Buck one of your own men? Why, I seen him up at the camp jest a while ago!”

“Maybe you did, but the next time you call around he’s apt to be missin’.”

“D’you think—”

“He’s double crossed us. I not only seen the girl an’ her father at Buck’s house, but I also seen a big dog hangin’ around the house. Gus, it was Black Bart, an’ where that wolf is you c’n lay to it that Whistlin’ Dan ain’t far away!”

The sheriff stared at him in dumb amazement, his mouth open.

“They’s a price of ten thousand on the head of Whistlin’ Dan,” suggested Purvis.

The sheriff still seemed too astonished to understand.

“I s’pose,” said Purvis, “that you wouldn’t care special for an easy lump sum of ten thousand, what?”

"In Buck Daniels's house!" burst out the sheriff.

"Yep," nodded Purvis, "that's where the money is if you c'n get enough men together to gather in Whistlin' Dan Barry."

"D'you really think I'd get some boys together to round up Whistlin' Dan? Why, Hal, you know there ain't no real reason for that price on his head!"

"D'you always wait for 'real reasons' before you set your fat hands on a wad of money?"

The sheriff moistened his lips.

"Ten thousand dollars!"

"Ten thousand dollars!" echoed Purvis.

"By God, I'll do it! If I got him, the boys would forget all about Silent. They're afraid of Jim, but jest the thought of Barry paralyzes them! I'll start roundin' up the boys I need today. Tonight we'll do our plannin'. Tomorrer mornin' bright an' early we'll hit the trail."

"Why not go after him tonight?"

"Because he'd have an edge on us. I got a hunch that devil c'n see in the dark."

He grinned apologetically for this strange idea, but Purvis nodded with perfect sympathy, and then turned his horse up the canyon. The sheriff rode home whistling. On ten thousand dollars more he would be able to retire from this strenuous life.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE SONG OF THE UNTAMED

BUCK and his father were learning of a thousand crimes charged against Dan. Wherever a man riding a black horse committed an outrage it was laid to the account of this new and most terrible of long riders. Two cowpunchers were found dead on the plains. Their half-emptied revolvers lay close to their hands, and their horses were not far off. In ordinary times it would have been accepted that they had killed each other, for they were known enemies, but now men had room for one thought only. And why should not a man with the courage to take an outlaw from the centre of Elkhead be charged with every crime on the range? Jim Silent had been a grim plague, but at least he was human. This devil defied death.

These were both sad and happy days for Kate. The chief cause of her sadness, strangely enough, was the rapidly returning strength of Dan. While he was helpless he belonged to her. When he was strong he belonged to his vengeance on Jim Silent; and when she heard Dan whistling softly his own wild, weird music, she knew its meaning as she would have known the wail of a hungry wolf on a winter night. It was the song of the untamed. She never spoke of her knowledge. She took the happiness of the moment to her heart and closed her eyes

against tomorrow.

Then came an evening when she watched Dan play with Black Bart—a game of tag in which they darted about the room with a violence which threatened to wreck the furniture, but running with such soft footfalls that there was no sound except the rattle of Bart's claws against the floor and the rush of their breath. They came to an abrupt stop and Dan dropped into a chair while Black Bart sank upon his haunches and snapped at the hand which Dan flicked across his face with lightning movements. The master fell motionless and silent. His eyes forgot the wolf. Rising, they rested on Kate's face. They rose again and looked past her.

She understood and waited.

"Kate," he said at last, "I've got to start on the trail."

Her smile went out. She looked where she knew his eyes were staring, through the window and far out across the hills where the shadows deepened and dropped slanting and black across the hollows. Far away a coyote wailed. The wind which swept the hills seemed to her like a refrain of Dan's whistling—the song and the summons of the untamed.

"That trail will never bring you home," she said. There was a long silence.

"You ain't cryin', honey?"

"I'm not crying, Dan."

"I got to go."

"Yes."

"Kate, you got a dyin' whisper in your voice."

"That will pass, dear."

"Why, honey, you *are* cryin'!"

He took her face between his hands, and stared into her misted eyes, but then his glance wandered past her, through the window, out to the shadowy hills.

"You won't leave me now?" she pleaded.

"I must!"

"Give me one hour more!"

"Look!" he said, and pointed.

She saw Black Bart reared up with his forepaws resting on the window-sill, while he looked into the thickening night with the eyes of the hunter which sees in the dark.

"The wolf knows, Kate," he said, "but I can't explain."

He kissed her forehead, but she strained close to him and raised her lips.

She cried, "My whole soul is on them."

"Not that!" he said huskily. "There's still blood on my lips an' I'm goin' out to get them clean."

He was gone through the door with the wolf racing before him.

She stumbled after him, her arms outspread, blind with tears; and

then, seeing that he was gone indeed, she dropped into the chair, buried her face against the place where his head had rested, and wept. Far away the coyote wailed again, and this time nearer.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE COWARD

BEFORE the coyote cried again, three shadows glided into the night. The lighted window in the house was like a staring eye that searched after them, but Satan, with the wolf running before, vanished quickly among the shadows of the hills. They were glad. They were loosed in the void of the mountain-desert with no destiny save the will of the master. They seemed like one being rather than three. The wolf was the eyes, the horse the strong body to flee or pursue, and the man was the brain which directed, and the power which struck.

He had formulated no plan of action to free Buck and kill Silent. All he knew was that he must reach the long riders at once, and he would learn their whereabouts from Morris. He rode more slowly as he approached the hotel of the sheriff. Lights burned at the dining-room windows. Probably the host still sat at table with his guests, but it was strange that they should linger over their meal so late. He had hoped that he would be able to come upon Morris by surprise. Now he must take him in the midst of many men. With Black Bart slinking at his heels he walked softly across the porch and tiptoed through the front room.

The door to the dining-room was wide. Around the table sat a dozen men, with the sheriff at their head. The latter, somewhat red of face, as if from the effort of a long speech, was talking low and earnestly, sometimes brandishing his clenched fist with such violence that it made his flabby cheeks quiver.

"We'll get to the house right after dawn," he was saying, "because that's the time when most men are so thick-headed with sleep that—"

"Not Whistling Dan Barry," said one of the men, shaking his head. "He won't be thickheaded. Remember, I seen him work in Elk-head, when he slipped through the hands of a roomful of us."

A growl of agreement went around the table, and Black Bart in sympathy, echoed the noise softly.

"What's that?" called the sheriff, raising his head sharply.

Dan, with a quick gesture, made Black Bart slink a pace back.

"Nothin'," replied one of the men. "This business is gettin' on your nerves, sheriff. I don't blame you. It's gettin' on mine."

"I'm trustin' to you boys to stand back of me all through," said the sheriff with a sort of whine, "but I'm thinkin' that we won't have no trouble. When we see him we won't stop for no questions to be asked, but turn loose with our six-guns an' shoot him down like a dog. He's

not human an' he don't deserve—Oh, God!”

He started up from his chair, white-faced, his hands high above his head, staring at the apparition of Whistling Dan, who stood with two revolvers covering the posse. Every man was on his feet instantly, with arms straining stiffly up. The muzzles of revolvers are like the eyes of some portraits. No matter from what angle you look at them, they seem directed straight at you. And every cowpuncher in the room was sure that he was the main object of Dan's aim.

“Morris!” said Dan.

“For God's sake, don't shoot!” screamed the sheriff. “I—”

“Git down on your knees! Watch him, Bart!”

As the sheriff sank obediently to his knees, the wolf slipped up to him with a stealthy stride and stood half crouched, his teeth bared, silent. No growl could have made Bart more terribly threatening. Dan turned completely away from Morris so that he could keep a more careful watch on the others.

“Call off your wolf!” moaned Morris, a sob of terror in his voice.

“I ought to let him set his teeth in you,” said Dan, “but I'm goin' to let you off if you'll tell me what I want to know.”

“Yes! Anything!”

“Where's Jim Silent?”

All eyes flashed towards Morris. The latter, as the significance of the question came home to him, went even a sicklier white, like the belly of a dead fish. His eyes moved swiftly about the circle of his posse. Their answering glares were sternly forbidding.

“Out with it!” commanded Dan.

The sheriff strove mightily to speak, but only a ghastly whisper came: “You got the wrong tip, Dan. I don't know nothin' about Silent. I'd have him in jail if I did!”

“Bart!” said Dan.

The wolf slunk closer to the kneeling man. His hot breath fanned the face of the sheriff and his lips grinned still farther back from the keen, white teeth.

“Help!” yelled Morris. “He's at the shanty up on Baldeagle Creek.”

A rumble, half cursing and half an inarticulate snarl of brute rage, rose from the cowpunchers.

“Bart,” called Dan again, and leaped back from the door, raced out to Satan, and drove into the night at a dead gallop.

Half the posse rushed after him. A dozen shots were pumped after the disappearing shadowy figure. Two or three jumped into their saddles. The others called them back.

“Don't be an ass, Monte,” said one. “You got a good hoss, but you ain't fool enough to think he c'n catch Satan?”

They trooped back to the dining-room, and gathered in a silent circle around the sheriff, whose little fear-bright eyes went from face to face.

"Ah, this is the swine," said one, "that was guardin' our lives!"

"Fellers," pleaded the sheriff desperately, "I swear to you that I jest heard of where Silent was today. I was keepin' it dark until after we got Whistling Dan. Then I was goin' to lead you—"

The flat of a heavy hand struck with a resounding thwack across his lips. He reeled back against the wall, sputtering the blood from his split mouth.

"Pat," said Monte, "your hoss is done for. Will you stay here an' see that he don't get away? We'll do somethin' with him when we get back."

Pat caught the sheriff by his shirt collar and jerked him to a chair. The body of the fat man was trembling like shaken jelly. The posse turned away.

They could not overtake Whistling Dan on his black stallion, but they might arrive before Silent and his gang got under way. Their numbers were over small to attack the formidable long riders, but they wanted blood. Before Whistling Dan reached the valley of Baldeagle Creek they were in the saddle and riding hotly in pursuit.

CHAPTER XXXV

CLOSE IN!

IN that time-ruined shack towards which the posse and Dan Barry rode, the outlaws sat about on the floor eating their supper when Hal Purvis entered. He had missed the trail from the Salton place to the Baldeagle half a dozen times that day, and that had not improved his bitter mood.

"You been gone long enough," growled Silent. "Sit down an' chow an' tell us what you know."

"I don't eat with no damned traitors," said Purvis savagely. "Stan' up an' tell us that you're a double-crossin' houn', Buck Daniels!"

"You better turn in an' sleep," said Buck calmly. "I've knowed men before that loses their reason for want of sleep!"

"Jim," said Purvis, turning sharply on the chief, "Barry is at Buck's house!"

"You lie!" said Buck.

"Do I lie?" said Purvis, grinding his teeth. "I seen Black Bart hangin' around your house."

Jim Silent reached out a heavy paw and dropped it on the shoulder of Buck. Their eyes met through a long moment, and then the glance of Buck wavered and fell.

"Buck," said Silent, "I like you. I don't want to believe what Purvis says. Give me your word of honour that Whistlin' Dan—"

"He's right, Jim," said Buck.

"An' he dies like a yaller cur!" broke in Purvis, snarling.

"No," said Silent, "when one of the boys goes back on the gang, they pay *me*, not the rest of you! Daniels, take your gun and git down to the other end of the room an' stand with your face to the wall. I'll stay at this end. Keep your arms folded. Haines, you stand over there an' count up to three. Then holler: 'Fire!' an' we'll turn an' start shootin'. The rest of you c'n be judge if that's fair."

"Too damned fair," said Kilduff. "I say: String him up an' drill the skunk full of holes."

Without a word Buck turned on his heel.

"One moment," said Haines.

"He ain't your meat, Lee," said Silent. "Jest keep your hand out of this."

"I only wish to ask him a question," said Haines. He turned to Buck: "Do you mean to say that after Barry's wolf cut up your arm, you've been giving Whistling Dan a shelter from the law—and from us?"

"I give him a place to stay because he was damned near death," said Buck. "An' there's one thing you'll answer for in hell, Haines, an' that's ridin' off an' leavin' the man that got you out of Elkhead. He was bleedin' to death."

"Shot?" said Haines, changing colour.

Silent broke in: "Buck, go take your place and say your prayers."

"Stay where you are!" commanded Haines. "And the girl?"

"He was lyin' sick in bed, ravin' about 'Delilah' an' 'Kate.' So I come an' got the girl."

Haines dropped his head.

"An' when he was lyin' there," said Silent fiercely, "you could of made an' end of him without half liftin' your hand, an' you didn't."

"Silent," said Haines, "if you want to talk, speak to me."

"What in hell do you mean, Lee?"

"You can't get at Buck except through me."

"Because that devil Barry got a bullet for your sake are you goin' to—"

"I've lived a rotten life," said Haines.

"An' I suppose you think this is a pretty good way of dyin'?" sneered Silent.

"I have more cause to fight for Barry than Buck has," said Haines.

"Lee, we've been pals too long."

"Silent, I've hated you like a snake ever since I met you. But out-laws can't choose their company."

His tawny head rose. He stared haughtily around the circle of lowering faces.

"By God," said Silent, white with passion, "I'm beginnin' to think you do hate me! Git down there an' take your place. You're first an' Daniels comes next. Kilduff, you c'n count!"

He stalked to the end of the room. Haines lingered one moment.

"Buck," he said, "there's one chance in ten thousand that I'll

make this draw the quickest of the two. If I don't, you may live through it. Tell Kate—"

"Haines, git to your mark, or I'll start shootin'!"

Haines turned and took his place. The others drew back along the walls of the room. Kilduff took the lamp from the table and held it high above his head. Even then the light was dim and uncertain and the draughts set the flame wavering so that the place was shaken with shadows. The moon sent a feeble shaft of light through the window.

"One!" said Kilduff.

The shoulders of Haines and Silent hunched slightly.

"Two!" said Kilduff.

"God," whispered someone.

"Three. Fire!"

They whirled, their guns exploding at almost the same instant, and Silent lunged for the floor, firing twice as he fell. Haines's second shot split the wall behind Silent. If the outlaw chief had remained standing the bullet would have passed through his head. But as Silent fired the third time the revolver dropped clattering from the hand of Haines. Buck caught him as he toppled inertly forward, coughing blood.

Silent was on his feet instantly.

"Stand back!" he roared to his men, who crowded about the fallen long rider. "Stand back in your places. I ain't finished. I'm jest started. Buck, take your place!"

"Boys!" pleaded Buck, "he's not dead, but he'll bleed to death unless—"

"Damn him, let him bleed. Stand up, Buck, or by God I'll shoot you while you kneel there!"

"Shoot and be damned!"

He tore off his shirt and ripped away a long strip for a bandage.

The revolver poised in Silent's hand.

"Buck, I'm warnin' you for the last time!"

"Fellers, it's murder an' damnation for all if you let Haines die this way!" cried Buck.

The shining barrel of the revolver dropped to a level.

"I've given you a man's chance," said Silent, "an' now you'll have the chance of—"

The door at the side of the room jerked open and a revolver cracked. The lamp shivered to a thousand pieces in the hands of Bill Kilduff. All the room was reduced to a place of formless shadow, dimly lighted by the shaft of moonlight. The voice of Jim Silent, strangely changed and sharpened from his usual bass roar, shrilled over the sudden tumult: "Each man for himself! *It's Whistling Dan!*"

Terry Jordan and Bill Kilduff rushed at the dim figure, crouched to the floor. Their guns spat fire, but they merely lighted the way to their own destruction. Twice Dan's revolver spoke, and they dropped, yelling. Pandemonium fell on the room.

The long riders raced here and there, the revolvers coughing fire.

For an instant Hal Purvis stood framed against the pallid moonshine at the window. He stiffened and pointed an arm toward the door.

"The werewolf," he screamed.

As if in answer to the call, Black Bart raced across the room. Twice the revolver sounded from the hand of Purvis. Then a shadow leaped from the floor. There was a flash of white teeth, and Purvis lurched to one side and dropped, screaming terribly. The door banged. Suddenly there was silence. The clatter of a galloping horse outside drew swiftly away.

"Dan!"

"Here!"

"Thank God!"

"Buck, one got away! If it was Silent—Here! Bring some matches."

Someone was dragging himself towards the door in a hopeless effort to escape. Several others groaned.

"You, there!" called Buck. "Stay where you are!"

The man who struggled towards the door flattened himself against the floor, moaning pitifully.

"Quick," said Dan, "light a match. Morris's posse is at my heels. No time. If Silent escaped—"

A match flared in the hands of Buck.

"Who's that? Haines!"

"Let him alone, Dan! I'll tell you why later. There's Jordan and Kilduff. That one by the door is Rhinehart."

They ran from one to the other, greeted by groans and deep curses.

"Who's that beneath the window?"

"Too small for Silent. It's Purvis, and he's dead!"

"Bart got him!"

"No! It was fear that killed him. Look at his face!"

"Bart, go out to Satan!"

The wolf trotted from the room.

"My God, Buck, I've done all this for nothin'! It was Silent that got away!"

"What's that?"

Over the groans of the wounded came the sound of running horses, not one, but many, then a call: "Close in! Close in!"

"The posse!" said Dan.

As he jerked open the door a bullet smashed the wood above his head. Three horsemen were closing around Satan and Black Bart. He leaped back into the room.

"They've got Satan, Buck. We've got to try it on foot. Go through the window."

"They've got nothing on me. I'll stick with Haines."

Dan jumped through the window, and raced to the shelter of a big rock. He had hardly dropped behind it when four horsemen galloped around the corner of the house.

“Johnson and Sullivan,” ordered the voice of Monte sharply, “watch the window. They’re lying low inside, but we’ve got Barry’s horse and wolf. Now we’ll get him.”

“Come out or we’ll burn the house down!” thundered a voice from the other side.

“We surrender!” called Buck within.

A cheer came from the posse. Sullivan and Johnson ran for the window they had been told to guard. The door on the other side of the house slammed open.

“It’s a slaughter house!” cried one of the posse.

Dan left the sheltering rock and raced around the house, keeping a safe distance, and dodging from rock to rock. He saw Satan and Black Bart guarded by two men with revolvers in their hands. He might have shot them down, but the distance was too great for accurate gun-play. He whistled shrilly. The two guards wheeled towards him, and as they did so, Black Bart, leaping, caught one by the shoulder, whirling him around and around with the force of the spring. The other fired at Satan, who raced off towards the sound of the whistle. It was an easy shot, but in the utter surprise of the instant the bullet went wide. Before he could fire again Satan was coming to a halt beside Dan.

“Help!” yelled the cattleman. “Whistling Dan!”

The other guard opened fire wildly. Three men ran from the house. All they saw was a black shadow which melted instantly into the night.

CHAPTER XXXVI

FEAR

INTO the dark he rode. Somewhere in the mountains was Silent, and now alone. In Dan’s mouth the old salt taste of his own blood was unforgotten.

It was a wild chase. He had only the faintest clues to guide him, yet he managed to keep close on the trail of the great outlaw. After several days he rode across a tall red-roan stallion, a mere wreck of a horse with lean sides and pendant head and glazed eye. It was a long moment before Dan recognized Silent’s peerless mount, Red Pete. The outlaw had changed his exhausted horse for a common pony. The end of the long trail must be near.

The whole range followed that chase with breathless interest. It was like the race of Hector and Achilles around the walls of Troy. And when they met there would be a duel of giants. Twice Whistling Dan was sighted. Once Jim Silent fought a running duel with a posse fresh from Elkhead. The man hunters were alert, but it was their secret hope that the two famous outlaws would destroy each other, but

how the wild chase would end no one could know. At last Buck Daniels rode to tell Kate Cumberland strange news.

When he stumbled into the ranch house, Kate and her father rose, white-faced. There was an expression of waiting terror in their eyes.

“Buck!” cried Joe.

“Hush! Dad,” said Kate. “It hasn’t come yet! Buck, what has happened?”

“The end of the world has come for Dan,” he said. “That devil Silent—”

“Dan,” cried old Joe, and rushed around the table to Buck.

“Silent has dared Dan to meet him at three o’clock tomorrow afternoon in Tully’s saloon in Elkhead! He’s held up four men in the last twenty-four hours and told them that he’ll be at Tully’s tomorrow and will expect Dan there!”

“It isn’t possible!” cried Kate. “That means that Silent is giving himself up to the law!”

Buck laughed bitterly.

“The law will not put a hand on them if it thinks that they’ll fight it out together,” he said. “There’ll be a crowd in the saloon, but not a hand will stir to arrest Silent till after the fight.”

“But Dan won’t go to Tully’s,” broke in old Joe. “If Silent is crazy enough to do such a thing, Dan won’t be.”

“He will,” said Kate. “I know!”

“You’ve got to stop him,” urged Buck. “You’ve got to get to Elkhead and turn Dan back.”

“Ay,” said Joe, “for even if he kills Silent, the crowd will tackle him after the fight—a hundred against one.”

She shook her head.

“You won’t go?”

“Not a step.”

“But Kate, don’t you understand—?”

“I couldn’t turn Dan back. There is his chance to meet Silent. Do you dream any one could turn him back?”

The two men were mute.

“You’re right,” said Buck at last. “I hoped for a minute that you could do it, but now I remember the way he was in that dark shanty up the Baldeagle Creek. You can’t turn a wolf from a trail, and Whistling Dan has never forgotten the taste of his own blood.”

“Kate!” called her father suddenly. “What’s the matter, honey?”

With bowed head and a faltering step she was leaving the room. Buck caught old Joe by the arm and held him back as he would have followed.

“Let her be!” said Buck sharply. “Maybe she’ll want to see you at three o’clock tomorrow afternoon, but until then she’ll want to be alone. There’ll be ghosts enough with her all the time. You c’n lay to that.”

Joe Cumberland wiped his glistening forehead.

“There ain’t nothin’ we c’n do, Buck, but sit an’ wait.”

Buck drew a long breath.

“What devil gave Silent that idea?”

“*Fear!*”

“Jim Silent don’t know what fear is!”

“Any one who’s seen the yaller burn in Dan’s eyes knows what fear is.”

Buck winced.

Cumberland went on: “Every night Silent has been seein’ them eyes that glow yaller in the dark. They lie in wait for him in every shadow. Between dark and dawn he dies a hundred deaths. He can’t stand it no more. He’s goin’ to die. Somethin’ tells him that. But he wants to die where they’s humans around him, and when he dies he wants to pull Dan down with him.”

They sat staring at each other for a time.

“If he lives through that fight with Silent,” said Buck sadly, “the crowd will jump in on him. Their numbers’ll make ’em brave.”

“An’ then?”

“Then maybe he’d like a friend to fight by his side,” said Buck simply. “So long, Joe!”

The old man wrung his hand and then followed him out to the hitching-rack where Buck’s horse stood.

“Ain’t Dan got no friends among the crowd?” asked Cumberland. “Don’t they give him no thanks for catching the rest of Silent’s gang?”

“They give him lots of credit,” said Buck. “An’ Haines has said a lot in favour of Dan, explainin’ how the jail bustin’ took place. Lee is sure provin’ himself a white man. He’s gettin’ well of his wounds and it’s said the Governor will pardon him. You see, Haines went bad because the law done him dirt a long time ago, and the Governor is takin’ that into account.”

“But they’d still want to kill Dan?”

“Half of the boys wouldn’t,” said Buck. “The other half is all wrought up over the killings that’s been happenin’ on the range in the last month. Dan is accused of about an even half of ’em, an’ the friends of dead men don’t waste no time listenin’ to arguments. They say Dan’s an outlawed man an’ that they’re goin’ to treat him like one.”

“Damn them!” groaned Cumberland. “Don’t Morris’s confession make no difference?”

“Morris was lynched before he had a chance to swear to what he said in Dan’s favour. Kilduff an’ Jordan an’ Rhinehart might testify that Dan wasn’t never bought over by Silent, but they know they’re done for themselves, an’ they won’t try to help anybody else, particular the man that put ’em in the hands of the law. Kilduff has swore that Dan *was* bribed by Silent, that he went after Silent not for revenge, but to get some more money out of him, an’ that the fight in

The Untamed

She rose and faced him with a little gesture of surrender.

“Then you must follow the wild geese, Dan!”

“You don’t mind me goin’, Kate?”

“No.”

“But your eyes are shinin’!”

“It’s only the reflection of the firelight.”

Black Bart whined softly. Suddenly Dan straightened and threw up his arms, laughing low with exultation. Buck Daniels shuddered and dropped his head.

“I am far behind,” said Dan, “but I’ll go fast.”

He caught her in his arms, kissed her eyes and lips, and then whirled and ran from the room with that noiseless, padding step.

“Kate!” groaned Buck Daniels, “you’ve let him go! We’ve all lost him for ever!”

A sob answered him.

“Go call him back,” pleaded Joe. “He will stay for your sake.”

She whispered: “I would rather call back the wild geese who flew across the moon. And they are only beautiful when they are wild!”

“But you’ve lost him, Kate, don’t you understand?”

“The wild geese fly north again in spring,” said Buck, “and he’ll—”

“Hush!” she said. “Listen!”

Far off, above the rushing of the wind, they heard the weird whistling, a thrilling and unearthly music. It was sad with the beauty of the night. It was joyous with the exultation of the wind. It might have been the voice of some god who rode the northern storm south, south after the wild geese, south with the untamed.

THE END