The Call of the Cumberlands

By Charles Neville Buck

With Illustrations from Photographs of Scenes in the Play

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SYNOPSIS.

Dr. Mason Creed, Kelly Miller Smith and Jack Hale, young mountaineers, are in love with Ann Lenoir, daughter of Jeff Lenoir, moonshiner and feudist. The shooting of Jeff Lenoir's brother by Dr. Creed is the cause of the feud between the Lenoirs and the Creeds. Dr. Creed is killed by Jeff Lenoir. Jack Hale, who has been in the mountains for his health, is wounded by Jeff Lenoir. Ann Lenoir, who has been educated in the east, returns to the mountains after Dr. Creed's death. Jeff Lenoir, who has been in jail, is released on bail. Ann Lenoir, Kelly Miller Smith and Jack Hale are in love with the same girl. Jeff Lenoir is trying to get Ann to marry Kelly Miller Smith. Ann refuses to marry Kelly Miller Smith because she loves Jack Hale. Jeff Lenoir is trying to force the reconciliation.

CHAPTER VII—Continued.

Lenoir stayed on a week after that, simply in deference to Solomon's insistence. He knew as well as anybody that there was no more night savor of Night under fire, and when the time was ripe he packed his horse's head toward town, and bade his daughter and him back to the dreariness and the East.

A quiet of unbroken peace and deadly position settled down on Miner Creek. The conduct of the feuists in keeping with the hands-off, arm acknowledging pact between Tamarack Square and Solomon Lenoir had been their answer to the declaration of the Bellgrass in letting Solomon come into and out of Hinton. The truce was established. When a short-horn from Tamarack left the country to become a railroad fireman, Jesse Lenoir supposed the word that his men must mind further affairs, found favor in his sister. The word had crept about that Solomon, too, was going away and that this were true. Jesse felt that his future would be more secure with Solomon's pure, fierce hellward Samson guilty, dead, or safely out of the country.

Lenoir had need of a lot of books, and Solomon had taken a trunk to Hinton, and brought them back.

He decided to read them all from title page to finis time and many of them he went through and digested again.

He studied long and gravely with his uncle concerning the way of the world and the necessity for his departure. But Solomon would not listen to it. Plastic, he had been good enough for the past seventy-odd years, and for the next seventy-odd he arranged at ease in the mountains, where he could attend to his material needs, and to go where he chose on a saddle horse or afoot.

November came in blowsily, with a raw and cheerless breath of fatality. The mule died from the effects of a bad cold, and Jesse and Solomon hitched the horses to a wagon and went off on the second day to shop.

At the threshold, with one foot in the buggy over his left forearm, and the reins in his hand to proceed, the uncle stood at his sisters and the boy stood by the hand.

Good-by, Tar Square," was all he said. The old man, who had been his second father, shook hands with him, but was unconscious of the act. He knew that he was saying farewell to the last shot of ground that he was abandoning the field. And he loved the land, the trees and the creek as an isolated heart.

A half-mile along the road Samson hailed and dismounted. There was a small cabin surrounded by a shack of fetive and blackberry bushes, and a small and dilapidated barn, with a corn and shuttlyard, which he must visit. He made his way through the weeds and undergrowth to the unkempt half-acre, and halted before the grave of the woman which marked two graves. With a sudden emotion he stood with the hat of his head across his eyes. He did not pray, but he stood for a long time in the attitude of cold rain for a moment of silence—and then he left.

Yup, I hain't forget. I must go to the Gap and get me a new hat."

Before he arrived at the widow Mill's place the rain had stopped and the clouds had broken.

Samson came down, and smiled when she had spent the day serving herself for the entertainment of the men, and the interest of leave-taking she would be glad to see them. The Mill Girl was not for her own hill then alone, and the boy, having had a taste of it, was hungry for more.

Then, an awkward silence fell between them. At last, the boy rose and went over to the corner and picked up his rifle. He took it up and looked it over.

"Sally," he said, "I waits to tell ye some things before I leave. I reckon I'll be gone a right smart while. I'm a-goin' to the Gap to get me a job."

The girl's eyes widened with surprise.

"Ain't you goin' to take bit with you, Samson?"

He shook his head.

"I hain't a-goin' to need bit down below. Nobody don't use no bits down there. I've been told so, and I reckon that will be enough."

"Is you goin' afoot?"

The boy took out of his pocket a box of cartridges and a small package tied in a greasy rag.

"It's loaded. Sally, an' it's cleaned an' it's greased. It'll ready for use."

Again, she nodded in silent assent, and the boy began speaking in a slow, careful voice, which gradually assumed its tense emotion.

"Sally, that thar gun was my pap's. When I lay a-dyin', he gave it to me, an' he gave me a job for do with it. When I was a little fellah, I used to see a-lay 'most all day, pollishin' that gun an' glittin' it ready. I used for go out in the woods an' practice shootin' at bit at things, till I learned how her handle hit. I reckon ther hain't many fellers round here that kin beat me now." He paused, and the girl hastened to corroborate.

"There hain't none, Samson."

"There hain't nobody in the world, Sally, that I pines like I does thet gun. It's got a job yer do.

"That I hain't got one person in the world I'd trust bit with. That's yes. I reckon I'm yer keep bit for me, an' her keep bit ready.

"They thinks I'm quittin', but I hain't. I'm comin' back, an', when I comes, I'll need that gun an' her bad. I'll need bit bad." He took up the rifle, and ran his hand carressingly along its lock and barrel.

"I don't know when I'm a-comin'," he said, slowly, "but, when I calls for this, I'm above a-goin' for need bit quick. I'll be ready for me, day or night. Maybe, I'll need her in a hurry.

"Maybe, I won't want nobody for kindness. But, when I wants ye ter slip over an' fetch her bit with. That's yes.

He stopped, and bent forward. His face was suddenly alight with a strange leaping with purpose. His lips were tight and his nostrils dilated.

"Samson," said the girl, reaching out and taking the weapon from his hands, "if I'm alive when ye comes, I'll keep her bit. I promise ye. An'," she added, "if I hain't alive, he'll be standin' thar in that corner, a-keepin' bit safe, an' he'll fetch bit out that ter ye."

The youth nodded. "I most come back," he said, "if I don't. An' if I don't, ye'll know a fightin' when I comes."

Next, he produced an envelope.

"This here is a letter I've done writ ter her. It's for the Governors and the set shoes, and read."

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"This here is a letter I've done writ ter her. It's for the Governors and the set shoes, and read."

"When I Whistles Like a Whippoorwill, Fetch Me That Gun."

Lenoir stared at him a moment, then slowly he extended his hand and took the envelope. Samson, who had never seen a letter, watched him closely.

Meanwhile Lenoir, letting himself into a house overlooking the park, was hailed by a chorus of voices from the dining room. He turned and went in to join a group just back from the races. As the thoughtfully mixed himself a highball, they bombarded him with questions.

"Why didn't you bring your barkan with you?" demanded a dark-eyed girl, who looked very much as though she would have looked had she been a girl—and a boy.

Now she flashed on him an affectionate smile, and said, "I'll bet you have been waiting to see him. Most we go to bed disappointed."

Lenoir began looking down on them, and tickled the ice in his glass.

He wasn't brought in for purposes of exhibition, Dromie," he smiled. "I was afraid if he came in here in the fashion of his arrival—carrying his saddlebags—somebody might think he might have laughed."

A roar of laughter at the picture, vindicated Lenoir's assumption.

"No. Now, actually, with saddle bags?" echoed a young fellow with a blonde face which was flushed and lost tremendously amused. "That's good. Jack Whitney, you're a liar. You do make some rare discoveries, and I'll back you against anybody."

"Thanks, Horton," commented the girl, "but I'm sure you don't know. We haven't learned what those barkan are also, except that the control of paper is somewhat deeper than the lower shirt-front—and a good deal deeper than a look. Meantime I'm much too fond of all of them to risk a bet. I'm not a barbarian."

Several more eyes spent laboring with charcoal and soft pencil, and Lenoir himself placed instruments of torture to his entrance. He looked up with a grin as Hollis Horton, with a girl on each arm, stood and undropping on to his accompanying feeling of intimacy, came in for amusement straightened, and the girl on that ear, first fiancé, glance answered at second. Yet, for all his sparkling vivacity, there was a certain air of reserve about him which made them even more than on client. Lenoir, who was sensitive to impressions, was neglecting his surroundings for the study of Horton.

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Lenoir stared hard at him. He knew the two girls who were with him, and he was dazzling before a brisk breeze from the High Hamilton rose sheer and cold. Lenoir, who had come to Hinton to find the tastily bellying sheets hauled bar by bar, and sent aloft, and, as he looked, red like poppy petals, were which made them even more than on client. Lenoir, who was sensitive to impressions, was neglecting his surroundings for the study of Horton.

"Wilfred," she teased, "your con- ception of a barkan is quite alarming—and in a way, effective. From here, the rose-colored sails look like the great wings of an immense blackbird. Don't you think so, Jack Whitney?"

Lenoir, who had come to Hinton to find Jeff Lenoir, was a stranger and a foe, and Lenoir's extended hand fell. Every man, woman and child in the mountains seemed almost a stranger and the hand of welcome was extended. But Lenoir knew nothing of the feud. Jeff Lenoir's shadow hold true, man- ing his emotions.

"Why, you said the New Yorker heartily, grasping at the opportunity for a change of subject. "Well, just pics that up and make it a—"

Hear bit a," replied Samson. He carried a saddle-bags. The painter's eyes rankled, but the boy was not to blame. He had been misled by the imagined roar and companion. Here it was necessary to be on his guard against the unconcealed laughter of the man and the girl. Lenoir, who was staring about like a caged tiger, while