

Nard Jones

BY NARD JONES

Of the Columbia River—

SWIFT FLOWS THE RIVER
SCARLET PETTICOAT
STILL TO THE WEST

Of Western wheat lands—

OREGON DETOUR
WHEAT WOMEN
ALL SIX WERE LOVERS

And—

THE PETLANDS
THE CASE OF THE HANGING LADY
WEST, YOUNG MAN!
(WITH J. GORDON GOSE)

STILL TO
THE WEST

Dodd, Mead & Company

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AFTER hearing David Morse's story, Ellen knew that there had been no arrogance or contempt in what he had said about the raising of wheat. She knew that despite his awkward apology on the porch he had really believed what he had said, and it had not occurred to him until afterward that his idea might not be acceptable. He had spoken as if he took it for granted that they, too, knew this thing, had long ago admitted it to themselves.

Perhaps some of them had, Ellen thought to herself. Could that be why Ben Farraday drank so much? Could it be part of Sally's unrest? And had not Ellen herself wondered what it would be like to have gone through thirty or forty, perhaps fifty harvests? Perhaps her mother had felt that way, for a time when she was young. Maybe even Joseph Patrick O'Malley had felt it. Maybe that was why he had liked to shock people out of their smugness, and crack out with his bull whip, and get roaring drunk, and (when he could do nothing else any more) keep forever riding or driving somewhere.

But of course, David was utterly wrong about the women tearing down what the men had built up. That part of his notion was certainly in error. Ellen thought she knew what made him say such a thing. He had never quite been able to forget his step-mother's unfaithfulness. Probably he had never had much use for women, and not much time for them. She suspected that those for whom he would have had the time, or the money, could not have been much good for him, either.

Ellen had heard somewhere that a woman likes to believe that perhaps she, out of all other women, is the one who would be good for a man. Could this be the reason she had felt so sud-

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denly different toward Morse, there on the porch of her grandfather's first house? It was hardly pleasant to think she could have been as stupid as that.

It seemed equally stupid to have been converted simply because of his talk about the big Coulee, and because his wide dreams and his belief in the country around them reminded her of her grandfather. But it had been good to hear a man talk like that again!

She smiled as she remembered how he had gone in from the porch to join the crowd, and how within five minutes he had cornered Ben Farraday, talking about the dam again. "You see, it's the Coulee that makes the dam possible. The big Coulee will be the canal and the secondary reservoir. There wouldn't be men enough or money enough in the world to create the Coulee—but that part of the work is finished and ready. And the dam site is there, too, ready made, white granite going down eight hundred feet. The gravel for the concrete is there waiting, right on the river bank."

He hadn't even noticed that Ben's eyes were fogged and that Ben was wondering only whether he could go into the kitchen for another drink without having Sally raise the devil.

After they all had gone and she lay beside Victor in the darkness, neither of them able to sleep with the supper and the highballs and the echoes of talk and radio, she said, "What did you think of Frank Moss's friend?"

Victor rolled on his back and rested a forearm over his eyes. "Morse? He's all right, I guess. Talked an awful lot about that damned fool Grand Coulee business."

A wave of loyalty went through Ellen for the man who lay beside her, the urge of loyalty in a woman for a man she knows well indeed—knows why he cannot feel this way or that way, and why he must feel as he does; and above all, knows that he has done the best he has known how to do. "Yes," she said. "The was pretty boring about it."

"That why you got him out on the porch?" There was, she

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noticed curiously, not a shred of jealousy in the question. Only a gently sarcastic humor.

"I was afraid he was going to make someone angry with that rot about the cycles of wheat."

Victor was silent a moment, trying to remember. She realized he had completely forgotten what there was to be angry about. Perhaps he had not thought there was anything to be angry about at all.

"Didn't you hear him when he was telling how dull he thought wheat ranching was, and how the men built it all up in the earlier years and the later generations of women spoil it?"

"Oh, that!" Victor said. There was a monosyllabic chuckle.

"You didn't like his saying that the women tear it down, huh?"

"I didn't mind that," Ellen said, half piqued. Sometimes she thought Victor consciously tried to be a fool. "It was the part about the cycles in the wheat, and the contempt he showed for raising wheat."

"Well, I suppose it could seem that way to him," said Victor blandly. "To people who don't go to sea, the life of a sailor might seem dull. All that water around you, day and night, and nothing much to do. Yet I guess it's exciting, if you like it."

"Of course, it's exciting," Ellen thought to herself. Somehow the blandness of Victor's reaction made her body suddenly warm, and she threw back the blanket on her side of the bed. "Of course it's exciting," she thought, "and I can understand how it would be, even though I've never been to sea. There's change in the sea, just like there is in the sky, and there would scarcely be an hour that was like the one that had gone before it."

"What's the matter?" Victor said drowsily.

"It's hotter than Hell, is all," Ellen said. "How can you stand that blanket?"

"I don't think it's hot," he answered. . . .

THE idea of the Grand Coulee project had come forcibly into Ellen's mind only twice before she met David Morse. Once

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had been on that day when her grandfather read aloud the piece from the *Wenatchee World*. The other time had been when Sam Seith had talked about it so positively, and she heard it discussed in the lobby of the Davenport Hotel.

Although the plan as conceived by its boosters would, if accomplished, skirt the edge of the Walla Walla Valley, there was not much interest in the valley itself. That was because the scablands and the dry lava dust were a world apart from the valley, though separated from it by only a few miles. The crops of the valley needed no irrigation, and to most valley ranchers the dam was just a crackpot scheme that would never come off. Or, if it did, would be a failure. They could only hope that the mistake would be discovered before the thing was completed entirely.

Only an occasional headline in the newspapers had reminded Ellen that the subject of the dam was still alive, and she had begun not to take those headlines seriously. Her father said the idea had no chance. "The Northwest itself don't want it," he said. He was very positive; and since Joseph Patrick's death he had become more positive, more like the old man. It was as if he had been waiting, deferentially, until it was proper to take the old man's place. "Hell, we got more farmers now than can make a decent living. And the idea of a lot of new manufacturing industries is a lot of bellywash. The big markets are still in the East, and there's the long freight haul back there. Now if the Northwest don't want the God damn dam, then it's a cinch the East doesn't want it. Congress won't see all that money spent in a State with no more voters than the State of Washington has got in it!"

It was much the same argument that Ellen had overheard in the lobby of the Davenport and with which she had taken issue. But she had grown older, and she could see now that Oregon O'Malley said might be right. She had begun to believe the doubters because, after all, to merely say an idea is hopeless and insane is one of the most powerful arguments in the world.

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Ellen had heard them say it so often now that she subconsciously thought: "Yes, they're right; I remember the things I thought could happen, and would happen, but they haven't happened and they won't. You can hedge yourself pretty well from disappointments by not believing too much."

But that was before she had heard David Morse. After that she began to watch for the stories about the Grand Coulee project in the newspapers. There seemed to be growing publicity about it, but perhaps this was because she was looking for the stories now. It was a long time before she realized that in following the news of the project she was hoping for its victory over the opposition. Every afternoon she got the Walla Walla *Bulletin* from the mailbox at the road, and if the wind was quiet she would go through it there, standing by the box, to see what had been said about the Grand Coulee. She would read about the Coulee first, before anything else. It never occurred to her to discuss the latest development with Victor, although she and Victor found themselves leaning more and more on the *Bulletin's* local news to keep away silence at the supper table.

In the September following Morse's visit to the ranch she read that a survey of the Coulee had been started. She had no conception of what maze of politics or mysteries of engineering still had to be encountered before the dam was built, but something told her that it was real now, that it had begun in actuality. She thought, suddenly and exultantly, "*Dave's won!*" And it was only then that she realized how tense and close her interest had been, how oddly secretive, and how tied up with that strange moment on the porch with Dave Morse.

That day Ellen did something she could never afterward quite explain to herself. The impulse had been so strong that no particular thought had been attached to the action. Indeed, she had not really thought of it in any true sense until it was done.

After she had read the news she got out the car, and in overalls and denim shirt drove into town. There at the Western Union office she sent a telegram to David Morse at Spokane, telling him

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how glad she was to learn that work had started on the dam. She could have telephoned the message from the ranch. But getting into the car and driving along the road, moving apart from the slow-moving things of the ranch, was a part of the impulse.

She said nothing to Victor about it. He would be almost certain to ask, "What made you do that?" not in anger, but in simple curiosity, and she could not answer that she did it because she had felt like doing it. Victor wouldn't understand it that way; he would think she was being stubborn and quixotic, as he did when she wanted to sew sacks on the harvester or ride Ben King through the rain. And she was damned, she told herself, if she would try to make it sound like the thing she should have done. She would not walk into the house, with supper late, and say, "I went into town to send a wire of congratulations to David Morse. They've begun work on the Coulee project, the paper says, and he seemed so enthusiastic about the dam that I thought it would be nice. . . ."

No reply came from Morse, which made Ellen realize that she had expected one. It occurred to her then that the telegram might have puzzled more than pleased him. Or, she thought, he might have accepted it casually as part of his due. "He's likely to be an insufferable egotist now that this has happened," she thought. "I could see it that night—he could be pretty crude and sweating about it from now on." But she was too honest not to know that she was really angry at Ellen O'Malley Hammond.

THERE wasn't much news of the dam that winter, except of speeches by men who were against it and who now were becoming more vociferous. A couple of articles appeared in national magazines, explaining what a colossal folly the project was. Ellen read them and found herself burning with resentment against the authors.

Spring came on, and then the harvest—and one day Ellen read that the President planned to visit the site of the dam in August. "Let's drive up there," she said to Victor. "He's going

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to make a speech."

Victor's eyes were round with surprise behind his glasses. "Say, I wouldn't drive across the ranch to hear Roosevelt make a speech! Anyhow, I couldn't get away that time of the year."

"Around the first of August? Harvest will be over, Victor."
"I know. But there's always a lot to do right afterward. You ought to realize that."

"Well," Ellen said, "I'm going to drive up. I want to hear him even if I don't always agree with him. And he's not likely to be this near to Walla Walla again."

"I saw Harding once in Portland," Victor said. "He was on his way to Alaska. Wasn't long after that he died." His voice sounded almost hopeful. "If you drive up, why don't you take Mary along? She thinks a lot of Roosevelt."

"I'll ask her if she'd like to go."

Even as she said it she knew that she would drive to the Coulee alone, and she knew that it was not to hear the President.

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TWENTY thousand men, women and children were standing shoulder to shoulder in the shadows of the gorge that all its millions of years had been almost unpeopled. They had come by automobile, and by train, and by horse and buggy and wagon. Some had walked from the sparse settlements of the sage land, and a few had come by air. However they had got there, and whatever their work and station in the Northwest country, their eyes and ears were for one man—and his voice through the loud-speakers filled the canyon. There was a warm friendliness in the voice, and there was an assurance that somehow made them glad they had come.

Not all of them were interested very directly in the dream of a giant dam at Grand Coulee, but all of them wanted badly to see dreams in America come into reality again. Their interests were as divergent as the interests of the great Northwest, but they had been drawn there because of this one man and his ability to make them see that this or that thing was not impossible, and because of the hope that he was able to hold out to them. His voice was the common denominator that made them one, that made them workable together as a whole, yet none of them standing there recognized this oneness.

There was a fisherman from Seattle who had started out with his family on a holiday drive and who, remembering, had said, "I read this morning that the President was going to speak over east of the mountains. Let's drive on over and hear him." Distance meant nothing to these men and women, and meant even less to the fisherman, for every year he ranged three thousand miles into

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the Bering Sea for halibut in his own vessel. A car was faster, and the distance over the Cascades much less—so he was there in the gorge, listening. It was the first time he or his family had been in the dry lands of their State and they found it uncomfortable and strange. Their faces were reddened, but from winds and driving rains rather than sun. Their faces were round, and had small blunt noses, and innocent blue eyes, and they were all blond and not far away from the northern countries of Europe. They wondered how anybody could live so far removed from the sea, even though a great river was near by, and they saw no real reason for making this land green when west of the Cascades, on Puget Sound, there was, it seemed to them, enough green land and blue water for everybody. There was the fisherman, in his Sunday blue serge, and his wife who was larger than he was, and the two blond children, sticky with the all-day suckers they had bought, back in Wenatchee. And they listened, like the rest of the crowd, and grew proud about what the President was saying.

There was a cattleman who had ridden down from Okanogan on his favorite mare in his fanciest saddle, a Hamlin from Pendleton. He wore corduroys stuffed into high-heeled boots and a coat from an old business suit and a white shirt—plastered wet to his body now—and a black bow tie. His lean tanned face was shielded by a ten-gallon hat; he looked as a cattleman should look, and he knew this. He could have driven down in his car, looking like a druggist or a doctor, but this was an excuse to saddle Maria and take a long ride down through the sage.

A lumberman had followed the Columbia River highway up from Portland, Oregon, to see the Coulee and hear what the President had to say about it. He was a square built man, square of face and body, and his hands were like wood blocks. Once he had worked for wages in the woods, but later he had made a fortune shipping Douglas fir timbers to Japan, and now he was thinking of building a plywood mill as soon as things looked a little better.

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There was a woman in a faded wash dress who shielded her crinkled eyes with a hand as dry and seamed as a piece of twisted sage. There was no way to tell her age. She could have been near thirty or she could have been beyond fifty, but she had lived in the dry lands so long that she had stopped thinking about how she looked. Until today she had almost forgotten how she had come west hopefully with her husband, thinking to raise apples and ship them all over the world like the real estate folder had said. But it had not worked out, somehow. The price was low when the apples were good, and when the price was high something always seemed to happen to their orchard. Now the orchard was as worn out as she and her husband, and there was no prospect of getting young trees to start again. Her husband was so bitter that he had refused to come today; he had preferred to try to forget himself in another day of thankless work—but his wife had postponed her chores and she was there in the Coulee, listening. She did not see how this land could ever be green and fertile, but she was there and listening.

A group of Walla Walla ranchers had driven up together, curious and suspicious. They stood close to one another, silent and looking prosperous. They knew the dry dust of the Coulee and had worn overalls and boots, but as a concession to the occasion they had on coats and neckties, despite the heat. They were a little fearful at the picture of an onrush of new farmers onto new land, and the fear showed in their faces. If the new farmers and the new land would raise wheat then the dam could only make matters worse.

The politicians had come, too, from Seattle and Portland and Spokane and Walla Walla. They wanted to be seen by their constituency, to be identified with this dream of a better life. They hoped for a chance to shake the hand of the President, or, even better, for a place with him on the speakers' platform in front of those twenty thousand.

The children were there—nobody but the very aged had been left behind. The children were tired and dusty and warm, but

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few of them were objecting. They had never seen so many people crowded together, and this in itself was fascinating. And the older ones had caught some of the enthusiasm of their elders. "You're going to see the President today. The President is coming to the Coulee and you're going to hear him speak." It would be something to tell about for a long time. It would be something to write about the next time the teacher asked for "a theme." And Papa seemed to be feeling good, so no doubt on the way home they would stop somewhere and have ice cream. They might even have a bought supper at a restaurant with ice cream for dessert and somebody to wait on them and no bother with the dirty dishes afterward. There was a feeling in the air like it was the Fourth of July.

There was a storekeeper from Idaho who had stopped by on a vacation trip to the coast. He owned a little general store near the Salmon River and from its front windows he could see the Pahsimeroi Mountains. The International Harvester Company had been plaguing him about a bill for plow parts, and the Plymouth Cordage Company wanted him to pay for his shipment of last year's binder twine, and the Walla Walla Grocery Company was threatening to cut him off from ordering any more canned goods. But he was a perky little man with a shiny bald head and he was not afraid of himself or of the country. "Hell's fire, Savannah," he had said to his wife, "we'll take a vacation this year same as always!" And when he got to Spokane he heard that the President was going to talk about the new dam down at Coulee. "Hell's fire, Savannah, we might as well go down to the coast thataway. Won't use up much more gas." He stood now with his bald head red and sparking in a shaft of noonday sunlight. He looked perkier than ever as he listened to the talk about the dam. International and Plymouth and all those big companies could go straight to hell. They would get their money in time, he wouldn't put them out of business, and they'd deal together again. "Hell's fire, Savannah, quit your fretting and worrying!"

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Hell's fire, Savannah, why worry in a land like this? It's thirteen per cent of all the land in the U.S.A., and that ought to be big enough for a man to straighten himself out in. And God knows it's not crowded—no more than three per cent of the population lives in the big Northwest. That was how Savannah's husband felt, although he did not put it in so many words. It was a feeling with him, not a set of facts. If it had been a set of facts he would have told Savannah about it. "We got half the virgin timber, Savannah, and almost half the potential electric power. Look at the lumber, the wheat, the flour, the apples, the wool, the salmon, the potatoes." What if the distant markets in Europe had largely disappeared? Wasn't the West making its own market now? Didn't somebody say that four hundred thousand new folks had come in during the last four years? Maybe it was more than that, because nobody knew accurately. The little Idaho storekeeper had talked to one of them and asked him why he had come. "You want to know why?" the man had said. "Because here I don't have to look up at the sky every morning to see if my family is going to eat."

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"We believe," the President said, "that by proceeding with this great project it will not only develop the well-being of the far West, but will give an opportunity to many individuals and many families back in older, settled parts of the nation to come out here and distribute some of the burdens which fall on them more heavily than fall on the West. There is a great opportunity for the people of the East, people of the South, and in some overcrowded parts of the Middle West. It shall be the opportunity of still going West. This land around us here is going to be filled with the homes not only of a great many people from this State, but a great many families from other States in the Union."

"See there, Savannah?" the little storekeeper from Idaho whispered. "It's like the old days, like opening up the frontier again. Only it's a little different this time. In the old days every man came for himself. This time we'll all come together for the common good!"

LOST in the crowd, so far away from the platform she could not see the President's face clearly, Ellen thought of what must be happening at that moment over the rest of the continent. Hundreds and thousands of miles away they would be listening. On the old plantations and the pine lands in the South, on the sick tired lands of the plains, and in the tenements and slums of the big Eastern cities, they were all listening and thinking the old thought . . . *out West*. There would be in their blood now the same stirring that Narcissa and Marcus Whitman had

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known. The same ferment that had moved Joseph Patrick O'Malley across the plains to Oregon.

It was a promise, and the voice commanded belief. *You shall have the opportunity of still going West.*

The President stopped speaking and the twenty thousand sent up a roar of shouting and applause that rolled back and forth against the ancient cliffs and sent little slides of talus from the crevices, as if the very gorge itself was awakening to meet its destiny. Ellen knew that she was shouting with the rest, though she could not hear her own voice. She felt her eyes filling, and she thought, "Oh, if Grandfather can know of this . . . if only he can! . . ."

FOR there was no question about what was going to happen in the big Coulee now. If people had found it hard to believe from newspapers and store gossip, they had to believe it now. Up there on the platform was the Secretary of the Interior, and the Secretary of War, and the President himself who spoke of the dam almost as an accomplished fact. A lean brown farmer near Ellen turned to his companion and slapped him on the back, "Well, by God, we got 'er now—whether we want 'er or not, we got her! And I'll bet some of them God damned Congressmen in them Eastern States are sore as boiled owls."

There was that satisfaction everywhere, and Ellen could fully understand it. She had heard her father and grandfather complain bitterly about the privileges that government gave the thickly populated East. The East got everything, because it was older and closer to the politicians and the big wealthy. Joe O'Malley had heard that complaint the moment he started down the far side of the Rockies and he had done his part to keep it alive. So had his son, and Oregon O'Malley had thrown in California, to boot, as belonging to the sections that wanted to hog everything, and usually did. Well now, Ellen thought, lapsing into the O'Malley idiom, the Northwest had got something and it was satisfactorily big. It was the biggest God damned thing

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man had ever built in the world. That ought to be big enough! Yes, they could really believe it now, if the squatters and the mushroom towns hadn't begun to convince them. For there were people who believed in it, or were gambling on its possibility, before the President came to stand in the gorge and tell of his hopes. In the hills above the site of the dam, new little settlements had already started amid the sage and barren lava soil. Along the road leading down to the River, Ellen had seen three separate townsites and heard the noise of hammers and saws. She'd seen the proud signs, too. GRAND COULLEE. ELMORE. FLEISCHMANN. All three of them adjoined at the upper end of the Coulee. And down on the very floor of the Coulee was the start of still another settlement.

The signs with the names of the towns did not yet include the size of the population. But they would, and soon. And the freshly elected fathers would figure out some distinguishing mark. One of the towns was sure to be "The City Nearest the Dam." Another certainly would claim to be the biggest west (or east or north or south) of some well-known landmark. They'd figure out something, Ellen knew, and they'd make it stick. As she neared the River she frequently encountered a warning:

NOTICE

Squatters living on the proposed construction site of the Grand Coulee Dam, or within one and one-half miles of the boundaries of that site, must vacate within three weeks of this date.

By order

Columbia Basin Commission

July 25, 1934

So the new towns were filling up quickly. Stakes were pulled and tents rolled, to be set up within the man-made lines of a recently created microcosm. Battered trailers were hitched again to decrepit automobiles whose drivers reluctantly sought out a town. Many of the men and women who were settling the new

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towns were doing it with ill-concealed dislike. They had believed that when you came West you could simply start up from your first campfire. They had seen no fences therabouts, and very few houses, and no crops—nobody was using the land. But here it was again, the old story. Somebody was telling them where they could set down and where they couldn't. There were going to be boundaries and authority.

But they could swallow that, for God knew they had swallowed a lot of it all their lives. There was still plenty of room and freedom for the kids, and in a town the old lady would have somebody to yammer at, and pretty soon there would be good jobs on the big dam. So they obeyed the order of the Commission and made for where they saw telephone and light poles jutting up bare from the scablands. Already they found places open for business: lumber yard, grocery store, barber shop, confectionery, and a pool hall. They dug down in their slender savings for rough lumber and tar paper, or got a job in the town so they could buy the stuff for a house. Some simply put up their tent house again, or unhitched the trailer where it stood and said to hell with building anything until we see what this is going to amount to.

All around them teams were dragging plows and scrapers through the sage, laying out streets, and the air was bright yellow from the lava dust and alkali standing between earth and sun.

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