The Lamp in the Valley

BY ARTHUR STRINGER

W. N. U. Service

THE STORY SO FAR

Three women love Sidney Lander, Alaska mining engineer. He is engaged to Barbara Trumbull, whose rich father is contesting the mining claim of Carol Coburn, teacher at Matanuska. Lander breaks with Trumbull. Salaria Bryson, a big out-door girl, also loves Lander. She disappears. Lander finds Salaria. Barbara misinterprets the rescue and flings away her engagement ring. Lander and Carol fly to Chakitana, scene of her claim. Someone shoots at the plane. It was Sock-Eye, a friend. He thought it was a Trumbull plane. He told them Trumbull had sent Eric, the Red, for dirty work. Eric, the Red, had annoyed Carol on several occasions and threatened her.

The menace of Red seemed still present.

INSTALLMENT XVIII

"That's the Big Squaw," he said with an unmistakable note of triumph in his voice.

Yet all I could see, in the distance, was a meandering ribbon of water, an uncertain thread of water muddy with glacial silt as it twisted between broken rock and gravel beds fringed with dwarfed birch trees and in the blue-shadowed distance lost itself in what must have been a small lake.

"There's no plane at Cranberry Lake," I heard him say. "And the Trumbull mine's shut down. Everything's empty there."

He stooped and handed me the glasses, pointing into the valley. I finally made out the mine buildings, deserted and idle. And in all the broken terrain beyond them I could detect no sign of life.

"I don't understand this," Lander said as he reached for the glasses again. And even as he spoke a sound that was neither a whine nor a whistle smote on my ears. A moment later the sound was repeated, followed by the splash of a bullet against the rock on which Lander was standing.

"Get back," he called out to me. "Keep low."

His own drop from the rock top was so abrupt that the binoculars fell at my feet. He motioned me down as another bullet whined overhead.

"So that's how they welcome us!" he said as his eyes narrowed and yet remained alight with a grim sort of humor.

Still another bullet cut across the top of the rock behind which we crouched.

"They're getting their range," my trail mate sardonically observed.

"But who is it?" I gasped.

"That's what I've got to find out," said Lander as he reached for his own rifle. But instead of bringing it into use he crowned the barrel end with his hat and slowly lifted it above the top of our sheltering rock.

There was a far-off report, and I saw the hat that had been on the barrel end whisked ten feet away. Lander, when he guardedly recovered it, found a bullet hole through one side of the felt brim. He looked at it ruminatively. Then he put the hat back on his head.

He sat in the rock shadow, studying the wide amphitheater of runneled and canyoned mountain slope that surrounded us.

"We'll crawl back," he quietly announced, "and come on him from another quarter."

"On whom?" I queried, trying in vain to match quietness with quietness.

"The man who's trying to murder us," was Lander's curt reply.

That backtrailing, however, turned into a quartering and cautious advance, once we had climbed to higher ground. We crept forward in a westerly direction, crawling closer and closer to the heights overlooking the Big Squaw and the empty mine buildings.

I was glad to sit and rest while Lander crawled cautiously forward and, through that tangle of willow, carefully studied the alley beneath him. He studied it for a long time. Then he crept back to my side, his somber eyes quite without any look of satisfaction.

"Let's eat," he said as he reached for his discarded shoulder pack.

Instinctively I looked about for fuel; but he stopped me with a gesture.

Later we squatted Indianlike on the rocky floor of a sheltering bowl and ate as the shadows shifted and a wood-warbler twittered and hopped between the clump-willows.

"You'll have to stay here," Lander said, "I've got a little scouting to do. If anything should happen, give me a couple of signal shots from that six-gun of yours."

"But I can go where you go," I maintained.

Lander studied my face. Then he smiled a little.

"I don't want you in this," he said with a quiet but steely firmness.

"But if it's dangerous for you I want to be in it," I persisted.

"I know what I'm doing," he said. "And you've still got to believe in me."

He didn't even say good-by. He merely slipped over the edge of the rock and lost himself in the fireweed and balsam fringing the stream that went singing down into the lower valley.

I crouched behind my clump-willow, watching for some sign of him. I saw him at last, flattened Indian fashion in a narrow crevasse as he inched his way down into that hollow of uncertainty. He went very slowly.

Then my heart leaped into my mouth. A rifle shot echoed through the valley, tearing a hole in the silence. And before its echoes died away it was followed by another shot, and still another.

I saw Lander drop beside a boulder; and I thought, for one frantic moment, that he had gone down with a bullet through his body. But I could see him edge up over the crown of that boulder, with his rifle extended, pointing across a rock-stippled stadium to where a small whiff of smoke was drifting off between a sprinkling of hardheads. I could see him suddenly bend low and run toward the shelter of a larger boulder, where he again guardedly trained his rifle and fired at some undecipherable target.

I forgot my trail mate's warning and went scrambling over the shelf edge, groping for my six-gun as I went.

I knew it was dangerous, but I didn't much care. All I remembered was that I was Alaska born and my blood was up. I couldn't see a man killed for a cause that was essentially mine. To stand aside, at such a time, was more than cowardly.

I disregarded Lander's shout of warning and ran on, scarcely thinking of cover.

Then an odd thing happened.

Instead of the bark of a rifle I heard the bark of a voice, half in protest and half in anger.

"Sock-Eye," was the shout that fell on my ears. It came from the tall figure which was no longer crouching behind its rock shelter.

To stand aside, at such a time, was more than cowardly.

And that, I knew, was Lander, a startled and indignant Lander who wasn't even trying to wave me back.

"Sock-Eye, you old fool, stop it," was the repeated shout that echoed across the valley. And it was answered, a moment later, by a call that was halfway between the howl of a timber wolf and the ki-yi of a happy cowboy.

I could see the shaggy old figure that emerged from its hiding place and stood in startled wonder, staring at his equally startled enemy.

"I'll be hornswiggled if it ain't Sid Lander," cried the embattled old-timer as he lowered his firearm. "And me a-tryin' t' blow him out o' the valley!"

"What do you mean by it?" demanded Lander, striding toward him.

Sock-Eye stood scratching his head, a picture of bewilderment touched with contrition. His wandering gaze fell on me and he emitted a second triumphant ki-yi.

Then Sock-Eye turned back to the taller figure confronting him, the squint of incredulity going out of his bearlike eyes as he studied the newcomer. Then he spat and leaned on his rifle.

"I thought you was that yellow-bellied coyote Trumbull planted in these parts t' do his dirty work for him."

"What coyote?" questioned Lander.

"That fire-eatin' Ericson," Sock-Eye answered. "He's still snakin' round this valley tryin' to ease the hate out o' his system by puttin' lead in folks."

This fact brought a frown to Lander's face.

"Then it was Ericson fired on the plane two days ago?"

I could see a look of guile creep over the seamed old face. Then a smile widened the brown-stained and slowly relenting old mouth.

"I reckon them pot shots came from me all right," he slowly acknowledged. "I was under the deloosion it was Trumbull comin' back t' trump my ace when I had him already licked."

"You might have killed somebody," cried Lander.

The bearlike old eyes lost the last of their benevolence.

"There's jus' one snake, I'm aimin' for t' git," Sock-Eye slowly affirmed "And right now he's hidin' and huggin' a rifle somewheres between here and Cranberry Lake. And if you don't git him he'll sure git you."

Lander's narrowed eye studied the valley bottom.

"Why is he here?" I asked, chilled by the thought of unseen menace all about us.

"B'cause he's fuller o' venom than a cage o' copperheads," was Sock-Eye's deliberated reply. "He's so plumb sour with hate he can't see straight. And Trumbull cashed in on that when he posted him here as an armed guard t' protect his property. It was like leavin' a trap set with pizen bait behind him."

"What did you mean by saying you had Trumbull licked?" Lander demanded.

Still again I saw the look of guile on Sock-Eye's crafty old face. His eyes, when he spoke, were not on Lander, but on me.

"I ain't got nothin' aginst college-dood engineerin'," he said. "Least-a-ways, when a high-collar plootocrat tries t' change the face o' nature, there's always two can play at the same game."

"What do you mean by that?" Lander questioned.

"I mean, mister," was Sock-Eye's quiet-toned answer, "that I happened t' mush in here afore Trumbull and his survey officials dropped into this valley. They was bankin' on the Big Squaw t' show 'em ol' Klondike Coburn's claim couldn't lie along the crick bank where his patent sure said she ought t' lie."

I waited for Sock-Eye to go on. But as he stood silent for a moment or two, with a somber light in his crafty old eyes, he seemed to be turning a succulent thought over in his mind, very much as a squirrel turns a nut over in its paws.

"I reckon a earthquake must've run recent through these regions," he blandly suggested. "For there was the ol' Big Squaw, right back in the bed where she belonged. And when them engineerin' sharps got through with their maps and sightin' tools they sure had t' tell Boss Trumbull the mine was located proper and the claim stood as recorded. And the ol' skunk was so sprayed with his own scent that he—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Lander, fixing the other with a steady eye. "How much dynamite did you pack into this valley?"

Sock-Eye scratched his head and spat. Then his leathery old throat shook with a chuckle.

"I reckon, tenderfoot," he observed, "I savvied how t' handle blastin' powder afore you was born."

"Then it was you changed the course of the Big Squaw?"

"I put 'er back where she belonged," Sock-Eye stubbornly maintained, "where she was on the original survey."

"But that doesn't mean the issue's settled," contended my champion.

"Sure she's settled," Sock-Eye proclaimed. "Them gover'ment sharps flew out three days ago, headin' for Juneau t' register their findin' and confirm the claim. I'll lead you over t' the Big Squaw and show you where your location posts is all set reg'lar and your limits defined."

"Why do you say when the coast is clear?" Lander exacted.

"B'cause there's a hate-soured son o' misery skulkin' around behind them rocks," he announced, "and he ain't consoomed with love for any one of us. Fact is, folks, we've got t' git under cover."

He turned and pointed toward a rock ledge that wavered along the water-torn mountain slope. "I've got me a nifty little hide-out up that hillside there. She's tarp-roofed and bedded down with balsam and plumb out o' sight from pryin' eyes down here."

I knew a sudden sense of weariness touched with homelessness as I waited for Lander to retrieve our overlooked shoulder packs.

"You've had hard goin,' girlie," Sock-Eye observed after a glance into my face. "But you've got your mine."

"It doesn't seem so important," I said out of my backwash of weariness.

Sock-Eye wagged a shaggy head.

"I guess you're right, girlie. It ain't the gold that stacks so high in this game. It's the doggoned joy o' diggin' it out. And I may as well tell you, straight out, she ain't no El Dorado. There's a showin' of color all right. But accordin' t' the test pits I put down she's going to run thinner than your ol' pappy counted on."

Lander plainly resented that decision.

"You can't appraise a mine by a scratch or two on the surface," he said as we made our way up the broken mountain slope, slowly step by step.

Sock-Eye's gaze, as he stopped and blinked at the taller man, was one of asperity.

"I ain't no college dood," he affirmed. "But I panned these cricks afore you was a pulin' infant. And I reckon I kin still sniff out a payin' pocket when she's under my nose."

It seemed very futile and foolish. And I had trouble in finding my footing along the fan-shaped gravel bed that lay in our path. I even staggered a little.

"This girl needs rest and sleep," Lander said as he shifted his rifle and reached out an arm to hold me up.

I could feel that arm tighten about my tired body as we moved on again.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Kathleen Norris Says:

Live a Minute at a Time

(Bell Syndicate—WNU Service.)

To live each moment perfectly, to round it out so that it contains all that it can hold of love and service is to find your vague whirling fears strangely dissipated. You can live that one moment without them, and when it comes you can live the next.

By KATHLEEN NORRIS

THERE is no greater philosophy in the world than the philosophy that teaches us to live a minute at a time. There is no surer cure for doubt, anxiety or despair. There is no quicker road to security and happiness.

I say "security" because of late months we have been substituting that word for our old supreme goal, "happiness." We pitifully want security. Not wealth, titles, jewels, gaiety, travel. The world's bitter woes and bitter needs have swept away those old weak desires. We want security now; security for everyone. Security to have an untroubled home, though it be only of four rooms, and a lamp by which to read books, and a few beloved faces near us. Security to go to church on Sunday, to have simple food on the table three times a day, to teach our children what we believe of honesty and forgiveness and brotherhood, and to launch them simply and quietly into simple and quiet lives of their own.

Security for All.

We want everyone to have this; not just Americans, not just our friends. We want security for obscure Chinese women, pattering along beside their muddy canals with their open little baskets that hold life-giving rice, and with a clean bit of rag in which to wrap the precious scrap of pork. We want security for East Indian women, slipping through narrow streets and jangling bazaars, pushed aside by the arrogant cattle they hold sacred, obliged to hide everything of their beauty and youth except their dark eyes, stooping eagerly to drink the filthy sacred waters of the Ganges in which bodies and sewerage float together.

We want it—we women of America are begging God each day to grant it, to show us how to hold it!—we want security for women in the Balkans, in the jungles of Africa, in the hungry oppressed countries of northern Europe, in the poorest slums of the great cities. Just security! No matter on what humble terms, no matter how plainly, but let us feel safe!

It may be a very low roof, a platter of macaroni, a bowl of potage, a dish of Irish boiled potatoes, it may be the goulash of Hungary, the bortsch of Russia, the rice of the Orient—nothing more. But after this war, with its fears piled upon fears, is over, let us begin to spread humble peace, humble plenty in every town and village and crossroads hamlet of the world, and let us gladly sacrifice half of what we have, two-thirds of what we have, for the divine knowledge that want and hate and fear are lessened in this world, and that fear and war have gone with them.

Remedy for Worries.

Things aren't going, in these days, the way many of us would have them go. Some of us feel that a very little spent upon peace departments would pay us better than a great deal spent upon war. But if you feel dissatisfied, if you feel restless and fearful, confused by conflicting arguments and assertions, unable to believe all the badness that is floating about as current gossip, then turn to the age-old wisdom of the great spiritual leaders who gave us this theory of living each tiny space of time only for itself, who revealed to us the magic of "the sacrament of the moment."

> **SECURITY**
>
> *We want security now; security for everyone . . . an untroubled home, church on Sunday, simple food to eat, schools for our children . . . It's true, isn't it? And to discover how to obtain this security, read Kathleen Norris' up-to-date article.*

To live each moment perfectly, to round it out so that it contains all that it can hold of love and service is to find your vague whirling fears strangely dissipated. You can live that one moment without them, and when it comes you can live the next. Through all life's changes this one simple little rule will still carry you safely; nothing can disturb it. No yesterday, with all its mistakes; no tomorrow with all its imagined pitfalls. Just this one moment to make as happy as you can for everyone about you.

We laugh at the small child who anticipates trouble. We quote with amusement the soliloquy of the New England woman on a Sunday night long ago. "Tomorrow Monday and that big wash, Tuesday all my ironing, Wednesday this big place to clean! Half the week gone and nothing done!"

Banish Fear.

But when it comes to nations borrowing trouble and imagining enmities there is no laughter. We take that very seriously. Too seriously. Stop taking it seriously this moment. Do what you can in all charity and loyalty, do exactly what your own conscience and knowledge of events dictates. Don't worry because it isn't more, and because perhaps—and maybe—and possibly—and they say—and someone heard—

Cut that all out. Banish it by the magic of the sacrament of the moment. The history of the past is full of strange twists, surprises, reversals, changes. The history we are living today will be. Nothing comes out as our fanciful fears construct it, and the only thing to fear is fear. Because nations have made mistakes and have been misled doesn't mean they will always make mistakes, always be misled. Sometimes they reform; sometimes they come to a new birth.

We were the rebel nation once, outcast colonials without grace or dignity, our decent blood thinned by the flotsam and jetsam, the lees and dregs of the old world's vagrants and criminals. We survived it; we didn't do so badly in making ourselves promptly into the greatest nation of the world. France had her dark hour, religion destroyed, intelligentsia destroyed, calendar destroyed, the very walls of her Capitol spattered high with blood. Only 140 years ago.

Decency, Civilization to Come Back.

All central Europe swarmed with homeless, desperate outlaws for 20 years after the Hundred Years war. And so she will again. But time heals, dictators die in one way or another, decency and civilization creep back, and presently the ships begin to move again, and the returning travelers begin to tell us how things are going over there.

And this time we won't laugh at their debased currency, take advantage of their ruin. This time we'll all rebuild together. We'll live a minute at a time, making the perfect moments run together.

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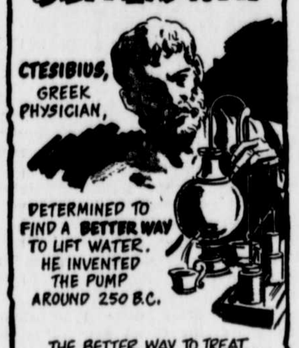
Harmful Greed

A clever man should regulate his interests, and place them in proper order. Our avidity often deranges them by inducing us to undertake too many things at once; and by grasping at minor objects, we lose our hold of more important ones. — La Rochefoucauld.

HE FOUND A BETTER WAY



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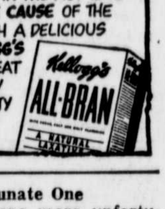

Unfortunate One

There is no one more unfortunate than the man who has never been unfortunate, for it has never been in his power to try himself.—Seneca.

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