

Lin McLean

by

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How Lin Mclean Went East

In the old days, the happy days, when Wyoming was a Territory with a future instead of a State with a past, and the unfenced cattle grazed upon her ranges by prosperous thousands, young Lin McLean awaked early one morning in cow camp, and lay staring out of his blankets upon the world. He would be twenty-two this week. He was the youngest cow-puncher in camp. But because he could break wild horses, he was earning more dollars a month than any man there, except one. The cook was a more indispensable person. None save the cook was up, so far, this morning. Lin's brother punchers slept about him on the ground, some motionless, some shifting their prone heads to burrow deeper from the increasing day. The busy work of spring was over, that of the fall, or beef round-up, not yet come. It was mid-July, a lull for these hard-riding bachelors of the saddle, and many unspent dollars stood to Mr. McLean's credit on the ranch books.

"What's the matter with some variety?" muttered the boy in his blankets.

The long range of the mountains lifted clear in the air. They slanted from the purple folds and furrows of the pines that richly cloaked them, upward into rock and grassy bareness until they broke remotely into bright peaks, and filmed into the distant lavender of the north and the south. On their western side the streams ran into Snake or into Green River, and so at length met the Pacific. On this side, Wind River flowed forth from them, descending out of the Lake of the Painted Meadows. A mere trout-brook it was up there at the top of the divide, with easy riffles and stepping-stones in many places; but down here, outside the mountains, it was become a streaming avenue, a broadening course, impetuous between its two tall green walls of cottonwood-trees. And so it wound away like a vast green ribbon across the lilac-gray sage-brush and the yellow, vanishing plains.

"Variety, you bet!" young Lin repeated, aloud.

He unrolled himself from his bed, and brought from the garments that made his pillow a few toilet articles. He got on his long boy legs and limped blithely to the margin. In the mornings his slight lameness was always more visible. The camp was at Bull Lake Crossing, where the fork from Bull Lake joins Wind River. Here Lin found some convenient shingle-stones, with dark, deepish water against them, where he plunged his face and energetically washed, and came up with the short curly hair shining upon his round head. After enough looks at himself in the dark water, and having knotted a clean, jaunty handkerchief at his throat, he returned with his slight limp to camp, where they were just sitting at breakfast to the rear of the cook-shelf of the wagon.

"Bugged up to kill!" exclaimed one, perceiving Lin's careful dress.

"He sure has not shaved again?" another inquired, with concern.

"I ain't got my opera-glasses on," answered a third.

"He has spared that pansy-blossom mustache," said a fourth.

"My spring crop," remarked young Lin, rounding on this last one, "has juicier prospects than that rat-eaten catastrophe of last year's hay which wanders out of your face."

"Why, you'll soon be talking yourself into a regular man," said the other. But the camp laugh remained on the side of young Lin till breakfast was ended, when the ranch foreman rode into camp.

Him Lin McLean at once addressed. "I was wantin' to speak to you," said he.

The experienced foreman noticed the boy's holiday appearance. "I understand you're tired of work," he remarked.

"Who told you?" asked the bewildered Lin.

The foreman touched the boy's pretty handkerchief. "Well, I have a way of taking things in at a glance," said he. "That's why I'm foreman, I expect. So you've had enough work?"

"My system's full of it," replied Lin, grinning. As the foreman stood thinking, he added, "And I'd like my time."

Time, in the cattle idiom, meant back-pay up to date.

"It's good we're not busy," said the foreman.

"Meanin' I'd quit all the same?" inquired Lin, rapidly, flushing.

"No--not meaning any offence. Catch up your horse. I want to make the post before it gets hot."

The foreman had come down the river from the ranch at Meadow Creek, and the post, his goal, was Fort Washakie. All this part of the country formed the Shoshone Indian Reservation, where, by permission, pastured the herds whose owner would pay Lin his time at Washakie. So the young cow-puncher flung on his saddle and mounted.

"So-long!" he remarked to the camp, by way of farewell. He might never be going to see any of them again; but the cow-punchers were not demonstrative by habit.

"Going to stop long at Washakie?" asked one.

"Alma is not waiter-girl at the hotel now," another mentioned.

"If there's a new girl," said a third, "kiss her one for me, and tell her I'm handsomer than you."

"I ain't a deceiver of women," said Lin.

"That's why you'll tell her," replied his friend.

"Say, Lin, why are you quittin' us so sudden, anyway?" asked the cook, grieved to lose him.

"I'm after some variety," said the boy.

"If you pick up more than you can use, just can a little of it for me!" shouted the cook at the departing McLean.

This was the last of camp by Bull Lake Crossing, and in the foreman's company young Lin now took the road for his accumulated dollars.

"So you're leaving your bedding and stuff with the outfit?" said the foreman.

"Brought my tooth-brush," said Lin, showing it in the breast-pocket of his flannel shirt.

"Going to Denver?"

"Why, maybe."

"Take in San Francisco?"

"Sounds slick."

"Made any plans?"

"Gosh, no!"

"Don't want anything on your brain?"

"Nothin' except my hat, I guess," said Lin, and broke into cheerful song:

"'Twas a nasty baby anyhow,
And it only died to spite us;
'Twas afflicted with the cerebrow
Spinal meningitis!"

They wound up out of the magic valley of Wind River, through the bastioned gullies and the gnome-like mystery of dry water-courses, upward and up to the level of the huge sage-brush plain above. Behind lay the deep valley they had climbed from, mighty, expanding, its trees like bushes, its cattle like pebbles, its opposite side towering also to the edge of this upper plain. There it lay, another world. One step farther away from its rim, and the two edges of the plain had flowed together over it like a closing sea, covering without a sign or ripple the great country which lay sunk beneath.

"A man might think he'd dreamed he'd saw that place," said Lin to the foreman, and wheeled his horse to the edge again. "She's sure there, though," he added, gazing down. For a moment his boy face grew thoughtful. "Shucks!" said he then, abruptly, "where's any joy in money that's comin' till it arrives? I have most forgot the feel o' spot-cash."

He turned his horse away from the far-winding vision of the river, and took a sharp jog after the foreman, who had not been waiting for him. Thus they crossed the eighteen miles of high plain, and came down to Fort Washakie, in the valley of Little Wind, before the day was hot.

His roll of wages once jammed in his pocket like an old handkerchief, young Lin precipitated himself out of the post-trader's store and away on his horse up the stream among the Shoshone tepees to an unexpected entertainment--a wolf-dance. He had meant to go and see what the new waiter-girl at the hotel looked like, but put this off promptly to attend the dance. This hospitality the Shoshone Indians were extending to some visiting Ute friends, and the neighborhood was assembled to watch the ring of painted naked savages.

The post-trader looked after the galloping Lin. "What's he quitting his job for?" he asked the foreman.

"Same as most of 'em quit."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Been satisfactory?"

"Never had a boy more so. Good-hearted, willing, a plumb dare-devil with a horse."

"And worthless," suggested the post-trader.

"Well--not yet. He's headed that way."

"Been punching cattle long?"

"Came in the country about seventy-eight, I believe, and rode for the Bordeaux Outfit most a year, and quit. Blew in at Cheyenne till he went broke, and worked over on to the Platte. Rode for the C. Y. Outfit most a year, and quit. Blew in at Buffalo. Rode for Balaam awhile on Butte Creek. Broke his leg. Went to the Drybone Hospital, and when the fracture was commencing to knit pretty good he

broke it again at the hog-ranch across the bridge. Next time you're in Cheyenne get Dr. Barker to tell you about that. McLean drifted to Green River last year and went up over on to Snake, and up Snake, and was around with a prospecting outfit on Galena Creek by Pitchstone Canyon. Seems he got interested in some Dutchwoman up there, but she had trouble--died, I think they said--and he came down by Meteetsee to Wind River. He's liable to go to Mexico or Africa next."

"If you need him," said the post-trader, closing his ledger, "you can offer him five more a month."

"That'll not hold him."

"Well, let him go. Have a cigar. The bishop is expected for Sunday, and I've got to see his room is fixed up for him."

"The bishop!" said the foreman. "I've heard him highly spoken of."

"You can hear him preach to-morrow. The bishop is a good man."

"He's better than that; he's a man," stated the foreman--"at least so they tell me."

Now, saving an Indian dance, scarce any possible event at the Shoshone agency could assemble in one spot so many sorts of inhabitants as a visit from this bishop. Inhabitants of four colors gathered to view the wolf-dance this afternoon--red men, white men, black men, yellow men. Next day, three sorts came to church at the agency. The Chinese laundry was absent. But because, indeed (as the foreman said), the bishop was not only a good man but a man, Wyoming held him in respect and went to look at him. He stood in the agency church and held the Episcopal service this Sunday morning for some brightly glittering army officers and their families, some white cavalry, and some black infantry; the agency doctor, the post-trader, his foreman, the government scout, three gamblers, the waiter-girl from the hotel, the stage-driver, who was there because she was; old Chief Washakie, white-haired and royal in blankets, with two royal Utes splendid beside him; one benchful of squatting Indian children, silent and marvelling; and, on the back bench, the commanding officer's new hired-girl, and, beside her, Lin McLean.

Mr. McLean's hours were already various and successful. Even at the wolf-dance, before he had wearied of its monotonous drumming and pageant, his roving eye had rested upon a girl whose eyes he caught resting upon him. A look, an approach, a word, and each was soon content with the other. Then, when her duties called her to the post from him and the stream's border, with a promise for next day he sought the hotel and found the three gamblers anxious to make his acquaintance; for when a cow-puncher has his pay many people will take an interest in him. The three gamblers did not know that Mr. McLean could play cards. He left them late in the evening fat with their money, and sought the tepees of the Arapahoes. They lived across the road from the Shoshones, and among their tents the boy remained until morning. He was here in church now, keeping his promise to see the bishop with the girl of yesterday; and while he gravely looked at the bishop, Miss Sabina Stone allowed his arm to encircle her waist. No soldier had achieved this yet, but Lin was the first cow-puncher she had seen, and he had given her the handkerchief from round his neck.

The quiet air blew in through the windows and door, the pure, light breath from the mountains; only, passing over their foot-hills it had caught and carried the

clear aroma of the sage-brush. This it brought into church, and with this seemed also to float the peace and great silence of the plains. The little melodeon in the corner, played by one of the ladies at the post, had finished accompanying the hymn, and now it prolonged a few closing chords while the bishop paused before his address, resting his keen eyes on the people. He was dressed in a plain suit of black with a narrow black tie. This was because the Union Pacific Railroad, while it had delivered him correctly at Green River, had despatched his robes towards Cheyenne.

Without citing chapter and verse the bishop began:

"And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him."

The bishop told the story of that surpassing parable, and then proceeded to draw from it a discourse fitted to the drifting destinies in whose presence he found himself for one solitary morning. He spoke unlike many clergymen. His words were chiefly those which the people round him used, and his voice was more like earnest talking than preaching.

Miss Sabina Stone felt the arm of her cow-puncher loosen slightly, and she looked at him. But he was looking at the bishop, no longer gravely but with wide-open eyes, alert. When the narrative reached the elder brother in the field, and how he came to the house and heard sounds of music and dancing, Miss Stone drew away from her companion and let him watch the bishop, since he seemed to prefer that. She took to reading hymns vindictively. The bishop himself noted the sun-browned boy face and the wide-open eyes. He was too far away to see anything but the alert, listening position of the young cow-puncher. He could not discern how that, after he had left the music and dancing and begun to draw morals, attention faded from those eyes that seemed to watch him, and they filled with dreaminess. It was very hot in church. Chief Washakie went to sleep, and so did a corporal; but Lin McLean sat in the same alert position till Miss Stone pulled him and asked if he intended to sit down through the hymn. Then church was out. Officers, Indians, and all the people dispersed through the great sunshine to their dwellings, and the cow-puncher rode beside Sabina in silence.

"What are you studying over, Mr. McLean?" inquired the lady, after a hundred yards.

"Did you ever taste steamed Duxbury clams?" asked Lin, absently.

"No, indeed. What's them?"

"Oh, just clams. Yu' have drawn butter, too." Mr. McLean fell silent again.

"I guess I'll be late for settin' the colonel's table. Good-bye," said Sabina, quickly, and swished her whip across the pony, who scampered away with her along the straight road across the plain to the post.

Lin caught up with her at once and made his peace.

"Only," protested Sabina, "I ain't used to gentlemen taking me out and-- well, same as if I was a collie-dog. Maybe it's Wind River politeness."

But she went riding with him up Trout Creek in the cool of the afternoon. Out of the Indian tepees, scattered wide among the flat levels of sage-brush, smoke rose thin and gentle, and vanished. They splashed across the many little running

channels which lead water through that thirsty soil, and though the range of mountains came no nearer, behind them the post, with its white, flat buildings and green trees, dwindled to a toy village.

"My! but it's far to everywheres here," exclaimed Sabina, "and it's little you're sayin' for yourself to-day, Mr. McLean. I'll have to do the talking. What's that thing now, where the rocks are?"

"That's Little Wind River Canyon," said the young man. "Feel like goin' there, Miss Stone?"

"Why, yes. It looks real nice and shady like, don't it? Let's."

So Miss Stone turned her pony in that direction.

"When do your folks eat supper?" inquired Lin.

"Half-past six. Oh, we've lots of time! Come on."

"How many miles per hour do you figure that cayuse of yourn can travel?" Lin asked.

"What are you a-talking about, anyway? You're that strange to-day," said the lady.

"Only if we try to make that canyon, I guess you'll be late settin' the colonel's table," Lin remarked, his hazel eyes smiling upon her. "That is, if your horse ain't good for twenty miles an hour. Mine ain't, I know. But I'll do my best to stay with yu'."

"You're the teasingest man--" said Miss Stone, pouting. "I might have knowed it was ever so much further nor it looked."

"Well, I ain't sayin' I don't want to go, if yu' was desirous of campin' out to-night."

"Mr. McLean! Indeed, and I'd do no such thing!" and Sabina giggled.

A sage-hen rose under their horses' feet, and hurtled away heavily over the next rise of ground, taking a final wide sail out of sight.

"Something like them partridges used to," said Lin, musingly.

"Partridges?" inquired Sabina.

"Used to be in the woods between Lynn and Salem. Maybe the woods are gone by this time. Yes, they must be gone, I guess."

Presently they dismounted and sought the stream bank.

"We had music and dancing at Thanksgiving and such times," said Lin, his wiry length stretched on the grass beside the seated Sabina. He was not looking at her, but she took a pleasure in watching him, his curly head and bronze face, against which the young mustache showed to its full advantage.

"I expect you used to dance a lot," remarked Sabina, for a subject.

"Yes. Do yu' know the Portland Fancy?"

Sabina did not, and her subject died away.

"Did anybody ever tell you you had good eyes?" she inquired next.

"Why, sure," said Lin, waking for a moment; "but I like your color best. A girl's eyes will mostly beat a man's."

"Indeed, I don't think so!" exclaimed poor Sabina, too much expectant to perceive the fatal note of routine with which her transient admirer pronounced this gallantry. He informed her that hers were like the sea, and she told him she had not yet looked upon the sea.

"Never?" said he. "It's a turruble pity you've never saw salt water. It's different from fresh. All around home it's blue--awful blue in July-- around Swampscott and Marblehead and Nahant, and around the islands. I've swam there lots. Then our home bruck up and we went to board in Boston." He snapped off a flower in reach of his long arm. Suddenly all dreaminess left him.

"I wonder if you'll be settin' the colonel's table when I come back?" he said.

Miss Stone was at a loss.

"I'm goin' East to-morrow--East, to Boston."

Yesterday he had told her that sixteen miles to Lander was the farthest journey from the post that he intended to make--the farthest from the post and her.

"I hope nothing ain't happened to your folks?" said she.

"I ain't got no folks," replied Lin, "barring a brother. I expect he is taking good care of himself."

"Don't you correspond?"

"Well, I guess he would if there was anything to say. There ain't been nothin'."

Sabina thought they must have quarrelled, but learned that they had not. It was time for her now to return and set the colonel's table, so Lin rose and went to bring her horse. When he had put her in her saddle she noticed him step to his own.

"Why, I didn't know you were lame!" cried she.

"Shucks!" said Lin. "It don't cramp my style any." He had sprung on his horse, ridden beside her, leaned and kissed her before she got any measure of his activity.

"That's how," said he; and they took their homeward way galloping. "No," Lin continued, "Frank and me never quarrelled. I just thought I'd have a look at this Western country. Frank, he thought dry-goods was good enough for him, and so we're both satisfied, I expect. And that's a lot of years now. Whoop ye!" he suddenly sang out, and fired his six-shooter at a jack-rabbit, who strung himself out flat and flew over the earth.

Both dismounted at the parade-ground gate, and he kissed her again when she was not looking, upon which she very properly slapped him; and he took the horses to the stable. He sat down to tea at the hotel, and found the meal consisted of black potatoes, gray tea, and a guttering dish of fat pork. But his appetite was good, and he remarked to himself that inside the first hour he was in Boston he would have steamed Duxbury clams. Of Sabina he never thought again, and it is likely that she found others to take his place. Fort Washakie was one hundred and fifty miles from the railway, and men there were many and girls were few.

The next morning the other passengers entered the stage with resignation, knowing the thirty-six hours of evil that lay before them. Lin climbed up beside the driver. He had a new trunk now.

"Don't get full, Lin," said the clerk, putting the mail-sacks in at the store.

"My plans ain't settled that far yet," replied Mr. McLean.

"Leave it out of them," said the voice of the bishop, laughing, inside the stage.

It was a cool, fine air. Gazing over the huge plain down in which lies Fort Washakie, Lin heard the faint notes of the trumpet on the parade ground, and

took a good-bye look at all things. He watched the American flag grow small, saw the circle of steam rising away down by the hot springs, looked at the bad lands beyond, chemically pink and rose amid the vast, natural, quiet-colored plain. Across the spreading distance Indians trotted at wide spaces, generally two large bucks on one small pony, or a squaw and pappoose--a bundle of parti-colored rags. Presiding over the whole rose the mountains to the west, serene, lifting into the clearest light. Then once again came the now tiny music of the trumpet.

"When do yu' figure on comin' back?" inquired the driver.

"Oh, I'll just look around back there for a spell," said Lin. "About a month, I guess."

He had seven hundred dollars. At Lander the horses are changed; and during this operation Lin's friends gathered and said, where was any sense in going to Boston when you could have a good time where you were? But Lin remained sitting safe on the stage. Toward evening, at the bottom of a little dry gulch some eight feet deep, the horses decided it was a suitable place to stay. It was the bishop who persuaded them to change their minds. He told the driver to give up beating, and unharness. Then they were led up the bank, quivering, and a broken trace was spliced with rope. Then the stage was forced on to the level ground, the bishop proving a strong man, familiar with the gear of vehicles. They crossed through the pass among the quaking asps and the pines, and, reaching Pacific Springs, came down again into open country. That afternoon the stage put its passengers down on the railroad platform at Green River; this was the route in those days before the mid-winter catastrophes of frozen passengers led to its abandonment. The bishop was going west. His robes had passed him on the up stage during the night. When the reverend gentleman heard this he was silent for a very short moment, and then laughed vigorously in the baggage-room.

"I can understand how you swear sometimes," he said to Lin McLean; "but I can't, you see. Not even at this."

The cow-puncher was checking his own trunk to Omaha.

"Good-bye and good luck to you," continued the bishop, giving his hand to Lin. "And look here--don't you think you might leave that 'getting full' out of your plans?"

Lin gave a slightly shamefaced grin. "I don't guess I can, sir," he said. "I'm givin' yu' straight goods, yu' see," he added

"That's right. But you look like a man who could stop when he'd had enough. Try that. You're man enough--and come and see me whenever we're in the same place."

He went to the hotel. There were several hours for Lin to wait. He walked up and down the platform till the stars came out and the bright lights of the town shone in the saloon windows. Over across the way piano-music sounded through one of the many open doors.

"Wonder if the professor's there yet?" said Lin, and he went across the railroad tracks. The bartender nodded to him as he passed through into the back room. In that place were many tables, and the flat clicking and rattle of ivory counters sounded pleasantly through the music. Lin did not join the stud-poker game. He

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