"FRANKLIN'S FORTUNE"

CHISHOLM came out on the hotel piazza to join the little group of men gathered about the door. They were an oddly assorted crowd, the cowboys, their sunburned faces contrasting with the paler but smoke-grimed railroaders and the flannel-shirted miners. With ready hospitality "Doc" Wrenn made a place for him on the soap box and accepted in return a cigar from the proffered case.

"Goin' t' be here long?" he demanded when the brown cylinder was alight.

Chisholm nodded.

"I expect to stay here some time," he agreed with a light laugh.

"Mines?" questioned Wrenn with a curiosity so frank that it was robbed of its impertinence.

"That's what," confirmed Chisholm.

"I can sell you a fine location," offered Wrenn. "It's the property of a chap who had to go back east because his wife couldn't stand this altitude. It's the best little property in seven counties. It's a bargain at any price, but I'll sell low."

"I've bought one already," explained Chisholm. "A friend of mine back east sold it to me. It is part of a legacy."

"You don't mean Barton's old mine?" questioned Wrenn.

"I don't think so," said Chisholm. "This is known as the Franklin's Fortune mine."

The announcement was greeted by a burst of laughter. Cowboys, miners and railroad men alike threw back their heads and guffawed. It was full five minutes before the laughter died down and Chisholm could ask the reason for their mirth.

Franklin always was the unlucky cuss," explained Wrenn while some of the old-timers still chuckled and rumbled at the humor of the situation. "That claim was named sarcastic like, you know. Fortune means luck, and it was Franklin's luck to locate a claim that was so good that it was like to bankrupt him. The only thing that saved him was sellin' it to a yap from the east."

"I understood that ore yielding $8 a ton was not a bad lot," said Chisholm. "The mine was sold to me on a guarantee that it would average that."

"It will," Wrenn hastened to agree. "But when Slick Saunders sold the mine with that guarantee he played the same trick on you that was played on him."

"But where is the trick?" demanded Chisholm. "You admit that the ore will run that much to the ton."

"You know these rich fellows what have fancy farms and tell you to drink milk or champagne as you like because it costs them the same?" asked Wrenn.

"I've heard the story," agreed Chisholm, "but I fail to see the connection."

"Well, running the Franklin is just that sort of expensive luxury," explained Wrenn. "It yields $8 to the ton and takes $9 to get it to the railroad."

"But Saunders said that it was only half a mile to the railroad," protested Chisholm.

The remark started a fresh burst of laughter and the tears were streaming down Wrenn's cheeks as he turned again to his seatmate.

"That's one of Saunders' own," he declared. "That's been put on since he bought the mine, because the L &V B didn't run within 10 miles of the place when he got stuck."

"But it does now?" reminded Chisholm.

"Sure," assented Wrenn with a chuckle, "but, man, don't you see—" a fresh outburst of mirth interrupted and it was a full minute before the sentence was completed.

"That half-mile is through solid rock," he finally explained. "The railroad tunnels the mountain and runs within half a mile of the mine at a point about a third of the way in. Just go into the tunnel about 1700 feet, then turn to the right and begin to dig. You'll get there in time if you're a good digger."

"How far is it around the mountain instead of through?" asked Chisholm, trying to conceal his chagrin.

"About 60 miles," was the startling information. "You can't get over the top. There's a sort of gulch that runs to the north about 30 miles. You have to go around that spur to reach the railroad. It's 30 miles each way."

Chisholm looked about the circle of grinning faces.

"I'm going to make that mine a go," he announced as he arose to his feet. "Can I get over there tomorrow?"

"I'll show you the way," volunteered Wrenn. "I guess you won't talk that way after you've seen it."

"I said that I'm going to make a go of it, and that is what I mean," was the quiet answer. "And now, since the laugh appears to be on me, if you gentlemen will—"

There was no need to complete the sentence. The door to the bar stood invitingly open and the crowd filed in. With real good will they drank a toast to Chisholm's success, for they liked his gameness in not turning back as half a dozen others had done since Franklin had completed the first sale.

Chisholm went up to his room and Wrenn went with him. "Doc" Wrenn was an old character about the little town of Marathon. It had been a mining camp when he had first drifted into the place. Now the town was a division point on the L & V B, and it had grown into a place of importance, but "Doc" Wrenn was still a personage of local celebrity.

He dabbled in real estate in a small way and he ran survey lines for prospectors, but there was little that he could not turn a hand to and he was a mine of information as to local history and geography.

Before Wrenn left the room, Chisholm realized that Eben Saunders had deliberately swindled him in selling him the mine. He had gone to ask the hand of Saunders' ward, Helen Hale, in marriage, and Saunders had skilfully diverted the conversation to talk of mines, explaining that he wanted his ward to marry someone who had a definite fortune.

In a burst of impulsive generosity he had offered to sell Chisholm this mine for half its real value, hinting that as a mine owner his suit would be regarded with greater favor. If Helen married without Saunders' consent her little fortune was to revert to her guardian. Harry Chisholm did not care for the money, but he wanted to spare her the unpleasantness of a quarrel with her guardian and he thought well of the mining scheme.

Now he knew that it was all a swindle. The impulsive offer was a clever bit of acting, the guarantee, which had seemed so fair back east was but a trick repeatedly played on the unsuspecting and the assurance of the railroad's proximity was a ghastly bit of humor which added to Saunders' offence.

There was little sleep for Chisholm that night and it was with heavy heart that he fared forth the next morning with Wrenn. Even traveling light, they could not do better than 30 miles a day and it was late in the afternoon of the second day when at last they reined their ponies before the mouth of the tunnel which was the visible part of Franklin's Fortune. An old shack, the only sign of habitation, was slowly rotting away and the decaying boards served only to furnish them fuel for their camp fire.

EVEN TRAVELING LIGHT THEY COULD NOT DO BETTER THAN 30 MILES A DAY.

"These boards cost about $3 apiece," declared Wrenn as he broke one up with a hatchet. "Franklin was too high-toned for a log hut and he wanted boards. You can imagine the time they had getting them in over the trail."

Chisholm nodded. The reference to the trail reminded him of the task it would be to get the ore down the tortuous path. There was not even width for a wagon road, while a cable way 30 miles long was out of the question. He had seen a place some 10 miles down the gulch where a trail might be made over the divide, but even that would be useless with anything except high grade ore. He had not lost his determination to succeed, but he was depressed by the desperate outlook.

Long into the night he tossed restlessly on the rude bed of fir boughs they had built in the mouth of the tunnel. Plan after plan suggested itself to him, only to be dismissed as impractical, and finally he dropped off to sleep through sheer brain weariness.

It seemed but a few minutes before he was wakened by someone roughly shaking his shoulder, and he half-roused to become conscious that Wrenn was trying to wake him.

"Is it daylight already?" he asked sleepily.

"Daylight be hanged," said Wrenn. "I don't know what time it is but it's not daylight. Get up and come with me."

He took Chisholm's hand and led him down the tunnel. They had torches, and Wrenn stopped to light one of these. The faint illumination was scarcely sufficient to show them their way, but Wrenn stumbled on after a look at his watch, nor did he pause until they had brought up at the far end of the tunnel which had been sunk deep into the side of the mountain. Franklin will run the tunnel well in.

There was always the possibility of striking higher grade stuff, and he had worked until his last penny was gone. Most of the ore lay outside the tunnel mouth, forming an artificial platform in front of the entrance. It was perfectly safe there, for no one was so foolhardy as to attempt to carry it off.

"Now, I'll tell you," announced Wren as he huddled close to the rock. "I'll swear that I heard the east-bound Overland a little while ago. There's a west-bound freight that goes through as soon as the Overland clears. If we hear that—Well!"

"How can we hear through half a mile of rock?" questioned Chisholm.

"That's just it" explained Wrenn, "If we hear the freight it's because the rock's not there. When they built the tunnel they ran into a sort of cave. I've been in it, but no one ever explored it fully. I've an idea that it goes back further than we believed, and that it is near the end of this tunnel that the cave terminates. If it is—"

With a dull rumble the west-bound freight rattled past and the torch fell from Wrenn's hand as he sprang to his feet.

"I win," he cried. "It's a long cave and the sound comes up like a speaking tube. We'll drill through and ship our ore down into the cave. We can get the railroad people to run a siding into the cave and load right there. Then we can run it over to Caldwell and—say, I'll bet there's nobody been in this tunnel since the railroad tunnel was built. If Saunders had taken a look he might have found out, but as soon as he heard what he was up against he went back east to slip the mine to someone else.

"And you think that you can break through?" asked Chisholm.

"We'll get the sticks and picks and go to work on it," declared Wrenn, striking a match and relighting the torch.

He fairly danced down the tunnel to the mouth, and after they had boiled coffee and fried some bacon they cared for the horses, then armed with picks and drills they pushed their way into the tunnel again.

Wrenn dispatched Chisholm for more dynamite, while he remained behind to make the drill holes. Four days later Chisholm was back with the supplies and that night the shot broke through the barrier and Wrenn, lowered by a rope, made his way to the mouth of the cave.

"It's all right," he reported on his return. "A little blasting will enable us to tumble the quartz down a chute and then load on the cars, using the cave as a switching yard. Got a girl?"

Chisholm nodded. "She is a ward of Saunders," he explained. "It is on her account that I am out here.

"Send for her," commanded Wrenn. "She can take out an adjoining claim and so will I. That will give us enough surface to control the tunnel and take toll from ore from other mines passing through ours. There may be more prospects. In any event it's worth while taking precautions."

"Then you are sure it's all right?" questioned Chisholm.

"Right?" echoed Wrenn. "Why, man it's the finest joke that's ever been played on 'Slick' Saunders. He did me in a deal once. Now we're square. He sold it to you for $12,000, you say..."

"That was what he got," assented Chisholm. "He said that he wanted to see Nell married to a man of property, and he sold me the mine for half of its real value."

"And three times what he paid for it," said Wrenn with a chuckle. "And it was all because he wanted to see you get ahead. Well, he got his wish all right. Here's hoping that he's happy when he finds it out."

THE NEW MATE

CAPT. MOLLY MILNE, in all the glory of blue coat with its fouled anchors, climbed aboard the Hurry Up and gave the crew the sign to cast off.

The "crew" promptly obeyed and took his seat in the stern to watch enviously Molly's deft handling of the motor of the boat. Motors were not for 12-year-olds to play with and, sitting in the stern, Dicky gave himself up to dreams of the joys that should be his when he, too, should have a motor boat and not be forced to act as crew to his sister-captain.

The motor boat was Mollie's newest fad. It was the speediest little craft in the harbor of the seaside town where the Milnes spent their summers and already Capt. Molly had beaten all comers, including the Swift, Francis Condon's new boat.

The last had been an empty victory, for the beating had brought out a display of bad temper on Condon's part that had ended in the breaking of their engagement.

Molly had told herself that she was glad she had learned of his bad temper before it was too late, but there was a wistful little look in her eyes that told another story.

Condon was out in his boat now, and Molly altered her course to pass on the other side of the little island that guarded the harbor. It required more skillful handling, for the north channel was marked by several ugly ledges, but Molly knew the course. Presently they were upon the open sea. Dicky reached for the fishing tackle and threw over his line.

The fishing was so good that he gave no heed to anything else, but Molly, as she slowly puffed along, kept her eyes on the boat Condon was handling.

It looked very much like the Swift, but there were certain small points of difference which convinced Molly that it was another boat with which Condon hoped to wrest the honors from the Hurry Up. It seemed to be the speedier boat, too, as it slipped through the water. Plainly, the motor was more powerful.

It was just like Condon, she told herself, to seek to find a speedier boat for the purpose of disgracing the little craft of which she was so proud.

As she thought of his revenge her eyes snapped and her lips pressed close together. The Hurry Up was her pride, and Condon knew that he could best humiliate her by striking at the boat.

She was still thinking it over when there was an explosion and the new boat was wrapped in flames about the bow. Capt. Molly threw the wheel over, put on full speed and made for the scene. Condon was in the water clinging weakly to the stern, and Molly blew her whistle to let him know that help was at hand.

The two boats had been more than a mile apart when the explosion came, and to Molly it seemed that the Hurry Up barely crept through the water. The tiny fingers that clasped the wheel were white and bloodless from the rigidness of her grip and her eyes were strained to see that Condon still hung on.

THE MOTOR BOAT WAS MOLLY'S NEWEST FAD.

The flames were blazing fiercely, but they kept to the bow and there was a chance that they would not reach the stern before she came up.

Dicky had crowded up beside her and his excitement seemed to serve to quiet her as she spoke words of encouragement to him.

"We shall be there in a minute," she declared bravely, wondering why her eyes watered so. She seemed to see the other boat through a mist and yet she knew that she was not crying.

"You'll have to make it quick," urged the boy. "The fog's coming."

Almost as he spoke a thick, white mist closed in on them and only the roaring and crackle of the flames serve to guide Molly. Then the flames gleamed redly through the mist and in a moment Dicky had grasped Condon's collar and Molly backed "The Hurry Up" away from the danger of the flames.

Together the and Dick got the almost unconscious man into the boat and, with steady hands, Molly applied a temporary dressing to the burns on his face and hands. Then she left him to Dicky's care while she resumed her place at the wheel.

In spite of its difficulties she made for the north channel, for that was the quickest route and she could see that Condon was suffering greatly and should be landed at once.

The shore was lost in the bank of gray, but Molly was used to steering by compass and with her eye on the needle she threw in the high speed and peered sharply into the bank of fog.

Condon was sitting up in the stern now and out of the eye, not covered by the bandages, he watched her admiringly. He would not have dared run his own boat at such a speed in the fog and when Molly neatly picked up the buoy he nodded his head approvingly.

Molly cut down speed a little for the tortuous channel, but they made good progress. Presently they were at the little wharf and a dozen willing hands were held out to assist Condon out of the boat.

He was hurried off to the physician's and after she had seen "The Hurry Up" cared for Molly hurried home for a good cry. She did not know just what she was crying about, but it was a relief to her feelings.

Scarcely half an hour had elapsed when there came a gentle tapping at her door and Condon's card was brought to her. She went downstairs to find him pacing the length of the parlor. The rough bandages were replaced by others more neatly applied and not so heavy. One hand was partly free and with this he caught her own.

"I am not burned very badly," he said quickly, "and the doctor said it would not hurt me to stop off. I had to come, Capt. Molly, to tell you what a brute I've been."

"About the boat?" asked Molly coldly. "I could see that it was not the Swift."

"Not alone that," he confessed, "but about everything. It was childish in me to grudge you your triumph over my boat, and today I had to admit that you excelled me in seamanship. I never should have dared to come through the north channel in a fog."

"It was the shortest way in," explained Molly. "It saved half an hour."

"And showed your pluck," supplemented Condon. "Capt. Molly, I want you to ship me—as crew. You've proved the better skipper and I'm willing to be crew for the rest of my life. May I, dear?"

"Dicky is the crew," reminded Molly, "but if you are very sorry—"

"I am," cried Condon with sincerity.

"Then you may be the mate," said Capt. Molly with an adorable blush.

IN THE PARK

BRADY'S attention was first held by the fresh piquancy of the girl's face. It seemed to him that he had never seen a face more attractive and it was this close scrutiny which prevented him from perceiving Mona until that intelligent little beast made her presence known by snapping at his ankles.

Brady's face grew blank with dismay as he realized that this was Mrs. Renview's cherished King Charles being led about on a leash by the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

For a moment he was minded to pass on and ignore the efforts of Mona to compel his notice, but he was under many obligations to Mrs. Renview and Ben had been his chum for years.

He bent over, and under the pretence of patting the dog's head scrutinized the collar. There could be no question about identity, for the collar was one he had presented Mona, and he rose to confront the girl, who looked all the prettier for the blushes which burned face and throat.

"It was rather imprudent to bring the dog to such a public place as the park," he said coldly. "There are many of her owner's friends who are liable to see her."

"But the dog seems to love this walk," defended the girl.

"All the more reason why you should avoid her regular haunts," said Brady. "You must have known that Mona would be recognized by some one."

"I do not see what difference that makes."

The flush was fading and the confusion in the girl's eyes was giving place to indignation.

"Only the difference that dog stealers do not usually parade their captures where they are liable to be recognized. You can not plead that you have just found Mona, for the name and address of her owner are on the collar and the dog has been advertised for a week."

"You think that I stole the dog?" The girl's voice was cold with contempt.

"I am loth to believe it," returned Brady steadily. "At the same time, Mrs. Renview has made herself almost ill worrying over her lost pet, and now I find the dog in your possession and evidently upon terms of familiarity with you."

"Mona was brought home this morning," explained the girl. "I am employed by Mrs. Renview to exercise the dog every morning."

Brady glanced at the trim, tailored gown, the dainty little hat and the face, in every line of which was stamped refinement, and his eyes grew troubled.

In his heart he believed that the girl spoke the truth, and yet it was inconceivable that this charming girl should be employed at such an occupation.

His bear told him to pass on and drop the incident after an apology, while his head warned him that he could never forgive himself should he later learn that his instinct was at fault and that he had passed on, ignoring Mona's appeal. The Renviews were childless, and Mrs. Renview had concentrated her affection on the dog.

MISS PALMER.

Something of the debate, the girl read in Brady's face, and her lip curled in scorn.

"I see that you find it difficult to credit my story," she said bitterly. "May I suggest that since it is nearly time for Mona to be going in, that you accompany me to Mrs. Renview's and obtain from her own lips the verification of my statement? It will be better than calling a policeman and having me arrested."

"I had no such idea," declared Brady, pushing guiltily. "Suppose I call a cab?"

"If you are in haste," was the indifferent response. "If you have the time Mona and I would prefer to walk. We will go ahead that you may be certain that we do not attempt to escape."

"Rather too much the effect of a procession," objected Brady. "With your permission, I will walk with you. I don't believe that I need to go at all."

"But you do need to go," insisted the girl. "I have the right to demand it now."

Silently Brady fell into step beside her, and they crossed the park.

Brady exerted himself to be pleasant, but the girl only answered in monosyllables with the effect of causing him to redouble his exertions and not until he heard her voice did he realize that Mrs. Renview was approaching.

"Isn't it perfectly lovely that Mona has come back?" gushed the lady as Brady raised his hat in greeting. "I didn't know that you were acquainted with Miss Palmer, Carleton."

The dumb misery in Brady's face compelled the girl's compassion.

"We have but recently become acquainted," she explained quietly, while Brady was still seeming to discover an excuse for his assininity.

"It is perfectly dear to have such a charming care for Mona," ran on Mrs Renview. "It's so brave of Laura to work her way through college since her father died. Are you going to the house, Carleton? Jack has gone down town."

"I was just walking with Miss Palmer," explained Brady lamely, and as little Mrs. Renview bustled on, after kissing the tip of Mona's nose, Brady turned to the girl.

"Nothing I could say were I to talk for the remainder of my days could ever make excuse for my taking you for a dog thief," he said, contritely, "and I am sure that I did not deserve your kindness in shielding me from Mrs. Renview's curiosity but will you give me an opportunity to prove that I am not always such a brilliant idiot? May I—er—walk with you again?"

His eyes, eloquent with admiration pleaded his cause.

"I take Mona out every clear day," she said softly, "and—in spite of your objections—I think we shall continue to walk in the park."