

The Mountain Lily

by

Bud Morris

www.BudMorris.net

The fleeing prospector vaulted over the water-logged dead fall with his left hand, landing prone in the sandy gravel behind it. It had been a close call, but he had won the first round. Bill Dawson's chances of survival weren't great, but they were better than they had been a moment ago.

It was the glitter in the sediment in the bottom of Bill's prospecting pan that had distracted him. Its promise had momentarily dulled his awareness. The arrow that glanced off the pan brought him back to the realities of life and death on the frontier; and initiated his hectic dart across the stream to the shelter of the dead fall. The arrows that whizzed along his erratic path encouraged all the speed his moccasins could muster.

The Indians had attacked from the forest on the other side of the stream that flowed from the Big Horn Mountains down to the prairie below. Bill's problem was that there was still about fifty feet of alluvial gravel and sand between him and the forest on his side of the stream. He might stand two or three Indians off with his handgun, but a major defense would be difficult without his rifle, especially if there were enough Indians to work their way across the stream and get behind him. Unfortunately, his '64 Joslyn was still in its scabbard on Buck; and Buck was still ground-hitched in a nest of boulders about a mile downstream where he had first started seeing those flecks of gold. Gold had a habit of making fools out of men!

Bill drew his Colt from its holster and squirmed his way to the swollen root end of the dead fall that had been deposited along the edge of the creek by flood waters of some bygone storm. Peering between the abbreviated remnants of the roots, he made out the forms of three Indians with nocked arrows across the stream in the edge of the woods. They were playing the waiting game; and if they could wait, so could he. Worst come to worst, he'd try to slip across the open area behind him to the safety of the forest come dusk, if he lived that long.

The prospector's position in the afternoon sun was miserable. Rivulets of sweat ran sideways across his back, soaking the lower side of his shirt. He licked cracked lips as water that might just as well have been miles away sparkled tantalizingly three feet in front of him. He dared not move lest the savages catch a glimpse of his face through the rotting roots that concealed him. To top off his misery, the red ants were beginning to carve small chunks out of his legs.

As the prospector watched, one of the Indians finally loosed an arrow directly at Bill's head. Ducking the arrow, the prospector raised his torso above the dead fall and

returned the fire. He heard the smack of his bullet on human flesh as he ducked the volley of arrows that sped toward his position.

Dawson was on his feet instantly, plunging erratically for the cover of the trees. Arrows swished on all sides, but not a one struck his gyrating form. But as the desperate man entered the forest three more Indians who had been sneaking up behind the prospector gang-tackled him, throwing him face down in the mossy earth of the forest floor. He scarcely knew what had hit him before his hands were tied mercilessly tight behind his back.

The Indians jerked their prisoner to his feet, buffeting him with their fists. Although he knew it was hopeless, Bill fought back with everything he had. He managed to land a couple of solid kicks on a brave or two before they realized how powerful he was. His only chance now was to show enough spirit to win their respect. Not that it would prevent their killing him, but it might stave it off long enough for him find a way to escape.

When Bill stopped struggling, the Indians hustled him back across the stream to the rest of their war party. There were seven braves in all, though the one Bill had shot appeared to be seriously wounded. The pain on his face wrenched Bill's heart, and he suggested in his halting Sioux that they moisten the suffering man's lips with water. Someone understood him well enough to put a cup of water to the Indians lips. It seemed to revive him a bit.

The war party built a fire near the spot where the attack had taken place, and settled down for the night. Bill was tied to a tree in a standing position, with no consideration for his comfort. The Indians snacked on dried meat without offering the prisoner any. As the Indians dropped off to sleep, Bill leaned against the tree and catnapped as best he could. The pain and numbness in his hands prevented any real rest. As the cool of the mountain night bit into him, he suggested that they move the injured warrior nearer to the fire. Again, someone responded by dragging the chilling Indian closer to the fire.

The following morning the party mounted up and struck out towards the southeast. Bill's hands were left tied behind his back; and he was placed on a barebacked pony that was led by a watchful brave. His mind naturally turned to Buck, but he was not worried about the resourceful horse. He had been ground hitched, which meant that he would be free to move when hunger overwhelmed his training. More than once he had seen the horse toss his head in such a way as to flip the reins over his head to hang on the saddle horn, so he knew the beast would survive despite the gear that was attached to him.

The wounded man was drug behind his pony on a travois. Every time they crossed a stream, Bill urged them to give him more water. After a while, they started giving Bill a drink whenever they gave their patient one. That helped a lot.

The party rendezvoused with a larger party of about a dozen more braves that afternoon. The braves of the larger party touted many fresh scalps of whites and Indians alike. They drove several oxen ahead of them; and the entire group made camp near the edge of the prairie within a couple of hours.

The larger party had a prisoner too. She was a small shapely squaw, which Bill suspected was the reason why she had not been killed outright. As the prospector watched from the tree they had tied him to, an arrogant brave approached her with a lewd gesture. When she spit in his face he picked up a club and beat her mercilessly. She remained defiant; hurling what Bill gathered was a Sioux insult in his face.

Shortly after the party made camp an ox was slaughtered. The crude butchering was accomplished with knives and axes; and soon the aroma of roasting meat was wafting from the various fires that had been kindled. At Bill's suggestion, the wounded brave was given broth to drink. The Indians consumed an incredible amount beef throughout the evening, but the prisoners were given nothing.

The next morning the wounded man was strong enough to mount his horse. Bill was famished but knew better than to evidence any weakness by begging for food. That afternoon the war party spotted a small wagon train several miles south of them on the Bozeman Trail. Bill watched helplessly as the Indians raced towards the hapless settlers. After the slaughter, the victims were scalped and the wagons were looted. There were no survivors as far as the prospector could tell.

The Indians returned with several cases of whisky, which they lit right into. The more they drank, the more boisterous they became. Soon they were butchering another ox, which they devoured without consideration for the prisoners.

Eventually the festive Indians turned their attention to the prisoners. Bill's bonds were cut free; and the struggling prospector was dragged over to a large ant hill. Four stakes were driven into the ground; and each of his limbs was tied to a stake with a piece of bloody un-scraped cow hide from the butchered ox. He was left tightly stretched over the swarming ants, with no way to protect himself.

"Die well!" he heard the still bound female prisoner encourage him in English as the drunken Indians began to taunt her. Her spunk gave him the determination not to gratify his tormentors by showing any pain as the ants devoured his body.

The pain of the ant bites was not as severe as Bill expected. Slowly he began to realize that they were more interested in the bloody cowhide that bound his hands and feet than in his body. Despite the many bites that he was getting, he lay perfectly still. Before the sun went down, he began to feel the disappearing bonds loosening a bit, but it would not do to let the Indians realize what was happening.

By the time it was dark, the Indians were far too drunk to pay much attention to the prospector. At first they had seemed to be squabbling amongst themselves over the squaw, but even that did not last long. One by one they were falling into drunken stupors on the ground, bottles often still in hand. Around midnight Bill felt the bond on his right hand give way. Reaching over to the left, he was able to worry that one loose as well. He sat up quietly without being detected and managed to untie his feet within a few minutes.

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The freed man fought the impulse to slip away as rapidly as possible. No self-respecting man could leave any woman, dark or light, to the humiliating death the female prisoner was bound to suffer. Gliding silently around the drunken Indians, he slipped up to the tree where she was tied. She awakened as he fumbled with her bonds, and leaned back into the tree to create more slack for him to work with. The job was painstakingly slow in the dark, for she was tied well; but a half an hour later they were slipping away in a westerly direction from the Indians' camp.

Bill wanted to try to swipe a couple of horses, but the squaw insisted that they were guarded by a several braves that had not been allowed any alcohol. They were too likely to be caught unarmed in the act, so they struck out towards the Big Horns in the starlight of the prairie sky.

Before dawn the sky began to cloud up and a cold wind sprang up. As the prairie darkened the Indian woman placed a trusting hand on the white man's shoulder so she could follow him in the blackness. Thunder rolled, and jagged lightening flashed ominously as a vicious storm bore down on the fugitives.

Suddenly a great blast of wind all but knocked the fleeing pair down, as rain began to pelt them mercilessly. They hunkered down on the ground as the tall grass whipped their faces. Bill could feel the squaw's trembling hand against his back as eerie ghosts of ball lightening rolled over the prairie, some close enough to illuminate their unprotected bodies. Then hail began to spatter down, small at first, and then occasional pieces as large as hen's eggs. Bill reached back and drew the small woman around to the front of him, hunching over her to shield her from the beating he was taking. After five minutes or so the hail stopped and a few minutes later the rain slacked off to a cold drizzle, while gusts of wind chilled the soaked victims to the bone. They huddled against each other on the prairie floor for warmth until dawn arrived and the rising sun brought partial relief from the cold.

When Bill stood up in the morning light, he could see a meandering string of trees a mile or so to his left. As he headed towards the stream the little squaw followed Indian fashion a respectable distance behind him.

The advantage of the storm was that it would have wiped out all traces of their trail from the Indian camp. The disadvantage was that it was impossible not to leave an obvious trail across the wet knocked-down prairie grass as they moved farther from their enemies. Anyone happening by would be able to track them without effort.

When they reached the stream, they walked upstream in the swollen water. At least the trees hid them from distant eyes, and they were no longer leaving a trail. Around noon Bill sat down on a boulder in the stream, while the Indian woman stepped into the trees. She returned a moment later with a four foot green stick which she sharpened by rubbing it on a rough stone. Within a few minutes the woman had speared a couple trout, which she scaled and gutted with a sharp stone. It was their first food since their capture. Since a fire was out of the question with the Indians searching for them, they ate it raw.

Going up the creek was slow, but both of them knew that it was their best bet for freedom, so they moved on silently without rest until dusk. When they stopped, they wove supple green tree branches with the leaves on them together for a small hut about three feet tall, five feet wide, and six feet long. Both of them climbed in and lay down back to back. As the night grew colder, they unconsciously scooted against each other for warmth.

The next morning Bill realized that they were beyond the devastation of the storm, so he struck out across the prairie in a more direct path towards the mountains. By evening he was beginning to recognize features of the distant mountains that told him where he was. They slept by another stream the next night, but it was warm enough they did not build a shelter. They were so chilled by morning that they found themselves huddled together again for warmth. Maybe a shelter would have been more appropriate, he told himself as they eased away from each other.

Until this time there had been little real communication between the white man and the Indian woman. Their concern had been to escape from their captors and survive the elements despite the coolness of the altitude. Bill had spoken as often as necessary, and the squaw had answered intelligently in perfect English as needed. She had accepted his leadership without question, and they had survived. But on that third morning the little woman asked, "Where are you taking me?"

It was a new idea to Bill. His immediate objective had been to find the area where he had been captured. Buck would probably be waiting around for him, and the Joslyn would greatly help their situation.

"I think I can find my horse and my rifle," he answered. After that we can figure out what each of us needs to do."

By evening they had found the right stream, but were considerably downstream from where Bill had left his horse. That night the squaw built a fire in the shelter of the forest by rubbing two dry sticks together, a trick that Bill had never been able to do. Fish was way better cooked than raw.

By noon the next day they had found the place where Buck had been ground-hitched. When Bill let out a shrill whistle the horse trotted out of the woods to him. The saddle had slipped under its belly, but the Joslyn was still in its scabbard around the horse's neck. A search of the area turned up the prospector's saddlebags and the blanket that had been rolled up behind the saddle. There was an extra knife in the saddlebags, but they never found Bill's skillet. Life would have been a lot less complicated if there had been two blankets, Bill thought.

When the Indian woman saw the rifle, she exclaimed, "I can make another blanket out of deer skin if you can shoot me a couple of deer."

They rode double up the stream to a small meadow, and found a good campsite in the edge of the woods, anticipating that a few deer would come out to graze as evening approached. Bill was able to drop a buck before dusk, which they field dressed and hung in a tree. They huddled together under the blanket that night, and actually felt warm when they awoke. The prospector got another buck in the morning.

While Bill skinned the deer, the Indian woman built a smoking rack under the trees. Bill started smoking thin strips of venison while the squaw began scraping the hides, leaving the hair on them. Hours later, when they were thoroughly clean, she smeared the under sides with squashed deer brains, working the pasty gruel into all parts of the hide until it was equally slippery throughout. A day and a half later she washed the brains off in the stream, wrung out the tanned hides, and smoked them on the smoking rack for several hours. Finally, she sewed the hides together lengthwise to make herself a suitable blanket. From then on they slept on opposite sides of their camp sites.

As the two partners of fate worked together they began to converse more freely. She was a Sioux from a village that had been cultivated by Christian missionaries. The village's acceptance of Christianity had estranged them from the other divisions of the Sioux to the point that they were considered traitors of their people. She had been educated by the missionaries and hoped to become a teacher of Sioux children if she could find acceptance among her people. Red Cloud's war was making this highly unlikely for the moment.

Her name was Lily, taken from the mountain lilies of the Rockies. She had been captured by the Sioux in a stage coach attack along the Bozeman Trail while on the way home from a temporary teaching assignment at a mission near Fort C.F. Smith. Her captors

were unsure what to do with her because of her Sioux heritage, so they claimed to be taking her back to their village. Bill was still of the opinion that her shapeliness had more to do with the reason she was spared than anything else. She was truly a beautiful woman.

Lilly's immediate need was to get back to her mission village which was off the Oregon Trail about fifty miles northeast of Fort Laramie. It would be about two hundred miles to the southeast of their present position as the crow flies, but Bill was ready to return to the warmth of civilization for the winter anyway. He agreed to escort the little Indian woman at least down to the Oregon Trail, and all the way to her home if necessary.

They would ride double to Fort Reno, on the Bozeman Trail. They could obtain another horse there. From Fort Reno they could avoid the almost certain harassment by Red Cloud's associates along the Bozeman Trail by heading due south across the country to the Oregon Trail. If the Oregon Trail was reputed to be safe when they crossed it, they would follow it to Ft. Laramie. If there was too much harassment on the trail, they could continue south to the Medicine Bows, and cut east to Fort Laramie. The rest would be easy.

The ride to Fort Reno took just over three days. Bill actually found himself enjoying Lily's company. The gentle touch of her hands on his shoulders, her arms clasped around him to stabilize herself on steep places they had to cross, and mostly just her trust in his judgment and leadership were comforting. The typical squaw stereotype was giving way to a more realistic image of an intelligent and intriguing woman in his mind. When they dismounted at the stockade he proudly escorted her into the fort. He was disgusted to find her less than welcomed by the soldiers, though she was better educated and certainly better looking than most of them.

The prospector had a mediocre season's worth of gold in his saddle bags, and was easily able to purchase a good horse for Lily, complete with tack. He also purchased an S&W .32 rim fire revolver with a hundred rounds of ammo, which he asked her to carry "for him;" since it was illegal to provide fire arms to the Indians. He replaced the Colt revolver that the Indians had taken from him with a new one for himself.

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A supply detachment of over a hundred soldiers from Fort Reno was scheduled to leave for Fort Laramie within a couple of days. If Bill and Lily could accompany them down the Bozeman Trail, they would be relatively safe from all but largest parties of marauding Indians. It would probably be safer than the cross-country route they had expected to

take to the Oregon Trail; and it would save them days of rough uncharted cross-country travel.

When Bill approached the captain of the detachment for permission to accompany them, he was told that he would be welcome to come. "But I won't have that heathen woman in my party," the captain said. "She might double cross us and signal our position to Red Cloud."

"But I just rescued her from Red Cloud's men," Bill argued.

The captain was adamant. "I won't have a heathen in my detachment," he hissed.

"Sir," Lily addressed him respectfully, "Why do you call me a heathen? I believe in Jesus Christ the same as you do."

"I don't believe in God," the captain retorted. "If He's out there, why does He let these Indians get away with killing so many people?"

"When you think about it, Sir," she replied earnestly, "If I believe in Christ and you don't even believe in God, then I am a Christian and you are the heathen."

The captain turned away with an air of finality, but the reality of what Lily had said struck deep into Bill's conscience. He had never given any thought to what he believed. If a heathen was someone who didn't believe in God, he was probably a heathen himself.

The travelers stocked up with supplies and left the fort in the early afternoon. Bill wanted to get as far away from the beaten path as possible to reduce the probability of meeting a Sioux war party before making camp. That evening they had flapjacks, bacon, and coffee for supper instead of deer jerky; and they enjoyed it immensely.

Before they retired, Bill asked the Christian woman about her people. "How can they be considered heathens if they believe in the Great Spirit?" he began. "Isn't the Great Spirit God?"

"I don't think so," she responded. Jesus said that if people really believed in God, they would believe in Him as well. By and large, the Indians reject Jesus Christ, so they must not believe in the true God. I think the captain was right to consider most of my people heathens. But they are no more heathen than any white person that does not believe in God; and if a white man does not believe in Jesus Christ He is really rejecting God and is just as heathen as the Indians are."

"But nearly all white men believe in Jesus Christ," Bill mused.

“Bill,” she said so seriously that it shook him. “There’s a difference between believing about Christ and believing in Him. “If you believe in history you believe about Him. You know, the great teacher of two thousand years ago that taught that men ought to love one another. But believing in Him goes much further.”

“Believing in Christ,” she continued as she unconsciously rose to face him, “Involves believing His testimony that we are sinners that really deserve to be punished in hell for ever. It’s believing that God sent His Son down to earth as a man to die on the cross as the payment for those sins. It’s believing that if we accept Christ’s death on the cross as the payment for our sins we are completely forgiven. It’s repenting of our resistance to God and believing that He gives those who trust Him a new life that loves Him and wants to do His will instead of our own. The Bible calls it being born again.”

“But Lily,” he asked, rising to face her. “How can God consider me that bad? I don’t go around swearing, drinking, stealing, or fighting. I was willing to risk my life to save yours, wasn’t I?”

“Bill,” she answered, throwing her arms around him spontaneously. “You don’t know how much I appreciate all you’ve done for me. You not only saved my life, you saved my dignity...my womanhood...my virtue.” She laid her head on his chest as she spoke, bursting into uncontrollable sobs. His arms went around her as if to protect her as she wept away the horror of what she had anticipated as a captive of those Indians. The sobs gradually subsided, and she finally pulled herself away from him.

“Thank you so much, Bill Dawson,” she said through her tears. “But, God still says we are sinners and need a Savior. I’ll be praying that you’ll understand that.”

Bill didn’t sleep well that night. The issues she had stirred up confused him; and he had to admit that he was not the Christian he had always considered himself to be.

The cross-country trip down to the Oregon Trail was difficult and dangerous. Both the travelers were experts at leaving as little evidence of their passage as possible, but they were acutely aware that any Indians that recognized their passage were likely to come after them. Bill kept a constant watch on the way before them as well as on their back trail. They spoke little as they rode, always conscious of the need for caution. He was not about to let the savages get this woman that he had learned to respect so much.

It took the travelers eight days to reach Emigrant Gap. They ran across recent tracks of several war parties, but saw no Indians until they came to the south fork of the Powder River. As they looked down from a high forested hill, they could see a party of Sioux warriors nearly thirty strong camped on the banks of the river.

“Why are the Sioux so hostile?” Bill asked Lily as they waited for the Indian war party to move on.

“Red Cloud’s war is actually over the Fort Laramie treaty that the United States made with the Indians in 1851,” Lily answered. “The Indians agreed to accept specific boundaries, giving the U.S. government the right to establish roads and outposts within those areas. The United States agreed to protect the Indians from infringement of their territories by its citizens. Because many Sioux did not recognize a central government within the Sioux nation, they did not feel obligated to abide by the treaty. And more and more U.S. citizens infringed on the Indian territories to hunt, trap, prospect, and even ranch. Neither the Indians nor the United States government were willing or even able to uphold their sides of the treaty; and each side feels that the other side’s violations invalidate it. Red Cloud is primarily trying to defend the Sioux nation from annihilation or forced assimilation into the white man’s culture.”

“Maybe I shouldn’t have come out here in the first place,” Bill mused aloud. “Do you think I should go back east?”

“One man’s leaving wouldn’t change a thing,” she answered. “Where would you go? The whole United States was taken from the Indians. But in all fairness,” she continued, “The Indian also took whatever land they could conquer and hold. Tribal boundaries were largely determined by whoever was the strongest; and the white man’s technology makes him the strongest. At this point the Indians cannot survive without assimilating into the white man’s culture.”

The travelers remained in their concealed vantage point for a full day before the Indians moved off towards the east. Bill saw Lily shutter violently several times as she peered down at the distant savages. They did not detect any other fresh signs of Indians the rest of the way to Immigrant Gap.

Fort Casper was only a day’s ride along the Oregon Trail from Immigrant Gap. They rode up to the fort the next evening, but Lily was not even allowed to enter the stockade. “No savages in here!” the guard told Bill. “If I had my way I’d shoot every Injun I seen, no questions asked.”

“And you call her a savage?” Bill answered hotly, emphasizing the “Her.” “She’s one of the gentlest people I’ve ever met.” They camped outside the stockade that night, and started out on a long week’s journey to Fort Laramie at dawn the next morning.

Four days later they topped a rise in the prairie to see a wagon train under attack by a small group of Indians. “You ride back up the trail towards the fort, Hon,” he yelled, not realizing that he had used a term of endearment. “I’ve got to help those people.”

When Bill got close enough, he opened fire from behind the Indians. That’s when he noticed that Lily’s horse was at his horse’s hindquarter; and she was blazing away with her little S&W. The additional firepower from outside the tightly circled wagons turned the tide, and the Indians took to the hills in a northerly direction.

The wagon master thanked Bill heartily for their salvation. "That's quite a squaw you've got there," he added.

"She's not my wife," Bill explained. She's just a Christian lady that I am escorting to her home."

"Thanks for the term," she murmured inaudibly; but she wasn't sure whether she meant the respectful one or the endearing one herself. "Maybe both," she thought.

They made Fort Laramie in six days, a little earlier than they had expected to. They purchased more supplies that afternoon, so as to be ready to leave for Lily's village the next day.

"Where are you headed for?" the storekeeper asked Bill.

"To Nazareth," Lily replied.

"Oh," the man grunted disdainfully.

"Why do you call it Nazareth?" Bill asked Lily that evening after supper.

"Because Nazareth was where Christ lived," she answered. "It was a place of derision. When they said that He was from Nazareth, everyone kind of thought, 'Oh,' just like the storekeeper did today. It's where we who have chosen to live for Christ bear His reproach. We are hated by our own people because we follow Him. We are poor because we do not plunder the pioneers. We have no horses to help us hunt. We are not allowed to have guns. We have to make our own clothes, but can scarcely kill enough deer and buffalo to eat, much less to clothe us. We are despised and rejected, as Christ was, by Indians and whites alike; but we have the joy of the Lord in our souls." Tears were trickling down her cheeks as she finished; and it was all he could do not to blot them away with the kerchief he wore around his neck. What a woman!

Two days later they rode into Nazareth. The mission consisted of a log home for the missionaries, and a small dilapidated church building. About twenty forlorn tepees surrounded the buildings.

The barking of dogs alerted the people of their arrival. Young and old folks poured out to greet Lily with unmasked joy. The missionary couple held her in a double embrace that she finally squirmed out of long enough to introduce Bill. "He rescued me from a war party," she explained.

"We've been praying for you since you disappeared," everyone answered.

Lily was hustled off to her parents' tepee. Bill was invited to spend the night with the missionaries. The dinner was sparse, and he realized that they were suffering everything that their Indian converts were. There was nothing hypocritical about them at all.

Bill was urged to stay longer, but a strange uneasiness had settled on him. As he saddled Buck in the morning, Lily brought her horse to him. "Take him," she urged. "You are the one who bought him."

"Lily," he answered genuinely, "I want your people to have him." Perhaps he will help them find more meat and skins. And don't let the soldiers catch you with that gun," he added.

When he was ready to leave, he turned to face her. "Good bye little lady," he managed to say. And then, scarcely realizing he was doing it, he bent down and kissed her forehead. Tears glittered in her eyes as he mounted and rode off without daring to look back.

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Bill Dawson rode mechanically back to the trail. When he reached it he turned east for no particular reason. Four days later he was eating lunch at a saloon in the new railroad town of Cheyenne. As he chewed aimlessly on his food two men at the bar got to disagreeing over whether or not the town should have been called "Cheyenne." The bigger one suddenly backhanded the smaller one. The smaller man responded by taking a punch at his opponent. Suddenly the man who started the fight was crouching in an amateur gunfighters' stance, bellowing, "No one punches Jack Robbins and lives."

Caught up in the excitement of the fight, Bill hoped the smaller man would draw and shoot the bully. He deserved it! Suddenly the smaller man yelled, "Draw," and both men went for their guns. Five seconds later they were both on the floor, mortally wounded.

Bill was sick. Two men had killed each other over what the name of the town should have been.

"God," he breathed, "we really are as bad as you said we are. I really hoped that man would kill that bully over nothing at all. Forgive me Jesus; I'm no better than anyone else. I want You to change me."

"That shootin' shake you up that much?" the man across the table jeered as he saw Bill's reaction.

“Yes it did,” Bill answered as he arose. “I’m a Christian, not a savage.”

The new Christian stepped out the door to his horse. A strange peace settled over him as he took the trail back to the west. He had believed, he had repented, and he was born again. “Thank you, Lord,” he murmured over and over again, occasional tears trickling down his cheeks.

At first Bill rode aimlessly, hardly knowing where he was going. But as the hours passed, he began to realize that he had been going back to Lily all the while. He longed for the feel of her gentle hands again. He wanted her arms around his waist again. He wanted to feel the softness and warmth of her body against his again. He wanted Lily more than he had ever wanted anything else in his life.

Three days later Bill topped the last rise to Nazareth. He was shocked! The cabin and the church were burned. The tepees were slashed. There was no activity in the village. Horrified, he rushed down to the devastation before him. The swollen bodies of young and old lay decomposing on the ground where they had been shot.

Madly he checked each corpse as he found it. Lily was not among them. Racing to the remains of the buildings, he found only the charred bodies of the missionary and his wife. Gradually the shock wore off to where he was able to think a bit.

This was not the work of Indians. No one was scalped. At least a dozen iron-shod horses had ridden off over the prairie after the massacre had occurred. There was no wealth in Nazareth. The only thing they could possibly have wanted was his beautiful woman. Bill mounted up and followed their trail at a mad gallop. What had they done with Lily?

The maddened man’s senses gradually returned to him as he rode. He would have to slow down and save his horse. The massacre had happened at least two days ago, and it would take at least two or three days to catch up to the murderers. Then he’d have to find out if they had taken Lily captive or not. He had no illusions about what could happen to her. These desperadoes were every bit as savage as any Indians were.

The culprits’ trail was fresh enough by noon of the third day that Bill knew he’d catch up with them soon. He caught sight of them when he topped a steep rise just as the sun touched the horizon. They were setting up camp in the trees by a stream, about three hundred feet from where he stood. He drew back a ways to ground-hitch Buck where he would not be visible on the horizon, and squatted to survey the situation through the seed heads of the grass. He was planning a route down to the camp when he heard a yell, and saw Lily racing up the hill in his direction. In an instant he was astride Buck, racing to meet her. Three or four men were strung out behind her, but she was outdistancing them all.

Bill took Buck past Lily on her left side, blazing away at her captors with his Colt in his right hand. He circled back on her right side as she turned around to face him. He

slowed the horse, kicking his left foot out of the stirrup and reaching for her with his left hand. She grasped his hand with her left as she slid her left foot into the empty stirrup and swung her lithe body up behind him, wrapping her arms firmly around his waist.

Buck was galloping full tilt up the hill; and unfriendly rifles were crashing away as Bill cut a bit to the left to get a better angle to fire at desperadoes behind him. Suddenly he felt a tremendous shock as a bullet smacked him in the left side of his chest. He started to go down, but Lily grasped the reins with both hands and held him erect between her arms. A moment more and they were over the rise into the relative safety of the back side of the hill.

It was already dusk; and the escaping woman knew that darkness would enshroud them if she could just hold out for a few more minutes. She gave Buck his head, and the faithful beast literally flew over the prairie, putting more and more precious distance between her captors and freedom. Within half an hour it was dark enough that she knew they would be safe until morning. She slowed the horse to a steady walk and settled in for an all-night ride.

When Buck crossed a stream, Lily drew up in the trees and helped the wounded prospector dismount. She lit a fire and put water on to boil while he reloaded his gun. When Bill was ready she pulled his shirt up for a look at his wound. To their relief, the bullet had plowed a five-inch long groove along his rib cage, glancing off a rib without entering the man's chest cavity. The wound had bled a lot because they had not been able to stop and dress it, but it was not nearly as serious as it could have been. Lily boiled a long hair from Bucks tail and sewed it up by firelight, so it would heal faster.

When the moon came out, the couple remounted and rode down the stream in the water for several hours. When they came to the third tributary they turned up it and rode against its current the rest of the night. As they rode, Lily remarked that it was amazing that she had seen Bill and Buck on the horizon in that instant when they first popped over the top of the rise. "It was because a repentant believer in Christ had been praying for you for three solid days," he told her. He felt her arms tighten around his waist possessively when she understood what he meant.

By dawn Buck was totally exhausted. The fleeing pair had little choice but to hole up in some cottonwood trees and wait for him to recover. Bill took the first watch, and Lily took over about noon. By nightfall, they felt that they were safe from the murderous savages that had massacred Nazareth.

As they sat by a small fire that night, Bill blurted out, "Mountain Lily, will you marry me?"

"I will, Bill Dawkins" she answered. "Adam got his bride from a wound in His side when God made Eve from one of his ribs. Christ got His bride from a wound in His side by

allowing Himself to be crucified for His church. Now you've got a wound in your side from rescuing me. I want nothing more than to be your wife."

One evening nearly a week later the Christian lovers showed up at the minister's house in Cheyenne. "Sir," Bill addressed him, "Lily and I have been through a lot together, especially in the last two weeks. By the grace of God we have survived almost insurmountable odds. You've got to marry us tonight, because I can't wait another minute to have her as my bride."

A few hours later they were snuggled up on a deer skin ground cover under a single blanket beneath the brightest stars that Wyoming prairie had ever seen.