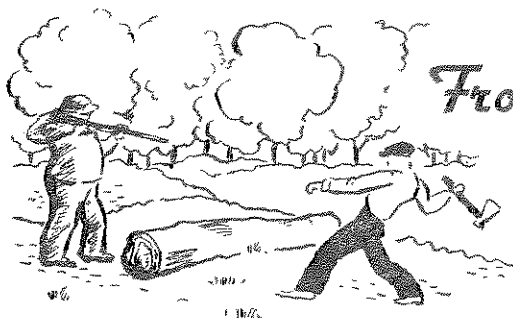


May, 1945



Frontier Incident

Gösta Larsson

Author of "Our Daily Bread,"
"Ordeal of the Falcon," etc.

DAN squinted his eyes against the sun. Good land, this, and not claimed. Not a soul to be seen! . . .

"Whoa!" He pulled in his team, and the creaking prairie schooner came to a stop. Wiping the sweat from his creased brow he sat looking silently about him, nodding approval as his gaze swept from the blue waters of the distant creek, across the level grass land, to the edge of the shadowy forest.

"A likely spot—what ye think?" he grunted, with a glance back at his wife, who had pushed her head out between the flaps of the wagon hood. A couple of children, too, were eagerly trying to get a look.

"Yes," the woman said, her voice denoting her surprise at this fair scene. "Maybe we won't have to go any further on. Could settle right here, perhaps."

Dan's answer was another grunt. He watched the creek that came in like a narrow finger of the sea, with rich green grass on the banks. Fine cattle feed. And there ought to be fish to catch.

"Still can't understand how come we're the first here," he said. "Seems as good a place as ye could ever wish for."

"The others went further south. We had luck."

Dan eased himself down on the ground. The woman, too, and the children scrambled out of the wagon, stretching their legs and looking around. "Oh, Pa, see what I found!" One of the girls, a six-year old, picked a large white shell from the ground. Dan took it from her and examined it thoughtfully. "Oyster," he muttered, with a glance at the far-off creek. The shell was withered and sun-bleached as though it had been

GÖSTA LARSSON, brilliant Swedish-American author, has led a life full of exciting and adventurous episodes. He fought for his life on a burning ship in the South Seas, again in turbulent Arab quarters in Capetown, and narrowly escaped death on a sinking freighter in the North Atlantic. Born of a poor artisan's family in Sweden, Larsson left school at 11. At 18 he was awarded the Cedergran Scholarship for the study of engineering. After graduating, he worked as a bridge designer in South Africa. His "Daily Bread," "Fatherland Farewell," "Ordeal of the Falcon" and "Revolt In Arcadia" have won international acclaim.

lying there for a good many years. "Odd," said Dan. "I'd never have believed the water ever reached as far up as this."

He handed the shell back to the girl and took an axe from the wagon. The sharp edge flashed in the sun. "You stay here," he said. "I'll walk over to that wood. Maybe I'll mark a couple of trees, and we can stay here."

"Would be a nice sheltered place for a house," said his wife, gazing at the wood.

He nodded. "Timber and all. Well . . . I'll have a look around first. Got to look around in there."

"I'll fix a bite while you're gone."

"Good." He shouldered the axe and walked slowly across the level grass, scanning the ground as if appraising the soil underneath, dreaming perhaps of black furrows to be plowed, seeing with his mind's eye a field of golden grain in the summer sunshine.

There! . . . Something white in the grass. Another withered shell. And again it seemed odd to him that an oyster shell should be lying here, for as far as his experienced eye could judge, the sea had never reached this far inland. The nature of the grass was proof of that.

He walked on, strolling with an easy pace toward the somber wood. Yes, he liked this spot. Rich soil and fine pasture grounds. And fish in the creek. He hastened his steps, for suddenly it all seemed too good to him. He had expected to travel west another month, perhaps more. This was a great stroke of luck, and he was anx-

ious to cut a mark in one of those trees over there, thus establishing his right to the site—his right as first-comer. A stroke of the axe, and this land belonged to him.

On the edge of the wood he stopped and turned around, glancing back at the wagon in the summer sun. A wind from the distant sea rippled the grass. The children were laughing and romping about.

Otherwise not a sound. The forest was silent and dark. . . . Then he heard a slight noise. He listened attentively. But nothing more was heard. Some animal, he thought. Some game. So much the better. He'd go hunting as soon as these preliminaries were attended to.

He stepped further in among the trees. But here the wood was too dense, and the trunks too thick; he wanted to find a natural clearing. He climbed over a fallen tree trunk, rotted and dry from having lain here many a year. A hundred yards ahead the sunlight filtered down through the foliage. There was the clearing he was looking for. A few trees felled, and he could build. And the house would be sheltered from winter storms.

Might as well make up his mind on this spot, he thought. He'd mark one of these trees right now. Then, whoever might come, he'd be safe. And all his life he would remember this day as a day of great luck.

Swinging his sharp axe he cut a wedge-shaped mark in the nearest tree. Then he walked a little further on and notched another trunk. There—it was done! Resting on the axe he

felt at peace with himself. This land was his now.

And as he stood there, dreaming of years to come, right in front of him he saw another one of those shells. And a few yards away a patch of ground was white with them.

He was still puzzling over his find when the creaking of dry twigs caused him quickly to raise his head. He saw another man coming toward him, shotgun in hand, and eyeing him belligerently.

The man came nearer, cautiously. He held his gun in readiness. His narrowed eyes were fixed on Dan. Dan returned the stare.

"What ye doin' here?" the man asked, his tone tense and hostile.

Dan said nothing. But his grip tightened around the shaft of his axe.

Glancing between the tree trunks, the man with the shotgun saw Dan's wagon there, off across the grass. He shifted his eyes back to Dan, and they had a fierce look. "Ye better move on out of here," he snapped. "This place belongs to me."

"Belongs to me," said Dan. "It's mine."

They stared at each other; the man was breathing hard. "What ye mean?" he said. "I was here first. Drove in around the hill back there."

"Maybe ye did," said Dan. "I don't know. But I've cut my mark in them trees, and I'm goin' to hold on to what's mine. I was here before you."

"You're a liar," said the man angrily.

"Don't call me a liar," Dan retort-

ed, taking a step forward, his fingers tightening around the axe shaft. "I'm here, an' I mean to stay here."

"The hell ye are. It's me that's goin' to stay."

"Seems we both are goin' to stay," said Dan, sarcastically. "Don't be a fool—put away that gun if ye know what's good for ye."

Hatred flashed in the other's eye. His finger pressed the trigger. A shot rang out in the stillness of the wood. A frightened bird flitted, screaming, off among the foliage.

Dan stood straight and taut for a brief moment, sucking in his breath through clenched teeth. But before he fell he summoned his strength and swung the axe. His adversary tried to dodge the blow, but in his excitement he stumbled over a fallen branch, and the axe struck him at the base of his neck.

THERE WAS no sound except the flutter of wings overhead. A beam of sunlight cut down among the trees and flashed on the white shells that littered the ground. They were red with blood now. Dan had wondered about those shells a few minutes ago, not knowing what silent language they spoke. For lying there on the ground, sun-bleached and withered after centuries of weather and wind, they were eloquent of the age when these were the hunting grounds of the Indian. Dan had claimed he was here before the other man, and the man with the gun had claimed he was here first. But the shells proved that the Indians were here before either of them.

Long, long ago, before white men came and killed one another and slaughtered the natives for private possession of the land—long ago the Indians built their wigwams here and hunted in the forest. The red men took oysters from the salt-water creek and carried them inland, feasting on them, then throwing the shells on the ground. And the shells remained there centuries after the tribes vanished.

"This place is mine," Dan had said. And the other man had claimed the land belonged to him. But if they had listened to the withered shells they would have learned a secret—the secret of the age-old land. The earth belongs to no one. For the land is but a loan to each passing generation. We

are here now, and shall soon pass—as the Indian passed, and as the Legendary Race came and passed before the appearance of the Indian. We are but wanderers, doomed to leave this world as bare of possessions as we came.

"It's mine," Dan said.

"It belongs to me," said the other man.

But they had spoken with the ignorance that breeds passion, sorrow and death. The shells carried the message that neither to the one nor to the other does the land belong. It is but a loan. And as a loan we must learn to receive it, for common use in our lifetime, for the welfare of all—and as an inheritance for those who will come after us.



Robot Cameraman on Night Shift

✧ An electronic control automatically synchronizes a new type shutter for aircraft cameras with the bursting of a flash bomb, thus enabling military observers to photograph, from high altitudes and at night, the destruction caused by their explosives.

After the desired exposure time has elapsed, the control closes the shutter. Simultaneously, the camera automatically rewinds the film and gets ready for another picture.

The brain of this robot control is a sensitive photoelectric cell that acts on the light impulse coming from the exploding bomb. When the flash is caught by the camera, the impulse is magnified and transformed into an electric current to which the shutter responds in less than 1/500 of a second. The control mechanism operates on three-billionths of a watt of energy—about equal to that involved when a human hair falls one-tenth of an inch through space.

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