The Lamp in the Valley

BY ARTHUR STRINGER

W. N. U. Service

THE STORY SO FAR

Sidney Lander, mining engineer, is engaged to Barbara Trumbull, but apparently has fallen in love with Carol Coburn, Matanuska school teacher. Salaria Bryson, one of her pupils, a big out-door girl, is also in love with him. Carol's father died in Alaska with an unproven claim which Trumbull is contesting. Lander quits his employ, becomes field manager for the Matanuska Valley project. Sock-Eye Schlupp, an old sourdough, calls on Carol to tell her she ought to be in Chakitana to fight for her father's claim. He himself is moving on away from the new Matanuska; it has become too "civilized."

The old "bush rat" has nothing but contempt for the new project. Carol asks what he plans.

INSTALLMENT XV

"I can break trail for the back hills where a he-man's still got breathin'-room," was his solemn-noted reply. "I can mush on to a valley that ain't overrun with weaklin's and womenfolks."

"Thanks," I said.

"I ain't got nothin' against you, girlie," he said. "I've been strong for you from the first crack out o' the box. I savvied, from that snowy day I spotted you on the trail, you was good leather. And later on I savvied you was mixed up with a bunch o' snakes here. That's why I kind o' hate t' mush on and leave you sittin' out on a limb."

"I've always managed to take care of myself," I assured him.

"That's what you think," said Sock-Eye. "But it's time some plain-spoken hombre put a bee or two in your bonnet. For I savvy a heap more'n you imagine, girlie. You think Big John Trumbull'll give you a square deal on your claim trial. But he won't. He ain't built that way. And there's a glib-talkin' tarantula right over in that transient-camp who's figgerin' on bustin' you up in this colony, when the chance comes around. And he's got Trumbull behind him."

"Is that Eric the Red?" I demanded, my thoughts suddenly back to more imminent things.

"That's the bird," acknowledged Sock-Eye as a leathery old claw stroked his six-gun holster. "And in the good old days when us sourdoughs cleaned up a camp as she ought to be cleaned up that windjammer'd have swung from a tamarack bough afore he'd passed out his second mess o' pizen-talk. I don't like what he's sayin' about you and Sid Lander. I don't like anything he says."

"What's he got against Lander?" I asked.

"One item worth mentionin'," Sock-Eye said with his not unkindly smile, "is the fact that Lander's ridin' range for you."

"Why should he ride range, as you put it, for me?" I inquired with purely defensive obtuseness.

Sock-Eye took another chew before deigning to answer.

"Why, that long-legged giloot's so crazy about you, girlie, he can't see straight."

I could feel the color come up into my face. But I managed to keep control of my voice.

"Did he ever tell you this?" I asked.

"That hombre," asserted the frowning Sock-Eye, "ain't given to talkin' much. But when he gits set on doin' a thing he does it in his own way."

"But it would be in an honest way," I proudly proclaimed.

Sock-Eye's shaggy head nodded its dubious assent.

"He's a straight-shooter all right. But that's jus' where the hitch is. He's too straight. And considerin' what he's facin' it ain't gittin' him far."

Sock-Eye's gaze wavered away and regarded the design I'd embroidered on a gunny sack for a floor mat.

"I ain't nosin' into that tie-up with the Trumbull dame. That's something 'twixt him and his Creator. But there's that girl o' Sam Bryson's. S'lary ain't what you'd mebbe call civilized."

"She has her good points," I regretfully admitted.

"Mebbe she has. But when a maverick in petticoats like that gits an idee in her head, when she's set on somethin' she ain't no special right to, she's a-goin' after it like a wildcat after a rabbit."

I began to discern the threatening bush about which my old friend was so artfully beating.

"Lander seems able to take care of himself," I ventured.

"Mebbe he is," retorted Sock-Eye. "And mebbe he ain't. But book learnin' and shadow-boxin' with the Ten Commandments ain't goin' t' help you much when you're competin' against a she-wolf."

"I haven't," I ventured, "seen signs of any conflict."

"You wouldn't," acceded Sock-Eye. "But as I told you once afore, gold's where you find it. And so is a hombre's consolation for livin' alone. But it's mebbe worth rememberin' that both the man and the metal is usually corraled by the forager who's first t' hightail it in t' where the strike is."

I sat, deep in thought, after he had gone. I picked up two letters which had to go to the post office at Palmer and at the same time gave me a ponderable excuse for invading that forbidden territory.

As I approached the Commissary I realized that crowd was doing more than loiter. A few of the men had pitchforks in their hands; a few had pick handles and axes. Still others, I noticed, carried heavy clubs of spruce wood. And a broken cheer went up from them as Eric the Red pushed through their ranks and mounted the porch end.

"Are we cattle," he demanded, "or are we freeborn Americans? Instead of coming to a colony of homes you were brought like driven sheep to a hobo city of lousy tents. You were fed on tainted beef and big promises. Your women and children waded through mud and you were told to grub out spruce roots or go without a crop. And when your children fell sick they were taken away from the homes where they belonged and carried off to a jerry-built pesthouse and kept prisoners there while a couple of overfed she-nurses sat around smoking cigarettes and playing checkers with an imported sawbones who lined up your little ones and vaccinated them whether they needed it or not. And now it's about time—"

That was as much as I heard. For a wave of resentment went through my body and rang a little bell somewhere at the back of my brain. I found myself clambering up on the porch beside the momentarily silenced Ericson.

"Wait a minute," I heard my own voice shouting above the jeers and the derisive laughter my over-abrupt eruption gave birth to. "I want to tell you the truth about this trouble-maker and what he's doing to this colony. For if you're fools enough to let him poison your minds with his cheap lies and his half-baked Red ideas you don't deserve the

"You've a chance to conquer this last frontier."

chance this Project is giving you. You've a chance to be nation-builders. You've a chance to be heroes. You've a chance to conquer this last frontier and make happy homes here and—"

But the envious rabble-rouser at my side had no intention, obviously, of surrendering the stage to an outsider. There was a shout of laughter as I was unceremoniously bumped off the porch end.

"Don't listen to this kid-tamer," I could hear Ericson shouting as I gathered myself up. "She can't pull that kindergarten stuff with men like us who know our own minds. And know, as well, that she's the private pastry of that imported college-dude engineer who's trying—"

And that, still again, was as far as Eric the Red got.

His speech was cut short by a bullet that splintered the porch post within ten inches of his head. Before he could recover from his astonishment at that interruption a second bullet cut through the crown of his hat and buried itself in the woodwork behind him.

I glanced back, at that second shot, and caught sight of Sock-Eye standing just beyond the outer fringe of the crowd.

"Grab that old fool," someone cried. "He's drunk."

"Drunk, am I?" he croaked as he advanced slowly toward the porch end, the clustered bodies making way for him as he so threateningly moved forward. "Mebbe I am; but I'm still sober enough t' scotch a two-legged snake."

The only person who didn't fall back was Ericson. I don't know whether it was courage, or whether it was hopelessness. But he remained there at the porch end, white-faced and motionless, with his narrowed eyes on the swaying old-timer.

Sock-Eye took three slow steps toward him.

"Now dance high, tenderfoot," he suddenly barked out. And with equal abruptness the two poised pistols repeated that bark, splintering the porch floor at Ericson's feet.

Ericson didn't exactly dance. His foot-movement, as a third bullet nipped the toe of his foot, must have been largely an involuntary one. But his repeated movement, as another bullet cut into the sole-edge of his other boot, might have been interpreted as a none too happy dance step. And that was repeated until he stood with his back against the porch post.

When he suddenly holstered one of his revolvers and jerked out his sheath knife I thought, for a dreadful second or two, that the old fire-eater was so far forgetting himself as to disembowel a helpless enemy. But I could see, when it was all over, that the flashing knife blade had merely severed Ericson's belt and slashed loose his trouser legs, leaving him standing there bare-kneed below his ridiculous cotton shorts. Then with incredible dexterity the old desert-rat swung the twisted leg cloth around the younger man's startled body, knotting him there a prisoner against the post. His movements were more leisurely as he tied a third strip about Ericson's thin neck.

I had no clear suspicion of Sock-Eye's intentions until I saw him stroll down the steps and pick up an empty salmon tin lying in the road dust. There he eyed it with solemn approval.

His steps were distressingly unsteady as he returned to the porch and placed the tin on Ericson's head. A laugh went up from the crowd when Ericson shook the can from its resting place.

Sock-Eye solemnly replaced it.

"Do that again," he croaked, "and I'll sure fan the bump o' veneration off'n your skull."

He backed slowly away, the full length of the porch.

"That gun-fanning old fool's going to pull the William Tell trick," cried someone at the edge of the crowd.

"Better get an apple," cried another guttural voice.

But I couldn't see any excuse for mirth in the situation. I could feel my heart come up in my mouth as I saw Sock-Eye's long arm swing about in an airy half-circle, with the heavy six-gun in the tremulous old hand.

My impulse was to stop such madness. I even called out and started forward. But I was too late.

The shot rang out before I could reach the porch. And at the same time the empty salmon tin went spinning through the evening air.

Sock-Eye, ignoring the shouts of the crowd, went solemnly after it. His intention, apparently, was to repeat that foolish and perilous performance. But it was cut short when a military-looking car swung in from the highway and Colonel Hart flung out of the seat beside his driver.

"Arrest that man," he called to the Anchorage marshal who stood on the running board.

But with an altogether unexpected nimbleness Sock-Eye rounded the Commissary, dodged out past the stock shed, and disappeared in the spruce scrub, at the same time that Katie and her Black Maria roared closer along the highway that skirted the railway siding. On the seat beside her was Salaria, armed with a rifle, and plainly a self-appointed vigilante.

"Who's hurt?" I heard Colonel Hart call out as the ambulance shuddered to a stop.

"Two transients caught setting a fire," answered Katie. "They showed fight and had to be subdued."

"And it was Sid Lander done the subduin'," proudly announced the self-appointed vigilante at her side.

CHAPTER XIX

When Barbara Trumbull and her father came in, they came by plane. What prompted that return was, of course, unknown to me.

But I was more worried, at the time, by Sock-Eye's abrupt disappearance. The bullheaded old gun-fanner had possessed himself of two pack mules, which he hid in the hills beyond Knik Glacier and loaded down with grub and equipment and three cases of dynamite. Rumor had it that S'lary Bryson had not only been his go-between during those preparations but had been his companion and trail mate on his first day's travel out through the hills. And after that the silence had swallowed him up.

When I went to the Bryson shack, to glean a little more light on the matter, I found Sam alone there, alone and singularly acid-spirited. But when I questioned if Sock-Eye wasn't too old and erratic-minded for lone-fire prospecting like that he refused to share in my fears.

"That ol' sourdough knows his hills. And he knows how t' mush through 'em, winter or summer."

"Where's Salaria?" I asked as I made a show of producing the text-books that motivated my visit.

"Bear shootin'," was Sam's truculent reply.

"I'm sorry," I said, "that she's missing a lesson.'

That seemed to give Sam the opening he wanted.

"It ain't wringin' no tears out o' me," he protested. And there was no mistaking the tremor of indignation in his voice. "What's more," he continued, "instead o' all this book-readin' doin' my S'lary a bit o' good, it's fillin' her up with enough loco idees t' founder a pack horse. And I ain't thankin' you or anyone else for pizenin' her mind and makin' her about as easy t' live with as an underfed she-grizzly."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Kathleen Norris Says:

The Luckiest Girls in Town

(Bell Syndicate—WNU Service.)

No girl of sixteen or eighteen knows what she is jeopardizing when she goes about with a reckless crowd. She endures half-intoxicated women and men who can't make up their minds to go home. She risks the return home with a driver who is unfit to handle a car.

By KATHLEEN NORRIS

GIRLS who are kept at home by strict maternal rule and obliged to obey pretty severe rules of conduct in the matters of dances and dates and late hours, are the luckiest girls after all.

They may not see it at 18, but ten years and fifteen years later they see it. And it is then, in happy young wifehood and motherhood, with their own potential responsibilities coming along, that they turn to the older woman with an affectionate laugh and begin to repay the debt they owe her for guarding their girlhood.

"Mother was a Gorgon!" they say proudly. "Nancy and I couldn't get away with ANYTHING! Mother had to know all about boys before they could even take us to movies."

But of course Sixteen and Eighteen don't see this, and if they possibly can they escape from home control. "Good heavens," they mutter, as they curl up their shining locks and paint their young mouths, "what's the harm of dancing? What's the harm in one cocktail! I never took too much to drink in my life and neither did Nancy! You'd think from the way Mother and Dad talk that we were going right to the bad!"

Too Much Freedom Harmful.

But there IS harm in giving youth too much freedom. The harm is that no girl of Sixteen or Eighteen knows what she is losing or jeopardizing when she goes about with a reckless crowd. She is completely incapable of judging how she will feel a few years later, how this group of men and women will impress her. Even if she stops short of actual improprieties with men, she has to face infinite dangers. She sees men drunk; she hears stories and phrases that should never reach her ears; she endures the stupid delays of half-intoxicated women and men who can't make up their minds to go home, or go anywhere, but who remain drowsily drinking and dancing hours after all pleasure has gone out of the occasion. She risks the return home with a driver who is unfit to handle a car.

Must Pay Some Price.

Many a girl quite innocently invites danger and fright and harm to herself in this way. She may apparently escape actual injury, she may not have to face the world with a fatherless child in her arms; although even that Victorian situation is not as unusual as today's girls would like to think. But no girl gets off scot free after a few young years of recklessness and license. Her manner, speech, standards, personality are all affected; other women realize that the minute they meet her.

For the young years are very important years. It is in them that we lay the foundation for the future. And restraint and fineness and discrimination and self-control in those years bear inevitable fruit. The girl who deliberately makes herself lawless and common at eighteen is not going miraculously to emerge from cheapening associations and find herself admirable at 25, clean of speech, clean of mind, clean of soul.

Here is a letter some girls might read to advantage this Sunday morning. It comes from East St. Louis.

"Dear Mrs. Norris, I am 29," writes Anna, "and have been married for five years to the finest man in the world. We have a daughter of three and are expecting a new baby in midsummer. This is my problem.

WHAT PRICE FREEDOM?

Does mother have to know where you're going, with whom, and how long you intend to be gone? . . . Does she object to late hours and dime-a-dance night clubs? . . . You say she does and you hate it! Well, Kathleen Norris has a different view on the subject. Read her frank discussion of the effect too much freedom has on young women!

Went With Wrong Crowd.

"My husband is a doctor, a year younger than I. He was recently offered a very advantageous position with a clinic in my old home town. Since our marriage, and indeed for two years before that, my family has lived in this city, and I met Tom here. I have never been back to the place where I lived as a girl, nor seen any of my old associates there. I went with the wrong crowd, as I see now, and I was glad to leave it all behind me.

"In that old group, in those reckless days, was a man I will call Larry. He was a rough, dark, violent sort of fellow, older by six or seven years than the rest of us, coarse and noisy, but fascinating, and we all knew he was brilliant. This man, if Tom accepts the flattering offer he has just received, will be my husband's immediate superior and close associate.

"I was never, in the sense of making our relationship public or constant, this man's mistress. But we were always paired off together, and on certain week-end trips either to hotels in the mountains, or to somebody's cabin or camp, I did not feel, at 18, able to behave in a manner very different from the rest. The tragedy of it is that I never really loved Larry. He wanted me and I wanted to go along with the others.

Fears to Move Back.

"My husband knows nothing of this. It was long ago, it was unimportant, it has been completely forgotten in the realer experience of being a beloved and honored wife. Tom is proud, sensitive and fine in every way; he would be shocked to know it and I would never recover my place with him. And, as I say, it is not important enough to worry about; it has nothing to do with our lives now.

"But at the same time, how can I move straight back into the neighborhood not only of this man, who will instantly remember all the past, but perhaps other members of that group, who knew perfectly well what was going on? Larry is a coarse man, our sex is not much respected by him, it was part of his charm—or in my idiotic little girl days I found it so, that he boasted of his masterful ways with women.

"I am trying to influence Tom not to accept this offer, which bewilders and disturbs him. What I am writing to ask you is whether it would be wise for me to write honestly to Larry, and ask him to have his board of directors withdraw the invitation?"

And she encloses the money for a telegraphic answer.

Face the Difficulties.

What I advised was her return to her old town, an honest facing of the difficulties, an explanation to Larry that will not be too long or involved or tearful or penitent, and a concentration upon the building into her life of fineness and goodness and simplicity, with a complete forgetfulness of the past.

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HOUSEHOLD QUESTIONS

To prevent dough sticking to the spoon when making dumplings dip the spoon into hot liquid each time before putting it into the dough.

• • •

Stewed prunes, stuffed with cheese, nuts or celery and arranged on lettuce leaves, make a suitable salad to serve with chops or roasts. French or mayonnaise salad dressing may be used with it.

• • •

Drain all boiled vegetables as soon as tender. They become soggy if they are allowed to stand unstrained after cooking. The water drained off may be saved for soup stock.

• • •

Lemon juice mixed with wood ashes will remove tarnish from brass.

• • •

Gilt picture frames can be restored to brightness by rubbing with a sponge moistened in turpentine.

• • •

If using icebags in a sickroom, instead of shaving ice each time you wish to fill a bag, to save time shave enough to fill a quart pitcher and keep it in the refrigerator.

• • •

Paint piazza and garden chairs now so that they may be thoroughly dried before you wish to use them.

• • •

If your floors are worn and will not hold wax, try touching up the worn places with white shellac and then wax. The floors will be much improved by this treatment.

• • •

Grease the inside of the container, near the top, to keep milk from boiling over.

• • •

Save all celery tops, wash and dry them and place in the oven, turning them now and then. Store the leaves in an airtight tin. Use them for flavoring soups, salads, etc.

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Long ailments wear out pain, and long hopes joy.—Stanislaus.

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