

Archie Macdonald's

A STORY OF THE SAN SIMON PLAIN.

BY CLARENCE PULLEN.

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(Continued.)

"We were not kept waiting long to learn the cause of the mules' alarm. Out of the bushes rose a man, who waved his hat as a signal for us to stop, and then came down to meet us, carrying his rifle, muzzle forward, on his shoulder. Behind him a second man appeared, pale and dishevelled, his arm supported by a sling made from a cotton handkerchief. He slowly followed the other toward the trail. They were the two prospectors.

"We paused at their approach, and after a nod of recognition waited to hear what they had to say.

"Does any one of you happen to be a surgeon?" asked the foremost man. "No," I answered. "What's the matter? Has your partner been getting hurt?"

"Nothing but an Apache's bullet through his arm. The Indians jumped us from ambush just back of here, while we were travelling along the trail. Came pretty near getting us, too. But we got up the hillside, in among the chacoaral, and kept our rifles pumping wherever a redskin showed so much as a glint of an eye. After a few minutes they sneaked to where they'd left their horses and stolen stock, and rode to the south. Our skirmish was pretty hot while it lasted, though. They killed one of our burros at the first fire, but the other two followed us into the brush and stayed as closely by as dogs, so the Apaches couldn't stampede 'em, do what they would. They know the Indians too well to let that happen. But Jim's wound here needs dressing. He's lost considerable blood and feels pretty bad. I don't think he'll be good for much travelling afoot for a good spell yet, and it's a bad country to be left in wounded. I was in hopes one of you was a doctor and would find some way of fix up his wound so 'twould do till he could get into Silver City."

Felix was off his horse at once and was by the wounded man's side examining the injured arm. That he had been a medical student before he came to the West had pretty soon become known to the haps and tumbles of our rough life, and I used sometimes to call him Dr. Felix. He felt the wounded arm, and had the man move it to and fro and turn it about. "There are no bones broken," he said. "I think we can fix this to do you all right until you strike white settlements and a doctor."

A bit of packing rope tied tightly above the wound had served as tourniquet. Felix untied it and satisfied himself that the flow of blood was stanch. From his cantinas he took a roll of lint cloth. From this he tore several strips, and with them bandaged the wound.

"There, you'll do for awhile—until to-morrow morning, if necessary," he said, when he had completed the operation. "Now take these extra strips, and you'll have them at hand when you want to renew the bandage. Now about your getting to Silver City."

"He can ride with us," said Don Ramon, from the carriage. "We will make room for him, and he will be very welcome."

The prospectors looked at each other and shook their heads.

"We are obliged to you for your offer, sir," said Jim, the wounded man. "But of foot, and with those two burros to drive, my pard can't keep along with you, and I reckon we won't separate. Now that my wound's dressed, we'll get along somehow. I can foot it along by easy stages."

"You can do better than that," said Felix. "There are teams coming along behind us that left the stage station this morning—the Pike county outfit and the Mexican showman's. They are travelling at a slower rate than we are. The showman, Senor Trimbajo, is a good fellow, as you know, and will gladly give you a lift. Your partner can keep pace with them while driving along your two burros. And you'll all travel safer and more comfortable for being together."

"We'll see you again, I hope, in Silver City," he added, as the two men signified their approval of this plan. "Good luck to you."

He swung himself upon his horse, and we started on. The interruption had cost us a quarter of an hour's time. Now we were off again, heading toward the Burro mountains, the most dangerous part of our route, the wooded, crag-bound lurking place of the Apaches in all times of foray.

As we travelled we talked over the situation with Don Ramon, and made out plans for the night journey. He cordially agreed with the hitcher side of that dangerous ground to rest our animals, and get our supper, and take the trail again after night had fallen. The darkness would protect our passage through the defiles and canyons so favourable for Apache ambuscade, and if all went well the morning should find us in the open country beyond, with an open road before us to Silver City.

It evidently was a stormy afternoon in the mountains all around the northern horizon. Stein's peak now and all the Pelonillos were veiled in an impenetrable curtain of mist that for an hour past had hidden them from our view. The Burro mountains ahead were outlined, spectral, against a cloudbank, darkened pearl-grey in tint, which concealed all but the nearest peaks. This bank was rent almost continuously by zigzag streaks of lightning, while the sullen rumblings of distant thunder came to our ears in an unbroken sound. All the time the sky was clear overhead, and the sun shone brightly, except when twice the heavens were dimmed for a few minutes, and a light sprinkling flecked the dust on the trail and tapped against the carriage top.

Thicker and blacker the sky became ahead until the rain and clouds, like a leaden pall, shut the mountains from our view. We had crossed the lowest arroyo that wound along the plain, and the trail ahead rose in a gentle upward slope to the mountains. It was now past four o'clock in the afternoon. The carriage stopped, and Don Ramon turned to speak to Felix and me.

"There are water pools in the arroyo," he said. "We shall have to halt soon in any case to give our stock a chance to rest and eat. It would be well, I think, to stop here where the grazing is good rather than push forward into the storm. The rain will most likely be over by sunset."

"I turned toward Felix, who nodded his assent to the proposition. "Very good," I said to Don Ramon. "We will stop at whatever place it pleases you to select."

With no more ado, the carriage and team turned sharply off the trail to the right, and stopped at a long, smooth slope, where the buffalo grass was tall and thick. The mules were unharnessed from the carriage, our stock picketed out and feeding. Felix and I took the shovel, which is an indispensable part of every wagon outfit in Arizona, and went down into the arroyo to see if we could find a water pool.

It was a pleasing picture that our outfit and its surroundings presented as, before descending into the arroyo, I paused a moment at its verge to view it. At the carriage, Don Ramon was seated on the water keg comfortably rolling his cigarette, Manuel was adjusting a piece of the harness, and Dolores, kneeling by the little fire we had kindled from brushwood picked up in the arroyo as we crossed, was kneading dough for tortillas.

Half way between the carriage and the arroyo Carmen, the central figure in the scene, stood where she had paused to pick some wild flowers which now she was fastening at her throat. With a white blossom shining in her heavy hair, she had turned toward the carriage to call to her father, and show him the posy she had gathered. Beyond her was the green slope, with the feeding mules and horses, and in the background was the cloud pall that covered the mountains, rent by vivid lightning flashes that were accompanied by the frequent crashes and constant deep-toned mutterings of the sullen thunder.

The general course of the arroyo was northwest, leading toward the Gila river. Two hundred yards above the stage trail crossing by which we descended into it the channel made a sharp bend, so that upon two sides it inclosed the spot where the carriage had halted. Up the channel, half way to this bend, was a moist place in the sand, about which were footprints of antelope, coyotes and smaller animals leading to and from it. These tracks were an unmistakable indication that water was near the surface. Digging a hole in this moist spot, we soon had the satisfaction of seeing it fill with water quite up to the level of the river bed, and soon it ran over and trickled in a rivulet along the sands.

"Ah!" exclaimed Felix. "Here's a sign of high water. There's a river running through these sands below the surface. We're beginning to hear from those storms in the mountains. When the full head of water gets along, we may have a flood in the arroyo."

"Look over there," he continued. "The water's coming in sight already!"

At a low place in the channel, where five minutes before we had noticed no moisture, a little pool was forming. In several other places moist spots were forming by water rising through the sand. And, even while we looked, upon the opposite side of the arroyo a little stream came round the bend, trickling down the channel, seemingly pushed forward by a growing volume of water behind.

Our outfit was on the safe side of the arroyo, and we certainly were assured of water in plenty. Looking up at the turn in the channel I suggested:—

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to walk up to the bend and take a look beyond it? It's just the route a band of Indians or rustlers would choose in sneaking up to within gunshot of our camp."

"Good!" Let's go," said Felix. And leaving our shovel sticking in the sand



Just in time to see four horsemen dashing down the valley.

by the pool, we started up the channel for the bend.

Scarcely had we taken our second start when we were brought to a sudden halt by the sound of pistol shots ringing out beyond the bank in the direction of our encampment. With the firing were mingled the sounds of the swift tramping of horses, shouts of men, and wild screams of terror from a woman's throat.

The steep, crumbling banks of the arroyo offered us no chance of ascent at that point. With revolvers drawn, we ran down the channel to the stage crossing, and up the bank to the prairie level. We arrived at the top of the bank just in time to see four horsemen dashing down the valley at breakneck speed. All were Mexicans, riding magnificent black horses of great size, was Gaspar Sangrado. Held before him, struggling wildly to free himself from his grasp and crying for help, was Carmen.

Don Ramon, near the carriage, was firing after them with his revolver, while Manuel came running to him, bearing his repeating rifle. The old Don seized the rifle, and sent several bullets after the fleeing horsemen.

It is little wonder that his shots went wild. The bandits' sudden attack had been as complete a surprise to the party at the camp as it was to Felix and me. With Manuel, Don Ramon had gone to a little distance away from the carriage to straighten out a difference between two mules whose picket ropes had become entangled. Sangrado and his followers had emerged from the arroyo, beyond the bend, and the first notice Don Ramon had of their presence was their shouts and pistol firing as they dashed down past the carriage. Their bullets, evidently aimed to kill, had whistled unpleasantly near the Don and his servant; but, the distance being considerable, regarded at pistol range, and the shots being fired from the backs of horses going at a tearing gallop, no one was hit.

As Carmen stood, arranging the flowers she had picked, between the carriage and the arroyo, the sound of rushing hoofs and shouts and shooting-moose likely he over by sunset. I turned toward Felix, who nodded his assent to the proposition. "Very good," I said to Don Ramon. "We will stop at whatever place it pleases you to select."

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(To be Continued.)

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