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**BULLETS
FOR BOOTHILL**

by Lee Floren

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"I. C. S. made the impossible—easy!"

You've often heard Arthur Godfrey, famed "Huck Finn of Radio," on his coast-to-coast "Talent Scouts" and other CBS programs—now winning new renown on television. But this is the first time you've heard the star on the subject of I. C. S.:

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As usual, the former Navy radio operator and present Commander in the U. S. Naval Reserve knows what he's talking about. As an I. C. S. graduate, Mr. Godfrey is in the best of all positions to tell you about the educational system that's served so long as talent scout for American industry.

Study his statement. Then mark your interest on the coupon and mail it today for full information on what I. C. S. can do for you!



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WESTERN

TEN COMPLETE STORIES

Volume 14 August, 1953 Number 4

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Next Issue on Sale August 1st

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ROBERT W. LOWNDES, Editor

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Amazing New "EASER" Offers Magic New Comfort to Hernia Sufferers!

The WRIGHT EASER for your rupture must be the best **EASER** for your **RUPTURE** you ever wore. It must give you more comfort and better relief or you get every cent back at once.

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Order the **WRIGHT EASER FOR YOUR RUPTURE** — wear it for ten days — wash it; give it every test you like — compare it for ease, comfort and relief with anything else. **If you are not satisfied, return for refund.**

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Join the thousands of happy wearers who now find joy in work and play and fun with the **WRIGHT EASER FOR THEIR RUPTURE.**

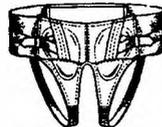


Stop wearing old fashioned and expensive devices. . . . Switch to the **WRIGHT BRACER!** It enables you to work on your old job. It will enable you to enjoy sports. **IT WILL MAKE LIFE WORTH LIVING. ORDER NOW!**

PERFECT FIT GUARANTEED!

IT'S ADJUSTABLE . . .

It's comfortable, and gives the relief you have been looking for. Just send measure around the lowest part of the abdomen and specify right side, left side or double. That's all there is to it!



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It must be the strongest, best form-fitting easer you ever had — It must give more relief. It must fit better or you get your money back!

GET SCIENTIFIC SUPPORT!

No laces to bother with . . . simply step into it . . . adjust the leg strap and side straps . . . **That's All! It's guaranteed not to show through clothing.** No one — not even your dancing partner — can tell you are wearing it.

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Know Your West

A Department For
Western Story Readers
By Harold Gluck

THE DEATH BRAND

SHERIFF John Butler was ordinarily a cool man, capable of handling any situation. But just now he sat at his desk and nervously thumped his fingers. Lou Ferris, foreman of the Bar-6 Ranch was mincing no words.

"That new boss of mine must be the devil himself. He says that Jed Harris is stealing stock from our outfit and it is up to you to do the arresting. Otherwise there is going to be trouble on the range."

The man whose responsibility it was to enforce the law in Dalton County felt like throwing his badge on the desk and quitting. He didn't like the position into which he was being forced.

"I met all kinds of people in a life time but this fellow who calls himself Captain Wilbert Perforce Simplimton is something that doesn't make sense. Sure we got a lot of Englishmen who are investing money in ranches. When he accuses Jed Harris of being a rustler, that means trouble. There's going to be bloodshed and shooting. And also that crazy idea of your new boss."

"Captain Simplimton claims that it had always been known that cows

raised in the southern part of Texas would put on weight if transferred to the grasses of the northern counties. And also that it is a foregone conclusion that a southern-bred Texas longhorn could not weather the cold and snows of a real northern winter," continued Lou Ferris. "My boss can think what he wants. He pays us good wages and treats us fine. But when he claims he sees in the dark, then he must be the devil."

In the bunkhouse the cowboys were talking about the books that had been given to them by Captain Wilbert Perforce Simplimton. Harry Miller had finished reading "Julius Caesar".

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, "that fellow Shakespeare could sure spill the real stuff. He's the only poet I ever seen what was fed on raw meat. Too bad he isn't in this part of the country. Bet he could write something about cattle."

Lou Ferris entered the bunkhouse and immediately, Al Kehl, one of the old hands got up from his bunk and spoke. "This new boss has brains in his head. For the last week we have been watching Jed Harris and his men, and we counted their stock; only way they could have gotten that big addi-

[Turn To Page 8]

What's My Job? - I Manufacture Weaklings into MEN!

Charles Atlas

Actual photograph of the man who holds the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

GIVE ME a skinny, pepless, second-rate body—and I'll cram it so full of handsome, bulging new muscle that your friends will grow bug-eyed!... I'll wake up that sleeping energy of yours and make it hum like a high-powered motor! Man, you'll feel and look different! You'll begin to LIVE!



Let Me Make YOU a NEW MAN —IN JUST 15 MINUTES A DAY!

You wouldn't believe it, but I myself used to be a 97-lb. weakling. Fellows called me "Skinny." Girls snickered and made fun of me behind my back. I was a flop. THEN I discovered my marvelous new muscle-building system—"Dynamic Tension." And it turned me into such a complete specimen of MANHOOD that today I hold the title "THE WORLD'S MOST PERFECTLY DEVELOPED MAN."

That's how I traded in my "bag of bones" for a barrel of muscle! And I felt so much better, so much on top of the world in my big, new, husky body, that I decided to devote my whole life to helping other fellows change themselves into "perfectly developed men."

What is "Dynamic Tension"? How Does It Work?

When you look in the mirror and see a healthy, husky, strapping fellow smiling back at you—then you'll be astounded at how short a time it takes "Dynamic Tension" to GET RESULTS! "Dynamic Tension" is the easy, NATURAL method you can practice in the privacy of your own room—JUST 15 MINUTES EACH DAY—while your scrawny shoulder muscles begin to swell, ripple... those spindly arms and legs of yours bulge... and your whole body starts to feel "alive," full of zip and go!

My Illustrated Book Is Yours—Not for \$1 or 10c—But FREE

Send NOW for my famous book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It has 32 pages and is packed from cover to cover with actual photographs and valuable advice. It shows what "Dynamic Tension" can do, answers many questions that may be puzzling you. Page by page it shows what I can do for YOU.

Yes, this book is a real prize for any fellow who wants a better build. Yet it doesn't cost you a penny—I'll send you a copy absolutely FREE. Just glancing through it will open your eyes. In fact, it may be the turning point in your whole life! So don't put it off another minute. Send the coupon to me personally: CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 48, 115 East 23rd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

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Mail the coupon right now for my illustrated book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." Tells all about "Dynamic Tension" methods. Crammed with pictures, facts! Address me personally: CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 48, 115 East 23rd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

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tion is by helping themselves to other people's property."

"I just come from the boss," announced Ferris, "and he has been talking to the other ranch owners. They are going to organize the Cattle Raisers' Association so that our interests can be protected by legal means. The sheriff will be made inspector. He'll have a book containing all the registered marks and brands of the members. And we all unite to stop the rustlers."

IT WAS A dark night, and you could hardly see ten yards ahead. But this was the kind of night that meant business to Jed Harris. He and two of his men had their rifles in hand. On the ground was a small fire. A brand was being changed quickly and efficiently.

Jim Purcell came over to his boss. "The news is all over the county that this crazy Englishman is saying that you are stealing his stock. And he says he can prove it. What are we going to do?"

"I'm calling him a dirty liar," snapped back Jed Harris. "And that ought to start some gunplay. We better do things in a hurry. Once he gets that association started, we are out of business."

Suddenly a shot rang out. The rustlers were startled. Then the voice of the sheriff shouted at the top of his lungs, "We got you all ringed! There are fifty of us against you! Drop your guns and come out with your hands high in the air. You will not be hanged, but tried by a court."

"Come and get us," replied Jed as he started shooting with his rifle. "You can't bluff us."

Fifty armed men poured a hail of deadly lead into the group of rustlers. It was all over in two minutes. Lou Ferris looked at the dead men on the ground and then turned to his boss. "I don't know how you did it! To see in the dark is impossible. But you knew they were here. Changing the

brand on one of your stock. What do we do?"

Captain Simplinton took the branding iron and held it in the dying fire. He turned to his foreman and gave an order. "Hold that steer while I put on a special brand and see that this fire keeps going."

When the branding was done, the assembled group of cattle men looked with amazement on the word that had been branded on the side of the animal: *DEATH*.

IN THE YEARS that were to pass, that animal was to become a legend. All kinds of stories were to be told about the origin of the brand. But there was just one true explanation.

"Those men died just because of that animal. They had a chance to surrender and live. They fought and died."

Sheriff John Butler was nobody's fool. Two months later he came over to visit the Captain, who was now one of the leading men in the state. Everybody knew how he had handled the rustlers.

"Mind you," said the sheriff, "I'm just thinking to myself. You convinced the ranchmen that Jed Harris was rustling by having your boys count his stock. But the stock he stole I just learned he always shipped out to Mexico. So that leaves one conclusion. You must have deliberately added some of your own stock to his!"

There was a smile on the Captain's face as he ignored this logical conclusion. He handed a box to the sheriff. "Just in case you ever have to find rustlers in the dark. I am no devil. Here is a present. A powerful marine or night glass which I ordered from San Francisco. That is how I saw in the dark."

Question: Can you spot the big error in this story? (You'll find the answer on page 94)



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THOUSANDS OF TECHNICIANS NEEDED NOW — BE READY FOR A TOP-PAY JOB IN MONTHS

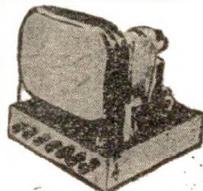
—Says R. C. Anderson, President of C.T.I.

A TRIPLE OPPORTUNITY FOR SUCCESS IN AMERICA'S FASTEST GROWING INDUSTRY

Why waste your time on a drudge job at low pay when you can learn to install and repair television sets so easily! As a technician, you can earn up to \$100 a week and more — with lots of opportunity for overtime. There's a shortage of technicians with 16 million sets now in operation. Experts say that within five years, 50 million receivers will be in use. What a chance to get in on the ground floor! You can quickly get a high-pay job with a dealer; open a shop of your own; or earn plenty of spare-time profits. C.T.I. trains you in months for success — at home in spare time.

YOU BUILD and KEEP A 16-INCH TELEVISION SET

In addition to over 100 well-illustrated, step-by-step lessons, C.T.I. sends you tools, parts and tubes for building a top-quality television receiver. You get valuable experience, and you keep the set to use and enjoy. Note that you learn TV—not just radio!



YOU GET 20 BIG KITS-BUILD TEST INSTRUMENTS



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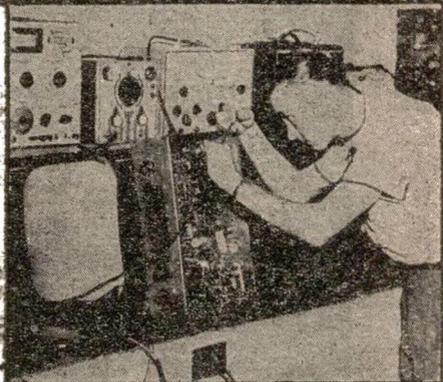
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Commercial Trades Institute, 836 Broadway, New York 3, N. Y.



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Within three years, it is estimated that over 130,000 technicians will be required to install and maintain home TV receivers. But there are big opportunities in industrial electronics, too! A leading trade magazine recently stated that the electronics industry could use possibly 70,000 well-trained technicians right now. Your C.T.I. training prepares you for many good jobs in this field, as well as for positions in communications.

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We have prepared a valuable booklet entitled, "You Can Succeed in Television." It is jam-packed with facts. It describes your opportunities in television, and it tells how you can prepare for a well-paid position or a business of your own. Discover how easily you can learn television at home through C.T.I.'s famous shop-proved method . . . in months! Get the facts from the school that has graduated over 30,000 ambitious men! Mail coupon!

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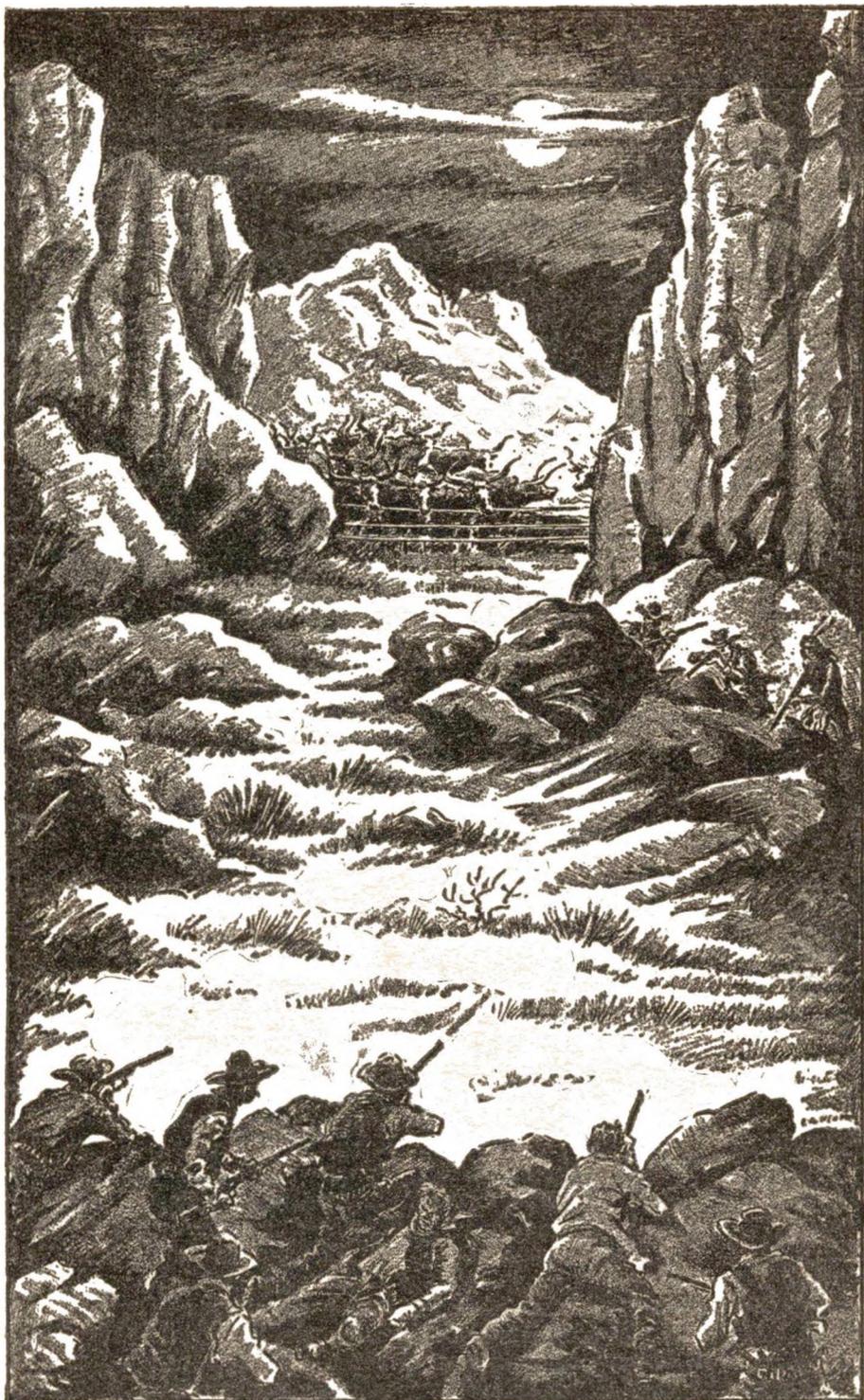
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| <input type="checkbox"/> TELEVISION | <input type="checkbox"/> Upholstering | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical Nursing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Mechanics | <input type="checkbox"/> Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Millinery |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Body-Fender | <input type="checkbox"/> Foremanship | <input type="checkbox"/> Charm and Modeling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building Construction | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Factory Management | <input type="checkbox"/> High School |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration | |

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____ Zone _____ State _____



The moon was once more shedding its light over the bloody canyon as firing started up again . . .

It was a risky project, but the only other choice for Tap and Betty was starvation — they preferred facing bullets to hunger.

MUSTANG VENTURE

Feature Novelet
by R. S. Lerch



TAP SINGLETON checked the steeldust at the crest of the ridge and looked back. Pride and pleasure shone in the eyes of the rangy young rancher as he viewed the clean lines of fifty foot spruce logs that formed the walls of the ranch house on the knoll. The rafters and ridge pole were already in place and beneath them he could see the partitions outlining the five rooms, with the stone fireplace dominating the large living room. Down by the stream at the foot of the knoll, the two skilled workers he had hired and his eighteen year old ranch-hand were resting after a belated noon meal. Beyond them was the new, peeled aspen-pole corral. There were too few horses inside that corral, but additions to the cavy would have to wait until fall.

As Tap headed for Malpais again, the pleasure he felt was heightened a little at the thought of Betty's

enthusiasm when she first saw their new home. He had planned to have her ride back with him in the morning. Then a touch of fear momentarily chilled his enthusiasm.

They had figured on marriage as soon as the cabin was finished. That would mean lean months ahead, until the beef round-up was completed. But she was a sensible girl. She knew he was putting his last cent into this and would understand the necessity for economy until the beef herd was marketed. The calf drop had been good and the future looked bright if he could scrape through until fall without mortgaging the ranch. He feared that, since it could mean the loss of all he had worked so hard for during the last five years.

It was early evening when Tap Singleton reached the sleepy little cow town. He left the steeldust at the stables with instructions that it be given a rubdown, and flipped a quarter to the grinning stable boy.

"I'll sure take care of him good, Mr. Singleton." Billy cried as he deftly caught the coin.

When Tap signed the register at

the Malpais Hotel he noted the name above his. *Robt. Duryea, Rock Springs, Wyo.* the legend read.

"Whiskey drummer?" he asked indifferently, indicating the name.

The clerk shook his head. "Horse buyer, and particular. Cas Duval's trying to sell him some of the half-broken stock he has left after he got rid of his good stuff to the army. But Duryea's cautious."

Tap nodded without interest, picked up the room key, and turned away, saddle bags draped over one shoulder.

And then the clerk called softly, "Duval's tough boy, Dinny Bates, is in town. Watch yourself, Tap."

Singleton checked his stride, his face stiffening slightly, then nodded again and continued to the stairs at the end of the lobby.

Up in the hotel room he washed and put on a clean shirt and neck scarf and turned toward the door. Then he paused and returned to sit on the bed, where he drew his six-gun, wiped it and checked the loads and action.

The hate of Dinny Bates stemmed from an incident nearly five years old, when Tap caught the youth branding one of the Circle S calves and had worked him over with a rope end, then had botted him to his horse and drove him off the range. Dinny now fancied his gun-skill and his resentment had festered until sometime, somewhere, he would try to square the account with Tap Singleton.

LEAVING the hotel, Tap walked toward a small white cottage at the southern end of the street. Though his manner was outwardly casual, nothing moved along the way that he did not instantly detect. He slowed his gait as he passed one of the saloons, glancing inside.

At a rear table a heavy-set man in a calfskin vest was leaning forward, his hands making gestures, his heavy features flushed, his voice reaching the street in a low rumble. Opposite him sat a small, gray-haired man wearing a goatee and mustache and a

non-committal expression on a seamed and darkly-tanned face. Back of the table, watching the pair and lounging against a partition to a private room, was as small, blond youth with viciousness marked in mouth and eyes, and wearing twin six-guns.

Tap Singleton instantly identified the trio; Cas Duval trying to sell horses to the buyer, Robert Duryea, and Duval's shadow, Dinny Bates. Tap passed the saloon and continued down the street, his manner more relaxed.



Betty Carston opened the door as he mounted the steps to the small porch, then stepped back. She was not so tall as Tap and had developed the rounded contours of maturity. Her features were placid, but a generous, softly curving mouth and calm blue eyes that held a twinkle in their depths as Tap lengthened his stride to cross the threshold, gave an indication of spirit beneath the reserved exterior. She lifted her arms and he went to her eagerly.

After a moment she drew gently back.

"Supper'll get cold, Tap. I've got stewed chicken. Mrs. Prescott dropped by today and gave me a fat hen. She knows Saturday is your day to come to town."

"Bless her, and lead me to it," Tap cried. "And I've got a surprise for you. The ridge-pole and rafters are up, and so are the partitions, so tomorrow you're going to ride back with me to pass judgement on your future home."

Betty Carston looked back over her shoulder and smiled.

"Not until after the mail from the early stage is sorted," she said, reminding him that though it would

be Sunday, she was still postmistress of the little cowtown of Malpais.



Tap leaned back in his chair, sighed heavily in regret that he could eat no more, then drew sack and papers from a vest pocket and rolled a cigarette. As he lit it, Betty rose and hurried out of the room.

"I almost forgot," she called back. "I've mail for you, the queerest, flat package. It came yesterday. Now you go into the parlor while I clean up here. It won't take but a minute," she finished as she returned and handed Tap the package wrapped with coarse brown paper.

He looked at the awkwardly printed letters that formed his name and address, then glanced at the return address. There was no name merely, *Green River, Utah*. He frowned in perplexity.

"Don't know anybody in Green River," he said thoughtfully, as he headed for the front room.

When Betty Carston entered a few moments later she was startled and checked by the change in Tap Singleton. He was holding the content of the package and staring at it, an expression of eager anticipation on his face. Almost as startling was the object itself.

It was a disc of hide some ten inches in diameter, with coarse gray and brown hair on the underside that identified it as marmot, white and stiff from salt rubbed into it above, with little figures painted on it that she could not see clearly from her position across the room.

"For goodness sake, what is that, and who sent it?" she cried as she moved toward Tap.

He looked up, grinning, as she perched on the arm of his chair while he explained. She saw, now, that around the hide's perimeter was painted a black band in the shape of a horseshoe. Inside this were several rows of little brown horseshoes, with

one in white down in the corner. Below the rows of shoes were ten Xs.

"This is from an old Ute friend of my footloose days," Tap began. "That big horseshoe in black is his signature. His name's Iron Hoof. I worked with him for three years. He and his two brothers and two cousins are mustangers. This is to tell me that he has some horses ready for sale. There are thirty-five brown horseshoes and one white, which means he has thirty-five corraled. I don't know what the shoe means. The ten Xs mean that he wants ten dollars apiece for them."

She nodded her understanding, watching his animated expression. A slow chill formed in her. She arose and moved to another chair, still studying him. Finally she spoke.

"Interesting, Tap, of course, but if it's going to take nearly all the cash you have just to finish the cabin, I don't see where this message can mean anything to you. You couldn't even buy the four or five additional horses you need at the Circle S, even at so low a price, and not run a big chance of wrecking our plans."

Some of his enthusiasm died. He met her inquiring gaze and there was neither laughter nor eagerness in his eyes now.

"Are you a gambler, or can you be one just for once, Betty?" he asked soberly.

"Go on," she replied quietly and without expression. "Tell me the rest."

Quickly, and with gradually mounting eagerness, he told her the news he had had from the garrulous hotel clerk.

"Don't you see, Honey?" he cried. "Cas Duval sold his best stock to the army two months ago and all he has left are scrubs. Bein' what he is, he'll try to unload these on this Duryea, but from what the clerk said, he won't have much luck. I can get these thirty-five ponies for ten dollars apiece and likely Duryea'll pay twenty-five or thirty for them.

"It'll take all the cash I have, and there is the gamble. If anything happens to block the deal it means our

home won't be finished until after the beef round-up. And maybe even then, if the market doesn't hold up, we'll barely be able to skin through the winter. But if the deal goes through," and he spread his hands, "we'll be all set. The cabin gets done, we get the furniture and conveniences we'd have to wait a year or more for, and still have money in the bank to meet emergencies."

He was leaning forward when he finished. Then, slowly, he sobered. Bethina Carston was leaning back, one hand at her breast, her eyes staring past him into space.

"Of course, honey, if you say, 'No', that's the end of it. But it looks like a twenty-four carat chance to me," Tap said hopefully.

"And if Cas Duval, and that little wasp of his, Dinny Bates, learn of your plan they'll see that you never get here with the horses, maybe never get back yourself—a lonely grave in a canyon or mesa somewhere south of here. I couldn't stand that, Tap."

"I don't reckon I can let a thing like that scare me from trying," Tap replied drily. "Not if I want to go on living with myself. Besides, I won't be advertising what I'm doing. I'll see this Duryea on the quiet, then head out of town immediately. Iron Hoof and his boys will be driving the mustangs back with me. I reckon, even if Cas Duval does try something, he'll find he's bit off more than he bargained for."

For a full minute she said nothing. Finally she shook her head slowly.

"I'll do or say nothing to hinder you if you want to make the gamble. If I did, and you didn't go ahead, though I know you'd never say anything about it, you'd feel that I'd prevented you from making our future secure, and there would be resentment. You couldn't help that, Tap. Now go interview your horse buyer and if you leave town tonight drop in before you go. I'll want to know your exact route, and I'll have some food for the trip."

Though he knew, from her conservatism, Betty might be right in wanting to play it safe and continue as they had originally planned, Tap could not help but feel a shade of resentment at her attitude, though he tried not to show it when he headed for the hotel. A stubbornness of which he was scarcely conscious was rising. He'd make this deal, and he'd see it through.

AS HE PASSED the saloon where Duryea and Cas Duval had been seated, he looked inside again. Duryea was gone, but Duval and Dinny Bates sat at the table, a bottle between them.

Crossing the hotel lobby, Tap asked the clerk, "Mr. Duryea in his room?"

The clerk's gaze sharpened. "Yeah. Went up about a quarter hour ago. Understand he's going out in the morning to look at what Cas Duval's got. You got horses to sell, too? I thought yours was a cow ranch."

Tap Singleton waited until the man was through, looking at him with calm, unrevealing eyes. When he had finished Tap said, "It is a cow ranch," and turned and walked toward the stairs.

A flash of anger at the patent rebuff to his curiosity showed in the man's eyes as he stared after Singleton. Tap mounted the stairs without once glancing back.

The horse buyer had a room at the front of the hotel and when Singleton rapped on the door there was a sharp, "Come in."

Tap entered and backed the door shut. The neatly dressed little man with the gray mustache and goatee was seated beside a table on which was a bottle of bourbon. Tap thought the man had the sharpest eyes he had even seen in a human as he looked questioningly at his visitor.

"My name's Singleton and I have a ranch about twenty miles west of here. I understand you're looking for some good horses," Tap ventured.

"I am. You got some?"

"Not yet, but I can get them. Mind

telling me just what and how many you want?"

"Nope. I want twenty-five to thirty. Don't care about blooded stock, racers, or anything fancy. But they've got to be tough and well-broken. Some of them may be used as pack animals. A party of explorers and prospectors going into the Wasatch Range. I'll pay as high as thirty-five dollars apiece, cash, for the right animals. I won't take any at any price that don't meet those standards. I'm going out tomorrow to look at some, but from what I've learned, they probably won't be what I want."

"They probably won't," Tap agreed drily. "But I think those I can buy will. They're mustangs, and they're not broke, they're gentled. Five Utes, friends of mine, are in that game and time means little to them. Patience and kindness tame the wildest, and those mustangs will be tough, too, you can depend on that. But, before I put my last dime into their purchase, I'll want to be sure the market's still open when I get them here."

"When will that be?" Duryea rapped. Then, "Sounds like just what I want, but I won't commit myself until I look them over."

"Don't expect you to. All I'm asking is that you won't make any purchases before you see them. I'll leave at once—they're down in the Black Mesa country—and reach their camp tomorrow evening. With the Utes helping me drive, we should be back here within three days after that."

"Go get 'em. I'll make no buys until you arrive. And by the way, do you suppose I could get your Indians to drive them north?"

"If you pay day wages they'll probably be glad to make the extra money."

"I expect to do that. Now have a drink to seal what looks like might work itself into a good deal for both of us."

Tap relaxed, grinned, and stepped to the table where Duryea filled two shot glasses. They downed their drinks and the peppery little buyer actually smiled.

Tap set his glass down and said, "Thanks. Now, I'm off," and headed for the door.

With his hand on the knob, he turned back almost hesitantly.

"There's one more thing," he ventured. "I'll appreciate it if you'll say nothing about this deal. It's quite a drive through some pretty wild country, and if anyone wanted to interfere, for the purpose, maybe, of preventing the herd from reaching here, it could be tough."

The buyer's gaze sharpened. Then he nodded vigorously.

"I think I knew what, and who, you mean. No word of this will get out through me, Singleton. And—good luck."

"Thanks," Tap said again, relief in his voice.

As he stepped into the corridor he thought he heard the quiet closing of a door somewhere nearby, but absorbed in contemplating the trip ahead, he gave it no attention. He retrieved his saddle bags and descended to the lobby where the night clerk was now on duty. The man showed no curiosity when Tap paid for the room and turned in the key.

2



BACK AT the white cottage he found Betty Carston waiting. There was no outward evidence of regret when she saw the saddle bags and knew he had committed himself to the venture. In fact her greeting indicated that she had expected it. She welcomed him as usual, then led the way into the living room. A pencil and paper had been placed on the table. She pointed to them and the chair before them.

"You sit right down there and draw a map of the country you're going into. I'll want to know where you are all the time, and when you expect to

reach Malpais again. While you're doing that I'll take your saddle bags and put in some food I've prepared for your trip."

Grinning a little, Tap crossed the room and sat down at the table. Five minutes later Betty was back in the room. Tap took one look at the bulging bags.

"I won't be gone more'n a month or two," he said with a smile.

"Maybe your Ute friends can help you. They might like white man's food for a change. Now explain that map to me," she finished, depositing the bags near the door then moving over to stand at his shoulder.

"Well," Tap began, picking up the pencil for a pointer, "this dot at the top is Malpais and the broken line leading south is the trail I'll follow, both down and back. This crooked line is Squaw Creek. I'll reach there near midnight, camp until daylight to give my horse a rest, and then reach Iron Hoof's camp late tomorrow. This dotted country with the jagged lines running east and west is the Skull Canyon country, rough and the most difficult spot to cross on the way back. Still further south is the Black Mesa, and over to the west, where I put that cross, is Iron Hoof's headquarters. That's where he'll have the horse herd. Reaching there tomorrow night, and starting back the next day we should be here the second day after that. Any questions?"

She studied the map without replying, then placed the tip of a finger on the stretched marked, "Skull Canyon."

"If that's a canyon how will you get down into it with a wild horse herd and up again on this side?"

"Those ponies won't be wild, though they will have spirit. About where my trail crosses there's a spot where an avalanche made a steep but passable pitch up on this side. Across from that there's a ledge winding down where we'll have to go single file."

She straightened.

"I think I've a pretty clear picture now, Tap," she replied, stepping back

as he arose.

He went to the door, picked up the saddle bags, and Betty followed him into the vestibule where he turned. Suddenly, impulsively, she was in his arms, her face pressed hard against his chest.

"Take care of yourself, Tap. And—come back to me," she murmured.

"Why, Honey, this is just a pleasure jaunt, like a hundred other trips I've made," he objected a little too heartily.

"I—I hope so—but I've a strange feeling," she returned looking up. "Now go before I do or say something foolish."

He kissed her, tightening his hold, pressing her close for a moment, then released her.

"Don't you worry, Betts. You'll see me back here in four days, and things will be pretty bright for the future then," and complying to her quick little shove, he turned and left the cottage, with the disquieting sound of a sob in his ears as the door was closed behind him.

The headquarters of Iron Hoof might very well have been those of a small ranch, except that there were more and larger corrals than was usual at a ranch. Two log cabins squatted near a creek flowing down from the hills. The location was a wedge of flat land between the steep hills and an escarpment that reached upward nearly a thousand feet to the level of Black Mesa, which merged with the hills.

Even at a distance where he could barely make out the cabins and corrals, Tap Singleton saw that the larger of the two corrals was crowded. A small one a little distance away disclosed some white animal that he could not at first identify. There were tiny, moving figures around the cabins.

He lifted the reins and the steeldust broke into a weary canter. Finally, he sent a long, high call winging across the plain. The men immediately stood motionless, facing in his direction.

Within a few minutes he saw one of them come forward. And then, as he drew closer to the headquarters, objects became more distinct. He recognized the man striding to meet him as his old friend, Iron Hoof. But almost immediately his roving glance centered and held on the small corral and he could not tear his gaze away from it. He knew, now, the meaning of the white horseshoe in his friend's message.

IN THE SMALL corral, head high, moving with smooth grace on long, beautifully proportioned legs and dainty hoofs, was the most exquisite palomino stallion he had ever seen. Of a light cream color, with luxuriant silvery mane and tail, pride and power were revealed in every perfect line and graceful motion.

"My brother likes Silver? He is as gentle as he is proud."

At the sound of the voice in the Ute tongue Singleton tore his gaze from the stallion and saw that Iron Hoof was waiting, a light of amusement and pleasure in his dark brown eyes.

Tap Singleton replied in the same language.

"If it takes all I've got, I'm going to buy that stallion," he cried.

Iron Hoof shook his head. "Silver is not for sale. But come on to camp. You have come far and ridden hard. We are glad to see you, have been expecting you."

"Just got your message yesterday, Iron Hoof, and headed out at once. That looks like a fine bunch of mustangs. I'll take them providing we can start the drive north to Malpais the first thing in the morning. I've a buyer, but there's a time limit. I'm reserving five of them for my own ranch, however. I'll explain."

"Yes, of course, we can move at any time. But now is time for eating. You can tell me after we eat. Smoking Man will look after your pony," he finished, and one of his cousins immediately came forward to take the steeldust.

In one of the cabins Singleton put his saddle bags on the table. When he opened them and took out the wrapped delicacies Betty had prepared the Utes grunted in anticipation. One of them went to the stove and returned with a steaming roast of antelope saddle.

Only after the meal was eaten and Tap and his friends had lighted cigarettes, did the conversation turn to business. Still speaking in their native tongue, Tap explained the deal and the events leading up to it.

"I wouldn't fool you, my friend," he finished. "I'll be getting thirty-five apiece for those horses if they're sold. I feel guilty as hell at paying you only ten dollars."

Iron Horse raised a hand. "I am glad. My friend needs much money, I know. I have set my price. We are all satisfied. We will take no more."

Tap immediately reached into a pocket of his levis and brought out a check book and indelible pencil. He made out a check for \$350 for the thirty-five mustangs.



"I don't need to look at them," he said quietly, passing the check to Iron Horse. "This will get you the correct amount at the bank in Malpais. And now about that palomino. I'll pay whatever you ask, and without question, as soon as I get my money for the mustangs."

Iron Horse shook his head decisively. "Silver is not for sale. I said so before. But you, my brother of the old days, are getting married, as you just told us. Iron Horse, and his two brothers, would make you a wedding present. Silver is yours; has been yours since I first took charge of his

training. He is gentle, can run like the wind, and never pitches. He will soon learn to love you for you, too, treat your horses gently. Take him, with our wishes for the best of luck."

Tap stared at his Ute friend, scarcely comprehending. Silence had settled over the room, and Tap suddenly realized that the other four were watching him, awaiting his decision, that refusal to accept their gift would hurt deeply, if not actually insult them. Slowly, he reached a hand across the table and Iron Horse gripped it.

"No man could receive a finer gift, nor be more glad to get it," he said slowly. "And all of you have my deepest thanks. Be sure that Silver will be well cared for."

Iron Horse said, "We know that, and we are satisfied. But there is one request. The stallion was leader of the herd. They follow him willingly. Silver is your horse now, but will you let me ride him on the trip to Malpais, leading the herd?"

Tap grinned. "You know I will. No one else knows the best route. Silver is your horse to ride any time you come to the ranch. That's understood."

Iron Hoof turned to his companions. "We move out at daylight, and each of you will take his rifle. I'm sorry we do not have an extra one, but maybe we won't need any at all."

"I sure hope we don't," Singleton replied fervently.

EXCELLENT time was made the first day of the drive. The horses had been held in the corrals for weeks, and even though the enclosures were large enough to give them some exercise, they were used to open unlimited range. Recognizing some freedom, they were ready to run. The six riders kept them fairly well bunched, however, and Iron Hoof on the white stallion set a fast pace at the start. That night, with the mustangs held in a rope corral by a small stream, Iron Hoof announced that they would reach Skull Canyon by late afternoon of the next day, and if nothing prevented,

would be in Malpais the following evening.

It was mid-afternoon, when Tap could already make out the uneven sky line marking the canyon country, that Iron Hoof halted the palomino. The mustangs bunched, separated, and under the watchful eyes of the four flank riders, finally began to graze on the sparse grass. The leader motioned and Tap, riding drag, swung around the mustangs and went to the Ute. Iron Hoof was staring ahead, one hand shading his eyes. Following the direction of his gaze, Tap could make out a little, moving dot, apparently a rider heading toward them.

"A boy on a pony that has been ridden too hard. It is beginning to break. We'll go toward him. Better stay with me, Tap, until we see what he wants. I've a hunch he brings news for you," and he waved his hand again.

Immediately the others started the herd forward. Within a quarter hour Tap saw what Iron Hoof, with his wonderful, wilderness-trained eyes had discovered before. The horse was breaking stride, and the sunlight was reflected from hair that was covered with lather and sweat. A moment later Tap recognized little Billy, the barn boy at Malpais. He rode forward to meet the lad and once more Iron Hoof halted the herd.

Billy tumbled from the saddle and ran to Tap, one hand digging inside his shirt. His horse stood on wide spread legs, head low, sides heaving.

"Here, Tap. Sure glad I met you. And I got something more," Billy cried, thrusting out an envelope, then turning and hurrying back to his horse.

In his name written across the face of the envelope Tap recognized the fine, even characters of Betty Carston's hand. He tore it open and took out the paper inside.

Dearest Tap, the note began. *That nosy clerk at the Malpais Hotel listened outside the door when you and Mr. Duryea made your agreement,*

and he went to Cas Duval with the information the next morning. Billy was up in the barn loft when Duval and Dinny Bates came in for their horses, telling about it and outlining their plans. He came to me soon as they'd left. They rode out to Duval's ranch for his half dozen tough hands and plan to hit your horse herd in Skull Canyon, scattering it, then gathering it up again and making the sale themselves. I have a key to the store where the post-office is, you know, and I went there and got the rifle and three boxes of shells because I know you don't carry a rifle when you come to town. May you not have to use it, but if you do—shoot hard and straight.

*All my love and my prayers,
Beth.*

"Here, Mr. Singleton. She's a beauty and new as the day she came from the factory."

At the boy's words Tap thrust the note into a shirt pocket and looked down. Billy was standing beside Tap's mount and holding up a .30-30 Winchester carbine and three boxes of cartridges.

"Billy, you're a hero, and I'll get even with you before this is over. Did you get out ahead of Duval's band?" Tap replied with quiet sincerity as he took the rifle and ammunition.

"Aw, you know I'd go to hell for you, Mr. Singleton. This was just fun. Sure, I'm way ahead of them. Duval and Dinny had near twenty miles to ride to their ranch before heading south again. That'd take them almost a day before they rode through Malpais."

"Bad news?"

At the calm question behind him Tap Singleton turned and outlined the message to Iron Hoof. Momentarily, Billy had lost interest in his hero; he was staring goggle-eyed at the palomino. The Ute looked down at the boy and a smile almost broke through his naturally stern reserve. He spoke haltingly, in English.

"Your horse—no good—now. We

put your saddle on mustang—make hackamore. You ride way behind, lead your horse slow. Savvy?"

Billy tore his glance from the stallion and looked solemnly at the Indian, then nodded his understanding. Iron Hoof remained silent a moment, then spoke again to the lad.

"You come up ledge?"

Billy said he had.

"If we far ahead when we reach Skull Canyon, you go on down into it. One will meet you at bottom of ledge. Bring you to where we camp."

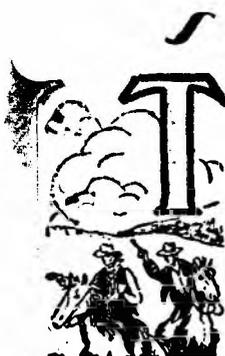
While he had been giving the instructions, one of his brothers had removed the saddle and bridle from the exhausted horse, given it a quick rub-down, and saddled one of the most tractable of the mustangs. A moment later a lariat was shaped into a hackamore and the man led the saddled pony and tired horse up to Billy.

"You wait. Then walk him long ways—or you kill your horse," Iron Hoof cautioned as the lad prepared to mount the mustang.

Then he turned to Tap, reverting to his own tongue.

"We move fast now. We want to beat them to Skull Canyon, so they'll find us at the place I pick. Maybe you better stay at point with me."

"Let's go," Tap replied shortly, thrusting the final cartridge into the loading gate of the Winchester and dumping the reserve supply into one of the saddle bags.



HE SUN was balanced on the western horizon when Iron Hoof halted the palomino at the edge of the canyon. Here a fault in the wall, when some prehistoric upheaval had split the rock wall diagonally and thrust the lower section outward, or the upper one back, slanted to the canyon floor. It was as

much as twelve feet wide in some spots and in others no more than four feet, and it twisted and turned, following the uneven wanderings of the wall, but it formed a negotiable though tricky pathway to the canyon floor.

Tap drew to one side and watched as the other Utes brought up the main herd. Iron Hoof urged the stallion to the edge of the shelf but, looking a half thousand feet straight down, the animal became nervous, pranced a little, then laid its ears back in rebellion and rose on its hind legs, the forefeet pawing the air.

It was then that Tap began to appreciate the wonderful mastery and understanding of the Ute for a horse. The stallion, frightened at the prospect of descending with a rider on its back, would become a raging, fighting, uncontrolled mass of nerves and powerful muscles in another moment, and might well plunge itself and rider over the edge of the cliff. But Iron Hoof, while holding a tight rein, rested his right hand up under the animal's jaw and drew it caressingly down along the neck, at the same time speaking softly and with a confident, reassuring tone. Silver came down from his rearing protest, stepped forward a few paces, then, with a ringing neigh of defiance, moved onto the ledge and started down.

Immediately one of the mares, following the lord and master of the band, followed. The Utes, urging the mustangs forward, had little trouble now. Soon a lone file of horses was moving across the face of the escarpment. Tap, his position at one side of the ledge, saw the white stallion as it came into the canyon. Iron Hoof headed west, though the long, open slope of dirt and rubble formed by quake and avalanche by which the opposite wall could be surmounted lay a quarter mile in the opposite direction.

And then the last of the riders was on the ledge, and Tap moved to follow. A quick thought halted him and he looked back across the treeless plain. Little Billy was in sight, but coming



slowly, leading a tired though no longer exhausted horse. Tap waited.

"It was a half hour before he quit heaving and hanging his head and took a roll. When he did that I knew he could travel, but I come slow anyway," Bill explained.

Tap nodded. "Good boy. I thought he was a goner when you reached us, but it looks as though he'll be all right now. You start down and I'll follow right behind you."

What made Tap, on the point of heading the steeldust onto the ledge, pause and stare northward beyond the opposite rim he could not have told. Some faint movement may have registered subconsciously. He caught the object almost at once, merely a small black patch so far away that it was scarcely visible, but as he stared he saw that it did not quite merge with its background, that very slowly but unmistakably it shifted against that background. Sure that what he looked at was a moving mass, he put the steeldust to the descent.

When he reached the canyon floor the horse herd and its riders had disappeared around a bend, but the trail was easy to follow. Within a half mile he found one of the Utes waiting at the mouth of an opening in the south wall. Tap, with Billy following, entered the defile. A hundred yards ahead, an almost right-angled bend hid what lay beyond. As Tap reached and rode past the turn he almost gasped.

The branch canyon had narrowed at the bend to no more than a couple of rods. Beyond the bend it widened abruptly to a pocket nearly a quarter mile in diameter, with a spring in its center surrounded by a carpet of grass. An ideal holding ground for the mustangs. Already two of the Utes were busy with ropes, closing off the bend so that none of the herd could wander back into the main canyon.

Iron Hoof came toward Tap. When the Indian reached him Tap spoke quietly.

"They're coming."

Iron Hoof's gaze sharpened. "How know?"

Tap described what he had seen.

The Ute replied, "Good! So far away they didn't see you. And they won't get here before dark. We have time to eat, and prepare."

NIGHT HAD fallen but a rising moon shed silvery light along the canyon floor, leaving a wide shadow-band along the base of the north escarpment. At the western edge of the pocket mouth Iron Hoof was crouched, rifle in hand. Beside him knelt Tap Singleton. A boulder a couple of yards to his right would be Tap's cover when the fight started. Still farther to the east near the opposite wall of the pocket was another Ute. Behind and between these three, the remaining three waited. It was a half hour since a scout out in the canyon had reported hearing Cas Duval and his crew descending the north slope.

Suddenly Iron Hoof straightened. Tap followed his gaze. A tracker, bent forward, was following the sign of the unshod horse herd. He was within a half hundred yards of the pocket and turning toward their position when Tap caught movement from his companion. The Ute had raised his rifle, was aligning the sights. Tap knocked the rifle barrel up, then swung toward the approaching man.

"Come right ahead," he called, "with your hands in the air."

Instead of complying, the tracker

leaped backward, then ran a zig-zag course and dived into the shadow-band. Tap's two shots had not stopped him.

"Should have targeted in this rifle. She shoots a might high," he observed.

"You should have let me drop him. Now they will know where we are and that we're ready."

"A man has to have his chance, even one of Duval's tough waddies," Tap returned quietly.

An hour passed, and another.

"Could be they're waiting for morning and for us to get out in the open," Singleton suggested.

Iron Hoof shook his head. "No. More like they wait for the moon to go down, when all the canyon is dark."

A moment later he gave a low exclamation. "Ah—that what they want. They come pretty quick now, I think."

At first Tap did not understand. Then he saw that the bright moon path was dimming, was but a shade lighter than the black band of shadow along the base of the opposite cliff. He looked up. A film of cloud, drifting from the west, was crossing the face of the moon. Tap moved over to the boulder and knelt while his eyes searched the slightly lighter part of the canyon floor. It was possible, he thought, that Duval and his men were already directly opposite the pocket mouth, having moved up very slowly and without sound along the hidden base of the north wall. His eyes stabbed at the blackness and discovered nothing. After a moment he switched his attention eastward along the gray path in the canyon's center.

There was movement out there; vague, almost invisible, detectible only because it was movement. Tap thumbed back the hammer of his rifle, waiting for a definite target. The enemy had had their warning: they would receive no other. There were other illy defined movements in other spots.

Then the Ute on his right fired, the report of his gun echoed by that of Iron Hoof. Yells! A bitter curse, and a cry that ended in a bubbling sound. Winks of returning rifle fire. The In-

dians at the rear opened up and Tap fired three shots at those splashes of light, aiming low and a little to the right of each spurt. More curses, and faster movement, coming toward or circling away from the pocket mouth.

Silence followed. Once Tap thought he heard a faint, sliding movement on his right, but he could see nothing. Then there was motion on his left, beyond Iron Hoof. He concentrated his attention on that, but it was now hidden by the lip of the canyon wall at the Ute's back. Iron Hoof, with head thrust forward was looking past Tap. Tap thought that the Indian over there, to his right, had been hit. He was stretched prone behind his sheltering boulder and was not moving.

Tap stiffened and slowly laid his rifle on the ground, his right hand snaking out his six-gun. He'd detected an object at the same time he caught its movement. It was scarcely ten feet behind Iron Hoof and looked like the head and shoulder of a man inching beyond the edge of the escarpment. Then brightness came. The cloud had drifted past and the moon was once more shedding its light over the bloody canyon. There was no doubt about what Tap saw now. Half of the man's body was in the open and the rifle in his hands was coming up to center on Iron Hoof. And from behind Tap came a thin, exultant voice.

"Turn this way, Singleton, and take it. We settle accounts right here," in the unmistakably bitter intonation of young Dinny Bates.

Tap did not turn. His six-gun bucked in his hand. His shot almost blended with that from the rifle of Iron Hoof. The rifle that was lining on the back of the Ute's head went off, its lead flung high toward the canyon rim, and the man behind it pitched sideways to lie groaning in the open. Behind Tap a thin, high curse drifted away to a whisper and silence.

Again there were winks of light. Tap counted only three. And they were answered by the Utes. It was a relief to note that the prone Indian over to

the east of Tap was firing with the others. At least he was not dead.

And again silence; a short silence pregnant with suspense settled down. A little later a man stood up from behind a boulder, his hands above his head and empty, clear in the light of the moon.

"Singleton—" he yelled. "Call off your wolves. We got enough. Duval hit and down, an' maybe dyin'. Dinny Bates killed, and three others dead. Only three of us left. We quit. Can we drag out the dead and wounded?"

"Sure, but hold your pose. Them other two come up beside you, hands in the air," Tap called.

Immediately two others rose from behind their shelters and moved to their companion.

"Now drop them gun belts and step clear. Then come and get your partners. You'll be covered every inch of the way. Make it fast."

Two of the men moved up to Iron Hoof's left and lifted the sobbing, cursing Cas Duval, carrying him down the canyon to where their camp was evidently located. The third picked up the light body of Dinny Bates and followed them. The Utes and Tap Singleton remained where they were, watchful. A little later the three returned, leading three horses. They draped and tied a body across each animal's back and once more moved away.

IRON HOOF gave quick, low orders to one of his brothers. The Indian arose and glided out into the canyon, crossing to the shadow-band.

Iron Hoof stood up and moved toward Tap, but looking beyond him.

"I think Smoking Man has been hit," he said, and Tap likewise walked toward the Indian.

"Smoking Man only got bad headache," came from the Ute. "Lead parted his hair and put him to sleep for a little while."

"We go to the spring and build a fire and look," Iron Hoof said as the man got slowly to his feet.

Smoking Man would have fallen. He stood swaying, fighting the vertigo. Iron Horse reached him and took an arm. Tap moved up and took the other arm and they walked toward the bend in the blind canyon.

They were met by Billy, who had been under stern orders not to leave the sheltered pocket and to see that the rope fence closing it off remained intact. Told that it was all over and the enemy had pulled out, he let out a high yell of excitement, then hurried to gather wood and start a fire beside the spring.

The creased Ute lay sleeping in his blanket. Two others were preparing coffee by the fire that Billy kept supplied with wood. Iron Hoof turned to Singleton, speaking in his native tongue.

"You saved my life, my friend, and I am in your debt more now than I can ever repay. When your enemy called you to face him and fight, you ignored the challenge, even though it would mean a bullet in the back, and shot the man who was behind me."

Tap grinned at his friend. "Reckon that makes us even, Iron Hoof, 'cause you took care of Dinny Bates for me. So I'm in your debt, too, and we call it even."

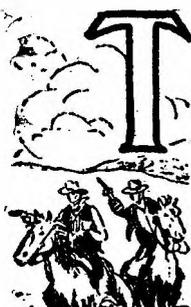
Iron Hoof shook his head and would have objected, but checked himself and looked toward the bend in the pocket. The scout was returning. He stood before the others and spoke quietly.

"Their leader is wounded, but I think he might live. They have buried their dead in shallow graves at the edge of the dirt slope, where we go up out of the canyon. They have left their camp, with their wounded leader, have gone up the north slope and are riding north. It is my thought, from what I heard, that they are hurrying to get their leader to Malpais and a doctor."

"Good," Iron Hoof answered. "It is over. We make the rest of the trip

in peace. Now we eat lightly and sleep. Tomorrow at daylight we move."

4



HE DOUBLE row of dusty, weathered buildings that was Malpais lay just ahead. Tap Singleton moved over to Billy, now riding the pony that had brought him south.

"Billy, I want you to take the palomino into the livery stable immediately. Put him in a box stall, and groom him until he shines. Someone very special is due to be introduced to him in about an hour."

The lad grinned widely. "He'll shine like a new silver dollar, Mr. Singleton. You can count on it."

They were nearing the town now, and Iron Hoof and his Utes had turned the horse herd toward the corral a little distance west of the stable. Billy slipped a hackamore over the head of Silver and led him toward the stable while Tap joined the others in hazing the herd into the pole enclosure.

Scarcely had the bars been replaced after the last mustang was in when Tap saw several men hurrying down the street. Leading the curious was the dapper little figure of Robert Duryea, the horse buyer, and beside him strode the lanky hotel clerk. Tap dismounted and walked to meet them, and there was little of satisfaction in his expression.

Duryea, coming up, said, "Heard you had a little trouble. Those mustangs look like just about what I've been hoping to find."

Tap did not answer, nor even look at the man. He took a stride past him and a long arm shot out, the fingers fastening in the shirt front of the hotel clerk. The man let out a startled squawk as he was jerked forward. Tap's voice was thin with repressed rage.

"If you ever mix in my affairs again, you damned sneak, I'll wring your neck," and with a violent shove he hurled the frightened man down on his back in the dust.

The clerk picked himself up and his long legs almost twinkled as he ran back to the comparative safety of his place behind the desk at the Malpais Hotel. Tap turned to Duryea, explaining.

"So that's how Duval knew?" the horse buyer said thoughtfully. "Well, he won't be trying anything like that again for awhile. He's in the doctor's three room hospital. Pretty badly shot up, but he'll live. Now, to get down to business," he continued as they walked to the corral.

His eyes were bright as they darted over the horses. "They don't look vicious, and I see saddle marks on some."

"We've been changing to them all the way here, and not once did any of them more than dance around a little when they were mounted. Iron Hoof," he continued as the Ute came toward them, "meet Mr. Duryea, the man who is looking for tough horses that aren't too wild."

"How! These ponies plenty tough—and they not wild," the Ute said.

"That's good enough for me. I don't need any demonstrations. Let's get over to the bank and finish our business. You and your boys will drive the herd north for me?" he finished, looking at Iron Hoof.

The Ute nodded. "That is th' deal," he said calmly.

Duryea led the way back into town.

"You come, too, Iron Hoof. I'll help you cash your check," Tap called over his shoulder.

With the sale completed, Tap converted a hundred dollar check into ten dollar bills. He also made a deposit of \$25.00 and received a savings account book in return. As he and Iron Hoof walked back toward the corral and livery stable, Tap handed the sheaf of ten dollar bills to the Ute.

"Divide this among you and your

four boys—a little extra for what you've been through. Duryea paid it to me as a bonus for getting exactly the kind fo stock he wanted."

Singleton saw his friend hesitate and refusal beginning to form. He thrust the bills into the Indian's hand and closed the dark fingers around them.

"That's settled. I'll be seeing you when you ride back after delivering the herd north. Right now I got business with Billy, and then I got to hurry to that white cottage or get in wrong with a certain little squaw."

Iron Hoof's stern features split into a wide grin. He said nothing about the money, but in an unusual gesture for him, clapped Singleton on the shoulder.

"Your squaw get tough, you turn her over to me. I gentle her—she not so much different from a mustang."

Tap grinned back at him, then said a little drily, "I reckon that won't be necessary."

In the stable he found Billy going over the stallion with a curry comb. He called the boy and handed him the savings account book.

"For saving my life, and insuring my future. It's little enough, Bill, but it's a start. Add to it, but don't draw any out," he said after explaining the purpose of the account.

"Gee!" was all the lad could say, but his eyes were so bright that Tap turned quickly and left before he could see the forming tears course down the grimy cheeks.

BETTY CARSTON'S first words when she answered Tap's knock were, "You've been in town over an hour," but there was not the severe reproof in her voice that her words were intended to convey.

Tap grinned a little. "Had to be sure that we'd won. Now it's settled, and our future's made. But I did more than make a good business deal, I also picked up your wedding present."

"Never mind that just now, Tap. Cas Duval, almost unconscious, and three of his men rode in here this morning and Cas is in the hospital.

He went south with seven others, including Dinny Bates. Come in and tell me about it before we do anything else."

Relief, and a suggestion of the strain she had been under, were evident in her voice and manner. Tap immediately followed her into the living room and there detailed the events of the expedition.

"And now, young lady, you take a little walk with me to look at your wedding present."

She stared at him, scarcely comprehending. When he stood up, however, she arose and followed.

The girl stared, excitement and admiration mirrored in her eyes.

"Oh—you beauty—" she breathed and moved close to the edge of the box stall.

The palomino stretched his head forward and, impulsively, the girl's arms went around his neck. His vel-

vet-soft nose nuzzled her behind the ear and as she tightened her hold the stallion nickered softly.

"They've fallen in love with each other already." Billy murmured to Tap.

Tap gave the lad a wink, then turned toward Betty as she released her hold on Silver.

"But there's one condition," he said with mock severity.

She looked at him with shining eyes.

"You don't ride him until you are Mrs. Tap Singleton," he finished.

Then, "I'm turning in my resignation the first thing in the morning," she said finally with slow deliberation. "And I'll ride him before tomorrow night."

Tap stared, then excitedly swept his stetson from his head and slammed it to the barn floor. But the girl did not see. She had turned back to the silver stallion.

★

Here's Another of the Famous "Kewpie Donovan" Murder Mysteries



Kewpie Donovan could be very tolerant, for a price; he could put up with the vicious screwball Rittendon family, if the pay was right—and their offer was good. But having a client slain in Donovan's office was pushing matters too far!

Don't Miss This Feature
Novelet

DEATH WEARS WHITE

by Wilbur S. Peacock

You'll find it
in the August

FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES

A face bending over a sick-bed . . .
the smell of war . . . tired men . . .
and Matt knew that the end of his
trail was in San Simon.

REBELS DON'T DIE



by W. Edmunds Claussen

A HUSH had come to the air and the sun, bloodshot and dead, had already set. San Simon lay gripped in its dismal rest, the deep desert stillness running back from the adobe houses and blending with the distant pulsations of Mexican singing. Matt Roderic put his horse to the crooked trail and quit his cavalry saddle. He was saddle-lame, stiff. He didn't like what he saw of San Simon.

He leaned solidly against his sweating dun and let his eyes drift beyond the Mexican well while his fingers curled a smoke. Absently, he kicked the persistent dust with boots that had been hand made of matchless leather. Now they were worn to utter unfitness; twin exponents of the changes that had come with the end of the war. His shoulders were still covered

by the tattered remnants of a gray uniform from which the chevrons of a Texas cavalry detachment carelessly had not been removed. There was a blandness to the dusty mask of his face. It was stern and old for his twenty-six years, and across it a weariness lay deep. Yet beneath his floppy hat brim his eyes held the cool gleam of burnished brass.

Again his unsparing glance stalked through the street. The place was as he had expected, for a border town. A blending of shabby wood and adobe, sun-bleached and gray, with the fingers of a foreign land coming in and flavoring the place. Two men stood hipshot beneath the hotel piazza, and it was these two who soured all evaluation of the place. The solemn street took a sinister feel from their insolent gaze.

This was a dirty wickiup, Matt thought, a sultry town where a man couldn't be sure whether they'd offer him the knife or the bullet. Yet he'd get either one in the back, Matt knew, if he started talk of R-Bar-Nine cattle. Matt had lost better than three hundred head, and although he had fumbled over cold track a good part of these past two weeks, he was certain he had not come this far for nothing.

He tore his glance from the hotel and moved toward the boot-trampled walk. A light had gone on upstreet in the sheriff's office. He knew Ben Sloanaker only by reputation, but the sheriff of San Simon was a just, intrepid officer.

Other lights were coming on. One struck against the outline of a figure thinly cloaked by a light wrap—a woman's figure. She was young and full-bosomed and a certain air of good breeding at once touched Matt, lifting his brows that such a woman should be about. He moved nearer with his spurs making a soft music that turned the girl's attention. He noted first how her chestnut hair caught the lights from the store's chain-hung lanterns. Then her glance touched him. She had gray eyes, deeply shadowed and penetrating. But the salient point that drove through him now was their open wonderment. She recognized him.

Matt knew her, too. He had never been able to lay aside the impression of that chestnut head bending over his surgeon's cot. It was a faintly blurred and vague impression—the recollection of her bringing him food, and then of the long empty intervals. Yet the memory of her eyes, of her gentle fingers, remained with him. He had been unable to put her from him, and her nearness now was edging him with a strange, peculiar awkwardness. They had told him at the base hospital, later, that she was Doris Marsh. Address—Texas.

SHE SAID now, her lips bending softly, "I see they pulled you

through. I'm glad, Matt. We rebels are hard to kill."

"The lung is all right," and he knew a quick rippling joy. She knew and had remembered his name. By the light that shone in her face he saw how it was with her. He had not been alone with his lingering memories. He said politely, "I suspect I owe you more than I know ma'am."

"You don't owe me anything. It was all part of the thing—the grimness of war." A vague shudder ran through her and then her eyes caught a smile. "If you'd only been able to talk a little. I'd known you were from Texas, then. The Louisiana insignia had us fooled, and there were no papers. We knew only your name; that you mumbled."

"I picked up the coat from a dead corporal on Pea Ridge after mine was slashed to ribbons." His gaze wandered to the shop front wondering why Doris was standing here in the dismal street. The shop was scarcely more than a Mexican jacal filled with remnants of things that had long ago grown shabby. Articles once discarded had been restocked on the shelves in the absence of fresh merchandise.

Doris was talking again. "Father was murdered on the trail eastward. My brother and I have come to find his grave."

A dull, flat weariness was tugging him. But its edge had long ago worn smooth. This was the harvest of war. The casualties were too many to leave any deep mark against him, and her words registered tenuously against the edge of his mind. His glance was running beyond her; to the two ill-favored men slouching under the hotel columns.

The one was short, thin, leaning slightly forward in his stance. His eyes were hidden beneath the black hood of his hat. Under the darkness Matt sensed they would be button-round, deady, and set narrowly into the stubble-bearded face. The hands lingered close to the belt and gave his calling away. Gunman.

The other was tall, straight. His

boots were black, his clothes a rusty brown, his Stetson a crowning masterpiece of hatmakers' art. From beneath, his face held the hardness of a domineering man, and the utter soullessness of one who meant to rule. From his lower lip hung an imperial. Somehow Matt sensed these two would know the trails of rustled cattle. By standing here now beside Doris Marsh he was bringing some of their menace closer to her. He said quietly as he touched his hat with a finger: "I'd admire to see you later, Miss Doris. Looks like I'm drawing greenheads your way."

She said quickly, "It's just possible, Matt Roderic, I'm the one drawing flies!"

But she left him then and he sensed she knew the same reluctance. She walked to the doorway with a sharp catchlight dancing through her eyes. Not even a glance at the somber figures lounging beneath the hotel's colonnade. He let her go like that killing the sharp, prodding voice of regret. Life had been too empty of late and he dared not give his feelings rein.

Fuller appreciation of who she was closed about him. He knew now she was the daughter of Jim Marsh, brutally murdered by Mangas Colorado's Apaches in the jumble of broken country near the Arizona line.

He had been a stout character, Jim Marsh; a Texas man from San Antonio. He had been division manager of the Butterfield stages and when the company had ordered him to proceed to free soil, he had proved loyal to his line. At the outbreak of hostilities, all stock and possessions were to be herded into California so they might not fall into Rebel hands. Marsh had never reached his destination. Along the way, his mutilated body had been dropped in a shallow grave scraped among the rocks.

A fresh angle of the story came back to Matt. Jim Marsh had had in his possession thirty thousand of stage currency. The story ran that Southern sympathizers had betrayed Marsh into Apache hands. The thought brought a

bitterness to Matt Roderic and the set of his face tightened. He knew no true Southerner had ever delivered a white-man into the fate Mangas Colorado could devise. Particularly a Texas man carrying out his duty as he saw fit. The Confederacy had not fought that way.

Rather, Matt thought, the genesis of Jim Marsh's murder still lurked in this border valley. Yet now Matt put the matter behind him as his boots touched the sheriff's threshold. He was here, he coolly told himself, after R-Bar-Nine cattle!

BEN SLOANAKER looked him over from behind his scarred flat-top desk. Twice his eyes had drifted to the Service Colt sheathed in worn leather, butt foremost, against Matt's flat hip. Each time his look had drawn back to the mold of Matt's face. The sheriff found a challenging similarity between the black scabbard and the face. Both were grim, resolute. The sheriff thought that this man had seen blood and death and he was afraid of neither.

"So you think your cattle found their way into my canyons," Sloanaker said suddenly. He had been forced to drop his eyes from the other's level gaze, as though Matt held him silently accountable for the lawlessness that ran rampant over the thousand square miles of border country. Sloanaker pulled himself solidly to his feet and strode to the thick-walled doorway, looking into the night.

"I've heard of you, Roderic. You belong in Texas. What you doing here?"

"Not Texas anymore, Sheriff." Matt said, a little sadly. "Texas is sick. I came home to find the old man dead. The ranch and all our buildings burned out. I gathered what stock I could chase together and moved them into New Mexico. The Mogollons are still clean, untouched by it all. There's good graze in the valleys and clear water. It's all a man can ask. The

country will grow, Ben, if we stomp out the rattlers."

"Did you stop to think," the sheriff said from the doorway, "that it just could be the snakes won't let you do much stompin'?"

"I don't look at it that way. I aim to start stomping."

Sloanaker shifted the bulk of his Colt unconsciously in an easy, swift movement. "Find a valley inside my territory that holds your cattle and I'll side you so you get 'em back," the sheriff said.

Some of the pressure lifted from Matt's shoulders. He had been hopeful of the officer's help from the start. Now he was certain. He said again, "There's hundreds of draws and box canyons where a band might hold a herd until their new brands healed."

"Thousands," Sloanaker corrected.

"There's men in town you could give me a lead on." He knew Sloanaker's gaze was traveling restlessly downstreet. "Those two, for instance. Who are they, Ben?"

"Sidney McClure, with the beard. He never bent his back to earn a dollar. While you and your neighbors were fighting, McClure was gathering mavericks and driving west. No brands—they were nobody's cattle. What you going to do?"

"The other is Thompson Rusk. I'm waiting for that gazabo to tip his hand. There's others—dozens, that the war left behind. They're out to fatten without work. Redbird, a half breed Apache, drifted into San Simon today. He's part of McClure's outfit. When they don't have any work he drops below the border. It's a raw country, Roderic, and you've got your job cut out for you."

"What about the girl?" Matt said suddenly. He saw his words pull the sheriff up, and he swore at the door and turned.

"She oughtn't to have come, her and her brother. An eastbound party buried Jim Marsh in the canyon, we don't know exactly where. It's somewhere

around Stein's Station. But the canyon's been dug full of potholes ever since with men hunting the stage money."

"They never found it then?"

"Oh things drift in that were part of the stageline, but never anything that looks like thirty thousand. Old Marsh outsmarted them is all. Whoever had him murdered never got much out of it."

"Where was McClure at the start of the war?"

Sloanaker's eyes drifted to judge him. "He's been here longer than that. Drifted out of the Cherrycows sometime in Sixty. The other one's newer. He was a Union trooper. I heard he shot his sargeant through the back of the head and got through their lines. Redbird and a few other breeds have been with McClure's outfit a long time. You're shoein' a hard horse. Roderic. Watch out you don't get kicked."

"Maybe I like a hard horse to shoe," Matt twisted the ends of the smoke he had built and moved to the door watching Sloanaker solemnly. "It's all been interesting, Ben. When I learn something more to it, I'll drift back to see you."

"Just so you come back under your own power," Sloanaker grumbled.

THE FIRST thing Matt saw was Doris Marsh emerging from the dusty Mexican shop. He saw her glance around with her keening eyes picking out McClure and Rusk gawking rudely. They had closed nearer to the shop and they were moving even closer now, as though to close in on her. She turned her gaze and saw Matt. Hurriedly she strode toward him. In addition to her handbag she carried an object that obviously had come from the store. Instinctively Matt realized her life was in danger so long as she retained it.

Nearer, she stepped into a darkened doorway and waited. Matt quickened his pace feeling the tension at work. Beyond her he watched the figures of

the men. McClure's face wore an expression of impatience. The other's hand had hooked through his shell belt. It was an evil look that had touched Rusk's eyes.

Matt came up to the doorway and Doris drew him into the darkness, and then he felt her come up against him. He dropped his glance, searching, and found her eyes on him. He lowered his head and met her lips. Just one short passionate moment before she pulled away leaving in his hands the object she had carried.

The Army game, Matt thought. She was passing the buck, and now he carried it and would probably fight to hold it. Yet a realization swept over him that Doris Marsh had done this only because she was driven by utter desperation. She was fighting a grim game and shaken deeply by the grip fear had laid over her.

He moved beyond the girl holding the package against his side. It was too dark for the others to have caught the action, yet he suspected McClure was not to be taken in by the ruse. Now Matt was within fifty feet of the pair. He saw the glance that ran between them and he saw the cattleman's stride lengthen. He knew the other was hurrying to intercept Doris before she disappeared.

Rusk now stood before him, studying him quickly with his button-round eyes. Matt broke his stride beside his dun, waiting for Rusk's first move. He felt the touch of the other's spidery gaze, and a stillness settled over the street and the pull of it came distinctly to both men. Suddenly the silence was broken by one sharp cry from Doris. Then that died, its echo clinging an interminable time to the dead street. Instinctively Matt's elbow tightened its pressure against her package and he knew McClure was not going to get what he was after.

He knew, too, Sloanaker would be going out in answer to that call. The feel of her softness was still with him yet he put it away rudely. For the moment her fate must rest in Sloan-

aker's hands. He looked keenly to Rusk and saw that the man's nerve had broken. The other was slinking dispiritedly toward a gallery that lay dark with shadows. Matt saw then that a third man had come in, crossing obliquely from the dimly lit apothecary. By his raven hair and his straight, unbending carriage Matt identified him as the Apache, Redbird.

His feet touched stirrup, the complete conviction carrying through him that they would make their play before he got his dun to the end of the block. Mentally he was putting the men in their places, moving them as a game of chess. Sloanaker would have quit his office with Doris's scream, thus accounting for McClure. But these two beneath the gallery undoubtedly would recover their nerve and make their try for him.

He sat facing downstreet forcing a stony calm to his nerves, his back a broad target. Yet his fears for Doris rode him sharper than the men at his back. Somehow the conviction ran through him more solidly that in carrying whatever fight the girl was making, he was actually closing with the men who had rustled his cattle.

At the first corner he swung left, noting at once the open runway of a second-rate livery. He tipped the dun with a spur and entered the gloom and sensed at once a warm stable reek folding about him. A figure loomed in from the rear and the man said, "Take him all the way to the end. Empty stalls in the back, senor."

Deeper in his mind Matt was laying plans. When Rusk or McClure or Redbird quit town—whichever left first—he meant to ride their trail. He would follow each man successively. In the core of his mind he knew one or the other must lead him to R-Bar-Nine cattle. As his boots touched the damp stable floor he told the hostler, "I'll need a fresh horse. Switch my saddle."

Against the rear wall lay a pile of hay the hostler had been pitching from the loft. A lantern hung against

an upright that had once been gypsumed. Matt walked toward it feeling the stalking curiosity of Doris Marsh's purchase run over him. His face was grim and humorless. When a man fought for anything, he had a right to know what he might lay his life down for. He stripped the soiled paper wrapper, holding in his hands a cowhide covered canteen.

What had prompted a girl like Doris Marsh to make such a purchase? Matt felt the barbed interest prowl through him. It was a bare, unadorned object, obviously of not much importance, with its covering worn and laced along one edge by rawhide. A restless thought began to work through his head. She had bought it because it belonged to the past—the past that had drawn her here into San Simon.

A deep, uncanny urging drove Matt's fingers as he unlaced the brittle rawhide. He pulled the outer covering from metal that was rusted and dull. The yellow lamplight picked out faint tracings and he ran his fingers over the surface.

Gradually he made out two triangular markings with a crude circle beneath. An arrow pointed from the circle, and to one side were a few numerals scratched with a blunt knife or a stone. The kind of hasty sketch a man might make lying on his belly with the scream of Apache arrows lacing the air above his ears. Matt photographed the details of these markings vividly against his mind.

The hostler was rubbing his dun with sacking. Matt replaced the can within its leather and moved deeper into the rear stall, lifting the hay and throwing the canteen deeply under.

Now his gaze ran further into the stall. There were marks here in the foully dampened earth that drew him nearer. He bent to read them better. The shoe of a horse whose left fore-foot turned slightly in. Far back in the Mogollons he had picked up a trail like that, and he knew for a certainty now that his cattle would not be far from here.

He straightened and stalked to the hostler, his fingers busy forming a cigarette. For a moment he lingered in the stall shadows letting his gaze run over the stableman in close study. He was short, thick-set, with a face the color of dark walnut. A man with little gray matter behind his temples.

"You ride a long way," the stableman said. "Many days on the trail. His muscles are knotted."

"A long trail," Matt nodded softly. "I'm afraid he's loosening a shoe." He let the silence run briefly. "I see marks of a horse in the back stall whose shoe turns inward. Who uses that stall?"

"They call him by the name Rusk," said the hostler, "sometime when McClure rides to town, Rusk puts his cayuse up here."

Matt felt his vitals tighten. He moistened the tip of his cigarette. In the yellow match-glow his face was unyielding. He said presently, "I won't be needing your horse for half an hour, maybe longer. Pick me a black with bottom. A solid-colored animal."

"Si, senior," answered the stableman.

MATT MOVED out through the rough runway knowing full well he must get to Doris Marsh before he entangled himself further with McClure. Somehow he must find where she lived and give her brother the information he had discovered.

There was no premonition in Matt, no fear of the black night. He saw the crimson finger reach for him from the street's far walk, heard the crash of gunfire rattle against the wooden shanties. Guided by instinct taught him during these turbulent years, his fingers leaped after his gun. He flung himself face foremost grovelling in the dirt. He caught a second shot coming from down the block and he drove a bullet into the muzzle flash. They had him in a dangerous cross fire.

Now the first gunman was opening up a steady cannonading with his six-gun. There was a trough made from a hollowed log above Matt's head. He

counted the lead crashing into the side and knew the gunman had unloaded. The water had stopped the balls and he knew for the moment he was safe. But the water was spilling into the street on the opposite side through five live gushets.

He sent one more ball after the man reloading his pistol. Then he lay still, waiting. He had learned patience in the grim war days, and now he channeled his thoughts tightly and held to a brooding calm. He knew the other would soon have his chambers recharged.

Again the blast racketed off the painless clapboards. This time lead broke the trough's near side. Matt held a steady bead driving his ball into the center of the other's fire. He heard a throaty scream, then Rusk calling downblock in a voice that was out of register. The clatter of hoofs reached them from the main street and then Rusk raised himself to one knee, dragging himself upright into the center of the road.

Matt walked out to meet the stalking figure. Rusk's Colt roared against his hip. Again Matt fired. He saw the blandness run over Rusk's face. The man lost his hat, jerked a step backward before he slipped and sprawled in the dirt. A horse threw gravel rounding the corner and Matt swung, seeing Sloanaker shoving his dappled gray between the shanties. Downblock Redbird was leaning tighty over the neck of a pony, slashing him mercilessly with a quirt.

"Hold on, Ben!" Matt yelled.

But Sloanaker went past throwing dust. At his feet Matt saw Rusk kick a leg in a final contortion of his muscles. In death a tallow-likeness had come to the gunman's face.

Now Matt was conscious of another running over the walk. He bent toward her and caught Doris lightly with his free arm. He felt his moment of brief thanksgiving, as though the weight had shifted.

"You're safe!" he whispered.

"Now," she said quietly, "you

know who is drawing flies!" He led her that way along the street holding to the shadows. "You have the canteen," she asked suddenly.

"Back there in the stable. There was something on it."

"What, Matt?"

He let the silence run a moment. "I'll take you to your brother. He'll want to know," he said.

He saw her nod and her body relaxed against him with a fresh courage and they hurried their pace over the walk. They journeyed that way with the feeling deepening within him that their destinies were weaving irrevocably together. It was the feeling of one who has been a long time alone, brought suddenly together with another who must share life's problems. The feeling sank its roots deeply and grew and at last lost its newness and made pleasant thinking.

She led him into a narrow street at the end of the block. Her nerves had quieted and her voice sounded clear and bright. "It was father's canteen," she told him, finally.

"McClure saw me staring in the Mexican window. I wasn't certain until I went in and looked closely. The shop keeper said an Indian brought it to him only this morning. He'd sold it for a few cents—and nobody knew then it had belonged to Dad."

"What he wrote must have been done with his last strength," Matt said. He led her through a broken gate and over a trampled walk. Lights flared from the windows of a yellow, box-like adobe directly before them, and now Matt felt the sudden premonition. Unconsciously his arm drew the girl tighter. He knew there should be some way to keep her outside the house and yet he wondered how he could do it.

THEY FOUND Web Marsh lying on the floor in a pool of blood. Doris smothered a little scream. Then a slow hardening came over her outer being. She had seen blood before with all her sordid months of army nursing,

and it was as though a bland mask had dropped over her. The color had left her face and she stared hopefully at Matt, her white fingers lying against her throat.

"We'll need a little whiskey, ma'am," Matt said.

He was on the floor beside her brother, lifting the damp head into a pillow. There was no chance of Web's life, for the knife had entered deeply between the ribs on his left side. Matt took the flask from Doris and spooned it slowly between Web's teeth. After a long time the man's eyes fluttered weakly.

"Speak to me, Web," Doris begged, clutching his hand tightly to her breast.

"It was that—damn Indian," Web said. After a moment he gained strength. "They saw me out there riding. I—told you how I surprised them running brands on cattle." A pain racked Web's side and his words stopped. Then gradually it seemed to subside. He looked questioningly at Matt.

"This is the man I told you about," Doris said. "—the one nobody thought could live. After I left they pulled him through."

Web's lips rippled in a faint smile. "Take—care of her," he whispered.

Matt said testily, "Can you tell me where you found those cattle?"

"Sure. It was at the end of a canyon that empties into New Mexico. Stage station about a mile beyond—tall, pointed peak—and two cottonwoods with a spring underneath where the stages used to water. There's a horseshoe canyon around to the north—wild place, not much chance of anybody stumbling on them unless it was a crazy guy like me—"

Web was sinking fast. Matt felt the other's life run out through his shoulders and he covered Web's face with a blanket. The man's words were beating against his consciousness. Two trees with a dug well beneath was what he had already seen pictured on the rusty canteen. The rocky brakes in

the inaccessible region beyond held the secret of what had happened to his R-Bar-Nine cattle. And close by stout Jim Marsh had drawn his cryptic message.

Matt heard the sobs run through Doris' body. He slipped his arm about her and gently drew her to her feet. "It's not safe here, ma'am. I'm going to get you to Sloanaker's office until we round up McClure's outfit."

She let him have his way with her, moving quietly to the door. They walked to the gate and Matt noted vaguely that the moon had topped Cochise Head peak and was laying a livid brilliance along the crooked street. His own mood was dark and his thoughts were distilled from restless stirrings. Had he been more observant, he might have seen the horse before McClure labored him roughly into the gate opening. The man's voice brought a harsh melange against the quiet village.

"Better hand me the canteen before I put my shot into him," McClure said.

Matt's eyes traveled from the dark end of McClure's gun to the stony eyes. His heart dropped a beat, and he knew McClure had tricked him smartly. The vague fogs of surprise cleared slowly from his brain and he felt an anger run through him. He said with a temper coloring the tone of his words, "She doesn't have the canteen, McClure. This time you deal with a man."

A sharp cry had slipped unbidden from Doris' lips. Now she hated herself for her weakness. Yet the stark violence of McClure's face filled her with an utter misery. She had taken an unconscious step toward McClure in her half run, and instantly his gun had swerved a little to cover her breast. Now she stood still, obediently, waiting for McClure's reaction.

But when she had run forward, his horse had shied nervously. He was still swinging his head and the thought whipped through her that McClure's animal was unused to women. Sight

of her light colored wrap in the moonlight was making him excitable. Breathlessly she unbuttoned the fastenings along the front of her coat, praying desperately that McClure might not divine her purpose.

"There will be just three seconds of grace for the pair of you," McClure ground out. The hammer of his Colt dogged back to full cock. "If I don't get the canteen there is a bullet for each of you."

Doris pulled the last button loose with a piece of cloth still clinging fast. She flapped the coat directly under the horse's nose just as McClure fired. The animal let out a blast and went up on its hind legs, striking with its forefeet as it rose. Doris fell back knowing Matt was safe by the pistol crash behind her.

Matt had fired as his Colt cleared holster. He fired with his body rocking back from the impact of McClure's bullet. He drove his second shot quickly, reaching to his shoulder with his left hand. He saw the fury beat itself out in McClure's eyes. The man was fighting his roan with spurs, gripping the animal furiously with his knees not to be unseated in his pain. Again Matt drove his shot. This time

the ball struck the horseman in the neck, upending him. The horse ran shrieking through the street leaving McClure spraddled in the dust beside the gate.

DORIS WAS burying her face into Matt's chest when Sloanaker rode up on his dappled gray. He was trailing a pony over which the handcuffed figure of Redbird slouched sullenly. Sloanaker looked from the dead man to the pair in the walk. A slight twinkling came to his eyes. He said loosely, "Well, I got him this time—redhanded, I guess. What you been doing while I been gone?"

Matt looked beyond her hair that brushed his cheek. He grinned thinly, "A little of everything. I figure I'll get my cows back, Ben. But this part—this part beats it all."

Doris stirred uneasily against his chest. "We'd better go in, Matt. You've been hit and I must get a bandage on your shoulder."

His voice sounded tired but there was happiness threading it. "It's not much, Doris. I sort of remember you've got a gentle touch—we'll go inside, anyway."

★

"You're too green, kid; you'll be a good catcher some day, but right now..." That's what they told Eddie — but hadn't all the great backstops been green once?



BABY AT THE PLATE

by Richard Brister

and, in addition, we present

A WING AND A PRAYER

by Seven Anderton

CAST-OFF CHAMPS

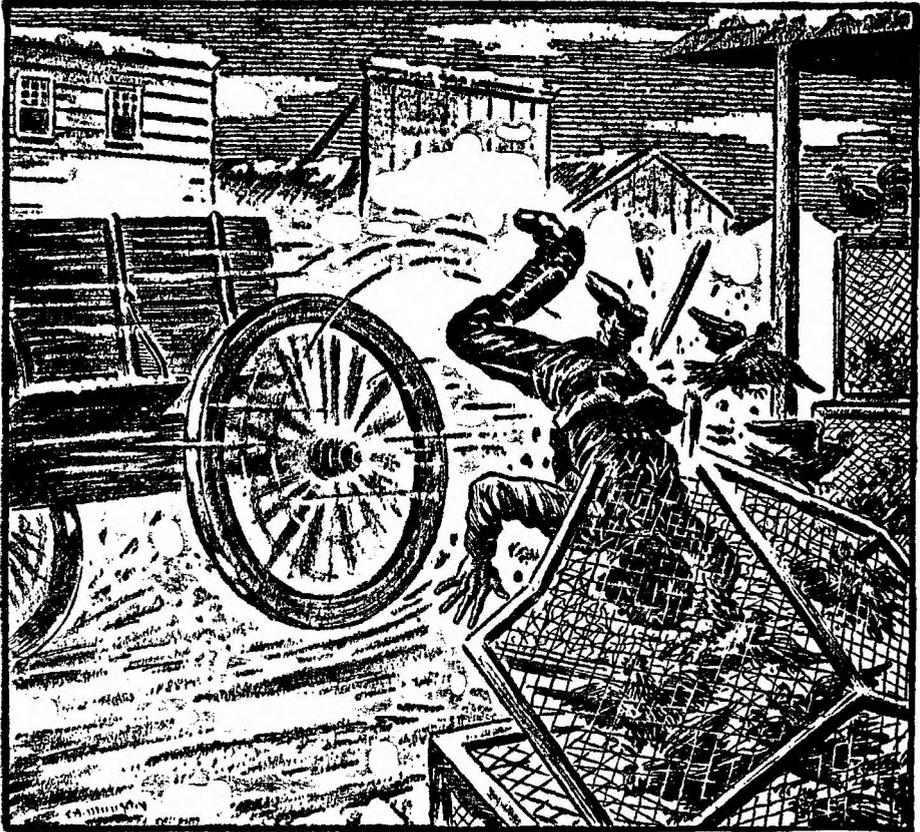
by Roe Richmond

*These gripping stories
of today's baseball
are in the June issue of*

SUPER SPORTS

DIGGER JOHN, Medicine Man

by A. A. Baker



★ ★ ★

"First," Digger John shouted, "I send five magic bullets on their journey." He fired his rifle five times into the air . . . "Five will die," he continued, "when those bullets are commanded to return from the sky. They will strike where I say." Slim Deakins had to admit that Digger's medicine sounded good; but how was he going to work out his trick?

★ ★ ★

THE DRY snow lay like white sores under the bleak underbrush of the Sierra's ridges as Digger John moved ahead of his burro, on his return to Gold Run. The once-bulging pack on the fat Jenny, had dwindled to empty pockets that flapped under the cutting wind. Behind him, storm clouds writhed like a bagful of snakes wriggling to be free, so as to cover sturdy trees with sleet and snow, to drive prospectors into the towns, and to seek out impoverished Indians and freeze them in their scrawny camps.

The prospector's clothes were in

tatters. His red undershirt, worn thin by the three-months trip, peeked through the thread-bare sleeves of his blanket pancho. His hat, misshapen by numerous trips to canyon waterholes for drinking water and blackened by the fannings of a hundred campfires, exposed tufts of black hair.

Digger John paused wearily on the edge of the Chinese diggings. He dangled his booted legs over the rim and gazed down into the vast, bustling cut. Fires dotted the expanse, throwing red bellows of flame from the hot stacks of steam boilers. Behind him the sun whitened the snow clouds, lifting the dark shadows of the Sierras, while Digger studied this new business of the industrious Chinese.

The nearest boiler was just below his perch. It was a fat steam-boiler with a tall black stack. Behind the boiler rested a huge vat of steaming liquid; stirred earnestly by several of the hip-booted yellow men.

"Looks like a wholesale distillery..." he muttered to the burro. The animal, impatient with the delay, nuzzled his back and tipped the big miner over the rim. He yelled all the way down the hundred foot slope, his anguished curses being drowned out by the clatter of falling rock and soggy gravel. Daintily, the graying burro picked a way down the slope and, standing to one side, watched the Chinese hurry forward to dig the shouting man out of the slide. Digger was buried to his neck, his black hair filled with sand, his stubble of red beard laying on the sand like the decapitated head of John the Baptist.

"Get me outa this!" he shouted, until the trickling gravel filled his mouth and crept up around his nose. An excited Chinese slapped the burro out of the way. Digger John's wild eyes threw fire as he shouted again. "Don't smack that burro around!" he gulped and the rest of his head disappeared under the continued slide of gravel.

Digger came alive upside down. The two powerful Chinese had lifted him

by the boots while a third man was pounding his back with a whitened paddle. "Let me loose..." he coughed weakly. They upended the huge man. He was finally able to speak. "What you doin' with all the boilers, vats an' such? Makin' whiskey?"

"Salt," came the reply in pidgin english. "Boil until water gone, then is salt," the man chattered pleasantly.

"Well..." Digger's voice was crusty with disappointment. "Much obliged for yore help." He turned a stern eye on the burro. "Let's go, Jenny, but this time, yew lead off." The burro brayed and moved off toward the shivering town of Gold Run that lay on the far rim of the Chinese Digging.

THE MINER followed the plodding animal up the far side and entered the steep street of lower town. His boots slipped on the thin coating of snow that covered the white river rock paving the slanted street. A few sleepy miners were busy stoking their stoves and the lazy smoke curled straight up into the still air.

A miner, slouching back from the small chicken coop he had nailed to a pine tree, shouted: "Where'd yew come from, Digger John?" His welcoming shout brought several heads from the cabin doors and smiles of welcome greeted the plodding man.

"Been holed up in Shirt-tail Canyon," answered Digger John. "Come in for the winter." He half smiled, then added when he saw the suddenly fallen faces. "An' a winter's drinkin'." The faces instantly cleared and broke into wide smiles as he invited. "Follow me up to *Dredger's Saloon* and we'll tap a barrel or so."

"Oh...we better step inside a few minutes until..." the first miner cautioned as he stared up the street, turning his turkey like neck in a listening attitude.

"Naw. Not now. I..." began Digger but he was talking to suddenly-closed doorways. The miners had ducked hurriedly back into their cabins and slammed the doors. Digger's burro stared forward, its

head ducked until its huge braced ears looked like floppy listening funnels.

The careening roar of an iron-rimmed light wagon slammed noise at the stunned man. Two horses, harnessed to the wagon, raced down the street. A yelling Chinese clung to the iron hand-brake of the wagon seat. The wheels slewed from side to side behind the wild-eyed running horses. Gravel spurted against the closed doors and ricocheted until the entire street was filled with sharp sound.

The burro hurriedly jammed its fat body between two houses and, tucking its tail between its legs, got clear. Digger dived to the left as the horses pulled to the right, in a vain attempt to miss the racing driver. The horses cleared Digger, but the tailgate of the swaying wagon caught his diving feet and hurled him into a chicken-coop. The fine wire snapped and chickens fought past his head for freedom. Their sharp feet dug the skin from his neck, their slapping wings beat at his face. He braced his hands against the tree trunk and pushed frantically back. The chicken coop broke loose and he sat heavily in the snow muddied earth. The chickens still inside, flapped around the cage until the owner cautiously left his cabin and hoisted the coop off the bewildered Digger John's head. He spat feathers for a few seconds then turned and glared balefully at the rescuer.

"Now take it easy, Digger, this has been goin' on for weeks. Them Chinaboy's found a salt bed; they work it with boilers, then sack it in them rattan sacks. They haul the sacks out in them light wagons, up to the top of the cemetery hill, where the teamsters can get at it with the heavy wagons. I don't know why," he shook his head dolefully, "but they always come back empty an' the same way. Like a bat outa hell. We got used to their schedule. I tried to warn you."

"Help me get my burro unstuck," snarled the chewed up man. "Unless it ain't safe yet to go out in the street?"

"They won't be another wagon come down for maybe a half hour."

"That'll give us time," snorted Digger. "This Jenny's on the way home, she'll help us get her out of her predicment. If she was goin' out loaded, she'd wedge herself in deeper." He paused and muttered. "Comin' home is always so dam' excitin'. Spent three months with the grizzlys and mountain lions what hole up in Shirt-tail Canyon, but, they don't claw me up none. Then, soon's I get in spittin' distance of Gold Run, I get buried alive. Next, I'm run over by a wagon. Things is gettin' so they move too fast."

The burro proved stubborn and the two men hauled and pulled but without disturbing the animal. "Wait'll I get a rope." The cabin owner ducked back inside and came out swearing. "That damned Jenny's got her head in my salt raisin' bread. Stuck right through the window."

"Aw...then to hell with her!" shouted the perspiring Digger. "She'll have to unstuck herself or die where she is." He reared back his head, opened his mouth wide, and let out a Comanche yell then began a wild run up the street toward Dredger Dan's Hotel and Saloon.

DOORS POPPED open. Men stared then joined the yelling Digger. By the time he was opposite Black's store, he had half the town-folk hurrying along behind him. They knew the pocket-hunter was on a spending-spree. He crowded into the saloon and Digger slapped the bar with a doeskin bag of gold dust. "Get the jugs goin', Dredger!" he bellowed at the saloon man. "We got us some howlin' to do."

The stumpy hotel man spread his hands, splaying his fat fingers and muttered. "Been hearin' yew comin', Digger. Drinks is set up." He halted and his face was a sad as an under-

taker's at the bedside of a recovered man. "But..."

Digger gulped the first drink and elbowed his way closer to the open whiskey barrel. "Roust out Bomar. He'll have a snort of Sasparilla."

"That's the trouble." The crowd quieted as Dredger slowly continued. "Bomar ain't around." He fidgeted in the silence of the room and the heavy breathing of the men was the only sound.

"He ain't been around since two months." Dredger answered the unspoken question. "He took off. Livin' with the Fishmouths. Kind of a medicine-man."

"They's somethin' more to this." Digger leaned coolly against the polished wood and waited.

"Yeah!" a harsh voice shouted. "He drove the little fella off."

"Why?" The word carried liquid heat, like the sizzle of a hot iron doused in water.

"'Cause he was a nuisance!" shouted Dredger Dan.

"Sick, he was too," the harsh voice in the crowd added more detail. "Crippled with roomatizm he was, 'til his hands was swole like knots."

Digger's throat grew husky with the thought. Bomar, the little bundle of hell, the pigmy Indian with his red hair tufted in a horse tail braid. Bomar, wandering painfully over the mountains, suffering from the cold water fever that—

"He ain't bad off." Dredger inserted the statement belligerently. "Them Fishmouths is real nice Indians. They think he can make spirits an' move quick to do his biddin'. They'll take care of him an'..."

"Ye-ah..." growled Digger and reaching across the bar, grasped the saloon-man by the tight ruffles of his gay shirt. "They'll do that 'til the winter-sickness hits, like it does with the Pogonip wind that's due to freeze them Injuns' lungs. Then what'll they do to Bomar? They'll run him him down and drop boulders. They'll

throw rocks at his crippled body 'til his head is a squashed mess. Fish-mouth medicine-men don't last more'n one winter."

The angry thoughts added strength to the knotted muscles of Digger John's arm and he turned the cloth until the saloon man's breath whistled through his open mouth. "Listen, Dredger. I'm goin' back out an' bring Bomar home. When I come back, I'm gonna finish that grave-stone of yores. When it's finished, yew'll be planted under it. Particularly," he savored the word, "if somethin' happened to that little feller before I get him out."

Several men stepped forward. The click of Slim Deakins' roulette wheel stopped and the gambler edged to Digger's side. "We'll go along, Digger."

"Jest yew, Slim," Digger answered. "Jest yew an' me. We'll find the little, redheaded half-pint of a beggar."

"Sure, Digger, sure." Slim laid his fine clean hand on Digger's sweat dried shirt and pulled, until the huge hand loosened its hold on the saloon man. They moved out the door. Dredger Dan gripped the edge of the bar and let his breath explode with relief.

THE BATWINGS were still swinging, tension still held the men quiet. The clocked ticked loudly. A man spat on the stove and the sharp sizzle was noisy. Dredger turned a sly eye toward the clock and cocked his ear toward the street.

The squeal of the runaway wheels rose in a keening sound. The thud of the racing horses gathered force, like an explosion blasting out of a mine shaft. The street filled with sound and crashed into the bar room. The excited yells of a Chinese joined the maelstrom. A wild yell of warning rose from the gambler, a blankly muttered curse from Digger John. The men heard the thud of a body thrown violently against the building, making the polished back mirror

bounce and tip to a crazy angle.

The batwings opened and Slim Deakins reappeared. He shouted: "Digger got hit! His legs are bent like they were torn off. Help me get him up."

They crowded around the injured man. He had his back braced against the hotel wall stared wildly down the street. The runaway salt wagon was bouncing out of sight, the Chinaboy yelling and screaming at the horses. Digger turned his eyes to his left leg. It was bent at an angle. His boot lay in the middle of the muddy street. The boot was retrieved and Digger John hoisted to his good leg. He glared at the twisted member then groaned. "The danged thing ain't broke, jest pulled out of line." He hobbled over to the bench against the porch support, and steadied his foot.

"Now, pull her back into the socket," he ordered.

Slim snapped the leg and the click brought a moan of relief to the injured man. "Thet done it. but..."

"No 'buts', Digger," snapped Slim Deakins. "You'll have to lay around until you can walk. Bomar can take care of himself until..." he raised a protesting hand as Digger's mouth flew open... "Now, listen to me. It isn't going to do Bomar any good if you can't walk far enough to find him."

"Yeah," finally agreed the miner. "Help me over to the adobe." He threw a black look at Dredger Dan. "It'll give me a little time to work on the headstone, anyways."

Digger John's adobe was just below the Teamster's Lot and the bullwhackers complained of the noise that kept them from their sleep. He kept the blacksmith busy sharpening his rock chisels. His fireplace roared and the light streamed from the deep inset of the windows as he hammered at his huge piece of granite. The gravestone was head tall and was

assuming the rotund outline of the hotel owner.

Slim Deakins visited and Digger hobbled out back to show off his private graveyard. The creek, heavy with winter water, burred by the white monuments to the dead.

"This one," the miner stroke a smooth black volcanic rock cut in the shape of Mount Lassen, "is for Casey Brown. Whilst he was crossin' Lassen, about January of 1848, he slipped into a ice crevice and was never seen again. Coupla years later, the mountain exploded. I allus figured ol' Casey was still tryin' to dig his way outa hell. He had too much alcohol in his pack to freeze him, so he musta... Anyway, we got him a nice headstone."

He hobbled to a dark corner of the graveplot and lowered his voice. "Over here, is the one for a fella named Ackermine. He built up a steam beer business in Nevada City. We found an Indian breech cloth in his vats an' run him off. 'Fore we knew the truth, we hung his book-keeper. He was a tall Irishman. The Irish can stand a good snap of the rope but this fella swole up his neck an', cause he was so stubborn, we cut him down. Heard later, he become general manager of a mess of stages. Anyways, I got Ackermine's headstone, if he ever turns up."

"This one?" Slim Deakins laid a hand on the smooth polish of a round stone.

Digger grinned slyly. "That's for a crooked gambler. Slippery smooth. Drowned in Bigler's Lake. The body so filled with lead that he couldn't swim." He moved off to a block of pure, square granite. "Like this one, Slim?"

The gambler nodded. "Square. Nice true edge. Sort of like an honest man. Who's it for?"

"You," smiled Digger. He watched the pleased man stroke the square edged stone. "Read the words."

Slim Deakins bent his thin frame, hunkering onto his knees to read

aloud. "*Slim Deakins—Gambler. Even his bullets were square.*"

"But we've been layin' around long enough," Digger growled. "My knee is all right, the swole is gone down. Let's set out tomorrow. Then heavy clouds over the summit means snow. Bomar's gotta be brought in."

"See you at sunrise, then," agreed Slim Deakins.

THE STORM broke during the night. Cold Spring Mountain reared up behind the town like a baldheaded man under the barber's white cloth. The wind howled and sprayed icy motes of frost through the air. Chill sucked through the tight scarves wrapped tightly over the hats of Digger and Slim and bit into their lungs. The exhaling steam turned to slick gray ice on their chins. Between the two men, a plodding burro flopped its ears, stepping directly into the sloshing path of Digger John.

They crossed the Canyon Creek on a slippery, snowpacked windfall, the burro balancing gingerly. Digger stepped out firmly and Slim Deakins crawled across on his wet knees. The snow began a pelting hell, with a rising wind, as they reached Mormon's Bar on the American River. The scattered cabins were cold and deserted as the two men stopped for the night.

"Get yore tail outa that fireplace!" Digger John shouted at the burro. The animal eased over against a bunk and the two men sat in front of the fire, both eating out of a gold pan of steaming beans. They passed the remains to the nuzzling burro.

"Now, it seem to be," Digger laid plans, "thet Bomar is with them Fishmouths. They generally hole up in these deserted cabins along the river. Four years ago, they was fifteen found froze to death when Elroy Jimpson opened up his claim in the spring. We'll follow the river, check all the sand bar settlements, search back in the canyons, 'til we find their winter camp."

He gazed at the burro, licking the last of the beans from the pan. "We'll turn Jenny loose. She'll get back to Gold Run."

Slim Deakins stared at the huge pile of supplies the burro had carried in. "We'll have to carry all that?" he asked.

"I know it'll be tough," agreed Digger, "but them Injuns'll kill just for thet Jenny."

"And why not for what we're carrying?"

"Cause we'll trick 'em someway. They'll leave us alone 'til we get Bomar loose or," his voice became harsh, "they'll be a part in the dangdest fight they ever seen. Now, let's sleep til it's light." He kicked the front ashes against the fire, curled up against the slumped burro and was soon asleep.

The brittle noon sun, hidden by white clouds, left the two pack-laden men picking their slow way along the river trail. Far below, the rushing water smashed its way through the boulders and tore holes in the packed snow on the banks. Ahead lay the huge rock known to the miners as Lover's Leap. It shot straight up from the cold water. Topped with snow, its sides were glazed with dripping ice.

"There's Bomar!" Digger's voice sounded dull but his whiskered face worked with fury. He leaned into the rock of the path to ease his pack as he pointed a finger high up onto the pinnacle. A small figure huddled under an overhang. Above were tall figures of Indians, very busy throwing rocks and rolling bouncing boulders at the small figure. The boulders crashed in heavy arcs down the cliff and seemed to explode into spray as they hit the rushing waters far below.

"Gawd help the poor little devil!" Slim panted. "They're trying to kill him."

DIGGER kept his eyes pinned above as he explained rapidly.

"Them Fishmouths is funny Indians. Like the Nevada Piauxes. They elect one fella into being medicine-man. Then the fella brews up herbs an' makes magic an' such all year, til winter. Then winter allus brings the lung sickness. The medicine-man can't help the lung sickness, so the tribe runs him off. Usually, stonin' him to death. That's what they're doin' now but, Bomar's fairly safe where he is, as long as he can hold on, up there."

"You start firing, Digger. I'll hurry around to the top and come up." Slim's cold hands looped his gun cord over a shoulder as he dropped his pack and started up the steep bank.

"Won't work," Digger answered. "We got to fool them someway. Make them think we can take care of the lung sickness if they leave the little fella alone. He's maybe stove up some an' couldn't move far." He halted his words and listened hard, turning his head so his right ear faced back down the trail.

"They're some of them movin' up behind us. Now, Slim, don't..." His words were cut off as a huge boulder rolled heavily through the snow above the overhang, hit the lip of the shelf above them, and bounced out into the cold air.

"White man!" The sudden words tore around the last bend in the trail. "Drop guns, quick!"

"Yeah, but first..." Digger raised his gun, muzzle pointing straight up in the air and quickly levered five shots. The rifle cracked dully, mingling with the sound of the roaring river far below.

"First," Digger shouted, "I send five magic bullets on their journey." He threw the rifle on the ledge and nodded at Slim who let his rifle slip from his hands.

Two Indians crept forward. Thin hands retrieved the rifle and snatched the Colts from the white men's holsters. A tall Indian, thin legs shiv-

ering beneath buckskin leggings and feet wrapped in burlap, spoke.

"What you want here?" The tone was thin with impatience.

"Stop the stonin' of Bomar," demanded Digger John.

"Medicine-man must die. Cannot heal sick. The white devil kill my people. Bomar's medicine weak, many die..."

"Five more will die," Digger chanted, "when those bullets are commanded to return from the sky. They will strike where I say. What is your name?"

He shouted the question so suddenly that the tall Indian, caught by surprise, answered, "Long Deer."

Digger snatched the name and shouted ominously into the lowering sky. "Bullets that return. Strike Long Deer and his family!"

"Wait!" Slim laid a hand on Digger's arm. "Ask the chief once more to let Bomar come down before you kill his family."

Digger looked doubtful, then turned to the Indian. "Will you let Bomar come down?"

The chief promptly opened his mouth and shouted fearfully. The Indian's words were relayed up onto the high cliff and the silhouettes of the Indians halted.

Digger moved hurriedly along the trail and began the long climb toward Bomar. The Indians followed, watching the big miner clamber up the rough rock and gently ease the small figure down to the trail.

The rescued man was a tight bunch of muscles, like a large man who had been crammed into a bottle and compressed to one fourth his size. He had red hair, now crusted black from the frozen blood on his scalp. Gold armlets fit closely on his biceps and a golden belt fit his thin stomach. His chest was bare, his hands knotted into claws. Bomar was exhausted, but his eyelids flickered and his welcoming grin spat out a rush of sound that was exactly like that of the huge rocks of the cliff so recently sent crashing down

on him. The watchers jumped and the Indians on top of the rock ran hurried back from the overhang.

"Same old Bomar." Digger's words were half-chuckle, half-sympathy.

He was interrupted by the snort of Long Deer. "We are freezing here. He must be brought back to the village. The elders will decide."

Digger shrugged and carrying the pigmy carefully, began the long descent down the ice crusted trail.

THE LONG house was located in an open space, two miles below Mormon's Bar. A dozen rock houses clustered around the frame structure, like sucklings around the torpid body of a fat pig. The entrance was hip-high and the two white men crawled into the smoky room, then rose to their feet. Digger strode over to the fire that smoked fitfully in the center of the dirt floor and laid his small friend gently on a grizzly skin. The men of the tribe crowded around. Long Deer was the only tall man in the tribe. The others were squat, broad chests rising above skinny legs, like barrels on short stilts. Their chunky faces were dotted by small eyes that stared hatefully at the pigmy, Bomar. He glared back and suddenly let loose with a harsh cough that sounded like the grizzly skin had come alive. Several of the Indians jumped and, in a far corner, a cage of chickens cackled their excitement. A dog shot into the building and sniffed importantly around the skin. Another dog charged from a dark corner and tangled with the intruder. In the excitement caused by the fighting dogs, Digger slipped over to the chicken coop and dropped a handful of white pellets on the floor of the coop.

Meanwhile, seven old men had sedately settled down on blankets on the far side of the fire. Long Deer began a harsh chant in Indian. Long sentences broken only by significant pauses while the seven judges would stare, first at Bomar, then at the two white men. Long Deer finally arrived at the incident of Digger's threat to

call the bullets in from the sky to kill Long Deer and his family.

Digger John moved slowly over to the half circle and spoke. "This Bomar has lost his medicine because he is sick. He is a great medicine-man but, it is well known, that the evil forces what attack men..."

"Talk!" Angrily one of the judges rose. "Talk is the weapon of the white man. You are Medicine-Man? Then, prove to us the truth of your words!" He sat down and an angry mutter rose from the packed room.

"Bring me water!" shouted Digger. "I will return the bullets from the sky."

A skin bucket was reached down from a pole and forced forward. Digger John dipped into the bucket with the drinking olla and muttered softly over the water. Then he raised his head and roared. "Bring me four of those chickens!" He held up four blunt fingers and slowly turned around until all had seen the extended hand.

Four scrawny chickens were brought forward and held by the wings in front of the miner. He reached out and, with several waves of the water cup, opened the beaks of the chickens and poured the water into their throats.

"Now, put them back in their cage," he ordered and turned to the circle of judges. "I have recalled four of those bullets from the sky. One is still flyin' about in the sky. We will leave. An'...the sick medicine-man will go with us." He turned to Slim Deakins and continued.

"This man will lift the weakened Bomar. He will walk out of the long house. If he is halted or attacked, the fifth bullet will strike his attacker."

THE SEVEN judges were on their feet. Long Deer snarled and rushed at Slim Deakins, even now striding toward the low entrance with his burden. Long Deer drew his knife and charged across the dirt floor. Slim, without turning his body or flinching his bent back, continued to stride stoically through the parted tribesmen. As Long Deer began a leap that would

bring the raised knife slashing into Slim's back, a chicken suddenly exploded!

The feathers flew with the bang and the chicken's body hurtled against the twigs that made the cage. Long Deer whirled in midair to stare at the cage. Another chicken exploded and, quickly, the other two.

Slim had reached the low doorway. He knelt and disappeared through the opening. "One more bullet remains," Digger's shout was harsh. "Remember, I will call it down, to kill!" He strode through the Indians and followed his partner. The awestruck Indians crowded away from the chicken coop.

The saloon section of Dredger's Hotel was crowded. It was warm and the talk jovial. Slim Deakins' roulette wheel was clicking, the stove roaring. Digger John raised his tin cup and, throwing a benign glance at Bomar who sat on the top stair leading to the sleeping rooms, saw him blowing bubbles into his sasparilla bottle and

shouted, "That's the story. It was carbide I fed them chickens. The water caused the gas an' the poor critters exploded at jest the right time. If Slim had even ducked his head, he'd been cut to pieces, an' they'd a tanned my hide an' made Injun belts outa it. Any miner knows thet old trick."

"But, it took you, Digger," Slim's voice rose above the clicking wheel, "to think of it." He glanced at the grinning pigmy on the stairs. "Can you figure out a cure for Bomar's rheumatism?"

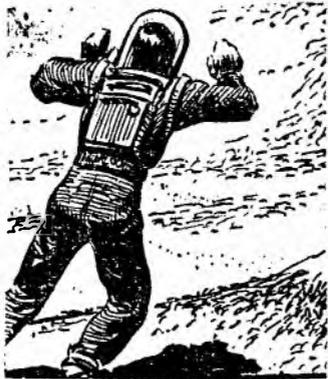
"Shore," answered Digger. "Come spring, we'll sting it out with rock hornets..." the whiskered man suddenly turned to glare at the saloon keeper. "An' Dredger Dan'll serve as hornet-catcher. Or, I'll get his monument finished in a hurry!"

Dredger Dan nodded meekly. "If'n thet's what yew want, Digger, I'll catch them hornets. Guess I got thet much punishment comin'." He ducked his head and scrubbed hard at the bar.

★

It seems that the boys at top have been running out of classifications for stuff that's not to be talked about. There was *Restricted*, and *Secret*, and *Top Secret* . . . and finally, a classification to end all secret classifications. A project so secret that the member couldn't even reveal it to himself. This was

★



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The Mail Pouch

A DEPARTMENT FOR OUR READERS

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

"Bear Trouble. The author says this is a true story—and we see no reason for doubting him." Dawg gone it now, it *is* true. I ought to know, and I can prove it. Fred Molt of the Lazy K-M is still living; he was the owner of the spread. And anyway, it was me who sat in the tree, and I am still chewing the same brand of tobacco—only now I spike it with a bit of snuff. I like it strong. Ask my youngest son—he got a sprinkle of it in his eyes one day as we were riding along.

"Well," he says, "any bear who gets that kind of juice in his eyes would move fast."

With that statement off his chest, he moves around to the other side where the wind wouldn't blow it into his face again.

You know—as I know—the world is full of doubt, but the story is true.

Let's tackle another that's true. On a visit up on Crevice Mountain where an old prospector lived (now that's years ago), you go on up from Gardner Montana to a mining camp known as Jardine. The road is steep, but

from Jardine on up she's tough. Away up, dang near on top of the old mountain there lives—or did live—Oscar Hageman. (He is dead now.) Well, anyway, Oscar had tunnelled in under the mountain higher up; he mined a heap of Scheelite—that's a Tungsten Ore—and he also got some gold, now and then.

Well, me and my oldest son went up to see old Oscar some 20 years ago; we was sitting in his cabin talking, when a female bear comes lumbering right in through the open door. Well, sir, if that had been a one room cabin—which it wasn't, we would have been in one hell of a fix; as it was, me and the boy dove through the window. Oscar dove for his gun hanging on the wall—a 30-30—then he, too, came out the window in no time short. For an old fellow of 76 he moved fast. Well, sir, it took three slugs to finish that fellow, and that is gospel truth.

Here is another: back in 1913 I, and an old partner of mine by the name of Fred Cooper, went prospecting over in the big Horns. Fred had been there the year before and had

done a bit of sluicing along on Dry-head, along the Big Horn canyon. We sorter wanted to smell around in the Black canyon, and the Bull Elk, before heading over on Dryhead. That was our downfall, or rather it was Fred's downfall; it was he who took a beating from a female bear.

Fred had gone up the canyon a ways doing a bit of prospecting. We had pitched camp just below the old Soldier trail. I got to wondering what Fred was doing, so I starts off to find him.

Well, sir, I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen the finish of it, but I did. Fred had gotten himself mixed up with a couple of Bear cubs, meaning no harm to them; but old mother bear thought otherwise, and came a running—and with Fred's gun being between himself and the bear, he was in for trouble. That bear mauled Fred something awful.

Fred, as he told me afterwards, was knocked plumb out; when he came to, the cubs were still there—but the old girl, as stated, was some 30 or 40 yards off eating elderberries. When she saw she hadn't finished Fred, she came a'running hellbent for the kill. Fred, being a big man, picked up a heavy piece of driftwood lying near the stream, and here was where I came in.

He hit mother bear right on her snout, and then kept pouring it on to her. I didn't dare to shoot for fear of hitting Fred; anyway, I wouldn't have had to: he kept hitting the bear till there was no more bear—that is to say live bear—except, of course, the cubs. I guess they got scared; anyway they headed for the brush off a ways.

Fred goes over and gets his gun from where he had left it. Coming back, he sits down on the bear, he was hurt pretty bad.

After awhile he looks up, and says, "Dawg gone Pete, did I kill the 'onery critter, or did you?"

"Well, old timer I sure and certain didn't kill the critter, so you must have."

I took a few pictures and got Fred

back to camp; we headed out of the mountains, and I got Fred over to Billings, where he nursed several broken ribs and cuts for the better part of two months. Well, sir, I could go on telling about bears, and their way of destroying a feller's camp. Rooting through some of my old pictures and film, I found one which will speak for itself. Then, if there are anyone who would like to rassel with one of 'em, I will take them to where there are plenty of bears—as a matter of fact I will be headin' for camp in the Continental Divide next month. I have a nice camp up there, 850 feet up beautiful country. Hunting is good; trout fishing is good; and if you tire of that, you go a few yards from camp and pan some gold.

In "Know Your West," Gluck says *Istawatse*, for Iron Eyes. Benton was where Chief Gall fought against the whites. In Sioux of the Hunkpapa Iron Eyes is *Ma'za Ista'* or *Maza Wies-ta Waste*, (Iron Eyes is good). Otherwise, Mr. Gluck is all right. As for Will Rogers we—or rather I—worked on one of the shows with him. I, too, was a Roper, and still do some trick Roping. Will was one-eighth Cherokee, no more.

I don't want to start anything with Mr. Verrill, simply because I am not sure of what Indian he really speaks. If he is referring to the Indians in the East, all of whom have long been intergraded amongst the whites, then I can say nothing as I know absolutely nothing about them; and as to his south and central Americas, I know little or nothing.

When Mr. Verrill talks about north-west Indians having no scalp-locks, he is off his bean; the Crows always wore scalp-locks. Even today, the old Crows are still wearing them. The lock is a tuft of hair standing straight up like a Rooster's comb, over the middle of their heads.

He also states that Indians are not stoic; he is off again. From babyhood on they are about as stoic as can be—a little one, or an old one will look at

you and never move a muscle. Again he speaks of blond Indians, red-headed Indians and brunettes; just where are these things located? Sure, there are some breeds who have blond and red hair; I have a "Cantay Skuya" sweetheart over on the Cannon Ball, a cute little filly. Mister, she is a red-head. But, her mother is a quarter breed, and her daddy is a redheaded Irishman; her sister is a blonde, but being less than a quarter Indian is not Indian. Half-breeds, three-quarters and full bloods have the blackest kind of hair and eyes; they are not narrow-eyed, nor as a general rule are their eyes big, but in most cases small.

No Sioux ever dyed his hair, except during ceremonial affairs; even then, it never was a practice, and only ochre was used. I have seen a few of the squaws do it in the real old days, but not often. And as for whiskers, and hair on their faces— No, no, no, never. No fullblooded Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Shoshone or Crow would ever allow a hair to grow on their face. Many a time, when I was a little shaver, I would sit and watch them while they carefully went over their faces; if a hair was spotted, out it came. A few breeds, once in a great while, would have what may be called a few scraggly hairs sticking on their chins; now and then, we would see one with a thin mustache. But no mother's son is going to tell me that any of the Northwest Indian ever wore whiskers; even my father, who was white, never wore whiskers; how he kept them off, I don't know. His father, whom I never knew, or saw, wore a mustache, as I was told.

And as for yelling when attacking; mister, I may not be a hundred, but I have heard their war-whoops since I was knee high to a tall Grass-hopper sixty some years ago. I was old enough to see and hear— I am not my father, who came amongst them back in 1868 o. '69. And as for scalping; take the Custer battle. There wasn't a man, except Custer, who wasn't scalped and mutilated. Custer was not scalped.

Why? He was of the evil spirit. The Indians of the Northwest all scalped, as did many of the whites. My father never took a scalp, that I know for sure; he was much too kind-hearted a man. But no one can tell me that scalping was not a practice.

As for the Mandans, Mr. Verrill is right in one respect; they did build dome-like mud or earth houses along the upper Missouri; but then the Hopi and the Apaches did the same in Arizona. I put in the winter of 1913, and again in 1933, with the Hopis. Now as to the Apaches, they are yet far from being what one can call a civilized people, but let that be; I am not Apache nor Hopi. Yes, the Sioux and other Northwest Indians did, and do yet, build Log cabins; many even get loans, or from sale of cattle or land will build or have built, small one- or-two-room frame houses. I grew up amongst the Sioux and know.

Few can tell me anything about Indians here in the Northwest. And although I have been in South America, I know nothing of the Indians there, but I suppose they have (as the Indians here) been kicked around and swindled as much as our northern Indians. As for myself, I have roamed around over the Dakotas, Wyoming and Montana since I was knee high to tall Indian, and I consider myself a Damakota.

Mr. Verrill also says, Indians are not big men; that, too, is wrong if he speaks of the Indians out here as of average height. They are better than six feet amongst the Sioux. There are, of course, those who are shorter. I know some that stand 6 feet 4 to 7 inches, so as an average, the Sioux are a well-developed and husky people. Of the Cheyennes, most are good-sized men: Wolf Black and Red Robe, who come to me quite often, are big men. Wolf Black stands 6 feet 5 inches; as an average the Cheyennes are good sized people also. As for the Crows, they are noted for being big men; amongst the Arapahoes there many big men, as there are amongst the



Shoshonies. The Southwest Indians are smaller, but even there many are big and powerful men. And all of the above are very stoic, and are so from childhood up; someday, when on your vacation, come out. I will take you amongst the Sioux and Cheyennes; they will smile at me, but never at a stranger.

Now as to war-bonnets; only Chiefs of the higher ranks wore war-bonnets, with streamers—not tails, as Mr. Verrill calls them. Sub chiefs wore war-bonnets, but without streamers; feathers were earned, not merely thrown around for anyone to wear. Chiefs, such as "Pizi Ha' Yusokda" and "Sungakan Wachinhuuni" "Non'-Pa Hanyetuwi" or "Tatan Kabdoka I'Yotanhahan un"—these were some of the most unyielding chiefs amongst the Sioux. There were Chief Gall, Crazy Horse, and Two Moons of the Cheyennes; there were many others, who wore war-bonnets with streamers hanging to the ground, and they wore the very finest; when attacks were made, they would be standing by, directing. Seldom did they take any actual part in the battle, but, believe me, their finest was there. Crazy Horse often fought by the side of his "Ozuye We Tawatas", but then there was only one Crazy Horse. Warriors wore little of finery, but even they, wore one or more feathers or Porky Wapahas shields and other paraphernalia, even on their Ponies.

Mr. Verrill also states that he fails

to see mention of what sub tribe—not Sub, but tribe, I tell of in "The Red Man's Story." In the first chapter I mention the "Hunkpati" Yanktonians, or Yanktonais, or as some prefer to call us, Yanktons. There are many Sioux tribes, such as Yanktonais, Sissetons, Tetons, Santees, Hunkpapas, Oglalas, Assiniboines, Mandans, Minneconjous, and many others of Sioux relationship. Even the Cheyennes are more or less related to the Sioux, though they speak a different language. Mr. Verrill also states that the word "How" is not used. I have heard it spoken for many, many years. The word, as he has it, "A-Hau"—never heard of it, so I can't argue that point. But, as he says, it means peace be with you, well perhaps; in Sioux we say "Wookiye Un Kici Wicaya" or instead wicaya "Yopi". Most Sioux is spoken backwards. For example, "Kangi Cigala" the way it is spelled would be in English Crow little; but to the Sioux it is Little Crow. Or like "Wambdi Ska"—that would be Eagle White; but to the Sioux it is White Eagle. "Wambdi Kuyan" would, or does spell Eagle Flying; but to the Sioux it is Flying Eagle. See what I mean—it is all backwards.

As for greeting, that is "Kiciyunihanpi". Well, I know not of what Indians Mr. Verrill speaks; but what he is stating in his story won't go out here. We know better. It may go in the East, but not here. I have already been bombarded by many who read "Erroneous Ideas of the Indians". And as for blue-eyed Indians, never amongst the full-bloods out here. There are some breeds with dark blue or brown eyes; but forget about whiskers, and blue eyes, or red or blond hair amongst half-to-full-blooded Sioux, or any other Northwest tribe. As I have said, a girl friend of mine is a redhead; but dog-gone, she is less than a quarter Sioux. Well, maybe I should have kept my mouth shut; but having lived with the Indians as long as we have here in the West, we should know. Even most of the half-breeds

would yank the hair from their faces. There were Pete St. John, Leo Rabbit and Henry Jakops, all dead now—been dead for many years. There were Yanktonais. Often did I see them pull stray hairs from their faces; as I have said, there are a few today who try to raise a little mustache, this amongst the young breeds, but never a full-blood.

Well, I have no argument with Mr. Verrill; he, no doubt, knows all about certain tribes, and so knows his beans. But we know ours. So I will say to you Sir: *Nita waste Koda, Wambdi Ska Miyec.*

—Pete Carter, Box 444, Miles City, Montana.

P. S. It is quite true that Sitting Bull started out as a Medicine-man, but not for long. He was as great a Chief as any. He was shot in a cowardly manner from behind. His son is still living.

Speaking of Indian faces, they are mostly broad, with high cheek-bones;

their faces, except amongst the real old, are full. Speaking of painted faces, bodies, and ponies—this all had a meaning. Different colors, as well as different designs had their meanings. The war-path had its colors, as did the hunting trail, or just roaming the trails. Designs on ponies had their meanings, as did the paintings on a chief's tepee—these told of his favorite exploits.

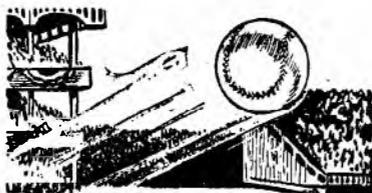
Again, it was not only feathers in ceremonials and ceremonial dress. There were buffalo bonnets, porcupine bonnets, and trail bonnets; during ceremonial dances today, painted bodies are used in the Sun dance, Ghost dance, and so on; in the squaw dances, the squaws will paint their faces.

Ceremonial dances are held quite often amongst both Sioux and Cheyennes during summer months, and even during winter. Come out, some time, and you will see them.



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BULLETS FOR BOOTHILL

by Lee Floren



Layton slammed a right hook into Webster's body.

Jim Layton had sworn off guns, back in a Chicago alley. But out here, a gun could have a different meaning . . .

LAWYER JIM LAYTON was looking at the wall map when the two men stalked into his office. When he turned and recognized the intruders, his annoyance changed to anger. He spoke to the older man. "You always come into a man's quarters without knocking, Weber?"

"I go *where* I want to go and I go *when* I want to go!" Cowman Ed Weber almost snarled his words. "Layton, call off that surveyor of yours. He has no legal right to run a survey across my Sagehen range!"

Jim realized this pair had come looking for trouble.

He studied Weber momentarily. He saw a heavy man—not too tall. A cattle king of the old school, Ed Weber had long been the boss of this Sagehen country rangelands.

He looked at Weber's gunman, slim and boyish Kid Watson. Boyish Kid Watson, with the buckteeth and the easy grin—still, with a grain of toughness in his wiry makeup. A hired killer; a gunhand . . .

Slowly, deliberately, eyes on Jim, the gunman chewed his tobacco. And Jim Layton became wary, tough.

"You don't legally own Sagehen grass," the lawyer said carefully.

Anger flushed Ed Weber's hanging jowls. "I ran cattle onto that grass over twenty years back, and I claim it by the theory of squatter's rights."

"That isn't legal. The court in Helena threw out a similar claim two years ago. To own land now in Montana Territory you have to have outright deeds to it. Weber, and you know it."

"That railroad," said Weber, "is not

crossin' Sagehen land, savvy! With the steel would come farmers. With farmers come bobwire and with bobwire comes the end of open cattle range!"

"We've gone over this before," Jim reminded.

Kid Watson shifted his chew and his grin was short and tight. "Boss, this gent don't wear a gun, so a man can't talk to him with a .45. And they ain't no use wastin' words on a shyster lawyer, 'cause he's trained to spout out words. Why don't you do the same to him what I did to thet surveyor back in the hills?"

"Did you tangle with my surveyor?" Jim Layton demanded, attention now on the slender gunman.

Tawny-cat eyes showed whimsical amusement. "Now why would you jump to such a conclusion, shyster?" The gunman did not wait for an answer. "Why don't you be a big boy and why don't you pack a pistol? This ain't Chi, you know—we have men out here, not sisters!"

"That's my business, Watson."

"You have a surveyor on my range," Ed Weber gritted, "and that is my business!" And, without warning, he hit.

Hurriedly Jim threw up an arm. The fist smashed against his forearm and almost upset him. Weber had the strength of a Hereford bull. Brows pulled low, muttering curses, he came ahead, fists in front of him.

Jim thought, *He outweighs me by at least thirty pounds, and he's tough from the saddle.* He decided to fight at long range and wear down Weber. Weber did not know that Jim had been the light-heavy weight champ on the Chi police force.

He slammed a right hook into Weber's belly. He figured that the man's midsection would be his weak point. He grinned as he heard Weber's agonized gasp. He had science. Weber, rough and tumble.

Which would win?

Jim circled, momentarily forgetting Kid Watson. And there he made an

error. For, without warning, something hit him over the head from behind.

The stars swooped, exploded.

A GAIN, JIM saw stars. This time, they gathered, retreated. They spun and turned into a woman's face. Sick as he was, he saw she was a beautiful woman—brown hair, brown eyes.

"Jim, what in heaven's name happened?"

Jim got to his feet. His knees were unsteady as he lurched for his chair, almost missing it. He summoned a tight grin.

"Ed Weber called on me, Velma. He tangled with me and I got my back to Kid Watson. Wonder what he socked me with?"

"This was on the floor beside you."

Jim looked at the heavy paper-weight. He winced. He looked at the alarm clock on the wall-shelf.

"I must've been out about ten minutes. How come you came over here?"

"Just to—see you..."

Jim's head pounded. But some traces of his usual good-nature showed as he said, "Well, that was right nice of you, honey." He looked around his office. Chair overturned, desk pushed back. "We had a set-to, looks like. Didn't anybody see them leave my office?"

"I saw them come in. I was in the Mercantile working. They never came out, so—I went to investigate."

Jim said, "I believe, damn it, that you love me, woman."

"Don't jump to conclusions."

Jim smiled. "Kid Watson mentioned tangling with my surveyor. I'd best go out and check on him. I don't believe they would dare kill him."

"They're ruthless. You've only been here a few months. I've spent most of my life on this range and I know them."

"The railroad would really get after them if they killed him."

"I sent word out to the sheriff," Velma said.

Jim got to his boots. "I gotta get out to check on my suveyor." His knees had strength now. For a moment he stood there, slim, silent, and had his

thoughts. His thoughts were evidently the same as Velma's. For she said, "Jim, you'd best pack a gun—you know how to use one."

"I—know—how—to use one, honey."

"Jim, this isn't Chicago. This is Montana Territory. I've seen you fire a six shooter so fast—well, the sounds were one. You can shoot but—"

Suddenly she stopped. Jim watched her lovely, frowning face. When he had first seen her, he had said to himself, *She's the one to be mother to my kids*. He was thinking of that again, now.

"But what?"

"Forget it, Jim."

Jim moved over. She stood and watched him. He did not put his arms around her. He looked down into her eyes. They were soft, and yet, in the softness, was a measure of what looked like sadness.

"I couldn't pull a gun against a fellow man and kill him, Velma."

"Not even to save your own life, Jim?"

He bit his bottom lip. He stood like that, watching her, loving her. Then slowly he said, "Not even to save my own life."

"Then you—don't think much of me? They'd kill you—I'd be alone, Jim!"

"I think the world of you. I love you. I love you so much—" He caught himself. This was getting nowhere fast. She did not know about Chicago, and she did not know about Jim Layton—Sergeant Jim Layton. Jim Layton, the crack pistol shot of the Chi police force.

"Get your gun, Jim, and wear it."

Again, he shook his head.

A man came in, panting slightly. He was fat and round but his red-freckled face was not the face of a peaceful man. It was a marked face, and violence had marked it. And pale blue eyes studied Jim Layton.

"What happened, lawyer?"

Jim told about Weber and Kid Watson jumping him. The sheriff's

eyes narrowed, and Jim read their indecision. The sheriff and Weber were old friends.

"You want to file a complaint, lawyer?"

Jim shook his head. "That would do no good, sheriff. I know you'd serve it and serve it to the best of your ability, but it would look bad for me—appealing to the Law for help."

The pale eyes showed agreement.

"Jim Layton, why don't you pack a gun?"

There it was again—out in the open, glistening under the sun. And Jim, standing there, remembered that dirty, tin-can littered alley. He remembered the youth who had died there on those soot-stained bricks in that alley. And, because he remembered this, he knew the pull of fear.

He said not a word.

He turned and walked out the back door and entered his barn and saddled his sorrel.

As he threaded the latigo through the cinch-ring he remembered the puzzled look that had lighted the sheriff's dull eyes. And he remembered the eyes of Velma—they, too, had been puzzled.

They did not know.

HHEAT SHIMMERED on the snow-tipped peaks of the western mountains. Heat danced across Sagehen Valley and smashed down on sagebrush and greasewood. Sweat showed on the sorrel's shoulders.

Still, Jim drove the bronc on. And his thoughts, harsh and stern, found accompaniment in the hard pound of the sorrel's hoofs. He remembered standing in the office, back there in Chicago, and he remembered handing in his star.

"I'm leaving the force, sir."

"Why?"

"I have my personal reasons, sir."

The Chief had looked at him with almost sad eyes. "Sergeant Layton, I believe in all sincerity, that you are making a mistake. The jury acquitted you of this youth's death, saying you

were acting in the line of your sworn duty. You can wear this badge and be proud of it—”

“I can’t, Chief. I never want to line up another gunsight—against a human—”

Those eyes, sad and weary, had touched him. “That is your—decision?”

“It is, sir.”

“It’s none of my business, but what do you intend to do?”

“Study law. I’ve always liked law.”

“Good luck.”

Run, sorrel horse, run. Run away from my thoughts, horse. I remember sitting in class during law courses, and I remember seeing not the text book or the instructor—I remember watching that youth run, and I remember watching him fall. And that memory blotted out everything...

He swallowed. He had a bad taste in his mouth. But still, despite swallowing, the taste persisted.

He looked at this high Montana range. Good grass, even with very little rain, and lots of water, for snow was always on the high peaks. And, because he thought of grass, he thought of Ed Weber. Yes, and of Kid Watson...

Weber was prepared to die for this grass, if need be. And Watson would die because Weber paid him money. Of the two, then, Weber was the more worthy, if that label could be used on the domineering, ugly cowman.

Weber had killed seven men, so Jim had heard. Killed them to establish his domain over this grass.

And he’ll kill me, unless I kill him first...

That thought was not good. He had become part of the law office of the Great Northwestern Railway System. And his company was surveying this area because of the mountain pass to the west. Weber was right. Rails would bring in farmers and barbwire.

But Weber, too, was short-sighted.

Rails would bring in women and children. Homes would be established. Schools would spring up and on calm

Sunday mornings church bells would call people to reverent worship.

An empire, a people, were moving West, always West. And Weber, with his guns, was trying to stop it.

Jim, suddenly, felt proud. He was doing something to atone for that youth who had died, his blood spilling across the hot bricks of that Chicago alley. And then, without warning, his blood went cold.

Ahead was a smashed, ruined buggy. It lay on its side, three wheels broken, the third idle in the air. Evidently the team had broken loose, for no horses were hooked to the double-trees.

Behind him, Jim heard hoofs. He turned, hand going to his hip before he remembered he did not pack a gun. He had half-expected Weber and Kid Watson to trail him out of town.

But the rider was Velma.

His hand came away from his hip.

The girl flanked her bronc, dust rising. She looked at the buggy and said, “The surveyor’s rig, Jim?”

“His outfit, Velma,” Jim said slowly. “And yonder, in that bunch of sagebrush, is his team, tangled in the brush. But where is he?”

“Maybe they—killed him?”

“Let’s scout, honey.”

They split up and rode through sagebrush as high as the bellies of their horses. It was Velma who found the surveyor in a small draw that had a spring in it. The man had crawled to the water on his hands and knees, leaving a trail of blood behind him. Then he had passed out.

“Over here, Jim.”

Jim spurred over and dismounted. He put the man on his back—he was a short, heavy man of about thirty—and he saw that the man had no bullet wounds. Somebody had beat him severely over the head.

“They pistol whipped him,” he said, savagely. “Two against one, just like they jumped me.”

His eyes met those of Velma across the unconscious man. And he read fear in the girl’s eyes. Fear for a man named Jim Layton?

That thought, despite the press of the outside danger, was a good thought.

"This will end only one way, Jim."

"Yes?"

"In guns, Jim, in guns..."

They got the team untangled from the tugs and Jim got the surveyor on the night horse. The surveyor told his story briefly, and it was as Jim had expected. Kid Watson had ridden behind the surveyor while Ed Weber had held the man's attention while talking to him.

"He done slugged me, Jim. Knocked me cold."

Jim grinned mirthlessly. "He did the same to me." He told the man about his fight with Weber and Kid Watson.

"My instruments are all busted. My plat maps are torn. I'm gettin' off this range, Layton."

Jim studied him. "You—afraid?"

Anger stirred the man's bloodshot eyes. Then Jim saw this anger die before the push of discretion.

"I got a woman an' five kids in St. Louis. I don't wanna leave her a widow and my kids without a father just because of a job."

"You don't want to get even with Kid Watson?"

"Hell, no! I only wanta git outa this damn' country!"

Jim said, "There's a stage at dusk. Catch it out. I'll contact the head office and say you got sick and had to leave."

"Don't lie on account of me. If I ever get west of the Mississippi again it'll be only to St. Louis, and no further."

Jim smiled.

THEY REACHED town. The surveyor said, "You gonna take that stage out with me, Jim?"

Jim shook his head.

"They'll kill you, fella," the surveyor warned.

Jim said dryly, "A man only kicks the bucket once, fellow."

They dismounted in front of the hotel. An old man came and took their broncs. He looked at the surveyor's bloody face and said not a word. The

man lurched, and Jim caught him on one side; Velma took the man's other arm. They got him into bed in the hotel.

The medico came, looked at Jim, said, "Well, maybe you learned your lesson, lawyer."

"I'm still on the job," Jim assured.

He and Velma went back to the hotel lobby. The girl was quiet and Jim glanced at her. Her jaw was set, her lips tight; she showed determination. Jim reached out and caught her hand. She jerked her hand away.

"What's the matter, honey?"

She did not look at him. He saw her full breasts rise and fall under her sheer blouse.

"I think, Jim, you're—a coward."

"Why do you say that?"

"You won't pack a gun. Neither Weber or Kid Watson can draw against you because you have no gun. You protect yourself by not having a pistol on your person!"

Jim watched her. She did not meet his eyes. They stood in the dimly-lighted hall. He saw the proud sweet profile of her face.

"That isn't the reason, Velma."

"Then—what is—"

"Sometime, I'll tell you." He tried to pull her close. She jerked her hand away hurriedly and stepped out of his reach. He felt a feeling akin to despair, a sinking feeling, a touch of fear. Was he losing her?

"What is the reason, Jim?"

He did not answer right away. He was again seeing that brick-paved alley, seeing the youth run, hearing the roar of a gun. His gun... And again, in his mind's eye, he saw that youth fall, a bullet through his brain. And he remembered standing there, sick inside, dying inside, looking at his gun, and he remembered saying to the .45. "You shot wild... You've killed him..."

He had stood there, talking to his pistol...

"Jim, the reason?"

He tried to joke. "Just like all women—full of questions."

He had said the wrong thing. She looked at him and said, "You go to hell," and then she ran out the back door.

Jim felt even sicker.

He went into the lobby. Ed Weber stood beside the desk and Kid Watson stood beside the door. Weber looked at him and said nothing. Only the cowman's eyes were alive—probing, feeling, touching.

Kid Watson said, dryly, "My gun barrel did a good job, Layton. I hear tell he's turned chicken and is goin' leave. . . You could profit by his example."

"Maybe I won't leave."

Weber listened, evil head canted. Weber felt of his swollen bottom lip with dirty fingers. And Ed Weber listened.

"Then get a gun, Layton."

"Maybe I won't pack a gun, killer."

Kid Watson's eyes were glistening points of agate. "I won't hit you like Weber did. I'm no fool. Why use a man's fists, for knuckles can be hurt and broken? They can slow down a man's gunhand."

Jim looked at Weber. He met the measured evilness of the cowman's slow eyes. Weber smiled despite his swollen mouth. Jim looked at Kid Watson. Watson, the killer, seemingly loafing, yet tight and tense underneath. Their eyes met.

Jim stepped outside.

A kid said, "You goin' gun with them, lawyer?" He was about six, with a dirty face, and his brown eyes were sharp as daggers.

"Maybe, maybe not. . ."

"If you don't, you're a coward!"

Jim said, "From the mouth of babes and sucklings. . ."

The boy frowned. "What does that mean?"

These townspeople were watching. Some watched openly; others, covertly. Some were for Weber; others hated him. But still, in their hate, they feared him and his gunman.

A woman came out of a store, saw him, paused, then met him.

"Hello, Mrs. Jones."

"How do you do, Mr. Layton."

She continued on. Usually she would stop and chat with him, for she was the town gossip. Jim glanced across the street. Kid Watson and Weber were moving toward the *Silver Cup Saloon*. He understood why Mrs. Jones had hurried on without a word. She was, to put it bluntly, afraid somebody might start shooting, and she did not want to be around the flying bullets.

Watson called, "You're a coward, shyster!"

The words rang up and down the street. The entire town heard them. Jim stopped, anger flushing his face.

Weber said, "Pack a gun, or get out of town, tinhorn lawyer!"

Eyes were on Jim. He could almost feel their silent imprint. These people figured he was a coward. He remembered the police pistol-range, and he remembered them timing his draw, and somewhere back in Chicago there was a cup—a silver cup—with the name of Jim Layton—Sergeant Jim Layton—on it.

Your elbow moved. Your hand came down fast. Your hand met your gun-grip. Your gun rose, and the shots blurred. . .

Jim looked at the Mercantile's door. Velma stood there, watching him. Their eyes met, and hers still held sadness. Then she went into the establishment.

Jim looked at Kid Watson.

Derision flared in the gunman's narrowed eyes. Satire, disgust, and an ugly derision. And Jim got the impression suddenly that Kid Watson, although he killed for dollars, was better than he. At least, Kid Watson was not a coward in the eyes of these people. . .

Lawyer Jim Layton looked at Cowman Ed Weber.

"Get out of town," Weber snarled.

Jim turned and went toward his house.

HIS .45 AND gunbelt were in his suitcase. He took them out, feel-

ing their sterling weight, and he laid them on the bed. Sunlight slanted in to lose its identity against the black grip of the .45.

He stood there, looking at the gun.

He heard the door open, close. He knew it was Velma without looking. He could sense that, feel it.

"Jim, your gun—"

"I'm strapping it on, Velma."

She grabbed his shoulders, and he turned. He looked into her eyes. "Jim, tell me, please. Maybe I can help..."

"I love you."

"Yes, and I love you."

They did not embrace or kiss. The tragedy of the moment was too binding. Jim found his lips moving.

"I was a cop—the fastest on the force—with a gun. I could smash a target to smithereens. One night—on my beat—some kids ran from a hold-up—"

He had run down the alley, this youthful robber. And Jim, telling her, saw it again, and it was clear.

"I shot to scare him. I had never missed. But—for some reason—my bullet went low, Velma."

"And you—killed him?"

"Shot him through the head. I remember his mother—and she cursed me—and I remember him falling..."

"So you—quit the force?"

"Yes, and studied law."

She bit her bottom lip. "I think you were foolish."

"Why?"

"For one thing, it was an accident. Accidents can happen to anybody. And, for another thing, the boy you—killed— He was harming other people, Jim."

"But he might have changed and become a useful citizen. He was out for the thrill—he came from good parents—"

"No, he wasn't. His parents might have thought themselves good, but they were not good—if they had been, he would not have robbed. You got to think the other way, too, Jim."

"And what way is that?"

"He might have killed a man in that

holdup, or in other robberies. Then the blood of an innocent man would be on his hands. Is it not better that you killed him, an outlaw, than he kill a man say with a family—a wife, children?"

"I've thought of that, too."

"You're too sensitive, Jim. Sometimes we buy the things we need at the altar of death, for the world consists of death in some form or other. If Weber is out of the way, you help hundreds of families. They'll come and build homes and love and raise families and they'll revere your name."

"And if I get—killed?"

"Then I die with you, Jim." She kissed him then, and her lips moved under his, and her eyes watched him. "I'm getting a rifle and I'm going out there with you, because you are my man."

"No, you stay behind, please."

"If you die, I want to die. If you get killed, then I'll follow you—even if I have to take my own life."

He watched her. "You love me—that much?"

"I've waited and waited—and I'll not lose you now."

He kissed her, then. He did not kiss her hard. He kissed her softly, sweetly, reverently. Then he walked to the bed. The gun was heavy yet, in its weight, was assurance.

He buckled the belt on. And his hands were steady. He spread his legs and the gun rose and dipped and rose again—it was liquid steel. Then he restored it to its holster. He looked at her.

"I'm ready."

"My rifle is outside. I took it from the store."

THEY WENT outside, hand in hand. Outside the doorway he stopped and kissed her, and this time, his lips were hard. This done, their pact sealed, they went on together, hand in hand, with Velma carrying her rifle. They did not speak. The sun had moved down, dusk was creeping in, and sagebrush had its magic aroma. They came to the main street and a

man ran ahead hollering, "He's packing his gun and his woman is with him!" And the man darted into a saloon.

Velma said, "He's warning them, Jim."

Jim said, "Yes," and his voice was steady.

They stood there, man and woman together, and they watched Weber come out first, and Weber was tough and hard and mean. Kid Watson came out, too, and the Kid moved out, watching them carefully.

Weber said, "This is it," and he spoke to the world.

Watson said, "The woman—I don't pull against a woman, Weber."

"She asked for it!" Weber snarled.

Still, the gunman shook his boyish head. "No woman's blood will be on my hands," he said. He spoke to Jim. "Get rid of her, lawyer."

Without warning, Jim pushed Velma.

He pushed her with his left hand, and he pushed her very hard. The unexpected force knocked her to one side. She tripped on the plank sidewalk and sat down. And then, Kid Watson's gun lifted.

Jim thought, *He's chained lightning...*

Jim Layton had many thoughts. They spread across his mind, flashes of light, and he remembered them timing him, and he wondered just how many split seconds it took for Kid Watson to lift his gun, level it, fire. *The Kid*, he thought, *is faster than I ever was.*

Or was it because, when he had pushed Velma, he had given the Kid a split second edge?

He saw the gunman's .45 flare. Hard on the roar of Kid Watson's .45, his own gun lifted, spouted smoke, kicked back. Watson screamed, his gun slid from his hand, and both hands went over his lower ribs.

He drew too fast, Jim thought.

He did not see Watson go down. He had no eyes for the gunman now—he was out of this. He swung his .45 on Weber, and then the weight hit him.

From out of nowhere the smashing weight came, hitting him in the leg, dropping him. He was sick and hurt and the world reeled.

Then, Weber was walking ahead, arms down. His .45 had fallen and Weber kept on walking until he found the hitchrack. Jim watched, sitting there beside Velma, and he thought, *I never fired at him.*

Jim smelled gunsmoke.

Rifle smoke.

He looked at Velma's rifle. Smoke, from the end of the barrel. He looked at her.

"I—I shot him, Jim."

He looked back at Ed Weber.

Weber was clawing onto the hitchrack. Weber said, "And a woman—she did it—" Weber had a twisted, surprised look on his beefy face. He looked at a horse tied to the rack.

He said to the horse, "A woman—she killed Ed Weber..."

The horse, his surprise gone, nuzzled Weber. It pushed Weber over and he grabbed again, missing the tie-rack.

Then, Weber was in the dust.

The horse smelled of him, got the smell of blood, then reared and tore loose and ran down the street, broken bridle reins trailing. Jim looked at Velma. She had broken now and she was crying.

He got his arm around her and he said, "Lie down."

They lay on the plank walk and he put his weight against her and kissed her. Somebody said, "They're both dead—Watson and Weber—" and the doc squatted and said, "This isn't any place to love."

The joke fell flat.

Jim whispered, "Thanks, honey."

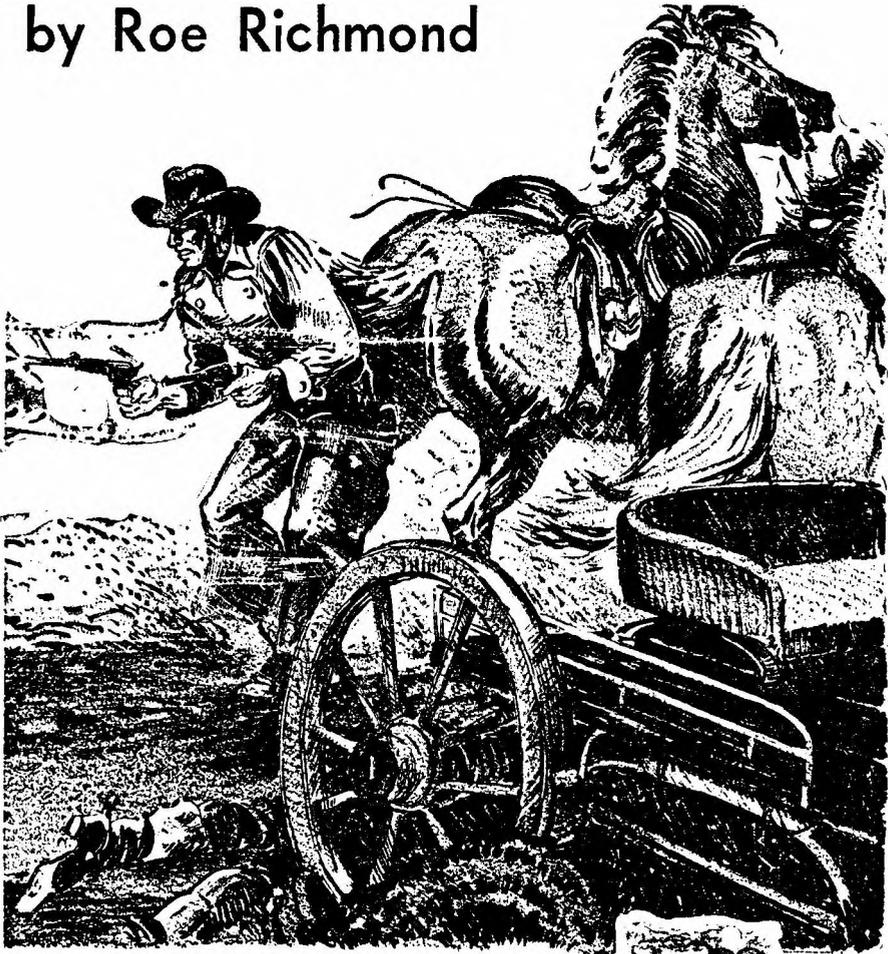
She looked at him. Her eyes were those of a little girl—round and probing and filled with tears. Her lips moved before sound came.

"I told you—I'd die with you—live with you."

"We'll live a long, long time," Jim assured quietly.

THE GUNHAND'S TURN

by Roe Richmond



“A man has to live with himself, first and always,” Alrick told Leslie. “I never backed down before, and I don’t relish the idea now!”

AL RICK was afraid. To a man who made his living with a gun, it was not a new sensation. There is always a certain amount of fear before battle, but this time it seemed different, sapping his will and strength, leaving him hollow and brittle. As he walked along the familiar streets of Thornbury, Alrick had the feeling that his fear was obvious to

everyone he met. He fancied a shade less respect in the way people greeted and looked at him, a frank curiosity in some of the glances. Wondering if he would stay to face Hilleboe; wondering if he would live to see another sunrise... Already he was set apart from the living, as if he belonged more with the dead. A cold and overwhelming loneliness came over Alrick, and

with it a dull resentful anger against the Sandford brothers.

They had enough profitable enterprises without opening a stagecoach line, in direct competition with Munsill's long-established route. They should have been satisfied that Munsill had not interfered with their other projects. The Sandfords owned and operated a freight business, livery stable and corrals, a large general store, the *Home Range Hotel*, the *Granada Saloon* and gambling house. They dominated Thornbury almost as much as Munsill did his town of Washtenaw, and Munsill had never tried to check their growth. But he would not stand for this new stage line, and everybody knew it. Munsill would send down a crew of his gunhands—or Hilleboe alone.

Ambition always turns into greed, thought Alrick. He had started out with the Sandfords and seen the change in them. The more men got the more they wanted, until it became a lust and obsession. He had liked Brad and Paul Sandford in the beginning, but it was difficult to feel any fondness for them now. Alrick had been loyal, protecting their interests with his life and his guns. They paid him well, but of late he wondered if it was worth it, if any payment could be enough for such services. Getting on toward thirty, the reckless daring of youth burned out, a man was less inclined to risk his life. A man thinking of marriage for the first time was more interested in staying alive.

Maybe that's what has softened me up some, Alrick thought. *A woman can do that to you, and in this kind of work it may be fatal. You can't afford to lose any of that toughness and sureness. You've got to keep that keen steel-edged hardness, the feeling that you're a little better than the best of them, or you don't last long in this field...* Alrick was chief trouble-shooter for the Sandfords, the same position that Hilleboe held for Munsill.

The group of men in front of the saddle shop broke off their discussion as Alrick came along the slat sidewalk under the board awnings. They said, "Howdy, Al," and their furtive embarrassment indicated they had been talking about him. Alrick said, "How are you, boys?" his voice low and easy as usual, and turned into the rich leathery-smelling dimness. Nat Weed, lank and stooped, raised a thin saturnine face from his work, faded eyes lighting a little as he saw who it was. Thoughtfully the saddlemaker studied Alrick and stroked the smooth leather with a long veined hand.

"Well, son," he said. "You should of learned a nice trade like this, when I gave you the chance."

Alrick smiled. "There's time enough, Nat. A man can pick that up when he's too old for anythin' else." His tone was gently chiding.

"Some don't live that long, Al," said Nat Weed, dryly and pointedly.

"That's right," Alrick agreed easily. "Maybe you wouldn't have, if that slug hadn't smashed your knee-cap."

"It's possible." Weed looked down at his stiffly protruding left leg. "I've always been kind of grateful for that bullet... Any sign of 'em yet, Al?"

Alrick shook his head, glancing past the hanging saddles, bridles, reins and belts to the dingy front windows. The men out there had drifted along, he noticed absently, preferring to discuss his probable death at longer range... Alrick sauntered to the door and lounged there, making a cigaret and staring across at the new Concord stagecoach before the Sandford freight office. Nat Weed got up and stumped stiff-legged after him, leaning a gaunt shoulder on the opposite doorjamb, long jaws moving slowly on his tobacco.

"A pretty wagon," Weed remarked. "Too bad it ain't goin' anywhere."

"You think it ain't?" drawled Alrick. "You're as cheerful as the rest of the town, Nat."

"Common sense, boy. Munsill's too big for the Sandfords, or anybody else,

to buck... Are you still damn fool enough to get yourself shot up, just because the Sandford boys are tryin' to outgrow their britches?"

"What you want me to do—run out?"

Nat Weed spat at a horsefly on the awning post. "What good is pride to a dead man? Let the Sandfords do their own dirty work, for once."

"And get myself branded a coward all through the Onawanda?" inquired Alrick. "You know what'd happen if I pulled out, Nat. Every two-bit tinhorn and liquored-up cowhand in the valley'd be callin' me."

"There's other places to live, Al."

"Sure, but a reputation follows you close in this country."

"I suppose your girl don't matter, one way or another?"

Alrick laughed shortly. "I'm not even sure she's my girl, Nat... There's Kellard and Paul Sandford, you know."

"If you're not tophand, there's one reason," Nat Weed said flatly. "You can't blame a woman for shyin' off'n a gent that lives with a gun in his hand."

"I haven't used a gun much lately."

"You had to use it plenty to get a name that keeps 'em from drawin' now. You're good, Al, everybody knows you're good... But this Hilleboe is in a class by himself, son."

Alrick shrugged a high shoulder against the casement. "I don't know, Nat, I just don't know..."

Weed squirted tobacco juice across the porch. "Well, it's your life, Al. But I hate to see you throw it away." He turned and limped back to his workbench.

AL RICK stepped outside under the awning and stood watching the morning sun flood the dusty street with golden light. He was six-feet, looking even taller because he was thin as whip-thong except for the spread of shoulders, a long loose-limbed figure with an effortless grace of movement. He had sharp angular features, slight-

ly hollowed at cheek and temple, the nose, cheekbones and jawbones prominent under the smooth bronzed skin. His green eyes were deepset, somber, sun-squinted into narrow three-cornered slits, but the wide mouth was pleasant and good-humored, boyish in its smile.

Mild-mannered, soft-spoken, quiet and gentle acting, Alrick was a strange young man for a gun-fighter. He had been first driven to it by a shy sensitive nature that was easily hurt, backed by a flaring hair-trigger temper, forever whipping him into action to avenge such hurts. He was friendly and good-natured, until aroused by some affront... Never a heartless killer, he never fought unless he had to, but from early youth he had been constantly crowded into fighting; it seemed, one of those men born to battle. Most of his killing had been done before he joined the Sandford brothers; by that time, his reputation and his presence with undrawn guns were enough to settle most issues without open warfare... But it would take a lot more than that in this particular case, for Hilleboe had a record that wholly overshadowed Alrick's; Hilleboe was regarded with awe and terror throughout the territory.

There came a hollow rumbling thunder in the north, as Munsill's morning stage clattered across the bridge over the Onawanda River and rattled dust-clouded into the main street of Thornbury. Alrick straightened away from the corner post and loosened the Colt .44s in their sheaths, low on his long legs, almost wishing that Hilleboe would be on it, bringing this affair to a head without any further wondering and waiting. A nervous flicker ran up his legs and along his spine, tightening his scalp under the flat-crowned hat. His heart hammered hollowly in his chest, and an icy sinking chill plumbed the pit of his stomach. On both sides of the street men emerged from houses, stores and saloons, and others flocked to watch from windows and doors, as the battered coach creaked to a halt

in front of the Wells-Fargo Express depot.

Slit-eyed and bleak-faced, Alrick watched four passengers clamber out into the hot sunlight, but Hilleboe was not among them. Charley Bassett, the driver, spotted Alrick and called across: "He's on his way, Alrick, don't get impatient!" Bassett then gestured at the new Concord, said something to his shotgun guard, and they both laughed loudly, climbing down from the high seat.

There was a disappointed murmur along the sidewalks, and people turned away to go about their business. Alrick, feeling the tension ease out of him as his pulse slowed to normal, moved back and sat down on a crate against the wall. "Too bad, you buzzards," he murmured half-aloud. "You'll just have to wait some more..." The idea of waiting, prolonging the agony of indecision, doubt and fear, was immeasurably depressing to Alrick himself. He liked to strike in the instantaneous white heat of the moment, get it over and done with. He was no stolid patient Indian fighter, stoical and emotionless... But Hilleboe was that kind of fighter, inhuman in his cold calm restraint, often breaking his victims down before he killed them... *To hell with Hilleboe*, he thought. *He's just a man with two arms, two legs, two eyes; and he's not bulletproof.*

Alrick was still sitting there when the stage pulled out, Bassett and the guard saluting him with mockery, and then Sheriff Buckhout came up the street toward him, a stocky bowlegged veteran lawman with graying hair and a tobacco-stained gray mustache, chewing the usual cigar and scowling into the sun's glare. Buck had been a fighting sheriff in his day, a gunman of renown, but he was too old for it now. With a weary sigh he sat down on a box beside the younger man.

"So you didn't take my advice, Al?" the sheriff said.

"Not yet, Buck."

"There's still time. A man has to

take a sensible step, once in his life... If he wants to go on livin'."

"You never did what you want me to," Alrick protested mildly.

"Different with me, boy," Buckhout said. "I stood for law and order. All you're representin' is the money-hunger of the Sandfords. Is that worth dyin' for?"

Alrick smiled. "It's nice to see everyone so damn sure I'm goin' to die."

"Son, I've seen this Hilleboe. Through the years I saw a lot of them, most of the best ones, but never his equal."

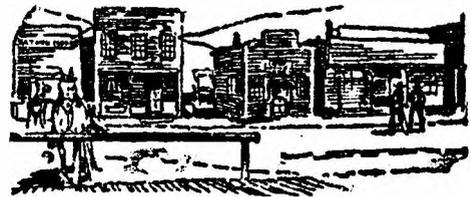
"There's things you have to do, Buck. Even when you know they don't make much sense."

"This ain't one of them, Al. I hope this deal..."

Alrick removed his hat and shook his tawny brown head. "No friendship left in it. Just business, Buck."

"Seems like you owe somethin' to Leslie, son. Not just because she's my niece, that I raised like a daughter."

Alrick grinned. "Seems like Leslie has trouble makin' up her mind, too."



"You know why, don't you?" Buckhout demanded. "As long as you pack guns for the Sandfords, your chance of livin' ain't much, compared to those of Little Sand or young Kellard, or any man livin' a natural life."

"I reckon not, Buck."

The sheriff nodded at the new coach across the way. "That stage's supposed to start its first run at three o'clock. If I was you, I wouldn't be here this afternoon, Al."

"Maybe I won't," Alrick said slowly.

Buckhout rose to go on to his office. "Do one thing for me before you decide anythin', Al. Go see Leslie—once more."

"I kinda figured on doin' that, Buck," drawled Alrick.

"It's only fair and right, son." Buckhout's weathered face, dour, seamed and wise, lighted with a brief wintry smile. He moved along the shady arcade, bent and scarred by the years, an honest forthright four-square man, fond of Alrick, devoted to his niece Leslie, and full of hatred for cold-blooded killers like Hilleboe, greedy grasping men like Munsill and the Sandford brothers.

ON A STRAY impulse, Alrick crossed the street and climbed the steps to the broad loading-platform of the freight company, to see his employers. It struck him as odd that neither of the brothers had come out to watch Munsill's stage, almost as if they had known Hilleboe wouldn't be on it. . . . They were both in the office, Brad Sandford pacing the floor, a brawny restless giant in rough clothes, Paul sitting at a desk cleaning his fingernails with a gold penknife, neat and dapper in an expensive blue-gray suit. Big Sand stopped pacing and stood with huge fists on hips, shaggy head cocked to one side, dark eyes flaring scornfully at Alrick. Little Sand, who was small in comparison to his burly brother, tipped his sleek black head to smile with faint contempt at the visitor.

"So, you're still stickin' around?" Brad rasped, in his hoarse unpleasant voice.

"Did you think I wouldn't be?" asked Alrick.

Paul Sandford laughed lightly. "We heard you was goin' to be called out of town, all of a sudden."

"You heard wrong," Alrick said quietly. "But I think this'll be my last job for you."

Brad's bellowing laugh jarred through the room. "A lot of other people are thinkin' the same thing, Alrick!"

"I don't mean the way they do. I'll still be around."

"Brave talk," jeered Brad. "But it

don't cover how scared you are, Alrick. That sticks out all over you. . . . Maybe we'd better take you off this job. It'd be a lot surer to post men with rifles."

Alrick smiled dimly. "That way you'd get Hilleboe, but you know what'd happen to this town? Munsill would send down enough men to wipe it off the map."

"He's right, Brad," said Paul, swinging the knife on its chain.

"Maybe Munsill'll try that anyway."

"Not if Hilleboe is taken in a fair fight," Alrick said.

"Right again," agreed Paul. "The boy's smarter than he looks, Brad."

"And you're a little too smart lately," Alrick told him.

"You don't like it?" Paul Sandford said, indifferently amused.

"I don't like it," Alrick said.

"Then get the hell out!" said big Brad Sandford.

Alrick stood slim and indolent before the hulking giant. "When I get ready," he said evenly. "You don't own me, Brad."

Big Sand snorted. "Own you? We've bought and paid for you a hundred times over, Alrick! Take a walk now."

Alrick turned his head from side to side, his large fine-shaped brown hands hanging near the gun butts. "Some day you're goin' too far."

The giant snarled in his bull throat. "Some day I'll catch you without them guns on!" His hands jerked up into huge spread claws.

"I'll take 'em off for you—any time," Alrick said, no longer afraid of anything with action at hand, his eyes triangular slits of green fire, his face a smooth bronze mask.

Paul Sandford stood up with studied casual grace, Little Sand, who was as tall as Alrick's six-foot height, broader and heavier in his tailored broadcloth. "I'll take my chances—with the guns on." He brushed back the skirt of his blue-gray coat, clearing the ivory-handled Colt, a superior smile on his handsome face, his dark eyes cold and disdainful.

"Shut up, Paul," said the big brother. "There's no call for any of this." He grinned sheepishly at Alrick. "I'm sorry, Al. I guess we're all kinda edgy... Let's forget it, huh? We're on the same side."

"Sometimes I wonder," Alrick drawled, smiling without warmth or friendliness. "But let it drop—for now. What time you expectin' Hilleboe?"

Brad looked vaguely startled. "Why, uh—most any time now."

Paul had more poise and insolence. "I say he'll be in about three."

Alrick nodded, as if with secret understanding. "That's what I figured. I'll be around." He turned to the door.

"We'll have you covered, Al," said Brad gruffly.

"Don't bother," Alrick said. "It's got to be man-to-man, to do any good." He went out, dropping lightly from the platform into the soft dirt and crossing the bright street, feeling their eyes on his back all the way. *If I live through this, he thought, there's going to be a showdown with the Sandford boys. I've got more against them than I'll ever have against Hilleboe... It's too bad Hilleboe and I'll never have a chance to talk things over. Sometimes a man doesn't know his real enemies until too late...*

LESLIE MILLER, the sheriff's niece, came out of Sandford's General Store with a brown-paper parcel under her arm, a rather tall blonde girl, tanned a golden-brown, her eyes very blue in a softly-rounded radiant face, her body deep-curved and full of flowing grace. She smiled with some reserve at Alrick, her mouth full and generous in its handsome red width, her teeth white and even.

"I'll carry that home for you, Les," offered Alrick.

"Well, I was supposed to meet Kell..."

"Never mind Kellard. I haven't got much time." Alrick took the package, and they moved toward the street the Buckhout house was on, the girl somewhat hesitant, still looking around for the young rancher.

"Are you going to ride out, Al?" she asked finally.

"Afraid not," he said. "It wouldn't look very good, Leslie."

"Well, I can be stubborn too," Leslie Miller said. "I told you it was all over if you stayed, Al, and that is what I meant."

"I want to talk to you, that's all."

"Is there anything left to talk about?"

"I'm quittin' the Sandfords—after today."

"That might be too late, Al. So far as I'm concerned, it is."

Alrick's smile was crooked, cynical. "Everybody's got me dead and buried in this town. You too, Leslie?"

At the corner, Kellard shouldered out through the swing-doors of the *Granada* and walked toward them with a rider's stilted swagger, a solid well-built good-looking man in colorful range clothes, ignoring Alrick and smiling at Leslie Miller. One of the most prosperous young cattlemen in the Onawanda Valley, Kellard had all the assurance of wealth and success.

"I reckon it's the privilege of a lovely lady to be late, Leslie," he said, and glanced at Alrick for the first time. "I'll take that bundle."

There had always been hatred between those two, instinctive and un-reasoning, bone-deep and bitter. Now, Alrick's temper flared up, firing him instantly to a fighting pitch. "You'll take nothin' but the air," he said with soft intensity and a sharp gesture.

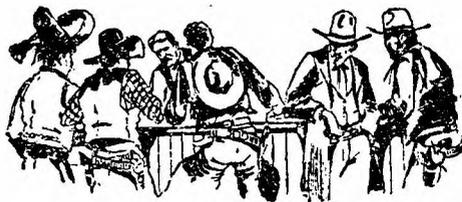
"I had a date with Leslie," said Kellard. "You're the third party."

"That can wait," Alrick told him, "this can't. Stand out of the way, Kellard."

The rancher remained motionless, blocking their path, his square fists on his gun-belt, his auburn head set arrogantly, his amber eyes shining dangerously. "You may be a professional," he said with biting contempt, "but I'm not backin' down, Alrick."

"Please, let's not have a scene here!" protested the girl.

Alrick disregarded her. "Forget the



guns, Kellard. Either move aside, or get your hands up and ready."

"No hired gunhand can push me around," Kellard stated flatly.

Alrick thrust the parcel into Leslie's arms. "Walk along, Les. I'll be with you in a minute." She started to object, but something in Alrick's face and eyes stilled her voice and set her moving past Kellard and down the side street toward home.

Kellard's breath whistled through his teeth as he swung mightily, before Alrick could turn from the girl to him, but Alrick ducked with razor sharp reflexes, the blow glancing off his bronze head, knocking his hat to the ground. Kellard was off balance when Alrick's left lashed into his face, the cream-colored hat flying as the reddish head snapped back from the impact. Alrick's right ripped home with solid smashing force, and Kellard landed on the back of his neck and shoulders in the dirt. Dust clouded up as Kellard's booted legs thumped down. He struggled to get up, his right eye a welted bruise, blood streaming from his nose and mouth, but the muscles failed to respond. With a sobbing moan, Kellard settled back into the gravel, and Alrick picked up his own worn sweated hat.

"You'll die—for this—Mister," Kellard panted weakly.

Alrick smiled and rubbed his knuckles, wondering how many times a man could die in one day. . . Men were converging on that corner from all sides now, and Alrick turned away to stride after Leslie Miller, overtaking her near the sheriff's homestead. The girl regarded him coolly, a trace of scorn about her full red mouth.

"I suppose you'll kill him next?"

Alrick shook his sandy head. "I

don't think so. But I've always wanted to hit him, and today he asked for it, Les."

"Fighting and killing," she murmured with disgust. "That's all you live for, Al. . . Will you please leave me now?"

ALRICK stood for a long moment dusting his black hat, flattening the crown to its accustomed creases. Back on the main street corner, Kellard was up and trying to free himself for pursuit of Alrick, raging but held back by the surrounding men. . . It came to Alrick how much Leslie meant to him, how barren and desolate his life would be without her. She was the only woman who ever had mattered, and there wouldn't be any other for him. Pride and self-respect, reputation and honor, all faded into insignificance before his need of her. Alrick could not let her go like this. He had to have her, even if it meant running out, humbling and shaming himself in the face of the whole Onawanda.

"Maybe I will ride out, after all," Alrick said slowly.

Leslie shook her golden head. "No, not you, Al. . . Not ever."

"If I have to do it, to keep you—I'm goin', Les."

"Do you mean it, Al?" she cried, her blue eyes glowing softly and hopefully. "Are you really getting some sense? It's the only smart thing to do. . . What are the Sandfords to you? Why should you risk your life for them? Did it ever occur to you that they might like to see you dead—especially Paul?"

"Not until today," he answered her final question, then asked one of his own: "Does Paul mean anythin' to you, Les?"

"No, Al—not Paul, not Kell, not anyone but you. I just used them, trying to bring you to your senses."

Alrick laughed quietly. "You're a hard woman."

"Well, I'm dealing with a hard man."

"Nobody'll think so, if I pull out this afternoon," he said soberly.

"What do we care what people think?" Leslie demanded. "Is that important—compared to us?"

"No-o, I guess not."

"You've fought enough, Al. Everybody knows you can fight, nobody questions your courage... A man has the right to stop fighting and settle down to a life of his own sometime."

"That's what Buck and Nat said, that's what you say... You can't all be wrong, Leslie." Alrick smiled at her. "I'll be ridin' now."

"I'm so glad—and proud, Al."

Alrick smiled wryly. "I can't feel any pride in it, Les... But I got nothin' against Hilleboe, either. In my book, there's others who need killin' more..."

"We'll get married and go away," Leslie Miller said. "The world isn't bounded by the hills around this valley."

Alrick nodded thoughtfully. "We'll have to move all right. Every man in the Onawanda'll be wantin' to make me run—after today."

They went inside the house. Alrick took her in his arms and kissed her, holding her with fierce tenderness, crushing the sweet ripeness of her mouth beneath his. He left her abruptly, walking out and away in long strides, never looking back, although Leslie watched him until he was out of sight.

Fifteen minutes later, Alrick was mounted on his chestnut mare, heading out of Thornbury. On the sunburnt plain outside he hesitated, staring from the massive grandeur of the Potawatan Peaks on the west to the rolling Burnt Hills in the east, finally kneeling the horse in an easterly course, away from the Onawanda River.

Within a half-hour everyone in town knew that Alrick had run out on the Sandford brothers, fleeing like a craven coward before the threat of Hilleboe's coming... The talk was

enough to set his ears on fire, miles away...

An hour into the Burnt Hills, still fighting his inner battle, Alrick reined up and stepped down in the shade of cedars beside a small creek, letting the mare drink, stretching flat on the bank to bury his own face in the cool running water. Afterward he lounged back on the grass, shaping and lighting a cigaret. Alrick could not reconcile himself to what he was doing; everything in his nature rebelled against it. He had known fear countless times in the face of danger, but he never before had run from it. This flight left a bad taste in his mouth, a slight sickness in his stomach.

Bowing out this way, he thought, erased all the satisfaction gained in previous victories, destroyed everything he had built up through the years, blighted the name of Alrick forever. The shame of it would haunt him relentlessly, tarnish the rest of his days, rattle always in his memory... *I can't do it, he decided at last. Even if I lose Leslie, doom myself to eternal loneliness, I've got to go back and face Hilleboe... Yes, even if I die there, in a stupid meaningless cause...* A man owes something to himself. He might endure the censure of his fellowmen, but self-condemnation would corrode, rot and ruin him in time. A man has to live with himself, day in and day out, and self-hatred soon becomes intolerable. In the final analysis a man knows himself best, and his judgment means more than that of the world at large.

BUT WHEN Alrick mounted and started on again, he was still drifting eastward, deeper into the broken wooded hill country, his mind still unsettled, the inward strife still tearing and rending him apart.

At the edge of a clearing, a small ragged boy jumped up in the brush and started racing toward the homestead shanty, screaming: "It's him, he's comin', the big man with the guns! He's here, Pop, I seen him!"

Puzzled, Alrick cantered his chestnut into the open, recalling now that this was the nester place of the Philler family, on the fringe of Sandford's Slash S range. The boy disappeared into the shack. As Alrick drew up in front, Philler stepped outside, open-palmed hands half-raised, fear in his narrow wisened face, a stooped little man with an abject attitude of defeat. Behind him a slatternly woman came to stand in the doorway, two smaller children peeping around her drab skirts, terror plain in all of them.

"You're Alrick?" asked Philler, dull and hopeless.

Alrick nodded. "What's the trouble here anyway?"

"We'll get out," Philler mumbled. "We'll clear out right now. They said you'd be comin'. Alrick."

"Who said it?"

"Why, Beach Unger and two other men from the Slash S."

Alrick's angular face hardened, jawbones and cheekbones standing out sharply under the tanned skin. Big Beach Unger was top gunhand for the Sandfords on the range, and most likely the other two were Hinze and Klepper, a couple of gun-sharps.

"They told you to move out, Philler?" asked Alrick.

"Said if we didn't, you'd be out with your guns," muttered the homesteader, scratching his sparse hair. "You're the Sandfords' man, ain't you?"

Alrick smiled ruefully. "I was... But I didn't know anythin' about this deal."

Philler frowned in perplexity. "They already routed out half-a-dozen families, mister. Beat up some of the men, and shot Murphy down, right in front of his wife and kids. Burnt most of the places down."

"Well, they aren't drivin' you out, Philler," said Alrick. "You stay right here."

"I ain't aimin' to die," Philler protested, and suddenly cocked his balding head, a gnarled hand cupped to his ear. "Somebody's comin' now, and it's apt to be them."

Alrick was already urging his mare toward the rickety barn. "I'll duck in here, Phil. Don't let on—and don't be afraid. Nobody's goin' to hurt you while I'm around."

Tethering the chestnut at the rear of the dim littered interior, Alrick crept back to stand beside the barn door, as three riders clopped into the yard, the three he expected. The Philler family had withdrawn into the cabin. Beach Unger swung down and bellowed: "Come outa there, nester! You got ten minutes to pack up and go!" Hinze and Klepper sat their horses, watching with bored amusement; it was evidently an old familiar routine to them.

Alrick tried his Colts in their sheaths and stepped out into the sunshine, saying: "Hold on, Unger."

The three Slash S riders whirled in surprise and anger. "Alrick!" said Hinze, utterly amazed. Beach Unger hunched his brawny shoulders and spread his thick-fingered hands, as Alrick paced toward them in slow measured strides.

"What you doin' out here, Al?" demanded Unger.

"You been usin' my name," Alrick drawled. "I figure that cuts me in. Kinda particular how my name's used, Unger."

"You got orders from the Sandfords?"

"What do you think?"

Beach Unger blew out his full lips in ugly exasperation. "I think you're outa line, Alrick, hornin' in where you don't belong."

"So?" Alrick said softly, standing long and lithe, slender and relaxed, before the other's broad burly form.

"So get out!" Unger growled, baring his teeth. "Big and Little Sand both told me to take no more orders from you, Alrick."

"They did, did they?" mused Alrick, his eyes wicked green triangles set deep in the bone-bleak mask of his bronzed face. "Well, I'm still givin' orders, Beach. And you three are gettin' out of here—and stayin' out."

Beach Unger flicked a glance at his two companions, frozen in their saddles. His heavy jaws bulged and his thick lips writhed in fury. With an abrupt heave Unger went for his holster, fast for a big man, but Alrick's Colt seemed to leap into his right hand, flash high over Unger's head, and whip down in a swift savage arc. The barrel flattened Unger's high-crowned hat and bit into his skull, bowing his head and bending his knees. Unger's gun slid back into the leather as he sagged earthward.

Alrick's left hand caught the big man's throat, held him half-upright, a massive shield between himself and the two horsemen. Klepper's gun was part way out when Alrick fired past Unger's drooping head. Klepper jerked around, letting go of the weapon, his left hand clasping the bullet-shattered right arm, blood seeping out through his tense fingers. Hinze, making no motion to draw, was busy trying to calm his pitching horse now, and Klepper's mount skittered about nervously.

"Drop your belts," Alrick said, still supporting the senseless Unger and holding his .44 on the other two. "Dump the rifles, too." They did as they were told, six-guns and carbines thudding to the ground, and Philler stepped in to unbuckle Unger's belt, hefting the six-shooter in his own grimy hand. "Ride out now," Alrick told them. "And don't come back here, boys. The next time you'll die. Beach'll be along when he's ready to ride."

"You're crazy man," said Klepper, moaning with the pain of his broken arm.

"Maybe," Alrick said. "Hit the breeze, you two." He flung Unger's unconscious bulk to the sod, and stood watching the others ride off into the woods. . . . He turned to the homesteader. "See what I mean, Phil? You're stayin' right here." He gestured at Unger's body. "Keep his guns. Tie him up and keep him for security, until I can send somebody out here."

"What if they come back?"

"They won't right away. Not until they get more guns and men. You can hold 'em off, with a gun against Unger's head."

"Where you goin', Alrick?" asked Philler.

"I don't know—yet," Alrick said slowly. "But I'll send you some help, soon as I can. As long as you've got Unger, you're safe."

"I'm sure obliged to you, mister," Philler said earnestly.

"Not'in' at all," Alrick said, smiling gently at him. "For that matter, I'm obliged to you, too."

Philler watched Alrick get his mare out of the barn, swing into the leather, lift a hand in farewell, and ride out of view. "Kinda odd young fellah," muttered Philler. "But a mighty good man to have on your side. Get some rope, sonny, and we'll truss up this big brute here for insurance."

"Can I have some of them guns, Pop?" the little boy asked eagerly.

"For the time bein', I guess," Philler said grimly. "You might as well learn to handle 'em right now, Bobby. In this country, a man ain't nothin' without a gun."

"That Alrick's a heller, ain't he, Pop?" cried the youngster.

"What kinda talk is that, Robert?" protested his mother, blinking the tears from her faded eyes, smiling in spite of her attempt to scold.

The boy laughed delightedly as he fetched strips of rawhide to his father, and went on to examine the firearms on the bleached grass. There was new purpose and assurance in Philler, as he knelt over the gross hulk of Beach Unger. The mother fussed contentedly with the two smaller children on the doorstep. They were a different family than they had been before the coming of Alrick.

AS THE HOUR of three approached, the main street of Thornbury was strangely deserted, but every doorway and window was crowded with curious onlookers, attention focused on the new Concord stagecoach in front

of Sandford's freight station. Even the tie rails in that immediate vicinity were empty, all the saddle horses and wagon teams racked well away on either side. Alrick was out of town, Hilleboe had not yet been seen, and nobody knew what was going to happen—if anything. Perhaps, men whispered to one another, the Sandfords had grown so strong that Munsill was going to leave them strictly alone. But those who knew Munsill best scoffed at such a notion. The Sandfords, or anybody else, they declared, would never get that powerful.

Six horses had been harnessed to the gleaming glossy-painted coach, with driver Barney Cullum and guard Joe Nealley standing by ready to climb into the boot. There were no passengers in evidence, and not likely to be any in these circumstances. Big Brad Sandford was striding up and down the platform, shaggy head thrust forward on the bull neck, eyes like black molten fire. Paul Sandford, elegant and immaculate, leaned negligently on a post, smoking a long thin cigar, contemplating the empty street with a cool superior smile.

Paul glanced at his gold watch again and said, "All right, Brad." They descended together to the slat sidewalk. "Take her out, boys," instructed Brad Sandford. "Let her roll, Barney." Cullum and Nealley mounted to the high seat, Cullum taking the reins from a hostler, Nealley placing the rifle across his knees. The driver was reaching for the whip when something arrested his hand in midair, left him stark and rigid as a long-drawn murmuring gasp swept the street like a mournful wind.

Hilleboe, a stocky compact man in plain dark clothing, had come out from the alley near the *Home Range Hotel* and was walking, easy and deliberate, toward the stage, moving with quiet deadly menace through sunlight and shadow. Hilleboe's hard-chiseled face was expressionless, his pale eyes lighted with an ice-cold flare, straw-colored hair showing under his hat. A trim neat figure in black, the bone-handled

guns white and low on his thighs, a cold calm man with perfect poise and complete confidence, dead-panned, emotionless, wholly unafraid.

Barney Cullum, recovering the use of his limbs, wrapped the reins around the brake-handle and climbed down. Joe Nealley laid his rifle on the seat and dropped into the dust. Brad Sandford cursed them roundly, but Cullum and Nealley simply shook their heads and leaned back on the loading-platform, leaving the brothers to meet Hilleboe beside the coach. Hilleboe came on with unhurried ease, cold and remorseless as death itself.

"Don't keep them horses standin' in the hot sun," Hilleboe said in a flat toneless voice. "Get 'em unharnessed and back in the stable."

"You can't get away with this, Hilleboe," blustered Brad. "There's twenty rifles trained on you this minute!"

Hilleboe shrugged ever so slightly. "Kill me," he said indifferently, "and this town'll come down, a heap of ashes... Where's your man, Alrick?"

"He ran out," Brad said disgustedly, and then wheeled to follow the flickering fire of Hilleboe's colorless eyes, surprise shocking his rugged features.

Alrick was walking across the street from the *Granada Saloon*, a long lean whip-lash figure in the glaring afternoon. Hilleboe turned and sidled clear of the stage to wait for him, and the Sandford brothers shifted out of line behind Hilleboe. A terrible tension held men rooted, breathless and unmoving, watching the lazy swirl of dust from Alrick's boots.

"You should of stayed out, son," said Hilleboe.

"Maybe," murmured Alrick. "I had the intention, but somethin' hauled me back." He came to a halt, standing loose and limber.

"Too bad." Hilleboe's lips scarcely moved when he spoke. "But you can still turn around and drift, Alrick."

"I guess not, Hilleboe," said Alrick. "Make your play any time."

"Your privilege," Hilleboe told him. "I'm waitin' on you, son."

Then another voice broke in, starting clear and grave, as the two gunmen faced one another across thirty feet of sunshot dirt: "Wait a minute, men! The way I see it, you two've got nothin' to fight about whatever." It was Sheriff Buckhout, of course, ambling into the street on bowed legs, a double-barreled shotgun under his crooked right arm.

"Keep out of this, Buck," warned Hilleboe mildly.

"I can't, Hilly, the way things are," Buckhout said. "And you wouldn't want me to either. You boys are just hired hands..."

"What the hell are you blattin' about?" demanded Brad Sandford, making an angry motion toward his holster.



AT THAT moment Nat Weed limped out of the nearby alley, an old Sharps in the bend of his elbow, cocked and ready. "Never you mind, Brad," said the saddle-maker. "Buck's goin' to have his say here."

"I don't like this," Hilleboe said. "Munsill won't like it, either."

Buckhout laughed, low in his throat, and Nat Weed splashed the board walk with tobacco juice. Buck said: "You're right about Munsill not likin' it much, Hilly. Now I got this pretty straight and reliable, boys. Munsill and the Sandfords made a deal, formed a part-

nership, you might say. Maybe they figured you two had outlived your usefulness; I don't know. But it looks like they wanted you to kill each other off."

"You're lyin', Buck," said Hilleboe. "You're just tryin' to break up this game."

"Did you ever know me to lie, Hilly," protested Buckhout, and then his voice sharpened: "*Watch your back!*"

Big Brad Sandford had his gun all the way out, but Hilleboe spun with smooth incredible speed, dust spiraling from his heels, and lightning leaped from his right hand before Big Sand could trigger. The blast jolted Brad backward, his great shoulders slamming the platform. He came forward again, horror on his broad face, his involuntary shot splintering the plank sidewalk. Brad fell, slow and majestic as a chopped tree, crashing full length on the slats, dust clouding up around him.

Paul Sandford, eyes fixed on Alrick with fanatical hatred, had his iron half-drawn in that first instant, but Alrick's right hand flashed up and burst aflame ahead of him. The slug smashed Paul into an erratic pivot, his gun jerking wildly and exploding into the sky. Snarling, Paul swung back and tried to bring the weapon to bear on Alrick, but Alrick hammered another shot into him. Little Sand reeled sidewise on buckling knees, twisted and caught the high back wheel of the stagecoach, hung there spread-eagled, sleek black head sagging, blood darkening the fine blue-gray broadcloth of his coat. With a final strangled groan, Paul let go of the wheel and collapsed into the red dirt of the street.

Alrick and Hilleboe stood looking at one another, still half-stunned by the sudden strange turn of events, smoking guns hanging in their hands. Alrick managed a slow strained smile, at last. Hilleboe's strong carved face never altered, but he was the first to speak:

"I reckon you and me owe the sheriff a couple of drinks, Alrick."

"We sure do, Hilly." Alrick turned

to Buckhout and Weed, who were watching the swarming street for any signs of hostility, and his smile widened, creasing his brown cheeks into pleasant lines of merriment. "For a pair of peace-promotin' men, you two look pretty damn warlike," Alrick said.

"Fightin's all right, Al," the sheriff said, "when the cause is a good one. There lay the two worst thieves in the whole Onawanda."

"Next to Munsill," amended Hilleboe. "And he'll be ridin' the same trail they're on, soon as I get back to Washtenaw."

Nat Weed munched his tobacco solemnly. "We knew you'd be back, Al. The way things panned out, it's a good thing you came."

"I hope Leslie thinks so," Alrick said wistfully, as they left Buck's deputies in charge and moved toward the saloon.

"You'll know in a minute, boy," said Buckhout. "There she is."

Alrick winced and ducked his head like a truant school boy, almost afraid to look her way, apprehensive of what he might find in her blue eyes and clear face. The other men laughed as he shuffled toward the golden-haired girl on the sidewalk. When Alrick glanced at her, he saw surprise and relief on her countenance but no accusation, and he went weak-kneed and giddy with his own vast relief at this.

"You promised you were riding out,

Al," Leslie Miller said, determined not to let him off too easily.

"I did," Alrick said meekly. "But there was nothin' about when I was supposed to come back, Les."

"Why, that was understood."

"Yeah, but somethin' in the Burnt Hills changed my understandin'."

"Well, it's all right, Al," Leslie relented. "As long as you're not hurt, and you're not Sandfords' hired gunman any more. You can quit fighting now."

"I hope so," Alrick said. "You don't care if I have a drink with the boys though?"

The girl smiled brightly. "Another thing you should quit—sometime. But I'll never insist on it, Al. Go ahead with them. I'll be waiting for you at home."

"We may have to go back into the hills to take the Slash S off the homesteaders there," Alrick confessed reluctantly.

But Leslie's smile was warm and reassuring. "I'll still be waiting, Al," she said. "But let's not make a habit of this."

"Don't you worry, Les," grinned Alrick. "I'll probably be underfoot so much you'll get sick and tired of me."

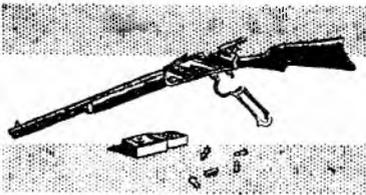
"Come on, boy," Sheriff Buckhout called from the saloon door. "We want to drink on some of that Sandford money."

★

A Full-Length Feature Novel

SMOKY RIVER GUNSMOKE

by Lee Floren



Ralph Watson wanted to quit the saddle and get started building up his own outfit. But he couldn't hang up his guns — not when there were gunmen ready, willing, and eager to stop him from putting down his roots.

Look for the
July issue of

DOUBLE ACTION WESTERN

MAN OF IRON

Fact Feature

by E. E. Clement



IN THE ANNALS of the West there have been many brave men. Many too who were called brave were little more than dangerous exhibitionists. The six-gun and the Winchester created fiery figures whose primary claim to notoriety was their inability to live within the conventions of civilization.

It is a safe assumption that the majority of the West's famous men achieved their distinction because of uncanny speed and dexterity with firearms, but beyond this they served no purpose, were dedicated to no ideals nor were they concerned with the future of the raw land, its rising tide of immigrants, or its development.

Among the Westerners who recognized that the wild days were the birth pangs of a new era, was Al Sieber, "The Man Of Iron", as the Apaches called him. Sieber labored mightily

and often single-handedly to secure the outposts for those yet to come. He was a man of vision as well as courage, and, above all else, he had the finest kind of courage. The kind that believed fully in the conviction that the West's wildness must be curbed so that progress could bring in the man with the ox to replace the man with the gun. Toward this end Al Sieber dedicated his life and toward the early promulgation of peace and plenty, he steadfastly and often ruthlessly crushed out the fire that held back the tide of settlement.

Al Sieber was born on the twenty-ninth of February in 1844, in Germany. There was some trouble and the Siebers fled to America where Al, when the Civil War broke out, enlisted in Company B, 1st Minnesota Infantry, under the author's grandfather. He showed great proficiency with guns

and became a sharp shooter in the Army of the Potomac. He was wounded on the 2nd of July, 1863, at Gettysburg. While Sieber was lying where he had fallen he was hit again and after these two wounds was hospitalized for half a year, afterward being attached to a Reserve Corps until late in 1863 when he was honorably discharged. So much for the vital statistics of The Man Of Iron.

After the war was over Al Sieber couldn't settle down. There were long fields to be plowed and planted. Each furrow seemed endless and the horizon was no higher than a plowman's boot tops. That was an occupation for a human beast of burden, not for a man whose life had been spent hectically in the dark bivouacs and fiery fields of battle. Al left the 'civilized' land behind him. He sought a country where no empty realties or hackneyed cries of 'convention' tried to make of every man a machine. He wound up in Nevada and, after a brief rest and a look around, joined a group of men bound for California, where he patiently dug, washed and scrounged for elusive gold.

California gold lost its appeal for Al Sieber quickly. Again he found himself hunched over like a beast of burden, his perspective limited to the harsh, fir planks of a flume. He threw it up and joined up with a band of men taking a remuda of horses to Arizona. Finally Al Sieber's destiny had found him and like iron he was named after by the fierce Apaches, Al was drawn to the magnet of Arizona. Here at last was his niche; his stage upon which the balance of his full life was played out and the lonely, simple land that holds his bones to its bosom. Here was a hard crust of earth that was made for the tough sinew and unbending idealism of Al Sieber.

Shortly after arriving in Arizona Territory, Sieber went to work on the Williamson Valley ranch of Charley Bean. He hadn't been there three weeks when m a u r a d i n g Apaches struck. In the furor the Indians made

off with a large band of horses. Sieber organized pursuit among the few white ranchers in the area and rode pell mell after the raiders. The Apaches were run to earth and a furious battle ensued in which eleven Apaches were killed. Most of the horses were recovered but some frightened by the battle, kept right on going and supposedly wound up in Mexico.

The days came and went for Al Sieber. Soon they were years, and still the wanderlust that had plagued him for so long after the war failed to return. This no doubt was because there were no dull or dreary moments in the Arizona Territory and Al was constantly active.

There were other Indian wars for Sieber; many of them. And while he refused to scalp fallen enemies, he "counted coup" on more dead Apaches than most of the celebrated frontiersmen in Western history.

IN 1871 GENERAL Stoneman talked Sieber into becoming his Chief of Scouts. This was a task that fitted Sieber perfectly. He scouted, skirmished and killed to his heart's content. His proficiency with gun or knife became a legend among the soldiers. Twice he fought hand to hand personal battles with Apache warriors who didn't believe any white man was as tough as rumor claimed Al Sieber was. Both of these fights were with a knife, bare footed and with spectators. Sieber survived both, which cannot be said for the Apaches, although he was severely slashed in the last fight and was most of one winter convalescing.

In 1873 General Crook, a wily and experienced Indian fighter, employed Sieber in the capacity of Chief of Scouts. There was a slight difference, however, between scouting under Stoneman and Crook. The company of scouts turned over to Sieber were Apache Indians! Some of the red men were actually related to the hostiles that Crook was out to crush and an-

nhiliate. Sieber was supposed to train these men and take the field with them!

It is an interesting and revealing insight into Sieber's character and personality that he took over the Apaches, trained them and was often many days in the field with them, alone, the only white man who was abroad in Arizona, in that day, in the company of Apaches, and alive.

General George Crook was the instigator of the idea of using Indian scouts to track and find Indians. His strategy was based on the old tenet that one can "set a thief to catch a thief". The theory was sound and highly productive, although Al Sieber, whether he knew it or not, was the guinea pig, because there was voiced doubt in higher military quarters of the feasibility of such an idea, and it was suggested that the Apaches be sent out a few times, alone, with their white chief.

For fifteen years Al Sieber rode the backtrails, eyes slitted and jaw locked, watching for the stealthy, dark hand that was lying hidden, awaiting the chance to count coup over The Man Of Iron.

There were gruesome and bloody clashes and the fierce Apaches grudgingly acknowledged the bravery and sagacity of the scout. Al counted coup in the Indian fashion over innumerable Apaches. He was every bit as wild and savage in combat as his primitive foemen. Once Sieber surprised a maurauding party of Apaches in camp. The raiders were the advance guard of a large war party coming out of Mexico after a particularly bloody and successful invasion. At first Sieber thought the Apaches were a party of traveling Mexicans. He kicked his jennet and rode down the slope of a land swell toward them. Too late the mistake was evident and Al, with a sinking heart, rode on nonchalantly toward the watching and amazed Indians.

Without a word or a nod, Al singled out the head man, who was easily rec-

ognizable, rode up to him and dismounted slowly. "Do you know me?"

The Apache nodded with a victorious smile. "Man Of Iron. Apaches wait long time count coup over you. You brave man, not afraid to die. Apaches like this. You die, but first, why you ride this camp?"

Sieber knew the Indians were consumed with curiosity. Whatever the reason, they had seen the white warrior ride purposefully into their camp. Sieber allowed the proper amount of time to elapse before answering.

"You have been killing and raiding in Mexico. The Mexican army is after you but they cannot cross the border. They have requested the American Army to corral you for them, then they'll extradite you. The American Army is willing because you are on the warpath and therefore are renegades this side of the border, too. The Yellow-Legs even now are riding toward you." He shook his head wisely. "I have fought Apaches for many years, and I'll live to fight them a while yet, but if you are caught here, between the American Army and the Mexicans behind you, neither of us will live to fight the other much longer."

The desperate logic went over with a resounding effect. The Apaches talked among themselves for awhile, then took hastily to horse, thanking Sieber, and rode South to catch their main column and warn them of the impending encirclement. Sieber had talked himself out as desperate a spot as any man was ever in, and not with an original ruse either.

IN THE COURSE of some of his scouting forays while in the field for the Army, Sieber often rode as much as fifty miles a day and he demanded the same hard work from his Apache scouts. The Indians normally did what Al did so as not to be outdone by a white man, but then too, there was a great measure of respect for the hard, quiet Chief of Scouts.

Occasionally Al Sieber got replacements among his Indians. Every now



and then these newcomers wouldn't embrace the *esprit de corps* that Sieber worked so hard to instill into his Apaches. Sometimes recalcitrants refused orders, too. But with Al Sieber this was the equivalent of death, for Sieber shot and killed no less than sixty Apaches who refused to obey orders while in the field. To Sieber insubordination under fire was the worst form of cowardice and he became judge, jury prosecutor and executioner all in one.

Sieber was stern and uncompromising in his demands of his scouts, yet he was fair and honest with them. In raids when horses were captured they were distributed equally among participants. This meant a lot to scouts because captured horses were the same as a bonus to them and when sold for cash made a fairly profitable business out of what otherwise was a poorly paid and highly dangerous form of endeavor.

Sieber and his Apaches scouted the country and made the first tentative contacts that resulted in the surrender of Geronimo in 1873. To Sieber the Geronimo affair was contemptible. The Indians were taken first to Camp Verde, according to treaty, but within two years they were removed en masse to San Carlos, known among whites and Indians alike as Hell on earth.

The San Carlos migration was as fine a bit of treachery as the United States Government ever instituted against its neolithic wards. Under military 'escort', armed to the teeth and ordered to maintain order at rifle point, the Indians were herded like criminals to their new 'home'.

San Carlos at that time was a muddy, swampy flatland of desolation and filth with shacks thrown hereabouts for makeshift mess halls and soldiers' barracks. The Indian treaty made no mention of such treatment and naturally the Apaches, having learned early that the white man was a liar, resented their deportment strongly. During the grim trip to San Carlos, the Indian resentment flared into armed rebellion and while the soldiers were noisily trying to bring order out of the bedlam, some of the Apaches ran for it. They were pursued and holed up in Rattlesnake Canyon.

Al Sieber and his scouts took over from the Army, fought two bloody skirmishes with the bronco bucks and forced them to return to San Carlos. Sieber, at this time, made it quite evident, regardless of listeners, that he thought the San Carlos removal was a sneaky and dishonest piece of business. He went after the bronco Apaches only because he was honor bound to do so, but he was quite emphatic that for that reason only did he subdue them. This, for the first time in his long career with the Army, caused him enemies in high places. Enemies who one day would attempt to destroy a civilian frontiersman whose vision and courage were second to none.

At San Carlos the Apaches had only one certain obligation. They collected their rations at stated intervals, and, while the Army attempted to put them to work, this didn't come off. Indians, Apaches included, hate convention and menial labor. By instinct, environment and nature, they are free people, given to hunting, fighting and traveling. At San Carlos they had no opportunity to live in their normal manner

and their meat, which the government allocated to them, was what started trouble once more.

The contractors who sold the government beef for the Indians had a lush set-up. They grazed their critters across the Gila River from the Apache agency, and when it came time to deliver their stock, per contract agreement, they would keep them away from water for a couple of days, then drive them across the Gila, where they naturally put on a 'big fill', and were weighed in, then they were turned over to the Indians. This ruse cost Uncle Sam plenty, but more important, it caused the agency Indians to get short rations since they were given a division of the beef by weight.

There was grumbling again, and trouble began to break out when Al Sieber, lone and without any military backing at all, raised hell. The Army investigated and made corrective changes, but again Sieber had been a thorn in the side of a clique of officers and he was fast becoming a marked man.

Sieber twice told a large hearing of Army officers that if the Apaches were kept placated, immigration would soon populate the land, and therefore it was to everybody's advantage to see that the Indians were treated fairly.

In February, 1874, there was another rebellion among the fierce Apaches. This time it was caused by whiskey smuggled onto the reservation and sold to the Indians. A group of bronco bucks shot up the agency while riding their horses at full speed through the camp. Sieber shot one buck off his horse—the Apache was dead before he hit the ground; this while the Indian was riding with the wind behind him and was sliding over the off side of his charging mount. Al went after the other bronco, faced him down, took him sullenly to the guard house and threw him in. The balance of the broncos sobered up and quieted down in a hurry.

Incidentally, the rotgut sold to the Indians was made according to the

following recipe, verbatim:

- '1 quart of alcohol
- 1 pound, rank, black chewing tobacco
- 1 handful, red peppers
- 1 bottle Jamaica ginger
- 1 quart, black molasses.

Mix with water—as much as needed—boil until all strength is drawn from the tobacco and red peppers.'

DISCONTENT developed periodically because of one reason and another, until all hell broke loose in 1881, and the massacre at Cibicu followed when soldiers under General Carr met in head-on combat with Apaches warriors under Nockay-dell-Klinne. After this fight the majority of the Apaches returned, defeated and broken to San Carlos, but a large band of fighting men ran for it to Mexico and live there to this day.

When Colvig, Apache agency chief of police, was shot down and killed by the recalcitrants of Na-ti-o-tish, Al Sieber and his scouts were sent in pursuit with troops from Fort Thom, Fort McDowell and Fort Apache following. There was a fight in which Sieber's scouts saw first and last action. Sieber was once more wounded but continued to fight until the last Apache was either dead or under guard. Victory came to the soldiers solely because of the tenacity and courage of Sieber and his scouts, but, while a youthful Lieutenant named Cruse was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his part in the fight, Al Sieber and his scouts were ordered into the field again to search for more maurading Apaches. This, despite his wounds.

Al Sieber was no longer a young man. He had been fighting constantly for many years. Trying, as he said, to help bring civilization to a bloody land. As proof of his proximity to danger, Al Sieber had been wounded no less than thirty-one times in his lifetime, by either Rebel or Indian bullets or knives!

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The things a man remembers...



TWO WERE OUTLAWS

by Brett Austin



JAMISON was dismounting when the man came out of the Trigger Happy Saloon, hand on his holstered .45. He was only a youngster, about seventeen, and his thin face was pale.

He had no eyes for Jamison.

His eyes were on the gunman who had come out of the Six Shooter Bar, across the street.

"Comin' at you, Bart Malone," the young man snarled.

Jamison turned, and he looked at Bart Malone. A gunman, this Malone—squat, short, deadly. Jamison knew all the signs. This was a gunfight. And

he had unknowingly ridden in between the two men!

The youth snarled, "Get out, stranger, and move fast!"

Then the harsh voice of Bart Malone said, "Let the fool stop lead! If he ain't got sense enough to duck lead let the sap die. Pull your gun, Mack O'Reilly!"

Jamison moved.

He ran to one side, abandoning his bronc. The name *O'Reilly* registered, for he had come into this Montana town to kill a man named O'Reilly. But this gunman, this thin, slender kid, was *Mack O'Reilly*. And Jamison had ridden north to kill *Hank O'Reilly*.

The guns roared.

The squat gunman was fast—he was living speed. And the kid, although

fast, was slow when compared with Bart Malone. Jamison saw the smash of flame from Malone's six-shooter. The bullet hit the kid, sent him to one knee, and the youth shot, almost dead on his boots. By luck, the bullet hit Malone's six shooter, and when Malone shot the bullet tore into the fork of Jamison's saddle.

Then young O'Reilly was down, dead in the dust.

Jamison said, "Damn you, Malone, you shot into my saddle!"

Malone looked at him with small piggish eyes. "Who the hell are you?"

Jamison looked at his saddle. The bullet had ripped into the fork, tearing through leather and the rawhide tree-covering. The saddle was ruined. Jamison had had that saddle for some years, too. His father had given it to him long before, down in Texas.

"Who are you?" Malone repeated, voice ugly.

Townpeople were gathered around the dead youth. Jamison saw a girl of about seventeen kneeling beside the dead man. His head was on her lap, blood soaking into a print dress. She wept.

Jamison looked at her, and a great pity entered him.

She was blonde, about five feet tall, and well built. For a moment, she looked at him; their gazes met, held. But she did not appraise him. Her blue eyes were vacant, ripped empty.

Then she bent her head and kissed the dead man's lips.

"This is my town!" Bart Malone had moved closer, and he snarled the words in Jamison's ear. "If you don't cotton to the way I kill my men, stranger, get on your bronc an' ride out."

"You buy me a new saddle," Jamison said quietly.

Bart Malone looked at him, as though doubting his ears. "Bart Malone buy you a new saddle, eh? That's a good one—"

He opened his mouth, to laugh.

Jamison hit him.

HE WAS A tall man, this man called Jamison. He was wiry, though,

and he still had strength—prison had not taken away his strength. His fist smashed under Malone's heavy jaw.

Malone had not expected the blow. He flung up his thick forearms to block, but Jamison's fist roared in. He dropped Malone with one wicked, savage blow. The girl was on Malone then, kicking him in the face, screaming and hollering and wild with rage.

Jamison stood back, rubbing his knuckles. He did nothing to stop the girl. He looked at his saddle and then went into the Trigger Happy Saloon. He put his hand on the bar and looked at his skinned knuckles.

"I've hit them harder," he said, "but they never dropped that fast."

The bartender pushed out a bottle. "You walked into trouble, stranger. Malone won't forgive... or forget."

Jamison poured, bottle steady on glass-rim. "Tell uncle," he said.

The bartender, a slender man, watched them take the girl, away. "She kicked him plenty. Helen loved young Mack."

Jamison was cynical. "That's for all to see. Mack O'Reilly, his name is; has he a brother, Hank?"

"He did have."

Jamison lifted his dull eyes. He regarded the man in stony silence. "Explain yourself?"

"Three days ago, Bart Malone killed Hank O'Reilly."

Jamison stood there, tall and thin, and he turned the whisky glass, and Jamison had his thoughts. They moved through him in ironic procession. So Bart Malone, whom he had just slugged, had beat him to the job. Malone had gunned down Hank O'Reilly.

"Did you know Hank?"

Jamison lied, "I heard down in a town below here that Hank O'Reilly wanted to hire a cowpuncher, so I rode in lookin' for the job."

The bartender's pale face showed a frown. "Somebody lied to you. Hank O'Reilly needed no hands. He and his brother are farmers—rather, they were farmers. First and only farmers in this Willow Crick area."

Jamison nodded, seeing another answer. "They moved in on Malone's range, then? That the bone of strife?"

"That's right. But now they are both gone. Malone said he would kill them, and he did."

"Tough guy," Jamison murmured.

The bar towel made short circles. "I'm not one to meddle into the other gink's troubles, stranger. But don't try to collect for the damage done your saddle."

"Thanks."

The bartender moved to the far end of his bar. Townsfolk were coming in, discussing the killing, talking it over. Jamison was aware of their sharp glances. He was aware, too, that Bart Malone had got to his feet, had entered the Six Shooter Bar, across the street.

Jamison had his thoughts. Six years before two men had broken out of a Texas penitentiary, in Canyon City. Jamison remembered tunnelling for days. *Dig by shovel, and the shovel wears out; dig with your fingers, Jamison.* He remembered bloody fingers, for the Texas clay was bone hard.

Then, at last, freedom for him, and for Hank O'Reilly. The dash across the compound, the roar of guns from the wall. He remembered stumbling, the bullet in his leg, and he remembered calling to Hank O'Reilly.

"Hank, help me—"

"To hell with you! I help you, and we both go back—"

Then Hank, with a burst of speed, had reached the lip of the coulee. Down he went, leaping, plunging, diving through brush to freedom. And he, Jamison, had tried to hobble, the bullet through the calf of his leg.

Hank could have helped him, and both would have still escaped. Hank had, in a desperate moment, turned against his old cell-mate.

Jamison had served his sentence.

You walk a cell, and bitterness is in you, and you remember a traitor. And your hands itch for a gun, for you want to kill that traitor. Six years, and they turn you loose, with a limp in

your right leg, and with hate in your heart. And you trail that traitor... trail him laboriously and slowly. And when you find his whereabouts in far away Montana, he is already dead... killed by the gun of a man you slugged.

JAMISON said, "Hell...."

"What did you say, stranger?"

Jamison looked at the bartender. "I said hell," he stated.

The bartender sent him a queer quick look. Jamison got the impression that the man doubted his sanity. He paid for his drink and went outside.

A dirty little cowtown. Dusty streets, hot sun, a few mangy dogs trotting down alleys, looking for garbage cans. Jamison looked at the western mountains. Clear, capped with snow. They looked clean.

Mountains, here I come.

He looked at the Six Shooter Bar. Through the wide window he saw Bart Malone, sitting at a card table, with the doctor daubing his face. Malone watched him and Jamison put his thumb to his nose and wagged his fingers.

Malone watched, dark, silent, dead-ly.

The irony of this, the bitterness, was still in Jamison, driving an anger into his blood, making him feel a tough antagonism toward the world in general and otherwise. The whole thing had blown up in his face. For years he had fed his blood on hate, he had planned revenge, and now that hate, that revenge, those sleepless nights—what had they amounted to? Nothing. Just nothing.

For some reason, he remembered the girl looking at him as she crouched over her dead lover.

He remembered her eyes.

There had been a woman once in his life, but that was before he and Hank O'Reilly, hot with Texas blood in their young veins, had robbed that Lubbock bank. Two trigger-happy youths, out for a wild time, robbing a bank more in fun than in purpose. And that deal, too, had backfired.

Where was Mildred now?

Jamison thought, "Now why did I think of her?" She was gone, a lost cry in a far wind, a thought moving against the dull gray of space. Somewhere she was, probably married, with her family, her husband, and she had forgot him. What would she look like after these twenty odd years? Would she be slim and stately, fat and slovenly? *What difference does it make, Jamison?*

A woman said, behind him, "Sir, I'd like to talk to you."

Jamison whirled, hand going to his gun. Then his nerves steadied and he looked at the woman. No, not a *woman*. . . just a *girl*.

"What do you want, girl?"

The roughness of his voice took her slightly aback. "Do you remember me?"

"You're the girl who kicked Malone in the face."

Her blue eyes were steady. Tears were behind them, but the urgency of the moment had postponed tears.

"He killed the man I was to marry this coming Sunday. He killed Mack for the same reason he killed Mack's brother, Hank."

Jamison said, "And that?"

"He wants their land. If they had stayed, other farmers would have come in, and the Heart Bar Nine would have been doomed."

Jamison asked, "Where do I come in?"

The blue eyes watched him. Suddenly scorn came into them. "You *come in*, as you say it, *nowhere!* I don't want you to snarl at me; you mean nothing to me. I came only to thank you for knocking down Bart Malone."

Jamison turned, looking toward the Six Shooter Bar. Malone still watched, and Malone was dark with hatred.

"Malone is out to kill you," the girl said.

Jamison nodded. "I came into this all by accident." Why tell any more? Hank O'Reilly was dead, and he had ridden in to kill Hank O'Reilly. *Keep your secrets, Jamison.*

The girl said, "I'm fighting him. I'm moving out to the O'Reilly homestead. I'm living there and I'm farming that land. I'll hire somebody—or I'll do the work myself. And I'll kill Malone some day!"

The steel in her voice, the heavy hate, made Jamison shiver slightly. She would do what she said. He was sure of that.

SHE WAS young; her blood was hot. He remembered how he and Hank O'Reilly, acting only on a dare, had agreed to rob that bank, down there on the Panhandle. This girl meant every word she said.

"Hank—did he leave a family?"

"He never married. He was on this grass for over five years, too." She seemed to want to talk; he got the impression talk would alleviate her taut nerves. "He and his brother came from Texas. My man—Mack—was raised in Kansas. He went there when a child—their parents died and Mack went with some other people, who raised him."

Jamison nodded, face somber. He had never heard Hank speak of a younger brother. She had explained a certain facet of this to him unconsciously.

"Hank spent some years in the penitentiary," she said.

Jamison caught his breath. "Why do you tell me this?"

"It makes no never-mind now. Both Hank and Mack are dead. Hank told us about it. He and a man named Jamison had robbed a bank in Lubbock. Kid stuff, badmen, a deal like that. . . ."

Jamison did not meet her eyes. He was looking at Malone, seated there behind the window, watching him.

"Go on, girl."

"Hank had a woman who wanted to marry him. He used to tend bar here in town, and Mack was with him—then the Homestead Act was passed, and he and Mack decided to take homesteads."

"When?"



"About three months ago. Hank was waiting for this man, this Jamison. He wanted to have something for Jamison—something like cattle—they were going to be partners—"

Jamison's voice was a croak. "Go on, damn it!"

She looked at him, surprised. "Hank and Jamison made a break out of the pen. Hank had to keep on running. If he had turned back—Jamison got shot—the whole thing would have been worthless."

Jamison was himself again. "I've heard enough. . . . I don't care to hear your troubles."

She said, "You go to hell!"

She turned.

Jamison asked, suddenly, "Where is these homesteads?"

She faced him. "Out on Willow Creek. Between here and the mountains. Why ask?"

"You going out there?"

"Yes, I'm moving into Mack's house. He built it for me."

He said, "Good luck."

"What's your name?"

"Wilson," Jamison lied.

"Goodby, Wilson."

She left, and Jamison watched her straight back. Time would dull her grief, as time dulls all grief, but she would kill Malone unless he killed her first. This thought was not comforting.

Maybe Hank had been right in fleeing and leaving him for the guards. Hank had had the right heart, he had told this trouble to his brother, to the girl his brother was to marry. . . .

Hank had developed a piece of land, then, for him—for Jamison?

Jamison kept remembering the girl's eyes. He kept remembering Hank. He had loved Hank, the way a man loves another man—a deep and reverent love, different than the wild love a man has for his woman.

His hate, then, had been useless?

Jamison had these thoughts. He stood there in this town, and he remembered Hank. He remembered lying in the bunk, hands behind his head as he looked up at Hank's bunk, and he remembered talking to Hank.

The things a man remembers. . . .

Malone would kill this girl. He would not do it openly, because even a range as wild as this would rebel against the murder of a woman.

But Malone would kill her.

JAMISON looked at the western mountains. He looked at the Six Shooter Bar. He looked at the blood spot there on the street. The point where the blood of young Mack O'Reilly had jetted into the dust.

Beyond the rim of the town, he could see a cemetery. Neat headstones, cropped grass.

Hank slept there.

Jamison shook his head slowly and almost reverently. The irony of this was strong, permeating his blood, giving him purpose. Hank had built a spread for him, and the man who had killed Hank was across the street. Leering at him through a window of a saloon.

Jamison turned.

He remembered dust rubbing his boots. He remembered stepping over the blood spot in the dust. He remembered entering the Six Shooter Bar.

Malone had seen him coming. Malone had risen to his boots, and Malone was crouched, hand on his gun.

Jamison stopped.

Malone stood alone, a pinpoint of hate. Jamison watched him and Jamison said, "They tell me I can't leave town, Malone. They tell me you have made a boast that you'll kill me for sluggin' you?"

Nobody had, of course, told that to Jamison.

Malone said, in a shallow voice, "You want trouble?"

"You are the one who has made the

boast." Jamison cursed him with cold intensity. He cursed him as he had never cursed a man before. He saw color recede, leaving the jowls beefy and big, the mouth trembling. Along the bar, men listened, and Malone knew that if he took this cursing, he was through in this town.

So Malone made his draw.

Jamison still had his old speed. He shot Malone through the heart three times, gun bucking. He had no compunctions, no regrets. Then the smoke coiled, Malone was down dead, and Jamison looked at the top of the bullet-ripped table.

"Tore into the table and ripped it, like his lead ripped my saddle."

He looked at the men, gun smoking.

A man said, "No trouble here, stranger."

Jamison walked out, holstering his gun. The thought came that now Hank would rest in peace. He swung into leather, looked at his saddle's ripped fork, and then rode out of town.

He headed toward the mountains.



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it appears in the big August issue of

DYNAMIC SCIENCE FICTION



Someone was playing a brand new game called, "Step, Step, Where's the Step?"

STAIRWAY TO DEATH

by John T. Lynch

DOCTOR Robert Q. Quillen, because of his middle initial, became known to the citizens of Bisbee, Arizona, in 1876, simply as "Doc Quack." The Doctor always protested that such a nickname belittled the dignity and honor of a member of the medical profession. True, he had been run out of Chicago, St. Louis and Kansas City, in quick succession for various malpractices, but never before had he been called "Doc Quack." Being threatened, jailed and banished by the several authorities, both medical and legal, in the Eastern cities were as nothing compared to being called "Doc Quack." But, the folks of Bisbee, being what they were, dubbed him "Doc Quack." And so it remained. . .

The Doc soon found that he could save himself a lot of time and trouble by establishing his office in the two large vacant rooms up over Sloan's Saloon, for Sloan's was the heart of Bisbee's social life—and a bleeding heart it was. Nine out of ten of the town's numerous and frequent lethal affrays took place in Sloan's, and seldom a night went by in which Doc Quack wasn't roused from bed to attend to one or more victims who were not yet quite ready for the final ministrations of Lem Sellers, the busy undertaker.

Convenient as it was to have his offices so close to the bulk of his work, the Doc was quick to find one serious drawback. He took his life in his hands whenever he passed through the saloon to get to the inside stairway, in



Each night, they sneaked out and stole another step . . .

the rear of the two-story frame building, to get to his place of business. Many times, on leaving to attend to an outside case, or on entering on returning from an errand of dubious mercy, he had to dodge flying knives, bottles or bullets—depending upon the type of missile being used at the time by the enthusiastic combatants.

Feeling that it would be obviously unfair to the people of Bisbee if he happened to get killed, Doc Quack decided to have an outside stairway built onto the side of the old structure. He had noticed that many other of the town's two-storied, false-fronted buildings sported outside wooden stairways, leading to the upper floor.

However, Ed Sloan, owner of the building as well as the saloon, played all money matters close to the chest. When the Doc broached the matter to him, the landlord agreed that it was a good idea. "But, I ain't going to pay for no outside stairway, nor to have a door cut in the side of the building, up there. I didn't do it in the first place because it cost extra money. You want it—you pay for it, yourself."

Although Doc Quack was making plenty of money in medical fees, at the time, he was always on the short end as far as cash was concerned. An inveterate, but amateurish and inefficient gambler, he was usually broke. But such a small matter as not being able to pay for anything did not stop the Doc from calling in Ezra Kitter, the best carpenter in town.

It took Ezra Kitter a mere three days to construct an outside stairway, according to Doc's specifications. Ezra could have completed the somewhat crude job in much less time, as he was to get only forty-dollars for his efforts. This small sum included materials, and, after the lumber was purchased, allowed only four cheap nails per step. It took Ezra three full days, though, because, every now and then he had to knock off work to play a practical joke on somebody or other. Ezra Kitter was Bisbee's chief joker, in more ways than one. As folks often said, "Who is the biggest joker in town—Doc Quack or Ezra Kitter?"

ON COMPLETING the work, Ezra walked up the new outside stairway and knocked at the recently installed door. The Doc opened the door and came out on the little porch. "This is just fine, Ezra," he said. "Just what I needed. Think it'll hold up?"

"I think she'll will," answered Ezra. "Just be kind of careful of the steps, though. They might come loose. Not enough nails in 'em. But all you got to do is hammer 'em down when they come loose. Just watch 'em."

"Thank you, Ezra, and good day," the Doc smiled, starting to close the door.

"But—but—I finished my job," said Ezra. "I'd like you to pay me now."

Doc Quack looked surprised. "You are wrong there, Ezra. It is up to Sloan to pay you. It is his building, not mine."

"You've got to pay, Doc. You ordered this stairway built. Not Sloan. When I first started to work, Sloan

came out and told me he was not responsible in any way. He said it was your doin's, completely. So, you got to pay me."

Doc Quack thought things over for a minute. Then he announced that he had no intention of paying for a stairway on somebody else's building. "And you can't force me to pay, either," he added. "There is absolutely nothing you can do about it."

Now it was Ezra's turn to do some thinking. Suddenly he grinned broadly. Here was a chance to play a good joke and collect his money, too. "Doc," said Ezra, happily, "each morning I'm coming to you for my money. If I don't get it, I will remove a step from the stairway that night. I'll start at the bottom. For each day you still owe me, off comes a step."

As Ezra was much huskier than the Doc, there was nothing the latter could do. So on the following night Ezra came by and, with a few easy jerks with his clawhammer, removed the bottom step. Each night for the next four, Ezra returned and removed another step. With the lower five steps gone, it was necessary for the Doc to jump the few feet of open space on his way in and out. He realized that, with the removal of a few more steps, he would no longer be able to use the outside entrance to his offices. Even so, he stood pat. The next night the sixth step was removed.

By deft manipulation of his wiry body, the Doc was able to cope with the stairway until the eighth step was no longer in place. Then he borrowed a six-foot ladder, which helped when the ninth and tenth steps were taken away.

The entire town watched the battle of the missing steps with glee. The more stubborn the Doc became, the more determined Ezra Kitter was to



force payment of what he deemed a just debt.

On the eleventh straight day that Ezra appeared to demand the money, Doc Quack again refused. Ezra, tiring of the joke, ambled angrily into Sloan's Saloon and proceeded to get drunk by easy stages.

The Doc, up in his quarters, also tiring of the whole thing, started to work on a quart bottle of rotgut he had been saving for medicinal use.

At sundown, the Doc, having emptied the bottle, had become sleepy and stretched out on the floor for a long nap. The more Doc Quack drank, the sleepier he always got. With Ezra Kitter, the effects of Bisbee rotgut was just the opposite. As his alcoholic content went up, so did his energetic, practical-joking energies. As darkness descended on the town, Ezra decided to bring matters to a grand climax. With the help of a few cronies and some extra hammers he went outside and removed the balance of the steps from the structure and, for good measure, knocked the boards from the floor of the small platform in front of the upper door. When the work was finished, nothing remained but the outside upright posts and the flimsy ban-nister.

Despite the noise of the destructive crew, Doc Quack slept on and on. In justice to Ezra Kitter, he had taken the precaution of looking up at the Doc's windows before demolishing the stairway. Not seeing any lights, as the Doc had slept through the sundown period, Ezra took it for granted that Doc Quack was not in his quarters at the time. But Ezra was wrong. . .

Just before daybreak Doc Quack aroused from his drunken sleep. Violently thirsty, he hurried to the door to head for the water pump out in back of the building. Pulling the door open, he stepped out onto the now non-existent porch.

A group of miners, headed for the early morning shift, found the body of Doc Quack at the foot of the defunct stairway. His neck was bro-

ken—even the non-medical men could tell that.

EVERYBODY in Bisbee had long enjoyed Ezra Kitter's practical jokes. But, this time, they felt he had gone a mite too far. Even though all were aware of the events leading up to the untimely and unmourned demise of Doc Quack, they felt that justice called for some action. Ezra was reluctantly arrested and taken up to Tombstone, the county seat town, to await trial. The friendly sheriff allowed Ezra a great amount of freedom, and told the prisoner from Bisbee that the court calendar was so crowded that it would be three or four months before his case could be heard.

"And—when my trial does come up, what penalty do you think I'll get?" asked Ezra Kitter.

"Don't rightly know, Ezra," came the answer. "Up here we all know the full story of what happened. An accident, kind of. Judge Crane knows it, too. And he likes you, Ezra. Tell you what. I will ask him what penalty you might expect."

The following day the sheriff told Ezra that he had talked to the judge. "He wants you to get all the best of it," said the lawman. "Just like we all do. He said he is going to have the jury composed of all Bisbee people—your friends. He says they'll have to find you guilty, and that he will have to sentence you—and figgers that he will have to give you four months in the Territorial Prison at Yuma."

"Wonder if I could talk to Judge Crane?" asked Ezra. "I got me an idea."

Ezra, standing before the good judge explained, "Can you fix it for me to go to Yuma and start to serve my sentence? I'd rather do it now than in th' summer months. Gets to be so damn hot up there."

"But you ain't been convicted, yet," observed the judge.

"But I will be—and I have to wait so long for trial that—"

"It's sort of irregular," the judge cut in. "But I'll do it."

A few days later the warden at the Territorial Prison was amazed when the lone man entered his office and handed over official commitment papers naming one Ezra Kitter.

"Where you got your prisoner, this Kitter?" asked the warden.

"That's me," said Ezra. "I am my own prisoner. They trusted me to come up here and commit myself—"

"But, this says there wasn't even a conviction," said the warden.

"No—but there will be. Th' judge said to tell you that this paper is legal, for sure."

The warden shrugged. "I have no objection to making you a convict, if that's your heart's desire," he said. One hour later Ezra was wearing stripes.

For almost four months Ezra Kitter lived, suffered and worked with a collection of the most notorious

criminals ever to scourge the West, in the toughest and most notorious prison of all.

Then, one day he was sent to the warden's office. Striped cap in calloused hand, he stood meekly before the official.

"Ezra Kitter," said the warden, "you are now a free man."

"But, my four months ain't quite up, yet," said Ezra, who was puzzled.

"You been wastin' your time," said the warden. "See, they held your trial a few days ago, in Tombstone."

"And what sentence did I get?" asked Ezra.

"No sentence," answered the warden. "They found you *not guilty!*"

Ezra was momentarily stunned. "Not—not guilty!" Then, after a long pause, he added, "Looks like th' biggest joke I ever pulled was on—myself."

The folks of Bisbee agreed with him. But Doc Quack would have argued.



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These, and other stories appear in the August issue of

**SCIENCE FICTION
QUARTERLY**

KNOW YOUR WEST

(continued from page 8)



HE WANTED TO KILL INDIANS

WHEN HE was sober, Captain Henry Pegnam was one of the best-liked officers at Camp John Husted. He was tall and well-built and had risen from the ranks. His bravery during the War between the States was well known and the decorations he had received were numerous. But when he was drunk, he would give vent to a set of feelings that belonged more to a monomaniac than to an army officer.

"Kill all the redskins," he would shout. "Run 'em into a canyon and wipe 'em out! Nothing but dirty, ignorant savages. Like animals! Wait till we get those repeating rifles. I'll show the West how to handle the Indian problem."

Unfortunately, there were numerous people who shared the viewpoint of Captain Henry Pegnam. His commanding officer, who was also his brother-in-law, would try to reason with him. And Colonel William S. Rath had been raised in the west.

"Man for man, the Indian is more than the equal of his white brother, as a fighter. When we stop making and breaking treaties and use a bit of human understanding, then we will solve the problem. It is bad for morale when you talk that way; there are soldiers here who are raw and green, and think that fighting the Indian is something like a Roman holiday."

"If Custer were here, he would back me up," retorted the Captain. "There is a man for you."

The Colonel reached over to his desk and took up a book. He turned a few pages and then said. "Here is a book written by the man you respect. Now let me tell you just what he has to say about the Indians: *'If I were an Indian, I often think that I would greatly prefer to cast my lot among those of my people who adhered to the free open plains, rather than submit to the confined limits of a reservation, there to be the recipient of the blessed benefits of civilization—with its vice thrown in without stint or measure.'*"

Captain Henry Pegnam made no reply for a few minutes. Then he smiled and continued talking. "Elsie feels much better today. I told her an old friend of my father would soon be here. George Andrews started his wagon-train business with money my father loaned him. In 1856 he had about three hundred and fifty wagons and teams at work. He made about three hundred thousand dollars profit. Then he bought a mine and went broke. And now, at his age, he is back again with his wagon-trains, bringing us supplies. Ought to arrive at the end of the week."

THERE WAS excitement in the air when the wagon-train arrived with supplies, the new rifles, and ammunition. Old George Andrews was certainly spry for a man of his age. "Brought the new Colt Revolving Rifle for your men," he informed the Colonel. "58 caliber. And also those new paper cartridges. Plenty of bullets and caps."

The soldiers were thrilled as they handled and used the new rifles. Armed with a Colt revolver, and this remarkable new Colt rifle, the soldier felt almost invincible. And in that sick brain of Captain Henry Pegnam a plan was being born; all he wanted was a chance to go after the Indians.

George Andrews and his empty wagons left the fort at sunrise. He must have been about a mile from the fort when you could hear the war-whoops and the pounding of Indian ponies. The mule-teams obliqued inward and the train formed itself into a rectangular stronghold. An alert picket saw what was happening and rushed back to the fort.

"About a hundred Indians are attacking the wagon-train." The news was given to Captain Henry Pegnam who was temporarily in command, because his brother-in-law was ill with fever.

"Boots and Saddles," sounded the bugles. And with one hundred mounted

men, armed with the new rifles, he went out to relieve the wagon-train. Behind Captain Henry Pegnam was young Lieutenant Roger Whitely. They rode up to the wagon-train and the redskins fled.

"After them!" shouted the Captain, who he felt this was his chance. Who could withstand his mighty rifles? He and his men bore down on the few mounted Indians, who seemed always just ahead. And over the ridge they went. Two thousand Indians were massed under the command of Chief Fleet Horse. Up went the long lances in signal for the charge, and the fight was on.

The Indians had few firearms, nor did they need them. Arrow after arrow was shot into the thinning ranks of the soldiers. And then came the final rush. The soldiers died to the last man, stabbed and clubbed. The few soldiers who grew panicky never had a chance to run; they died on the spot. Then there was silence.

Later they collected the mutilated and scalped bodies and gave them a decent funeral. The Colonel wept like a baby. "If I hadn't been sick! That fool was only waiting for a chance like this. He took those men into a death trap."

There was an investigation, but to what avail? They did erect a monument to the fallen Captain and it read: "*To a Brave Man.*"

Someone changed that inscription and it read for awhile: "*To a Fool.*"

Question: Can you spot the big error in this story? (You'll find the answer on page 96)

WAGONS WESTWARD

ALL DAY long you could hear the hammers rattle on wagon-tires and horseshoes. Then one by one, the wagons with their white covers—drawn each by 6 or 8 horses, mules, or oxen—stretched their traces, cracked their whips and pulled out for

the great journey. The wise ones had taken time to cut timbers for spare axles, tongues, and other needed items. Jim Davey had been chosen captain of his train, and he watched Peter Simpson writing in a sheepskin notebook.

"We start in an hour, Pete, so you better hurry up with your work. At the rate you are going, you should fill several of those books. Hope you get enough material for your grandchildren to read. I suggest you check on your guns."

For a week now, the wagons were on the trail to the coast. The men had made a good choice in electing Jim Davey as their head. He had made the trip two years previously and was well aware of the problems to be met.

"You must carry enough food with you," he had warned the men. "Every group of wagons is figgering on shooting game to help out with the provisions. And if there isn't game to be shot? Then you go on short rations. For every man, you got to carry a

hundred and twenty five pounds of flour, fifty pounds of cured ham, fifty pounds of smoked side bacon, thirty pounds of sugar, six pounds of ground coffee, one pound of tea, a pound and a half of cream of tartar, two pounds of soda, three pounds of salt, dried fruit, beans, twenty five pounds of rice, pepper, ginger, citric acid, tartaric acid, and sixteen and a half pounds of hard bread."

And he made certain that the men in his wagon-train did buy all the goods which he had put on a list and then posted.

For five days the wagons had slowly moved ahead without any trouble. And sure as night would come, there you would find Peter Simpson making his entry.

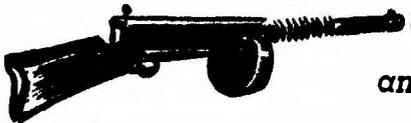
"We left our camping ground half past five. Travelled 17 miles without water, over the roughest road since we left the frontier. Came to the river at one o'clock. Put our stock across the river, and let them graze for three hours. Took supper, hitched up, and

There were two questions that a good detective should have asked at the very beginning: why had a knife-killer switched to a gun? And why had the victim been switched, just as suddenly. Sherlock Holmes would have deduced it in five minutes or less, no doubt — but I could see that it was going to take me longer. But then, Holmes didn't have a girl like Joy to distract him . . .

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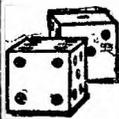
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"On the Plains, oxen are better than horses for getting their feed and fording streams," insisted Jed Hopkins. "And at night the Injuns can't run off oxen as easily as they do horses. Give me the oxen any day."

As Westward went the wagons, they found less and less grass. Finally one day they stopped at a rude hut. There was a large crude sign which read: "Grass for Sale."

"Three hundred dollars a ton is the price," said Sam Meeger who, with three other men, had figured out a simple way to make money.

"He's a highway robber," shouted Jed Hopkins. "I got a good mind to take it without paying. We should treat them like robbers."

Sam Meeger didn't blink an eyelid as he noticed how Jed Hopkins' right hand was going nearer his gun.

"My squaw is an Omaha," replied Sam Meeger. "If anything happens to me they'll wipe you out."

So the men paid the terrific price and fed their stock. Then they continued on their way. The next week was uneventful and they met a group of wagons going east. The men in both wagon-trains stopped and exchanged news.

"We have seen the elephant," explained Burt Hawkins, leader of the eastbound train, "and we are going back to St. Louis."

"What elephant?" demanded Jed Hopkins.

"The famous one that escaped from the circus," replied Burt Hawkins. "On the road ahead you can buy wagons for \$10 to \$15 each and provisions for almost nothing. Look at my Conestoga wagon. Got it for \$20."

THE WAGON had blue wheels and a red body shaped like a boat with a long curve that raised the front and rear above the middle and so would prevent the load from spilling on the steep grades of mountain travel. The bottom of the body was fully fourteen feet long. It was equipped with overlapping tongues and a pin so that the

[Turn To Page 90]

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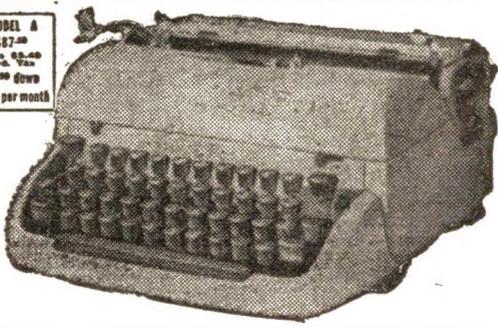
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FAMOUS WESTERN

wheels might be coupled together.

"I think I want to go back again to the coast," said Burt Hawkins. "Can I join your group?"

The men agreed so Burt Hawkins joined them. He helped willingly in all tasks but was annoyed at one thing. It was Peter Simpson.

"Seems to me all he does is write and write."

It was on a Thursday night while all the men were tight asleep and Burt Hawkins was on night duty. He fired his rifle once and shouted: "Injuns!"

The men all slept with their arms at their side and in an instant they were up. But they could see no redskins.



"One fired an arrow at me," explained Burt Hawkins. "Missed me and went into Jed Hopkins' wagon."

They found the lifeless body of Jed with an arrow straight through the heart. He had died at once. Peter Simpson examined the body and then made an announcement.

"His money-belt is missing. He always slept with it. Funny, how a redskin would know about it."

"Calling me a liar?" demanded Burt Hawkins.

"And a killer, too," snapped back Peter Simpson. "If that arrow missed you, then it would have torn a hole in the covering of the wagon. Show me a hole! You plunged that arrow into Jed's heart and stole his money-belt. He always talked about it."

An hour later, after a rough but fair trial, they hanged Burt Hawkins from a wagon tongue. And onward, westward, went the wagons.

Question: Can you spot the big error in this story? (You'll find the answer on page 98)

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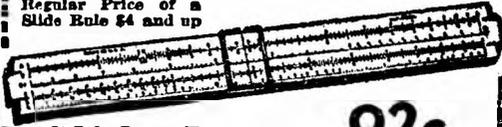
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FAMOUS WESTERN MAN OF IRON

(continued from page 74)

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There was quite a scuffle and except for the prudence of the Captain, there might have been bloodshed. At any rate Al Sieber's sun had set. He left his post and his friends and returned to a civilization that he had worked so hard to bring into the Arizona Territory.

In 1907 he was bossing a road construction gang of Apaches, volunteer laborers, when he saw a large boulder begin to move. He yelled for the Indians to run for it, which they did, but Al Sieber—old Al Sieber—was no longer capable of fast physical coordination and the great block of granite crushed him to death. He was buried in the Grand Army of The Republic's plot in Pioneer's Cemetery at Globe, where he rests today under the simple monument that says:

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References

1. "Trail Dust and Saddle Leather" by Jo Mora. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York 1946. See page 28 about Texas cows weathering a real northern winter. The error once was believed.
2. "The Cowboy" by Philip Ashton Rollins. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York 1936. See page 171 about cowboy reading Shakespeare.
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4. "The Story of the Cowboy" by Emerson Hough. D. Appleton and Co. New York 1897. See Chapter XV for The Rustler and changing of Brands.
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6. "The Cowboy and His Horse" by Sydney E. Fletcher. Grosset & Dunlap. New York 1951. See page 82 for brand chart.

[Turn To Page 96]

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7. "The Longhorns" by James Frank Dobie. Little Brown and Co. Boston 1941. See pages 63 to 68 for story about steer with "Murder" Brand.
8. "The American West" edited by William Targ. Cleveland and New York. World Publishing Co. 1946. See Extract on Colonel Charles Goodnight and how he used those night-glasses to spot rustlers.

HE WANTED TO KILL INDIANS

That Colt repeating-rifle was a fizzle, and had to be discarded. The Indians actually winning with bow and arrow versus the gun is true stuff.

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1. "Custer Battlefield" by Edward S. and Evelyn S. Luce. National Park Service. Historical Handbook No. 1. Washington, D. C. 1952. See page 28 for that quotation by Custer.
2. "Seventy Years on the Frontier" Alexander Majors' Memoirs. Rand, McNally & Co. 1893. Chicago. See page 142 for great profits made in the wagon-train business.
3. "The Machine Gun" by George M. Chinn. Vol. 1. Prepared for the Bureau of Ordnance, United States Navy. Washington. 1951. See pages 30-31 for story about that Colt Revolving Rifle.
4. "The Peacemaker and Its Rivals" by John E. Parsons. William Morrow and Company. New York. 1951 See pages 14-15 for statement about the Indian as a fighter.
5. "Indian Fighting Army" by Fairfax Downey. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York. 1941. See pages 46-47 for arrows versus guns.

[Turn To page 98]

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6. "Death on Horseback" by Paul I. Wellman. J. P. Lippincott Company. Philadelphia & New York. 1947. See page 57 for scalping and mutilation of bodies.
7. "Indian Horrors" by Henry Davenport Northrop. National Publishing Company. Philadelphia, Pa. N. D. See page 333 for investigating committee and no censure.

WAGONS WESTWARD

The elephant story is the error. "Seen the Elephant" was used in the West but it meant to be discouraged, disillusioned, or in modern phraseology, "fed up." The story about the high price for grass is true.

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2. "Forty-Niners" by Archer Butler Hulbert. Little, Brown and Company. Boston, 1949. See page 11
3. "A Pioneer of 1850" by George Willis Read. Little, Brown and Company. Boston, 1927. See page 81 for his entry into notebook. Used here.
4. "Ox-Team Days On the Oregon Trail," by Ezra Meeker in collaboration with Howard R. Driggs. World Book Company. Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York. 1922. See page 58 for argument that oxen are better than horses.
5. "The Kilgore Journal." Edited by Joyce Rockwood Muench. Hastings House, New York, 1949. See page 57 for high price paid for grass.
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7. "Wagons West" by Elizabeth Page. Farrar & Rinehart, Inc. New York, 1930. See page 81 for description of Conestoga Wagon.



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her above all else and who was
tough enough to fight his own
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BUENA VISTA**
by Francis Flick

in the big July issue of

REAL WESTERN ROMANCES





**"I was lonely...
and my wife was
out of town..."**

What does it feel like to face the ELECTRIC CHAIR... for a murder you didn't commit?

IT COULD HAPPEN to anyone so easily—so innocently. That's the terrifying part of it. Just suppose your wife is out of town. You meet an attractive young woman named Nan Ordway... who is trying hard (she tells you) to succeed as a writer. You're lonely and sympathetic, and you take her out to dinner. Then, in a burst of kind-hearted generosity, you offer to let her do her writing in your quiet apartment, during the day while you're at the office.

You rarely see her. Each day she leaves you a "thank-you" note. Then, one afternoon, you bring your wife home from the airport, and you find Nan Ordway is waiting for you... *HANGING* from your bedroom chandelier!

You're horrified! You try to convince your wife, your friends, and the police that there was **NOTHING** between you. But Nan's room-mate points an accusing finger and says, "*Nan told me every sordid detail about you... how you seduced her... how you promised to divorce your wife and marry her! She killed herself because of you!*"

You listen—in **SHOCKED AMAZEMENT!** Then your maid is questioned. She says she found Nan Ordway in **YOUR BED** one morning, sleeping in **YOUR WIFE'S** pajamas! White with anger, your wife leaves you. Your friends desert you... and you begin to live in terrible fear of this dead girl who seemed determined to destroy you...

But the worst is still to come. While you are trying desperately to clear your name, the Police Medical Examiner delivers his report: *Nan Ordway didn't hang herself. SHE WAS KILLED!*

Now the cops are after you—for **MURDER!** You **KNOW** you are innocent. But the **ELECTRIC CHAIR** doesn't know it. And unless you can **PROVE** it, in just a few hours a prison door will close in your face **FOREVER**...

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