

MOLLY McDONALD

A TALE OF THE FRONTIER



By
RANDALL PARRISH
Author of "Keith of the Border," My Lady of Doubt," My Lady of the South," etc., etc.

Illustrations by V. L. Barnes

COPYRIGHT 1912 BY A.C. MCCLURG & CO.

SYNOPSIS.

Major McDonald, commanding an army post near Fort Dodge, seeks a man to intercept his daughter, Molly, who is headed for the post. An Indian outbreak is in the process. Hamlin, a sergeant who had just arrived with messages to McDonald, volunteers for the mission and starts alone. Major McDonald sends two days ahead of schedule. He decides to push on to Fort Dodge by stage in company with "Suster" Edie Moylan, Gonzales, gambler also to cover. Hamlin meets the stage with stories of depredations committed by the Indians. It is decided to return to Ripon, the dinner date being the time when Indians appear. The Indians are twice repulsed in attack on the stage by Hamlin, Moylan and Gonzales. The latter is killed, Moylan is killed in next attack. Indians retire, and Hamlin and Molly wait for the next move.

CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

Certain facts were clear—to remain meant death, torture for him if they were taken alive, and worse than death for her. Perspiration burst out upon his face at the thought. No! Great God! not that; he would kill her himself first. Yet this was the truth, the truth to be faced. The nearest available troops were at Dodge, a company of infantry. If they started at once they could never arrive in time to prevent an attack at daybreak. The Indians undoubtedly knew this, realized the utter helplessness of their victims, and were acting accordingly. Otherwise they would never have lighted that fire nor remained on guard. Moreover if the two of them should succeed in stealing forth from the shelter of the coach, should skulk unseen amid the dense blackness of the overhanging bluff, eluding the watchers, what would it profit in the end? Their trail would be clear; with the first gray of dawn those savage trackers would be at work, and they would be trapped in the open, on foot, utterly helpless even to fight.

The man's hands clenched and unclenched about his rifle-barrel in an agony of indecision, his eyes perceiving the silhouette of the girl against the lighter arc of sky. No, not that—not that! They must hide their trail, leave behind no faintest trace of passage for these hounds to follow. Yet how could the miracle be accomplished? Out from the mists of tortured memory came, as a faint hope, a dim recollection of that narrow gully cutting straight down across the trail, over which the runaway had crashed in full gallop. That surely could not be far back, and was of sufficient depth to hide them in the darkness. He was uncertain how far it extended, but at some time it had been a water-course and must have reached the river. And the river would hide their trail! A new hope sprang into his eyes. He felt the sudden straightening up of his body.

"What—is it?" she questioned, startled. "Do you see anything? Are they coming?"

"No, no," almost impatiently. "It is still as death out there, but I almost believe I have discovered a means of escape. Do you remember a gully we ran over while I was on top of the stage?"

"I am not sure; was it when that awful jolt came?"

"Yes, it flung me to the foot-board just when I had untangled the lines. We could not have traveled a dozen yards farther before we struck this bluff—could we?"

"I hardly think so," yet evidently bewildered by his rapid questioning. "Only I was so confused and frightened I can scarcely remember. Why are you so anxious to know?"

"Because," he returned earnestly, bending toward her, "I believe that gash in the earth is going to get us out of here. Anyhow it is the only chance I can figure. If we can creep through to the river, undiscovered, I'll agree to leave Mister Indian guessing as to where we've gone."

The new note of animation in the man's voice aroused her, but she grasped his arm tighter.

"But—but, oh, can we? Won't they be hiding there too?"

"It's a chance, that's all—but better than waiting here for a certainty. See here, Miss McDonald," and he caught her hand in his own, forgetful of all save his own purpose and the necessity of strengthening her to play out the game, "the trend of that gulf is to the west; except up here close to the bluff it runs too far away for a guard line. The Indians will be lying out here on the open prairie; they will creep as close in as they dare under cover of darkness. I'll bet there are twenty red snakes now within a hundred feet of us—oh, don't shiver and

spits of fire cleaving the darkness, the barking of guns of different caliber. A bit of flying lead tore through the leather back of the coach with an odd rip; another struck the casing of the door, sending the wooden splinters flying like arrows. Hawk-eyed, Hamlin fired twice more, aiming at the sparks, grimly certain that a responding howl from the left evidenced a hit. Then, as quickly, all was still, intensely black once more. The Sergeant drew back from the window, leaning his gun against the casing.

"That will hold them for a while," he said cheerfully. "Two less out there, I reckon, and the others won't get careless again right away. Now is our time; are you ready?"

There was no response, the stillness so profound he could hear the faint ticking of the girl's watch. He reached out, almost alarmed, and touched her dress.

"What is the trouble?" he questioned anxiously. "Didn't you hear me speak?"

He waited breathless, but there was no movement, no sound, and his hand, trembling, in spite of his iron nerve, groped its way upward. She was lying back against the opposite window, her head bent sideways.

"My God," he thought, "did those devils get her?"

She lifted her slight figure up on one arm, all else blotted out, all other memory vanished through this instant dread. His cheek stung where flying splinters had struck him, but that was nothing. She was warm, her flesh was warm; then her searching fingers felt the moist blood trickling down from the edge of her hair. He let out his breath slowly, the sudden relief almost choking him. It was bad enough surely, but not what had first feared, not death. She had been struck hard—a flying splinter of wood, perhaps, or a deflected bullet—her hair matted with blood, yet it was no more than a flesh wound, although leaving her unconscious. It he hesitated it was but for an instant. The entire situation recurred to him in a flash; he must change his plans, but dare waste no time. If they were to escape it must be accomplished now, shadowed by darkness, while savage watchers were safely beyond sound. His lean jaws set with fierce determination, and he grimly hitched his belt forward, one sinewy hand fingering the revolver. He would have to trust to that weapon entirely for defense; he could not carry both the rifle and the girl.

Moving slowly, cautiously, fearful lest some creaking of the old stage might betray his motions to those keen ears below, he backed through the open door. Once feeling the ground firm beneath his feet, and making sure that both canteen and haversack were secure, he reached back into the darkness, grasping the form of the unconscious girl. He stood erect with her held securely in his arms, strands of hair blowing against his cheek, listening intently, straining with keen eyes to penetrate the black curtain. The wind was fortunate,

"I do," she answered gravely, "you must believe I do; but I have never been in such peril before, in such a situation of horror, and I am all unnerved. There doesn't seem to be anything left me but to trust you."

"That is good; all I can ask. I know you are all right, but I want you to keep your nerve. We are going to take a big chance; we've got to do it—a single misplay, a slip of the foot, an inaccurate breath may cost our lives."

"Are you going to try to get away?"

To elude the Indians?"

"Yes, and there is but one possibility of success—to creep the length of the gully there, and so reach the river. Here's Gonzales' belt. Don't be afraid of it; it is not dead men who are going to hurt us. Swing the strap over your shoulder this way, slip the revolver into the holster. That's right; we'll carry as little as we can, and leave our hands free." He hesitated, staring about in the darkness, swiftly deciding what to take. "Do you happen to know if either of the passengers carried any grub?"

"Grub?"

"Plains' term for food," impatiently, "rations; something for lunch en route."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Moylan did; said he never took chances on having to go hungry. It was in a flat leather pouch."

"Haversack. I have it. That will be enough to carry, with the canteen. Now there is only one thing more before we leave. We must impress those fellows with the notion that we are wide-awake, and on guard yet. See any movement out there?"

"I—I am not sure," she answered doubtfully. "There is a black smudge beyond that dead pony; lean forward here and you can see what I mean—on the ground. I—I imagined it moved just then." She pointed into the darkness. "It is the merest shadow, but seemed to wiggle along, and then stop; it's still now."

Hamlin focussed his keen eyes on the spot indicated, shading them with one hand.

"Slide back further on the seat," he whispered softly, "and let me in next the window."

There was a moment's silence, the only sound the wind. The girl gripped the back of the seat nervously with both hands, holding her breath; the Sergeant, the outline of his face silhouetted against the sky, stared motionless into the night without. Suddenly, not making a sound, he lifted the rifle to his shoulder.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Way to the River.

She waited in agony as he sighted carefully, striving to gauge the distance. It seemed an interminable time before his finger pressed the trigger. Then came the report, a flash of flame, and the powder smoke blown back in her face. Half-blinded by the discharge, she yet saw that black smudge leap upright; again the Henry blazed, and the dim figure went down. There was a cry—a mad yell of rage—in which scattered voices joined;

and farther along a foot slipped off a treacherous stone, but the slight noise died unnoticed in the night. It was farther to the gully than he had supposed; his heart was in his throat fearing he had missed it, half-believing the depression failed to extend to the base of the bluff. Then his foot, exploring blindly, touched the edge of the bank. Carefully he laid his burden down, placing his battered campaign hat beneath her head. He bent over her again, assuring himself that she breathed regularly, and then crept down alone into the shallow ravine.

His nerves were like steel now, his hand steady, his heart beating without an accelerated throb. He knew the work, and rejoiced in it. This was why he was a soldier. Silently, swiftly, he unbuckled his belt, refastening it across the straps so as to hold canteen and haversack noiseless, and then, revolver in hand, began creeping down under cover of the low banks. He must explore the path first before attempting to bear her along in his arms; must be sure the passage was unguarded. After it swerved to the right there would be little danger, but while it ran straight, some cautious savage might have chosen it to stalk in. To deal with such he needed to be alone, and free.

He must have crawled thus for thirty yards, hands and knees aching horribly, his eyes ever peering over the edge of the bank, his ears tingling to the slightest noise. The tiny glow of the fire far away to the left was alone visible in the intense blackness; the wind brought to him no sound of movement. The stillness was profound, almost uncanny; as he paused and listened he could distinguish the throb of his heart. He was across the trail at last, for he felt and traced the ruts of wheels, and where the banks had been worked down almost to a level with the prairie. He crossed this opening like a snake, and then arose to his knees beyond, where the gully deepened. He remained poised, motionless, scarcely daring to breathe. Surely that was something else—that shapeless blotch of shadow, barely topping the line of bank! Was it ten feet away? Or five? He could not tell. He stared; there was no movement, and yet his eyes began to discern dimly the outlines—the head and shoulders of a man! The Sergeant crept forward—an inch, two inches, a foot. The figure did not stir. Now he was sure the fellow's head was lying flat on the turf, oddly distorted by a feathered war bonnet. The strange posture, the utter lack of movement, seemed proof that the tired warrior had fallen asleep on watch. Like a cat Hamlin crept up slowly toward him, poised for a spring.

Some sense of the wild must have stirred the savage into semi-consciousness. Suddenly he sat up, gripping the gun in his hands. Yet even as his opening eyes saw dimly the Sergeant's menacing shadow, before he could scream his alarm, or spring upright, the revolver but struck with dull thud, and he went tumbling backward into the ditch, his cry of alarm ending in a hoarse croak. From somewhere, out of the dense darkness in front a voice called, sharp and guttural, as if its owner had been startled by the mysterious sound of the blow. It was the language of the Arapahoes, and out of his vague memory of the tongue, spurred to recollection by the swift emergency, Hamlin growled a hoarse answer, hanging breathlessly above the motionless body until the "ugh!" of the fellow's response proved him without suspicion. He waited, counting the seconds, every muscle strained with expectancy, listening. He had a feeling that some one was crawling over the short grass, wiggling along like a snake, but the faint sound, if sound it was, grew less distinct. Finally he lifted his head above the edge of the bank, but saw nothing, not even a dim shadow.

"They are closing in, I reckon," he said soberly, "and it isn't likely there will be any more of these gentrified as far back as this; looks as though this gully turned west just beyond. Anyhow I've got to risk it."

He returned more rapidly, knowing the passage, yet with no less caution, finding the unconscious girl lying exactly as he had left her. As he clasped her form in his arms, her lips uttered some incoherent words, but otherwise she gave no sign of life.

"They are closing in, I reckon," he said soberly, "and it isn't likely there will be any more of these gentrified as far back as this; looks as though this gully turned west just beyond. Anyhow I've got to risk it."

He returned more rapidly, knowing the passage, yet with no less caution, finding the unconscious girl lying exactly as he had left her. As he clasped her form in his arms, her lips uttered some incoherent words, but otherwise she gave no sign of life.

"Yes, yes," he whispered close to her ear, hoping thus to hold her silent. "It is all right now; only keep still."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Queen Elizabeth Opened It.

In connection with Granville Barker's production of "Twelfth Night," it is interesting to recall that we have still standing in London one of the halls in which the play was performed during Shakespeare's lifetime. In the hall of the Middle Temple, opened by Queen Elizabeth in person in 1576, "Twelfth Night" was acted at Christmas, 1601, and there is a strong probability that Shakespeare himself played a part in that performance. In the early days the inns of court were patrons of the drama, and the hall of Gray's Inn can also claim to have witnessed a contemporary Shakespearean production. "A Comedy of Errors" having been given there in 1594—London Chronicle.

concluded Beardley, who was only a boy, spoke up:

"Mr. Wilde," he said, "you have forgotten to mention Nero's greatest religious achievement."

"I must confess I do not know to what you are referring," admitted Wilde.

"I am referring to his action of pouring oil on Christians and setting fire to them," said Beardley. "Wasn't it Nero who lit the first fires of Christianity that illuminated the world?"

MOTHER HEN STEALS LITTER OF KITTENS

Old Cat Ate Chicks, So She Proceeded to Get Even—Young Pussies Satisfied.

Greensburg, Pa.—Phil S. Emmons, proprietor of a hotel at Ruffsdale, has a novel freak in a hen that has taken possession of a family of kittens and is bringing them up in the most approved poultry style.

Biddy became ambitious to raise a family two months ago, and Emmons supplied her with a setting of eggs. In due season the chicks arrived, and the happy mother and her brood were well on the road to happy chickenhood when a cloud darkened the home of the hen and robbed her of the entire family.

Among the other live stock about the hotel was an old tabby cat, Marie.



Met With a Warm Reception.

Antoinette. On account of her remarkable ability as a ratter, Emmons prized the feline highly. Just about the time the hen had brought her family into the world, Marie also gave birth to a family of four promising Marie kittens. The mother instinct told Marie Antoinette that nourishment of the most delicate nature was necessary to bring up her family. One by one the peepers disappeared until finally the old hen found herself bereft of her family.

By observers, it is said, Biddy was possessed with a spirit of retaliation. She sought the nest of Marie Antoinette, and during the absence of the mother cat took possession of her litter. When puss came home she met with a warm reception and was driven from her own door by the enraged hen. Several times she was seen trying to enter the door of her home to her own lawful offspring, and just as many times she was driven away by her feathered enemy. For 23 days the old hen mothered the kittens.

Hundreds of people stopped at Emmons' home to see the freak. The hen was proud of her family and gave as much attention to the kittens as if they were her chicks. On their side the kittens appeared well satisfied with the mothering of the hen. Marie Antoinette disappeared after she was thoroughly pecked by the hen.

LITTLE GIRL DIES OF GRIEF

Lost Her Foot and Declared She Would Not Go Through Life as Cripple.



How Light She Seemed, as Though He Clasped a Child.

blowing steadily across the flat from the river, and they were surely invisible against the background of the overhanging bluff. He did not even feel it necessary to crouch low to avoid discovery. He knew that peril would confront them later, when they ventured out into the open. How light she seemed, as though he clasped a child. Bearing her he was going to be easier than he had supposed; the excitement yielded him a new measure of strength, yet he went forward very slowly, feeling along, inch by inch, planting his feet with exceeding care. The earth was hard-packed and would leave little trail; there were no leaves, no dead grass to rustle. Beyond the protection afforded by the stage he felt the full sweep of the wind and permitted her head to rest lower on one arm so that he could look about more clearly. She had not even moaned, although he had felt her breath upon his face. Once he stumbled slightly over some fallen earth,

the hearts you leave behind as the stars on the brow of evening. Good deeds will shine as bright on the earth as the stars of heaven.—Thomas Chalmers.

Nero's Claim to Distinction. Aubrey Beardley, the famous artist, once outshone Oscar Wilde, who was the greatest wit and conversationalist that ever lived.

At a dinner at which both were guests Wilde talked interestingly on Nero for nearly two hours. When he

concluded, Beardley, who was only a boy, spoke up:

"Mr. Wilde," he said, "you have forgotten to mention Nero's greatest religious achievement."

"I must confess I do not know to what you are referring," admitted Wilde.

"I am referring to his action of pouring oil on Christians and setting fire to them," said Beardley. "Wasn't it Nero who lit the first fires of Christianity that illuminated the world?"

Saved Old Mules.

St. Clairsville, Ohio.—Three hundred miners here struck—not for higher wages—but to save the old mules their jobs. The company replaced the old ones with new animals and the miners want the experienced mules back.

Cows Eat Dynamite.

Watertown, Conn.—Leon J. Myers, a farmer living at Carthage, is trying to find some one to milk his four cows. They ate ten sticks of dynamite.

LONG LEGAL FIGHT OVER LITTLE CALF

Animal Worth \$10 May Cost Some Thousands.

IT CAUSES ORATORY

Rides Into Town in a Prairie Schooner Dressed in Trousers With an Armed Native on the Bow and Another on the Stern.

Muskogee, Okla.—The battle for the red bull calf of Brushy mountain has been on in a local justice court for several months, and the indications are it will continue until one or both of the litigants are dead or bankrupt. When the row began the calf was three months old and worth \$10. It is now seven months old, its rightful ownership is still a matter of dispute, and the cost of the suit has run to \$1,000.

M. C. Rucker, a farmer, charged his neighbor, L. P. Hatley, with the theft of the calf and had him arrested. Hatley was acquitted and sued Rucker for \$5,000 damages. Rucker undertook to replevin the calf, but Hatley retained possession by giving a redelivery bond.

The hearing of the replevin proceedings before Justice Matt Thompson is what brought as witnesses practically every farmer in Brush Mountain township to Muskogee. The litigants employed the ablest lawyers in Muskogee.

The calf—or, perhaps, a calf—also came to town. It rode in a prairie schooner with a Brushy mountain native on the bow and another on the stern, both armed with a six-shooter. The calf wore two pairs of gunny-sack trousers, a coat of the same material and a kind of peek-a-boo calico hat. All this sartorial adornment was for the purpose of concealing its exterior appearance. It had been intended that the calf be exhibited in the court room. But it had grown to a size that made this undesirable.

The lawyers raved and roared their level best. Jim Cosgrove, for Rucker, stung with his sarcasm until even the calf bellowed.

"This bovine," shouted Cosgrove, "has been exalted to the throne. It has been elevated and decorated like a



The Calf Wore Two Pairs of Gunny Sack Trousers.

man of royalty, placed in purple robes (poetic license) and cloth of gleaming gold. And it has been hidden as if it were too precious to be seen by common eyes."

Farmer Rucker took the stand and described the calf in detail. Then the court, the litigants, the lawyers and the onlookers moved in solemn procession into the street to inspect it. At the word of command the gun wranglers aboard the schooner began disrobing the calf. It kicked and butted against the indignity, but without avail.

Farmer Rucker stepped forward then, fell back, gnashed his teeth. His description as given in the court room did not synchronize with the physical markings of the calf. Farmer Rucker thereupon shouted that he was the victim of hocus-pocus; in other words, another animal had been switched on to him.

Search is being made for the original calf. Rucker swears it is somewhere in the Brushy mountain country. The lawyers on both sides are happy. Continuance means more fees.

Snake Stops Cycle.

Belleview, Ill.—Arthur Will was thrown from his bicycle the other day when a five and a half foot blacksnake which had run over became entangled in the rear wheel. He was scratched and bruised. He was speeding along a narrow path alongside the Wilder-mann cemetery when something lashed him on the back. The next instant the wheel stopped.

When Will picked himself up he found the snake tangled in the spokes. The reptile was hissing and trying to strike. Will sharpened a stick and freed the prisoner.

Powerful Lightship.

Liverpool.—The most powerful lightship in the world with a 40,000 candle power light, has been placed in Mersey bay.