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Molly McDonald

CHAPTER XXIV—Conners, soldier ac-
complice of Dupont, is found murdered.

CHAPTER XXV—Hamlin's party is
caught in a fierce blizzard while heading
for the Cinnarron. One man dies from
cold and another almost succumbs. Was-
son is shot as they come in sight of the
Cinnarron. Hamlin dashes blindly for-
ward alone in pursuit of the man who
fired the shot.

CHAPTER XXVI—By heroic work he
resuscitates Carroll, his remaining trooper.
Hamlin discovers a log cabin hidden
under a bluff.

CHAPTER XXVII—It is occupied by
Hughes, a cow thief, who is laying for
LeFevre, who is charged with a cattle
deal. His description identifies LeFevre
and Dupont as one and the same. Le-
Fevre is hand and glove with the In-
dians. Hughes shot Wasson mistaking
him for one of LeFevre's party.

CHAPTER XXVIII—Hamlin decides to
wait at the cabin until the storm abates
before attempting to take up the trail of
LeFevre, who is carrying Molly to the
Indians' camp.

CHAPTER XXIX—Hamlin and Hughes
start in pursuit of the fugitives. Two
days out they sight them.

CHAPTER XXX—A fight ensues in
which Hughes is shot by an Indian.

CHAPTER XXXI—Hughes, dying,
makes a desperate attempt to shoot Le-
Fevre, but hits Hamlin, while the latter
is disarming LeFevre. LeFevre escapes,
believing Hamlin and Molly dead. Molly
tells Hamlin that her father was impli-
cated in the plot to steal the paymas-
ter's money.

CHAPTER XXXII—Hamlin confesses
his love for Molly and finds that it is
reciprocated. They start for the log
cabin.

CHAPTER XXXIII—Molly tells the
story of her experience. Her father was
in the power of Mrs. Dupont, who was
bleeding him for money. He was forced
into a plot to secure the paymaster's
money by pretending robbery. McDonald
was killed as result of a quarrel.

CHAPTER XXXIV—They meet an ad-
vance troop of Custer's command, start-
ing on a winter campaign against the
Indians. Hamlin remains as guide and
Molly is escorted to Custer's headquar-
ters.

CHAPTER XXXV—Custer compliments
Hamlin. They start after the Indians.

CHAPTER XXXVI—The winter camp
of Black Kettle is discovered. Custer
plans an attack.

CHAPTER XXXVII—Indians are sur-
prised and defeated in a desperate fight.
Hamlin is sent with report to Sheridan.

CHAPTER XXXVIII—In which Le-
Fevre's plot against Hamlin is laid bare
and his name cleared of the disgrace of
his discharge from the Confederate ser-
vice.

"Snow," he announced soberly.
"Thought I felt it afore, and the wind's
changed."

Hamlin turned in the saddle, feeling
already the sharp sting of snow pel-
lets on his face. Before he could even
answer the air was full of whiteness,
a fierce gust of wind hurling the fly-
ing particles against them. In an-
other instant they were in the very
heart of the storm, almost hurled for-
ward by the force of the wind, and

blinded by the icy deluge. The pelting
of the hail startled the horses, and in
spite of every effort of the riders, they
drifted to the right, tails to the storm.
The swift change was magical. The
sharp particles of icy snow seemed to
swirl upon them from every direction,
sucking their very breath, bewildering
them, robbing them of all sense of
direction. Within two minutes the
men found it impossible to penetrate
the wintry shroud except for a few
feet ahead of them.

The Sergeant knew what it meant,
for he had had experience of these
plain storms before.

"Halt!" he cried, his voice barely
audible in the blast. "Close up, men;
come here to me—lively now! That
you, Wade? Wasson; oh, all right,
Sam. Here, pass that lariat back;
now get a grip on it, every one of you
and hold to it for your lives. Let me
take the lead, Sam; we'll have to run
by compass. Now, then, are you ready?"

The lariat rope, tied to Hamlin's
pommel, straightened out and was
grasped desperately by the gloved
hands of the men behind. The Ser-
geant, shading his eyes, half smothered
in the blast, could see scarcely ill-
defined shadows.

"All caught!"
The answers were inaudible.
"For the Lord's sake, speak up; an-
swer now—Wasson."

"Here."
"Wade."
"Here."
"Carroll."
"Here."

"Good; now come on after me!"
He drove his horse forward, head
bent low over the compass, one arm
flung up across his mouth to prevent
inhaling the icy air. He felt the tug
of the line; heard the labored breath-
ing of the next horse behind, but saw
nothing except that wall of swirling
snow pellets hurled against him by a
pitiless wind, fairly lacerating the
flesh. It was freezing cold; already
he felt numb, exhausted, heavy-eyed.
The air seemed to penetrate his cloth-
ing, and prick the skin as with a thou-
sand needles. The thought came that
if he remained in the saddle he would
freeze stiff. Again he turned, and sent
the voice of command down the strug-
gling line:

"Dismount; wind the rope around
your pommels. Sam. How far is it to
the Cinnarron?"

"More'n twenty miles."
"All right! We've got to make it,
boys," forcing a note of cheerfulness
into his voice. "Hang on to the bit
even if you drop. I may drift to the
west, but that won't lose us much.
Come on, now."

"Hamlin, let me break trail."
"We'll take it turn about, Sam. It'll
be worse in an hour than it is now.
All ready, boys."

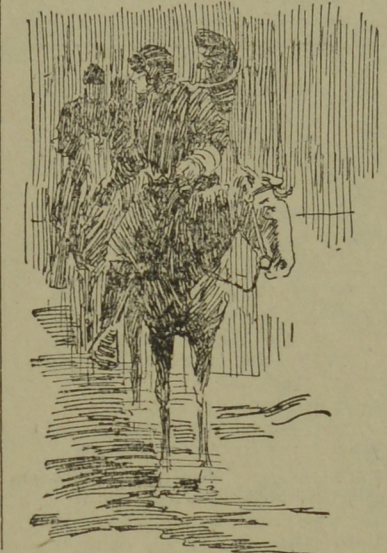
Blinded by the sleet, staggering to
the fierce pummeling of the wind, yet
clinging desperately to his horse's bit,

the sergeant struggled forward in the
swirl of the storm.

CHAPTER XXV.

In the Blizzard.

There was no cessation, no abate-
ment. Across a thousand miles of
plain the ice-laden wind swept down
upon them with the relentless fury of
a hurricane, driving the snow crystals
into their faces, buffeting them mor-
tally, numbing their bodies, and blind-
ing their eyes. In that awful grip they
looked upon Death, but struggled on,
as real men must until they fall.
Breathing was agony; every step be-
came a torture; fingers grasping the
horses' bits grew stiff and deadened
by frost; they reeled like drunken
men, sightless in the mad swirl, deaf-
ened by the pounding of the blast
against their ears. All consciousness
left them! only dumb instinct kept
them battling for life, staggering for-
ward, foot by foot, odd phantasies of



"Close Up, Men; Come Here to Me."

imagination beginning to beckon. In
their weakness, delirium gripped their
half-mad brains, yielding new strength
to fight the snow fiend. Aching in
every point, trembling from fatigue,
they dare not rest an instant. The
wind, veering more to the east, lashed
their faces like a whip. They crouched
behind the horses to keep out of the
sting of it, crunching the snow, now
in deep drifts, under their half-frozen
feet.

Wade, a young fellow not overly
strong, fell twice. They placed him
in the center, with Carroll bringing
up the rear. Again he went down,
face buried in the snow, crying like a
babe. Desperately the others lashed
him into his saddle, binding a blanket
about him, and went grimly stagger-
ing on, his limp figure rocking above
them. Hour succeeded hour in cease-
less struggle; no one knew where they
were, only the leader staggered on.

his eyes upon the compass. Wasson
and Hamlin took their turns tramping
a trail, the snow often to their knees.
They had stopped speaking, stopped
thinking even. All their movements
became automatic, instinctive, the re-
sult of iron discipline. They realized
the only hope—attainment of the Cin-
narron bluffs. There was no shelter
there in the open, to either man or
horse; the sole choice left was to
struggle on, or lie down and die. The
last was likely to be the end of it,
but while a drop of blood ran red and
warm in their veins they would keep
their feet and fight.

Carroll's horse stumbled and rolled,
catching the numbed trooper under
his weight. The jerk on the lariat
flung Wade out of the saddle, danc-
ing head downward. With stiffened
fingers, scarcely comprehending what
they were about, the Sergeant and
Wasson came to the rescue, helped
the frightened horse struggle to his
feet, and, totally blinded by the fury
of the storm which now beat fairly in
their eyes, grasped the dangling
body, swaying back and forth as the
startled animal plunged in terror. It
was a corpse they gripped, already
stiff with cold, the eyes wide open and
staring. Carroll, bruised and limping,
came to their help, groaning with
pain, and the three men together man-
aged to lift the dead weight to the
horse's back, and to bind it safely
with the turn of a rope. Then, breath-
less from exhaustion, crouching be-
hind the animals, bunched helplessly
together, the howl of the wind like
the scream of lost souls, the three
men looked into each other's faces.

"I reckon Jim died without ever
knowin' it," said the scout, breaking
again the film of ice over his eyes, and
thrashing his arms. "I allers heard
tell it was an easy way o' goin'. Looks
to me he was better off than we are
just now. Hurt much, Carroll?"

"Crunched my leg mighty bad;
can't bear no weight on it. 'Twas
darn near froze stiff before; that's
why I couldn't get out o' the way
quick."

"Sure; well, ye'll have ter ride, then.
We'll take the blanket off Jim; he
won't need it no more. 'Brick' an' I
kin hoof it yet awhile—hey, 'Brick'?"

Hamlin lifted his head from the
shelter of his horse's mane.

"I reckon I can make my feet
move," he asserted doubtfully, "but
they don't feel as though there was
any life left in them." He stamped
on the snow. "How long do these bliz-
zards generally last, Sam?"

"Blow themselves out in about three
days."

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