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LOUIS L'AMOUR
WESTERN MAGAZINE

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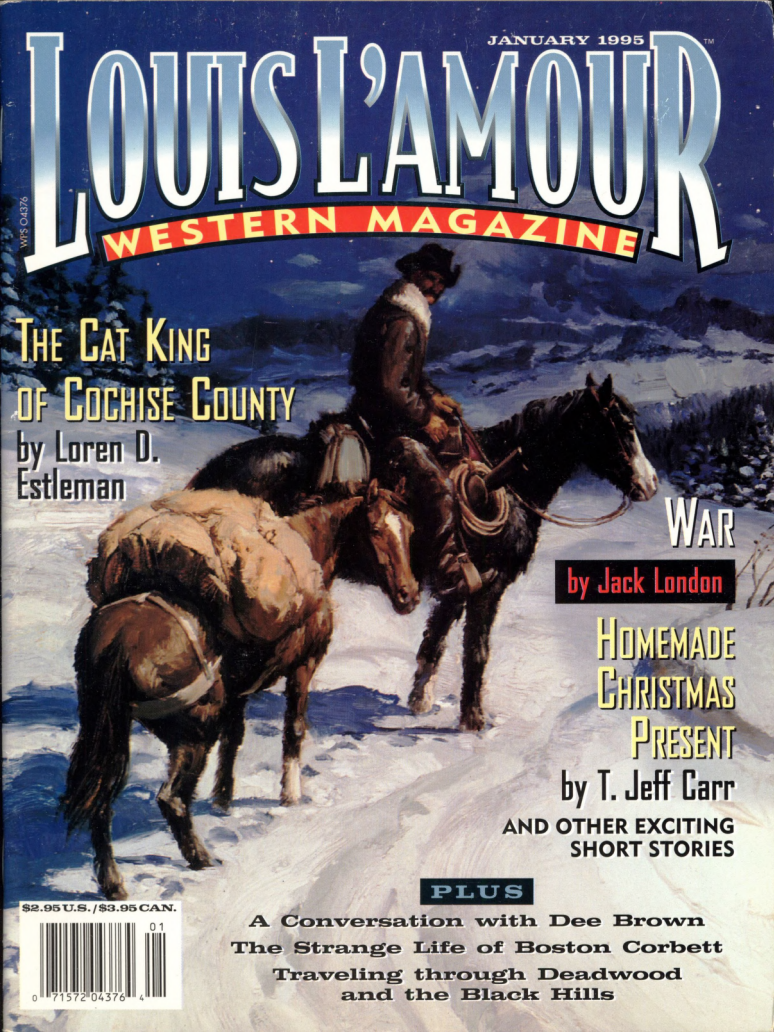

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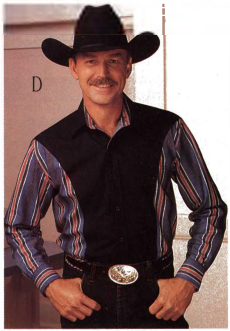

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BY ELANA LORE

We have an unusual Classic Western in this issue. "War," by Jack London, is somewhat of a lost masterpiece. It was brought to our attention by Dale Walker, whose interview of Dee Brown appears in this issue. Dale, among other things, is an authority on the life and works of Jack London–he is the author of two books about him and editor of three collections of his short stories.

Dale says he has taught the story in university-level English classes and students love it because of its mystery, its moodiness, and the grand irony of its ending. He says they love to debate whether London was giving us a pacifistic message on the cruelty and horror of war or an aggressive statement on the fate awaiting the person who hesitates in time of war.

We hope you enjoy it.

We like to use this space to give you news of other work by our authors, and so we are happy to announce that Jane Candia Coleman, who wrote the travel article on Deadwood and the Black Hills for this issue, has a book coming out next May on Big Nose Kate, who was the lover of gunfighter and gambler Doc Holliday. The book, called *Doc Holliday's Woman*, is being published in hardcover by Warner Books and has already been optioned for the movies.

Loren Estleman, who wrote "The Cat King of Cochise County," was interviewed in our September issue. For fans of his western writing, *City of Widows* was published a few months ago by Forge/Tor Books. For fans of his other work, he has a book coming out in hardcover in April from Warner/Mysterious called *Edsel*, which is the fourth in his Detroit crime series. Before you read his story, you should know that he does like cats. He has three–Chance, Joey, and Possum.

Teddy Keller, author of "Accidental Bad Man"–his first appearance in this magazine–says he is a lifelong westerner who has been transplanted to the East by his wife's career move. He is a full-time writer with some rather diverse interests. He belongs to, or has in the past, the American Guild of Organists, the Screen Actor's Guild, the Billy the Kid Outlaw Gang, the Swiss Army Knife Society, and the Sports Car Club of America.

We are proud of the fact that we read all submissions to the magazine. You don't need an agent to submit to us, nor do you need to have been published before. If you would like to submit a story to us, please send a self-addressed, stamped number ten envelope for our writers' guidelines to: LLWM Guidelines, 1540 Broadway, #1509, New York, NY 10036.

In this issue, "Charity," by Sandra Whiting, is a first story by a woman who is a computer programmer in Wichita, Kansas, when she isn't writing. In addition to her job and writing, she says she has worked with the Wichita Area Girl Scouts for the last five years at a "cowtown" camp where the girls and adults wear clothes as though they actually lived in 1876 and learn the skills that a girl then would have had to know how to do, such as knitting, sewing, quilting, and cooking. ⊞

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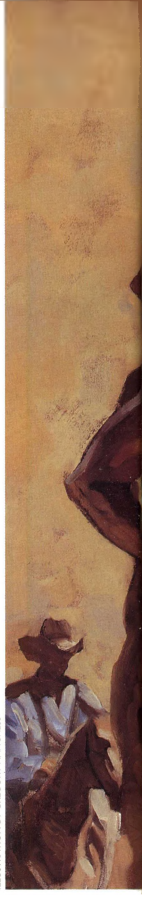

ILLUSTRATION BY GREGORY MANCHESS

"Pa? Four riders comin'."

There was no alarm in Clara's voice. But my fifteen-year-old daughter had learned to view the world with some caution since her mama died. I sunk the double-blade ax into the stump I was using to split firewood for the upcoming winter and took the dipper of water Clara had ladled from the wood bucket at her feet. Only after I emptied two dipperfuls down my gullet did I turn and look in the direction her eyes had held since she had spotted the men.

There were four of them, all right, a quarter of a mile away with their horses coming on at a jog trot. Descending down out of a heavy stand of aspen trees, already turned golden by mid-October of 1889, they rode in single file, but unevenly spaced. None of them were outfitted the same, either in dress or the color of horse they rode. About the only things they had in common were on their saddles. All had tapaderos, something that riders used in the brush country farther south.

BY ROBERT P. JORDAN

The four men drew to a halt and fanned out so it was hard for me to see them all at the same time.

The leader was a heavyset, bearded man whose gut I could see from four hundred yards away. His substantial bulk kept him settled in the saddle of his pale buckskin even while the animal trotted. The second in line rode a black horse that he kept dangerously close to the leader's. I'd have thought the buckskin might take a dislike to having another horse putting a nose up his tail, but maybe he was used to being trailed so close. The second man was thin and small of stature. The other two men, both looking to be about my size, rode behind at ten-yard intervals on a bay and a red roan with a distinctive blaze and white socks on both rear legs.

I glanced at the Winchester .44-40 leaning up against the pile of firewood, my Stetson and shirt hanging on the barrel. The Ute, Cheyenne, and outlaws had not made any trouble for us during the five years we'd been homesteading and running cattle on government range along the foothills south of Monument. Still, it seemed prudent to keep the rifle nearby with a round chambered when I worked out in the open.

"Leave the bucket and get on back to the house," I said in as emotionless a voice as I could. "And stay there." Something just didn't look right about those four rounders, and I wanted her inside.

"But Pa . . ." she protested.

"Get on back, Clara. I know you'd like some company 'sides me. And if these yahoos seem straight enough, I'll ask 'em to stop for coffee and a wedge of your apple pie, which I can smell from here. 'Specially if there's a young and handsome one in the bunch." I took my eyes off the approaching men to smile at Clara and motion her along with my head. "Don't worry, girl. They're prob'ly just some punchers let go from one of the big outfits down south after fall roundup, and they're lookin' to see the elephant in Denver 'fore the snows fly."

I watched my daughter for a moment as she started for our peeled log house a furlong away. The breeze trailed her long, blond hair out behind her yellow gingham dress just like her mother's used to do. Clara had turned into a pretty thing, as pretty as her mama was when we wed in Kansas City. Though it took some years, Melody and I saved enough from my job as a stockyard wrangler to move west to buy a place of our own. If I was going to work hard, I wanted the result to be for my family's benefit and not for some stockyard owner's.

Clara came along a year after we were married, but as much as we tried, Melody and I could never give her a brother or sister. Doctors shrugged and said it was just the way of Nature. It still made me smile to recall how, even after we knew that there would be no more children, we never gave up trying. Sure made for many a short night over the years, but neither of us minded. When Melody took ill with pneumonia and passed on two winters ago, being that close to her for so long made for a lot of lonely, empty days and nights since. I tried to ease the grieving by working hard, and with Clara around, I was never alone. But she could not fill the hole in my life that Melody's passing had created.

Shaking off such thoughts, I turned my attention back to the riders, who were near enough for me to see more detail. The fat man wore two pistols on crossed belts, handles forward, which was an awful lot of hardware for a grub line cowboy. Sometimes that sort of gunfighter's rig was purely for show, but there was no way of telling until lead flew. I bent over, pretending I was getting another dipper of water. When I stepped toward the bucket, I put on my hat to shield my eyes. That the men approached with the afternoon sun directly behind them made me more wary. But I was within easy reaching distance of the rifle. After I took a sip of water, I twisted lazily to toss the excess behind me, just so I could check on Clara. She was within fifty yards of the front door.

The four pulled up to a walk when they neared me. Drawing to a halt, they fanned out so it was hard for me to see them all at the same time. One of them, who hung back a little, caught my eye. Sitting easy on that red roan gelding like he was part of him, the rider wore a beat-up cavalry hat and faded blue army blouse beneath a leather vest. His sleeves showed darker areas where stripes, now gone, had kept the sun from fading the blue. Other than noting that his hair was graying at the temple, I thought it best to quit my study of him and cast my gaze to the three closer men. They were the ones who made me feel uneasy.

The leader, maybe a half-dozen years younger than my thirty-nine, had beady eyes set close together above a much-broken nose,

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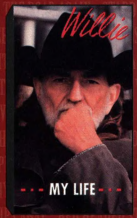

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harlie, the leader, shifted his eyes around, looking for sign that there were other males on the premises.

a testament to his share of fist-fights over the years. On the black gelding, Little Man, as I'd dubbed him in my mind, reminded me of a nervous lap dog, always glancing at the leader and looking to take his cue from him as to what to do. The rider on the bay was the youngest, maybe twenty. He wore a battered brown derby that held a shock of long blond hair in place. A vacant look in his washed-out blue eyes made me think he didn't have a full complement of wits. His cracked, chapped lips split into a grin showing no front teeth, probably victims of a bar brawl. I was feeling relieved to have sent Clara inside. I sure wasn't going to invite these roughs in for coffee.

"Howdy," came the opening of communications from the leader. Nodding toward my buildings, he thumbed back his sweat- and dust-stained hat. "Mind if we water our horses and fill our canteens at your place?" A mountain-fed creek ran through my quarter-section, and I had diverted some of it with old wooden flumes I'd brought down from an abandoned mine farther up in the hills. That way, clean water flowed to the ranch yard for us as well as the few horses, chickens, and goats we kept. When the running water froze up in the winter, we drew water from the well.

Without taking my eyes off the fat man, I nodded toward the flat, aspen-covered hill behind the cabin that the locals called Tabletop. The creek descended from there. "Best water for miles around pools up there above the house. You can take what you need 'fore you move on."

The leader glanced once to his men, then smiled at me. "Say, friend, I see you got four horses in your corral. What say we trade even up, and I'll throw in fifty dollars extra on top o' that? These mounts have seen a few miles the last couple days, but after some rest and grain, you'll find you got the best o' the deal." Holding the slack reins in one hand, he folded his arms over his big belly.

Honest cowboys riding the grubline wouldn't have run their animals down like that without good reason. With the possible exception of the roan, the animals looked used up like they'd been ridden on a long chase. If so, I figured these men weren't on the pursuing end of it. "Just got some slow workhorses and an old wind-blown mare I keep for the kids," I lied.

"I saw one of your kids goin' back to the house. Any more like her around?" I didn't like the way he said that or the leer that came with it.

"Naw. Got two sons, though. Oldest is eighteen. He went out early this mornin' to lay in a supply of venison. Good shot, too. He ought to be back soon. T'other is sixteen. I left him inside cleanin' his rifle when I came out here to chop wood." I tried to slather it on thick, hoping they'd get the idea that no matter what they planned to do to me, there'd be two almost grown boys nearby with long-range weapons.

"Charlie?" the jittery Little Man whined.

"Shaddup." Charlie, the leader, shifted his eyes around, looking for sign that there were other males on the premises. His face took on a pained expression, as if thinking hurt him something awful. When he smiled, though, I knew I'd failed to convince him and his friends to move on.

"Looks to me that you might be tellin' us a tale, mister. If'n I had me a sixteen-year-old buck at home, I'd have *him* out here choppin' wood. I sure's hell wouldn't do it myself." His crossed arms lowered so slowly I almost didn't see his hands moving toward the pistol grips. If it had only been him, I figured I had a better than even chance of grabbing my Winchester and taking cover behind the woodpile. But with Little Man and Blue Eyes there to back his play, I knew I was in trouble.

"Charlie!"

At the commanding roar of the leader's name, we all froze. I'd forgotten about The Soldier. With a flick of his spurs he urged the roan forward, his pistol already magically clear of the holster. He rode between Charlie and me before dismounting. Leaving the horse ground-tied, he slowly circled where I stood but never pointed his revolver directly at me. I put my arms straight out to my sides anyway.

"I didn't sign on with your outfit to do this, Charlie."

"You forget what's behind us? We need fresh mounts."

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a look of regret pass over The Soldier's face like the shadow of a cloud coming across the prairie. Like most outdoorsmen, the skin at the corners of his light brown eyes was crinkled from years of squinting against the sun. Under the trail dust and several days' growth of a salt-and-pepper beard

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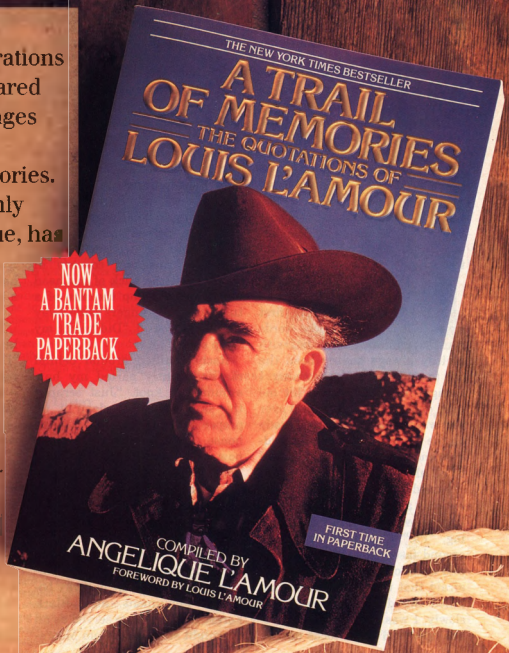

The stolen horses and the bump on my head were nothing compared to what the men had almost done to Clara.

was a handsome man still short of fifty by a year or two. He might have been someone you'd want to trade drinks with on a Saturday night and maybe get to know well enough to call a friend. But the Colt he held brought that thought up short.

"Hell, let's get this over with," Blue Eyes blurted out. His words grabbed my attention so I didn't notice The Soldier move up behind me. Then I felt the not ungentle touch of his left hand on my upper back.

"Sorry, mister, but you'll thank me . . ." The rest of his little speech was lost among the crashing thunder in my brain as he brought the revolver barrel down across the back of my skull. The last thing I remember as darkness took over, ablaze for a moment with stars, was that stupid, gap-toothed grin of Blue Eyes.

"Tod. Tod Winters. You wake up." My hearing was the first sense to recover, and those words were so familiar to me, what with Melody always having been the one to rise first in the morning. I thought The Soldier had hit me hard enough that I'd crossed over and was meeting up with Melody on the other side. Then I felt sadness and fear for Clara. She would be all alone now.

I tried to form words of reply, but only a moaning came from my lips, followed by Clara's voice calling, "Pa." That made me come around faster than the splash of cold water on my face. I was really afraid that those four riders had killed my daughter, too. Then, slowly, I was able to get my eyelids open so I could focus on two women's faces framed by the late afternoon Colorado sky. One was Clara's, and I was sure glad to see her there. The other face was the widow Rachel Sedlak's, and hers was also mighty fine to look upon.

I lifted my hand feebly, letting them know I was getting my senses back. Not being able to speak had one advantage at that moment. If able to say anything, I'd have called out Melody's name to Rachel. And no matter what the circumstances, there aren't too many women who like to be called by another woman's handle.

"Clara, you go get some more water in the bucket and bring it here," she ordered. When Clara had rushed off, Rachel asked, "You going to be all right, Tod?"

As she helped me sit up, I looked into her wide-set, pretty eyes and saw real concern in them. I felt the back of my head and found a bump the size of a turkey egg. My fingers came away sticky with blood. "Did he cut my scalp open?"

Rachel shifted around behind me and gently parted my hair around the knot. "Just scraped the skin some. I'll clean it up proper when I get you to the house. It's too late to go home now, so I'll stay the night. I told Tom to close up the store if I didn't get back in time. When we get to The Corners tomorrow, we can send out a rider to tell the marshal at Monument about this."

Ruffin's Corners, or The Corners, for short, was a little community sitting about halfway between Monument and Black Forest that had once served as an overnight stage stop. Tom Moorehouse was a stove-in puncher too crippled-up from riding accidents to cowboy anymore, so he made his living clerking at the store for Rachel. "Why go to your place?" I asked with a wince. Just talking hurt.

"Because you probably aren't too steady on your feet, and Clara's not quite up to caring for you alone. I came out here to bring those supplies you ordered, and to ask you to Sunday supper. Now it looks like I'll be having you both at home for a spell."

"I'm not that bad hurt," I grumbled, feeling better, but not yet convinced it was a permanent improvement. Grimacing against the pain, I stared off at Clara lugging a fresh bucket of water toward us with both hands. It took some doing, but I finally figured out what was different about her. She had switched her yellow gingham dress for a blue calico. "What a time to change clothes."

"She had to."

The full meaning of her words hit me like a fist to the stomach. "Did they . . .?" I couldn't get the rest out.

Rachel shook her head. "Clara's all right, Tod. She just learned a bitter lesson about men that she won't ever forget."

"You stopped them?"

Rachel shook her head again. "I have Malcolm's old Henry rifle with me, and I sure would've tried. But it was one of the four men that stopped the others from taking her," she replied with downcast eyes. "I found her trying to bring you around when I got here. Clara said that when she saw you fall, she left the house and came running. That's when

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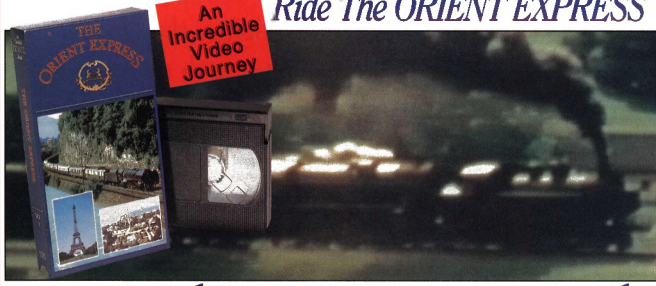

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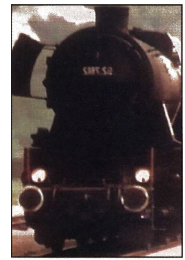

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If I could cut their trail before they reached Denver, I might be able to catch the men red-handed on my horses.

they grabbed her. Then, after the one man stepped in to protect her, the others stole provisions and your rifle. They saddled your horses and rode back into the trees only a few minutes before I arrived. I figured she wouldn't want to be seen in a torn dress like that, so I sent her back to the house to change." Rachel looked at me without blinking. "I'm not saying you should forget, but let her decide when to talk about it."

Rachel helped me up to my feet. The fear I'd felt for Clara was soon replaced with raw anger that stayed with me even through the dizzy haze that shaded my eyesight for a moment when I stood. The stolen horses and the bump on my head were nothing when compared to what they had almost done to Clara.

When my daughter got to us, I looked on her with a sympathy that ached inside me, but I said nothing. I wanted to take her in my arms and tell her I'd make those men pay, but I figured that might upset her more. Drinking some water from the dipper Clara handed me, I bent over to pour the rest over my head. Its coldness shocked me completely awake. It was then that I remembered I still wore no clothing from the waist up. I started to cover my bare chest with my hands, but let them drop to my sides. "I wasn't expectin' polite company."

I looked at Rachel, and we laughed. We'd both been married to others for too long to concern ourselves with such delicate niceties.

Before he was killed in the Halloween blizzard of '85, Rachel and her husband, Malcolm, had run The Corners' general store and the hotel at the stage relay station. Freighting in supplies by himself, Malcolm was caught in the early season snowstorm still fifteen miles from home. With the temperature dropping forty degrees in an hour, he got lost in the whiteout and perished with his team of horses. We didn't find him until a brief thaw in November. Afterward, Melody and Clara stayed with Rachel until she could get by on her own. It was then that they all became fast friends. Unable to keep both businesses going after Malcolm's death, Rachel sold the hotel. It was a great source of shame to her that, when the stage line folded, the new hotel owner made it into a bawdy house for punchers and other menfolk around.

After Melody passed on, it was Rachel's turn to be a friend of the family. She often drove or rode the eight miles out to visit us at the Flying W. Though she'd had several offers to sell out, Rachel kept the store and made a decent living from it. But I knew she wished she could move on with her life. For the past year, I often thought about asking her to be part of my life and Clara's. Somehow, the courage to say something and the opportunity for me to say it never seemed to come at the same time.

At sundown, after cleaning myself up, I was steady enough to put the horses away. While watching the outlaws' cast-off animals and Rachel's team crunch down on some hay and a little grain, I ruminated over what would probably happen when that incompetent town marshal at Monument learned what had taken place. At best, he would forward the information to the county sheriff, who might send it on to other lawmen around the state. Weeks would pass, and I'd probably never recover my property or avenge the way those men had treated my daughter.

The four were obviously outlaws on the run. They wouldn't ride back south, where I figured they came from. And with snow already in the high passes, I didn't think they'd be riding west over the Great Divide. If they meant to cross the prairie, they would have headed east from my ranch, instead of going back into the trees. So I thought they were probably still pointed toward Denver or up north to Wyoming or Montana, where they could lose themselves before winter set in. But even with their head start, I knew I could make better time riding a parallel trail north across the grasslands than they could holding to cover through the forested foothills west of the ranch. If I could cut their trail before they reached Denver, I might catch them red-handed on my horses. It was a long shot, but I figured no one else was going to help me.

After supper, with Clara nodding off in a rocking chair by the woodstove, I talked out my plan while sitting across the table from Rachel. As I expected, she thought the blow to my head had addled my brain. She argued against it, saying that if the outlaws' horses turned out to be stolen, they had to be returned to their rightful owners. I might as well get used to the idea I needed to buy some new animals, she said. But I was dead set on going after those men.

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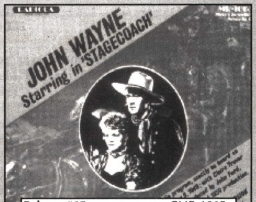

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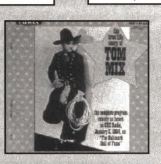

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"Don't be put off men cause of what they tried to do, Clara," I said. "We aren't all like that."

"It's really because of what they did to Clara, isn't it?" she finally asked.

"You can't let scum like that go on stealin' and hurtin' others. Lawmen don't care so long as it isn't one of their own people. And what would Clara think if I did nothin'? That you just hunker down and accept it?"

Rachel shook her head. "What would become of Clara if something happened to you?"

"I thought you might take her in," I muttered, almost too quiet to hear.

"And I would—gladly. But have you thought what it would do to me if something happened?"

"Do to you?"

"Why do you think I make so many trips bringing supplies out to your ranch when I don't do it for anyone else?"

"To see Clara."

"I love her like a baby sister, Tod. But she's not the only one out here."

I fiddled with the coffee cup in front of me, then looked at Rachel. She had a plain face with clean lines and a delicate nose, and those green eyes made me melt inside. Rachel wasn't beautiful the way Melody had been, but that didn't matter to me so much as what she was feeling in her heart. The closeness Melody and I had had for so many years was a rare and wonderful thing, and I wasn't sure I could settle for anything else. I searched Rachel's face, pondering what I should do, when her full lips spread into a pretty smile I couldn't help returning. I reached across the table, and she placed her hands in mine like it was something we'd been doing for years every night after supper.

"There's always a risk in ranchin'," I began, "but the herd is growin.' All we got isn't just what's in my pocket. We have some set by in a Denver bank." Then I added with a shrug, "Life's been lonely for both of us, Rachel, and I know you'd like to get away from The Corners."

"Go on," she urged when I faltered.

"I care for you far more than common, Rachel. We have more to talk 'bout 'fore it goes much further 'tween us. But I offer what I have to you . . . if you'll be my wife." When she didn't reply at first, I added, "Maybe I'm not the kind of man you'd want to hook up with."

"I know exactly what kind of man you are every time I see her and how good she's done since her mama died," Rachel said, nodding toward Clara. "And when I'm near you, I feel things inside me I thought were gone forever when Malcolm died. But I won't have you if you go after those men with vengeance in your heart."

I pondered over her words for a moment before offering a compromise. "What if I just trail them north till I can point them out to the nearest lawman? I won't brace them myself."

"Then I'll have you, but only if you come back to me and Clara unhurt. You hear me, Tod Winters?" Though the words might have been harsh, the tone of her voice wasn't.

Still an hour short of sunup, I saddled The Soldier's red roan, then went back inside the house. By then, Rachel and Clara had the kitchen stove stoked up and breakfast cooking. I watched my daughter closely, trying to decide if her ordeal the day before had left any traces. But other than being sleepy for that early in the morning, she acted like herself.

With Clara's back turned to us for a moment, Rachel stole up to me and planted a kiss on my lips. When I saw my daughter was still busy tending eggs in the pan, I wrapped my arms around the widow and returned her good-morning. But I suspect Clara knew what was going on behind her. None of us said much while we ate, but the widow and I exchanged more than a handful of smiles during that quarter hour at the table.

I wanted to linger over another cup of coffee, watching Rachel there in my house, but I had to ride out as soon as I could see a few yards ahead of me. I rose from the table and took a lamp with me to the bedroom. I pried up a loose floorboard and got out the small strongbox hidden beneath. Figuring both might come in handy, I retrieved a little money and my copy of the Flying W brand registration made out by the El Paso County recorder.

Then, with the kitchen lamps throwing their light out the back door, I stood just off the porch in front of Clara. "I know it's painful to think upon, girl, but I need to know. Which of those men stood 'tween you and t'others?" I waited patiently, wondering if she would reply.

"Don't know his name, Pa. But he was the one who hit you."

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walked straight into the camp with my eyes shifting from one man to the other. They studied me by firelight.

I nodded, somehow already knowing The Soldier had been the one. I cleared my throat before tipping her chin up to look at me. "Don't be put off men 'cause of what they tried to do, Clara. We aren't all like that." I struggled to find the right words to say, but she cut in.

"Not too long before Mama took sick, I asked her about men and women and . . . and such. And she told me. It's bad with men like that, and it's right and good with a man like you . . . I mean, when I find someone to love like Mama found you. Ain't that what she meant?" Clara asked, looking to Rachel.

"You understood better than most folks," the widow replied, stepping down off the porch.

I kissed my daughter, then took Rachel in my arms. Her lips were warm and soft and sweet as they moved against mine. I swung up in the saddle and looked back at them, their arms around each other. After turning the livestock out into the pasture to fend for themselves for a few days, Rachel would take Clara back to The Corners until I returned. Then the widow and I would hash out just what we expected from each other. Knowing what it's like living with someone is one advantage to having been married before. But I didn't think we'd find much disagreement between us.

The sun rose in the east-southeast in October, so I set the back of my right shoulder to that gray horizon. To the west, the sky was near black, a fitting color for the outlaws I was hoping to run to ground before they disappeared into the vastness of the country. I had taken a chance in riding the roan, what with all the miles he'd already done the last few days. But he'd met me that morning with his head up and his eyes bright. Though he was a little lean in the flanks, the gelding had been cared for right well. And as the miles slipped by in his smooth, ground-eating trot, I knew I'd made a good decision to leave Rachel's dray horses behind. They were broke to ride but were unused to being under saddle for hours at a time. The roan had bottom to spare.

Still, taking into account he might tire easily I paced the animal, dismounting to lead Red, as I came to call him, for five minutes each hour. After every three hours, we rested for thirty minutes while he grazed after taking a small measure of grain from one of the flour sacks of supplies I'd tied to the saddle. I let him drink at every water crossing we made, and he got more rest when we came across wire fences. It took a few minutes each time to cut the wire, lead the gelding through, then make a quick splice before continuing on to the north.

Red seemed to thrive on such travel. And though I was often in the saddle most all day with my neighbors during fall and spring roundups, we took turns dismounting to do ground work. But by midafternoon on this ride, I'd been in the saddle seven of the previous nine hours. My sitbones and knees began to add their complaints to those of my head. Though the knot on the back of my skull had shrunk considerably, it still throbbed.

At twilight, which came fast when the sun set behind the mountains, we'd come near fifty miles. I'd cut several riders' trails that day, but I didn't figure any were the outlaws.' They wouldn't leave the evergreens and aspens that showed purple and gold on the hills to the west. Moving as slow as they had to in such heavy cover, Red and I might've already drawn even with them. Though Denver was only twenty or so miles to the north, both the gelding and I were ready to bed down for the night. At dawn the next day I planned to head northwest, find the men's trail, and close on them. I hoped I wouldn't have to face them and break my promise to Rachel.

In the failing light, I spotted a copse of willows poking up out of a ravine. Those trees meant there was a good chance that water was down in that draw as well as some dry firewood, considering we hadn't had a good rain for nigh on two weeks. As we came up on the arroyo, both Red and I were droopy-drawer tired. So when his head snapped up and ears twisted forward, I paid attention. He'd smelled woodsmoke long before I did.

I dismounted and led him the last fifty yards toward the edge of the ravine. Even before we got there, I could see the campfire's light reflecting off smoke shimmering up from below the edge and heard the drone of men's voices. After rubbing Red on the nose for a moment to calm him, I reached back along the saddle scabbard and took out Malcolm Sedlak's old Henry repeating rifle that Rachel had lent me. I slowly jacked a cartridge into the cham-

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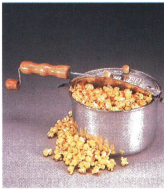

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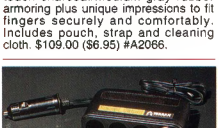

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"Not that you ain't the owner of that ranch south of Monument," Rudd said, "but can you prove who you are?"

ber, then let the hammer down easy before crouching to approach the lip of the ravine.

Two horses, neither of them mine, were picketed near a small creek. Upstream a ways was a small campfire where their riders lay sprawled on rolled out slickers. If the men had looked up, I'd have been a clear target silhouetted against the light purple sky. Figuring I better announce my presence before they decided I was some ne'er-do-well ready to ambush them, I hollered out loud and clear.

"Hello, the camp!" Even in the semidarkness of the arroyo, I could see both men jump. One began to move his hand to his side away from me, probably to pull his gun. Though I kept the Henry pointed up and away from them, I thumbed back the hammer, its click plain above the wind sighing through the bare willow branches. "Let's keep this friendly, fellas."

"Marty, hold it," hissed the other, who had remained motionless. He tilted his head up and found me easy enough, illuminated as I was by the twilight. "Got the drop on us, mister. Whatcha want?"

By then, an inviting smell had come to me on the wind. "A cup of your coffee, for starters. After that, maybe some talk." I let the Henry's hammer click back down as a sign of good faith.

Though the men's faces were hidden for the most part by their hat brims, I could tell they nodded to each other. "Don't seem we have much choice. Come on in, mister, and welcome," the cautious one invited.

I led Red down a sandy incline and walked straight into the camp with my eyes, shaded by my own hat, shifting from one to the other. Both had stood up by then, and they gave Red a good look-see before exchanging glances. Leaving the roan ground-tied, I dug out a cup from inside one of the flour sacks tied to my saddle. Using a rag the men had left near the fire, I grabbed the pot handle and poured out a steaming cup. They studied me by the firelight, and I did the same to them.

The cautious one looked to be in his early thirties, older by a decade than the other. Both were dark-haired and sported neatly trimmed mustaches. Neither was dressed like a working man. The younger one, Marty, wore a fancy brocaded vest beneath his lightweight suit coat. "Might get a frost by mornin'," I ventured before attempting to sip at the scalding brew. "Looks like you're missin' soogans and such for sleepin' out in the cold air."

"We'll keep the fire goin'," Marty replied. I could see he wanted to say more.

"Somethin' else on your mind, son?" The familiarity of my address made him bristle.

"Where'd you get that horse, mister?" he blurted out. Marty's partner gave him a vexatious look before he turned his eyes back to me.

I hefted the Henry a hair and took another sip before answering. "Is he yours, son?"

"I ain't your son. And I asked you where you got that roan." When he took a step toward me, the older man grabbed him.

"Now, hold on, Marty. We ain't in no position to be demandin' anythin'." He turned to me and continued, "We're interested in that animal, mister, 'cause we've been followin' the fella that's been ridin' him for the last two days. Him and his three friends. We got close 'nough day 'fore yesterday to see the horse good with binoculars, but never the rider's face. The rider wore an old army blue uniform shirt, which you ain't wearin'."

"Could be I changed my shirt, or it could be those four rounders came onto my ranch down south of Monument, pistol-whipped me, then stole horses and provisions." I nodded back toward the tired Red. "Could be this is the only one of their mounts they left behind that was in good 'nough shape to ride." I decided to keep quiet about what had happened to Clara. "When I got my legs steady under me again, it was too late to take out after them till this mornin'. I figure they're headin' for Denver and was hopin' to point them out to the nearest law and maybe get my property back."

"So you know what they look like?" Marty asked.

I nodded. "You two lawmen?"

"Of a sort," Marty replied with a self-satisfied look on a face that hadn't yet lost the fleshiness of youth.

"Well, son, either you're lawmen or you ain't. Not a whole lot of neutral ground in between."

At those words, Marty's partner tipped back his head and laughed. "We're detectives for the Southern Colorado and New Mexico Railway. My name's Bob Rudd, and this is Marty Sutherland." Reaching slowly inside his coat, he retrieved a leather wallet that held

Josiah McWerter sat in a rocking chair just outside the entrance to the livery, whittling on a chunk of pine wood.

a badge and identification papers. Handing it to me, he said, "Wasn't much time to outfit ourselves proper for a long pursuit through rough country. Just a coffeepot, cups, and a sack of Arbuckle's. We lost their trail down south for a spell, prob'ly when they rode onto your spread. Then we picked up their tracks again late yesterday. One cold night up in the foothills was sufficient perdition for us, so we decided to make camp down here on the grassland."

"Knocked over one of your trains, did they?" I thought about The Soldier and asked, "Anyone hurt?"

"Naw. They were masked, so no one saw their faces. Sure knew what they were doin'. Greased the tracks on an uphill grade so the engine couldn't make the climb. While the train was stationary, they forced the door on the baggage car, overpowered the clerk, and took off with over twenty thousand in old, worn greenbacks bein' taken back to the mint to be destroyed. Slick as could be."

"No guards to stop 'em?" I inquired.

Rudd looked down at his feet. " 'Cause we ain't never had a robbery since the war, the SC & NM brass let all the guards go to save money. Well, they figured wrong. The company has to make good on any shortages, includin' robberies. Hell, if we don't get that money back, it'll end up costin' the railroad more than all of the guards' pay for years." Rudd brought his hands up to his hips and cleared his throat. "Not that you ain't the owner of that ranch south of Monument, but can you prove who you are? Like I said, we never saw this horse's rider up close."

I withdrew the brand registration from my wool vest's inside pocket, placed it atop Rudd's wallet, and handed him both. "Thought I better bring this along in case I'm able to find my horses. The animals are all marked or the near shoulder with the Flying W, and them that's got 'em won't be carryin' proper bills of sale."

When the detectives were satisfied that they weren't palavering with one of the desperadoes they'd been chasing, we shook hands. After pouring another cup of coffee, I noticed a distinct lack of food in camp. Keeping back just enough jerky and a couple of Rachel's biscuits for breakfast, I gave what I had to the hungry Rudd and Sutherland. After letting Red grain up, I hobbled him and split the remaining oats with the detectives' horses. I wouldn't have been so free and easy with my victuals, except that we'd make Denver in the morning.

With the animals fed, we three sat back and talked it over. All of us were headed in the same general direction, and Rudd and Sutherland invited me along. Because I could identify the men, they abandoned their plan of following the outlaws' trail and decided to make a beeline to Denver. I learned that the detectives had already wired the SC & NM Railway agents there to alert the local lawmen. But in a place that large, we figured the outlaws might split up and be harder to spot. As individuals, they could spend some of their booty on new outfits, liquor, or sporting women without raising undue suspicion.

Exhausted, I bedded down for the night. Before sleep numbed my throbbing head, knees, and behind, I thought about Clara and Rachel, and how it was going to be when I went home. I was still angry enough to draw a bead on those men if the chance presented itself, but I'd try to remain clear of any gunplay. I wanted to keep my promise to Rachel.

We reached Denver just before noon, and the first thing Rudd and Sutherland did was to make a courtesy call to the local constabulary and have themselves sworn in as special deputies. SC & NM agents and the local law had been on the lookout for the outlaws. But with only general descriptions relayed north via the telegraph, any of the outlaws could have walked up to the lawmen and said "Howdy," and they wouldn't have known the difference. With fewer than fifty constables to patrol a growing city of sixty-five thousand souls, they were glad to find out I could recognize the four. And with what I could add to the descriptions, Chief of Police Billy O'Brien, a heller of a Texas Ranger in his younger years, dispatched what men he could spare to saloons, hotels, brothels, and even barber shops, just in case the outlaws might clean themselves up to be unrecognizable even to me.

Though I was not unfamiliar with the city, coming north two or three times a year to do what banking and trading that needed doing, I wanted someone with authority to help me search for my horses. I liked the cut of one of the uniformed constables and asked

hadn't taken a handful of steps inside when my knees nearly buckled. At the other end of the car sat The Soldier.

O'Brien if his subordinate could accompany me on my rounds of the various liveries, most of which were located along a five-block section of Seventeenth Street. Constable Joe Trueblood turned out to be a well of information on each livery, telling me which were honest and which might not be too particular about proof of ownership when buying horses. I thought we should inspect the shady businesses first. After Trueblood procured himself a mount, we rode off to make the rounds.

We struck pay dirt at the second establishment we entered. There, resting atop the corral of the Lucky D Livery, were three well-used, dusty rigs with tapaderos. Trueblood and I climbed to the rickety top rail to look over the animals crowded into the filthy enclosure. Sure enough, there were three of my horses. I was showing my brand registration to Trueblood when the shifty-eyed proprietor came up to us. He about had an apoplectic fit when the constable told him that the animals were stolen and would be impounded and returned to me. But the liveryman's choler didn't rise so much because he was in possession of stolen property, an offense in itself, but because he would lose the money he had paid out for the animals.

That the outlaws had sold their rigs told me they might be planning to leave by stage or one of several railroads that crossed tracks in Denver. When Trueblood questioned the Lucky D's owner, he gave us good descriptions of Charlie, Little Man, and Blue Eyes. Because of what they'd done on my ranch, I figured The Soldier had preferred to be shut of them as soon as they arrived in Denver.

"Which livery in town treats horses the best?" I asked the constable as we left the Lucky D.

"McWerter's, at the corner of Pine and Seventeenth. Why?"

" 'Cause that's where I figure my other horse is." I ignored Trueblood's questioning look and swung up onto Red's back.

The difference between liveries was startling. Where manure lay over hock high in places at the Lucky D, McWerter's employed two boys to, among other duties, keep such odorous byproducts of horse-keeping to a minimum. And unlike the other livery, the barn and corral were both in good repair. Josiah McWerter, it turned out, was an old-timer who had been making an honest living dealing horses since before the Civil War.

The proprietor sat in a rocking chair just outside the front office entrance, whittling on a chunk of pine wood. Trueblood could have just walked back to the corral and looked, but he showed his respect for the old man by asking him if my horse and a saddle had been sold that morning. McWerter gave us both a good study with his clear blue eyes before thumbing back his hat and shifting a pipe from one side of his mouth to the other.

"No one sold me a horse fittin' that description, son." My hopes fell. "But," he drawled, "a horse like that one was tied up at my corral this mornin' with a note statin' that she and the rifle that come with her belonged to a rancher down south o' Monument. Said I should take the saddle, which weren't stole, as payment for the horse's keep and asked kindly that I telegraph the law down there to let the rancher know where he could find his property. I take it that'd be you," McWerter said, stabbing his pipe stem in my direction. When I showed him my brand registration papers, he nodded. "Those be the mare's markin's. She and the fella's rig are 'round back, rifle still in the scabbard. With young boys workin' 'round the place, he took care to unload it."

As Trueblood and I started toward the rear of the livery, I said, "I'll be takin' just the Winchester, for now."

"No hurry 'bout the mare, son. That saddle's worth a couple weeks o' boardin'."

If so, I planned to get my other animals out of that dung heap of a livery at the Lucky D and put them up at McWerter's to rest until I trailed them home. We found The Soldier's well-worn but serviceable saddle, including his saddlebags, in the tack room. I only took the time to pat the bags down, but they felt empty. Then I withdrew my Winchester from the scabbard and fed some .44-40 rounds into its magazine before I located my mare. She was in good condition because of The Soldier's care. Knowing that and knowing how he'd helped Clara, I dreaded what would happen when Rudd and his partner tried to arrest him. I didn't see him giving up his freedom without a fight.

Having recovered my horses and rifle, minus a few cartridges, I figured my business in Denver

shifted my rifle so that the barrel pointed in The Soldier's direction. It seemed only seconds later that the gunshots began.

was just about done, and I could get back to Clara and Rachel. There was still the problem of what to do with Red, but I planned to take him south to my ranch and let him rejoin the other outlaws' horses there. Before winter set in, though, I'd take the animals over to Monument and let that lazy town marshal deal with them. Still, I'd hate to lose the roan.

We'd just headed our mounts back when another constable came riding toward us at a lope, shouting at me even before he'd pulled his horse to a halt. "Them railroad 'tectives think they seen the men they're after. They tol' me to bring you along to the Union Depot so you can look 'em over." The constable did not wait for a reply. Turning, and with Trueblood and me following, he prodded his animal back into a lope. Though tired, Red gamely kept pace as we rode down Seventeenth Street toward the train station. With no wind to speak of, I could locate it in the distance by thin columns of smoke rising nearly straight up from two steam engines sitting idle on the tracks.

Reaching the rail yard, we turned our horses up between the two waiting trains and rode along the roadbed to a group of about a dozen uniformed men, most armed with rifles, that included Rudd and Sutherland. Chief O'Brien emerged from their midst and nearly dragged me out of the saddle and up into one of the deserted passenger cars. Careful to stay away from the windows, he spoke in a hushed voice, "This is the eastbound to Topeka. They won't be boardin' for a spell, so no one'll be gettin' in our way." Pointing out the open windows to the platform beyond, he asked, "Ever seen any o' them galoots before?"

I had to look twice because they'd cleaned themselves up and were right dandified in their new clothes. But there, lounging on a platform bench well away from the other waiting passengers, were Charlie, Little Man, and Blue Eyes, all with garish new carpetbags at their feet. I wouldn't have bet against the stolen money being in their luggage. "That's them," I nodded.

The chief's eyes narrowed. "Rudd's already checked with the ticket agent. The northbound's due in thirty minutes, and all three are booked for Cheyenne. Is the fourth *hombre* about?"

I searched the long platform. "Not here." O'Brien scratched at the stubble on his chin, pondering how he'd handle the situation. After a long, silent minute, I jerked a thumb behind us toward the other train. "Where's that one headed?"

"SC & NM southbound. Goes down through Raton Pass and on to Las Vegas 'fore loopin' 'round to Santa Fe. I don't 'spect any o' them would be goin' south again." Nodding his head toward the door, we rejoined the others standing expectantly on the cinder roadbed.

O'Brien dispatched two of his men inside the coach to watch the three outlaws while he gave orders. After allowing five minutes to get into position, he would have the train's engineer give a short blast of the locomotive's whistle. At the sound, Rudd and Sutherland, using the nooks and crannies of the brick depot as cover, would approach the three men and demand their surrender. The chief constable and his men would be set up in the coach with their rifles to back the detectives' play. "And if any of 'em so much as twitches a finger, we shoot."

He handed Trueblood his pocket watch. "Son, you take the horses up past the engine and tie 'em good. Then, five minutes from now, accordin' to my gold-inlay watch, you tell the engineer to toot once, easy." The young constable looked disappointed at being left out of the party, but he nodded in reply. "You want a piece o' this?" O'Brien asked me when I handed Red's reins to Trueblood.

"Nope. I'll just stay in the background."

When he and his men had clambered on board and Trueblood had led the three horses beyond the front of the train, I jacked a cartridge into the Winchester's chamber and let the hammer down carefully. Then I crept toward the baggage car in the rear of the SC & NM southbound, circled it, and came up along the other side. Its door was open, and the clerk was snoring away on a narrow folding bench built into the compartment's wall. No one else was around. Such a sight did not inspire great confidence in the SC & NM's ability to keep its cargo secure.

I moved along to the next car and slowly mounted the coach's stairs. Trying not to look on the prod, I walked down the aisle, spurs jingling lightly with each step. Maybe a dozen souls were in that passenger car, but I recog-

stuffed the remaining money inside my shirt and buttoned my vest over it so the bulge wouldn't show.

nized none of them. When I reached the end of the car, I stepped across the space above the coupling and entered the next coach. I hadn't taken a handful of steps inside when my knees nearly buckled. At the other end, chin on chest in sleep, sat The Soldier. My hunch had been right. Unlike the others, he'd go in a direction the law wouldn't expect —south.

I walked past the only other passengers in the car—two men playing cards halfway down the aisle—and stood ten feet from the outlaw. He had shaved, and his gray-tinged hair was newly cut and slicked back. A new black hat with flat brim and telescoped crown was perched on one knee, and he had shucked his old clothes for some new duds. His vest, boots, and gun belt remained from his old outfit. A leather valise sat beside him on the bench.

I slipped quietly onto the seat facing his and sat catercorner from him. Arms folded across his chest, The Soldier slept soundly while I watched for a good two minutes. But his eyes snapped open at the sound of my rifle's hammer being thumbed back. His face, especially his eyes, which looked like he hadn't slept in a couple of days, telegraphed his emotions. He was the sort who couldn't tell a lie and hide it. I saw surprise, recognition, and then resignation come over him while he kept his hands tucked motionless under his arms.

"How's your head?" he inquired with a tiny smile.

"Fair to middlin', considerin' what your partners wanted to do to me," I replied, keeping my voice low so the other two passengers could not overhear. "Hope my noggin didn't dent your pistol none." We shared a big smile over that. "Just your left thumb and forefinger. Pull that iron out and hand it to me slow."

When he'd given me his revolver, I laid the Winchester across my thighs and emptied his weapon. Flipping the loading gate shut, I pocketed the bullets and put the Colt beside me on the bench. "You must've found your mare," he said, nodding toward the rifle. "Gary stole the gun from you, and I stole it back from him." When I looked funny at him, he added, "Gary Jensen's the yellow-haired kid who must've been hidin' in the woodshed when God gave out smarts."

"I figure I owe you thanks, 'specially for protectin' my daughter from those vermin."

"My interferin' with their fun didn't sit real pretty with 'em. I had to stay awake all last night and watch my back till we split up early this mornin', just south of town. Any decent man would've done the same for your kid."

"Decent men wouldn't ride with that bunch," I replied with a nod toward the depot. "Why you?"

The Soldier shrugged at first, then mumbled. "Seemed like the thing to do at the time."

"That don't cut it with me. I want to know."

He sighed. "I put thirty good years into the army, both in peacetime and war, and I reckoned to settle down on my pension. But, hell, what I get won't buy 'nough beer to pass clear water once a day. I tried punchin' cattle, but all I could find was seasonal work. So I took a job as a guard on this here railroad. Less'n a year later, they fired all us guards."

The Soldier shrugged again, as if embarrassed. "I was mad, as you might expect. Well, I met Charlie Rodee and his friends in a Pueblo saloon a week ago. They'd just been let go from an outfit near La Junta, and we started commiseratin' and treatin' each other for drinks. The talk got wild, and I said if I had a mind to, I knew the best place to hold up the SC & NM when the regular shipment of worn-out money went north to be turned over to the mint in Denver. Next thing I remember, I was on ol' Jake . . . he's the red roan I left at your ranch . . . ridin' to the upgrade I told 'em about. When I'd sobered up, I coulda backed out of it. But I was still fightin' mad 'bout bein' fired. Two days later, we greased the tracks and robbed the northbound when she couldn't make the grade." The Soldier patted his valise. "Most of my cut is here. It wasn't like robbin' a bank, where the money belongs to real folks. Still, I wish I could give it back."

"What were your plans?"

"Bein' in the army separated me from my family so many times that my wife got fed up and left me. She took our daughter to California 'bout ten years ago. Hadn't heard from 'em till last month. My daughter'd traced me through army pension records and sent me a letter. My wife'd died, God rest her long-sufferin' soul, and my little girl's now almost nineteen. She wrote that she still thought of me and wanted to see me again if ever I could make it out to the

coast. I'd planned to put aside some of my railroad pay to do just that when the SC & NM fired me." He grinned, "I guess I wanted to get back at the railroad brass while puttin' together a quick grubstake. Was gonna travel to Santa Fe and catch the westbound 'cross the desert to California and then up the coast." He glanced at my rifle. "Looks as if I'm not gonna see my . . ."

The rest of his thought was lost when I heard a short, low whistle from the eastbound's locomotive. I shifted my rifle so that the barrel pointed in The Soldier's direction. It seemed only seconds later that the gunshots began. He started, as I did, and looked a question into my eyes. The first pistol reports were overwhelmed by the cracks of rifles until it sounded as if every long gun in the state except mine had opened up on those three outlaws. The Soldier must've answered his own unspoken question, for his face grew sad. While the two other passengers behind us scrambled around, trying to see the action, we remained quiet during the fusillade, which eventually tapered off. Then we heard exuberant cursing and nervous laughter from O'Brien's men. When the haze and heavy smell of gunsmoke drifted into the open windows of the coach, neither The Soldier nor I doubted that the three other outlaws were dead.

"I feel sorry for Lenny," he spoke softly of the one I called Little Man. "He was the kind who needed someone to follow and would've been as loyal to a saint as to Satan. Too bad he chose Charlie Rodee to ride with." He looked to me and said without a trace of self-pity, "I don't have the same excuse. I knew I was doin' wrong."

"They'll be comin' for you soon." When he nodded in reply, I ordered, "Hand over your share of the money." Watching that he did not pull a holdout gun from the valise, I took from him a brown paper packet tied with string and undid it enough to see several bundles of worn greenbacks. "Did you get any severance from the railroad when you were let go?"

"Not so much as a by-your-leave."

I peeled off several bills and tossed them over to him. "How much you figure your red roan is worth?" He named a fair price, and I paid him from the railroad money. "I reckon the SC & NM owes me that much for my help. Write me a bill of sale, and make it out to Tod Winters. Quick, man. The railroad detectives might be here any minute."

The Soldier pawed through his bag and found a store receipt for his new clothes. I handed him the stub of a pencil from my vest pocket, and, using the back of the receipt, he scribbled out a bill of sale for the horse I would now call Jake. When he handed me the re-

ceipt, I looked at the signature. "Ross Oak," I mumbled. The handle fit him well.

I stood up and stuffed the remaining money inside my shirt and buttoned my vest over it so the bulge wouldn't show. Handing the unloaded revolver to the dumbfounded ex-soldier, I let the hammer down on my rifle. "Go see your girl, Oak." After he'd holstered his weapon, I added, "Then find some honest work out there in California, eh?"

"But . . . why?"

"Rottin' in Leavenworth won't do you, your daughter, or even society much good. 'Sides, I'm not employed by the railroad or the Denver law," I smiled. "If they can't do their job, I ain't gonna do it for them." From his seat he extended his hand toward me, and I took it up.

Turning away, I left the coach and had begun to descend the stairs when I saw Rudd trotting up alongside the southbound. I stepped clear of the train just as its conductor signaled the engineer to start up. Over the noise of the puffing locomotive, its spinning iron wheels, and the crashing of the couplings as the cars jerked forward one by one, the detective shouted, "Was the fourth man in there?"

"Didn't see anythin'," I lied. Unlike Oak, I could put on a poker face.

"We got most of the money back." I could see Rudd shudder before he continued, "It would've been all right, only the yellow-haired kid reached for his gun. The lawmen just cut 'em all down like wheat with a scythe. If'n they hadn't been wearin' uniforms, a jury'd call it murder." With those words, any guilt I felt about letting Oak go vanished. "You gonna hang around Denver and help us look for the last outlaw?" he asked as the baggage car passed us. We began to walk toward where Trueblood had tied up Jake.

"Nope. I'm sure the law'll get its man. This big city's too confinin' for me. Gonna rest my horses one more day and then start back to my family." Riding home, I was going to treat myself to the pleasure of thinking long and sweet on Clara and Rachel. I was hoping that we could get the store sold before Thanksgiving, visit the preacher in Monument, and then winter in together.

After I'd mounted the new addition to the Flying W remuda, Rudd shook my hand and bid me *adios*. But I knew I'd be seeing him again real soon. Reasoning that I might not have checked Oak's rig all that thorough, I reined the gelding toward McWerter's livery. In about fifteen minutes, after "finding" nearly a fourth of the railway loot in the saddlebags at McWerter's, I'd ride hell bent for leather to the police station. Then we'd all stand around and laugh and say how that stupid outlaw was probably halfway to Helena and still didn't know he'd left his share of the money behind.

ACCIDENTAL BAD MAN

by Teddy Keller

I never used to mind not being big. I mean, folks sometimes go outta their way for a runty cuss. Even when you're all growed up and going on twenty, like me, folks'll still treat you like you was somebody special and you git out of some of the dirty jobs.

Well, like I said, it never bothered me much till that first summer I rode to Dodge City with a trail herd. Course, I had to talk myself blue in the face before I could git the trail boss to believe I was strong enough to make the drive. That's what came of having a reputation. Actually, I was purt near as strong as my Uncle Luke, and he could purt near bend a horseshoe–with the horse attached.

But I signed on and everybody should of knowed after the first day that I weren't no weakling. Man, if you ain't ever been on a trail drive, don't. You're in the saddle before sunup and when it's time to git down at night you wonder if yore legs is going to break right off when you hit the ground. If you're lucky, there's still grub. If you're real lucky and you ain't stuck out on night herd, you may even git three or four hours of sleep before the cook comes along and kicks the bottoms of yore feet.

Well, you can see why a man'd develop a thirst by the time he crossed the Arkansas. Specially if he was riding drag like me. Man, I swallered enough dirt that trip to plant buffalo grass and graze a hunnert head of longhorns.

Course, you're wondering what all this has got to do with me being small. And whut I'm gitting at is how being runty got me into such a peck of trouble. Weren't just being scrawny that did it, though. Part of it was being left-handed.

Maybe being left-handed ain't no disgrace in some families. Why, my ma like to've throwed a conniption fit. Nobody much noticed till I went to school, account of we had a big family. Then Ma found out they was learning me to write left-handed and she plumb near got that schoolmaster run out of the country.

And Pa, too. He wouldn't let me use an ax or shovel or knife and fork or nothing left-handed. Then he seen me twirl his old cap-and-ball Colt left-handed, and 'lowed as how maybe, if we didn't let Ma know, that much'd be okay. But I guess that's the only thing I ever learned to do very well, was handle a gun. Not that we could afford ammunition for me to ever shoot it much, but I could've.

Anyhow, them's the two things whut got me in that stew pot in Dodge. Being runty and left-handed.

It was the summer of 1883 when we rode into that camp. Man, you never seen such a place. All there was was yelling and shooting and drinking and gambling, and everybody carousing night and day. And such goings-on with them fancy women. Oh, my.

Now, there's them that says old Wyatt Earp, he had that camp buffaloed when he left in 1879. Well, I ain't sure. I never did figure how a town could git so wild in just four years. It was plain wide open hell with the hair on.

I decided to go see the town. Which is when being runty and left-handed got me in dutch.

Well, two minutes after we hit town, I couldn't find a single man from the crew. They lit out like chickens with a coyote in the henhouse. I kinda looked for that, though. For three weeks previous they hadn't talked of nothing except women and booze and gambling.

I don't mind admitting I was more than somewhat scared. I never had saw such a big town before. But that weren't all. My pa and ma brung us up going to church and reading the Bible ever' morning. And I'd heard too much about them scarlet ladies and that bottled lightning.

Course, I had me a thirst. So I found me a pump and I drunk so much water it felt like all that dirt I had ate was washing down and my boots was full of mud. But I sure felt a heap better and that's when I decided to see the town. Which is when being runty and left-handed got me in dutch.

I started off looking things over south of the deadline. Man, such stomping and kicking and elbowing I never seen. Less'n a man was six foot tall he just couldn't go nowhere without he got an elbow in his teeth.

Well, I purty quick got plenty of being stepped on, so I figured to see what life was like north of the deadline. I got across the tracks, all right. I even walked up and down the boardwalk on Front Street. But it really wasn't much better. All I could think of was that I'd sure hate to fry catfish for all them folks.

Thinking about catfish got me homesick. I found a bench in front of a store and I set down there and got to thinking about Ma and Pa and wondering what they'd be having for supper.

Well, I kinda got to singing to myself. I don't know whether I'd heared the song in one of them dance halls or what. But I was half humming, half singing that song about my Bonnie lying over the ocean. I was right in the middle of about the fourth verse when this gent come along and tapped my shoulder.

"What's your name?" he says.

Gimme a start, he did. I just blurted out what I was singing, and since I was almost out of breath, the only word that come out was, "Bonnie."

"Bonnie," he says, and the way his eyes lit up you'd of thought he just swallered a prairie fire.

I see him looking at my gun on my left hip and he's sorta measuring me with his eyes. Whut I mean, he was figuring how big I was since it was hard to tell with me sitting down and all.

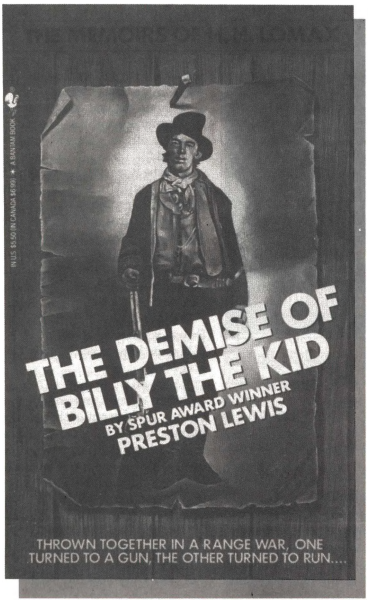
Well, while he's doing this, I'm sizing him up. It don't take me long to peg him as a hardcase. He hadn't stood close to a razor in anyway three days, his clothes was all dirty and tore, and his eyes had a way of gitting real little, like he was making sure he didn't see nothing good nowhere. Real mean looking, he was, and big as Uncle Luke's breeding bull.

"I'll be damned," he says and you'd of thought he just discovered Europe or some other foreign country.

Well, I figured he would be, talking like that. Damned, I

READ ABOUT THE WILD WEST FROM THE PEN OF SOMEONE WHO SAW IT ALL...

"Of all the fellows I met during my years wandering about, not one was more likable than Billy the Kid. Something about the Kid won you over. That's why I'm glad I didn't kill him when I had the chance."



So says H.H. Lomax in
THE DEMISE OF BILLY THE KID
the first installment of
THE MEMOIRS OF H.H. LOMAX
by Spur Award Winner Preston Lewis

Lomax claims that he rode with Billy the Kid and knew the illustrious and infamous men of his time: Geronimo, Jesse James, Wyatt Earp, Wild Bill Hickok. Hardheaded and resourceful, he was an unknown player in the drama of the American West . . . or the most accomplished liar of his era.

" If any man in all of Lincoln County had bigger ears than the Kid, it was John Chisum. I could've whittled on them all day and not made a noticeable difference in their size. If his hearing was as sharp as his ears were big, he could hear a flea break wind during a thunderstorm."
—H.H. Lomax

H.H. Lomax is a "likable loser . . ."
—The Wall Street Journal

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mean. But I couldn't see what he was gitting at.

"I heard tales about you gitting away," he says, "but I never believed 'em." (I'm sorry, but I ain't going to repeat everything he said.) He says, "Billy, you and me're gonna make each other's fortune. And you don't have to worry about Garrett up in this country." Then his eyes got squinty again and he says, "No, sir, Mr. Bonney. Your secret's safe with me—just as long as we're cutting the same trail."

I was about to laugh in his face when he called me Billy, 'cause that ain't my name. It's Dan. Then it got to me what he said about Garrett and calling me Bonney and I thought I'd bust if I didn't let out a hee-haw. Then I seen his little eyes. Right then I figured him as a gent that wouldn't cotton to being laughed at. I shut my face in a hurry.

"Come on," he says. "Let's go meet the boys."

If I'd of had a lick of sense, I'd of took off like greased lightning and found my horse and rode right out of Dodge. But I took too long to git that figured out. He turned around to see why wasn't I coming and then it was too late.

I follered him across the deadline again and he got through that crowd like it was nothing. First thing I knowed, we was sitting at a table in the back of one of them cheap saloons.

"Fellers," he says, kinda raspy, "this here's Billy the Kid."

About then my eyes got used to all the smoke and the dust. I felt like I was gitting drunk just smelling the place. Then I wished I was. I thought the guy who drug me there was tough looking. My goodness. There was three more of them, all bigger and uglier than the first. Why, they'd of curdled the cream, just riding past the pasture where a milk cow was grazing.

Two of the jaspers, they just looked at me and their eyes was like when you're a kid and fall down on rocks and skin your knees. They was that red. Their breath would of singed old Nick hisself.

The third gent, he give the first one a real nasty look and he says, "Swede, you're plumb loco. Hell, must be two years since Pat Garrett sent the Kid over the jump."

"That's what everybody thinks," Swede says, "but we got the Kid right here." He swiveled his head my way and give me a look that says I better agree with him and he says, "Ain't that right, Kid?"

When old Swede jumped me, first thing I commenced thinking was how nice it was having my hide all in one piece.

Well, lots of folks called me Kid since I weren't very old or very big, like I already told. So I says, "Yeah."

"Haw," Swede says. "What'd I tell you, Calhoun?"

Calhoun looked at me like I was a skeeter buzzing around his ear. "Him saying it and being it is two different things. How come he ain't drinking and pinching girls? I always heard the Kid to be a sport."

"Just talk," Swede says. "Anybody knows a gunfighter don't drink much. Got to keep sharp."

"Supposed to be a real happy sport," Calhoun says.

"Man," Swede says, "Garrett purt near killed him. That ain't nothing to be happy about."

When old Swede jumped me, first thing I commenced thinking was how nice it was having my hide all in one piece. Them other jaspers got me to thinking about forty times as fast. And I was thinking none of them'd be happy if I told them I was Dan Shiffler and I was just a plain old cowboy. Swede and Calhoun'd kill me, and the others'd kill Swede, and well, I hankered to keep my soul on this side of the Jordan for a spell.

"I'm plumb happy," I says. "I just got to be careful everybody don't find out who I am."

Calhoun leaned way over the table and pushed his face smack in front of me. "Garrett planted the Kid."

"Maybe it was Mulcahy," I says. That's my Uncle Luke's last name. He's on Ma's side."

"Never heared of no Mulcahy riding with the Kid," he says.

I give him a laugh like I knowed more than I was telling. "Neither did Garrett," I says. "That's why I'm here."

"What're you doing in Dodge?" Swede wanted to know.

"I come here to eat," I says. "I'm starving."

"Come on."

Swede got up and commenced bulling his way out of there. I was plumb tickled to git away from them others, so I hung on his heels. We crossed the deadline again and I seen he was headed for a place name of the Railroad Cafe.

"Awful quiet," he says, kind of apologetic. "Best grub in Dodge, though."

It was a fine looking place. Ev-

erything was clean and it had red checkered tablecloths and smelled like Ma's kitchen. We was the only ones there when we went in. Then this waitress come out and, man, I like to of died right then.

Her eyes was blue and sparkly, like she laughed a lot. She had long hair the color of that wheat the sodbusters grow. Her little bitty nose didn't poke out much more'n her dimples pushed in. And I was ready to be broke to double harness right then.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," she says, smiling.

Now I been called lots of things, but not *gentleman*. I grinned all over my silly face so big I couldn't talk. She must of liked it, 'cause she blushed. But then old Swede give our order and she left. I could of killed him.

Purty soon she come back, though, and man, you never seen such vittles. Fact is, I hardly seen them, I was so busy looking at her. I think Swede must of et some of mine. Only now she was more businesslike and she give Swede some real peculiar looks. It bothered me. After I cleaned up my plate, it still bothered me. I guess that's why I started whistling, nervouslike, when we was leaving. And she gave a smile that even wilted old Swede. We was clean outside before I realized what I was whistling. It was the Doxology.

Well, sir, I follered Swede like a puppy dog. I was plumb beaddled over that girl and I didn't care if everybody in Dodge thought I was Billy the Kid or Wyatt Earp or General Custer. My boots hardly touched down when we crossed the deadline. Next thing I knowed we was back in that saloon. Calhoun looked meaner and them other two was sobering up on coffee and not liking it for a minute.

We'd just got set down when a coupla jaspers at the bar commenced to holler. They was both tall, but one was wide and the other was thin. The wide one says, "So you're Jesse James, huh?"

"Yep," says the thin one.

Now, it hadn't been a year since old Jesse got put away. I had saw pictures of him and this gent didn't even look like him. He was trying to get away with something.

"My daddy was a conductor on a railroad train back in Missouri,"

"All we gotta do is find out when the money's coming and hold up the train," Swede said.

the wide one says. "The James gang killed him dead. Now I'm gonna kill you."

The thin one started to say something. But derned if the wide one didn't just pull his hogleg and old Jesse, or whatever his name, was laying there bleeding like a stuck pig.

People crowded around and somebody hollers, "Git the sawbones," and somebody else hollers, "Git the marshal." It only took two of them punchers to pick up the thin jasper and carry him off to some doctor.

"That's what happens to impostors," Calhoun says, looking suspicious at me.

Scared? I was petrified. Here was four jaspers'd massacre me if I let on I wasn't Billy the Kid. And a thousand of Billy's enemies what'd do the same if they thought I was. I was thinking of ways to git to my horse and out of town when I remembered that girl waitress. I couldn't leave Dodge.

Somebody offered to buy drinks and everybody forgot about the recent shooting. That's when Swede says, "Let's get down to cases."

"Yeah," I says.

He lowered his voice and leaned way over the table. "Here it is, Kid. We figure with all the beef that's shipped outta Dodge, there's gotta be some money coming in. All we gotta do is find out when it's coming and hold up the train."

"Easy," I says.

"How?" Calhoun says.

I didn't mean nothing by it. I was just making talk. But I got to thinking fast. "Just git friendly with the ticket agent," I says. "He knows what's coming and going."

"I told you," Swede says. "He's smart."

"Then he can do it," Calhoun says.

"Sure." I was figuring that a train'd take me a long ways, and when I got back in a week or two, these jaspers'd be gone but the girl would still be at the cafe.

"Just don't git any idea about crossing us," Calhoun says, meaner than ever. "Down by the river there's three trail outfits from New Mexico. Lotta boys already in town. If they thought the Kid was hereabouts, they'd have a hunnert men on yore trail in an hour."

Well, they had me and I had to at least pretend to go along with this whole scheme. Weren't nothing I could do but mosey down to the depot and git to talking to the ticket agent. He was a jolly man, built like a barrel. He didn't have much hair and he wore one of them green eyeshades. I found out his name was Tom Morrison and I told him mine, Dan Shiffler. I told him I didn't like to carouse much and I druther hang around where trains was, which was the truth.

Purty soon what was left of the afternoon was gone and he says it's supper time and wouldn't I like to eat with him, and I says, sure, if he's going to the Railroad Cafe. He smiled real sly and when we got there, this waitress kissed his cheek and called him Daddy.

"My name's Daddy, too," I says, leaning my cheek at her.

"Oh, go on," she says. But she's laughing and blushing and I know she don't mind the idea.

"Abbie," Mr. Morrison says, "meet Dan Shiffler. I'm going to make a railroader out of this waddie."

"The special job?" she says. And when he nods, she looks at me real proud and says, "He can do it."

She headed for the kitchen and we got sat at a table and her pa looked me over like I was a prize bull. And then I guess he decided I was.

"Dan," he says, "how would you like to ride the train to Newton and back and get ten dollars for your trouble?"

"Fine," I says.

"Well," he says, "here's how it is. Folks east of here are scared to death of Dodge. In Topeka, they can't even hire guards to ride as far as Newton. Well, we ship a lot of money and we need guards that aren't afraid. The Santa Fe'll pay you ten dollars just to ride herd on a couple of cash boxes."

"They will?" I says, 'cause I couldn't think of anything else.

"They will. Ten days' wages. All you have to do is ride tonight's train to Newton and sit in the baggage car coming back tomorrow. Ever make any easier money?"

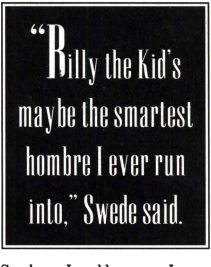
"No," I says and I wondered how anything could've worked out better for Swede and Calhoun and their friends. All I wanted was to get sick and throw up and git out of there before Abbie found out what a slicker I was. In Dodge City, seemed like, it was more trouble being honest than being a train robber.

I was trying to think up some cock-and-bull story that'd git me outta there when I looked up and here come old Swede. He give us a big howdy and I had to interduce him. Then he set down with us. Before I knowed what was going on, Mr. Morrison had went and offered Swede the same proposition, on account of each car needed two guards, and any friend of mine was a friend of his.

Swede about died trying to keep his face straight. He says, "Well, now, Mr. Morrison, I always had me a special attraction for trains and I sure could use ten dollars."

Just then Abbie come in with our grub and she says, "I hope you persuaded Dan to take the job, Daddy. It would be nice to have him around a while longer."

I seen I had a choice. I could say no and git mortified by Morrison and hated by Abbie and killed by



Swede, or I could say yes. I says, "Okay."

After that, you'd of thought I was the Prince of Whales. Abbie acted like I'd as good as spoke for her at a box supper and her pa give me that blessings-on-you smile. I knowed by that time tomorrow they'd be looking for me with a rope. But old Swede like to throwed a fit. He kept kicking me under the table and winking at me when he thought nobody was looking and acting like a skinny cat what just found a crippled mouse.

Man, I ain't ever been so miserable. Here was this purty gal maybe gitting sweet on me and her pa thinking I was on the square and, oh, my. I felt like a skunk what snuck along on a Sunday school picnic. I wished I'd of hit town drinking and carousing like everybody else and none of this would of happened.

We finally finished eating and Morrison leaned back and hauled out his big watch and says, "Well, boys, if you're going to need any gear, you'd better get it. That train leaves in a half hour."

"Ain't no hurry," I says, leaning back real comfortable.

"We got boxes to guard," Swede says. He give me that mean look and I knowed it was no use trying to stall him.

If Abbie hadn't smiled at me, I'd of took off running as soon as we got out the door. But then I was just as glad I didn't. A hunnert men on my trail if Swede and Calhoun and them others didn't git me first was more'n I wanted.

Swede lit out for that saloon like a rump-slapped bronc. He drug me in there and was slinging gents aside that I wouldn't of said boo to.

"Boys," he says, barging to the table, "you oughta all say thankyou to this here waddie. Billy the Kid's maybe the smartest hombre I ever run into."

"Like hell," Calhoun says. And I never seen a grouchier cuss.

Swede set down, then, and told how I got around Morrison by shining up to his daughter and how him and me was going to be on the train guarding the money.

I was still trying to find a way out. I says, "Makes it real easy. You boys won't even have to board the train."

"Like hell," Calhoun says again. "This way we git on the

train and we got time to rob the passengers, too. Must be a lotta cattle buyers carrying a lotta cash."

"Good idea," Swede says. "You still wanta make it at Spearville?"

"That don't give us much time," Calhoun says, "if we're gonna clean the passengers. Better make it Kinsley."

"That's a long ride," Swede says. "You better light a shuck."

That's how we all come to be leaving at the same time and run smack into Mr. Morrison. He must of follered us, just to check, and I could see he didn't like the company me and Swede was keeping. Even Swede could see that.

He says, "Some of the boys're heading south in the morning. We was just telling 'em good-bye."

Maybe Swede thought he fooled Mr. Morrison, but I knowed better. He watched when Calhoun and the others sloped off into the dark to their horses. But he didn't hardly say nothing until the three of us got to the depot. Then he stopped and give us a real sober looking over.

"Maybe you boys had better go on with your friends," he says. "I guess I won't need you this trip after all."

"Oh, no?" Swede says, getting mean again.

Mr. Morrison shook his head. "I reckon I can ride shotgun this trip. I haven't been to Newton in a long time anyhow."

"Maybe you better reckon again," Swede says. "We're going."

And all of a sudden there's Swede's gun jabbing Mr. Morrison in the belly. Swede just held it there for a minute. All the time, his face was gitting uglier and meaner than anything. Then he sheathed the hogleg.

"We'll all go," he says. "One squeal outta you 'fore we git back to Dodge and Abbie's gonna be a orphan girl."

Mr. Morrison just looked at Swede kinda helpless and at me kinda sad and he turned around and got up into the baggage car. What Swede said about Abbie must of scared him. He stopped talking altogether.

Me, I'd never actually rode a train before, and this was some thrill. Even in the dark, I knowed we was going like a scalded ghost. It sure beat a horse or wagon.

What with water stops and mail stops, it was the middle of the night when we got to Newton. I kinda wanted to see the town, being as I'd heared about Shootin'

Ever' once in a while the train stopped at a town and folks run out and kissed each other. It set me to thinking about Abbie.

Newton. But Swede figured we better git some sleep, so we got a hotel room and we took turns sleeping and guarding Mr. Morrison.

That gent just got sadder and sadder. When it was my turn to guard him, I mostly looked out the window. I guess he must of give up on me. He didn't even try to talk when Swede was sleeping. He just set and looked at me and made me feel like I just kicked out my grandmother's teeth.

I wanted to let him go. And I would of. And I'd of took Swede to the sheriff and told him everything. But I figured Calhoun and them would surely git even with Abbie if something went wrong with the robbery, not to mention that I weren't far enough away that a hunnert men from New Mexico couldn't track me. So all I could do was set and have Mr. Morrison look at me, and when it was my turn to sleep I couldn't, 'cause I kept seeing him looking at me.

Finally, it was morning. Swede had his gun ready. We all got on the train like it was nothing and a railroad agent turned over some papers to Mr. Morrison. After that, Swede remembered we hadn't ate. He jumped off the train and in a jiffy I heared a scream. Here come Swede a-running with a coffeepot in one hand and some ham and bacon and fried potatoes wrapped up in a tablecloth in the other hand. And then the train got to chugging out of Newton.

Swede even give Mr. Morrison some chuck, which seemed to make him feel better. He said something about stolen fruit being tasty and he sure would of liked to of saw the girl that hollered.

After we had ate Swede perched on a crate close to the door and watched us. Me and Mr. Morrison set on the money boxes and looked out. Mercy, we flew. The landscape up close was a blur. But I could gauge on a barn or a tree farther away and figure we was going faster'n any horse ever run. We passed riders and wagons and a stagecoach and people just standing and watching the train, and they waved and I waved back.

Once Mr. Morrison got up and Swede asked where he was going. Mr. Morrison said he should throw off a mailbag, but Swede says to set down. After that we just rode.

Ever' once in a while the train

stopped at a town and folks run out and kissed each other. It set me to thinking about Abbie and how nice it'd be if she come and kissed me when I got off the train. And then I commenced to get scared. It couldn't be long till Calhoun and them got on the train, and I didn't know what to do. I knowed I was quick with my gun. But Swede was probably just as quick and he'd likely shot his gun a time or two.

Then we stopped at a town and we just got started again when Abbie come into the baggage car. She was wearing boots and a hat and a riding skirt, and even if she was tired, she was so purty I like to fell over. At first she looked relieved. Then she seen her pa and how he was just setting and she sorta froze up.

"Abbie," he says, "what're you doing here?"

"I was worried." She circled wide around Swede and close around me and stopped by her pa. "I saw you with those tough-looking men last night and I thought something was wrong. Then I saw Swede pull his gun and . . ." Her face got pinched like she was fixing to cry. I got up and she set down on the money chest near her pa.

But her pa says, "How in the world did you get here?"

"Well," she says, "I started to ride after those other men. But then I got to thinking that I wouldn't know what to do if I overtook them. So I left my horse at the livery stable in Spearville and took the eastbound train to meet you halfway. We got there about ten minutes ahead of you."

"But Abbie," Mr. Morrison says, "you shouldn't have."

"I had to," she says. She looked at her pa and then at me and then at him again, and I felt like swallering my Peacemaker and pulling the trigger. "I had to find out if you were okay and if Dan was mixed up in this."

I found some pieces of rope over by the mailbags and tied up Mr. Morrison. Abbie wouldn't look at me.

Man, if that didn't make me feel good. Boots to bonnet, she was cute as a bug. But here she had rode, horse and train, most of the night and she was red-eyed and tired. It was all my fault and she knowed it. And after that, she wouldn't even look at me. Not till Swede opened his yap.

"Kid," he says, "we're gonna be hightailing outta this country pronto. Might's well let these folks know who they run into. Maybe they won't feel so bad at being took in."

"We know," Mr. Morrison says.

"A black name I won't soon forget," Abbie says, and now her eyes flashed sparks enough to set off a powder charge. "Dan Shiffler."

"Is that what he goes by?" Swede laughs an ugly laugh. "Folks, let me interduce you to Billy Bonney, better knowed as Billy the Kid."

It was like he had went and kicked Abbie and her pa in the belly. Their mouths dropped open and their eyes got big as silver dollars. Then Abbie looked at her pa and she giggled. He just up and hee-hawed. Then they was leaning on each other and laughing fit to choke. Swede got all red in the face, figuring they was funning him.

"What's so all-fired hilarious?" he bellows.

But Abbie and her pa kept it up with hee-hees and haw-haws and leg slapping and everything. And then Swede stomped over to where they was setting on the money chests.

"Tell me what's funny!" he hollers.

Mr. Morrison seen how mad Swede was and got Abbie calmed down. He says, "Swede, before Abbie's mother died and we came to Kansas, I worked in a store in Lincoln, New Mexico Territory."

"What's so funny about that?" Swede wants to know.

"The store," Mr. Morrison says, "was owned by a gentleman name of McSween. He was about as close a friend as Billy ever had, except for the señoritas, of course." Mr. Morrison got to chuckling again, and then he put my neck in a noose. "I met Billy the Kid a hundred times. And I can tell you"—he pointed at me—"that's not him."

Well, Swede may of been big, but he weren't slow. He had his gun on me before I could blink. Mad? He could of ate up that railroad engine and picked his teeth with the rails. He stomped toward me past the door and he snorted and looked at Abbie and muttered what was probably cuss words. Then he snorted some more and waved his gun at me.

"You dirty little four-flusher," he roars. "I oughta kill you right now."

"Oh, cut yore bellering," I says, sounding a whole lot braver than I felt. "What if I ain't the Kid? Didn't I git you on this train?"

"Yeah. But you lied to me."

"No, I never," I says, madlike. "I never told nobody I was the Kid. That was your idea."

"You could of told me different."

"Look," I says, "you're on the train and you're standing next to two boxes of cash money. Could you of did that without me?"

"Well . . . I guess not," he says.

"Put up yore iron," I says.

He sheathed his Colt and his red commenced fading. But Abbie and her pa looked at me like I had stole the collection plate at church.

"Likely I couldn't of got here without you." Swede gave his head a shake. "I guess that's what's important."

"What is important," I says, "is that Abbie's here and nobody's going to bother her. Besides, if I ain't Billy the Kid, them hunnert New Mexico cowpokes ain't gonna be after my hide."

Too late I knowed I had blabbed too much. Abbie may of perked up at what I said. But Swede looked at me crossways, like he'd invited me to my own lynching.

"Ain't far to Kinsley," he says. "We better tie up your friends."

"Yeah." I didn't want Swede gitting hot at me till I'd figured something out.

"I'll cover 'em," Swede says. "You tie 'em."

I found some pieces of rope over by the mailbags and tied up Mr. Morrison. Abbie wouldn't look at me. I give her hand a little squeeze, trying to tell her that everything was okay, which it weren't, and I tied her loose.

I walked around in front of them. I wanted to whisper to them, but I knowed Swede was watching close. So I says, "Don't try nothing and you won't get hurt."

I just got that last word out when Abbie's eyes bugged. I wheeled and ducked, but not quick enough. I had one glimpse of Swede's .45 swinging down at me before stars went off in my head. Next thing I knowed for sure I was on the floor, my head hurting like sin, hog-tied from here to breakfast.

"There's Kinsley," Swede yells. He was leaning out the door and looking ahead through the locomotive's smoke.

"Swede," I says, and I managed to sit up, "you hadn't ought to of did that."

He looked at me and I guess he tried to grin. But he never must of practiced much and when he tried, it looked like a horse had stepped on his face. He leaned out the door again, and I wriggled a little closer to Abbie.

By then my head was clearing a little and our situation looked awful. If Swede didn't throw us off the train before we got to Kinsley, then we'd have him and Calhoun and them to contend with. I sure hated to think what they might do with us afterward. I wormed over a little closer to Abbie and her pa. Swede seen me.

"Goin' someplace?" he says. Then he busted out that mean laugh and leaned out the door again.

Real quick then I wiggled toward the door. If the train hadn't been making so much noise, Swede might of heared me. But he must of seen somebody. He leaned farther out and waved and didn't look back until I had wormed my

way almost beside him. Then he seen me and cussed and started to pull himself back in. But I rolled onto my back and kicked his belly. Old Swede flew out that door like a full mailbag.

Abbie got her and her pa untied in about a minute and then she untied me. While this was going on, she was talking to her pa.

"He had to go along with Swede. Don't you see? Dan thought Swede's henchmen would harm me. And they thought he was Billy the Kid, and a bunch of New Mexico cowboys were after him."

"That part Swede made up," Mr. Morrison said. "The only people in New Mexico that didn't like Billy were those crooks from the Santa Fe Ring and a few lawmen."

And then I was untied and the train was pulling into Kinsley. I checked my gun real careful. Then I leaned out of the baggage car. Calhoun and them was down by the water tower. I waved to them and motioned for them to come running. Then I got Abbie and her pa down behind the mail sacks. That's when the train got stopped and I stood up near the door where them owlhoots could see me plain. I acted like everything was fine.

Them jaspers come swinging into the baggage car and before they could figure out what had happened, I had the drop on them. Mr. Morrison hog-tied them. Then the train started up again.

We corralled them gents in the front of the car where we could keep an eye on them, and I commenced telling Abbie and her pa how being runty and left-handed had got me into such a pickle.

They was enjoying my story and even laughing some. Then all of a sudden it sounded like the back end of the car had fell off. I heeled around and old Swede was coming at me with splinters of the door hanging on him. I sure hadn't kicked him off soon enough. He must of caught the back end of the train and come on through.

He cussed something fearful and started shooting. Well, I still didn't know if I could actually shoot somebody. But he was mad and blooded up and his first shot missed Abbie and her pa and me.

I ducked to my left and brung up my gun and my first shot plugged his right shoulder. It didn't knock him down, but he dropped his gun and folded over.

Well, everybody in Dodge thought I had did something purty good and the marshal found out there was rewards for Swede and Calhoun. Abbie called me a hero and Mr. Morrison got the Santa Fe Railroad to give me a free pass. I collected fifty dollars for Calhoun and a hunnert for Swede and man, I was rich.

Me and Abbie, we had us a real honeymoon, and we rode the train to Topeka with a side trip to Wichita. Folks still say she's the purtiest girl ever in Dodge, and me—I'm the runtiest deputy. ⊞

by

Sandra Whiting

Charity

I was thirteen when I met him. He was the first Indian I'd ever seen up close. With the reservation being only five miles south of town, I'd seen plenty of Indians, but always from a distance. This one, however, was barely ten feet away.

There were actually three of them. They rode up to our house just like they owned it, Ma said. They would have walked inside, but she met 'em at the door with the Winchester .66. It was an old rifle, but it still worked. Ma told me later that as soon as the Indians had seen it, they'd given it and her a mighty respectful distance.

I was on my way home from school—walking, of course, cause Pa needed our one and only horse, an old bay gelding that had seen at least fifteen years, to plow the fields. As I came over the hill, I saw the Indians in the distance and wondered if I should keep the same. Well, it was my house and if they were plannin' on killin' me, they'd have to do it there. I set my jaw and walked on home.

Again the Indian looked at me, but this time he winked. This was a revelation to me. I never guessed Indians could wink.

Pa'd seen the commotion from the fields and hurried to my mother's side. He could talk a little Indian sign language, but not much. When I reached the house, he was asking those half-naked redskins what they wanted.

Just as I walked within spittin' distance of those Indians, one of 'em turned and looked at me. He had black, waist-length hair and even with him on horseback I could tell he was tall. He had an eagle feather and several hawk feathers woven into his hair. He also had two yellow stripes painted on his arm. I didn't know what any of it meant or if any of it meant anything. At thirteen, I was more interested in the beautiful chestnut horse he was sitting on. He saw me admiring his horse and motioned for me to come close, but I wouldn't go up to him because, I must admit, I was a tad afraid. We kids used to say we weren't afraid and dare each other to sneak onto the Indian reservation that lay just south of town, but in truth, we were terrified of Indians. We should have been more afraid of rattlesnakes.

Pa saw the Indian looking at me and shooed me into the house, where Ma could keep a watchful eye on me. I was the youngest of four children and the only girl. If I wasn't in school or at church, Ma always made sure I was with her or her spinster sister, or at least alone. She said I wouldn't get into trouble that way. The boys could do anything, but not me. It made me so mad.

Finally, Pa figured out the Indians wanted to trade with us. It seemed they wanted an old iron cooking pot that had long since been demoted to flowerpot once Ma'd inherited her mother's brand-spankin' new one.

Ma cleaned up the pot. I stood beside her at the door as she traded. She could just have given it to them outright, but she didn't want them to think they were getting a handout. The Indian who'd stared at me just minutes before did the swapping. He looked at me and smiled. I blushed and felt silly about it afterward. He also seemed to me to be the youngest of the three, although he did look older than my eldest brother, Matthew. Matthew was sixteen goin' on six, my mother was wont to say when Matthew threw a fit about doin' chores.

A price of five rabbit skins was agreed upon for the old pot and the Indians left. I looked at Ma, holding those rabbit skins in her hand. "Whatcha gonna do with them?" I asked.

She held them up. They were fine quality, not a mark on them. "I guess I'll make a baby blanket out of them. There's not enough there to do much else with." I knew by the tone of her voice that Mother felt like she'd robbed them. She'd always been one to trade fairly with everyone—not like them cutthroats Back East, as she'd say.

School had been out for the summer a week already before I saw him again. He was riding up the road with two other Indians. I supposed they were the same ones as before. As there were three of them again, I assumed they traveled in groups, perhaps for safety's sake, which brought to my attention the fact that I was traveling in a group of one—me—and I was afoot.

Again he looked at me, but this time he winked. This was a revelation to me. I never guessed Indians could wink. I didn't say anything, but quickened my pace to the wild strawberry patch. I heard them laughing behind me.

Spring rains had been plentiful that year and I'd already picked at least thirty quarts from that patch. I expected to get at least ten more before summer took over completely and wilted the little plants into the dust.

From the berry patch, I could see a summer squall brewing to the northwest. I figured I had about an hour left before it came calling. I picked faster and faster, never minding if I didn't get all the green caps off. I could do that later. My mouth watered with the thought of fresh strawberry pie.

My two buckets full, I was fixin' to leave when lightning struck a nearby tree. I was so close to it, I felt the electricity bounce off the tree and into me. Stunned, I stepped backwards, right into a prairie dog hole.

I don't recollect how long I lay there on the ground with my foot in that darned hole. Next thing I knew I was soaked to the skin from the pounding rain and there was someone standing over me—someone with long, black hair. I blinked my eyes to clear them and tried to sit up. That was a mistake. Pain shot through my leg like a bullet and I fainted.

When I came to, I was lying under a crude lean-to that had *Army* written across it. I rather suspected it had been part of a tent at one time or another. I then discovered that except for my under-

drawers, I was completely naked. There had been a blanket wrapped around me, but still, someone had to have taken my clothes off in the first place. I was mortified. I never, ever let anyone see me that way.

In the dim evening light, I looked for my clothes. They were hanging on that same tree that lightning had struck, blowing like flags in the wind. By now I figured out that my leg was broken, so there was no way under God's great heaven I was going to be able to fetch them myself. Whoever was my benefactor was going to have to do it for me.

I lay back and contemplated my predicament. If I hadn't been in such a hurry to pick all the berries I'd have been home before the lightning struck and this unladylike and embarrassing situation wouldn't be happening to me.

I was lying there, feeling rather sorry for myself, when my rescuer put in an appearance. Horror of horrors! It was that same Indian who'd winked at me. I then remembered him standing over me in the rain before I had fainted. I pulled the blanket around my body as tight as I could and then some. It was hard to say at the time if I was more embarrassed at knowing he'd removed my clothes or scared of what he was going to do to me.

Frantic, I pointed to my clothes, hoping he'd get the message that I wanted them back. He shook his head, then pointed to a nearby puddle. I assumed he was telling me that they were still wet. I didn't care. Unfortunately, I wasn't in a position to argue.

I looked around my small shelter. The berry buckets were at my head, still full of berries. At least I hadn't lost those, I thought to myself. I peeked around the side of the lean-to and saw his two friends leaving. I thought they would head in the direction of my home to fetch Pa, but instead they headed directly the other way—south, away from town. My hopes dashed, I lay back down. I resigned myself to being an Indian squaw for the rest of my life. *Squaw*—how I detested the word. The men said it with such disgust. Why couldn't they be called wives?

Right at sundown, my benefactor brought my clothes to me. They were still damp in spots, but not drenched, as before. I thought he would leave me to dress in private, but he sat down under the lean-to with me. If he was expecting me to put on a show for him, he had another think coming. No matter how much it made my leg hurt, I kept that blanket around me and dressed under it.

Again it started to rain. As it did, my Indian started to help himself to a handful of my hard-earned berries. Before I could think, I slapped his hand away, just like I did my brothers' when they got too friendly with my berries.

He was surprised, and his face showed it. I thought his eyes were going to pop clean out of their sockets. I quickly imagined myself without my scalp. I snatched a few berries out of the bucket and held them out in the rain to wash them, pretending I only wanted to stop him from eating dirty ones. I fed them to him one at a time. I think he forgave me for slapping his hand. It also seemed to me he was amused at having me feed them to him.

With the sun gone and the rain still pouring, it was pitch-black and there I was, out on the prairie, with a nearly naked Indian beside me. Having resigned myself to the fact that I was now his squaw, I decided that the first thing I was going to do for him was make him a shirt—a bright red one, so I could see him comin'.

I'd just gotten myself settled down from the initial fright of having him sit so close to me when he lay down beside me and covered us both with his blanket. Fear once again held me in its clutches—so overwhelming that my body was temporarily paralyzed. I'd supposed he would sit beside me all night but there he was, on the outside of the lean-to, and I, on the inside. My fate was sealed. There was absolutely no way I could or would crawl over him to get out. I crossed my arms over my chest and waited to die.

In my sleep, as I waited for angels to take me to their heavenly home, I was suddenly awakened by the most wretched noise I'd ever heard. I opened my eyes, fully expecting to see a large carnivorous animal waiting to feast upon my body, but there was nothing there. The noise came again. It was from my lean-to companion. He was snoring! I wanted to laugh out loud, but instead I pushed on his shoulder so he would roll over, just as Ma did to Pa each night. At last I had found common ground between red man and white man, though I

Having resigned myself to the fact that I was now the Indian's squaw, I decided I would make him a bright red shirt so I could see him coming.

did not think it would be written up in the annals of history.

Morning came without a hint of storm. I sat up. I knew my hair was untidy, so I pulled out the pink ribbon that hung at the end of my solitary braid and ran my fingers through my hair. By now, my Indian was awake and watching me. My hair was light brown and he seemed to like it. Feeling slightly embarrassed at the way he was looking at me, rather like he was interested in me, I turned my back to him. As soon as I did, he ran his fingers through my hair. Startled, and surprised he'd do such a thing, I nearly came clean out of my skin. He saw me start and pulled his hand back, as though he'd touched fire. I reassured him with a smile that I'd only been startled and not frightened, even though I really was the latter—at least a little bit.

Cautiously, so as not to scare me, he caressed my hair. He pulled it around to the front and laid it on my shoulders, then smiled and said something I didn't understand. I've always thought he was telling me I was pretty. Once again, I blushed. He only smiled in return. He then pulled my hair to the back and without braiding it, tied the ribbon around it in a bow. Chalk up another one for Indians. I didn't know they knew how to tie bows.

My companion's friends arrived and, much to my dismay, helped themselves most liberally to my berries. The lean-to was folded and put on a horse. Next, I was loaded up onto the chestnut horse I'd admired when I'd first laid eyes on my Indian weeks before. I was wondering where its owner was going to ride when he quickly got on behind me.

My injured leg, now splinted up with sticks and tied with vines, stuck out awkwardly from the horse. As we traveled, I found pain would run the gamut of my leg with each little jostle. I tried not to cry, as I didn't want him to think I was a baby, but every once in a while, a tear would sneak out anyway. He must have noticed my distress because he shifted me around just a bit so I could put my leg up higher. This, however, required that I lean back on his chest, which I was most reluctant to do, but a quick smile from him assured me he had only my comfort in mind.

> I was always amazed at how fast timber could be found to build a gallows, where it took weeks to find enough to build a house.

Those two miles home from the berry patch seemed like twenty by the time we arrived. There was a small gathering of people at my house, which I assumed was a search party out to hunt for me now that the rain had let up. Several of the men who'd gathered held their rifles up with a look on their faces that made it seem like they'd shoot if the Indians were to make any sudden moves. I thought they should be grateful I wasn't dead. I looked at my Indian. He wasn't smiling anymore. Maybe he expected everyone to thank him for rescuing me. I suppose you could say he was thanked by the fact that no one decided to shoot him.

My Indian wouldn't let Pa carry me into the house, but chose instead to carry me himself, as if proving that his intentions were of the honorable kind. I wanted to thank him for helping me, but I didn't know the words. I then remembered my hair ribbon. I pulled it out and gave it to him. He looked at it, then me, smiled, and left.

When I told the story of my rescue, I only said that the Indians had found me and brought me home. I didn't want anyone to know I had spent the night right beside one of them. I was afraid they'd think something else had happened, so I led everyone to believe I was found that morning.

My new friend came to check on me several times over the next few weeks. Each time he came, he brought a handful of berries, which I washed and fed to him, but only if no one else was around to see. I also let him run his fingers through my hair on several occasions. He was nice. I began to trust him.

I made him that bright red shirt I had silently promised him, as well. It fit him just right. I also noticed he wore my pink ribbon in his hair. My brothers wouldn't be caught dead with a ribbon in their hair, but my Indian friend didn't mind.

One day, my youngest brother came running into the house, completely out of breath. "They're gonna hang your Indian!" he blurted out.

"Why?" I asked him, disbelieving him.

"Some folks think he and the two Indians who were with him stole horses and killed some folks up north." Horse stealing and killing—those were serious offenses.

"When?" I asked.

"When what?" my brother asked back.

"When did they steal the horses and kill those folks?"

"It was that night you broke your leg, back in the big rain. Folks say they was on their way back from doin' it when they found you and the only reason they rescued you was to mislead everyone as to what they'd done. That's why all those men were at our house that morning—to hunt down them killers. They supposed you was dead already. They say they now know it was them because your friend was seen snooping around the place the other day and they say a killer always returns to the scene of the crime."

"That's utter nonsense!" I exclaimed. "They were . . ." I didn't finish the sentence.

"Come on, Luke, we've got to get to town and stop this hanging!" By now I was all of fourteen, but I had the lives of three innocent human beings in my hands. As we hadn't any other horse, Luke helped me up onto the old bay and got up behind me. We ran that horse for all it was worth and prayed he wouldn't keel over and die before we got to town.

The gallows was almost finished when we arrived. I was always amazed at how fast timber could be found to build one, where it took weeks to find enough to build a house.

I saw my friend, in the red shirt I'd made him, along with his companions, in shackles. I begged the sheriff to let me talk to them but he said they were dangerous men —killers—and wouldn't let me near. When I asked him what evidence there was to convict the Indians, he showed me a scrap of red cloth and nothing more.

As I couldn't get near my friend, I hobbled around on my nearly mended leg and asked everyone I thought was involved to help me stop this hanging at least until a judge could be found and give them a fair trial. But, because I was young and female, no one would listen to me.

I was in a panic. After having talked to a slew of different folks and eavesdropping on others, I knew the full story, and knew without a doubt my friend was innocent. He was going to die and I was helpless to stop it.

As the three were being taken up to the gallows, like lambs to the slaughter, the words of the circuit preacher echoed in my mind. "No greater love hath a man than he lay down his life for his brother." I assumed it also meant dignity.

Quickly, before I chickened out and before anyone could stop me, Luke helped me up onto the gallows. The gathering crowd grew silent. I took a deep breath. It was now or never.

"Listen to me!" I shouted. "These men are innocent. They were nowhere near the old Drigger place the night them folks were killed."

"How do you know?" came a voice from the crowd.

It was hard to tell them how I knew, but it was either swallow my pride or live with three dead people on my conscience for the rest of my life. "They were with me all night. They found me the same night I broke my leg—not the next morning, as I led everyone to believe." Several of the ladies gasped out loud at this revelation. A young girl and a man simply did not spend the night together without benefit of marriage, and for her to spend the night with an Indian and still have any of her virtue left was unthinkable.

> I hobbled over to my Indian, took the noose from around his neck, and put it around my own. It almost choked the life out of me.

"How do we know you're tellin' the truth?" came another voice.

"Because, because—" I hesitated.

"Kill them redskins!" shouted a voice.

"No. Wait. I know they were with me all night because this one snored and kept me awake!" I pointed to my Indian. It wasn't exactly the truth, as he'd been the only one to stay the night, but I had seen his friends and they'd certainly not been headed north to the Drigger place. I had to give them the benefit of the doubt. I was sure no one else would, not with them being Indians.

"Hang 'em anyway, then we won't have to ever worry about 'em killin' anyone. Besides, we came to see a hangin'!" shouted two different voices.

This made me mad. I had a stubborn streak, still do, and it chose that moment to come out. I hobbled over to my Indian, took the noose from around his neck, and put it around my own. It almost choked the life out of me as it was, my being much shorter than he. "There, now you can have your hangin'! I have given you testimony of their innocence. If you choose to hang someone, I also choose to take his place. I will not let an innocent man die and my lifeless body, hanging here, will haunt each and every one of you the rest of your lives!" I did favor the dramatic side.

"Charity, have you plumb lost your mind?" It was my brother hollering up at me. I refused to look at him. I didn't think anyone would hang me, but I wasn't exactly sure.

The sheriff came up to me. "Are you sure of your facts, Miss?"

> The Indian pointed to me, then to the stick figure of his baby, and said my name. He was naming his baby after me.

I looked up at him, but couldn't see his eyes, as his hat shaded them. "Just as sure as I'm standing here with this noose around my neck," I said stubbornly.

At last, the sheriff was having his doubts. A hanging was forever; there was no taking it back. I played on his doubts. "One of your men said he'd found shoed horse tracks and another horse had a nail missing from its shoe. These Indians don't have shoes on their horses. You also said yourself, Sheriff, that the only thing found at the house was a piece of red cloth that matched this man's shirt. I made that man's shirt a week after he found me and took me home. He couldn't have had it the night of the murders and besides, he was right next to me all night, like I done already said." I trembled with worry. Was it enough? I prayed it was.

"Thomas," the sheriff called to one of the townsmen, "did you find any unshod pony tracks out there?"

"No."

"Then all the evidence against these men is very iffy. I warned you about this when you insisted on doin' the investigatin'. Horse tracks and a scrap of cloth aren't enough to condemn 'em and we have a witness who says they were nowhere near the Drigger place that night." The sheriff hollered this to the posse and townsfolk as well. He then whispered to me, "You better be damn sure you're tellin' me the truth, Miss, 'cause if you're not, you'll be hung 'longside these three as a conspirator to murder." I nodded my head vigorously, or as vigorously as I could with a rope around it.

The sheriff removed the noose from my neck as well as the others'. No one there spoke much Indian, but with hand gestures, the three formerly condemned men were given back their horses and told to get out of town. My Indian gave me one last mystified look as he departed. I felt sorry for him. He probably didn't even know what he was going to be hanged for.

I stepped down off the gallows, happy my Indian had been spared, but anxious as to what folks would say about me after finding out I'd spent the night with a man. Whatever happened, I knew I'd done the right thing.

By the time school started again, my leg was mended enough to allow me to walk without crutches. I endured the stares of my classmates as they pointed their fingers at me and wagged their tongues. I ignored them to the best of my ability. Soon they left me alone.

It was right after the first snow that I saw my Indian again. This time he was alone and had considerable more clothes on, including the red shirt. He must have been watching the house because he arrived just after my parents left for town in the wagon. My brothers were away doing whatever boys did when it snowed. I suspected it wasn't work of any kind. I was left to tend the house and keep the fires burning.

Having not seen him in a while, I was greatly surprised when I opened the door and found him standing there in the cold. I motioned for him to come in and sit on the floor by the fire. Having no berries at this time of year to feed him, I cut a huge slice of apple pie and fed it to him. I could tell he liked it as he readily opened his mouth for each bite.

As we sat on the floor, he gazed at the fire, then at me. I somehow knew he wanted to talk, but his mouth simply couldn't form the white man words and I couldn't speak his. I thought how terrible it must be to be a foreigner and not know the language. It struck me then that I was a foreigner and this was his land, but we white folk had changed it to make it appear as though they were the intruders and not us.

Finally he stood and bade me come outside with him. I pulled on my coat and bonnet, for it had started to snow again, and followed him out. He led me over to his horse that I so admired. I patted the horse on her neck. She was the most beautiful creature I'd ever seen.

My friend handed me the rope that was around the animal's neck and said something I did not understand. Mystified, I stared at him. He said it again, only this time he tied the rope to my wrist. I pointed to the horse, then to myself. He smiled and nodded his head. I was stunned. He was giving me his horse. I tried to give it back, but he would have nothing to do with it.

Without further explanation, my red-shirted friend disappeared into the snow. I thought about him for a long time. I'd heard that sometimes, when an Indian man wants to marry a woman, he offers horses to her father. I wondered if this young man wished me for his wife. I was no longer repulsed by the thought of being a squaw but I knew, deep down inside, that I would never be able to live in his world and he could never live in mine. Our homes were separated by more than the miles between them.

It was two summers later when I saw him again. I was nearly sixteen and my interests had gone beyond horses. There were several young men I'd taken a fancy to, but somehow, I always ended up comparing them to my Indian.

Once again I was out picking berries at the patch, only this time there wasn't a cloud in the sky. I stood to move to a richer plant when all of a sudden, there he was. I liked to dropped my bucket of berries. He began to laugh. I suppose he thought it funny he'd managed to sneak up on me. I gave him a snooty face. He poked me in the ribs and I threw a strawberry at him. He wasn't the least bit deterred. Right then and there I knew I had a lifelong friend.

He followed me around as I picked, then we sat down under the sole cottonwood. I fed him some berries, thinking that's what he wanted. He ate a few, then stopped. He wanted to talk.

He drew a stick picture on the ground and pointed to himself, then another one, obviously a woman, beside him. He'd married. Part of me was happy for him and part of me was crushed. Somehow, I'd always considered him mine. He then drew a small stick picture and held his arms as if he were cradling a baby. He was telling me he had a baby. I inquired, with a crude drawing of my own, if the baby was a boy or girl. It was a girl.

He pointed to himself and said something, then to several other things and called each one something. He was naming them. He pointed to me and I said *Charity*. He pulled a scrap of tree bark and a small piece of charcoal out of a bag and made as if he was writing. He handed me the tree bark and charcoal. I gathered he wanted me to write my name. I thought that unusual, for I'd heard the Indians had no written language, but I complied.

I handed him what I'd written. He repeated it out loud several times, pointed to me and said it, then to the stick figure of his baby and said it. I was flattered. He was naming his daughter after me.

He stood to leave. It was then that I noticed the tear in his shirt. On closer inspection, I discovered that it was not only torn, but threadbare. He needed a new one. I would make it for him.

I held up three fingers and pointed to the sun, laid my hands beside my head as if to sleep, then pointed to the tree. I wanted him to come back in three days. He made as if he understood, then left.

Three days later, with a new red shirt, I was back at the tree and so was he. I had also made a small blanket for his baby out of those five rabbit skins Ma had received in payment for the iron pot and had never used. He thanked me with a nod of the head and left me once again.

This went on for years, even after I'd married and raised four fine sons and two daughters. Each spring, when the strawberries were ripe, I'd meet Red Shirt—the name he'd been given when the final rolls were taken—at the berry patch, gifts in hand to give his family, along with a new red shirt for him. He learned a smattering of English, but I could barely say his name in his language.

His first wife died after producing two daughters and one son. One daughter lived only two days longer than her mother. I grieved for him. His second wife produced one son and one daughter.

On occasion he'd show up at my door, but only when my husband was away, and ask for food. My husband was a good man and had only cautioned me not to give so much away that our own family would starve. My children, after they were older, disapproved of my giving away our food to Indians, but I told them it was our duty, as taught in the Bible, to help those less fortunate. It could be us in their shoes. I'd then give him all he could carry and then some. I prayed it was enough. I'd saved his life and wasn't about to let him die by starvation. At least, that's what I told myself. Actually, he was my friend and I was determined to help him.

Red Shirt came to visit me once a week, despite the disapproval of my children and his. Having company was good.

The years aged us both. My hair

turned a silvery gray and I was no longer the spry young thing I used to be. Red Shirt had adopted the white man way of dress and tucked his hair up under his hat to disguise the fact he was Indian. He wouldn't cut it, and I was glad.

A few more years found me a widow. I also knew his second wife no longer walked this earth. My grown children begged me to come stay with them and I would for a little while, but the itch to be in my own home soon drove me back there. Even though the facilities were outside and I had to pump my own water, it was mine.

It had now been close to fifty years since I had first met Red Shirt. Hitler was coming to power in Europe and my sixth sense told me he'd be a far worse menace than any Indian ever was. Red Shirt came to visit me once a week, despite the disapproval of my children and his. There was very little conversation, but having company was good. I'd feed him a piece of pie and a glass of lemonade. Sometimes we'd play checkers—he let me win every once in a while—and sometimes we'd simply sit in front of the fire. He still liked to run his fingers through my now nearly white hair and tie a bow in it, as if I were still thirteen. I didn't mind.

I'd made him a new red shirt last week. I must have made at least fifty of them by now. He looked handsome in it. But even as he strutted around in it like a young buck, I knew his health was failing. Proper nutrition had been hard to come by on the reservation, and a single piece of apple pie and whatever else he'd eat when he was with me once a week simply wasn't enough to make up for sixty-plus years without it.

I somehow suspected I'd not see him again after that last visit. There weren't many things we could do together, as old Indian men had a habit of being run off from anything and everything in town. Some of the younger folks are changing, but until the young become old, the hatred and distrust will remain. But no one could tell us what we could and could not do in my own home.

"And now you've come to tell me he's gone. I think soon I'll join him. I will miss our visits," I said in a barely audible voice.

"My father made me promise to come see you after he died. I didn't want to, and to tell the truth, I never liked him seeing a woman who was not of our people, even though I was named after you. But I'm glad I did. Would you mind if I came back from time to time?"

"Of course not. You're always welcome. I would like to find out more about your people before there isn't anyone left who knows."

Charity Red Shirt handed me a small parcel. "He wanted me to give this to you."

I opened it. Inside was my pink ribbon. He still had it after all these years. I held it to my breast. Words could not express what I felt. "Would you tie it in my hair, please? My fingers just can't do it anymore."

"Yes, I'd be happy to," she replied. "You know, my father loved you."

Yes, I knew. And I think he knew I loved him, too.

BUST OUT

by W. M. Shockley

The snap sounded like it came from the campfire, but the fire had long since turned to muted embers. Merle came instantly awake: the campfire, or someone stepping on a twig nearby. Somebody hunting him and the boy. Already. Too impossibly soon.

Before opening his eyes, he slowly slid his right hand down his side to where he kept his Colt. He hoped the movement wouldn't be seen in the bad light. Where the gun should have been he felt only the empty bedroll. No Colt. He should never have had the campfire—he knew it at the time he was lighting it, but his craving for coffee had gotten the better of him, and now he was paying the price. He thought he'd chosen a cave where the smoke wouldn't be seen from outside—he was obviously wrong in that. They'd take him back to Shasta and fit him with a

Merle sprang at the boy and knocked him over backwards. The Colt discharged very loudly in the small area of the cave.

California collar alongside Buddy and watch him dance.

He opened his eyes enough to see the big, black *O* of a gun barrel staring at him. The light was good enough for that. His hand jerked toward his body and reached for the bowie knife in his boot. He might make the knife, but he knew he'd never be able to use it before they shot him dead. Better that than hanging—better by a long shot, but hanging would be *later*.

"My papa won't allow me to even touch a gun," the boy said. "My mama says they aren't part of decent civilization."

Merle froze before reaching the handle of the knife. He waited several seconds for someone to answer the boy, but no one did.

"Aren't you awake, mister?" the boy asked.

"Who's there with you?" Merle whispered.

"No one."

"Point that away from me," Merle said in his regular voice, still without moving. He wanted to scream at the boy, but didn't want to scare him into firing. He knew the boy would scare easily, had scared at every animal noise in the woods. The noise that had awakened him, he realized, wasn't a twig or a fire-snap, but the hammer being pulled back on the Colt.

"It's heavier than I thought," the boy said as he waved the gun in small circles.

"Point it away!" While the gun wasn't hair-triggered, the boy was clumsy enough to squeeze off a shot by accident, and Merle would be the one to suffer. Merle wasn't so much afraid of dying—if he was, he wouldn't have tried to bust Buddy out of the Shasta jail—but he didn't want to die by *accident*, shot by his own gun, by a twelve-year-old boy scared of his own shadow.

"When will my papa be coming for me?" the boy asked. He pointed the gun suddenly toward something outside the cave opening, holding it with two hands to steady it.

Merle didn't wait. He crawled and sprang at the boy and knocked him over backwards. The Colt discharged very loudly in the small area of the cave, ricocheted from the top of the cave, and then shot out into the night. Merle never took his eyes off the gun and grabbed it before the boy could do anything else with it.

"If you *ever* touch my Colt again," Merle seethed, breathing hard, not so much from the effort as from the excitement, "I'll shoot you dead on the spot and leave your body for the buzzards." The boy said nothing. "Understand? You understand me, boy?"

"Yes." The boy answered, biting off the single syllable. He bit his lip and started to cry. Again. Twelve-year-old boys didn't *cry*. But then, this was the cryingest boy Merle had ever seen. Didn't even have to hit him to get him started. Merle wondered if he'd ever been away from his mama and papa before. He was away from them now, and for a while to come. If they made San Francisco, it would be a week-long trip, maybe longer—and if the boy cried all the time, he might not make it.

Merle didn't know if he could stand it. He might have to dump the boy in a river somewhere.

After checking the camp and the horses—he was glad he'd hobbled as well as tethered them—he lay back down to sleep, resting his thigh against the gun. He'd shoot the boy, just like he had said he would, if he touched the gun again. Might shoot him for the hell of it, to be rid of him.

The gunshot in the quiet night might draw the posse, but there was nothing he could do about that short of pulling up stakes and tiring the horses more. And he knew he'd have *no* chance of getting away with dead horses.

"When's my papa coming for me?" the boy whimpered. "He doesn't like me being outside after dark."

"We'll meet up with him later," Merle said. Merle didn't see how the boy could still think his papa was coming for him—how the boy could have believed the story Merle had told him—but he didn't straighten him out. "Now, shut your trap and go to sleep. We're getting up early."

He was too excited to sleep now—would be, he knew, for an hour or so while the gunshot wore itself out of his mind. He got up again, relieved himself against a tree. When he came back to camp, he nearly kicked over the pot of beans he'd set out to soak overnight for cooking tomorrow. He lay on his bedroll and thought back to how he'd gotten himself in this fix.

The day had started like most others had lately, with Merle in the cabin in the hills above Whiskeytown, waiting for word from Buddy. Buddy had told him to sit tight and wait, and that was what

"Buddy says to bust him out about noon today," Beth said. "There's just one deputy, so it should be easy enough."

Merle had been doing for five days already. There was Arbuckle's coffee enough for more than a week yet, and the beans and rice and flour would last for a month. Down on the flat, Merle knew the temperature was already in the nineties, even so early in the morning, but up in the hills above Whiskeytown, it was perfect: warm and cool together. And quiet. Too quiet for a man alone with not much to do for days on end.

When he saw the dust on the trail, he was sitting on the stoop of the cabin, on the chair he'd made out of scrap wood and branches, throwing playing cards at his hat. He'd already tired of Canfield, but he was better at it than at hitting his hat. The damned queen of spades kept smiling at him from the ground.

About time, he thought. *About time Buddy showed up.* But it wasn't Buddy who rode in astride the beautiful chestnut gelding. Merle recognized the woman from town, but didn't know her name. She dismounted like a man, but fussed with her blue calico dress like a woman. Five years ago she would have made a fine-looking woman, but she'd put on weight and her face had turned hard. Wouldn't matter, though, in the dark—hard face and soft everywhere else.

"You Merle?" she asked as she looped the reins over the railing of the porch. If the horse bolted, most likely it would take the cabin with it.

"Yes, ma'am," he answered, standing up and retrieving his hat, which he put on. "Who're you?" He gathered up the cards and shoved the queen of spades into the deck.

"Buddy sent me, so don't get any ideas. Name is Beth."

"You work down at the saloon. I remember." He'd been having some ideas, but if she was Buddy's woman, then Merle wasn't going to mess with her.

"Get me some water," she said. She looked dusty from the ride up from Whiskeytown, and Merle knew how hot it was down there. He hadn't been keeping the drinking barrel by the cabin full—walking down to the stream below gave him something to do a couple of times a day.

"I'll be back," he said as he picked up the bucket he used to fill the barrel with.

When he returned, Beth was sitting in his chair with her elbows on her knees. Thinking. She grabbed the scoop from Merle's hand before he could empty the bucket into the barrel and drank before saying anything.

"Way I got it figured," she said, "you're going to have to bust Buddy out." Water had poured off her chin and wet the front of her dress, dead center and spreading.

"Out of what?" Merle asked. Last he'd heard, Buddy was in the hotel in Whiskeytown, planning the bank job. More likely, with Beth and planning nothing.

"The jail up in Shasta."

"What's he doing there?" Merle asked, though he knew it was only a matter of time before Buddy got caught. And once Buddy got caught, Merle knew he wouldn't be far behind. Buddy did most of the thinking for them.

"Waiting to be tried and hanged," Beth said. "*I* don't want to see him hang. He'd do it for you."

She was sweet on Buddy, that was easy enough to see. Lots of women were sweet on Buddy: he knew how to show a woman a real good time, and they never forgot him for that.

"Tell me what to do," Merle said. If Buddy wanted him to bust him out, that's what Merle would do. He just needed some idea of how to do it.

"Buddy says to bust him out about noon today. The jail's in the basement of the court building in Shasta, across the street from the dry goods store. Ride up and leave the horses behind the court building—there's a small yard there—and bust him out. There's just one deputy downstairs at noon, so it should be easy enough."

"Two horses?" Merle asked. It was lucky that Buddy had left the packhorse with Merle at the cabin. She wasn't the fastest horse, but she'd do for a while, until Buddy could steal himself another.

"Yeah, two: one for you and one for Buddy. And what supplies you've got. I'll meet up with you at a place Buddy knows, south, on Clear Creek. Then you can get away to San Francisco, or head on over the Sierras."

"Or go to Mexico," Merle suggested.

"You know Buddy won't have nothing to do with Mexico."

Merle packed the horses and was ready to go in ten minutes.

Beth went down the trail with him part of the way but didn't say anything until she took the south trail. "See you this afternoon," she said.

The boy looked up in terrified surprise. Merle grabbed him, threw him over the front of the saddle, and leaped up after.

He tipped his hat to her but she'd already turned. Leading the packhorse, he ambled down the mountain toward Shasta. He'd never busted anyone out of jail and thought it might be fun—until he rode into Shasta. Shasta had the *feel* to it—Merle couldn't ever describe the feel, but he knew it was real. Something wasn't right. Lots of things weren't right. Still, he forced himself to walk the horses into town. On one side of the street there were fifteen or so buildings up and under a tree-covered hill. On the other side was the jail building and some others in a field. He stopped in front of the bakery at the end of the street—the Germans were baking something, and it smelled too good for Merle to pass up. He tied the horses and went inside. The smell was even better: real food after five days of rice and beans and biscuits. He bought several rolls from the fat wife and went back outside, where he put some of the rolls in his saddlebag.

The big clock showed 11:46. Merle leaned against the hitching rail and ate a roll. He split another between the horses. He'd been able to rest them pretty good, even as they came into Shasta, so they were ready to run when he busted Buddy out. *If* he busted Buddy out—the feel kept coming back on him. The town *looked* normal enough, with only a few people on the street, mostly going into or coming out of the dry goods and general stores down the way. Across the street, the courthouse didn't even look to be open. No, everything looked peaceful and quiet. But the feel told him it wasn't so.

If it was anybody but Buddy, Merle would have ridden right out of town and forgotten all about the breakout, but Buddy had been like a brother to Merle for three years now. Riding together, robbing together. "Three years," Buddy had told him, "is a long time to be robbing. Maybe it's time to retire." And he'd been right. They'd caught him now.

At 11:58 a boy walked out of the dry goods store carrying two folded shirts like they were royal flushes. Merle unhitched the horses, led them across the street and around the back of the courthouse.

He was about to tie them up when he looked at the back of the building. Somebody in an upstairs window turned his back on the courtyard, and the feeling came back real strong. A trap! He knew it was a trap as he knew his name. A trap and an ambush. Somehow, they'd found out about Buddy's plan. If they were upstairs waiting, they'd be downstairs waiting, too. Merle kept the reins in his hand and slowly walked to the side of his horse. He put his foot in the stirrup, climbed on as quickly as he could, and jerked her hard over. He was going to head out the way he came into town, back to the northeast, but a deputy with a rifle aimed at him was blocking his way.

"Stop. I'm the law!" the man shouted.

Merle fired at him twice before turning down the street. The boy who had been carrying the shirts stepped out of the courthouse seconds ahead of Merle. Merle jerked the reins hard to avoid trampling him, skittered to a jumping stop. The packhorse hit his horse in back and jarred him off, but Merle still clung to the reins.

The boy looked up in terrified surprise—at seeing the horses so close, Merle, or his gun—it didn't matter. If Merle was going to get out of town, he'd need something, and the boy was it. He grabbed the boy, threw him over the front of the saddle, and leaped up after.

"No!" someone screamed. "No, don't shoot. He's got—"

Merle was riding hard by the time the man finished his sentence and didn't hear what he said. Looking back, he saw a crowd starting to form, looking after him as he fled with the boy.

It was over so quick, Merle had trouble remembering it.

The boy, surprisingly, lay quietly across the saddle and didn't struggle to get away. Of course, falling from a galloping horse wouldn't have been a very smart thing to do—not when another horse was running right behind.

Only when they were out of town and relatively safe did the boy start to cry.

Merle knew he'd have to be moving early to stay ahead of the posse. He knew the tracks of the two horses would be easy to follow for at least another day. He could try and hide them by wading in the river, but that would take more time than it would save him—a couple of good trackers would flank the river and spot where he came out.

About half an hour before sunup he roused himself and poked the boy. "Aw, mama, another hour," the boy mumbled before remembering where he was.

The posse must have taken a wrong turn somewhere, Merle figured; otherwise, it would have been upon them by now.

Then he sat bolt upright and said, "You kidnapped me!"

"Finally figured that out?"

"You said my papa was coming for me."

Merle didn't have the time or the inclination to explain it to the boy. "Yeah? So I lied."

"You shouldn't lie. 'Thou shall not bear false witness.' That's in the scriptures."

"Shut up!" If there was one thing Merle really hated, it was folks who quoted scripture at him.

"Kidnapping's against the *law*."

Merle laughed at that as he busied himself with getting the fire started for the morning coffee. The kid just didn't know when to shut up. Shooting at that deputy—that was against the law. He'd didn't even know if he'd hit the man, though he figured he must have because the deputy never got a shot off at Merle.

"I wouldn't worry too much about the law out here," Merle answered. The boy huddled against a wall of the cave, wrapped in the blanket Merle had given him the night before.

"I would if I were you," the boy said. "When my papa finds you, you'll be in big trouble." Couldn't be in any trouble bigger than he was in already. He needed Buddy to figure out what to do, but there was no getting to Buddy now. He'd ridden almost the whole length of Clear Creek looking for Beth, to explain what had happened, to find out what he should do, but he never did see her or where she was waiting for Merle and Buddy. He didn't go all the way to the Sacramento River on Clear Creek, but only because there were too many people along the Sacramento.

"Who is your papa?"

"He owns the dry goods store in town." Merle shrugged his shoulders at that. Store owners didn't scare him. "You've never heard of Mr. Solomon?"

Again, Merle shrugged. He emptied his canteen into the coffeepot—no matter, they'd camped near enough to a small stream so he'd refill before they got moving.

"It's still dark out," the boy whined.

"You know, boy, it might be easier for me to kill you and dump you here." Merle meant it only to scare the boy, but the more he thought about it, the more truth he saw to it. He could surely travel faster without the boy—and traveling fast was what he had to do now.

"You wouldn't do that."

"Stop your eternal whining, or I might."

"That's a lie, too," the boy said, but he shrank back into the blanket.

"And it's against the law," Merle teased.

Neither said another word until the coffee was ready. When Merle offered him some, the boy said, "I'm not allowed."

"What are you allowed?" Merle asked. Seemed to him the boy was too much put upon. When Merle was seven or eight, he was already drinking coffee and was a lot tougher than this twelve-year-old. "Can't touch guns—they're not civilized—can't drink coffee. What are you allowed?"

"I don't *want* any," the boy answered. "I want some food." Whining again.

"No time to cook now, whiner," Merle said. Though, if he'd put the beans on to cook at the same time as the coffee, they'd be ready now. He didn't eat in the morning, so he didn't expect the boy would either, especially before the sun came up.

The boy started to say something but thought better of it. So maybe he was learning to keep his mouth shut. Merle drank his coffee alone, while he packed the horses. He left the boy as he filled the canteen and was surprised to see him sitting in the same spot. No place to escape to.

They rode—the two on one horse again because the boy told Merle he didn't know how to ride!—for several hours in the early morning, leaving the stream and heading south and a little west into the foothills. He *wanted* to stay near the Sacramento River but dared not. He wasn't sure there was much water in the mountains between them and the coast. Two big canteens would hold them until they found more.

The packhorse trailed, its halter tied loosely to the saddle of Merle's horse. Merle couldn't remember ever having ridden so early in the morning. The sun rose behind them and lit the hills and trees out in front and above them as they climbed the uneven ground under the pines.

He was surprised that the posse hadn't come upon them in the night. Following the trail should have been pretty easy. Of course, the wind had come up good in the night so maybe the trail was blown clean away. Still, a good tracker would follow them by

Merle tried to teach Reuben about throwing, but he had never had any kind of practice and was hopeless.

what they'd done to the trees in passing.

"Where are we going?" the boy asked.

Merle didn't have a ready answer for him. His immediate plan was to escape over the mountains toward the coast, then head south toward San Francisco where he could get himself good and lost. There weren't too many people up in these mountains to bother him. When he got to San Francisco, he'd send word to the boy's father where he could find the boy. "San Francisco," he said.

"This isn't the best way to get there," the boy said.

Merle laughed. "I know. What's your name?"

"Reuben Solomon."

"Like the king?"

"Yes, like the king. My papa says we're descended directly from King Solomon."

They had made good time, crested a number of smaller hills, and Reuben hadn't complained, so Merle asked, "You ready to stop for some grub?"

"Yes."

"When we find a decent spot, we'll stop." The posse must have taken a wrong turn somewhere, Merle figured; otherwise, it would have been upon them by now. Probably tried to track at night, read something wrong, and went off in the wrong direction. Nobody would expect Merle to head so far south, away from the Sacramento. Not that he was complaining.

The horses smelled the water before Merle heard it—a small spring that splashed out the side of a hill and ran for a short distance before widening into a decent-sized pool. There was food and water for the horses, so Merle decided to stop.

"It's so quiet," Reuben said. "Not like at home where there's always somebody sawing or hammering or something." The only sounds they heard, aside from those they made themselves, were an occasional birdcall, the spring, and the wind sighing in the tops of the trees.

They dismounted and picketed the horses on a long tether. "I'll get wood for the fire," Reuben volunteered. The night sleeping away from home seemed to have done the boy a world of good—or maybe it was Merle's threat of shooting him.

"Good." There wasn't much chance of him running off. And if he did, it *would* simplify Merle's life. He'd never make it back to Shasta, and he had to know it. Merle busied himself with unpacking the beans he'd soaked and the rice. He thought about hunting—he'd seen a couple of deer in the trees and the ever-present squirrels—but decided it would take too long. He filled the coffeepot with water from the spring, dumped the Arbuckle's in it, and gathered a few of the closer sticks for kindling. Reuben returned with a huge armful of wood.

"Want to burn down the forest?" Merle asked. He took a few of the longer pieces and broke them into good lengths, which he laid out for the fire.

Reuben dropped the rest of the wood, stomped his feet, and said in a shaky voice, "I was just trying to help."

"You're not crying *again?*" Merle asked. "You're the crying-est thing I ever saw."

Reuben sniffled his tears to a stop but said nothing.

"Gather up some needles and we'll start this. Just a handful or two." While the boy returned to the edge of the woods, Merle took two pieces of forked wood and pushed them into the ground. He put the handle of the coffeepot over a third stick and laid the stick across the forks.

When Reuben came back with the pine needles Merle started the fire. He put the rice pot on to boil. He'd add the beans in a few minutes.

"This all you eat?" Reuben asked. Not exactly whining.

"Unless I go hunting. Got no time today. Don't suppose you ever hunted."

"It's not civilized," Reuben answered and then laughed at himself. "Show me how to shoot a gun."

"I'll think about it," Merle answered. He didn't want to take the time to show the boy how to shoot. Not much chance of him shooting Merle, but Merle'd already awakened one time with a gun in his face.

Merle skipped some stones across the pool—good-sized flat ones he found on the shore—and Reuben wanted to know how to do that. The rice would be a few minutes, and there was no harm in showing him that, so Merle tried to teach him about throwing. But Reuben had never had any kind of practice in throwing and was hopeless. "What do you *do* all day long?" Merle asked him. "I mean, when you were home."

"Help my papa, mostly. Learn things. Read. My mother loves to read, and we've got the best library in Shasta."

Merle had resigned himself to giving up without shooting. Too much chance that Reuben would get hurt—and no chance he could escape.

"You never just played? Baseball?"

"No time." *Poor kid,* Merle thought. *Couldn't be much of a life for a boy, never playing.* He wasn't such a bad kid, Merle realized—he'd just never been taught anything useful.

"I never learned how to read," Merle said.

"You *should,*" Reuben said with real excitement. "It's the best thing there is. When you're alone, with nothing to do, you can go to all these different places." Merle could understand that idea. Sitting at the cabin waiting for Buddy had been pretty boring, and a good story would have made it go faster.

"Come on," Merle said. He was going to take Reuben to set up some branches to shoot at, but the coffeepot started boiling. The rice was starting to boil, too. He took the coffeepot off the branch it was on and set it aside to cool down. The smell of it made him want to drink it, even though he knew it was too hot. He stirred the rice and added the beans. "How come you never learned any *boy* things?" Merle asked.

Reuben kicked at the dirt. "My papa and mama don't think I *need* to know any of the things out here. 'It's all changing. By the time you grow up, it'll all be different.' That's what they say. Learning the business and getting an education—that's enough for anybody. I'll be going off to college Back East when I'm old enough." Things were changing, and maybe the boy's father was right about that. But he was wrong about other things.

"College. Phew." Only people that Merle knew who went to college sat on the wrong end of a judge's bench. He poured himself a cup of the coffee. "Phew," he said again. "Still too hot."

"Could I try some?" Reuben asked.

"Only got the one cup."

"That's okay." He tried a sip but spit it out.

"I told you it was too hot."

Reuben shook his head. "Too nasty. How can you stand it?"

"Some people put sugar in it, but I'm out now. I like it mean and nasty, so it talks back to me."

They ate the rice and beans and a couple of the rolls Merle had bought in Shasta. The beans were still a little hard, but Reuben didn't complain.

After eating, Merle repacked the horses but left them picketed. He took the boy about forty yards away. There, he took the time to show Reuben how to handle the Colt properly. Or as properly as he could. Reuben was afraid to take it at first, almost crying again.

"What's the matter with you now?"

"You said you'd kill me if I touched that Colt."

"Yeah, well now I'm telling you I might kill you if you don't touch it." First he asked to learn how to shoot, and then he was afraid to touch the gun! His papa might not think he needed to know it, but as long as he was living in Shasta, it couldn't hurt.

He got the idea of aiming right off, but couldn't seem to hold the gun steady and squeeze the trigger at the same time.

"I'll never be any good," Reuben complained after missing his twelfth shot at a tree trunk.

"Just takes practice and stronger wrists. When you get home, you tell your papa you want a gun to practice with."

"He'll never let me have one."

"You just *tell* him; don't ask. Now, let's go." Reuben waited for Merle to lift him onto his horse, but Merle pointed to the packhorse.

"I can't ride," he said.

"It's a long *walk.*" The packhorse was lady-broke—easy enough for even Reuben to ride. He showed the boy how to use the stirrup to climb up and told him how to hold the reins. "Most likely, though," he said, "she'll just follow me." She was so used to walking behind Merle's horse that that was exactly what she did.

"This is *simple!*" Reuben yelled after a few minutes.

"She's an easy horse to ride," Merle laughed. The boy was *simple.* "Not all of them are."

After four more days of traveling south and west, Merle began to think no one was following them. He didn't believe it, but he began to think it. Anybody with any tracking sense would have come up on them already. They hadn't tried to hide their trail, but maybe they'd gone off in such a strange direction that nobody believed it.

Reuben had practiced with the Colt every day until they ran low on bullets. He could now hit a tree trunk seven times out of ten from twenty feet. He wasn't good, exactly, but he wasn't as terrible as he'd been.

He hadn't cried in over three days.

"You Merle Mescoe?" the man behind the rifle asked. Merle had no chance to get out his gun or knife. He sat up slowly.

He'd learned a lot and helped a lot around camp. He'd been quiet for over an hour as they rode along a river they'd come upon. It was a quiet time in the forest, the only sounds the clomping of their horses' hooves and the occasional blue jay. Merle felt like he was outside of time, as though there was nothing wrong in the world at all, that all he had to do was ride in the coolness of the forest, build a fire for the night, and get up the next morning to do it again.

Where were they behind him? As he watched the boy trying to learn, Merle had resigned himself to giving up without shooting. Too much chance that Reuben would get hurt—and no chance that he could escape. But no one had come to force his hand.

He looked back and saw Reuben asleep on the packhorse. No wonder—the pleasant weather, the gentle rocking motion, the fresh air, the river's lullabye. Merle had felt himself nod off a couple of times. If horses could sleep and walk at the same time, these would be doing it.

"What were you doing in Shasta?" Reuben asked about forty minutes later.

"Enjoyed your sleep, did you?"

"I don't sleep during the day. There's too much to do."

"Like riding that horse?"

"Like riding this horse."

He didn't ask again about Shasta, and Merle didn't say anything about it. He hadn't thought about Buddy in a couple of days. There was nothing he could do for Buddy now, and no point in letting that harp on his mind. And to think that only a couple of days before, he'd spent so much time thinking about him, how smart he was. Buddy wasn't the smart one—he was the one they were going to hang. Not that Merle was a smart one, either—his invite to the necktie party had already been given, too; he'd just been lucky in getting away. No, the smart one was Reuben's papa. Might not be exciting, but then neither was sitting in a cabin for five days waiting for Buddy, or most of the other stuff Merle did. Find himself a good woman—or a not-so-good woman, come to that—settle down and forget all about Buddy and his past. He was beginning to think he might get clean away.

He looked back and Reuben smiled at him. "Want meat for dinner?"

"Sure! Are we going to hunt for it?"

"Meat don't just fall off trees."

Merle dismounted in a clearing by the river and watched as Reuben did the same. He'd gotten the hang of it and didn't get tangled in the stirrup. He picketed the horse without being told.

"These trees are so full of squirrels I could pop one with my Colt—but I might miss, and we'd never see another. 'Course, if I hit him wrong, with this size bullet, there won't be much left for eating." He pulled the Winchester out of its scabbard, pushed a couple of shells into the breach, and worked the lever. "Come on," he said as he walked toward the trees. "Once you pull this lever up, you've got to be careful because it's ready to fire." He hadn't let Reuben see the Winchester before today, but he was hungry for some meat. He held the rifle to his shoulder and waited for a squirrel. It didn't take long—the squirrels were everywhere on the trees. He'd seen a few skittish deer in the woods, but none close enough now to shoot.

He aimed and fired, blew the head clean off.

"Meat does fall off trees!" Reuben said with a laugh as the headless squirrel landed a few feet from him. "Not much to eat on this thing." Merle expected that Reuben would have been more upset by the dead squirrel, but he wasn't.

"More than enough," Merle said as he stowed the Winchester in its scabbard. "Have to be because his friends won't be coming out for a while. When we get this cooking, I'll show you how to shoot a rifle. If you want."

"It's so big," Reuben said.

"It is big, and it's got a mean kick, but you can handle it."

While the meat sizzled, Merle showed Reuben how to hold the Winchester tight against his shoulder, to take a breath and hold it while squeezing the trigger.

When Reuben pulled the trigger, though, the rifle was loose to his body, and the kick knocked him back and almost over. He was a pretty thin boy, and not too tall, but the lesson he learned from the kick was a good one. Next time he'd hold a rifle tight! He came up to Merle, holding the Winchester by its barrel and said, "I don't think I *ever* want to shoot that again." When Merle took the rifle, Reuben rubbed at his shoulder and winced a couple of times. A couple of tears touched his eye, but none got out.

They rode side by side until they saw the hills of San Francisco across a stretch of water. It was the biggest collection of buildings Merle had ever seen.

Merle found himself almost promising to get Reuben a smaller rifle, a Stevens .25-20 maybe. But he knew his time with the boy was short and getting shorter every minute as they got closer to San Francisco.

"When's your birthday?" he asked the boy instead.

"October the third. Why?"

"Meat's done." That stopped all Reuben's questions. When he sat to eat he held his shoulder stiff. Merle had a look at it. It was already bruising up pretty good. "That's going to hurt for a while."

"I can tell that."

The squirrel wasn't *much*, but it was a damn sight better than what they had been eating. Served with rice and beans, it made a pretty good meal.

He heard the snap of a twig and was sure it was a twig until he opened his eyes and saw the dark *O* of a rifle barrel several inches from his face. The extra few minutes of sleep had really cost him this time. Each day they'd been traveling together, Merle had let himself and Reuben sleep longer in the mornings, almost until sunrise. And now, the sun was up and—

"You Merle Mescoe?" the man behind the rifle asked. Merle had no chance to get to his gun or knife. This time it wasn't a twelve-year-old boy staring down at him.

He sat up slowly, and the man with the rifle backed far enough away to be out of grabbing range before repeating, "You Merle Mescoe?"

"No," Reuben said from behind Merle. "His name's Isaac. Isaac Jacobs, and he's my pa. Now you just clear off."

The man with the rifle looked over his shoulder and shrugged, aimed the rifle at the ground. "Sorry, Mr. Jacobs. Got word out of Shasta to be looking for a man traveling with a boy he kidnapped. Thought you might be them."

"No," Merle said. "I ain't him."

Merle turned and saw Reuben holding the Winchester tight against his shoulder, though it had to hurt him pretty good, aiming down the barrel. As the man moved back toward his horse, the rifle in Reuben's hands followed him.

"How far are we from San Francisco?" Merle asked.

"Three hours' easy ride," the man answered as he climbed on his horse. "Sorry about the mistake." Merle wasn't sure he believed the man, but the man rode off.

"You can't go into San Francisco," Reuben objected when the man had ridden out of hearing. "They'll have *posters* of you." Merle hadn't thought about that. There might be posters of him—he'd been gone long enough for them to be printed and sent around. But he wasn't going to let Reuben go into a town like San Francisco by himself. A twelve-year-old could get himself into too much trouble. Especially a boy who didn't know anything.

"You *lied* to that man, Reuben. Lied."

"I'm sure glad I didn't have to shoot him. My shoulder's still sore from the first time I shot this."

Reuben gathered the wood and kindling and made the fire for the coffee while Merle picked up camp. Less than three hours and the boy would be out of his life, and he'd have a chance to get on with a new life. He had heard the trip to Mexico wasn't so bad from San Francisco but decided he wanted to head up north, into Mendocino maybe, or up on into Oregon, look into the logging business.

When Merle finished loading the horses—all his stuff on his own horse, just the saddle on Reuben's—he walked back to the fire.

"You'll have to get more coffee," Reuben said. "There's only a little left after this." He took a sip from the mug before handing it to Merle. He spat it out. "Just can't get the hang of that," he said, making a face.

"Try it when you're home. Not so strong and with some sugar in it. You'll like it."

"I doubt it."

"Have I ever led you wrong?"

Merle meant it as a joke, but Reuben thought about it seriously. "No, you haven't. Everything you told me was right." More lightly he added, "Except for the part about killing me, and kidnapping me. But that's nothing."

"I was in Shasta," Merle said after a long pause, "to bust a friend of mine out of jail. They're going to hang him."

"What for?"

Merle shrugged. "Things he did. Things I helped him do."

"What happened? I mean, when you picked me up, your friend wasn't there."

"It was an ambush. A trap. A deputy upstairs was *waiting* for me. I had to shoot at another deputy to get away."

"I thought I heard shots, but everything was so confusing. Did you kill him?"

"The deputy? I don't know if I even hit him. I was turning and shooting and trying to run all at once. I almost trampled you."

Reuben thought about that for a moment before asking, "Do you think maybe your friend told them you were coming?" The question smacked Merle right between the eyes. It should have been obvious to him. They *were* waiting for him. He said that himself. How could they be waiting for him unless Buddy told them? Buddy wouldn't do that. They'd been together too long. He'd rather swing alone than rat on Merle. Still, he couldn't argue his way out of the fact that they were waiting for him.

"I don't know," Merle admitted. "Maybe." Maybe not: in the swirl of activity at Shasta, he remembered seeing a blue calico dress like the one Beth had worn. And if she was in Shasta instead of being out on Clear Creek, then maybe she was the one.

"Well, it's over and done with," Reuben said. "You've got to get on with your life, that's all."

"And you with yours. We're only a couple of hours from San Francisco, so—"

"I know," Reuben took a stick and stirred the fire. "I'm going to miss you. You've taught me so much."

The burning behind his eyes stopped Merle from saying anything. He didn't trust his voice —he didn't want Reuben to see *him* crying, not after all the grief he'd given the boy about his doing it.

"Let's ride," he managed to say without his voice breaking.

When Reuben mounted his horse he asked, "Why're the supplies on your horse?"

"I'll be needing them," Merle answered. "You won't."

"But—" Reuben answered. Merle kicked his horse into motion.

They rode, Reuben in front and Merle behind for an hour without talking. When they came onto a path they rode side by side until they saw the hills of San Francisco across a stretch of water. It was the biggest collection of buildings Merle had ever seen in his life, and he wanted *no* part of it, not even to buy coffee. Merle stopped in awe, and Reuben stopped a few seconds later and rode back to Merle.

"You could get lost in there," Reuben said.

"I could get caught in there," Merle answered. Much as he *wanted* to go on with the boy, he knew he couldn't.

Merle unbuttoned one of his shirt pockets and took out a twenty-dollar gold piece. "There's a ferry boat down there," he said to Reuben as he handed him the coin. The boy's hand was still soft, but not like when he had started out on this trip. "Ride it across into San Francisco and find a telegraph office to tell your father where you are."

"What are you going to do?"

"Tell them I'm heading for Mexico." He knew the boy would.

"Where are you going?" Reuben repeated. "So I can send you the horse."

Merle turned his horse sharply. "It's yours." He kicked his horse and took off northward without looking back.

On his birthday, nine weeks to the day after Reuben returned home to Shasta, a man he didn't know came into his father's dry goods store. He looked around and said to Reuben, "You must be Reuben."

"Yes, I am. What can I do for you?"

"I waited till your pa left. I got something for you."

Reuben smiled as the man opened his long coat and took out a rifle. "From—"

"Merle!"

"Mr. Isaac Jacobs—says you'd understand. Also said to tell your pa to let you practice with it 'cause if he don't, Mr. Jacobs'll pop on down here and make sure he does."

It was lighter than the Winchester and more comfortable. He pulled it to his shoulder and held it tightly there while aiming out the window.

"Where is he?" Reuben asked.

"Said I shouldn't tell. You'd understand that, too."

"Yeah," Reuben said, putting down the rifle, "I guess I do. Thank you."

"Oh yeah," the man said. "He said to give you this." He handed Reuben a folded piece of paper. "Wrote it hisself," the man said. "Copied it over, really, 'cause he's still learning to make his letters."

For the first time in months, Reuben felt a hot rush behind his eyes. "Where is he?" Reuben asked again. "In case I want to go riding."

"Learning the lumber trade in Northern California—that's all I can say."

"Thank you," Reuben repeated and the man left the store. Reuben unfolded the single, dirty piece of paper.

Reuben,

It's a Stevens .25-20 single shot. It should not kick so hard. It's a good rifle and will do you until you get your full growth.

M.

BY Ellen Gray Massey

THE HOG LOT SHOOTING

Ocie Tulley frowned as she handed the neatly typed and bound manuscript back to the young man, who was eagerly awaiting her opinion. "Lies," she said. Behind her steel-rimmed glasses her eyebrows contracted, forming two deep lines in her forehead. "Mostly lies."

Affronted by her unexpected condemnation, he watched as, with steady hands, she tied her sunbonnet under her chin. The shadows from its stiff brim made her wrinkled face even blacker. Spurning the young man's help, she pulled herself from the chair with her homemade crutch and limped out to the porch of her clapboard cabin. She wiped the perspiration from her face with a flowered handkerchief from her apron pocket and, supporting herself with her crutch, stared across the dirt road at her hog lot.

"But..." Grayson's body stiffened at her blatant dismissal of his scholastic research. The presumption of this former schoolteacher!

ILLUSTRATION BY MARK WEAKLEY

And after all his efforts to find her, overcome her suspicions of him, and persuade her to read his thesis. When he had pointed to her brother's name in his paper, she had stopped shaking her head. Then she had opened the screen door to let him into her living room when he explained that he wanted to see the actual rooms in her house where the dead men were carried after the shooting.

Controlling his resentment, he pointed across the dirt road where she was looking and demanded she agree. "But wasn't over there where young Mort Killion fell over dead?"

"That's where he tumbled off his horse—right over the fence into my hog lot," Ocie said.

"And over there . . ." His lips tightened into a smug line as he pointed to their right, down and across the road about fifty yards to a big white oak tree in the woods pasture. "Over east there, isn't that where Oliver Larimore, the Pinkerton detective, was mortally wounded by Mort's brother?"

"That's where the last bullet hit him." Ocie nodded her head.

"Then how can you say my account of the gun battle is lies?"

" 'Cause them two fellers getting shot is about all you got right." Ocie eased her thin body into a homemade rocker on the porch, smoothing out her apron over her long print dress. Sighing, she rocked with a rhythmic squeak-rumble as the runners of her chair rolled back and forth across the cracks in the unpainted, rough oak floor of the porch.

"That was a long time ago," Grayson said, his frown deepening. He thumbed through the pages of his manuscript. "Perhaps you've forgotten."

"A long time, yes," Ocie agreed. "Forty-eight years last March. But I remember." Her eyes did not look at her indignant visitor, but continued to stare across the road.

Grayson sat on the steps, one foot swinging among the golden marigolds as if they and not the woman were opposing him. He looked alternately at his pages, at Ocie, and at the two fatal spots across the road, his eyes squinting in vexed concentration. A Model A breezed down the road, followed by a cloud of dust that settled on the hood and canvas top of Grayson's 1921 Buick touring car. Ocie's hogs grunted and nuzzled one another as they wallowed in the cool mud in the corner of the lot—the very spot where many years ago young Mort Killion finally lost consciousness and fell off his horse after earlier being hit with a bullet from the gun of Pinkerton detective Oliver Larimore.

"If you are the historian you claim to be, why didn't you wonder why Wally was guiding the detectives?" Ocie asked.

"And," Grayson insisted, "wasn't Mort Killion's body carried to your house—this one right here?"

Her eyebrows lowered as she nodded and pointed to her bedroom window, overlooking the porch. "And laid on my bed, hog manure and all."

Grayson's self-assurance was returning. "Well . . ."

"And Wally's body." Ocie mumbled so softly Grayson could barely hear her. Tears welled up in her black eyes. One tear coursed its way down a wrinkled path to her chin. She wiped it away with her handkerchief. "His body was here, too. Laid out on the porch." She tapped the spot beside her with her crutch.

"Yes. Yes, of course, your brother Wally."

"You don't hardly mention him in that story, 'cept to say he was a guide for the Pinkertons. Varmints like the Killion brothers and a famous detective from Chicago—that's all you write about." Her mouth tightened and her eyes never left his. "What about my brother? He was killed, too. All you said about him was, 'The Pinkertons' Negro guide was killed in the gunfire.' "

Grayson looked away, his haughty manner softening. "Perhaps I should have talked with you before writing this."

Ocie nodded again, in time with her rocking. "If you are the historian you claim to be, you sure enough should have. Didn't you wonder why Wally was guiding the detectives? Or why they were all here at his place? Written history ought to answer such important questions. Ought to have the facts straight."

Grayson threw his shoulders back and raised his head, once again angry that she dared to criticize him—to censure *him*, a noted authority on guerrilla activities on the Missouri-Kansas border before, during, and after the Civil War. In a voice louder than necessary, as if lecturing to his freshman university class, he blurted, "I have read every word that has ever been written about the gun battle. I read the reports from the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, and . . ." he paused to give emphasis to this fact,

". . . and I interviewed Guy Killion himself up there in the penitentiary before he got paroled." He paused to let the magnitude of this sink in.

Ocie grunted as if to say, "So what?"

"Guy Killion was the only surviving witness to the shooting in which his younger brother Mort and the Pinkerton detective Oliver Larimore were killed," Grayson continued. "And *he* described it to me in great detail."

Though Ocie looked straight at Grayson, her negative expression did not change. "Lies," she said.

Irritated by her attitude, Grayson opened his manuscript. "He drew a map—see, here it is. I was impressed by him. He didn't seem a cold-blooded killer. His manner was reserved, but courteous. He told exactly where everyone was and what happened."

She grunted again.

"Hell, woman!" He'd had about enough of her disrespect. Looking from the map to the hog lot and big oak tree across the road, he explained as if to a child, "The map is accurate. Guy had already been caught, tried, convicted, and had about served out his time. Even seemed sorry. Why would he lie, especially since what he said about the event corroborated all the written testimonies?"

"Event?" she snorted at his choice of word.

Ocie pressed her lips tightly together. Her hands clutched the worn arms of the chair as she increased the tempo of her rocking. The gentle squeak-rumble became an ominous crackling, almost like gunshots as the wooden runners slammed across the cracks.

Grayson patted the rust-colored cover of his manuscript defensively. "Yes, this is a carefully researched and documented thesis. Because of its thoroughness, I've been asked to present a reading at the Western Historical Society annual meeting next month in Kansas City."

"Guy Killion wasn't the only surviving witness to the shooting?" Grayson asked, aghast.

The noise of the rocker stopped. The only sound now was an occasional squeal from a pig across the road.

Grayson looked up from his manuscript at Ocie. The pinkish palm of her right hand pushed back into the recess of her bonnet a strand of kinky white hair. In the shadow of the bonnet brim, her eyes were soot black and flared in disagreement.

Aghast, Grayson suddenly understood her resentment and guessed what she wasn't telling him. "Guy Killion *wasn't* the only surviving witness to the shooting?"

Ocie's hands relaxed and her eyes softened as she resumed her gentle rocking motion.

"*You* saw it all!" Excitement replaced Grayson's irritation.

Ocie's eyes rolled at his stupidity.

"Why didn't you say so?" Grayson asked. The researcher in him was eager to learn what she knew. "In all the reports and coverage, the only mention ever made of you was that the wounded detective died here in your house."

Ocie wiped her face again with her handkerchief, but said nothing.

Suspecting her reluctance to speak was due to fear of retaliation from the other Killion brothers, Grayson said gently, "Didn't you know, Mrs. Tulley, that Guy Killion is dead now?"

Ocie released a barely audible sigh. She shifted in her chair to face him better.

"Yes, he died last month. Guy was the last of the four Killion brothers," Grayson said. "There is no longer any danger from any of them."

Ocie's rocking slowed to an occasional squeak as she studied Grayson's face. Her lips relaxed their thin, tight line, showing their red fullness.

Holding up his manuscript, he said, "Okay, since you say what I've written is lies, then tell me what did happen."

For the first time since his arrival Ocie smiled, her white false teeth gleaming in her black face, giving her a youthful, pixielike appearance. With another glance at the hog lot where Mort Killion had fallen dead, she braked the rocking movement of her chair with her good foot, leaned forward, and looked Grayson in the face. One historian to another, she began her story.

The last gun battle of the war was right here in March of 1874. Here in western Missouri the Civil War didn't end in sixty-five like it did everywhere else. The Killions, Jesse and Frank James, and some other Bushwhacker trash like them liked the shooting, killing, stealing, and raping so much that they just kept on. Kept killing northern sympathizers and helping themselves to anything they wanted—even robbing banks and trains. And what local law there was couldn't, or wouldn't, do much about it.

My brother and I were born slaves. After the war we saved enough for the down payment on

As long as the Killions just preyed on ordinary folks, not much was done to catch them.

this forty acres here. Some of our relatives had farms near us—lots of coloreds in the neighborhood. We farmed, mostly raising and butchering hogs like I still do, but to get cash to meet our yearly mortgage payments, Wally worked some at the docks on the Osage at River Bend when there was enough water that steamboats could travel that far upstream. Other times he took what jobs he could find in town—like guiding cattle buyers.

Before I started teaching, I worked some at the hotel. Coloreds didn't make as much as the whites, but the community of former slaves here in this neighborhood then helped one another. Whites and coloreds together, we got along.

The Killion brothers were often in this vicinity 'cause they had lots of sympathy among the white folks here. Some of the colored, too. The Killions were sort of heroes because they were part of the gang that burned out Lawrence, Kansas, in sixty-three after the Kansas Jayhawkers burned down River Bend two years earlier.

Well, anyways, the Killions would hole up around here in between jobs in this rough, hilly country. Along the bends in the river there were lots of good hiding places and good bluff lookouts. People hid them. The sheriff and other lawmen could never catch them.

Ocie's eyes narrowed and her lips tightened. The pitch of her voice rose as she talked.

"But they didn't get sympathy from you?" Grayson asked.

She shook her head vigorously. "They thought they did. They'd stop here—we're right on the road, you know—and make me fix them a meal. They'd carry away with them anything they wanted. Wally had to rub down their horses and feed them. They never paid anything. Just thought it was due them—treated us like slaves again, ordered us around, and threatened to shoot us if we ever told the sheriff about them. Would have, too. We did what they wanted. We had to put up with all kinds of people in order to survive."

"It was a terrible time," Grayson agreed.

"The four brothers would ride in pairs. Never all together. If something happened to one pair, the other retaliated." Pinpoints of hate came into Ocie's eyes.

"Did they ever . . ." Grayson hesitated, wondering how to ask about the worst of all crimes against women.

"Yes," Ocie said. "That stinking, red-headed Mort Killion . . ." She clenched her gnarly fists as if strangling the outlaw. "Mort Killion came by time after time. The others would stand by and laugh, make vulgar jokes. Called me pig and lots of other words I won't say. To them I was no better than those hogs across the road. Only afterward I could cook for them."

"So what did you do?"

The sympathy in Grayson's eyes encouraged her. "Wally and me, we figured out a plan to trap them."

"Tell me," Grayson said, leaning forward to catch every word.

As long as the Killions just preyed on ordinary folks, not much was done to catch them. But when they started robbing banks and trains, then not only the local sheriff, but hotshot detectives hired by the railroad came looking for them.

One day in March of 1874, two city fellers checked into the hotel while I was working. They said they were cattle buyers and asked around if anyone had cattle to sell. Now, Wally and me thought they were too well armed to be cattle buyers. They didn't carry the regular Smith & Wesson rifles or Colt pistols like most of the local men did. Wally said that they had an English-made gun called the Trantor, a .43 caliber with a 5-7/8-inch barrel. I know guns. I remember.

Now, the guns aroused suspicions that these fellers might be lawmen, especially since there had been another railroad robbery north of River Bend a few weeks before. Talk was that the Killions had done it. The sheriff had been around earlier asking everyone about them. But he quit looking after a few days.

The cattle buyers hung around the bars and on the square listening to the gossip, we thought, hoping to get some information about the Killions. So we figured this was our chance. When the cattle buyers—one was Oliver Larimore; I forget the other—when they asked for a guide to show them where they could find some cattle to buy, Wally took the job. They planned on leaving the next morning.

I pretended to be sick so I wouldn't have to go to work at the hotel. The timing was right, for we knew that two of the Killion brothers, Mort and Guy, were staying the night with the O'Connors—some folks catty-cornered

across the section from us. We didn't know whether they would stay there for noon dinner the next day or come to our place, as they often did. But we knew they would stop by sometime during the day. I stayed home so when they came, I could keep them here until Wally maneuvered the detectives to capture them.

The road leading to the farm where they could buy the cattle went right by the O'Connor place. To check out the house, Detective Larimore went to the door pretending to get directions and to ask if they had any cattle to sell, while Wally and the other feller waited out in the road on their horses. Larimore chatted pleasantly a few minutes, learning that O'Connor had no cattle but a woman down the road did. O'Connor gave him directions to her house—the same woman that Wally was taking them to.

While there, Larimore looked around for any trace of the Killions. O'Connor was nervous and seemed to want him to leave quickly. Though Larimore's trained eye didn't see any evidence that the brothers were there, he believed from O'Connor's manner that they were close.

Meanwhile, the other detective glanced around outside the best he could without causing suspicions. He noticed that there were more horse tracks in the dirt than one family would make, but he decided that if the tracks belonged to the outlaws, they had already left because many of them headed north.

Grayson interrupted. "How do you know all these details? Those men were all killed, and you were here at the time."

Ocie gave her pixielike grin. "Yes, I was here, right on this porch almost where you are now, listening and watching for the horses."

"Then you couldn't know what they saw at the O'Connors'. You're making all this up."

Shaking her head, Ocie held up her hand for him to be patient.

Well, the Killions *were* at the O'Connor place all along, even though the detective fellers didn't know it. The outlaws had heard the horsemen coming down the road and climbed to the attic, where they could see the room below as well as outside. They knew how to keep out of sight. They had already hidden their horses back in the timber behind the house.

I can't believe that those detectives didn't suspect anything. I'm sure Wally did. Then they did another dumb thing. O'Connor told later that the Killions watched them leave. But instead of going straight north on the main road to the woman with the cattle, Larimore led them northwest on an old trail that cut across to our house.

Wally tried to get him back on the main road. Now, even though Wally knew the men were not cattle buyers, the men didn't know that he knew this, so Wally could only object, and then go along with them. Wally didn't tell them of our plan—wouldn't have paid any attention to him anyways, for white folks think we are stupid. He intended to tell them when he saw that the Killions were in our house.

Our plan was simple. When the brothers arrived, I would feed them as always in the kitchen, where you can't see the road. While they were eating, I'd get their guns, or at least maneuver them so that their guns were not handy. Then Wally and the detectives could surround the place and capture them.

But for this to work, Wally needed to keep the detectives away long enough to give the Killions time to get here. Going down the road a piece to ask about the cattle would do that. Then, while the detectives haggled with the woman over the sale, Wally could watch and listen for the Killions to leave O'Connor's house and ride to our place. Wally probably saw something at O'Connor's that told him the Killions were still there. But Larimore's cutting across and getting to our house first ruined our plan, so Wally could only go along with them, playing dumb.

Meanwhile, back at O'Connor's, Mort Killion was convinced that the heavily armed strangers were detectives when they didn't follow O'Connor's directions to the cattle. Rather than let them go on their way, he convinced his more cautious brother to chase after them.

"I'll get rid of them," he bragged to O'Connor. "Think they can fool me!"

Here at home, I was about to decide that we had missed them, when instead of from the east road, where I was watching for riders, I heard horses coming on

"Wally stopped by the hog shed and waved me back into the house. We both knew this was trouble," Ocie said.

the old trail across the field from behind.

At first I thought it was the Killions, who sometimes took that trail. I was excited, but trembly all over, thinking that our trap was working. Then my heart gave a skip when I recognized Wally's roan pull ahead of the other two to the road in front of our house, where he knew I'd be watching. He stopped by the hog shed. We signaled each other that we hadn't seen the Killions. He also waved me back into the house. We both knew this was trouble.

I watched the two Pinkerton men cautiously ride up, guns out, ready for the outlaws. Larimore, on a bay mare, was in the rear. Seeing everything was quiet, they joined Wally, who waved them on.

> **"Though he was bleeding, Mort spurred his horse after Larimore. He was weaving from side to side, his hair falling into his face," Ocie said.**

The first detective reached the hog lot just as we heard horsemen galloping up the trail.

I grabbed the rifle from under my bed and crouched in the front room under this window that overlooks the porch and out across the road to the hog lot.

Mort Killion, his face as red as the hair stringing from under his hat, was carrying a double-barreled shotgun. Guy, more cautious, with his head turning in all directions, had one pistol drawn and another in plain sight in his gun belt. Hearing the hoofbeats, the first Pinkerton man spurred his horse west down the road and disappeared around the bend. No one around here ever heard of him since that day.

Pointing his gun alternately at Wally and Larimore, and backed up by Guy's gun, Mort Killion yelled out as he rode up to them, "Drop yer guns, dammit."

Wally let go of his like it was burning hot. Larimore swore, but dropped his, also.

Wally cried out, "Mort, it's me, Wally. These here fellers are only cattle buyers from the city. They jest this morning hired me to guide 'em."

Guy was behind his brother. Alert, his eyes now watching Wally and Larimore, Guy dismounted slowly, dropping his reins to the ground. His gelding stood quiet in the middle of the road. Without taking his eyes off Larimore and Wally, he pocketed Wally's pistol and then picked up Larimore's fancy English gun.

"You're in bad company, boy," Guy said to Wally. "This here feller looks like a detective to me." He studied Larimore's gun, pushing up the brim of his hat to see it better. "This ain't no cattle buyer's gun."

"Aw, Guy, a man's got to carry a good gun. You know with all the killin' and robbin' 'round here you've got to have good guns to protect yourself," Wally said.

Poised like an animal ready to pounce at any second, Mort glared through the sights of his gun at Larimore. Larimore knew his danger, but sat very still, watching Mort closely. The gun battle began while Guy was momentarily distracted, talking with Wally. Mort squeezed the trigger just a fraction of a second before Larimore shot Mort with a number two Smith & Wesson he pulled from his gray coat.

Both men were wounded. Mort's shot struck Larimore in the right shoulder. Larimore's bullet went through Mort's shoulder near his collarbone. The red blood that spread over his coat was brighter than his hair, which almost covered the wound.

Larimore's bay mare reared at the shot. Guy's horse, which was only ground-tied, ran off, bucking and neighing in fright.

Guy swirled around, crouched, and shot at Larimore. His bullet went high.

With his left hand, Larimore neck-reined his excited mare up the road east and quickly cut off north into the woods for protection. Standing in the stirrups and turning back to fire again, he didn't see the low-hanging limb that caught him across his side just under his shoulder wound. As his horse galloped on, he fell to the ground, his gun flying a good twelve feet away and clattering on some rocks. Larimore didn't move. He was just a gray bump in the leaves and mosses under the white oak tree.

Though bleeding, Mort spurred his horse after Larimore. Weaving from side to side, his long hair falling into his face, he held on to the saddlehorn with one hand to keep his seat. Cursing and yelling, he pulled up short when he reached the fallen detective. Seeing that he didn't move, Mort fired two careless shots into Larimore's sprawled body. Then he reined his horse back toward Guy, who was still standing in the road with his gun pointed at Wally.

Wally was crying, "I don't know

nothin' about detectives, Guy. I was jest . . ."

This was when Mort stopped at the hog lot fence. He steadied himself in the saddle, leveled his gun, shot once, turned swiftly around in his saddle, and shot again. There was a third shot almost at the same time as Mort's second shot. Like a sack of corn that had been dangling from the saddlehorn, Mort Killion dropped dead from the saddle, toppling over the rail fence into our hog lot.

Ocie paused, her chin resting on her chest. Her bonnet completely hid her face.

Grayson said nothing for a few seconds. When Ocie lifted her head, her face was wet. This time she let the tears drop unwiped from her chin.

"And your brother?" Grayson asked gently. "It was him that Mort shot just before he fell?"

She gave one brief nod, then tapped the fingers of her right hand on the chair arm as she continued.

I have to back up a bit. Remember, Guy was on the ground picking up the guns and talking to Wally when the shooting began. Guy's first shot at Larimore missed him, but being the coolheaded one, he kept his gun sighted on Larimore's back as the detective fled. Guy couldn't fire again for fear of hitting his brother.

During this, Wally was still sitting there in the road on his roan. Too late to run like the other detective did. He couldn't outrun Guy's bullet, and besides, Wally wasn't their enemy—the detective was. If he sat still, Wally wasn't worried about Guy. But Mort? A different matter. Both Wally and I kept our eyes on him, hoping he would fall from his wound.

Mort was wild and swearing savagely when he returned from chasing and putting those two extra shots into Larimore's body. Mort paused at the hog lot fence. He steadied himself in the saddle and deliberately pointed his big navy pistol at Wally. He murdered him—shot him through the neck. Wally dropped to the ground almost at Guy's feet.

> **"The shooting brought the neighbors running right quick," Ocie said. "I stashed my rifle under my bed and sneaked out the back."**

Noticing a slight movement from Larimore, like he was after his gun, Mort fired one last time in his direction. Just as he made that wild shot, a bullet knocked him off his horse.

There were three bodies on the ground now—Wally in the road, Mort in the hog lot, and Larimore under the oak tree. Only Guy was left.

When Wally fell, Guy booted him over to make sure he was dead. Kicked my brother just like he was a thieving coyote! Guy swore something I couldn't hear and then ran to the lot, where Mort had fallen. Pushing the hogs out of his way, he waded into the mire of the pen and knelt to see that his brother was truly dead. He removed Mort's watch and pistols and rummaged through his pockets for other personal belongings. Seething with rage and looking all about, he then glared at our house, straight to the window where I was crouched.

Ocie's voice broke so that she had to stop talking.

Grayson stared at her in amazement. *"You* were the one who killed Mort Killion, not Oliver Larimore!"

Ocie nodded. "Larimore's pistol shot at the beginning of the shooting wounded Mort, but my bullet finished him. It was what knocked him over the fence into the hog pen."

"Did Guy see you?"

"No."

"Hear the shot?"

"It was at almost the same time Mort fired at Larimore. Hard to distinguish."

"But you don't know for sure he didn't hear it?" Grayson asked.

"No."

"And you've lived all these years afraid that Guy would someday . . ." Grayson didn't finish. He dropped his manuscript in admiration.

Ocie resumed her quiet rocking. Her whole body seemed to be agreeing as it rocked forward and backward.

"You could have shot Guy also. Why didn't you?"

"He didn't shoot my brother. Could have, but didn't. Mort was the mean one."

"In my interview with Guy in prison, he didn't tell it like this. He said Larimore shot first. He bragged about how Mort, though mortally wounded with Larimore's bullet, did all that riding and shooting until he finally keeled over. That was the way he said it happened."

"Larimore's bullet only hit his shoulder. Mine went through his heart."

"But why did Guy look toward the house if he didn't see you?"

Ocie shrugged her shoulders.

"We buried Wally quick, cause we feared with so many white strangers around, the crowd might turn ugly," Ocie said.

" 'Course, he wouldn't tell the story the way it really happened. Couldn't let anyone know that a colored person killed the notorious Mort Killion—and a woman, at that. More fitting end to be killed by a Pinkerton man in a gun battle."

Grayson's respect increased. "And here you've outlived them all."

"Probably."

"What do you mean, probably?" Just when he thought he had the complete story, Ocie kept giving new hints. "Except you, everyone involved in that gun battle is dead now that Guy has died."

"Maybe not." Ocie's stubborn stance indicated there was more to her story.

"How's that possible?"

The shooting brought the neighbors running right quick. I stashed my rifle under my bed and sneaked out the back. I swung around to the front when the others got there, like I'd been working in the garden and had just heard the shots. Guy was stomping around in a violent temper, giving orders to carry Mort's body into my house. He ordered the O'Connor boy to stand guard over him. 'I'll come back and shoot you if anyone harms his body," he said.

Guy would have, too, even though the O'Connors were friends. Hadn't his brother just killed Wally, who was his friend? Guy wanted to make sure no one would molest the body, like cut off his head or string him up.

Then, before the sheriff could get there, Guy rode Mort's horse south to Arkansas to join his two other brothers.

The neighbors who came were concerned with caring for Larimore, for he wasn't dead, though he had Mort's three bullets in him. The men carried him onto Wally's bed.

And Wally? No one paid any attention to him, for they were either scared of Guy, working on Larimore, or were busy running to River Bend after the sheriff and doctor. Poor Wally was of no consequence. 'Cept to me.

I grabbed an old quilt, spread it in the dirt beside him there in the road, and rolled him over onto it. Then I wrapped it around him and dragged him to the porch. By lifting his head and shoulders and then his legs, I managed to get him out of the sun, up on the porch.

Just when I had him stretched out and was putting pebbles on his eyes to keep them closed, Guy Killion stomped out of the house after seeing to Mort's body. His angry eyes held mine for several seconds, like he was trying to decide what to do. Without saying a word, he jumped off the porch, climbed on his horse, and galloped off. I never saw him again. Or either of his two surviving brothers.

"You still haven't explained. You and Guy *were* the only survivors of the battle. Now, since Guy's death, *you* are the only one left. For sure Guy didn't tell you what happened at the O'Connors', so how did you know?"

"Oliver Larimore told me."

"But he was in a coma until he died the next day. The sheriff and the doctor both testified to that."

"More lies," Ocie said.

Grayson knew he had to let Ocie tell her story in her own way. "Then . . ."

It didn't take the sheriff and his deputies long to make the two miles from town. They were here not fifteen minutes after Guy left. The sheriff had one man stay to guard Larimore while the rest followed Guy's trail. Never caught up with him, though.

The doctor arrived soon after. I was trying to prepare Wally's body for burial, but the doctor grabbed me to help with Larimore. He dug out three bullets, just like your account says, but they weren't where you said. One was in his right shoulder, one in his thigh, and the other hit his hand—they weren't all in his chest, as you wrote in your paper.

Now, that Oliver Larimore was no dummy. He had pretended to be dead or in a coma so the Killions would leave him alone. But he wasn't dead, though he was bad off. The doctor fixed him up that evening, telling me what to do after he left and promising to come back in the morning.

By this time there was a crowd of people out here—not just the neighbors, but people from town and miles away. Ignoring me like I didn't exist, they helped themselves to the food in my kitchen. They raided the cellar and smokehouse, and even milked the cow. You'd have thought my house was Main Street in front of the courthouse the way everybody tramped through it, viewing Mort Killion's body and talking about what had happened. 'Course, none of them knew.

Old Mr. O'Connor was the loudest. He told his story over and over to each newcomer—how the Killion brothers had forced him to put them up the night before, and about the cattle-buying strangers stopping. He boasted that he had known right away that they were Pinkerton detectives. He'd look through the door at Larimore's unconscious body lying in Wally's bed and brag, "Yup, soon as I seen this here feller, I knowed he was a detective. 'Course, I didn't tell the Killions that."

Stories got magnified as they were told. Instead of the eight shots actually fired, the talk made at least twenty. How with a bullet from a Pinkerton Trantor in his heart, Mort Killion did all that riding and straight shooting. He became a sort of hero right there.

I didn't think I could stand it. Here was my own murdered brother lying out on the porch, almost at their feet, but they paid no more mind to him than if he'd been one of our hogs that got shot by a stray bullet.

As the doctor stepped out on the porch after finishing with Larimore, he shook his head and told the crowd milling around, "Pretty bad shape. Don't think he'll last the night." Then he ordered me, "Go tend to him."

When I laid my hand on his forehead to check his fever, Larimore whispered to me, "I'm all right for now. Go see about your brother." Then he closed his eyes again as he lost consciousness.

That was the first human act I'd seen all afternoon. Here he was on his deathbed, and ever since the first shot from Mort Killion's gun had plowed into him at the beginning of the gun battle, the only words Larimore spoke were concern for me.

My relatives and me, we buried Wally that evening. We buried him quick 'cause we feared with so many white strangers around, the crowd might turn ugly.

Even during the night my house and yard were full of men. Several of them took turns guarding Mort's body. Thought it an honor. Think of the tales they would tell the rest of their lives about the famous Bushwhacker. The deputy popped himself in a chair right outside Wally's bedroom, where Larimore lay, for he feared that one of the Killion brothers might come back to finish what they had started.

I stayed beside Larimore the whole night. It was the safest place to be with the deputy guarding the room. Also, I didn't trust anyone else to see to Larimore. I did what the doctor told me and some other things that I knew to do. My mother was a healer and I knew lots of cures. So I tended him.

He roused several times during the night. Careful not to let anyone else see that he was awake, he smiled his thanks and mumbled a few words. I couldn't make out all he said. "My fault about your brother." "Shouldn't have . . ." "You saved my life."

At first I thought he was saying that my nursing him saved his life, but when he added, "Good shot," and, "Have finished me if you hadn't . . ." I knew my nursing him wasn't what he meant at all.

The medicine the doctor gave him dulled his pain so that he could sleep for short periods. In between he'd ramble, worried about my danger from the Killions and how his wife would manage if he died. He worried about the baby they were expecting. He'd grab my hand, confusing me with his wife.

Toward morning his fever broke. His eyes were clear, his mind rational. We talked freely, as everyone else in the house was asleep.

"You're still in lots of danger," I told him as I removed the bloody bandage from his thigh wound.

He nodded that he knew that. "But not from the wounds?"

I shook my head. We both knew where the danger was. "Everyone thinks that you killed Mort Killion."

He nodded again. "Good. That's how it should be."

"As soon as the other Killions hear that you shot their brother, they will join Guy to hunt you down no matter where you go. They operate as far as Chicago."

"I know."

Grayson jumped up in his excitement. His manuscript spilled unnoticed down the porch steps.

We needed a plan. Though my plan to trap the Killions had cost me my brother, I knew that Larimore's survival, and mine, depended on our coming up with some scheme. This time we had to work together to outwit them. Too late I realized that Wally and I could have shared our plan with Larimore. He'd have listened.

"The doctor told everyone that you won't last the night," I said. "But you're not that bad."

As I put on the fresh dressing and wrapped his thigh with strips torn from my sheets, he caught my hand, held it a moment, and gave it a squeeze of gratitude. He

studied my face like he wanted to memorize it.

I mulled over the problem of the Killions for a few minutes, planning how to keep Larimore safe. "You've been in a coma ever since you were brought in here and . . ."

"Most of the time I've been faking that," he interrupted.

"That's what I figured."

Right then I knew the idea I'd been hatching might work. I glanced around to make sure nobody was awake and whispered, "Now let's fake your death."

Larimore grinned. "Can we carry it off?"

"If you're up to it, we can put you in a coffin and cart you out of here to the railroad and ship you back to Chicago."

"I'm ready."

"I'll put a crowbar under you, and when the train gets under way, you can pry off the lid, get out, and hammer the lid back on."

"And my wife . . ." He smiled as he thought of her. "She could have a funeral for me in Chicago and bury the empty coffin?"

"Exactly. The Killions will never bother you."

We discussed the idea, carefully working out all the details so that no one would ever suspect he didn't die from the gunshot wounds, like the doctor predicted.

Grayson's astonishment increased as Ocie talked. "And your plan worked?"

"Yes." The squeak-rumble of Ocie's rocker started again.

"Did he get safely back to Chicago?"

"Yes." Ocie's body was relaxed, her face beautiful in its new peace.

"How do you know?"

"I got a card. Want to see it?"

Grayson jumped up in his excitement. His manuscript spilled unnoticed down the porch steps and landed among the marigolds. "You bet!" This was documented proof of Ocie's story.

Ocie grasped her crutch to stand up. Grayson stepped over to help her. "I can do it, young man," she scolded him, and then laid her hand gently on his arm, patting him in apology for her rudeness. "Sorry, young feller, I guess I'm too independent, but I've been alone for a long time."

Letting the screen door slam behind her, she disappeared into her house. Before Grayson thought it possible, she was back again, pushing her bonnet off her head so that it dangled from its straps down her back. He could clearly see her elfish grin as she handed him a faded and worn penny postcard.

Handling it reverently, he read Ocie's name and address and noted the postmark and date: "Chicago, Illinois, May 12, 1874." He turned the card over and read aloud the unsigned note.

"Our baby boy's name is Wally." ⊞

THE CAT KING OF COCHISE COUNTY

PEOPLE IN SALT LAKE CITY CALLED CHICKENWIRE CHICKENWIRE ON ACCOUNT OF THE DEVICE HE'D COME UP WITH TO KEEP CHICKENS FROM BEING EATEN BY ELDER EVILSIZER'S BOAR, DEUTERONOMY.

THE BUSINESS HAD STARTED WHEN SISTER GERTRUDE, THE ELDER'S PRIMARY WIFE, HAD FED THE CARCASS OF A HEN TO THE HOGS BECAUSE SHE WASN'T SUFFICIENTLY CERTAIN OF WHAT HAD KILLED IT TO COOK IT AND DIDN'T FEEL LIKE DIGGING A HOLE. THE HOGS, PARTICULARLY OLD DEUTERONOMY, DISCOVERED A TASTE FOR CHICKEN, AND AFTER THAT WHENEVER A BIRD STRAYED NEAR, THE LAST IMAGE ITS PEA BRAIN CARRIED TO PULLET PARADISE WAS OF THE BOAR'S HAIRY SNOUT AND GNASHING TEETH. FEATHERS, BONES, BEAKS, AND CLAWS WERE ALL GRIST FOR DEUTERONOMY'S MILL; OFTEN ONLY A FURIOUS PATTERN IN THE DUST OF THE BARNYARD AND A PEPPER OF BLOOD REMAINED TO TIE UP THE MYSTERY OF

BY LOREN D. ESTLEMAN

the diminishing local chicken population.

It wasn't long before the aging swine's dietary preference led it to neighboring farms, which was the reason a committee of whisker-faced, sad-eyed Mormons showed up at Chickenwire's mercantile store to ask him for some miracle that would protect their best layers from the predatory pig. Shooting the offender was out of the question. So, too, was demanding that Elder Evilsizer take measures to keep his boar at home where it belonged. The violence of the elder's disposition, compounded by his reputation as one of the last of the Destroying Angels involved in the Mountain Meadows Massacre, was legend, preventing any word or action on the part of his gentler neighbors that might call down his wrath.

Chickenwire's response was to fashion a net from spools of wire he had rescued from a wagon abandoned by Western Union in the Shoshone country north of the Great Salt Lake. He reasoned that by stretching the screen around skates encircling the birds' scratching ground to keep Deuteronomy out, and above their heads to keep the chickens in, the farmers might put an end to the bloodshed without inviting retaliation.

The theory proved sound. The wire was bought, the pens built, and the pig, after a number of unsuccessful attempts to breach Ilium, was forced to settle for the turnips in its trough, together with such game as it could find out on the great alkali plain.

Moreover, the idea turned out to be an invention that outlasted its original necessity. Months after Deuteronomy got hold of a bad prairie hen and finished its existence on the Evilsizers' dinner table, orders for the remarkable wire continued to stream in. There were still wolves and stray dogs to contend with, and the participating Mormons' many wives had reported a secondary benefit in being able to cross their yards without dragging their hems through fresh droppings. Chickenwire, whose vision was not always equal to his entrepreneurial spirit, had reason when he parted with his last thirty feet to regret not commandeering the entire wagonload when he'd had the chance.

He only saw the prospector once, but what the man said changed Chickenwire's life.

When he came to think about it, however, he thought perhaps it was just as well he ran out when he did. The wire was devilish to work with, having slashed up a dozen pairs of leather gloves he'd hoped to sell at a profit, and he was confident that as word got around that his store was no longer a source of the stuff, the farmers would stop calling him Chickenwire. Born Michael Aloysius McDonough, he had been known as Iron Mike in the California gold camps, where he'd made his grubstake knocking down miners for wagers. He much preferred that address; although the thirty years since he'd given up prospecting and come to make his way as a Gentile among the Latter-Day Saints had packed forty extra pounds around his impressive musculature, he still introduced himself as Iron Mike.

He'd liked the raw life of the camps. Successful man of commerce that he was, he missed the rough company and unpredictable nature of a place that could double its population almost overnight once a major lode was uncovered, or lose a citizen in a heartbeat when the same card turned up twice in a poker game in one of the tents. Most of all he missed the candor. The Mormons were much like everyone else as to percentages of good and bad, but altogether too civilized for a man who liked to know right off what sort of person he was dealing with. In the camps you knew where you stood. If a man didn't like you he came at you with something, fists or a shotgun or some kind of club. In Salt Lake City he mouthed pleasantries to your face while spreading stories behind your back that the flour you sold contained rat poison.

It was fitting, then, that Chickenwire McDonough's vague dissatisfaction with his current circumstances should be turned into action by a man from the camps.

From the moment the fellow entered the store, some two or three weeks after the last ten yards of wire had been sold, it was obvious he was no Mormon. His beard was too scraggly, for one thing—more the result of late unfamiliarity with a razor than deliberate cultivation—and his filthy slouch hat, sun-blanched flannel shirt, and torn overalls were as far from the sober black that the faithful wore to town as one could come. He read aloud from a list scribbled in thick pencil on a greasy scrap of paper he held close to his sunken, red-ringed eyes. They were the items that a man traveling a long distance would request: axle grease, flour, cartridges, iodine for cuts and fistulas, beans, brogans, coal oil, and four sacks of Arbuckle's.

"Homesteading?" Chickenwire totaled the order in his ledger.

"Prospecting." The stranger's vocal cords grated against each other like hacksaw blades. "Bound for Montana and silver."

"I hear silver's growing scarce up that way."

"I don't care. It's too cold there for rats and that's good enough for me."

"Rats?"

"They're big as rabbits in Arizona. Had me a nice little claim a day's ride out of Tombstone, but the rats run me out. I can put up with lice and Apaches and highwaymen, but I sure don't warm to waking up with a large gray rat chewing on my big toe."

"Can't you trap them?"

"Not the ones in Cochise County. They're too smart for traps. Some of 'em's smarter than either one of my partners. I sold out to them finally and hauled my freight north. My partners, not the rats; though they're big enough to do their share of the digging, and that's a fact."

"The cats down there must be lazy."

"Not lazy. Scarce. Cats go with barns. Ain't no barns down there, nor farmers to build 'em. Just miners and Mexicans. Mexicans don't keep cats."

Chickenwire ran broken-knuckled fingers through his whiskers. "How's the dirt?"

"Rich as Vanderbilt. The Can-Can Restaurant sells ham in champagne sauce. Two bucks a throw, and they run out every Saturday. Them nuggets don't get time to knock the dirt off on their way to some fancy man's pocket in town."

The prospector paid for his supplies in silver and carried them out. Chickenwire never saw him again, and in time forgot his features. But what he'd said changed the merchant's life.

When young Lemuel Dent reported to the mercantile the next morning for his part-time delivery duties, he found the proprietor gummy-eyed from lack of sleep but sparking with energy from some unknown source.

"How many friends you got, boy?"

Lemuel considered. His employer was perched on his stool behind the counter with a brand-new ledger flayed open before him. The pages were black with figures and the countertop was a litter of short chewed yellow pencils. It was obvious he'd been doing sums all night. At inventory time, Chickenwire's temper was shorter than his pencils, and a thing to tread carefully around. "I don't know," answered the boy; and because that didn't seem specific enough he added, "Some."

"Round them up. There's a quarter in it for you if you can have them here by noon."

"A NICKEL I WILL PAY FOR EVERY STRAY CAT YOU BRING ME BETWEEN NOW AND SUNDOWN," CHICKENWIRE SAID.

Youthful avarice flared in Lemuel's eyes, slightly crossed since an encounter he regretted with a mule's left hind foot on his tenth birthday. "What do I say?"

"Tell them there's money to be made."

In the boy's absence, more than one potential customer found Chickenwire's door locked and the CLOSED sign in the window. Had they been able to peer around the shade, they'd have seen the storekeeper removing slats from his inventory of wooden crates and replacing them with scraps of wire formerly deemed too short to mess with. By the time Lemuel rapped at the door, accompanied by eight of his closest friends and one or two boys he didn't like at all, Chickenwire had finished nine of a projected twenty cagelike contraptions, complete with doors hung on leather hinges and secured with tenpenny nails on the sliding-bolt principle.

Mopping his great bony brow with a smeared bandanna, the proprietor surveyed this bounty of boys barefoot and brogan-shod, overalled and knickerbockered, dirty-faced and scrubbed pink. At length he grunted his approval and ostentatiously surrendered a disk of shining silver to the young man responsible, who pocketed it without ceremony. This transaction was observed closely by his companions, who then looked to Chickenwire for their share in the bonanza.

"A fifth part of that," he announced. "Five cents, if you don't know your fractions. A nickel I will pay for every stray cat you lads bring to me between now and sundown. A dollar extra to the young fellow who delivers the most. *Healthy* cats, mind. I'll not pay for mange or palsy. Fly, now!"

The command provoked a thunder of feet and a brief scuffle on the threshold as a number of lithe bodies attempted to pass through a single doorway at the same time.

What occurred in the streets between midday and dusk on that date has achieved regional immortality as the Great Cat Hunt of Salt Lake City, and requires no extrapolation here. Suffice it to say the next day's *Deseret News* reported two discharges of rock

salt by homeowners at undersize prowlers vaulting over back fences with wailing felines clamped beneath their arms, and one close call involving a dray wagon when a skinny youth in corduroys dived in front of the horses to snatch a flying Siamese. By the time these and similar incidents were connected with the increased demand at apothecary shops for iodine to treat cat scratches, and the whole traced to their source, Chickenwire McDonough had crossed the territorial line, unaware of the animus against him.

In his defense it must be stated that when the day was done and the merchant found himself, among the noisy multitude, in possession of two cats wearing collars and bells, he instructed the boys who had brought them to return them to their owners: *"Stray* cats, I said!" The rest he paid for. The promised bonus went to Fatty Ambrose, whose corpulence did not prevent him from depositing no fewer than seventeen cats in the mercantile's back room.

The tally, once the boys had been ushered out with pockets jingling, came to forty-six, including thirteen tabbies, ten calicos, seven black witch's familiars, six tigers, one blue Angora, and nine hollow-flanked alley veterans of indeterminate color and pattern. Reluctantly—for he calculated their collective worth to be sixty dollars—Chickenwire released six cats by way of the back door; two per cage was crowding things well enough, and he needed to eliminate as many casualties due to disease and fights as possible during the long journey ahead.

Every inch of which, he reasoned, would prove well worth the inconvenience.

For if the miners around Tombstone were content to part with two extremely hard-earned dollars for a dish of plain ham swimming in fizzy wine, how much would they pay on a one-time-only basis to be rid of the rats that plagued their digging and made their lives miserable in the tents when they slept? Ten dollars hardly seemed unwieldy. Thus, upon an initial investment of three dollars and twenty-five cents for inventory, plus an approximate fifty dollars to outfit himself for the trip, which would be covered six times over when he sold the store and its stock, Michael Aloysius McDonough stood to gross four hundred dollars at the end of the trail—far more than the amount required for a place to live and a healthy interest in a claim that showed promise. The adventurer in him embraced both the odyssey and the camp camaraderie for which he pined; the speculator in him warmed itself at the fire of the riches that would be his.

> THE CATS, CRANKY FROM CAPTIVITY, SCREECHED AND HISSED AND TRIED TO CLAW CHICKENWIRE THROUGH THE WIRE.

Elder Evilsizer, six feet four inches of fierce, white-bearded piety with a back as straight as a Winchester barrel, heard out Chickenwire's proposition the next morning from the bentwood rocker on his front porch an hour's ride from town, where he was accustomed to keeping an eye on his hired man to ensure he plowed a straight furrow and avoided his secondary wife's rose bushes.

"Two hundred dollars," he said.

Chickenwire shook his head. "Three hundred is the price, and a bargain at that. I have nearly a thousand tied up in the building and stock."

"Two hundred dollars."

The conversation continued in that vein for some minutes, at the end of which Chickenwire, no longer a storekeeper, drove away from the farm with twenty ten-dollar bank notes in his inside breast pocket. The sum was a disappointment, but the elder was the only member of the community who could put his hand on more than a few dollars at a time. Most of the others traded in chickens and homemade quilts.

Although he considered his own delivery wagon, a medium-size Studebaker designed for use as an ambulance by the federal army during the late war, more than adequate for his excursion, Chickenwire gave the blacksmith down the street from the store thirty dollars to replace a doubtful spring and reinforce the tires, axles, and hounds with iron. While that was being done he fed the cats, changed the shelf paper he had placed in the cages to collect waste, and organized the necessaries he had excluded from his transaction with the elder to carry him a thousand miles. Among these the item that consumed the most space was sardines—nearly a hundred tins packed in oil to sustain both him and his cargo. Casks of water, a bearskin for protection against the arctic blasts that sometimes occurred even in the desert, repair tools, and medical stores completed the kit. This last precaution came to mind while he was scratching a bothersome new itch, turning his

thoughts toward witch hazel and the like.

The wagon was ready the following day. He loaded his supplies carefully, distributing the burden equally so that the construction would not pull against itself while lurching over uneven ground. He hitched it to a fine chestnut and bay he had taken in trade for an overdue bill owed by a farmer who had gone bust on the worthless ground west of the lake, and stacked the cages atop one another in the bed, lashing them securely. The cats, cranky from captivity and sensing more unpleasantness ahead, screeched and hissed and tried to claw him through the wire. And then he was on the seat and away, without once turning to look back at the enterprise that had supported him for close on three decades.

Allowing time for delays, he calculated the trip would take a month to complete. In the jockey box were railroad survey maps of the Utah and Arizona territories. Behind the seat, within easy reach, he had placed a Springfield carbine for shooting antelopes and jackrabbits when he tired of sardines, and a Walker Colt for shooting Indians and highwaymen when they tired of local prey. The very thought of hazard set his blood to singing. He marveled that he'd stuck out city life as long as he had.

Three cats died the first week.

He blamed himself for the first, a motheaten tabby whose bones showed, but whose ravenous appetite and nasty disposition had convinced him the animal was heartier than it appeared and worth bringing along. After three days it stopped eating. On the fourth morning it was as cold and stiff as jerky. Then a pair of cage mates, a black and a calico, got into a savage fight, and although Chickenwire separated them by moving the calico in with the dead tabby's cage mate, the torn and bleeding combatants took infection and perished within twenty-four hours of each other. He cast out the carcasses, cleaned both cages, and used them to relieve the crowded conditions elsewhere. Thirty dollars shot to hell.

CHICKENWIRE'S EYES HAD BECOME PUFFY, AND UNCONTROLLABLE FITS OF SNEEZING PLAGUED HIM FOR AN HOUR AFTER HE FED THE CATS.

The itching he'd noticed back in Salt Lake City had by this time turned into an angry rash on his neck and between the fingers of both hands. Despite the application so far of half a bottle of witch hazel, it kept him awake nights in his bedroll and stung like bees when he sweated in the heat of the day. His eyes had become puffy, too, and uncontrollable fits of sneezing plagued him for an hour after he fed the cats or changed the paper in their cages. Although he knew nothing of allergies, he was no fool, and immediately connected this sudden breakdown in the aggressive health of a lifetime to his furry charges. But he had stood worse for much smaller rewards. Come Tombstone he would be shut of the business.

He found the Fremont River three times wider than on his last crossing. Unseasonal rains in the Wasatch Mountains had made a mockery of its banks and accelerated its current, uprooting small trees and dismantling century-old beaver huts as if they were built of playing cards. Circumventing it would take him three days out of his way. While he felt he could put up with the itching and sneezing for the extended period, he was not as confident of the cats, two more of which were off their feed. Chickenwire tied one end of a hundred-foot length of hemp to a rock on the bank, unhitched the horses, swam the chestnut over with the other end of the rope in hand, and made it fast to a fir tree on the opposite bank. He then worked his way back, hand over hand along the rope, swam the bay across, and worked his way back again. After two hours' rest he spent the remainder of the day caulking the wagon.

When that job was finished he wanted desperately to make camp, but he feared the river would continue to swell throughout the night and become uncrossable by morning, leaving him stranded with his horses on the wrong side. He double-fastened everything, taking special pains with the cages, and, standing in the wagon bed up front, grasped the rope with one hand and pushed off with a shovel. The current snatched greedily at this fresh flotsam, trying to turn it downstream, but using the shovel as a paddle and gripping the rope until his fingers cramped, Chickenwire guided the wagon toward the opposite bank by force of his own might.

Halfway across, he felt the shovel slip and nearly fell overboard as he lunged to retrieve it.

The river tore the handle free and took it away, the spade end ducking and bobbing until it was out of sight. Lest he follow, he grasped the rope in both hands, inadvertently creating a pivot. The rear of the wagon swung around, a corner dipped beneath the surface, the cargo shifted, and one of the leather harness straps that held the cages in place burst with an earsplitting report. The top cage toppled off. Chickenwire, struggling to maintain his grip on the rope, watched helplessly as the cage containing two cats splashed into the water. The doomed animals squalled piteously; and then they, too, like the shovel, were beyond seeing.

The sudden absence caused a change in balance that brought the swamped corner up out of the water. Now the captain of the craft allowed the current to push it the rest of the way around and, sliding his hand along the waterlogged hemp, worked his way to the stern, which had now become the bow. He took with him the Springfield carbine. Leaning over the tailgate, he lowered the wooden stock into the water to act as paddle and rudder. Five minutes more and the submerged wheels came to rest against the original bank. He laid aside the carbine, leapt out, and with the river eddying around his hips, exhausted his remaining strength hauling the wagon up the slope and out of the Fremont's clutches.

In blue twilight he lay in the sparse grass on the south bank, soaked to the skin, caked with mud, his chest heaving and his heart hammering in his ears. He was sure it would stop. When it didn't, when his breathing slowed and he found he could move his limbs more than an inch at a time, he dragged himself to his feet and proceeded to assess the damage.

The wagon and its surviving contents had come through remarkably well. In addition to the cage, he had lost a water cask, and a case of rifle cartridges, and two sacks of flour had become saturated. Some of the pegs holding the wagon together had loosened, but he was sure he could tap them tight with the blunt edge of his ax once they'd dried. The lost cats were the tragedy. One was the blue Angora, a beautiful, sweet-tempered female he'd hoped to palm off on some sporting lady with a soft heart and deep pockets for twenty dollars and recoup some of his losses.

However, he was a practical businessman who knew that every venture carried risks. If just half his cargo came through, he stood to realize a seven thousand percent return on his original investment—more than enough to satisfy any plunger, let alone one interested mainly in arranging a comfortable stake for mining. And so when the cats and horses were seen to and his bed prepared, dreams of avarice claimed him until the sun hit him in the face like a skillet.

CHICKENWIRE KNOCKED ASIDE THE PISTOL AND THREW A LEFT HOOK FROM AS FAR AS THE GOLD CAMPS OF CALIFORNIA.

In his charge was a particularly obstreperous tiger, a slat-sided alley fighter with one eye, a broken tail, and an ear that drooped from a lacerated muscle, who, unlike most of the others, had refused to adjust to the confined quarters. From dawn to dusk it spat and sprayed, and at feeding time swiped a set of claws nearly an inch long at the hand that opened its cage. Chickenwire bled copiously until he fell into the habit of pulling on a pair of the leather gloves he had used to work with the wire. More than once he had considered releasing the disagreeable creature to starve in the desert, but there were many miles to go and the value of each item in his inventory was climbing. Instead, rearranging the cages to restore balance, he placed the tiger's in the corner left vacant by the incident in the river. Should history repeat itself, the sacrifice would not leave him inconsolable.

Arizona offered no obstacles until the Colorado River, an unfordable torrent that made the Fremont seem a sleepy creek by comparison. There a weather-checked little ferryman loaded with big-handled pistols under a sombrero wider than his shoulders walked around the wagon, evaluating its features and cargo, and offered to take him across for twenty dollars.

"I never paid more than a dollar to cross water in my life!"

Quick as thought, the little man drew both pistols and thumbed back the hammers. The weight of the barrels bent his wrists. "Then I reckon you best do your business this side."

Chickenwire chewed his whiskers, then paid over the requested amount. Halfway across the charging river, propelled by an ingenious lock-lever device attached to the guide rope, the little man stopped the ferry and demanded the rest of his passenger's poke.

"You're holding me up?"

"I got expenses," said the fer-

ryman. "What good's your stake if you can't get across?"

"What good is it if I don't have it at all?"

Out came the pistols. "I done my talking, mister."

"I don't have it on me. It's in a false bottom in this cage. I'll get it." Chickenwire undid the latch on the top cage.

"Back off! How do I know you ain't got a hogleg hid out there?"

"That's foolish." He started to open the door.

"I'll blow you into Mexico if you don't back off!"

Chickenwire stepped back, raising both hands. Belting one of the pistols, the ferryman covered him with the other and swung open the door. The tiger cat pounced. Cursing, the ferryman snatched his hand back, bloody. Chickenwire stepped in, knocked aside the pistol, and threw a left hook from as far as the gold camps of California. He felt the ferryman's jaw give way and caught the pistol as he fell. He slammed and latched the cage door and pointed the pistol at the man groaning on the deck. "Can you swim?"

"What? No!" The ferryman was supporting himself on one hand and trying to hold his jaw together with the other.

"Pity." Chickenwire laid the pistol inside the wagon bed, lifted the man beneath the arms, and pitched him over the rail. The big sombrero could still be seen riding the whitecaps long after its owner had gone under. Watching it, Chickenwire wished he'd thought to take back his twenty dollars.

He lost the best part of a week detouring around the Grand Canyon, whose size he had greatly underestimated, whipped the horses brutally over the San Francisco Mountains to make up the time, and sweated off twelve pounds crossing the desert west of San Carlos. Three calicos, a black, and an alley mongrel perished in the heat. The buzzards that perched in the mesquite bushes near his camp had grown too bold to frighten off, even when he fired at one with the Springfield and sent it dashing to the ground. He wasted no more ammunition on this project, there being more birds than he had shells.

The rash had spread over most of his body. When a sneezing fit

AT NIGHT HE LAY SHIVERING IN HIS BEDROLL, STILL SNEEZING AND ITCHING BUT TOO WEAK TO SCRATCH.

came upon him he was forced to alight from the wagon and lead the horses, putting as much distance as possible between himself and the cats. Nothing else would bring relief.

It was during one of these intervals that he encountered his first Apache.

The suddenness of it took his breath away. He had been directing his eyes to the ground to avoid the glare of the sun, and when he raised them the Indian was there, straddling a rattle-boned paint not fifty yards in front of him. The man was naked but for a breechclout and high-topped moccasins and carried a long-barreled rifle slung behind his back from a strip of braided rawhide. His eyes were fissures in a face the color and apparent texture of the pottery bowls that the merchant used to accept in trade from the tame Shoshone who had come to his store for supplies. This, however, was no tame Indian.

Instinctively, Chickenwire dropped the reins he was holding and lunged toward the wagon and the Springfield behind the seat. The seat exploded. He lost his balance and sat down hard in the sand. The Apache, having unslung and fired his rifle in less than a heartbeat, was already seating another charge, ramming it home with a thin wooden rod as long as the barrel of the ancient flintlock. It was ready to fire again before Chickenwire could regain his footing. He stood with his hands clear of his sides as the Indian heeled his paint up to the wagon.

Up close, the newcomer appeared to be younger than the white man had thought at first. His eyes, graphite colored, glittered between narrowed lids as they took in every detail of the wagon and its owner. At length he stepped down and, making it clear that he would raise and discharge his weapon at the first sign of resistance, inspected the horses in their traces, examining their teeth and haunches and squatting to feel their fetlocks.

Rising, the Indian pointed to the chestnut, then his own horse, repeating the gesture several times. Chickenwire stared doubtfully at the paint, which looked even bonier close up and mother-eaten besides, but nodded, observing that even an outmoded firearm was of enormous advantage in horse-trading. He unhitched the chestnut and accepted the horsehair attached to the paint's bridle.

The Indian showed no inclination to leave. Waving the white man away from the wagon and the rifle inside the bed, he walked to the rear and peered inside. For

a moment he contemplated the strange cargo in silence. Then he reached inside, fumbled with the latch on one of the cages, opened the door, and pulled out a yowling black by the scruff of its neck. Now he grinned for the first time. Guessing his intent, Chickenwire took a step in his direction. Immediately the flintlock came up. The grin vanished.

Chickenwire stopped, raised his hands high. He watched as the man swung aboard the chestnut, expertly checking its attempts at rebellion with his knees as he slung the weapon over his shoulder and forced the cat into a reclining position, head down across the horse's withers. Then he wheeled, uttered a high-pitched cry, and was gone, galloping toward the horizon with his long hair flying unfettered behind him.

The puzzle of the cat's value to the Apache occupied the merchant's thoughts for a long time afterward. Companionship? An ingredient in some tribal ritual? Food for the family tepee? At which point he sought a better subject.

The paint proved a bad trade. It had never been broken to any kind of wagon, and when its new owner attempted to maneuver it between the traces, it fought the bridle and tried to rear. When he dug in his heels, the horse arched its back, causing a sudden slackening in the reins, then rocked back on its hind legs and clawed the air. Ducking to avoid a slashing hoof, Chickenwire lost his grip on the reins. The paint spun and clattered away in the direction its late master had gone. In another minute only a cloud of dust remained to mark its passage.

This was not a good turn. Chickenwire was stranded in desert country with a wagonload of cats and a tired bay unequal to the burden.

He jettisoned everything that wasn't absolutely necessary. Axes were superfluous in that arid landscape, where buffalo chips served for firewood. Coffee, bacon, and flour were luxuries when sardines sufficed, weary though he had grown of them. Toiletries, tobacco, a fine old walnut rocker his grandfather had made and which had accompanied him all the way from his Ohio birthplace—out everything went. Doubling up the more compatible cats allowed him to discard a number of cages.

The load was still too much for the bay. When the animal stopped

HE HAD NOT BEEN OUT OF HIS CLOTHES IN WEEKS; HIS OWN CAKED SWEAT GRATED BENEATH HIS ARMS AND BEHIND HIS KNEES.

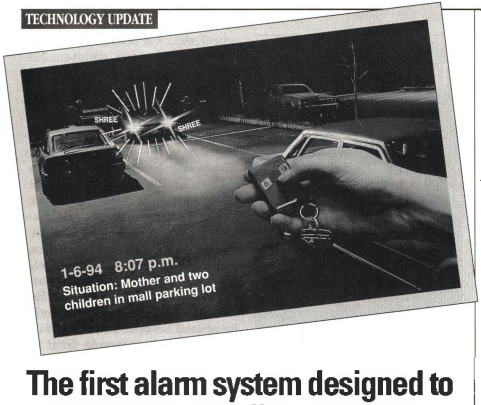
and hung its head after barely a dozen yards, Chickenwire raged, stamped about, and tugged at his beard until the roots popped. Then, as in a trance, he hoisted five cages to the ground and unlatched the doors. Nine cats bolted in nine directions. Despite his distaste for the noisy, irritating creatures, he hoped they would find enough roadrunners and pack rats to sustain them.

When the tenth cat did not emerge from its cage, he looked inside. One of the muddy-colored beasts of mysterious lineage lay licking a moist, pink, mouse-sized squirm with a squinched face. Two more were huddled inside the curve of the cat's body, sucking energetically at teats.

Chickenwire's face felt funny. He realized he was smiling —beaming, for the first time in recent memory. Enormous as were the odds against three kittens surviving the journey, he looked upon the miracle as a sign of hope. He secured the door and gently lifted the cage back into the wagon. Now he altered his plan to toss out a full case of sardines after releasing the cats and saved out a dozen tins. Mothers required more food.

New life does not greatly improve a grim situation. Not counting the kittens, he was down to half his inventory, with a wagon that was still too heavy unless he climbed down and walked beside it at regular intervals, and better than a hundred miles to go before Tombstone and the promised land. And he had a fresh scratch on his hand courtesy of the scrappy tiger, registering its disapproval at the prospect of a roommate after all this time. Already Chickenwire regretted his softhearted decision not to abandon the tiger to the desert with the others as a reward for helping out with the larcenous ferryman.

The monsoons caught him shortly after crossing into what he determined to be Cochise County, home of Tombstone and an area larger than some European countries. The rains transformed the earth to ropy mud that sucked the wagon down to its hubs, slowing him to a crawl and obliging him often to step into the vacant harness next to the bay and pull with all his might when it stuck. At night he lay shivering in his bedroll, coughing up specks of blood, still sneezing and itching but too weak to scratch.



The first alarm system designed to protect you as well as your car...

Revolutionary new vehicle security system is the first of its kind to focus on the safety of the vehicle driver as well as the vehicle itself.

By Charles Anton

Do you wonder why car alarms have countless features to protect your car, but nothing to protect you? After all, what's more important your car or the safety of you and your family?

Now there is a car alarm that *will protect you and your family.* It is the first of its kind to focus on the safety of the vehicle owner as well as the vehicle itself.

Protect yourself. It all begins with the panic button. Imagine you're walking to your car at night and a person approaches. Pushing the panic button on your transmitter lets your car come alive with a shrieking siren and flashing headlights. While the panic alarms of other vehicle security systems have a range of 100 feet, the Smart Alarm's panic alarm lets you call for help or scare away potential attackers from up to 400 feet!

Exclusive feature. Unlike other car alarm systems that begin and end their focus on personal protection with the panic alarm, that's just the beginning of the Smart Alarm. In addition to the panic alarm, the Smart Alarm also has a car finder feature. You'll never again have to wander around a dark and dangerous parking lot searching for your car. You will be able to know where your car is from anywhere within 400 feet by flashing its lights and briefly sounding the siren. You can activate and deactivate your car's headlights by remote control to light your way in a dark driveway or parking lot.

Carjacking. The Smart Alarm also addresses a growing hazard for today's motorists—carjacking. It's alarming how often drivers are hurt in their cars because they refuse to give them up to carjackers. Because of its anti-carjacking device, the Smart Alarm allows you to safely retain your car when confronted by a carjacker. This is made possible by a delayed panic alarm.

What makes Smart Alarm better?

- **Range.** Most car alarm features only work up to 100 feet away—all Smart Alarm features work up to 400 feet away.
- **Panic button.** Smart Alarm lets you call for help or scare away potential troublemakers by controlling a piercing alarm and your car's headlights.
- **Car finder.** Your car will be able to let you know where it is by flashing it's lights and briefly sounding the siren.
- **Carjacking.** Its delayed panic alarm allows you to safely prevent theft of your car when confronted by a carjacker.
- **Easy installation.** Other car alarms are complicated or cost hundreds of dollars to install. Smart Alarm is inexpensive, and you can install it in just minutes.

Smart Alarm is the first car alarm that will protect you and your family.

Easy installation. *Installing the Smart Alarm requires no fumbling with wires. Special Plug-In Connectors let you install the Smart Alarm without a single wire-cutter! Simply unplug the headlight connector, plug in the Smart Alarm connector, and then plug the headlight connector to the Smart Alarm. Connect the Smart Alarm to the battery cable with the special clip. In minutes, you and your car can enjoy complete 24-hour protection. Away from your car, you'll feel safer knowing that your car is protected! Near your car, you'll feel safer knowing that you are protected!*

All you do is give up your car and activate the delayed panic alarm. When the assailant has reached a safe distance and is no longer a threat to you, a deafening 120dB siren and flashing lights will force him to flee your car, letting you recover it safely.

Vehicle protection. Smart Alarm's current sensor triggers the siren if the trunk or any of the doors are opened while the alarm is armed. To supplement the current sensor, a shock sensor triggers the siren when it detects a blow to your car. Together, these sensors provide your car with blanket protection.

An adjustable shock sensor prevents the siren from being triggered, eliminating false alarms. You can also adjust the shock sensor and the siren with your remote control at any time you choose. The siren's tone and volume can be adjusted to six separate tones. As a result, you'll never confuse it with any other alarm. You can also customize the siren, making it louder in noisy neighborhoods and quieter in more peaceful neighborhoods.

Risk-free home trial. With the Smart Alarm, you get a complete "No Questions Asked" 30-day money-back guarantee. If it's not everything we say, just return it for a full refund. The Smart Alarm is also backed by a two-year warranty. Your order will be shipped UPS in seven to ten working days.

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A kitten died. Two grown cats succumbed to pneumonia. He shared that malady and was certain that before long he would share their fate. Still he pressed on.

When a second kitten died he shed tears, but he wasn't sure whether they had more to do with his genuine sorrow or his runny eyes.

Huddled in his soaked covers beneath the wagon, he dreamt Death came to him. Deep in the folds of Death's black hood shone the yellow-green eyes of a cat.

Late into the next day he remained supine and swaddled. The sun was low when the plaintive meowing of his famished charges aroused him. His skin felt cool. The fever had broken.

After two days he felt strong enough to continue. In the meantime a calico had succumbed. He disposed of the carcass, moved its cage mate in with another, and threw out the empty cage. Resigned now to tragedy, he looked in on the mother and remaining kitten, and was surprised to find that both were doing well. The young one seemed even to have grown. Rather than encouraging him, however, the news found him numb. He was past all emotion.

The rains stopped. Almost immediately he longed for their return. He could actually see the puddles turning to steam, the earth drying and cracking like old plaster. He had not been out of his clothes in weeks; his own caked sweat grated beneath his arms and behind his knees. When he treated himself to a swallow of water from his suddenly dwindling supply, the liquid stung his weather-checked lips like acid. Despite reasonable rationing among the cats, two more calicos and a tabby dried up and died. He wondered what the next generation would make of the derelict cages along his trail.

Three days from Tombstone, he came to an arroyo that stretched to the horizon in each direction. It was steep and strewn with boulders, but he calculated that going around it would cost a week, with nary enough water left in his casks to sustain a man for half that time, much less a man and thirteen and a half cats. Gripping the brake lever to control the descent, he gave the reins a flip.

That night, thawing the evening chill from his bones before a fire, Chickenwire pondered his future.

The bay picked its way over rocks of unequal size and loose shale, making gasping snorts as the wagon lurched behind, threatening to throw it off balance. A third of the way down, the animal lost its nerve and stopped. Chickenwire, who could feel rubble shifting beneath the wheels, cursed and smacked his whip at the horse's rump. It whinnied, shook its mane, and took another step.

A piece of shale the size and shape of a bishop's hat turned under its hoof. A knee buckled. The wagon lunged.

Chickenwire released the brake and lashed the whip, shouting at the top of his lungs. The bay bolted.

When the wagon's left front wheel struck a boulder, the merchant heard wood splinter. He was standing at the time and threw himself clear as the wagon heeled over and skidded on its side into the lead, pulling the screaming bay down the slope all the way to the base. Cages flew. The yowling of the terrified cats echoed in the arroyo for a full minute after the dust had settled.

Dazed, Chickenwire lay listening as the horse's cries grew feeble and finally stopped. When at length he tried to push himself up, his wrist bent suddenly, shooting white heat to his shoulder. He didn't know he'd passed out until he opened his eyes and saw a pair of caked boots inches in front of his face.

"You dead, hoss?"

They were the first words he'd heard since the encounter with the ferryman. He made a reply, but his throat was parched and it came out a dry rattle. Boots squatted. Pain lashed Chickenwire again as his arm was lifted and probed from elbow to hand. The man smelled of sweat, earth, woodsmoke, and bacon. "That's as broke a wrist as ever I seen, hoss." He raised his voice. "Syke, fetch me that busted shovel and a canteen."

He was turned onto his back. A hand supported his head as he swallowed a blessed draught of mossy-tasting water. While Boots fashioned a splint from a splintered wooden handle and a length of hemp, Chickenwire observed that the arroyo was alive with men in filthy Levi's and flop-brimmed hats—miners, if he remembered his camp days at all—calling information to one another from their positions next to the ruined wagon and scattered cats. He learned the bay was dead of a shattered spine and that most of the cages were empty, having broken open on impact and freed their captives. Three contained dead cats.

"What about the rest?" he asked.

The man called Syke, shorter and stouter than the horse-faced Boots, returned from the wagon, mopping the back of his neck with a red bandanna. "Six in the wagon, and one don't look too good. And a kitten, though I wouldn't count on it lasting. The mother's dead."

"Dutch Bill's got him a goat," Boots said. "He might could get it to suck goat's milk from a neckerchief. Don't know what your plans was, hoss, but we sure can use cats in these here parts. We got more rats than prospectors."

Chickenwire made a decision.

"Take them."

Boots's eyes rolled white in a face stained with silver clay. "This here's a problem. It ain't nothing to josh about."

"I'm not joshing. You saved my life. I'll need a horse, too, and water and provisions to get me to town. Divide them up how you want. If I never see another cat it will be too soon."

The miners moved swiftly, as if afraid he'd change his mind. Within the hour a gentle dun mare was produced, complete with a worn saddle and pouches filled with tins of beef and tomatoes. Boots helped Chickenwire straddle the mare and hung a canteen on the horn. One of the other miners, an honest lot, had found the merchant's poke and brought it to him.

From his high seat Chickenwire surveyed the wreckage of the wagon and its contents. "Help yourself to whatever you can salvage. I've had my life's portion of sardines, as well."

"Good luck to you, hoss," Boots said. "My chewed fingers and toes sure do thank you."

That night, thawing the evening chill from his bones before a fire and trying not to think about his throbbing wrist in its makeshift sling, Chickenwire pondered his future. The remainder of the money the elder had paid him for his store in Salt Lake City, while not enough to buy into a good claim, might net him a partnership in a store in Tombstone. In a year or two he might set a sufficient amount aside to invest in pay dirt. The enterprise would be a success after all, and it would not depend on cats. After all those weeks in their company he could still hear them meowing.

Meowing.

He caught himself looking for the source of the fancied sound and smiled. The tinkling of the pianos in the all-night saloons would drown out the echoes soon enough. He would find the cure for his rash in the arms of a sporting lady. Chickenwire was picturing the enameled women in their bright dresses when a specter came into the firelight and slunk toward him, meowing.

He sneezed, and the fresh pain in his arm made him curse. The cat—for it was the one-eyed, vile-tempered tiger he had despised for a thousand miles—shrank from the oath, hissing and flattening its single undamaged ear; then started forward again.

Obviously, the beast had been among those that had escaped when the wagon overturned. How or why it had trailed him to this spot didn't concern him. The species filled him with rage. With his good hand he reached for the Walker Colt under the saddle he was using for a backrest, cocked it, and rested the barrel atop his raised knee, sighting in on the tiger's chest.

"Cat, you just went and spent the last of your nine lives."

Ignoring the weapon, the animal came forward the rest of the way. At his knee it paused and ducked its head, rubbing its body against his leg. As it did so, a velvety rumble issued from deep inside its throat. The sound caught a little from a lifetime of disuse.

Chickenwire said, "Well, I'm damned," and let down the Colt's hammer gently.

Early Tombstone cherished its characters nearly as much as it did its heroes and villains. Well into a new century, when old-timers wearied of recounting the exploits of the Earps and Clantons and Johnny Ringo, they would wet their whistles and launch into the story of how Itchy McDonough, part proprietor of the Golden Gate Mercantile on Fremont Street, came to town with nothing to his name but an old mare and his one-man cat, Elder Evilsizer.

Homemade Christmas Present

BY T. JEFF CARR

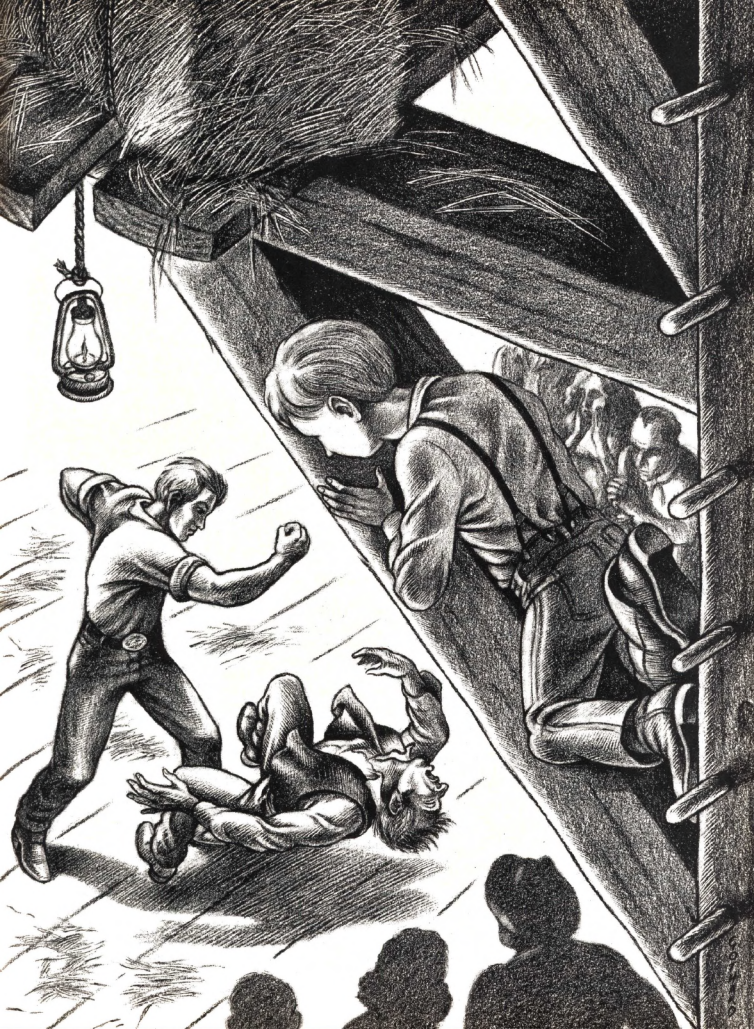
Ma gettin' well again was the only Christmas present I wanted that year. I was ten then and had learned already not to expect much for Christmas except what we made for one another. I aimed to make this Christmas present by prayin'. I reckon we all prayed plenty–even Pa.

More'n sixty years've slid by since, but I can still remember exactly how I felt then. I watched Ma lyin' helpless in her sickbed, so weak she could hardly move, and I'd get a heavy pain around my heart. That feelin' ain't hard to remember–anybody who's lived awhile's felt like that plenty. I know I did every time we put another one of us under a cross up in our little family plot here on the hill. Lots of 'em was just babies or kids. So many younguns died in those days.

My youngest brother didn't even have a name yet, bein' only a day old. He was the last of us–a dozen in all. Only seven lived to grow up. Ma didn't get out of bed after him, even to see him buried. It seemed like losin' one too many busted her mainspring.

Before I go much further I'd better lay in a little bit of background, because what happened that Christmas had started a long time before.

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID GOTHARD



Pa must've had a notion there might be trouble at the dance at the Griggses'. He didn't plan to go, at first.

Families was mighty close in those days—had to be. Generally all we had to depend on was one another, with the nearest neighbor maybe ten miles off, the nearest doctor or law a hundred. And us Harkinses hung tighter'n the average. That was mostly Ma's doin'. She was the glue holdin' us that tight. Pa loved all his kids, but he didn't show it so much —men ain't got time. I can still hear Ma sayin', "God made people to love one another—especially blood kin. Don't ever forget, blood's a whole lot thicker'n water."

When I first heard her say that I was too young to understand what she meant. I think Pa brought that home to me, and how he did is part of my story, too. He come from Kentucky, where anybody drawin' blood had to be pizen serious or crazy to do it because they knew the kin would be down on 'em right quick. Men was mighty polite to one another in a country like that. But even at that, likker made 'em forget theirselves—likker an' gals. It was just the same out here in No Man's Land, mebbe a little more so. On top o' touchy men all packin' irons, we had the hard ones hidin' out or driftin' through. You could generally read the wolf sign on that kind. But don't get me wrong there—the last thing most of 'em wanted was any more trouble—but they was human and we had our share of likker, even if somebody else got our share of the gals. The few gals we had was naturally fought over pretty often, even the wolf-ugly ones.

The notion there might be trouble never kept us from gettin' together for a dance, though. Generally somebody'd hold one after the fall work was done and before snow flew. I was maybe six or so the first one I *remember* goin' to and I sure got my money's worth on that one. That's where I seen how that "blood's thicker'n water" business worked out. I reckon by then Pa was pushin' forty, but his youngest brother, my Uncle Cal, was only maybe eighteen. With the big families they had in those days, they stretched out like that. Cal lived with us and worked just like a hired hand, but he was aimin' to start his own spread as soon as he scratched together enough to start on. Pa paid him a cut of the calf crop every year and enough cash to keep him in tobacco an' jeans.

Cal was sparkin' Delia Griggs. So was all the other young bucks in the country, and some not so young. Her pa run a division of the XIT. You could toss a stone from our place into Texas, but the Griggses' place was a good thirty miles away. It was one of the few houses in that country big enough to have a dance all inside.

Sometimes folks'd just sweep their yards and dance outside. A little wrinkle like that never stopped us. Everybody was hungry for some fun, especially the womenfolks like Ma, who mostly looked at four walls or a garden all year—if they even had a garden. Ma always had a big one. It was one of my crosses to bear. I toted enough water for it up in buckets from the Canadian to float a ship. When I got big enough to drive a team, I brought water up in barrels. Men was too busy and overworked in gardenin' season for that kind of helping out. If they managed to get home at night they'd just eat and drop in bed.

Well, I'm strayin' off my story here, I reckon. I was tellin' about that dance at the Griggses'. Pa must've had a notion there might be trouble. He didn't plan to go, at first. Anyhow, he took his six-shooter along. That was after most of the Injun trouble was past so he'd usually just carry a rifle or shotgun in the wagon, maybe both, in case he could bag some game. There wasn't no game laws yet in those days—if a man saw somethin' fit to eat, he shot it and gutted it right there. The buffalo was all gone, but there was still deer. Us little ranchers always figured we was ahead with whatever saved us from killin' our beef for the table.

Delia Griggs was a pretty gal, and even the plain ones had a line o' men aimin' to court 'em. Folks married young out here. A gal twenty was gettin' to be an old maid. Most had a kid or two by then. Ma was sixteen when she married Pa, an' had three kids by the time she was twenty. Anyhow, Cal wasn't about to let anyone get ahead of him with Delia, so he aimed to make it to the dance come hell or high water—which, come to think of it, ain't always a joke here along the Canadian. And something decided Pa to hitch up and take the whole crew of us. Prob'ly mostly us hollerin' to go, but like I said, something told him he ought to go hisself, or he might've just left the haulin' of us to Cal and stayed here.

Travelin' like that we'd put hay in the bottom of the wagon and take blankets an' buffalo robes in case a blue norther hit. Everybody, just about, had buffalo robes

Us kids was allowed to watch and listen to the music if we stayed outta the way, so I seen the trouble start that time.

then, and most o' the men had buffalo overcoats. I still have one in the attic if the moths ain't et it. Used to belong to Pa. Anyhow, them was nice outings for us kids if the weather held good. If it didn't, Pa'd put the sheet up over the wagon bows and we'd snug down in the hay under our robes, with maybe Ma and whoever the newest baby was in there, too. There wasn't no real road down there—still ain't, for that matter—but the prairie is pretty smooth between gullies. It took just about all day to make it that far. We'd get there the day before the shindig and everyone slept wherever they could find room —us kids usually in the wagon, menfolks in the barn or in bedrolls, and women in the house. I never heard no complaints—we was all too excited, lookin' forward to a little fun.

Us kids generally got up as soon as it was light and was wanderin' around tryin' to stay outta trouble, but gettin' into it anyhow. Some wild ones always tried to ride a big calf if there was any corraled, or a colt, or sometimes a horse. Every once in a while they got bucked off and skinned up and bruised, though kids seldom break any bones like you do when you get older. The men never really got very mad at us. The cowboys mostly got a kick out of kids, some being still almost kids their own selves. Some of the men would saddle up gentle horses for us and we'd race off, which was prob'ly the idea—to get rid of us for a while. We was always careful not to get caught chousin' the weight off any cows—leastways, we hoped we wouldn't get caught when we had a little rodeo of our own after we got off by ourselves. Every kid tried to rope whatever his horse could catch up with.

We was all up for the noon meal when Terrence Boone and a bunch of his hands from the L Bow come in at a run, yellin' like Comanches. Boone was boss for only the west division, the L Bow bein' another big outfit, though not nearly as big as the XIT—none was. Everybody called Terrence Terr, and some called him Holy Terror behind his back, 'cause he come pretty close to that and had a pretty good opinion of hisself. When those boys come roosterin' in like that, every horse on the place spooked.

Somethin' was brewin' all right; Pa had his signals straight there. Anybody who's been around when something like that's in the wind gets a feelin' about it. The bottles that started passin' around about then didn't help any either. There was a few fistfights, but outta sight of the womenfolks, who mostly didn't like that sort o' thing. Us kids never missed a fight if we could help it. Most cowboys, of course, couldn't fight their way outta a wet paper bag with their fists, so usually nobody got hurt very bad. If anybody got killin' mad, the rest would break it up. Otherwise, it was go as you please—mostly cussin' and hard breathin', but fun to watch.

Nobody ever picked on Pa, though. He wasn't no giant for high, but he was broad as a barn door. I recollect he could bend a fat iron bar over his knee and hold a keg of nails straight out with his arm. I reckon he didn't do that to show off, but more to stay outta trouble, to let the rest know what he could do. He didn't have them go-to-hell blue killer eyes, though. His was more yellow, but one look from him was all it took. I know just his look kept us boys in line. They was the damnedest pair of eyes I ever seen on anybody—shiny when he was feelin' good, which was most of the time, and almost like a trapped wolf's if he got riled, sorta like hot coals.

At them dances us kids was allowed to watch and listen to the music if we stayed outta the way, so I seen the trouble start that time—or, more like, heard it first. Somethin' crashed over, then some gal let out a scream, then I seen Uncle Cal on the floor, shakin' his head, his mouth bleedin' a little. Then some more gals screamed, but Delia wasn't one of 'em. She was between Cal and Terr Boone when Cal got up.

She said, "Terr, you hit him when he wasn't expectin' it!"

Cal was still shakin' his head to get things in focus, I expect. I know about how he felt. Delia went right on talkin' and she had a I-ain't-foolin' sound about her when she said, "Now, Terr, you apologize right his minute and shake hands, or get!" Nobody offered to butt in, least of all Old Man Griggs, who knew his daughter. She was only about eighteen then, but as much a woman as she'd ever be, and more man than a lot o' them, too.

If Terr had ever had a chance with her, that was right where he lost it. He snorted, "Apologize to *that?* Hell!" She slapped him hard as a man her size could've done and rocked his head for fair.

Terr really forgot hisself then. Before he thought—and it was prob'ly likker talkin'—he ripped out, "If you was a man . . ." and his eyes had kill in 'em.

In a real quiet voice, but one everybody there heard, Pa said, "They don't come back from where you boys're headed."

That was steppin' over the line and no argument about it. There was a couple of gunmen there would've took it up and killed Terr in a second. You could've heard a pin drop. But it was Cal who made the first move. He shoved Terr hard and kinda growled, "Let's go outside and finish this proper!"

"There'll be no gunplay here!" Old Man Griggs said.

"I ain't talkin' guns," Cal said. "I meant the way he started it."

Either way would have suited Terr fine, I expect. He had a rep as a fistfighter as much as a gunman, and he could really scrap with his fists where the run of cowboys couldn't. Fists suited Old Man Griggs, too, where guns didn't—it'd pull the fangs on what might've gone to guns later. On his place he could've put the kibosh on any fight at all and made that stick, too; he must've had at least twenty cowboys on the place that would've fought if he said the word. But he knew things between Cal and Terr'd just fester and come to a head later if he didn't let 'em have it out then. It was pretty clear he'd already picked Delia's man, even if she hadn't. He didn't want to see Cal perforated.

"Do it in the barn," Old Man Griggs told 'em. "Some of you boys get lanterns."

I ran for the barn to get a ringside seat before Ma could grab me and keep me from seein' it. There was a big alley clear through and that's where they had it out. I was practically hangin' from the ceiling on a post brace I shinnied up from inside a stall. I could see the whole thing. Pa must've figured it might come to more'n fists, but I was too young to expect that. Naturally, I was rootin' for Cal. Some of the men was hollerin', "Go it, Cal!" But nobody except his own boys was yellin' for Terr, and I noticed a couple of them wasn't doin' that. They prob'ly wanted to see him get his. The L Bow had run over too many of us on Terr's orders, or else he'd pushed one or another of the neighbors around hisself, and it looked like he'd done it to some of his own crew. Been a miracle if a fella like him hadn't. Like I said, he was pretty handy with his fists and went out of his way to show it.

Boy, was he in for a surprise. This time Cal had fair warning and, like a lot of big men, he was quick as greased lightnin'. He ducked a roundhouse punch that Terr prob'ly thought was gonna end the affair, and just grabbed Terr like a bear. Cal was built just like Pa and likely was almost as strong, I'd bet, even as young as he was. He just plumb squeezed the stuffin' outta Terr for a while and had him gaspin' and kickin' like a fish pulled out on the bank. When he let him go he gave him a shove and Terr just hung in the air like an empty spud sack, which was when Cal hit him with one big, whackin' punch that knocked a bunch of his teeth all over the barn. Terr didn't even know his own name till at least the next noon. The fight oughta been over right there, but a couple of Terr's tough hands brought pistols down there and naturally figured they had to make a show.

Old Man Griggs seen what was maybe shapin' up and yelled, "Don't you boys start anything now," and got between them and Cal. He said, "It was a dead square fight and Terr asked for what he got." But with likker in 'em, that might not've cut any ice. Things looked pretty scary about then—even I knew what might happen and was thinkin' about huntin' a hole.

Two of them hardcases put their hands on pistols they had shoved in the front of their pants. That kind of pickle can go to smoke derned quick. That's when Pa stepped up not two feet in front of 'em. He didn't say a word at first, just looked at 'em. I can imagine his eyes. His own six-shooter was shoved in his belt like theirs, but he didn't even touch it. In a real quiet voice, but one everybody there heard, he said, "They don't come back from where you boys're headed."

It was so still for a few seconds I could hear those two with their hands on their guns start to breathe hard. Actually, it was a good sign. It showed they had started thinkin' and they was thinkin' maybe Pa was right. Their big talk washed as far as it went, but this was a horse of a different color. Finally, one of 'em let out his breath like he'd been holdin' it too long, and said, "What the hell. It ain't our fight. Let's take Terr home."

Old Man Griggs took over then before anybody could change their mind and said, "You'll need a wagon for him. I'll let you use one."

Somebody laughed and said, "Looks more like you'll need a Black Maria," and that got a laugh all around that busted up the trouble for good. Even Terr's crew laughed on that one. I reckon you know what a Black Maria was, but in case you don't it's

When Terr and a couple of his hard cases rode into our yard that Christmas Ma was so sick, they caught us flatfooted.

what you call a hearse today, only then they was a horse-drawn affair.

We all went home the next day, with Cal ridin' behind on his horse just like we come, but there was one difference—Cal whistled dern near all the way, even with a split lip. There was an understandin' about weddin' bells before too long. Most likely Delia already knew her mind and would've saved a lot of trouble if she'd come out with it sooner. But that's the way gals are. Even the real practical ones like her ain't perfect.

Ma put her finger on one of the problems with that kinda flirtiness. She said to Pa on the way home, "You mighta got killed."

"More likely Cal woulda," Pa said. "And he's blood kin as close as you can get. What did you expect me to do?"

She was quiet for quite a while. Then she said, "Just what you done. I'd a done the same thing exactly."

Little as I was I was man enough to wonder if she really would, her bein' a gal and all.

You might ask what all this has to do with the Christmas Ma was dyin'—not that any of us give up on her while there was still breath in her. I almost did, though, a couple of times, seein' how pinched and white her face was. Worst of all, she wouldn't eat a thing and her hands shook bad when she'd try to drink water without help. That's when I'd have to go hide somewhere and put every ounce I could into prayin' right, even gettin' down on my knees and shuttin' my eyes tight. I'd beg, "Please, God, don't let my ma die!"

They say the ways of the Almighty are mysterious and I reckon they are. I'll let you be the judge for yerself. First of all, let me tell you that Terr Boone never forgot that shellackin'—or, as it come back to us, "What the Harkinses did to him." I judge that Pa backin' down his boys afterwards musta graveled him a lot, too. Then he come out of it with the nickname *Toothless*. For a fella that set hisself up till then as a lady's man, that didn't sit for sour persimmons. He got to be a laughin'stock—behind his back, o' course, but he knew. The word had got around he had killed a few men before he come to our neck of the woods. And after that he was on the peck most o' the time and finally got hisself into a shootin' scrape down in Tascosa an' had to skin out. He turned outlaw for fair, then. We'd hear about him and his gang, mostly rustlin', and then we didn't hear much about him for a long while. But we knew his kind; they wasn't the type to forget a hurt.

That's why I knew what to expect when Terr and a couple of his hard cases rode into our yard that Christmas Ma was so sick. They caught us flatfooted. I had a armload of wood I was totin' in for the stove to keep Ma extra warm. I could feel my heart in my throat.

Pa leaned on his ax and just stood hitched, starin' at 'em. There wasn't much else he could do. I dropped my armload o' wood and all three of their horses spooked a little. Terr gave me a nasty look. He'd as soon shoot a kid as not.

"Don't be tryin' any little tricks, kid, to help give yer Pa a break," he warned me. Then to Pa, he said, in a loud voice, "I'm aimin' to leave this country, Harkins, and come by to give you a Christmas present. I reckon you can guess what one. I heard about what you said to my boys after your brother knocked my teeth out with a lucky punch." He let that settle in. The way he lisped when he talked reminded me o' them teeth, but I didn't feel much like laughin'.

"And what would that be?" Pa asked, stallin' for time. He knew what it was.

Terr said real slow and mean, "They don't come back from where yer goin'."

Pa never twitched a muscle as far as I could tell—just kept starin' at 'em. I could tell he was gonna make a break, though. It was his only chance.

Terr had his .45 drawed all along, and was aimin' it at Pa, so I knew he didn't have a chance. "Don't you do it!" I yelled. "Ma is inside dyin' and we need Pa bad."

If you live to be a million you'll never guess what Pa said then. He said, "Don't beg, son."

Those coulda been his last words, and I reckon he knew it.

Terr never said a word, only sighted more careful, but he never got to squeeze off, and it turned out them wasn't Pa's last words, either.

It sounded to me like the scattergun went off right in my ear. Terr's gun arm just plumb wilted. I saw blood flyin' and saw his pistol drop, but didn't really know what was happenin', it was so quick. Then Terr's horse bogged his head and went to buckin'. One o' the other horses got the same idea from Terr's, like they sometimes do, and went to pitchin', too. That third hard case was a sight,

None of Terr's boys so much as peeped—maybe because they was thinkin' that Pa might make 'em dig their own graves.

with his own nag's head pulled almost into his hip pocket, tryin' to keep him from goin' sky high like the other two. His horse finally throwed itself on its side and he hit the ground hard. None of 'em was in any shape just then to think about shootin', I can tell you—especially Terr. He got pitched off on the first jump and was tryin' to get off the top of his shot-up arm, squealin' like a stuck pig. Pa streaked in and scooped up his six-shooter from where he had dropped it.

Ma yelled—yeah, it was Ma shot Terr, sure enough. Anyhow, she yelled as loud as she could, "I still got one more barrel left," and her voice didn't sound much to me like she was dyin'.

I said to myself, "Thank you, God."

There wasn't any fight left in that crowd, especially after the second one of 'em went flyin' off his horse. He made a pretty good ride, I gotta admit, up till then, but he lit and got the wind knocked outta him so bad he sounded like a calf bawlin' and just couldn't stop for nigh onto a minute. I never heard nothin' like it till the same derned thing happened to me years later. I knew it was me squawkin' that time and learned how that fella musta felt, but I couldn't stop to save my life.

Pa finally rounded up all three with that six-shooter and I wondered if he was just gonna take 'em out and shoot 'em. We relieved 'em of all their hardware. It was pretty clear that Terr wasn't gonna be a gunman after that—leastways, not a right-handed one.

Pa was a tough bird and what he said then shouldn't leave no doubt about it. He looked them over like they was snakes and said, "If you fellers think we're gonna patch Terr up and have you in for Christmas dinner, you got another think comin'. I seen men worse hurt 'n him put in a good day ropin'. Get him back on his nag and drag it. Yer lucky I ain't gonna have you all put over the road." You coulda sharpened a knife on that voice. None of 'em so much as peeped—maybe because they was thinkin', like I was, that Pa might take 'em out in the hills and have 'em dig their own graves. They was derned glad to be let up that easy and it showed on their faces. They wasn't about to squawk.

Then another thought hit Pa, and he said, "You ain't been over to Cal's, by any chance?"

Terr didn't .say anything, or look at him. Just nursed that bleedin' arm, tryin' to tie his bandanna around it. Pa shoved him in the belly hard with that six-shooter. "Speak up, or you won't have to worry about that arm, I'll gut-shoot you!" he said.

"We ain't been over there. Think we're crazy, with all them XIT boys around?"

By then, Cal was straw boss under Old Man Griggs.

One of the others said, "We was headin' outta the country. I told him we shouldn't stop here."

Terr was hurtin' too bad even to give him a mean look.

Pa said, "You boys wouldn't be runnin' from somethin', would you?"

The one who spoke up said, "Huh-uh. Just headed for healthier country, you might say."

"If you take my advice, the healthiest thing you can do is get away from this skunk." He motioned at Terr with his six-shooter. "Git him outta here. He's beginnin' to stink the place up."

Ma was still holdin' the shotgun when they lit a shuck, though she was startin' to wobble a leetle now that it was over. Pa went and took the shotgun before she dropped it, and put his arm around her.

His voice was shaky for the first time. He asked her, "You all right, honey?"

She was leanin' pretty hard on him by then, but smiled the best she could manage. She said, "I'm just a little hungry, is all."

BY
Jack London

War

He was a young man, not more than twenty-four or -five, and he might have sat his horse with the careless grace of his youth had he not been so catlike and tense. His black eyes roved everywhere, catching the movements of twigs and branches where small birds hopped, questing ever onward through the changing vistas of trees and brush, and returning always to the clumps of undergrowth on either side. And as he watched, so did he listen, though he rode on in silence, save for the boom of heavy guns from far to the west. This had been sounding monotonously in his ears for hours, and only its cessation would have aroused his notice. For he had business closer to hand. Across his saddle-bow was balanced a carbine.

So tensely was he strung that a bunch of quail, exploding into flight from under his horse's nose, startled him to such an extent that automatically, instantly, he had reined in and fetched the carbine halfway to his shoulder. He grinned sheepishly, recovered

himself, and rode on. So tense was he, so bent upon the work he had to do, that the sweat stung his eyes unwiped, and unheeded rolled down his nose and spattered his saddle pommel. The band of his cavalryman's hat was fresh-stained with sweat. The roan horse under him was likewise wet. It was high noon of a breathless day of heat. Even the birds and squirrels did not dare the sun, but sheltered in shady hiding places among the trees.

Man and horse were littered with leaves and dusted with yellow pollen, for the open was ventured no more than was compulsory. They kept to the brush and trees, and invariably the man halted and peered out before crossing a dry glade or naked stretch of upland pasturage. He worked always to the north, though his way was devious, and it was from the north that he seemed most to apprehend that for which he was looking. He was no coward, but his courage was only that of the average civilized man, and he was looking to live, not die.

Up a small hillside he followed a cowpath through such dense scrub that he was forced to dismount and lead his horse. But when the path swung around to the west, he abandoned it and headed to the north again along the oak-covered top of the ridge.

The ridge ended in a steep descent—so steep that he zigzagged back and forth across the face of the slope, sliding and stumbling among the dead leaves and matted vines and keeping a watchful eye on the horse above that threatened to fall down upon him. The sweat ran from him, and the pollen dust, settling pungently in mouth and nostrils, increased his thirst. Try as he would, nevertheless the descent was noisy, and frequently he stopped, panting in the dry heat and listening for any warning from beneath.

At the bottom he came out on a flat, so densely forested that he could not make out its extent. Here the character of the woods changed, and he was able to remount. Instead of the twisted hillside oaks, tall straight trees, bigtrunked and prosperous, rose from the damp fat soil. Only here and there were thickets, easily avoided, while he encountered winding, parklike glades where the cattle had pastured in the days before war had run them off.

His progress was more rapid now, as he came down into the valley, and at the end of half an hour he halted at an ancient rail fence on the edge of a clearing. He did not like the openness of it, yet his path lay across to the fringe of trees that marked the banks of the stream. It was a mere quarter of a mile across that open, but the thought of venturing out in it was repugnant. A rifle, a score of them, a thousand, might lurk in that fringe by the stream.

Twice he essayed to start, and twice he paused. He was appalled by his own loneliness. The pulse of war that beat from the west suggested the companionship of battling thousands; here was naught but silence, and himself, and possible death-dealing bullets from a myriad ambushes. And yet his task was to find what he feared to find. He must go on, and on, till somewhere, some time, he encountered another man, or other men from the other side, scouting, as he was scouting, to make report, as he must make report, of having come in touch.

Changing his mind, he skirted inside the woods for a distance, and again peeped forth. This time, in the middle of the clearing, he saw a small farmhouse. There were no signs of life. No smoke curled from the chimney, not a barnyard fowl clucked and strutted. The kitchen door stood open, and he gazed so long and hard into the black aperture that it seemed almost that a farmer's wife must emerge at any moment.

He licked the pollen and dust from his dry lips, stiffened himself, mind and body, and rode out into the blazing sunshine. Nothing stirred. He went on past the house, and approached the wall of trees and bushes by the river's bank. One thought persisted maddeningly. It was of the crash into his body of a high-velocity bullet. It made him feel very fragile and defenseless, and he crouched lower in the saddle.

Tethering his horse in the edge of the wood, he continued a hundred yards on foot till he came to the stream. Twenty feet wide it was, without perceptible current, cool and inviting, and he was very thirsty. But he waited inside his screen of leafage, his eyes fixed on the screen on the opposite side. To make the wait endurable, he sat down, his carbine resting on his knees. The minutes passed, and slowly his tenseness relaxed. At last he decided there was no danger; but as he prepared to part the bushes and bend down to the wa-

So suddenly that it almost startled a cry from him, the bushes parted and a face peered out.

ter, a movement among the opposite bushes caught his eye.

It might be a bird. But he waited. Again there was an agitation of the bushes, and then, so suddenly that it almost startled a cry from him, the bushes parted and a face peered out. It was a face covered with several weeks' growth of ginger-colored beard. The eyes were blue and wide apart, with laughter-wrinkles in the corners that showed despite the tired and anxious expression of the whole face.

All this he could see with microscopic clearness, for the distance was no more than twenty feet. And all this he saw in such brief time, that he saw it as he lifted his carbine to his shoulder. He glanced along the sights, and knew that he was gazing upon a man who was as good as dead. It was impossible to miss at such point-blank range.

But he did not shoot. Slowly he lowered the carbine and watched. A hand clutching a water bottle became visible and the ginger beard bent downward to fill the bottle. He could hear the gurgle of water. Then arm and bottle and ginger beard disappeared behind the closing bushes. A long time he waited, when, with thirst unslaked, he crept back to his horse, rode slowly across the sun-washed clearing, and passed into the shelter of the woods beyond.

Another day, hot and breathless. A deserted farmhouse, large, with many outbuildings and an orchard, standing in a clearing. From the woods, on a roan horse, carbine across pommel, rode the young man with the quick black eyes. He breathed with relief as he gained the house. That a fight had taken place here earlier in the season was evident. Clips and empty cartridges, tarnished with verdigris, lay on the ground, which, while wet, had been torn up by the hoofs of horses. Hard by the kitchen garden were graves,

A bullet went through his hat, but he was unaware, though he did know when another tore through the apples on the pommel.

tagged and numbered. From the oak tree by the kitchen door, in tattered, weather-beaten garments, hung the bodies of two men. The faces, shriveled and defaced, bore no likeness to the faces of men. The roan horse snorted beneath them, and the rider caressed and soothed it and tied it farther away.

Entering the house, he found the interior a wreck. He trod on empty cartridges as he walked from room to room to reconnoiter from the windows. Men had camped and slept everywhere, and on the floor of one room he came upon stains unmistakable where the wounded had been laid down.

Again outside, he led the horse around behind the barn and invaded the orchard. A dozen trees were burdened with ripe apples. He filled his pockets, eating while he picked. Then a thought came to him, and he glanced at the sun, calculating the time of his return to camp. He pulled off his shirt, tying the sleeves and making a bag. This he proceeded to fill with apples.

As he was about to mount his horse, the animal suddenly pricked up its ear. The man, too, listened, and heard, faintly, the thud of hoofs on soft earth. He crept to the corner of the barn and peered out. A dozen mounted men, strung out loosely, approaching from the opposite side of the clearing, were only a matter of a hundred yards or so away. They rode on to the house. Some dismounted, while others remained in the saddle as an earnest that their stay would be short. They seemed to be holding a council, for he could hear them talking excitedly in the detested tongue of the alien invader. The time passed, but they seemed unable to reach a decision. He put the carbine away in its boot, mounted, and waited impatiently, balancing the shirt of apples on the pommel.

He heard footsteps approaching, and drove his spurs so fiercely into the roan as to force a surprised groan from the animal as it leaped forward. At the corner of the barn he saw the intruder, a mere boy of nineteen or twenty for all of his uniform, jump back to escape being run down. At the same moment the roan swerved, and its rider caught a glimpse of the aroused men by the house. Some were springing from their horses, and he could see the rifles going to their shoulders. He passed the kitchen door and the dried corpses swinging in the shade, compelling his foes to run around the front of the house. A rifle cracked, and a second, but he was going fast, leaning forward, low in the saddle, one hand clutching the shirt of apples, the other guiding the horse.

The top bar of the fence was four feet high, but he knew his roan and leaped it at full career to the accompaniment of several scattered shots. Eight hundred yards straight away were the

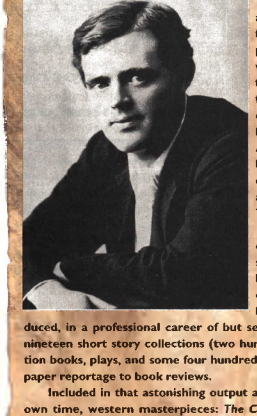
woods, and the roan was covering the distance with mighty strides. Every man was now firing. They were pumping their guns so rapidly that he no longer heard individual shots. A bullet went through his hat, but he was unaware, though he did know when another tore through the apples on the pommel. And he winced and ducked even lower when a third bullet, fired low, struck a stone between his horse's legs and ricocheted off through the air, buzzing and humming like some incredible insect.

The shots died down as the magazines were emptied, until, quickly, there was no more shooting. The young man was elated. Through that astonishing fusillade he had come unscathed. He glanced back. Yes, they had emptied their magazines. He could see several reloading. Others were running back behind the house for their horses. As he looked two, already mounted, came back into view around the corner, riding hard. And at the same moment, he saw the man with the unmistakable ginger beard kneel down on the ground, level his gun, and coolly take his time for the long shot.

The young man threw his spurs into the horse, crouched very low, and swerved in his flight in order to distract the other's aim. And still the shot did not come. With each jump of the horse, the woods sprang nearer. They were only two hundred yards away, and still the shot was delayed.

And then he heard it, the last thing he was to hear, for he was dead ere he hit the ground in the long crashing fall from the saddle. And they, watching at the house, saw him fall, saw his body bounce when it struck the earth, and saw the burst of red-cheeked apples that rolled about him. They laughed at the unexpected eruption of apples, and clapped their hands in applause of the long shot by the man with the ginger beard.

JACK LONDON
(1876-1916)



by Dale L. Walker

In 1911, the year "War" first appeared, Jack London was thirty-five years old and had been writing professionally for twelve years. He wrote stories of prehistory and the future, of the South Seas, of prize-fights and revolutions, but his novels and stories of the West–from Mexico to his beloved California, to Alaska and the Yukon–established him as America's bestselling, most celebrated and prolific western author between the eras of Mark Twain and Louis L'Amour.

When he died of a drug overdose (probably accidental–he was suffering excruciating pain from kidney disease and other ailments) on November 22, 1916, just before his fortieth birthday, he had produced, in a professional career of but seventeen years, twenty-two novels, nineteen short story collections (two hundred stories in all), several nonfiction books, plays, and some four hundred other published items, from newspaper reportage to book reviews.

Included in that astonishing output are works now considered, as in his own time, western masterpieces: *The Call of the Wild, White Fang, Martin Eden, Burning Daylight, The Valley of the Moon,* and such unforgettable stories as "The White Silence," "An Odyssey of the North," "To Build a Fire," "All Gold Cañon," and "Lost Face."

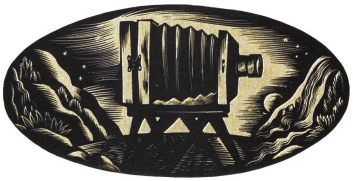
Oddly enough, "War" was rejected by ten magazines (including *Cosmopolitan, McClure's, Harper's,* and *Saturday Evening Post*), before it was finally sold to the British magazine *Nation* for a paltry £2.12 (a bit over $10). Why was it so difficult to find a publisher for it? Nobody knows. Maybe it was a trifle too weird for the big magazine markets of the day–after all, London keeps the reader in limbo in terms of where and when the story takes place, even what war the young man is involved in. Maybe magazine editors who normally would have jumped for joy at a story by Jack London suspected there was a hidden message in it that they couldn't figure out.

London himself considered the story "one of his gems," as his wife, Charmian Kittredge, said in her biography, *The Book of Jack London* (1920), but the story languished for decades before it was noticed and anthologized.

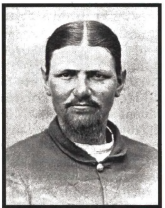
John Griffith "Jack" London was born on January 12, 1876, in San Francisco, and by the time his first professional story was published in 1899 in *The Overland Monthly* he had been a cannery worker, an oyster pirate on San Francisco Bay, a seaman on the sealing schooner *Sophia Sutherland* in the Bering Sea, a tramp with the western contingent of Coxey's Army, and a prospector in the Klondike goldfields.

His was one of the most compelling, eventful lives in American literary history and through all of it, Jack London lived up to his personal credo:

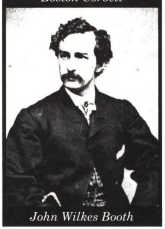
"I would rather be ashes than dust!...I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet... I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. I shall use my time."



THE STRANGE LIFE OF BOSTON CORBETT



Boston Corbett



John Wilkes Booth

THE PEOPLE OF CLOUD COUNTY, in north central Kansas, knew that they had a strange new homesteader in their midst when Boston Corbett arrived in the county seat of Concordia in 1878 in a buckboard pulled by a pony he called Billy. He was small and wiry, with a thin, straggly mustache and beard. He wore a faded homespun shirt and trousers held up with an old army belt from which two pistols flapped in scuffed holsters at his sides. Everyone who saw him remarked on his hair–parted severely in the middle of his head and pulled behind his ears to hang down in straight black locks to his shoulders–and his burning brown eyes, which were fueled as if by some interior fever, unblinking and scary.

He said he was taking up farming on eighty acres of land a few miles northeast of Concordia, along the Republican River. He built a crude dugout on his property and hired some men to plow the ground and plant corn. But he seemed to do little farming–he had no stock other than his faithful pony, and no farming implements. He had no friends and

BY HUGH McCORD

made none, welcomed no one on his property, and waved his pistols at those who ventured too close to his dugout. He lived as a hermit—a strange life for one who, as it soon became known, was a seasoned fire-and-brimstone evangelist, one of the "shouting brethren," as a Topeka newspaper described him, calling sinners to task at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Concordia.

It became clear that his God was an angry God and that he was His militant messenger. In his preaching he would throw his arms out crucifixionlike, toss his long hair from side to side in a spasm of religious ardor, and recount his days as a "down-and-outer," how he "came to Christ," was baptized, heard voices, and saw angels. He told of seeing signs in the sky that read, "Repent, for the Day is at hand!" and of going off to war to kill Confederates. He said he marched into battle with a single thought in mind: "I will say to them, 'God have mercy on your souls'—then pop them off."

He made no secret of his past; indeed, his notoriety had preceded him even to remote Concordia and his name and his single celebrated act, having occurred only thirteen years before, drew crowds to his revivals.

People came not so much to hear his fervent messages of sin and redemption as simply to see him: Boston Corbett, Lincoln's Avenger, the strange, fiery little preacher-soldier who had killed John Wilkes Booth.

What is known of Corbett's life before that violent moment on April 26, 1865, when he became the Jack Ruby of his era, has been pieced together from Corbett's own periodic, often confused and contradictory testimony and that of his few acquaintances and fewer friends, from Union Army records and newspaper accounts.

He was born Thomas P. Corbett in London in 1832, emigrated with his parents to Troy, New York, in 1839, and as a youth, he said, "struggled in poverty for an education, became a fair scholar and fluent speaker."

PEOPLE CAME NOT SO MUCH TO HEAR CORBETT'S FERVENT MESSAGES OF SIN AND REDEMPTION AS TO SEE THE MAN WHO HAD KILLED JOHN WILKES BOOTH.

In Troy, at a young age, he learned to be a hatter in a time when the dire occupational hazard of the trade was unknown. In the 1850s, when Corbett was learning his craft, the felt for hats was made from rabbit fur soaked in open vats of nitrate of mercury, and the inescapable inhalation of these vapors affected the brain. Hallucinatory episodes and outright psychoses were often the product of the hatter's labors and were most certainly the root of Corbett's undoubted madness.

He worked as a hatter in Troy and in New York City for several years and is said to have married during this period, and to have lost his wife and baby in childbirth. After this tragedy, he drank heavily and strayed into religion after attending a Salvation Army meeting in New York.

In 1857, while working in Boston, Corbett was baptized. The experience so moved him that he changed his name to that of his adopted city.

He was by now a local eccentric, wearing his hair long "because all the pictures of Christ represented Him wearing long locks," but his benign religious fanaticism was to take a violent turn in the summer of 1858. After a revival meeting at a North Square church in Boston, he was accosted by two prostitutes. The experience so unhinged him that he returned to his cheap boardinghouse room, pored over chapters 18–19 of the book of Matthew ("And if thine eye offends thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee . . . and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake . . .") and castrated himself with a pair of scissors. He was treated at Massachusetts General Hospital from July 16 until August 18, 1858.

In April 1861, Corbett enlisted as a private in Company I, 12th New York Militia, and reenlisted in August 1863 as a corporal and later as a sergeant in Company L, 16th New York Cavalry. Despite his advances in rank, his army career was marked by disciplinary problems. He insisted on haranguing fellow soldiers for their profanity, held unauthorized prayer sessions, and argued with his superiors. He was remembered by New York cavalrymen for his periodic punishment tours around the guardhouse carrying a knapsack filled with bricks.

Corbett was taken prisoner in Culpeper, Virginia, in June 1864, by Confederate rangers under John Singleton Mosby and sent to the already notorious (it had opened only four months before) Andersonville Prison in Georgia. He endured five months of incarceration there, three of them outdoors, since shelter was unavailable, before being released in an exchange of prisoners. He was sent to an army hospital in An-

napolis, Maryland, to recover from exposure, malnutrition, and scurvy.

There is no clear record of Corbett's duties or whereabouts at the end of 1864 and in the first four months of 1865, but he had returned to the 16th New York Cavalry by April 24, 1865, and was the first man to volunteer for service in the pursuit of President Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth.

On April 15, the day Lincoln was shot, Gen. Lafayette C. Baker, provost marshal for the War Department in Washington, was given command of the mission to capture Booth. His specific orders were to "capture but not to shoot Booth." Corbett stepped forward when Lt. Edward P. Doherty of the 16th Regiment asked for twenty-six volunteers.

Doherty and his men took the steamer *John S. Ide* down the Potomac from Washington. In the darkness of the early morning of April 26 the cavalrymen advanced to a point near Bowling Green, Virginia, sixty miles south of the capital, where it was reported that Booth and a fellow conspirator, David E. Herold, were hiding in a tobacco barn on a farm owned by one Richard Garrett.

At about three in the morning, Doherty's men surrounded the barn and Booth and Herold were ordered to surrender. Herold complied but Booth refused to emerge. Pine boughs were brought forward and placed around the barn, yet Booth still refused to lay down his weapons and give himself up. The order was given to torch the boughs and the barn erupted in flame like tinder.

Corbett, meantime, was among Doherty's troopers stationed at a safe point on the outbuilding's perimeter. He could see the lone figure inside through a gap in the barn's siding. Corbett claimed later that he saw the fugitive

FROM THE BEGINNING THERE WAS CONTROVERSY AS TO WHETHER CORBETT KILLED BOOTH OR BOOTH COMMITTED SUICIDE.

standing on a bale of hay and fired his rifle through the makeshift loophole after seeing Booth raise his pistol to shoot at Doherty. In seemingly contradictory claims he also said he did not want Booth to be roasted alive in the barn and that "Providence directed me."

Whatever the case, Booth, shot through the spine, was dragged from the burning barn and died between 5:30 and 7:00 A.M. (the accounts vary).

Corbett was immediately arrested by Lt. Col. Everett J. Conger, Doherty's superior officer and the man in overall command of the Garrett farm raid. The charge was breach of military discipline "in firing without Doherty's order and in defiance of General Baker's order."

Corbett was taken away in custody to the capital to await court-martial, but upon hearing the story of the incident, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton ordered the sergeant's freedom. "The rebel is dead," Stanton announced theatrically, "the patriot lives . . . the patriot is released."

Corbett was mustered out on August 17, 1865, and moved to Danbury, Connecticut, where he found work again in the hatter's trade. In Camden, New Jersey, where he cropped up in the late 1860s, he was known as a "Methodist lay preacher," and soon became full-time minister at the Siloam Methodist Episcopal Mission there. A Philadelphia reporter who found him in Camden wrote that Booth's slayer lived alone in a little house, did his own cooking, and "preaches and exhorts himself and uses a Windsor chair for a pulpit."

From the beginning there was some controversy as to whether or not Corbett fired the fatal shot that killed Booth or whether Booth committed suicide. Byron Berkeley Johnson, who seems to have known Corbett well, and who even had dinner with him after his release from custody and took him to Matthew Brady's studio in Washington to have his portrait made, wrote of those who denied Corbett's deed, "It might as truthfully be said that Booth did not shoot Lincoln." Even John G. Nicolay and John Hay, who had unlimited access to the records, credit Corbett with killing Booth in their ten-volume biography of Lincoln published in 1890.

For his part of the government's reward for bringing Booth to justice, Corbett received $1,653.85. His petition for a federal pension for his service in the union Army, specifically for his work as a volunteer in the dangerous business of tracking down Lincoln's assassin, came through in 1882. He was granted $7.50 a month in appreciation of his "services" to the United States.

What drew Boston Corbett to Kansas in 1878? And why Kansas, specifically Concordia, of all places?

The answers, like those on Corbett's life, begin with *perhaps* and *maybe* and require the word *allegedly*. Perhaps he knew some former Union soldiers or fellow Andersonville prisoners in the area. Perhaps he was running away from something, such as those letters he allegedly received from unreconstructed Confederates

which were signed "Booth's Avenger." Maybe he wanted to escape the incessant notoriety he received from eastern newspapers, even thirteen years after the event, as "Lincoln's Avenger." Maybe he was curious about heartland America, a place he had never been, and saw it as a fertile field for his evangelism.

As for the facts of Corbett's Kansas period, what is known from the actual historical record is sparse and sad; all of it points to the deterioration of his mental state.

In November 1885, Corbett was arrested for threatening some boys with a pistol who were playing baseball on the Sabbath in a pasture near his property. The case was dismissed by the county attorney.

A year after this incident, a state legislator from Cloud County managed to get Corbett hired as an assistant doorkeeper at the Kansas House of Representatives in Topeka. Corbett reported for duty in January 1887, and lasted a month before his brain's demons caught up with him.

In a 1913 account gathered by author Byron Berkeley Johnson, this account was given of Corbett's conduct in the Topeka legislative chambers: "On February 15 [1887], laboring under the impression that he was being discriminated against by other officers of the House, Mr. Corbett drew a revolver and, running the officers from the building, created such a commotion that it became necessary to adjourn the legislature. He was finally seized by police officers, overpowered, and taken before the probate judge, where he was adjudged insane on the following day."

Subsequent newspaper reports in the Kansas capital said that Corbett believed the other doorkeepers and "officers of the legislature" were laughing at him behind his back, that he first drew a knife and threatened a janitor, then pointed a revolver at the House sergeant-at-arms and, proceeding to the House gallery, succeeded in causing lawmakers, staff, and workers to flee for their lives.

THERE IS NOT A SINGLE SUBSTANTIATED SIGHTING OF CORBETT OR A SHRED OF REAL EVIDENCE ABOUT HIM AFTER HE ESCAPED FROM THE ASYLUM.

Prairie justice abided no wasting of time. The day after the fracas, Corbett was brought before a judge. Topeka District Attorney Charles Curtis (later vice president of the United States under President Herbert C. Hoover) spoke for the state. The verdict was to commit Corbett to the Topeka Asylum for the Insane.

Corbett made at least one failed attempt to escape before May 26, 1888, when he succeeded. Walking around the asylum grounds on that day with other inmates, Corbett saw, tied up in front of the hospital office, a pony belonging to the young son of the superintendent. He returned, stole the horse, and rode away.

A week later, as flyers were posted everywhere and posses combed the state for him, Corbett was spotted in Neodesha, in the southeastern part of the state. There, it was reported, he met a local school superintendent named Richard Thatcher and one Irvin DeFord, son of a soldier who had served with Corbett at Andersonville. Thatcher and DeFord are said to have supplied Corbett with a fresh horse, food, and money, and it is their testimony, filtered through others, that Corbett said he intended to flee to Mexico.

He may have. He was only fifty-six years old and in good physical health, and Mexico was the perfect place to do what he did—disappear.

There is not a single substantiated sighting of Corbett or a shred of real evidence about him after June 1, 1888—the date he rode away from Neodesha. A Judge Huron, appointed Corbett's "guardian" by the court that had judged him insane, tried to track his ward, but to no avail. In the early 1900s, Huron investigated the case of a man who filed for a pension under the name Boston Corbett. The judge determined that the claimant was six feet tall and under fifty years of age (Corbett was five feet five inches tall and would have been sixty-eight years old in 1900) and succeeded in sending the man to a penitentiary in Georgia.

Other impostors cropped up periodically. In September 1905, the *New York Sun* carried a story about a man in Dallas, Texas, claiming to be Corbett. He turned out to be a fraud. In November 1913, another "Boston Corbett," much too young (Corbett would have been eighty-one), was a patient in the government hospital for the insane in Washington, D.C.

In 1901, a writer named Osborn H. Oldroyd wrote in a privately published book about the Lincoln assassination that Corbett in the 1890s was earning a living as a traveling patent medicine peddler and made his home in Enid, Oklahoma. A 1913 story in the *Boston Herald*, perhaps derived from

Oldroyd's account, also claimed that Corbett became "a patent medicine peddler and was residing in Enid, Oklahoma" at the time of his death. In the 1920s, historian Lloyd Lewis investigated Corbett's disappearance and concluded that Oldroyd's story contained some inaccuracies but that there was "evidence of Corbett's residence in Enid, Oklahoma."

Enid, not far south of the Kansas state line and only about 150 miles southwest of Neodesha, where Corbett was last sighted, is where the strange story of Boston Corbett takes its strangest turn. To trace it, we have to turn the calendar back to 1870.

In that year, a Memphis lawyer named Finis L. Bates moved to the town of Granbury, Texas, near Fort Worth, and had as one of his first clients a saloonkeeper named John St. Helen. This man, when he fell ill in an asthma attack and thought he was at death's door, told Bates that his real name was John Wilkes Booth. He said that the man killed in the Garrett tobacco barn was a Confederate sympathizer named Robey and that he, St. Helen/Booth, had never been in the barn or near the Garrett farm and had, in fact, escaped to Texas where he had assumed his St. Helen identity.

St. Helen recovered from his illness and disappeared from Granbury. Bates, who believed his client's tale, eventually moved back to Memphis and spent a lot of time investigating St. Helen's claim. He had a tintype photograph of St. Helen and collected "evidence" that his former client was Lincoln's murderer. (Among the scraps of "evidence" was the story that another Memphis lawyer, former Confederate Gen. Albert S. Pike, had caught a glimpse of St. Helen in Fort Worth and exclaimed, "My God, Booth!")

In January 1903, Finis Bates read a newspaper story about the suicide by arsenic poisoning, in Enid, Oklahoma, of a man known as David E. George, a local barfly and house painter who had claimed to be John Wilkes Booth. Bates went to Enid, found the corpse of George still on display in Penniman's Undertaking Parlor —embalmed, dressed, and unclaimed—and was satisfied that David George and John St. Helen were one and the same man.

Enid, Oklahoma, is where the story of Boston Corbett takes its strangest turn.

In a bizarre turn of events, Bates ended up buying the corpse and taking it home with him, where he placed it in his barn. He wrote a book about the case, displayed the mummified remains to friends, then leased the corpse to a carnival promoter who went broke and ended up in Declo, Idaho, where he occasionally placed the mummy on his porch in a rocking chair and charged a dime to passersby to view it.

Finis Bates died in 1923 and the mummy of "John Wilkes Booth" cropped up around the country in carnival circuits until the 1930s, when it disappeared.

Now, whatever can be said of the claim of St. Helen/George that he was Booth, he apparently became notorious among the citizens of Enid, Oklahoma, for his *claim* to be Booth.

Did Boston Corbett, vaguely associated with the town in the 1890s, and with at least one newspaper claim that he died there, go to Enid to meet or confront the man who claimed to be John Wilkes Booth? It seems a miraculous coincidence that the man who claimed to be John Wilkes Booth and the man who was credited with killing John Wilkes Booth, both had a contemporaneous association with a town as obscure as Enid (which was not incorporated until 1893), in Oklahoma Territory.

But no matter the curiosity of these circumstances, it is unlikely we will know Boston Corbett's fate at this late date.

The last documented occasion on which he was sighted was June 1, 1888, in Neodesha, Kansas.

All else is mystery and speculation.

There is a trace of him remaining. A few miles south of Concordia, Kansas, is a stone marker between two cedar trees in a pasture just off a county road. On the marker a plaque reads:

1878
Boston Corbett's Dugout
Sixty yards south is the site of the dugout home of Boston Corbett, who as a soldier shot John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Lincoln

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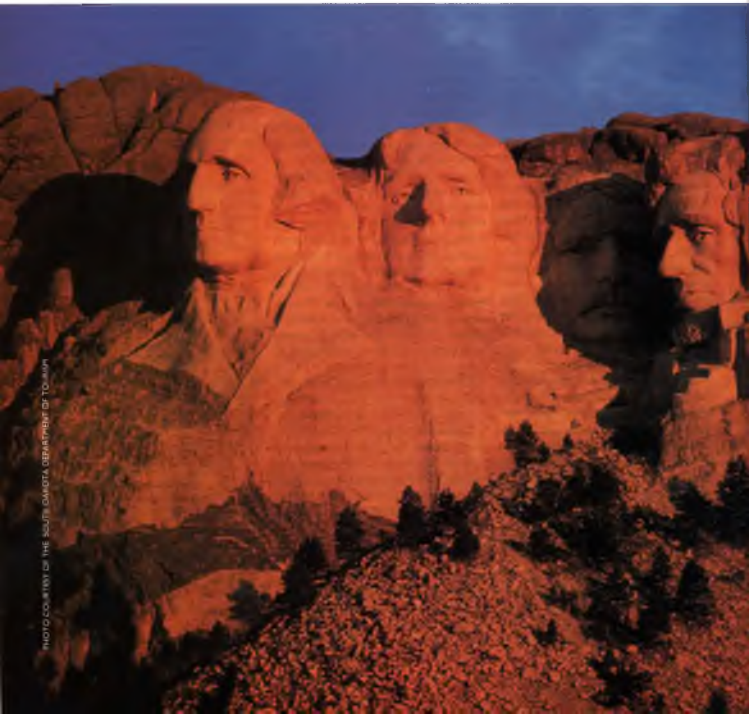
DEADWOOD AND THE BLACK HILLS



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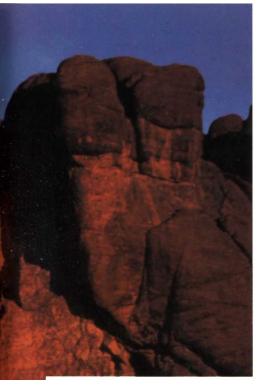
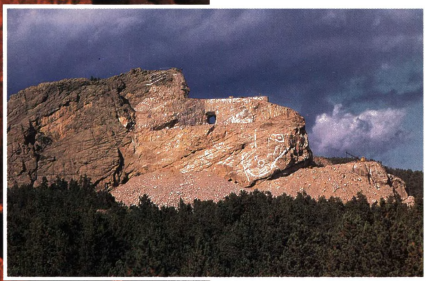
BY JANE CANDIA COLEMAN



"GOLD! STIRRING NEWS FROM THE BLACK HILLS...A BELT OF GOLD THIRTY MILES WIDE. THE PRECIOUS DUST FOUND IN THE GRASS UNDER HORSES' FEET...!"

The headline in the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* of August 7, 1874, stirred the hopes and greed of thousands and began one of the largest gold rushes in American history—this regardless of the fact that the Black Hills, the sacred *Paha-Sapa* of the Sioux, had been deeded to them "forever" by the Treaty of Laramie in 1869.

Mount Rushmore, a major tourist attraction in the Black Hills, features presidents Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt, and Lincoln. (Inset) Nearby, work continues on the Crazy Horse Monument, which was begun over forty years ago.



That treaty set aside forty-five thousand square miles of present-day South Dakota west of the Missouri River "for the absolute and undisturbed use and occupation of the Sioux Nation," and stipulated that no white person could settle or even pass through the territory without consent of the Indians.

(INSET PHOTO) TONY STONE WORLDWIDE

Then as now, however, the American West was a land of adventure and promise, and rumors of gold in the Black Hills had persisted since Father de Smet had explored the Upper Missouri in 1839.

In July 1874, by orders from Washington, General George Armstrong Custer and the Seventh Cavalry, accompanied by geologists, botanists, news correspondents, a photographer, miners, and a military marching band, mounted an exploration of the Black Hills.

What they found was not so different from what travelers find today: lush mountain meadows, massive stands of ponderosa pine, clear streams, and wildflowers in abundance.

On my own trip through the hills, the list of flowers that I saw reads almost like a poem: black-eyed Susans, purple and yellow coneflowers, spikes of blue vervain, pink and white yarrow, orange butterfly weed, acres of lavender bee balm that, when crushed, filled the air with the scent of mint, fields of daisies tossing in the breeze, stalks of woolly mullein—the list is endless, a botanist's delight.

And in those same high meadows, even today, are large herds of buffalo, antelope, and deer, and once, when I stopped to photograph, a red fox broke cover and ran from me, his bushy tail streaming, his fur tipped with gold.

Yes, these hills are sacred, but not in the way modern churchgoers define the word.

What exists is a vast, outdoor cathedral—rock, earth, trees, and sky—and with the exception of a few small towns, it is still unspoiled.

What Custer's expedition discovered in addition to the physical beauty of the area, however, were extensive traces of gold, "from the grass roots down," as they phrased it, and regardless of treaties, the rush was on.

By 1876, Deadwood was a boom town of over ten thousand people, and by its very presence, one of the causes of the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

The Gordon party—twenty-six men, a woman named Annie Tallent, and a boy—sneaked into the hills and survived the winter of 1874 by building a massive stockade.

They found gold, but were evicted in the spring by the Seventh Cavalry, which was under orders to keep miners out of the hills.

By 1875, however, five thousand hopefuls were ensconced in what today is Custer City, living in tents and staking out prospects. But the discovery of gold in Deadwood Gulch caused Custer City to be abandoned. By 1876 Deadwood was a brawling boom town of over ten thousand people, and by its very presence, one of the causes of the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Sitting Bull, himself, was outraged over the breaking of the Laramie Treaty. "I want no white men here," he said. "If they take the Black Hills from me, I will fight."

It is interesting to note that, although we tend to define the Old West in terms of cattle ranches, cowboys, and outlaws, much of the development of that land beyond the one hundredth meridian was due to mining—whether for gold, silver, or copper, or for modern-day uranium and coal. The cattlemen came later, driving their herds northward to feed the hungry prospectors and finding the lush forage that made ranching possible.

Deadwood is a prime example of this expansion, for with the discovery of "gold galore" came not only miners but all those who, of necessity, make up civilization: doctors, lawyers, storekeepers, dressmakers, newsmen, schoolteachers, actors, and the teamsters whose wagons and oxen hauled in not only the rudiments of civilization, but the frivolities, as well—whiskey, gamblers, and girls.

In addition there was a thriving Chinatown, beautifully described in Estelline Bennett's book, *Old Deadwood Days*—a description at odds with our perception of frontier boom towns. She writes, "In the shabby little shops were piled great quantities of beautiful Oriental silks, embroideries, eggshell china, sandalwood, teak, and carved ivory. There were innumerable laundry shops . . . gambling games . . . a joss house painted brown with little red embellishments . . . A peculiar and intriguing odor of incense came to meet you a block away." Bennett grew up in a charming house on the hill above the gulch. Her father was Granville Bennett, who came to Deadwood as judge in 1876.

There is also the story of an enterprising fellow who brought in a wagon load of cats and sold them at a handsome profit as mousers in a town overrun by rats and mice, and as companions to the "girls," who paid as much as twenty-five dollars for the prettiest of the felines. The clever mer-

Prospectors flocked to Deadwood Gulch during the gold rush of 1876. (inset) Deadwood today. The town takes great pains to preserve its historical buildings.

PHOTOS COURTESY THE SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

chant then sold his team and wagon and left town by stage with his pockets well-lined.

Whether or not he returned home safely with his money is uncertain. The Cheyenne-Deadwood stage trip was a dangerous one. The Sioux, angry at the violation of their *Paha-Sapa*, often ambushed the stage and removed the scalps of drivers and passengers, and outlaws held up the coaches with regularity.

Agnes Wright Spring, in her book, *The Cheyenne and Black Hills Stage and Express Routes*, states that in the spring of 1877, two hundred thousand dollars in gold bullion—the accumulated wealth of a winter in Deadwood—made the stagecoach trip out of town with Wyatt Earp riding shotgun.

Whether true or not, Wyatt and his brothers certainly spent the fall and winter of 1876 in Deadwood, cutting wood, freighting, and gambling.

Spring also mentions that a J. H. Holliday lost his watch in a stage holdup in June 1877. This of course was *the* J. H. Holliday, better known as Doc, who left Denver in the fall of 1876 after a brawl over a card game. What better place to go than the little boom town where miners carried their gold dust and nuggets in buckskin pouches, spent freely and gambled foolishly?

But Wyatt Earp's and Doc Holliday's places in history were to be made in another mining town. Deadwood had its own names to add to the roster of western characters: Monte Verde, the dark-haired gambler and singer; Poker Alice Tubbs—madam, gambler, and smoker of cigars; Sheriff Seth Bullock; Potato Creek Johnny,

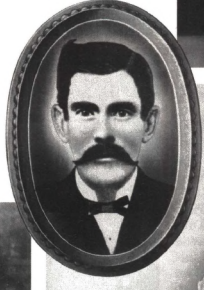
who found a nugget five inches long that weighed almost eight ounces and who spent his life in search of another; and, most famous of all, Wild Bill Hickok and that colorful, cussing female known to us as Calamity Jane.

James Butler Hickok—Indian scout, dispatch rider for Custer, and one-time marshal of Abilene, Kansas, arrived in Deadwood sometime in June of 1876—around the same time that Custer was riding into history at the Little Bighorn.

Hickok was accompanied by his friend Charlie Utter, Calamity Jane, and a prostitute named Kitty Arnold. That Hickok and Jane were together is doubtful, as in March of that year, Wild Bill had married Agnes Lake Thatcher in Cheyenne.

And why had he deserted his new bride so quickly? A look at her photograph on the marriage license (on display in the Adams Museum in Deadwood) might give us a clue, together with the fact that Agnes was eleven years older than her husband who, in true gentlemanly fashion, lied about his age for the marriage record.

Regardless of his reasons, once in Deadwood, Hickok did as he had been doing for many years. He gambled. And on the afternoon of August 2, 1876, while holding a poker hand with two aces and two eights, afterward known as "the dead man's hand," he was shot in the head from behind by



Some of the figures connected with Deadwood and the Black Hills were (clockwise from top right): Wild Bill Hickok; George Armstrong Custer; Doc Holliday; Calamity Jane.

BETTMANN ARCHIVE

Jack McCall, also known as Crooked-Nose Jack.

McCall then ran down the street and hid in a butcher shop. At his trial, Calamity testified that she tracked him there and threatened him with a meat cleaver, although others claimed she was nowhere in sight.

The trial was a travesty. McCall was acquitted by a jury of his friends and left town. Shortly thereafter he was arrested in Laramie, Wyoming, by federal authorities, tried in Yankton, South Dakota, and found guilty. He was hanged on March 1, 1877.

And Calamity, what of her? Although it is almost certain that her real name was Martha Jane Canary, the myth has become so confused with reality that the true woman may never be known. She was a teamster, a mule skinner, and a hard drinker who could outcuss most men. She had several husbands and at least one child, a daughter she had brought to Deadwood in hopes of raising money to educate her. Whether Jane actually served as scout and mule skinner for General Crook is doubtful. Her name appears nowhere on the records.

That Wild Bill ever loved her is also doubtful, although we can assume that she, in her rough and simple way, idolized him. Enough so that at her request, she was buried beside him in Mount Moriah Cemetery.

Certainly she was loved by those in Deadwood who were there at the town's birth, for when she died they gave her a fine funeral, with the service conducted by Dr. C. B. Clark, father of the poet, Badger Clark. In his sermon he focused on Calamity's kind heart and good deeds, such as the time she volunteered to nurse a group of miners with smallpox at the risk of her own health. Whatever her vices, they were forgotten by those who knew her, although she lives in history because of them.

No account of Deadwood would be complete without mention of the Homestake Mine, America's greatest and largest mine and one that is still producing today.

Discovered in April 1876 by Fred and Moses Manuel, Hank Harney, and Alexander Engh, the Homestake now owns over eight thousand acres of water and mineral rights, and the mill complex dominates the hill overlooking Bobtail Gulch and the town of Lead (pronounced *Leed*).

The original owners sold the claim for $115,000 to three men from California: James Ben Ali Haggin; Lloyd Tevis, president of Wells Fargo; and George Hearst, who had earlier made his fortune on the Comstock Lode and whose son, William Randolph, founded the Hearst newspaper chain.

In the first century of its operation, the Homestake produced one billion dollars in gold and is still producing today from shafts that descend nearly seven thousand feet into the earth.

Today, another kind of rush populates the little town in the gulch.

With the passage in 1989 of a law legalizing gambling, Deadwood came alive again. From the Bella Union, Saloon #10—scene of Hickok's murder, The Silverado, and scores of other places, comes the ringing sound of slot machines.

On the reconstructed Main Street tourists roam, clutching plastic containers filled with quarters, or sit indoors mesmerized before the colorful windows, inserting quarters and pulling levers in a kind of stylized dance. They hope to strike it rich just as the miners did.

Blackjack dealers do a steady business; old-time melodramas reenact moments from the colorful history of one of the greatest boom towns ever; and the Days of '76 Celebration recalls that time when the gulch never slept; when the Gem Theater, with its curtained boxes, doubled as a house of prostitution; when Jack Langrishe and his talented wife performed Shakespeare and the death of Little Eva for a spellbound audience; and the Bella Union sponsored a parade to advertise the arrival of the first piano; when teams of oxen crowded the street; and the coming of the stagecoach, with its six-horse hitch, bold drivers, and news from "outside," was a stirring event.

The profits from the gambling house licenses go, now, to the restoration and upkeep of the town and its buildings. Everything seems to sparkle, and the streets are clean. The newly restored Adams Museum houses an impressive collection of early photographs, Indian beadwork, and mining memorabilia.

One senses a happiness that lingers even on the roads out—south into the tall hills, north and east onto the vast and rolling South Dakota prairie.

On my own way south, beyond the great granite faces of Mount Rushmore on the route that winds through Custer National Park, a herd of burros was crossing the road. Unafraid, they came up to the car, politely asking for a handout, taking pieces of apple out of my hand with a gentleness I hadn't expected. These were the true, wild burros, marked with a cross on backs and withers, and there was a kind of magic in them, in their wise dark eyes, their fine manners, their dignity.

Certainly they aren't indigenous to the region, and yet they belong, as the buffalo belong, and the herds of mustangs, the fox that glides like a swift red arrow.

I close my eyes and see it all: slot machines, flowing streams, an abundance of flowers, the magnificence of sky, and I hope the magic will remain, and the unspoiled beauty of *Paha-Sapa*. The Black Hills. The Sacred Land.

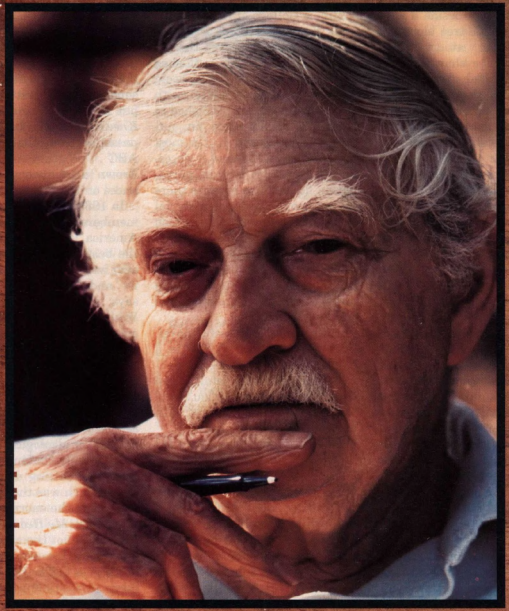
A CONVERSATION WITH DEE

Theodore Roosevelt was president, Jack Johnson was heavyweight boxing champion, Henry Ford introduced his $850.50 Model T, and General Motors and Champion Spark Plugs were launched in the year he was born. Mark Twain had two years to live. Dee Brown grew up in a world in which Libbie Custer, Buffalo Bill Cody, the Wright brothers, Kaiser Wilhelm, and Thomas Edison shared newspaper space. An era, he says, "of steam locomotives, Civil War veterans' reunions, Victorian attitudes, genuine patriotism, baseball players who loved the game as well as money, gadgets that were easily repaired and were usable for years, frequent and sudden fatal diseases, depressing funerals held in family parlors, religious revivals under big tents, and politicians who apparently believed in honor and country.

"The world I was born into bears little resemblance to the world we live in today," Brown reflects. "It was so close to the nineteenth century that I have always felt a kinship with that era."

His books, all thirty of them, show that kinship: *Fighting Indians of the West, The Settlers' West, Trail Driving Days, The Gentle Tamers: The Women of the West, The Year of the Century: 1876, Fort Phil Kearny, Showdown at Little Bighorn, The Galvanized Yankees, Grierson's Raid, The Bold Cavaliers, Hear That Lonesome Whistle Blow, The Westerners,* and his most celebrated book, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee;* and, among his novels, *Creek Mary's Blood, Kildeer Mountain,* and *A Conspiracy of Knaves.*

BROWN



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BY

Dale L. Walker

E MUST ACCEPT THE FACT THAT THE OLD WEST WAS SIMPLY A PLACE OF MAGIC AND WONDERS."

Dee Alexander Brown was born in Alberta, Bienville Parish, Louisiana, in 1908, and had a storybook beginning as a writer. At age five he remembers sitting on his grandmother's lap, beside a window with an apple tree blooming outside, looking at a school primer. One page showed a dog running and had some black marks beneath the picture. His grandmother pointed to the marks and read them: "The dog ran." Brown recalls, "I must have thought, *What magic is this? What wonder is this?* To me, the event was the discovery of a secret that for some reason had been kept from me by conspiring adults. It was the startling event of my childhood. From that moment on, I was an addict of the printed word."

He worked on the *Daily Times* in the Ozark town of Harrison, in Boone County, Arkansas; set type for the *Log Cabin Democrat* in Conway, Arkansas, while in college there ("Nothing has ever matched the fragrance of printing ink in my nostrils," he says); saw his first published composition in the Stephens, Arkansas, *News* in 1918; and sold his first story to *Blue Book* at the age of seventeen, receiving the fortune (for a teenager in 1925) of $100 for it.

His devotion to western history came from his early reading of accounts of the Lewis and Clark expedition and in seeing, at age twenty-one, the Bozeman Trail and the site of the 1866–67 Fetterman massacre and Wagon Box fight near Fort Phil Kearny, Wyoming, and the then-still-mystical town of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Brown's love for the printed word led to his career as a professional librarian. He was trained at George Washington University and practiced in the army in World War II, at the U. S. Department of Agriculture and War Department, and at the University of Illinois College of Agriculture.

His first book, *Wave High the Banner*, a novel based on the life of Davy Crockett, was published in 1942; his first nonfiction book, *Fighting Indians of the West* (with Martin Schmitt) was published in 1948. His novels were an outgrowth of his research. "In most cases," he says, "I found it necessary to construct certain narratives in fiction form because there was not enough research material for documented nonfiction, which I prefer."

Distinguishing features of Brown's novels are their solid historical bases, and of his nonfiction works, their novellike dramatic flair.

Brown's most successful novel, *Creek Mary's Blood* (1980) is a complex work that traces five generations of an Indian family from Georgia to the Minneconjou Sioux reservation in South Dakota, with Creek Mary the matriarch.

His best-known book, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1971), was, he says, "the product of twenty-five years of researching and writing other books. For a long while I collected Indian speeches without knowing exactly how I would use them. When I came to writing a history of the American West from the Indian point of view, the words of the Indians themselves gave the book much of its authority." He admits he was skeptical at first, wondering about the authenticity of speeches so beautifully phrased, at least in their translations. "I spent hours tracking down identities of the official interpreters," he says, "and eventually reached the conclusion that in most cases, it mattered little who the interpreters were. The words came through into English with the same eloquence, seasoned with inspired metaphors and similes of the natural world."

Brown credits television personality Dick Cavett with helping put *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* on bestseller lists by quoting passages from the book on his ABC program. (Eventually, Brown made two guest appearances on the Cavett show.)

In 1985 a panel of one hundred members of Western Writers of America, Inc., selected the book as the best nonfiction western book ever written. Of it, western novelist and historian Win Blevins says: "In *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, Dee Brown managed to be a revolutionary without being a radical. He changed America's views of the Indian and did it without being confrontational. In that book and in his others, he changed the way we look at the West and did it without a political or ideological agenda, did it by simply looking at the Old West and setting down what he saw—which was the truth."

(Despite the enormous popularity of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, it is not the author's favorite among his own works. That honor goes to *The Year of the Century: 1876* (1966), a book about the centennial of American independence and a year Brown considers the watershed of the nineteenth century.)

The eighty-six-year-old author continues to work. His memoir, *When the Century Was Young: A Writer's Notebook*, was published

OULDN'T IT BE WONDERFUL TO HAVE DINNER WITH SITTING BULL, GEORGE AND ELIZABETH CUSTER, SUSAN SHELBY MAGOFFIN, AND MERIWETHER LEWIS?"

in 1993 and in late 1994 his *The American West*, an anecdotal, illustrated portrait of the western experience, will be released by Simon & Schuster.

In his introduction to *The American West*, Brown sums up his convictions about the West and his philosophy in writing of it: "We must accept the fact that the Old West was simply a place of magic and wonders. Myths and folktales form the basis of almost every enduring saga in the literature of the American West. They are the comfort and joy of screen and television writers. But let us be wise enough to learn the true history so that we can recognize a myth when we see one."

Dee Brown answered LLWM's questions from his home in Little Rock, Arkansas.

LLWM: Having lived in all ten decades of this century, can you identify some of the things you miss from the early decades and some things you like and dislike about the later ones?

BROWN: Looking at both ends of the twentieth century: When I came into it, the United States had only about one-third the number of people it now has. Some call that progress, but as much as Daniel Boone disliked the "crowding" of his largely uninhabited world, I am discomfited by the rapid destruction of the land's loveliest places to make room for more people. Call it selfish if you like, it was my world and I liked it better the way it was. I grew up in small towns and small cities. In small groups of people each individual was important. In mass, the individual becomes an ant. That's why individuals were important in the thinly populated Old West.

LLWM: But there was a downside to the early days?

BROWN: Yes, the early years of this century had their bad side as well. Life expectancy was too short for the average person to get much done. Diseases baffled the medical profession and killed many promising young people. Many were poor. It was possible to rise out of poverty, but nutritional deficiencies and psychological effects sometimes shortened the lives and careers of those who managed to succeed.

LLWM: Medical advances, then; what else in contemporary America pleases you?

BROWN: What I have liked about the last years of this century are the advances in medical sciences, the rapid and reasonably priced means of travel and communication, and the creature comforts. Whether the latter are good for the human race, however, is doubtful. Air-conditioning is overpopulating the South and Southwest with overlarge and unmanageable cities.

LLWM: What of the communication revolution?

BROWN: The information superhighway will be of no use to me; I can't digest the information that comes in now. The kind of research I did for most of my books would be impossible today. The archives are being locked up to protect them from the public, and the libraries are destroying their catalogs. One can always write a novel, but who reads novels?

LLWM: In reading your *When the Century Was Young*, I was struck by what you said about feeling a kinship with the nineteenth century. Are those who love history destined to want to live in another time?

BROWN: One reason why twentieth century westerners feel a kinship with the nineteenth century is the drama of its unfolding, particularly across the West: the exploration of so much territory unseen by any beings of European origin, the importance of the individual everywhere, and the many opportunities the century afforded for success and failure. It was an era of romance, adventure, and courage; the era of steamboats, the first railroads, the madness and glory of the Civil War and the Indian wars; of cattle drives, the cowboy, the settlers on the plains, the miners in the mountains, the first American ballads and ragtime; of religious fervors and the first truly American pieces of literature. With all its dangers and evils and the brevity of lives, it was a special time. No other century in any other part of the world appeals to me as does the nineteenth century in America.

LLWM: Your maternal grandmother lived with your family when you moved to Arkansas in 1913. Her father hunted with Davy Crockett and she came to Arkansas in a covered wagon in 1849. As a youngster listening to her stories, were you aware of the historical importance of her experiences?

HE WRITING AND RESEARCH OF *BURY MY HEART AT WOUNDED KNEE* TURNED OUT TO BE THE RESEARCH FOR *CREEK MARY'S BLOOD*."

BROWN: One of the ironies of American life is that so few youngsters listen to what their elders, especially their grandparents, have to tell. One of my grandmothers lived through two-thirds of the nineteenth century and told me stories of wagon trains, hunting, the Civil War and Reconstruction, primitive foods and clothing, the coming of the railroad to her county, and much more. But I was too young to know its value, too ignorant to write it down.

LLWM: I know you fell in love with Sherwood Anderson's books, and those of John Dos Passos, at a young age. What other books and authors do you remember as an adolescent?

BROWN: In addition to Anderson and Dos Passos, of course I read Edgar Rice Burroughs and Zane Grey. Then there was Robert Louis Stevenson, Jack London's sea tales, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and the pulp magazines—especially the western variety.

LLWM: What was the first historical work you can remember that made an impression on you?

BROWN: The account of the Lewis and Clark expedition made a deep impression on me. That book was put in my hands by a high school teacher whose name I should honor, but alas, can't recall.

LLWM: Who are some of your favorite historical writers and fiction writers?

BROWN: My favorite historical writers are J. Frank Dobie and Shelby Foote. There are several others who have published one good book, but none are writing as Dobie or William H. Prescott wrote. My favorite fiction writers are Mark Twain, Joseph Conrad, William Faulkner, and my friend Charles Portis [Arkansas author of *True Grit*, *Norwood*, and other books]. Add a poet, Stephen Vincent Benet, and add several others who have published one great book.

LLWM: What western personalities have interested you the most?

BROWN: There are a lot of them that have captivated me: Sitting Bull, George and Elizabeth Custer, Susan Shelby Magoffin, and, of course, Meriwether Lewis. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have dinner with those five people?

LLWM: I think you were twenty-one when you made your first trip into the far West and saw the old Bozeman Trail and the sites of the Fetterman and Wagon Box fights in Wyoming. Had you read about these places and events before you saw where they had taken place?

BROWN: Before seeing Fort Phil Kearny I had heard something about the Fetterman fight from the splendid history teacher I was accompanying. And I had read John Neihardt's epic poem about it, *Twilight of the Sioux*. In that period there was very little available about Fort Phil Kearny or many other incidents of the Old West.

LLWM: Why do you suppose these places made a bigger impression on you than the Custer battlefield?

BROWN: Probably because of the absence of markers, unlike at the Custer battleground. Marble monuments and paved roads do not a realistic historical site make.

LLWM: You have had an uncommon writer's career in that your books include successful and highly regarded novels, as well as historical works. Looking back, which gave you the most pleasure as a writer—the fiction or the histories?

BROWN: Working on and completing a historical or documented nonfiction work is more satisfying to me than writing a novel. In writing history, incidents or "bridges" to connect a narrative flow cannot be invented; they must be searched out and proven. This is like solving a mystery or puzzle, and can be very rewarding. In a novel, the author simply invents incidents and bridges to tell a story.

LLWM: College creative writing courses seem to belittle nonfiction writing as a craft and raise fiction and poetry to a pedestal as art. Do you consider your nonfiction work creative?

BROWN: Yes. Of course nonfiction is creative. It is also harder to write than fiction.

LLWM: Your historical books have staying power: they are always in print, always being read and used. What do you think you

did in writing these books that made them so appealing?

BROWN: I wish I knew.

LLWM: I think I know, but I'm supposed to be asking the questions, not answering them. I think it would be fair to say that your most celebrated nonfiction book is *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, and your most famous novel is *Creek Mary's Blood*. Both clearly required a lot of hard research. Which took the longest to research and write?

BROWN: The writing and research of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* turned out to be the research for *Creek Mary's Blood*. The work of fiction was the logical outcome of the nonfiction research.

LLWM: What was the inspiration behind *Creek Mary's Blood*?

* * *

BROWN: I started to write a biography of the real Creek Mary, but I didn't have access to enough material, so I used the facts I had as a basis for fiction. The real Creek Mary never got out of Georgia. She was all Creek. Her children were Creek and Cherokee.

LLWM: Nearly a quarter century after its publication, and knowing what you know since writing it, is there anything you'd add or delete from *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* if you had to write it over?

BROWN: I've often regretted that I didn't include more about the Wounded Knee massacre. By the time I wrote that part I was so tired that I didn't want to write anymore.

LLWM: Geoffrey Wolfe, in reviewing *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* in *Newsweek*, used the phrase, "revisionary history." Were you aware in writing the book that it was revisionary?

BROWN: I don't know what it means.

LLWM: I think it has the same approximate meaning as the kind of spin the "new" historians are putting on the era of nineteenth century western expansion—framing it in terms of conquest, racism, genocide, and environmental ruin. What is your reaction to these "revisionists"?

BROWN: I think they are young academics trying to be noticed.

LLWM: Well said. You became a newspaperman at a young age and I notice that there are reporters in your fiction—the narrators of *Creek Mary's Blood* and *Kildeer Mountain*, for example. Was your newspaper background of value to you later as a historian and writer?

BROWN: Yes, I would say so. I became a newspaperman at the Harrison, Arkansas, *Times*. I went to Conway later, to go to college, and I operated a Linotype machine at *The Log Cabin Democrat* for part-time income.

LLWM: In 1947 or thereabouts, when you were working on *Fighting Indians of the West* and visiting the Scribner's office in New York, you had a meeting with the legendary editor Maxwell Perkins. What is your recollection of him?

BROWN: He wanted to get things done and didn't waste time with idle talk. He was ordinary looking and combed his hair straight back. He was slightly deaf.

LLWM: Have you had trouble separating myth from reality in writing about the Old West? Can one, in fact, be separated from the other?

BROWN: No, never. They both belong together. Myth comes out of reality and vice versa.

LLWM: What is there about our western saga that so captivated you and made it your life's work?

BROWN: I got into it before science fiction was in vogue and before the period of space exploration. The West was the exciting time in my life.

LLWM: Are there books you still want to write?

BROWN: There is always something else you want to write. It takes time and energy . . . but I have an unfinished novel set in the last half of the nineteenth century that perhaps someone will complete.

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