



***EDWARD
WILLETT***

***SILVERSPUR; OR,
THE MOUNTAIN
HEROINE: A TALE
OF THE ARAPAHO
COUNTRY***

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Silverspur; or, The Mountain Heroine: A Tale of the Arapaho Country

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I. MOUNTAIN MEN.

CHAPTER II. A FOOT RACE.

CHAPTER III. THE GIRL WARRIOR.

CHAPTER IV. THE PROPHET'S CHILD

CHAPTER V. THE SNAKE.

CHAPTER VI. CONFESSION UNDER TORTURE.

CHAPTER VII. OLD BLAZE IN A TIGHT PLACE.

CHAPTER VIII. A LOVER'S MEETING.

CHAPTER IX. DOVE-EYE DENOUNCED.

CHAPTER X. THE FALSE PROPHET.

CHAPTER XI. NOT UNWHIPT OF JUSTICE.

CHAPTER XII. "THE GOVERNOR."

CHAPTER XIII. KATE ROBINETTE.

CHAPTER XIV. DIFFICULT NEGOTIATIONS.

CHAPTER XV. KNIFE TO KNIFE.

CHAPTER XVI. CONCLUSION.

CHAPTER I. MOUNTAIN MEN.

Table of Contents

In a saloon adjoining the St. Louis theater (the city at that time could boast of but one theater) were collected half a dozen men, middle-aged and young. It was evident, even to a casual observer, that they were bound together by ties of friendship, or of interest, or of common pursuit; for they formed a knot by themselves, associating with no others, and their appearance was quite different from that of other frequenters of the saloon. Their dress was fine—not gaudy, but costly—and they wore their broadcloth with the air of men who had been born to it. Their manners were gentlemanly, if not refined, characterized by the frankness and high-toned independence that ought to distinguish the American citizen. Their tastes, also, were of a costly and luxurious nature. Disdaining the low-priced whisky and the fiery brandy that was chiefly dealt out at the saloon, they lavished their gold pieces upon the choicest wines, as freely as if they had owned mines of the precious metals. They were talking, when they entered the saloon, of the theater which they had just left; but their tone changed after a while, and the conversation was of mountains and plains, of Indians and buffalo, of wild scenes and daring exploits. They spoke of these subjects, so strange and wonderful to the uninitiated, as if they were matters of every-day occurrence, laughing and joking the most over the worst perils and the greatest hardships.

These men were objects of interest to a person who made his appearance in the saloon shortly after they entered it—a man past the middle age, grotesque, uncouth, and strangely out of place in those surroundings.

Although his features were peculiar enough, his dress was chiefly calculated to attract attention in a civilized community. His principal garment was a hunting-shirt of dressed deerskin, embroidered in the Indian fashion, and ornamented with a fringe of green worsted. A heavy cape was attached to this garment, and it was tied at the waist with a red worsted sash. The breast was open sufficiently to give a view of a red flannel shirt. Under the principal garment were leggings of deerskin, heavily fringed below the knee, until they were joined by a pair of moccasins. A cap made of the skin of the gray fox, with the tail prominent behind, and a silver medal set in the front, completed the attire of this strange personage.

His face and form were also peculiar. From under his cap fell straggling locks of black hair, thickly touched with gray. Beneath bushy eyebrows were set a pair of keen, sparkling and restless eyes. His nose, large, prominent, and shaped like the beak of the eagle, had been by some means turned awry, and its end pointed unmistakably toward the left side of his face. His mouth was large, but pleasant in expression, and his right cheek was remarkable for a purplish spot that covered the region about the cheek-bone. None of his other features were visible, being hidden by a heavy beard, of black mixed with gray, that flowed in a tangled mass to his breast. As to shape, he was a little above the medium height, with very broad shoulders and breast and thence tapering

down to his feet, which were big and broad enough to support the structure above them.

His left hand carried a long and heavy rifle, ancient and battered, worn by time and hard service. A knife with a buckhorn handle was stuck in a leather sheath in his sash, and his powder-horn and bullet-pouch hung at his side.

After watching the group of well-dressed men for a while, he stepped up to them.

"I heern tell that ye are mounting men, strangers," he said, "though I'm durned ef ye look a bit like it."

"You are not far wrong, my friend," replied a heavy set man, with a jovial countenance; who seemed to be the chief personage in the group. "We are generally called mountain men, though most of us belong to the plains, rather than the mountains."

"Ye're all fixed up so mighty fine, that I had my doubts, and I felt kinder skeery of ye; but I allowed I mought make bold to ax about suthin' I'm on the hunt of down hyar. Hope thar's no harm done."

"None to us, my friend. We are always glad to meet a mountain man in the settlements. Won't you take something to loosen your tongue?"

"Don't mind ef I do, cap., bein' it's you."

"Thunderation!" exclaimed the mountaineer, as the effervescent champagne bubbled out into a goblet before him. "Hev ye got a b'ilin' spring down hyar in St. Louis?"

"Drink it quick, my friend, before it dies."

"Wal, ef I must eat it alive, hyar's to ye!"

"Don't you like it?" was asked, as he sat down the glass, with a wry face.

“Cain’t say that I really love the taste of it. It’s most too sweetish to suit this child, and I’m afeard the crittur is never gwine to quit kickin’.”

“Peter, give the old man some brandy, or any thing he may choose to call for. You said, my friend, that you wished to ask us about something that you are on the hunt of. We will be glad to help you.”

“I allowed, bein’s ye’re mounting men, ye mought p’raps know suthin’ of a young chap named Fred Wilder.”

A young man in the group gave a slight start, and laid his hand on the shoulder of the gentleman who was about to reply.

“There are several men of that name in the city,” he said. “Did the person you speak of ever pass by any other name?”

“The Injuns called him Silverspur, and he was ginerally called by that name in the mountings; but I allow he wouldn’t wear it down hyar in the settlements. Thar’s me, now; I’ve been called Old Blaze so long, and nothin’ else, that I ain’t raally sure whether I’ve got any other name.”

“What sort of a man was he?”

“Wal, as fur looks, he was what is called a good-lookin’ man, though I never took on much about his good looks, or thought they war any thin’ to brag on. He was about your hight, and with jist such eyes, and nose and mouth the same to a dot. Durned ef you don’t look a heap like him.”

“Thank you for the compliment.”

“But looks don’t count in a skrimmage, and they ain’t worth talkin’ about. Thar’s whar Silverspur did count, and he was as good a man in a tight place, fur his inches, as I ever

sot eyes onto. Ye mought bet yer pile that he'd never ran away from a fight, or go back on a friend. He was the right kind of a man, and old Jule knows it."

The hunter slapped his rifle with his hand, to give emphasis to this assertion.

"Perhaps," suggested one of the gentlemen, "this Wilder is the same man who was hung last week, for horse-stealing."

"Ye're wrong thar, stranger," said the hunter, as his eyes flashed wickedly. "I won't say but ye may hev sech a notion; but I hope ye won't speak it out ag'in afore me. Silverspur warn't the kind of a man to git picked up as a hoss-thief."

"He is mistaken, my friend," said the young man. "I knew Silverspur; but he is dead."

"Dead! That chap! Dead!"

The hunter's rifle fell on the floor, with a crash that startled all in the room, and his countenance was expressive of the deepest sorrow, as he stared blankly at his informant.

"Ef Silverspur is dead, what's other folks livin' for? Seems that a man like him hain't no right to be took away. Thar's few enough like him, and old Jule knows it. Did he jest die, stranger, or mought suthin' hev happened to him?"

"He was killed—shot in an encounter—here in St Louis."

"Some sort of a skrimmage ye mean, I reckon. Is the man who did it a-livin'?"

"There were several men. It was not known which of them fired the shot."

"Will ye be so kind, stranger, as to put me on the trail of these men?"

"What would you do?"

“Foller it up, ontill the last one of ’em is wiped out. They’ll never shoot another man. Such a chap as Silverspur!”

“Come, Fred,” remarked one of the party; “don’t carry the joke too far.”

“You take it too hard, my friend,” said the young man, as the hunter’s eyes filled with tears. “I may have been mistaken. In fact, Silverspur is alive and well. Why, Old Blaze! don’t you know me?”

The hunter looked amazed. He seemed hardly to know whether to be angry or pleased; but gladness got the better of indignation, and his face fairly blazed with joy as he grasped the outstretched hand of the young man.

“The livin’ thunder!” he exclaimed. “Who would ever hev thought that ye could fool this child so easy! It’s plain enough now, though shavin’ and ha’r-trimmin’ and settlement fixin’s do make a powerful differ.”

“You will forgive me for my joke, I know, if you are really glad to see me.”

“Glad! That ain’t no word fur it boy. I’ve come all those many miles to see ye, and I reckon I ort to be glad to find ye, at the eend of such a long trail.”

“What is the news in the mountains?”

“Wal, things go on purty much in the old way; but thar’s suthin’ turned up that I ’lowed ye’d want to know about.”

“What is it?”

“That Injun gal. Hev ye forgot her a’ready?”

“Dove-eye? No indeed! You may laugh if you please, gentlemen; but this is a matter in which I am deeply interested.”

“An affair of the heart,” remarked one of the party. “I was spoony about a red-skin girl myself, when I was younger than I am now. We will leave you with Old Blaze, Fred. As he has come so far to see you, he must have something of importance to communicate.”

The traders left the saloon, and Fred Wilder, leading the hunter to a seat, asked him concerning the news that he had brought.

“It’s all about that Injun gal, I tell ye,” replied Old Blaze. “It was White Shield who sent me—that Blackfoot friend of yours.”

“Where is White Shield, and how is he? I would be right glad to see him.”

“Ye’ll never see him ag’in, in this world. That Injun’s dead.”

“You are not following my example, I hope, and trying to fool me.”

“Not a bit of it. The Blackfeet got him. They were powerful mad because he quit the tribe and ran off with you and old Robinette’s gal, and they were bound to kill him when they caught him. I happened to be on good terms with the riptyles jest then, and I saw White Shield afore he died. He told me about the Injun gal, and made me give him my solemn promise that I would hunt you out and let you know.”

“How did they kill him?”

“Jest knocked him in the head, and left him to the buzzards.”

“Poor fellow! It would have been better for him if he had never seen me. His friendship was fatal to him. What did he

say about Dove-eye?"

"Yes, that is the gal's name, ef it ain't wrong to call a warrior a gal. Thar's precious little of the dove about her now, 'cordin' to what White Shield said. He was among the Crows, when they had a skrimmage with the 'Rapahoes, and he said that Dove-eye was about the wildest warrior the Crows had ag'inst them. Since she took to the war-paint, he said, the 'Rapahoes seemed to hev abundance of bad feelin' toward the Crows, and fou't 'em as ef they wanted to rub out the tribe."

"I thought she was dead. I sought her so long, without finding even a trace of her, that I could only suppose her to be dead. As she is living, I must seek her again. I must go to the West. White Shield never lied."

"I reckon you will soon see her, cap., ef you will stay with the Crows a while. It won't be long afore you will hev a chance to knock her in the head or take her prisoner, ef she don't git ahead of you in the fightin' business."

"Come to my lodge, Blaze, and stay with me while you are in town. In two days I can get ready, and then we will start for the mountains, if you are willing."

"Willin' and glad enough. I'm tired of this hyar settlement a'ready."



CHAPTER II. A FOOT RACE.

[Table of Contents](#)

Near the head of the Platte, more than a hundred miles beyond Fort Laramie, had encamped, one midsummer night, a party of hunters and trappers, among whom were Fred Wilder and Old Blaze.

The party numbered only a dozen men, and as their force was so small, they had taken special care to guard against attack or accident. Notwithstanding their precautions, they discovered, in the morning, that four of their best horses were missing, and a council was held to consider the matter.

As there were no signs of Indians to be seen, they came to the conclusion that the animals had got loose, and had taken the back track on the trail by which the party had come. As most of the men were in a hurry to reach their destination, they proposed to push forward without regarding the loss; but Wilder, to whom three of the horses belonged, was loth to lose them, and he declared that he would go in search of them, if he had to go alone. Old Blaze declared that he should not go alone, and volunteered to accompany him. It was settled, therefore, that the two men should go in search of the animals, and should join the others at the Devil's Gap, at which point they proposed to stop for a while.

Silverspur and Old Blaze set out in one direction, while their companions went in another. They followed the trail back to their last encampment, where they saw signs of the missing animals, but discovered that they had gone on

without stopping. As it was useless to pursue them any further on foot, the two men encamped for the night among the trees that lined the banks of a creek.

In the morning they started to rejoin their comrades, and an accident befell them at the outset of the journey. Silverspur shot a deer before they proceeded far, and the animal fell to the ground, mortally wounded. Old Blaze, drawing his knife, ran to finish the deer, but stumbled and fell as he was running. As bad luck would have it, he fell upon his knife, which entered his thigh, making a deep and painful wound.

The gash was bound up immediately, and the hunter, after resting a little while, was able to walk, though his progress was slow and difficult.

Soon after this second start, Silverspur, happening to look around, discovered a large body of Indians, less than a quarter of a mile in their rear.

“What shall we do now?” he asked, as he pointed them out to his companion.

“What you kin do is plain enough,” replied Blaze. “Yer legs are good, and you kin git away. As fur me, I can’t run, and will hev to take my chances.”

“Do you think I would leave you? You know me better than that, old man. I think we can both save ourselves. The Indians have seen us, no doubt, but have not found us out. They probably mistake us for some of their own people, as they are in no hurry to get to us. If you will pull up a little, until we get to the creek yonder, you can hide under the bank. The Indians will follow me, and you can get clear when they have gone by.”

“Are you right sure, boy, that your legs are good?” asked the hunter, looking hard at his companion.

“I can trust them, and you need have no fear for me. The Indians are afoot, as you see, and I am sure that no runner among them can catch me before I reach the Devil’s Gap.”

“All right, then. Yer legs will hev to save yer own skelp and mine.”

“Come on. I belive they are getting suspicions of us.”

Old Blaze quickened his pace, and they soon reached the creek, where he concealed himself in the dense foliage under the bank.

Silverspur crossed the creek, and gained an elevation beyond it, from which he looked back at the Indians. They had become suspicious of the strangers, and runners from the main body were hastening toward the creek. As he started to run, the advanced Indians gave a yell, and pushed forward in pursuit.

The young man had not reckoned without his host, when he said that he could trust his legs. It was not their length that he confided in, but their activity and endurance. More than once they had served him well in grievous peril, and he had no doubt that they would carry him safely to his friends.

He halted but once—to see that the Indians did not stop at the creek to search for Old Blaze—before he had run a good two-mile stretch, and had put a considerable distance between himself and his pursuers. After that, he stopped whenever he found himself on a hill, to see whether they were gaining on him, half hoping that they might abandon the race. The hope was a vain one, as he well knew that