

## "The Fighting Trail"

### Episode 5—"TORRENT RUSH."

Gwyn rushed from the room and out through the door. Nan stood as if she were dazed. The dawn was beginning to cast a thin, gray light in the sky and shone as a mist through the tops of the trees. Around the hut and in the thick stretches of trees it still was dark. As Gwyn threw himself upon a horse, ready saddled and prepared to ride out to the trail, Nan rushed from the hacienda and mounted another. They did not speak a word but clattered off toward the trail at top speed.

Meantime, Yaqui Joe, faithful to his

trust had ridden bravely after the brigands and, as it transpired into the jaws of death. When he mounted his pony and started after the gang it was easy for him to pick up and follow their trail. He rode rapidly for nearly five miles and then, his practiced eye noting that the others had stopped their horses, apparently to hold a conference, he suddenly dismounted, tethered his horse and began cautiously to advance on foot.

The Indian had gone only a sparse one hundred yards when suddenly the huge form of Shoestring Drant came hurtling from the brush on a rising at the right hand side of the road. He landed squarely on Joe's shoulders, bearing him to the ground and knocking his rifle from his hand. Von Bleck, Cut-Deep and two other men quickly joined Drant. Joe struggled manfully but in vain. The odds were too great for him and it was a matter of only a few seconds for the outlaws to make him a captive.

Then began the torture that showed the depths of fendishness that lay in Cut-Deep Rawls and Shoestring Drant. Joe was bound fast to the trunk of a tree, his bonds cutting into his flesh so that he winced from the pain. But he made no outcry. Rawls demanded that Joe, as the price of his liberty, reveal the location of the mine. The Indian made no sign. Rawls struck the man a blow in the face. Again he made his demand. Again Joe was silent and Rawls, his anger welling up like a torrent, showered blow after blow on his victim until even the rugged Yaqui failed under the brutal attack and he passed into unconsciousness, his body sagging limply.

Rawls turned away. To Drant he said:

"You and the others stay here and see what you can get out of this bull-headed coyote—Von Bleck and I will return to Ybarra's and hunt for the other half of this infernal map."

He and Von Bleck mounted and rode away and Shoestring gave his attention to Joe who, weakened though he was, revived in a few moments.

Shoestring took up the torture where Cut-Deep had stopped, but beating still failed to make the Indian be-

tray his master's secret. Enraged, Shoestring drew his revolver and deliberately shot off the lobe of the Indian's right ear. Still Joe remained silent. Drant then drew forth a long-bladed hunting knife and, with cruelty unbelievable, plunged it into the flesh of Ybarra's faithful servant, and soon blood was streaming from a score of wounds in Joe's arms, legs, neck and chest. When this failed to unseal his lips, Drant ordered his men to build a fire beneath the feet of their victim.

Joe by this time was almost beyond feeling and nothing that Shoestring could do now would add any more to his sufferings. He was fast sinking into unconsciousness from loss of blood.

But the malignant Drant was determined and he personally applied the torch to the pyre that was to make Joe divulge his secret. The latter had slipped into unconsciousness again, but Drant depended on the fire to bring him back to life and confession. The outlaw had just lifted a burning brand and was letting the flames play on Joe's feet when a shot rang out. Startled, he swept the valley in a quick, all-embracing look, then leaped to his feet. He started to the trail where he had left a man on guard and his other followed with him, leaving the dying Yaqui alone.

Arriving on the trail, Drant and his companion discovered their sentinel in a death grip with Gwyn. He and Nan had descended into the canyon on its farthest side by means of a rope which Gwyn took from a well on the side of the trail. Tying one end to the pomel of his saddle and taking Nan's rifle he had descended to the bottom of the canyon and she, refusing to be left alone, had followed. They crossed the bed of the canyon unobserved by Drant's sentry and climbed up the other side to the trail. Gwyn was almost upon the guard before the latter saw him and fired. He missed and Gwyn leaped on him, Nan then taking a short cut to the point where Joe had been left to die.

Drant and his companion lost not a

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moment in going to the rescue of Gwyn's antagonist. Each tried to bring his weapons into play but could not. The struggling pair moved so rapidly they dared not take a chance of killing their friend. The pair leaped on Gwyn, but he fought like a tiger. He engaged the three singly and together. A dozen times they swayed to the edge of the trail and it seemed as though all must plunge to death. But they did not. Finally, catching the guard around the waist, Gwyn hurled him over the brink and to death. The other man leaped down soon afterward, breaking his neck as he struck the rocks below.

Fearful of a similar fate, Drant fled down the trail, intending to return and finish Joe before Gwyn could rescue him. As he approached Joe, who had been released by Nan, rose from the ground and fired. Nan did likewise. Drant, his fury turned on the girl, fired at her. But Joe had anticipated him and he leaped in front of Nan, taking in his own heart the bullet that was intended for her. Drant disappeared in the brush as Joe fell, dying to earth. Nan was quickly over the morally wounded servant and raised his head to her lap as Gwyn came running up. They realized that Joe's valiant life was near its end.

Suddenly the old, wrinkled face of the faithful Yaqui brightened. His eyes lighted for an instant, his lips parted, a whisper came forth. They bent low to hear. He spoke:

"Joe no tell."

They were his last words. His head fell back, his face relaxed. He was dead.

Tenderly, Gwyn raised the poor, blood-run body in his arms. Followed by Nan, he carried his burden to a point deep in the canyon and laid it in a rocky grave, piling rocks high over it so that coyotes or vultures should not get to it. Then they began to ascend the cliff, Nan softly weeping as they went. Half way up the trail Gwyn halted, his eyes riveted on something deep down the valley. It was Drant, riding like mad. Tying careful aim, Gwyn fired one shot from the rifle and an instant later Drant's white pony went to earth, shot through the head, and his rider went flying.

(Continued on page 6.)

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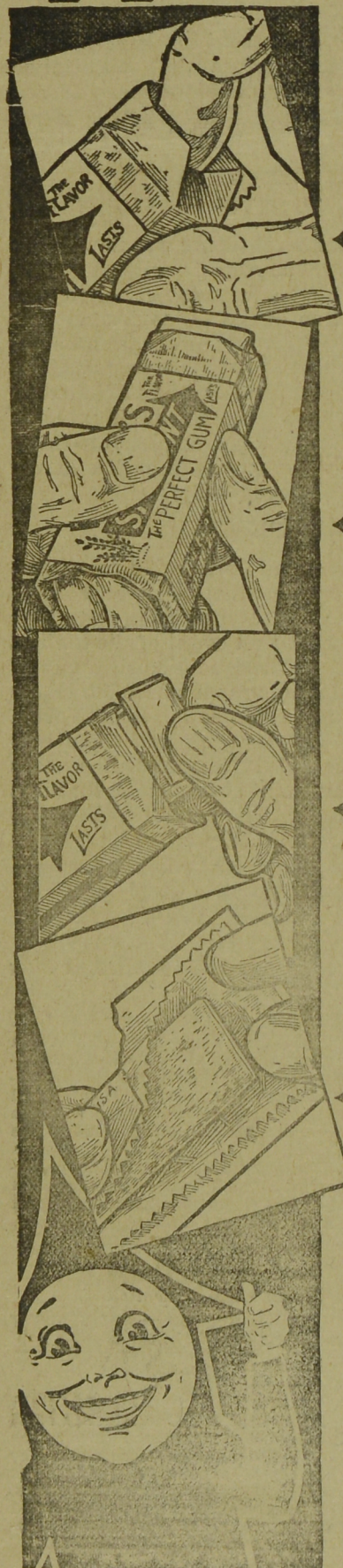
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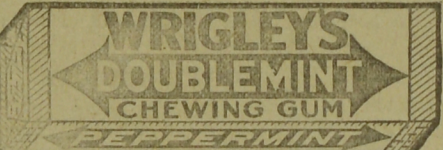
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