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 F. L. Barnes

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SYNOPSIS.

Major McDonald, commanding an army post near Fort Dodge, seeks a man to intercept his daughter, Molly, who is headed for the fort. An Indian outbreak is threatened. "Brick" Hamlin, a sergeant who had just arrived with messages to McDonald, volunteers for the mission and starts alone. Molly arrives at Fort Ripley two days ahead of schedule. She decides to push on to Fort Dodge by stage in company with "Bullet Bill" Moylan. Gonzales, a gambler, is also a passenger. Hamlin meets the stage with stories of depredations committed by the Indians. It is decided to return to Ripley. The driver deserts the stage when Indians appear.

CHAPTER V.

The Defense of the Stage.

There were times when Hamlin's mental processes seemed slow, almost sluggish, but this was never true in moments of emergency and peril. Then he became swift, impetuous, seemingly borne forward by some inspiring instinct. It was for a sound experiences as this that he remained in the service—his whole nature responding almost joyously to the bugle-call of action, of imminent danger, his nerves steadying into rock. These were the characteristics which had won him his chevrons in the unrewarded service of the frontier, and, when scarcely more than a boy, had put a captain's bars on the gray collar of his Confederate uniform.

Now, as he struggled to his knees, gripping the iron foot-rail with one hand, a single glance gave him a distinct impression of their desperate situation. With that knowledge, there likewise flashed over his mind the only possible means of defense. The Indians, numbering at least thirty, had ridden recklessly out from under the protection of the river bank, spreading to right and left, as their ponies' hoofs struck the turf, and were now charging down upon the disabled coach, yelling madly and brandishing their guns. The very reckless abandon of their advance expressed the conception they had of the situation—they had witnessed the flight of the two fugitives, the runaway of the wheelers, and believed the remaining passengers would be helpless victims. They came on, savage and confident, not anticipating a fight, but a massacre—shrieking prisoners, and a glut of revenge.

With one swing of his body, Hamlin was upon the ground, and had jerked open the inside door of the coach, forcing it back against the dirt of the bluff which towered in protection above. His eyes were quick to perceive the peculiar advantage of position; that their assailants would be compelled to advance from only one direction. The three within were barely struggling to their feet, dazed, bewildered, falling as yet to comprehend fully those distant yells, when he sprang into their midst, uttering his swift orders, and unceremoniously jerking the men into position for defense.

"Here, quick now! Don't waste time! It's a matter of seconds, I tell you! They're coming—a horde of them. Here, Moylan, take this rifle barrel and knock a hole through the back there big enough to sight out of. Hit it hard, damn you, it's a case of life or death! What have you got, Gonsales? A revolver? Into that window there, and blaze away; you've got the reputation of a gun-man; now let's see you prove it. Get back in the corner, miss, so I can slip past—no, lie down below the fire line!"

"But—but I will not!" and she faced him, her face white, but her eyes shining. "I can shoot! See!" and she flashed a pearl-handled revolver defiantly. The Sergeant thrust her unceremoniously aside and plunged across to the opposite window, gripping his Henry rifle.

"Do as I say," he growled. "This is our fight. Get down! Now, you terriers, let them have it!"

There was a wild skurrying of mounted figures almost at the coach wheels, hair streaming, feathers waving, lean, red arms thrown up, the air vocal with shrill cuterwaul—then the dull bark of a Henry, the boom of a Winchester, the sharp spitting of a Colt. The smoke rolled out in a cloud, pungent, concealing, nervous fingers pressing the triggers again and again. They could see reeling horses, men gripping their ponies' manes to keep erect, staring, frightened eyes, animals flung back on their haunches, reeling madly in the air. The fierce yell of exultation changed into a savage scream, bullets crashed into the thin sides of the coach; it rocked with the contact of a half-naked body flung forward by a plunging horse; the Mexican swore wildly in Spanish, and then—the smoke blew aside and they saw the field; the dead and dying ponies, three motionless bodies huddled on the grass, a few dismounted stragglers racing on foot for the river bank, and a squad of riders circling beyond the trail. Hamlin swept the mingled sweat and blood out of his eyes, smiled grimly, and glanced back into the coach, instinctively slipping fresh cartridges into his bot rifle.

"That's one time those fellows ran into a hornet's nest," he commented quietly, all trace of excitement vanished. "Better load up, boys, for we're not through yet—they'll only be more careful next time. Anybody hurt?"

"Somethin' creased my back," replied Moylan, complainingly, and trying vainly to put a hand on the spot. "Felt like a streak o' fire." The Sergeant reached across, fingering the torn shirt cautiously.

"Seared the flesh, pardner, but no blood worth mentioning. They've got some heavy artillery out there from the sound—old army muskets likely. It is our repeating rifles that will win out—those red devils don't understand them yet."

"Senor, you tink we win out den?" and Gonzales peered up blinking into the other's face. "'acre! dey vil fight deeferent de nex' time. Ze Americaine muskeet, eet carry so far—eas eet not so?"

Hamlin patted his brown barrel affectionately as if it were an old friend, and smiled across into the questioning eyes of the girl.

"I'm willing to back this weapon against the best of them for distance," he replied easily. "And it's accurate besides. How about it, Moylan?"

"I'd about as soon be in front as behind one of them cannon," answered the sutler soberly. "I toted one four years. But say, pardner, what's yer name? Yer a cavalryman, ain't yer?"

"Sergeant—forgot I wasn't properly introduced," and he bent his head slightly, glancing again toward the girl. "Hamlin is the rest of it."

"'Brick' Hamlin?"

"Sometimes—delicate reference to my hair, miss," and he took off his hat, his gray eyes laughing. "Born that way, but doesn't seem to interfere with me much, since I was a kid. You've heard of me then, Moylan? Has our little friend, Gonzales, here."

The sober-faced sutler merely nodded, evidently in no mood for pleasantry.

"Oh, ye're all right," he said finally. "I've heard 'em say you was a fighter down round Santa Fe, an' I know it myself now. But what the hell are we gotn' to do. This yere stagecoach ain't much of a fort to keep off a bunch o' redskins once they git their mad up. Them musket bullets go through like the sides was paper, an' I reckon we ain't got no oversupply o' ammunition—I know I ain't for this Winchester. How long do yer reckon we kin hold out?"

"Do As I Say," He Growled. "This is Our Fight."

Hamlin's face became grave, his eyes also turning toward the river. The sun was already sinking low in the west, and the Indians, gathered in council out of rifle-shot, were like shadows against the glimmering water beyond.

"They'll try us again just before dark," he affirmed slowly, "but more cautiously. If that attack fails, then they'll endeavor to creep in, and take us by surprise. It's going to be a clear night, and there is small chance for even an Indian to slide in that buffalo-grass with the stars shining. They have got to come up from below, for no, buck could climb down this bluff without making a noise. I don't see why, with decent luck, we can't hold out as we are until help gets here; those fellows who rode away will report at Canon Bluff and send a rider on to Dodge for help. There ought to be soldiers out here by noon tomorrow. What troops are at Dodge now?"

"Only a single company—infantry," replied Moylan gloomily. "All the rest are out scouting 'long the Solomon. Damned if I believe they'll send us a man. Those two cowards will likely report us all dead—otherwise they wouldn't have any excuse for runnin' away—and the commander will satisfy himself by sendin' a courier to the fellers in the field."

"Well, then," commented the Sergeant, his eyes gleaming, "we've simply got to fight it out alone, I reckon, and hang on to our last shots. What do you make of those reds?"

The three men stared for some time at the distant group over their rifles, in silence.

"They ain't all Arapahoes, that's certain," said Moylan at last. "Some of 'em are Cheyennes. I've seen that chief before—It's Roman Nose."

"The big buck humped up on the roan?"

"That's the one, and he is a bad actor; saw him once over at Fort Kearney two years ago. Had a council there. See?" in surprise, "ain't that an Ogalla Sioux war bonnet bobbin' there to the right, Sergeant?"

Hamlin studied the distant feathered head-dress indicated, shading his eyes with one hand.

"I reckon maybe it is, Moylan," he acknowledged at last gravely. "Those fellows have evidently got together; we're going to have the biggest scrap this summer the old army has had yet. Looks as though it was going to begin right here—and now. See there! The dance is on, boys; there they come; they will try it on foot this time."

He tested his rifle, resting one knee on the seat; Moylan pushed the barrel of his Winchester out through the ragged hole in the back of the coach, and the little Mexican lay flat, his eyes on the level with the window-casing. The girl alone remained motionless, crouched on the floor, her white face uplifted.

The entire field stretching to the river was clear to the view, the short, dry buffalo-grass offering no concealment. To the right of the coach, some fifty feet away, was the only depression, a shallow gully leading down from the bluff, but this slight advantage was unavailable. The sun had already dropped from view, and the gathering twilight distorted the figures, making them almost grotesque in their savagery. Yet they could be clearly distinguished, stealing silently forward, guns in hand, spreading out in a wide half-circle, obedient to the gestures of Roman Nose, who, still mounted upon his pony, was traversing the river bank, his every motion outlined against the dull gleam of water behind him. From the black depths of the coach the three men watched in almost breathless silence, gripping their weapons, fascinated, determined not to waste a shot. Gonzales, under the strain, uttered a fierce Spanish curse, but Hamlin crushed his arm between iron fingers.

"Keep still, you fool!" he muttered, never glancing around. "Let your gun talk!"

The assailants came creeping on, snakes rather than men, appearing less and less human in the increasing shadows. Twice the Sergeant lifted his Henry, sighting along the brown barrel, lowering the weapon again in doubt of the distance. He was conscious of exultation, of a swifter pulse of the heart, yet his nerves were like steel, his grip steady. Only a dim fleeting memory of the girl, half hidden in the darkness behind, gave him uneasiness—he could not turn and look into her eyes. Roman Nose was advancing now at the center of that creeping half circle, a hulking figure perched on his pony's back, yet well out of rifle range. He spread his hands apart, clasping a blanket, looking like a great bird flapping its wings, and the ground in front flamed, the red flare splitting the gray gloom. The speeding bullets crashed through the leather of the coach, splintering the wood; the Mexican rolled to the floor, uttering one inhuman cry, and lay motionless; a great volume of black smoke wavered in the still air.

"Wait! Wait until they get to their feet!" Hamlin cried eagerly. "Ah! there they come—now unlimber."

He saw only those black, indistinct figures, leaping out of the smoke, converging on the coach, their naked arms uplifted, their voices mingling in savage yells. Like lightning he worked his rifle, heart throbbing to the excitement, oblivious to all else; almost without realization he heard the deeper bellow of Moylan's Winchester, the sharp bark of a revolver at his very ear. Gonzales was all right, then! Good! He never thought of the girl, never saw her grip the pistol from the Mexican's dead hand, and crawl white-faced, over his body, to that front seat. All he really knew was that those devils were coming, leaping, crowding through the smoke wreathes; he saw them stumble, and rise again; he saw one leap into the air, and then crash face down; he saw them break, circling to right and left, crouching as they ran. Two reached the stage—only one! One pitched forward, a revolver bullet between his eyes, his head wedged in the spokes of the wheel; the other Hamlin struck with emptied rifle-barrel as his red hand gripped the door, sending him sprawling back into the dirt. It was all the work of a minute, an awful minute, intense, breathless—then silence, the smoke drifting away, the dark night hiding the skulking runners.

CHAPTER VI.

The Condition in the Coach.

Mechanically—scarcely conscious of the action—the Sergeant slipped fresh cartridges into the hot rifle chamber, swept the tumbled hair out of his eyes with his shirt sleeve, and stared into the night. He could hardly comprehend yet that the affair was ended, the second attack repulsed. It was like a delirium of fever; he almost expected to see those motionless bodies outstretched on the grass spring up, yelling defiance. Then he gripped himself firmly, realizing the truth—it was over with for the present; away off there in the hase obscuring the river bank those indistinct black smudges were fleeing savages, their voices wailing through the night. Just in front, formless, huddled where they had fallen, were the bodies of dead and dying, smitten ponies and half-naked men. He drew a deep breath through clinched teeth, endeavoring to distinguish his comrades.

All He Really Knew Was That Those Devils Were Coming, Leaping, Crowding.

The interior of the coach was black and soundless, except for some one's swift, excited breathing. As he extended his cramped legs to the floor he touched a motionless body. Not until then had he realized the possibility of death also within. He felt downward with one hand, his nerves suddenly throbbing, and his finger touched a cold face—the Mexican. It must have been that last volley, for he could distinctly recall the sharp bark of Gonzales' revolver between his own shots.

"The little devil," he muttered soberly. "It was a squarer death than he deserved. He was a game little cock."

Then he thought of Moylan, wondering why the man did not move, or speak. That was not like Moylan. He bent forward, half afraid in the stillness, endeavoring to discover space on the floor for both his feet. He could perceive now a distant star showing clear through the ragged opening jabbed in the back of the coach, but no outline of the sutler's burly shoulders.

"Moylan!" he called, hardly above a whisper. "What is the trouble? Have you been hit, man?"

There was no answer, no responding sound, and he stood up, reaching kindly over across the seat. Then he knew, and felt a shudder run through him from head to foot. Bent double over the iron back of the middle seat, with hands still gripping his hot rifle, the man hung, limp and lifeless. Almost without realizing the act, Hamlin lifted the heavy body, laid it down upon the cushion, and unclasped the dead fingers gripping the Winchester stock.

"Every shot gone," he whispered to himself dazedly, "every shot gone! Ain't that hell!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Really an Old Term.

"Cheek" in the sense of impudence is an old term. The earliest quotation in Sir James Murray's dictionary is from Captain Marryat (1840). But it has lately been found in the sixteenth century records of Galway, in the west of Ireland. The municipal rulers of that fighting city—the "man from Galway" has become proverbial for pluck and readiness to defend the hottest of corners—decreed that any person giving "cheke" to the mayor should "forfeit 100 shillings and have his body put into prison."

The Word of Life

By REV. H. W. POPE, Superintendent of Mon. Moody Bible Institute, Chicago

TEXT—"Holding forth the word of life." Phil. 1:16.

In writing to the church at Philippi which he had just founded, Paul urges upon them two things: First: That they be blameless and harmless, or in other words, that they live a consistent Christian life. Secondly: That they form the habit of holding forth the word of life to others. Paul then goes on to say that if these Philippian church members were satisfied simply to set a consistent example, and did not also engage in personal effort to help the unsaved he should consider his labor upon these as well nigh lost. The ease with which one can do this work, and the blessing which usually accompanies it, makes it almost inexcusable for us to neglect it.

On one occasion I handed a little card to a man asking if he would like something to read. On it he saw the word Christian, and at once he said with a sneer, "'Christian,' yes, I have neighbors who are Christians, and I have some who are not, and the latter are more neighborly and more honorable in business every time." "That may be," I said, "but remember that it is not their religion which makes your neighbors mean and dishonorable, but the lack of it, and it is not fair to blame Jesus Christ for what does not belong to him."

Then I added, "It may be that you do not feel the need of a Savior now, but the time will surely come when you will feel it."

"I guess I need him enough now. My wife died about a year ago, and since then I have lost my daughter. My home is broken up and I haven't anything left to live for."

The man's voice trembled, and the tears began to come. I saw that I had touched a tender chord, and I said, "My friend, if there is any one on this earth that needs Jesus Christ, I think you are the man." Then I held up Christ as a comforter and told him how willing Christ was to come into his sad heart and make it glad, and into his desolate home and make it bright with heavenly hopes. Then, taking it for granted that he did not know how to find Christ, I went on to explain the way of salvation. Then I said, "Now my friend, with this understanding of what it is to become a Christian, are you willing to accept Christ as your Savior right here and now, and give me your hand on it?" "Yes sir, I am," he replied, and he grasped my hand heartily. Then we removed our hats, and I prayed, and he prayed after which he gave me his name and told me all about himself. This was at a county fair in the midst of noise and confusion. Horses were racing, fakirs were shouting and the merry-go-round was in full blast. And yet in the midst of that surging crowd this man with bared head was confessing his sins to God and inviting Jesus Christ to come into his heart.

It is a great aid in opening conversation with strangers to have with you a variety of leaflets or gospel cards. You can hand one to a person saying, "Would you like something to read?" If he does not express an opinion, you can give him another, saying, "This one is a little different," or "Here is one which I think you will enjoy." By this mean you gradually become acquainted, and by and by you can give him one which presents the way of salvation plainly, and ask him if he has accepted Christ as his Savior.

Sitting in a hotel in Denver I was reading a newspaper. By my side sat a young man talking with two others. Soon he uttered an oath. Taking out a little card entitled, "Why Do You Swear?" I laid it down on the arm of the chair between us, and went on reading. He picked it up and read it. As soon as his companions left he said to me, "My friend, that is the best thing on swearing I ever saw. It is an awful habit I know and I ought not to do it, but you see I am a newspaper man on the Chicago Inter Ocean. I am thrown in with a rough crowd and I cannot seem to overcome the habit." He then went on to tell me about himself and we had a long heart to heart talk. Remember he began the conversation, and he did most of the talking.

When we have ascertained one's real position, the next thing is to lead him to accept Christ. The main object is not to lead people to give up their bad habits, or to attend church, or even to join the church, but rather to accept Christ as their personal Lord and Master. We should then show them from God's word that they have forgiveness of sins and eternal life (Acts 10:43; John 3:36).

They should also be instructed in the duties of the Christian life, especially the duty of confessing Christ publicly, and the habit of daily prayer and Bible reading.

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PRETTY LANGUAGE OF LOVE

In Switzerland Flowers Are Made Use of by Those Who Seek Their Companions in Life.

In remote Alpine hamlets and villages especially in the Bernese Oberland there still exist ancient and pretty customs of proposing marriage by the language of flowers. If a maid accepts a bouquet of edelweiss from a suitor a bouquet of edelweiss from a him as her fiance, the idea being that the man has risked his life to obtain the flowers for the woman he loves.

Another method which exists in the Canton of Glarus is for the young man to place a flowerpot containing a single rose and a note on the window sill of the girl's room when she is absent from home and waits—perhaps days—for a reply. If the maid takes the rose, the young man boldly enters the house to arrange matters with her parents, but if the rose is allowed to fade away the proposal is rejected without a "Magic word having been exchanged between the couple. Sometimes a fickle girl will keep a young man waiting a day or two for an answer, but whatever it may be it is considered final.

Sure.

Here's the wind of fortune blows,
Don't let doubt trouble your pose;
The loss you think about your roses,
The loss, old chap, they'll worry you.

It takes a mother to explain that if it wasn't for the other bad boys her "Willie" would be an angel.

In Ancient India.

A writer on Indian women of 2,000 years ago says that they were "treated with suspicion," and quotes from Kranya Kanda to support his assertion: "Women will continue to like their husbands only so long as they are young and influential; but the moment they are reduced in circumstances they will be abandoned by them. Women resemble the lightning in their waywardness, weapons in their sharpness, and the high gale in their force."

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