

# Texas Western

EVERY STORY NEW AND COMPLETE

JAN. 25¢

FEATURING

## TEXAS RAWHIDER

A Novel of the Brawling Frontier

By JACK BARTON



A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION



# Do You Want a **SUCCESS-WINNING VOICE?**

Give the Feuchtinger Voice-Method  
a chance to help you develop more  
**POWER VIGOR CHARACTER**  
**IN YOUR VOICE**

Add *controlled* strength to your voice and people will listen when you talk. A stronger voice may make you more interesting, more persuasive, more poised. What you say will have more importance, when your voice is full-toned, because people generally respect a BIG voice.

**Thousands are held back  
by a negative voice—  
AND DON'T KNOW IT!**

Your popularity and recognition depends, frequently, on your voice and the impression it makes. Don't be handicapped by just an ordinary common weak voice. You'll improve your personality by replacing "thinness" in your voice with new desirable strength. And, of course, I don't have to mention the direct dollars-and-cents cash value of a more positive voice for salesmen, executives, preachers, announcers, union leaders, politicians.

**AMAZING DETAILS—Just fill in  
coupon and rush it back to me today**

You'll find this training enjoyable as well as valuable—as have more than 150,000 other ambitious students during the past 51 years. Helps both your speaking and your singing. Self-training lessons, mostly silent. You get your results in the privacy of your own room. No music required. Everything is handled confidentially and all mail is sent in plain wrapper. *Take this first step* toward your personal self-advancement now, it's free . . . send for my fascinating illustrated booklet "How to Strengthen Your Voice to be More Successful." Simply fill in and mail this coupon today. (Cannot be sent unless you state your age.)

**PREFECT VOICE INSTITUTE, Studio AX-6  
210 South Clinton St. Chicago 6, Ill.**



I can strengthen  
your voice—build  
it up to be one of your  
most valuable assets. Get the  
ring of confidence in your voice  
and it will help you get ahead  
in business, increase your income,  
develop leadership.

—Eugene Feuchtinger

**FREE "Successful Voice" BOOK!**

**MAIL  
THIS  
COUPON  
TODAY**

**PREFECT VOICE INSTITUTE**  
Studio AX-6, 210 South Clinton St.  
Chicago 6, Ill.

Please send me—free and without obligation—your inspiring and helpful illustrated booklet "How to Strengthen Your Voice to be More Successful," by Eugene Feuchtinger. Mail in plain wrapper. No salesman will call.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_

My age is: \_\_\_\_\_

# Tired of the same old job?

Sure, you are. Anybody gets tired of standing still in the same place. But don't get the idea that just quitting your present job and going somewhere else will take you out of the rut.

The trouble may be *inside yourself*. You're restless because you want to get ahead—make more money—do more interesting work. All right—why not?

Look around you. The men who are advancing are the trained men. They've learned special skills that bring them higher pay. It's the men *without* training who stick in the same old job.

What are you going to do about it? Just wait and hope for something better to come along? If you really *want to succeed*, you can get the necessary training by studying at home in your spare time.

International Correspondence Schools offer you a course in practically any field you choose, giving you the practical plus the bedrock facts and theory. You'll earn while you learn. Students report better jobs and more pay within a few months.

Read carefully the list of subjects in the coupon below. Pick out the field of study that interests you most—the one with the greatest future for you. Then mark and mail the coupon, and *find out* what I. C. S. can do for you. All its costs is a stamp or postcard, yet it may be the most important step you've ever taken!



## Why Home Study?



When you learn the I. C. S. way, your time is your own. Arrange your schedule to suit yourself. No tiresome traveling to and from school. No classes missed because of other engagements. Home study through I. C. S. has proved out for millions of ambitious men and women. You, too, can use it to get ahead!

## wide choice of courses

I. C. S. offers a total of 391 different courses—391 roads to advancement. Among them is the one you want. You'll find the lessons modern, simple, easy to understand. Each one you study takes you farther along the road to knowledge and success.

## machine operator to shop foreman

"When I enrolled for my I. C. S. course in Carpentry and Millwork, I was a machine operator. Today, eleven months later, I am a shop foreman. As a consequence my salary has been increased 73.3%."

# INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS



BOX 3969-Y, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, send me "HOW TO SUCCEED" and the booklet about the course BEFORE which I have marked X:

- ART**
- Commercial Art
- Magazine and Book Illustrating
- Cartooning
- Show Card and Sign Lettering
- Fashion Illustrating
- AUTOMOTIVE**
- Automobile, Mechanic
- Auto-Elec. Technician
- Auto Body Rebuilding and Refinishing
- Diesel—Gas Engines
- AVIATION**
- Aeronautical Engineering Jr.
- Aircraft Engine Mechanic
- Airplane Drafting
- BUILDING**
- Architecture
- Arch. Drafting
- Building Contractor
- Estimating
- Carpenter and Mill Work
- Carpenter Foreman
- Reading Blueprints
- House Planning
- Plumbing

- Heating
- Steam Fitting
- Air Conditioning
- Electrician
- BUSINESS**
- Business Administration
- Certified Public Accountant
- Accounting
- Bookkeeping
- Stenography and Typing
- Secretarial
- Federal Tax
- Business Correspondence
- Personnel and Labor Relations
- Advertising
- Retail Business Management
- Managing Small Business
- Sales Management
- Salesmanship
- Traffic Management
- CHEMISTRY**
- Chemical Engineering
- Chemistry
- Analytical Chemistry
- Petroleum—Nat'l Gas
- Pulp and Paper Making
- Plastics

- CIVIL, STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING**
- Civil Engineering
- Structural Engineering
- Surveying and Mapping
- Structural Drafting
- Highway Engineering
- Reading Blueprints
- Concrete Construction
- Sanitary Engineering
- DRAFTING**
- Aircraft Drafting
- Architectural Drafting
- Electrical Drafting
- Mechanical Drafting
- Structural Drafting
- Sheet Metal Drafting
- Mine Surveying and Drafting
- ELECTRICAL**
- Electrical Engineering
- Electrician
- Electrical Maintenance
- Electrical Drafting
- Electric Power and Light
- Lineman
- HIGH SCHOOL**
- High School Subjects

- College Preparatory
- Mathematics
- Commercial
- Good English
- MECHANICAL AND SHOP**
- Mechanical Engineering
- Industrial Engineering
- Industrial Supervision
- Foremanship
- Mechanical Drafting
- Machine Design-Drafting
- Machine Shop Practice
- Tool Design
- Industrial Instrumentation
- Machine Shop Inspection
- Reading Blueprints
- Toolmaking
- Gas—Electric Welding
- Heat Treatment—Metallurgy
- Sheet Metal Work
- Sheet Metal Pattern Drafting
- Refrigeration
- POWER**
- Combustion Engineering
- Diesel—Electric
- Electric Light and Power

Please send information about I.C.S. employee training for companies.

- Stationary Steam Engineering
- Stationary Fireman
- RADIO, TELEVISION, COMMUNICATIONS**
- General Radio
- Radio Operation
- Radio Servicing—FM
- Television
- Electronics
- Telephone Work
- RAILROAD**
- Locomotive Engineer
- Diesel Locomotive
- Air Brakes
- Car Inspector
- Railroad Administration
- TEXTILE**
- Textile Engineering
- Cotton Manufacture
- Rayon Manufacture
- Woolen Manufacture
- Loom Fixing
- Finishing and Dyeing
- Textile Designing
- HOME ARTS**
- Dressmaking and Designing
- Cookery
- Tea Room Management

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Home Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Working Hours \_\_\_\_\_ A.M. to \_\_\_\_\_ P.M.

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

EVERY STORY BRAND NEW

# Texas Western

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

VOL. 1, NO. 1

JANUARY, 1953



## COMPLETE NOVEL

### TEXAS RAWHIDER . . . . . Jack Barton 10

T is for Texas—and trouble. Ed Kincaid was one hombre who couldn't keep out of either—because there was a railroad to build and a woman to tame

## A NOVELET.

### WOMAN FROM TUCSON . . . . . Dean Owen 78

When his brother brought Josie home, Cal reckoned he'd have a fight on his hands, a girl in his arms

## SHORT STORIES

### THE MIDNIGHT CLEAR . . . . . A. C. Abbott 71

Sheriff Rock Bradden wore his heart under a badge

### TOOLS OF THE DEVIL . . . . . Bob and Jan Young 100

This shrewd preacher didn't pay the devil his due

### THE SHORTHORN KING . . . . . Henry Carlton Jones 103

Mike turned insults into compliments with his fists

## FEATURES

### DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS . . . . . An Editorial 6

### BLOOD CALL . . . . . Ferris Weddle 8

### ONCE A TEXAN (Verse) . . . . . Pecos Pete 59

### TEXAS TIDBITS . . . . . Harold Helfer 91

Also See Texas Featurettes on Pages 39, 47, 67 and 107

TEXAS WESTERN is published bi-monthly and copyright 1952 by Standard Magazines, Inc., 1125 E. Vaile Ave., Kokomo, Ind. Editorial and executive offices, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Subscription: (12 issues), \$3.00; single copies, \$.25; foreign postage extra. Entry as second class matter pending at the post office at Kokomo, Ind. Material is submitted at risk of the sender and must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes. All characters in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used it is a coincidence. January, 1953. Printed in the U.S.A.



There's a **LEE** for EVERY job...

and for every member of the family



Lee Overalls, made of tough Jelt Denim, give far longer wear.



Lee Chetopa Twill Matched Shirts and Pants come in 5 colors.



Lee Riders are genuine Western cowboy pants for all the family.



World's Champion Cowboy Casey Tibbs wears Lee Riders and Jacket.



Buy Buddy Lee Cowboy and Engineer Dolls at your Lee Dealer's.

**Lee**

America's Best-Made,  
Best-Known Work Clothes

Copyright, 1952,  
THE H. D. LEE COMPANY



# DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS



**H**ERE it is, readers, the magazine you've been demanding! **TEXAS WESTERN** is the latest addition to the **THRILLING** group of magazines. And it's a mighty big, mighty exciting hook about a mighty big, mighty exciting place—**TEXAS!**

In the pages of **TEXAS WESTERN**, you'll meet the men who made the great State of Texas what it is today. You'll rub elbows with ranchmen, gunmen, lawmen, rustlers, hustlers, good men, bad men and their equally colorful women

**TEXAS WESTERN** will take you back to the frontier days of the great Southwest. You'll belly up to the mahogany with waddies in town for a toot. You'll flirt with dance hall ladies whose attentions don't stop with flirtation. You'll listen to bitter ex-Confederates, griping under carpet-bag tyranny. You'll swap punches and lead with as rough and tough a gang of *bandidos* as you've ever run afoul of.

In every hard-riding, straight-shooting **TEXAS WESTERN** story, you'll play a part in settling and building a great state in the Union. You'll shoot it out in bloody range wars, you'll ride with hell-for-leather posses, you'll tangle with the fastest hardware handlers you've ever come up against!

**TEXAS WESTERN** is more than just another Western magazine. It's a magazine about the founding of the richest, greatest, most dramatic empire in the world today—the Lone Star State! And it teaches those virtues which made Texas great and keep it great—loyalty, courage, straight shooting, straight talk and two-fisted action.

You'll enjoy **TEXAS WESTERN**. Just start reading and see!

—*The Editor*



# I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME FOR GOOD PAY JOBS IN RADIO-TELEVISION



J. E. SMITH has trained more men for Radio-Television than any other man.

**2 FREE BOOKS SHOW HOW MAIL COUPON**

**America's Fast Growing Industry Offers You**

## I TRAINED THESE MEN

**LOST JOB. NOW HAS OWN SHOP**  
"Got laid off my machine shop job which I believe was best thing ever happened as I opened a full time Radio Shop. Business is picking up every week."—E. T. Slate, Corsicana, Texas.

**GOOD JOB WITH STATION**  
"I am Broadcast Engineer at WJPM. Another technician and I have opened a Radio-TV service shop in our spare time. Big TV sales here . . . more work than we can handle."—J. H. Bangley, Suffolk, Va.

**\$10 TO \$15 WEEK SPARE TIME**  
"Four months after enrolling for NRI course, was able to service Radios . . . averaged \$10 to \$15 a week spare time. Now have full time Radio and Television business."—William Weyde, Brooklyn, New York.

**SWITCHED TO TV SERVICING**  
"I recently switched over from studio work and am now holding a position as service technician. I am still with RCA, enjoying my work more and more every day."—N. Ward, Ridgedale, N.J.

**WANT YOUR OWN BUSINESS?**  
Let me show you how you can be your own boss. Many NRI trained men start their own business with capital earned in spare time. Robert Dohmen, New Prague, Minn., whose store is shown at left, says, "Am now tied in with two Television outfits and do warranty work for dealers. Often fall back to NRI textbooks for information."

## 1. EXTRA MONEY IN SPARE TIME

Many students make \$5, \$10 a week and more EXTRA fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time while learning. The day you enroll I start sending you SPECIAL BOOKLETS that show you how. Tester you build with kits I send helps you make extra money servicing sets, gives practical experience on circuits common to Radio and Television. All equipment is yours to keep.

## 2. GOOD PAY JOB

NRI Courses lead to these and many other jobs: Radio and TV service, P.A., Auto Radio, Lab, Factory, and Electronic Controls Technicians, Radio and TV Broadcasting, Police, Ship and Airways Operators and Technicians. Opportunities are increasing. The United States has over 105 million Radios—over 2,900 Broadcasting Stations—more expansion is on the way.

## 3. BRIGHT FUTURE

Think of the opportunities in Television. Over 15,000,000 TV sets are now in use; 108 TV stations are operating and 1800 new TV stations have been authorized . . . many of them expected to be in operation in 1953. This means more jobs—good pay jobs with bright futures. More operators, installation service technicians will be needed. Now is the time to get ready for a successful future in TV! Find out what Radio and TV offer you.



## You Learn Servicing or Communications by Practicing With Kits I Send



**Television Is Today's Good Job Maker**

TV now reaches from coast-to-coast. Quality for a good job as a service technician or operator. My course includes many lessons on TV. You get practical experience . . . work on circuits common to both Radio and Television with my kits. Now is the time to get ready for success in Television!

This is Just Some of the Equipment My Students Build. All Parts Yours to Keep.

Keep your job while training at home. Hundreds I've trained are successful RADIO-TELEVISION Technicians. Most had no previous experience; many no more than grammar school education. Learn Radio-Television principles from illustrated lessons. You also get PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE. Pictures at left, are just a few of the pieces of equipment you build with kits of parts I send. You experiment with, learn circuits common to Radio and Television.

Mail Coupon—Find out what RADIO-TELEVISION Can Do for You  
Act Now! Send for my FREE DOUBLE OFFER. Coupon entitles you to actual Servicing Lesson; shows how you learn at home. You'll also receive my 64-page book, "How to Be a Success in Radio-Television." Send coupon in envelope or paste on postal. J. E. SMITH, Pres., Dept. 3A-Q, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D.C. Our 89th Year.

## Good for Both—FREE

Mr. J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 3A-Q, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D.C.  
Mail me Sample Lesson and 64-page Book "How to Be a Success in Radio-Television." Both FREE. (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_  
Approved under G.I. Bill



. . . and the voice of the longhorn is heard in the land

# BLOOD CALL

**C**VILIZATION has silenced many of the voices of the outdoor West and one voice that has been silenced forever is that of the longhorn cattle. No voice was more hair-raising than the pagan blood call of the longhorns, particularly the bulls.

Unlike the pure-bred range stock of today, the longhorn bull was a fighter most of his life, battling everything from grizzly bears to men on horseback. A popular sport in the early southwest was a staged battle between two range monarchs with long horns so sharp that they could be rammed through a thick board.

One of the fiercest of such bulls was an outlaw in the Nueces River brush country called Diablo by the vaqueros. A huge bull who showed his Spanish ancestry, Diablo was almost black. He had been shot at and roped so many times that he hated men and gored several horses from beneath their riders. He always challenged any strange bull that might wander into his particular territory. He would become enraged with any bull that offered to dispute him. First, there would be the preliminary pawing of the earth, digging of his horns into the earth, all accompanied with grunts and short bellows. Then sufficiently enraged, he would send forth his challenge.

The bellow, deep at first, would thin out into something near a scream and eventually emerge into an ear-piercing shriek. Then, midst more dirt-pawing, he'd bawl—long bawls and short ones, followed by the deeper bellows. From somewhere would come an answer and another bull would appear, bellowing and bawling. The gorging, goring

battle would be on! It usually ended up with one of the bulls badly gored, completely defeated, or dead. For many years Diablo was the champion. It took some twenty rifle slugs from a group of cowhands to kill him after he had succeeded in severely wounding one hand.

Perhaps even more terrifying was the longhorn response to the smell of blood of their own kind—the blood call. Even domestic cattle will often become extremely excited when they smell bovine blood, but the show that these civilized cattle put on is mild compared to that of the wild or semi-wild longhorns. Upon scenting the blood, the cattle would become possessed with a sort of madness that made the hair raise on one's neck. A different pattern of noise was made during the blood call and has been described as beginning with short bellows, which rise and fall, and then rise into a scream. It's an agonized sound as though the animal is in terrible pain.

The blood call was used by some Texas cattlemen to good advantage in gathering wild stuff. Blood, saved from a butchered calf, would be poured in a clearing and gentled cattle would be turned loose. They would begin the terrifying call and soon the brush would be alive with moving cattle, answering the call. Then the brushoppers, waiting out of sight, would close in on the cattle.

Although the voice of the longhorn has gone, let's hope that the West does not become so civilized that the coyote will no longer be heard.

—Ferris Weddle







# This *Christmas* Stake Your Friends to a Wagonload of Western Thrills!

Save money . . . save shopping time . . . save trouble . . .  
by giving RANCH ROMANCES as a Christmas gift to every friend  
who shares your interest in good Western reading.

### What a payload of excitement and romance they'll get!

- 26 BIG issues of RANCH ROMANCES — jammed with all the pulse-quickenning drama of the untamed West.
- 3500 spine-tingling pages — packed with the lives and loves of hard-riding men and their glamorous women.
- Over 400 stories — all brand new, never before printed.

Use the handy coupon below to order Christmas gift subscriptions to RANCH ROMANCES. We'll send a gift card in your name to each person on your list. And while you're at it, why not enter your own subscription at the same time.

.....

**RANCH ROMANCES** Best Books, Inc. 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

YES, please enter a one year subscription as my Christmas gift to the persons listed below. I enclose \$5 (a saving of \$1.50 on the single copy price) for each subscription.

*(Please add 80¢ per subscription for Canadian postage; \$1.50 for foreign)*

GIFT FOR: _____	• GIFT FOR: _____
ADDRESS _____	• ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____	• CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____
GIFT CARD TO READ FROM _____	• GIFT CARD TO READ FROM _____

GIFT FOR: _____	• MY NAME _____
ADDRESS _____	• ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____	• CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____
GIFT CARD TO READ FROM _____	• <input type="checkbox"/> Enter my subscription. <input type="checkbox"/> Extend my subscription.

I enclose \$\_\_\_\_\_ for\_\_\_\_\_ subscriptions. (Use separate sheet for additional gifts)



The roan went down in a crashing heap  
while Kincaid flattened to the ground

T is for Texas—  
and trouble.  
Ed Kincaid was one  
hombre who couldn't  
keep out of either—  
because there was a  
railroad to build  
and a woman to tame!





# TEXAS RAWHIDER

A Novel by JACK BARTON

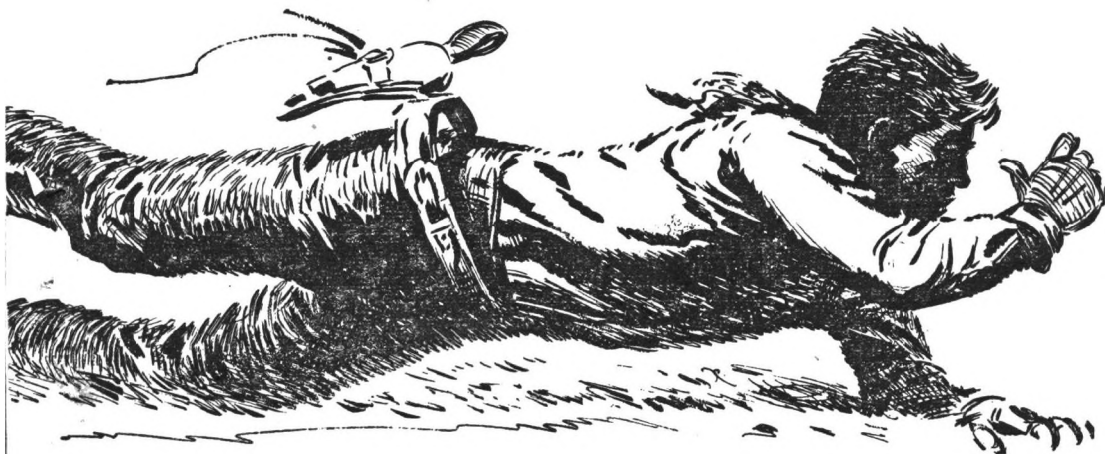
NIGHT came early, dripping wet and sooty black. The westbound freight slowed to a crawl, the beam of its headlamp blunted by the downpour. It felt its way toward the high trestle over Hatchet Creek Gorge, then, at the ruby gleam of a red lantern, came to an abrupt stop with a crashing shudder running its length.

The mechanical spasm reached the caboose as Ed Kincaid started to pour a cup of coffee. The jolt threw him off balance, spilled scalding coffee over his left

hand, forced an oath from his lips. The brakeman rolled from his bunk half awake and said, reaching for a lantern, "What's up?"

Kincaid growled, "How should I know?" He pulled a bandanna from his pocket and wiped his burned hand. Pot and tin cup had been dropped, and the deck of the caboose was half awash with steaming, mud-colored liquid.

The brakeman went hurrying out and was hardly gone when a sound of voices brought a look of alertness to Kincaid.



But before he was certain that this was trouble, two men in wet-gleaming black slickers entered the caboose. They were big, rough looking men, as tall as Kincaid but bulkier. Each of their faces bore mementos of savage brawls. One had suffered a broken nose that had healed crookedly. The other, smiling, revealed a cracked front tooth.

The man who smiled said, "Nothing personal in this, Ed."

"Not for you and Jake Dutcher, maybe Tim. But for Miles Banning—"

Tim cut in, "Nobody said Miles sent us, bucko."

Kincaid made an impatient gesture. "Everybody knows that Tim McShayne is Miles Banning's man, body and soul." The wary look that had come to his eyes at their arrival was now replaced by anger. He was a tall, big-boned man and, despite being whip-lean, rugged enough. Except for a lack of spurs, he was dressed like a riding man. Seven years with the railroads hadn't made a railroader of him. He braced himself on his rider's boots. "Body and soul, Tim," he added. "You're not your own man."

Tim McShayne's heavy face reddened. "Don't make me mad, Ed," he said. "I don't want to make it a personal matter with me. If it comes to that, I'm apt to forget that I like you. Jake and I have orders, and what can we do but carry them out?"

"Well, carry them out — and be damned."

"We're to tell you to stay aboard this rattler. You're not to get off it in Texas."

"So you flagged down a train just to tell me that."

McShayne's smile returned. "Can we help it if somebody left a red lantern along the right-of-way?"

Kincaid saw no humor in the situation. "You've carried out your orders," he said. "Now get out."

"We've given you the message. But there's more."

"Banning thinks of everything."

"He said you'd need persuading."

"He knows me, all right."

McShayne eyed him curiously. "I don't know why he's so afraid of you," he said. "All I know is, he gets nervous when you get within a hundred miles of him. As for why you hate him—well, it must be because of a woman."

Jake Dutcher said, "Let's get on with it, Tim. That train crew will come snooping back here once they don't find anybody standing by that danger signal." He eyed Kincaid doubtfully. "Let's get on with it. It may take some little time, by the looks of him."

McShayne nodded, and the two of them crowded in on Kincaid.

**E**D KINCAID backed away, looking for a weapon. He grabbed a lantern, swung it by the bail, aiming the makeshift weapon at McShayne's face. McShayne blocked the blow with his left arm. There was a crash of splintering glass. McShayne drove his right fist to Kincaid's jaw. The blow landed solidly, and Kincaid staggered backwards and came up against the forward door of the caboose. Pain exploded in his brain, and blurred his vision. He struck out wildly, landing several blows but the power of them was deflected by the slicker McShayne wore. Grabbing him by the right wrist, McShayne jerked Kincaid away from the door and whipped him about so that he reeled against Dutcher who caught his arms and pinned them behind him. Kincaid struggled wildly, with a panicky desperation, but failed to break loose. McShayne moved in, battering. He gauged his punches to hurt and mark, but not to maim. At last, when he decided that it was sufficient, he drove a final hard blow to the chin. Kincaid's head rocked back and he had the glare of the overhead lamp in his eyes. Dutcher turned him loose and stepped hastily away, and Kincaid, still falling backwards, sprawled on the floor.

There was a salty taste of blood in his mouth. He began a painful retching. He heaved over onto his side, doubling up, for a moment close to unconsciousness. Then he was clear minded again, and afire



with pain.

McShayne bent over him. "Nothing personal, mind you, Ed," he said. "This hurt me more than it did you, bucko. So don't make us give you the same treatment—or worse—a second time. Just stay aboard until this train gets out of Texas."

They left with that, and Kincaid, listening to the going, was as full of hatred as he was of pain. And his hatred was not for them, but for the man who had sent them: Miles Banning, who never dirtied his own hands in such fashion.

Thirty-five minutes later the train slowed for the town of Dahlman. Kincaid threw his valise to the station platform and then dropped from the caboose. The train sped away from him, and he wondered, as he watched its lights disappear in the rainy dark, if he hadn't played the fool by not staying aboard. What he had suffered at the hands of Banning's hoodlums was only a warning, rough treatment though it had been. He could expect worse, now that he had set foot in Dahlman. Evidently, Miles Banning had picked the Texas Panhandle as his newest happy hunting-ground and would tolerate no trespassing.

Kincaid picked up his valise, carried it into the station, set it on a waiting-room bench. The telegrapher, the only person in evidence, was half asleep by his chattering key. He watched disinterestedly as Kincaid took his gun-rig from the bag and buckled it on beneath his coat. Then he straightened in his chair.

"Looks as though you should have been wearing that gun a little while ago," he said. "Or was it an accident? What happened to your face?"

Kincaid had washed up before leaving the train, but his face bore the marks of the battering McShayne had given him. A cut upper lip, bruises galore, the livid promise of a black eye.

Kincaid said, "I should have been wearing that gun. The Great Western House hard to find, friend?"

"No. This is mostly a one-street town. You can't miss the hotel."

"Thanks."

THE rain had eased off to a drizzle when Kincaid took to Dahlman's main street, and the town's lighted windows glowed more brightly. The last time he saw Dahlman, it had been composed of a dozen plank buildings and a few adobe huts. Now it appeared to be something of a cow country metropolis. Near the station was a lumber yard, and beyond that a livery stable. Opposite were the buildings and yard of a freighting company. Farther along the street was lined with twin rows of frame houses. The business section had all the hopeful enterprises of a booming community—stores, shops, saloons, dancehalls. The Great Western House was one of the larger buildings, of two stories and with a false-front lending additional height.

Kincaid turned into the hotel, and the lobby floor was covered with red Brussels carpet while a fancy chandelier of great size cast a warm yellow glow about the wide room. Several men lounged in maroon plush chairs. There was a potted rubber plant on either side of the entrance to the adjoining dining-room. A pale young man with pomaded hair presided at the desk. The Great Western had all the trimmings. And Kincaid would have bet that it, like the whole town, stood on a foundation of little more than hope. Hope that Dahlman would live and grow. So often, he knew, the odds were against such towns.

He signed the register, and added merely "Texas" as his address. He could not do otherwise; it was years since he had called any place home. The clerk gave him a key, said, "Room Twelve, Mister—" he glanced at the register—"Mister Kincaid. And, in case you haven't had dinner, perhaps I'd better mention that the dining room closes at eight."

Kincaid nodded. "I was to meet a man named Meecham here. Dan Meecham."

"Oh, yes. Mr. Meecham and some other cattlemen are holding a meeting upstairs, in the room we call The Parlor. At the front end of the hall, sir."

Kincaid nodded again, said, "Thanks. He pocketed the key and left his valise

by the wall near the stairs, then turned toward the dining-room. Telling himself that Meecham and the other cattlemen could wait. There were but a few late diners, and at the table nearest the entrance were two people who had finished their meal and now sat talking. They leaned toward each other, intent upon each other in the fashion of lovers, and the girl, Kincaid saw, was something of a beauty. And her companion was a handsome man.

A very handsome man, Miles Banning.

Kincaid halted just inside the entrance, taken by surprise. Not surprised that he should find Banning with an attractive woman; Miles Banning was a ladies' man, always. He was surprised that he should happen upon the man so soon. It had seemed likely that he would have a bit of trouble finding Banning, that, after having put McShavne and Dutcher onto him, Banning would be a bit difficult to find. Of course, the man may have believed that a roughing-up would be sufficient to keep him out of Dahlman. Kincaid thought, Miles, you know me better than all that. The hatred he'd known after the beating was with him again. But he let none of it show when he moved toward the couple.

Banning looked away from the girl with obvious reluctance. As he recognized Kincaid a look of astonishment came to his eyes. But he was good at covering up, and now, mindful of his manners, he pushed back his chair and rose. Smiling. Kincaid smiled back, thinking, all right; if that's how you want to play it. His smile was mostly an ugly grimace.

"How are you, Ed?" Banning said. "What a surprise, seeing you in Dahlman."

"I can imagine. I was told that you didn't want to see me here."

"So my boys did get in touch with you?"

"As you can see by my face."

**B**ANNING'S smile became amused. He was always smooth, Kincaid reflected. And tonight, perhaps because of

the girl, he was at his best. But he was evidently banking on Kincaid's not starting trouble in a public place. He was a year or two older than Ed Kincaid, stockier of build and perhaps two inches shorter. He was a blondish man with a ruddy complexion. Clean-cut. Likeable. In the beginning it had been hard for Kincaid to hate him.

Banning was looking at his face. "You look as though you've had a little accident, Ed," he said. "I hope Tim and Jake weren't involved in it."

"They were involved. But they came through it without a scratch."

"Those two have the devil's own luck."

"Just so you share it, Miles," Kincaid said, and glanced at the girl.

He found her well worth looking at, but recalled that Banning always had good taste when it came to women. This one was young; hardly more than twenty, he judged. She had a wealth of auburn hair, an outdoor complexion. A ranch girl, judging by her mannish shirt, divided riding skirt and bright green neckerchief. Wholesome looking. A flush came to her cheeks, telling him that she was aware of his appraising gaze. He knew suddenly how he could pay Banning back for that beating he'd been given. He cocked an inquiring eye at the man.

Banning frowned, reluctant to introduce them. Then, hesitantly: "Miss Meecham, this is an old friend of mine, Ed Kincaid. He's just passing through Dahlman. I believe."

She looked up, smiled. "How do you do, Mr. Kincaid."

He smiled back at her. "It's a pleasure, Miss Meecham. And I'm not just passing through. At least, I think not. It depends on a man named Dan Meecham. Is he a relative?"

"Yes. My father."

"I'll tell him that I had the pleasure of meeting his daughter," Kincaid said. He looked at Banning. "By the way, Miles, I should inquire about the lovely Mrs. Banning. Is she well?"

It was a below-the-belt blow, but he had learned long ago that in a fight with

a man like Miles Banning no punches were pulled nor any holds barred. It was Banning himself who had thrown away the rule book.

The man winced, and his pretense of friendliness vanished. It was evident from his reaction, as well as from the girl's startled gasp, that he had neglected to tell her that he was married. Just as Kincaid had suspected. There was a long silence. During it Banning, for once far from his usual debonair self, squirmed with embarrassment while the girl stared at him first with shock and then with fury.

Then: "Aren't you going to tell Mr. Kincaid whether or not Mrs. Banning is well? He seems very much interested."

"Now, Katherine, this can be explained."

"You can explain away a wife, Miles?"

She threw her napkin onto the table,



THE BUSHWHACKER

and rose. She turned to Kincaid. "Meeting you has been enlightening," she told him. "Goodnight, gentlemen."

She walked from the dining-room, every inch of her angry.

Banning said, "That was hitting too low, Ed." He sat down, took out a cigar, bit off the nub with a savage wrenching of his teeth. He struck a match, and his hand trembled as he held the flame to the cigar. Then: "All right, we're even. You've squared the account."

"It was pretty rough, the beating I took."

"It could have been worse."

Kincaid shook his head slowly, marvel-

ling. "You're a cool one, Miles. You don't even attempt to deny that you sent McShayne and Dutcher."

"I don't want you in Dahlman, Ed. Don't stop here. No matter how good an offer Dan Meecham makes you, don't take it. You can do better elsewhere."

**K**INCAID'S face hardened. "Listen, Miles. I'm not taking it any more. You've done me dirt too often. From now on, I'm giving it back. And not even the fact that Louise is your wife will save you if you try to pull anything more on me. If anything else happens to me, I'm coming after you. I don't think you've ever been roughed up in your life, but there's always a first time for everything. As for this Meecham girl, I've done her a favor. Her and Louise. And maybe you too. You're going to fool around with the wrong woman one of these times—one with a man around who thinks enough of her to look out for her, maybe to the point of shooting you for trifling with her affections. In more ways than one, friend, you'd better watch your step."

"Trifling with her affections? Lord, Ed, I'm in love with her."

"You're in love with every woman you can get to smile at you."

"No. This is real. This time it's different."

"It's always different. And what about Louise?"

Banning shook his head. "Louise and I are through. Our marriage was a mistake. She's applying for a divorce, Ed." He looked up at Kincaid, as though asking to be understood in this matter at least. "It wasn't my fault that it didn't work out. She would be the first to tell you that."

"Miles, don't blame her. Don't be that low."

"I'm not putting the blame on her. She couldn't help herself. It was always you with her, you she loved. Sure, she was infatuated with me . . . but it wasn't long before she realized that she should have married you."

"This I can't believe."



"Why would I lie about such a thing?" Banning said. "See her, ask her. She's in Denver. She'd be glad to see you. Why not go to her, Ed?"

Kincaid felt his pulse begin to pound. A divorce, Louise free. This was news he'd dreamed of and hoped for, though he had never considered the possibility of Louise leaving Banning. But there wasn't all truth in what the man had said. It wasn't because Louise was in love with him, with Ed Kincaid, that the marriage had failed. If she had loved any man, it was Miles Banning. The truth certainly was that she hadn't been able to stand the parade of women through her husband's life.

Kincaid said, "It won't work, Miles. You can't get me away from here that easily."

"Suit yourself. But if you care at all for Louise. . . ."

"Your wife. Until she gets that divorce, she's still your wife."

"And you have ethics," Banning said. His voice was mocking. "You wouldn't even look at a woman unless she was wholly without strings. Or maybe it's more than that. Does it bother you that she once belonged to another man—to me?"

Kincaid's face took on that rocky look again. "Call it what you like," he said. "But I won't even discuss your wife like this." He started to turn away, then faced about. "Remember, Miles. From now on you can count on it as a sure thing, my hitting back."

He walked out, forgetting that he had entered the dining-room in order to get a meal.



**A**T THE door of the room the clerk had mentioned, Kincaid knocked, and a gruff voice said, "Come in." He entered a large, comfortably furnished room where five men were seated about a library table. Each man had a glass in his hand or at his elbow.

The air was hazy with tobacco smoke.

There was a map spread out on the table. Kincaid closed the door.

"I think you gentlemen are expecting me," he said. "Kincaid is the name."

Five pairs of eyes appraised him, then the man at the head of the table heaved to his feet. "We're expecting you," he said. He was the owner of the gruff voice. "I'm the man who sent for you—Dan Meecham."

He held out his hand.

Kincaid was reminded of a shaggy old bull buffalo. Dan Meecham was big, bulky. His hair was a gray mane, his mustache thick and unkempt, his eyebrows bushy. His features were bold, rough-hewn. He dominated this small group, as no doubt he would have dominated any gathering. And Kincaid, shaking his hand, found the old man to be even taller than himself.

Meecham gestured toward the others, saying, "Matt Fenton on my right, and next to him Ben Carmody. To my left, Jim Hanna. Cattlemen, like myself. The man next to Hanna is Russ Grierson, and he's in the freighting business."

Kincaid looked at them, nodding in acknowledgement of the introduction. Fenton and Carmody were about fifty, Hanna twenty years younger. Typical cattlemen, weather-worn and rawhide tough. They would be the biggest ranchers hereabouts, Kincaid reflected; they and Meecham. Grierson was fat and florid, dressed like a townsman. It was obvious that he stayed behind a desk and let hired hands do his muleskinning.

Kincaid looked back at Meecham, the important one.

Meecham said, "Whiskey on the sideboard, Kincaid. Help yourself and make yourself comfortable."

Kincaid said, "Thanks," and went to the sideboard. He felt the need of a drink, after the beating he'd taken and his encounter with Miles Banning. He selected a bottle of New Orleans bourbon, and poured it neat. He carried his drink to the end of the table, seated himself. He said, "To our understanding each other, gentlemen," and took his drink.

There was a humidor within his reach, and he helped himself to a cigar. After lighting up, he looked inquiringly at Meecham. The old man noisily cleared his throat.

"We understand that you're known in the railroad game as a trouble-shooter," he said. "You come to us highly recommended."

"Am I to understand you have a little problem here?"

"Otherwise we wouldn't have asked you to come."

"Your problem happens to be a locally financed railroad, I suppose."

Meecham nodded. "Should a locally financed railroad be a problem?" he demanded.

Kincaid found the cigar a good one, and enjoyed it for a moment. The five men watched him expectantly, and he knew what they wanted. They had invested money in a railroad, which was now about to be built or was a-building, and they wanted to be told that their investment was a sound one. They had reason to be concerned about their money, and they wanted his word for it that the money was safe. He had met with men like these under such circumstances before, and he had never been able to put their minds at rest. The truth, Kincaid reflected, always hurt.

He said, "That sort of a railroad is always a bad risk."

"Why?" Meecham said. "Why does it have to be?"

Kincaid shrugged. "There are probably as many reasons why such a railroad is a bad risk as it will take ties to lay the track," he said. "I won't bore you with more than a couple of them. One is that such a road always costs more finally than its backers anticipate. Another is that if the road is a promising venture, the big railroad interests get interested in it." He paused, took another drink of bourbon. Then: "Gentlemen, I was a small rancher before I sidetracked into this job of trouble-shooting for the railroads. I know all a cattleman's problems. So I can tell you this from experience—no cattle-

man ever finds himself with the kind of fight on his hands that the big railroad interests can give a small locally financed railroad." He smiled wryly. "Those two reasons why such a railroad like yours is a bad risk should be sufficient. Either could ruin your road, bankrupt it."

Dan Meecham scowled, and the others looked worried.

Kincaid asked, "How far along is your road?"

"Three miles of track are laid," Meecham said. "Construction has just started."

"And you've run into trouble already?"

"No trouble."

Kincaid looked surprised. "Then why did you send for me?"

**M**EECHAM continued, "Here's the deal, Kincaid. As cattlemen, we weren't anxious to see a railroad built across cattle country. Railroads always bring into any country a swarm of settlers—and settlers make trouble for cattlemen, as you should know. Grierson doesn't want the railroad for the simple reason that it will hurt, maybe ruin, his freighting business. We held out against the idea as long as we could. But the people of Dahlman and what settlers are already in the country pushed it, and we bought stock in the company in the hope that we would have some control over the railroad once it's completed. It was a matter of self-defense, so to speak. The five of us are in it to the tune of a hundred thousand dollars."

"Against your will, you might say," Kincaid said, as the cattleman paused.

Meecham nodded. "No sooner had the scheme got underway than we began to hear talk that most locally financed railroads fail. Go bankrupt. That threw a scare into us. So we sent for you, because we're dead-set on protecting our investment. Miles Banning, who's head of the outfit building the road, the Banning Construction Company, says that there's nothing to such talk. But I've inquired around, and I've found that it's true. Most such railroads go bankrupt, and end up

being taken over by the big railroad interests." He scowled again. "Kincaid, can you get this railroad built?"

"I can try."

"What will it cost us?"

"For my services?" Kincaid said. "Well—"

He broke off as the door opened. All of them turned to see who was entering. It was Katherine Meecham. She took a chair in a corner of the room. She no longer appeared angry, but there was, Kincaid saw, a hurt look in her eyes. He would understand her feelings, and he felt a moment's guilt about having been the one to tell her that Miles Banning was a married man. But sooner or later she would have found out what sort of man Banning was, and perhaps he had saved her a greater hurt by having spoken up tonight. Perhaps. . . .

Dan Meecham said, "Your proposition, Kincaid."

Kincaid looked back at him. "I'll expect five thousand dollars when and if the railroad is completed under the control of your company," he said. "I'm to have a free hand. You'll inform Miles Banning that I'm your trouble-shooter. The rest will be up to me. If it's a deal, I'm your man. Nobody else will be able to buy me out, not even at ten times five thousand."

"Your price is pretty steep," Meecham said. "Especially, since we're not sure there'll be any trouble."

Kincaid rose. "If no trouble develops, you can send me packing without it costing you a cent. If this is a map of the railroad right-of-way, I'd like to borrow it. Tomorrow I'll take a trip out along the route and see what sort of a construction job it will be. And now, gentlemen, if there is nothing more. . . ."

Meecham had nodded that he could have the map. Kincaid rolled it up, reached for his hat, turned from the table, but at a gesture from Meecham, he stopped.

"I take it," the rancher said, "that you expect no payment if the railroad should fail because of some trouble that you can't handle. I want that understood—that we

owe you nothing for your services in case of failure."

Kincaid smiled. "It's understood," he said. "If your railroad doesn't get built because of trouble I can't handle, I probably won't be alive to collect anything for my services. Goodnight, gentlemen."

**I**T WAS a surveyor's map bearing the legend: Property of the Banning Construction Company. Kincaid spread it out on the bed of his own room. He had stripped to the waist and as he washed up had examined the livid marks left on his face and body by McShayne's pummelling fists. He'd rolled and lighted a cigarette, and now gave the map his undivided attention.

According to the map, the railroad—called the Dahlman and Texas Panhandle—would be one hundred twenty miles long and extend from Dahlman to a town named Tulare. Construction had started at Dahlman. Forty miles north was the Meecham ranch, the Slash-M. The right-of-way crossed the Slash-M in hilly country. Meecham's range was partly in the Dahlman Mountains. Ranches belonging to the other men who had been at the meting—Fenton, Carmody, Hanna—were located close to the Meecham spread.

The route of the D & TP looked practical, and, if the map was accurate, it threatened Miles Banning with few engineering problems. It crossed plains country all the way to the Dahlman Mountains, and followed a pass through the uplifts. No tunnels were required, and tunnels were a major item of expense in railroad construction. Beyond the Dahlmans was more plains country, and the only other hilly terrain was in the vicinity of Tulare.

The thought occurred to Kincaid that Banning might have one map for the people who invested money in the scheme, and another for himself to use in the field. He would know more about that when he rode out to make his own survey of the route.

A knock sounded at the door, and he said, "Come in," without taking his gaze



"So you've come a cropper at last, Kincaid!"



from the map. Then, his caller having entered and closed the door, he looked around and, with a sense of shock, saw that it was the Meecham girl. Grabbing the cigarette from his mouth, he jumped up and began looking for his shirt. It lay on a chair across the room, with his gun-rig atop it. To hell with it, he thought. The damage was done. If she hadn't known before, she knew by now what a man looked like bare to the belt. At any rate, she seemed less embarrassed than he felt. He faced her.

"Yes, Miss Meecham?"

"I had to know about Miles. About his being married."

"I'm sorry I talked out of turn," he told her. "But I was sore at Miles. I didn't mean to upset you. He is married, but he told me after you left that his wife is getting a divorce."

She said, "Well, thank you," and turned to leave.

He said, "Wait, please."

She shook her head, smiling bleakly. "Don't be alarmed," she said. "I'm not thinking of doing anything so melodramatic as throwing myself off a bridge or drinking poison. I'm not like that."

"It didn't enter my mind."

"Then what was it you wanted to say?"

He considered a moment, then said, "I've known Miles Banning a long time. I think he's no good for any woman. But for what it's worth to you, he told me that he's in love with you—that this time it's different."

"There'd never been any other girl, he told me. And all the while there was a wife. He lied to me. I don't think it's possible to lie to someone you love. How could I ever believe him again?"

"Well, there can't be any lasting harm done."

She gave him a bitter look. "Maybe that's how it seems to a man," she said. "It's different with a woman. But I shouldn't be angry with you, should I? I should be grateful. Well, I am. Thank you. Thank you very much!"

She turned and went out.

Kincaid closed the door after her, and

under his breath cursed Miles Banning.

**I**N THE darkened room Kincaid lay abed, as far from sleep as he'd ever been. He was in a low mood because of Louise. True, he could have welcomed the news that she was divorcing Banning. And told himself that now there was a chance for him. But he'd been unselfish in his love for her; he'd wanted her happy, and her happiness had depended upon her marrying another man. So he had accepted it with regret but also in the proper spirit. But she wasn't happy now. And he couldn't be pleased about the failure of the marriage, and think that he could step in and give her happiness.

He had called himself a fool a thousand times during the past two years, since the day Louise broke her engagement to him. He had taken it hard. She had been that important to him.

It was he who had introduced Banning to her, not suspecting that the man would attempt to take her from him. He'd known that Banning was a ladies' man, but they had been working together, were on friendly terms, and it hadn't occurred to him that the man would want his woman.

In a way, he hadn't blamed Banning. Louise was a wonderful person, and beautiful. Many men had wanted to court her. No, he wouldn't have blamed Miles Banning at all—if the man had been decently in love with Louise.

But he'd merely desired her, and he had realized that he could possess her only through marriage. So, for the first time, Banning had ventured into marriage. And at first, the marriage had seemed like fulfillment for Louise. Being Miles Banning's wife had seemed to make of her the woman she was intended to be.

Kincaid couldn't remember when it happened, but suddenly he was no longer friendly with Miles and Louise Banning. He saw them as a couple less frequently, and soon not at all. Too, he had been hired as a trouble-shooter on one of Banning's construction jobs—not by Banning, but by the railroad company—and he had caught the man involved in some crooked-

ness. He'd given him a warning, then tried to cover up for him. That had been the end of any friendliness between them, and in time the two of them had become bitter enemies.

A man made enemies, trouble-shooting.

It wasn't a trade at which any sensible man would work.

Kincaid had taken it up by accident, seven years ago, when a railroad was being built in southern Texas. He'd been a two-bit rancher, a raggedy-pants cowman, and the construction crew had been killing and eating his beef. He'd collected for those cows by going to the construction camp where he found a group of railroad bigwigs in a fancy private car. He'd busted in on them. He'd whipped three tough track-layers who were ordered to throw him out, and he'd gotten his payment for the stolen beef.

He also got the offer of a job as trouble-shooter for the railroad.

He'd bucked the company's troubles with his wits, fists and, on occasion, his gun. He'd tamed the mob of whiskey-sellers, gamblers and prostitutes that moved along with the railroad to prey on the workers and kept them from doing a day's work for a day's pay. He'd thwarted an attempted hold-up on a train carrying the workers' payroll. He'd talked a deal onto a railroad-hating cattleman who armed his riders with Winchesters and refused to let tracks be laid across his range. He'd forgotten about being a rancher, and gone on as a trouble-shooter from one construction job to another. Texas, Arizona, Colorado, down in Sonora. He'd taken beatings as well as given them. He'd been shot at, and he'd been knifed.

He'd gained a reputation, and he'd made a lot of money.

Money.

It had been important at one time. He'd banked most of what he earned, but not until he met Louise had he known why. Then he had told himself that he would invest in a sizable cattle ranch, and be somebody—a substantial citizen. He would be done with trouble-shooting, on the day he and Louise married.

After he lost her to Miles Banning, money was no longer important and he had kept on at his unusual trade. He'd squandered his savings. He'd bought stock in a wildcat mining scheme that turned out a swindle. He'd staked a friend in a cattle-buying venture in Mexico, and the friend had lost the money at poker. He'd become a soft touch for acquaintances down on their luck. He'd started to drink, gamble, take up with gay ladies; habits he'd never had before. It all cost him plenty, but it hadn't helped him forget Louise.

He'd been a damned fool in more ways than one.

So Kincaid told himself, and finally slept. . . .

**H**E LEFT Dahlman early in the morning, riding a stocky roan gelding he'd bought at the livery stable. It was good to be in the saddle again. It would be even better if he were riding his own range, Kincaid reflected. An odd thought. He'd stopped thinking of owning his own ranch two years ago. He was sitting a brand-new saddle, and there was a shiny Winchester in its boot. He came upon the newly laid D & TP tracks just west of the town.

A small but imposing station had already been built—Miles Banning's idea, Kincaid knew, so that the D & TP stockholders could see that they were getting something for their money—and a freight shed was under construction. A siding ran parallel to the east-west tracks of the Texas Western, the main line through Dahlman, and a TW yard engine was shifting a string of rail-laden flat cars over onto the siding.

The D & TP tracks ran north, alongside a wagon road, and here it was granger country. The land had been given over to the plow, and now wheat grew where once there had been only grass. Farm buildings dotted the plowed-under prairie, in every direction. Then ahead Kincaid sighted a beehive of activity. The antlike activity of hundreds of men. A puffing work engine shunted a car of rails forward for the track-layers. Sledges rang



against spikes with a rhythmic clatter. Ties were placed on the roadbed directly from wagons that had hauled them from a lumbering camp in some distant hills. Beyond, teams dragged scrapers and dump carts moved the disturbed earth from one place to another. Men worked in gangs, with picks and shovels. Poles were being erected to carry the telegraph wire. Smoke rose from the pipe chimney of a big mass tent. The foghorn voices of gang foremen rose above all the other sounds. Three work cars stood on a temporary siding, and one of them, Kincaid knew, would be Miles Banning's headquarters.

He turned toward the cars, thinking of Banning with a grudging respect. It took a capable man to build a railroad, and there was no denying that Banning, for all his faults, knew his job.

Banning came from his headquarters car before Kincaid reached the siding. He was wearing whipcord breeches and high laced boots. He was carrying a roll of blueprints, and he was smoking a pipe. He looked the way a construction engineer ought to look. He was followed by burly Tim McShayne, and the two men, seeing Kincaid, halted by the car and watched him as he rode up.

McShayne was frowning. "Ed, you're a hard man to discourage."

"You knew that before now, Tim," Kincaid said. "But lay off me. I'm working for the stockholders now."

"Yeah? But for how long?"

Kincaid ignored that. He folded his hands on his saddlehorn, looked at Banning. "I've had a look at one of your maps. This looks like a nice, easy construction job. Let's keep it that way, eh?"

Banning puffed on his pipe, his face expressionless but his eyes resentful. "That's how I want it," he said. "Nice and easy. I'm in a hurry to get this road built. I've another job waiting up in Oregon. There's not going to be any trouble. I told Meecham it was a waste of money to put a man like you on as trouble-shooter." His voice hardened. "You know that, too. You know there's no need for a trouble-shooter on a small job like this."

"If there's to be no trouble, how come you were so anxious to keep me away?"

"You know the answer to that, Kincaid."

"No. Tell me."

"All right, I'll tell you," Banning said. "I don't want you on my neck. For two years this thing has been building up in you, and now you're ready to go haywire because of it. You want to ruin me, for a personal reason, and you think this is your chance. I'm not fooling myself. It's possible for you to ruin me. That's why I don't want you around this job."

"Miles, I wish I could take your word for it," Kincaid said. "I wish that I could believe that that's the real reason you're afraid of me."

Banning swore. "What other reason would I have?"

"You know it, better than I do. You've built two locally financed railroads in the past five years. Both went bankrupt just before they were completed, and they were bought up for a song by the railroad crowd. I can't prove that you were working hand-in-glove with the big railroad interests, but I'm convinced in my own mind that you were. And you could be again. That's the other reason, friend."

Banning flushed, and was at a loss for words.

Before the man could express his denial of guilt, Kincaid went on, "Sure, I've got a personal reason to ruin you. But so long as you're on the level, I'm not going to bother you. You have my word for that, and, damn it, my word is good. But if you trip up, Miles, I'm going to give you a booting."

McShayne came and stood beside Kincaid's horse, scowling up at him. "Ed, I like you. You're all right, except that right now you're mixed up. This job is on the level. I know it, and you know it. Or you should, if it wasn't for that grudge you've got against Miles. And that's what I don't like about you. Holding a grudge, keeping a feud going. I'm not talking for Miles now, but for myself. If it comes to a booting . . . well, you're going to be on the wrong end of it. That's Tim McShayne

talking, bucko, and his word is good, too!"

Kincaid smiled. "Keep him straight," he said, "and there'll be no booting."

He turned his horse away.



**T**HE sign read: *Shamrock Ranch—Private Property—No Trespassing*. The words had been burned into a board with a running-iron, and the sign was fastened to a gate across the road.

Kincaid reined in, hooked a leg about his saddle-horn, took out makings, and considered the sign as he rolled a cigarette. It was mid-afternoon. The road now twisted through low hills, and beyond loomed the craggy cliffs of the Dahlman Mountains.

He had left the farming country behind during the morning, then ridden through barbwire-fenced cattle range. At midday he had come to a side road—and a gate like this one now barring his way—and seen a ranch headquarters a couple of miles along it. He had turned onto the side road, ridden to the ranch buildings. It had turned out to be Ben Carmody's place. And Carmody, genial and friendly, had invited him to dinner. He'd eaten with the rancher and his crew, talked a little, then ridden on north.

According to the map in his saddle-bag, this was a part of Dan Meecham's Slash-M range. But the sign proclaimed it to be Shamrock Ranch.

Barbwire stretched across a gap in some bluffs, and the gate was midway in the length of fence. The road showed signs of numerous passing wagons, so the gate was not intended to keep traffic off the land beyond. Too, the surveyor's stakes marking the railroad's route marched on beyond the fence, showing that the railroad company expected right-of-way across Shamrock Ranch. Evidently, the no-trespassing sign was merely a matter of form. The land was thus posted, Kincaid supposed, so nobody would get the idea that the owner was giving up his title to the part of it used by public vehicles.

He straightened in the saddle, rode to the gate, shoved it open. It was rigged with pulleys and weights, and so swung shut when he passed through. The road led him through the bluffs and more low hills, then into a valley that reached to the mountains a mile away. The road aimed straight across the valley toward a V-shaped cut in the barrier of cliffs.

A shallow creek twisted its way through the valley and flowed into a lake to the east. The shore of the lake was fringed by cottonwoods. A wide cedar brake flanked the road for some distance beyond the entrance to the valley. It was a pleasant place after the monotonous flatness of the plains to the south, and Kincaid could understand why the owner kept it posted as private property. A man wouldn't want to share such a range with outsiders.

Curious about the owner, Kincaid left the road once he was past the cedar brake and struck out toward the lake. He glimpsed buildings at its far end, amid a stand of cottonwoods, and, approaching them, saw that there was a small cabin and a log barn with an adjoining corral. Cabin and barn were in a state of disrepair from long neglect. The place looked deserted, but then he saw a pinto pony standing ground-hitched before the cabin and a moment later Katherine Meecham appeared in the doorway.

He reined in, dismounted, wondering what she was doing at this abandoned place. He said, "Hello, Miss Meecham. We seem to keep running into each other, but I never expected to see you here."

She regarded him without apparent interest. "I come here often."

"It's a beautiful spot, this valley."

"Yes."

Kincaid gave her a searching look, feeling rejected by her lack of expression and the dull tone of her voice. He had seen anger in her eyes when she learned that Miles Banning had a wife. Later, there had been hurt—deep hurt. Now she seemed empty of feeling, beyond anger or hurt. And suddenly he knew how it was with her. As it had been with him

when he lost Louise. Something had gone out of her when she found out the truth about Miles Banning. Nothing was important to her now. She'd really been in love with the man.

**A**T FIRST he thought that it would be charitable of him to ride on, to leave her alone. Then he wondered if it wouldn't be more kind to remain and talk, and perhaps help her forget to some extent.

He said, "The sign on the gate calls it Shamrock Ranch. On the railroad map, it's a part of Slash-M. How does that figure?"

"This valley is a part of Slash-M Ranch," Katherine said. "But it's a separate part. I own it, not my father. I hold title to it. When the road from Dahlman to Tulare was opened, I posted a no-trespassing sign at the south gate and another at the north gate over at the pass in the mountains so that there could never be any dispute over my ownership of the entire valley."

She spoke in that same dull tone, without any interest in what she said.

"I can't blame you for not wanting to give up any part of the valley," Kincaid said. "But how is it that you own this part of Slash-M?"

"My father was one of the first cattlemen to move into the Panhandle," Katherine said. "He homesteaded here in the valley, built this cabin, then brought my mother and me here. We moved up from the Brazos River country. Mother came to love it here. She always said that it was the most beautiful place she'd seen in Texas. She was Irish, you know, and after Ireland . . . well, I guess it's a more beautiful place than most of Texas. It was all green hills and valleys, she used to tell me. It was my mother named the valley Shamrock. She told Dad that when she passed away, she wanted to be buried here—not out on the flats where he founded his second headquarters."

Katherine was silent a moment, a far-away look in her eyes as memory took her back to her mother. It occurred to Ed

Kincaid that perhaps this was not too good, but at least it had taken her mind off the hurt she had suffered because of Miles Banning.

She continued, "Her grave isn't far from here. Several years before she died, Dad told her that if she liked the valley so much he would deed it over to her. He did. And mother left a will, giving the valley to me. So Shamrock Valley is mine, a part of Slash-M Ranch and yet not a part of it. Dad grazes cattle up here occasionally, and pays me a grazing fee." She smiled faintly. "It's no longer a ranch, but I like to think of it as one. That's why my no-trespassing signs bear the name Shamrock Ranch." She smiled bitterly. "Once I had an idea—a dream—that when I married, my husband and I would start a ranch here."

"Hold onto the idea," Kincaid said. "Keep it your dream."

"No. Dreams are no good. Not day-dreams, anyway," she said. Then, after a long silence: "I saw Miles after I spoke to you last night. He was waiting when my father and I left the hotel. He tried to explain himself. Do you know how?"

Kincaid said that he didn't.

"He said that this woman who is or was his wife pursued him. That she tricked him into marriage. That she never was in love with him, but was in love with you. She merely considered him a better catch financially. Tell me, Kincaid, is there any truth in that?"

"No. Louise was in love with him."

"I knew it, even when he was saying it."

"Well, he's not worth crying over."

"I'm not crying. You don't see me crying. All I want is to pay him back, make him regret what he did to me."

"That's no good. Forget him."

"He swore that he loved me," she said. "If he loves me, it will hurt him if I turn to another man, won't it?"

"You're not ready for another man, Katherine."

She came and stood before him. "He hates you," she said. "And because he hates you, it would really hurt him if I



turned to you, wouldn't it?"

"Maybe. I'm not sure it would."

"I said to him, 'The first man that wants me—'"

Kincaid was shocked. "You don't mean that."

"I mean it," she said fiercely. "I mean it, all right!"

"It won't work," he told her. "You can hurt him, maybe. But you can't really get over him by turning to another man. It's not that easy. After I lost Louise to him, I got to know a lot of women. It didn't help. There's got to be something between a man and a woman, Katherine, to make their knowing each other satisfying. There's nothing between us. No love—"

"Love! It's just a word. What's wrong, Kincaid. Aren't I attractive enough?"

**H**E LOOKED at her then, to see what she was really like. She was attractive, all right. Tall, mature of figure, features bold but finely molded. Full,

almost sensuous lips. Her red-brown hair a soft thick mass, breasts rising and falling with her hurried, excited breathing. He would have been less than a man not to have found her desirable.

"All right," she said, and now there was fury in her eyes—and scorn in her voice. "If it's not you, it will be another man!"

She turned toward her pony.

"Wait—"

She faced him again. "I thought so. A lot of fancy talk first, to place yourself in a better light. That's a man for you. Well, if you want me, Kincaid, you'll have to come and get me."

Perhaps five feet separated them.

He studied her, and was sure that she didn't really want such a thing. Not deep inside her. It was contrary to her real nature; he was convinced of that. But she believed that she wanted it, though later she would certainly hate herself. He hadn't called her to wait because of a decision to do as she wanted, but because he'd

[Turn page]



**Round-Up Pete Seg.**

"The man who did more to arouse us workingmen was the inventor of the alarm clock."

**AND THERE'S NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT TO WEAR A PAIR OF—**

# Carhartt MASTER CLOTH Overalls

Bib overalls, Sanforized, with coats and work caps to match.

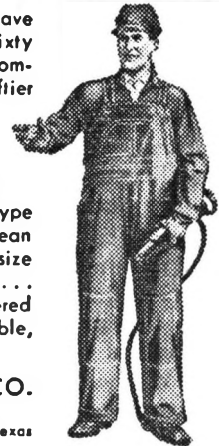


Lace back dungarees and waist overalls in longwearing Carhartt Master Cloth blue denim.

Round-Up Pants—Western style blue jeans—for work or play.

Three generations of the Carhartt family have been producing work clothes exclusively for sixty three years—your guarantee of top quality, roomier cut, more experienced tailoring and thriftier economies.

Whether it's our exclusively made rain repellent, extra heavy Brown Ducks for those tough, he-man jobs—blue denims for farm and shop—lace back dungarees and waist type overalls—shop coats—Western style blue jean Round-Up pants for the kids—you'll find a size and style to fit you . . . fit your pocket book . . . and fit the job, too. Quality and price considered you can't beat Carhartt's for washable, durable, on-the-job comfort.



**HAMILTON CARHARTT OVERALL CO.**

Detroit 16, Michigan  
Carhartt Park, Irvine, Ky.    Atlanta, Ga.    Dallas, Texas

hoped to talk her out of the idea. Now he realized that nothing he could say would change her mind. There would be another man if she did not have her way with him. And another man might have no scruples against an easy conquest. But if talk wouldn't help, action might. He smiled at her.

"All right. I'll come and get you. But remember, I told you that I'm no saint."

"Is any man, Kincaid?"

"I don't know about that."

"Are we to do nothing but talk?"

"I want you to be warned."

"All right, I'm warned. And your conscience is clear. Now what are you waiting for?"

He laughed, then moved toward her. Even as he reached out his hands, there was indecision in her eyes. And then, as he touched her, he saw her look of panic. He had been right about her. This was against her better nature. He understood Katherine Meecham, all right. In a moment she would break away in wild flight. He closed his hands about her shoulders, and felt her shudder. But the break didn't come. She steadied, became submissive. It would take a great deal to frighten her.

He slipped his arms about her, drew her body against his.

And found her mouth with his lips, man-rough in the way he kissed her.

Her arms went about his neck and she strained against him, and it seemed to Ed Kincaid that there was an explosive quality to this girl's passion. It wasn't going as he had planned it, and he knew that there was real danger that the wildness in her would ignite desire in him. And that would lead to a situation that would not only cause her to hate him, afterwards, but give him reason to hate himself.

Then he felt a change in her. She shuddered once more, and tried to break away. He knew that it was all right. She could go so far, and no farther. But he had to convince her completely that this was no good, shock her out of her foolishness. He tightened his arms, held her to him. And sought her mouth again.

She turned her face away, crying out. He lifted his right hand and caught hold of her hair, and forced her to take his kiss. Suddenly she was a wild thing, fighting him and her fury was as great as her passion had been for that one brief moment. She struck his face with her clenched fists, then freed herself the instant he loosened his embrace. She stumbled away from him, staring at him with frightened eyes. She lifted her hand and drew it across her lips, as though wiping away something unclean. She was trembling violently.

"Now you know," he said. "That's what it would be like."

She stared at him a moment longer, then ran to her pony. She rose to the saddle and wheeled away. She struck out at a hard run, southeast across the valley, in panicky flight.

Kincaid watched until she disappeared around the far end of the range of bluffs. He stood there a while, remembering what holding her in his arms had been like. And for the first time in two years, the memory of Louise had dimmed. It was Katherine Meecham who remained in his thoughts as he turned to his horse.

He mounted and turned back toward the road, and he was just beyond the lake when a rifle shot cracked. He heard the shriek of the slug, and so knew that he was the target. Pulling his own rifle from its boot, he dropped from the saddle. The second shot came as his feet touched the ground, and a wild scream came from his horse. The roan went down in a thrashing heap, and then, as Kincaid dived for the cover of a brush thicket, it lay motionless. It had been shot through the head.

**A** THIRD shot racketed, and the slug tore at the bushes among which he crouched. He flattened to the ground and jacked a cartridge into the Winchester's firing chamber. He waited, the fright that was a normal reaction to such a situation bathing him with a clammy sweat and causing his heart to pound hard and fast.

The bushwhacker was somewhere in the dense cedar brake, and now he was wait-

ing for his quarry to move and expose himself. The man's marksmanship was not of the best, or perhaps sheer nervousness had thrown off his aim on those first shots. If it were the latter, Kincaid reflected, the bushwhacker would steady his nerves during this period of waiting—and make his next shot count.

The bushes were scanty cover, and Kincaid had the uncomfortable feeling of a naked man trying to hide himself behind a too-small towel. Naked to the deadly eye of the hidden rifle. A slow minute passed. He lifted his head, peering toward the scrubby trees, and a shot came immediately and threw a clod of dirt against his cheek. He ducked his head and rolled over twice, another shot striking dead center the position he had just abandoned. He rose to fire as he completed his second roll, and drove two quick shots into the brake beneath a lazily rising haze of powder smoke. A startled yell came from the bushwhacker, and Kincaid, knowing he had his moment, came erect and fired twice more.

He glimpsed a movement among the cedars, and, thinking he had the man on the run, he broke from the brush and sprinted toward a boulder midway to the brake. A shot cracked, and the slug made a tearing sound in the air close by his head. He dived for the boulder, crouched behind it, breathing hard. Another slug struck the rock, and ricocheted screaming. He fired from the side of the rock, but had no target now. He looked for powder smoke, and saw a faint smudge of it a hundred feet from where the first haze had appeared. He took cartridges from his pocket and refilled the Winchester's magazine. Then he had a second glimpse of the bushwhacker, running now, heading deeper into the brake.

Kincaid left the boulder and headed for the trees, plunging in among them. He heard the scurrying of his quarry, but had no sight of him. The cedars grew in a dense thicket, serving the fleeing ambusher as a screen.

Driving on, Kincaid finally realized that he was taking the wrong direction, for the

sounds of the man's running were now farther away, so he turned through the thicket in the direction of the road. After plunging another fifty yards through the brake, he stopped to listen and heard a distant drumming of hoofs.

He rushed on, reaching the road in time to get a brief look at the bushwhacker riding south along it. The man was running his mount, and now, reaching the gap in the bluffs forming the south rim of the valley, he shot a frightened look back over his shoulder. And Kincaid recognized him.

Jake Dutcher—Miles Banning's man.

He fired a last shot at Dutcher, another miss, and then the range was too great. Slowly and deliberately he took out his makings and started building a smoke. There was no surprise in him. He'd known from the first shot that whoever the bushwhacker might be he had been sent by Miles Banning. It added up to the fact that Banning was afraid of Ed Kincaid because he had something he wanted to hide and it was possible that Kincaid would find out what that something was and do something about it. Yes, Banning was afraid . . . so afraid that he would have murder done.

Kincaid lighted his cigarette, then turned back to where his dead horse lay. He would have to get his saddle and hoof it to some place where he could obtain another mount.

The Slash-M was the nearest place.



**I**T WAS five days later that Kincaid returned to the construction camp. He'd completed his survey of the D & TP's proposed route on the chance that Banning had tried to have

him murdered because there was something the contractor didn't want him to see along the route. But so far as Kincaid had been able to ascertain there was no discrepancy between the actual route and the surveyor's map that Banning had given to the D & TP stockholders and which he, Kincaid, now carried with him.

During the five days the railhead had been shoved ahead several miles, and the entire camp was a beehive of activity. Tim McShayne was bossing a pick-and-shovel gang that was filling in an arroyo. The man scowled at the sight of Kincaid, and came toward him with a chip on his shoulder.

He said, "Move along, Ed. No need for you to snoop around here."

"Don't try to shove me around, Tim. Where's Banning?"

"Gone to Dahlman."

"How about Dutcher?"

"Jake? He's not around any more. He asked for his time and pulled out. Four, five days ago. After being with Banning Construction for a half dozen years. Don't ask me why."

Kincaid leaned forward in the saddle, not knowing what to make of Tim McShayne. If the man knew about the bush-whacking, he was covering up well. "I'll tell you why he pulled out, Tim."

"So?"

"He rode out after me the day I stopped by the camp," Kincaid said. "He followed me up to Shamrock Valley and did his damndest to kill me. If he was a little better with a rifle, I'd be a dead man now. As it was, he only killed my horse. That's why he pulled out. He knew I'd come hunting him."

McShayne looked puzzled. "Dutcher?" he said. "Why?"

"He was sent. By Banning."

"You're crazy, Ed!"

"You didn't know he followed me north that day?"

"No. And I don't believe a word of this. Miles wouldn't—"

"All right, Tim," Kincaid broke in. "Believe what you want. But I know. If I ever get my hands on Dutcher, I'll make him confess it to you. But he's probably a thousand miles from here by now, with a couple hundred dollars of Miles's money in his pocket. And I can't prove a thing against him—or Banning."

He saw anger mix with the disbelief on McShayne's face. He knew that it was no use to try to convince the man that Ban-

ning was anything but what McShayne believed him to be. Banning's charm was no less effective with men than with women. He had the brawny, slow-witted Tim McShayne under his spell.

Kincaid said, "Like I said, Tim, believe what you want. But you'd better open your eyes where Miles Banning is concerned—and keep them open."

He turned away, but McShayne grabbed his horse by its headstall.

"Hold on, Ed," he said. "If Miles was going to pull something like that, he would have told me—taken me into his confidence."

"No."

"I'm his right-hand man."

"You're his left hand, Tim, and Banning never lets his left hand know what his right is doing," Kincaid said. "He knows there's no rule in the book that you wouldn't break, except maybe the one against murder. Besides, he knows that you and I have always been halfway friendly. No, he wouldn't take you into his confidence about having me murdered. Now turn my horse loose, hombre!"

"What do you figure on doing, Ed?"

"Have a talk with your boss."

"You give him a chance to prove he hadn't anything to do with it. You hear?"

"All I'm going to do is read the riot act to him," Kincaid said. "But if there's a second time . . . well, it'll be just too bad for our friend Banning. Turn my horse loose, Tim."

Suddenly McShayne obeyed.

Then stood there watching him ride away, a worried look on his face.

**K**INCAID stabled his horse upon reaching Dahlman, then went in search of Banning. He met the contractor coming from the TW station at the south side of town. He felt a quick surge of rage at sight of the man, and the urge to do violence. He wanted to use his fists on Miles Banning; he wanted to rip and smash Banning's face until it was changed beyond all recognition. A false-front, that handsome face. A false-face. A mask. It was one thing, while the real man under-



neath was something else. There was a girl in a parlor house in El Paso whose face bore such a look of innocence that she was known as The Virgin. Banning was like that prostitute, Kincaid reflected. Appearances were deceiving. Kincaid halted before him, watching the smile come to Banning's lips and the wary look to his eyes.

"Well, Ed, are you satisfied with the D & TP survey?"

"It had one rough spot."

"Oh? What's that?"

"Shamrock Valley," Kincaid said. "I came close to getting killed up there." He lowered his voice. "Miles, I grew up in the cattle country and I learned there that when a man is after your life, the only way to stay alive is to kill him. You—"

Banning said, "Ed, I don't know what you're talking about."

"Dutcher. You sent him to kill me."

"Dutcher's not with Banning Construction any more."

"I guess not. Not after bungling that bushwhack attempt."

"Lord, Ed; you're not saying that I sent him to kill you. You don't believe that." Banning showed injured innocence now. "Look, Ed; if I had done such a thing, would I have sent word to Louise that you are here. Here, this is proof that I want to bring you two together. This is her reply to my wire. I've only just now received it."

He pulled a paper from his pocket, held it out to Kincaid.

Kincaid said, "Miles, you think to cover all the angles, don't you?" He didn't take the telegram. "How low can a man sink, anyway? You trying to unload your unwanted wife on another man!"

Banning flushed. "Ed, you always misunderstand my motives," he said. "I'm concerned about Louise. I want to see her have what she wants out of life. Which happens to be you. She says in her wire that she would like the three of us to get together and work things out in a friendly fashion. Will you see her when she arrives?"

Kincaid had the feeling that the tables

had been turned on him, that it was he who was on the defensive. "She's coming here?" he said.

"Yes, of course. She wants to see you."

"All right. I'll see her."

"Good," Banning said. "That will please her."

He touched a seemingly friendly hand to Kincaid's shoulder, then turned away.

Staring after him, Kincaid swore under his breath. There was in him a feeling that the man had outwitted him. And the prospect of seeing Louise again soon didn't give him any pleasure.

He was still standing there looking after Banning when the two men approached. He was acquainted with the one, and if he hadn't been, he still would have known them for railroad detectives. They had the tough look on flabby faces, the suspicious eyes, the heavy look of men who seldom exert themselves physically. They were dressed like townsmen, but there was no mistaking them, Kincaid reflected, for merchants, bankers or clerks.

The one he knew, Ambers, said, "Kincaid. Mr. Prentiss wants to see you."

"Old Hiram? He's in Dahlman?"

"Yeah. Let's go."

Kincaid felt a stirring of rebellion. "Maybe Prentiss wants to see me, but I don't want to see him," he said. "Tell him some other time will do, Ambers."

Ambers's face hardened. "Orders, Kincaid."

"Listen; you tell old Hiram—"

It was close to being sacrilege. Hiram Prentiss was president of the Texas Western Railroad; he controlled a half dozen other western railroads. He was the grand mogul of the big railroad interests, a little tin god to a lot of men like Ambers and his partner. He was never called anything but "Mister" or "sir"—and with the proper tone of respect. Ambers frowned with displeasure.

"One way or another, we're carrying out our orders, Kincaid," he said. "So make it easy for us and for you yourself. Let's go."

Kincaid thought it over, then shrugged. "All right."

THE TWO men flanked him, escorted him to a private coach on a siding just beyond the station, and entered it with him. The compartment into which they stepped was furnished as an office, and Len Graves, Prentiss' secretary, was busy at a desk. The old man who was so powerful that his influence was felt over a vast part of the west and even extended to Chicago and Wall Street sat huddled, small and frail, in an armchair. He had a woolen shawl about his shoulders. His face was gray with the pallor of his age, and it was etched with a myriad of wrinkles. But his eyes were clear and somehow youthful, and they fixed on Kincaid with a lively interest.

"Ah, Ed Kincaid," he said, his voice a dry croak. "It's nice of you to drop by to see a friendless old man."

"And I came of my own free will, Hiram."

"Without giving my boys a bit of trouble, eh?"

"No trouble, Hiram. What have you got planned for me?"

Prentiss uttered cackling laughter. "I like you, Ed," he said. "You're the only person who dares call me by my given name." He turned solemn. "Why aren't you afraid of me, boy?"

"You want an answer to that, Hiram?"

"No," the old man said peevishly. "I know it. You're not afraid of me because I'm old and weak and you're young and strong—and because you're one man who's not awed by wealth. You know, Ed, I'm worth a hundred million dollars and I'd give it all to be what you are right now."

"God forbid," Kincaid said. "You'd steal the whole country blind."

Prentiss gazed at him with resentment, then, moving his skinny shoulders in a faint shrug, he looked from Kincaid to the two detectives. "All right, clear out," he ordered. When the pair had gone, he said, "Ed, you've worked for me a time or two. And you did a good job. Now I've got another for you."

"Where?"

"Over in Arizona. A bit of trouble for

you to handle. You can name your own price, within reason."

"No."

"You're turning me down?"

Kincaid smiled. "Hiram, this is one time you're easy to see through. Miles Banning is playing your game here in the Panhandle, and you've got an eye on the Dahlman & Texas Panhandle Railroad. It must look like a profitable proposition, the D & TP. So you want it, if you can gobble it up at your price. And Banning is willing to help you get it. But I showed up, and I looked like grief to him. So he sent word to you, and you came running to help him get me out of the way. This job in Arizona is nothing more than a bribe."

"Call it what you like, Ed," Prentiss said. "Just so you accept it."

"Nothing doing."

"Why not, man? It'll be profitable for you."

"Profitable! That's all you think, Hiram—in terms of how profitable a thing may be. Well, you and I don't think along the same lines."

"All you can pick up on the D & TP job is five thousand dollars," Prentiss said. His face turned ugly. "If you manage to stay alive until it's completed."

"I'll manage it, friend."

"Unless you have an accident, mind you." The old man's eyes were beady now.

Kincaid stared at him, suddenly uneasy. He knew Hiram Prentiss to threaten men with accidents, and accidents had befallen them—or at least what appeared to be accidents. The old man had probably a hundred men on his payroll who were experts at rigging fake accidents, men who weren't as clumsy at it as Banning's man, Jake Dutcher. Fear and anger mingled in Kincaid.

Then, stubbornly: "I'll risk that."

He turned and left the coach, stepping out into the hot Texas sunlight that now failed to warm him. He was chilled to the core by the old man's sinister threat, knowing the next accident victim could—more likely would—be himself.

**M**ILE after mile the railroad moved steadily north. Kincaid, if he had not known different, if the evidence had not been to the contrary, would have given Miles Banning credit for a job well done. He would have been inclined to think that nothing interested Banning but to complete the track to Tulare and then move on to that construction job awaiting him in Oregon. But he did know different; there was evidence to the contrary. Trouble would develop. Contrived trouble. And Banning might do the contriving.

Track was laid across Ben Carmody's range, then Dan Meecham's range lay just ahead—and beyond it Katherine Meecham's little Shamrock Ranch and the



He leaped from the train and landed with a terrific jolt

gateway through the Dahlman Mountains. While track was being laid across the Slash-M, Banning received word that a box-car on the D & TP siding at Dahlman had been broken into and looted. Kincaid went to town to look into the matter; he found that a deputy sheriff had investigated the matter, recovered the stolen goods, and arrested the thieves. After leaving the sheriff's office in the courthouse, Kincaid came face to face with Louise Banning in front of the Great Western House.

"Ed—How nice to see you!" she cried.

"You're looking well, Louise." He was surprised at how calm he felt.

"And you, Ed," she said, returning the compliment with a smile. "You don't seem surprised to see me, though."

"Miles told me you were coming. When did you arrive?"

"Yesterday," she said. "I haven't seen Miles yet. I sent a note to the construction camp only this morning. I'm on my way to the post office. Walk with me?"

He nodded, and they turned toward Donley's general store in which the post office was located. She took his arm without it being offered, and the touch of her hand brought to him the first quivery feeling of being aroused. A dozen and more women lay between him and Louise, yet there was no lessening of his desire where she was concerned. Miles Banning was between them, too: that thought dulled his feelings somewhat, and made him unsure that Louise could mean as much to him as she had once meant.

She was not so tall as Katherine Meecham, but the crown of her dark head came just above her shoulder. She was full of body; more mature of body than when he'd last seen her. And she was as lovely as ever. She wore a pretty dress of some dark green material, the bodice fashionably form-fitting and the skirt wide and flowing. She carried herself well, in that prideful way of a woman aware that she is attractive. She gave him another smile.

"It's pleasant, having a man to walk with again."

"Miles said something about a divorce."

"Yes. It was all that was left for me."

"I'm sorry your marriage didn't work out. You know that, Louise."

She nodded. "I know you wanted to see me happy," she said. "You're like that. I tried to make a go of it, Ed. I tried to be a good wife, a loving wife." Her voice became edged with bitterness. "It wasn't quite enough."

"You're really done with him?"

She was slow in answering. "I'll be truthful," she said. "I don't know. My mind says that I should be, my heart doesn't want me to be. I came here to

find out if my divorce has given him any feeling of having lost something worthwhile. Deep inside, I know the answer. He's not displeased that I've given him his freedom. He hasn't changed. It's his nature to—to—"

"To be a damned tomcat of a man," Kincaid finished.

"That's putting it crudely. But it does describe Miles Banning."

"Banning is a fool."

"Women make it so easy for him. Too many can't help themselves where he is concerned. To a woman, he's as handsome as a Greek God. And then she finds out that he has no morals at all. Has he a woman here, Ed?"

"Well . . ."

"Don't cover up for him, Ed."

He smiled. "I won't. He was involved with a girl named Katherine Meecham. But I let it out that there was a Mrs. Banning, before I knew of the divorce. She hadn't been told that there was a wife, and it hit her hard. She may still be in love with him, but she's no longer seeing him."

"What is she like?"

"Katherine? Well . . ."

Kincaid faltered, wondering how he could describe Katherine. She was a beauty, as much of one as Louise. And younger. Too, she seemed to be a pretty wonderful person. Before he could go on, they halted before Donley's store and there was Katherine's pinto pony at the hitch-rack and the girl herself coming from the doorway. She gave him a curt nod and went directly to the hitch-rack. He lifted his hat to her. And Louise, with a woman's quick intuition, sensed that this was the girl of whom he had spoken.

At the store doorway, she said, "He always has good taste, doesn't he, Ed?"

"Don't torture yourself with jealousy."

She smiled a hurt smile. "It's been nice, meeting you," she said. "I'm at the hotel. Come see me, when you can. I'm going to be lonely, Ed."

"I'll do that, Louise."

She smiled again, then looked past him toward the Meecham girl with the smile fading and her lips thinning with dislike.

There was an ugly look in her eyes for an instant, then she turned into the store. And Kincaid knew that she was no longer the girl he had worshipped. Two years with Miles Banning had taught her how to hate.

He turned to Katherine; she had untied her pony and stood beside it. He saw the half veiled look of curiosity in her eyes. He leaned against the rail, took out makings.

"Yes," he said, "that's the former Mrs. Banning."

"I thought so. From the look she gave me."

"She wanted to know if Miles had a woman here."

"And you pointed me out to her, of course."

"I told her that you stopped seeing him when you found out that he wasn't as much a bachelor as he led you to believe."

"Thanks." She turned and mounted. Then: "That was very kind of you."

He moved close to the pony, looking up at her. "Look, Katherine; do we have to be enemies?" he said. "Sure, I acted like a brute out at the cabin. But you've got to understand why. I wanted to scare you out of that crazy idea you had of taking up with the next man who came along just to have revenge on Banning. I think it worked, Katherine. I did you a favor. Why hate me for it?"

"Do me another favor, Kincaid."

"Now you're going to be plain nasty, Katherine."

Her voice cut like a knife.

"Just keep away from me. Do me that favor and then I'll be able to stop hating you."

With that she swung the pinto about and rode away.



**W**ORK on the D & TP came to an abrupt halt ten days later, when the graders reached the Shamrock Ranch's barbed wire fence. Three men armed with Winchester rifles had warned the graders' boss against



trying to tear down the fence. When Kincaid rode up, Miles Banning was lounging against a pile of ties and puffing on his pipe. He looked amused.

"Well, Ed, what are you going to do about it?"

"You've talked to Katherine?"

"McShayne has. She's not letting us cross her land."

"You know why she's doing this, don't you?"

"Sure," Banning said. "She wants to pay me back for having had a wife. Women! The way their minds work. You're the trouble-shooter. So do something about it."

Kincaid eyed him sourly. The man wasn't displeased. The delay was merely a matter of minutes so far, but every minute was costing the Dahلمان and Texas Panhandle Railroad Company money. And if the delay lasted long enough, the company might be badly hurt financially.

Tim McShayne appeared, saying, "What are we waiting for? There's only three of them. Ed, you're not scared of them?"

"I've got a healthy respect for Winchester rifles," Kincaid said. He looked at Banning. "This is the only practical way through the mountains?"

"Unless we dig a string of tunnels," Banning said. "And that would bankrupt the D & TP. Or we could swing west to Hondo Pass, but that means thirty more miles of track. And you know what it costs to lay a mile of track. The girl has got this railroad over a barrel. She's keeping us from getting to Comanche Pass, which is the shortest route through the mountains." He puffed on his pipe, grinning. "There are two ways of handling the situation, Ed," he went on. "One is for you to handle it here, by bucking her gunmen. The other is for the company to take her to court—and that will take time."

Kincaid said, "There's another way. I'm going to have a talk with her," and rode toward the fence.

He kept to the wagon road, coming to the gate in the fence. He reined in and watched one of Katherine's guards bead

him with his rifle.

"I want to see the girl."

"Stay where you are," the man called back. "She'll be along."

"I'm coming through."

"Damned if you are!"

Kincaid said, "She never refused permission to riders wanting to cross her range," and leaned from the saddle to pull open the gate. The man fired a warning shot over his head, then levered another cartridge into the rifle's firing chamber as Kincaid rode through. Kincaid said, "Hold your fire, you fool. All I want is to talk with her."

HE RODE on, keeping to the road, putting the man behind him. For a time his back felt as broad a target as the side of a barn. But no second shot came, and soon he was through the gap in the bluffs. He saw Katherine and four riders coming along the road where it cut through the cedar brakes. He reined in and waited, and Katherine, after speaking to her companions and sending them on toward the fence, halted facing him.

"Hired gunmen, Katherine?" he asked.

"No. They're ranchers," she said. "They don't like the idea of a railroad because of the settlers railroads bring. And they weren't so foolish to buy stock in this one."

"Not so foolish as your father, eh?"

"He knows what I'm doing, Kincaid."

"But he can hardly approve."

"I'm over twenty-one," she told him. "I have my rights."

He nodded, said, "I suppose you have." He hooked his right leg about his saddlehorn and started to roll a smoke. Then: "Banning says there are two ways of handling you. One is by using force. One is by taking you into court. The railroad company can get the court to condemn your land, Katherine."

She gave him a defiant look. "Part of this range was homesteaded," she said. "And my mother is buried on that part. The law says that a homestead with a grave on it can't be condemned. I read that somewhere a long time ago. I saw a

lawyer to find out how true it is. The company can take it to court, Kincaid—and it will cost them a lot of time and money for nothing. As for you using force—well, try it!” Her eyes seem to hold a new light as she challenged him.

He lighted his cigarette. “I’ll try some talk first,” he said. “I like a girl to have spirit, but you’re acting like a spoiled brat having a tantrum. You want to hurt Miles Banning. You want revenge on him. But you’re not going to hurt him by pulling this stunt. The fact is, Katherine, Banning isn’t just dishonest with women. He cheats at business as well as at love. I can’t prove a word of this, but you’ll have to believe it and—”

“You’re wasting your breath, Kincaid!”

“Banning is in cahoots with the big railroad interests,” he continued. “He is friendly with Hiram Prentiss of the Texas Western, and Prentiss would like to get control of this railroad—if he can get it at his own price. And Banning is helping him to get it. Prentiss’ price will be dirt cheap, which means that he’ll try to bankrupt the Dahlman and Texas Panhandle Railroad Company. Then take it over. Every bit of trouble that develops will hurt the company, and give Prentiss—and Banning—more of a chance to win out. So you’re not hurting Miles Banning. Actually, you’re playing his game.”

“I don’t believe a word of it, Kincaid.”

“All right,” he told her. “But I’m going to keep talking. If the D & TP should go bankrupt, your father and the men who put up their money with him are going to be hurt. And along with them a lot of other investors—townspeople and settlers, maybe hundreds of them—will lose their savings. Do you want that on your conscience?”

“Build your railroad around my land.”

“That will mean thirty miles more track. And the cost—”

“You haven’t convinced me,” Katherine said. “And you won’t.”

He shook his head resignedly. “And all this because a man lied to you,” he said. “You’ve got to have revenge, even if it doesn’t really hit the man you hate.”

He threw his cigarette away, straightened in the saddle, girmed his horse closer to hers. “There’s one last thing I’ve got to say,” he told her. “I’ve been at this game of trouble-shooting for seven years, and I’ve come up against tougher men than those siding you. I’m going to tear down your fence and send the graders and track-layers through. If your men try to stop me, I’ll fight them.”

“You won’t. You don’t dare.”

“Come along and see.”

“Kincaid, I warn you!”

He lifted the reins to turn his horse away. “I’ll fight—and maybe some of them will get killed or I will. If you want that on your conscience too, all right. If you don’t, come and tell your men not to interfere with me.”

He swung away, headed back toward the fence.

**S**EVEN men with guns were ranged along the short stretch of fence and beyond were the hundreds of idle railroad builders. It was not surprising that so few men could stand off so many. The workers were rough men, with plenty of brawlers among them. But they fought with their fists, or, if really enraged, with pick handles. Few of them owned firearms. So the seven men on the north side of the barbwire, with their Winchesters and six-shooters, had them cowed.

Besides, the laborers felt that if they gave a day’s work for a day’s pay that was all expected of them. They hadn’t been hired to fight, and Miles Banning and the gang bosses weren’t talking fight to them. Most of the men had been employed on other construction jobs, and so knew that there was always one man on the payroll who had been hired to handle any trouble. They were content to stand back now and let Ed Kincaid earn his pay.

Kincaid rode slowly to the fence at the point where the tracks were to come through, and two of the guards stepped forward to block his way. He reached for his lariat, shook out the loop, still walking his horse in on the pair. They stood their ground, and one said, “What

do you think you're doing, hombre?"

Kincaid heard Katherine ride up. He said, "Ask Miss Meecham."

He touched spurs to his horse, and it bounded forward and caused the two men to duck away. He made his throw, dropping his loop over a fence post. He had the end of his catch-rope tied hard and fast, and now swung his mount about and took up the rope's slack. One of the men swung his rifle up.

"So help me, mister, I'll shoot you off that bronc!"

Kincaid reined in. "Go ahead," he said. "It's that, or this fence comes down." He looked at Katherine, and she was pale. He said, "Tell him to go ahead and shoot, if that's how you want it."

He rode on and the rope pulled taut and the fence post began to bend and creak. The man who beaded him swore savagely and growled, "By damn, you're getting it!"

Katherine cried, "No, Pete—no!"

Pete lowered his rifle and stared at her, and his companions moved in to gaze at her first wonderingly and then with disgust for her woman's weakness. Kincaid kept his horse moving. The fence post snapped at the ground, and staples snapped loose at the two next posts as the strain on the wire increased. There was a sudden roar of voices as the construction workers saw that Kincaid was getting away with it. The men grabbed up their picks and shovels or took to their teams. They came slurging forward—a motley mob of Mexicans, Chinese, Irish, and just plain Yankees. They swarmed through the break in the fence, onto Shamrock Ranch.

Kincaid shook his loop off the fence post, coiled his rope. He didn't feel good about it, not when he looked around at Katherine. He rode to her.

"Katherine, I'm sorry it had to be this way."

"Go ahead and crow, Kincaid. You've earned the right."

"Every word I said to you was truth."

"Even if it wasn't, it doesn't matter. You've had your way."

He shook his head. "Don't hold a grudge Katherine," he told her.

She gave him a direct, bitter look. "Forgive and forget," she said. "That may be your way, Kincaid. But it's not mine."

She turned away, rode off at a lope back into Shamrock Valley, and disappeared in the direction of her cabin.

Kincaid rode slowly back to where Miles Banning still leaned against the pile of ties. He dropped from the saddle and took out makings, and studied Banning while rolling his cigarette. The man was smiling faintly. He puffed on his meerschauum pipe, looking for all the world as though Kincaid's small victory was no setback for him.

Kincaid lighted up, then said, "That's how it'll be, Miles, from here to Tulare. Better make up your mind to that. Play it straight, and you'll come to no grief."

"How'd you swing it, Ed?"

"Let's say that I've learned how to handle women."

"In that case, you should devote a little attention to Louise."

"You wouldn't care if I did, would you?"

Banning shrugged. "I'm not jealous," he said. "With me, what's past is past."

Kincaid frowned. "She's still in love with you, Miles. She could have been good for you. She still could be. If you have some idea that you can still get somewhere with the Meecham girl—well, you're due for a disappointment."

Banning straightened and knocked the embers from his pipe. There was a sulky look on his face. "Lay off me, Ed," he said, and walked away.

**I**RON rails crossed Katherine's valley and thrust through the V-shaped notch in rock cliffs that was the entrance to Comanche Pass. The grading and tracklaying went more slowly in the mountains, however. There was rocky terrain where a great deal of blasting was required, and a series of trestles had to be built. But, all in all, the Dahlmans were hardly a formidable barrier. Constructing a railroad through such moun-

tains would have been no problem even to a less capable engineer than Miles Banning.

Banning was a paradox. He pushed the work, drove the men, rode his foremen, and was busier than anybody on his payroll. That, Ed Kincaid had to admit. But there was the other side of the man's nature which permitted him to double-cross the people who hired him. *Or am I wrong about him?* Kincaid found himself wondering as he watched Banning show a clumsy powderman how to set a dynamite charge.

It was weeks since the attempt on Kincaid's life, and he had to look back to that day, to his gun fight with Jake Dutcher, to remind himself that it had happened at all. Even then he had some doubt, thinking that perhaps Dutcher might not have been sent by Banning but, over-zealous, had tried to get rid of him on his own hook. Or maybe, Kincaid reflected, it wasn't Banning who had given Dutcher his orders—but old Hiram Prentiss.

It wasn't convincing. Hiram Prentiss wasn't above using violence, or paying to have it done, but it was more characteristic of him to try bribery first. And the old man hadn't offered him a bribe, Kincaid recalled, until after Dutcher's try at bushwhacking him. No, there was no reasoning that Miles Banning, because he was doing a good job so far, hadn't wanted to have him done away with—so that there would be no one to interfere with the underhanded job he was to do sooner or later for the eastern railroad interests.

There was a steady stream of visitors to the railhead, most of them men who owned stock in the company, and they came to see how the work was progressing. Many of the investors who were settlers or townsmen rode out on the trains that hauled rails and ties and equipment. Some came by horse and wagon. The ranchers arrived by horseback. Dan Meecham came riding up one afternoon, watched the work for a time, then swung over to where Kincaid lounged against an

idle dump cart.

"First time I ever saw a man earning five thousand dollars doing nothing, friend," he said, dismounting. "You'll sure not bust a gut through hard work."

Kincaid grinned. "I'm earning that five thousand just by being here, Dan."

"By keeping an eye on Banning?"

"Well, it could be."

"Or it could be that you sold me a bill of goods, bucko."

"I gave you a waw out. I told you you could send me packing if no trouble developed. Remember?"

Meecham nodded. "I've half a mind to," he said. "The only trouble you've handled is what my own daughter made. And that wasn't much, at that. She didn't put up a real fight." He stared, frowning. "How'd you get her to change her mind, Ed?"

"Didn't she tell you?"

"Not a word. I tried to pump her but she wouldn't say a word."

"How is Katherine, Dan?"

"Wildcat nasty ever since."

Kincaid laughed. "You made her a wildcat with your spoiling her," he said. "The man who marries her will have his hands full taming her." Then, sobering: "You'll get your trouble, Dan. I expect it when the railhead gets about halfway between the mountains and Tulare. Maybe sooner. Then I'll start earning that five thousand I hope to collect from you."

"You still think Banning will sell us out, eh?"

"I think he'll try."

"Well, a good try could do a lot of damage," Meecham said. "The company treasury is running low in funds, and there's talk that it'll have to levy an assessment on us stockholders. With me holding forty thousand dollars worth of D & TP paper, my assessment will be a big one." He mounted his horse, then scowled down at Kincaid. "You earn that five thousand, Ed. You hear?"

"I hear, Dan," Kincaid said.

Watching the rancher ride off, he didn't know that he would start earning the money that night. . . .





**M**cSHAYNE brought the note. It had come up from Dahlman on the train that was hauling rails and other materials to the railhead, and the conductor had given it to McShayne to deliver. McShayne held the sealed envelope to his nose, grinned, and said, "Smells like a billy-do, bucko. You got a woman in Dahlman?"

It was nearly dark and the men had knocked off work and were now lined up at the mess tent for chow. Kincaid had eaten earlier, to keep out of the rush, and he was hunkered down, rider-fashion, by a stack of spike kegs having a smoke.

"No woman," he said. "Not unless one has tracked me down from elsewhere."

He held out his hand, and McShayne said, "Nice perfume. Take a whiff."

He sniffed at the envelope. "Yeah. Nice."

The envelope bore no writing other than his name, but he knew the handwriting. Louise's. He'd had other letters from her, long ago, and she always gave her capital letters a lot of curlicues. It wouldn't be a billet-doux, he knew; Louise wouldn't write him a love letter. He ripped open the envelope, took out the sheet of note-paper. There was a very short message.

It read:

*Ed:*

*I know you must be busy, but it's important that I see you at once. I must see you. Please come as soon as you can.*

*Louise.*

He frowned, and, though he would do as she requested, there was a reluctance in him. She was seldom in his thoughts nowadays; he thought of that with a sense of guilt, as though he was being unfaithful. But the truth had to be faced. He was not so much in love with Louise as he had once been. On the other hand, if she needed him . . . he thrust the note into his pocket and got to his feet. He saw that McShayne hadn't gone far.

"Tim, what time is Number Nine pulling out?"

"At nine. You going to Dahlman?"

"Yeah."

"Well, have yourself a time, bucko," McShayne said.

Number Nine was a diamond-stack engine that the D & TP had acquired along with some other rolling stock from a short-lived Kansas road. It picked up a string of empty flats and boxes, and was ready to roll at nine o'clock. The caboose was coupled on behind the tender, with the rest of the cars trailing it. Kincaid swung aboard and entered the caboose as the engineman highballed it. Number Nine labored up a long grade in the north range of the mountains, then had easier going. There was a two-mile level stretch in the middle of Comanche Pass, with only a few curves. Hitting the level stretch, the train racketed along at high speed and the caboose swayed and bumped over the light and none too even roadbed. Flanged wheels shrieked on the curves.

The conductor was up ahead in the cab, but the brakeman was with Kincaid in the caboose. Kincaid cocked an inquiring eye at him, and said, "Somebody's in a hell of a hurry, the way that tea kettle is being pushed."

The brakeman was stretched out on a bunk. He rolled his head and grinned. "Don't let it bother you," he said. "You're in safe hands. O'Mara learned railroad-ing on the Santa Fe."

"O'Mara should go back to school. On a road like—"

Kincaid never got the rest of it said. There was a sudden explosion of sound and the caboose pitched like a bucking bronc. The brakeman was thrown from the bunk. He landed on all fours, and was up instantly yelling, "Get out of here, man!"

He ducked out the back door before Kincaid, who had been sitting up, recovered from the jolt and heaved to his feet. The train was still in motion, but in such wild motion that Kincaid knew it was derailed. He leapt to the doorway and saw the brakeman jump from the platform. He heard the man utter a terrified scream. Then the pile-up came, and the caboose

began to topple over onto its side. Kincaid grabbed at the platform railing. His hands touched it, but then it was jerked beyond his reach. He was slammed one way and another.

And the wrecked train kept piling up with a great solintering of wood and crashing of metal.

**H**AD WAS thrown clear, and he landed heavily on the ground. He lay dazed, and only slowly became aware of a ruddy glare pushing back the darkness. And of somebody screaming. He pinched himself up, stood swaying. The glare came from the caboose. Its oil lamp had been shattered and set fire to the car. Roaring flames were leaping high.

Like the caboose, the engine and its tender were over on their sides and steam was geysering from sprung boiler plates. To the rear, the string of flat cars and boxes was jammed together in accordion fashion.

Somebody was still screaming.

It was Mapes, the brakeman. Kincaid found, and he had dropped between the caboose and the flat car behind it. The forward under-carriage of the flat had broken loose, and the man was pinned beneath it.

Kincaid said, "Take it easy, Mapes. I'll get you out of there."

Mapes screamed that he would burn to death, revealing that his fear was greater than his pain. Kincaid strained against the loose carriage, at first unable to budge it at all and then, as flames licked at him, he gave a desperate heave that moved it a few inches. He took Mapes by the shoulders and dragged him away from the wreckage, and Mapes, after another scream, lost consciousness.

Somebody called from over by the engine, and Kincaid, turning in that direction, saw that it was the conductor, Bailey. They walked toward each other, and Kincaid saw that Bailey's face was a bloody pulp. The man was staggering like a drunk, but he was still carrying a lighted lantern.

Kincaid said, "How about O'Mara and his fireman?"

"O'Mara's dead. Mickey is bad hurt. Where's Mapes?"

"Lying over there. Bad hurt, too."

"A hell of a thing," Bailey said. "I feel sick."

Kincaid swore. "It's lucky any of us are alive. That O'Mara should have known better, highballing it like that. I thought he was supposed to be a railroader. And you—it was your train, Bailey. Why didn't you hold O'Mara down?"

Bailey said worriedly. "You're not blaming the train crew, Kincaid?"

"Who do you figure should be blamed?"

"We weren't traveling at too high a speed, considering it's a level stretch of track and we had only a string of empties behind us. O'Mara had Number Nine under control, and we ran at the same speed over this stretch plenty of times before. If there's any engineer who would have taken it any slower, I don't know him—and I've been railroading for thirty years. Damn it, Kincaid, a train crew can't be blamed for an accident caused by a loose rail!"

"What do you mean, a loose rail?"

"What else would have derailed us?"

Kincaid said, "Give me that lantern!"

He walked back past the burning caboose and the flat that had lost one of its carriages, seeking the spot where the engine had left the rails. He played the glow of the lantern along the track, and shortly found the loose rail. He was hunkered down and staring at it when Bailey came limping up.

"Was I right?"

"You were right, Bailey."

"Those punks laying track—"

"They're not to blame anymore than you are," Kincaid said. "This rail was spiked down proper. I know. I walked every tie of this track after it was laid." He swore bitterly. Then: "Somebody pulled the spikes and removed the coupling plates while Number Nine was at the railhead."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure," said Kincaid, rising. "I've seen cute little jobs like this before." He handed the lantern to Bailey. "I'll hoof it

back to camp and send out a wagon to take Mapes and Mickey to a doctor in Dahlman.

**I**T WAS a dozen miles to the railhead, and Kincaid was limping in his high-heeled boots by the time he arrived. A light burned in Miles Banning's headquarters car, and Kincaid entered to find Banning playing poker with Tim McShayne, John Wyatt, the surveyor, and Herb Witman who was Banning's office clerk. The four men looked at Kincaid without much interest, except for McShayne who said, "Didn't you go to Dahlman after all, Ed?"

"I started out, but I didn't get far."

"What's that mean?"

tell Bailey to show you the rail that was monkeyed with. And I guess you better take O'Mara's body to Dahlman for burial—"

McShayne nodded and left the car before he could say more, and the other three men, having got to their feet, reached for their hats and started to follow. Kincaid said, "You, Miles. I want to talk with you."

Banning nodded, waited until the others had gone. Then: "I know what you're thinking, Ed. But you're wrong and—"

Kincaid hit him.

He struck with cool deliberation rather than out of rage. Talk had never gotten



A story out of Dallas is that a ranch woman drove up from her place to one of the swankiest jewelry shops in Dallas and ordered an expensive set of silverware. The clerk asked about the initials. "Initials, hell!" she bellowed. "Put our cattle brand on it."



"Number Nine is piled up halfway through the pass," Kincaid said. "O'Mara's dead and two more of the crew are hurt."

He saw how quickly the four of them lost all interest in poker, but he was really watching Miles Banning. Banning looked as startled as the others, but, Kincaid reflected, there was never any telling about the man. Banning was good at covering up. He was a damned good actor. The more guilty he was, the more innocent he could manage to appear.

Kincaid said, "It was deliberately wrecked. Somebody loosened a rail."

McShayne swore. He heaved to his feet, saying, "We'd beter get out there."

Kincaid nodded. "Load a wagon and team on the flat car, Tim," he said. "You'll need a rig to get those two hurt men to Dahlman. It'll take a couple days to clean up that mess, and there's not much you can do tonight. So there's no use to take a wrecking crew out until morning. You

him anywhere with Banning, so he was determined to see if his fists would accomplish more. The blow knocked Banning against a drafting table, and he hung there for a moment with a dazed look in his eyes and a trickle of blood coming from his mouth. Then he collapsed to the floor.

"Let's have the truth," Kincaid said.

"Ed, I swear—"

"Miles, give me a little truth for once—before I beat it out of you!"

Banning rose. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and held it to his mouth. Then: "You'll have to beat me, Ed. I don't know a thing about this. If a rail was loosened, I can guess who did it—or had it done. And my guess is the same as yours should be."

Kincaid stared at him, convinced in spite of himself that the man was telling the truth. "You're saying Hiram Prentiss had it done?"

"It seems likely."

"And you're sure you knew nothing about it?"

"I'm sure, Ed."

Banning walked unsteadily to a bench and sat down. He held his head in his hands. Kincaid looked at him with disgust. One punch and he'd caved in. It seemed that there was a way to get the best of Miles Banning, after all.

Kincaid said, "Is Prentiss' private car at Dahlman?"

"I don't know. I haven't been to town for more than a week."

"Who would he send out on a job like that?"

"I don't know. Maybe Chris Boland."

"You seen Boland around?"

"No. I don't know when I ran into Boland last."

"You had any word from Louise lately?"

Banning looked up. "No. Why? What's she got to do with this trouble?"

Kincaid shrugged. "Nothing, I suppose," he said. "If you didn't know the job was planned. If you did, maybe you got her to give you a hand. I had a message from her. She wanted to see me in a hurry. That's why I was aboard the train. Miles, I hope I don't find out that you rigged it so that I was aboard at the time of that accident."

"That's crazy talk, Ed!"

"Maybe. You don't know why Louise wants to see me?"

Banning shook his head. "I haven't seen her or heard from her," he said. "Not since the last time I was in Dahlman. How should I know what she wants of you?"

Kincaid said, "All right, Miles," and turned toward the door.

Banning said, "Where are you going?"

Kincaid said, "To try to pick up the trail of the man who loosened that rail." And went out, wondering if he was a fool to have taken Banning's word on any part of what had been said.

**W**HEN daylight came, he was back at the scene of the wreck, cutting for sign of the man or men who had so effectively loosened the rail. He knew that

if he were to find any sign, it would have to be before the work engine arrived from the railhead with the wrecking crew. There was nothing within the immediate vicinity of the wrecked train, but in a gully a hundred yards away he found the spikes that had been removed in the loosening of the rail. And, more important, the butt of a thin Mexican cigar.

He was acquainted with Hiram Prentiss' man Boland, and he recalled that Boland habitually smoked those long, thin *cigarros*. A dark and gloomy looking man, Chris Boland; a humorless man with a secretive nature. A man who moved in the shadowy bypaths of Hiram Prentiss' railroad barony. Yes, Kincaid to'd himself, it had been Boland. In that at least, Miles Banning had touched upon the truth.

Kincaid mounted his horse and rode on through the gully, coming shortly upon boot tracks and hoof marks. Two men, two horses. The men had mounted and ridden from the gully, one heading south and the other north. Kincaid debated a moment, then followed the hoof marks that led south. He had an idea that it was Boland who had headed toward Dahlman, and his helper, whoever he had been, who had turned north—either toward the construction camp or toward the town of Tulare. And it was Chris Boland he wanted.

Upon reaching Dahlman he stopped first at the Great Western House.

The clerk with the pomaded hair was behind the desk again, and he said, in reply to Kincaid's question. "No, sir. We have no Mrs. Banning registered here."

"Then the lady is registered under her maiden name—Miss Louise Taylor."

"Oh, yes. But Miss Taylor is no longer with us."

"When did she check out?"

"About a week ago."

Kincaid gave him a bewildered look. "You're sure?"

The clerk nodded. "Yes, sir. Miss Taylor took a house in town, over on Second Street. It was just about a week ago that she left us."

"I see. Well, thanks," Kincaid said. "Now maybe you have a guest named Bo-



land. Chris Boland?"

"Mr. Boland has checked out too," came the reply. "He was here two days. He checked out last night, early in the evening."

Kincaid said, "Thanks," again, and turned out of the hotel.

**H**IS brows knitted in a thoughtful frown, Kincaid rode around to Second Street. South of Main, Second was a Mexican section of grubby adobe huts. North of Main, there were a dozen or more small frame houses. Louise appeared at the door of one of the frame houses as Kincaid slow-walked his horse along the north side of the street. He swung over, dismounted.

"You wanted to see me, Louise?"

"Yes, Ed. Please come in."

He left his horse ground-hitched, then looked closely at her as he moved into the house. He removed his hat and looked about the small, poorly furnished parlor as she closed the door. It was not the sort of home she was accustomed to, and he felt a little sorry for her. He turned to find her watching him.

She smiled. "It isn't much, I know," she said. "But I was tired of being cooped up in a hotel room, and I was able to rent this place furnished at a very reasonable price. Of course, I have plans for it—if I stay long in Dahlman."

"What does that depend on, your staying?"

"I hardly know, at the moment."

"Miles isn't interested in a reconciliation?"

"Hardly, with that Meecham girl on his mind."

"He's not seeing her."

"Perhaps not. Maybe he's playing a waiting game."

Kincaid said, "He's wasting his time, if he is. She's one woman who has had enough of Miles Banning. What did you want to see me about, Louise?"

She shrugged. "I was lonely, Ed, unbearably lonely," she said. "I needed someone to talk to, to let me cry on his shoulder. I thought that you would come

to me last night. But you didn't. Why not, Ed?"

"I was on my way. The train was derailed in the mountains," he told her. Then, moving toward her: "You're sure there was nothing else?"

"I'm sure. It seemed important to me when I sent that note."

"Look; do you need money?"

"No. Not at the moment. But thanks for asking."

"Tell me if you do, Louise."

"I don't. Not just now," she said. "You're leaving so soon?"

He nodded and saw the disappointment in her eyes. "I've got a job to do," he said. "Maybe some other time?"

She said flatly, "I'll be here, I suppose," and turned her back on him.

Leaving the house on Second Street, Kincaid rode to the Texas Western station at the south side of town. He found the stationmaster lounging in the doorway, a cranky looking oldtimer. He wondered if money would get him the information he wanted, and decided to try a five-dollar bill.

"This is worth a five spot to me, friend," he said. "Were there any trains through here today besides the eastbound express?"

"A westbound freight. Why?"

"I'm looking for a man." Kincaid described Chris Boland. "Did he take the express or the westbound freight?"

"You know better than that, mister. A freight carries no passengers."

"A freight would carry this man. He works for Hiram Prentiss."

"If he works for Prentiss, maybe, I shouldn't say I saw him."

"That'd cost you this five dollars."

The old man eyed the bill in Kincaid's hand. "You win," he said. "He took the eastbound express. I don't know where he's headed, because he didn't buy a ticket. If he works for Hiram Prentiss, he wouldn't need a ticket and—"

"When's the next eastbound train through here?"

"There's a freight in about an hour, if it's on time," the stationmaster said. "But

it makes no stop here, and it carries no passengers."

"Never mind," Kincaid said.

He handed over the five dollars, then took his horse to the livery stable. He had dinner at the Longhorn Cafe, and, an hour and seven minutes after talking to the stationmaster, he flagged down the eastbound freight just short of the station. He had an old pass for the Texas Western from the days when he'd worked for Prentiss, and it took some of the fire out of the freight conductor's anger over being stopped to pick up a deadhead. The pass bore old Hiram's signature.

As the freight carried him southeast toward Forth Worth, Kincaid wondered if he were playing the game right in trying to track down Chris Boland. His idea was to prove to Boland—and to Hiram Prentiss—that he wouldn't let them get away with making trouble on the D & TP. But Boland might be leading him on a wild goose chase, and, while he was drawn away from the D & TP, old Prentiss might have another of his men pulling another job . . . no, Kincaid didn't know whether he was making the right or the wrong move.

Only time would tell. . . .



**A**FTER a week of riding the Texas railroads, Kincaid admitted the truth—that he was being played for a sucker and that Chris Boland was leading him on a wild goose chase. The man's keeping on the move proved it. Finally, at El Paso, he learned that Boland had taken the Mexican Central and gone on a trip across the border. And he called it quits.

He took the shortest route back to Dahlmans, disgusted over having been outsmarted by Boland and feeling fed up with the job of trouble-shooting. The D & TP track in the mountains had evidently been cleared, for there was a train about to leave for the railhead with three cars of

rails. He boarded the caboose as it pulled out.

Tim McShayne was aboard, lying on a bunk. He had a bandage around his head and his left eye was black. Kincaid stared at him.

"What happened to you?"

"What wouldn't have happened, maybe, if you'd been around doing your job."

"You think I've been off on a holiday?"

"It's an idea that occurred to me," McShayne said. He sat up, then groaned and held his hand against his left side. "Seven stitches the doc put in my scalp, my eye needs a chunk of beefsteak, and I'll swear I've got a cracked rib. Where you been, bucko?"

"Trying to catch up with the man who wrecked Number Nine."

"No luck?"

"Damn poor hunting," Kincaid said. "He had it figured that I'd follow him. You know Chris Boland?"

"Yeah. A mighty slippery snake-in-the-grass."

"Who roughed you up, Tim?"

"A bunch of toughs," McShayne said. "A half dozen jumped me at once. I used my fists, and I should have had a pick handle. Hell's been popping while you were away. We cleared up that pile-up in the pass, then laid three miles more of track and came out of the mountains. There's where the fun began. A bunch of sports from Tulare have set up a hell-on-wheels along the right-of-way. Ed."

"That's one trouble I figured we wouldn't have."

"Well, we've got it. Whiskey-sellers, gamblers, loose women, bully-boys."

"And you tried to clear them out, eh?"

"Yeah," McShayne said bitterly. "I took a couple of the gang foremen and went to read the riot act to that crowd. They were ready for us. I'd hardly opened my mouth before a whiskey bottle smashed against my skull. That was last night, after three days of seeing our crew on the wildest binge a man can imagine. The boys had a lot of pay in their pockets, since they had no place to spend it until those Tulare sports set up shop, and they were plenty

anxious to throw it away. Three days work we lost, and I'll bet a month's wages that they're not back at work today."

"Who's bossing the crowd?"

"A gambler named Jarrett—Dude Jarrett."

"Who gave him the idea to move in on the construction camp, Tim?"

"Maybe it was his own idea."

Kincaid shook his head. "More likely he was tipped off that he could make a quick killing off the construction workers without much interference," he said.

McShayne gave him an ugly look. "You saying it was Miles?"

"Did Miles go with you when you tried to clear them out?"

"No, but . . . well, Miles is no fighting man."

"You're right. He gets by on his wits."

"Ed, I don't like your riding him all the time. You blamed him for Dutcher's trying to kill you, and it could be you figure he had something to do with that wreck. Now you're saying—"

"And I can't prove a thing," Kincaid broke in. "So forget it."

They were silent for a long time as the train raced north. They sat staring at each other, Kincaid in as bad a humor as McShayne. Finally, after rolling and lighting a cigarette, Kincaid said, "Tim, I've gone sour on this job. When it's over and done with, I'm not taking another."

"Going back to punching cows, maybe?"

"That'd be a nice, peaceful kind of life."

"I'll believe you're quitting when I see it," McShayne said. "What are you going to do about that crowd of tin horns?"

"You know."

"Well, watch your step," McShayne said. "It's a tough bunch, and if you're not careful, you won't stay alive to go back to punching cows." He was silent a moment. Then: "I'm banged up, but I can still swing a pick handle. I'll go along and protect your rear."

Kincaid nodded. "Thanks, Tim."

**T**HERE was some sort of a commotion at the camp when the train arrived there shortly after nightfall. A couple hun-

dred of the men were gathered in a crowd, and their voices rose in an angry babel. Kincaid shoved through the throng, with McShayne following him, and in the center of the gathering a Mexican lay bleeding. One of the gang foreman was trying to doctor the man's wound. Kincaid turned to another of the foremen.

"What happened?"

"A brawl over at the hell-on-wheels," the man said. "A drunk got rolled by one of the women, and that started it off. Then one of the gamblers was caught dealing from the bottom of the deck. The Mexican got a knife between his ribs, and an Irishman got killed. Things are getting pretty rough, and they'll get rougher before the boys go broke. And that won't be soon. Payday is only two days away."

Kincaid looked at the milling, grumbling men. At the moment, they'd had enough of drinking, gambling and wenching. Spilled blood had soured them temporarily. They would get over their anger shortly, of course, and go back for more sport. So there wasn't too much time in which to take advantage of their rage, Kincaid knew. He winked at McShayne, then jumped onto a pile of ties.

"Listen, buckoes!" he shouted. "We've got to show those tin horns that they can't get away with killing one of our boys and knifing another. Those sports and fancy women are taking our money and now, damn it, they're taking our lives. I say that we've got to teach them a lesson!"

They had become silent. They stared at him.

McShayne had gotten himself a pick handle. He waved it over his head, and yelled, "I'm with you, friend! Let's give them a lesson they won't forget!"

There were a few shouts of approval, then a roar of voices. There was a point that such men reached where a brawl was sport, and this bunch had reached that point. With as much eagerness for a brawl as with anger, they began looking around for weapons. Picks, axes, shovels were relieved of their handles. Some of the gang foremen, sensing that Kincaid intended to wreck the hell-on wheels, provided them-

selves with sledge hammers.

McShayne nudged Kincaid. "You've got them going. Keep them moving!"

Kincaid shouted, "All right! Let's go!"

He dropped to the ground and with McShayne for a guide led the excited crowd toward the hell-on-wheels. It was located beyond the edge of the construction camp by a hundred yards, a cluster of big tents and canvas shelters and the wagons that had brought the outfit there from Tulare. Most of the canvas deadfalls were brightly lighted, and, since only about half the D & TP workers were following Kincaid, the plank bars and gambling lay-outs were well patronized by the rest of the men. McShayne pointed his pick handle at the largest tent.

"That's Jarrett's dive," he said. "The worst of the lot. They say you can even buy opium in there."

There was a gaudy banner lighted by two bright oil flares across Jarrett's tent, and the lettering on the banner proclaimed it to be The Red Casino. Kincaid stepped through the wide entrance and took it all in at a glance. The Red Casino was far less imposing than some of the deadfalls he had seen in other hells-on-wheels. But it had a long rough plank bar with a glittering display of bottles behind it—while two bartenders served rotgut whiskey out of kegs. There were a dozen tables to one side where customers could sit and drink, and at the rear of the tent were the gambling lay-outs with the usual blank-faced professionals operating them. There was even a piano in the one rear corner, and a girl in a gaudy red dress was playing it in a listless fashion.

Sprinkled through the customers were a half dozen tough-looking men that Kincaid knew to be bouncers. McShayne nudged him.

"That's Jarrett," McShayne said. "At the far end of the bar."

Kincaid had only a glimpse of Dude Jarrett, a lean and swarthy man in a loud checked suit, for the onsurging men following him slammed into him and he was forced, off balance, farther into the Red Casino.

JARRETT and his employes were alerted now, and the casino-owner and his bartenders and bouncers gathered in a defensive group to protect the place. The half dozen professional gamblers formed another group to be dealt with at the rear of the tent.

McShayne let out a wild yell, leapt onto the bar, swung his pick handle in great blows to smash the display of back-bar bottles. Kincaid, with a yell of his own, upset a table and then whirled to meet the rush of two of the bouncers. The mob of construction workers went berserk, and the place became a madhouse. Kincaid took a punch and a kick, then his own fists were hitting back. He downed the nearer of the bouncers, then smashed his fist to the face of the other and sent him reeling away.

He ducked as a thrown chair hurtled toward him, then he had to shove his way through the frenzied workers to get at Dude Jarrett. There was a moment when Jarrett seemed determined to stand his ground, but then, as Kincaid closed in, the man broke and fled toward a rear exit. Kincaid collared him midway through the tent, and flung him against the bar. Jarrett cursed him and pulled a derringer from his vest pocket.

Kincaid grabbed out his own weapon, and slammed the six-shooter's long barrel down upon Jarrett's wrist. A scream ripped from Jarrett's throat. He lost his grip on the derringer, and fell to his knees. He hugged his wrist, which might have been broken, against his middle and kept groaning in agony. Fighting boiled around Kincaid, but by now it was a one-sided fight and Jarrett's battered and bloodied followers were doing their best to break it off.

The gang bosses were at work with their sledge hammers, and the bar and the gambling lay-outs were quickly shattered. A Mexican worker took down a hanging lamp and threw it against the side of the tent. There was an explosive crash of glass and a heavy splattering of coal oil. The lamp's wick continued to burn and touched off the spilled oil. Almost in-

stantly the canvas wall was a mass of flame.

There was a frantic rush of men, and Kincaid stayed behind to see that none were left behind. But those hurt or unconscious were carried or dragged outside, and Jarrett, with the help of the girl piano-player, vanished through the rear exit. Upon leaving the burning tent, Kincaid saw that a complete job was going to be done on the hell-on-wheels. The mob was now swollen by the addition of the men who had been patrons in the Red Casino, and the entire crowd of yelling, laughing men was already attacking another deadfall. Kincaid had only to stand aside and watch the destruction completed.

The second tent came billowing down when a couple of men got the idea of cutting its stake ropes and pulling out the support holes. A third tent came down in the same fashion, and a bevy of scantily clad women went scurrying from it uttering frightened shrieks and hysterical giggles.

There was some fighting at another tent, but it was quickly over when the defenders were overwhelmed by the howling mob. McShayne came, smiling hugely.

"A grand night's work, Ed!"

"Just so the cost isn't too high, Tim."

"Hell; nobody's getting hurt. It's all in fun!"

Then, to make a liar of McShayne, a gun started blasting.

The first shot told Kincaid that he or McShayne, or both, was the target. By the time the second came, he had yelled to his companion to drop to the ground while he, gun in hand and bent low, darted toward the cluster of wagons belonging to the Tulare crowd. He'd seen the muzzle flashes of the gunman's weapon there.

Kincaid heard the shriek of another slug, and then a fourth struck a rock beside him and ricocheted screaming. Four loads gone, Kincaid told himself. By then he'd gained the nearest wagon in the park, and, after an instant's hesitation, ducked beneath it. He dropped flat on the ground, and saw moving legs beyond another

wagon. The legs made a poor target, but he fired at them and his shot drew a yelp from the gunman. He saw the legs buckle, then recover and break into a run. He was up instantly, running, circling the wagon behind which he'd glimpsed his quarry. And then he saw the entire figure of the man. He shouted, "Stand still or I'll drop you!"

**E**VEN though he was limping badly the man ran faster at that. And a moment later, trying to jump over the tongue of still another rig, he tripped and fell sprawling. Kincaid was upon him before he could rise, and with his boot heel he stamped down the man's hand holding the gun. The man cried out in pain, let his weapon fall, and Kincaid kicked it beyond his reach.

The man rolled over, came to a sitting position, nursing his stamped hand.

Kincaid was not greatly surprised to see that it was Jake Dutcher, but Tim McShayne, coming up, began to curse Dutcher in a loud, injured tone and reminded the man that once they had been friends.

Kincaid waited until McShayne ran down.

Then: "I've been wanting to catch up with you, Jake. Now we're going to have a heart to heart talk. And don't clam up on me. If you try that, you'll get worse than a creased leg and a tramped hand. You savvy?"

Dutcher nodded jerkily. His face in the glare from the burning tent was sullen, with a trace of fear in his eyes. "I'll talk, Kincaid," he muttered. "Just go easy on me. I'm in enough pain as it is."

"Who put you up to trying kill me?"

"I never—"

"Quit stalling," Kincaid cut in. "You can't lie out of it. I saw you that day in Shamrock Valley, and I caught you in the act tonight. Who put you up to it?"

"The first time?"

"Yeah?"

"It was Miles Banning. He—"

McShayne yelled, "Jake, you're lying! I'll knock your teeth down your throat!"

Kincaid said, "Shut up, Tim. This is the



truth, and you've got to swallow it." He looked back at Dutcher. "Keep talking—about Banning."

"He told me you were out to ruin him," Dutcher said. "He said it was worth a thousand dollars to him to be rid of you. I was fool enough to fall for that. When you came close to killing me instead of me killing you, Banning gave me two hundred and told me to clear out. He said you'd be gunning for me. So I cleared out. That's all there's to it."

McShayne was muttering under his breath.

Kincaid said, "What brought you back tonight? Explain Dutcher!"

"I was working for Dude Jarrett as a bouncer," the man said, whining now. "I was broke and needed a job bad. I knew I shouldn't have come back to the D & TP, but—"

"Who put Jarrett up to starting this hell-on-wheels?"

"How should I know?" Dutcher said. He was over his scare, and a calculating gleam showed in his eyes. "What do you aim to do with me, Kincaid—turn me over to the law?"

"That or shoot you, damn it."

"Look, Kincaid . . . how about a deal?"

"Keep talking."

"I got a creased leg and a hurt hand," Dutcher said. "I've been paid back for taking those wild shots at you. All I was doing was to try to throw a scare into you—yeah!"

"You're as poor a liar as a marksman, Jake," Kincaid said coldly. "But I'll go for a deal. You tell me what more you know, and I'll let you go scot-free. After I've taken you to Miles Banning and shown him that I've got a witness to prove he's the no-good I always claimed. So talk, man!"

**R**ELIEF showed on Dutcher's face. "A man named Chris Boland gave Jarrett the idea," he said, "and Boland is one of Hiram Prentiss' men."

"How about Banning? Is there anything between him and Jarrett?"

"They're friendly."

"How about you and Boland?"

"What do you mean, Kincaid?"

"Are you friendly with Boland?" Kincaid said. "He wrecked that D & TP train in the mountains, and he had a partner. When they parted after the job, Boland's partner rode north—either to the construction camp or to Tulare. I've a hunch it was you, Jake."

Dutcher shook his head, made a vigorous denial. "I'm making a clean breast of it, Kincaid," he said. "But I won't admit to anything I didn't do. I wasn't in on anything that Boland pulled. If he had a partner who came north after that train was wrecked, the man must be somebody working for Banning Construction. Yeah. It could be."

Kincaid was only half convinced by Dutcher's claim of innocence, but he let the matter drop. He looked at Tim McShayne whose homely face showed the uncertainty that was gnawing at him.

McShayne didn't want to believe Dutcher's accusations against Miles Banning, but his loyalty to Banning had suffered a hard blow. Though he had few principles of his own, McShayne looked up to Banning as a man whose principles were beyond reproach. His faith in the man was badly shaken, for he had to accept Jake Dutcher's word that Banning had wanted Kincaid killed, and McShayne, for all his toughness, was no cold-blooded killer.

He said, "Give Banning another chance, Ed. I'm asking it. I'll keep him straight from now on. I give you my word. I'll have a heart to heart talk with him, and, damn it, I'll warn him that I'll break him in two with my bare hands if he pulls anything crooked again. Giving him another chance is the best way out. If you queer him with the railroad company, it'll break his contract and they'll have to find another contractor to take over. That'll cost the company time and money, and—"

"All right, Tim," Kincaid said. "I figure it that way, too. If we can handle him now, it'll be better than queering him with the company. All right, Jake. On your feet. We're going to Banning's headquarters car."

McShayne said, "Miles is in Dahlman, Ed."

"Well, we'll keep Jake around until he gets back."

"Ed—"

"Yeah?" Kincaid said. Then, seeing a shocked look on McShayne's face: "What's wrong?"

"Hiram Prentiss is at Dahlman, too," McShayne said. "I saw his private car dropped off the westbound train and shunted onto a siding when I came from

weight to impress the trainmen, and the conductor finally, if reluctantly, agreed to forget about his schedule.

The engineman on this train wasn't as reckless as O'Mara of Number Nine had been, and it was nearly midnight when he completed the run.

**F**EW light showed in the sleeping town, and the night had become bluster with an occasional splatter of falling rain. Kincaid dropped from the caboose and headed directly for the Texas Western tracks, and found Prentiss' private car on the same siding as when he had visited it several weeks earlier.

The office section of the coach was lighted, and Kincaid entered to find the old man's secretary, Len Graves, busy at his desk. A porter in a white jacket lounged in an armchair, a glass in one hand and a cigar in the other. The porter, Luke Whiteside, was Prentiss' valet, cook, nurse, bodyguard—all purpose man. He was a big, amiable Negro, and he and Kincaid had always hit it off fine. Maybe because they alone refused to crawl before the old man, and tacitly respected each other for not being awed by his wealth and power. Luke smiled at him.

"How are you, Ed? Can I get you a drink or a smoke?"

"No, thanks. I want to see the old boy."

Len Graves gave him an outraged look. "Mr. Prentiss is in bed and asleep."

Kincaid said, "This is business, and he never sleeps when there's business at hand. Rouse him, somebody."

Graves sputtered, more outraged than before.

Luke Whiteside smiled reproachfully. "It's like this, Ed. The boss has so much trouble sleeping nowadays that I never wake him for anybody or anything once he's asleep. I wouldn't wake him for the President of the United States. He's an old, old man who needs his rest. Tell you what, Ed . . . you come back first thing in the morning—say, at nine o'clock—and talk business then."

Kincaid looked at the white-toothed smile in the ebony face and was not de-

---

## WHO CALLED

# TEXAS

## A SHRIMP STATE?

**P**ERHAPS nobody ever did—but just the same, it's the shrimp capital of the United States! The title has been applied to the town of Brownsville, Tex., since the discovery four years ago of huge shrimp beds nearby in the Gulf of Mexico. Last year close to 40,000,000 pounds of shrimp were caught by boats operating out of the Brownsville area.

the doctor's this afternoon. It could be that Miles—well, maybe Prentiss sent for him. And Miles would figure he'd better come running when the old man whistled, even if he didn't want to have anything to do with the railroad crowd." He cursed old Hiram Prentiss, blaming him for Banning's trickery. "I've a notion to go wring that old buzzard's scrawny neck!"

"You stay here and get the men back to work in the morning," Kincaid said. "That's the important thing right now. You leave Prentiss to me."

He turned away, headed for the construction camp.

The train on which he and McShayne had come up from Dahlman was due to pull out on the return trip at nine o'clock. It was now a few minutes past eight, but Kincaid managed to convince the train crew that it was imperative that he get to Dahlman in a hurry. His status as trouble-shooter for the D & TP carried enough

ceived. Luke was in dead earnest. To wake Hiram Prentiss, a man would have to fight Luke Whiteside. And whip him, too, which would take some doing.

Kincaid said, "All right. But tell me, was Miles Banning here to see the old man this afternoon or tonight?"

Len Graves said, "That's none of your business, Kincaid."

Luke said, "He was, Ed. Banning had a long private talk with the boss."

Kincaid nodded. "Thanks, Luke," he said, and looked in the box with Banning's room number to make sure it was.

The rain was really coming down now, and Kincaid splashed through it to the Great Western House. The clerk with the pomaded hair and overly polite manner was off duty, and his place behind the desk was filled by a beefy individual who was half asleep. To Kincaid's inquiry, he replied that Miles Banning was a guest but was not now in his room.

"You're sure?"

"His key's here in the rack," the clerk said, and looked to make sure it was.

Kincaid debated a moment, then said, "Thanks," and went out into the down-pour again. He had a hunch about where Banning might be, and it wasn't a place which he, Kincaid, should visit at this hour of night. But he was determined to see Banning. He meant to have a showdown with him, and he wanted to have that showdown while he was in the proper frame of mind.

By working on Banning from now on until nine o'clock in the morning, when he was to see Hiram Prentiss, he might be able to convince the man that the game was up. By telling him that Jake Dutcher had talked, Kincaid believed it possible that Banning might even go along and tell Hiram Prentiss to his face that the deal between them was voided. And that, along with a warning from Kincaid, might cause Prentiss to see the light and give up his underhanded attempt to gain control of the D & TP. So Kincaid walked to Second Street and turned north along it, buffeted by the wind and drenched to the skin by the rain.



ONLY one house showed lamplight, and it was Louise's. That she was up so late convinced him that he was right in thinking that her ex-husband was calling on her. And he felt a mild resentment about their being together. Yes, a sudden jealousy; he had to admit that. But he knew that Louise was still in love with Banning, while the man . . . well, Banning had his uncontrollable urges and he knew that Louise was no different about him now than before the divorce. Once he reached the door, however, Kincaid was hesitant about knocking. It was not a time to intrude upon them.

He knocked finally, urgently, telling himself that there were matters more important than Miles Banning's love life. And the response to his knock came so quickly that he was taken by surprise.

Louise opened the door a moment after he knocked. "Why, Ed!" she exclaimed. "You're alone?"

"Alone? Why, yes, of course. Who—"

"I thought Miles might be here. I want to see him."

"Miles? Oh, no. But come in, Ed. Don't stand there in the rain."

She reached out and tugged at his arm, and he let her draw him into the parlor. She closed the door, then took his hat and said, "My, but you are wet. What's so important that you're out hunting him at this hour and in a storm?"

He wore no coat, and his sodden shirt clung clammily to him. His boots made squishing sounds when he shifted his weight from one foot to the other. But he was hardly aware of the discomfort of being soaked to the skin, now looking at Louise. She was ready for bed. Her hair hung loose at her shoulders, in soft waves of enamel black. She wore a pale green negligee over her nightgown, and on her small feet were slippers of a darker green. He had never seen her like this before, so intimately. He had once been engaged to her, but he had never possessed her. He had been so sure of her that he had been

willing to wait for the wedding night that had never been—for him, at least. Her cheeks had taken on a slight flush since his arrival, and her eyes were brighter. Too, her breathing was hurried and he could see the rapid rise and fall of her breasts.

She came to him, put her hands on his chest, and said, "You'd better take off that wet shirt and let it dry, or you'll catch your death of cold." Her voice was husky, vibrant. Her fingers fumbled with a button. "Let me—"

He was aware of her heady perfume, her warmth.

**R**AIN drummed on the roof, wind rattled the windows. The house that was such a poor background for a woman like Louise seemed suddenly cozy. He felt the hammering of his heart, the swift coursing of his blood. He shrugged out of his shirt when she had it unbuttoned, and he watched her place it carefully on the back of a chair.

She said, "I asked you a question, Ed. What's so important?"

"I've got Miles where I want him."

"Oh?"

"I'm using what I've got as a club, to force him to break with Hiram Prentiss and the railroad interests."

She looked at him frowning, shaking her head. "Now you have a club," she said. "And Hiram Prentiss has gone. Maybe yours isn't as strong as his, Ed. It could be that Miles will still fear the one that old man wilds."

"This is news to me."

"But let's not discuss Miles, Ed. Not to-night."

"Tell me more," he said, demandingly. "A lot more. The whole of it."

She shrugged. "I'd made up my mind to forget him," she said. "But it seems you won't have it that way. I don't know exactly what it is that makes Miles fear Prentiss and do his bidding, but I know there's a paper in the safe in his private car and—"

"A paper?"

"So Miles told me once, when he was in a rare confiding mood. A paper that could

cause him a lot of trouble. With the law, I assume. The time he talked of it to me, he kept saying that he wished he had nerve enough to try to steal it. He argued himself out of that, of course. Nobody steals from Hiram Prentiss."

"A paper?" Kincaid said again. "You wouldn't have any idea where Miles is?"

"How should I know?" Louise said touchily. "Remember, I'm no longer his wife. And even when I had that dubious honor, I seldom knew where he could be found. Ed, you walked out on me some time ago. You're not going to do that again, are you?"

He looked at her and saw the excitement in her.

Suddenly nothing else was important. Not Miles Banning, not Hiram Prentiss. Not the D & TP. The rain and wind blotted out the rest of the world. There was nothing and nobody in it but Louise and himself. He unbuckled his gun-rig, dropped it onto the chair that already held his drying shirt. He went to her. He bent and lifted her in his arms, held her against his bare chest—and carried her unprotesting into the bedroom.

Her arms went about him, and tightened. She said, in a voice hoarse with passion, "Don't leave me afterward, Ed. I won't be able to stand that. I can't bear to be alone. Ed, will you take me away from this place—this awful town, this horrible house? Will you, Ed?"

He said, "Of course, darling." He would have promised anything.

"When?"

"Soon?"

"I want to know."

"As soon as I've finished this job."

Her arms tightened again, and she strained against him. "No," she said. "I won't wait. Take me away tomorrow, Ed. Please—"

He placed her upon the bed, saying, "I can't do that, and you know it. I've got a job to do. For one thing, I gave my word I'd finish it. For another, I'll need the money if I'm taking on a woman—a wife."

She grew rigid under his hands and he

saw the ugliness of quick fury mar the flawless beauty of her face. "It's that or nothing," she said flatly. "Let's understand that." Then, as though she realized that wasn't the way to handle him, Louise caught his face between her hands and found his mouth with her own. After a long moment, she said, sighing, "Now will you do as I ask?"

He was lost, and he hated himself for it. But his self-hate was a weak thing compared to the rising pressure of his desire, and he said, "All right. It'll be your way—tomorrow."

"You're sure?"

"I'm fed up with my job, anyway. As for money, I've got a little saved."

"You won't change your mind—later?"

"I won't break my word to you, Louise."

She smiled a woman's mystifying smile, and her eyes were filled with her pleasure over the conquest of him. Then: "Excuse me for a moment, darling."

He rose, watched as her negligee dropped to the floor.

Then his gaze went to the table beside her bed. There was a small lamp with a prettily decorated chimney upon the table, its wick turned low. There was also a sewing basket and a paper-backed romantic novel. And a pipe.

It was Miles Banning's yellow-bowled meerschaum.

**I**N THE interval of a heart beat the whole thing curdled for him. He rose, stood looking down at the woman on the bed, knowing he had once loved her, and seeing her for what she had become. His face was cold, almost ugly. "How long since you've seen Miles?" he asked.

She looked up startled. "Ten days, two weeks—why, I don't know exactly." She hadn't yet understood. "What does it matter? You're not going to be jealous of him, are you, Ed?"

"Louise, he was here tonight. Here in this bedroom!"

"No!"

"For God's sake, don't lie to me!"

She flinched. Then, in a whisper: "How—how do you know?"

Kincaid gestured. "He left a part of him behind. You must have had him in as bad a state as you had me a moment ago, to have caused him to forget his precious pipe."

She stared at the meerschaum, her face growing pale.

He said, "You're not the woman I knew and loved. He put you up to this. He was here and made love to you, then told you what you must do for him. That divorce you got . . . it was nothing more than an attempt to bring him to heel. But it didn't work, and now you have to take him on his own terms. And he drives a hard bargain, doesn't he, Louise?"

"I can't live without him!"

"And you'd go off with me because he wants it."

"For a little while. I'd do anything to hold him."

"There's a name for women like you."

She flushed, and then, fury in her voice, "You're only a man among other men, Ed. To a woman, you're not half the man Miles Banning is. The only thing I regret is that I couldn't pull it off. But the fault isn't mine. It's his. If he hadn't left that pipe—oh, get out, Ed! I'm sick of the sight of you!"

"I'm going," he told her. "You may be sick of the sight of me, but I'm disgusted with the sight of you. This thing must be a bigger deal than I realized, that Miles would use you to rid himself of me. What's behind it, anyway? What's he getting out of it?"

"I told you he has to take orders from Hiram Prentiss."

"And that's the truth?"

"It is," she said. "He's got to do as he's told, or go to prison. But if he pleases Mr. Prentiss, he'll be well paid. It is a big deal, Ed. Mr. Prentiss says that he'll develop this country once he controls the D & TP. He'll bring in settlers by the thousands and promote towns and—"

"And make himself another million or two."

"It's wrong of you to stand in the way of anything so big, Ed."

"So big and so crooked, you mean."



She was sitting up now, and she moved closer to him. She slipped her arms about him, pressed her face to his chest. And whispered, "Come away with me, Ed. Even if you're angry now, you'll love me when we're away from here. Mr. Prentiss will give you the five thousand dollars you'll lose by quitting your job. We'll have ourselves a time and—"

"And afterwards you'll go back to Miles?"

"Stop being jealous of Miles, Ed."

He took hold of her arms and pried them loose from his body, then flung her down on the bed. He walked to the doorway, then faced her from there.

"I'm going to do one last thing for you and Miles," he said. "I'm going to take that club away from Prentiss, so that Miles is free of him. Not that I believe that he wants to be free—"

"Ed!"

He ignored her pleading cry.

He put on his still wet hat and shirt, buckled on his gun-rig. He went out into the rainy night, and as he closed the door of her house, he knew that he was shutting her out of his life at last. And he was glad.

He turned south through the town, striding along toward the siding where Prentiss' private car stood. When he reached it, Len Graves was still busy at his desk and Luke Whiteside was dozing in his armchair. Graves looked at him with an impatient frown, saying, "You again." Luke stared at him uneasily, and said, "Ed, don't make trouble."

Kincaid said, "Sit still, Luke. This won't disturb the old man's sleep, and you've got no concern in his business affairs." He went to Graves's desk. "The old man has some sort of paper that gives him the whip-hand over Miles Banning. I want it. I aim to have it."

**L**EN GRAVES was a little man, both physically and in spirit. He was a pale little worm of a man in a cubby-hole of papers and account books. But there was a stubborn streak in him; the sort of stubborn streak that forced him to labor

for hours, even for days, to make two columns of figures balance when another man, a man like Ed Kincaid, would say, after a few minutes, "To hell with it." Small things, trifling matters, were important to Len Graves. It was possible that he didn't know how big a thing this paper Kincaid wanted might be, but it was unthinkable that he should permit any paper belonging to his employer to get out of his charge. So he looked stubbornly up at Kincaid.

"If there's any such paper, it wouldn't be here," he said. "It would be kept at Mr. Prentiss' offices in Denver."

"The way I was told it's here. In this safe."

"I tell you—"

"You're wasting your breath, Graves. I told you that I aim to have it."

Graves jumped from his chair and turned toward the safe, which was open, in a corner of the office compartment. Kincaid collared him, knowing the man's intention was to close and lock the safe.

He flung the man across the compartment, and he slammed against the wall and stayed there. Kincaid knelt before the safe and started going through the mass of documents it held. After a long search, he came upon an envelope bearing the name Miles Banning. He ripped open the envelope and took out the sheet of notepaper. Banning's scrawled signature was at the bottom of the paper, but the text of the document was in a more legible hand—no doubt, Kincaid reflected, Len Graves' clerk-like script.

He let his gaze run quickly over the document; and it was the club, all right. It was a confession of a swindle involving thirty thousand dollars, and one of the victims of the swindle was Hiram Prentiss. It was dated three years earlier, and the swindle had taken place in Missouri. Kincaid didn't take time to probe his memory, but he supposed that in time he would recall the circumstances. He pocketed the paper and rose.

Graves said, "I warn you, Kincaid. This is theft, and Mr. Prentiss will have the law on you. He was good enough to let Ban-

ning go scot-free when he could have sent him to prison, and now you—"

"He had use for Banning," Kincaid broke in. "And so he told Banning that if he signed a confession, the matter would go no farther. But then he used the confession to tie Banning to him permanently."

"Mr. Prentiss may decide to turn him over to the law, after this."

"That could be. But will the Missouri law go to the bother of taking him back from Texas? Besides, the old man will have to furnish evidence of the swindle and without Banning's confession, that'll be a lot of bother—after three years. And I doubt that Banning would be fool enough to sign another."

Luke Whiteside said, "There's one thing you're overlooking, Ed. Hiram is going to be mighty put out with you. And he's sure got a long reach."

Kincaid smiled faintly, and left the car without so much as a backward look.



**K**INCAID spent the remainder of the night in a room at the Great Western House, and in the morning had breakfast in the hotel's dining-room. Miles Banning came in when Kincaid had nearly finished his meal. He looked in a bad humor, and he frowned when Kincaid motioned to him, but then came reluctantly to the table and seated himself. He told the waitress, "Just coffee please."

"A hangover, Miles?" Kincaid asked. "Or some bad news."

"You're happy. So why bother about how I feel?"

"So you've heard from Louise?"

Banning stared into space, said nothing.

Kincaid said, "She tried her best, and her best is pretty good. Now that I think about it, she tried twice. The other time when I stopped to see her after receiving that note saying she needed me. Miles, it was a nasty trick, using a woman like that so badly—a woman so in love with you."

Banning said sourly, "Ed, lay off me."

Kincaid smiled, finished his breakfast and Banning sipped at his coffee when it was brought. Kincaid said, "Did you hear from Hiram Prentiss too, Miles?"

"Why should I hear from him?"

"He lost that fool confession you signed. To me. I've got the whip now, friend, and I'm going to crack it. By the way, just how did he get you to sign that paper?"

"He promised to square me with the law," Banning said bitterly. "He kept his promise—to a certain extent. But once he had the confession, I had to take orders from him—or he'd throw me to the wolves."

"Well, now you're free of him."

Banning gave him a sardonic look. "And I'm out a lot of money too."

"What's money?"

"You would say a thing like that. You're a damned odd man, Kincaid." He finished his coffee, then took out his pipe and, seeing Kincaid's gaze upon it, he managed a wry smile. Then: "I came of a poor family. A dirt-poor family. By the time I was twelve, I'd made up my mind that some day I was going to have a million dollars. And I told myself I didn't care how I got it." He took out his tobacco pouch, filled the meerschaum he must have gotten back from Louise's bedroom table. "You're probably costing me my million," he added, "by queering me with old Hiram Prentiss. That's hard to take."

"But you'll have a clear conscience," Kincaid said, with sarcasm. "That's something."

"Yeah—you going back to the rail-head?"

"Where else?"

"Let's go, then. There's a train at seven-twenty."

They rode the caboose, and the train rolled north at low speed through the downpour that had started at midnight. The day was dreary and the land lay sodden. The tracks were awash in numerous places, and Miles Banning, puffing on his pipe, was worrying a little about the roadbed. He was sure that it was properly graded and ballasted, or so he told Kin-

caid; but it was evident that he had some grave doubts.

The man was a paradox, and Kincaid, stretched out on a bunk, reflected that there was no figuring him. A good engineer, Banning. But at the same time he had that warped side that made a crook of him. No doubt he had gotten off on the wrong foot, Kincaid told himself, when he became a contractor as well as an engineer. When he involved himself in the business end of the construction game. If he had hired out as an engineer, Banning might have remained as honest as the next man. Holding down a job for wages, a man had little opportunity to be dishonest. But of course Banning hadn't wanted it like that. And so he'd made his own opportunity to be crooked by putting himself into the contracting business.

Still, the engineer was always in conflict with the crook and so Banning now, though still Hiram Prentiss' man at heart, even with the old man wanting the D & TP to end up bankrupt, concerned himself with the condition of the roadbed. He was more engineer at the moment than he was unscrupulous contractor.

Kincaid quit listening to Banning's voice, and half dozed. The train labored on toward the Dahlman Mountains and the railhead beyond, and the rain fell in torrents. The brakeman and the conductor came in not long after the train left the town behind, and they fell into conversation with Banning.

**F**INALLY Kincaid fell asleep, and when he awakened, he found two men standing beside his bunk. Two men who had not been in the caboose earlier. One reached out and pulled Kincaid's revolver from its holster. Kincaid grabbed for the gun, but he was too late. He sat up, swinging his feet to the deck only to find himself covered by his own weapon.

"Take it easy, Kincaid."

The last cobwebby strands of sleep were swept from Kincaid's brain. He saw now that the man who had taken his gun was Ambers, the Texas Western Railroad detective. And his companion was the train-

wrecker, the gloomy looking Chris Boland. There was a cocked gun in Boland's hand.

Kincaid said, "You two are on the wrong railroad."

Boland said, "If you want to argue that, friend, get on your feet."

Kincaid divided a look between them, seeing how it was to be. If he got up and got rough, they'd club him down—with his own gun. Banning, the brakeman and the conductor were crowded together at the far end of the caboose, watching with interest but without any promise of giving Kincaid a hand.

"All right," he said. "What's next on the program?"

"We're taking you back to Dahlman," Boland said. "Mr. Prentiss is a little annoyed with you for looting his safe."

"Why'd you wait until we're this far from Dahlman?"

"We have a healthy respect for you when you're armed and awake," Boland said. "So Ambers and I decided not to risk having a gun-fight when we took you. We figured you'd sleep sometime during the trip. You see, Kincaid? We know a lot about you. We know that's one of your habits, getting some sleep when you ride a caboose. So Ambers and I rode a box until we figured you'd be in dreamland."

"You've turned out to be quite a talker, Boland."

"I feel good, now that we've taken the reputedly tough Ed Kincaid."

"You haven't got me back in Dahlman yet. And like I said, you're on the wrong railroad. Hiram Prentiss still doesn't control the D & TP."

"It's only a matter of time," Boland replied. "And so the employees of this two-bit railroad might as well get used to working for Mr. Prentiss. We're going to back this rattler up, all the way to Dahlman." He glanced at Ambers. "Tell the conductor. Give him his orders."

Kincaid said, "The hell you say," and shoved himself off the bunk.

He slammed into Chris Boland, hitting the man in the middle with his left shoulder and knocking him against the little stove in the corner of the car. Boland's

gun went off, harmlessly but the blast of the shot seemed to rock the caboose. Whirling, Kincaid threw a punch at Ambers's flabby face, but the detective ducked and struck back with the captured six-shooter. The Colt's barrel caught Kincaid alongside the face and exploded pain in his brain. He struck out wildly and this time connected, staggering Ambers. He had one brief moment, then, and he took advantage of it. He leapt for the forward door, jerked it open, dived out onto the platform. He swung over the guard-rail, threw himself across the couplings, and got a precarious hold on the ladder of the box-car ahead of the caboose. He scrambled upwards.

The cat-walk atop a moving freight car was always a tricky thing to navigate, and downright dangerous footing when wet, especially for a man wearing cowpuncher boots. And Kincaid started along it at a run.

His feet slipped out from under him when he was midway across. He hit the roof of the car on his side, then, despite a desperate attempt to save himself, he rolled off its edge, dropping loosely past the moving car, toward the stone-ballasted roadbed.

He landed with a terrific jolt, his left leg buckling beneath him. He lay dazed for a long moment, while the train continued on its way to vanish through the murky curtain of rain. Then, filled with a fear that Boland and Ambers would force the crew to halt the train and have it back up so that they could search for him, he forced himself to rise. The pain in his left ankle was tearing agony, and he could continue his flight only at a painful limping gait.

He headed east away from the track, and by the time the sound of the returning train reached him, he was well out of sight of it. The downpour not only restricted vision, but was washing away his tracks. And it would probably dampen the enthusiasm of the two Texas Western men for a manhunt across the drenched countryside. The pain of his ankle coursed through him as he continued east.

**H**ALF an hour of painful walking brought him to the base of a low hill, and he knew that he was south of Shamrock Valley. He had a choice to make then; he could make his way to Slash-M Ranch, which would be a sanctuary, or to the abandoned cabin by the east end of the lake in the valley beyond the hills which would give him only shelter. Slash-M ranch headquarters was to the southeast, and farther away—and his injured ankle might not carry him too great a distance. Besides, he couldn't with any pride seek sanctuary with Dan Meecham, the man who had hired him as a trouble-shooter. Too, he didn't feel up to facing Katherine Meecham when he was no longer master of the situation. So he made his painful way through the hills to the valley, and hoped that Boland and Ambers didn't know about the old cabin there.

It was unfurnished, and its ancient roof leaked in a half dozen places. He found a dry place, and sank to the floor. It took him some minutes to remove his boot, and for a time he feared that he might have to cut it off. His ankle was swollen to twice its normal size, and badly discolored. It wouldn't carry him anywhere for quite a while. In fact, he feared that it would become worse.

He had shelter, all right, and for the moment he had eluded Hiram Prentiss' men. But otherwise he was in one hell of a fix.

One hell of a fix. . . .

By mid-afternoon the next day, the rain had stopped falling and the Texas sun reappeared. The cabin began to grow warm, finally became a bake oven, but he had too much throbbing pain in his ankle to move across the floor to open the door. Thirst came, became a torment. It was but a hundred yards to the lake, but it might as well have been three hundred miles. His ankle grew worse. It throbbed with every beat of his heart, and each throb was a fierce stab of agony.

Darkness came, and Kincaid fell into restless sleep. He was awake at gray dawn, and then dragged himself to the

door and opened it. He crawled from the cabin and to the water, tortured each inch of the way. He drank deeply, and then eased his foot and ankle into the water. The coolness of the water seemed to ease the hurt and he remained there until the sun appeared. Then he drank again and crawled back to his shelter.

It was the longest day of his life, and finally in the middle of the afternoon, upon hearing the approach of horses, he was so done in that he would have welcomed even Boland and Ambers.

There were two horses, he could tell. And when they halted just outside the cabin, he almost expected to see the two Texas Western men appear at the door.

But it was Katherine Meecham.

She stood in the doorway and watched him force himself to a sitting position, then said, "So you've come a cropper at last, Kincaid."

"A bad one, Katherine."

"Do you mind if I chat a little?"

"No, I deserve it from you."

She crossed to him, knelt, looked with concern at his ankle. "Did that happen when you jumped from the train?"

He stared. "I didn't jump," he said. "I fell. But how did you know?"

She sat beside him. "From the sheriff," she said. "Sheriff Cole came to Slash-M about noon, looking for you. He's got a warrant for your arrest. He thought you may have gone to Slash-M, since you're working for my father. I waited until he went his way, then I saddled up and came up here. I thought you might have made your way to the Shamrock."

"Who's with you?"

"No one."

"I heard two horses."

She avoided his gaze. "I brought a mount for you."

"Then you didn't come to gloat?"

"No, I suppose not," she said in a soft voice. "I brought you a horse, blankets, a gun, some food. All you'll need to get away from here. But with that ankle, I don't see how you're going to be able to." She looked at him again. "Why did you do it, Ed?"

Her friendliness puzzled him, but he liked it too. "Do what?" he asked. "Take that paper from Prentiss' safe?" He shrugged. "I admit it was a fool thing. But Prentiss was using it for a club on Miles Banning. And I thought I could swing it, myself. To keep Banning in line."

"What about the money?"

"What money?"

"Prentiss claims you looted his safe of twenty thousand dollars. Did you, Ed?"

Kincaid swore. "I didn't take a cent," he said. "The old man's secretary, Len Graves, knows that. So does Prentiss' valet, Luke Whiteside. But they would have to lie for Prentiss. I should have known he'd pull something like this. There's no getting ahead of him."

"How are you going to prove you didn't take the money?"

"How? There's no chance of that."

"Sheriff Cole will come by here looking for you, sooner or later."

"Well, I won't be here."

"How can you leave?" Katherine said. "You can't put your weight on that ankle. You can't even get your boot on. Ed, it's not broken?"

"No. It's just a bad sprain."

She rose. "I'll ride home for some liniment," she said. "It won't take me long. When I get back, I'll fix you a meal and then—then we'll see."

She turned to the door, then faced about when he spoke her name.

He said, "Why, Katherine? Why are you bothering yourself about me?"

A look of annoyance came to her face. "Because I'm a silly fool where handsome men are concerned," she said bitterly. "Didn't I prove that with Miles Banning?"

She whirled and went out, and a moment later he heard her ride away at a hard lope. He lay back and tried to figure out what she meant. It couldn't be that she'd gotten completely over Miles Banning—and was now interested in him, in Ed Kincaid. It just couldn't be. . . .

**I**T WAS a half dozen miles or more to Slash-M headquarters, but it didn't



take Katherine long to make the trip there and back. She was gone long enough, however, for Ed Kincaid to think things over and to have gotten himself in a frame of mind to see her differently when she returned. To look upon her as a woman who might be important to him. Once it had seemed that he would never be able to share his life with any woman but Louise. But now he had gotten her out of his system, and it would be foolish of him, he reasoned, to refuse to admit that Katherine Meecham might fill the void that losing Louise had created in him. And by the time Katherine returned, he was convinced that his knowing her as much as Louise's own actions had helped him overcome his sense of loss.

She was flushed and breathless when she entered the cabin with a bottle of liniment. She knelt by him, uncorked the bottle and poured some of the liquid into the palm of her right hand. She rubbed the liniment onto the swollen ankle, her touch a gentle ministration.

Kincaid said, "Just when did you discover that you didn't hate me?"

She glanced at him, her flushed look deepening. "I never hated you."

"What about that day I found you here?" he said. "When I acted like a brute."

"Not even then," she said. "I understood what you were trying to do. I did—after I got away from you and thought it over. You knew that I was acting like a silly fool, and you tried to scare me out of it. That's what you said, didn't you, Ed—and I believe you."

He nodded. Then: "And you didn't hate me when I forced you to back down and let the D & TP cross your land?"

She shook her head. "By then," she said, "I'd come to realize that you—well, that you were a lot wiser than I. And that you were one man I couldn't get the best of. I told myself that I hated you, but I wasn't able to believe it. This all sounds crazy, I know. Because of the way I thought myself in love with Miles Banning. You probably think that if I didn't know my own mind and heart then, I may be mis-

taken again. But I was merely foolish where he was concerned. I let him convince me that I was in love with him. And—" she was rueful now— "he's clever at that sort of thing. But you've never tried to convince me that I'm in love with you, Ed. I've discovered that for myself. So it could be that I'm not making a mistake about a man a second time. Except that my talking like this makes me a hussy. I'm no proper young lady, am I?"

"You're pretty wonderful, Katherine."

"And you're in love with the—the ex-Mrs. Banning."

He said, "No. I've had my eyes opened, too," and he reached for her.

She came into his arms as though that was where she belonged, but said, "Ed, I won't want this to happen unless you're in love with me."

"I love you, Katherine."

She was silent a moment, as though debating within herself whether or not she dared believe him. Then, suddenly and fiercely: "Show me, Ed! Show me!"

He tightened his arms about her, and he was rough and demanding in his love-making. . . .

**T**HEY lay in each other's arms, emotionally becalmed. The afternoon was gone and now it was dusk. He knew that he should be on the move. His danger was real, forgotten though it had been during their period of passion and intimacy. The law in the person of a sheriff named Cole was looking for him. Capture by Sheriff Cole meant a jail cell, a trial, and almost certainly a prison sentence. But arrest might be better than being found by Prentiss' hirelings. Boland and Ambers would be apt to give him no more break than came out of their guns, if they found him. They might have orders to kill him. After all, Hiran Prentiss had long ago threatened him with an "accident." He stirred uneasily.

"What's wrong, darling?" Katherine whispered.

"I should get started."

"You can't go anywhere. Your ankle—"

"You've brought me a mount. I won't

need to walk."

"I'll go with you."

He rubbed his face against her hair, and told her she couldn't. A man on the dodge was safer alone, he explained. And she understood. She told him of a canyon in the mountains, its entrance to the left just beyond Comanche Pass.

She said, "It was a *comanchero* rendezvous in the old days. It's wild country and—" her voice choked up—"and you may be safe there. I'll come to you three nights from now, to bring you more food."

"And to love me a little more?"

"If you wish."

"I wish."

She cuddled closer, and asked, "When did you fall in love with me, Ed?"

He thought about it. "I knew I was in love with you when you walked into the cabin this afternoon," he said. "But I've an idea you were growing on me for quite a while. Maybe from the day I forced you to let the D & TP cross your range."

"Not the first time you saw me?"

"Maybe that was the start."

"No. You were still in love with Miles' divorced wife then," Katherine said. "Tell me, Ed, when did you discover that you'd gotten over that woman?"

He made his mistake then, because he loved her and wanted to be truthful with her. He said, "Just the other night." And he told her about his visit to Louise's house and how she had thrown herself at him and how he had carried her into the bedroom and then found that she had entertained Miles Banning there not long before. Even as he talked, he sensed the change in Katherine. She moved from him and she was ominously quiet.

"What's wrong, Katherine?"

"Nothing."

"There is. It's easy to see."

"Are you so thick that you don't understand?" she said furiously. "You wanted her. You would have loved her as you loved me. If you hadn't found out that she and Miles are still lovers, you would have taken her and not wanted me. I've been wrong about a man again. I am a silly fool about handsome men, aren't I?"

"Katherine, listen—"

"Don't touch me, Ed. Don't ever touch me again!"

"Katherine, I've been honest with you."

"Honest!" she said bitterly. "As honest as Miles Banning!" She dressed hastily, then ran to the doorway. "I'll bring you food," she said. "But only because I promised it. Right now, I'd not care at all if you are caught. And I mean that!"

She whirled, went out to her pony, and then all Kincaid had of her was the hard drumming of hoofs as she rode away. And the memory of what she had been like in his arms. That, and the fear that he would never be able to convince her that he had hurt her only in trying to be honest with her.

He rose and tested his injured ankle, and the pain came knifing again. He sank down and rubbed it with liniment, and then tried it again. He forced himself to bear the excruciating pain. He rode away from the cabin a half hour later, on the Slash-M horse. There was a rifle in the saddle boot and a flour sack filled with provisions, a coffee pot and a frying pan were tied behind the cante. He found a revolver in the saddle-bag. He slipped it into his holster.

He headed across the valley toward the distant purple mountains. . . .



**B**Y THE third night, when Katherine was due, his ankle was less swollen and not so discolored and the pain had eased. But in the time he'd been holed up in the brush of the canyon, he'd hit upon no way to strike back at Hiram Prentiss and take the pressure off himself. The old man had made a smart move by framing him with the law.

Katherine came shortly after full dark, and she did not come alone. Her father accompanied her, and old Dan Meecham appeared to be in a bad humor. He was scowling, and Katherine's face was stiff

with a look that said she was there only because of her promise to him. As Kincaid limped forward to meet them, she untied a sack of provisions from her saddle-horn and handed it to him.

"Katherine—"

"My father wants to talk to you," she said, and turned aside.

He watched her frowningly, not knowing how to handle her. Meecham giggered his horse forward, coming between them.

"Kincaid, I tagged along when I found out where my daughter was headed," he said. "I'm not going to beat about the bush. You haven't lived up to your reputation. You've blundered on this job."

Kincaid nodded. "I admit it, Dan."

Meecham went on. "Things have gotten out of hand on the D & TP since you got yourself in this jam. Rumors are thick as flies that the Dahlman and Texas Panhandle Railroad Company is about broke. A lot of stockholders are panicky. Some aren't paying the assessment levied against their shares. Some are unloading their stock at less than what it cost them. A couple of the men who went into this thing with me are scared. Russ Grierson wants me to buy his block of stock Ben Carmody likewise."

"Who started the rumors—Hiram Prentiss?"

"It's likely," Meecham said. "A lawyer in Dahlman is buying up what stock the panicky stockholders are dumping and I've an idea he's acting as proxy for Prentiss. A lot of good people are taking a licking on this loco business—and there's plenty of truth to those rumors. There's a payment of thirty thousand dollars due the Banning Construction Company—overdue now. And because he hasn't been paid, Banning couldn't meet his payroll—or claims he couldn't—and so his men have walked off the job. Construction is completely stopped."

Kincaid waited, saying nothing.

Meecham lighted a cigar, then continued, "I'm no man to throw good money after bad. But I'm willing to go deeper into this thing if I see a chance of saving the railroad without taking too much of

a financial licking. The company officials have asked me to loan them the thirty thousand dollars for Banning. On a short-term note. I'm willing to go along, even though I can't afford to act as the D & TP's banker. But I've got to be convinced that there's a chance that we investors won't lose control of the railroad to Prentiss."

"I don't know how to advise you, Dan—if you've come to me for advice."

"I want to know if you can get Banning back in line."

"You know the fix I'm in," Kincaid said. "I'm willing to take my chances with Prentiss' men. I'll be able to protect myself once I reach the construction camp. It's not likely that they'll come gunning for me there. But the sheriff will come there after me and—"

"Supposing I take him off your neck for a little while?"

"Then I'll do what I can to get work started again."

Meecham nodded. "Fair enough," he said. "You take care of Banning. I'll give the D & TP the loan it needs, and Banning will get his money. It's a deal?"

"A deal, Dan."

"And I'll do my best to get Grierson and Carmody to hold onto their stock," he said. "But, by damn, there are days when I feel like dumping my own!"

"If you do that, Dan, you'll put Prentiss one step closer to controlling the D & TP," Kincaid said. "There's one good side to this. He's given up the idea of trying to bankrupt the company. That's why he's buying up its stock. The old man knows a good thing when he sees it, and he's determined not to let the D & TP get away from him. By buying up the stock, it's costing him more than he wanted to pay. But still he's getting it cheap—if we let him have it."

"Yeah," Meecham said. "Well, I'm counting on you, Kincaid."

"I'll start to the railhead right away."

"And I'll go to Dahlman and see if I can get the sheriff to look for you at the other end of the county. If I could fix him altogether. . . ." He let it go at that, evidently convinced that Sheriff Cole

couldn't be fixed. "I'll keep in touch with you."

He turned his horse away, saying, "Come along, Kate."

Katherine started to follow him, but Kincaid moved forward at a hobbling run and caught her pony by its headstall. He said, "Katherine, don't behave like this."

"What are you worrying about, Ed?" she said. "When you get the urge, you'll find another woman. And one will do as well as another. For you as for Miles Banning. You'll be as well satisfied with another as with me. You got over Louise Banning. You'll get over me. Now turn my horse loose."

---

## ONCE A TEXAN

In New York, Georgia, Tennessee,

Many Texans you will find;

Once a Texan, that you'll be—

Texas is a STATE of mind!

—Pecos Pete

---

He released her pony. "Katherine, I've got to make you believe that I—"

Katherine cut in, "Try me ten years from now. Maybe I'll believe your tender words then—if you've had no other woman between now and then."

She kicked the pony savagely with her heels and rode away fast.

**I**T WAS nearly midnight when Kincaid reached the construction camp. A lamp burned in Miles Banning's headquarters car. He entered it to find Banning stretched out on his bunk and Tim McShayne slumped in a chair. McShayne held a bottle of whiskey, and was drinking straight from the bottle. Banning sat up, swung his feet to the floor, stared at Kincaid. His face was no longer quite so handsome. It was badly bruised, and there was a slowly healing ugly cut on his chin. His expression was sullen.

Kincaid said, "What happened to you?"

Banning didn't answer.

McShayne said, "He got roughed up. Because of that stunt you pulled, bucko. That was to show him that he's still Prentiss' man, even though you took that paper out of the old man's safe. Ed, don't you know the law's looking for you?"

"The law's being fixed," Kincaid said. "Who roughed him up?"

McShayne was in as sour a humor as Banning. He said, "A bunch of hoodlums led by Chris Boland. They came out from Dahlman on one of our trains. All of them were armed. They held their guns on me and the gang foremen while Boland spoke his piece to Miles and had one of his toughs give Miles a working-over. It was a nice little visit they paid us, and they promised to come back if Miles got out of line again." McShayne gave Banning a murky look. "So our friend there," he added, "is playing it safe."

"Things are different now that I'm back."

"So you think, Ed. Miles may have other ideas."

Kincaid said, "You'll get your overdue money in the morning, Miles. Dan Meecham is guaranteeing it. You're not getting paid on time was no good excuse for not meeting your payroll. You can't be that hard up."

"Why should I use my money to keep things going?" Banning said. "The D & TP is on its last legs, and I'm not going to come out with the short end of the stick when it crashes. As for you—get out. I'm sick of the sight of you."

Kincaid's face turned rocky, and he remembered how Louise had said the same thing to him. He said, "I'll get out of your life one of these days and let you shift for yourself, Miles. Maybe you'll be a lot better off, but you sure won't play the game straight. You don't want to play it straight. More than that, you haven't the guts. You're too afraid of Hiram Prentiss. Right now, though, I'm camping here. You're paying off the men first thing in the morning, and then they're going back to work. We're going to lay track as it's never been laid before." He glanced at

McShayne. "You with me, Tim?"

McShayne was eyeing Banning, the man he once had looked up to, with contempt. "I'm with you," he said. "But there's one thing to consider. Boland and his hoodlums will be back as soon as they hear you're giving the orders here."

Kincaid nodded. "I know," he said. "And we'll be ready for them."

**T**HE camp bustled, the railhead rammed ahead across the plains. With their pay in their pockets and a couple days of loafing behind them, the men—Mexicans, Chinese, Irish, and just plain Yankees—worked together with a right good will. The gang bosses kept hustling, and over them Tim McShayne's voice cracked like a whip. Ed Kincaid was here and there and everywhere, on horseback, but most of all he kept an eye on Miles Banning. And Banning, he had to admit, was doing his share. He was back in his role as engineer, that old paradox again. Now the man was with the surveyors, then with the track-layers and again seeing that the grading was properly done.

They laid ten miles of tracks in the time it ordinarily took them to lay five . . . and the hills near the town of Tulare, where the end of track would be could be seen hazily in the distance. They reached a stretch of buttes and roughly eroded country, and a great deal of blasting was required. The engineer side of Miles Banning caused him to be fussy about powder charges, and he either worked side by side with Fred Royer, the chief powderman, or stayed nearby to supervise the work. Blasting had come on at regular intervals all that day, but late in the afternoon a heavy charge went off without the usual warning signal being passed out to the men working nearby.

Kincaid heard an excited shouting immediately after the blast, then saw a number of men running toward the rocks where the charge had been set off. He swung onto his horse and lifted it to a lope. A cloud of mingling red dust and yellow smoke hung over the blast sight, and there was still a shower of rock particles falling.

Fifty or more men had reached the scene by the time Kincaid arrived and several of them were using their bare hands to dig a man out of a pile of blast debris. Some others were lifting Miles Banning from a smoking dynamite crater into which he evidently had collapsed after the explosion. A third victim of the blast, one of Royer's helpers, lay bloody and unconscious. There were three men in Royer's powder crew, and Kincaid saw that the third, a big blackbearded man named Brucker, was uninjured.

Dropping from his horse, Kincaid went to where the rescuers stretched Banning in the shade of a boulder. The man was barely conscious, and his blood-smeared face kept contorting with pain. "We'll get you to a doctor in a hurry, Miles," he said. "We'll get you patched up."

"Ed—"

"Yes, Miles."

"Get this job done. You hear, Ed?"

"I'll get it done. Don't worry about it."

"Prentiss . . . this time he went too far, damn him!"

"You think—"

Kincaid received no reply, for Banning had slipped into unconsciousness. There was a commotion behind him, angry voices and the sounds of a scuffle. Looking around, he saw Tim McShayne approaching.

"How bad is he, Ed?"

"I don't know. He passed out on me," Kincaid said, rising. "Tim, he blamed this on Prentiss. That means it was no accident, that somebody—"

"Yeah. Brucker."

"You're sure?"

"Fred Royer said it, just before he died," McShayne said. "He claims that Brucker lit a short fuse and beat it without giving the rest of them any warning."

Kincaid said, "How's the third man?"

"Kelly? Bad enough, but I'd say he'll live. A tough Irishman. What about Brucker?"

"Leave Brucker to me," Kincaid said. "You get Banning and Kelly aboard a train for Dahlman. They've got to have medical treatment in a hurry."



**B**Y NOW a couple hundred men were milling about the spot. Kincaid shoved his way through the crowd, coming to where Brucker stood with his back to a jagged red-rock formation and was holding a dozen or more angry workers at bay with a long powderman's drill. The man held the drill like a club and kept swinging it slowly, threateningly, in front of him. His beard seemed to bristle, like the hackles of a frightened dog. There was a wild, cornered look in his eyes.

Kincaid gestured for the others to move back. He ignored Brucker's club. "So you lit a short fuse, eh, Brucker? And you ran without warning the others, did you?"

"It's a lie!" Brucker spat the words at him. "Somebody else lit the fuse. I saw it burning, and I yelled. Keep away from me, Kincaid!"

"A man died, Brucker. You killed him. Two others are hurt and—"

"A lie! I lit no fuse!"

"I'm turning you over to the law. I'm going to see you hang."

Brucker flinched, and now his protest, that it was a lie, was only mumbled.

Kincaid said, "You're on somebody's payroll, Brucker. You take orders from Chris Boland, and your pay comes from Hiram Prentiss." He paused, waiting for the man to figure out for himself that he might get himself partly off the hook by involving Boland and Prentiss, but Brucker continued to stare at him in that wild way while swinging his steel club and mumbling to himself. Kincaid added, "You work with Chris Boland, too, don't you, Brucker? You helped him loosen that rail back in the mountains and wreck a D & TP train. You—"

Brucker yelled, "It's a lie!" and leapt away from the rock. He came at Kincaid, his drill upraised.

Kincaid didn't make the mistake of backing away, knowing that would surely get him clubbed down. He dropped into a crouch the instant Brucker began his rush, and drove himself at the man. He got in under the drill, and Brucker, missing his target, was thrown off balance by the power behind his blow. Kincaid

slammed into him, drove him back against the rock. He straightened with his gun in his hand, and struck Brucker across the right wrist with its barrel. The man howled with pain and dropped the drill.

Kincaid said, "I'm locking you in a box-car, Brucker. By the time I'm ready to turn you over to the sheriff, you'd better be ready to talk about who pays you and gives you your orders. Maybe that will get you a prison sentence instead of the gallows. Think it over, friend—if you have any use for your neck!"

He gestured to some of the workmen, told them to lock the man in a freight car. They led him away, fighting savagely. It was his chance to pin something on old Hiram Prentiss. Kincaid told himself. But, watching Brucker, he wasn't sure that anything would come of it. His prisoner was as stubborn as he was tough, and there was no way of telling how much of a hold over him Prentiss had.

Kincaid faced the idle man, and shouted. "All right, get back to work! There's still track to be laid—and we're going to lay it!"

**M**ILE after mile, Ed Kincaid and the horny-fisted laborers rammed the D & TP rails closer to Tulare. Soon they were within ten miles of the town, with only a range of low hills to confront them as an engineering problem. With Miles Banning hospitalized in Dahlman, the surveyor, John Wyatt, served as engineer. Tim McShayne was the construction boss.

Ed Kincaid was still merely the trouble-shooter, and his job of seeing that the others hustled was an easy one. But he wasn't easy in his mind, and he'd taken certain precautions—knowing that sooner or later old Hiram Prentiss would strike back. He still had Brucker locked up, but the man stubbornly refused to admit that he had touched off that deadly premature blast—or to involve himself with Chris Boland or Hiram Prentiss.

One of Kincaid's precautions was to have Dan Meecham send him twenty Winchester rifles and a supply of ammunition. Another was that the engineman of the

train running between Dahlman and the railhead was under orders to tie down the lanyard of his whistle when approaching the construction camp. If the whistle sounded in one long blast as the train approached, Kincaid would know that no unwelcome visitors were aboard. If the whistle was silent, he would assume that the train had been commandeered by Prentiss' toughs—and prepare for them.

The train was now making but one round trip a day, arriving at the camp at eight in the evening. The railhead was within five miles of Tulare the night that the whistle sounded in the customary manner and then went silent.

Kincaid was in the headquarters car talking with John Wyatt, the surveyor turned engineer, when the whistle stopped blowing. The sudden silencing of the whistle caused Kincaid to tense. Tim McShayne rushed into the car.

"Ed, you notice?" McShayne said, yelling it. "There's trouble coming!"

A moment later the gang bosses came crowding into the car, and McShayne passed out rifles to them while Wyatt handed out ammunition. Kincaid left the car, and he could see the headlamp of the locomotive about a quarter of a mile away. The train was approaching at normal speed.

McShayne, Wyatt and the foremen gathered about Kincaid, and he led them along the track and deployed them about the spot where the train would stop. They took cover behind stacks of ties, dump carts, scrapers, anything that was handy.

"No shooting until I give the order," he told them. "If we can, I want to round them up without bloodshed. If we have to open up on them, fire the first volley over their heads. Then, if they don't heed the warning, shoot to kill."

The train rolled in, braked to a stop.

Shadowy figures dropped from the engine cab, from the caboose, from boxcars and flats. More men than Kincaid had anticipated. Perhaps fifty of them.

He shouted, "Boland! Chris Boland! You hear me?"

All along the train men froze and stared

uneasily into the darkness. Then the train began to move again, heading farther into the camp, pulling away from the visitors and leaving them stranded without cover.

There was a long moment of silence, then Chris Boland called, "I heard you, Kincaid! What do you want?"

"I've got you ringed with guns, Boland," Kincaid told him. "If you want a fight, all right. My men will give you more of one than you want." He paused, then said, "Tim, that bunch needs convincing. Give them a warning blast."

McShayne shouted the order, and a dozen and a half Winchesters racketed. The men along the track yelled, cursed, shrieked with alarm. Some dropped to the ground. Others milled about seeking cover that wasn't there.

Kincaid called, "Convinced, Boland? Or does somebody have to get killed?"

Boland was so enraged that it took him a full half minute to reply. Then: "You'd better listen, Kincaid. You're through. Hiram Prentiss has bought up more than half the D & TP stock, and that gives him control of this railroad. He sent us up here to take over. And to throw you off the right-of-way—for keeps. If you shoot a single one of my men, I'll have the law out here by morning. Now call off your men—and clear out!"

McShayne said, "A bluff, Ed. Don't fall for it!"

Kincaid wasn't so sure that it was a bluff. He'd had it from Dan Meecham that some of the stockholders were dumping their stock and Prentiss was buying it up—at his own price. It was possible that panic had spread among the D & TP investors with the result that Prentiss had managed to buy up enough stock to give him a controlling interest in the company. On the other hand, Prentiss was wily enough to try a trick such as this. Kincaid wanted to believe it was that: a bluff, a bluff. The thought of failure with the railroad so close to completion was intolerable.

He called out, "Boland, I'll need more than your word for it. I'm giving the lot of you one minute to surrender."



**A**MONG Boland's followers, an uneasy muttering arose, and before the minute was up, some of them threw down their weapons and came forward with empty hands held

high. Chris Boland cursed them, but soon all but a half dozen men had surrendered and were under guard.

Kincaid said, "One last chance, Boland—and you'd better take it."

Boland finally threw down his gun and came to surrender with the half dozen die-hards following him. McShayne lighted a lantern, and in its glare Boland's always gloomy face was a stiff mask of hatred.

"What'll it get you?" Boland said savagely. "Prentiss will send the law and—"

"Meanwhile, I'll build the D & TP into Tulare," Kincaid said. "Even if it is for the old man. Tim, lock up our friend in the box-car with Brucker."

McShayne took Boland by the arm, rough about it. Then asked, "What about that bunch of hoodlums?"

"We'll send them back to Prentiss," said Kincaid.

Ed went to the headquarters car and opened a bottle of whiskey that he'd noticed some time before in a drawer of Miles Banning's desk. He was drinking from the bottle when McShayne appeared.

McShayne said, "You celebrating a victory, Ed, or holding a wake?"

Kincaid said, "I don't know for sure," and handed the bottle of McShayne. "It could be that Boland told the truth, Tim. I heard from Dan Meecham that a lot of the stockholders were panicky and dumping their shares. If Prentiss could buy up enough stock . . . well, it could be the end of it for me."

"Well, you made a good try of it, bucko."

"Now I'm out five thousand dollars—maybe."

"Hell; you never cared about money."

"True enough. But I needed that five thousand."

"What for? A woman?"

Kincaid nodded. "A woman," he said. "Find a cheaper one."

"This one I'm going to marry, Tim."

McShayne showed surprise. "Oh, sorry if I said the wrong thing. But if she's the kind you want to marry, she shouldn't care about your not having a stake. A good woman—"

Kincaid cut in, "It doesn't matter to her. But I wouldn't marry her when I'm broke, with nothing to offer her. But that's only part of it, Tim. It makes me damned mad to think of all the little people who lost money in this railroad—while Hiram Prentiss, with half the money in the world, takes it over and gets richer. You know what he'll pull, don't you? He'll manipulate the D & TP stock until he's squeezed out what stockholders have held onto their shares. Like old Dan Meecham, for example. Meecham has a big stake in the D & TP, but with Prentiss in the saddle, there's not much chance that he'll even break even. By manipulating the stock—"

There was a commotion outside: loud yelling, the blast of a gunshot.

McShayne set down the whiskey bottle and ran from the car. Kincaid rose and followed him, and there was still a lot of shouting and milling among the hoodlums and their guards. Several of the Boland men had made a break. All had been recaptured but one. A guard had fired at him, but the man had vanished into the darkness.

McShayne caught up a pick handle and went in among the prisoners, Kincaid following to protect his back. A few blows with the club and shouted orders to sit down and the entire bunch of men were brought under control. They were a tough lot, some of them recruited from among the Texas Western Railroad employees and others were hardcases such as could always be hired in some large city when a man like Hiram Prentiss could see profit in making trouble for somebody.

When they were all seated on the ground, Kincaid said, so every man could hear, "Tim, tell the guards to shoot to kill if any more of them try to escape."

"I'll do that," McShayne said. "What about the one that got away?"

"I'll try to ride him down."

He saddled his horse and rode for several miles along the tracks, thinking that the escaping tough would have headed in the direction of Dahlman. But he saw nothing of the man, and so turned back toward the camp. Things had quieted down there, and most of the men under guard had stretched out on the ground and were asleep.

McShayne called, "No luck, Ed?"

"Poor hunting," said Kincaid. "But it doesn't matter."

He rode on to the headquarters car, off-saddled his horse, then went inside to have another pull at the bottle. He was in a low mood. He knew that Chris Boland had spoken the truth about Hiram Prentiss sending the law—if the old man now controlled the D & TP. He told himself that if he had any sense at all, he'd take Boland's word for it that Prentiss had won the fight—and clear out. The trouble was, he had a stubborn streak. He liked to see things through to the bitter end. And, damn it, he wasn't quitting until his last chance at collecting that five thousand dollars was gone.

He was still sitting there an hour later, the bottle beside him nearly empty, when McShayne came in and said, "Ed, there's a train pulling in."

Kincaid said, "By rights, I'm the one who should be drunk, Tim. Look: we've got only three locomotives on this two-bit railroad. Four, counting the wrecked Number Nine. Two work engines and one road engine besides it, and all three are here at camp." He stared at McShayne. "You're sure?"

"I heard the whistle, I saw its headlight."

"You know what this means, Tim?"

"Yeah. It's got to be a Texas Western train."

"An engine, a tender and Hiram Prentiss' private coach," Kincaid said. "And the old man is coming to take over the D & TP. Maybe with the law to back him up!"

THEY could hear the loud clanging of the Texas Western train's bell. The man in the engine cab was feeling his way not only because he was running on track unfamiliar to him but also because he had one of the country's most important men for a passenger. A whole train crew could be sacked for so much as humping Hiram Prentiss' private coach.

Kincaid smashed the whiskey bottle against the wall of the headquarters car, then heaved out of his chair. "Well, let's get it over with, Tim," he said sourly.

McShayne said, "Get on your horse and clear out, Ed."

"No. I'll face the old man."

"If he's brought the law—"

"I'll face that too," said Kincaid.

They went out and saw that they had figured it correctly. A big Texas Western locomotive hauling a single coach was coming to a halt behind the D & TP freight that had brought Chris Boland and his toughs out from Dahlman. They stood watching it, and one of the rifle-carrying foremen came yelling for McShayne.

"What's the trouble, Mike?"

"That freight car you had Boland and Brucker in—it's empty!"

"What?"

"I just came by it, Tim," the man said. "Somebody let them escape. You know what I think? I think the hombre that broke away earlier was hiding somewhere close by, and when he saw his chance, he freed those other two. You want us to hunt them down?"

McShayne looked inquiringly at Kincaid.

"They're not important," Kincaid said. "Forget them."

"That Boland," McShayne said worriedly. "He hates your guts. He'll not go far. He may be hiding around the camp even now—waiting for his chance to kill you. If he should get hold of a gun—look—I'll start a search for him."

Kincaid said, "All right, Tim," and headed for Prentiss' car.

Ambers and another beefy but tough looking Texas Western detective were standing on the rear platform. Ambers

said, "We were just coming after you, Kincaid. Mr. Prentiss—"

"I know," Kincaid said. "He's ready for the showdown with me."

They followed him into the car, halting just inside the doorway. Hiram Prentiss sat huddled in his armchair, his shawl about his frail shoulders. Len Graves sat at his desk. A third man stood lounging against the wall. There was a silver star on his shirt. Kincaid glimpsed the badge as the man—Sheriff Cole, he supposed—pushed his coat back so that it cleared his holstered six-shooter. A man of about sixty, Cole: gray of hair and mustache, shrewd of eye.

Kincaid said, "All right, Hiram, let's have it."

The old man's eyes twinkled at him, and he said goodhumoredly, "Didn't Chris Boland explain that I've acquired a controlling interest in the Dahlman and Texas Panhandle Railroad Company?"

"He told me."

"So you're through, my young friend."

"That's the whole of it?"

"Hardly," Len Graves said loudly. "Sheriff Cole has a warrant for your arrest. There's a small matter of the twenty thousand dollars you took from Mr. Prentiss' safe."

Kincaid said, "Where's Luke Whiteside?"

Graves smiled at him. "Luke quit his job with Mr. Prentiss," he said. "After thirty years, he quit without so much as giving notice."

"He wouldn't lie along with you, eh?" Kincaid said. "He's too honorable a man, eh, Graves?" He looked at Cole. "I thought Dan Meecham fixed it with you."

Cole shook his head. "You can't fix something like this, friend," he said. "Not even Dan Meecham. He asked me as a favor to give you a little time, enough time to get this railroad built. I have to do a favor once in a while. But I can't shirk my duty entirely. You're under arrest, Kincaid. Hand over your gun." He drew and cocked his own gun.

Kincaid handed over his weapon, butt first.

Hiram Prentiss' wrinkled face was wreathed with a mocking smile. "I'm disappointed in you, Ed," he said. "I thought you would resist arrest. I certainly did." Then, businesslike: "Ambers, get Boland in here. I want to see him."



**A**MBERS went out and was gone so long that Len Graves said edgily, "Mr. Prentiss, I've got a feeling that something is wrong." The old man looked anxious too. He

told the other detective, calling him Shard, to look for Ambers. Shard left the car, and Prentiss took out his watch, peered at it, then sat there holding it in his hand. Every few seconds he glanced suspiciously at Ed Kincaid. Sheriff Cole looked unconcerned, but he kept an eye on Kincaid who had seated himself and was casually rolling a smoke. Finally Prentiss snapped his watch shut, pocketed it.

"Fifteen minutes since Shard left," he said. "Len, get this train moving."

Graves jumped up and hurried forward through the car, and a moment later Tim McShayne came in from the rear platform. He halted just inside the doorway, covering Cole. The sheriff had holstered his gun after disarming Kincaid and lighted a cigar. Caught off guard, he swore under his breath.

McShayne said, "Everything's under control, Ed. We've got Ambers and that other guy. Your horse is just outside. Come on, bucko—get moving!"

Kincaid was tempted, but he saw the resolute look on Cole's face and he knew that running was no good. The sheriff would come after him, and keep after him until he got him. Kincaid shook his head.

"I'll take my chances, Tim," he said. "And I've got one chance. Listen: you find Luke Whiteside. He'll testify that I didn't steal Prentiss' money. You—"

The train began to move, backing.

McShayne said, "I'm telling you, Ed, you've got no chance at all. Boland armed himself before he left camp. He slugged

one of our men and took his rifle. If he's waiting out along the track to come aboard this train—"

Kincaid said, "Find Luke Whiteside for me, Tim. You hear?"

McShayne nodded jerkily, then, shaking his head in resignation, he turned out onto the platform and dropped to the ground.

Len Graves must have convinced the train crew that Hiram Prentiss was in grave danger and that only speed would get the old man safely out of the trap. The train was gaining speed with every thrust of its drivers. Len Graves returned looking relieved and followed by the conductor who, with an anxious glance at Prentiss, hurried through to the coach's platform which was now the front end of the train. Sheriff Cole again lounged.

Kincaid lighted his cigarette, dragged hard on it. He was hit hard suddenly by the realization that for him this trip would end in a jail cell. He had almost convinced himself that he could prove his innocence of Prentiss' trumped-up theft charge. But he was gambling on the truthfulness of a man who had probably disappeared.

Luke Whiteside might have refused to stand by Len Graves in the lie Prentiss had put in his secretary's mouth, but the Negro wouldn't be waiting around to contradict Graves's testimony when Kincaid stood trial. Luke would either have left for parts unknown on his own hook, or Hiram Prentiss would have removed him from Dahlman by trickery or by force. The old man had pulled the wool over the eyes of the sheriff, and he would hoodwink a jury—and have his revenge on the man who'd dared to buck him. No, Luke Whiteside would not be found.

It occurred to Kincaid that he would have been wiser if he'd taken Tim McShayne's advice and made a run of it. He probably wouldn't have gotten far, but there might have been one chance in a million that he could have gotten away. He had no chance of escaping now. His gun was in Cole's pocket, and the sheriff was one of those cow country men who could put a slug through the leg of an escaping prisoner.

Then there was Katherine, and thought of her hurt. He'd hoped to make his peace with her. He'd meant to go to her and make her believe that whatever had been between Louise and him counted for nothing—that, indeed, the thing that happened between Louise and him had served to free him so that he could fall in love with Katherine.

Now he wouldn't see her unless she visited him in his cell, and then it would hardly matter. There would be iron bars between them . . . and how many wasted years? He looked bitterly at old Hiram Prentiss, and wanted to ask, how many years in prison he was going to guarantee to satisfy his hatred of him. It was a hell of a thing, so frail an excuse of a man having bested him—a supposedly tough trouble-shooter.

Trouble-shooter!

Kincaid told himself that he should have remained a raggedy-pants Texas cowman.

Then, as the train hurtled along perhaps two miles on its way, the crash came. It was familiar enough to Ed Kincaid, since he'd gone through such a wreck not long ago. There was the same frightful bouncing and swaying, the same crashing roar, the same rending of wood and metal. He and the others were thrown about like so many empty bottles in a rolling barrel. The desk at which Len Graves had been sitting was catapulted across the coach, narrowly missing Kincaid and pinning Sheriff Cole against the wall. Graves was bowled over and old Hiram Prentiss was pitched from his chair. The old man's wasted body was all loose and disjointed, thrown one way and another like a scarecrow blown about by high winds.

Kincaid was thrown to his hands and knees, and something slammed against his head. He sprawled on his face, pain exploding in his brain. And through the pain ran the wild thought: *Now's your chance! Run, Kincaid—Run!*

**T**HE wrecked coach came to rest at a crazy angle, teetered for a moment but failed to overturn. Kincaid forced himself erect, stood swaying. He saw Sher-



iff Cole crumpled behind the desk, and he moved toward him. He pulled his own gun from the lawman's coat pocket, thrust it into his holster and turned away. Cole didn't protest. He was too dazed, perhaps too badly hurt.

Kincaid turned and made his way across the crazily tilted deck of the coach toward the door. Then he saw the flames from a fallen, shattered lamp. He faced about, saw Len Graves escaping through an open window. But Cole was still trapped, and Hiram Prentiss was a small, grotesque heap by the safe. Kincaid hesitated for just a moment, and the flames spread furi-

trouble-maker, Chris Boland. Boland got away from my men before this train reached the camp. He mustn't have known that Prentiss was on his way. So he pulled that old stunt of his, loosening a rail. But instead of wrecking a D & TP train, he wrecked a Texas Western—and the old man's private car, at that."

Cole was still suspicious. "Why would he do that?" he asked. "When he knows that Prentiss is taking over the D & TP?"

"Just because he hates my guts," Kincaid said. "Or maybe he didn't know Prentiss was taking over the D & TP. That old crook pulls so many tricky deals that


---



## TEXAS CAN DIVVY UP

TEXAS is the only State that has the right to subdivide into smaller States if it wants to. During the negotiations on the annexation of Texas to the United States, a joint resolution of both Houses of Congress, approved by President Tyler, provided that the State could divide itself up later on if it wished.

---



ously. He swore and went to Cole, and shoved the heavy desk away. The sheriff gave him a dazed look, said hollowly, "Thanks, Kincaid," and went staggering toward the door.

Kincaid went to the old man, lifted him, and Hiram Prentiss weighed little more than a child's doll. He carried his light burden from the burning coach, and lay him on the ground well away from the holocaust. The conductor came stumbling toward them, having miraculously escaped despite having been on the front platform. He was mumbling something, and Sheriff Cole, having caught some of his words, said, "What's that? You're sure?"

"The conductor said, 'I know what I saw,' then swore bitterly. 'I saw three men run away from the track just before we were derailed.'"

Cole looked at Kincaid. "Your men?" he demanded.

"Not mine," Kincaid told him. "Some of the old man's. One of them his chief

nobody knows when he's on the level. Maybe he was pulling some sort of a bluff by coming here tonight. Who knows?"

Len Graves cried, "Gentlemen, gentlemen! I think Mr. Prentiss is—is dead!"

Cole turned to where the railroad king lay, and in a moment said, "He's dead, all right. Now, that's a pity. A fine old gentleman like that. . . ." But Kincaid laughed. He couldn't help himself.

Either the thunderous crash of the wreck had been heard at the construction camp or the fire had been seen. At any rate, a rider shortly came galloping up. It was Tim McShayne, on Kincaid's horse. A D & TP engine was on its way, too, inching along cautiously. McShayne dropped from the saddle.

"Ed, what happened?"

"Boland," Kincaid said. "He loosened another rail."

He took the reins from McShayne's hand, swung onto the horse. A shout lifted from Sheriff Cole, but he ignored it and

struck out at a lope. He reined in atop a rise of ground, and the glare of the burning railroad car added to the moonlight gave him a view of a wide stretch of the flat country in every direction. Since the conductor had seen the three men, Kincaid had hopes that he could spot Boland and his companions. They couldn't have traveled far, being afoot.

He saw them—three shadowy, running figures—south along the track. He quartered down from the rise and lifted his horse to an easy lope, pulling his rifle from its boot. They saw him shortly, and ran faster. He smiled in ugly fashion, and said under his breath, "Run, Boland—Run!" This was different from the last time he'd tried to run the man to earth. This time Boland couldn't lead him all across Texas only to vanish across the Mexican border.

One of the three was falling behind, and soon he came to a stop. A gunshot racketed, and Kincaid, hearing the shriek of the slug, jerked his horse to a stop and dropped from the saddle. He drove two quick shots at the man, hoping it was Boland and somehow knowing that it was. He ran to a boulder, fired again from there, and drew an answering shot. The slug struck the rock and ricocheted; and Kincaid fired at the muzzle flash of Boland's rifle, then left the boulder and sprinted toward a gully. He reached it safely, despite two shots from Boland's weapon. He reloaded his Winchester, then, bent low, ran along the gully. A slug struck its bank and kicked dirt into his face. He dropped down, taking a prone firing position.

"Boland!"

"Yeah?"

"You know what train you wrecked?"

"I know now."

"A bad mistake, Boland. You killed old Hiram Prentiss."

Boland yelled, "I'll hold a wake for him later, Kincaid, but I'll get you first!" He opened fire again.

He was crouched behind the roadbed, the rails and ballast giving him cover. But if he was a difficult target, his own marks-

manship was poor. It seemed to Kincaid that Boland was shooting a bit wildly, like a man with panic in him. Holding his own fire, Kincaid hoped for the man to expose himself for an instant. Then a yell came from Boland: "Get him, Brucker!"

Kincaid shot a startled look over his shoulder, then heaved over in a roll. Brucker had circled around him, and now the man, having rushed in, struck down with the sledge hammer that must have been used to loosen the rail. The blow landed where Kincaid's head had been only an instant before. Then Brucker whipped it up again, for another try, and Kincaid had only time enough to fire his rifle with one hand. The shot caught Brucker in the chest, however, and knocked the man over backwards. Whirling, Kincaid saw Boland running at him. He knew now that there had been no panic at all in the man. His wild shooting had been intended to distract Kincaid while Brucker closed in. Boland stopped short, jerked his rifle to his shoulder.

Kincaid threw himself to one side an instant before the man fired, then drove his shot home. He saw Boland stagger, drop his weapon, take two lurching steps, then collapse. He rose and walked to his horse, knowing that Boland as well as Brucker was dead. There was still a third man somewhere around, but he was unimportant. Kincaid rode back to the wrecked train.

Back into custody.

**I**T TOOK the rest of the night and most of the next morning to get the Texas Western engine and tender back on the rails and the track repaired. The locomotive eased past the burned private coach and went on toward Dahlman. The body of old Hiram Prentiss was taken south aboard a box-car hauled by a D & TP engine. The bodies of Boland and Brucker were transported in the same car. Ed Kincaid rode in the caboose with Sheriff Cole and the badly broken-up Len Graves.

Dahlman learned from the TW train crew of the night's events, and the town

was in a turmoil of excitement by the time the D & TP train rolled in. Sheriff Cole took Kincaid directly to the court house, to his office, where he booked him and said, "Kincaid, you've played square with me. I hate to lock you up. Give me your word that you won't leave town, and I won't put you in a cell."

"You've got it, Sheriff."

"All right. That'll be your bond."

Kincaid said, "Thanks," and turned to the door.

Cole said, "Just be on hand for your trial. Don't make me come hunting you."

Kincaid nodded and went out.

He visited a barber shop and got cleaned up, then had dinner at the Great Western House. He rolled and lighted a cigarette, then strolled around to the little frame house on Second Street. Louise opened the door to his knock.

She looked tired. She was pale and there were blue smudges beneath her eyes. But she could smile, and her smile seemed genuine.

"Come in, Ed."

"I stopped by to see how Miles is coming along."

"He's well on his way to recovery."

He stepped into the parlor, removed his hat, looked at her searchingly. He said, "You're happy, Louise."

She nodded. "He's mine now, all mine," she said. "You'll see."

She lead him to the bedroom, and Miles Banning was seated in a rocking chair. He was wearing a robe and slippers and smoking his meerschaum pipe. Shock came to Ed Kincaid. He understood then why Louise was so sure that Banning was now all hers. The man's good looks were gone. He was handsome no longer. The blast had left his face a scarred and misshapen thing, not ugly or grotesque—but no longer a face that would attract women. And the strange thing was that Banning sat there looking content. He took his pipe from his mouth, smiled lopsidedly at Kincaid.

"Louise just heard the news from a neighbor, Ed," he said. "So the old man is dead?" He didn't wait for a reply. "You

getting the D & TP built?"

It seemed that Banning hadn't heard that Kincaid was under arrest. Kincaid said, "A few more miles."

"I'm hoping to be on hand when the last spike is driven."

"I'll have a train ready to take you to Tulare that day."

"Do that, Ed."

There had been another knock at the door, and Louise had gone to see who was there. She returned to the bedroom, and said, "Sheriff Cole wants you to come to his office, Ed. He sent a deputy for you."

Kincaid nodded, said, "I'll see you two later," and went out.

**W**HEN he reached the sheriff's office, Dan Meecham was there. So was Luke Whiteside. The Negro merely nodded to Kincaid. There was grief in his eyes. He'd heard that Hiram Prentiss was dead.

Dan Meecham said, "Ed, you've been cleared by Whiteside. He's signed a statement to the effect that he was present when you took the document from Prentiss' safe, that he watched you the entire time and saw you take no money. He admits that Prentiss wanted him to testify that you had taken money, and when he refused, the old man sent him packing. It was Kate who found him at Fort Worth and talked him into coming back. So you can get back to work."

Kincaid looked at Sheriff Cole, and the lawman nodded.

Kincaid said, "Thanks, Luke. I understand why you didn't talk up for me before now. You loved the old man."

"Yes, Ed," Luke Whiteside replied. "I loved that ornery old gentleman."

Kincaid looked questioningly at Meecham. "Back to work, you said?"

Meecham nodded. "Prentiss went off half-cocked in his wanting to take over the D & TP. He'd convinced Russ Grierson that he could sell his block of stock. Grierson agreed, but demanded as much as he paid for his shares. Prentiss wouldn't go for that. He told Grierson that he'd see him today and that by then he'd better

sell—at Prentiss' price. The old man was so sure that Grierson would give in that he took that trip out to the railhead. And Grierson came to see me. I bought his stock, and paid him what he wanted. The trouble with Hiram Prentiss was that he pushed too hard a bargain. Now you get the D & TP built into Tulare, Ed, and you can collect your five thousand dollars."

"All right, Dan. But I've got something more important to do first."

"What's that?"

"Your daughter. I've got to see her."

"Well, she's gone home to Slash-M. But I don't know if she wants to see you."

"I'll have to find that out," said Kincaid and left the office.

It was after dark when he reached Slash-M headquarters. Katherine appeared at the door of the ranchhouse as he reined in. He gazed at her as she stood silhouetted against the lamplight within, tall and nicely formed and, the first time he had so seen her, wearing an extremely feminine dress. He dismounted and went to her.

"I stopped by to think you for getting Luke Whiteside to clear me," he said. "If you believed me when I said that I didn't

take money from that safe, you should believe the other things I told you."

"Maybe I didn't believe it—until Luke convinced me."

"Still, you went to the trouble of locating him."

"Maybe I hoped he'd say that you did steal some money."

"Maybe," Kincaid said. "You once said something about my coming back in ten years . . . I think I'll do that, Katherine. I'm asking you to marry me. If you won't, I'll go my way and not come back for that long. I'll want you just as much ten years from now as at this moment. You and no other woman. But if you're going to be stubborn and waste ten years, if you're going to be a spoiled brat and—"

"Ed. . . ."

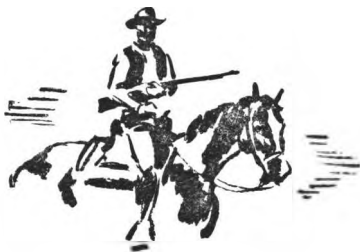
"Yes?"

"I acted like that only because I was so insanely jealous."

"Believe me, you've got nothing to be jealous about. I love you, Katherine."

She moved toward him, whispering. "Show me, Ed—Show me!" as she had once before.

She came into his arms, where they both knew she belonged.



*The Next Issue of*

## TEXAS WESTERN

*will feature*

# TEXAS IS FOR TEXANS

A Novel of Texas Under Carpetbag Tyranny

By WALKER A. TOMPKINS

PLUS MANY OTHER STORIES AND FEATURES



Monty's hand streaked for his gun and he lunged at Rock

# The Midnight Clear

By A. C. ABBOTT

**T**HE SNOW had stopped and darkness had fallen, soft and deceptively peaceful, when Rock Bradden dismounted stiffly in front of the log building which housed the sheriff's office and jail. He was a big man whose lean face was hidden behind a week's growth of black beard,

whose dark eyes, on this quiet Christmas Eve, glinted with more than their usual coldness.

Joe, the slight gray man he had appointed temporarily to run the office, stepped outside and stopped short, staring at the led horse on which was roped



The Sheriff Wore His Heart Under His Badge

the body of a man. "Did you get 'em?" he asked then, quickly striding forward.

"One of 'em."

"Who?"

"Parker."

"Parker! Was Todd Mason with him?"

"Not when I caught up with him, but he helped rob the bank, all right."

"Well, I'll be darned. I thought those two long riders had left the country. Did they have anybody with 'em on this job?"

"I got part of the loot," Rock said coolly as he turned to pull his rifle out of the saddle scabbard. "Enough to put a little merriment into this town's Christmas."

"Good!" Joe breathed. "Folks'll be grateful, Rock. That deal put a crimp in the whole dang country, don't you know it?"

"Murder usually has that effect," Rock said bleakly.

"Yeah. Got any idea where Mason went?"

"Not yet." Rock shoved away from his horse and ducked under the tie rail. "Monty in town?"

"Yeah, he rode in awhile ago with Miss Kinsley. They're up at the hotel." Joe grinned knowingly. "He was down here lookin' for you. Wanted to buy you a little Christmas cheer, I think."

Rock rubbed a hand wearily along his stubbled jaw, thinking of the many care-free holidays he'd spent with Monty Wade. They had been saddle pardes for a long time, painting a vivid trail across the vast Southwest before drifting to this northern country two years ago.

"Get somebody to help you with this outfit, will you?" he said evenly. "I'm all in."

"Yeah, sure," Joe said hastily. "I'll take care of things. You go ahead and get out from under that brush pile."

Rock strode into the office, put the rifle on the deer horns above the desk, and unbuttoned his heavy Mackinaw. Then for a long moment he stood motionless, frowning down at the desk, but seeing instead the clear gray eyes of Eileen Kinsley, the only woman in the world he would ever want. He had known it the moment he

met her, but he had met her too late.

**S**OMEWHERE a bunch of kids were carolling, their voices sweet and thin in the cold air, their words of joyous promise slowly eating into Rock and leaving him empty. With a sudden bitter curse he swung out of the office and turned up the street.

Lights were twinkling merrily all over the snug little town, and a slight wind was murmuring softly among the pines. Farther along, the snowy street was lined with horses and buckboards, and people bustled in and out of lighted doorways. Rock turned into the two story log hotel, relieved to find the small lobby empty except for the clerk.

"Monty in?" he asked brusquely.

"Yeah, he's in number six, down the hall. Merry Christmas, Sheriff."

"Thanks," Rock said without color and kept walking. He paused for a second before the door, then knocking once, sharply, and went on in, closing the door carefully behind him.

Monty turned from the wash stand, a comb in his hand and an instant grin on his lips. He looked as clean and fresh as a new dollar, his tall lithe body encased in white shirt and dark pants, his blue eyes flashing warmly.

"Rock, I'm sure glad you got back," he said heartily, stepping forward. "Merry Christmas, you old maverick!"

"Hiya, Monty," Rock said evenly. "Getting all slicked up, huh?"

"You betcha. I'm taking Eileen to the doin's at the new church. The boss said it was too long a ride in from the ranch just to get a sack of free candy, but he winked at me when he said it." Monty grinned boyishly. "When did you get back Rock?"

"Just now."

"Any luck?"

"Yeah, I got Parker." Rock saw the quick startled light in Monty's eyes and he knew, with chilling certainty, that Parker had told the truth.

"So you got Parker, huh?" Monty said slowly. "Dead or alive?"



"He's dead now, but he didn't die quick enough," Rock said harshly. "He spilled the whole works, Monty."

"So." Monty flicked a glance at his gun-belt, hanging over the back of a chair out of reach. "How'd you happen to get him?"

"His horse gave out. He holed up with a rifle and wouldn't listen to reason." Rock's voice turned rough. "I—wish I'd killed him outright. It hurt like hell to have him tell me the best friend I ever had was a bank robber!"

"Yeah." Monty tried to grin but failed miserably.

"There was a man killed in that deal, Monty."

"Yeah, I—heard the cashier died. That wasn't my doin's, Rock."

"You're guilty before the law," Rock said with hard restraint. "Just as guilty as Todd—and you'll hang just as high!"

"No," Monty said narrowly, bracing himself, "I won't. You can't arrest me, Rock."

"I'm not trying to—yet! And stay away from that gun. For God's sake, don't make me kill you!"

**M**ONTY sucked in a slow painful breath, then sagged abruptly onto the bed, his head hanging. Rock took a long stride toward him.

"Monty, what were you *thinking* of?"

"Money," said Monty frankly. "Cow-punching was too slow. I stumbled onto those boys one day while I was riding the east line, and we got to talking."

"They talked you into it, huh?"

"Sort of. They were holed up at that Old Baldy line camp."

"You knew I wanted 'em!"

"Sure, but they just needed a little grub and a stake to get 'em out of the country. I supplied the grub—and got a little stake of my own." Monty looked up with a crooked grin. "I didn't think you'd ever catch 'em."

"Where's Mason now?" Rock demanded.

"I don't know," Monty said quickly, looking back at the floor.

"Did he pull out of the country?"

"I reckon he did. He quit Parker that night just a little ways out of town and doubled back to meet me."

"And you haven't seen him since?"

Monty shook his head, still without looking up.

"I'll get him," Rock said grimly, "if it takes the rest of my life!"

"Yeah." Monty sighed, then raised his eyes wearily. "Have you told Eileen?"

"I haven't told anybody," Rock retorted. "Maybe I won't. I know you've never done anything like this before." He stopped, his hatred for Todd Mason momentarily choking him. Rock knew he was rationalizing, but it was Mason he blamed, not Monty. With an effort he spoke again. "What about the future, Monty?"

"I'm cured," Monty said simply.

"Have you still got your share of the loot?"

"Most of it."

"Hand it over." Without hesitation Monty stood up and pulled a plain leather money belt from under his shirt. Rock shoved it into a pocket of his Mackinaw. "How much is missing?"

"Just this." Monty pulled a small white box out of his shirt pocket and opened it to disclose a sparkling diamond ring. "I was figuring on offering it to Eileen tonight."

For a moment Rock stood rigid, gripped by a cold fury that made him want to smash something. "Bought with stolen money!" he gritted. "Monty, how could you do it?"

"She wouldn't ever know."

"She *won't* ever know! You'll give me your word to go straight from here on or I'll run you in right now."

"Hey," Monty protested, startled. "What's biting you?"

"You blind fool!" Rock bit out savagely. "I've been in love with that girl ever since you introduced us. If I thought for a minute you'd break her heart—" He broke off, stopped by the shocked incredulity on his friend's face. He hadn't intended to give himself away like that, but it was done now. "You'll have time to

give her that," he finished coldly. "I'm giving you till midnight to get out of town."

"Midnight?" Monty echoed, unbelieving. "You're not kicking me out of town?"

"Kicking you out or locking you up."

"Wait, Rock—"

**R**OCK cut him off with a tight gesture. "I took an oath when I took this badge, Monty, to look out for folks around here. I'll be double-crossing 'em when I let you go; but, dammit, I can't believe you're a murderer and I can't see you hang. I can't let you stay here either."

"Holy Smoke!" Monty breathed. "Gonna look kind of sudden, ain't it?"

"Not for a cowpuncher. You can tell old man Kinslev you just got the urge to drift. Listen, Monty." Impulsively Rock gripped his shoulder. "You've played hell, but it needn't ruin your life. Give me your word that you'll get out of the country and go straight, and nobody'll ever know about this."

Slowly Monty closed the box and put it back in his pocket. He was breathing hard, his nostrils flaring below his narrowed eyes.

"Will you go?" Rock asked tensely.

For a long moment Monty hesitated, his eyes flicking back and forth across Rock's face. Finally he said, "I don't know, Rock."

Rock stepped back, cold as ice. Deliberately he took out his watch and flipped open the case. Then he closed it again with a snap.

"You've got four hours to make up your mind. Be out of town by midnight, Monty, or I'm coming after you."

Rock swung out of the room and closed the door, swearing in futile anger. As he emerged from the dark hallway, he saw Eileen Kinsley rise quickly from her chair in the lobby. Her long dark hair curled softly at the collar of her white blouse, and the clear gray eyes that Rock knew so well were sparkling with eagerness.

"Hello, stranger," she called gaily. "Where in the world have you been keeping yourself?"

Rock ducked his head and took plenty of time in getting his hat off, fighting for self control. By the time he came to a slow halt before her he was his usual cool self. "Hello, Eileen," he drawled with a smile. "How's everything at the Box K?"

"Fine," she said and smiled quickly to hide the worried frown that had started to gather. "What's new, Rock?"

"I got one of those bank robbers," he said matter-of-factly. "Recovered over half the loot."

"Oh, Rock, that's wonderful!" she cried, her eyes shining. "Merry Christmas!"

Rock laughed, embarrassed by the warm glow of pride stealing through him.

Eileen turned serious, although she was still smiling. "You know, that was a heavy loss for a town this size. The banker couldn't meet it. He was broke, and some of the rest of us were badly bent."

"Yeah, I know." Rock paused, then added quietly, "I'll get the rest of it before I'm through."

"Know who's got it?"

"Yeah. Todd Mason."

"Todd Mason!" she echoed. "Why, I thought he'd left the country long ago."

"Yeah," Rock said, not meeting her gaze, "that's what we all thought."

"Where is he now?"

Rock looked up with a quizzical grin. "If I knew where he was," he said reproachfully, "I wouldn't be standing here now."

She laughed merrily as she laid a warm friendly hand on his arm. At that moment Monty strode into the lobby, and Rock quickly stepped back, drawling smoothly, "I was about to run off with your lady friend."

"You wouldn't get far," Monty retorted with a tight grin.

"Well, is that so?" Eileen said indignantly. "Wouldn't I have anything to say about that?"

Monty hesitated, glancing narrowly from Eileen to Rock and back again. The girl laughed at his discomfiture, then turned to Rock.

"Come to church with us," she urged. "There'll be a good program."

Rock flashed a look down at his battered clothes and at the gunbelt sagging prominently around his waist. "Good gosh!" he blurted. "Can't you just see that congregation scatter?"

"Fiddlesticks," she scoffed, and the way she wrinkled her nose took the sting out of her next words. "They know you're a wild sort of a proposition. That's why they asked you to take a star, but they'll love you when they find out about the money you've recovered."

"Maybe," Rock said dubiously, "but I got a hunch they'll like me better if I stick to sheriffing." He glanced again at Monty, and it was then that he spotted the bulge of a gun under his friend's coat. With a supreme effort Rock kept his voice level. "You two go ahead. I'll see you later."

**R**OCK turned, cold-eyed, out of the hotel, feeling with dreadful certainty that the trouble he had hoped to avoid was going to blow up in his face. It would depend on Eileen. If she unwittingly urged Monty to stay, he would stay. And Monty Wade was like greased lightning with a gun.

Rock avoided the excited crowd hovering around the front of the sheriff's office and went directly to his living quarters at the rear of the building. The small room was tidy, the bed carefully made, which proved that Joe had not been too busy during his absence. Rock was just pulling his coat off when Joe entered, grinning broadly.

"How does it feel to be a hero?" he asked gaily.

Rock's answer was short. "I wouldn't know."

Joe laughed, then quickly sobered. "I hunted up old Abe so he could put that saddle bag full of money back in the vault. That was a good haul, Rock."

"That wasn't all I got." Rock pulled the belt out of his pocket and handed it over, meeting Joe's astonished gaze squarely. "I forgot this awhile ago," he said evenly. "See that Abe gets it, will you?"

"Will I! My gosh!" The Adam's apple

in Joe's skinny throat bobbed convulsively. Then he beamed. "Get your clothes changed, cowboy. I want to go with you to the doin's. Maybe some of that glory of yours will rub off."

Rock turned away, getting a stick of wood from the box behind the stove and adding it to the fire. "I'm not goin'." His voice sounded sullen.

"Aw, sure you're goin'," Joe protested. "Everybody's goin'. Forget Todd Mason for awhile, Rock. This is a time for peace, don't you know it?"

"Peace hell!" Rock straightened, his teeth bared in a bitter snarl. "You can't have peace just by wishing for it!" He saw the shocked look on Joe's face, but he couldn't stop. "You and the rest of these folks buy your peace for a hundred and fifty bucks a month, but I'm not in on the deal!"

Joe's face suddenly flamed. He shifted his feet awkwardly, looking everywhere except at Rock. "Shucks, Rock, I never meant—"

Rock dragged in a deep breath and held it till his chest ached. "Forget it, Joe," he said then, gruffly. "I'm just sour. Tired, I guess. You go ahead and have yourself a good time."

"Well, I hate to leave you. Especially on Christmas Eve." Joe grinned uncertainly. "It'd do you good, Rock. You sound kinda like you're gettin' homesick or somethin'."

"Homesick!" Rock snorted. "How could I be homesick when I never had a home?"

"Easy. You can be lots sicker for somethin' you never had, don't you know it? Somethin' you know about, you got some memories that ain't so good. But when you're just dreamin'—"

"Get out of here!" Rock yelled, brandishing a stick of firewood. "Go on over and get your sack of candy and let me clean up."

"Well, all right." Joe shuffled reluctantly toward the door. "I'll be back soon's it's over."

"No need of it. I don't reckon Mason will come waltzing in here, and I'm not going after him—tonight."

**A** SHAVE, clean clothes and a hot meal did very little toward relieving Rock's black mood. Eleven o'clock found him restlessly pacing the street, watching family-laden buckboards pull out for surrounding ranches, listening to the merry calls of women and the happy squeal of kids. He had seen Eileen and Monty return to the hotel but had avoided them deliberately, not wanting to verify his fear that they were making plans for the future—plans that did not include a move from the Box K.

There were still a number of saddled horses in front of the Silver Spur, but the town was growing quiet when the shot rang out. Rock whirled and then stopped in his tracks, waiting for something to tell him where it had happened. Somewhere in the middle of town. Cowboys began to straggle out of the Silver Spur, bunching on the board walk and staring around curiously.

Automatically Rock loosened the gun in his holster as he hurried forward.

"Here comes the sheriff," someone called out. "What's up, Rock? Where's the shooting?"

"I don't know," Rock answered. "Where'd it come from?"

"Down the street aways, sounded like."

The men opened a path for him, then fell in behind him as he strode along the walk, unaccountably jumpy. Stray shots were not uncommon, but Rock had a premonition this one was not a stray.

As he passed Brent's general store, he saw that, although the store was dark, the front door was ajar. He shoved his way inside and stopped, motioning silence.

"Brent?" he called softly.

A groan answered him, coming from somewhere on his right. Cautiously Rock groped his way toward the sound, not caring just yet to strike a light. Then, as his eyes became adjusted to the gloom, he saw the back door was wide open.

"Find a lantern, somebody," he ordered as he lit a match and held it high.

They found the old storekeeper huddled near a counter, clutching his bleeding side with both scrawny hands. He had been

badly dazed but evidently was coming out of it. Rock knelt beside him and hurriedly examined the wound as one of the other men ran for the doctor. Joe joined the group and helped Brent take a drink.

"Take it easy, Brent," Rock said gently, as the man lay back. "This isn't so bad. Got any idea who did it?"

Brent drew in a careful breath, his eyes squinted from the pain. Then he whispered, "Todd Mason."

"Mason!" Rock snapped. "You sure?"

Brent nodded. "I saw him plain when he fired. He was after grub, I reckon. Maybe ammunition."

"Where in the devil's he been?" Joe blurted.

"Wherever he's been," Rock said grimly, "he's figuring on pulling out now."

"Yeah. Reckon he found out you were wise to him."

"He must have ben watching the store," Brent said huskily. "I had just locked up, but I forgot something and came back. Didn't bother with a lamp. I—guess he didn't hear me til I—got real close."

"Better not try to talk any more," Rock advised. "Doc'll be here in a minute." He rose to his feet, his fingers closing automatically over the butt of his gun.

Joe stood up also. "Let's go after that jigger, Rock. He can't have gone far, and trackin' will be easy in this snow."

"And I'm a blame good tracker," a cowboy said, head bobbing emphatically.

"Two of us," said another. "I'd sure admire to hang on m' Christmas tree."

Joe started for the door. "Let's go."

"Wait," Rock said.

"Wait for what?"

"There's something I've got to see about. Joe, you saddle my horse, will you? The rest of you wait here."

Rock gave them no chance to argue or ask questions as he stalked out of the store and turned toward the hotel. There was no doubt in his mind that Monty had lied to him. He had known where Mason was and had warned him that he better get out of town. If he knew now where Mason was heading, he was going to tell Rock Bradden.

**T**HE lamp was turned low and the clerk was not in evidence as Rock strode through the lobby, the sound of his boots dulled by the worn carpet. Not for a moment did he hesitate. He thrust open Monty's door, saw his friend standing, startled, in the middle of the room. Then he stepped well into the room and slammed the door behind him.

"Monty—" he began, then broke off to make a desperate stab for his .45.

Monty's hand had streaked toward his gun, and at the same time he lunged at Rock. Rock ducked aside, trying to evade the charge, but Monty's left shoulder caught him in the chest and knocked him spinning. As he went down, he heard the deafening crash of a gun behind him and knew that Todd Mason had been behind that door. Other shots followed.

Rock lit rolling and came up hard against the wall, feeling the sting of lead on his neck. In one continuous movement he plunged to his feet and whirled, his gun flaming almost before he came around. Mason was slammed back against the door by that first slug, but he clung to his gun, got off one more wild shot and Rock sent a bullet through his brain.

In the stifling smoke Rock wheeled to see Monty down beside the bed, struggling to get up. He reached him just as the cowboy collapsed and turned him swiftly over onto his back, but there was nothing he could do. Monty had taken Mason's first slug full in the chest.

"You oughta knock," he said, trying to grin. "Busted in like a—locoed bronc."

"Monty, why didn't you yell?"

"No time. Todd's—too fast."

Monty lifted a trembling hand to his shirt pocket and pulled out the little white box, pressing it into Rock's hand. He tried once more to speak, his blue eyes glinting feverishly. Then the glint faded out. . . .

Rock was just climbing to his feet when Joe burst into the room, followed by the cowboys who had wanted to ride with the posse. They stopped short, staring first at Monty and then at Mason.

Rock's hand closed tightly around the little white box. "Mason must have fol-

lowed me here. If it hadn't been for Monty, he'd have got me cold."

He was aware of their incredulous exclamations but didn't really hear them. Shouldering his way to the door, he turned down the hall with dragging steps, thinking only, Eileen must never know.

She stood at the foot of the stairway, her fluffy white robe but little whiter than her face. "Rock, what is it?" she whispered fearfully. "What happened?"

Rock forced his legs to carry him within reach of her. "There's been a fight," he said heavily. "Monty saved my life."

"And—Monty?"

Rock couldn't meet her gaze. He took her hand and pressed the box into it.

For a moment Eileen just stared at it. Then she bowed her head and swayed against him, crying silently. Rock held her, steeling himself. "You thought a lot of him, didn't you?"

"I loved him. Everyone did. He was such a cheerful, happy-go-lucky boy." She drew back, fishing for a handkerchief. "I was going to miss him, anyway."

"Anyway?" Rock echoed blankly.

"Yes." She looked up, then looked quickly away as if embarrassed. "When I told him tonight I couldn't marry him, he said he was leaving."

Rock was stunned, incapable of thought. Something in those gray eyes seemed to reach out to him, then recede.

"Eileen," he said and stopped.

For a long moment she looked up at him, searching his face for the thoughts he couldn't express. Then, with a tremulous smile, she placed a hand on his cheek.

"You thick-headed darling," she said softly. "It's been you for a long time, but I couldn't sav anything either. Until tonight. I told Monty."

Rock folded his long arms around her, fearfully at first, but with increasing pressure as the full meaning of her words surged through him. Suddenly, as the old clock in the lobby, started its soft melodious chiming, he buried his face in her hair, his eyes tightly shut.

Midnight had come—and gone. It was Christmas. ● ● ●



# WOMAN

"Take this girl back and put her on the stage—unharmd," said Jacklin





# FROM TUCSON

by DEAN OWEN

When his brother brought Josie home, Cal reckoned he'd have a fight on his hands—and a woman in his arms!

**W**HEN his brother did not return from Tucson within the week as he had promised, Cal Gorman decided he could no longer be without a rifle. This morning he had seen fresh hoofprints beyond the windmill and knew that during the night a horseman had studied the house from that vantage point. And on one of the six-by-six windmill supports was the mark of a knife and on the ground a fresh pile of shavings.

Burke had taken the only rifle to Tucson with him which meant that if the Jacklin bunch decided to make trouble, Cal would be caught trying to hold the place with only a revolver.

As he swung through Refugio Canyon he cursed his brother silently. Burke had twelve years on him and by this time should be settled. But there was a wildness in Burke that would not be tamed. Sometimes Cal thought of quitting and going to work for the S.P. You could get a job easily because they were pushing track east from Yuma. But he knew Burke would either let the ranch go to

ruin, gamble it away or maybe let Tom Jacklin take over. In a way, he supposed, you couldn't blame Burke too much. Losing Helen had been a blow, even though Cal suspected Helen had more peace in her grave than she ever had in the seven years she had been married to Burke.

As usual Burke had broken his promise. He had some kind of business to take care of in Tucson, he said. He would be back in a week. Here it was two weeks. Likely Burke was lying in back of some cantina, waiting to get the tequilla out of his brain so he could drive the buckboard home.

Then, as Cal rode toward Palehurst's Store, he was hit with a dread possibility. Perhaps Jacklin had jumped Burke and now Burke's body was lying out in that flat and angry desert that stretched clear to Tucson. The thought sobered him. The gray eyes in his angular face were suddenly thoughtful as he moved slowly toward the two-story frame building set back from the Tucson road.



**P**ALEHURST must have seen him coming because his lank form appeared on the shadowed porch and a white-sleeved arm lifted in a signal to ride in. Cal tied his horse in the shade of the big combination way station, mercantile and saloon.

"Seen you out there," Palehurst said, the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes deepening as he squinted against the sun. "Figured you'd want to know there ain't none of the Jacklin 2H crowd around to make you trouble."

With a wide shoulder Cal broke passage through the double screen doors. He asked Palehurst if he had a second-hand rifle for sale cheap, then beat the dust out of his hat on a denim clad leg.

Palehurst laid out two rifles on the counter beside the coffee mill. The first one Cal discarded instantly. He had no use for the Sharpes, powerful as it might be. He took a .30-30 Winchester. The stock was scored and there was rust on the outside of the barrel, but inside it was clean. It would have to do until Burke got home with some money. He paid Palehurst twelve dollars for the rifle and bought a box of shells.

Palehurst made change from the twenty dollar gold piece Cal gave him. Palehurst said, "What's eatin' Jacklin? Him and Quince was in here yesterday pawin' the dirt and tellin' it bad about you and Burke."

Cal nodded. "I've heard about it."

"Claimed you and Burke been gettin' away with 2H Morgans."

"Accusing a man of rustling horses," said Cal, inspecting the rifle, "is a good way to get your brains shot out."

"Well, it does seem odd to me," Palehurst said, wiping his hands on an apron that had once been white, "how Jacklin keeps movin' them horses around on his 2H range. But no matter where he moves 'em, the rustlers always know where to look."

Cal's gray eyes found Palehurst's face. "Yeah," he said thoughtfully, "it sure is odd."

Palehurst nodded. His brown hair was

heavily streaked with gray. "I guess Burke was sore when Jacklin showed up in Revere last night and spoiled Burke's game with the judge."

"You mean Burke's back?" And when Palehurst nodded, Cal went on, "What's Burke want with the judge?"

"I dunno, but I heard tell he was raisin' old Ned in Revere last night, tryin' to find Judge Harris. And then Jacklin and his boys rode into town and Burke had to beat it with the woman."

It took Cal a moment for this to settle in his mind, then he said, "So Burke has gone and brought another girl home with him."

Palehurst saw the anger on the brown young face and said, as if this would temper his statement, "I hear she's a looker."

"They're all lookers, the ones that Burke brings home."

The sound of hoofs in the soft dust outside caused Cal to swing around. Through the dirty front window he saw Quince dismount and come stomping into the store on his long legs. Cal laid down the rifle and hipped around against the counter so that his belted .44 was within easy reach.

"Hello, Gorman," Quince said in his rough voice, looking Cal over. "I thought that was your horse out there."

Cal swallowed. According to the stories that were going around, the Jacklin 2H foreman should have either called Cal Gorman a rustler to his face or pulled a gun and got it over with. But the tall man, stooped a little at the shoulders and bowed in the legs, got a bottle of beer from Palehurst and took it to one of the tables against the wall. He slid a lean hip over the edge of the table, his eyes still on Cal. He took out a knife, flipped a button on the hilt and a blade leaped out. He began trimming the edge of the table with it.

"I got a message for you, Gorman," Quince said.

Cal walked over, hating himself for obeying Quince and yet not wishing to anger the man needlessly.

QUINCE looked at him a long moment out of his green eyes, then said quietly, "You tell Burke it's gettin' damn late in the day."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Quince glanced across the big room at Palehurst who was puttering behind his counter and paying no attention to them. Then he said to Cal, "You tell Burke. He'll know what I mean."

Cal met the narrowed green eyes a moment, then said, "You were out at the ranch last night."

"How you figure that?"

"Somebody was watching the house. While they watched they whittled some on the windmill." He looked down at the knife blade peeling thin slivers off the underside of the table edge.

Quince flushed slightly, then closed the knife. "A man can get into some bad habits," he said, and laughed a little self-consciously. Then he finished his bottle of beer and went outside. He boarded his horse and headed down the road toward Revere.

Palehurst said, when Quince's dust was still settling, "I sure had a bad minute there. I figured he was going to pull a gun on you."

Cal made no reply. He carried his rifle and shells outside and rode north. When he was a hundred yards away from Palehurst's Store he felt perspiration break out on his back. He swallowed in a dry throat as reaction set in. He wasn't any gunman. He hated fighting and the thought of maybe killing a man set his scalp to crawling.

Had the 2H foreman been in the mood, he could have shot Cal down and that would have been the end of it. Cal shivered slightly at the thought.

An hour later when he swung through the gate to the Hub he saw, beside the unpainted shingled house, a clothesline filled with wash dresses and feminine undergarments. He felt more angered at Burke than at any time since they had come to the Hub eight years ago. Here they were up to their ears in trouble with Tom Jacklin, and Burke had to com-

plicate it by bringing home another woman.



BURKE saw him coming, for now he flung open the door and came stomping across what had once been Helen's flower bed, his thick arm around the waist of a scrawny looking girl with pale yellow hair.

"This here is Josie," Burke said, as if Cal should be overjoyed. "Me and her met up at Ormsby's Dance Hall in Tucson."

Cal was unsaddling his roan and now he turned to give the girl a flat, level stare. He saw the color mount to her cheeks. She wasn't as thin as he had at first supposed. Maybe it was just her cotton wash dress that seemed a size too small. It was short and Cal could see her straight brown legs.

Josie said, a sort of pleading in her blue eyes, "We were going to be married last night in Revere. But—"

Cal looked at his brother. "So that's why you wanted Judge Harris."

"You heard about it then."

Without answering, he turned the horse into the corral. Josie followed him over. "We would have been married," she said, that pleading still in her eyes, "but some men rode into town and we had to leave."

"Jacklin and his bunch," Burke said, coming up behind her. "Josie said we should've got married in Tucson. Reckon now maybe she was right."

As Cal looked at his burly brother he wondered what any woman could see in him. He wasn't handsome. He had a belly starting to balloon out over his belt. His black hair never seemed combed. Now as Cal looked at him he remembered what a neighbor had told him once. "You got to make up your mind to one thing. Burke is no damn good."

Josie said, "You understand about us trying to get married last night, don't you?"



Cal felt sick inside . . . it did something to a man to whip his older brother.

"You make it sound important," Cal said, and pulled the baling wire loop down over a post on the corral gate to lock it.

"It is important," Josie said, her cheeks flaming. "I—I don't want you to think I'm a—"

Cal said angrily, "First girl out of a dance hall I ever saw who was so all-fired particular about getting married."

Burke's dark eyes were ugly. "Get in the house, Josie."

But the girl didn't move. She had spirit, anyway. Cal had to give her credit for



that. And she was cuter than most of the girls Burke brought home. There was something clean, fresh-washed about her. The cotton dress was old and frayed a little around the hem, but it was clean and ironed. He tried not to look at her breasts, so firm and pointed against the front of the too-tight dress.

"I won't have you two fighting because of me," Josie said firmly. "I'll leave first." She peered up at the big, scowling man at her side. "I mean it, Burke."

**S**UDDENLY Cal hated his brother, hated him for driving his first wife to an early grave. He wondered if this girl had any idea what it was like to live with a man like Burke. He guessed she didn't.

Then she crossed the yard on her long brown legs and took down her wash from the line and carried it into the house.

Burke stood a moment clenching and unclenching his big hands. "You're sore

about the girl."

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"But this one's different, Cal," Burke said, losing the truculence he had displayed in front of Josie.

"They're all different. They stay around till you spend all your cash on them. Then they pick up with a teamster or a drummer and leave you flat."

"I'm going to marry this one," Burke said.

"Do you really think it's necessary?"

Burke took a step forward, glaring down at his younger brother. For a moment Cal stiffened, waiting. He'd met these situations with Burke before, met them head on. Since his fifteenth birthday they had all ended the same. That was seven years ago.

Changing the subject, Cal said, "Quince was in Palehurst's today."

Burke was instantly on his guard. "What'd that son want?"

"He told me to tell you that it was getting late in the day."

Burke went pale around his thin mouth. There wasn't much resemblance between the two. Burke was big, heavy through the shoulders and middle, his legs long and too thin for the weight of his upper body. Cal had none of his brother's heft. But he was solidly built and what he lacked in height he made up in speed.

Cal said, "Quince was over here last night. He watched the house for a while."

Burke chewed a thin lower lip. "Did you see him here?"

"He whittled on our windmill. Go look for yourself. You know how he is with a knife." He watched the play of emotions across Burke's face, then said, "You keep away from Quince, you hear?"

"I'll see whoever I damn please." Burke took another step forward. His eyes were bloodshot and he needed a shave. Whatever he'd been drinking in Tucson was boiling in him enough to bring out the meanness.

Burke said, "I've taken all I'm goin' to off you today—"

Beyond Burke's thick body Cal could

see Josie's face at the window peering at them.

He looked at his brother. "Let's not fight in front of her." He smiled thinly. "Besides, we both know how it'll end if we do."

Burke turned as if to look back at the house, then smashed a fist against the side of Cal's head, driving the younger man to his knees. Cal twisted aside, avoiding the upward plunge of Burke's knee that was aimed for his face. He scampered along the ground on all fours but Burke kicked him solidly on the thigh and it tumbled him against the fence. Then he was on his feet, his fists reaching for the heavy face. He found it, knuckles on the point of the jaw and Burke dropped into the dust.

**A**S HE always did after these things were over, Cal felt sick inside. He looked toward the house, but Josie's face was no longer at the window. It did something to a man to be able to whip his older brother. A man should look up to an older brother, find some solidity, some strength. But he had been able to whip Burke since his fifteenth birthday. It was when Burke and Helen had first been married. A handsome, patient woman, Helen had taken Burke's drunken abuse, and when Burke struck her across the face for some fancied remark, Cal had whipped him. Cal had packed up that night, but Helen begged him to stay. She said that when a woman married a man the gate behind her was closed. She had to stick with him. That night at supper Burke had apologized.

Burke stirred in the dust and sat up, shaking his head. Cal caught his brother by the wrist and pulled him to his feet. With a corner of his bandanna he wiped a trickle of blood from Burke's chin. Burke gripped the top rail of the corral in his big hands, his head bowed.

Cal said, "I'm sorry, Burke."

Burke shook his big head slowly from side to side. "Did Josie see it?"

"I don't think so, Burke." He put a hand on Burke's arm. "We've got two hundred head ready for market. Let's peddle those cows and I'll take half. You keep the

ranch. I'll go somewhere else and get a fresh start. We—we just don't seem to hit it off."

Burke's hands dropped from the corral rail and he straightened his shoulders. There was a tight set to his mouth. "I need you, Cal. You're the only thing that keeps me going. Don't leave. Please."

Cal looked up at him, knowing it was the same old story. Fight and then apologize. Temper and whiskey and women. Then the period when Burke did his share of the chores and made glowing plans for the future. And then the same old cycle all over again.

Cal said, "We'll see how it works out."

Cal saddled his roan and when Burke wanted to know where he was going, Cal said he noticed some of the fence on the east line of their Hub was down. It was just an excuse. He wanted to get away and think.

Burke hung his head. "Keeping the fence up is my job. I'll tend to it."

From the saddle Cal said, "You stay with your girl. I'll handle your chores for a few days." He thought of what a big lie that was. He was always handling Burke's chores.

Cal suddenly remembered something. "How did that business of yours work out in Tucson? Or was that just an excuse to cut loose again?"

Burke looked up at him and licked his cut lip. "I—it was all right. But I—"

"And you came home broke again. You never did tell me what kind of business you were taking care of over there."

Burke didn't say anything. He just turned and walked quickly back to the house.



**F**OR the next hour, whenever Cal tried to reach a logical conclusion in his thinking, he always came up against a blank wall. Burke was playing some black and deadly game. And Burke wasn't smart enough for that sort of thing. The whole world



was going to crash in on top of Burke.

Cal was straightening a rotted fence post when he heard the ominous tramp of hoofs near the road. As some riders cut around the edge of a hill, Cal made a frantic lunge for the post where he had looped his gun and belt. But Tom Jacklin spurred in and cut him off with a harsh command and the thrust of a rifle muzzle against Cal's chest. Cal looked from Jacklin's smooth round face to Quince who sat his saddle hipped over, a sullenness on his narrow features. The rest of the crew—five riders, all armed—pulled up a dozen yards behind.

There was a gone feeling in the pit of Cal's stomach. He had seen Jacklin around Revere a few times in the year the rancher had been here. But this was the first time they had met face to face since the trouble started and Jacklin had been making his accusations. What a fool he was to let them catch him out here, Cal thought. Carelessly leaving his gun on the fence post. And instantly he blamed the girl. As he had worked on the fence he kept thinking of Josie and his brother together. The thought sickened him.

Jacklin swung down. He was short and plump, with the type of face that would never tan. The tip of his button nose was sunburned and had peeled. The man was money, you could tell that; expensive silk shirt, whipcord tailored pants and benchmade boots. He cuffed back a fawn-colored hat and peered at Cal for a long moment, his gaze steady and without malice.

Then he said, "I've heard some things about you, Cal. You're a hard worker. You keep the Hub going. And you take a drink but you don't go crazy like—well, like some people I know."

Quince had taken out his knife and from the saddle was whittling a slice off the top of a fence post, letting the slivers fall to the ground. He saw Cal looking at him and smiled faintly and put away the knife.

Cal said, "And I've heard some things about you, Jacklin. You've accused me of rustling your horses."

Jacklin lifted a plump hand, let it fall.

"I didn't accuse you personally," he said, his brown eyes carrying a meaning Cal didn't fail to catch.

"And Burke's no rustler, either," Cal said heatedly, wondering now as he always did why he always sprang to the defense of his older brother—why he had to. "Burke's taken a long time to settle down, that's all."

"Quite a long time," Jacklin observed. "By the time a man's thirty-four he should have his boots planted solid—if he's ever going to plant them."

"Before you go accusing people you better have some proof," Cal said.

"I've got the proof now. You've got all your money in cows, I understand."

Cal nodded, something about Jacklin's calm statement making his heart pound.

Jacklin said, "Then how come Burke can spend seven hundred dollars in Tucson in two weeks?"

"I don't believe it," Cal managed to say, trying to put indignation into his voice.

"A friend of mine was in Tucson at the same time," Jacklin went on. "According to my friend, seven hundred dollars was a conservative estimate."

**C**AL GORMAN'S face showed a sudden strain. He searched wildly for something that would give him solid footing again. His eyes shifted to Quince's narrow, speculative gaze. To Jacklin he said, "Maybe you could start looking close to the home pasture for the man who's stealing your horses. Ever think of that?" And when he saw Jacklin's faint surprise, he went on, "Sometimes a man gets so set against his neighbors that he can't see the fire in his own wood box."

"You can say it plainer than that," Jacklin snapped.

Cal said, "Quince was hanging around our place last night. Why?"

Quince stepped down quickly from his horse, his bowed legs bent at the knees. "What're you tryin' to say, Gorman?"

Jacklin turned to look at his foreman for a moment. "Answer the man, Quince. What were you doing at the Hub last night? If you were there."

"I was watching the corral," Quince said. "If I'd seen a 2H horse in that corral I was going to start shooting." He looked at Jacklin. "If it was me I wouldn't waste rope on the Gorman brothers."

Jacklin appeared thoughtful a moment, then he peered at Cal. "This brings me to the point of our meeting. I'm a patient man. I came here from New Mexico to raise horses. I like it here and I've got a lot of money tied up in those Morgans. When a man steals a horse from me it's the same as reaching in my pocket and stealing my money."

Quince said, "We've got this one." He jerked a thumb at Cal. "Let's get it over with."

Jacklin shook his head, still watching Cal. "Where I come from we have only one medicine for horse thieves." He waited a moment, then said, "The next horse I miss that can be laid to the 2H won't bring any talk. It'll be action instead. You follow me, Cal?"

Cal only glared at him, trying to show the rancher that there wasn't any crawling fear in the pit of his stomach.

Jacklin said, his round face still showing no anger. "Next time, Cal, I'm going to hang you."

Cal watched them ride off. Then he got his gun and his horse and cut rapidly for the ranch. He'd settle this business with Burke, he vowed, once and for all.

**W**HEN Cal got back to the house Josie was ironing the clothes she had washed. Burke sat at a table, a fresh bottle of whiskey at his elbow. He was drinking out of the bottle and his eyes were red-rimmed and belligerent. From the symptoms Cal guessed Burke and Josie had had a quarrel.

This was not the time to brace his brother about Jacklin, Cal knew, so he waited.

Josie got supper. She could cook, which was a revelation to Cal. The other girls Burke had brought home were an untalented lot.

All through the meal no one spoke. Burke barely tasted his food, then went back to his bottle. Cal would have taken

the bottle from him forcibly, but he didn't want a scene in front of the girl. Besides, she might as well know what she was getting into, and the sooner the better. She might yet leave before it was too late.

When Cal helped her clear off the table, she said, "We're driving to Revere in the morning to be married."

Cal made no comment. He sat down and mended a bridle while Josie did the dishes. His eyes kept straying to her slender figure bent over the dishpan. A wisp of yellow hair kept falling over her face. She would lift a wet hand from the pan and brush it aside. Once she smeared soap-suds across one cheek. She turned around, caught Cal looking at her and blushed.

"Guess I'll bunk in the barn," Cal said, covering an exaggerated yawn with the back of his hand. He rose from a chair, wondering how many other times he had let Burke have the house alone with a woman.

Josie looked frightened. "I—I'd just as soon you stayed here."

Cal frowned at her, then shifted his gaze to Burke at the table. "But you two—"

She crossed the room and held up a blanket over an old cot on the opposite side of the room where Burke and Cal slept in the double bunks. "See," she said brightly, "I can screen off the bed." She turned to Burke. "You understand, don't you?"

Burke only took a pull at his bottle, staring through the window at the deepening shadows across the yard.

Cal helped her string a rope across one corner of the room; and then he hung a big double blanket over it, making an effective screen.

Burke glowered at him. "I tell you one thing," he said. Cal knew that note in Burke's voice. He didn't like it at all. And Burke was wearing his gun, a thing he rarely did in the house. "You're goin' to stay away from *this* wife!"

Cal saw the quick pain on Josie's face. He should have been angered, but it was such an old, old story. Whenever Burke got drunk he blamed the unhappiness of his other marriage on Cal.

Cal said, "I never touched Helen and you know it."

"Yeah," Burke said, his voice heavy with sarcasm, "you was just a brother to her."

Cal felt his cheeks flush. It was one thing to have. Burke accuse him when they were alone. But now there was Josie and her eyes were wide and frightened.

**T**HERE was the sudden crack of two rifle shots close together, sounding fairly close to the house. Cal turned down the lamp on the table. Drawing the rifle he had bought at Palehurst's, he started to unbar the door, but Burke brushed him aside, as another rifle shot put its angry sound into the darkness.

"I'll see what it is," Burke said, and stepped outside and closed the door.

When Burke had gone, Josie said, "Was somebody shooting at the house?"

Cal shook his head. He was listening to the sounds of Burke's horse moving out of the yard and in the general direction of the windmill.

Josie sat on the cot, gripping her knees. "I didn't know he'd been married before."

Somehow just seeing her sitting there, untying the ribbon that held her hair angered him. The hair, soft and yellow, fell loosely to her shoulders. "What if he did have another wife?" Cal snapped. "A girl he picks up at Ormsby's Dance Hall can't be too particular. You're lucky he even wants to marry you."

She rose, her face white. "I want you to know this, Cal Gorman. Burke didn't pick me up at the dance hall. He took me there. I was clerking at Mrs. Leemert's store when Burke met me."

"And he was spending money like a fool and you figured this was a chance to get yourself a rich husband."

Anger was bright in her eyes. "Have you ever thought what it is like for a woman to be alone in this country? Without family, with no friends?"

"A pretty woman like you shouldn't have any trouble getting along," he said, wanting to hurt her. He turned to look out the window, but he could barely make out

the silhouette of the barn in the darkness.

She said, "I know Burke is no bargain. But he told me he had a ranch with his younger brother. And that we'd be one big family." She crossed the room, standing very near so that he could catch the scent of her hair. Lilac, he thought it was. Her breasts stirred softly with her breathing. "I wanted a home," she went on. "A girl is lucky to get married at all. Don't you see?"

"You could have had other chances."

She looked down at her clenched hands. "Yes. But I wouldn't settle for anything less than marriage."

He laughed. "You play around Tucson two weeks with Burke, you ride all the way from Tucson in a wagon. And still you're not married."

She raised her eyes. "I haven't been a wife to him—not yet I haven't."

"Burke wouldn't wait. I know him too well."

"He's waited this time." She laughed



This was the first time they had met face to face since the trouble began

bitterly. "That's what we were arguing about when you came in. That's why he got his bottle." She looked at him. "Why else do you think he's resorting to marriage?"

She put a hand on his wrist, her fingers warm against his flesh. She said, "I want us to be friends, Cal. I know you and Burke fought today. You knocked him down. Whatever there is between you must stop. This is my one chance for security. I don't want you to mess it up for me." Her voice held a desperate plea.

Suddenly he felt pity for her. He put out his hands wondering at the feel of her soft shoulders under his fingers. "Josie," he said, his voice choking.

The door opened and Burke walked in. He looked at them standing together and Cal wheeled aside, shielding the girl's body with his own. But Burke barred the door and removed his gun belt. He hung it on a peg and then turned down the blankets on his bunk. He seemed stone sober. In the lamplight his face looked old and sick.

"Better get some sleep, Josie," he said. "We got to be up early to drive to Revere."



**N**EXT morning Cal rode out of the yard as the first dawnlight was laying its colors across the basin. He followed the tracks Burke's horse had made during the night. The tracks led to another set of tracks where a horseman had sat waiting. There were heel prints on

the ground where two men had stood and talked; a couple of smoked-down cigarettes. A few feet away lay a stick of greasewood, one side showing the marks of a knife. On the dusty ground was a small pile of shavings.

He caught Burke at the corral just as his brother was getting the team out. Burke said, "I'd admire to have you ride in and stand up for me." He wore his Sunday suit, the one he had worn to Tucson.

Cal said, "We've got to have a talk." Burke was sober, and this was the time to get across his point. Quickly he told Burke of the meeting with Jacklin. "He's not fooling, Burke."

Burke said heatedly, "He's got his nerve accusing a man without proof."

Cal put a hand on Burke's arm. "Blood's thicker than water, Burke. No matter what Jacklin says, you're still my brother."

Burke looked at him a moment, seemed about to say something then looked toward the house where Josie stood in a clean white dress, her yellow hair slicked back. She was picking a few geraniums that had grown wild in Helen's neglected flower garden.

Something twisted in Cal. "You can't marry that girl, Burke."

Burke looked angry for a moment, then his shoulders settled. "Soon as I finish up what I got to do, I'll be different. I need a wife. A good woman."

Cal said accusingly, "You met Quince last night." Burke's brows lifted, then he scowled as Cal went on, "I found a stick he'd been whittling on. Besides, I got to thinking. It isn't the first time we've heard three rifle shots and then you've left of a night." He took a deep breath. "You and Quince have been stealing Jacklin's horses."

Burke's lips were drawn back from his teeth. "If I was wearin' my gun, I'd—"

"You wouldn't do anything, Burke. You haven't the guts to kill a man."

Burke swallowed, his eyes filled with pain. He banged a fist against a corral post. "What can I do, Cal? I'm in a tight."

"You spent Quince's share of the money you got for those horses. That's right, isn't it? One big two-week drunk. And when you sobered up you thought marrying somebody like Josie would cleanse you—"

"Shut up about her!"

"And now Quince wants his money," said Cal quietly.

Burke made no reply, but the truth was plain in his eyes.

Cal said, "We can sell enough cows to pay back Jacklin. And to hell with Quince. I'll go to Jacklin with you or go alone. I'll lay the cards on the table and tell Jacklin to take out in cows what he figures he's lost in horses."

"I can't do it," Burke said miserably.

"You can't marry that girl with something like this hanging over your head."

"Quince won't hold still for that—"

Once again that old revulsion touched Cal. His brother was afraid of the narrow-eyed 2H foreman. He was afraid of any man unless he had his gut full of whiskey.

Calmly he said, "I'll handle it, Burke."

Burke looked sick. He made marks in the dust with the toe of his boot. "You comin' to town with me and Josie?"

Cal shook his head. "Stay here. Don't go to town until I see Jacklin. Josie will understand. Tell her some kind of a story."

When Cal rode out of the yard, Burke was talking to Josie on the front steps. The girl nodded and went back into the house.

**I**NSTEAD of following the road he cut for the high country, following a trail that led around a sheer cliff, through a brushy bench and then into the higher mountains where the grass grew thick and green. He rode warily because he didn't want Jacklin's 2H crew to spot him and start shooting. But this trail would save him a dozen miles. And time was important.

He was just skirting a rocky hill when he pulled up his roan and jumped down and clapped a hand over the animal's nostrils. Ahead in a park two men were hazing half a dozen head of Morgan. And from the pace Cal knew instantly these were no ordinary cowhands moving horses. The two men, judging from their fancy gear and highpeaked hats, were Mexicans. They kept glancing back over their shoulders as they rode their spirited little Mexican ponies. Cal saw sunlight touch the brass ends of cartridges in bandoliers criss-crossed over their chests. Each man carried a belt gun and a rifle.

He watched them for a quarter of a mile until he saw another rider angle down

from a narrow canyon that bisected the park. Even from this distance he recognized the lanky 2H foreman.

At sight of Quince one of the Mexicans looked up, and yelled at his companions. The Morgans ran on a few yards and began to graze. Instead of running, the two riders wheeled their ponies and streaked over to Quince who had dismounted and stood rolling a cigarette.

Keeping below the ridge so he wouldn't be skylighted, Cal rode parallel to the position where the three men stood talking in front of one of the sheer canyon walls. The two Mexicans were smoking now. They had dismounted, their ponies standing with rumps to the sun.

Cal swung down not fifty yards from the men. He drew his gun, wishing he could get close enough so he could overhear the men. Then, suddenly, his horse reared, and Cal saw a rattler coiled by a rock, disturbed from its morning sunning by the movements of his horse. Instinctively Cal shifted his gun and fired. The snake lay quivering, its head gone.

He looked down into the park. The two Mexicans stood frozen, looking up in the direction of that shot, hearing the sounds of Cal's still frightened horse. And then an incredible thing happened. As the two men leaped for their horses, Quince drew his gun and shot them both. The two men stumbled to their knees and one of them, as he was going down, tried to reach his gun. But Quince shot him twice again. And the other one started to crawl but a bullet knocked him flat. And then Quince stood looking up at Cal Gorman riding down from the ridge. When Quince saw who it was, he lifted his gun and dropped the hammer in one swift movement. But the gun hammer fell on an empty shell.

Cal rode close before Quince could reload or reach his rifle, holding his cocked revolver on the man. "Who did you think it was?" Cal demanded coolly, looking at the two men crumpled on the ground. "Did you think Jacklin had you at last?"

**Q**UINCE looked down at his empty gun and then at his horse with the rifle

butt projecting from a scabbard. He took a side step and Cal warned, "Hold it, Quince."

Carefully Quince scanned the ridges, then looked at Cal. "You alone?"

"What does it look like?" Cal jerked his head at the dead men. "Some more of your boys? Did you get tired of dealing with Burke?" Cal had to restrain himself from smashing the barrel of his gun across that narrow face. Why were there always Quinces in this world, he asked himself, to tempt a weak man like Burke. And those poor devils on the ground. He looked at Quince. "You thought it was Jacklin coming, so you killed them to shut them up."

Quince smiled thinly. "I saw they had some 2H horses and stopped to ask them what the hell they were doing with them? One of them drew a gun and I had to kill both of them."

"Is that the story you're going to tell Jacklin?"

"Why not? He'll believe it."

Cal stared at him. "You've got a good job. Why does a man like you have to steal?"

Quince shrugged. "Did you ever hear of a foreman dying rich?" That thin smile was back on his lips. "Besides, I don't steal. I've always got fools like your brother."

"And what about the pair on the ground?"

"I fixed it so they could get away with some horses—for a price." He smiled. "There's a new revolution boiling down in their country. Makes a good market for cavalry mounts."

"We'll tell that to Jacklin."

"Your brother owes me some money. I'd be willing to wipe the slate clean if you forebet about seeing Jacklin."

"Then you admit you and Burke have been rustling 2H horses!"

Quince shrugged. "I told Burke where the horses would be spotted, then kept the crew on the other side of the range."

"Burke couldn't handle them alone. Who's in it with you?"

Quince made no reply. He let his empty

gun fall to the ground.

"What you've just told me," Cal said, "is enough to hang you."

"It's your word against mine. Jacklin will believe me, you can bet on that."

Cal stepped to Quince's horse, drew out the rifle and threw it into the brush.

"Jacklin's not at the 2H." Quince said. "He's gone to Revere. He'll be at the hotel two days. You go ridin' to town with me and you won't live very long."

Cal said, "Get on your horse."

For a moment Quince hesitated, then he shrugged and started moving leisurely toward Cal. Suddenly he flung himself headfirst to the ground, drawing his long legs up under him, rolling toward one of the dead Mexicans. He was just reaching for a gun that lay beside the dead man when Cal stepped in. He smashed the barrel of his gun into Quince's face. Quince moaned and clapped both hands to his bleeding nose. Blood poured through his fingers.

"I've been wanting to do that for a long time," Cal said. "Next time I'll put a bullet in you."

He got the shaken Quince in the saddle and dropped a noose over his head and pinned his arms to his sides.

Quince looked back. With a bandanna he had wiped the blood from his face. He said, "Where we goin'?"

"To Palehurst's Store. I'll send word for Jacklin to come out from town."

Quince said nothing, only swung his mount down the trail, past the dead men and the horses that grazed at the far end of the park.



**C**AL had decided on what he considered the only logical course of action. If he took Quince to Revere, it would be fifteen miles farther; and Quince might be working with other members of the 2H crew who might be in town with Jacklin. That could lead to trouble. The law was the natural thing, but only a part-time deputy named Barnes



was located in Revere. He was seldom in his office. Cal had considered taking Quince to the Hub and sending his note to Jacklin. But he didn't want to humiliate Burke in front of Josie, for the whole story would have to be told. The girl's life would be tough enough without knowing her husband was a horse thief.

No, Palehurst's Mercantile was the best. He could lock Quince in the stone cellar and send a message to Jacklin explaining everything. He wanted to see Quince try and lie his way out of this.

There were three horses at the rack on the shady side of the store when Cal and

the store, wiping his hands on an apron. "What you doin' back here?" he demanded peevishly, as if angered that Cal had invaded the privacy of his quarters. Then he saw the gun and froze.

Cal said, "Any of that bunch out there 2H?"

Palehurst shook his head. He had followed Cal into the kitchen. Now he stared at Quince who stood with his arms roped to his sides. He pointed at the foreman's battered face. "Looks like a horse kicked him."

Cal told him about the scene at the park. When he had finished, Palehurst said,

## TEXAS TIDBITS

Ad Topperwein, San Antonio, shot a .22 rifle continually at little wooden blocks thrown in the air eight hours a day for ten consecutive days, and out of 72,500 shots missed only nine times!

*Kim, Texas race horse, won the Texas horse-racing championship at the age of 23.*

These Texans! Cecil Burns carried a 120-lb. bale of cotton 1200 miles on his back—from Dallas to Chicago.

*Texan T. J. Coyne—he's from Cleburne, suh—observed his 103rd birthday the other day by attributing his age to "tobacco and whisky."*

At Bird Island, Corpus Christi, Tex., cows catch fish and eat them.

## By Harold Helfer

his prisoner rode up shortly past noon. Cal shoved Quince into Palehurst's cluttered bachelor quarters at the rear of the store. All the fight seemed to have been knocked out of the foreman by the blow in the face. He just stood silently on his bowed legs, his narrow-set eyes revealing none of his thoughts.

A stack of dirty dishes filled a tub. A suit of long underwear hung on a line next to a rusted iron range.

**G**RIPPING his gun, Cal looked into the front part of the store. Palehurst was talking to three riders who drank beer at one of the tables. He didn't think any of the men were 2H but you couldn't be sure. An outfit as big as Jacklin's was always having a turnover.

Palehurst caught his eye and crossed

"Don't that beat all? Jacklin's own foreman doin' the rustling! And him blaming it on you Gorman boys."

"How about locking him in the cellar?" said Cal.

"Yeah, but what then?"

"I'll send a note by the afternoon stage. Jacklin's in Revere, so Quince says. I'll get him and that deputy out here. I've got quite a story to tell."

"You sure have, boy," Palehurst said, "that's for sure."

Palehurst unlocked a padlock on a door and led the way down a flight of stone steps into the cellar. Cal shoved Quince ahead of him. The walls and floor were stone and there was only one barred window, too small for a man's shoulders. They left Quince down there and then locked the door.

Palehurst rustled up paper and pencil and while Cal wrote his letter went up front to see if his customers wanted any more beer.

Just before the door closed, Palehurst said, "Soon's they're gone, I'll come back and give you a hand." He shook his head slowly from side to side. "This sure beats all, don't it, Cal? So it was Quince all along! I'll be damned."

**I**N A FEW minutes when the three riders had left, Palehurst entered the kitchen carrying a shotgun. Cal looked at the weapon. "Quince can't get loose; don't worry about it."

Palehurst locked over Cal's shoulder, read the letter he had composed and said, "Boy, you sure got it down in black and white." He unlocked the padlock on the cellar door. "Let's talk to Quince and see what he's got to say."

"He's talked enough." Cal said, and picked up the gun he had left on the table. "Let him save his breath for Jacklin."

Palehurst frowned. "Now look here, Cal. I just got your word about this. I got to stay neutral unless I'm convinced that Quince has done all you say he has."

"You read the letter. What more do you want?"

"To talk to him." Palehurst said stubbornly. "I got to know in my own mind that what you're doin' is right." He paused a moment, his eyes meeting Cal's. "Because if you're wrong, the 2H will never give me a nickel's worth of business again. I got to look out for myself, Cal. You see how it is."

Cal said, "All right. But keep your ears open for the stage. I don't want to miss getting this letter on board."

"The stage always stops anyhow," Palehurst said.

When Palehurst opened the cellar door, Cal moved down the steps, Palehurst trailing along. Quince sat on an upended case of tinned goods. He looked sullenly at Cal. "Get these ropes off me. My arms are goin' to sleep."

Cal ignored him. He turned to Palehurst, saying, "Go ahead and ask him what

you want—"

Palehurst hit him squarely over the crown of the head with his shotgun barrel. Cal dropped, numbed. When he put out a hand to clutch his fallen gun, Palehurst jammed a foot down on his fingers. Cal groaned at the pain. Then Palehurst jerked him up by the collar of his shirt and shoved him over a pile of sacked flour. Cal fell loosely. Palehurst kept the shotgun trained on him, then took out a knife and cut Quince loose.

Quince flexed his arms, glaring at Palehurst. "Why didn't you jump him when he first brought me in?" he demanded. "Of all the stupid—"

Palehurst said, "I had customers. Did you want 'em to hear the rumpus?"

Quince reached out a hand for Palehurst's knife. "Cal ruined my face. I'm going to work him over."

Palehurst shook his head. "That's a fool trick to mark him up. You want Jacklin and the deputy to see him like that?"

Quince glowered, turning the statement over in his mind. Then he said, "Maybe you're right."

"'Course I'm right." Palehurst jerked a thumb at Cal who sat on a sack of flour holding his head in his hands. "I told you we'd have trouble with this one. He ain't like his brother." Gently he lowered the hammers of the shotgun when Quince picked Cal's revolver up from the floor and stood holding it.

"You better think up a good story," Quince told Palehurst gruffly.

"I got one. You jumped Cal and Chico and Guitierrez at Dutchman Flats. You killed the two Mexes and brought Cal in. You could have killed him even when he tried to fight and messed up your face. But you wanted him alive so he'd talk. See?"

Quince glared at Cal who was shutting his eyes tight and then opening them against the throb of pain in his head.

"I was set to get myself a stake," Quince said. "One more month and I'd had enough to quit this damn country." He suddenly kicked Cal in the chest, knocking him over the sacks and to the floor. He stood over

Cal, cocking his revolver. "When I met Burke last night I come back to your house. That's a right pretty gal he's got out there. When we hang you two I'm goin' to get her. You understand?"

**T**HE two men stomped up the stairs and slammed the door shut. Cal heard the heavy padlock snap into place. Then he was sick as pain and misery claimed him. He retched. What a fool, he thought. Why couldn't he be like other men, clever, fast with a gun? But no. He had to walk right into it. Now that he thought of it why wasn't Palehurst the perfect ally for Quince? He knew all the border riff-raff. It had been Palehurst who probably picked up the word that there was an easy market for cavalry mounts and had made the contact between Quince and the two dead Mexicans. With Quince to spot the horse herds and keep the rest of the 2H crew out of the way, it became a fairly simple operation.

From the start Burke had played right into their hands, so if Jacklin became suspicious the Gorman brothers could be blamed for the whole setup.

In a few minutes he heard a rider head down the road at a gallop and knew it was probably Quince on his way to fetch Jacklin.

Even as Cal thought of his own plight he couldn't get Josie out of his mind. She'd be truly alone this time, and defenseless. And he knew Quince well enough to realize it was no idle boast the foreman had made. When he shut his eyes Cal could see Quince's hands touching Josie, and see the terror on her face.

Finally he managed to stand up on his caving legs but the pain in his head was so intense he had to sit down for a moment. He tried again, prowling about the big cellar Palehurst used for a storeroom. He tried the window bars but even if he could free them from the masonry the window was too small for escape. He climbed the stairs, put a shoulder against the door, but it was as solid as the wall.

He listened, hearing Palehurst pattering around upstairs, his feet sliding over the

flooring. The floor. That was a chance. He piled up boxes so he could climb up and put his head against the ceiling. Just the beams and the board floor above. He could see sunlight through the cracks of the planks.

**W**HEN he had come down the stairs he had noticed a lantern hanging on a nail by the door. He went up, got the lantern. Then he found some empty sacks. He unscrewed the cap on the lamp base and let kerosene trickle over the sacks. His hands were trembling when he took a match from his pocket. He piled another box on top of the stack he had used when he inspected the ceiling. He put the sacks on top of the stack of boxes and threw a flaming match into the wet smear of kerosene. The sacks burst into flame; a cloud of smoke spread out under the flooring and he knew some of it would seep through the cracks into the store. He climbed down and held his breath. The seconds nibbled away. If he had guessed wrong the smoke would kill him before the fire did.

In a moment he heard Palehurst shout. Then the sound of his boots as he pounded across the floor. The lock clicked and the door was flung open.

"What you tryin' to do?" Palehurst yelled down the stairway. "Burn me out?"

He came thumping down the stairs, a cloud of smoke enveloping his lanky body. When he reached the last step Cal braced himself against the wall. He kicked the shotgun out of Palehurst's hands. The weapon skidded across the floor; one barrel was discharged, tearing a gash in a ceiling joist. Then he flung Palehurst back against the steps and drove a fist into his face. Palehurst started to get up, but Cal hit him again. This time Palehurst fell back limply and didn't move.

It took Cal fifteen minutes to beat out the flames with gunnysacks he wet under the kitchen pump. Then he hauled Palehurst up the stairs and dumped him on the kitchen floor. Near the cash drawer Cal found a loaded revolver. As Cal

coked his gun Palehurst suddenly sat up, looking at the weapon with a sort of mute terror.

"Don't kill me, Cal," he said hoarsely. "I never wanted to hurt nobody. Just steal a few horses. But it's gone too far. Take your brother and get out of the country. I can't stop what's comin'. I couldn't even if I wanted to. You can't beat Quince. Nobody can. Not even me. I'm in it up to my ears, boy."

Cal said, "I ought to shoot you."

Palehurst got to his knees, his mouth open, a stricken look in his eyes. "I got five hundred in gold in a sack under the counter. Take it, boy. It's yours. Go to Mexico—"

Cal turned his back and walked out. Twice today he could have killed a man. First Quince, now Palehurst. He was a man without sand, he told himself. This country wasn't for men like him. It took the Burkes and the Quinces and the Palehursts. Steal and murder and then grovel on your knees when you face death. Sickened, he rode home.

He could have stayed and faced Jacklin, but he knew Quince and Palehurst would lie him into a noose. He spurred his horse, taking the trail to the Hub.



**T**HE minute he crossed the yard he knew something was wrong. Josie stood in the barn doorway. There was a bruise on her right cheek. Cal slipped from the saddle. "Burke hit you," Cal

accused, and started for the house, but Josie caught his arm.

"Why is he jealous of you, Cal? So terribly jealous? He told me some awful things about you and his first wife."

"Lies," spat Cal angrily.

Burke had started drinking soon after Cal left the ranch that morning, the girl said. Cal wanted to know why she wasn't in the house—why had she gone to the barn?

She lowered her eyes, obviously embar-

rassed. "Burke didn't want to wait—until we were married."

"Did he hurt you?"

"No. That's why I ran. I was hoping you'd come."

Cal brushed Josie's hand from his arm and strode angrily into the house. Burke sat at the table with a bottle at his elbow. His eyes, as he looked up, had that familiar mean-drunk look.

Cal's head ached. The sour mash smell of the whiskey turned his stomach. Suddenly he wanted to throw that bottle through the window. "Why'd you hit her?" he demanded.

"Because she wants you!" Burke snarled, gripping the edge of the table with his thick fingers. "I'll turn my back someday and it'll be you and her together."

"That's a lie, Burke, and you know it."

Burke shook his shaggy head. "Just like it was with Helen."

Cal was aware that Josie had followed him into the house, looking small and scared. Suddenly Cal felt the old pity for Burke rise in him. He said, "Listen to me, Burke. We're brothers. Brothers don't do those things. You wouldn't touch my wife, if I had one. I wouldn't touch yours. We're brothers, Burke."

Burke looked at him for a long moment. "Pa brung me home one night twelve years before he married your mother. So we're no kin. Not at all. I should've told you years ago."

It took a moment for that to sink in, then Cal said, his face working, "You thought because we weren't kin that it would make a difference. That I'd steal your wife."

"I—I guess so." Burke looked away.

Cal took a deep breath. "Brother or not, we've got to get out of here. We'll try and make it to Tucson. We'll tell our story to the sheriff. It's our only chance."

Josie was looking at Burke. "I'm not going with you, Burke. I won't marry you."

Burke gripped the edge of the table. "It's Cal, isn't it? You like Cal." He lurched to his feet, his big fists held in

front of him.

Cal said tiredly, "You shouldn't have told me we're not brothers, Burke. If you jump me this time I won't hit you. I'll shoot you."

Burke stared at him, then suddenly he pitched the whiskey bottle into the wood-box where it shattered. The small room was filled with the odor of raw whiskey. Burke said, "I ought to shoot myself instead of you doin' it."

Cal took off his hat and winced. In one way it was a relief to know that Burke was no kin. But it didn't shock him too much.

All along he had sensed there was some mystery about Burke, but the old man had never said anything. Just before he died his father had asked Cal to look after Burke.

**J**OSIE noticed the blood on Cal's head. "You're hurt!" she exclaimed. She pushed him into a chair and worked over his head, cutting away the hair, applying arnica.

Cal said, "Palehurst is in it with Quince. But of course you knew that, Burke. Quince killed two of his boys. That's what he would have done with you. You can stay here if you want, but I'm not leaving Josie. I'm taking her back to Tucson where she came from."

Some of the old jealousy leaped into Burke's eyes.

"Why you doin' that?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Because Quince said that when you and I are dead, he'll have Josie."

Cal told Josie to throw a few clothes into saddle bags. He saddled a horse for her.

For a while he didn't know whether Burke was going to come, but at the last minute Burke rode with them.

They cut for the hills, trying to put as many miles as possible behind them before dark. It was an hour before sundown when Cal spotted a spiral of dust in their wake. Then the flash of sunlight on glass.

"Somebody's watching us through field glasses," Burke said.

Cal wished Burke had shut up. He didn't want to worry Josie. But the old fear seemed gone from the girl's face. She seemed unusually thoughtful as they pushed on again.

They rode half a dozen miles and then Cal backtracked hoping to throw off whoever was following them. It looked as if he had achieved his goal, for the sky to the south bore no telltale smudge of dust. For the first time in many hours he relaxed.

For a camping place Cal chose the crest of a hill, surrounded by high shoulders. He went in first, looking for snakes. But he found none. Cal unsaddled Josie's horse and then the roan. Burke did not dismount, and kept staring back in the direction they had come.

"I'm goin' to see if we got rid of 'em," Burke said.

"You be careful," Cal warned him.

Burke said gruffly, "It wouldn't make very much difference whether I come back or not."

He looked at Josie, then rode out of the clearing.

**N**OT wishing to risk a fire, Cal opened a can of beans he had brought, saved some for Burke and split the remainder with Josie.

They sat eating in silence. Josie looked tired.

She peered at Cal through the fringe of her pale lashes. "I'm not going to marry him."

"That's what you said," Cal told her without glancing up from his plate.

She gave him an angry look. "That means I'm free, Cal." She waited a moment for him to say something and when he didn't she said, "No man in this world has a claim on me now."

He scoured his plate with sand. The sky had darkened in the time they had been eating. Now he rose to peer down the rocky slant to the trail they had left. Nothing moved out there. He hoped he might see Burke but there was no sign of him. Maybe it was just as well, he told himself. Burke could keep on running now

for the rest of his life. He wouldn't have Cal to back him up. Maybe that had been what was the matter with Burke. Somebody to lean on sometimes weakened a man. And Cal had humiliated him in front of Helen. You couldn't whip an older man in front of his wife without leaving him scarred. Burke had been trying to even up that beating ever since. And he could never quite do it. Burke had the strength but some deep-ridden fear made him impotent. Something that probably went back to the years before Cal's father had found him.

**H**E THOUGHT of Josie. She was pretty and, thrown back into the turmoil of Tucson, she would be vulnerable. She had gone off with a man because he promised to marry her. Burke had been sincere in wanting her for his wife, Cal wanted to give him credit for that. But the next man Josie might pick up with—Border towns were filled with girls who'd picked up the wrong man.

Now they just didn't give a damn any longer.

He risked a light and touched it to the cigarette he had been rolling. He looked back at Josie, who lay on the ground. She had made a pillow of her saddlebags. She had kicked off her boots but she still wore the blue shirt and levis she had put on in the barn. A thought touched him: she was a woman and all too soon she would give up the fight and go down in the dust. He closed his eyes, imagining that he was riding down an alley in some strange town in the years to come; a girl called to him from a window. Not calling his name, but just calling. He could see himself leaning over in the saddle, peering at a face he had once known. A hard little face now, the red mouth a bitter line. Then he opened his eyes. All too soon it would happen.

He looked at Josie, lying on the ground. Her eyes were open. She was watching him.

He suddenly threw away his cigarette. Well, why not? he asked himself. At least Burke owed him that much.



**W**HEN he crossed the clearing and stood looking down at the oval face he suddenly laughed. She sat up suddenly. "What's the matter?" she asked.

He got his blanket and carried it across the clearing away from her. "I was just thinking," he said, hoping to cut her.

"Thinking what?"

"Burke has more decency than I have. At least he was going to marry you."

For a moment she made no reply as he crawled into his blanket. "Would that be so bad?" she whispered.

But he closed his ears against her. He had almost made a mistake. Had he weakened he would have been forever in her power, for he knew he would have married her. He would have felt a responsibility as he had toward Burke. As usual, he would view loyalty out of all proportion. She would have been a woman he wooed one night in the desert and so he would have married her. He wouldn't be able to help himself because that was the way he was made. The same quality that had allowed him to put up with Burke all these years instead of kicking him out.

Then he was aware that she was beside him. He turned his head. She lay on her stomach, resting her weight on her elbows. Her pale hair was loose about her face. "You've been good to me, Cal," she said softly, watching him. "You're sweet and gentle."

This girl had caused him pain. Seeing her with Burke had reawakened all the old longings in him. A man wanted a woman around the house; something more than maybe a monthly hell-raising trek to a Tucson back alley.

"If you could have read my mind a few minutes ago," he said acidly, "you wouldn't think me sweet and gentle."

"I don't care what you were thinking." She paused, adding, "Even if it was about me." She moved nearer to him. "I don't want to go back to Tucson. I want to stay with you."



Missing Page

Missing Page

to add to his collection.

"Do you plan to stay here permanently?" the major inquired.

"To be honest with you, Major, no," Parson Bond replied. "I have a small sum, only about \$300, laid by, and I hope to increase it so that I may retire from active work and take a post as missionary."

Parson Bond thought he noted a flicker of interest as he told the major of his plans. "Although I do have great hopes while I'm here—perhaps even to build a church."

The parson inquired of several people when the major didn't appear for the next few days. "Who cares?" most said. And the parson's fears were hardly relieved when Major Dentham did appear before him; it was apparent there had been a grave change in the fortunes of his friend.

"I have just received word that my dear mother is seriously ill in the East," the major offered. "And she must have a series of expensive operations, if she is to live."

Parson Bond patted his friend's shoulder sympathetically.

"I have purposely avoided calling on you for the past few days, Parson, in order that my troubles wouldn't burden you further," he explained, "You have already been such a spiritual uplift to me."

"But surely there is some small way I can help?"

Major Dentham thought carefully, then decided there was a way.

"If you could help me raise some money, my worries would be nearly over. But I don't want to borrow it," he explained hastily. "I have some valuable mining claims, which I have previously refused to sell, but which I will sacrifice now for, say, about \$300." The major lifted his averted eyes as he mentioned the sum.

**T**HE parson whitened slightly as he thought of his precious nest egg, but brightened again. "This will provide me with the money I need," he reasoned to himself. "Besides, the major has showed himself to be a true friend, and money should be of no concern when someone needs help." Then aloud he said to his

lamenting friend. "I'll be glad to take those claims for \$300."

The deal was consummated quickly, with the major pocketing the \$300, and the parson accepting the mining deeds.

Parson Bond was slightly disappointed when he received the unfavorable report from the San Francisco assayers concerning ore from the claims the major had given him—given him for \$300. "He probably didn't realize they were practically worthless," the parson philosophized.

But his hopes soared as the whisper sounded of a huge silver strike, a vein which seemed to run in the direction of his claims. A rumor which the parson didn't try to squelch.

"Parson," the Major said as they met a few days later, "Parson, they say confession is good for the soul. And I have to tell you that those claims I sold you contain very little ore. I was so upset with the thought of getting the money somehow for my mother that I lied. I want to give your money back in exchange for those deeds."

"Oddly enough, my friend," the Parson said, "I too have felt guilty about taking those claims from you in time of need. Very un-Christian of me. I will be glad to return them to you."

The major's smile broadened, and he quickly agreed to a small favor asked by the Parson. "I have selected a site which appeals to me for a small house and other things," the parson told him. "I would be glad if we could include it in the trade?"

"Of course, of course. You mean that claim site on the west side?" the Major asked. "This will be my way of atoning in small measure. When can I have those deeds?"

"We can trade right away, Major, if you have the ones I want—and my \$300," Parson Bond replied.

"Well, I don't know about returning the money, in this trade," the major started, but quickly changed his mind when the parson said he felt it was in the measure of salving his conscience. "Besides, you consider the claim worthless anyway," the parson said.

With the exchange of deeds and money,

the men again went their ways, both content with their shrewd deals.

**P**ARSON BOND was the first to sympathize with Major Dentham when the assayers report indicated the strike had been of surface nature and the big vein was about to peter out.

"But you're no worse off than before," the parson consoled him. He said nothing about the report he now had tucked in his pocket . . . his hunch had been right about the new claims, and the assayers confirmed there was a deposit of the richest borax . . . the gold of the desert.

Major Dentham had little to say when the find was announced. But the parson

told him:

"I found right off there was no silver in those first claims, but poking around, armed with the information you provided me when I first arrived, I found some curious white minerals on your other property—and the assayers confirmed the find.

"You gave me information about minerals, made the trade according to your own terms each time. What more do you want?"

The parson smiled benignly than added: "This money will be used in the work of the Lord, though I did have to employ the tools of the devil to get it above ground."

## ALBUM OF AMERICA'S FAVORITE COWBOYS



### JIM HATFIELD

Fighting Ranger of  
the Lone Star  
State

*Featured in Every Issue of*

**TEXAS RANGERS**



### WAYNE MORGAN

Valiant Quick-Trigger  
Robin Hood of  
the Range

*In Novels Featured Every Issue of*

**MASKED RIDER WESTERN**



### BOB PRYOR

A Battling Hero of  
the Pioneer  
West

*Featured in Novels Every Issue of*

**THE RIO KID WESTERN**



### STEVE REESE

Cleverest and Bravest  
of Cattle Country  
Detectives

*Starring in Every Issue of*

**RANGE RIDERS WESTERN**

**BUY THESE MAGAZINES AT YOUR FAVORITE NEWSSTAND!**



Mike kept letting go with that Rebel yell while he pounded Rance

# The Shorthorn King

By HENRY CARLTON JONES

**A**FTER we put the little shorthorn bull and the thirteen heifers in the valley corral Mike and me rode up to the ranch house and dropped our reins, pretty tired after seven hundred miles in the saddle.

The reins hadn't hardly hit the ground before our boss, old Colonel Willows, let out a yell that would curl a Comanche scalp-lock. "What's them things?" He pointed a shaking finger.

"Oh, them?" Mike said like he'd just seen 'em for the first time. "Oh, them's some cattle me'n Curley drove back. Man

in Dodge sold 'em to me. Come from a place up in Missouri."

"Cattle! You call them sawed-off, shoved-down runts cattle?" The Colonel leaped out of his rocker where he'd been sunning on the front porch and stomped around in his sock feet. As usual he'd kicked his boots off and was letting his feet rest. "Get 'em off my place," he yelled. "Somebody might think they was mine and I'd be laughed outa Texas. Get rid of 'em! Shoot 'em. Get 'em outa here!" He waved both arms and kinda choked.



Mike Turned an Insult into a Compliment with His Fists!

"Aw, Colonel, you'll get used to 'em. You'll like 'em after you see how nice and gentle they are." Mike eased around the house and left the old man waving his arms and sputtering.

**M**IKE had gone off around the house and headed for the kitchen where I knew he figured he'd find Lucy, the Colonel's daughter. I led the horses around and slipped off their saddles and bridles and turned 'em over to Manuel, the stable hand. I was kinda hungry and, besides, I wanted to hear what Lucy had to say to Mike so I moseyed over toward the kitchen myself. I stopped by the door and acted like I was fooling with one of my spurs while I listened.

"Well, I'm back, honey," Mike was saying.

"I'm not blind," said Lucy. "I can see you."

Mike sounded puzzled because she was so calm about it. After all we'd been gone almost five months and him and Lucy sort of had an understanding about things. "Has Rance Anderson been soft-footing around here while I been trail-riding?" Mike asked hotly.

"Maybe," said Lucy. She sounded mighty unconcerned and I could see her toss her head.

"Aw, aren't you just a little bit glad to see me?" Mike asked her.

"Oh, I don't know," Lucy said. "But Dad seemed excited to see you. Didn't know he liked you that much."

"Well," Mike said, sort of cautious. "He was excited all right but I wouldn't say it was because he was glad to see me. He don't much like my new cattle. But he'll get used to 'em."

While Mike was talking he was maneuvering around Lucy like he was sneaking up on a wild calf. Just then he grabbed her and gave her a good solid kiss. For a minute she didn't do anything. I guess she was giving herself time to enjoy the kiss. Then she broke loose and gave him a shove. "Now you stop that, Mike Stephens," she said. "I'm baking a cake and I've got no time for such foolishness."

"You're baking that cake for me, I suppose?" Mike said real pert.

"Don't be silly," Lucy said, "it's for Dad. Today's his birthday. Now go along with you. No—wait a minute. As long's you're here you might as well be useful. The cake's all done. Here, you set it over there on the table while I put the icing on the stove." While she was talking she was taking the cake out of the oven and handing it to Mike with a cloth wrapped around the pan so it wouldn't burn her hands.

Now I could of told her that handing that cake to Mike . . . in the dazed condition he was in after that kiss . . . was a big mistake. But there was nothing I could do but pray.

Well, the cloth slipped and Mike got a handful of hot pan and did exactly what anybody woulda done. He just naturally tossed that hot cake pan, with the cake in it, about six feet in the air; he jumped up and down, blew on his hands and uttered some choice remarks before he remembered where he was.

I heard the cake pan, then the cake, hit the floor and after that there was dead silence in the kitchen. Then Lucy began talking, gentle, and soft, her pert chin jutting and her eyes slitted.

"You ham-handed savage!" she said, sweetly, "you . . . fiddle-footed idiot! Listen . . . I got along fine around here while you were gone. I was still getting along just fine until five minutes ago when you came in here and started kissing people and getting in the way. I spent three hours baking that cake and I intended to use it to soften Dad up so maybe he'd give me that bay filly I wanted. Then—you—you—come in and started kissing people and throwing my cake all over the kitchen. Now get out of here before I grab that shotgun in the corner and blow out what few brains you've got." And she sounded like she meant it.

Mike came stumbling outa the kitchen door backward and I had to jump fast to keep from getting trampled. I took one look at him and saw by the look on his face he was a ruined man.

**Y**OU can't say I hadn't warned Mike about them shorthorn cattle. Up there in Dodge City, back in October, after we'd finished the drive up the Chisholm from Buffalo Gap clear across North Texas and Oklahoma Territory and the Strip up to the railroad, I'd tried to talk him outa buying 'em.

"You'll get laughed outa Texas," I told him. But he just set that long, stubborn jaw of his and we ended up by polishing a saddle all the way back to Texas, instead of riding the cars down to Dallas and then coming the rest of the way by stage like we usually did.

I'd got mighty fed up on the saddle by the time we'd nursed 'em fourteen shorthorns all the way back.

"Anyway you're different," I told him. "Most people are driving cattle *outa* Texas. But not you. *You* gotta drive cattle *into* Texas."

"Don't let it bother you, Curlev," he'd said. "Someday everybody in Texas'll be raising shorthorns." I just snorted but he didn't seem to care much.

I figured he was plumb foolish, but him and me had been cow waddies toæther for ten years and I couldn't go off and leave him to drive the herd down a'one. So, like I said, we rode leather both ways to Dodge and back, seven hundred miles each way.

We'd had a lot of joshing and ioking from trail riders we met along the trail but nothing seemed to bother Mike once he had his mind made up. "After all," he said a couple of times. "This here is 1879 and it's a free country and a man can do anything he's big enough to get away with."

I'd give up arguing with him by then but I did feel kinda silly. To a man who'd worked wild longhorns and cross-bred range cattle all his life them short-legged, blunt-headed little cattle were funny looking critters.

As we got closer to home I could tell Mike was worrying about what old Colonel Willows, the owner of the Lazy Z and also our boss, would think about his cattle. I knew Mike'd sunk all his money in

'em and I knew the Colonel would blow up like a volcano when he saw 'em. So all I could see was trouble when we got back to Buffalo Gap country and the ranch. But I hadn't figured on the cake. That was just something extra.

If you never saw Lucy Willows when she was twenty you missed one of the purtiest sights that ever walked or rode over the broad plains of West Texas. Her complexion, in spite of the West Texas wind, looked like cream . . . a honey-colored smooth rich cream and her hair was shiny brown with some red in it when she was in the sun. And her eyes were big—the color of bluebonnets in the Spring and when she let them long lashes down and sort of fluttered 'em at a feller—well, he was done for, that's all.

And while I ain't any expert at describing a woman's figger I'd be safe in saying there just wasn't anything like Lucy between El Paso and Fort Worth. You know, curves where curves belonged, and all them things.

Lucy could ride a horse like a Comanche, shoot like a Ranger and cuss as purty as any cowhand I ever heard. But she was a lady to the core and don't you forget it, whether she was wearing a pair of denim riding pants or a fancy dress from Fort Worth. Every lonesome cow waddie and bachelor ranch owner in the Valley was fit to be tied every time he got a look at Miss Lucy Willows but she hadn't give any of 'em much encouragement until Mike Stephens and me come along and started trail herding for old Colonel Willows . . . and you couldn't tell for sure if Lucy was in love with Mike or just teasing him along. But they'd got to riding out together kinda steady just before we'd left for Kansas this last time, and it had begun to look like maybe things was sort of settled. Of course, this fellow Rance Anderson had been making eyes at her too but it looked like Mike had the inside track for sure.

Anyway, you can tell, from what I've told you about how agitating a young filly this Lucy was, that Mike would be considerable upset over how he'd dropped



the cake and she run him outa the kitchen.

**A**FTER Lucy chased him outa the kitchen Mike climbed on a horse and fogged into Buffalo Gap and proceeded to get filthy drunk. It was the first time in two years . . . since we'd worked on the Lazy Z, that I'd known him to get liquored up. But this time he did a real good job and we got reports on it clear out at the ranch.

I rode in a couple of days later and found him under a pool table in the Red Front Saloon. I hauled him outside and drug him over to a horse trough in front of McChesney's Harness, Hardware and Livery and made him soak his head in the trough. He come up sputtering and cussing like he was coming back to life. Then he set on the edge of the trough and wiped water off his face. All this time he hadn't said a word except to do some mighty strong cussing on account of his headache.

"All right," I said when he began to act kind of sober again. "I guess you're strong enough now to bear up under what I got to tell you."

"I doubt it," he said, holding his head in both hands. "But whatever it is I got it coming to me." He sounded as enthusiastic as a man waiting to get hung.

"Well," I said, starting off kinda easy with the unimportant things first. "For one thing you done got fired. The Colonel says if you come back he's going to stuff them cattle of yours down your throat. He says to just send somebody after 'em . . . don't come yourself because he don't trust himself against what he might do to you if you showed up yourself!"

Mike nodded his head, then grabbed it in both hands. "Ow!" he groaned. I knew he felt like his head was going to fly to pieces, but I didn't give him much sympathy.

"Next thing is that Lucy says to tell you not to come soft-stepping around her no more either. A rumor got out to the ranch by the mail rider that you was going around here at The Gap kissing first one woman critter than another. Rumor also

says you tried to marry a Comanche squaw but she turned you down. Rumor also was that you was the drunkest white man to hit this country since Big Foot Wallace went through."

Mike shuddered, then he bowed his shoulders. "Pile it on high, boy. Beat me while I'm down."

"I ain't through yet," I said, beginning to feel ashamed of myself. "Rance Anderson has took up the lease on that state land you was figuring on using for them new cattle of yours."

Then I saw I'd hit him where it hurt. "Rance Anderson!" he said with an expression like he had took a bite of something expecting it to taste good and it had turned out real nasty.

"Yeah," I said. "Seems you neglected a little matter like paying the lease money on that state land and Rance noticed your oversight and paid it himself. So you ain't got any place to put your shorthorns."

"There's a nice little spring down on that lease, too . . . plenty of water." Mike sounded pretty mournful.

"Well," I said finally, feeling meaner all the time, "I guess I got just one more piece of news then I'm all through."

"You mean there's more?" he asked. But I could tell he wasn't much interested. He just set there with his head down. He'd lost his hat somewhere and that sorrel hair of his was sticking up in all directions like a wet chicken caught out in a high wind. "Well. I've stood this much. so go on. What's the rest of the obituary?"

"It ain't very important," I said kinda slow, "But Lucy told me just before I left that she and Rance is going to get married three weeks from Sunday. She said be sure and tell you."

"Thanks. You've told me," he said, "Is that everything?"

**I** NODDED and began fiddling with my makin' and papers trying to roll myself a cigarette, but my fingers must of shook a little because the tobacco kept spilling out. I knowed I'd just about busted Mike's heart.

"Come on," he said, all of a sudden,

standing up on them long legs of his. He started walking away, and I followed him.

He went into Peterson's Barber Shop, Blacksmithery and Home Cooking and sunk down on a stool at the counter.

"I can't stand grief on a empty stomach," he said. "My appetite is ruined, but I gotta keep up my strength so I can bear my tribulations." I watched him try to eat and it was like he said. His appetite was ruined. The best he could do was put away eighteen flapjacks, two plates of beans, five slices of sow belly and four cups of coffee. Finally he pushed back his plate. "I just ain't got the heart to eat," he said. "Let's go."

We went out on the street and squatted down on our boot heels and leaned our backs against the front of Kelley's Saloon and sort of relaxed in the sun. It was real cozy except my spurs kept digging into the

"Come on, I gotta find Rance." then he started off, taking real long steps.

As we walked up the street with him in front and me trying to keep up, who comes strolling out of the Red Front but Rance Anderson, strutting and sticking out his chest and looking pretty proud of himself. When he saw us he stopped and gave us a careful looking over.

Rance was wearing a gun, as always, and Mike as always, had forgot his, which he didn't know how to use anyway. There was a couple of fence riders from the Double O behind Rance so I guess he thought he had to say something cute to make a show so he looked at Mike real contemptuous.

"Meet the shorthorn king, gentlemen," Rance said, smirking and twisting that oily looking mustache of his.

Mike stopped like a yearling that had



The Capitol of Texas cost \$500 000 000 to build—*more* than 31 times more than the Capitol of the United States in Washington! As compensation for the construction of its Capitol, Texas gave the builders 3,000 000 acres of land, which is now worth at least a half billion dollars.



seat of my pants. I began to wonder what Mike was going to do.

Finally he got up and wandered over to the well by the side of Kelley's and pumped himself a drink. Then he filled a bucket of water and stuck his head in it. He set the bucket back down and came over and squatted on his heels again. Pretty soon I heard a grinding sort of noise and looked over and he was gritting his teeth and making the most awful faces I ever saw. "What's the matter? You sick?" I asked.

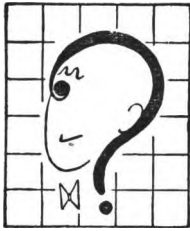
"Nope," he answered, "I'm just getting myself good and mad. I'm going to do something mighty foolish and I can't do it unless I get awful mad first. Just give me a few more minutes." He went on gritting his teeth and making those faces. Finally I ask him if he was mad enough yet and he said he was. He stood up and said,

stepped in a gopher hole. He looked Rance over and drew himself up to his full six feet three. "I consider that remark a mighty fine compliment, Rance," he said slow-like. "And gentlemen, the man that made it is the tinhorn king of Buffalo Gap, a cheap, claim-jumping, double-flushing, bottom-dealing coyote who oughta be walking on four legs instead of two!"

**R**ANCE'S face got brick red and he made a motion like he was going to grab for his gun. I stepped over toward him. "Mike ain't packing no hardware," I pointed out, at the same time delicately indicating that I was.

Rance settled back down in his clothes and let out a mean kind of laugh. "You talk mighty big when you know I can't take proper exception to your language," he said to Mike. "You come back and sav

*If You Like Quizzes,  
Word Games and Puzzles—*



**YOUR BEST BETS ARE  
POPULAR CROSSWORD PUZZLES  
BEST CROSSWORD PUZZLES  
VARIETY CROSSWORD PUZZLES  
and  
NEW CROSSWORD PUZZLES**

*Now on Sale at All Stands!*



**Buy Christmas Seals**

them things with some hardware on you."

"I can think of even better things to say." Mike said, sticking out that long jaw of his. "In fact, I could talk a whole hour and not run outa conversation. Why I know whole books full of words that describe you perfect . . . and a lot of words that ain't in books because they can't be printed. I'll be back all right. Be sure you don't get scared and run off."

"I'll meet you right here at noon." Rance hollered. "And if you ain't here at noon you'd better not let me see you in Buffalo Gap again . . . ever . . . or I'll fill you full of lead on sight . . . whether you got a gun on or not."

"I'll be here too," I said, "just to be sure nobody gets shot in the back or anything." Rance ignored my remarks and turned around and went back inside the Red Front with the two riders.

As I followed Mike up the street I was pretty sad. I'd always sort of admired Rance. He was a fine figure of a man, a mighty nice fellow except for a few small faults such as dealing crooked cards, rustling cattle, stealing from widows, dry gulching cowhands that had won big poker pots and was on their way home alone and a few other harmless pranks like that. So it made me sad to see trouble brewing between two fine fellows like him and Mike. But, of course, Mike was my partner and I had to stick by him.

"Well," I said as I followed Mike along, still not knowing where he was going or what he had in mind, "For a man who's already got a fair batch of trouble you sure believe in piling it up higher." He didn't answer a word. He just kept walking.

We went clear out to the edge of town, quite a long walk, about two blocks, and Mike stopped in front of an old buffalo skull fifteen feet away. "Gimme your gun," he said. "I gotta practice up a little."

"Hell," I said, disgusted, handing him my gun, "Everybody knows you're the worst shot in Taylor county. Why you can't hit the side of a barn . . . a real big barn."

"You just watch this," he said, holding

the gun like it was a firecracker that might go off in his hand any second. He pointed it toward the buffalo skull and pulled the trigger. A spurt of dust kicked up about four feet to the left.

"See?" I said to him. But he didn't answer. He fired again and some more dust jumped up about three feet past the skull. He fired all five shots and the last one finally chipped one edge of the skull.

"Ah-ha!" he yelled, "I got it. What did I tell you?"

"Yeah," I said, "Rance is the fastest draw in town and a dead shot. What'll he be doing while you pot-shot the whole landscape till you get the range on him? I hate to say it but you ain't got the chance of a snowball in the hot place."

Mike shuffled his feet and looked thoughtful. "I'll go get my own gun. I just need some practice with my own gun."

**WE WENT** back into town and located his gun where Big John, the barman at the Red Front, had hid it when Mike was getting himself liquored up. Then Mike went over to McChesney's to get some ammunition and I hunted up Rance.

"Rance," I said, hoping I could get him worried, "Don't feel too sure about things. I was just out at the edge of town with Mike and he took some shots at that old buffalo skull and he hit it four times out of five. He's better'n you think."

If I hoped my scheme would work I saw right away it hadn't. Rance set down his glass and hitched up his belt.

"Come show me that skull and I'll show you something, half-pint," he said, laughing that mean laugh of his that sounded like a rusty gate. "Come on, boys," he yelled at the fellows at the bar. We followed him out and I showed him the skull, and he stopped about thirty feet in front of it, whipped out his gun so fast I never did see him draw and plunked five shots right smack through the left eye. Then he reloaded his gun and stuck it back in his holster while my eyes was settling back into their sockets.

[Turn page]

# ACCOUNTANT BECOME AN EXPERT ACCOUNTANT .. BOOKKEEPER .. C. P. A.

The demand for skilled accountants—men and women who really know their business—is increasing. National and state legislation is requiring of business much more in the way of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Organization, Management, Finance. Men who prove their qualifications in this important field are promoted to responsible executive positions.

Knowledge of bookkeeping unnecessary. We train you from ground up, or according to your individual needs. Low cost; easy terms.

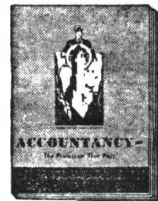
Send for free 48-page book describing the LaSalle accountancy training and the opportunities in this highly profitable field—plus "Ten Years' Promotion in One," a book which has helped many men.

## LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

-----417 S. Dearborn Street-----  
Dept. 1329 HR, Chicago 3, Ill.

Please send me "Accountancy, the Profession that Pays"—plus "Ten Years' Promotion in One"—without obligation.

- Higher Accountancy
- C. P. A. Coaching
- Bookkeeping
- Law: LL.B. Degree
- Business Management
- Salesmanship
- Traffic Management
- Foremanship
- Industrial Management (Machine Shorthand)
- Stenotypy



Name.....Age.....

Address.....

City, Zone, State.....

## MAKE EXTRA MONEY!

**SELL QUICK-BEARING NEW FRUIT TREES**  
GORGEOUS FLOWERING SHRUBS, ORNAMENTALS, ROSES  
Get FREE Sales Kit—make money fast demonstrating world-famous Stark Patented Apples, Pear, Peach and other fruit trees, Grapes and Berries. Gorgeous flowering shrubs, roses, ornamentals sell fast to home owners. Seasonal hardy. Quick bearing new varieties. Enormous demand for small farms, home yards, etc. No experience needed. Rush your name for Giant Kit and Color Plate Book—FREE! STARK BRO'S, DESK 6013 LOUISIANA, MISSOURI

## Secrets of VENTRILOQUISM Now Revealed!

Easy to learn in 60 to 90 days with our Home Study Course. **RESULTS GUARANTEED.** Make Money! Be Popular! Have Fun! Big Opportunity! Radio, Television, Stage Appearance! For FREE Information regarding price and terms. **WRITE** You must state your age. Dummy Catalog 26c.  
**FRED MAHER SCHOOL OF VENTRILOQUISM**  
Box 36, Studio TJ Detroit 24, Michigan Kensington Station

## MAKE EXTRA MONEY

**EVERY BUSINESS EVERYWHERE  
USES UNION LABEL BOOK MATCHES**  
No experience needed to earn big daily commissions. Be a direct factory representative of the world's largest exclusive UNION LABEL Book Match manufacturer. Prospects everywhere. Feature Glamour Girls, Hillbillies, scenics and dozens of other styles—Double Books—Jumbo Books—nearly 100 color combinations. New, bigger portfolio makes this fastest selling line a real profit maker for you. Write TODAY for full details.

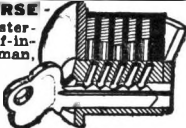
## SUPERIOR MATCH CO.

Dept. R-153, 7228 S. Greenwood Ave., Chicago 19, Illinois  
West Coast Salesmen, write Box 1047, San Jose, Calif

## locksmithing and key making

### PRACTICAL UP-TO-DATE COURSE

How to pick locks, de-code, make master-keys, install, service, etc. New, self-instruction lessons for every handyman, home-owner, carpenter, mechanic, service station operator, fix-it shop, hardware dealer, guarantee cycle shop.



Good steady money-making trade!  
**53 EASY ILLUSTRATED LESSONS**  
 Full price only \$3.95, nothing more to pay. Satisfaction or your money back. Fill in coupon at bottom of page and mail today.  
**NELSON-HALL CO.**  
 1139 S. Wabash Ave. Chicago 5, Ill.

## watch and clock repairing

### LEARN AT HOME—IN YOUR SPARE TIME

Prepare now for a happy future of prosperity, security. Fascinating high-grade occupation for men of almost any age or physical condition. You can earn while you learn.



**PRACTICAL COURSE IN HOROLOGY** How-to-do-it lessons for beginners as well as those already in the trade. Thorough self-instruction training in American and Swiss watches, clocks, containing a wealth of helpful photos, drawings, diagrams, charts, etc. Only \$4.95 for everything, complete. Satisfaction or refund guaranteed. Mail no-risk coupon below.

## practical RADIO servicing

**SELF-INSTRUCTION COURSE** Teaches you the practical side of radio . . . repair, adjustment, operation, alteration, troubleshooting. No previous knowledge necessary. Prepare to set up a shop of your own—or train for the big industrial electronics field. Simplified lessons including mathematics, review questions, problems, answers. Up-to-date! Only \$3.95, complete. Money-back guarantee. Use coupon below.



## REAL ESTATE BUSINESS

The foundation of all wealth is land! Train yourself for a career in this booming profession. Here is the information you need on how to get started and how to get ahead in real estate. Includes instructions in appraisals, valuations, management, investments, practical real estate operating, low cost housing, the law on real estate transactions including legal forms, etc., salesmanship, and many other subjects a successful real estate man must know. Strictly up-to-date. Complete, only \$5.95. Money-back guarantee. Use No-Risk coupon below.

## Short-Cut Mathematics

COMBINED WITH  
**Practical Mechanics Simplified**

Be a "master mind." Learn how to juggle figures, do banking tricks with numbers. Add long columns of figures this lightning-quick, short-cut way. Multiply 4 figures by 2 figures without old-fashioned multiplication. Here are speedy, simplified systems used by stage "magicians," expert accountants, engineers. Only \$1.45. Course includes illustrations, problems, answers. Mail coupon below!



## COMPLETE BLUEPRINT READING COURSE

Interesting, simplified self-instruction lessons for builders, mechanics, electricians, plumbers, welders, carpenters, automotive & aviation workers, etc. 24 volumes include over 600 actual blueprints, diagrams, other instructive step-by-step pictures. Unusual bargain for any practical man. Complete, only \$6.98, postpaid. Satisfaction or refund. Coupon below.

**BUILD IT YOURSELF**  
 Be a practical handyman! Save time and money with these professional "Tricks-of-the-Trade." Carpentry made easy! New self-instruction course in one handy volume, complete with full page photographs, diagrams, etc. Teaches woodwork, painting & decorating, upholstery, power tools, cabinet making, etc. Full price only \$1.98. Money-back guarantee. Mail coupon today!



### Mail This No-Risk Coupon—Quick Action!

**NELSON-HALL Co., 1139 S. Wabash Ave., Dept. AX-8 Chicago 5, Ill.**

Please rush me the items I am checking below. It is understood that if I am not 100% satisfied I will send the material back within 10 days and you will make full immediate refund, without question or quibble.

Watch & Clock Repairing	\$4.95
Locksmithing & Key Making	3.95
Practical Radio Servicing	3.95
Real Estate Business	6.95
Short-Cut Mathematics	1.45
Blueprint Reading Course	6.95
Build It Yourself	1.98
Apartment House Management	5.95
Jewelers' Encyclopedia	1.45
How to Sell Life Insurance	4.95
Complete Shorthand Course	4.95

I enclose \$\_\_\_\_\_ in full payment. Ship postpaid.  
 Ship COD for \_\_\_\_\_ plus postage and COD charges.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

I couldn't think of a thing to say so I just turned around and slunk back into town. All I could do then was hunt up Willie Barrow, the marshal, and tell him what was getting ready to happen.

"I ain't having nothin' to do with it," Willie told me. "Mike ought to have more sense than to get tangled up in something he can't get out of on both feet. I'll be around but I ain't going to get in the way of none of Mike's wild shots."

It was about eleven thirty by then and Mike was over in Kelley's Saloon building himself up with a few small drinks of rye whiskey. Meanwhile Rance was doing the same over in the Red Front. I couldn't think of anything else to do so I wandered over to The Great Imperial Western Bar and Dance Hall and had a few mild snorts myself.

About that time I saw Lucy Willows drive into town in the Colonel's buckboard and she was all dressed up in her Fort Worth clothes like a picture out of one of them mail order catalogs, all lace and flutters and a big white hat and a little bitty pink umbrella. She tied up the team in front of Miss Henrietta's Millinery and Ladies' Store and climbed over the dash and started inside. Just then Mike came wandering out of Kelley's, which was right next door, and danged if they didn't bump right smack into each other. I stepped outside to get a better look and heard all that was said and saw what happened.

Before Lucy knew who she'd bumped into she drew back real haughty. Then she saw it was Mike and smiled real sweet at him.

"Mike," she said, "I didn't mean it about the cake. It wasn't anything much anyway. Probably'd just of given Dad indigestion and . . ." Just then she stopped and sniffed.

"Mike Stephens," she hollered. "You're drunk. They told me you'd been helling around town and I didn't believe it . . . especially about the squaw . . . but now I do believe it . . . every word. You probably did marry her like they said . . . and I'm going to marry Rance . . . just to get even!"

I guess all that sort of dazed Mike because it took him some little time to collect his wits, maybe on account of the few small drinks he'd had in Kelley's and one dang thing after another. So he made the mistake of trying to grab Lucy by the arm. I guess he just wanted to hold her while he thought up some suitable reply.

**B**UT Lucy took exception to him grabbing her and hauled off and smacked him across the side of the head with her umbrella. It was a little umbrella but Lucy had a good strong wallop, and she mighty near knocked him down. While he was wobbling around trying to figure out what had happened Lucy ran back to the buckboard, untied the reins, jumped up on the seat and whipped the horses out of town in a whirl of dust.

Mike stood there rubbing the side of his head and squinting down the street the way Lucy had disappeared like he didn't believe what had happened. Then I heard him utter some philosophical remarks about women.

Just then somebody let out a yell, "It's just about noon. Head for cover." Then everybody began hunting something to hide behind. And that reminded Mike of what was supposed to happen about noon.

He straightened up a little, sucked in his breath and let it out and squinted up at the sun. I looked too. Sure enough it was just about noon. He reached down and hitched his gun back around in front from where it had slipped and gave it a hard slap with his right hand. Then he stamped his feet a couple of times, crouched over like he was going to make a practice draw or two, reconsidered and stepped down off the porch by Kelley's and walked over into the open space toward the pump where Rance had said he'd meet him.

About that time I saw the door of the Red Front slide open and there was Rance on the porch looking things over. Rance was drunker than Mike, if possible, and it looked like the silliest gun fight I ever saw getting ready to happen. The only trouble was—drunk or sober—Rance was a good

[Turn page]

## WANTED MEN TO LEARN CRIME INVESTIGATION

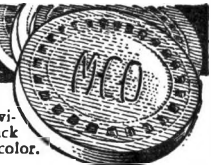
### BIG STEADY PAY THRILLING WORK

URGENT DEMAND for trained Detectives. Scientific Crime Detection now simplified so you can quickly master proven basic fundamentals every professional should know. **OLD-EST** Detective School in the **NATION'S CAPITAL**, center of law enforcement, teaches scientific detection of clues by a course on **HOW criminals operate! Facts, not fiction.** Learn in your spare time . . . Write for Free Book and Lesson Sample **TODAY.**



**INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE TRAINING SCHOOL**  
1701 Monroe St., N. E. Dept. 511  
Washington 18, D. C.

## POKER CHECKS



Famous Hub Checks, Non-Duplicate, Square Edge, Heaviest Game Check, Cut and Stack Accurately. Supplied in any color.

**FREE CATALOG** Expose: The Open Book, Sealed Book, Scientific Betting, Master Key System, How to Control Fair Dice, Runup System, Plastic "The Old Reliable" Playing Cards for Club Use.

**K. C. CARD Co., 843 S. Wabash, Chicago 5**

# RUPTURED?

## Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing **FREE** book, "Advice To Ruptured," and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write: **CLUTHE SONS, Dept. 33, Bloomfield, New Jersey**

## STOP TOBACCO



Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Redeemer. Write Today for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved over 300,000 people.

In Business Since 1909 **FREE BOOK**  
**THE NEWELL COMPANY**  
153 Clayton St., St. Louis 5, Mo.



## BE A Nurse

**MAKE \$50-\$60 A WEEK**

You can learn practical nursing at home in spare time. Course endorsed by physicians. Thousands of graduates, 54th yr. One graduate has charge of 10-bed hospital. Another saved \$400 while learning. Equipment included. Men, women 18 to 60. High school not required. Easy tuition payments. Trial plan. Write today.

**CHICAGO SCHOOL OF NURSING**  
Dept. 421, 41 East Pearson Street, Chicago 11, Ill.  
Please send free booklet, and 16 sample lesson pages.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_



EYE GLASSES by MAIL As low as \$1.95

WRITE for FREE  
CATALOG with 14  
LENS SAMPLE CARD

Thousands of  
Customers  
Est. 1929



QUALITY READING-MAGNIFYING OR  
BIFOCAL GLASSES FOR FAR AND NEAR

ADVANCE SPECTACLE COMPANY, Inc.  
537 S. Dearborn St., Dept. 100 Chicago 5, Illinois

## High School Course at Home

Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work — prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

AMERICAN SCHOOL, Dept. H-158, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

## Don't Neglect Piles and Colon Troubles

FREE BOOK — Explains Dangers of  
Associated Ailments



Avoid  
Dangers  
of Delay

Neglected piles, fistula and colon troubles often spread infection. Learn about rheumatic and other associated chronic conditions. Write today for 171 page FREE BOOK. McClary Clinic & Hospital, 197 Elms Blvd., Excelsior Springs, Mo.

# EAR ACHE?

## DENT'S

EAR WAX DROPS for  
fast temporary relief of  
accumulated wax condition

### TOOTHACHE?

ask your druggist for DENT'S  
TOOTH GUM, TOOTH DROPS or POULTICE

## FREE — Amazing Book on RHEUMATISM, ARTHRITIS

If you suffer the aches, pains and discomforts of Rheumatism, as manifested in ARTHRITIS, NEURITIS, SCIATICA or LUMBAGO, send today for the FREE Book. It reveals important facts about why drugs and medicine give only temporary relief without removing causes. Explains fully a proven, specialized system of treatment that may save you years of distress. No obligation. Write for this FREE Book today!  
BALL CLINIC, Dept. 504, Excelsior Springs, Mo.

SEE the World in Pictures in

# SEE

America's Favorite Picture Magazine

ONLY 15c AT ALL STANDS

shot and Mike, likewise—drunk or sober—was the worst in Texas.

By this time the only living souls visible were Mike, Rance, Willie Barrow and me. I took a quick look over at Willie and saw him bite off a big chew and ease down behind a rain barrel like he was taking no chances on getting hit. I decided to take my chances in the open, so I sauntered over to watch.

Rance was purty sure of himself and strutted a little as he meandered real slow across the street and kept coming toward Mike who was standing there by the pump. Everything was mighty still right then in Buffalo Gap. All the sounds of a teeming metropolis of two hundred souls was still. Nobody except us four men was in sight but I knew every pair of eyes in town was glued to a crack or a knothole.

Rance walked along, slower and slower till he was about twenty-five feet from where Mike was standing by the pump, then he sort of crouched down and whipped out his gun and fired. At the same time Mike jumped over to one side, yanked out his gun and cracked down too.

"One!" I yelled. Both shots missed but I noticed there was a flutter of cloth on Mike's left shirt sleeve and I knew Rance's bullet had come close.

Then Rance fired again and a lock of Mike's red hair sailed off in the air and I could tell from the expression on his face Mike was getting madder than ever. He fired at Rance twice real quick and I saw a chip fly out of a post by the side of the livery stable way down the street. I never did see what Mike's third shot hit, if anything.

I JUST can't explain how things happened from there on. According to all reason Rance should have plugged Mike. But I guess he was over-confident and careless with his first shot . . . and missed. Then, when he saw he'd missed that first one he must of got in a hurry and rushed his next shots. That's the only way I can explain how Mike didn't go down when Rance kept pumping shots at him.



Both of 'em was blasting away rapid fire and neither one was hit so far as I could tell. I'd intended to count shots but I got excited and lost track.

Anyway, all of a sudden Mike jumped about three feet in the air, let out a Rebel yell and swung his gun by the barrel end and threw it at Rance. I guess Rance was too surprised to duck or was busy getting off his last shot because just as his gun went off, Mike's gun hit him right spang in the mouth, butt end first and you could hear Rance's teeth snap when the gun hit.

Rance went down like he'd been hit by a club, and Mike swarmed all over him. In half a second they were snarling and jumping around, locked up like two wild-cats trying to claw each other to pieces. Blood was running down Mike's face and Rance was spitting out teeth and letting out yells and cusswords. And Mike kept letting go with that Rebel yell while he kept climbing all over Rance. Then they were rolling on the ground, kicking up dust and snorting and fuming.

By that time the more daring residents got bold enough to step out from behind cover and everybody begun to gang around to watch the fight. First Mike was on top, then Rance, clawing and gouging and kicking and pounding at each other. Then they'd back off and slug. First Rance would go down, then Mike.

About that time I heard somebody screaming right by my ear, "Kill 'im, Mike! Knock the rest of his teeth out." And I looked around and there was Lucy. I guess she'd heard the shooting and had come back. Anyway, there she was and there wasn't any doubt about who she was pulling for.

Her Fort Worth hat was down over one ear and she was swinging that pink umbrella around like it was a club and she kept yelling for Mike to kill him. And she was using some other language I guess would be described as what you'd call pitchersk. Anyway I couldn't help but admire her command of the language.

Mike and Rance had just about ripped

[Turn page]

## MAKE CRIME YOUR BUSINESS

### ON THE SIDE OF THE LAW!

Help fight crime! . . . Earn steady good pay as a Finger Print Expert or Investigator. I.A.S. trains you—by easy, low-cost home study lessons. Learn this exciting work in spare time. Write for full details now!

### OVER 800 POLICE BUREAUS...

Employ I.A.S.-trained men . . . proof of what I.A.S. can do. Write today (state age) for details. No obligation. No salesmen will call.

## INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE

Dept. 7961 1920 Sunnyside Avenue  
Chicago 40, Illinois

## MADE \$ 900 IN SPARE TIME



That's what L. M. Mix did in a year! You can make up to \$3 or \$4 an hour sharpening saws with the Foley Saw Filer. Steady cash business, no canvassing. Start spare time—Free Book shows how. Write Foley Mfg. Co., 168-3 Foley Bldg., Minneapolis 18, Minn.

## Free for Asthma

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma and choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is difficult because of the struggle to breathe, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Company for a FREE trial of the FRONTIER ASTHMA MEDICINE, a preparation for temporary symptomatic relief of paroxysms of Bronchial Asthma. No matter where you live or whether you have faith in any medicine under the sun, send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing.

FRONTIER ASTHMA CO. 309-T FRONTIER BLDG.  
462 NIAGARA ST. BUFFALO 1, N. Y.

## LAW...

**STUDY AT HOME** Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before.

**More Ability: More Prestige: More Money** We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL.B. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send NOW  
LABALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY, 417 South Dearborn Street  
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 1320L, Chicago 5, Ill.

## INVENTORS

Learn how to protect your invention. Specially prepared "Patent Guide" containing detailed information concerning patent protection and procedure with "Record of Invention" form will be forwarded to you upon request—without obligation.

**CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON**

Registered Patent Attorneys

38-A District National Bldg. Washington 5, D. C.

## Learn Profitable Profession in 90 days at Home



**MEN AND WOMEN, 18 TO 60.** Swedish Massage graduates make big money working full or spare time with doctors or in hospitals, health resorts, sanatoriums, clubs, private practice. A dignified interesting career! Qualify for your graduation certificate. Thorough instruction at home as in clean rooms. Write for Illustrated Book—FREE!

The College of Swedish Massage  
Dept. 363-A, 41 E. Pearson, Chicago 11



# Free Yourself FROM Tobacco Habit

If you want to stop smoking and just can't, try world-famous NO-TO-BAC Lozenges. See how quickly NO-TO-BAC may help stop your craving for tobacco. Rush \$1 to NO-TO-BAC, for 7 days supply. (For heavy smokers—16 days' supply—\$2.) Satisfaction guaranteed or money back. Write:

**NO-TO-BAC CO.**  
DEPT. S HEWLETT, NEW YORK

## How to MAKE MONEY with Simple CARTOONS



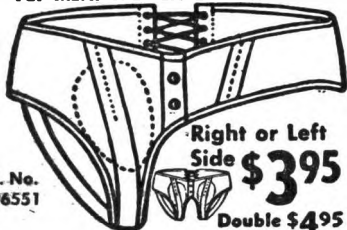
A book everyone who likes to draw should have. It is free; no obligation. Simply address **FREE BOOK**

**CARTOONISTS' EXCHANGE**  
Dept. 71 Pleasant Hill, Ohio

AMAZING COMFORT — NO SPECIAL FITTING

# RUPTURE-EASER

Reg. in U.S. Pat. Off. (A Piper Brace Product)  
For MEN, WOMEN and CHILDREN



Pat. No.  
2606551

Right or Left  
Side **\$395**  
Double **\$495**

A strong, form fitting washable support. Back lacing adjustable. Snaps up in front. Adjustable leg strap. Soft, flat groin pad. No steel or leather bands. Unexcelled for comfort. Also used as after operation support. Mail orders give measure around the lowest part of the abdomen and state right or left side or double. We Prepay Postage Except on C.O.D.'s

Over 400,000 Satisfied Users! **10 Day Trial Offer**

Money-back guarantee if you don't get blessed relief!

Delay may be serious — **ORDER TODAY!**

**PIPER BRACE CO.**

811 Wyandotte Dept. TP-13 Kansas City 6, Mo.

## BE A DETECTIVE

WORK HOME or TRAVEL. Experience unnecessary.  
**DETECTIVE** Particulars FREE. Write  
**GEO. T. H. WAGNER**, 125 W. 86th St., N. Y.

## Free Book

**MOUNT BIRDS, ANIMALS, FISH**

Yes, FREE. Explains Taxidermy. Tells how to learn at home by mail to mount birds, animals, heads... to TAN skins and furs. Great for MEN and BOYS. Fun! Also earns money in spare time. **WRITE TODAY — NOW —** for free book containing 100 game pictures. State AGE. N.W. School of Taxidermy, Dept. 4403, Omaha, Neb.



MAIL  
Postal  
Today

Look for the words —

**A THRILLING PUBLICATION**

—on the covers of the magazines you buy!

the clothes off of each other by now, and Mike seemed to be doing better all the time. Finally Rance sort of sat down and shook his head and Mike stood over him with his right fist cocked back waiting for him to get up. Then I saw a devilish grin come over Mike's face, and he stooped down real quick and picked up the water bucket he'd doused his head in earlier that morning.

"Ye-ee-ee-aa-ah!" he yelled. Then he dumped the water out of the bucket on Rance, and rammed the bucket down real hard over Rance's head. Rance managed to get to his feet and clawed at the bucket but Mike kept slamming it down on his head. Then he grabbed hold of Rance and whirled him around and finally turned him loose. Rance spun around and fell over in the horse trough and just lay there all sprawled out with the bucket still over his head.

Mike pointed to Rance, "Look!" he cackled, "The Water Bucket King!" Everybody yelled and laughed till he was silly, me included. Then I saw Mike looking through the crowd and there was a wild expression in his eyes.

"There you are!" The crowd broke and scattered as he made a plunge. Then I saw he was after Lucy. She'd started to edge out of the crowd and he was after her like a flash.

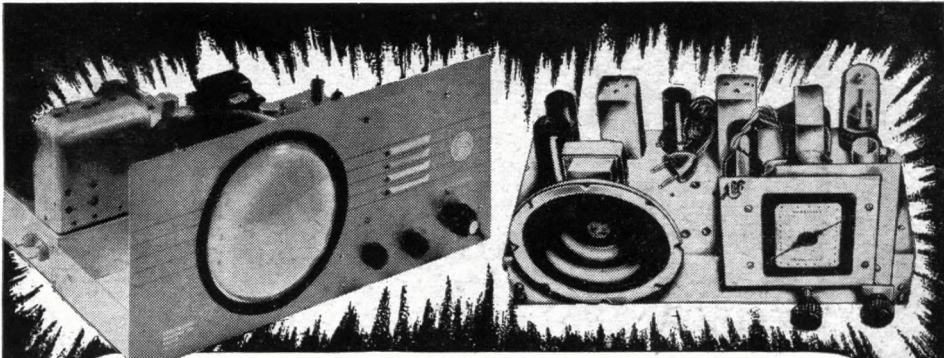
"Hit me with a parasol, will you?" he was yelling.

She stopped running and faced him. "Yes, and I'll hit you again if you touch me, you big—" Whatever it was she intended to say she didn't say it because he had her.

She kicked and hit at him but he just grabbed her up and walked off down the street carrying her. All of us turned and watched 'em, and I noticed that pretty soon she stopped kicking and I'm dead certain that just as they got to the livery stable he stopped and kissed her . . . and I'm purty certain she kissed him back.

Anyway, that was the last we saw of either of them in Buffalo Gap till after they got back from their honeymoon two weeks later.





**TRAIN FASTER—TRAIN BETTER—TRAIN EASIER  
IN 10 MONTHS—OR LESS—FOR  
**RADIO-TELEVISION****

**Our 21st Year Training Men for Greater Incomes and Security in Radio-Television**

**I SEND YOU  
18 BIG KITS**  
of Radio-Television parts and equipment. Much of your training will be actual construction and experimentation . . . the kind of truly PRACTICAL instruction that prepares you for your Radio-Television career.

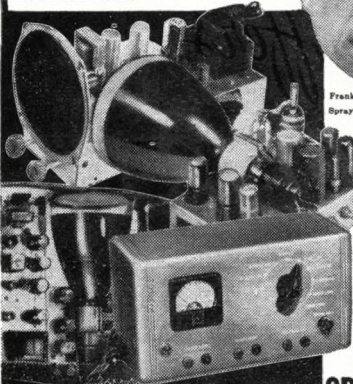


Frank H. Sprayberry  
President  
Sprayberry Academy  
of Radio

**NEW! NO OBLIGATION PLAN**

**You Have No Monthly Payment Contract to Sign  
Pay For Your Training as You Earn and Learn**

You can get into Radio-Television, today's fastest growing big money opportunity field, in *months* instead of years! My completely new "package unit" training plan prepares you in as little as 10 months or even less! *No monthly payment contract to sign—thus NO RISK to you!* This is America's finest, most complete, practical training—gets you ready to handle any profitable job in the booming Radio-Television industry. Start your own profitable Radio-Television shop . . . or accept a good paying job. I have trained hundreds of successful Radio-Television technicians during the past 21 years—and stand ready to train you, even if you have no previous experience! Mail coupon and get all the facts—FREE!



**Valuable Equipment Included  
With Training**

The new Sprayberry "package" plan includes many big kits of genuine, professional Radio-Television equipment. You perform over 300 demonstrations, experiments and construction projects. You build a powerful 6-tube 2-band radio set, multi-range test meter, signal generator, signal tracer, many other projects. All equipment and lessons are yours to keep . . . you have practically everything you need to set up your own profitable Radio-Television service shop.

**Earn Extra Money While You Learn!**

All your 10 months of training is IN YOUR HOME in spare hours. Keep on with your present job and income while learning. With each training "package" unit, you receive extra plans and "Business Builder" ideas for spare time Radio-Television jobs. New television stations everywhere, open vast new opportunities for trained Radio-Television Technicians—and those in training. If you expect to be in the armed forces later, there is no better preparation than practical Sprayberry Radio-Television training.

**YOU BUILD** the Television set and the powerful superhet radio receiver shown above IN ADDITION to the other test units shown here. (Many are not illustrated.)

Approved for Veterans under the G. I. Bill

**SPRAYBERRY ACADEMY OF RADIO 111 NORTH CANAL ST.**  
Dept. 5-S, Chicago 6, Ill.

**MAIL COUPON  
TODAY!  
NO OBLIGATION**

**SPRAYBERRY ACADEMY OF RADIO, Dept. 5-S  
111 North Canal St., Chicago 6, Ill.**

Please rush to me all information on your 10-MONTH Radio-Television Training Plan. I understand this does not obligate me and that no salesman will call upon me. Be sure to include 3 books FREE.

Name..... Age.....  
Address.....  
City..... Zone..... State.....

**I invite you to get all the facts—  
FREE TO YOU 3 BIG  
RADIO-TELEVISION BOOKS**

Rush coupon for my three big Radio-Television books: "How to Make Money in Radio-Television." PLUS my new illustrated Television Bulletin PLUS an actual sample Sprayberry Lesson—ALL FREE. No obligation and no salesman will call. Mail coupon NOW!







SENTINEL™  
Completely New  
Pen \$20.00  
Pencil \$7.50  
Ballpoint \$7.50

*Just in time  
for Christmas*

Point  
never "dunked" —  
never needs  
wiping

**THIS IS NEW!**

Sheaffer's™\*

**"SNORKEL"**

No one has a gift like this. As though by magic, the "SNORKEL" tube drinks the ink with siphon action... takes the "dunk" out of pen filling... point never needs wiping. Test it at your dealer's.

**SHEAFFER'S**  
WHITE DOT® OF DISTINCTION

W. A. SHEAFFER PEN COMPANY, FORT MADISON, IOWA, U. S. A.  
IN CANADA: MALTON, ONTARIO

\*TWIN MODEL

COPYRIGHT 1952, W. A. S. P. CO.