MOLLY McDONALD
A TALE OF THE FRONTIER
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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 post. An Indian outbreak is threatened. Sergeant "Brick" Hamlin meets the stage in which Molly is traveling. They are attacked by Indians, and Hamlin and Molly escape in the darkness. Hamlin tells Molly he was discharged from the Confederate service in disgrace and at the close of the war enlisted in the regular army. He suspects one Captain Le Fevre of being responsible for his disgrace. Troops appear and under escort of Lieut. Gaskins Molly starts to join her father. Hamlin leaves to rejoin his regiment. He returns to Fort Dodge after a summer of fighting Indians, and finds Molly there. Shots are heard in the night. Hamlin rushes out, sees what he believes is the figure of Molly hiding in the darkness and falls over the body of Lieutenant Gaskins, who accuses Hamlin of shooting him. The sergeant is proven innocent. He sees Molly in company with Mrs. Dupont, whom he recognizes as a former sweetheart, who threw him over for LeFevre. Mrs. Dupont tells Hamlin LeFevre forced her to send him a lying note. Hamlin declares he has been looking for LeFevre to force him to clear his record. Learns he overhears Dupont and a soldier hatching up a money-making plot. Molly seeks an interview with Hamlin. She says her father seems to be in the power of Mrs. Dupont, who claims to be a daughter of McDonald's sister. Molly disappears and Hamlin sets out to trace her.

CHAPTER XXI.—Continued.

He tramped along the brightly illumined street, and out upon the dark road leading up the bluff to the fort, his mind occupied with the events of the evening, and those other incidents leading up to them. There was no doubt that Miss McDonald and her father had returned to their home. But what could he do to assist her? The very knowledge that she had voluntarily appealed to him, that she had come to him secretly with her trouble, brought strange happiness. Moreover his former acquaintance with Mrs. Dupont gave him a clue to the mystery. Yet how was he going to unravel the threads, discover the motive, find out the various conspirators? What were they really after? Money probably, but possibly revenge. What did the woman know which enabled her to yield such influence over McDonald? What was the trap they proposed springing? The Sergeant felt that he could solve these problems if given an opportunity, but he was handicapped by his position; he could not leave his troop, could not meet or mingle with the suspected parties; was tied, hand and foot, by army discipline. He could not even absent himself from the post without gaining special permission. He swore to himself over the hopeless-

"May I Ask if Major McDonald Has Returned to the Post?"

ness of the situation, as he tramped through the blackness toward the guard-house. The sentinel glanced at his pass, scrutinizing it by the light of a fire, and thrust the paper into his pocket. Hamlin advanced, and at the corner saluted the officer of the day, who had just stepped out of the guardhouse door.

"Good evening, Sergeant," the latter said genially. "Just in from town? I expect they are having some dance down there tonight."

"Yes, sir," hesitatingly, and then venturing the inquiry: "May I ask if Major McDonald has returned to the post?"

"McDonald? No," he glanced at his watch. "He had orders to go east to Ripley on the stage. That was due out about an hour ago."

"To Ripley?" By stage?" the Sergeant repeated the words, dazed. "Why—why, what has become of Miss McDonald?"

The officer smiled, shaking his head. "I'm sure I don't know, my man," he returned carelessly. "Come back with Barrett and his ladylove, likely. Why?" suddenly interested by the expression on the other's face. "What's happened? Is there anything wrong?"

CHAPTER XXII.

A Deepening Mystery.

Startled and bewildered as Hamlin was by this sudden revealment, he at once comprehended the embarrassment of his own position. He could not confess all he knew, certainly not the fact that the girl had met him secretly and had vanished while he was endeavoring to turn aside Mrs. Dupont. He must protect her at all hazards. To gain time, and self-control, he replied with a question:

"Did not Connors drive them down, sir?"

"Yes, the four of them."

"And Major McDonald knew then that he was ordered East?"

"No, the order came by telegram later. An orderly was sent down about ten o'clock. But, see here, Sergeant, I am no Bureau of Information. If you have anything to report, make it brief."

Hamlin glanced at the face of the other. He knew little about him, except that he had the reputation of being a capable officer.

"I will, sir," he responded quickly; "you may never have heard of the affair, but I was with Miss McDonald during a little Indian trouble out on the trail a few months ago."

The officer nodded.

"I heard about that; Gaskins brought her in."

"Well, ever since she has seemed grateful and friendly. You know how some women are; well, she is that kind. Tonight she came to me, because she didn't seem to know whom else to go to, and told me of some trouble she was having. I realize, Captain Kane, that it may seem a bit strange to you that a young lady like Miss McDonald, an officer's daughter, would turn for help to an enlisted man, but I am telling you only the truth, sir. You see, she got it into her head somehow that I was square, and—and, well, that I cared enough to help her."

"Wait a minute, Sergeant," broke in Kane, kindly, realizing the other's embarrassment, and resting one hand on his sleeve. "You do not need to apologize for Miss McDonald. I know something of what is going on at this post, although, damn me if I've ever got on to the straight facts. You mean that Dupont woman?"

"Yes, she's concerned in the matter, but there are others also."

"Why couldn't this girl tell her father?"

"That is where the main trouble lies, Captain. Major McDonald seems to be completely under the control of Mrs. Dupont. He is apparently afraid of her for some reason. That is what Miss Molly spoke to me about. We were on the side porch at the hotel talking while the dancers were at supper—it was the only opportunity the girl had to get away—and Mrs. Dupont and her husband came into the parlor—"

"Her husband! Good Lord, I thought her husband was dead."

"He isn't. He's a tin-horn gambler, known in the saloons as 'Reb,' a big duffer, wearing a black beard."

"All right, go on; I don't know him."

"Well, I stepped into the room to keep the two apart, leaving the girl alone outside. We had a bit of talk before I got the room cleared, and when I went back to the porch, Miss Molly had gone."

"Dropped over the railing to the ground."

"That's what I thought at the time, sir, but what happened to her after that? She didn't return to the hotel; she was not at the dance hall, and hasn't come back to the post."

"The hell you say! Are you sure?"

"I am; I searched for her high and low before I left, and she could not get in here without passing the guardhouse."

Kane stared into the Sergeant's face a moment, and then out across the parade ground. A yellow light winked in the Colonel's office, occasionally blotted out by the passing figure of a sentry. The officer came to a prompt decision.

"The 'old man' is over there yet, grubbing at some papers. Come on over, and tell him what you have told me. I believe the lass will turn up all right, but it does look rather queer."

The Colonel and the Post Adjutant were in the little office, busy over a pile of papers. Both officers glanced up, resenting the interruption, as Kane entered, Hamlin following. The former explained the situation briefly, while the commandant leaned back in his chair, his keen eyes studying the younger man.

"Very well, Captain Kane," he said shortly, as the officer's story ended. "We shall have to examine into this, of course, but will probably discover the whole affair a false alarm. There is, at present, no necessity for alarming any others. Sergeant, kindly explain to me why Miss McDonald should have come to you in her distress?"

Hamlin stepped forward, and told the story again in detail, answering the Colonel's questions frankly.

"This, then, was the only time you have met since your arrival?"

"Yes, sir."

"And this Mrs. Dupont? You have had a previous acquaintance with her?"

"Some years ago."

"You consider her a dangerous woman?"

"I know her to be utterly unscrupulous, sir. I am prepared to state that she is here under false pretenses, claiming to be a niece of Major McDonald's. I do not know her real purpose, but am convinced it is an evil one."

The Colonel shook his head doubtfully, glancing at the silent adjutant.

"That remains to be proven, Sergeant. I have, of course, met the lady, and found her pleasant and agreeable as a companion. Deuced pretty, too; hey, Benson? Why do you say she masquerades as McDonald's niece?"

"Because her maiden name was Carson and the Major's sister married a man named Counts."

"There might have been another marriage. Surely McDonald must know."

"Miss Molly says not, Colonel. He has known nothing of his sister for over twenty years, and accepted this woman on her word."

"Well, well! Interesting situation; hey, Benson? Like to get to the bottom myself. Damme if it don't sound like a novel. However, the thing before us right now is to discover what has become of Miss McDonald." He straightened up in his chair, then leaned across the table. "Captain Kane, make a thorough examination of McDonald's quarters first. If the girl is not found there, detail two men to accompany Sergeant Hamlin on a search of the town."

"Very well, sir; come on, Sergeant."

"Just a moment—if we find the trail leads beyond the town are we authorized to continue?"

"Certainly, yes, Adjutant, write out the order. Anything more?"

"I should prefer two men of my own troop, sir, mounted."

"Very well; see to it, Captain."

The two men walked down past the dark row of officers' houses, the Sergeant a step to the rear on the narrow cinder path. McDonald's quarters were as black as the others, and there was no response from within when Kane rapped at the door. They tried the rear entrance with the same result—the place was plainly unoccupied.

"Pick out your men, Hamlin," the Captain said sternly, "and I'll call the stable guard."

Ten minutes later, fully equipped for field service, the three troopers circled the guard-house and rode rapidly down the dark road toward the yellow lights of the town. The Sergeant explained briefly the cause of the expedition, and the two troopers, experienced soldiers, asked no unnecessary questions. Side by side the three men rode silently into the town, and Hamlin swung down from his saddle at the door of the dance hall. With a word to the guard he crossed the floor to intercept Mrs. Dupont. The latter regarded his approach with astonishment, her hand on Captain Barrett's blue sleeve.

"Certainly not," she replied rather sharply to his first question. "I am not in charge of Miss McDonald. She is no doubt amusing herself somewhere; possibly lying down over at the hotel; she complained of a headache earlier in the evening. Why do you come to me?"

"Yes," broke in the Captain, "that is what I wish to know, Hamlin. By what authority are you here?"

"The orders of the Colonel commanding, sir," respectfully, yet not permitting his glance to leave the woman's face. "You insist then, madam, that you know nothing of the girl's disappearance?"

"No!" defiantly, her cheeks red.

"Nor of what has become of Connors, or your ranch manager?"

She shrugged her shoulders, endeavoring to smile.

"The parties mentioned are of very small interest to me."

"And Major McDonald," he insisted, utterly ignoring the increasing anger of the officer beside her. "Possibly you were aware of his departure?"

"Yes," more deliberately; "he told me of his orders, and bade me goodbye later. So far as Connors is concerned, he was to have the carriage here for us at two o'clock. Is that all, Mr. Sergeant Hamlin?"

"You better make it all," threatened the Captain belligerently, "before I lose my temper at this infernal impertinence."

Hamlin surveyed the two calmly, confident that the woman knew more than she would tell, and utterly indifferent as to the other.

"Very well," he said quietly, "I will learn what I desire elsewhere. I shall find Miss McDonald, and discover what has actually occurred."

"My best wishes, I am sure," and the lady patted the Captain's arm gently. "We are losing this waltz."

There was but one course for Hamlin to pursue. He had no trail to follow, only a vague suspicion that these plotters were in some way concerned in the mysterious disappearance. Thus far, however, they had left behind no clue to their participation. Moreover he was seriously handicapped by ignorance of any motive. Why should they desire to gain possession of the girl? It could not be money, or the hope of ransom. What then? Was it some accident which had involved her in the toils prepared for another? If so, were those unexpected orders for Major McDonald a part of the conspiracy, or had their receipt complicated the affair? The Sergeant was a soldier, not a detective, and could only follow a straight road in his investigation. He must circle widely until he found some trail to follow as patiently as an Indian. There would be tracks left somewhere, if he could only discover them. If this was a hasty occurrence in any way an accident, something was sure to be left uncovered, some slip reveal the method. He would trace the movements of the father first, and then search the saloons and gambling dens for the two men. Though unsuccessful with Mrs. Dupont, he knew how to deal with such as they.

The stage agent was routed out of bed and came to the door, revolver in hand, startled and angry.

"Who?" he repeated. "Major McDonald? How the hell should I know? Some officer went out—yes; heavy set man, with a mustache. I didn't pay any attention to him; had government transportation. There were two other passengers, both men, ranchers, I reckon; none in the station at all. What's that, Jane?"

A woman's voice spoke from out the darkness behind.

"Was that a soldier asking if Major McDonald went East on the coach, Sam?"

"Sure; what do you know about it?"

"Why, I was outside when they started," she explained, "and the man in uniform wasn't the Major. "I know him by sight, for he's been down here a dozen times when I was at the desk. This fellow was about his size, but dark and stoop-shouldered."

"And the others?" asked Hamlin eagerly.

"I didn't know either of them, only I noticed one had a black beard."

"A very large, burly fellow?"

"No, I don't think so. I didn't pay special attention to any of them, only to wonder who the officer was, 'cause I never remembered seein' him here before at Dodge, but, as I recollect, the fellow with a beard was rather under-sized; had a shaggy buffalo-skin cap on."

Plainly enough the man was not Dupont, and McDonald had not departed on the stage, while some other, pretending to be he, possibly wearing his clothes to further the deceit, had taken the seat reserved in the coach. Baffled, bewildered by this unexpected discovery, the Sergeant swung back into his saddle, not knowing which way to turn.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Land of Small Opportunity.

Census reports from the Panama canal zone give the population there today as 63,516, of which about 42,000 are employes of the canal commission, the Panama railroad and the various canal contractors. Generally speaking, the soil is not suitable for farming. It is not likely that Americans will be attracted, and since other occupants than Americans, for obvious reasons, are not desirable, Colonel Goethals is in favor of the deportation of the zone, except so far as it will occupied by canal operatives and by the military necessary for the protection of the canal.

The Final Destiny of the Wicked

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TEXT—Rom. 2:5-9.

This is probably the hardest of all the doctrines of Christianity to be received. If we ask the reason why, we receive various answers. Some would tell us that this doctrine is unwelcome to many because they feel themselves guilty, and their conscience tells them that unless they repent and turn to God this awful doom awaits them. Others believe that it is because the thought of future punishment strikes terror to people's hearts, and therefore this doctrine is repulsive to them. To others, the thought of future anguish seems utterly incompatible with the fatherly love of God. Yet it is acknowledged to be a remarkable fact that both Jesus and John, who more than any one else in the New Testament represent the element of love in their lives and teaching, speak most of the future anguish of the wicked.

1. The wicked are said to "die in their sins."

John 8:21—"Then said Jesus unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins." The "death" spoken of here does not mean cessation of existence any more than eternal life means the beginning of existence. Eternal life does not mean merely to live forever, but to live in a state of blessedness forever. Eternal life deals not so much with quantity as with quality of existence. Even in this life death can co-exist with life: "But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (1 Tim. 5:6); Eph. 2:1. What men call life God calls death. Rev. 21:8 describes what "death" means; "But the fearful, and the unbelieving . . . shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death."

2. The wicked are not annihilated. The texts most strongly urged as teaching the annihilation theory, if rightly interpreted, will be seen to refer to removal from off the earth, and not to future retribution. Here are the principal passages:

Psa. 37:20—"But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs; they shall consume; into smoke they shall consume away." This psalm is written for the encouragement of Israel, and against her enemies and their power on the earth. This earthly power shall be utterly broken, and be of no more account than the smoke of a burnt sacrifice. The great truth taught here is that the earth is the inheritance of the saints, and that the wicked shall have no part in it.

In speaking of the "everlasting punishment" with which the wicked will be visited, as recorded in 2 Thess. 1:9, the annihilationist would say that reference is made to the "results or consequences" of that punishment, and not to the punishment itself. But the Scriptures state that it is the "punishment" itself, and not the consequences, that is everlasting.

What need is there of a resurrection if the wicked are to be annihilated at death, or why should they be raised from the dead if only to be at once extinguished forever? Again, there is no such thing as "unconscious" punishment. Yet cannot punish anything that is unconscious. Can you punish a stone or a house? Punishment can take place only where there is consciousness on the part of the one suffering.

3. The wicked are to be punished. This punishment is eternal. We read of "eternal" or "everlasting" punishment; "everlasting" fire. It is objected that the word "eternal" or "everlasting" does not mean "forever." This may be true. But we are all willing to admit that when this word qualifies the condition of the righteous it means forever, without end, e. g., the righteous shall go "into life eternal." The same word, however, qualifies the punishment of the wicked, e. g., "these shall go away into everlasting punishment." Fairness demands that we make the joy of the righteous and the punishment of wicked—both qualified as they are by the same word—of the same duration. If there is any end to the reward of the righteous, there is also to the penalty of the wicked. The one lasts as long as the other. If "destruction" means annihilation, then there is no need of the word "eternal" to qualify it; further the Scriptures present the punishment of the wicked not only as "eternal" (or age-long), but as enduring "for over and ever," or "unto the ages of ages" (Rev. 19:2; 20:10; 14:11, R. V.). Here is a picture of ages tumbling upon ages in succession.

2. "Fire."

This is one of the most constant images under which the torment and misery of the wicked is represented. Fire is a symbol of the divine judgment of wrath (Matt. 5:22).