

The

May

LONE RANGER

10
CENTS

Magazine



The
Masked Rider's
Justice

A COMPLETE NOVEL

featuring

The Lone Ranger

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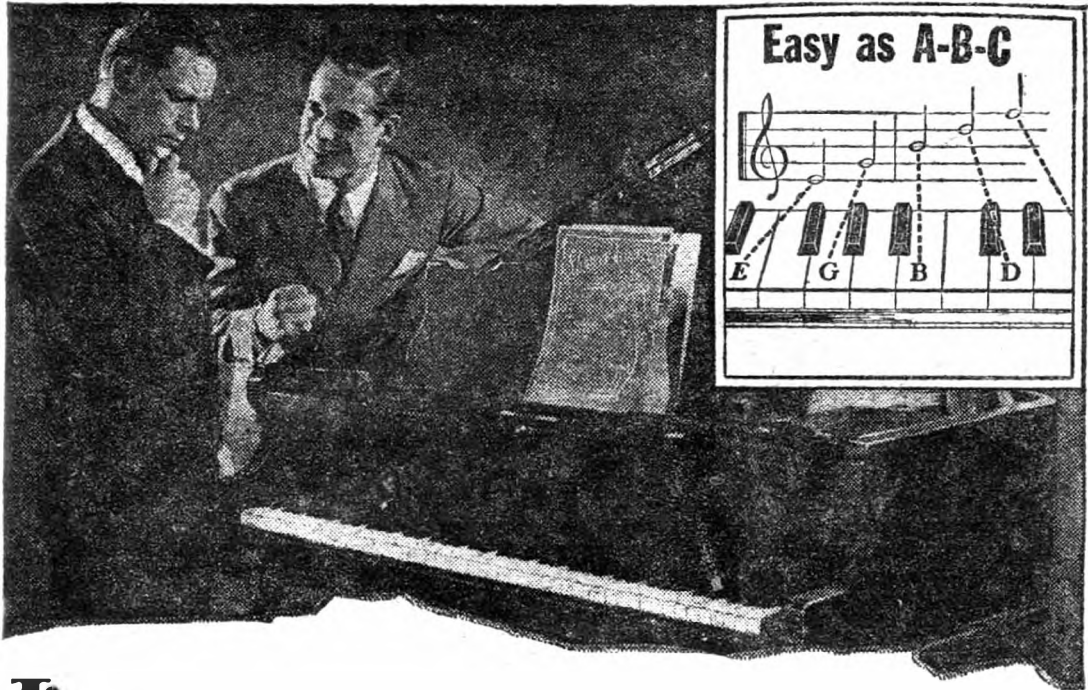
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Vol. 1

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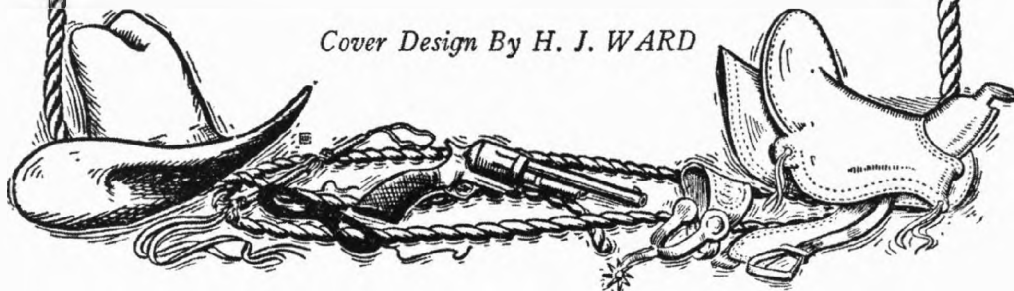
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Dear Lone Ranger Fans:

Thank you for the splendid response to the first issue of **The LONE RANGER Magazine**. As we go to press with this issue, letters and Club membership coupons are pouring in from all parts of the United States, and some from Canada and Mexico. Naturally, we are proud and pleased.

Of course we want to make **The LONE RANGER Magazine** the best of its kind on the newsstands. That is why you will find many interesting features added to the contents every month. In this respect, we wish to acknowledge, gratefully, the many helpful suggestions sent in by our readers. These are always welcome.

The Lone Ranger on the Radio

Many of our readers are devoted listeners to **The Lone Ranger** radio hour. To those unacquainted with these thrilling dramas of the West, featuring **The Lone Ranger**, "Silver", and **Tonto**, we urge them to tune in on Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings on the stations listed below.*

To ALL Our Readers!

We would like all of you to join **The LONE RANGER Magazine Club**. Many special features are being planned for Club members only. A membership coupon will be found on page 127. Mail it today and get your membership card. Let's hear from all of you!

—THE EDITORS.

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Justice Meant More to the Lone Ranger and His Companions Than Merely Saving an Innocent Boy From a Blood-Lusting Lynch Mob—It Meant Following the Job Through Until the Youth's Name Was Cleared and the Real Murderer Brought to Trial

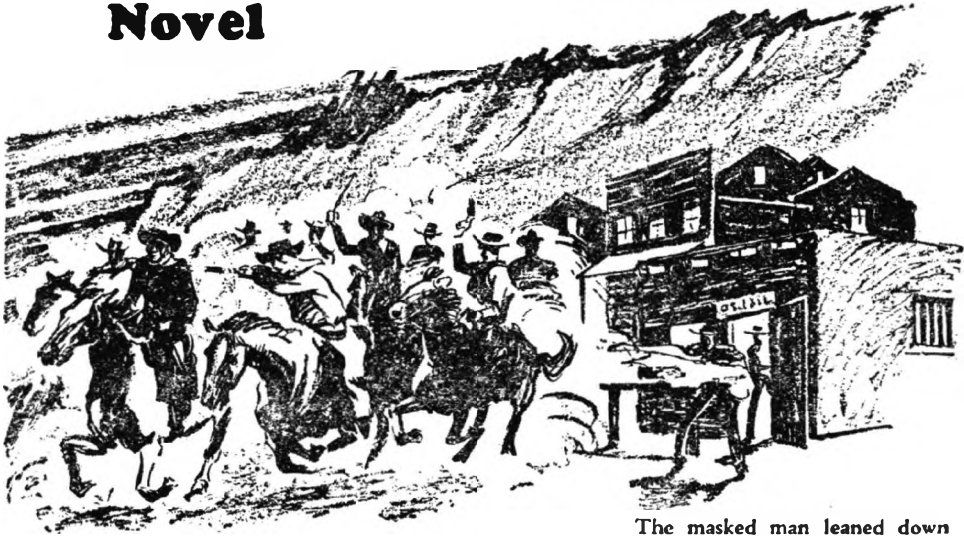


**The Pounding Hoofs of a Fiery Horse—A Ringing Cry—
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**With His Wonder Horse, “SILVER,” and the
Faithful Indian, TONTO**

THE MASKED A RIDER'S Complete Lone Ranger Novel JUSTICE



The masked man leaned down and swung Dave to the broad back of the big stallion.

CHAPTER I

From Death's Jaws

THE two figures on white stallions reached the crest of the ridge in moonlight. In the shadow of a clump of cottonwoods they stopped their horses and surveyed the scene spread out below them.

The jail, an isolated building, was several hundred yards down the hill, and beyond, the lights of Snake Corners. For a few moments the two men watched in silence, eyeing the squares of yellow light that marked the windows of the jail.

One was an Indian dressed in

buckskin shirt and fringed trousers. The other was masked, but the portion of his face beneath the mask marked him as a white man. Tall, lean and sinewy, he gave the impression of calm deliberation as his steely gray eyes studied the jail thru the slits in the mask.

He was an astonishing man, this masked figure. An almost legendary character, talked of throughout the length and breadth of seven states of the West. Some regarded him as a myth, but others had seen samples of his daring action, matchless shooting and furious riding when he acted in behalf of the downtrodden and oppressed; interpreting the law as he saw it,

and meting out justice as he felt proper.

No one knew where he came from, or where he went to, as he rode away in a cloud of dust with his ringing shout of "*Heigh-Yo, Silver!*" trailing behind him. This was the man who was known as the Lone Ranger.

If anyone shared the secret of the Lone Ranger's identity, it was his companion Tonto. But Tonto would never tell. True, there were times when that mask had to be removed, but in such cases stains made from roots, herbs and berries were used to change the mystery rider's face and make it unrecognizable.

TONTO grumbled uneasily as he stared at the distant view. "You think-um this safe?" he muttered.

"We've played this game before, Tonto. It is just as safe tonight as it ever was." The masked man's voice was soft, and he spoke in a clipped precise manner, quite different than the usual drawling style of the country. "And just as risky," he added.

Tonto nodded and squirmed slightly in the saddle. He recalled other times that his friend had risked his life in behalf of a man who he had never seen. A man to whom he owed nothing.

"You wait here Tonto, and keep both horses with you. Take them below the top of this hill, where they'll not be seen." The white man swung to the ground without a sound. There were no spurs on his boots, to jangle. His holsters were tied snug and couldn't flap.

His bandanna was knotted close to the strong neck and every detail seemed to add to the general impression of compact precision. No wasted motions, no needless sounds.

"If I'm not back in half an hour, do whatever you think is best," the masked rider directed.

Tonto agreed and directed a finger toward a dark mass moving from the town toward the jail. "Look-um yonder," he said. "You better go plenty quick."

The tall man tensed. He felt to make sure the mask was well secured. A lightning motion brought two heavy .44's to bear and a quick inspection sufficed to show that these weapons would not fail him in time of need. Slapping the guns back in place, he handed the bridle of his horse to Tonto, and started running down the grade. He seemed to travel with the easy grace of the panther, sure footed, swift, silent.

As he ran he cast apprehensive glances toward the dark body moving toward the jail. He noted that their advance was not fast, but grimly determined, menacing. He had seen other lynch mobs. Noisy, howling, bloodthirsty mobs whose acts of violence were the results of rabble rousing tirades of hate.

He knew that men who were moved to act as silently as was this mob tonight, were less likely to be turned from their purpose, and more likely to succeed with their Judge Lynch and swinging jury.

When he reached the jail, he paused a moment to regain his breath, then he moved with no more sound than a shadow, along



"Reach," commanded the masked figure at the window.

the 'dobe side of the building until he came to one of the two small windows. Inside a single oil lamp burned. Every nerve of his body was tense as his keen ears caught the first faint sound of the approaching horsemen. There was every need of speed, and yet he must have no careless misplay or his entire plan would fail.

Through the window he saw the two deputies on guard. Both sat with their heels adding new scars to the already well-worn table, and both puffed lazily on cigarettes to add more smoke to the smoke-filled room. They seemed to have no

thought of the approaching lynch mob, and they gave no attention to the small barred door on their left.

The man behind the mask gave one last estimating glance toward the black shadow that was approaching, then his hands came up from his sides gripping two guns which were slammed thru the window. His voice was crisp, sharp

and commanding. "Put your hands up quick!"

THE guards leaped to their feet as if shot by springs, their chairs spilling to the floor. In his eagerness to swing toward the voice, one almost knocked the table over. The other, disregarding the command, reached impulsively for his gun. A crash rocked the building as two orange tongues lashed from the masked man's guns. The startled outcry of the deputies was choked in their throats by the roar and chunks of plaster leaping from the wall behind them.

"Reach," commanded the masked figure at the window. Both men held their arms at shoulder level and stood motionless. The suddenness of the Lone Ranger's appearance left them with no power or inclination to refuse his demands.

"Don't try any tricks. Just back up to the cell door and be quick about it." The command was emphasized by a jerk of one of the six-guns. "Hurry!"

"What the Hell," breathed one of the two.

"Never mind the talk, back up."

There was no compromise in that voice. The deputies shuffled backwards until their backs pressed close to the barred door of the single cell of the jail. A thin, pale face with wide startled eyes stared over their shoulders at the masked face in the window. The blond hair was disheveled by the worried hands that had combed it with lean fingers. It was to the young fellow in the cell that the

next remark was addressed. "Reach through the bars and take their guns."

Dave Walters was at first too surprised to move. He continued to stare open mouthed over the shirted backs.

"Hurry," barked the Lone Ranger. "There is a lynch mob on the way here. Men are coming from Snake Corners to get you."

"M—me?"

"You've less than a moment left to get away."

"You damned little crook," burst out a guard, "you'll be found an' shot on sight!"

"Get those guns!" the crisp voice repeated.

A frenzied gasp broke from the boy's lips as he snaked out the guns of the guards and stuck them in his belt.

"Now find the keys and let yourself out of there!" barked the masked man.

A few slaps on the outside of the deputies' pockets located a jangling bunch of keys and the second one fitted the lock of the cell door. Dave shuddered inwardly at the bitter hatred that burned in the eyes of the guards as they glowered at him. He stood uncertain in the middle of the room.

The sound of the lynch mob's horses was plainly audible now. It brought the grim reality of the situation to Dave Walters. With that mob, there would be no trial, no hearing, no justice. With a little gasp he turned his back on the guards and raced from the room.

AS Dave burst into the night he saw the oncoming riders, but

a firm hand gripped his arm and a level voice said, "This way. Come on Dave."

"Who—who are you?"

"No time for talk now. My horse can carry both of us. It is just beyond the top of the hill."

The Lone Ranger started running, half dragging Dave with him. The first of the lynchers saw the two figures racing from the jail and shouted a warning. It spurred the rescued boy to greater speed. Whoever this masked man was, whatever the future might hold, it could be no worse than the certain death he raced to leave behind. They ran without pausing to look back.

By this time the deputies had left the building and were screaming at the riders. Spurs dug deep into horseflesh, guns whipped into action and the townsmen charged toward the men on foot. Bullets were coming close to the Lone Ranger and the boy, chugging into the ground almost at their feet. Dave was already winded and his breath was coming in painful gasps.

"I—I c-can't go on," he breathed.

"Those Cottonwoods, the top of the hill. You'll make it, Dave. You *must* make it."

There were times when Dave stumbled and would have fallen, were it not for the strong grip of the masked man.

The horsemen were scarcely a hundred yards away, and closing the gap with every split second, but Tonto was even nearer. Seeing that his masked friend had no chance to win this race with Death,

the Indian had started down the hill to meet the Lone Ranger.

Like angry wasps, the slugs of six-guns zoomed close. The shouts of the infuriated men rose above the wham of guns and pound of hoofs. Then Silver came abreast and wheeled sharply while the masked man leaped to the saddle, leaned down and swung an arm around Dave's waist to swing him also to the broad back of the big stallion.

Dave hardly understood that he was on horseback so confused was he by the fast sequence of the past few minutes. Then he heard a voice shouting close to him.

"*Heigh-Yo, Silver!*"

He felt a great lunge as the powerful legs drove the plunging horse up the hill. A great surge of muscles, and a tornado of wind whipping at his blowing hair. In



all the west, there was no horse to equal Silver.

Vaguely Dave was aware of an Indian racing alongside. Chancing

a backward glance, he saw that already the space between him and the lynch mob had widened. Escape had become a possibility. There came to him a wild hope that he might, after all, live to learn more of this mysterious stranger who had saved his life, who perhaps, knew that he was innocent of the crimes that had aroused law abiding men to turn lynchers!

"Where are we going?" he choked into the wind.

But the masked man did not reply.

THE plain stretched endlessly after the ridge was crossed and the two horses plunged ahead at even greater speed when the treacherous downhill footing was behind them. For a long time no word was spoken. Once more Dave looked back.

There, far behind the black outline of the ridge formed the horizon against the moonlit sky. Somewhere in the gloom beneath, a score of horsemen were pursuing, but each great stride of the white horse increased the space between. Now for the first time Dave dared breathe more easily. Then he became aware of a voice close to his ear. It was that of the Lone Ranger.

"We can take it a little easier now. Our horses are pretty sure-footed, but there's no use pressing our luck too hard. Gopher holes are treacherous things at night."

Taking the cue from the masked man, Tonto slowed the pace of his horse to match that of Silver and the two continued side by side. For the first time, Walters heard the

Indian's voice, shouting to make himself heard above the tattoo of hoofs and the pressure of the wind.

"We make-um for camp now?"

The Lone Ranger raised a hand and pointed, and Tonto understood the signal. To Dave he said, "They can't follow a trail tonight. They'll think we're heading for the Snake River Canyon. That's the logical place to go for a hide-out."

"It's the only place I know of," shouted Dave against the wind.

"It is the only place those men will think of. That's why we're not going there."

The horses changed direction and headed toward the left of the original course. Straight ahead a mass rose up against the sky. Dave heard the decisive voice speaking again.

"No man would hide or even try to hide around old Stony Butte. They'll never think of searching there, so that is where we are going."

STONY BUTTE was a familiar landmark in the region of Snake Corners. Some ten miles from the town, the barren rocky mass rose from level country to a considerable height. It looked like some giant plaything that the gods of another age had cast aside. The rock was polished by eternities of rain and the moon cast a reflection in a silvery light.

Dave wondered at this choice of the masked man for a hiding place. In Snake River Canyon, miles to the east, there were hundreds of hiding places. In the badlands, many miles North, a man could

hide forever, but at Stony Butte—hiding would be impossible.

Therefore the wisdom of this choice did not occur to Dave at the time. Because of its lack of hiding places this would be the one place where fugitives would never be sought. On level country, in the open, yet able at any moment to shift from one side of the Butte to another so thousands of tons of solid rock would be between him and the pursuers, the masked man thought he might be safe. At least for as long as would be necessary.

When the fringe of vegetation that surrounded the base of Stony Butte was reached, the two white horses came to a halt.

"Well, Dave," spoke the Lone Ranger, "we've arrived. Slide to the ground and stretch yourself free of kinks."

The voice of the masked man seemed to give the blond man a new courage. He squared back his narrow shoulders and stretched his head this way and that getting the stiffness out of his long lean neck. Tonto unsaddled his horse with little concern and no comment, just as if snatching men from the very jaws of death was a commonplace occurrence.

It seemed incredible to Dave that only two short hours had passed since darkness came. In that time he had disarmed two lawmen, escaped from jail, run from bullets and escaped death only through the help of a man he had never known and never seen.

Who was this strange tall man behind the mask? Why had he risked his life for Dave? How long before the lawmen found the

trail on the plains and came to Stony Butte to finish their interrupted work of lynching? Tonight the place might be safe, but daylight would surely tell another story.



A thousand questions were in Dave Walters' mind, but when he spoke it was in the form of a statement.

"You've wasted your time, Mister. I don't know why you hauled me away from the jail, and I'm real grateful to you for doin' it, but—but—" Dave paused before he went on, "the fact is, I might as well be dead as—as to be hunted all my life."

The masked man turned from a close inspection of his horse.

"If you are really the criminal you're branded, I agree with you, but I don't think you are."

"I ain't the crook I'm branded, Mister, but I *am* a crook. I reckon it's a true sayin' that goes, 'once a crook, always a crook'."

"Sit down," said the Lone Ranger, pointing to the grass in the shadow of the butte. "I want to hear your story."

CHAPTER II

Risen From the Dead

DAVE WALTERS was too disturbed to sit quietly on the ground. Pacing nervously back and forth, his long fingers occasionally swept a persistent lock of hair away from his forehead. He was young, barely twenty one, yet his eyes had depths in them that belied his actual years. His cheeks were sunken and his undernourished body didn't nearly fill the clothes he wore.

The trousers lapped over at the waist and extra holes had been punched in his belt. The denim shirt was open at the neck and it almost seemed as though his shoulders might push through the opening.

During the several moments that he fought to gain control of his emotions, the Lone Ranger watched him, waiting patiently. Finally the masked man prodded gently for the story.

"What *was* the crime you committed?"

"I stole."

The masked man nodded for Dave to go on.

"I was younger then, only eighteen. It seems like it was an awful lot more'n just three years ago. It was in New Orleans, where I was workin' in a bank."

Weakness overcame the boy and he sank to the ground in sheer exhaustion, bracing his back against the rocky mass. "I'll be all right," he assured the other. "I'm just worn out with what's happened to me in the past few days."

"You were talking of the time you were in New Orleans."

"Yes, it was in the bank there. My folks were awful proud; they wanted me to learn the bankin' business. The pay wasn't much, and the fellow that I worked with showed me how to—to change the figures in the books. It looked easy. I thought I could take a little money, then win a lot at gamblin' and put back what I'd taken. I got in deeper all the time, an' then I had to get out or go to jail. I—I ran away."

Dave paused and fingered his hair, then brushed his well worn blue sleeve across his mouth before he went on.

"I didn't have any money in my pockets when I left. I jumped a freight train and rode all night.

"In the morning when they found me they threw me off in the middle of nowhere's, but they didn't go to the trouble of throwin' off my bundle of clothes. All I had was what I was wearin' an' there wasn't anything to do, but start walkin'.

"When I met another man in the same position as me, we sort of teamed up an' traveled for a while together. He called himself 'Higgy'. He showed me how to go to a farmhouse an' do a little wood choppin' or something, in turn for a meal.

"Then when it was beginning to turn winter, he thought we'd better try to jump another train and head for Texas Territory or somewhere warm. But that's when I got hurt. I jumped for the freight when it was travelin' pretty fast and missed. It's a wonder I wasn't

killed. Higgy thought I was dyin', an' so did I.

"I was so sure of it, that all I cared about was to write a note to Pa, confessing the bank robbery and ask him to make it good for me. Higgy got the letter, and I gave him Pa's address and he promised to see that the letter got mailed. That was the last I ever saw of Higgy.

"He left me on the next train, an' I reckon I sort of lost consciousness or something. I know I was awful surprised when I came to and found that I was still alive, and awful cold and hungry.

"Some men found me and took me to their camp and I stayed there till a couple of broken ribs got better. They were doin' some work for the railroad company and had a camp where a cook was needed, so I did the cookin' for a time. I wanted to save enough cash to go back home and make a clean breast of everything."

DAVE had slumped to the ground while he talked and lay sprawled with his head cushioned on a bony fist.

"Don't go to sleep before finishing your story, Dave," the masked man cautioned. "We won't dare remain here after daybreak and I may want to return to town instead of heading for a safer hiding place. Go on. Did you go back to New Orleans?"

"Yes," replied the boy. "I'd been away for most of a year, and when I got back, I found that Pa had sold his house, and he and Ma had joined a wagon train that was coming to the West. Pa'd repaid

the bank for what I'd stolen and folks I talked to said he'd lost most of the rest of his money.

"I had to find him and I wanted to see Mom again, too. I didn't want her to always think of her son as a thief. I learned something



else, just before I left the city. I learned that a man had come to town with the story of how I'd been killed. Folks that knew me thought I was a ghost or somethin', I'd lost so much weight, an' looked so sort of pale and skinny, and they'd all been told that I was dead.

"Then I *had* to find my folks, so I took the cash I'd saved, sewed it inside my shirt, an' started workin' out toward the West."

"That was some time ago, wasn't it?" The Lone Ranger was making careful mental notes of each detail of the story Dave was telling. Dave explained that he had been roaming throughout different parts of the West, hopelessly try-



ing to find some word of his parents.

"I guess I didn't know how big this country was, when I started out. I didn't want to touch the cash I'd saved. That was to give back to Pa, when I found him. There was five hundred dollars sewed inside my shirt when I left New Orleans, an' it was still there . . . until—until I hit Snake Corners.

"That's where my real troubles started. I thought I'd had a hard time workin' my way through these past couple years but when I got to Snake Corners, it was worse."

He was speaking in a low voice, that at times grew husky with exhaustion. He coughed, a wracking, hacking cough and Tonto threw a blanket over his frail shoulders.

THE Indian dared not build a fire for fear of bringing members of the lynch mob to investigate the butte. The night was growing chilly and a light breeze was sweeping over the plains. After a wait of several moments, the Lone Ranger spoke in a kindly, sympathetic voice.

"What happened at Snake Corners?"

The boy roused himself with an effort.

"I'd heard that maybe an old couple that lived in Snake Corners might be my folks. I asked about 'em by name, but folks didn't seem to recognize it. I was headin' into the Corners on foot a couple days ago, maybe a week, when the Sheriff and half a dozen men rode up and grabbed me.

"I didn't understand what it was all about, but they searched me an' found the money. They wouldn't listen to anything I said, but just rustled me off to the jail. A couple different men came there an' looked at me an' said that I was the man they'd seen.

"It seems that I was bein' blamed for murderin' an old woman an' stealin' her lifetime savin's. Other folks came an' remembered me as bein' the one who had ast about some old folks, an' the first thing I knew, I was to be tried for murder.

"Th-that's all there is to it. I'm a crook, I stole from a bank, an' Heaven's my witness I suffered for it, but I ain't a murderer! I made a mistake in tellin' the Sheriff that I was once a thief. That seemed to be what made him sure I was the killer. I reckon it's true that when you give a dog a bad name, you might as well shoot it."

A strong brown hand rested against the trembling shoulder of the lad and firm fingers gave him a grip of assurance. "Dave, I'm going to let you sleep here, until half an hour before sun-up. Then Tonto is going to take you to a

better hiding place, and you'll stay there until I come for you."

Dave drew the sleeve of his shirt across his mouth and nose again.

"I'm a regular damn baby, cryin' in my bib like this," he blurted.

"Take it easy, lad," the masked

plans for a lynching I thought there might be more to your story than was known. I found out that I was right. I want to go back to Snake Corners, and find out some things, and I'm going tonight!"

"You're the first person's had a



He didn't understand what it was all about when the sheriff grabbed him.

friendly word for me, in—in years. I—I'd give my life for you, Mister—"

The masked man raised his hand to silence the boy's outburst.

"Now get some sleep. You will need strength for the trip with Tonto in the morning."

The Lone Ranger whistled softly, and from the lee side of the butte his stallion trotted to his side. Tonto, knowing the habits and manner of the Lone Ranger had not removed the stallion's saddle. Silver was ready and eager to

man spoke in a kindly voice. "Remember the finest steel is that which is tempered with fire. You've been through fire, and—"

"I've been through Hell," once the boy.

"When I heard talk in town, and

be away again, sweeping through the night with his beloved master in the saddle. Dave Walters was but vaguely conscious of the activity around him. When the fading rhythm of those fleet hoofs finally faded into the soft night, Dave was already asleep.

CHAPTER III

In Snake Corners

SNAKE CORNERS had boomed into being on rumors of gold. Pioneers, worn and disheartened after weeks of backbreaking travel overland in the quest of gold, had paused in the elbow of the Snake River where there was good water and fine grazing.

Their original plan had been to camp only long enough to repair the travel worn equipment, rest the cattle and regain the strength the overland journey had taken from them. Then when predecessors on the trail had returned to explain that the hills were barren, that the gold was a will-o-the-wisp, a more permanent camp was made.

Some few hardy souls repacked their wagons to return to the various parts from which they came. Others, finding good soil, plenty of timber and hunting, had built homes. Snake Corners became a town and in the natural course, dance halls, stores and a church, sprung up to cater to the various requirements of the citizenry. A typical prairie town on a well worn trail to the far West.

It was generally a placid town made up of cattle men and farm-

ers, but tonight it was riotous. Though past midnight the saloons were jammed and men shouldered each other to press close to the bar and hear for the hundredth time, the story of the masked man and the way he broke Dave Walters out of jail.

With each new arrival at the Royale Saloon, Eph Summers was called on to go through his dramatization of the incident.

"There was the two of us, me an' Jeff, with our hands h'isted starin' into the bar'ls of the stranger's guns, which same was jammed through the window. If the maverick had been inside the room, I'd o' jumped him, jumped him by gad at the risk o' life an' limb, but he warn't. He was outside the winder."

"Which same was blamed lucky fer you," commented one of the observers.

EPH glared through bleary eyes but couldn't spot his interrupter. He took a long drag at a bottle someone had shoved in his hand. The men waited until the bottle had been corked and stowed in a hip pocket.

"Wait'll he gits to the part where the escape comes," chuckled one of the keenly interested watchers.

"Now gimme plenty o' room," advised Eph, as he took a stance in the middle of the smoky hall. "Thar we stood, jest like I'm standin' here, our backs hard ag'in the cell door. This killin', murderin' coyote reached from behind the cell door an' grabbed at

our shootin' irons, an' then he got the keys an' let hisself out.

"He ran shoutin' threats to come back an' git the lot of us fer jailin' him. The man outside throws shots at us, jest missin' me by inches.

"The boys was ridin' down then, jest as the killer lit through the door. Jeff was plumb scared but me, I was clickin' off thoughts an' plans a mile a minute.

"The boys was a-comin' hell bent fer 'lection. I seen that if I could stop them two fer jest a few seconds, we'd have 'em. I ran outside, dove head first an' made a man sized effort tuh grab the heels of the escapin' criminal—like this."

He backed away a few paces, preparing himself for the high point of his act.

Taking a couple of quick steps, he launched himself forward, arms flung out. A cloud of dust shot up from between the wide pine boards, as he hit the floor with a clatter.

The crowd voiced its approval. Men slapped themselves on the thigh, roaring with laughter, and a dozen voices ordered drinks for Eph.

"Doggone," shouted one old timer, "even if it's a gosh blamed lie, it's a good yarn."

Eph gathered himself up and beamed at the crowd.

"It all goes tuh prove my theory," he said. "That young crittur's innocent lookin' face is deceivin' as Hell. I said all along there wasn't no doubt as to his bein' the guilty one that robbed old Ma Prindle, after killin' her.

Some folks said they didn't think he'd do no sech a thing, but I says then an' I say now, it's the innocent faced critturs that's most dangerous, just the same as the most poisonous snakes has the brightest, purtiest colors. If he wasn't a bad hontre, what was he linked up with that masked man for? Where's my drinks?"

AS FAR as Eph was concerned, he had satisfied himself that Dave Walters was bad. He had done all that could be expected of him as a guard and he had willingly and faithfully recounted the adventure until all the men were entertained to the point of buying him drinks. He eyed the row of glasses set out before him on the bar and methodically went to work on the first in line.

There was no thought of going



home that night. At any moment members of the hunting party might return with news of a capture and then there would be excitement aplenty. Old Ma Prindle had been a friend of everyone in town, and her murder had been a



cruel one. Some prowler had stabbed the white haired old lady.

She had been found on the floor of her home, her delicate blue veined hands still clutching an old worn handbag. Searchers found no sign of the little money she had saved to take care of her simple needs in the few years of life remaining.

Steve Delaney had found her there in her home. It was Steve who claimed that he had always given Ma Prindle a percentage of his winnings at the poker table, "to bring him luck," he had explained. Tall and striking in appearance, Steve was a picture of sartorial splendor at all times.

Even now, in the bedlam of the cafe, he sat almost unmoved at his favorite table and stroked his silky black moustache between light puffs on a slender cigar. He flicked an imaginary speck from his double breasted vest of fawn color then raised a well kept hand with slender tapering fingers and motioned to a waiter.

"If the Sheriff comes in," he said, "send him to me. I think I may be able to help out some more."

"Yuh shore helped him considerable already, Mister Delaney," ingratiated the tip-secking man in the white apron. "It was you that identified the killer as bcin' seen near the Prindle house, warn't it?"

The suave one nodded condescendingly as his fingers plucked a gold toothpick from a vest pocket.

"I know more than I told," he said.

"Is that so? Wal, I bet Sheriff Barton'll be mighty grateful if you c'd help bring back the killer an' his pard. Is there anything you want right now?"

Delaney shook his head and the waiter moved on. Steve was a good man at cards, and as such was a keen student of human nature. He knew that the fury of the townsmen would be vented on practically anyone pointed out as the killer of a beloved old woman and that once there was a suspect, imagination would do the rest.

After his description of the killer, Dave Walters had been picked up. The description was perfect. To further condemn the boy, there was the money, an amount close to what Delaney had said Ma Prindle possessed. Dave's death by the rope would have been a certainty even without the lynch mob, but Delaney never took a chance.

To make sure, he had, by careful suggestions, been the real instigator of the lynching party that night. Yet apparently he had taken

no part in it. Now he was tying strings that he might draw tight at a later date, to identify the man in the mask who had rescued the innocent boy from the jail.

Delaney knew that once Dave Walters swung, the murder of Ma Prindle would be considered closed. There would be no further search made for the murderer. This was much to be desired. Only the gambler knew *how* much. He fingered the diamond studded horse shoe in his cravat, then rose from his seat. Tugging lightly at the form-fitting coat and retilting the beaver hat at a jaunty angle on his pomaded, jet black hair, he sauntered out of the confusion of the Royale for a breath of fresher air.

THE Lone Ranger frowned as he rode an irregular course toward Snake Corners. Through his mind there raced a thousand notions, but one thing struck him as evident. Dave Walters had been framed. He had sensed that when earlier in the day he had heard the talk that buzzed through the town. Then he had worn no mask.

People took him for a wanderer, perhaps a cowpoke looking for a berth. He recalled that a man named Delaney had described Dave, even before he had been captured. According to Dave's story, the arrest was made even before the boy arrived in town. Who then, knew that Dave was on his way to Snake Corners? Who had advised the fellow that he might perhaps find his parents there?

One thing was certain. Before Dave Walters could be proved in-

nocent, the real murderer must be found! Who would have the strongest motive for wanting to see Dave caught? The murderer. Who had described Dave Walters to the sheriff? Steve Delaney.

The masked man asked and answered these questions as he rode, and each time he came back to the one important thing, find the murderer. A vision spurred the mysterious rider. A recollection of the care worn face of the thin fellow who at this moment slept near Stony Butte.

So, as he rode, he planned. It was better than half an hour since he had left Stony Butte. As he neared the town he brought his sweating horse to a slow walk and moved ahead with new caution. He had a recollection of an arroyo where in some distant era another stream had flowed to join Snake River.

He found it without difficulty and guided the big horse into the depression that ran behind a row of buildings, dark in the rear but facing the one thoroughfare of the town. He could hear the maudlin laughter and confusion from half a dozen saloons.

With every nerve tense, he swung to the ground and threw the reins of Silver over the tangled branches of a stunted shrub. The horse muzzled him gently.

"Old fellow," the masked man whispered, "you'll have to stay here for a time. A horse like you is too easily spotted. Get your wind back fellow, there may be a lot of running to do before day-break."

He gave the stallion a slap on the shoulder. Silver seemed to understand. It was but a few seconds work to remove the mask, and hide it beneath his shirt. When he left the depression to skirt the buildings and saunter into town, he was no longer the mysterious masked rider. Just one more individual to mingle with the crowds of men that had ridden in from ranches and farms for miles around to await the outcome of the manhunt.

STEVE DELANEY'S six feet of natural height was boosted another two inches by the heels of his fancy boots as he stood a little to the left of the swinging doors of the Royale.

Just prior to leaving he had noticed with amusement that Eph Summers had finished his dramatic efforts for the evening and was slumped in a corner overcome by the hospitality of his friends. Delaney tongued the gold toothpick to the opposite side of his mouth and hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his vest.

"Fools," he muttered to himself. "Any excuse to whoop it up. None of these men will be back before morning."

His appraising eyes studied a group of men moving along the dusty road, probably heading for another cafe where their credit might be better than the place they had just left. Delaney was more than a little disturbed by the activity of the town at this late hour. It was interfering with his plans.

For another quarter hour he

stood there, occasionally nodding to the men that passed between the swinging doors. Then he straightened, replaced the toothpick and looked at a heavy gold watch, attached to a chain as thick as a man's thumb. He snapped the watch closed but this gesture was the only sign he gave of reaching a decision.

As if he had no other thought than to pass a little time he sauntered down the road, careful to get as little dust as possible on the highly polished boots. Had Delaney turned to look behind him, he would have seen a man following him at a distance.

It was the Lone Ranger. He had intended to speak to the gambler, but having seen him look at his watch and saunter down the road, the mystery rider had shrewdly surmised that Delaney expected to meet someone. If this were true, the Lone Ranger intended to see *who* this person might be.

CHAPTER IV

Star Sapphires

THE Lone Ranger found himself sliding along the backs of crude buildings, keeping to the shadows as much as possible and maintaining a course parallel to that of Steve Delaney, who strolled past the same buildings but at the opposite end.

His heart thudded at the prospect of learning more about Delaney's business than he had dared to hope. Delaney was going

to meet someone, perhaps the one who had killed an old lady for a few paltry dollars. The noises of town were barely audible now, and there were but a few more of the rickety structures to be passed.

It was late, later than the town

The pale moon reflected from a white face inside the window and a faint whisper came to the Lone Ranger's ears. He was able to note that the man inside the house had a slender aristocratic outline to his face, surmounted by long



Had Delaney looked behind him, he would have seen a man following him at a distance.

of Snake Corners had been active since the Fourth of July celebration. At the last building in the row, Delaney paused beside a window. The Lone Ranger waited and kept well in the shadows. From beneath his shirt he drew the mask and slipped it over his eyes and nose.

white hair combed straight back from his brow. Hardly the type of man to have anything in common with the suave gambler, thought the masked man.

If he could only hear the whispered words that were exchanged, but though he strained his ears, he heard only the sounds of certain

consonants and nothing more. He thought he detected a pleading tone in one of the white haired man's speeches. Then he saw an arm reach out from the window and something was dropped into the gambler's extended hand.



He must hear what was said, at any cost. Cat-like he moved closer, pressing against the sidewall of the house. Carefully he inched toward the open window, and caught part of the gambler's conversation.

"I'll send it to you when I can."

"But this must be the last," the old man begged. "It is all there is. There's nothing left."

"I'll see what I can do," Delaney answered.

"For the sake of Martha."

"Sure."

The window closed and Steve Delaney started an easy stroll back toward the center of Snake Corners. The Lone Ranger came beneath the window in a couple of strides, intending to keep Delaney in his sight and when the chance came, force him to talk, but as he was passing the window the calm

of night was broken by a crash. Glass showered on the masked man's Stetson. The old man's shout of "thief, thief," was stopped by a woman's frenzied scream.

THE masked man froze in his tracks. His hands slapped leather and came up with two guns ready for action. From the jagged remains of the window an old duelling pistol was extended and orange flame lashed out to send a bullet singing on its way. Several horsemen were riding by at the moment and at the first shout they halted and wheeled in the saddle. "It's old Langford's place," cried one as they raced toward the house.

For the Lone Ranger, escape would have brought a dozen shots from the quick shooting men. A light came from the house now. There came the sound of other men approaching, eager for any excuse to give vent to their desire for trigger action.

For the moment, the safest place for the Lone Ranger was where he stood. To break from the shadow would be certain death unless he shot his way to freedom. The two who had come first on the scene were in the house, and above the excited cries of an elderly lady the voice of the white haired Langford rose in frantic explanations. "It's Martha's jewels. Her Star Sapphires."

"What about 'em," demanded one of the men.

"They were stolen."

"When?"

"Just now, I guess."

"Didja see the thief?"

More men were arriving as the news spread that John Langford had been robbed. Excited talk preceded the crowds that were racing through the dust of the road toward the house. At any moment the Lone Ranger might be spotted. He stood, uncertain as to what to do. Several of the lynching crowd had returned and it was not yet too late for the mob to wreak its vengeance, but with a different subject!

Langford was explaining in a loud voice.

"I woke up and saw the man in the house here. I don't know what wakened me. There was no sound that I know of. He was taking

things from Martha's table, I heard him open the jewel box."

"Those were the last of my jewels," bewailed a woman.

"They were all we had left of the finery we once had," went on Langford. "I got this old gun and called on the intruder, but he ran. He jumped right through that window and I fired a shot after him, but he must have gotten away."

"Pure falsehoods," thought the Lone Ranger. "If a falsehood can be pure." But the men believed the story. There was talk of starting another search. Now the Lone Ranger had to make a split second decision. A new arrival with a shrewder power of observa-



The first man he struck was bowled over by the fury of his hammering shoulder.

tion than the others, looked down the side of the house, studied it a moment, and then came forward to investigate further.

The window was a slight bay, and the masked man pressed even closer than before against the house, but the narrow shadow of the window would not hide the man completely. The approaching man stopped in his tracks and suddenly yelled at the top of his voice.

"Here's the thief."

MEN raced toward the Lone Ranger. To shoot his way out would mean possible loss of life to these men. That way could never be considered. Instead, he blasted shots from both his guns over the heads of the approaching men, then before they could bring their own guns to bear he charged.

Straight at the men he ran, head down, feet pounding to give more power to his attack. The first man he struck was bowled over by the fury of his hammering shoulder. His right hand swung the gun it held to crack against the next man's head. Guns barked but in that struggling mass no shot could be fired at the masked man. Rough hands clawed at his shirt and neck. Like a huge dog, he shook them off.

"Damned if it ain't the masked man," cried one of the group, and the fury of the fight increased with the determination of the men to hold this man who had previously eluded them. With his back to the wall, the Lone Ranger struggled against the overwhelming odds.

He swung and felt his fist con-

nect with a hard jaw. The man teetered from the force of the blow, and would have fallen, but the masked man caught him. Strong arms raised the struggling, squirming figure high, then threw it toward the others.

In that split second of confusion he saw a slim hope and swung to his right, running madly toward the front of the house where half a dozen horses waited for their owners.

Behind him, guns barked, but the shots were wild. Straight for the nearest of the horses he ran. His hands touched a mustang's rump and he leaped into the air with legs forked, to land in a saddle. The nervous beast was off like an arrow, unused to such wild antics by a rider.

Bullets whizzed close, as the Lone Ranger crouched low over the saddle's pommel. He raced madly through the heart of the community, running a gauntlet of shots from both sides. He felt one slug tug at his hat, another brushed the back of his neck, so close he felt the wind of its passing. Then he was clear.

For the time at least, he was still a free man, more eagerly wanted than before, more certain to be captured if he remained long in Snake Corners. As he raced away he realized that instead of helping Dave, he had made them more sure than ever that he was a crook. Besides, he, himself, was now accused of stealing Star Sapphires from an old man, and he still had not talked to Steve Delaney.

STRAIGHT out from town the masked man went and then, while the wiry little mustang was in full flight, he leaped from the saddle and even while in mid-air, his hand fell with a resounding whack on the back of the high strung animal. While the horse continued on, the masked man struck the ground, and rolled.

The force of his landing, at high speed, knocked the wind out of him and for a moment he was powerless to move. He gasped in huge breaths of air, then carefully tested aching limbs. He was badly bruised. The grass was cool against his tortured face and never had any bed or blanket roll seemed more welcome than this hard packed ground. But he could not stay here.

In a few moments the town would be turned upside down to locate him. Men would spread out once again to search for the masked man who had so baffled them. Silver, hidden in the arroyo would most certainly be found, and held as the horse of the masked mystery man. Perhaps used to bait a clever trap. He must get back to Silver.

Painfully he dragged himself to his feet. His guns were still in place, and even these had bruised him when he rolled on them. His lips were tense and grim as he took a few steps in the general direction of the arroyo.

The Lone Ranger couldn't have told how he reached the arroyo where his horse was tied. It seemed an endless trip on foot, but it was only a matter of a few moments. He sensed that men were

clattering about the town, making ready to start a systematic search for him. He knew that soon the riderless mustang would be found and his ruse understood. Then the search would be kept nearer to the town itself. Wise Silver, trained in the ways of his master, made no sound of greeting at the masked man's approach. No hoof clump or soft whinny came from the arroyo.

For a few moments the Lone Ranger fondly stroked the silky white neck of the beautiful stallion. Then, pulling a stub of a pencil and a scrap of paper from his vest, he hurriedly scribbled a note. Having tucked the message underneath the saddle, a method



of communication the masked man and Tonto had previously arranged, he loosed the reins from the mesquite.

With a whispered command of, "Go back, Silver. Back to Tonto,"

the Lone Ranger sent the stallion on his way.

For a moment the Lone Ranger stood, then he felt his legs growing too weak to support him longer. He slumped to the ground, his senses whirling. On all sides were men whom Fate had made more dangerous than enemies. Men who would shoot to kill if they found



him, but men *he* dared not kill, not even in self defense.

A confusion of thoughts raced through his mind, Steve Delaney and the jewels; Old Langford and his lies; Dave Walters, a murder, a theft, his own perilous position. He must locate the gambler, he must face John Langford and ram his lies down his throat, he must do many things, before he left Snake Corners.

But human endurance had been taxed beyond the limit. Even this strong man could stand no more. He felt no further pain from the countless bruises. He heard no more clamor from the town. There in the arroyo his eyes closed and

while danger stalked on every side, the Lone Ranger slept.

CHAPTER V

Higgy

HOW long he remained unconscious, the Lone Ranger had no idea. When he opened his eyes, he found himself on his back looking upward toward the stars. He saw the moon and the change in position helped him to conclude that about an hour had passed since he had fallen exhausted.

Behind him, and beyond the row of buildings he heard men and horses still moving about. Forcing himself to action, he crept up the sloping side of the arroyo until he could peer over the edge toward the dark backs of the buildings. The pain of cramped muscles lessened as he moved. The hour of rest had given him new strength to carry on his quest for Steve Delaney.

While he watched, he saw two men approaching on foot. "Odd," he thought, "that they would move along the rear of the buildings instead of in the road in front." They were coming nearer and he made out a tall gangling form and a short stocky man who almost waddled as he walked. The short man's arms hung low, like those of a gorilla and the heavy slouching shoulders, small head, and lean hips added further to the ape-like appearance. One of the men was speaking.

"Fo' bits, is fo' bits, an' I'll shore 'nuff show yuh the back o'

the place where Delaney lives, but if you'd make it six bits, ah'd show you the front, an' glad to do it."

"Don't want to see the front," the shorter of the two growled. "I want to see the back. What's more, I'll give you a dollar if you manage to forget that a stranger in town asked you fer information."

"Stranger, I already fo'got I ever seen yuh."

They were abreast of the Lone Ranger now and paused within twenty yards of him. The lean man spoke again. "Perduce that cartwheel mister, we'uns has arrived."

"Where's the place?"

"Straight ahead it is."

"What're you tryin' to pull on me? That's a saloon."

"An' a saloon is where Steve Delaney makes his home. Fact is, he owns said saloon, but that ain't gen'rally knowed. He won it from Jeb Larkspur in a poker game, but Jeb keeps on runnin' it an' Steve takes in the profits. He has a room in the back of it, where you see them two dark winders, an' that's what he calls home."

"Another man hunting Steve Delaney," muttered the masked man between set lips. "Things seem to revolve around the gambler."

The ape-like man was digging in a pocket. His hand came up with a silver dollar which he passed to his guide. The skinny man sunk his teeth down on it, then grunted satisfaction and stuffed it in his pocket.

"Now remember," the other

said, "You ain't seen no strangers in town, you ain't been asked no questions, an' you don't know a thing."

"I'll remember," promised the man as he strolled back the way he'd come.

APPARENTLY Delaney was still enjoying the night life of Snake Corners, perhaps in the saloon itself. The Lone Ranger was moving on all fours toward the building, keeping a careful watch on the stocky figure which was barely visible in the shadows. Then a light flashed in a window. It brought out the outline of the man in bold relief and showed him moving toward a small rear door, probably planned by Steve as a hasty means of exit if the need arose. Inside the room, the Lone Ranger saw Steve Delaney, the man he wanted to speak to, but he was too late. The broadshouldered man had gotten there first.

Delaney wheeled at the sound of the door and his hand flashed toward his gun, but he was already staring into the barrel of a weapon in the hands of the intruder. "Higgy," gasped the gambler. For a moment his suave manner dropped from him but his recovery was instantaneous.

"What the Hell are you doing here?"

"There's a little oversight on your part, Steve. Maybe you forgot that I had somethin' comin' to me. I thought maybe I oughtta come an' collect an' save you the trouble of takin' a trip to Coon Hollow."

"I've been busy, I was going there this week."

"You lie," spat the man called Higgy.

"Don't call me a liar," the gambler flared.

"Leave your hand off that gun, an' remember the man that holds the gun can call what he damn well pleases. I said you lied. You thought maybe I'd be scared off by the kid comin' out this way, but not me. I don't scare easy."

"Put down that gun you crazy fool, it might hurt someone. You'd have sold out for a tenth of what you've got if it hadn't been for me. I showed you how to get rich."

"Yeh, then tried to get me to gamble my share away to you. Good thing I ain't a gamblin' man, eh Steve?"

Delaney took a new tack.

"Haven't you heard of the excitement around town?"

"Ain't heard nothing. I ain't heard from you either, an' that's why I moved into town tonight. I thought this would be the best time to get you. It's past the usual shuttin' down hour ain't it?"

"I told you, the town's alive tonight. There's been a jail break and a robbery."

"Yeh?"

"And I've been one of the victims."

"What's that?"

"A masked man came to town, some friend of the kid, an' he got the kid out of jail. Then while the men that were set to lynch Walters were out hunting him, this masked man came back and robbed some people. He robbed

old Langford and he robbed me."

Higgy eyed the gambler suspiciously.

"An' I suppose Langford can't pay you any more an' I suppose you'll tell me next that all my share of what yuh had was stole along with yours!"

"That's the truth."

"Delaney, you're a smooth liar, that's how you made a success at cards an' other kinds of gamblin'. You can tell the biggest lies a man ever told, an never bat an eye, but it don't go down with me. Where the Hell's my money?" He jabbed the gun meaningly and advanced a pace closer to the slim dark man.

THE gambler had faced men with guns before. He knew that his cold poise had stopped many a trigger finger that would have been pulled if he'd shown fear or panic. Disregarding the gun to light a tailor-made cigarette, he proceeded to remove his coat, hat and fancy vest and hang them carefully over the back of a near-by chair. He drew deep on the smoke and exhaled toward the ceiling.

"Have you finished?" he asked.

"I ain't got started yet. I'm here to get my money an' I'll have it or I'll take it outen yer hide!"

"I'm sorry Higgy, but if taking anything out of my hide will give you any satisfaction, you may as well begin. I can't give you the money."

Higgy stood uncertain. "I'm broke," he said. "Maybe you could give me a little on account, an' then send the rest some other time."

"I can't give you a dime to-night. I'm cleaned out. Go on and shoot and you'll never get it. I admit the debt to you, and I'll pay you when I can. Now what more can a man do than that?"

"Who is this masked man? How much did he git?"

"I don't know the answer to either question. The men are scouring the town for him right now. He's hidden in one of the buildings, and he'll probably be found by morning."

"Then maybe you'll get back yer money?"

"Maybe."

"How'd they know that he's in town?"

"He got away on Sam Yaeger's mustang, and when the mustang got outside of town he jumped off and the horse kept going. They found the horse without a rider. As soon as it is morning they'll be able to find the trail of the man. It's too dark to do anything now."

"I could maybe wait till mornin'."

"It's risky, what if Langford sees you here?"

"I'll keep outen his sight. He don't leave the house much does he?"

"Seldom." The gambler was more confident than ever now. He had successfully outbluffed the slow witted man by sticking to the story that he told. Steve was willing to help Higgy with suggestions.

"You might get a room at the hotel and stay there until this thief is found."

The man was still not entirely

convinced. He lowered the gun slightly, narrowed his eyes, and asked, "How do you know this man's hid in someone's house?"

"I don't, but he can't be far from town. He can't get away from town without being seen, anyway. If he's in one of the buildings, he'll be rooted out and



if he's hiding in the arroyo, or on the plains, he'll be tracked down in the morning."

He dropped his half smoked cigarette to the floor and his polished boot ground out the fire.

HIGGY shifted his weight un- easily from one foot to the other. Somehow, he felt, he had lost control of the situation. His dull mind was trying to frame another question.

"How about the kid?" asked Higgy.

"He'll be found and brought back to swing for the murder of Ma Prindle."

"I—I wish't that was over an' done with."

"Well stop wishing, and put away your gun. I'm tired, and I'm going to bed. If you don't like the way I run things, just say so and the partnership is finished." The gambler rose to his feet and began undoing his fancy tie. "As a matter of fact," he went on, "I'm getting tired of you anyway."

"Aw, now Steve," pleaded the other, "I didn't mean no harm comin' here, I only thought that you was double crossin' me, that's all."

"And you come sneaking in the back door with your gun ready, calling for a showdown. Why you damned idiot, I should tell you to go to Hell with your schemes."

"Listen Steve, as long as you ain't tried to double cross me, it's all right. Don't hold no hard feelin's. What was I tuh think when I didn't hear from you? I didn't know about this robbery."

"Shut up." Delaney was acting indignant and his dark eyes flashed. "I told you to stay away from Snake Corners. As long as we're in the game together you'll do what I say."

"I will, honest I will. I just was—"

"I suppose you were fool enough to bring that letter with you?"

"Gosh no, if I lost that, it'd mean—"

"Where is it?" Steve was barking at Higgy when he spoke. He had gained complete control of the situation and he was quick to realize it.

"It's in a safe enough place. It

won't get lost, an' yuh needn't worry about it."

There was one thing that Higgy held on to with all the determination he possessed. It was a letter upon which an unusually well paying enterprise had been based. Steve was far too canny to arouse the man's suspicions by a direct request that the letter be turned over to him.

"Stay in the hotel until I see you again, and don't make any more crazy moves. Now get out of here."

Higgy nodded dumbly and put away his gun. He had a profound respect for this master mind and took pride in his alliance with the gambler even though that alliance must be a secret one. He held out his hand, but Steve disregarded it. Muttering a confused goodnight, the stocky man left.

AS THE door closed on his visitor, Steve moved to the window and drew down the shade. Making certain that no openings between the shade and the casement were left, he stooped to the floor and pulled up a section of the pine.

It revealed an opening some two feet long and six inches wide. His arm reached in to the elbow and when it came out, he had a calfskin sack. Slim fingers tugged the knot loose and jewelry spilled in the palm of the gambler's hand.

Diamond earrings reflected shimmering lights, a lodge emblem with a blood red ruby, an emerald ring, and several other trinkets studded with precious stones. He gloated over them a moment,

then reached for the coat he had worn that night.

From an inside pocket he extracted a pendant brilliant with star sapphires. He added this to the rest and dumped all the jewelry back in the sack. A quick twist and the rawhide string was tied. Then without warning, the door burst in and slammed back against the wall.

Delaney stared! For the second time that night he faced guns. Two guns this time, and a voice that had a sharp commanding ring to it that left no room for argument. "A move and I'll shoot."

Steve could only stare. It was the masked man who was at that very moment being hunted. The steely eyes were cold as they stared through the openings of the mask. The mouth was hard and firm, and the guns were held steady.

"It looks as though I'd interrupted you," said the Lone Ranger evenly.

Steve tried to speak, and for the first time in his life, words failed him. For the moment, the calf-skin bag in his hand was forgotten. The opening in the floor gaped wide.

The masked man holstered one gun and used his hand to close and bar the door behind him. While he

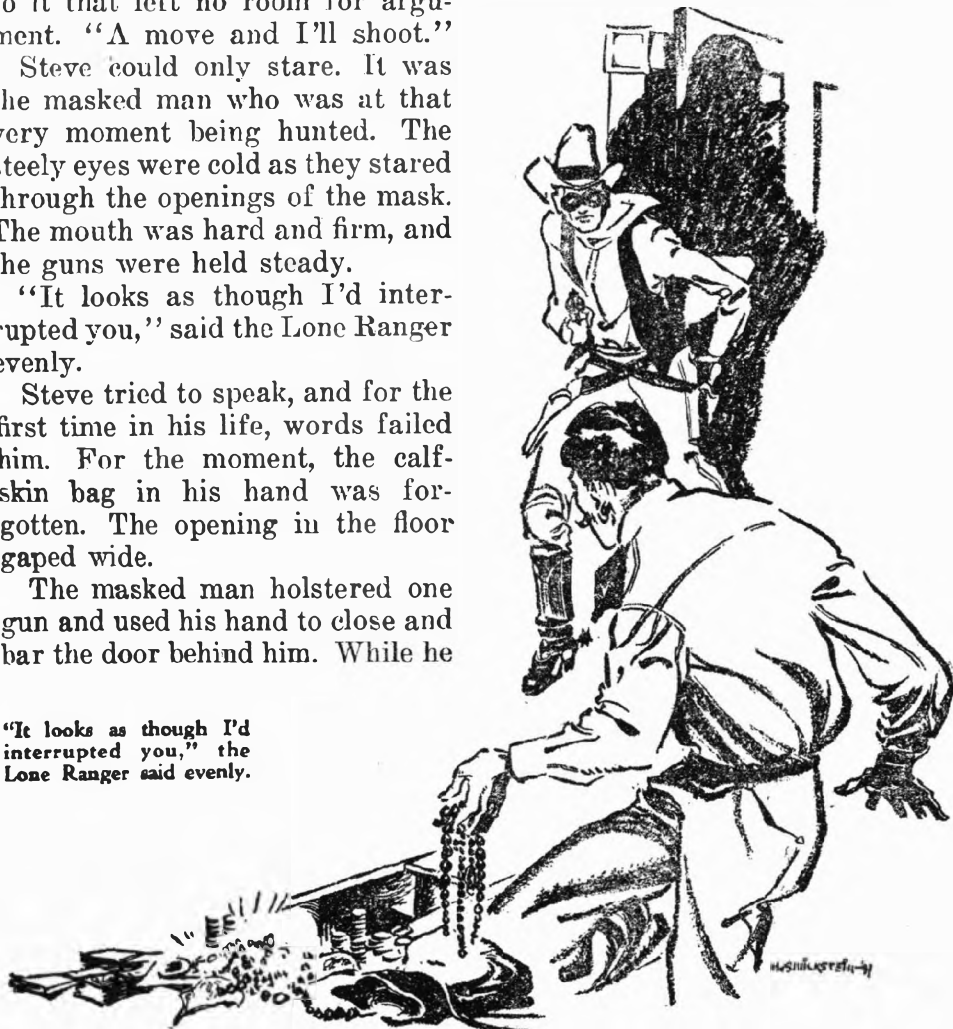
fumbled to fasten the entrance by touch, his voice went on. "Delaney, I came here for a showdown. I heard a lot before I came in."

The door was fastened now, and Delaney's lips were drawn back to expose his teeth like a wolf brought to bay.

"You won't live till daylight," he snarled. "The whole town's hunting you. You'd better take what time you have to get away."

"I don't intend to get away. I'm staying here."

The gambler was shifting the



"It looks as though I'd interrupted you," the Lone Ranger said evenly.

bag to his right hand. His eyes measured the distance to his gun, a good six feet from where he stood, to the dresser where the weapon lay.

"Don't be foolish enough to try for it, Steve," the cold voice said. "Sit down in the chair there."

WITH a curse the gambler swung his arm. The only thing at hand, the calfskin bag whirled through the air toward the masked man's head, but the throw was wide. It smacked the wall then dropped to the floor.

Delaney hoped, in that moment, to disconcert the man enough so he might dive for his gun and shoot, but the hand that held the gun which covered him had barely moved and the eyes behind the mask had not once left Steve Delaney. Always a gambler, Steve had made his play, and losing, he paused to take stock of the situation.

"All right," he said. "You've got the drop on me, what do you want?"

"More than you will tell me. I want to know who killed Ma Prindle."

"How do I know?"

"You identified Dave Walters as her murderer."

"Then he's the murderer."

"That isn't true. I want to know who the murderer really is, and I want to know why an old man gave you jewelry. I also want to know what Higgy and you were doing."

"What are you going to do?"

There was a little waver in the gambler's voice. That steady stare unnerved him. This was no ordi-

nary man who faced him. There was a steadiness and grimness in the masked man's manner that was greater than his own cold poise under every condition.

"Sit down in that chair."

It was a command that was emphasized by a push on the chest. Steve sat down, hard. One hand of the Lone Ranger was dragging a sheet from the bed. He deftly twisted it into a cord and wrapped it around the gambler and the chair. In short order the gambler's legs were tied to the chairlegs, and the job of binding was complete.

"This town is getting hot for me, Delaney, that's why I've decided to make this room my home for a time. You are expected to sleep until tomorrow evening. Unless you decide to leave here, no one will look for you. I think a safer place than this could not be found. I'll have several hours to get ready for a call on your friend, Langford! And I want to see Higgy too."

STEVE was mouthing vile curses at this masked intruder who made himself so completely at home. While he watched, the Lone Ranger examined the calfskin bag and its contents. He returned it to its hiding place, for the time being, and replaced the floor board.

Then he sat and studied the face of the gambler. For fully five minutes he sat staring, studying, and muttering to himself. From a shirt pocket, came a small case which held a sort of spirit gum, and little gobs of colored stuff.

"Moustache," the masked man muttered, "about the same size,—

clothes will be all right . . . hair can be changed,—I'll need the moustache."

Steve Delaney was genuinely scared. This was something different than he'd ever faced. The unhurried manner of the man who hadn't bothered to pocket the jewelry and the cool way in which he was being studied like some interesting specimen on a laboratory bench, confused him. He was watching every move the masked man made.

The lamp was moved close to the mirror and a chair placed conveniently. Then the masked man opened a clasp knife and disregarding the struggling, squirming, pleading of the gambler, he cut ruthlessly at the long black hair. He returned to the chair with a handful of long locks which he placed beside the packet of coloring matter. His hands were about to undo the mask, when another thought came to the masked man's mind. He rose once more and moved to Delaney.

"I think I'll gag and blindfold you," he said.

The gambler clamped his jaws to try and keep the knotted pillow slip from being shoved into his mouth as a gag, but the lean strong fingers of the Lone Ranger brought pressure to bear on Delaney's jawbones and his mouth came open.

A strip torn from a blanket and doubled, served as an effective blindfold.

Now the masked man made ready for a new step in the game. He sat before the mirror, with certain materials spread out on a table. Moving the lamp a trifle to

get a better reflection of light, the Lone Ranger removed his hat, shirt and mask. Deft fingers dipped into the small box of coloring materials, prepared from roots and berries. As he worked, he practiced facial expressions that were characteristic of the gambler.

Deep lines appeared from each side of his nose to the sides of his mouth. A crease showed in his forehead, between the eyebrows. He worked swiftly and soon he was ready for the moustache. A bit of spirit gum, held hair, cut from Steve's own head, in place, and a sharp bladed knife served to cut the false moustache the proper length.

When his face was a duplicate of that of Steve Delaney, he began to make the change of clothing. Soon the Lone Ranger was ready. Now he would investigate the cache beneath the floor and see what secrets it would give up. Then perhaps, for a short time, the Lone Ranger could rest.

CHAPTER VI

Behind Closed Doors

WHEN the Lone Ranger sent Silver back to Tonto, who was hiding with Dave Walters on Stony Butte, the intelligent stallion made his way unerringly toward the hiding place. Thus during the night, Silver joined the little group at the base of the big rock.

Tonto had awakened at the first sound of approaching hoofs. Seeing the horse riderless, he looked for the message that had been

placed beneath the saddle. Having read it, Tonto made ready to follow out the Lone Ranger's instructions.

First saddling his own horse, "White Feller," he roused Dave, telling him that the Lone Ranger had advised taking him to a safer hiding place and to bring both horses into Snake Corners. The Lone Ranger knew that little attention would be paid to a lone Indian riding one horse and leading another. The fine white coat of Silver would be covered with mud, so that he would not easily be recognized.

As Tonto and Dave rode away from Stony Butte, the sun was trying hard to penetrate the thick, grey mist that hung over the region, during the early hours of dawn. They made slow progress, as Tonto picked his way carefully to avoid leaving a trail. The Indian knew that if Dave Walters could be kept hidden for a while the Lone Ranger would soon be able to prove the boy innocent of the murder with which he was charged.

"D'you think he'll have me cleared today?" asked Dave Walters after a long pause.

"Not know-um. Maybe so. You keep-um hid until we come for you."

"Will it take long?"

Tonto grunted in a way that might mean anything. They were in Snake River Canyon now, with sheer walls on both sides, broken by innumerable caves. The fact that their entrance to the canyon had been made in a roundabout way would prevent the chance of searchers here. It would have

been decided far back that no fugitives had entered the canyon because there were no trail marks.

The Indian was watching the cliff never taking his eyes off the wall. Suddenly Tonto changed the course and headed directly toward the wall. Dave looked, but saw no sign of opening there.

It was not until they were within ten yards of the cliff that he saw a rock that blended so well with the cliff itself, that the wall's face seemed unbroken. Behind the rock, however, there was a cave. An opening large enough for a man to enter on horseback.

TONTO halted, and without command, Silver stopped beside the white horse of the Indian. "You get-um down here," suggested Tonto. Dave swung from the saddle.

"What'm I to do?"

"You stay here. Bimeby maybe, we come back for you."

"Ain't there somethin' I can do to help?"

"You stay here."

Tonto was inside the cave in a moment, and in another he returned to the Lone Ranger's horse with his arms loaded with a blanket, a tarpaulin, a slicker, and a couple of empty cases.

Dave looked inside the cave and saw that it was something of a cache for supplies, one of several scattered throughout the region, where the masked mystery rider and his Indian companion might go to replenish provisions or remain in hiding.

The white lad watched Tonto throw a diamond hitch to hold the

cases in place on Silver's back. The blanket, slicker and tarpaulin came next and were fixed carefully, but with every appearance of carelessness. When he finished his work, Tonto stood back and examined the powerful Silver.

The light, but cumbersome load might have been the entire worldly goods of a redskin who was moving to new hunting grounds. There might be some who would wonder at an Indian using such a fine stallion as a pack mule, but men were loath to question the doings of a redskin. Tonto would go through Snake Corners unmolested. He was sure of it.

With a few instructions to Dave Walters, the Indian leaped to the back of his own horse and reached for the reins of Silver. He was ready for the long trip into town. He of course knew nothing of the complications that had come, since the masked man's decision to corner Steve Delaney and force the truth from him. Dave watched until the two white horses disappeared around a bend in the canyon, then he sat down in the mouth of the cave to wait.

The sun was burning from a copper colored sky when Tonto rode into Snake Corners. Twice he had been questioned by searching parties, and each time had shaken his head dumbly to their questions.

From one he learned that the trail had already been followed beyond Stony Butte and there it had been lost. From another he heard that the canyon had been discarded as a possible hiding place, due to the lack of footprints of the

fugitives in the soft sand of the canyon's bottom.

THE town was sleepy that morning. Men had stayed up until all hours the night before. First they waited for the lynching that failed to materialize, and then they waited for the return of those who went to hunt for the mysterious masked man. And while they waited, most of them drank. The saloons, Tonto noticed as he moved through the dusty road, were deserted.

Apparently without premeditation, the Indian paused at a place where a battered, bullet-marked sign announced that this was the



Royale Saloon. Tonto slid to the ground and tied both horses to the hitchrack, then stepped inside and looked about. The place was dim and musty after the bright out of doors.

One man slid a rag across the polished bar and the only other oc-

cupant sprawled at a table in a dejected manner. He wore no coat and his vest hung open, one side weighted down with a big deputy's badge.

His elbow was resting on the table and his hand furnished a pillow for his ear. He barely noticed Tonto sliding into a chair. The bartender was speaking.

"Yuh shore put on a swell act last night, Eph. If I live tuh be a hundred I won't fergit the way yuh slid along the floor showin' how yuh dove at that masked man when he made his git-away."

"Humph," grunted Eph Summers.

"Yes siree, that was a hum-dinger," went on the man behind the bar. "I bet there was a hundred drinks bought fer yuh after that act."

"I feel like I drank ten times that many. Was Steve Delaney sore at me in partickler fer lettin' the murderin' kid escape?"

"Can't say what's made him sore, but he's sure mad as Hell about somethin' this mornin'."

"Me?"

"Dunno, but I reckon not. Last I see of him was when he left here las' night jest before the masked man stuck up old man Langford. He knowed about you lettin' the kid git loose then, an' he warn't mad. Fact is he seemed sort of chipper. He didn't come in till arter I'd gone home. He lives in back yuh know."

"I know. What's he said this mornin'?"

"That's jest it, he ain't hardly spoke. I figgered him to sleep till mid-afternoon like he most allus

does, but he sort o' surprised me. He opened the door a crack an' called at me tuh git some food an' set it out on a table. I done so, an' in a few minutes he comes out an' instead o' sittin' down an' eatin', he picks up the plates an' goes back tuh his own quarters. I ast him, was he feelin' low an' he growled somethin' at me tuh mind my own business."

"Maybe he lost some money."

Eph was only mildly interested.

"Shucks, he wins an' loses all the time, an' that don't change him none. Can't be that. Must be he's got a touch o' temperment or somethin' of the sort."

"Ain't you afeared he'll hear you talkin' of him?" Eph asked.

"Naw, he's got special heavy doors between this room an' his, so's if he aims to git to bed early, or sleep late, the noise in here won't bother him none." Then for the first time, the bartender paid attention to the Indian. "You got any cash money?" he asked.

TONTO grunted that he had and ordered food, paying for it in advance before the barman would begin to prepare the sandwich that was asked for.

"Can't git no fire-water hyar," the barman explained.

"Not want-um. You fetch-um milk."

The barman stared and Eph opened his eyes wide for the first time since the evening before.

"M—milk?" repeated the white-aproned man. "Y-yuh ast fer milk?"

Tonto eyed him coldly, then nodded. The bartender scratched

the fringe of hair behind his ear as he moved back toward his bar. "Wal, I'll be damned," he muttered.

Two other men entered the Royale and leaned elbows on the bar. Both were keen eyed men of middle age who wore their guns strapped low. One had a star pinned to his vest and his gun had at least a dozen notches filed into the handle.

"Who owns them stallions outside?" asked Sheriff Dixon.

The bartender stuck a thumb in the general direction of Tonto. The Indian nodded slowly, questioningly. "What's matter?"

Dixon moved toward the table and his finger rasped as he scraped his bristling chin. "Pretty fine horses for an Indian," he commented. "Where'd you steal 'em?"

Tonto shook his head. He had found it best at times to register incomprehension.

"Where you from," fired the Sheriff.

Tonto pointed toward the door of the saloon. "Come from North."

"Um-m," mused the Sheriff. "Where you headin'?"

The Indian's finger pointed toward the rear of the big dark room. "Head-um toward south."

"Might be a good idea to have a look at what you're totin'," said the lawman. "Eph," he called. "Go out an' have a look-see at the redskin's duffle."

Tonto's face showed no sign of the uncertainty that was within him. The cargo would be found a mere disguise for an expensive saddle of hand tooled leather with sterling silver trimmings. This

might bring, would unquestionably bring a further investigation that might—

The door to Delaney's private room swung open and a tall man with dark hair and black moustache came out. "I've been waiting for you Dixon," he said.

"Mornin' Mister Delaney," greeted the man with the star.

"Did you find Dave Walters yet?"

THERE was something about that voice that sounded queer to Tonto. This man was certainly the gambler, yet there was a depth and a crispness to the voice that was unusual. Any doubts the Indian might have as to the man's identity were dispelled when he heard the response to the Sheriff's negative reply. Somehow, Delaney had learned of the Lone Ranger's secret cave.

"I'll tell you where to hunt for the kid. I don't know why I have to do everything in this confounded town."

"Yuh don't have to do everything, Mister Delaney, we're all tryin' to do our part." The Sheriff was almost apologetic to the gambling man.

"I have to find the killer for you, so you can let a masked man break him out of jail, then I have to tell you where to go to find the kid again. How far into Snake River Canyon did your men go?"

"Went far enough to be sure he didn't go there."

"Then you didn't go far enough. There's another entrance to that canyon. Five miles beyond Stony Butte. Get men down there and

then start looking. Just beyond a sharp left bend in the canyon—'

"I know that bend," burst in Eph Summers.

"Just beyond there on the left hand side, you'll find a cave. You'll have to look sharp to find it, but it's there. What's more, the kid is there, and be sure that you bring him back alive."

There was murder in the glare that Tonto gave the gambler. Had his masked friend been captured and forced by torture to reveal this information? No, that could not be. No physical pain or suffering would ever bring unwilling words from the Lone Ranger's lips. How then had Steve learned this?

Tonto's usually orderly mind was in confusion. He sat quiet, unmoving, but vowing vengeance to himself. The Sheriff was gone, Eph and the other man with him. Inspection of the stallions' load had been forgotten. They were astride their own horses, and their voices shouting for companion riders were fading out in the distance.

"How'd you know that, Boss?" asked the barman.

"None of your business how I know things." The voice was surly, annoyed at the question. "Hey you, redskin."

TONTO lifted his eyes to the handsome dark face.

"Do you want to earn a dollar?" asked the gambler.

Tonto was about to shake his head. He had many things to consider, and there seemed much that he should do. He only wanted to be left alone for a moment. While

he watched the gambler's face, he saw him turn so his back was toward the barman who had returned to the making of a sandwich.

The lips mouthed certain words, silently.

Tonto almost gave a visible start. He looked more intently, his stare was concentrated on the thin lips. Again they formed the words, an Indian expression that the Lone Ranger frequently used in addressing Tonto. "*Kee-Moh-Sah-Bey.*"

Tonto rose from his seat.

"Well," barked the man in the doorway, "do you want to earn some cash or not?"

The Indian nodded and shuffled toward him.

"Tonto," the Lone Ranger whispered when his friend was close, "Take both horses around to the stable and leave them there. Unsaddle them, we'll be here for some time. When you finish, go in the back door of this place. I've left it unlocked. The real Steve Delaney is in there, tied and gagged." Tonto grunted without asking the questions that were in his mind.

"What for you send-um sheriff an' men to Canyon?"

"Because I want Dave back in town. By the time he gets here I'll have proof that he's not Mrs. Prindle's murderer. In fact I have that proof right now, but there's a lot of other things that must be straightened out. No, Tonto," the Lone Ranger noticed a worry lining his friend's face. "They'll not hang the boy. The Sheriff doesn't like lynch mobs, but last night things got out of his control."

"Him think-um you Delaney?"

"I wasn't sure that my disguise would stand his inspection. Lucky thing this room is sort of dingy. Now go and tend to the horses and then meet me in the room in back. There's a man in the hotel across the street, who Dave Walters might know. His name is 'Higgy'."

Tonto recalled the peculiar name. It was a man named Higgy who had been with Dave Walters when he was injured. Higgy was the name of the man to whom he'd given a note that amounted to a confession of grand larceny, for delivery to his father.

"Hurry back, Tonto," said the Lone Ranger softly. As the Indian left the Royale, the Lone Ranger eyed the bartender at the far end of the polished mahogany, working over glasses with a towel. The man held a tumbler to the light and examined it carefully, then wiped off a bit of lint and stacked the glass with its mates.

So far, not even the bartender had spotted the substitution of the Lone Ranger, for Steve Delaney, but it was a dangerous role to play. He knew so little of the gambler. At any moment, some friend might stroll in and see through the disguise. The slightest gesture might mean betrayal.

If this came the Lone Ranger already had his plans completed. He touched the small expensive gun of the gambler, then felt one of his own familiar six-guns tucked beneath the shirt he wore. He would take no chances in Snake Corners.

THE dusty thoroughfare through town was still practically deserted a half hour later when Tonto



left the gambler's room and trudged through the saloon and across to the opposite side of the street.

Men who had come from farms and ranches the night before, had returned to their various homes and townspeople were for the most part sleeping later after the night's spree. The few who had been about, had gone with the Sheriff to Snake River Canyon and Tonto had the town almost to himself.

The two story hotel, diagonally across from the Royale had grown old with neglect. The single coat of paint was almost off and the wood was cracked and warped in many places. The builder had long since found his investment a poor one and sold out for just what Pete Loomis had wanted to pay.

Pete had moved his wife into the hotel several years before. He showed her the kitchen in a lean-to

in the rear and parked his skinny figure behind the desk. Pete was quite contented there. The few people who came to stay overnight paid enough for the Loomis folks to eat on, and caused little worry or trouble.

Tonto took the two dusty steps in a single stride and crossed the porch. The rowel scarred railing had been broken in one place from a playful scuffle before Pete took the chairs off the veranda. The only two chairs that remained bore signs which said, "Keep off. Reserved for paying guests."

Mag Loomis was sweeping the floor when Tonto moved through the open door. Each morning she stirred up the dust to let it settle in new places on the threadbare carpet, and felt that she'd accomplished much. Pete looked at the Indian with bleary eyes when he moved to the desk. "Injuns pay cash in advance," he said.

"Me got-um business with feller here."

Pete's eyes came wide. "Business?"

The brawny woman stopped her sweeping and pushed forward.

"Any business you got, you can deal with me," she said. "I'll take that cash in advance at the same time. Let that good fer nothin' maverick get money an' he'll blow it over the bar at the Royale."

"Aw now Mag," the man began.

"Shut up," Mag snapped at her husband. Then addressing Tonto, "What d'you want?"

"Me want-um to see feller who come here before daylight. Call-um Higgy."

"Drat his hide," said Pete,

"He's the one that got me outta my bed tuh git a room fer him. He ain't got no conscience a-tall. Whyn't he wait on the piazzzy or somewhere's till gittin'-up time?"

Mag eyed the Indian suspiciously. "What d'you want to see him for?"

"Got business with him?" asked Pete.

"Feller over there send-um message for him. Tell-um me come plenty quick. Fetch-um message. Me go to see him now."

Pete looked through the open door where Tonto pointed and saw a tall dark moustached man leaning against the entrance to the Royale. "Jeehosopha, Mag, he means Steve Delaney."

"Delaney!" echoed the heavy woman. "Can't he wait till our payin' guest wakes up? Tain't hardly past breakfast time yet. Fact is we ain't even had ours yet."

"Me see-um him pronto! Now!" Tonto insisted.

"Guess we better let him go upstairs if Steve says so, Mag. He ain't a man that'll take offendin'. I better tell the Injun where this crittur's sleepin'."

"Do whatever yuh darn please," replied Mag and once more the dust rose from the floor as she returned to her sweeping.

"It's room number seven, Injun. Right up them stairs an' the last room on the left hand side. Lucky number, seven, eh?"

He chuckled at what he considered a bright remark, and then asked hopefully, "C'n you find it fer yerself?" Tonto nodded that he could and started up the stairs.

TONTO was playing a role assigned him by the Lone Ranger. He had been given explicit and careful instructions. The stairs were uncarpeted but the moccasined feet of the Indian made no sound. Pete didn't notice that he walked close to the wall, disdaining the bannister.

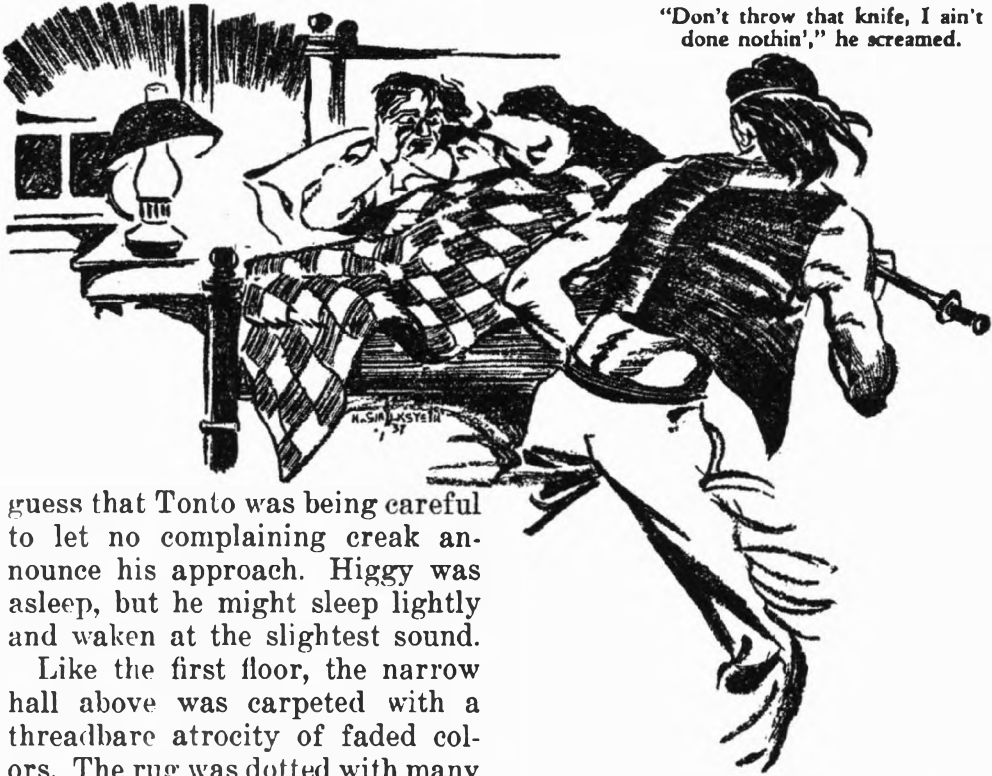
Even if he had, he would have thought little of it. He wouldn't

ber seven. "Lucky number," Tonto muttered, "But plenty unlucky for feller inside now."

He crouched, pressing an ear against the door and listened for a moment. From inside there came the sound of deep and wheezy breathing, slightly muffled. Then Tonto straightened and drew a knife from a belt around his waist.

He felt the six inch blade, and

"Don't throw that knife, I ain't done nothin'," he screamed.



guess that Tonto was being careful to let no complaining creak announce his approach. Higgy was asleep, but he might sleep lightly and waken at the slightest sound.

Like the first floor, the narrow hall above was carpeted with a threadbare atrocity of faded colors. The rug was dotted with many cigarette burns and the once gaudy pattern of flowers was only dimly visible now. There were half a dozen rooms on each side of the hall, some still showing the metal numbers, but from the others, the numerals had long since disappeared.

Making no more sound than a shadow, the Indian moved to the last door on the left, marked num-

tested the point on the ball of his thumb. His lips grew even more thin than usual and his stern face became more stern. He balanced the knife, gripping it with thumb and one finger by the pointed end.

Then he pressed on the door. It was unlocked, and opened inward. An inch at a time he moved it, so only the slightest of squeaks came from the rusty hinges. A fetid

wave of hot air struck him in the face. The stale atmosphere was reeking. The one small window to his right was closed and was so dirty that daylight could hardly penetrate.

Higgy was under a mound of quilt on the bed. Only the top of his head was visible and he moaned and wheezed with every rise and fall of the patchwork quilt that covered him. His boots were wide apart on the uncarpeted floor. His coat, vest and tie were tossed carelessly on the single chair. An empty holster and well filled cartridge belt were draped over the back of the chair. The gun was obviously where most men keep it when there is a likelihood of instant need. Beneath the pillow.

TONTO surveyed the room. Moving forward a pace, he studied the oaken panel that formed the head of the bed. Mentally he marked a certain spot and gauged the distance carefully.

The man beneath the quilt groaned softly and turned his head a little beneath the covers.

Tonto glanced behind him, retreated a pace and looked down the corridor. Near the far end he saw the well of the stairs and the railing surrounding it. He heard Mag Loomis and her broom then returned to his original place. He was ready to carry out the orders of his friend, the Lone Ranger.

"You," he called.

Higgy stirred slightly and the bed creaked when he moved. Tonto repeated his call, slightly louder. The man gave a complaining groan and turned over.

"You wake-um up, quick."

Higgy's voice was thick when he spoke. "What the Hell—"

"Wake up. Look-um this way."

The big hands pushed down the quilt and Higgy's eyes blinked open. He opened his mouth to complain and then saw the Indian standing before him with a knife held poised to throw. His mouth stayed open, but no words came forth.

"Steve send-um me to get you. Me not like to kill man asleep."

Then the other screamed. "Don't throw that knife, I ain't done nothin'." He saw no hatred for him in the eyes of Tonto, merely a cool resolve to carry out instructions, perhaps to earn a few blood dollars. Higgy was terrified.

"Me sorry," grunted the Indian and his arm swung down hard. The knife flashed through the air, and a second scream was choked in Higgy's throat. Even before the knife struck the wood back of the bed, a foot above the white man's head, Tonto was on his way down the narrow corridor.

He reached the top step as another scream rang from behind. Higgy was out of bed with his gun in hand. Tonto didn't hesitate at the top of the stairs. He lunged forward and took the entire flight in a single leap.

"What the Hell," shouted Pete.

Tonto was racing for the door as the sound of Higgy running through the hall shook the building. "Stop that Injun," cried the man above. "He tried to kill me."

"Stop him Mag" howled Pete.

Mag threw the broom and it skidded across the floor, almost

tripping the Indian in full flight, but Tonto managed to avoid it and it slid past harmlessly as he slammed the door behind him!

HIGGY'S stockinged feet were thudding clumsily down the stairs. His gun jumped and roared in his hand and Pete ducked beneath the counter.

"Get that killer," howled the big man, "Where'd he go?" The gun blasted again and the bullet carried away the glass of the door.

"Stop the shootin' you damn fool!" screamed Mag. "Look out what you're doin'." Higgy was grabbing at the door and finally snatched it open. He stood there looking out but there was no sign of Tonto. The Indian had disappeared.

"He heaved a knife at me, an' most got me!" muttered the heavy Higgy, haltingly, panting from his exertions.

Mag was fuming. "The Hell with that Indian an' what he tried to do to you, what about that door? Who's to pay fer it? That's what I want to know."

Higgy was somewhat stupefied, still mentally dulled with sleep, and his stockinged feet moved uneasily.

Pete's head appeared from behind the desk. "Wha—what'd you want to kill the redskin for?" he asked.

"He slung a knife. Jest missed my head by so much!" Higgy's thumb and index finger were held an inch apart. "Steve Delaney sent him to kill me!"

"Doggone, that don't sound like Steve Delaney."

"The Hell it don't. I know that gambler better'n you do," insisted the heavy man.

"Steve's a fine gent," blurted Mag. "He wouldn't try to kill nobody, an' he wouldn't send no one else to do it neither. You needn't try that stuff with me! I've known Steve fer years an' he's a fine up-



standin' man an' an honor to the community. Why he's supported pore old Ma Prindle fer years an' when she was kilt, it was Steve that located the killer."

"The Injun says he come from Steve though Mag," said Pete. "Don't yuh remember?"

"Then the Injun lied. Like as not had some score to settle with this man hisself or was workin' for someone else an' wanted to throw the blame on Steve." Mag would never know how close she came to the truth in that statement.

"Who d'you know Mister Higgy, that'd like you better dead than alive?"

Higgy stared stupidly at Pete. "I—I know it was Delaney, drat it,

he's the one behind it all right."

Mag scowled at Higgy. "First you git us up 'fore daylight, then yuh shoot up our hotel, an' now yore insistin' that our friends are hirin' Injuns to kill yuh. Go git dressed, then pay fer that window an' git out. I had enough of you!"

Mag reclaimed her broom and held it in a manner that suggested that she'd like to try it as a weapon on Higgy's head.

HIGGY found himself in a peculiar spot. Though he knew plenty of reasons why Delaney would want him disposed of, he could not mention them without admitting his own alliance with the gambler.

Without explaining all he knew, there was no way to make these people, or for that matter, anyone else in town, believe that Delaney had hired the Indian to kill him. Delaney had certainly tried to doublecross him, but even if he could convince these people of it, he would have no way to prove it.

"You goin' to stand there all mornin'?" snarled Mag.

"I'm goin' tuh my room right now." Higgy's stockinged feet were moving up the stairs. There was one thing certain in his slow moving mind. He'd have to get Delaney himself. Moreover, he must get the gambler soon, or the next attempt might not fail. Steve had showed his hand.

The clinking of glass accompanied the swishing of the broom downstairs as Higgy reached his room and closed the door while he thought this thing out. He pulled the knife from the bed where it had

penetrated half an inch and examined it.

"Dirty double-crossing skunk," he muttered. "I e'n see through his game all right enough. Told me that he hadn't none of the cash he got from Langford, the liar. He had it all right an' he wasn't robbed no more'n I was. He jest didn't want to divvy up with me, that's all. Stalled me till he could hire a man tuh kill me." As if the knife was a personification of Delaney he threw it from him.

He sat on the edge of the bed and slowly proceeded to dress himself. With every movement his fury seemed to grow fiercer, until the man was beside himself with rage.

"I won't hire no one to do my killin'," he muttered viciously. "I'll call on that skunk fer a show-down before another hour an' this time he won't talk me outen my notions wit' that slick tongue o' his."

Having buckled on his cartridge belt, he reloaded the empty chambers of his gun. Higgy was no coward. Slow thinking, stupid perhaps, and with little strength of character, but he was not afraid. Especially when such an all-consuming fury burned in his brain. Yet Higgy did not rush into blind, headlong action. The very fact that he was dull witted and slow thinking, made him wary and cautious.

Now, as he made his way to the door, he paused, and turned towards the window.

He peered through the dirty glass and noticed that the sloping roof of the one-story kitchen fell away from the wall of the hotel a

couple feet below the window. He worked at the small square, tugging and hauling until he managed to get the window open.

His gun bumped the ledge as he squirmed through the opening and clambered out on the roof. Easing his way down he reached the edge and then dropped the seven feet to the grass and sprawled.

He was on his feet in an instant, moving parallel to the road in the rear of the row of buildings, following the same course the Lone Ranger had used, the night before. He wanted to cross the road a little way off, perhaps at the end of the row of buildings, where there would be less likelihood of being seen by Steve Delaney. If he could bring his gun to bear on the gambler before he was seen, he'd have plenty to tell Steve before squeezing the trigger.

HE WAS nearing the end of the line of buildings now. His rapid pace had changed to a slow walk. He was using all his faculties to consider the best means of approaching Steve Delaney. Perhaps come upon him from behind, with his gun levelled.

Steve had a name as a fast shooter, he might wheel and shoot at the first utterance of Higgy. If he could only find something to get behind.

Now that he was coming closer to the reality of a showdown with the gambler, he wondered whether there might not be some mistake. After all, perhaps the Indian *had* lied.

If that was so, he didn't want to kill the man who'd already given



him a tidy sum of money. "If I only knowed how much he's got from Langford," he thought.

He paused at the last house in the row. It was tidier than the others and there was a little garden plot behind it. Cautiously he moved along the side of the house, prepared to cross the road as soon as he'd made sure Delaney wasn't watching.

There were signs of a recent scuffle on the ground. High boot-heels had dug deep and the grass was pounded down in many places. Midway in the side of the house, his heels crunched on broken glass and he recalled the fury of Mag Loomis. "Another busted window," he muttered, noting the source of the shattered, shining bits.

Then he stopped. A man was coming toward him. White hair was brushed back from a fine high forehead and a patrician nose was surmounted by gold-rimmed glasses. Though well along in years, the man stood straight and his head was held erect. Seeing Higgy, he stopped. In his hand he held a pitcher filled with water.

"Good morning," he said pleasantly. "Were you looking for me?"

For a moment Higgy was nonplussed. "I—uh—I dunno," he stammered. "Who are yuh?"

A somewhat amused smile broke wrinkles in the corners of the man's eyes. "My name," he said, "is Langford. John Langford."

Higgy's eyes popped wide. "Geez," he gasped! His hand came up, and brought his six-gun with it. "Langford, eh?"

The smile came off Langford's face and his heavy white eyebrows came together in a frown. "What's the matter?"

"So you're John Langford."

"I am. Who are you?"

"I'm one hombre that craves a chance to talk with you, an' I didn't know it until right now. March right back to the house, we're goin' to have a lot to talk about. By cripes, here's where I git tuh know aplenty about what Delaney has been gittin'."

At the mention of the gambler's name, Langford started to speak, but Higgy stopped him with a jab in the ribs from the gun.

"Quiet. Where's yer wife?"

"She's in the house, in bed. She isn't well."

"Then we ain't goin' to the house, that is not jest yet. We'll go tuh the woodshed in back. Reckon we can talk there without her hearin'. Don't try tuh argue with me, jest git goin' an' keep yer trap shut. I was headin' fer Delaney's place, but I'm sure damn glad I located you first. Here's where I learn plenty."

The white haired man obeyed in silence. He opened the door of the

woodshed and walked in, followed by Higgy, who kicked aside some logs that had spilled from the neatly stacked pile. Upending one, he sat and held the gun poised, resting on his knee. "Now then, Langford," he began. "Close that door."

CHAPTER VII

A Close Call

THE barman at the Royale was watching the man who stood in the doorway very closely. There was something about Steve Delaney this morning that didn't ring true. A moment ago, the man with the barmop thought he heard a couple of shots fired in the hotel across the street. He'd moved to the door and looked out, but Steve had ordered him back to his job. He thought he saw someone race from the front door of the hotel, and duck between a couple buildings, but he couldn't be sure.

Delaney was never up this early, and was seldom in the surly frame of mind that was his present mood. Baldy held another glass to the light and gave it a final inspection.

"Maybe he wanted someone kilt," thought the barman, "But that ain't like Delaney." He put down the glass and scratched his ear. "They's something funny goin' on, as sure as Hell."

Then he had an inspiration. Reaching beneath the bar he brought up a bottle and looked at the label. He poured out a glass of the stuff and called to the tall man

with the black moustache. "Boss, hyar's yore mornin' eye-opener."

The Lone Ranger left the door and came close to the bar. Baldy had his back toward the tall man, but he caught his eye watching him in the mirror. But Baldy dropped his eyes at once and fumbled with the arrangement of some glass-ware on the ledge.

The Lone Ranger slid the glass

bar and edged around the end to reach the heavy door in the rear. The back of the man who stood again at the front casually watching the hotel, was toward him. He tried the door to Delaney's room and found it locked. Catlike, then, he moved forward. A board squeaked, and the Lone Ranger whirled to stare in the ominous barrel of a .44!



Baldy hit the floor with the force of the Lone Ranger's attack.

toward him and let its contents spill into the brass cuspidor his foot drew over. Then he raised the empty glass to his lips and when Baldy turned, he saw the other walking toward the door again. The glass on the polished bar was empty.

Baldy chuckled softly. "Steve Delaney ain't never in his life took a drink in the mornin' an' he ain't drank red likker without a chaser. By gad, they sure is somethin' funny goin' on. That there man ain't no more Steve Delaney, than I am."

He drew a gun from beneath the

"Stand where yuh are, stranger. Yore covered an' I'd jest as soon shoot, as not."

HAD the Lone Ranger been wearing his own familiar equipment, one of his two heavy guns would have been in play before his turn was completed and the gun that Baldy held would have been blasted from his hand with a heavy slug, but the split second action that was required was impossible with the unfamiliar position of the gambler's gun. His hands came up.

"Well," he said. "What's the matter?"

"That's jest what I hanker tuh know. What's happened to Delaney, an' who are you?"

The steely eyes of the Lone Ranger were cold as he studied the bartender. There was no nervousness in Baldy as he held the big gun steady. He wouldn't fire impulsively at any rate.

"Do you think I expected to get away with this disguise?" the Lone Ranger asked.

"I don't see how the devil you could for long. Steve's too well known in town."

"Exactly. Then do you think that I didn't plan on just what I'd do to the man who found me out?"

"Stand still, don't edge toward me, or I'll blast you so full of holes daylight'll come through." Baldy motioned with the gun. "Git out yer key an' open up that door."

"The door's already opened." The Lone Ranger was looking past the man with the gun, as he spoke. He nodded slightly at the door and Baldy threw a quick glance in that direction, wary of attack from behind.

In that tenth part of a second the Lone Ranger charged. Head down he crashed full into the bib of the white apron. Baldy hit the floor with the force of the attack. The gun blasted and a bullet whanged into the ceiling. The tall man was on top when the two fell and his left hand gripped the wrist of the other's gun hand.

The heavy six-gun roared again in the empty room as Baldy struggled to free his arm! He was howling in fear and rage, and kicking out with both feet. A hard man to hold, and a rough fighter. He

squirmed his head around close to the arm that pinned his weapon to the floor and by a mighty effort wriggled so he could sink his teeth into the hard muscles of the Lone Ranger.

He bit down on the arm, and the man on top felt a numbing pain shoot from his shoulder to his wrist. He let go of the other's wrist. The gun was coming up fast, swinging to bear point blank into the disguised face, but the move was not completed.

As he released the grip, the Lone Ranger's arm swung forward. It was a short blow, traveling less than a foot, but his hard fist crashed against the barman's jaw with jarring force. The bald head snapped back and cracked against the pine floor.

Baldy's hand went limp and his fingers relaxed. The gun fell from his grip and landed with a clump to be quickly scooped up by the Lone Ranger. He felt hot blood running down the inside of his sleeve where Baldy's teeth had almost met.

Stuffing the gun in his belt, the tall man made sure that the bartender was only stunned, then he wrapped his arms around the unconscious man and lifted him.

WALKING toward the still locked door in the rear, with his burden over his right shoulder, the Lone Ranger paused, while his maimed arm fumbled in a pocket for the key.

In a moment he was through the door and his heel kicked it closed behind him. He deposited the bartender on the bed, next to a collection of small articles which he'd

taken from the cache under the floor.

Fresh strips, torn from the blanket served to bind the wrists and ankles of his new captive. He was working fast now, a glance through the window had shown Tonto making a cautious approach toward the door.

Delaney was watching his every move. Venomous hatred was in his smouldering dark eyes and his face was still contorted from the gag. He had been working for hours trying to loose his hands without success, and his arms and legs were numb from the bindings.

The Lone Ranger had removed the gambler's coat and vest and rolled up the sleeves of the shirt. He spilled water from the pitcher into a basin and was washing the gash in his left arm when Tonto entered the room.

The Indian saw the man on the bed, but showed no surprise. He said, "Me throw-um knife. Do what you tell-um."

"Good. You made Higgy understand that Steve Delaney sent you?"

Tonto grunted an affirmative.

He noted the wound and without comment found a piece of cloth and made a bandage. When it was in place the throbbing pain was eased slightly.

"What that stuff?" asked the Indian, pointing to the calfskin bag, some old letters, a notebook, and some jewelry on the bed.

"That's what Delaney had hidden beneath the floor."

pausing from time to time to glance again through the window. The moustache came off painfully, and then the black stuff was washed from his hair. He dried himself and proceeded to get into his own clothes.

For a moment, he stood before Tonto with his face unmasked and undisguised, and the Indian studied the handsome strong face that no other man had seen. The real face of the Lone Ranger. Handsome, bronzed and healthy. White teeth and a good chin. A face that was honest, clean cut, and youthful.

"Some day, Tonto, I'll tell you why I hate crime so! But not now."

There was a mutual understanding between these two. Tonto never asked about the Lone Ranger's past or his reasons for his chivalrous deeds.

Soon the Lone Ranger was fully dressed in his own clothes. "I



THE Lone Ranger was scrubbing the make-up from his face and

found enough in that place beneath the floor, Tonto, to clear up everything," he said. "All I want is to make Higgy tell the truth. No matter how much he fears Steve Delaney, or what hold that man has over him, he must be made to talk."

Tonto nodded.

"That's why I had you throw the knife at him. Now, knowing that Delaney's out to get him, he will have to do one of two things. Come and try to get Delaney, before another attempt on his life can be made, or—" He paused for another look into the area behind the saloon. "Or tell enough to have Delaney hanged! It all depends on how much he himself is involved."

The bartender groaned as consciousness returned. "Stand near him Tonto," the masked man said, "and see that he doesn't make any sound when he comes to. I'll be where I can see Higgy if he comes here. I'm going to the stable and unload the things from Silver's back. In a little while we'll be ready to make our final move, just as soon as the Sheriff and his men return from the Canyon with Dave Walters!"

He threw the rear door wide, looked both ways, then quickly made for the stable where a soft whinny welcomed him, as Silver, after a long wait, saw his beloved master.

CHAPTER VIII

Captured

DAVE WALTERS had no idea how long he had sat beside the mouth of the cave in Snake River Canyon. He

was enjoying the warmth of the sun, and amusing himself by idly marking the progress of the shadow cast by the large rock that concealed the cave from passers by.

For the first time in many months he felt at ease, and at peace with the world. The confident manner of the mysterious masked man who had proved a friend, gave the boy new hope. A fresh courage was coursing through his veins. He had been given a trust. Inside the cave were supplies for the masked man and Tonto. Extra equipment, a cache of food, and most interesting of all, a box of special cartridges the masked rider used.

Like many other people Dave had heard of the Lone Ranger's fame, but he had not suspected until recently that it was this rider of justice who had saved him from the blood lust of the lynch mob.

Right now, that tall strong man and his Indian companion were working in his behalf. The thought made the slim shoulders straighten, and the boy who had known such heartsickness, despair and discouragement felt a hope that after all, he was not a man who was shunned by everyone.

"I wonder," he thought, "if it's true that there's a couple named Langford livin' in the Corners. I wonder if they c'd be *my* folks. Gosh, if they was, an' if I was lynched there, it'd sure enough kill Ma."

He was glad that he'd traveled under the name of Walters. There was less likelihood of his mother, wherever she might be, hearing of this new disgrace that had been credited to him. To be hung as a

murderer, a thief. Worse than that, as the accused wanton slayer of a helpless old woman he would be in the depths of disgrace, and after he was dead there would be little chance of his name ever being cleared.

He wished that he might help the masked rider, but he knew that if his help could be of any value, he would not have been given such strict orders to remain hidden in the Canyon.

He watched a tiny insect crawling along the ground and tossed a pebble toward it. Feeling drowsy from the hot sun, he thought of taking a nap.

Time passed slowly. He hadn't been told how long he might have to wait. He only knew that he was to remain here until called for. An hour? No, it would take that long for Tonto to reach the Lone Ranger in town. Perhaps by noon someone might come for him, and on the other hand, it might be days.

There was food inside the cave, and he had been instructed by Tonto to help himself when he felt hungry. There was water in the canyon, and with a plentiful supply of food and water he could remain here indefinitely.

HIS eyes were closed and he was thinking of the years that had passed since he'd made his one mistake. Years of hardship, roaming endlessly, namelessly. Then he sat bolt upright. The clank of a hoof on rock came from down the canyon. Was Tonto returning? It was hardly possible that he'd come back so soon.

Another hoof beat, and then they

came in steady rhythm. More than one horse, thought Dave. Perhaps the Lone Ranger too, was coming. There seemed to be a lot of clatter for only two horses. It sounded more like a group of riders to the untrained ear of Dave.

He crept forward toward the big rock and then lay flat on the ground, squirming ahead until he could command a view of the canyon. There they came. Not one or two as he thought at first, but eight men, riding toward him with carbines slung in saddle holsters.

They were less than a hundred yards away, and spread out to advance abreast so that they covered the entire canyon from wall to wall. He saw the man in the lead signal to the others and the carbines were drawn out, the sun glinting from the blue steel barrels. Dave looked with dismay upon the scene before him. The men dismounted and spread out to advance on the big rock from all directions.

Dave scampered to the inside of the cave. There was a gun there, one he'd taken from Eph Summers. He was determined to defend the cave at any cost! But how had these men learned of his hide-out? Would they take possession of it in the name of the law? Would the property of the Lone Ranger be lost? Not while he could live to fire a gun, and had ammunition!

Grasping the gun, he went to the mouth of the cave, and looked out. A bright star glinted in the sun from the vest of one of the men. "The Sheriff," thought the boy. He saw another man at closer range and recognized Eph Sum-

mers, one of the guards of the night before.

The lawmen were advancing, taking advantage of each rock that offered itself as a shield. Soon they would be close enough to make a six-gun bullet more certain of reaching the mark. Dave gripped the gun so hard his knuckles grew white. With jaw set and lips faded to a thin line, he watched the men moving in.

He'd never taken a life, never shown a sign of violence, but now he was ready to kill! He would kill these men if he could. He alone, must guard the cave. He little suspected, that the Lone Ranger himself had sent the lawmen here.

Now they were nearer. He took aim at the nearest man, slowly and carefully, with the gun steadied by a rock. Squinting his left eye and sighting directly at the shield on the man's blue shirt, he squeezed the trigger. The gun roared and jumped. The bullet chipped a rock and the man let out a yell.

"There he is boys."

A DOZEN shots echoed Dave's own and the canyon rang with the blasts. Protected by the rock, Dave was unhit but the slugs showered him with chips of flint and limestone. Bullets whammed around him.

He fired and again his shot went wide of the mark. Cursing his faulty aim he fired again, and yet again, without a hit. When he paused he heard the voice of the sheriff coming from behind a rock.

"Stop your firin' you damn fool. We don't want to take you in dead."

"That's the only way you'll take me in," he cried. "Come an' get me if yuh want me, but I swear I'll blow some of you to Hell before yuh do."

His gun jumped and another roar rocked the valley and echoed and re-echoed. Then the hammer fell with a click. The gun was empty. He was aware that the men had stopped shooting. Now he heard the Sheriff calling to him.

"Dave, we ain't come to lynch yuh. We've come to take yuh back an' give you a fair trial. If you're innocent, you'll come out with your hands up."

"I was innocent last night," the boy shouted back, "but I'd be hangin' from a rope by now if I'd counted on you an' your fair trials."

"Come on out with yore hands up, or we're comin' in to get yuh!"

If they came, they'd find the things that were in the cave, perhaps, if he went to them, bargained with them . . . he had thought of a way that might guard the Lone Ranger's secret, even though it did cost him his life. Here was a means of repaying his debt, in small measure.

"Listen here," he called. "Suppose I do come out with my hands up like yuh said. What'll yuh do?"

"Take you intuh town to stand trial fer murder."

"Yuh won't take nothin' else? Yuh won't come near this cave?"

"We want yore masked friend too. He's the one that's wanted. Maybe he's the one that done the killin' yore bein' blamed for. Now come out an' don't take up no

more of my time, or we'll come gunnin' for you an' git you!"

The Sheriff shouted his message in short phrases so the echo would not make it hard to understand. Dave pondered. There was no more ammunition for the gun he held.

There was no use in—his thought was broken suddenly as almost two hundred pounds of bone and muscle descended on him. One of the posse had crept around to the side, and while the Sheriff talked, had moved close enough to jump the boy.

Dave was carried to the ground with the impact and the wind went from him in a gasp. He was barely conscious when he was jerked to his feet, and rough hands were tying him while voices chattered around him.

He could vaguely hear the Sheriff giving orders to search the cave, and he sensed more than he knew that he was being hoisted to the back of a horse.

He was being taken back to town. Back to Snake Corners to be tried and doubtless hung for murder. Was his mother in the town? Would he know that she was there? He seemed to feel convinced that he would swing, the only question in his mind was whether he could keep his identity a secret to the last.

CHAPTER IX

The Outlaw's Return

NO MAN could possibly have foreseen the detail that almost wrecked the Lone Ranger's careful plans. Higgy had done exactly what the masked rider

intended when he sent Tonto to the Loomis Hotel. Higgy had fumed in rage and planned vengeance on Steve Delaney.



This was as it should have been. At the moment when Higgy would have burst into Steve's room, the Lone Ranger would have taken charge of the situation, but a strange quirk of Fate had ordained that John Langford should meet Higgy that morning, when the latter was on his way to blast Delaney into eternity.

Higgy accosted the old gentleman, and forced him into the woodshed for a talk. He moved uncomfortably on the upended log and shifted his gun to his other hand. Langford watched him with a mixture of amusement and dismay. Finally Higgy spoke.

"You been payin' money to Steve Delaney, ain't yuh?"

Langford started. "How—how do you know that?" he gasped.

"Nemmine how I know! I know, that's the main thing. What I don't know an' what I crave to know, is this. How much!"

"I've nothing to say to you. If

you know that that man has been taking money from me, you'll be able to learn how much."

"All right then, lemme ask yuh this. What's that cash been paid out for?"

Again the old man refused to answer. His hand was shaking now. This bold stranger had blurted out the thing that he had spent the past three years and all his wealth to keep concealed. Did the man he faced know of the letter that he had once been shown? The next words of the man with the gun answered Langford's unvoiced question.

"They's a letter that yore kid once writ to yuh. In that same he



tells that he stole money from a bank he worked in."

"Not so loud," begged the old man. "My wife, you know."

"All right, I'll keep it low then, but I aim to find out lots of things, an' you better tell me what I want,

or I'll bust right in an' tell yer wife the hull works. That letter is the same as a confession of a crime, ain't it?"

Langford nodded.

"Yore kid was kilt, an' so there was nothin' to be gained by brand-in' him a thief. Yuh wanted that fact kept from his Ma."

"Listen to me, whoever you are. I don't know how you learned of this, but you seem to know the truth. My wife has been ill for years. Her only happy memories are of her son, our boy David. When we got the word that he had died, I—I tried to make the blow less cruel. I told her that he had been killed trying to save another's life. She wouldn't believe me at first, but I gradually impressed the idea on her.

"Then a man came with a copy of a letter that my son had written. I knew that it was true. I knew that Dave had made a mistake and I'd repaid the bank. I tried to buy the letter from that man."

Langford was almost pleading to that hard unsympathetic face.

"I AIN'T interested in all that.

I know all that you said. Now git tuh the things I ast yuh. How much did yuh pay this polecat?"

"I gave him money every time he called on me. Finally it was all gone. My wife was anxious to try a new country and we came west, but this—this beast followed us here."

"Um. He never told me that yuh gave him very much."

"When I came here, he started his old game again. He threatened

to show the letter to my wife. She could never stand it. I—I had to give him jewelry. Martha thought that I was selling it so we would have money to buy food. Last night I gave him the last of the jewelry. Her most precious possession. The one thing that we never wanted to part with. She wouldn't let me sell that."

He paused to see if his words were making any impression on Higgy. He could notice no change in the cold, unfeeling face.

"What'd you give him last night?"

"The sapphires! I couldn't tell Martha that I had sold those. I had to make her think that someone stole them. Del—er—that is, this man helped me fabricate the theft. That man has not only taken all I have, he's made me lie and deceive the one thing in the world I love! What in God's name else is there he can take from me?"

"Yuh still ain't said how much you paid!"

"At least ten thousand dollars in cash and all the jewels we owned!"

The old man's voice was vibrant with emotion as he summarized the extent of Delaney's blackmail, but he was drowned out by the bellow of Higgy. He leaped to his feet.

"Why the dirty damned swindlin' snake! He was to pay me half an' he gave me less than a thousand dollars all told!"

"You," cried Langford.

"Yes me, an' it was me that got the letter in the first place. It was me that made it so's he could get that cash, an' the low lifed son of a skunk held out on me."

"Who in the name of Heaven are you?" Langford grabbed the man by the coat disregarding the six-gun! "How do you know—where did you learn of the letter? What do you know of my son? Answer me I say!"

He shook the big man and his eyes flashed a fire that had smoldered for years. "Answer me," he repeated. "How did you know of the letter?"

"How'd I know," screamed Higgy, "for Cripe's sake I got the letter."

"Where is it? Where in God's name is it? I've paid for it. I've bought it a thousand times over, and each time he refused to give it to me! Where is the original letter from my son?"

Higgy shook himself free of the old man's grip and slammed open the door. "Now for the show-down," he screamed as he made for the road. He didn't care now if Steve Delaney did see him coming. While he had been fury-driven before, he was certain now that he had been gyped and swindled by the glib tongue of the gambler.

Langford started after him. His pace could not match that of Higgy, but he walked as fast as his age would let him toward the front of his house. He was about to cross the road when a woman's voice called to him from a window. He paused, and looked back at the pale drawn face of his wife. He entered the house and went to her side.

"John," she said, "what was all the loud talking?"

"Oh nothing, nothing at all,

Martha." The past years had taught John Langford to fib easily.

"But it must have been something. I heard that man shouting so loud and then I saw him running across the street."

"He just mistook me for someone else, that's all. He was looking for Mister Delaney. Now, Honey, you get back to bed. You know what Doctor Sanders said. You must have lots and lots of rest, and there was so much excitement last night—"

A tear came to the old lady's eye. Then looking at her husband wonderingly, she asked, "John, what makes you tremble so?"

"I—I guess I'm just a mite tired myself, Martha. Now you try and go to sleep again and I'll sit down here in the chair beside the bed an' doze a little bit." He gently tucked the counterpane around the slender shoulders of his wife. She smiled up at him.

"John," she said. "I've been thinkin' a lot about our boy these past few days. You know, there's somethin' that keeps tellin' me that he isn't dead."

"B-but, Honey—"

"You aren't sure he's dead yourself. I can tell, John. When you speak of him, and the brave thing he did, you talk like you weren't real sure of what you were saying. You're not sure that he's dead. I can feel it sometimes, that he's alive. I'm going to see David again. I know I am."

Her voice was barely audible to the man at the bedside. His blue veined hand brushed back a wisp of hair from Martha's forehead. Then he gently caressed her and

once more asked her to try and sleep.

He turned to the window so she couldn't see the quiver in his chin. She had mistaken the reason for his uncertainty. She thought David was alive. Let her hope so then, he thought. That one hope might sustain her. He raised the window higher to let in more of the clean fresh air and then a rider dashed into the town at break-neck speed.

The clatter of hoofs and the cloud of dust brought folks from their houses and from the shops. "They got him," he screamed. "They got the killer. They're comin' now, bringin' Dave Walters into town. Now he'll swing for sure." He disappeared down the road and Langford sighed.

"What was he shouting about, John," came the voice from the bed.

"That man that escaped jail last night has been recaptured."

Martha Langford sighed. "Poor boy. His name's the same as our boy's. What a blow for his mother."

"I expect she'll never know it, Martha. He's probably just some poor misguided lad that got the wrong kind of a start."

If Langford could have known that his own son was soon to pass that window in the hands of the law—

WHILE the Lone Ranger removed all of the superfluous load from his horse he kept a careful watch. From inside the stable he could cover the rear door of the Royale and he was ready to act

the instant that Higgy appeared. He talked to the stallion while he worked, and from time to time stroked the silky neck of the white beast. "I thought for sure Higgy would be here by this time, Silver, I wonder what's keeping him?"

The horse gently muzzled his master. Nearby the white horse of Tonto waited patiently for the Indian. The masked man knew that his companion would keep close watch on Delaney and the bartender. He need have no fear on that score.

He couldn't know that at that very moment Higgy was in Langford's woodshed. He took the last of the duffle from his saddle and then his horse was ready for riding at a moment's notice. But the masked man stayed in the stable. It was as good a place as any to wait. He could get Higgy before there was bloodshed, and he could watch the road for the returning posse with Dave Walters.

"Too bad about Dave," he thought. "He'll have a lot of unpleasant thoughts while he's being brought back, but I'll make up for them."

Then his forehead wrinkled beneath the mask. He had been sure that the Sheriff wouldn't kill the boy, that wasn't the Sheriff's style, but if Dave put up a fight—yet he was unarmed. At least that's what the Lone Ranger thought. He'd forgotten the gun that was Eph Summer's. He wished the Sheriff would return, but it was still too early to look for him. Another half hour at least, granting that good time was made and there were no delays.

He moved to the stable door and looked out. The morning was advancing and soon men would be sauntering into the Royale, demanding service, and the bartender was roped in the room in back! One more complication! If only Higgy would come and have the showdown that he'd counted on to bring out the facts that were still not definite in his mind!

He looked at his watch, then figured the time that had passed since Tonto had left the hotel. What was delaying the heavy set man? Was he afraid to meet Delaney? Was he hiding, waiting for the Sheriff to return? That didn't sound like him! He saw two men stroll down the road, cattlemen



who had remained in town overnight.

They moved into the saloon, and in a moment he heard them hammering on the bar and shouting for a drink. He dared not show

himself in this mask and outfit of his own. He was still the man who was hunted for a theft, and for aiding a supposed killer to escape.

"Git us a drink," bawled a voice in the saloon.

"Whar the Devil are you, Barkeep?" boomed a second voice.

The Lone Ranger took another look at his watch. He'd never been so helpless. Not a thing could be done until Higgy came, then he must hold the prisoners until the Sheriff returned. If he could only act, do something.

"Where the Hell is everyone?" shouted the first voice in the Royale. "Do we have to wait all day?"

"No, confound you," muttered the Lone Ranger. "If you must have service, you'll get it."

HE LEFT the stable and moved warily into the road, reaching it by going alongside the saloon. He glanced both ways, then pushed through the swinging doors. Two men stood with one foot on the bar and elbows braced on the polished surface. One was hammering with his fist. "Come on, what sort of game is this anyhow? We want a drink."

They didn't see the man behind them. He stood for a full minute, balancing things in his mind. Then his crisp voice addressed the two. "Help yourself!"

The two men turned, and their jaws dropped to their chest. "Cripes," shouted one. "A masked man."

"Masked man my eye," cried the other. "It's *the* masked man."

"And what about it?" asked the Lone Ranger. "You came here for

a drink. Help yourself. It's free."

"Leapin' Sagebrush, Eli, you hear that?"

"I hear it, an' I don't believe it."

"Go ahead, but if you've any notions of trying to capture me, forget them! I don't propose to let myself get captured." The voice was cold, dangerous! There was a dare and a threat in the way the masked man's hand hovered inches from one of the two guns.

"Masked man or not, a free drink's a free drink. Mister, I'm callin' yuh. I'm takin' that drink." The man called Eli was half way around the end of the bar as he spoke. "Name yore pizen, Zeke," he invited, "the drinks is on the house."

Though not as enthused as Eli, Zeke was nothing loath to take free drinks when offered. After all, this masked man was no business of his. Let the Sheriff worry about him. A drink's a drink. "Maybe we could git a couple seegars, too," he suggested.

"Help yourself," said the masked man, "the owner of the place won't need any more profit from it."

Both old timers lost the significance of this remark as they tipped bottles to their lips and drank until the cords stood out in their throats.

"Ahhh," breathed Eli. "Thar's an eye opener for yuh." He took a deep breath and upended the bottle again, while the masked man looked on in disgust.

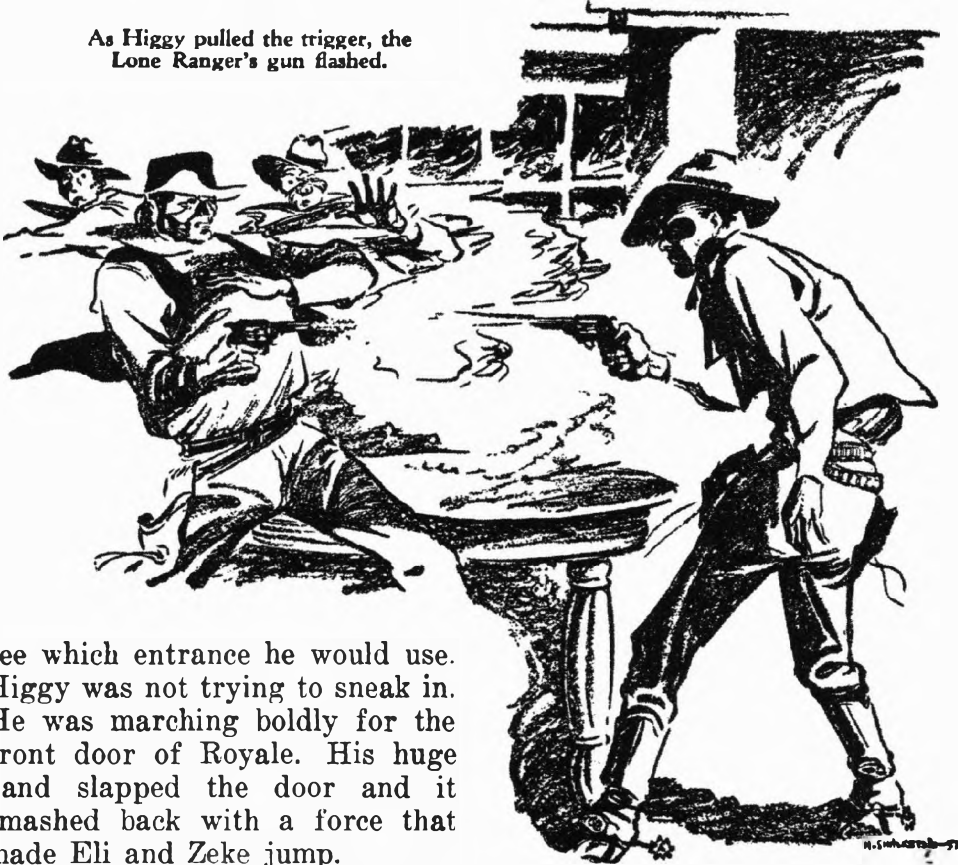
Then down the street came Higgy. There was no stopping him now. He was on the kill, aroused

at last to the point where he feared neither death nor injury. He swung his long arms and gripped the gun in one hand.

The Lone Ranger saw him coming, and stood ready, waiting to

"I'm here to deal with Delaney, an' no masked man will stop me." Higgy threw his gun up and squeezed the trigger. Two blasts shook the place as one. In the instant when Higgy pulled the trig-

As Higgy pulled the trigger, the Lone Ranger's gun flashed.



see which entrance he would use. Higgy was not trying to sneak in. He was marching boldly for the front door of Royale. His huge hand slapped the door and it smashed back with a force that made Eli and Zeke jump.

"Steve Delaney," roared Higgy when he was inside. "Show yore dirty slinkin' face. I'm here tuh collect!" Then he spied the masked man. He broke his stride and started to speak but the Lone Ranger interrupted him.

"Stand where you are, Higgy!"

"Yuh know me?"

"I know you all right, and I know Steve Delaney. Don't bring up that gun. I'll shoot it from your hand if you try it."

ger, the Lone Ranger's hand flashed up and his gun barked.

HIGGY screamed with pain and fury. His gun had jumped from his hand and arched a good ten feet through the air. The silver bullet of the Lone Ranger had gone true to its mark. Higgy was nursing his gun hand and shouting curses at the man who faced him.

"Stop your noise and listen to me," cried the Lone Ranger.

But unmindful of the weapon in the masked man's hand, Higgy rushed in like a frantic bull gone berserk. The tall man stepped lightly aside. Higgy crashed the wall and fell to the floor, taking a chair and table with him.

His eyes were bloodshot with rage, and he was on his feet again instantly. He could feel no pain now. Again he rushed, and again his attack missed its objective. He caught himself, turned and tried to close in. Those huge long arms were seeking to wind themselves around the body of the masked man.

Eli and Zeke had thought that discretion was far better than curiosity. They'd vacated with the blast of guns, taking a bottle under each arm with them. They were racing down the street now, shouting the news that the masked man was in the Royale.

"Listen to me, Higgy. Listen I tell you!"

The Lone Ranger was shouting to make himself heard above the raging of the other. Higgy was deaf to all voices, numb to all pain. He sought only to kill! He closed again, and the Lone Ranger had difficulty dodging. He didn't want to use the guns. Higgy must be made to talk before the Sheriff and his party returned.

"Will you listen? *I've got Delaney for you,*" the masked man pleaded.

An insane man, was Higgy. Ideas, thoughts, words didn't register. He was swinging blindly, trying to down this slender man

who stood between him and the man he'd come to kill!

The Lone Ranger jammed his gun to the holster, then on the other man's next charge, he dropped to the floor. His shoulder caught the big man at the knees and a shock went through his injured arm.

Higgy stumbled, as the masked man grabbed his legs and lifted. The crash of his landing shook the building, and the glassware rattled on the shelves. The Lone Ranger leaped on him, and grabbed two handfuls of the bristling hair, holding the man's head to the floor.

Higgy was roaring. "Lemme up, I'll kill yuh."

But the Lone Ranger disregarded the wild outbursts. Slowly he repeated, "I have Delaney for you. Get that through your head. I've got Delaney, tied and gagged, he's in back there now. I got him for you. Don't you understand?"

HELPLESS on the floor, winded from the struggle and weighted down by the lithe form of the Lone Ranger, Higgy stared into the steel blue that came from behind the slits in the mask. Then Higgy comprehended. He had met his master. At last the thought had been driven home and Higgy was willing to listen.

In the road outside, a mob had formed. Zeke and Eli had spread the news of the masked man. Men were storming toward the cafe, and at that moment a horseman appeared. He came on racing, shouting while he rode.

"They got the killer," he cried.

"They're comin' now, bringin' Dave Walters intuh town."

The horseman wheeled to a halt and repeated his startling announcement to the assembled men. Excited shouts that the masked man was in the cafe;

he was wanted dead or alive as far as these men knew. They were coming, coming on the run, and Higgy was too distracted to listen to what the Lone Ranger was saying. Then came an interruption which momentarily halted the mob.

"You men go around the back. Get him if he comes out!"



ney's barman had disappeared; that there was a fight, rose from the group.

The Lone Ranger was frantically trying to talk to Higgy above the noise outside. He dared not let the man into that back room just yet. He must talk first, and talk fast. In a moment the men would storm the saloon, guns would bark and bullets would fly.

The masked man was wanted,

A cry of, "There they come," was echoed by a score of men. The Sheriff and his posse, with Dave Walters as their prisoner, broke into view and thundered down the road! The outlaw had been brought to town. Shouts became screams, and the men were aroused to a peak greater than that of the night before.

The quarry was treed. The Lone Ranger, the masked man, was in the saloon, and the escaped man, Dave Walters, was brought back. The shouts of the men storming

on the cafe sounded like all the demons of Hell broken loose!

CHAPTER X

The Lone Ranger's Justice

AT THE last possible moment, the Lone Ranger gave up trying to reason with Higgy. He raced for the door at the rear as the horde burst through the swinging doors. The Sheriff was shouting, trying to keep order, but his words were drowned out by the shouts of the mob.

"You men go around to the back. Get him if he comes out!" Those nearest the Sheriff heard his shouts and leaped to obey. "You men," he screamed, "keep back!"

The men were rushing for the door at the rear, sweeping chairs and tables aside in their mad rush.

"Eph, Eph," howled the Sheriff, "keep hold of Walters, don't let him get away again."

"He won't," answered Eph, "I'll promise that."

The pale boy stood silent amid the uproar. Helpless, defeated at every turn, and now because of him the Lone Ranger was to become a prisoner.

In the midst of the throng that hammered on the heavy door, Higgy remembered Steve Delaney, the man he came to kill!

Then from inside Delaney's room came a shot. It sounded above all other noises. The men stopped shouting, and another shot brought complete silence. A dozen men were about to speak

when a sharp voice from inside called out. "I'm going to open this door and come out. Steve Delaney will be with me."

An awed hush fell.

The voice inside continued. "I'm depending on you men to give Delaney the chance to speak, if he can."

"If he can," muttered a man. "What's he mean by that?"

"Stranger," cried the Sheriff, "you got my word for it, you'll not be shot on sight."

The door was opened slowly, a score of hands were resting on gun butts, ready to flash to action at the least sign of a hostile move or attempt to escape. Then the door swung wide, and three men appeared.

Between the tall masked man, and the Indian, Steve Delaney was supported. He was disheveled, and his eyes were bleary with the ordeal he'd gone through. The long black hair that had been his pride was shorter than before, and his usually waxed moustache drooped despondently. He was working his mouth, but no words came.

The masked man spoke! "Sheriff," he cried, "keep a close watch on that man Higgy."

"What's the meanin' of this, mister? What've you done to Steve?" The Sheriff's question was followed by a snarl from Higgy.

"There's the dirty double cross-in' skunk," he cried.

"Be quiet," cried the Lone Ranger. "All of you, listen to me. Look at what I have in my hand." He held aloft a handful of jewels

for all to see and admire. "There is a lot that needs explaining here, but what you men are interested in, is the killing of Ma Prindle. Delaney accused Dave Walters of that. Didn't he?"

Several agreed.

"Well," continued the masked man, "Ma Prindle hadn't been supported by Delaney. The truth is she was constantly lending him money. He wasn't always the winning gambler. He was hoarding his winnings, and when he lost he borrowed from Ma Prindle! She held his I.O.U.'s for thousands of dollars."

"She got her cash from gold stocks," someone said.

"I don't believe what you say about Delaney," another shouted. "What's the matter with him? Why can't he talk for himself?"

"He has been gagged. He'll be able to talk soon, but he can't deny this evidence. Here are the I.O.U.'s he gave to Mrs. Prindle. The ones he killed her for, to get back, and neglected to destroy. Here is a note from her, demanding that he pay her what he owes or she'll make it unpleasant for him."

The masked man paused to let this register, and then went on.

"For some time, Steve had been blackmailing a certain man here who thought his son was dead. This boy was hunting for his parents, and was on his way to Snake Corners. A friend of Delaney heard of this, and told Delaney to keep the boy away from town. Delaney saw his chance to fix the blame for the murder on Dave Walters, and got the description

of Dave from that man called Higgy."

The Lone Ranger pointed a finger at the stocky man and Higgy fell back a pace.

"Higgy!" barked the masked man. "You know that Delaney



killed Ma Prindle! Here's your chance to tell the truth."

HIGGY faltered as all eyes were turned on him. He looked stupidly this way and that, and then turned back to the man who pointed at him.

"What about it, Higgy? Did Steve kill Ma Prindle?"

The Lone Ranger and Tonto waited more tense than anyone, save perhaps Dave Walters. Here was the moment that counted. Higgy opened his mouth, closed it and blinked his eyes, and then he spoke slowly.

"That dirty son of a—"

"Answer me, did he or didn't he kill the woman?"

"Yes, drat his soul, he did."

Steve's eyes rolled upwards. He slumped and would have fallen to the floor but for the support of the man on each side of him.

The Sheriff's cool gaze was turned to the boy at his side.

The Lone Ranger said, "What about that, Sheriff? Does that free the boy?"

"Cain't see no other way about it. I was a mite uncertain all along about this kid's guilt. Steve's the only one that was sure o' the description an' he give too darn good a description. I'll need them I.O.U.'s fer evidence, mister."

"You'll have them."

"Eph, you may's well cut loose them ropes an' let the kid go free, I ain't goin' to hold him no more."

Dave couldn't believe his ears. Congratulations poured on him and men fought to shake his hand.

"I got that cash of yours kid, that'll be returned to you." The Sheriff was making himself heard above the others. "I suspected it was wrong about you stealin' that from Ma Prindle, because she wouldn't never keep no paper money. All o' hers was gold. That's why I warn't sure you was the killer."

"Hold on," cried a voice. "There's the matter of the Langford theft last night. Some jewels was stole!"

The masked man held the jewels high again. "These are the jewels, but they weren't stolen. They were given by John Langford to this man. Delaney was blackmailing the man, holding a letter over his head. He made Langford fake a robbery last night so Martha Langford wouldn't know the truth."

"An' I'll vouch fer that, too," came from Higgy. "I ain't goin' tuh get mixed intuh no more

crimes of that crittur! Listen here, Sheriff, I got a lot tuh tell yuh. What I got tuh say will clear up everythin'!"

"Far as I'm concerned, there ain't nothin' tuh clear up. Dave is in the clear an' so's that masked man, an' Steve Delaney's a crook o' the first water, seems like!"

Dave shouted. "You've gotta listen, I've been tryin' to get heard fer a long time, you gotta listen to me! John Langford is my father!"

THE men's amazement rose to a new peak and they could only stare!

Then a voice, a fine cultured voice came from the door, "Son, Son, it is you."

"Oh, Pa!"

John Langford came to the side of his boy and gripped the skinny shoulders. Both father and son were unashamed of the tears that fell from their eyes. "Forgive me, Dad, w-will yuh?"

"My boy, you were forgiven long ago," Langford answered. Then turning to the Sheriff. "Whatever this boy has done, he's not to blame."

The Sheriff spoke. "As far as I'm concerned he ain't done nothin' except to fetch a man in a mask here that sort of cleaned up a nasty situation in this town an' brought a schemin' crook to justice. Boys, I see that Delaney has got back his tongue, so I reckon we can take him to the hoosegow!"

Willing hands took the load off the Lone Ranger and Tonto. Despite the pleas of the gambler he

was marched to the jail that Dave had lately left.

"Here is all the evidence you'll need, Sheriff, backed by what Higgy will tell you." The masked man turned letters, a notebook and jewelry over to the lawman.

"I'll tell aplenty," said Higgy.

The men looked at him and Dave's eyes grew wide. "Higgy! In the excitement I didn't recognize you. You're the one I gave the letter to. Didn't you take that to my folks?"

"No. I met up with that gambler in the East, an' showed him the letter. He said that he knowed how we could make a fortune on't. I let him go ahead, an' he handled things. I kept the letter, though, it's back in my own shack. He wouldn't lemme live in town when yore folks come here.

"I thought he didn't want me tuh get seen by Langford, but the truth was, he didn't want me tuh know how much he was gittin'. 'T'ain't no use tuh say I'm sorry, I'll do my term in jail, an' I'll help the law all I can. I'm jest a stupid dumb fool, that's all.

"Please Dave, I really thought that you was dead, an' I didn't know that Langford was bein' bled as much as he was . . . honest tuh Heaven I didn't."

There was a look in the face of John Langford that promised leniency.

Higgy saw it and said, "Langford, lemme have the chance to square things. I swear that when I heard that Dave was alive an' headin' here, I was downright surprised. I didn't know what tuh do. I was sort o' hypnertized by

Delaney. I'll work fer yuh fer nothin', I'll work my fingers tuh the bone, I'll—"

"You'll go tuh jail first off," interrupted the Sheriff, "an' if you ain't told another pack o' lies, maybe you'll git a chance tuh make good."

SUDDENLY Mag Loomis with a broom in her hand and fire in her eye, stormed into the place. "Thar's the coyote, lemme at him," she cried, and barged close to Higgy to clout him with the broom. "Sneak out on me will yuh, without payin' fer that busted winder." Another clout, and Higgy fell back before her fury.

"Sheriff, Sheriff," pleaded the big man. "Fer gosh sakes, take me tuh the jail."

Mag was finally subdued, and Higgy taken out to keep his erstwhile partner company until the trial. Dave Langford felt his father's arm across his shoulders.

The Lone Ranger was pressing



a handful of jewelry into the old man's hand.

"I think," he said, "the gold that Delaney had laid up is yours also."

He added a calfskin bag to the jewels and his mouth curved in a slight smile at the grateful look in the old gentleman's eyes.

"There's not much I can say. What good are words?" Without further speech he held out a hand, and the Lone Ranger gripped it.

Some of the men had left the place with Delaney, others followed Higgy and the men who held him, and Mag trailed him, trying to get in another crack with her broom. The Royale was almost deserted. Tonto came from the backroom with the bald headed bartender.

"I'm sorry I had to knock you out. Perhaps after we have gone, you'll have it all explained to you," the Lone Ranger said.

"I heard an' seen aplenty, I guess yuh knowed what yuh was doin' all right enough. I can't savvy it all jest yet, but—wal, don't you feel too bad about crackin' my cranium on the floor. I feel ornery an' lowdown fer sinkin' my teeth in yore arm."

Then he saw John Langford. "You here? Sakes alive, Langford, this is the first time you showed yoreself in a saloon!"

"I came," Langford answered, "to get my son. I think, Lad, you

can explain to your mother how you made a mistake, and paid for it, can't you?"

"G-gee, Dad, I'm sure nuff goin' tuh try." Dave turned to the tall man behind the mask. "I dunno why you did this fer me, but, I—I tried not tuh let the lawmen find yer cave, I—I done my best."

"Don't worry about that, Dave, I sent them there to get you."

"An' don't worry about that cave," the Sheriff added. "I had a few idees of my own on this thing all along, an' there wasn't none of us went snoopin' in that cave. Fact is, I doubt if any of the boys will ever mention bein' there."

A clatter of hoofs came from behind the building. Looking out, the Lone Ranger saw Tonto, and with him the two white horses, stepping high and pawing the ground, ready to ride to new adventures.

He walked through Delaney's room, and through the door beyond. The men remaining followed him with their eyes and saw him swing into the silver studded saddle. Dave waved his hand and the masked man waved back. Then came that shout, "*Heigh Yo, Silver.*" The Lone Ranger and Tonto rode away, crossed the arroyo, and headed out on the open plains beyond the ridge, beyond the jail, and into the purple haze.

BEGINNING NEXT MONTH

OUTDOOR TRAILS FOR SPORT AND HEALTH

The first of a series of fascinating articles

Edited by DICK WOOD

Well known authority on Hunting—Trapping and Fishing



The Story of John Wesley Hardin Ace of Texas Gun Fighters

Article by
Chuck Martin

*The second instalment of a thrilling
biography, the first having appeared in
the previous (April) issue.*

Illustrations by
H. Smilkstein

FOREWORD

John Wesley Hardin was born in Fannon County, Texas, on May 26, 1853. Although too young to fight in the Civil War, he had been trained in the use of firearms and was an expert marksman at an early age. When he was fifteen years of age, Hardin whittled the first notch on his gun when he shot and killed a big Negro who had threatened to harm him. As a fugitive from justice, Hardin travelled from county to county, involving himself in one scrape after another, until he killed a man who accused him of stealing his girl. This made the eighth victim and John Wesley Hardin was barely seventeen years of age. The second instalment picks up the story from that point on.

JOHNS WESLEY HARDIN having just killed the man who had accused him of stealing his girl's love, mounted his horse and rode away in the darkness of the night.

State officers searched for the young outlaw who was hiding at the home of his uncle in Brenham. His father was now studying law, and he persuaded his son to leave the State for a while. Wes agreed to go to Shreveport to stay with relatives.

A man named Hoffman had been murdered in Waco. Wes Hardin started south and was arrested in Longview for this murder, of





which he knew nothing. He was held in jail by the authorities, after which Captain Stokes of the State police chose a negro deputy by the name of Smalley to help him take the prisoner back to Waco, two hundred miles away.

Wes Hardin was tied to a horse and guarded carefully on the trip. On the third day the trio needed provisions, and Captain Stokes rode away to a distant farm house. The prisoner was untied and allowed to stretch his cramped muscles under the watchful eyes of the negro deputy.

Wes flexed his arms and reached inside his shirt as if to scratch himself. Under his left arm was an old cap-and-ball pistol in a shoulder-holster the young outlaw had invented, and which became known as the Wes Hardin shoulder scabbard. Such a hide-out was unknown in 1871, and a prisoner was seldom searched above the waist for hidden weapons.

Flame exploded from the young

outlaw's hand when he withdrew it from his shirt, and deputy Smalley fell dead without knowing what had happened to him. When Captain Stokes returned with the provisions, Wes Hardin and the negro's horse were both gone.

Hardin hid out for a while before attempting to escape into Mexico. He was surprised and arrested in Belton by State police, and three officers, named Smith, Davis and Jones, were detailed to guard him. Smith was detailed to guard the prisoner while Jones and Davis caught up with some sleep. He sat with a double-barreled shotgun across his knees facing the bunk where the prisoner dozed.

Wes Hardin became wide awake when Smith yawned with weariness, and when the guard began to snore, the prisoner crawled across the room and gently lifted the shotgun, also taking a pistol Davis had hung on a chair. Wes backed slowly to the door, aimed the shotgun and nearly decapitated Smith when



the contents of the first barrel took him in the head.

Jones was sleeping soundly when the second hammer dropped to riddle him with buckshot. Davis jumped out of bed clawing for his gun and dropped dead with two bullets in his heart from his own weapon.

The outlaw made his escape on the best horse and rode away to visit his father. He promised to leave the country at once, to go to Mexico, and started on the long ride. Near Austin he visited his cousins; Manning, Joe, and Gip Clements. The Clements boys were taking a trail-herd up the Chisholm trail to Abilene, and Wes Hardin was persuaded to accompany them.

Every man was a law unto himself on the cattle trail. The Clements herd overtook a Mexican trail-herd near Wichita and attempted to pass. The Mexicans refused to eat trail-dust and put up a fight. After the battle, Wes Hardin had a total of sixteen dead men on his



tally string. He had killed five Mexican *vaqueros*!

The herd was delivered in Abilene and turned over to Carrol and Johnson, the owners. The crew was paid off, and Wes Hardin decided to stay in Kansas because of the murder warrants against him down in Texas. Wild Bill Hickok was the marshal of Abilene at the time, with the reputation of being the most fearless and deadly peace officer in the west.

It was inevitable that these two masters of the Colt should meet, and the reports of their meetings are told in several different ways, because no two men see things alike. While the details differ slightly, the main body of the story remains the same.

Wes Hardin liked gambling, horse-racing and women. Eager for excitement after the long trail-drive, he went to a dance hall to meet the girls. A deputy Marshal by the name of Carson stopped him at the door of the hall and demanded his weapons.





"Shuck yore irons if yo're aimin' tuh shake uh leg inside," Carson blustered importantly. "That's th' town law!"

The young outlaw dropped his hand smoothly and covered Carson before the officer could slap the handle of his gun. He stared the deputy down with hell dancing in his eyes, and Carson backed off hurriedly.

"Wait till Bill Hickok hears



about this," he snarled. "He'll tame yuh down, *Tejano!*"

"Him or you, it's all one to me," Hardin answered quietly. "Now you git on about yore business!"

Carson hurried away while the outlaw entered the dance hall and picked a pretty girl for a partner. Satisfied at last, he left the hall and stepped out into the street. A soft voice spoke a command behind him, and Wes Hardin whirled to face Wild Bill who was covering him with a forty-five.

"Pull them guns easy an' pass 'em over with th' handles toward me," Hickok ordered. "Make it



easy, cowboy, or I'll scatter yuh all over th' street!"

Hardin drew his guns slowly and reversed the muzzles. Wild Bill lowered his gun and reached out to take the pistols. Hardin kept his fingers through the trigger guards and executed what afterward became known as the Roadman's spin, whirling the guns around so that Wild Bill found himself covered with his own pistol pointing at the ground.

"Holster yore iron an' be uh

good feller," the young outlaw drawled with a smile. "I like you, Bill, an' I don't want tuh kill yuh!"

Bill Hickok knew men and holstered his gun. Carson came racing up with his pistol drawn, and the Marshal curtly ordered him about his business.

"Yo're uh cool one, Hardin," he said to Wes. "Let's you an' me go over to th' Bull's Head an' have uh drink together!"

The two men walked to the sa-



loon and took a table in the rear. Both had several drinks, after which Wild Bill took a warrant from his pocket and showed it to Hardin. The outlaw tensed and waited until the Marshal replaced the paper in his pocket.

"Me an' you is friends now, Wes," Hickok said slowly. "I won't even think about that paper as long as we stay that-a-way!"

Wild Bill never again made the mistake of asking a Texan to hand over his guns. He made them toss the weapons on the ground and



step back, because many of the trail-crews had heard of the Hardin spin and practiced with fingers through the trigger guard.

Wes Hardin stayed on in Abilene and made many friends. One night he was drinking in the Bull's Head with another Texan named Paine. Paine had only one arm, but he knew how to use it when trouble started. Several drovers



entered the saloon and made disparaging remarks about Texans in general. Though outlawed by his native State, Wes Hardin believed that "Once a Texan, always a Texan."

"I'm uh Texan," he announced softly.

The four drovers went for their guns, and Paine was shot in the only arm he had. Wes Hardin threw down on the burly leader and shot him dead while the other three barged through the swinging doors to escape this super marksman.

The young outlaw leaped over the body and ran to his horse, just as a deputy Marshal ran up to the saloon. Hardin got the drop; covered the officer and made his escape to a cow-camp on Cottonwood

creek about thirty miles from town. Here he hid until two prominent cattlemen rode out from Abilene to enlist his aid.

"Billy Coran was kilt by a Mexican last night," one of them began. "Billy was uh Texan, an' he was holdin' uh trail-herd. He come up th' trail with you, Wes!"

"An' I'm on th' dodge," Hardin answered bitterly.

"We want yuh to trail this killer what goes by th' name of Bideo," the cattleman insisted. "We got a commission as deputy sheriff for yuh!"

"An outlaw deputy," the young Texan smiled crookedly. "But Billy was uh pard of mine, an' I'll take up for him. I'm startin' right now!"

The third and final instalment of this thrilling true life story on John Wesley Hardin will appear in the next (June) issue.

Don't Miss It!

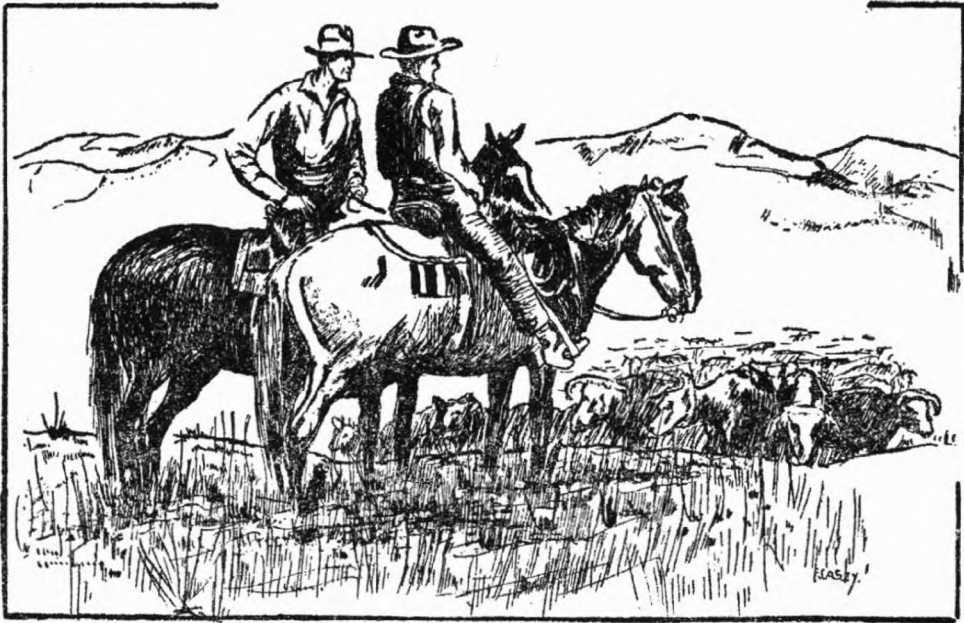
CATTLE RUSTLER'S MENACE

CONTRARY to general opinion, cattle rustling in the Southwest is far from a thing of the past. Quite the opposite. It has become a menace equally as great as that which faced the pioneer rancher of half a century ago, because modern means of transportation enable the cattle thieves to make off with their loot with much greater ease than formerly.

So acute has become cattle rustling in Texas that recently nearly two hundred sheriffs, rangers and other peace officers and cattle association officials met in San Antonio to formulate additional plans with which to cope with the growing menace. The meeting was called because of the tremendous increase in cattle theft during the past year or two.

Are You a Member of The Lone Ranger Magazine Club?

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WELL, folks and members of the saddle-loving fraternity, last month I told you about life on a cattle ranch during branding time. This time it's ranch life at shipping time.

Ain't but one reason for cattle ranches, and that's to provide good beef for the markets. So there come times on every ranch when we round up our stuff and look 'em over, separate the fat steers from the lean, and from our bulls and cows, fill in with as many calves as the veal market seems to want, and then ship. Good cows are also picked out for shipment, too. Depends on what the markets are asking for.

And, at shipping time, a cow ranch sure is busy, from dark until dawn—and mighty early dawn at that. As I said in my first article, the fellow who sleeps late gets a nice cold bucket of water throwed over him; and, like as not, his pay to date and an invite to

LIFE ON THE RANCH

A FACT ARTICLE

By

Wilton West

vanish to other parts where life's easier and he can get a manicure and a Turkish bath and a fancy hair-cut. Those little comforts ain't knowed on a cow outfit. We're sort of too busy, though we manages our weekly scrubs out behind the sheds, weather permitting.

First of all, after separating our shipping steers and calves and such cows as ought to be shipped from all our other cattle, we generally

hold the shipping herd on our best ranges, where they can eat plenty and put on weight, as that's the kind that brings us the best prices, naturally. And right here is where we are the most apt to encounter rustling.



A shipping herd is a mighty big temptation to those "long rope tossers" who infest the cow country since time began. So we always have a guard of several good punchers stick with the shipping herd, day and night.

Too, the cattle thus picked out must be held together until shipping day arrives, or they'd wander back over the range and have to be rounded up again—a waste of time on a busy cow outfit. And they'd mix with the other cattle, of course, for our ranges are not mere small farms, but wide-flung miles covering vast areas of rangeland.

While most of our big cattle

ranches have fenced their ranges nowadays, there's still plenty of space and "open range" in various parts of the West. To refer to but one such part of the cow country, a man on a bronc can start west from El Paso and ride almost to the California line, across New Mexico and Arizona, and never have to open a single gate in a barbed-wire fence; and that's telling the truth, folks. I've done it, heap of times. The other western states are the same, in many parts.

WELL, about this shipping herd we're holding. There's "Day men" and "Night Hawks," as we call 'em—riders who keep on their horses and keep riding around the herd for stated lengths of time. Good, too, if these riders carry six-guns, to use in case of stampede or to kill coyotes and wolves coming near the herd, besides the ever-present rattler.

Not to say too much in these modern times, but knowin' the West like I do, a six-gun ain't so darned bad for other purposes, sometimes. All the world ain't friends yet and strangers riding around a shippin' herd'll stand watching, when a six-gun is a mighty handy persuader if anything seems about to "bust wide open" as we say on the cow range.

While riding as day men or night hawks, we watch the weather with a mighty keen eye, and we sure smile while the state of the weather remains balmy. But then come sudden cloudbursts up in the foothills or thunder and lightning

storms; or maybe some fool green-horn riding night hawk will scratch a match along his first pair of chaps—and hell pops, right then and there.

The herd, lots of 'em lying down and the rest sleeping on their feet, just becomes a wild, brainless torrent of thundering hooves and slamming horns, night or day.

And that's when cowboys ride, folks. We try to reach the head of the herd, keeping off to the sides (not in front if we can avoid it); and then our six-guns screech for all they're worth, hoping the shooting towards the leaders will turn the herd and make 'em "mill," which means circling around like a vast hoop until we can make the circle smaller and smaller until comes the jam and all stop.

BUT, if all goes well, trailing day arrives. 'Course, we've "trail-branded" the herd—a hair brand meant only to help know the cattle on their way up to the loading pens in some town. Early dawn slips across the sky, the cook's gong bangs.

We eat fast, saddle up right away, listen to the trail boss' orders and then string out along the herd, taking whatever position he has assigned us—point (ahead), swing (beside the herd) or drag (at the rear).

Slowly, the cattle string out, following the point men, and we're on our way, covered, usually, in vast dust clouds that choke and redden the eyes and make a man wish for a fresh chew of tobacco. Mile after mile, but not too fast. Beef steers

and yearling calves must not be shoved too hard. They can lose a pound a mile, if you do.

Behind, our chuck-wagon, loaded with our grub and soogans, comes along, its six strong horses prancing as the cook's whip cracks with pistol-like sharpness in the early morning air.

Our neckerchiefs are now drawn up over our faces, leaving only our eyes free to look around; our wide-brimmed hats are pulled low. The whole outfit takes on the appearance of a bunch of brigands. Cattle moan as they move along. Bulls rumble, calves dart back and forth.

A swing man yells, darts after a steer trying to leave the column. A drag man swings his lariat against a "drifter" that won't keep up. The point men prevent the leaders from moving too fast or opening out.

Maybe it's nice and sunny, maybe raining like all hell, maybe sand is driving across the range like billions of needles. All in the day's work, and the man who grumbles just don't belong. We've all got bacon, flapjacks and coffee under our belts, good broncs to ride (even if a few do pitch on occasion), and are heading not only to the shipping pens up in town, but directly towards those enjoyments afterwards which commence to seethe within a puncher's happy head. Our "remuda" (horse herd) follows close.

Mile after mile, dust and more dust, laughter and jokes, physical expertness with horse and saddle, a man's whole being glowing with pride and health and the very joy

of living. Ever know them feelings, folks? And then, finally, we are at the loading pens, the cattle jammed, bellowing, inside the stout enclosures, the gates barred, the stock-trains whistling as they glide into place beside the loading platforms. Our horses tied, now, along the outsides of the pens, sweat-covered. We drag the ramps (short platforms to cover the open spaces between stock-car and loading platform) into place, secure them with their iron clutches.

THE trail-drive's over and we're all hungry as wild cats watchin' a bunch of squirrels. A general shout and we troop down to Chino Charlie's—"The Greasy Spoon" as the trail-boss calls it—and do we eat? Try to stop us.

While we've been "grubbin'," our broncs've been having their oats an' alfalfa. Now we're pounding leather again, back to the loading pens, for the engineer's whistle

has told us he's ready, cars placed. Couple of riders ride inside the loading pens, where the beef steers and cows have been shoved into one or more of the great corrals, the calves in another.

The Government inspector, while we've all been eating, has looked the cattle over, with our trail-boss, and given us his Okay. Our trail-boss gives us the high sign to start loadin'.

And right there's where we got that word "Puncher." From loading pens to platform leading into each stock car, there are inclined platforms on the outer sides of the chutes leading up to the cars.

Along these inclined platforms we take our places, sleeves rolled up, hats back, sweat pouring as we prod the cattle up from the pens below into the chutes and up them into the cars, using long, spiked poles.

There's a lot of romance written about punchers, folks, but darned little about the word itself—just sweating work until a man 'most drops before the last critter is shoved inside the last stock car and the car-door slammed shut and sealed.

We've rode since four A.M., trailed a dust-covered cattle herd twenty-six miles across a blazing desert, had our bronc fall once in a dog-hole and once when sliding down a bluff after a "drifter." We ain't washed since dawn, and our throats have been choked with alkali dust—all for forty and found and the love o' pounding leather over the rangeland. And we've had another fella's horse tromp on our



foot and a steer scrape our shin with his durned horn. Been out of tobacco for the last six miles and ain't had a decent drink since we started.

Well, the last stock-car door slams shut, is sealed, and the trail-boss says a couple of us'll go along with the cattle to K.C. and see that they're duly delivered and attended to along the way, day and night, and unloaded and reloaded in railroad yards whenever State laws demand it—as a lot do.

He says he's going too. We three'll ride back in the caboose and play poker for jack-pots most of the way; and we'll see the high lights of K.C. before we wear our chaps again, ten days from now. We give the other riders the cool and smiling wink, knowing they'd all like to go along with us. They're sort of doleful as they wave us goodbye.

But they ain't so badly off. I've been one of 'em and know. Back in town the big windows of the "Cowboy's Delight" are blazing as night falls, and some Mexican guitars, a violin and a rotten old piano are banging out *baile* music; and right soon, after a wash-up out behind the place, where's tin basins on a bench, our fellas'll be slinging a nasty boot over the sanded dance floor, swinging gals high, wide an' handsome.

But some, more level-headed than the rest, will get that dust out of their throats the proper way, and then invest in some new clothes and maybe couple pair of new fancy chaps, with four months' pay being handed out by the boss before our train started away.



And tomorrow morning, bright and early, they'll all be busting the wind back to the ranch, shouting all the way; that is, all 'cept the new fella we calls "Howdy, Mister." He laid down when a bronc fell with 'im and said he was hurt bad. Fact was, not even a skinned spot on 'im a-tall. Boss let 'im out. Wouldn't you hate being that hombre, folks—a quitter?

Are you entering

The Lone Ranger

Magazine Club Contest?

See Page 126

DUST DEVILS

By
Claude Rister

Three Desperate Gunmen Against One Inexperienced Kid. What Would Happen When Lead Starts Flying. Even the Kid Couldn't Believe His Eyes



"Well, we can rectify the mistake right now."

FRECK GILMORE looked the typical saddle tramp as he drew rein in front of the Five Spot ranch house. His Levis were faded and threadbare. His boots were cheap, run-over ones cast off by a nester. His holster and the loops in his cartridge belt were empty. His saddle was a weather-curved hull, his mount a crow-bait pony so poor that its ribs could be counted from a distance. Tufts of rust colored hair escaped through holes in the wreck of a hat. Original horse and saddle, gun, boots, spurs; even cartridges had

gone for food during a long period of unemployment.

The Big Bend ranch on which the kid had been brought up, had sold to a syndicate, and Freck had been told to drift. He had decided to head westward. Ranches all along the way had refused him work, saying that he was too young, too thin. What they did not know was that seventeen-year-old Freck Gilmore was an expert with both rope and six-gun, and that the kid was a very fine rider.

A man came to the door in answer to Freck's knock. "Howdy,



stranger," spoke Freck. "I thought maybe I might get put up for the night."

The man, a tall, slab-bodied hombre, peered at him, and then looked at the mount. "Saddle bum, huh?" The voice was harsh, contemptuous.

Freck's thin face went hot. The kid was proud. "I'm willing to pay," he blurted curtly, although he had but a dollar to his name.

"Oh, you are, huh? Well, come on in; we're just eating."

"I'd like to put up my pony first, if you don't mind. I—"

"Didn't I say we're eating? About finished, in fact. Think we want to leave grub-pile spread just for you? Let that stack of hide and bones wait. I reckon it won't collapse while you're away."

Resentment was boiling within the kid, but he told himself that he was in no position to argue or show offense. His gaunt belly was howling for food. And so although he pitied his pony, he clumped indoors.

As Freck entered the mess-room, he saw three other men. One was seated at the head of the table, both jaws bulging with food. Two others were just slouching out through a side door. They gave him curious, sneering glances over their shoulders. The one at the table stared at him coldly.

For some unaccountable reason a vague sense of uneasiness had

seized him. The four men all were hard looking fellows—still, why should he be afraid? He had nothing at all of value.

This anxiety became more pronounced as he ate his supper. The two men, after they had finished eating, kept staring at him, and there was something unfathomable in their boring eyes. They were brothers, he had learned—Cole and Hale Bastern. Cole was the one who had let him into the house. Freck had given them his name.

The harsh voiced Cole remarked:

"Riding the old grub-lines, huh? How come you honored this here country with your presence, kid?"

Freck's face flushed—it was a decidedly thin face; as speckled as a turkey egg.

"On my way to old man Hen Elton's Bar Forty-four spread. Hope to get me a job there. Elton and my dad were saddle pals, back in their boyhood days."

"Ugh! That so?" exclaimed Hale Bastern. In contrast to his brother, he possessed a twanging voice. "It happens we just sold seven hundred head of fine white-face stockers to the old gent. His boys are driving 'em to the home ranch by way of Desolation Peak, and Deadman's Pass."

FRECK became interested. Instantly had leaped into his mind the idea of catching up with



the outfit. He began asking questions.

For some strange reason the two men became taciturn, suspicious acting. They turned personally inquisitive. And now of a sudden that spirit of uneasiness which had seized the youth, became all the more pronounced. He felt exactly as if he had discovered that he had entered a snake-den. And another thing! These two men! Their hard faces seemed familiar! They stirred up sinister ghosts of memory within his mind. Yet he could not recall ever having heard the name, Bastern, before.

Suddenly the slate-eyed Hale, shot at him: "Haven't I seen you somewhere, kid?"

Freck gulped a mouthful of boiled beef and potatoes. Strangely, he felt almost terrified: "N—not that I know of." Both men leaned toward him. Their eyes seemed to be looking straight through him. His nerves began to quiver.

And then of a sudden the freckled youth had it! Ten years ago, in a country far away from this, he had cowered within a shack while two desperadoes had shot his father to death before his eyes and had cleaned the little ranch of stock. He had learned later that they were the notorious buscaderos, the Acher brothers.

So excited now was Freck that he blurted: "I know you now! Basterns, my eye! You're the murdering, thieving Achers!"

Remembrance came to "Cole Bastern" at the same instance: "It's that kid. The one we left in the shack that day down on the

border! I told you we ought to've killed him!"

"Well, we can rectify the mistake right now," twanged "Hale Bastern," as he kicked back his chair, jerked to his feet, and dropped a hand to his six-shooter.

Freck's brain and his heart were racing wildly. Unarmed! Faced by two men whom he knew to be inhuman killers! What to do! His mind screamed the question. Almost subconsciously he acted.

He ducked. As his tousled, sandy thatch went under the table edge a gun boomed, its detonation thundering there within the confines of the four walls. He heard the vicious: Ha-ash-h! of the slug above him.

Freck grabbed a table leg and heaved. Over went the table. So did Cole Bastern. There was a mighty clattering of spilled dishes and pans. Then came a terrific bawl, like that of a wounded steer.

Freck grinned in the darkness—the lamp had gone out. He grabbed up a chair and hurled it toward the place in the gloom where he knew Hale was standing, gun ready to send another slug. Gone now was the cold fear of a moment before. He laughed outright as he heard a thud, and Hale joined in Cole's swearing.

HE WENT bounding for the back door. There was amazing speed and agility in his frail looking body. Every cord and muscle within that slim form was like rawhide.

As Freck hurled himself through the back door two shots exploded behind him. To the kid in that in-

stant they sounded like the boom of artillery. His worn old nester boots whacked upon the back porch. A hide bottomed chair he kicked out of the way. It skittered crazily, and brought up against a post. He spun around a corner of the plank building and went sprinting desperately for his pony.

Now the whole ranch was in an uproar. The horses within the corral were snorting and galloping about. Awakened chickens were cackling. A leashed dog was barking and snarling. Within the kitchen there was a mad furore of stamping feet and shouting voices. Yelling men were breaking out of the bunkhouse.

"Don't let him get away!" brayed the peculiar voice of Hale Bastern. "Riddle him, men! The kid, I mean! Get him!" Colts popped. Hot lead hissed about the fleeing youth.

Freck Gilmore mumbled an exclamation of thankfulness as he reached his mount. A lunge, and his hands gripped the saddle horn. He flung his wiry body. Down came his spidery legs and clamped like steel springs. "Git, Billy!" he yelled, as he struck with his unspurred heels, and an open hand. The tired, ribby little horse responded to the best of its ability.

The crackling of guns became like a Fourth of July celebration. To the low-lying, desperately riding kid it seemed that lead was swarming about him. He was audibly mumbling hopes—and Fate granted his wish. Neither he nor his horse was touched. Soon the shooting ceased, and he realized that he was out of pistol range.

The Basterns were cursing like wild men—bitterly denouncing the two punchers, when they themselves, were more to blame for the kid's escape than the two men



from the bunkhouse. "After him!" Cole's voice seemed to jar to the very heavens. "We've got to get that kid! Saddle and ride, men! He can't escape us on that clevis of his! A month's extra wages to the man who drills the young'un! I want him dead, not alive!"

There was a keen brain beneath Freck Gilmore's rust colored thatch. He had bolted away southward. If he maintained a ride in that direction he would be quickly overtaken and shot to death. Now he boldly circled straight back toward the ranch house.

He chuckled grimly, as concealed by a dubious screen of greasewood, he watched four riders sweeping a hole in the night. Quietly, then, he rode to the corral, sprang down, and loosened his lariat.

Freck was not stealing a fresh

mount. He would release the animal when he caught up with old man Elton's Bar Forty-four herd, and let the cowpony return home. Soon he was in the saddle again. He looked longingly toward the house: "Maybe I could find a gun there." And then he shook his head: "Nope, I guess I better not risk it. I'd have to make a light, and it might be seen. Reckon I'll depend on this Five Spot cayuse to save my hide."

STEADILY Freck Gilmore rode westward. Although a stranger in that country, he knew the location of Desolation Peak and Deadman's Pass, for he had carefully inquired directions to old Hen Elton's Bar Forty-four ranch. The night wore on—to the steady thumping of his "borrowed" mount's hoofs.

Three hours past midnight! He looked up at the egg-shaped moon. The sky was dull, the stars sickly. Not a breath of air stirred, but there was a threat of sandstorm in the air.

"A feller can always smell a duster long before she arrives," muttered Freck, as his light-brown eyes anxiously studied the horizons. "It's a sort of—well—metallic smell. And the heavens take on a weird look."

He finally located the Bar Forty-four outfit, and rode into camp just as the punchers were getting ready for grub-pile. The east was faintly pink. The campfire glowed cheerfully beneath the string of Dutch cooking utensils. The wagon loomed a welcome. Freck heard the jingling of a bell, and saw that

the wrangler was bringing in the ponies. The herd was up and grazing. Human figures were moving about in the dawn.

The punchers gazed curiously as Freck rode into camp. They gathered about him, and after he had told his story, brows furrowed worriedly. Spade Manners, boss of the outfit, spoke thoughtfully: "Umph! Me, I'm sorter uneasy. The boss met them Bastern brothers at market point and dealt with them for some shorthorn breeders. We picked up the stuff and headed for home. Figured on venting and rebranding after getting there. Didn't want to delay none, account it had been looking sort of sandstormy, and we had some mean country to cross."

"You better look out for them two hombres," warned Freck. "They're snakes. They may try to get the cows back. With their brand still on 'em, all they'd have to do would be to haze 'em onto the home range, and—"

"Yeh, I was thinking about that. Wish we'd vented and branded before leaving their range. Can't stay halted long enough to do the work right now, though. She's coming a buster of a sandstorm, or I miss my guess, and we want to be out of this dusty country before it breaks."

The dark, wiry foreman thumbed his cleft chin thoughtfully: "Ex-desperadoes and killers, huh? They come to this country some years back, and went to raising blooded stuff. They've always acted sort of mysterious, but—You can fix their clocks by talking to the law," he broke off.

Freck shook his head: "They paid to the law—that is, all that the law could hang onto them. Now they're clear. I reckon my word wouldn't be sufficient to hang 'em for the murder of my dad. I could make things mighty unsociable for 'em in this country, though, even if I can't prove anything against 'em. They know it—and that's why they tried to kill me. If they'd succeeded, nobody would ever have known."

"The rattlers!" growled Spade Manners, and then: "Well, let's get rid of this grub; then we'll start the herd rolling. I'll dig you up a decent outfit, kid."

Shortly after sun-up the outfit was on the move. Freck Gilmore was happier than he had been in many a day, despite what had happened during the night. Spade had supplied him with a Bar Forty-four horse and a decent saddle. The boys had thrown in together, and now his clothes were those of the average range hand. To cap the climax, every loop in his ammunition belt was filled, and a Colt forty-five was swung at his right hip.

Yes, Freck Gilmore was happy. Exhilaration rolled up in him. Here he had been received and treated not as a kid saddle tramp, but as a seasoned cowboy. He felt a bit reckless. He would show them that their confidence in him was not misplaced. He could ride, and rope, and shoot as well as any dad-gummed one of 'em! They'd see!

Little did he know in his newfound happiness how much he was going to need all his abilities. A storm was coming from the north

—a storm of dust. Another was coming from the south—a storm of gunsmoke, and lead, and death!

THE sandstorm approached at midmorning. No adverse whim of Dame Weather is feared by range-wise riders half so much as a "duster," and here was one at its worst. There was an eerie stillness. The sun was brazen, but not hot. The sky was a dingy red. The atmosphere was pregnant with electricity. Sounds fell peculiarly flat—voices, hoofs, crackling of joints, the *whop* of lariats on rumps.

Eyes kept turning to the north. Over there, from east to west in a long, sombre line, the oncoming storm billowed and roiled in an awful way. Even the marching cow-brutes caught the tension—as their bawls, and their rolling eyes, and their quickened pace manifested.

Spade Manners, his tightly reined, loping mount seeming to float under him, circled the line of cattle. To each puncher that he reached he said: "She's coming, cowboy. Looks like a hum dinger, but we've all seen 'em before. Just keep the critters rolling, and everything will be all right."

His quiet, efficient way begot confidence. The punchers grinned, nodded, drawled agreement that there was nothing to worry about. But each man knew that both he and the other lied. Why, the atmosphere fairly quivered with danger!

"You come with me, Freck," Spade curtly directed. "It takes a

couple of good men to ride point at a time like this."

Swelling pride almost sent buttons whizzing from the kid's clothes. He pulled his Stetson lower, tightened his reins, fingered his Colt, jingled his spurs: "Sure, Spade, you can depend on me. Let's go."

Even the first puff of the dirt-storm was almost stifling. Men jerked their hats down to their eyebrows, and pulled their scarfs up over their noses. The cattle bawled uneasily, their bellowing drifting weirdly through the gloomy atmosphere. Tumbleweeds bounded along—phantoms out of nowhere, into nowhere. Wind whistled through scrub growth. Sand created a softly snarling sound as it drifted along the earth.

"My gosh, this is awful!" mumbled Freck. "A feller can't see



twenty yards in front of his face!"

"Don't worry," Spade Manners told him. "I can make Deadman's Pass even by guess. Once on the other side there won't be half so much dust."

On they went, a spectral proces-

sion—men and beasts! Blurred shadows moving within a tawny fog. An uncanny sort of gloom lay upon the range. At times the sun could not be seen at all; and even when it was visible, it was but a dirty ball, shedding no light. The surrounding hills had been blotted out. Stunted trees and small growth loomed faintly—ghostly things in the murk.

Grit trickled from lowered hatbrims. Human eyes became red-rimmed slits. The punchers coughed, and sneezed, and swore behind their masks. The cattle ceased to bellow, for they quickly had learned that in so doing they filled their lungs with sand. The horses kept their nostrils rattling. Manes and tails flew in the wind. Yes, the storm had made of day a terrible twilight.

After an hour of boring along through the duster, Spade Manners reined close to Freck and mumbled: "I can't leave point, kid; got to keep digging toward the pass. You turn back; circle the herd and see how the other boys are getting along. Give 'em all words of cheer from me, savvy?"

Freck nodded. Spade slapped him on the back and reined away. Freck wheeled and started back eastward, skirting a side of the stream of cattle.

BESIDES Spade Manners, and the man who had gone ahead with the chuck wagon, there were three of the Bar Forty-four waddies—one on each flank and one at the drag. After a while a smeared figure appeared in the haze. It took the form of a rider. The man's head

was down, his face masked by a bandana. "Hi, Arizona!" shouted the kid, taking note of the clothing and of the tall roan horse. "How's she going?"

The other spoke an unintelligible something, and glanced at the youth sidewise from under the lowered brim of his hat. Freck could see scarcely more than a single slitted eye. He called: "Spade says to just take her easy and don't worry. It ain't a heck of a ways farther to the pass."

The other nodded, and waved a gauntleted hand confidently. Freck did not notice that when the hand dropped it went to the butt of the rider's six shooter. The young fellow had socked spurs to his mount and was ripping a hole in the drifting grit.

Freck swung wide to get around a thick clump of bushes, and then of a sudden he pulled up short. A hat, driven by the wind, had passed right in front of his pony. To whom did that hat belong? There was supposed to be only one rider on this flank. He turned and went loping in the direction from which the mysterious headgear had come.

His horse snorted and danced to one side. Looking down, Freck saw a human form sprawled upon the ground. He dismounted and bent close. "Arizona!" he exclaimed behind his mask. A quick examination showed that the cowboy's skull was dented at the back. Doubtless he had been clubbed with a six shooter.

Freck rose slowly and peered back in the direction from which he had come. "Arizona!" he mut-

tered again. "Then I wonder who's the hombre I spoke to back there! He had on this waddy's clothes, and was riding his roan! The duds on this body ain't a-tall the things Arizona was wearing when last I saw him!"

Filled with anxiety he straddled leather and rode swiftly toward the tail of the herd. Arriving there he came suddenly upon another spectral figure. This rider, too, was closely masked and hatted. He wore clothing and rode the sorrel horse of a cowboy called Rio, but Freck felt certain that here was not the Bar Forty-four puncher who had been left at the drag. He pretended not to be suspicious, however.

The kid spoke just a few cheering words. He was cold all the while as he did so. He could see that the other was looking at him from the corners of slitted eyes, and he knew not at what second a hand might dart for a six-gun. His own fingers rested curled on his thigh, close to the butt of his forty-five. Swiftly he rattled off his words; then with a dig of his spurs he sent his mount away into the billowing dust.

Up the other side of the herd he went, making back toward the point. Spade Manners must be warned at once. After a while, though, he again yanked to a stop. Out of the storm had come the sound of a shot, strangely muffled there in the boiling, twisting, drifting dust and sand.

Freck felt certain that the shot had not been fired at him, for he had heard no sound of passing lead. Muttering to himself he plied spurs

to his horse and rode on. He swung quickly into a ghostly thicket as he described vague shadows in the gloom—a ground hitched horse; a man, bending over another who lay on the ground. The animate one was stripping the outer clothing from the inert form.



Freck's heart pounded. Horror crawled up and down within his slim body as he sat his mount there amidst the bushes and the dust, wildly turning over the situation in his mind. The Bar Forty-four riders were being attacked and their places taken by other men. These fellows were taking their victims' mounts and clothing, so that if any one not allied with them should come along before they had completed their game, they would not be recognized.

And who were these mysterious riders? Freck did not ponder that question at all. "The Bastern gang, of course," he told himself.

"I got to do something to stop

'em," Freck told himself grimly. "I—" The thought broke off. Another rider suddenly had appeared out of the fogging dust. He joined the one who was on the ground. They talked for a moment; then the one on the horse dismounted. The two of them picked up the inert form and came straight toward Freck with it. The kid gritted an exclamation and dragged out his pistol.

WITH calloused ruthlessness the two outlaws tossed the body into some bushes. Now while the killer dressed himself in the cowboy's things, he and his companion talked. They had to shout in order to be heard, and so their words carried plainly to the kid:

"Well, we're all set now, Cole. Bandy has done taken care of that waddy up front by this time."

"I don't know," replied the harsh voice of Cole Bastern. "He might've heard that shot. Sorry you had to fire it, Hale. Couldn't you get your man without shooting?"

"Nope, when I ordered him to put 'em up he reached for a six-gun instead. I didn't have a chance to club him, so I shot."

"That blasted kid's loose somewhere, too. He was circling the herd, handing out words of cheer. I followed him, aiming to backshoot him, but didn't see the little cuss again. He must've rode hard. Did you see him?"

"Nope."

"Better look out," the other warned after a brief silence. "He might've seen you and that body. I'll go on up to the point and see

how things are there. The drag can take care of itself. Soon as the whole crew's out of the way we'll start the cows rolling toward home."

Freck Gilmore did not wait to hear more. Taking advantage of a dense billow of dust he spurred his pony out of the clump of harsh growth, and went drilling into the stifling, blinding grit. "I hope they didn't hear the hoofbeats," he told himself.

Within the vicinity of the place where he had parted company with Spade Manners he swung to the right. The sand-fog had thinned a little, and he could see two horses, standing at the edge of a nest of boulders. He slowed his own mount to a walk and turned toward them. A moment later anxiety shocked him as he recognized one of the horses as the foreman's and saw that both saddles were empty. Perhaps another body was being stripped of its outer clothing.

There was desperate need for fast action on the kid's part, for even now Cole Bastern might be on his way to the point, and Freck knew that if Cole saw him the man would try to kill him. And so Freck again swung into a little clump of dry brush. He flung himself out of leather, and with his six shooter drawn, went humping swiftly forward.

He worked his way among the boulders, pausing now and then to listen, but he could hear nothing except the sounds created by the wind. Then he found himself suddenly right upon two men. One of them was stretched on the ground. His head was bare, and his hair

was filled with grit. Blood that was thickened with sand streaked down one temple. It was Spade Manners! The other man was kneeling beside him, removing the foreman's jumper.

Some sense warned the killer of another presence. He jerked up his head. In the narrow opening between the lowered hatbrim and the bandana mask, the kid saw two slitted, gleaming eyes. The next instant the outlaw was throwing himself aside, and sending a hand toward his gun butt.

TWO GUNS exploded, their reports sounding queerly flat there in the storm. As dull flame jerked from the muzzle of Freck's weapon, gravel flew from the ground half way between him and his opponent. His slug had found the other man before the fellow could raise his gun to a level. Down went the outlaw on his face, and with arms and legs flung wide he lay there without a move.

Freck went quickly to him. The kid's slim body was tense with horror as he grasped a lax arm and turned the fellow onto his back. He pulled down the mask and looked at the face. Immediately he recognized one of the two men whom he had seen slouching out of the Five Spot mess-room. The fellow was dead.

Freck rose to his feet. The next instant he was voicing a startled cry behind his bandana, and leaping to one side. There was a tall, slab-built devil of the sandstorm before him! Cole Bastern!

The quick-trigger killer fired as Freck lunged aside. The bullet

clipped a wisp of rust colored hair from a side of the kid's head. Before Cole could trigger another shot, the kid hurled a slug. He saw Cole Bastern's tall form jerk—but then that might have been caused by the push of a gust of wind.

A man to man gunfight with a notorious lead slinger! The flying thought fairly made the boy's red hair stand on end. What chance had he? But he pinched his lips together and shot again.

He saw now that his first bullet really had slammed into the murderer's chest. The man had been unable to pull trigger again. His gun fell from his long, bony fingers and vanished into the dust. His tall body was rocking. He strove to keep it erect, but failed. The wind shoved him backward. He struck like a felled pine.

Freck gaped in awe. He had killed two men, one of them a notorious desperado. It was almost inconceivable. He told himself that he must be dreaming.

Then he threw off the feeling. The cloak of youth had fallen away from him. He was very much a man now, a man with a warm gun in his hand, and more grim work to perform. His dad's brutal murder was being avenged.

Hale Bastern would have heard the shots. Doubtless even now he was on his way to investigate them. Why wait for him? Surprise is one of the shortest trails to victory. Freck thrust the naked gun under a side of his denim jumper to keep sand from blowing into the barrel; then he hunched his slim body and went trudging away into the storm.

Queer feelings were racing through him. His mind seemed foreign. He thought that he heard his name called faintly there in the eerie, sandblasted gloom, but he told himself that his imagination was running wild.

The next moment he was soberly, grimly contemplating his probable meeting with Hale Bastern. In the other two battles he had been fortunate. He had caught the first killer unawares, while his own gun was drawn. In the second instance he had saved himself by that instinctive lunge aside. What would happen when he met the second gun-slinging Bastern? Having heard the shots Hale probably would be alert as a lobo. What would happen?

THE stream of cattle had vanished into the harsh gloom—marching steadily on of their own accord, toward Deadman's Pass. As if sensing the catastrophe impending, the mid-day darkness became more sombre. The wind increased in violence. It wailed and shrieked among boulders and snagrocks, and whizzed through thorny growth. The sand kept up that harsh, softly snarling sound as it shifted ceaselessly along the ground.

The dust was almost suffocating. It was coming in gigantic, roiling, smokelike waves. At times Freck Gilmore was racked by coughs. The grit sifted right through his bandana mask, and his nostrils and his lips were caked with it. His eyeballs ached. It seemed that he was all alone within a weird world which was wholly without life ex-

cept for himself—an awful feeling!

A rider came lunging out of the flying grit. Freck Gilmore lurched to a stop and his gun flew from beneath his jumper. Before he could spring aside the horse's left shoulder struck him and sent him reeling away. Again he was lucky. The blow saved his life.

Evidently Hale Bastern had been riding with gun bared, for now Freck saw a dull red spurt of flame. The confined report of a six shooter jarred on his eardrums. A slug of lead whizzed past his head. The horse snorted and reared. "You, eh? Danged little rat!" Hale bawled behind his mask. "I'll—"

Freck fired; but Hale Bastern had swung his mount while the animal was rearing. The bullet struck the horse instead of the man. The pony squealed, pivoted, bucked twice; then its legs crumpled under it. Cole went flying from the saddle, and vanished into the dust. The dying horse sent up a veritable geyser of sand as it lay there floundering and flailing wildly.

The kid might have escaped Hale Bastern by taking flight, but he was not thinking of escape. His thin neck outthrust, slim body humped over his gun, he went running toward the spot where he last had seen the outlaw.

THEY met suddenly, and both jerked to a stop. Guns flew to cover human forms. The two weapons exploded at the same instant. Freck saw a flash of fire that disintegrated instantly into

flying sparks; then Stygian gloom snuffed down upon him.

When he awoke his brow and his hair seemed all muddy. He heard voices, recognized Spade Manners and another Bar Forty-four waddy. They grinned at him, helped him to sit up. "How you feeling now?" inquired the foreman, yelling to make his voice heard. He was stoppering a canteen.

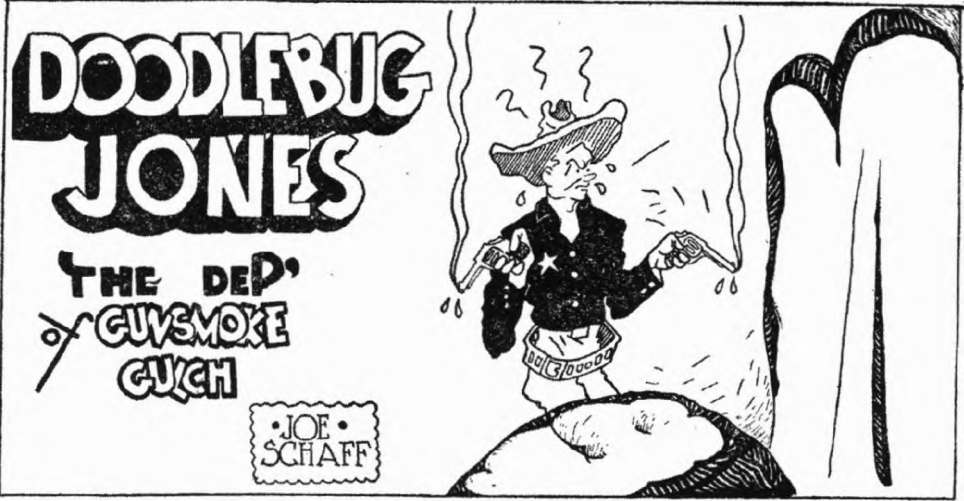
"Wh— what you rannies doing here? I—I thought—"

"Lucky day for us three. Harry, here was slugged, but soon woke up, and come to look for the rest of us. Found me just as I was coming to. A Five Spotter slugged me, too. We saw you disappearing into the storm and called to you, but you didn't hear. We run after you, but didn't find you in the dust. Then we heard guns banging. A moment later we found you and Hale Bastern here."

Freck Gilmore blinked, and looked at a form stretched out nearby. Spade Manners said: "Yeh, you got him. He only creased you. Quite a day's gun-work, Freck! You knocked off three lead slingers, including two notorious desperadoes. Yeh, some day's work! I don't think anybody's ever going to call you kid again!"

Freck got to his feet. "Spade," he asked dubiously, hopefully, "do you reckon that Mr. Elton will give me a job now?"

Spade whacked him on the back: "Will he! Cowboy, I'll be plumb surprised if he don't put me back to twisting brones, and make you foreman in my place!"



SOMETHIN' ORTA BE DONE 'BOUT THEM THAR SKONKS!~ EF ALL THE MEN IN THIS YERE TOWN 'UD GO ON THE HUNT FER 'EM- WE'UD BE ABLE TO CLEAN THEM OUT!~



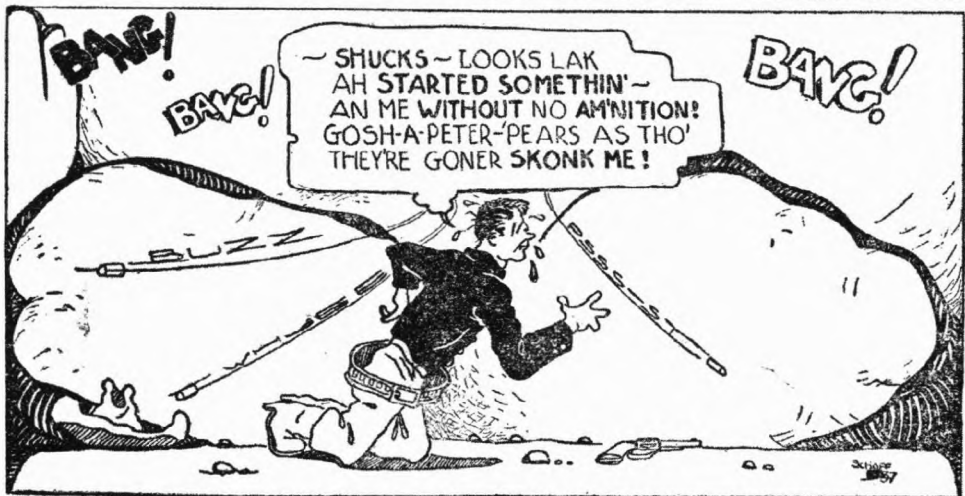
HOT DAWG~ LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE ELSE IS A GUNNIN' FER THET SKONK!!~



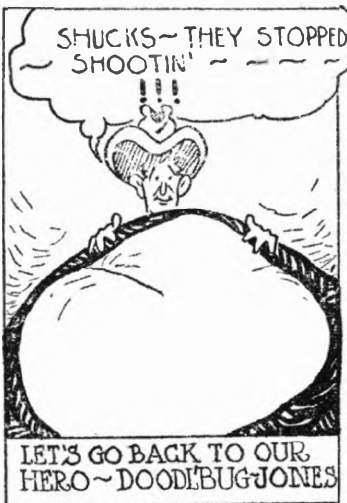
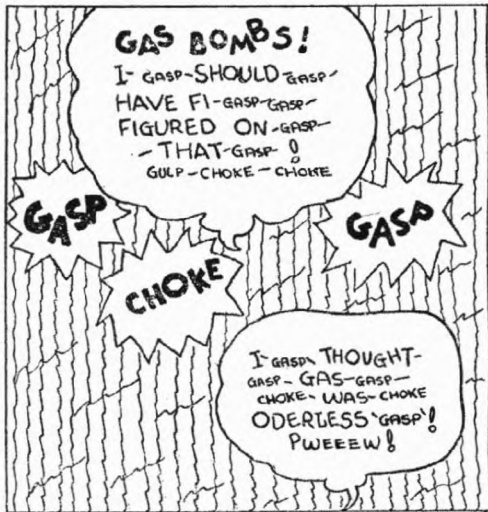
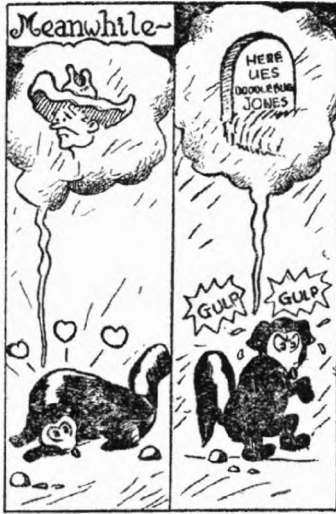
WELL- GUESS AH WAS WRONG!

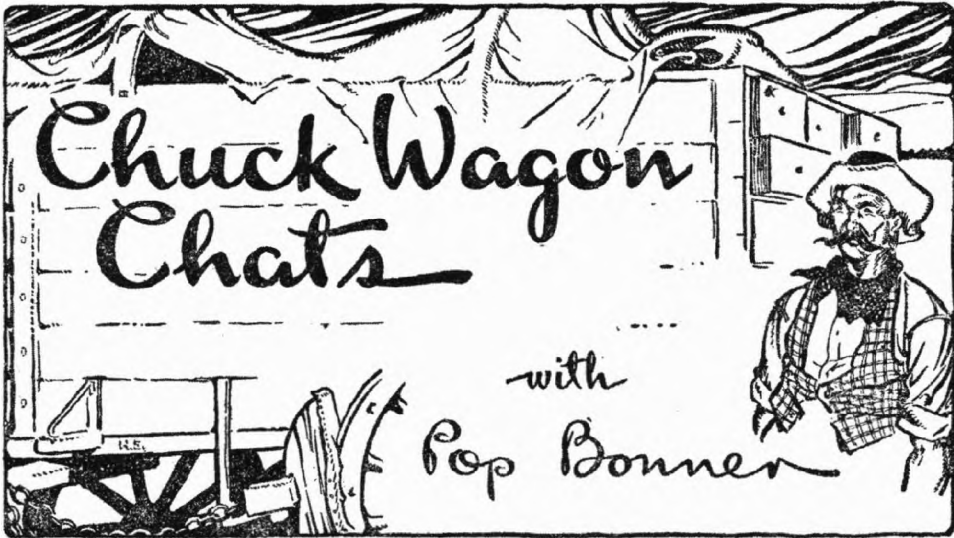


GOSH DARN~ AH BETTER GIT SET FER A FIGHT !!



~ SHUCKS~ LOOKS LAK AH STARTED SOMETHIN'~ AN ME WITHOUT NO AM'NITION! GOSH-A-PETER~ PEAR'S AS THO' THEYRE GONER SKONK ME!





WELL, folks, yere we air ag'in, all squattin' 'round th' old chuck wagon an' ready tuh hear th' cookie's grand old yowl, "Come an' git it!" Ain't no sound on th' cow range what brings fellas an' gals arampin' at a run like that one.

After all day ridin' trail, behind cattle what shore raises a mighty pile o' dust in a man's throat, makin' 'im wish a rattler'd chaw 'im so's th' wagon-boss'd pass out some good old red-eye as a cure, that old shout o' th' chuck-wagon cook jest sorta rings sweet on th' desert air.

I shore knows, me havin' rode th' range from Montany tuh th' Mex border fer well nigh ontuh forty year, come hell or high water, flood or blizzard. Yes, suh, ain't no sound no better'n that good old yell from cookie.

An' 'cause I got a heap o' recollections o' sech times, fellas an' gals, it's right nice all o' us squattin' yere beside our chuck wagon an' knowin' we're gonna git aplenty companionship an' yarns

soon's our belts grows tight 'round our middles.

Moon big an' round, stars ashin- ing, herd a bellerin' soft like from th' hed-ground, our night brones saddled an' awaitin' our turns as night hawks, an' mebbe th' boss comin' ridin' up with his two pretty daughters an' their mandolin an' guitar.

Folks, when them two gals gits asingin' yere 'side th' wagon, that's real livin'. Ain't a man what remembers, then, 'bout havin' been throwed intuh a cactus plant early that mawnin' when his bronc busted in half 'cause o' th' chilly air.

Things is jest calm an' plumb fine, when them two gals gits warblin' "Little Joe, th' Wrangler" or "Th' Chisholm Trail", o' which they ain't no grander songs ever writ by human hand. No, suh!

But they's some things what's equally okay, an' that's bein' give a heap o' top-hand stories from writers what knows their ranges like a baby knows its Ma, come chow time. An' ef yuh've done

read our first issue o' last month, yuh gotta own up there ain't no sweller yarns ever printed, no ways an' no where.

Sittin' yere an' visionin' th' boss an' Miss Brownie, his secretary, pawin' through a milyun stories tuh pick out th' very best for yuh, workin' like he does from sun-up till ev'ry night club in New York's closed up, an' takin' no time off tuh grab his hot meals, makes me feel yuh'd oughta be told how hard he's workin' so's yuh'll git th' very best westerns penned by human hands.

He shore throwed a wide rope last month in draggin' all them top-notchers intuh our corral like he did. But that's only jest a starter. Watch our smoke, folks.

An' they's another side tuh this holdin' down a swivel chair like I'm doin', 'stead o' forkin' a stock saddle an' yawpin' at cow critters down on th' Lazy J.

That's seein' my desk yere pile up with heaps o' letters from folks what's writ in askin' 'bout a hundred an' more questions 'bout th' western country. Makes my old heart git right het up, seein' how many fellas an' gals wants tuh hear 'bout us cow-folks an' way we live an' what we do.

Yes, suh, makes me right glad from th' soles o' my high-heeled boots tuh top o' my old Stetson. So I'm gonna git right at them fine letters an' give th' writers their answers, far's space'll permit, an' yuh kin all sit right yere beside me an' hear ev'rything.

First letter's from Baldy Powers, who lives out Oregon way. Yo're shore a right good looker,

Baldy, from yore photygraf—big, strappin' hombre what oughta make a runnin' bull think twict afore he tackled yuh. F'ella after my own heart, son.

Yuh wants tuh know what us cow fellas mean when we speak o' a "string" o' hosses. Well, Baldy (ain't yuh got no hair or is that jest yore best gal's pet name fer yuh, kid?), it's thisaway:

By a "String" o' hosses, we mean th' brones assigned tuh a cowboy on a ranch. Some ranches assigns two-three, others six tuh ten, 'cordin' tuh size o' th' ranch he's workin' for. Thataway, ev'ry rider knows his own hosses, rides 'em, busts 'em, looks out fer 'em, an' no other fella's got a right tuh touch 'em.

Ef yuh grabs a fella's brones outa his string without askin' his permission first, yo're liable tuh be handed a Joe Louis, an' without bein' paid none o' th' gate receipts.

Next letter's from Helen Le-Claire, o' Brewton, Alabama. That's where all th' pretty gals hails from, boys. Helen's sent me her picture, snap shot on her hoss, an' it shore makes me wish I had dinero 'nough fer a trip tuh her town. No use any o' you hombres writin' me tuh let yuh see her picture. Nuthin' doin'.

Folks, Helen's asked what us cow-folks means when we talks 'bout "cuttin'" hosses an' "ropin'" hosses. Well, it's thisaway, Helen.

Cowboys trains some o' their brones tuh be top-hand at ridin' intuh a herd o' cattle, pickin' out one speshul cow (mebbe with her

calf) an' shovin' that there cow an' calf outside th' herd so's other men, waitin' at th' brandin' fire, kin brand cow an' calf.

Some hosses gits so durned smart at th' cuttin' out job that onct th' rider's give th' signal, th' hoss'll 'most drive that cow an' calf outa th' herd without even a touch on th' reins; almost human thataway.

It's shore grand tuh watch sech a hoss work. He's quick as a cat on th' turns, follerin' th' cow clost an' guessin' each jump th' cow'll make afore she's made it.

A "ropin'" hoss is one what a cowboy's trained so's it won't mind a rope bein' whirled about it's head or laigs; what'll sit back pronto on th' rope onct th' rider's tossed his loop over a cow's haid an' w'll hold that rope taut long's th' cowboy's workin' over th' throwed cow or calf; nor let th' rope slacken or go walkin' away draggin' th' cow or calf at th' rope's end.

Plenty top-grade cow-hosses is good both at cuttin' an' ropin', but most gen'rilly a bronc excels at one or th' other job an' then his rider keeps 'im at that work.

Well, next letter's from Charlie Erskine, what hails from Montany. I been there, son. Usta punch cows up 'long th' Milk River, near Havre, an's shore right what yuh'd call chilly there come them long winters.

I've saw it low as fifty below zero, 'crost them Milk River Flats an' th' Bear Paw Mountains, an' that ain't no burnin' up temperachure, no time. But fellas an' gals

gits mighty healthy in yore country, Charlie.

A grand country ef yo're hard an' strong, like folks oughta be. Air up there's jest as fine as old Baldy Wiggins' whiskey in his Buckhorn Saloon in Miles City—so strong yuh kin take away th' bottle an' th' whiskey'll stand straight up, all by itself.

Why, one time me an' old George Saunders o' th' Bar-K spread was campin' in th' hills an' cookin' our coffee over th' fire an' darn ef that coffee steam didn't freeze so durned hard as it come outa th' nozzle that him an' me hadda poke a hole in th' bottom o' th' kettle tuh git th' coffee out. Yes, suh, Charley, yuh shore lives in a buffalo-coat country.

Yuh asks where Billy th' Kid's buried. Like yuh prob'bly knows, Sheriff Pat Garrett give th' Kid his fade-out on th' night o' July 14, 1881, when th' Kid war but twenty-one years an' six months old, in Pete Maxwell's room in old Fort Sumner, New Mexico. They planted Billy there an' his grave's still there an', so far's anybody knows, th' Kid's still sleepin' in it. He war said tuh've killed twenty-one men durin' his twenty-one years o' life, an', as Billy usta say, "not countin' Injuns."

Fella named Domingo Lubacher, friend o' Billy's, made th' coffin outa rough pine, an' another friend, Francisco Medina, dug th' grave. Th' whole lot o' men, women an' children o' Fort Sumner attended th' funeral. He shore had plenty friends.

They buried 'im beside two o' his pals, Charlie Bowdre an' Tom

O'Folliard, both killed by Sheriff Pat Garrett afore he got th' Kid. Pat Garrett hisself war shot tuh death near Las Cruces, New Mexico, on February 28, 1908, when he war fifty-nine year of age, in uh argymint over ranch lands.

He war given a huge funeral in Las Cruces, attended by hundreds an' honored as a brave, fearless law officer.

Well, folks, when we gits chat-tin' 'round this yere old chuck wagon it's shore plumb hard tuh stop, eh? But boss says fer me tuh leave some room fer th' writer fellas what's givin' yuh sech fine stories.

Afore I quit this time, lemme whisper tuh yuh that next number's gonna have th' swellest bunch o' yarns ever seen between th' covers of uh magazine, what'll keep yuh up all night, ridin' hell fer leather. Watch for th' next number, ev'rybody, an' keep yore guns greased good.

But I got some more good news fer yuh, afore I stop. We're openin' up a half page or so as our new SWAP CORRAL, where fellas an' gals kin send us in brief notices o'

anything they wanta swap an' we'll print 'em free o' charge so fur's limited space'll allow, so git shovin' in whatever swaps yuh have. It's shore fine sport, swap-pin' things. Jest try it an' see.

An' don't fergit tuh fill out th' coupon on page 127. Ef yuh'll cut that coupon out an' mail it in tuh us, enclosin' a self-addressed an' stamped return envelope, we'll mail yuh yore membership cyard in our LONE RANGER CLUB, free o' charge, pronto. Then yuh'll be ridin' 'longside o' us, boot tuh boot.

Write us all 'bout yoreself, so's our other members kin write yuh. In that way, yuh'll all git letters from far an' near, what'll add tuh yore joy o' livin'. An' don't fergit tuh put in yore address, so folks will know. We'll print yore letters far as space'll let us.

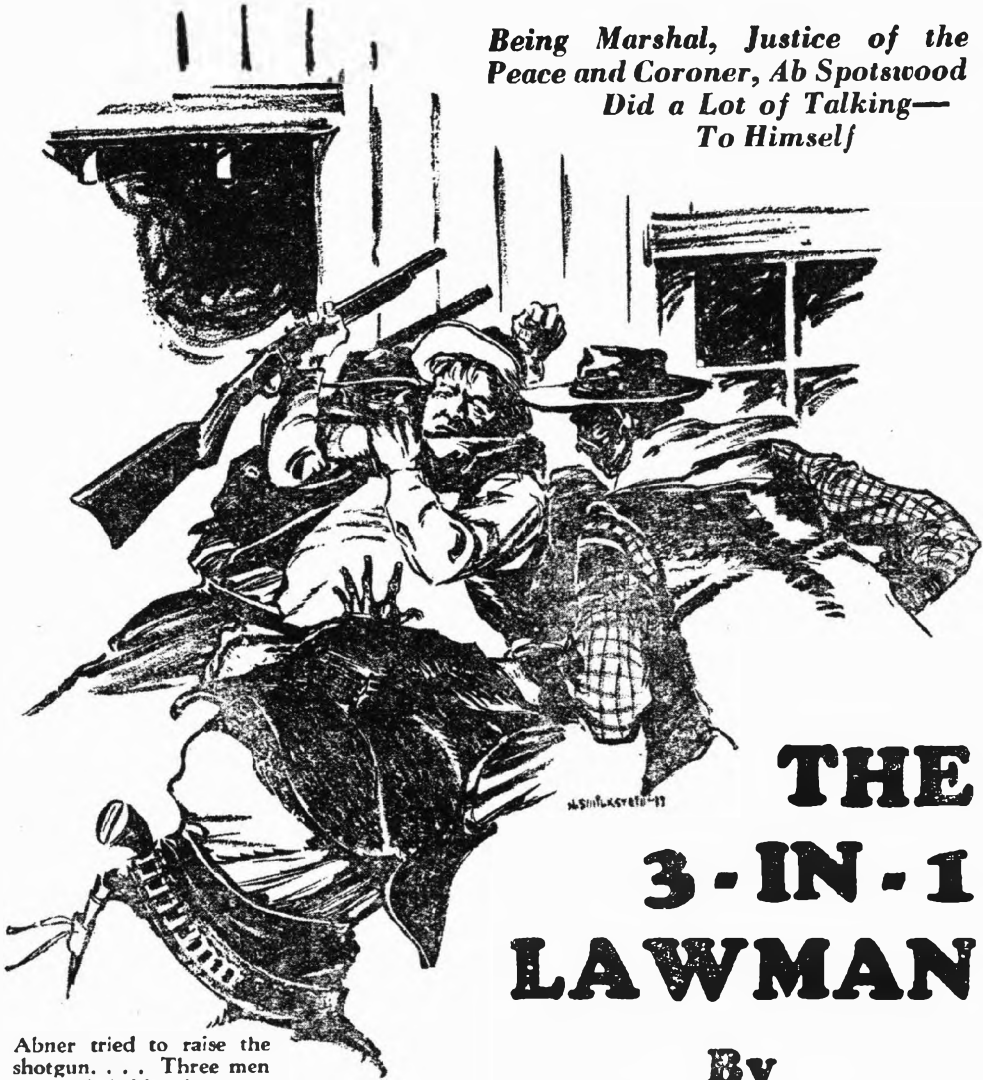
Well, reckon we gotta be forkin' our brones now an' headin' fer home. But this old *CHUCK WAGON* will be right yere ev'ry month waitin' for yuh, an' I'll be seein' yuh ag'in come next month. Until then, *adios, senores y senoritas, an' hola!*

Pop Bonner.

Editor's Note: Many letters addressed to Pop Bonner, which were received too late to be included this month, will be answered in the next (June) issue.



*Being Marshal, Justice of the Peace and Coroner, Ab Spotswood Did a Lot of Talking—
To Himself*



Abner tried to raise the shotgun. . . . Three men pummeled him in venomous, murderous silence.

THE 3 - IN - 1 LAWMAN

By
**LAWRENCE A.
KEATING**

ABNER SPOTSWOOD'S chair creaked strident protest as he tilted back lazily in the room known as Town Hall, above Sime Peddey's Cash General Store. His sawed-off shotgun rested over his thighs and his thumbs, as fat as sausages, were poked into the armholes of his vest. Waiting, he appeared serenely expectant that any moment now he would be re-elected con-

stable despite Red Becker and the tough crowd that wanted a lawless, wide-open Hondo.

Glares of hostility from the six town trustees seated around the long pine table left no impress on Abner. Their eyes roved to the shotgun that was potent backing for the chipped nickel star on his

grey shirt, as well as the profoundly respected enforcement tool of Hondo's justice of the peace—also Abner Spotswood.

Still under thirty, fat, with yellow hair spewing from his tipped-back Stetson, he ignored Red Becker's hirelings. With benevolent, blue-eyed interest he followed the antics of a joyful fly that zoomed, banked, and power-dived in the sunlit window fronting on Broadway. Red got to his feet, a solid six-footer with wild, flaming hair and a perpetual hard-faced scowl.

"Boys," he rumbled in a husky bass, "everybody knows our lawin' is a doggone outrage. We're here to name a new constable, and I reckon anybody'd be better than the guy we got. Gilly Murray, what do you say about it?"

Murray, who was Red's partner in the Starlight Saloon, darted an anxious glance at Spotswood. Ab-



ner's forefinger bulged his cheek in search of a tobacco shaving wedged between two teeth; then

he lowered his hand caressingly to the shotgun.

"W-wal," Gilly stammered with the nervous look of a man whirling a bobcat by the tail, "I reckon I—uh, suggest you for the constable job, Red.

"Men," he went on, his courage slowly seeping back, "there's high handed lawin' in this here town. Shotgun lawin'—takin' advantage of bein' constable and justice of the peace to convene court any time, any place, and holdin' that sawed-off smack up agin folks real threatenin'."

"Yeah, and cuttin' himself in on fines!" Sid Smart, the town treasurer complained in irritation. "Stickin' that cannon in a man's face, soakin' him ten bucks. Does the treasurer see it?" His squirt of tobacco juice rang into the brass cuspidor. "Never get my claws on the money!"

HONDO'S police and judicial system yawned and stroked the black barrels of his weapon. "Takin' them remarks as they come: We got to have this kind of lawin', Gilly Murray, until certain folks savvy this ain't no border sink-hole. You, Sid: Don't I always hand over the hull fine? Like yesterday when I got the drop on that Lazy B ranny for drunk and disorderly. Soaked him a dollar, and nine bucks cost. I gave you the dollar, Sid."

"Yeah, but how'about them other nine?"

Abner pursed his fat lips. "The other nine," he stated firmly, "ain't goin' over the bar at Red's

saloon. It's in a special account with Ase Jenkins' bank. This town needs sidewalks and a water tower. All I get is twenty-five a month. If I turned in more money you'd be drunk all the time instead o' just most of it."

Growls came from the six men around the pine table. "Dam' bloody high handed business I call it!" rapped Gilly Murray.

"Course it is," angular, cold-looking Bob Wolton agreed. "Ab sticks that danged cannon at a guy, sets court, and fines him. It's—"

"I represent the conservative crowd." Spotswood gazed about for the fascinating blue bottle fly. "You fellers aim to make this a hell-whoopin', wide-open town. But I don't figure you will."

"We aim to boot you outa office for a fathead, good-for-nothin'—"

"Hold on, Gilly. That there sounds like criticism o' my judicial operations."

"That there is criticism!" howled the slack-cheeked saloon-keeper. "We're ended with shotgun lawin', Ab Spotswood—plumb finished!" He searched face after face of his confederates. "Boys, I say let's make Red constable. Justice o' the peace too!"

"Constable appointment runs out today," Spotswood agreed placidly. "But you know, Gilly, I'm justice o' the peace till next We'nesday."

Murray uttered an angry, derisive snort. "Well, do yuh think we're boobs enough to elect yuh another year? Yuh shore won't be justice next *Thursday* to drive business away and—and—Darn

yore hide!" he cried, wrath at the younger man drowning his prudence. "I say yo're a helluva justice! I—"

The fore legs of Abner's chair struck the floor with a sharp tick. The ugly snout of his shotgun lifted. Spotswood went into a series of furious blinks while he droned

"Hear ye, hear ye! This right honorable court's convened, and if yuh got any complaints, arguments, anythin' gone wrong, bring 'em now before the bar o' justice or else forever hold your peace!"

He waited for that to sink in. "Officer," Abner commanded himself as constable, "state the charge."

"The charge, your honor," Abner replied at once, "is sneerin' at the dignity and learnin' of this here tribunal, contempt and abuse by one Gilly Murray. Disrespectful and disorderly talk, bad for the morale of the hull burg—"

"I won't pay it!" howled the victim, purple with rage. "I won't—"

"Gilly Murray," the court intoned sternly, "you're fined one buck for disorderly and disrespectful behavior. Nine bucks for costs. Constable," he proceeded, his eyes narrowing as he lifted the shotgun to his shoulder and aimed it full at the defendant not ten feet away, "collect the fine!"

FIVE faces paled with sympathetic anger. Red Becker made a furtive move toward the black-butted Colt gouging from a scuffed holster on his thigh; but instantly the shotgun swung his

way. Murray's countenance was mottled sallow and blue. Curses struggled up his throat while his beady eyes held as if fascinated on the twin muzzles that glowered at his chest.

"Ten bucks or the consequences!" Abner's cherubic face wore a grimly compelling look now. The frosty squint of his eyes pumped fear to the slow pounding heart of his victim.

Murray bellowed a last oath. His scrawny hand moved to the pocket of his baggy tan jeans. With deep regret he peeled several bills off the thick wad and hurled them at Spotswood.

Abner secured nine dollars, shoving the tenth to Sid Smart. "Court's still on," he reminded in a cool tone. "Now, bein' as the trustees are controlled by a certain schemin' and untrustworthy Red Becker and figure to make him constable, I'll act to protect guys that want Hondo kept decent—which is the crowd that don't want Red Becker 'lected.

"That bein' the case, and me havin' been spoke to by plenty of substantial citizens," Abner went on, his shotgun roving from one to another of the sputtering officials, "I appoint Abner Spotswood constable for sixty days from date. Accordin' to law the justice can do that in emergency. Furthermore, I pronounce and declare all meetin's of town trustees cut out for a month to prevent riotin'."

He jerked his head toward the door. "Red, the court instructs you to lead the egress."

Becker's black eyes shone dangerously and his Adam's apple twitched up and down as he swallowed to moisten his dry throat.

"Lead the egress!" Abner snapped. "That means, get out!"

Red shoved back his chair and ganged erect. Slowly, cursing under their breath, the five other trustees followed him through the Town Hall door.

The constable re-seated his Stetson, blinked reflectively as he rose with the shotgun cradled on his arm, and permitted himself a faint, hopeful grin.

"Court's adjourned," he announced to the empty room.

But as Abner waddled down the staircase his bland face wore a look of gravity. It was going to be difficult to defeat this ruinous open-town movement of which Becker was the unprincipled leader. Red had nerve. And he was a dead shot with that bluish forty-five, as the three notches on its butt mutely testified.

EMERGING in sunlight on the plank sidewalk, Spotswood turned into Sime Peddey's store where half a dozen merchants anxiously awaited his report. Banker Ase Jenkins hurried up to him, blinking and nervous as he twisted the hem of his rusty black frock coat.

"How about it, Ab?" he panted. "What happened at the meetin'?"

Spotswood shrugged. "Nothin' much, boys, nothin' much. Trustees talked about a janitor for Town Hall. And havin' a barbecue—"

"Yeah, but who got to be constable? Red Becker?" Peddey thrust his gold-rimmed spectacles higher on his forehead. "If he was, we're ruined," Sime groaned. "Why, Red and them hellions might set fire to this place just for revenge. They might—"

"Why no, boys. Red wasn't named constable. Ain't I still wearin' the star?"

They stared at him, their jaws slack, eyes round in wonder. "You mean," breathed Ike Timmerman of the Ace Hotel, "you *trimmed* them crows and—and kept the job?"

Spotswood munched ginger snaps from an open box. "Red's gettin' his crowd of gun-toughs organized and somethin'll sure happen mighty soon. Reekon he might have plans to kill me."

The circle of faces drew away as every man gasped. Banker Jenkins writhed in his clothes. "Gosh!"

"Main thing is, will you back me? Or are you goin' to let Red tromp on the lot of us like a door mat? Are you guys willin' to fight?" he demanded.

There was an instant of pause. Then they all nodded determinedly. "We got to," Sime Peddey pointed out. "Red would sure ruin the bunch of us if he won. It'd mean riotin' and disorders and such. We'll back yuh, Ab. We got to on account of our investment."

After relating the events of the trustee meeting the constable turned to leave. But Jenkins clutched his arm. He assured him-

self that Peddey's store contained no eavesdropper, then whispered:

"Ab, I got an awful snag o' cash on hand at the bank. Most I ever had! Becker and Murray told me



last week they might be drawin' real heavy so I better get ready to pay. Two other guys said the same thing—Smart and Wolton. Red's pals. Uh, do yuh think it's safe? I mean, if there's liable to be trouble. . . ." He wet his thin lips and squirmed again in his clothes. "Yo're awful young, Ab, to be runnin' a town like this. O' course I don't. . . Well—"

"We got to trust somebody, Ase," Timmerman argued.

The Hondo lawman reached for another handful of ginger snaps and bit into one, critically. He picked up his shotgun. "Well gents, I'm headin' for Becker's saloon to show them toughs I ain't scared. Much," he added reflect-

ively. "See you later about that bank cash, Ase." He moved slowly out of the store, conscious of a worried buzz of conversation in his wake.

The Starlight Saloon was well patronized, for all Hondo had expected Red to come from the trustee meeting with the star on his vest that, bafflingly, still sagged Abner's shirt. Bristling with knives, sixguns, and armpit deringers, that crowd could have made short shrift of him. But Spotswood's choice of weapon had not been hasty nor ill-considered, for thought of being blown to bits was an efficient check-rein to passionate impulses.

He edged his chunky figure to the bar. Every eye bored him with cold hostility. Becker, with his big nose the color of his hair, was the worse for half a dozen shots of buckeye whisky. Spotswood decided that if he turned his back to anyone it would not be Red.

SUDDENLY snarling oaths burst from two rough-looking men at a wall card table. Chairs crashed back. A sixgun whined on leather.

"Damn you, I'll teach yuh to cheat!" yelled a tall, black-bearded stranger. "I'll—"

"Drop it!" Becker and Spotswood lunged toward him. But the .45 raised, and on the stranger's face was the blood-lust to kill.

Red and Abner fired simultaneously. The gunman swayed back with a low cry. His knees yielded. One hand clawed wildly at the card table. Then he folded abruptly in a heap.

Blue smoke formed a slow-lifting haze as in tense silence every Starlight customer waited. Becker stared down at the gunman with a sneer curling his lip. "Pull a shootin' in my place, eh?" He kicked the corpse contemptuously.

Men looked at each other. Red's draw had been lightning, his shot dead center to the forehead. Admiration rose in their eyes.

"What do yuh know?" someone exclaimed puzzledly. "One o' them swingin' doors got busted!"

Reloading the shotgun, Spotswood masked his anger. His arm had been jarred just before he fired. The man who did it, he thought, was Gilly Murray, guffawing now as he pointed to the door that hung by only one hinge, all but blown to bits by the scattering charge.

"Ab busted it off!" Gilly howled. "Missed that gun-hombre by twelve feet, and he wasn't any farther away. Some shootin' for a lawman!"

"Boys, that proves we need a new constable," Murray cried. "Somebody that can handle toughs without endangerin' honest folks!"

Instantly the roar came back. "*Red!* Red oughta be constable!"

"Take that tin star off Spotswood right now!"

"Blows the door off—can yuh heat it? Can't hit a man at fifteen feet with a scattergun!"

"Get shovels from the jail. Carry that hombre out to Boot Hill," Abner ordered crisply, "and bury 'im." As they started to growl protest he raised the shotgun. "Don't argue or I'll convene court!"

His blue eyes clashed with the wrathful stare of Becker. "Say, dig *two* graves," he amended. "That gunflinger goes in one. The other's for either Red or me when we settle whether this burg is goin' to be a dive resort or an upstandin', substantial community!"

Men gasped. Becker gave a start but quickly resumed his composure. "Think you can bluff me, eh?" he challenged coldly. "I'll take my chance on stickin' you in that grave a dumb sight faster'n you'll plant me ther, Ab Spotswood!"

Growling, Murray and Pidge Peters dragged the corpse through the doorway and left it while they went to fetch shovels from the jail down the street. Abner followed, but paused to look back.

"It's you or me, Red," he agreed simply. "One or t'other of us in Boot Hill. I plan on bein' constable quite some time yet." And turning on his heel, he waddled across the dusty street to Ase Jenkin's bank.

INSIDE the bank Ase Jenkins nodded dubiously. "But how do you figure this cash and all is goin' to be safer in my house than it is right here? Oh, all right!" he added quickly at a ripple of impatience in the officer's plump cheek. "I'll snake everything home right off. I'll do it, Ab. And leave fake packages o' money here. Th-then what?" Jenkins quavered.

"Work ahead as if everything is great. And don't tell anybody the real assets are at your house. Sure would be trouble if the bank was cleaned out. Which there

might be a try to pull it off, I dunno. Certain parties have got to pay all them men howlin' for 'em, don't they?"

Stopped outside by Sime Peddey, Timmerman, and others of the local merchants, Abner calmly rolled a brown paper cigaret. "Now fellas, don't get excited. You know me. I'll take care o' things."

At Boot Hill he gazed on the freshly filled grave of the dead saloon fighter. Abner's interest wandered to the six foot hole nearby, edged with waiting mounds of loose dirt. He sighed and scratched his round stomach reflectively. Then he slouched up Broadway to his two-room clapboard cottage.

After his evening meal the Hon-do constable and justice of the peace tilted back in a chair on the board sidewalk. Abner's boots lay before him and his toes in soft cotton socks wriggled and curled



ruminatively on the rungs of his chair.

As usual, the shotgun rested across his knees. For the whispering, curious citizens who drifted past he simulated an unworried doze. It was what he termed "window dressin'."

Later, Abner drew on his boots.

Careful not to be observed, he padded across Broadway and continued to the alley, heading for Ase Jenkin's home a block from the Starlight Saloon.

It was bright tonight with a silvery flood from the dollar-shaped September moon that flecked the town with shadows. Hondo's peace officer took up a crouched position beside a three-walled stable, from which he could watch the rear of Ase's house.

Twenty minutes passed and he yawned. His thoughts traveled to the waiting grave out on Boot Hill, and Abner wondered whether he would occupy it or Red. Anyhow, he would be glad when all this fuss and botheration was ended and the future of Hondo fixed for all time.

Steps behind made him jerk to his full height, whirling. There came a low growl. A gun butt that slid down his temple made him stagger dizzily. Abner tried to raise the shotgun as he wrenched back against the barn. Three men pummeled him in venomous, murderous silence.

Their struggle was short and furious. Abner managed to clout Red Becker on the jaw, then use the stock of his weapon to mash a henchman's finger. But the next instant vari-colored lights speared through his brain. Spotswood seemed to be falling, falling from a great height. . . .

When he came to, his head rang as with the clatter of a hundred cracked bells. Slowly, dazedly, he groped to his feet. By chance he kicked his shotgun, and stooped to reclaim it. Then he shambled anxiously to Ase Jenkins' rear porch.

He found the door ajar, and entered. Flickering matchlight revealed the gaping, sagging door of Jenkins' safe.

Abner's shoulders drooped and he felt cold. Out in the alley again, he paused to debate his next move—but of a sudden heard the low throb of voices, the tramp of heavy feet. His heart seemed to halt with a jerk. Scarcely breathing, he cocked his head and listened.

“—Talked Ase into puttin' the bank stuff in his house. So Ab could grab it, o' course! Spotswood planned to lay the job on me. Lookit this bruise I got! But I grabbed him, you bet!”

“Red, we oughta lynch him, that's what we oughta do! No sawed-off shotgun crook can—”

AB DARTED down the alley. But he stopped with abrupt panic. Six or eight men loomed black before him, striding nearer with an air of grim determination. His escape was cut off!

Growls of rage and the boom of blood-lusting voices held him stiff, his brain a whirl of thoughts. Then he ran to the three-walled stable, poked his gun onto its roof, and jumped.

But he failed to make it the first time, perhaps from over-eagerness. Again he jumped, and got a knee over the edge. A moment later he lay flat on his stomach, pulses racing as furtively he peered at the throng of irate Hondo citizens that swarmed below.

“Why,” Becker cried, “he ain't here!”

A light flared in the house. “Ase's safe is busted open,”

someone yelled. "The money's gone!"

Pandemonium broke loose then. "Find him! Get the yella dog!" Red Becker roared. "But hold on, boys—wait. Scatter, and the first guy that spots him, fire three times. That'll call the rest of us."

Scarcely daring to draw breath lest it be heard, Abner hugged his shotgun and strove to make himself flatter on the roof. Red was crafty. He had rushed out on Broadway bellowing news of the tussle while his own confederates dashed away with the loot.

Spotswood dared not budge. Men milled on all sides, cursing as they probed shadows. The wait became tedious; minutes dragged like hours. He was uncomfortable, yet dared not change positions. Once when a tall individual pointed with upraised arm his heart seemed to turn completely over, like a rock levered from its bed.

By a miracle he was not discovered. Gradually the would-be lynchers drifted in wider circles. And at long last Abner ventured to peer again over the roof edge, his eyes boring up and down the alley for sign of anyone who might spy and bring the whole wolfish pack down on him.

He deemed it comparatively safe now. Grunting with stiffness, Abner dropped his shotgun to the ground. He swung his brief legs over and followed it. Swiftly he retrieved the weapon to crouch in shadow, listening.

He prayed that if seen he might be taken for one of the searchers. With the Stetson pulled low over his eyes and the shotgun partially

hidden by his vest, he slunk noiselessly down the alley.

He tried to put himself mentally in Red's place in regard to that money. Becker was shrewd—as the constable had reason to know. It seemed likely he might have another and more clinching card up his sleeve, an ace with which to blast forever his enemy's reputation.

Abner's flaxen brows knit and his boyish blue eyes were a squint of speculation. Cautiously he moved down the alley toward the edge of town. There was just one chance that he might yet outguess Red, surprise him.

Suddenly a dark shadow confronted him.

"Find that constable yet?"

The fugitive jerked, his spine cold. "Uh—not yet. But he's gotta be somewhere around, damn him!" he growled back, and kept on.

The fellow started after. "We better travel together, bein' as he's got a shotgun. Wait a second, brother, I—

"Hey!" he cried. "Help! Help! There he is, boys!" Recalling the agreed signal, he fired three times in swift succession—at Spotswood.

ONE BULLET ripped through his trouser leg as Abner broke into a run. A second slug whined close to his ear. He dashed into a passageway between two stores and a moment later reached Broadway, almost colliding with three men about to investigate the shots.

"He's back there!" the constable gasped hurriedly. Then he ran faster toward the edge of town, puffing, straining, driving his short

legs like pistons. The men scowled at each other. One raised a gun.

"Wait, you! I got a notion—"

"That's him, boys!" Sid Smart burst from the passageway like a rabbit from its hole. "That's Abner runnin, there. Come on!"

Spotswood, racing west with all the speed of his pudgy frame, suddenly burst from the protective shadows of false-fronted buildings into bright moonlight. The ground inclined slowly so that progress became harder.

Flame lanced in his wake. Bullets whined their ugly dirge around him. One sliced away part of his Stetson brim. Abner only ran the faster until a new hail rang out. Dead ahead it was, from low down. From the marker-dotted patch that was Boot Hill.

"Who's that comin'?"

The Hondo lawman slowed. His shotgun swept up. The dark blotch in the open grave became distinguishable figures as one man leaped out and shovels rang. The roar of the shotgun drowned cries and oaths behind him. A yelp of pain came from the running figure. Another man tumbled out, and fleet as a deer, raced for the grove of cedars.

"High with 'em! Quick!" Abner cried.

The wounded man tried to run but with a gurgling cry toppled on his face. He did not get up. A Colt exploded not twenty feet from the onrushing constable. Abner felt shoulder nerves jerk like wires, felt the grinding burrow of lead among his bones. It staggered Abner, made him stumble.

The force of his forward plunge toppled him into the grave.

Excited and vengeful, the mob swarmed up. But not a hand was lifted, not a gun used. Speechless, they stared into the hole with eyes glued on the lattlers.

KICKING, gouging, smacking fists on flesh, writhing and grunting in the narrow confines of the grave dug for one or the other—were Red Becker and Abner Spotswood. Becker's knee dug like a log end into the constable's round stomach. Abner sent his club-like fist pounding on Becker's ear. The fellow staggered against the end of the grave. Spotswood charged in fury, his cherubic face gone wild in the moonlight. Metal gleamed, caught up in the talon fingers of the powerful six-foot figure of sinew and brawn. Abner grabbed for the shotgun. They tussled over it, grunting.

Wham!

Flame billowed as from a forge, licking out, caught back in the flick of an eyelid. The double-throated roar shook mounds of loose dirt under jaw-sagging watchers. There was a dead silence—a low moaning cry. Red Becker slumped to the ground.

Horrified stillness. Sime Peddey had scant wit to clutch Abner's wrist to haul him out of the grave. The constable's pudgy frame quivered as he lifted a ragged, dirt-streaked sleeve and mopped his moist forehead. His eyes were like marbles, his clothes crazily tattered. Blood seeped from the wound in his shoulder.

"B-boys, Red and Gilly Murray

and Pidge Peters—stole that bank money from Jenkin's house." He left off, panting. "It's down there in the grave. Somebody haul it out. Reckon they tried the bank first—"

"They did!" It was Ase burrowing through the mob, hatless and pallid. "Near cracked my skull, Ab!"

"Huh. Made you tell, I reckon. I went to Jenkins' house to guard it. Red and them guys clubbed me. Then Red gave out that I'd done the job. Murray's over there—dead, maybe. Red's sure been gathered to his fathers for keeps. Peters run off, but we'll round him up later."

He stared between owlish blinks at the tense throng. Sid Smart and Bob Wolton and other Star-

light habitues scowled as they turned on their heels to start back to town.

Abner staunched his wound with a bandana, his boyish face wearing a look of wry content. "Got the loot back, Ase? Now a couple o' you men shovel that dirt in. We'll fix up a marker in the mornin'."

He cradled the shotgun as he waddled away—but stopped as if remembering some matter of importance.

"Might's well do it now," he muttered, facing about. "Hear ye! Hear ye! Court's convened, and if yuh got any complaints, arguments—anythin' like that—bring 'em before the bar o' justice right now or forever hold your peace. Officer," he commanded himself in

(Continued on page 125)



Kicking, gouging and writhing in the narrow confines of the grave dug for one or the other—were Red and Abner.

Famous Frontier Fights

by

COLONEL
JNO. J. BONIFACE

Forsyth's Fight on Beecher Island

RED-BLOODED men and women, since time began, have admired courage and determined valor against odds. May that spirit never die.

Our own western frontiers have produced great heroes and, among many, stands forth the name of "Sandy" Forsyth. On tiny Beecher's Island, he and his gallant band of fifty frontiersmen, defend-

ed themselves for nine long days, September 16 to 25, 1868, against a thousand screeching, blood-crazed Cheyenne, Sioux and Dog Indians; and "Sandy" and many of his men came out alive to relate the story.

In this first of our series, we shall tell of "Sandy" Forsyth and his gallant band and raise our hand in salute.

Shining rails were creeping westward across the great plains



to bind our western coast with our Atlantic seaboard.

The Kansas-Pacific Railroad was in the making. Hordes toiled at pick and shovel, driving onward with the work. Blue-uniformed Regulars guarded the workers. Buffalo hunters furnished fresh meat. Civilization was apace.

But, from surrounding mountain peaks, scowling black eyes gleamed hatred of the white man's invasion of territory which had belonged, from time immemorial, to the red warriors of the West.

Along the line of tracks had already begun those small mounds of rock and caliche and desert growths that marked the last resting places of men and women "Killed by Indians."

IT BECAME evident that war with the Indians could not longer be avoided. General Sheridan, commanding the Department of the Missouri, with his headquar-

ters at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, took the field in person, with strong military forces.

One of his staff was Major George A. Forsyth, popularly nicknamed in the army as "Sandy," an officer of sterling courage and character proven during the Civil War. Staff duty irked him and he appealed to his General for command of troops actively chasing the Indians.

But every body of Regulars had a commanding officer and young Forsyth's chances seemed remote. However, his General sympathized with his desire for activity and authorized him to raise a force of fifty civilians, to command it in person, and to go after the Indians as a sort of free lance.

In five short days he had organized his little command into a troop of cavalry ready for the field, but he had to engage his men by hiring them as Quartermaster employees at a dollar a day, with

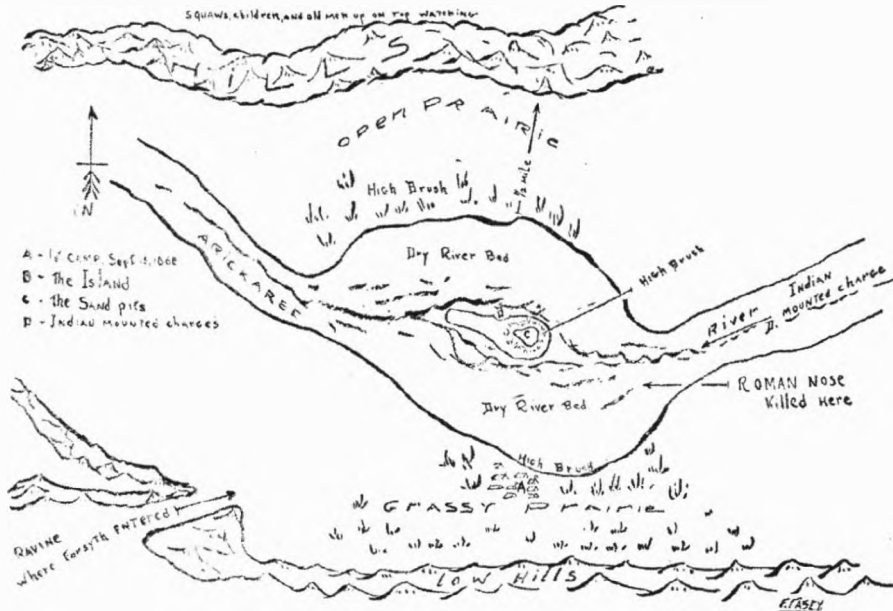


thirty cents extra allowed for forage for their horses, they furnish their own mounts.

He was overwhelmed with ap-

chest and lean loins, had a big Roman nose and penetrating eyes.

His physical strength was almost unlimited, his mind quick and



plicants but selected his fifty with special care, choosing those with war service or frontier life experience and every one physically fit for desperate adventure.

As second in command, he had Lieut. Frederick H. Beecher of the Regular Infantry, and as his 1st Sergeant he had W. H. McCall, who had, during the Civil War, been a Brigadier General of Volunteers. Also, he took along two civilian scouts of high reputation, Sharp Grover and Jack Stillwell, both already famous as Indian fighters.

Immediately, the little troop took the field, and against an unknown number of war-path Redskins under the leadership of one of the most remarkable Indians who ever lived—Roman Nose. He stood six-feet-three, with massive

keen; a fighter all his life, with scenes of carnage the very breath of his nostrils. He was then about thirty years old, with a grand head, and the war chief of the Cheyennes, hating all whites.

On the evening of the fifteenth of September, hot on the trail, Forsyth and his band rode through a ravine and entered the valley of the Arickaree Fork of the Republican River and made camp on its south bank.

In the middle of the almost-dry river bed was a little, sandy island about twenty yards wide and about sixty yards long. Its upper end was covered with thick brush, its lower bare but with one lone cottonwood tree. Around the island stood about a foot of slowly-flowing water. Otherwise, the hundred-

and-forty-yards wide stream was dry.

Just as the first signs of dawn appeared on the morning of September 16, the troop saw a warrior's feathered head against the skyline of the close-by hills. Forsyth fired instantly and the savage vanished, but then, from all sides but one—the one leading back into the ravine whence Forsyth and his men had come—a terrific fire opened from the hidden Indians.

Back on a long hill to the north, Indian squaws and children and old men sat, watching, sure their warriors would wipe out the hated white force in no time at all.

Only one line of retreat lay open to the troop and this one, back through the ravine, seemed to have been purposely left open by the Indians, to tempt Forsyth to lead his men back into it, where they could all be shot down like coyotes. Forsyth decided to take his command to the island and dig in, as the Indians were trying to stampede his horses.

THE TROOP rushed to the island, tied their horses in a circle on the brushy end, leaped inside the horse-circle and, using their knives and metal mess-kit plates, scooped themselves holes big enough to conceal their bodies and dropped down into these. Meanwhile, some of them kept up a steady firing at the redskins.

On both sides, men fell dead and wounded. Then the horses began to drop, one after the other, shot dead and filled with either arrows or bullets. The troop was armed with the new Spencer repeating

rifle, which held one cartridge in its chamber and six in its magazine—a vast advance over the old muzzle-loaders.

On the Indians' side, they had many rifles of various makes, as well as their bows and arrows. As the firing went on at a terrific rate, the voices of two white men were heard among the Indians—two renegades who had joined the Indians some months before.

One kept blowing an artillery bugle, and more and more Indians appeared, some afoot, most mounted on fleet-footed ponies, and all in vivid war paint and feathers. Finally, a full thousand redskins had assembled and entered the battle—against fifty whites, some of whom were already dead or wounded!

Forsyth's control of his little force was marvelous. His own fighting and exposure of self was magnificent. The surgeon, Doctor



Mooers, was shot through the head. He died, three days later, in his sand-pit, unconscious most of the time.

A bullet drove through Forsyth's right thigh, giving him ex-



cruciating pain. Then a second bullet smashed his leg-bone between knee and ankle, and a third bullet glanced across his forehead, slightly fracturing the skull and giving him a ghastly headache, almost unendurable.

Men were being killed and wounded all around him, Indian screeches blasting the air, rifles roaring and arrows hurtling, but he retained full command and kept giving orders from his pit, where he lay braced against its walls. From both brush-covered river banks, the Indians were pouring a deadly fire.

And now came the marvelous charge of Roman Nose and some of his Indians—over five hundred strong. Mounted on their war-bedecked ponies, waving rifles and bows, they came galloping down the dry river bed, with a front of sixty mounted warriors and over six platoons deep, screeching, firing.

Roman Nose wore a magnificent war bonnet that trailed the ground, and a brilliant red sash about his naked waist. The redskins were nude save for moccasins, breechcloths and paint. Behind the last platoon followed a horde of savages shrieking, sending arrows against the island, and more men died. But Sandy Forsyth's heart was fearless, his nerve dominant as he held himself against the walls of his sandy pit and gripped his revolvers.

"Stand by, men, and wait for my command to fire!" was his order.

THE CHARGING horde swept closer and closer—two hundred yards, a hundred, then . . . fifty!

"Now—FIRE!" Forsyth's voice rang out as his own guns roared. And from his men a storm of shots plowed into that first advancing rank like hail, mowing down horses and redskins in a way the Indians had never seen before. The Spencer repeating rifles were new to them.

The Indians broke into two columns and tore past the island, screeching, firing, driving more arrows at the little band inside the hastily-dug sand pits. More fell, on both sides, but the Indians raced away and gathered a few hundred yards beyond, amazed, temporarily defeated.

Then riding far out, they circled the island, formed again and came on in another charge. The first five volleys from the troopers sent many a redskin to the Happy Hunting Grounds. There were

screams of pain, horses wallowing in death blood, others falling over the first to go down.

At the sixth volley from Forsyth and his plainsmen, Roman Nose, a heroic figure as he came rushing down at the island on his war horse, plunged headlong, shot through and through, as was his horse. The Indians broke and went scurrying away, to assemble again beyond range.

But their great leader lay dead, chest torn open by bullets. And, behind him, his medicine man also lay, a huddled mass of blood, riddled by those unerring Spencer rifles from the sand pits.

Young Beecher lay dying. Doctor Mooers lay dying. Sandy, himself, soon discovered maggots in his wounds, but kept cool and in full command, directing his men as he lay in ghastly pain.

Rations soon gave out, and thereafter, they ate raw horse meat cut from the bodies of their mounts. Not one animal remained alive. All were filled with bullets and arrows and formed additional protection for the little force besieged behind them.

The redskins repeatedly attacked, often from several directions at once, both on foot and mounted. The days were intensely hot, making the sufferings of the wounded men in the sand pits even more frightful. They had neither medical officer nor medicines.

By an unfortunate oversight, due to the excitement when the first attack opened, the medicine chest had been left back on the south bank of the dry stream, a point almost immediately occupied

by the Indians after the little troop had gone to the island.

During the nights, the Indians removed their dead and wounded, as was always the custom among the Redskins; all except three bodies which lay too close to the sand pits to be carried away.

The wounds in Forsyth's leg and head became more and more excruciating and, finally, he begged his men to cut the bullet from the wounds in his leg, but they were afraid to do so because it had lodged close to the femoral artery. So Forsyth cut it out himself!

While some of his men were moving him to a more comfortable position on the fifth day, they accidentally dropped him and the fall drove his smashed shin bone through his flesh. On the sixth day he told his men they could try to break out and get away, but not one man would leave him.



ON THE night of September 17 Forsyth called for volunteers to go for help to Fort Wallace, a hundred and ten miles away—the nearest place. Scouts Trudeauux and Jack Stillwell were selected and crept away.

After innumerable hair-breadth experiences and sufferings they reached Fort Wallace and reported matters. Colonel Bankhead instantly despatched couriers to Colonel Carpenter then commanding some troops of the 10th Cavalry (colored), who was some sixty miles away in the field.

Colonel Bankhead, within an hour, started for Forsyth's island, taking a hundred troopers and one howitzer (small cannon). Jack Stillwell led this command back to the island using forced marches. It had taken Stillwell four days to reach Fort Wallace.

Meanwhile Colonel Carpenter, getting the couriers' message on September 23, started immediately. He had a hundred miles to go, across country he had never traveled before, and without any guide. With his troops was a surgeon.

While back on the island, on the next night, September 18, Forsyth sent two more of his men to try to reach Fort Wallace. The Indians drove these two scouts back. The following night, Forsyth sent out two more. These reached Fort Wallace, after harrowing experiences, travelling at night.

Colonel Carpenter, forcing the gait every mile of the way, finally reached the little island on the morning of the ninth day since Forsyth had occupied the sand pits on the island. Carpenter had averaged about fifty miles a day, over rough, unknown country.

As he galloped up, with his negro troopers, Forsyth still lay terribly wounded in his sand pit, while blood-poisoning had set in in

his leg, but his grim, stern eyes revealed no giving up.

With the coming of the troops, the Indians vanished, having lost over seventy-five killed. Later, they admitted larger losses, around a hundred dead. Also, they admitted to over two hundred more being wounded either seriously or with minor wounds.

Out of Sandy Forsyth's little command, two officers and four men had been killed; eight more had been so severely wounded as to put them out of the fight from the very beginning; and Sandy himself, and eight other men had been wounded but had kept on fighting. A total casualty list of twenty-three out of the original fifty!

Without medical care since the very first day, eating only the rancid horse meat but finding plenty of water in the sand pits, Forsyth and his gallant little group had once more written heroic history in the settling of the West.

Later, he became a Brigadier General in the Regular Army, and it was the writer's privilege to know him and to serve with him in later service.

SOME time after the fighting, the name of Beecher's Island was bestowed on the spot, in honor of young Lieut. Beecher. The fight had lasted from the morning of September 16 until September 25, nine full days, during which the firing had been almost incessant except that it greatly lessened during the last two days, but every

attack had been driven back and broken by the frontiersmen.

Long after, the valley became cow country and many a cowboy has ridden over the spot. Water no longer flows wholly around the island, because floods have shifted the bed of the river and its sands.

At the sacred spot where men so willingly battled that civilization might go on, a plain white monument rises towards the blue skies, as eternal reminder of brave men and the famous battle against one of the greatest Indians the West ever knew—Roman Nose, a grand figure and a terrible fighter.

A BADMAN'S BETTER SIDE

TO say that he had killed twenty-one men when he was twenty-one years old—not counting Mexicans and Indians, whom he did not deem important enough to commemorate with a notch on his Colt—is enough of an introduction to Billy the Kid. But there was more than one time, overlooked by his biographers, when this most expert killer of the Old West played a Samaritan role.

Not so many years ago there died in Roswell, N. M., a retired cattleman, named Ed. Wilson, who would not have reached the ripe old age he did had it not been for Billy's generosity.

One day during his prime as a cattle and horse rustler the Kid and his gang were taking a bunch of stolen horses over a lonely trail. They came upon the solitary cabin of a prospector. No one answering his knock, the Kid boldly

During Colonel Carpenter's march to Forsyth's relief, as he and his troops reached a small valley close by, they found a white wigwam of fine buffalo hides and, inside the tepee, lay the dead Roman Nose, wrapped in buffalo robes and with all his war weapons about him. The troops left the chief there, undisturbed.

When Colonel Carpenter galloped up to Forsyth on that ninth day, followed by his weary colored troopers, he was lying against a wall of his sand pit, reading an old copy of *Oliver Twist*, which had been found in a dead trooper's saddle bags!

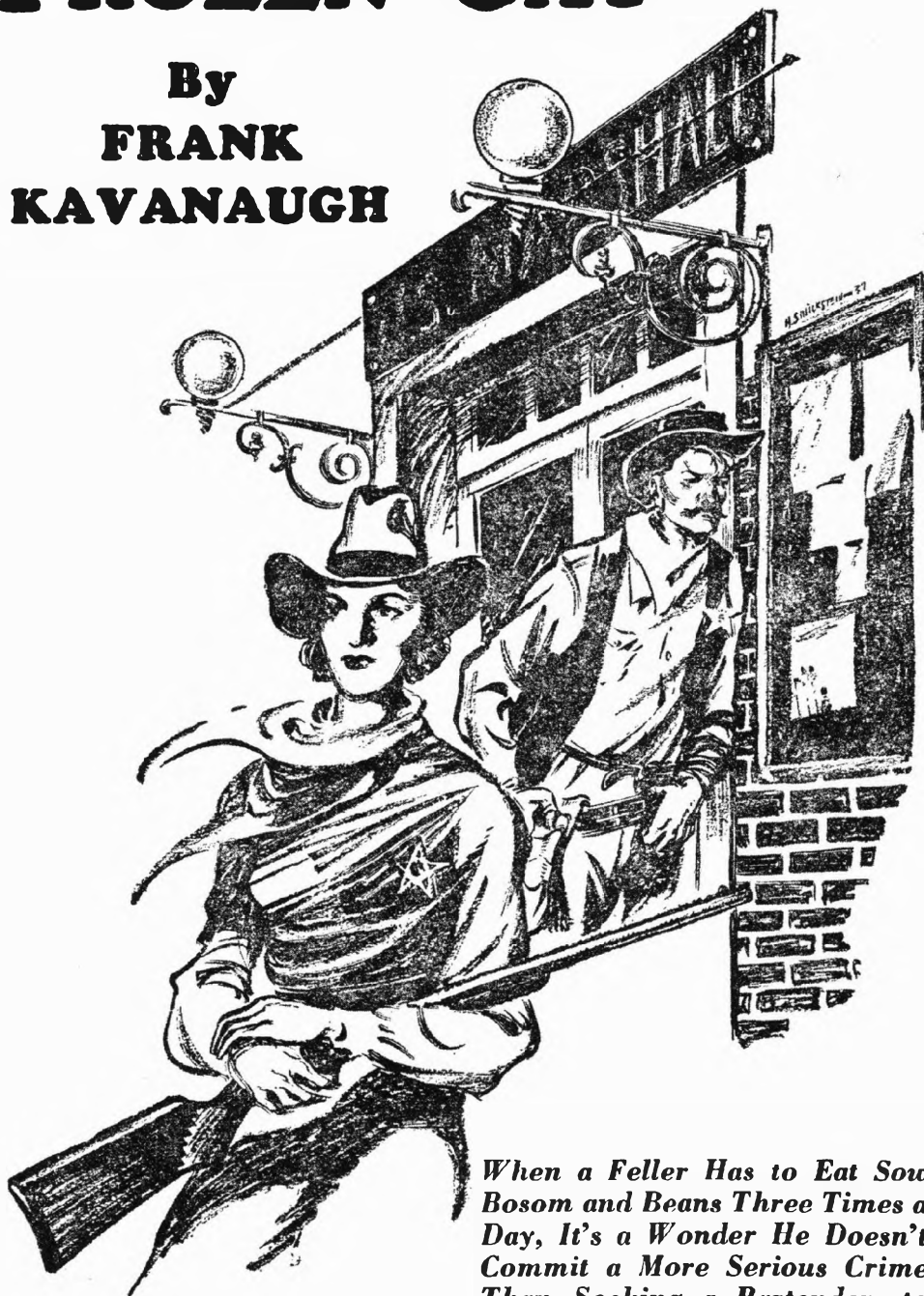
went in. On his cot, seriously ill, penniless and without friends, lay the cabin's occupant—Ed. Wilson.

Having learned the man's straits, the Kid ordered his men to go on with the horses. Remounting, the youthful outlaw spurred to Fort Sumner, where he hired a team and wagon. Having placed some sheepskins in the vehicle's box, Billy drove back to the lonely cabin, placed the sick man on the sheepskins and drove him one hundred miles to Las Vegas. A suitable place found for the patient, the Kid paid a sum in advance for board and medical care.

Upon Wilson's recovery a month later, the young outlaw paid the rest of the bill, loaned him a horse to ride back to his cabin and gave him ten dollars besides with which to make a new start.

THE MARSHAL OF FROZEN CAT

By
**FRANK
KAVANAUGH**



*When a Feller Has to Eat Sow
Bosom and Beans Three Times a
Day, It's a Wonder He Doesn't
Commit a More Serious Crime
Than Socking a Bartender, to
Get a Change of Menu*

WHEN Sapulpa Slim got in from Frozen Cat after a week's absence we was feeding our faces at the cook shack table. Two or three of the boys, who had filled their mouths full and had nothing to do but chew, looked up. Sapulpa was whistling a little tune we got on the phonograph at the bunkhouse, and seemed happy.

"Where y' been?" asked Spiney Gross, the foreman.

"I been in jail," Sapulpa answered, looking over the grub on the table sarcastic like.

"Then sit down and imbibe some grub," Spiney invited. "After eating the grub they send in from the Greek's at that Frozen Cat jail, you must be half starved."

"I didn't eat the Greek's grub," Sapulpa said disdainfully, "and I don't feel hungry for this," and he waved his hand in the general direction of the bean bowl.

"How come?" Spiney asked, reaching for a sinker.

"You know old man Brooks, that used to be marshal of Frozen Cat, went and died. They give the job to his daughter. She's got that same big bum, Skiatook Jack, for deputy. But she don't send over to the Greek's for grub for the prisoners any more. She cooks it herself, because she lives in the second story of the jail house, with an old woman for company. And that grub! Pancakes and maple syrup for breakfast, with lots of butter and good coffee, and roast chicken for dinner, and lots of other good stuff for supper. I wanted to stay my full time out,

but she insisted that I got a third off for good behavior and I had to get out. So did Job Anderson of the Two Bar spread."

ABOUT half of the boys, somewhat gorged on the Chinaman sow bosom and beans, looked up, interested like. "And you came away from all that," one of them remarked, "to come back to this rattlesnake poison?"

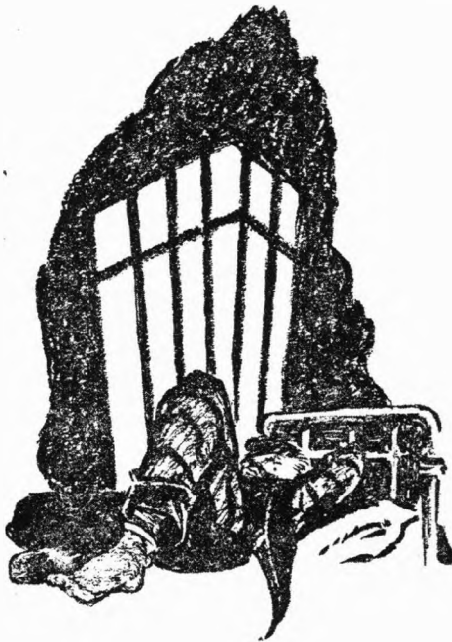
"Had to," Sapulpa opines: "My time was up and I hadn't a cent to get a drink with. Without a few drinks I just can't raise a row. Tried to get credit at all the joints, but those birds wouldn't give a busted man the sweat off their eyebrows."

Silence settled over the Triple X table. None of the gang had enough money to buy half a drink if hootch was selling at three cents a barrel. Nobody but Leggy Medders. Everyone on the Triple X knew he had twenty dollars saved up to buy a new saddle. That saddle that was priced in the mail order catalog at \$32.98. Next payday he'd send for it.

I got Leggy to one side after supper and asked him for the



loan of ten dollars, promising him two dollars interest pay day, but he wouldn't come across. He always was a close-fisted cuss and he turned me down—me, an old friend that had rid with him for years.



“I got use for it,” he said. “And besides that, Cowlick Perkins offered me five dollars interest and I wouldn't let him have it. I got use for it myself.”

I told him where to go, and rolled up in the bunk to dream of breakfast with pancakes and maple syrup, but I knew we'd have the beans that was left over from supper like we always did. I hadn't had pancakes and maple syrup for breakfast since I was knee high to a duck.

Next morning Leggy Medders was as absent as a flea on a hairless dog. He'd saddled his bronc and lit out in the night. Of course we all knew where he had went.

Leggy could eat more than any man on the spread, but beans and sow bosom three times a day sorta sours on your stomach, and after a while a man eats it because he has to, to keep his belly from flap-pin' against his backbone.

PERSONALLY and collectively we went to work next morning thinking what kind of a crime to commit to get pinched by the female marshal of Frozen Cat. A man had to be mighty careful about the crime. If you committed too awful a crime you got sloughed by a deputy sheriff and he took you up to county jail at Skunk Pass, where they fed you canned horse and gold fish, with coffee made from the grounds they threwed out of the hotel kitchen. The sheriff got only 50 cents a day each for feeding prisoners and he wanted to clear at least 45 cents of that.

I had my crime all figured out. I would take a sock at the third bartender I faced. It takes a least three slugs of hootch to make me fight. That sock would send me up for about ten days. With winter coming on, pancakes and maple syrup and chicken and a vacation of ten days would help me mightily. I intended to act rambunctious once in a while, so's I'd get no time off for good behavior. I had my plans all made out and only waited for payday.

Leggy Medders hadn't come back by payday, but six of us left for town. I drank one or two slugs with the rest of the bunch at the first joint and then evaporated. I

floor and Leggy Medders was
asleep on it. I crawled over a
dozen or so carcasses and shook
him awake. He looked at me
queerly. His face was drawn and
his eyes looked kinda tired.

“Hello, Leggy,” I said, as cor-
dially as my headache would allow.
“It’s gettin’ daylight now. How
soon do we eat pancakes and ma-
ple syrup?”

Leggy groaned. “You don’t,”
he said. “Neither now nor later.
Along about nine o’clock you get
a box of sardines and four soda
crackers. Then along about five
o’clock you get a box of sardines
and four soda crackers. That’s all.
You see, the female marshal she
nps and marries Skiatook Jack,
the deputy, and he’s savin’ enough
off the grub bill to buy a ranch.

And they’ve cut off time for good
behavior.” He groaned again.
“I’ll never get a new saddle now.
The only thing they give you
plenty of is water. There’s a
bucket full over there now if you
want a drink, but be careful and
don’t swallow that pet tadpole of
mine. He’s been a lot of company
to me.”

didn’t want to be with them when
I committed my crime. I went to
two or three other saloons, but the
bartenders all picked up a club as
I moseyed up to the bar to name
my poison. Finally at a little joint
I found a Mex bartender without
a club. I wasn’t sure it was a
crime to slug a Mex bartender, but
I’d try.

“What sort o’ stuff you serving
me, you greaser,” I yelled as I
swallowed my drink. I leaned over
the bar to slug him for a knockout,
when something hard hit my head
from behind and I wilted. Just as
I was dozing off I heard a guy re-
mark something about he won-
dered why all the Triple X and
Two Bar cowhands wanted to slug
bartenders that night.

I woke on the floor of the jail
house. The rest of the Triple X
bunch and four or five from the
Two Bar spread was there too, but
they hadn’t come alive yet. It was
getting daylight and I had a head-
ache, but I knew pancakes and
maple syrup would cure it. Then
the chicken dinner would put the
finishing touches on it.
There was only one cot on the

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An Interesting Article About Stamps and Stamp Collecting for Everybody. Each Month There Will Be Another Story About Stamps. Cut Them Out and Save Them—They Will Make a Fascinating Collection.

THE WORLD'S mailbags have never been so full of bright, attractive, pictorial stamps as during the last few months. From all over the world, new issues of stamps are competing with each other in presenting attractive pictures, or some sort of sales appeal for the country of origin.

Liberia has done it again—this time with another set of beautiful triangular stamps. The first five of them, picture animals and birds common to the fever ridden jungles of the little republic on the West coast of Africa. The six-cent value bears a portrait of President Edwin J. Barclay.

At about the time the stamps were placed on sale, some weird stories trickled out of Liberia,

about the raids of a secret society of "Leopard Men." This savage cult has the disturbing habit of dressing its members in leopard skins and masks, putting on an iron claw, and starting out on a "party." The object of the party is to find a suitable list of victims to murder. The claw is the weapon, and the victim looks as though a bloodthirsty leopard had done the dirty work.

No white man has ever discovered the strange jungle reasons for these outbreaks. And no black man, among the native police in Liberia can be enthused over the prospects of going out and capturing any of the murderers.

So, when this beautiful little set of six triangular stamps comes your way, any time now, they will be the more interesting on account of these recent news dispatches.

Liberian stamps have always been highly interesting and pictorial. In unused condition they are genuinely good property, but the used stamps are mostly "canceled to order." This means that for a small sum, a fraction of face value, the Liberian postoffice will cancel stamps and turn them over to dealers and collectors. However, they are so full of interesting pictures that they will always be popular.

AMERICAN HEROES

Swashbuckling adventure stories are fairly oozing out of the current issue of stamps appearing for the American Army and Navy heroes set. On the new two-cent value of the "Navy" series is Stephen Decatur and Thomas Mac-



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donough. Decatur was a star in the short American War with Tripoli, against pirating Moslems, and Macdonough made the British say "uncle" in the naval battle on Lake Champlain in the War of 1812.

These two worthies have stepped out of dusty volumes and boring dates, and have again swung their cutlasses for our patriotic inspiration, through these postal portraits. These two-fisted huskies were leaders in the days of wooden ships and iron men, when he-man courage was more important than cunning, and when our country was set aflame by the ringing battle-cry of, "Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute!"

Such things as these, such reminders that square-jawed scrap-pers helped to build America—these are the things that make a stamp collection mean something beyond just filling a space in the album. It is probable that by the middle of April the full series of ten stamps, five for the Army and five for the Navy heroes will be issued. A thumbnail knowledge of who each of the heroes was, and why, will make better citizens of all of us. Let's try it.

The next few months will see the end of the British Empire stamps bearing the portrait of the late King George. An entire new issue will be in use by Coronation Day, May 12th, in 45 Crown Colonies, and probably in the 17 Dominions. The new stamps will be about as large as one of our Special Delivery stamps, and will show the new king and queen with

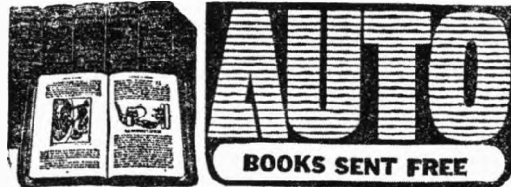
various royal raiments around the portraits.

This is a good time to pick up as many of the old type of stamp as you can find. Many of them, common enough now, will be hard to find and expensive to buy in a few years.

That thought reminds us of something else, which is the destruction of perhaps millions of stamps in the recent Ohio Valley floods. Towns that were twenty miles away from the river were covered with water. Countless thousands of collections must surely have been washed away or ruined in the muddy slime of flood-water.

All of which suggests that a waterproof box or vault, or oilcloth wrapping, would be some smart equipment to have handy in floodable areas. Or, if a collection is left at home on one's vacation, there would be some satisfaction in knowing that it would not be destroyed by floods from leaky pipes or lawless rivers.

Early in April the Postoffice Department will issue a booklet containing illustrations of all the stamps issued by the U. S. since 1847. Private individuals or companies cannot print such illustrations on account of the counterfeiting laws. The government-issued illustrations leave the laws intact (and they have teeth in them!). Meanwhile the collectors will soon have a pictorial guide to our country's stamps. Over a thousand advance orders were received for the book in January alone.



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If you have a local stamp club, or one in school, a lot of profitable fun can be had by a "bargaining party". Each member selects a certain country and bargains with other members for their duplicates in terms of the money units involved. For example, one collector chooses France, and talks in terms of francs and centimes. He offers a ten-centime stamp of France to a fellow member for a ten Reichpfennig stamp of Germany. If the deal is made, the seller of the German stamp loses. He loses because ten Reichpfennig are worth about four cents, while the ten centimes are worth only about half a cent.

Any Sunday paper will give the rates of foreign exchange for most countries of the world. With only the commonest used stamps for "currency" a lot of fun can be had. The bargaining should be without reference to values, other than what has been learned by the individual before the party. It is an entertaining game and shows that it pays to be informed.

Let us help you with your stamp collecting problems. Address, The Lone Ranger Stamp Editor, 480 Lexington Ave., New York, N. Y. Problems will be answered in this column, or enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a personal reply.

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(Continued from page 107)

his role of constable, "state the charge."

"Incitin' riot, resistin' an officer, robbin' bank money," was the prompt reply. "Red Becker got killed. Also Gilly Murray. Both bad eggs and it's damn good rid-dance for the town. But your honor there ain't any Hondo coroner.

"Sure thing there is! Coroner Spotswood, appointed by the court, finds Becker chose his own grave, got in it, and committed suicide by bein' at the illegal end of a loaded shotgun. Also Gilly Murray. Pidge Peters is still at large but he'll sure get his!

"All tough characters that supported Red are hereby warned they better get out o' town by dawn. Get that? Court's adjourned.

"I'm headin' for a drink, boys," Abner announced to the crowd. "The law is sure thirstyin' work. Who's comin'?"

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SURE



*Attention! Members Of
The Lone Ranger Magazine Club!*

WHAT do you know about the West? Here's a contest that will prove whether you are an old cow-hand or a dude. It costs you nothing to enter the contest, and you have a chance to win a genuine Indian arrowhead. There are 20 questions on Western expressions, habits and folk-lore to be answered. **EVERY ONE** having 10, or more, correct answers out of the 20, will receive this beautiful prize, absolutely free. There are no ties. Regardless of the number of contestants having 10, or more correct answers, **EACH** winning contestant will receive an arrowhead. Here are the simple rules to be followed:

1. You must be a member of The Lone Ranger Magazine Club.

Complete information on joining the Club will be found on page 127.

2. Answers should be written on one side of the paper only. Each sheet of paper used must be signed with the name and address of the contestant.
3. The judges for this contest will be the Editors of this magazine, and their decision shall be final.
4. There are 20 questions to be answered. All contestants having 10, or more, correct answers will receive a genuine Indian arrowhead, without cost, providing they have conformed to these rules.
5. Correct answers will be published in the July issue of The Lone Ranger Magazine, togeth-

- er with a list of the winning contestants.
6. All answers must be postmarked not later than April 10th, 1937.
 7. Address all answers to The Lone Ranger Magazine Club, 125 East 46 Street, New York, N. Y.

The Mental Round-Up

1. What famous plainsman was christened "Pahaska" by the Indians?
2. What is a cayuse?
3. What do cowboys mean when they refer to "cackleberries"?
4. What is a Calumet?
5. "Rocky Mountain Canary" is a jocular term for what?
6. What is a maverick?
7. What is a spooky horse?

8. What is Mulligan?
9. What is meant by calling a cowhand a "Coffee Cooler"?
10. Does the wearing of feathers by an Indian have a special meaning?
11. What is a cow poke?
12. What is meant by the expression "packing the mail"?
13. Why do cowboys wear high heeled boots?
14. What does a cowboy get when he orders "stamped leather cakes"?
15. What is a palomina?
16. What is a "bronc stomper"?
17. Why do cowboys wear chaps on the range?
18. What is a "Dude"?
19. What is a "Button"?
20. What is a "Sourdough"?

Keep a copy of your answers so that you can count your own score.

How To Become A Member Of The Lone Ranger Magazine Club

Mail the coupon below, properly filled out, enclose a 3c stamp, and you will receive your Membership Card by return mail. Readers wishing to participate in this month's contest, and who have not yet joined the Club, may include the Membership Coupon with their answers.

**The Lone Ranger Magazine Club,
125 E. 46th Street,
New York, N. Y.**

Gentlemen: I wish to join the Lone Ranger Magazine Club. Enclosed you will find a 3c stamp for which please send me a Membership Card by return mail.

Name..... Age.....

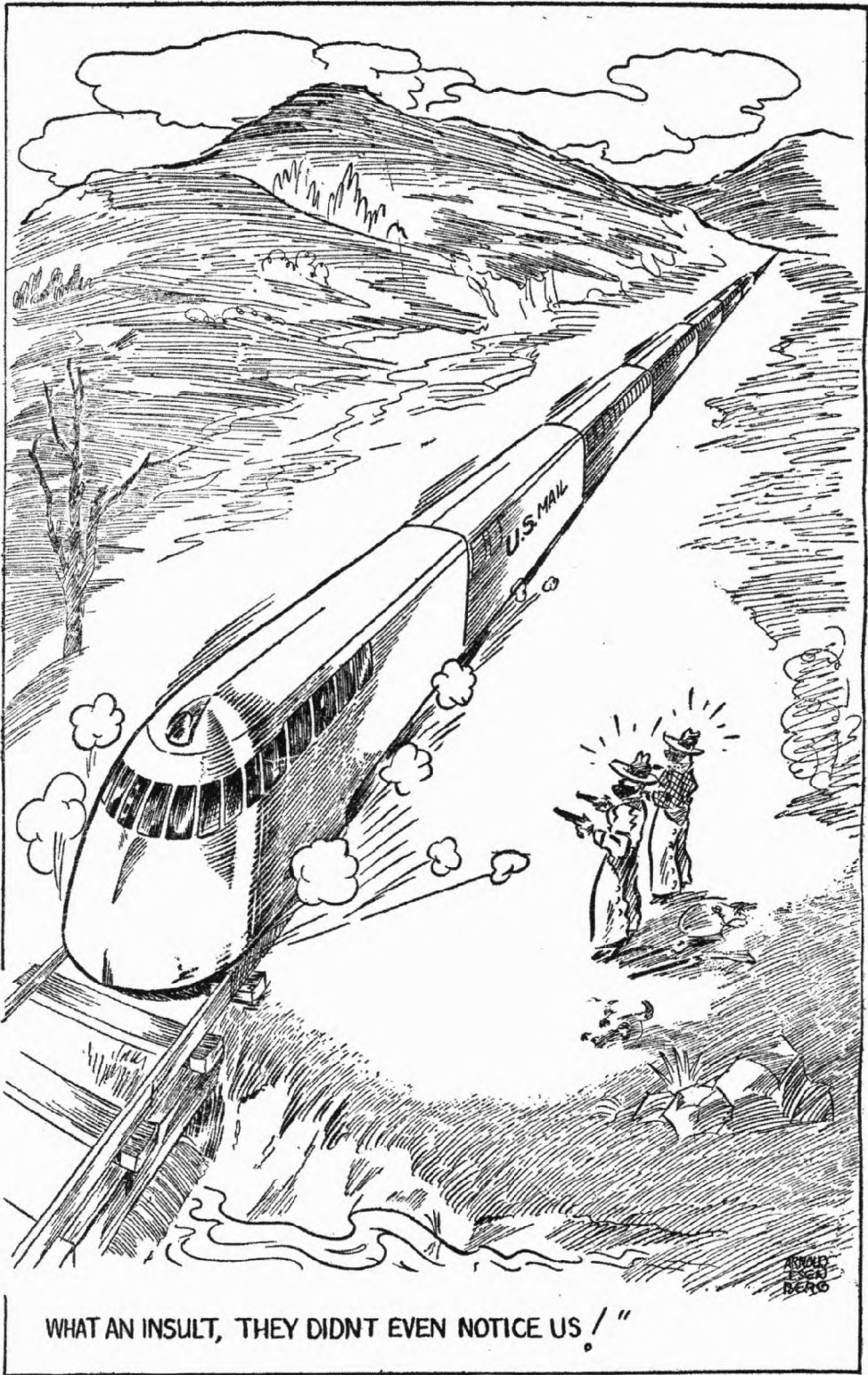
Address.....

City..... State.....

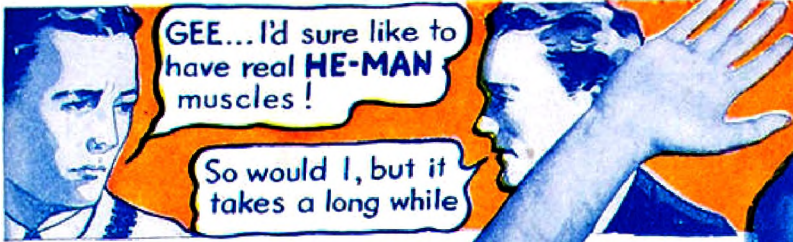
My Hobbies Are.....

Sports I Like Best.....

Are you a member of the Lone Ranger Safety Club?.....



WHAT AN INSULT, THEY DIDNT EVEN NOTICE US! "



GEE... I'd sure like to have real HE-MAN muscles!

So would I, but it takes a long while

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Holder of the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" won in over 100 competitions in the only national and international contests held during the past 15 years.

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No other Physical Instructor in the World has ever DARED to make the offer he makes in this announcement!

DON'T get the idea that it takes a lot of time and hard work for you to get smashing strength and powerful muscular development! And don't fool yourself into thinking that you need dumbbells, stretchers or any other such contraptions.

Each of these ideas are all bunk—and I have PROVED it. All I need is 7 days to prove what I can do for you! And I don't need any apparatus either. In fact, I have no sympathy with apparatus at all—don't believe in it. It is artificial—and it may strain your heart or other vital organs for life!

**NATURAL Methods
Are All I Need**

On this page you will see an actual photo of how I look today. This picture has not been changed in any way. No muscles have been "painted on." This photograph is the camera's honest proof of what I have done for MY body. I myself am ready to prove what my secret of *DYNAMIC TENSION* can do for yours!

To look at me now you wouldn't recognize me as the same man I used to be. Then I was a physical wreck. A 5-foot, scrawny, flat-chested, spindly legs, urine-like pipe stems.

I was worried—and I had a right to be! I decided to study myself to do something about my body. Then I made a discovery. I found a new way to build myself up—a way that was simple, natural, quick, and sure! "*DYNAMIC TENSION*" is what I called it. I put this secret to work. And in a short time I had the kind of body you see here—the body which has twice won the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

**This Secret Has Helped
Thousands**

Thousands of other fellows now know this secret, too—and know from their own personal experience what *DYNAMIC TENSION* has done for them. When they turned to me for advice, they were just as frail and puny as I once was. Now they are life-sized examples of what a man can and ought to be—with mighty energy, tireless endurance, and muscles that stand out like bridle-cables all over their bodies.

I have written an interesting booklet, filled with pictures, which tells my story—and theirs. I would like to send you a copy of it entirely free.

**Let Me Send You My
FREE BOOK**

I'd like you to know what *DYNAMIC TENSION* has done for me—what it has done for others—and what it can do for you! This little coupon will bring you my free book which tells all about it. There is no cost or obligation of any kind—and my name will call upon you

I just want to put into your hands proof that I can do for you what I have done for so many thousands of others: give you broad powerful shoulders,iceps that bulge with smashing strength, a chest which stands out solid and muscular, and an evenly developed body that will make others look like dwarfs next to you.

Will you gamble a stamp to win a body like mine? Then mail this coupon TODAY, **CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 175-R, 115 East 23rd St., New York.**



**This Sterling
Silver Cup Being
Given Away**

This valuable cup stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base.

I will award it to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months.

**CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 175-R,
115 East 23rd St., New York, N. Y.**

I want the proof that your system of *DYNAMIC TENSION* will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name
(Please print or write plainly)

Address

City State

FREE BOOK



Gamble a stamp today. Mail coupon for free copy of my new book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It shows you from actual photos how I have developed my pupils to my own perfectly balanced proportions.

Where shall I send your copy? Write your name and address plainly on the coupon. Mail it today to me personally.