

"The Fighting Trail"

"Now that we have changed our positions, I'll ask you my dear girl, just as I was asked, will you be so kind as to turn over the other half of the chart? I would not care to take bold steps but I remind you, you are holding something which would warrant my risking almost anything to obtain."

Gwyn, as he rode at a rapid gait down the trail, looked back once or twice to assure himself that all was well at the barn. He did not fear leav-

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ing Nan alone with von Bleck, for the prisoner had been securely bound and could scarcely move, he thought, let alone escape.

Suddenly, as he rounded another turn in the trail, his horse stopped short. Gwyn's hand almost automatically reached down to his holster. But a few feet ahead riding leisurely along the trail was Cut-Deep Rawls, the man Gwyn was on his way to town to meet—the man in fact, that von Bleck had confessed held the other part of the chart to the cinnabar mine.

Rawls' horse stopped almost as abruptly as had Gwyn's, but its rider was not as alert. When he lifted his eyes to see what had caused the unexpected halt, he found himself looking directly into the business end of Gwyn's revolver. He started, surprised and frightened, and obeyed Gwyn's command to dismount.

Reluctantly Rawls allowed Gwyn to remove his revolver from his belt and then, from the bosom of his shirt he extracted the half of the chart. Gwyn took it from him, glanced at it to make sure that he had obtained what he desired and not a blank sheet of paper, and put it in his pocket. Then, ordering Rawls to walk ahead, he turned his horse about and drove slowly back toward the barn where he had left von Bleck and Nan.

When he arrived within about a hundred yards of the barn, Gwyn dismounted and approached the dilapidated structure from the side, keeping Rawls always in front of him, covered with his revolver. A few feet from the door, Gwyn stopped and listened. He could hear the threatening voice of von Bleck addressing Nan. At first he could not hear what the agent of the Central Powers was saying, and then the words reached his ears plainly. There was a sarcastic sneer in the tone.

"You can tell your friend, Mr. Gwyn, that I was very sorry I could not wait until he returned, but important business made it imperative for me to leave immediately."

"Fortunately I arrived before you left so you can negotiate your business with me directly," Gwyn said as he strode across the threshold and beheld von Bleck backing slowly to-

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ward him while Nan sat helplessly upon the box where the prisoner had been tied. Von Bleck wheeled in astonishment. Gwyn's return was the last thing he had expected. In his hand he held Nan's gun, and he attempted to turn quickly and fire upon Gwyn, but discovered that upon facing the door he was in a direct line to receive the fire from the Easterner's own weapon. He had been covered first and there was nothing for him to do but meekly surrender. Rawls, standing with a scowl in the doorway, regarded the whole scene in disgust. He seemed ready to pounce upon von Bleck and thash him for having told Gwyn that he had the chart. Gwyn obtained the remaining half of the map from von Bleck without trouble, folded it and placed it carefully in his pocket with the other, and ordered

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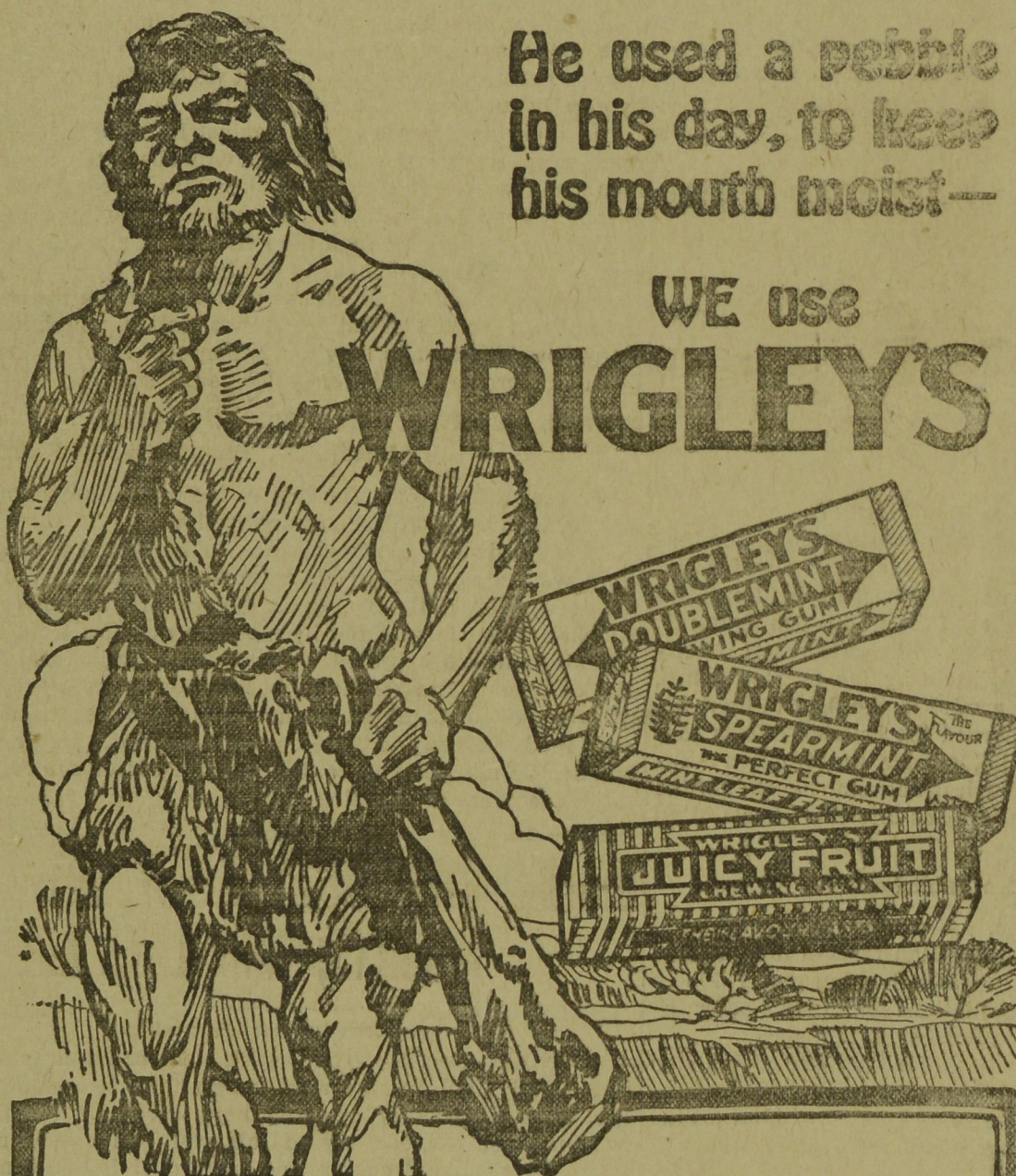
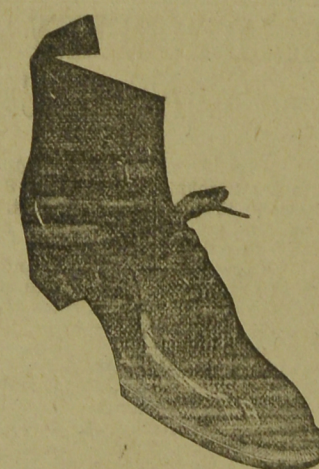
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the Central Powers' representative and Rawls out of the barn.

"The two of you," he said curtly and with a sternness that made both von Bleck and Rawls heed his words, "had better get on your horses and ride out of town. If you want to be perfectly safe my advice is that you keep on riding even then."

Dejectedly, and realizing that they had been defeated, von Bleck and his confederate mounted and rode down the trail toward the town of Lost Mine. Gwyn and Nan watched them until they had disappeared from view and then turned their attention to the map. The two portions placed together made a clear chart of the location of Cordoba's cinnabar mine. Nan and Gwyn now that they had procured the chart, decided to find the exact location without further loss of time. Baltherman, in New York, Gwyn explained, would soon be requiring more of the cinnabar to continue the manufacture of the explosive and, if they did not hurry their operations the whole nation would suffer. So replacing the chart in his pocket, Gwyn led the way and together they rode along the trail to a point where a group of three pine trees, marked on the map, showed they were approaching their destination. But Gwyn, in overcoming von Bleck and Rawls had forgotten that there remained another of the outlaw band with which he had to cope. Drant, the third confederate, had remained in the mountains searching for the mine when Rawls had left him to return to the town, where he had intended to meet von Bleck. Now as Gwyn and Nan approached, Drant was but a short distance away. He was attracted by the sound of their horses and commenced the dangerous undertaking of fording the river which separated them from the entrance to the mine. Drant, creeping cautiously behind the underbrush which hid him, followed.

Outside, the limbs of the pines creaked in the mountain wind with a dry, crackling sound. It was very dark and very lonesome in the thickness of the forest, but impenetrable blackness or the solitude of the hills reached neither the eyes nor into the feelings of the little gathering in the brilliantly lighted room of the Lost Mine hotel. John Gwyn and Nan Lawton were conversing both happily and seriously with a tall, robust individual, a stranger to Gwyn. The stranger whose features, despite his jovial tones and jocular manner, were firm in their expression of sternness and determination, was William Casey—known to the community as "Bill," a strong, sturdy, Irish-American who had come to Lost Mine a few years previously in search of his fortune and was still searching.

"We located the mine this afternoon," Gwyn said, and his smile reflected the enthusiasm revealed in his voice. "It is imperative that I arrange for the immediate development of the mine and the shipment of the cinnabar to New York. The organization which I am representing is eager that no time be lost, and the days that have been consumed by our strife with the Central Powers, in the form of von Bleck, have been precious ones. We must catch up now."

"Mr. Casey, since you are at the head of the vigilance committee hunting down the murderers of Don Carlos and Yaqui Joe, the developments of the future will depend greatly upon you."

"My warrants," replied Casey, "call for only Rawls and Drant. Von Bleck for some reason beyond my jurisdiction, is not included."

"If you get the men you are after—it's a pity that I didn't hold Rawls when I had him—von Bleck will be practically helpless to interfere with us," Gwyn said. "As soon as operations are begun I am going to install you as manager of the mine. Nan tells me that you have had a great deal of experience along these lines and are just the man I need. I hope that by that time Nan will be my wife. We plan to be married within the next few weeks, you know."

During the few months that immediately followed the little town of Lost Mine enjoyed the greatest boom in its history. It was fairly alive with bustling humanity, hurrying to and fro, each absorbed with his own important mission. The village, from

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