

The Lamp in the Valley

BY ARTHUR STRINGER

W. N. U. Service

THE STORY SO FAR

Carol Coburn, Alaska-born daughter of a "bush rat" who died with an unestablished mining claim, returns North to teach Indian school. Aboard ship, she is annoyed by Eric (the Red) Ericson and is rescued by Sidney Lander, young mining

engineer. Lander, working for the Trumbull company, which is fighting Coburn's claim, is engaged to Trumbull's daughter. Lander breaks with Trumbull. But the engagement to Barbara Trumbull stays. Christmas day, a fire breaks out at the

INSTALLMENT VI

But I refused to stay put. There was too much to be done. I didn't want to seem a slacker when everybody was so busy. And in looking after the others I could pretty well forget the pain of my own flame-blistered face.

Where the rambling old schoolhouse had been was a stretch of smoldering ashes with the skeleton-like iron bed frames and a stove or two standing there as melancholy as tombstones. And everything I owned lay consumed in those ashes. All I had left were the few scorched clothes that hung about my tired bones.

But I hadn't time to feel sorry for myself. A special train, I was told, was already on its way from Anchorage, to pick up our homeless school waifs and carry them on to the Indian orphanage at Fairbanks. From the pile of emergency clothing Katie commandeered for me an oversized pair of corduroy trousers, a patched plaid Mackinaw, and a caribou parka that had seen better days. To these Doctor Ruddock (who'd given up his little wooden-fronted office as sleeping-quarters for Katie and me) added socks and pacs and an old bearskin cap that made me look like a lady-huzzar in a bushy.

"What are we going to do?" I asked the ever-hurrying Doctor Ruddock when he dropped in, next day, to anoint my scorched epidermis with ambrosine.

"Toklutna's off the map," he proclaimed. "Katie will stay on here, probably until the breakup, to look after the old folks."

"Then where do I fit in?" I questioned with a sudden feeling of homelessness.

"You fit in very neatly," he said as he listened to my heart action. "I'd the Commissioner on the wire this morning and he agrees with me that this country owes you a berth. So you get the school job at Matanuska."

It took some time for this to sink in. "When?" I asked.

"As soon as you get sense enough to take care of yourself," he said with a barricading sort of curtness. "I told you to rest up, after your fire shock, and you didn't do it. So roll up in that bunk and stay there until you get a release from me."

He stopped in the doorway, with his dog-eared old medicine case in his hand, as I none too willingly shook out the blankets of my floor bunk.

"And there's a long-legged engineer waiting outside to see you," he added as he watched me dutifully crawl into my bunk. "But ten minutes is his limit, remember."

I had my second shock to digest. For the waiting visitor was Sidney Lander.

He stood very tall in that small office-surgery. And my appearance must have startled him a little, since he stared down at me, for a full half-minute, without speaking.

"Are you all right?" he finally asked. I had to laugh a little at his solemnity.

"Just a little scorched around the edges," I said with an effort at levity. "But my heart was beating a trifle faster than it should have been."

"I flew over, as soon as I heard," he rather clumsily explained. He looked out the window and then back at me. "That was good work, saving those children."

"But I lost my eyebrows," I reminded him.

Lander walked to the window and back.

"We've at least saved those citizenship papers," he announced. "I've shown them to John Trumbull," he explained, "and Trumbull claims they're not backed up by the records. That led to an argument that ended in a split-up. The Chakitana Development Company has lost its field engineer."

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

His laugh was curt.

"I was tying up with the Happy Day outfit," he explained. "But Trumbull's just trumped my ace by buying up the Happy Day."

"Does that mean you're going outside?" I asked, trying to make the question a casual one.

"Not on your life," was his prompt reply. "We've got to wait until the records show who's right in this."

"But that's my problem," I objected.

"I happen to have made it mine," he retorted with an unexpected light of battle in his eyes.

CHAPTER VII

I began to understand the meaning of what they call "the deep cold" before I set out for Matanuska. For the snows of midwinter soon buried the ruins of our lost school. The storms along Alaska's one stretch of railway also brought slides and broken snowsheds enough to block the line and keep trains from moving for over a week.

That cloud had the silver lining of giving me a chance to make over my nondescript wardrobe, to which big-hearted Katie added a sweater of Scotch wool and a pair of wolf-

skin gauntlets, a trifle over-sized. She was, I think, genuinely sorry to see me go.

So when traffic moved again and I mounted my day coach I found it crowded to the doors with leather-faced old sourdoughs and cud-chewing trappers and Mackinaw-clad loggers, along with a homesteader's wife who carried an undersized pig in a slatted crate.

I wasn't sorry when the conductor, pushing his way through that overcrowded day coach, blinked down at my still heat-blistered face and said: "Next stop Matanuska, lady."

"Could you tell me," I asked one of the men at the station, "where I'd find Mr. Bryson, Mr. Sam Bryson?"

His face, when he peered up at me, impressed me as both sour and sardonic.

"I'm Sam Bryson," he said. "The school superintendent for this district?" I persisted.

"I be," he retorted, plainly resenting my incredulous stare. "And ain't it fit and proper, seein' I happen to own that doggone schoolhouse over there?"

I meekly acknowledged that it was. And with equal meekness I

polished up a spell on her readin' and writin'. And if you ain't willin' to do your teachin' on the wing that-away, until this valley gits a real schoolhouse ratted together, I guess, lady, you're mushin' up the wrong trail."

There was no mistaking the finality of that statement.

"But where am I to live?" I asked as I stared at the snow that stood so white between the gloomy green of the spruce-lands.

"We was figgerin'," he explained, "on settin' you up in the old Jansen shack. That's just over the hill there behind that tangle o' spruce. But you'd sure have some tidyin' up to do afore you got set there." He looked with a frown of disapproval at my sprawl of luggage. "But the best thing for you to do, lady, is to let it over to the Eckstrom farm and see if they'd take you in for a day or two."

I had, however, no desire to go wandering about that snowy world asking strangers to take me in. I wanted my own roof over my head. And I so informed the morose Mr. Bryson.

Just then I became conscious of a strange figure making its way down the opposing hillside.

It was a man carrying the carcass of a deer, a ragged and shambling man with a rifle and a tined head above his stooping shoulders. It was Sock-Eye Schlupp.

"I'll be hornswizzled if it ain't Klondike Coburn's gal," he said. "What're you doin' back in these parts?"

I told him why I was there.

"Where you goin' to bunk?" he demanded.

"They tell me I'm to live in the Jansen shack," I explained.

"They're plumb locoed," said Sock-Eye. "You sure can't den up in that pigsty."

"I'm north born," I reminded him. "Mebbe you are," he retorted. "But this is a plumb lonesome valley for a chalk-wrangler 't take root in. I reckon you'd better come along 't my wickyp until things is ready for you."

That, I told him, would be out of the question.

"I s'pose you know young Lander's swingin' in with me?" he said with the air of an angler adjusting a gaudier fly.

"That, I knew, made it more than ever impossible. "And if that Jansen shack's not ready, I'll have to make it ready."

"Quite a fighter, ain't you?" he observed.

After a moment's silence, he added: "I'll give you a hand over 't that lordly abode o' yours."

He left me standing there, with a return, a few minutes later, with a hand sleigh borrowed from the station agent. On this, with altogether unexpected dispatch, he piled my belongings. Over them he draped the deer carcass, thonging the load together with a strand of buckskin.

"Let's mush," he said.

I took a hand at the towing line, and side by side, we made our way along the trodden snow, as crisp as charcoal under our feet. The valley seemed strangely silent. But I felt less alone in the world with that morose old figure beside me.

"Why is Lander swingin' in with you?" I asked.

"Seen 't this valley ain't bristlin' with hotels," answered Sock-Eye, "he deemed my wickyp good enough for a college dood until they could build him up-to-date livin' quarters at the Happy Day."

"But I thought outsiders bought out the Happy Day," I ventured.

Sock-Eye stopped to gnaw a corner from his chewing plug.

"They sure did," he admitted. "And left young Lander out on the limb. But, as far as I kin make out, that hombre ain't no squealer. And I reckon Big John Trumbull'll find him as full o' fight as a bunch o' matin' copperheads."

We went on until we came to a solitary small figure standing knee-deep in the roadside snow. It proved to be a Swede boy in an incredibly ragged Mackinaw, with a blue woolen scarf wrapped around his waist as high as his armpits. His eyes, I noticed as Sock-Eye asked him about a short cut to the Jansen shack, were even bluer than his encircling sash.

"But ol' Yansen ban dead," he announced. "He ban dead of the flu over three months ago."

"Which same makes room for you, little cheekack," snorted my grimy-eyed trail breaker.

But I stopped to ask the sash-wrapped youth his name. I liked the feeling of warmth he carried under that cocoon of wool and fags.

"Ah ban Olie Eckstrom," he said with the friendliest of smiles.

It wasn't until we came to the edge of a clearing that Sock-Eye stopped for breath.

"There be your wickypup," said Sock-Eye, with a wave of his miltened hand.

For the Love of Pat!

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By JAMES H. DUDLEY
(McClure Syndicate—WNU Service.)

"AND she had the gun, sure enough," Patrolman Hanney continued; "strapped in a holster above her knee. What a handful! The air was full of heels and finger-nails—like wrestling with a centipede. And when this punk horned in, I had to take time out to cuff him one."

"Holy Saint Peter!" thought Sergeant Duggan. "They get younger every day." He shifted his massive bulk in the chair and appraised the two prisoners, then picked up his pen.

"What's your name?" he asked the girl. Her lips closed firmly.

"The dame that tipped me off," volunteered Hanney, "called her Pat."

"Maybe her pal will oblige us after we work on him a bit." The sergeant pushed a button and a buxom police matron appeared. "Take her away," he ordered.

"Let her go and I'll talk," said the boy curtly.

"No, Frankie!" Hanney limped to the matron's aid. The girl's resistance collapsed and she went out quietly. With the closing of the door, the boy lost his air of aloof unconcern.

"All right. My name's Frank Danton. Get Sergeant Robinson, from Scott precinct, and I'll spill everything."

"Robinson! Why?" asked Duggan suspiciously. Confronted by an obstinate silence, he yielded to his inward curiosity and dialed with a stubby finger.

"Hello, Scott? . . . Duggan, from Davison. Get Sergeant Robinson, will you? . . . hello, Robbie! Say, we got a bird here called Frank Danton, alias Phantom Frank, who refuses to talk unless you're present . . . what? . . . what's the joke?"

Duggan scowled into the mouthpiece. "Oh, yeah! You better come anyway . . . okay."

Sergeant Robinson, round-faced and apple-cheeked, entered chuckling. He clapped the boy's shoulder and peered quizzically at the damaged eye.

"Tst, tst, Frank! Who hung the shiner on you?"

"He started something and got himself slapped," Duggan said shortly.

"Somebody's kidding you, Bill. I've known Frank ever since I was pouncing a beat twenty years ago."

"How about this?" Duggan slid the gun across the desk. "His girl was carrying it." Robinson's eyes sobered.

"It's like this, Sarge," explained the boy, shamefacedly. "Pat—she's Patricia Fahey—is crook crazy. Nothing wrong . . . she's just a kid and . . . well, I—I fell for her and was afraid to tell her I was a soda jerker. So I made up this story about being wanted . . . I even bought the gun for her to carry."

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