

AT MARYMERE RANCH

The Story of a Railroad Deal and a Love Affair.

By Richard Sargent.

"Percy Hyatt, by all that's great!" Hyatt slid stiffly from the back of his jaded bronco, and grasped the hand extended by the superintendent of Marymere ranch.

Dunlap turned his guest's horse over to one of the cowboys, and drew Hyatt into the great square room which served as an office for the superintendent and lounging room for the guests who came in search of the game for which Marymere was famous.

The two men grinned at each other silently for a few seconds, then shook hands again.

"Three years, Hyatt! I'd about made up my mind, by Jove, you were never coming back, and you drop in without a word of warning! A nice note if I'd been out on the range!"

"Oh, but I knew you wouldn't—under the circumstances—"

Hyatt paused awkwardly. His face flushed, and he saw with relief that Dunlap had not noticed the slip. The latter was tossing various articles of raiment out of the most comfortable chair to offer it to his friend.

"The matter would have a fit if she knew you were here. I sent her word to Cheyenne for a week or two. Fact is, it was Dunlap's turn to pause and look embarrassed. 'I say, old man, I'm jolly glad to see you, but I'd give a bunch of yearlings if you weren't a newspaper man!'"

"The leopard cannot change his spots, even to oblige his friends. Are newspaper men under the ban at Marymere?" A note of anxiety underlay the banter in Hyatt's voice.

Dunlap stretched his long legs and stared down at his friend.

"To tell the truth, just now—yes, Robert G. Shaw, president of the L. & G. is coming down here for a shoot, and a newspaper man is about the last person he'll want to see. Fact is, he's running away from you fellows!"

Hyatt's eyes narrowed to a mere slit. He was not sure which card to play.

"Robert, Shaw, oh, yes, he's the fellow that's trying to engineer the consolidation between the L. & G. and the D. & F. Great scheme! Would give him direct communication between New York and Puget Sound. Close-mouthed chap. We had a man on his trail last week in Chicago but didn't get a thing. What brings him to Marymere?"

"I told you game recreation and freedom from just such fellows as you."

"Thanks awfully! But there's no need of his knowing me as a newspaper man off on a much-needed vacation. Can't I join the ranks of your riders?"

Dunlap studied the little almost delicate physique of the Chicago man, and shook his head.

"You don't fill the part."

"Well, say, I'm not going to run away from a moosey railroad president after coming a thousand miles to see the only man worth such a journey. I'll turn in and act as your secretary." Hyatt glanced at Dunlap's disorderly desk and laughed. "I think you need one."

"That's the very thing. Personally I don't give a rap about Shaw, but I'd hate to have him think that a newspaper man was here spying on his movements. You make yourself comfortable and I'll have Pete fix up an extra bunk in my room. Shaw's party will need three rooms, and you know this is no palace."

The hospitable Dunlap hurried off. Hyatt absently picked up the tongs and turned the log which blazed year in and year out at Marymere. The newspaper man felt uncomfortable. He had not been in the business long enough to sacrifice friendship to the juggernaut of journalistic enterprise.

"Spying on his movements!" Hyatt realized his true position.

His friendship with Dunlap was responsible for his having been sent out by the managing editor of the Globe to follow President Shaw. The managing editor had told him it was the chance of his life. He was to watch every letter, every message, received by the railroad operator, and the arrival of any other capitalists on the scene would be the signal for a sensational story.

No man was attracting more general attention in the railroad world at this moment than Robert G. Shaw. Reporters from other papers would follow him, but they could get no further than the railroad terminus, Jackson's Hole, while a friendship founded and cemented in college days was the open sesame of Percy Hyatt and the Globe to Marymere ranch. It might mean a gigantic scoop for the Globe, and yet—no thorough-going reporter should flinch before the prospect of a broken friendship. Hyatt rose abruptly and sought consolation in his pipe.

The next afternoon President Shaw's party arrived by a stage from Jackson's Hole. Hyatt was at Dunlap's side to receive them.

His keen reportorial instinct summed up the two men at a single glance. Shaw was a Westerner, country bred, of moderate height, with square shoulders, a clean shaven face, save for a stubby mustache, a mouth rather large but firm, keen, alert eyes and a high forehead—a man who would unconcernedly wear a high hat with a sack suit, and drive his guests about Denver in a hired victoria, with an unverified coachman. Such was the railroad manipulator, who had given Eastern capitalists such a severe shock.

Ford, his secretary, was a dapper little fellow, well groomed and immaculately dressed—a man who would place beyond his religious views the custom of cold bathing and ten minutes' exercise with dumb bells and clubs. He looked forty-five, but probably was nearer fifty. Keen, alert, like his employer, he appeared the ideal secretary for a man of affairs.

But Hyatt, looking past the men to the girl who was gracefully acknowledging Dunlap's rather heavy greeting, forgot railroads and their presidents, newspapers and their assignments. He saw only a slender, youthful figure, clad in a smart gray traveling gown; a small, oval face, with deep, wistful brown eyes; hair almost red gold, topped by a coquettish mountain hat. Trim and neat, self-possessed and gracious, she formed a striking contrast to her slovenly, brusque parent.

"The devil!" groaned Dunlap when he had a moment alone with his secretary. "If I'd known the girl was coming I'd never let the mater go to Cheyenne."

Hyatt's eyes were twinkling.

"She doesn't seem the least embarrassed. I don't believe she's the sort of girl who needs a chaperon."

"I guess you're right. She will be worth her millions some day, to say nothing of having been abroad two seasons and being up in all the fads of the day. As for us fellows, we'll be dust under her feet, that's all."

But in spite of Dunlap's uncompromising prophecy, Miss Anita Shaw seemed to take more than passing notice of the "dust under her feet." She fraternized cordially with every one about the ranch, from the superintendent himself to Ah Lung, who washed for the gang, and did general chores.

Dunlap marveled at her adaptability but, being engaged to a sweet little girl in Cheyenne, he wisely refrained from extending even his fingertips toward the fire. After selecting the safest horse on the ranch for Miss Shaw to ride and ordering Ah Lung to keep her room immaculate on penalty of death and burial on these heathen shores, he left the task of entertainment to Hyatt.

The newspaper man accepted this added burden to his nominal duties as secretary with praise-worthy complacency. While Shaw and his secretary Ford went on long tramps after big game and the wily trout, Hyatt initiated Miss Shaw into the mysteries of the rough mountain life: the wild trails up mountain sides, the intricacies of fly fishing and the whole hearted existence of the cowboys.

Shaw had evidently lost interest in railroad amalgamations. Hyatt noted his indifference to business affairs with a great and holy joy. The burden of guilt rolled from his mind. He was at peace with the world.

There was absolutely nothing to write to the Globe, and little he cared that the managing editor was fuming over the lack of news from Marymere.

Life gradually took on a rose-colored hue more suggestive of the Italy of which Miss Anita Shaw loved to talk and dream than of the rough Western ranch among towering peaks and icy streams, where these two young people had blindly walked into a love story of their own. Two weeks of constant and unconventional comradeship had done their work, and there came a night when Hyatt and Miss Shaw, sitting alone in the angle of Marymere's broad porch, turned strangely silent.

The nights at Marymere are always chilly and Anita, swathed in rich fur cape, looked unusually delicate and girlish as the moon light fell upon her motionless figure. Hyatt had been smoking steadily as he gazed at the lake. Suddenly he tossed his cigar like a tiny rocket, toward the lapping waters, and swung round to face the girl.

Ford, Shaw Dunlap and one of the men were playing poker in the office. Anita, made a desperate effort to break the pregnant silence.

"Did you hear about Mr. Ford's telegram?"

"No; anything important?" replied Hyatt, wishing the untimely and unpropitious topic of conversation was at the bottom of the lake.

"Yes, rather. It means we can start for home to-morrow." Hyatt's throat turned dry. His lips set more firmly. "Everything is settled," she continued.

Hyatt suddenly felt as if everything had been hurled into chaos. The significance of her last words was lost upon him. He could think of but one thing. To-morrow "they" were going home.

When should he see her again? The distance between Denver and Chicago was bad enough, but the chasm which yawned between their stations, socially and financially, was even greater.

What Dunlap had said about her prospective millions rang in his ears. And yet her father might fail, and then—

Hyatt rose nervously and strove to shake off the temptation, but the girl raised her eyes to his, and he threw discretion to the winds. The words of love rushed to his lips and went straight to the heart of Anita.

He had meant to say many things—to make clear his utter unworthiness, the barrier of wealth, of social standing which stood between them—but, the tender face of the girl, so temptingly close to his own, the light in her eyes, the naive embrace of her slender figure to his embrace, drove all such thoughts from his mind.

There remained but one fact. She loved him.

They crossed to the rough hewn railing. His arm was still about her, his hand held hers, and her voice fell softly on his ear.

"I have never cared for Denver, and I almost believe I could be happier

here with you than in any big city." Hyatt moved uneasily. She was bringing him back to stern realities. She thought he belonged here—was a part of this broad, primeval life.

"But we may have to go to New York now. You see, everything is settled." Hyatt started at the reiteration.

"What is settled, dearest?"

"The deal with the D. & F. You see, Mr. Ford is not really papa's secretary. He is H. J. Fordham, president of the D. & F." Hyatt gasped. "Yes, isn't it funny? He traveled out here incog, so he and papa could discuss the consolidation in peace and quiet. It has worked like a charm. Everything's straight ended out. Oh, it's been a great two weeks for dear old daddy!"

A great light entered Hyatt's mind. He had been blind for two long weeks, but the reportorial instinct was alive within him now.

"The scoop" for which he had been sent to Marymere was within his grasp, yet he dared not close his hand upon it. Something held him back—the light of a woman's eyes, the love of a woman's pure soul.

If he failed to telegraph the great news to the Globe, he would break faith with his employer. If he did send it, he would betray the woman who had just promised to be his wife. Restlessly he paced the porch.

His face no longer bore the sign of love's triumph, but gleamed white and set in the cold moonlight. The reporter and the lover were having it out between them.

Mentally, he figured on the time necessary to reach Jackson's Hole, the chances of outwitting the few reporters who still hung round the railroad terminus. Then he turned and saw the girl's wondering face as she leaned a throne unsteadily against the railing.

Once more he drew her to his breast. "Anita," he whispered, unconsciously adopting the diminutive her father used. "I cannot go to your father until I've told you the truth about myself. I'm not a secretary either, but a cad, an impostor. I am a reporter on the Chicago Globe, sent out here to follow your father's every move."

Anita shivered slightly and would have drawn away from him, but he clasped her closer.

"No, I've never sent a line to the paper, and I never will. There are other reporters down at the Hole, but every last one of them may scoop me, and then I'll send in my resignation to the Globe. Perhaps you don't understand what that means for us. I'll be voted a wretched newspaper man. I had high hopes in that direction. Can you war until I've made a start at something else?"

What Anita said was drowned in a chuckle which sounded at Hyatt's elbow. The two young people started apart guiltily. Engrossed in their own happiness, they had not observed that the poker party had broken up. Mr. Shaw, cigar in hand, stood watching them, the amused look on his face gradually changing to something more serious, almost tender.

"I hate to spoil your heroes, Hyatt, but there's really no necessity for further secrecy. There is no stock gambling back of this deal, and the only question is, will you take the forty mile ride to Ringer's Gulch, and wire your paper from there? If you do you can scoop every one of those chaps lounging round Jackson's Hole."

"Will I?" echoed Hyatt. His voice quivered with excitement. He could hardly wait to saddle a horse. Shaw laid a friendly hand on the young man's arm.

"Wait a moment, my lad. I think you owe me another explanation before you leave us."

Hyatt turned and took Anita's hand in his.

"I hope you won't think us hasty or foolish, Mr. Shaw. We've known each other such a short time, but this secluded corner is different from the big outside world."

"Yes, the air is more rare," dryly interrupted Mr. Shaw. "It sometimes goes to people's heads."

"I know it was a tremendously cheeky thing for me to do, but I'm young yet, and with such a start as this, and Anita's love, I'm sure to rise."

Shaw's hand shook a trifle as he fecked the ashes from his cigar.

"Anita has her father well trained, you see, and I don't mind saying, after your manly confession regarding the consolidation, that I'm more than satisfied to let my little girl have her own way. And now that I've lost Ford as my secretary—there was a kindly twinkle in the railroad operator's eyes—"I need a new one. If I give you the job, perhaps we can manage to keep further information of importance in the family. At least, I'll feel safer than with you on the Globe."

"One thing more, Mr. Shaw: my friend Dunlap knew nothing of my mission here. He's square and above board always."

Mr. Shaw nodded his head and lighted a fresh cigar. Ten minutes later, father and daughter stood arm in arm, watching Hyatt riding away in the moonlight toward Ringer's Gulch.

The president of the new consolidated line from New York to Puget Sound seemed lost in thought. Suddenly he bent over and kissed his daughter.

"Square and above board! That fits the lad himself, only he doesn't seem to realize it. Anita, my girl, I'm glad we came to Marymere."

An English sailor was watching a Chinaman who was placing a dish of rice by a grave. "When do you expect your friend to come out and eat that?" the sailor asked.

"Same time as your friend come out to smell flowers you fellow put," retorted the Chinaman.

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