

STREET
AND
SMITH'S

WESTERN STORY 10 CENTS

MAY '31

VOL • 190 • No • 6

MAY 3, 1941



Desperate Men Drive A
Boothill Bargain But

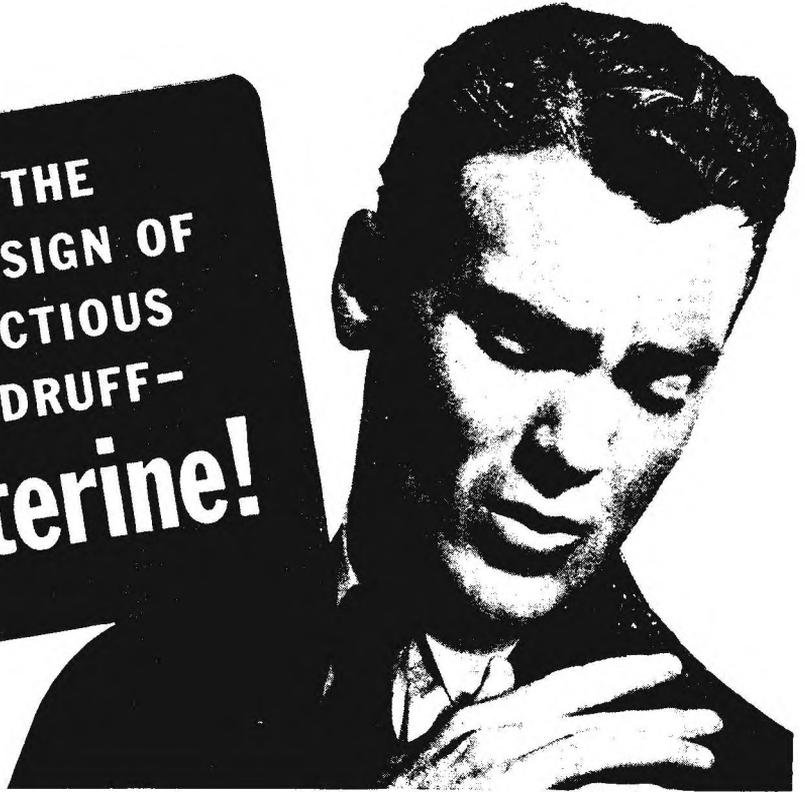
**FENCES MUST
COME DOWN**

An action-packed novel
by Ray Nafziger

★ ★ ★

HARRY S. DRAGO • C. K. SHAW • NORMAN A. FOX • AND

AT THE
FIRST SIGN OF
INFECTIOUS
DANDRUFF—
Listerine!



WHEN ugly flakes and scales begin to speck your clothes, when your scalp begins to itch annoyingly, it's time to act—and act *fast!*

Nature may be warning you that infectious dandruff has set in . . . may be telling you to do something about it before it gets any worse.

Start now with Listerine Antiseptic. Just douse it on your scalp and hair morning and night and follow with vigorous and persistent massage.

This is the simple medical treatment which has shown such outstanding results in a substantial majority of clinical test cases . . . the easy method used by thousands in their own homes.

Listerine often brings quick improvement, because it gives both hair and scalp an antiseptic bath. The loosened dandruff scales begin to disappear. Your scalp feels healthier, more invigorated. And meanwhile, Listerine is killing millions of germs on scalp and hair, including the queer "bottle bacillus," recognized by outstanding authorities as a causative agent of the infectious type of dandruff.

Clinical results of this simple, pleasant treatment have been literally amazing. In one test, 76% of dandruff sufferers who used Listerine and massage twice a day, within a month showed

complete disappearance of, or marked improvement in, the symptoms.

If you've got the slightest symptom of this trouble, don't waste any time. You may have a real infection, so begin today with Listerine Antiseptic and massage. To save yourself money, buy the large economy-size bottle.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO., *St. Louis, Mo.*

THE TREATMENT
that brought improvement to
76% of cases in a clinical test

MEN: Douse full strength Listerine on the scalp morning and night. **WOMEN:** Part hair at various places, and apply Listerine right along the part with a medicine dropper, to avoid wetting the hair excessively.

Always follow with vigorous and persistent massage with fingers or a good hair brush. Continue the treatment so long as dandruff is in evidence. And even though you're free from dandruff, enjoy a Listerine massage once a week to guard against infection. Listerine Antiseptic is the same antiseptic that has been famous for more than 50 years as a mouth wash and gargle.

BE A BETTER CITIZEN

WITH A BETTER JOB!



U. S. defense program needs TRAINED MEN! The demand is urgent! Enroll NOW for spare-time study with International Correspondence Schools — get MODERN TRAINING in a few months! 400 up-to-date I. C. S. Courses to choose from, including vital defense subjects. Thousands of former I. C. S. students are leaders of Business and Industry today. Be a better PATRIOT — and BETTER PAID! Mail this coupon TODAY for complete information.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
 CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF SERVICE TO AMBITIOUS AMERICANS

1891 * 1941

BOX 4908-L, SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course before which I have marked X: ★

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Air Brake	<input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing	<input type="checkbox"/> Mfg. of Pulp and Paper	<input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Section Foreman
<input type="checkbox"/> Air Conditioning	<input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Engines	<input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Drafting	<input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engines	<input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Signalmen's
<input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Drafting	<input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Lighting	<input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Drafting	<input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration
<input type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Electric Light	<input type="checkbox"/> Fire Booses	<input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Sanitary Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Auto Engine Tune-up	<input type="checkbox"/> Foundry Work	<input type="checkbox"/> Fruit Growing	<input type="checkbox"/> Mine Foreman	<input type="checkbox"/> Sheet Metal Work
<input type="checkbox"/> Auto Technicians	<input type="checkbox"/> Heating	<input type="checkbox"/> Heat Treatment of Metals	<input type="checkbox"/> Navigation	<input type="checkbox"/> Steam Electric
<input type="checkbox"/> Aviation	<input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> House Planning	<input type="checkbox"/> Pattermaking	<input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engines
<input type="checkbox"/> Boilermaking	<input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Engineer	<input type="checkbox"/> Machinist	<input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Steam Fitting
<input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Management of Inventions	<input type="checkbox"/> Poultry Farming	<input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing	<input type="checkbox"/> Structural Drafting
<input type="checkbox"/> Building Estimating		<input type="checkbox"/> Practical Telephony	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Works Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry		<input type="checkbox"/> Radio, General	<input type="checkbox"/> Radio Operating	<input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping
<input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineering		<input type="checkbox"/> Radio Servicing	<input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration	<input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Coal Mining			<input type="checkbox"/> Sign Lettering	<input type="checkbox"/> Textile Designing
<input type="checkbox"/> Concrete Engineering			<input type="checkbox"/> Sign Lettering	<input type="checkbox"/> Textile Designing
<input type="checkbox"/> Contracting and Building			<input type="checkbox"/> Sign Lettering	<input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaking
			<input type="checkbox"/> Sign Lettering	<input type="checkbox"/> Welding, Electric and Gas
			<input type="checkbox"/> Sign Lettering	<input type="checkbox"/> Woolen Manufacturing

BUSINESS COURSES

<input type="checkbox"/> Accounting	<input type="checkbox"/> Advertising	<input type="checkbox"/> College Preparatory	<input type="checkbox"/> Foremanship	<input type="checkbox"/> Railway Postal Clerk
<input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping	<input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence	<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> French	<input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship
<input type="checkbox"/> Business Management	<input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence	<input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accounting	<input type="checkbox"/> High School	<input type="checkbox"/> Secretarial
<input type="checkbox"/> Cartooring	<input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service	<input type="checkbox"/> C. P. Accounting	<input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating	<input type="checkbox"/> Sign Lettering
		<input type="checkbox"/> First Year College	<input type="checkbox"/> Lettering Show Cards	<input type="checkbox"/> Sign Lettering
			<input type="checkbox"/> Managing Men at Work	<input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management
				<input type="checkbox"/> Spanish

HOME ECONOMICS COURSES

<input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Dressmaking	<input type="checkbox"/> Home Dressmaking	<input type="checkbox"/> Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering
<input type="checkbox"/> Foods and Cookery	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional Dressmaking and Designing	

Name.....Age.....Address.....

City.....State.....Present Position.....

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada
British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England

STREET & SMITH'S

WESTERN STORY

TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

CONTENTS FOR MAY 3, 1941

VOL. CXC, No. 6

The editorial contents of this magazine have not been published before, are protected by copyright and cannot be reprinted without the publisher's permission.

BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL OF A BADLANDS GUN WAR

FENCES MUST COME DOWN Ray Nafziger 9
A ruthless bushwhack murder made Todd Carmony ramrod of the drought-ruined Dry Mesas country, and he knew his first bullet-backed edict to rip down barbed wire would blow the lid off a devil's caldron of range trouble.

A SERIAL

WAGON WHEELS WEST Walker Tompkins 105
Fourth of Six Parts
"I've got a hunch who's back of this killin' tonight," declared Monte Webb, "and whenever he comes out in the open I'll be ready for him!" But would a skulking, back-shooting killer ever "come out in the open"?

SHORT STORIES

BOOM-TOWN VENGEANCE Harry Sinclair Drago 49
--Only Ki Benton knew its fury had fallen on an innocent man--but could he bring to justice a murderer fiendishly clever enough to make another man pay for his crime?

TROUBLE-SHOOTIN' TEAM Norman A. Fox 62
Two ruts snaking along a ledge--that was the Skalkaho, and only by tooling a stage over it could Clay Farnum hope to top a double-crosser's crooked ace.

RIDE 'ER, BUTTON! C. K. Shaw 71
With the law ready to go into action tooth, nail and sixes, the Bar H faced trouble aplenty unless its button jockey brought home the bacon!

GOLD BAITS A DEATH TRAP Peter Dawson 82
"Don't set off that dynamite, Driscoe," old Nothing Dewing warned the tinhorn who'd tried to run a sandy on him. "You'll be the same as murdered if you do!"

WESTERN STORY FEATURE

RANGE SAVVY Carl Raht 61
Cattle country facts and legends.

DEPARTMENTS

THE ROUNDUP The Editor 5
GUNS AND GUNNERS Phil Sharpe 95
MINES AND MINING John A. Thompson 97
THE HOLLOW TREE Helen Rivers 99
WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE John North 101
MISSING 104

COVER BY H. W. SCOTT

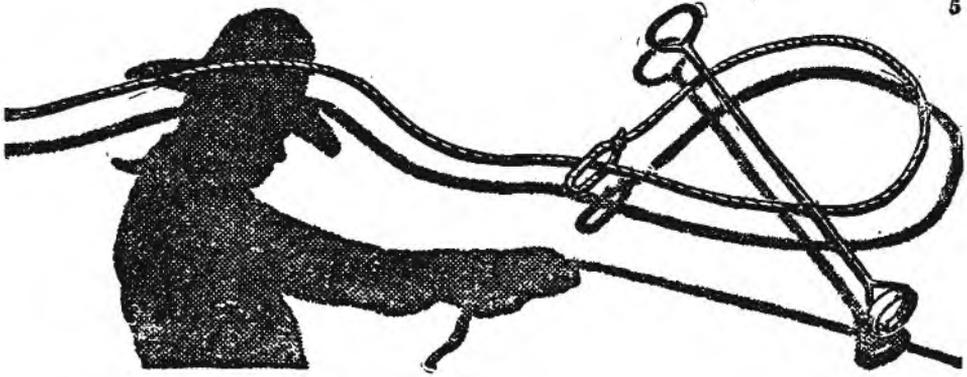
All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Publications, Incorporated, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Allen L. Grammer, President; Henry W. Ralston, Vice President; Gerald H. Smith, Treasurer and Secretary. Copyright, 1941, in U. S. A. and Great Britain by Street & Smith Publications, Inc. Reentered as Second-class Matter, May 15, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions to Countries in Pan American Union, \$5.00 per year; elsewhere, \$7.00 per year. We cannot accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or artwork. Any material submitted must include return postage.

Printed in  16 the U. S. A.

STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC. • 79 7th AVE., NEW YORK

10c per COPY
\$2 Six Months
\$4 per YEAR



The Roundup

It isn't often that we review a book in *The Roundup*, but when something really special comes along we are glad to tell our readers about it. Such a book, we think, is "The Longhorns," by J. Frank Dobie (Little, Brown & Co.—388 pp.—\$3.50).

In this book those doughty cattle which had so much to do with a whole segment of civilization are not incidental to the men associated with them; the longhorn is the hero, the villain, the friend, the enemy—whatever he is, he is the central figure, and man is rather incidental.

No one is better qualified to write about the longhorn than J. Frank Dobie. He was born in the brush country of Texas; his father and uncles had gone up the trail. "Until I was a young man," he says, "the only people I knew were people of the longhorn and vaquero tradition." Dobie spent years studying the history of the longhorn; he dug into records; he talked to countless old-timers who had had personal experience as brush poppers and trail drivers. Added to his scholarly passion for facts, Dobie possesses the facility of a top-notch story teller,

so "The Longhorns" is rich in interest, full of grand incidents, is written in a style that makes exceedingly easy, pleasant reading.

As most readers of Western fiction know, longhorns were a tough breed. They were the offspring of Spanish cattle brought in by the Conquistadores. For three centuries they ran wild, increasing to incredible numbers. Their original stamping ground was the rough, brushy country between the Nueces and Rio Grande Rivers in Texas and the semi-desert country of northern Mexico. In their wild state the longhorns had to be tough to survive—and they were. They could fight off mountain lions and bears, they could live in country where other breeds of cattle would have starved for food and water, they were fleet and cunning, and even would attack men on little or no provocation.

For two decades after the Civil War, the longhorn rated as the foremost commercial commodity of the Southwest. It was during that period that a breed of men, who had to be as tough as the cattle were, went into the dangerous business of driving them out of the brush, branding them, and driving them to market. It was during those years that the saga of the longhorn and the men who worked them reached heroic heights. After that the cattle boom waned, prices declined, railroads

pushed on and, above all, the range was fenced. The longhorn was not meant for small ranches and fence, so he was doomed. Gentler, short-horned cattle took his place, and another tough old warrior fell before the march of civilization. Today longhorns are almost extinct, though the government is trying to preserve a herd in Oklahoma.

"The Longhorns" is a stirring account of this breed whose horns measured from four to eight feet in width. There are accounts of canny lead steers, of fearsome stampedes in which longhorns ran as far as sixty miles in fifteen hours, proof that certain wily old mossyhorns returned to Texas all the way from Wyoming and Montana, exciting occurrences in rounding up and driving the wild critters. An excellent glimpse into the country and period is presented through Dobie's expert handling of his material. And, of course, he couldn't fail to present a vivid picture of the cowmen who, along with the longhorns, dominated the Southwest during those hard-bitten, exciting years.

The book is excellently illustrated with pen-and-ink drawings by Tom Lea, and with photographs. All told, it is one of the finest volumes of Americana that has come our way in a long time. We heartily recommend it to our readers.

The first letter opened in this week's mail gave us something of a start. Out jumped a "Wanted" notice. As soon as we made sure that some sheriff was not on our trail, we regarded the correspondence with considerable more calm. As a matter of fact, the wanted notice was one cut out of an issue of Western Story some time last year in connection with the Silver Star-Western Story Novel-Serial Contest, in which

we were seeking the best novel-serial of 1940. The letter bearing the notice was from Mr. Vere L. Hinman, of Wadsworth, Kansas, who writes as follows:

"The inclosed 'Wanted' will explain the reason for this letter. Is this contest yet open? I read many issues of Western Story, but I missed this issue until yesterday.

"I enjoy your magazine very much. I cannot say that I read every issue, but I would if I had time. In the SHERIFF OF POWDER ROCK, Ney N. Geer depicts a picture

Continued on page 129

Coming next week—

Preacher Devlin, L. L. Foreman's famous gun master, returns to Western Story in a trigger-swift novel entitled FAREWELL TO TEXAS. Cimarron City was on the wrong side of the Red River, as far as the Preacher was concerned, and with Texas Rangers smoking up his back trail, he wasn't resting his saddle any longer than it took to get his big black bronc patched up and ready to travel again. Meanwhile, there was the little matter of a cattle-stealing combine, a renegade-rod-ded town, and a mysterious stranger named Rio Jones to keep him occupied. Don't miss this blazing adventure of a lobo long rider who found his flaming guns siding the law.

Gripping stories of the range country by Ray Palmer Tracy, Harry F. Olmsted, Walker Tompkins and many other top Western authors are lined up in this big issue, and, of course, you'll find all your favorite departments and features.



A partial view of a department at Coyne

Learn ELECTRICITY

I'll Finance Your Training

I not only offer you an opportunity to get a practical "Learn by doing" training to prepare you for a good pay job—but I make it easy for you to get this training. I offer you a plan to get my training and pay for it in easy monthly payments after your training period is over. Then I offer you a plan that takes care of most of your living expenses. This gives you an opportunity to get your training with a surprisingly small outlay of money. Mail the coupon and I'll give you all the facts.

Learn By Doing in 90 Days

Don't spend your life hoping for a better job and a better salary. Let me show you how to train for positions that lead to \$35.00, \$40.00 a week and up in the great field of Electricity. NOT by correspondence but by actual shop work right on real electrical machinery. Then on my "PAY AFTER GRADUATION" PLAN YOU CAN PAY YOUR TUITION IN EASY MONTHLY PAYMENTS AFTER YOUR TRAINING PERIOD IS OVER.

In the Big Coyne Shops you have individual help by expert instructors so that you quickly and easily learn Electricity by actual work. No advanced education or previous electrical experience is needed. You are taught . . . not by correspondence, not by books or embarrassing reciting . . . but by the Famous Coyne "Learn-By-Doing" training method which has helped hundreds of successful graduates to get and hold the job they like, or go into business for themselves.

At Coyne you do PRACTICAL ELECTRICAL WORK on real electrical equipment.

Earn While Learning

If you are short of money and need part-time work to help pay for your room and board while training, my Employment Department will help you get a part-time job. When you have graduated, they will give you Lifetime Employment Service.

No Books No Classes

No dull books, no baffling charts, no classes, you get individual training . . . all real actual work . . . building real batteries . . . winding real armatures, operating real motors, dynamos and generators, wiring houses, etc., etc.



This modern fireproof building is occupied entirely by the Coyne Electrical School.



PREPARE FOR JOBS LIKE THESE

Armature Winder
Sub-Station Operator
Auto & Aviation Ignition
Maintenance Electrician
Service Station Owner
Air Conditioning
Electric Refrigeration
Radio Servicing
and many others

Our Employment Bureau for graduates gives FREE lifetime employment service.

READ WHAT THESE GRADUATES SAY

I think the "pay after graduation" plan . . . offers the fellow who wants to get ahead in life a wonderful opportunity . . . I am now employed by the ——— Power Co. I have been employed by this Company ever since graduating from COYNE . . . I make almost double what I did at my previous work . . . COYNE School helped me in landing the job I now have.



H. C. Lewis

James Dible

I owe a lot to COYNE . . . I secured a job after returning home wiring cranes for the ——— Machine Co. Before going to COYNE I was clerking in a grocery store earning the usual clerk's wages. I was in doubt about quitting my job but I have tried the cost of the entire course . . . in the first ten months. The school is everything you say it is and more. I was completely satisfied. Thanking you for your kind cooperation while at school and since returning home.—Jack E. Stroup.

GET THE FACTS

Don't let lack of money keep you from sending in the Coupon now. My Big FREE Book is full of facts and photographs which tell you about Coyne Training. It also gives you the details of my Pay After Graduation Plan, Spare Time Employment Offer, Graduate Employment Service, Lifetime Scholarship and other advantages.

MAIL
COUPON



Send Today for this FREE Book!

H. C. LEWIS, President,
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL,
500 S. Paulina Street,
Dept. 41-45, Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Lewis:—Without obligation send me your big free illustrated catalog, with all facts about Coyne Training and details of your "Pay-Tuition-After-Graduation" Plan, as well as the details of your 4 weeks' Radio Course you are including.

Name

Address

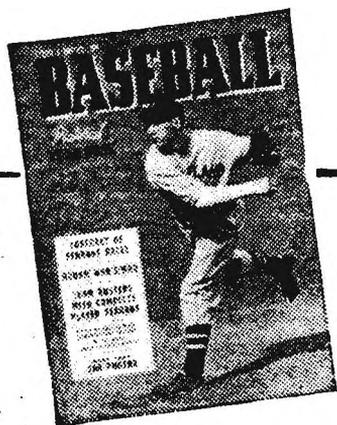
City State

Mail in envelope or paste on a postcard

COYNE H. C. LEWIS, President FOUNDED 1899
ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 41-45, Chicago, Ill.

**EXTRA
4 WEEKS
COURSE IN
RADIO
INCLUDED**

**what do
you want
to know
about
baseball?**



● Here's the first—and only—book of its kind . . .
a big-league work on a big-league scale!

Want to know—

the chances of your favorite team?

complete rosters of all major-league teams?

complete schedules including night games of both leagues?

It's all here!

Plus . . . The races of the American and National League analyzed by Arthur Mann.

Each club in both leagues analyzed by Daniel of the World-Telegram, or John Carmichael of the Chicago Daily News.

200 photos of stars . . . forecasts of future stars now operating in minors . . . the all-star team of tomorrow picked from the greatest young stars.

Everything you want to know . . . things you didn't know till now . . . they're all in Street & Smith's

BASEBALL YEAR BOOK

25c a copy—at all newsstands

If your dealer can't supply you, fill out the coupon below:

STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC.
79 Seventh Avenue
New York City

Here's my quarter. Please send along the **BASEBALL YEAR BOOK!**

Name

Address

City..... State.....



There was no quarter with treachery and greed so Todd Carmony lead his men into the most savage gun fight the Dry Mesas had ever known!

FENCES

MUST COME DOWN

BY RAY NAFZIGER

CHAPTER I

WELCOME HOME

JUCK DOLLAR, who was both marshal of Tipton and a deputy sheriff, stood in front of the Carmony bank—a gray-mustached, heavy

hulk of a man, who had been a law officer most of his life. The marshal star on his broad chest now meant little. Tipton was a shrunken half-ghost town, whipped by wind and dust, with as much use for a marshal as a wild hog has for a pair of chaps.

From the livery barn across the street old Whangdoodle Myers stepped to rap his pitchfork tines against a hitch post. A jackrabbit raced out of a clump of yuccas just ahead of a cloud of dust, and, finding himself on the main street of a town, leaped frantically along it. Whangdoodle leveled and aimed his fork like a gun and yelled "Bam!" Juck Dollar frowned. The marshal was too serious-minded to appreciate such childish horseplay.

Turning, Dollar saw a horseman topping the rise on the trail from the northeast. The rider was too far away for Juck's failing eyes to identify.

"Who's that, Whangdoodle?" he called.

Whangdoodle stared and suddenly stiffened. "Be danged if it ain't Todd Carmony! Comin' back to Tipton."

Startled, the lawman turned involuntarily down street to glance at Emily Reese's buckboard and team standing before the Pollock store. Emily, who had just carried out a parcel to the buckboard, waved at him before going back into the store.

Old Juck's seamed face lit up. He had no daughter, but if he had, he wouldn't have given his life more readily for her than he would have given it for Emily Reese.

"Todd Carmony," muttered Juck and walked over the broken sidewalk to the corner where the incoming rider was due to pass. The lawman's square face was set in rigid lines; his big chest was expelling breath gustily. So Todd Carmony, blast him, grandson of Tipton's banker, Spence Carmony, was coming home!

Muttering, the marshal fixed his failing eyes on the approaching rider, sitting deep in the saddle of a big, fast-stepping cow horse—a rangy,

rawboned machine with the stamina to go to hell and back. Which pretty well described Todd Carmony also. Todd's shoulders had become a mite wider in five years, but his face was still lean and dark with the color of wind and sun. After five years' absence Todd was still spoken of affectionately by a lot of men, but Juck Dollar wasn't one of them.

WHEN the rider came abreast, Juck waved him over. Todd Carmony pulled up close to the marshal, his gray eyes regarding Juck with a casual interest. In return Juck scowlingly examined Todd's outfit. A new saddle but the same old six-shooter and battered carbine he had carried away when he had left.

"Five years you been gone, a'most to the month," Juck rasped.

"That long?" drawled Todd. "Time shore whirls by fast and pleasant when I'm away from this Dry Mesas country."

"Too bad then you didn't stay fifty years. What in tarnation you wanting back here?"

The rider's face did not change expression. He was a good poker player, Todd, although he had lost his small Dry Mesas ranch to Al Button in a stud game five years ago.

"I'm askin' you," Juck said harshly. "Why you back?"

Todd grinned. "This startin' to ask me personal questions before I even swing a leg to light down," he drawled, "makes a poor welcome. I kinda expected a brass band. Anything wrong with my coming back?"

"You know dang well there is," raged Juck. "Five years ago when folks agreed to fence Dry Mesas you got so boiling mad you went on a big bender, gambled away your ranch, and pulled out. Leavin' behind Emily Reese, who thought the

universe spun round you. Leavin' her after the country had figured for years you and she was going to marry. Leavin' to drift around like a tramp, workin' a few months for a outfit and ridin' on. Ramroddin' a spread for an old rancher on the border until he offered to make you partner. Then headin' into Mexico to win a bunch of cattle at monte and ranchin' down there until you had to skip out after killin' three Mexicans in a fight."

Todd's grin flickered again. "You've kept cases pretty close on me. Except for leavin' out the more important things, like the times I called four aces with four kings."

He swung down suddenly from his saddle and stood facing the marshal, his lanky length topping Dollar's by inches. "But during all my travels," he went on grimly, "nobody ever asked me my business or pointed a finger down or up the road to me. Savvy, Juck?"

Juck Dollar's big fists clenched, but this was no fist-fighting matter. If it was a fighting matter at all, it called for guns.

"I'm telling you to get out, Todd," he ordered thickly. "After you visit your granddad a decent time. I give you one week to stay. And while you're here I won't have you going near Emily Reese. She's got a heart. You broke it once, and, by Satan, you're not busting it over again!"

"What was between Emily Reese and me is none of your business," said Todd, his voice riding a swift-rising rage.

"I'm makin' it mine since she's got no near kin," said Juck, raising his voice unconsciously against the gusts of wind sweeping the street. "Being a girl, she might see you again and forget you're not the settling-down kind; that your high am-

bition runs to a life helling around in gambling joints and drifting from one range to another. She might forget that there ain't no more foundation to you, Todd, than to a Mexican grass-roofed *jacal*. For what you did to her, Todd, I could see you laying here in the street with a bullet in your belly, and I'd laugh to see the funny way your legs kicked."

Todd's eyes flashed. "Look out it's not your legs kicking, Juck. I don't want to hurt you, but if what you feel against me is that serious, start your play."

"Are you crazy, you two?" The clear voice cut sharply across the blood-red rage of both men just as a gust of wind died.

BOTH men swung to look into the dark eyes of the girl, Emily Reese, standing near them. Her long-lashed eyes had always held a friendly warmth, but there was none now for Todd. To Todd she was prettier if anything, but she had changed nevertheless. That which had once transfigured her face—a certain deep, quiet happiness, the eager anticipation of a girl on the threshold of mature life—was gone.

"Juck," Emily said as her hand fell on the marshal's arm, "what's got into you? Working yourself into a rage over my personal affairs. Don't you realize that Todd did me a big favor when he left? He taught me that a heart is only a pump to keep your blood circulating." Her voice held a jaunty note; she was even smiling as if her own foolishness five years before now amused her. "Todd made the lesson so clear I'll never forget it."

Todd, standing hat in hand, stared dumbly at her, trying to gather his scattered wits.

"Your grandfather will be glad to

see you, Todd," Emily went on. "Let us hope for his sake that you can arrange to stay here permanently with him; he's lonely and old, and you're all that's left of his family." Which last might have been a sharp dig, but Todd judged not. Her attitude held indifference instead of enmity.

"You see, Juck," she continued, "Todd's return is not really worth bristling up one single hair about. Please come and untie my team."

She walked swiftly toward her buckboard and Juck went along like a grizzled old St. Bernard to help her into the rig and hand her the lines. Then she was gone, a slim erect figure in leather jacket, driving out into the dust and wind of the mesa.

Juck Dollar returned to Todd's side. "One week to stay," he said ominously.

Todd spoke from between tight lips. "That's too bad, Juck. Before you set a time limit, I was staying two days at most. Now I'm making it a week and a day.

"I'm telling you," said Juck, and, leaving Todd Carmony, he passed on to enter the Cloudy-in-the-West Bar. The wind which had slowly gathered force as the afternoon advanced toward dusk, scooped increasingly larger clouds of dust from under the big palmlike yuccas bordering the town. For six months a year wind and dust lashed the Dry Mesas lying between the Hatchet Mountains in the south and the deep trough of Hell's Far Canyon to the north.

Todd Carmony, a turmoil within him, headed slowly for the homely adobe-walled building which housed his grandfather's banking business.

In the wide doorway of the livery stable Whangdoodle Myers shook his head. Whangdoodle was a little lacking in sense, but he could smell

trouble. He leveled his pitchfork again and squinted along it as if taking aim. "Bang! Bang!" he told himself. "That's the way it's going to be with Todd Carmony and ol' Juck Dollar."

CHAPTER II

WINDY RAIKES' THREAT

WHITE-HAIRED, frail Spence Carmony, a smile playing on his wrinkled face, got up to greet his grandson. They sat talking while the wind violently rattled the battered tin sign of a saddler's abandoned shop across the street. Carmony's was a one-man bank, a pitifully small one since Tipton had sunk into a near ghost town.

They talked for a few minutes on generalities, then old Spence shifted in his chair.

"How does the country look to you?" he asked his grandson.

"Looks dry, sounds dry, and smells dry."

"Dry, yes. Todd, you told me when you left that you wouldn't come back unless it were a matter of life and death. I wished often to see you again, Todd, but I didn't send for you until it was life and death. Not for me or you, Todd. For this Dry Mesas country."

Todd grinned. "I got here too late then, granddad. It's already dead."

"This is too serious for joking, Todd. Dry Mesas is Carmony country. We were the first to ranch in this country; your father and two uncles grew up in it; you were born here. You and I are the only Carmonys left, but it's still our country; country that we pioneered and that the Carmony bank has seen through hard times."

He brought out an almost empty bottle of whiskey and divided it be-

tween two glasses. Spence Carmony had only one luxury: the whiskey he drank sparingly, but which had always been the oldest rye he could purchase.

"Better liquor than you've been drinking, no doubt," he remarked.

"Maybe," said Todd, eyeing the bottle. "But you haven't been drinking much of this better liquor. The folks that make it quit this style of bottle three years ago. Which means you've either been hoarding this whiskey a long time, or drinking cheaper stuff."

Spence grinned wryly. "You've got me. I bought that bottle over three years ago, and I've had to make it last."

"While you put every cent into keeping this blasted country on its feet. Granddad, all this Dry Mesas country isn't worth a bottle of good whiskey. I've seen pastures in Texas that could be burned off, and still have more feed. This country isn't worth the fences strung up over it. I'd have reached here a day sooner if I hadn't had to open so many gates."

"The fences," said Spence, "were a mistake—one that may break the country. You fought the fences and you were right, Todd. Over a hundred-mile-long strip of country it always rains on some part, and before fences the cattle were free to go where it had rained. Now they have to stay behind wires and wait for a rain to come to them. And the cattle are starving. But you'll remember that the ranchers agreed to try out the fences for only five years. That period is up now, and if a majority votes against fences, Dry Mesas goes back to open range. That's why I brought you home: to help me get votes for open range again. Some of the men who fought the fences hardest five years ago

now want to keep them, just to be contrary. Three are your old-timer friends, Reb Kinsey, Longhorn Kelso and Go West Greeley. You can persuade them to change their minds. Once we're rid of fences, we'll weather through. If the fences stay up, almost every rancher in here will go broke, and this bank along with them."

"I'm not surprised," remarked Todd. "It's a wonder to me you haven't gone broke long before from grubstaking this country. How bad off is the bank?"

"Bogged in a mud hole with the buzzards circling," his grandfather admitted. "Less than a thousand cash in the vault." He nodded at the old-fashioned steel vault set in brick at the back of the room. "If Lon Ransdell up at the Bell City Cattlemen's Bank wasn't my good friend, I'd be closed right now. Legally, the bank's insolvent, although there's only one man who's got more money on deposit than he owes. That's Dan Clond who bought the Mexican Ranch down in the valley. Every Mesas cattleman except Clond has notes in that vault for more than his cattle and places are worth right now. I need your help in getting rid of those fences."

LISTEN," Todd said grimly. "you forget you and I split up on these fences five years ago. You were for them then. You were pretty bitter at me for fighting them."

"I never made a greater mistake," admitted Spence. "But it's not too late. I've sunk every penny I own into this country, hoping it would prosper with mines and ranches and deep-well farming. The mines and farming played out, and, as I see it now, Dry Mesas is a country where twenty fair-sized cattle outfits can

prosper—if they'll take down those blasted wires. But they won't listen to me; not enough of them at least. Most people in here hate me for not loaning them more money."

"The usual gratitude you get for helping people," put in Todd.

"They don't understand. But they'll listen to you. If you can get old Reb and Go West and Longhorn to change their votes, we'll win. That's why I sent for you, Todd. The Dry Mesas need you."

Todd had a grim smile for that remark. Juck Dollar and Emily Reese sure didn't think he was needed. Nor did he himself think so. He was getting out. He didn't want to have Emily Reese eying him again as if he were a stranger. As for Dry Mesas being Carmony country because the family had pioneered it, that was only fool sentiment.

"Hate to refuse you, granddad," he said, "but I'm not mixing in. A lot of old maids that wanted to brand in a chute and keep their white-face pets out of the rough breaks of Hell's Far Canyon, voted in fences. Why don't you quit worrying about those folks? A partnership on a good border ranch is mine for the asking, me to pay out my share from the profits. I'll take it if you'll pack up and come with me to live easy the rest of your life."

Spence Carmony shook his head wearily. "I can't do that, Todd. This is my country. Let's forget fences; we're both too stubborn to change our minds. But you'll come out and stay at the old place and visit a while? I'm batching out there. Stay for a few months, anyway a few weeks. I want to get acquainted with you again, boy. When you're an old man with a grandson, you'll know why. But don't put off

starting to raise grandsons too long. I had hoped that you and Emily Reese . . . but that was your business. I'm going home now, and I'll be expecting you later. This is Saturday night, and I know you'll want to do some visiting with old friends. My team's in Whangdoodle's stable."

TODD went with Spence to the livery stable, leaving his saddle horse with Whangdoodle to feed. After Spence drove away, Todd hoo-rawed Whangdoodle a few minutes, then drifted to the store to chin with Abe Pollock. Finally, after dark, he entered the larger of Tipton's two remaining saloons, the Cloudy-in-the-West. There was a poker game in the same corner where Todd had lost his small ranch to Al Button. A young fellow sat in the chair Todd had occupied that night, a blond, well-dressed husky playing with Al Button and a mustachioed old rancher, Longhorn Kelso. Seeing Todd, Longhorn let out a delighted bellow.

Al Button said "Hello" in his thin-lipped way. Al was in his forties, slight, dark-faced, with small shrewd eyes. Long ago he had married one of Spence Carmony's daughters, and although she had since died, Al still claimed half-humorously to be an uncle of Todd's. Al was an inveterate gambler, and usually the owner of a fast quarter horse on which he won money racing.

"How are you, nephew?" he asked. "That ranch you lost to me is dried up and blowed away almost. I'll give it back to you for a hipshot Indian pony."

"Not me," said Todd. "You did me a big favor, Al, in taking it off my hands. I might have stayed to dry up with the ranch like old Long-

horn and the rest of the Dry Mesas pelicans."

"Shake hands with Pretty-boy Dan Clond," Al said sneeringly, indicating the blond young husky.

So this was the man who owned the Mexican Ranch which Todd had once begged his grandfather to back him in buying. The Mexican Ranch was at the extreme east end of the Tipton country, in the Hell's Far River valley.

"Clond's the only rancher up here rich enough to afford running cattle in desert country," Button continued. "His uncles are the millionaire Bill and Clay Clond that own the Hatchet Mountain Land Grant."

Clond, in his late twenties, greeted Todd genially and called for a round of drinks to celebrate the wanderer's return. "Your grandfather has often spoken of you," he told Todd. "A fine old gentleman, Spence Carmony. I hope you're back to help him get these cussed fences taken down. I'm not as bad off on my river ranch as the rest, but open range will help me. It's been a mighty dry summer down on the river, but up along the Hell's Far Canyon breaks there's a lot of browse my cattle could use. And next winter all our cattle could get fat down on the river range."

"Why don't you buy hay to feed your cows?" asked Button in his unpleasant voice. "Holy smokes, you're rich enough. How about showing us what you learned about poker, Todd, since you've been away?"

Al Button had always been sour of temper and contemptuous of tongue. As Todd joined the game, Button continued to throw barbed harpoons into Clond. The young rancher took it good-naturedly, which said a lot for his amiability.

Other ranchers drifted in to greet Todd. Two were Reb Kinsey, a dried-up little pepper box, and Go West Greeley. Longhorn, Reb and Go West were all old-timers. Each entrance called for more rounds of drinks in honor of Todd.

Late arrivals in the saloon were Windy Raikes and little Morg Moliney, ranchers on the rim of Hell's Far Canyon. They came over to greet Todd, but Windy Raikes didn't offer to shake hands. Raikes had a heavy, outjutting jaw which fitted his bulky body. He and Moliney evidently had been drinking in the other Tipton saloon. The liquor had put Raikes in a mean mood.

"It ain't the banker's prodigal grandson come home!" he said, staring hostilely at Todd. "Goin' to help your grandpappy get rid of our fences, are you? Well, me and Moliney is servin' notice nobody's takin' down our wires, savvy? And tell that to your money-grabbin' grandpappy."

"You're drunk, Windy," said Todd evenly as he got to his feet. "When you're drunk your mind gets woozy and you spout wild talk. I'm not interested in fences."

Raikes' jaw stuck out still farther. "Don't try to tell me that," he snarled. "I know slick old Spence Carmony too well. The old leech, suckin' the blood out of us ranchers—"

THE flat of Todd's left hand spat against Raikes' face and sent the rancher staggering. Cursing, Raikes countered with a punch that would have floored a gorilla had it landed. The rancher wasn't too drunk to be able to fight. The two tore into one another in the space between bar and wall, Raikes charging in throwing wild wallops. Todd

checked two of the man's angry rushes by letting him run into a couple of rights that smacked into the big jaw, snapping Raikes' head back.

Todd was grinning a little with the pleasure of slugging it out. Fighting was one way to get rid of the irritation he had felt since meeting Juck Dollar and Emily Reese.

Raikes' neighbor and inseparable companion, little Morg Molney, tried slyly to trip Todd up as the fighters circled during a breathing spell.

"Keep out of it, Molney," or-

dered Dan Clond loudly. "Fair play here. One of you at a time."

"If you want, Molney, you don't have to wait," offered Todd. "I'll take both of you on. Windy isn't the man he used to be."

Five years of too much liquor and too little riding had slowed Raikes, making his timing poor and soon taking the steam out of his punches. He had become softer, too; he grunted loudly whenever Todd landed a punch, which was almost at will.

Raikes, wearying fast, ran into a jab that traveled no more than six inches. Slammed hard against the bar, dazed, the rancher recovered to pick up a quart whiskey bottle near his elbow and fling it. Todd dodged, letting the bottle smash against a wall, and then rushed in to explode double dynamite in Raikes' face.



Raikes was almost whipped when he snatched a quart bottle off the bar and murderously swung it at Todd's head.

The rancher, in a panic, began to retreat, knocking over two tables, scattering poker chips and whiskey glasses.

Raikes bent at the knees and fell finally, to get gamely back to his feet. Todd was about to chop him down again when he suddenly sickened of the affair and let the man, blood running from his mouth, collapse to the floor. As Raikes fell the heel of his right boot caught between the end of the foot rail and a jagged homemade repair job on the supporting post, and was torn loose.

Todd frowned at the fallen man, raising a hand with its knuckles skinned and bloody, to feel of an ear that had been all but torn loose.

The barroom looked as though a small tornado had stepped in. Little Morg Molney brought a wet towel to wash blood from Raikes' face, and hastily tacked on the lost heel, talking comfortingly to the big fellow as if he were a hurt small boy.

Dan Clond escorted Todd to a tap of water and turned it on for him.

"Too bad it had to happen," Clond said. "But you gave him what he had coming for slandering your grandfather."

Marshal Juck Dollar clumped heavily into the barroom to scowl at Todd. "I knew it," he said. "Soon's you're in town you start raising Cain."

"I'm just warmed up," said Todd, tired of Juck's badgering. "Too bad you aren't twenty years younger," he hinted.

"Whenever you're ready, start in any way you want!" roared Juck, but Clond and Longhorn Kelso stepped between the two.

Molney conducted Raikes to the bar and poured a big drink for him. Raikes downed it and stood teetering on his heels, mumbling curses.

"Take him home," Juck ordered Molney.

"That's where we're goin'," the little rancher said. "Our horses is outside. C'mon, Windy."

At the door, Molney's arm about him, Raikes turned. "I'm telling it to you Carmonys," he said heavily. "I'm killin' you both before I'm done. First I'm killin' old Spence Carmony, and then I'm killin' you, Todd."

Urged by Molney, Raikes staggered on out. Todd shrugged off the threat as the idle one of a licked drunk. Raikes lacked the guts to kill anybody.

AFTER the barroom had been straightened the poker game in the corner was resumed, but Todd's mind wasn't on the cards. He should be riding out to his grandfather's place; Spence would be expecting him. Al Button was constantly taunting Dan Clond into making bigger bets than his cards justified, and Al's ill humor was beginning to get on Todd's nerves. Clond and Button, bickering over poker, switched to an argument on the merits of their watches. Clond had a fine thin hunting case; Button an open-faced old turnip.

Button's anger rose to a fury a little later when he had to admit that he was short of money to meet a big raise Clond had just shoved out. Clond refused to take an I O U, and Button demanded time to go to his room for money to see the other's bet.

"I've heard you offer to go after money before and then not show up," Clond said sarcastically. "You know I got you licked. You ain't coming back."

"I'll be back with more dinero in five minutes," declared Button vehemently. "Five minutes, hear me?"

And maybe you want to make a bet I won't. I'll bet you ten dollars, Pretty-boy."

Clond flung down a gold piece. "It'll be worth it to see you back to lose this pot, piker. It's five minutes to ten on my watch. Let's see you make it back here by ten sharp."

Button flung himself out of the door. The other players, Clond, Longhorn Kelso, little Reb Kinsey, Todd and one of the Grays ranching at Gyp Wells, went to the bar for drinks or played showdown for dollars during Button's absence. Clond, who had left his watch on the table, picked it up several times to keep count of the passing minutes. He was still keeping time when Button burst into the room, panting a little, his small swarthy face flushed.

"I made it," Button said triumphantly, and threw down a buckskin bag that clinked with the coins inside. "Figured you'd won ten off me, didn't you, Pretty-boy?"

"You only had ten seconds to spare," said Clond, scanning his watch in disappointment. "You come in just under the wire. Exactly ten o'clock. C'mon, shove out money if you're calling me."

On the two-hand showdown, Clond lost to Button. Todd played a few more deals, and then cashed in. As he got up from the table Clond suggested that they get together soon to hunt bear on the Hatchet Mountain Land Grant of his uncles. Todd promised to consider it, and after a few minutes' talk with the men lined up at the bar, went to get his horse from the livery barn.

THE wind, instead of stopping with night, was howling louder. At a swinging lope Todd's roan gelding covered the mile or so to the

old Carmony ranchhouse, snorting at the clouds of dust which rolled up on them.

The trail Todd rode was the same used by Emily Reese in driving to her ranch. Thinking of the girl, he told himself he did not blame her for being hostile to him. Five years before he had tried to explain to her why he was leaving Dry Mesas. He had done a poor job; it had been hard to put it into words. He wasn't leaving only because he opposed the fencing of free range, or because he had lost his ranch to Al Button. Mainly it was because he had wanted to see the world beyond Dry Mesas. Marriage then, even to Emily, for whom he genuinely cared, had seemed like putting himself into hobbles too early in life.

Anyway, he and Emily had quarreled, the kind of quarrel that was hard to heal.

Todd put away his horse in the stable behind the rambling Carmony house, once headquarters for the first ranch on Dry Mesas. A light burned in the house. That meant Spence was still up.

Entering the kitchen, Todd went into the huge living room, where in an easy-chair under a hanging lamp Spence Carmony spent his evenings reading.

When Todd stepped in, he found his grandfather, as he had expected, sitting in his accustomed chair. A big Bible was opened on his knees, but Spence was not reading it; he lay queerly crumpled, his face turned toward the ceiling.

Todd sprang forward, but he knew he was too late to be of any help to his grandfather. Spence was dead, killed by a bullet that had entered his temple.

Suspecting suicide, although Spence Carmony wasn't the kind to take that easy out, Todd looked

down on the floor for a fallen pistol. There was none. Then a draft of wind entering through a shattered windowpane at the side of the room revealed the pathway of the bullet.

Spence Carmony had been murdered!

CHAPTER III

TODD TURNS BANK ROBBER

FOR a long minute Todd stared down sorrowfully at his grandfather. Murder! A bushwhacking, cruel murder of a peaceful old man who had been fighting to save the Dry Mesas country from disaster. A thousand memories flooded Todd—of this man who had taken the place of his father when he had been left orphaned. And the regretful memory of his refusal to help his grandfather win over a few votes against fences.

Back in the kitchen Todd lighted a lantern and went outdoors to the window through which the murderer had fired the bullet.

The wind had been there before him, a broom leaving no prints on the hard earth. Nevertheless, Todd patiently moved the lantern about. Ten feet from the house he saw an object—a chunk of leather. No close examination was needed to identify it. It was the run-down heel off Windy Raikes' right boot.

With the heel in his pocket, Todd tried to pick up the trail of the assassin to his horse, but the hard wind had destroyed all tracks, even those of a shod animal.

He returned to the living room, to study the heel. Todd knew Windy Raikes as well as anyone except the rancher's buddy, little Morg Molney, knew him. Windy wasn't a killer, even when drunk. And despite the evidence of the boot heel

and the threat Windy had made in the saloon, Todd was convinced that Raikes hadn't fired that shot. Plenty men in the Cloudy-in-the-West had heard the threat. One of them must have ridden out here knowing that suspicion would naturally light on Raikes. That same man must have found the heel and had left it to convict the big rancher.

But was he leaning backward in trying to exonerate Windy Raikes? There was plenty to put Raikes on trial for his life, despite the alibi Morg Molney would doubtless furnish. Todd weighed the matter swiftly and stuck the chunk of leather into his pocket. Justice could afford to wait, if only it were certain in the end. And it would be certain, Todd vowed as he went out to his horse.

What Spence had feared was now certain to happen, thought Todd as he rode back through wind and dust to report the murder. The Carmony bank would crash and down with it would go Raikes and Molney, Reb Kinsey, Longhorn Kelso, Go West Greeley, Emily Reese and probably all the other Dry Mesas country ranchers except Dan Clond. A receiver would call in notes that were long overdue and foreclose on the mortgages Spence had said lay unrecorded in the bank vault.

The ranchers hadn't a ghost of a chance to pay—not with a drought on and their cattle starving behind fences. Someone would be able to bid in their ranches for a song. Todd shrugged his shoulders. They deserved to go broke, the whole stubborn lot of them. No, he was wrong. They might be stubborn about fences, but you had to be of a stubborn breed to survive on Dry Mesas; to fight through strings of bad years. But whether or not they deserved it, they were doomed.

Nothing could help them now with Spence Carmony gone.

APPROACHING the town, Todd turned off the trail to take a short cut past a thick clump of giant yuccas back of the bank. Tipton, except for the Cloudy-in-the-West, was all dark. Near the yucca clump, Todd drew up his horse, hesitating to report the murder, and wishing that what had been done could be undone. A horse nickered from among the trees, and with a range man's curiosity Todd rode in to investigate.

It was not too dark to make out a buckboard with a team tied to a big yucca trunk. Queer that the outfit should be hidden there. Mighty queer. The yuccas were close to the back of the bank, and acting on a sudden hunch, Todd left his horse to walk toward the bank, which stood between two vacant lots. Halting out of the wind at the rear of the building, he caught the smell of fresh-turned earth. Noiselessly, a hand on his six-shooter butt, he edged along the wall until he felt soft dirt under his boots.

Kneeling, he discovered a big hole leading under the foundation wall. No doubt it led through the floor into the back of the one room of the building. Todd listened, but heard nothing. Hoping he was not too late, he wriggled his way cautiously down into the hole. It was a tight squeeze, but the foundation was shallow, and the hole curved but little. He snaked along it for a few feet to come out through splintered floor boards into a little storage closet. The door to this was open and, stepping outside, he listened again.

The vault was also in the back on the other side of a partition wall in which two cashier cages were set.

He was not too late, Todd saw. Near the vault shone a faint light, coming from a bull's-eye lantern.

Todd knew a little about the manner yeggs went at such jobs. They fashioned a little cup of clay over the crack between the vault door and its frame, and poured in nitroglycerin—in slang, "soup"—which was touched off with a fuse. Little of the explosive liquid was needed, since it penetrated deep into the crack where it would do the most damage. Experts were able to blow open safe and vault doors with such light explosions that they were often not heard outside the building.

As he listened a certain relief came to Todd. There must be a connection between the killing of Spence Carmony and this robbery, and that would let out any of the local people. Or would it? How could that boot heel be explained if Spence had been shot by outsiders? And why would outsiders kill the owner of a bank before blowing open the vault? It was far more plausible that local parties would do both jobs, wanting to get possession of notes held by the bank and to end the man who knew about those notes. Both Raikes and Molney were heavily in debt to the bank. Could they be engineering this?

Revealed by the faint lantern light, two men were bending over the door of the small old-fashioned vault. Then one muttered something Todd could not catch, and footsteps creaked over the floor toward the closet where the hole ended.

Todd moved back into deeper darkness and lifted his six-shooter. He waited until the man stepped near him, then struck down swiftly with the barrel of the gun. He struck chiefly by guess, but his blow crashed against a skull.

As the man staggered and started

to go down, Todd shoved him aside to rush the second thug at the vault, revealed distinctly by the rays of the lantern. Hearing Todd's approach, the man at the vault promptly flung up his hands and let out a terrified squawk.

"For Pete's sake, mister don't bump into me! Not unless you want to blow us both to Kingdom Come! I ain't a-givin' you no fight."

Todd had heard that the explosive liquid used by safe blowers was highly dangerous, but suspecting a trick, he lifted the lantern to examine his captive. The man was a smallish fellow with a wizened face and grayish hair, and clad in a cap, sweater and corduroy pants. A search revealed that the only weapon possessed by the cracksmen was an old Colts revolver.

"That's a dang sight more dangerous than a gun, if it was knocked over," volunteered the small fellow meekly and pointed to a bottle sitting on a table a few feet away.

The man seemed far removed from the breed of desperado Todd had known. Which fitted in with what Todd had heard of the safe-cracker breed; they lacked the courage of the Daltons and their kind, who held up banks in broad daylight.

The man Todd had slugged was stirring awake, groaning a little. Todd dragged him into the light of the lantern and tied his hands with his own belt.

"You two don't seem to make much fuss," Todd observed.

"What kin we do?" whined the little fellow. "We never aim to do no shootin'. We jist slip into a town, do a job quiet and easy, and slip out again."

Todd scowled. "No shooting, huh? Try to prove that, with the

old man who owned this bank lying shot to death out at his house."

"We never done it!" exclaimed the man, plainly shaken. "We never killed nobody. Why would we risk gittin' our neck stretched? All we come here for is what is in this tin box. We learnt about this bank five years ago in Yuma Pen. A feller that once rustled cattle in this country tipped us off. Me and Jake drove here over a month ago and figgered it a easy job. That's the truth, mister. We didn't kill nobody to-night or any other time."

TODD was used to making decisions quickly. He made one now. He believed the man. It was incredible, but there was no connection between this pair and the murder of Spence Carmony. That the two men were in this country tonight was pure coincidence. A coincidence that suddenly put an idea into Todd Carmony's head. His grandfather had forced him to work in the bank just about long enough for him to know what was inside the vault. Each night Spence Carmony had locked up in it everything of importance—notes, mortgages and records containing all the details of the business; and of course the less than a thousand dollars cash that Spence had reported it held.

Into his hands, Todd thought swiftly, had been put a possible means of delaying the bankruptcy of the Dry Mesas ranchers. It would be against the law, of course, but often with the law you had to bend a rifle barrel around a corner to hit a target.

"Listen, you," he said. "Are you sure you can make a getaway if I turn you loose?"

"Can we?" exclaimed the little man eagerly. "We got a fast team that'll take us easy into Corson to

catch the mornin' passenger. Then we slip off at a station where we got a friend waitin' to hide us out in the hills. But what would be your notion, pardner, in turnin' us loose? I don't reckon it's just a soft heart?"

"You wouldn't savvy if I told you why," Todd replied. "You do what I say, and you'll make that train. Crack open that safe and do it quiet, and I'll turn you loose. I'll untie your partner so he can help you, but don't wake up the town or the deal is off. You birds were wasting your time here anyway. You'd have got less than a thousand dollars."

"Huh!" said the man, disgusted. "I could rob some kids' banks and get a'most as much. Not even expense money!"

Working swiftly, the two got busy, pouring liquid from the bottle into the small clay cup already fastened to the vault door. Laying a pair of horse blankets and a ragged cotton quilt over the end of the vault, they added some Indian rugs from Spence Carmony's office. These of course were to muffle the sound of the explosion. Then the small man lighted the fuse and they all stepped back. The explosion was not loud enough to carry even into the street, but it jarred the door from its hinges sufficiently so that the two could jimmy it open with a crowbar that was part of their equipment.

They had also brought a grain sack to carry off their loot. Into this Todd quickly dumped the cash in the vault, bills and coin, together with the contents of miscellaneous small compartments and drawers—notes and other valuable papers—adding finally all the books and records. It made a hefty load.

Next Todd stacked old record books and papers from ancient files

into the vault and the floor before it, touching a match to the mass and setting it aflame in several places. When the papers were burning fiercely, he led the way back through the hole, pushing the sack before him. Emerging, the pair of bank thieves ran like scared rabbits for their rig.

Todd lugged the heavy sack to his horse and hastily headed out with it over the saddlehorn. The fire in the bank had already been seen by some man who began bawling "Fire!" at the top of his voice.

The two yeggs had their team already stretching out on the trail toward Corson. Tipton had no telegraph line, and barring the buckboard throwing a wheel, the pair would escape without trouble.

Dogs were barking furiously to add to the clamor of shouting men when Todd topped a rise a quarter of a mile from town. So far so good. The bank robbery and the murder of Spence might throw the bank affairs promptly into court, but with everyone believing the records burned, it would be a long time, if ever, before the muddle could be straightened. Which would give the ranchers a chance to get in shape to pay their notes.

Todd had already picked a hiding place for the sack of papers: an old, unused kitchen cistern. Reaching the house, he pulled off the cistern cover and dumped the heavy sack inside.

Back in the living room, he stopped to look at the figure in the chair. Deep regret filled Todd again; he wished fervently that he had stayed in the Dry Mesas country the past five years, to spend them in association with Spence. Only after people were gone did you realize what they meant to you.

CHAPTER IV

FENCES COME DOWN

RETURNING to town, Todd found that the blaze in the bank had been put out, too late of course to save the papers he had set afire. Marshal Juck Dollar was locking the door and telling the gathered crowd that it might as well go home.

Juck scowled as Todd took him aside. "Something more serious than a bank robbery has happened," Todd said. "I found Spence shot and killed when I rode out from town."

Juck stared hard. "You mean it? Spence shot?"

"Yeah. Bushwhacked. Somebody killed him from the east window. While you get your horse I'll leave word for Doc Warms to come out."

Juck promptly went for his horse while Todd dropped word at the house of the Tipton doctor. Returning, he found Juck mounted, and the two headed out together.

"I'll go out to have a look," said Juck, "but Windy Raikes and Morg Molney are the two I want for that shooting. Windy passed the threat to kill Spence tonight. He and Morg did it and then came back to blow up the bank to get rid of their notes."

"That's the way it looks," agreed Todd. "But I doubt that's the way it was. Somebody in the crowd told me no one in town heard that explosion."

"No," admitted Juck. "I was in the Cloudy-in-the-West. Nobody heard it in there."

"The only explosive Windy and Morg would know how to use is dynamite," Todd said. "And that would have shook the whole town. Anyway, you couldn't blow off that vault

door with dynamite: it takes a liquid explosive that can run into the crack between door and frame. Professional cracksmen use nitroglycerin."

"You're right, but you seem to know a lot about blowing open vaults," Juck observed suspiciously.

"You'd be surprised how much I know and how I learned it," stated Todd. "I don't think Raikes shot Spence. Windy's talk has always been worse than his bite. He wore a gun tonight in his ruckus with me, but he never offered to use it. Windy's all bluff."

Todd wasn't telling this hostile one-track-minded marshal much of what he knew. He couldn't afford to for one thing. Technically, Todd was an accomplice to the robbery, and he was playing a lone hand, sitting tight behind a little pile of chips.

"There's got to be a hookup between the robbery and murder," insisted Juck. "The same parties done both jobs. If it wasn't Windy, then it was the bank robbers killed Spence."

THE two finished their ride to the Carmony ranchhouse and stepped inside. Juck Dollar had been a good friend of Spence Carmony. Looking at the body now, the marshal was obviously moved.

"A mighty good man, Spence," he said gravely. Then he swung on Todd. "You're hiding something," he growled. "It's queer—you coming home and your grandfather shot and the bank robbed all in a few hours. You know more'n what you're tellin'. You said you found Spence dead when you got home. You left town over a hour ago. What took you so long to report the shooting?"

"I spent part of that time," said Todd truthfully, "trying to pick up the trail of the fellow that did this. You accusing me, Juck, of killing my grandfather or robbing the bank?"

"No," Juck said grudgingly. "I wish I could. That bank job was done by yeggs. But yeggs don't fit in with this killing. Windy Raikes, the drunk fool, must've ended Spence. He's wrecked this country. The bank was a'ready about busted, and now the robbery and Spence's death means a receiver selling out all the Dry Mesas ranchers. With their cows starving and the drought, they got no chance of paying out. It means the end of Emily Reese and the rest."

"Maybe not," argued Todd. "With the fire destroying those bank papers and records, how is a receiver going to sell anybody out? The ranchers ought to have all this summer and fall to pray for rain and heavy calves. They could get by if they'd take down their fences."

"Them fences stay up!" growled Juck and, looking at Spence again, he ripped out an oath. "Damn whoever killed him!" he burst out. "A worthless grandson you are, Todd, leavin' him for five years. Then when you come back, trouble breaks. If you'd stayed away, this might not have happened. If Windy Raikes done it, it was account he went crazy mad figuring you'd get enough votes to put out the fences. I'm bringin' in Windy and Molney to question 'em, and I'll find out if they done it or not. And you're leaving this country right after the funeral!"

"Juck," said Todd, "get this: I'm staying on until whoever shot granddad is found out and pays for it, savvy? That may take a long time with the wind and dust doing away

with tracks. Also I'm doing what Spence asked me to do a few hours ago. Working to bring the fences down on Dry Mesas. Not because I care especially what happens to the ranchers, but because Spence wanted to pull them through."

"All right, you're stayin'," Juck mumbled reluctantly. He had to admit that Todd had a right to try to avenge his grandfather's death. "But only until this murder is cleared up. No later. And Emily Reese's fences ain't comin' down to let her cattle out on range to be stole. You stay away from her ranch!"

MUTTERING to himself, the big marshal and deputy sheriff went outdoors to look vainly for tracks, while Todd made coffee in the kitchen. Doctor Warms arrived a little later with Dan Clond, Al Button, Longhorn Kelso and Reb Kinsey. Button, as the former son-in-law of Spence Carmony, was demanding that a lynch party be organized to take care of Raikes and Molney.

The doctor said that the death had probably occurred not more than two hours before. Which would make it not over an hour before Todd had discovered the body. The bullet the doctor removed from Spence's body was discovered to be a .45-caliber slug. Raikes had a .45, but so did everyone else in the Tipton country. Juck Dollar left with Longhorn Kelso and Reb Kinsey, to ride to the Raikes ranch. Al Button volunteered to go to Corson for the undertaker, and also to summon the sheriff.

Dan Clond stayed with Todd until morning, when Juck Dollar arrived with Raikes and Molney. Both men maintained defiantly that they

*To top the trouble that was
roiling Dry Mesas that night,
Todd found a strange buck-
board staked out behind the
bank.*



had ridden straight from Tipton to Molney's ranch the night before. Molney insisted that he had been with Raikes every second of the time, and Juck Dollar could not shake their stories.

Baffled, the sheriff from Corson and Juck Dollar began to check other possible suspects and to turn over various theories to explain the double crime. They did not get far. Windy Raikes was released the same day for lack of evidence, which Todd could easily have supplied by producing the boot heel.

Despite Windy's release, there was

strong talk that he was guilty. Al Button was perhaps the most bitter. He had loved that old man, Spence Carmony, as a father instead of just as a father-in-law, the gambler declared with an unusual show of feeling. For a while Al threatened to go gunning for Windy Raikes, and Dollar finally had to take his gun away until he cooled off.

"It's got me stumped," Juck reported to Todd. "Anybody that owed money to the bank could be suspected both of the murder and bank robbery. I checked up on every man in town that night, and

almost any one of 'em could have slipped away to ride out to kill Spence without being missed. The only exceptions was the men playing poker with you; not one of 'em could have been mixed in the killing. Longhorn Kelso, Reb Kinsey, Hoot Gray, Al Button and Dan Clond were in the saloon steady up to the time of the fire. The only one that left in that time was Al Button, and I found out he was gone exactly five minutes. Not long enough to ride out to Spence's place even on a race horse to do the killing, and admitting Al had anything to kill Spence for. Which Al hadn't."

"Yeah, I can testify myself how long Al was gone," said Todd, recalling the bet Clond and Button had made. "Exactly five minutes."

"There's something queer about all this," Juck said darkly. "And I think you may turn out to be at the bottom of it."

The whole country attended the funeral of Spence Carmony, and Emily Reese sang the hymns in a clear, sweet voice. The next day a bank examiner arrived. Todd went to the bank with him. The man threw up his hands after he had pawed through the charred fragments of paper.

"As the only heir," he remarked to Todd, "it looks like you won't be heir to anything. With those papers destroyed, how am I going to tell how much money was owed the bank and how much the bank owed depositors? What can I do with a mess like this?"

"You might do nothing and give the people owing the bank a chance to get on their feet," suggested Todd. "They won't try to cheat the bank if they get in shape to pay up. Come back next fall; something may turn up by then."

THE shock of Spence Carmony's death had stopped the fence wrangle temporarily, but with voting time close the fight soon flamed up again. Todd rode out to do some electioneering, calling first on old Reb Kinsey. With him, as if he were running for office, Todd had taken three bottles of Spence's favorite brand of rye. He carried one of the bottles into Reb's bachelor kitchen, where the old rancher was getting dinner.

"A little present from Spence," said Todd. "I know he'd have wanted you to have his last bottle of whiskey to drink to the years you two were friends. The best friend he ever had, that's what Spence said about you more than once, Reb."

"Did he now?" said the tough Reb, profoundly moved both by the sentiment and the present.

"Spence had a favor to ask you," said Todd after the fourth drink. "He's still asking it from his grave. And Spence knew that in a pinch he could always count on you."

"He shore could," declared Reb fervently. "Folks never appreciate a good man until he's cashed in. Name the favor he wanted."

"It's in this fence matter," said Todd. "I know you've been against taking 'em down. Spence would appreciate it if you'd change your mind."

"I shore will," Reb said heartily. "I was only agin' him on that account they made me string up those cussed barb wires over my vote five years ago, and I made up my mind never to take 'em down. But if Spence was a-countin' on me, that's different."

Todd rode next to the ranch of Longhorn Kelso, who still raised slab-sided longhorns with a very faint trace of Durham blood. Longhorn was proud of his cattle. To

one of them, a tame old steer named Pole Star because he had been used years before as leader of trail herds, Longhorn would talk as if the animal were human.

Todd produced a second bottle of whiskey. "Spence," he lied shamelessly, "wanted you to have his last bottle of whiskey to drink to the years you and him were friends in this country. The best friend he ever had, Longhorn Kelso, he told me often."

Longhorn, even more deeply moved than Reb, began to talk as he and Todd lowered the bottle. "Trouble with this country, as I told Spence over and over, ain't fences: it's them blasted blue-blood white-faces people raise. Herefords jist ain't got no guts, Todd. Longhorns kin live a whole year jist on scenery, and not extry purty scenery either. Look at them longhorns o' mine; they don't even know there's been a drought."

Todd looked at the gaunt cattle watering in the Kelso corral. They sure looked as if they had been dining only on scenery, but all of them were on their feet; they had too much fight to let themselves get down to where a two-legged creature would have to tail them up.

"So tough they fatten jist lookin' at a pitcher of grass," bragged Longhorn. "They kin smell feed fifty miles off, and them long legs kin take 'em where it is."

"You're right," said Todd quickly. "It's a shame to keep those splendid animals cooped up behind fences. If you don't vote to take down those wires, how can you look old Pole Star in the face?"

Longhorn, bowled over by this brilliant argument, hemmed and hawed, but gave in, and Todd rode on to Go West Greeley to present the last bottle of whiskey. Go West

proved as agreeable as Longhorn and Reb, and promised to get his nephew rancher to vote the same way or bust said nephew's neck. The four votes wrangled by Todd were enough to swing the decision against fences.

AT a meeting of Dry Mesas ranchers in Tipton it was voted to open the wires immediately to make the country from Snake Hills in the west to Clond's river ranch once more free range. There was a victory jubilation in the Cloudy-in-the-West that night, paid for by Dan Clond, who had been the first to congratulate Todd.

"I wish Spence were alive to see what you've done to save this country," said Clond. "I'm having my crew start moving all my cattle up from the river tomorrow. Saving the valley range for our use this winter. If our cattle can get through in good shape up on the Mesas until fall, we'll all make out."

"Specially you with your millionaire uncles' money backin' you," sneered Al Button, who as the owner of a few head of cattle had voted to keep the fences. "But how about Raikes and Molney? They left town, sayin' they're guarding the fences round their waterholes above the canyon rim. Long as they keep those fences up, no cattle can use those Hell's Far breaks. And Juck Dollar's saying nobody touches any of Emily Reese's fences, either."

"Fences have got to come down," said Clond. "Todd, what do you say to our getting up a party and riding out some night to cut Raikes' and Molney's wire?"

Todd shook his head. "What is done should be done in the open. Night riding means gun trouble. Leave those fences to me."

Clond shook his head doubtfully.

"We'll ride out with you to see Molney and Raikes, but I'm afraid there'll be a gun battle."

"Sure we'll go with you," Al Button agreed. "Wouldn't be safe for you to go agin' them killers alone, Todd. We'll all saddle up and go with you, and I hope those two show fight. Only shootin' would be too good for the pair that killed Spence."

"I'm going out alone," insisted Todd. "There'll be no fight."

Al Button grunted. "It's your funeral, Todd. There's room in the cemetery for another grave alongside Spence's."

Todd headed next day for the Raikes ranch. Windy wasn't home and Todd jogged on to Molney's place, where he found Raikes and Molney perched on a rocky little point above their waterholes ready with rifles to stop any attempt to cut wire.

Todd swung down. "Looks like you two and me need to have a understanding," he remarked. "A bunch favored a night ride to cut your fences. If you'd shot some of that outfit, the two of you would have been lynched. Fences were voted out: yours have to come down."

Raikes' big jaw jutted out beligerently. "Better go bring that party of night riders to help you, Todd. 'Cause if anybody touches our fences, we're shootin'. Folks think I murdered Spence; I figure I might as well actually do some killin'."

"Windy," said Todd, "you and me never got along. But while other people suspect you killed Spence, I don't. And I've got more reason than other people to think so." He reached in his pocket and took out a chunk of leather. "You know this?"

"Could be the heel I lost off my

boot," said Windy warily.

"I found it outside the window that somebody busted when he shot Spence Carmony. Plenty men saw you lose that heel in the Cloudy-in-the-West the night Spence was killed, and they saw Morg tack it on again. If I'd turned that heel in, you know what it would have meant."

RAIKES paled. He realized that the heel might well have put his neck into a hang noose.

"Why didn't you turn it in?" he snarled defiantly.

"Because I doubt if even you were fool enough to leave that heel where you'd just killed a man. Anyway, it can wait. But that's why I'm telling you two to throw those waterholes open. I'm a better friend of yours than you think, Windy."

"Doggoned if I think so," growled Windy. "I don't believe you found that heel outside Spence's window."

"I'm not the only one that saw it there," said Todd. "Somebody else knew it was there."

Little Morg Molney, who usually gave in to Raikes, put in his say. "Todd's right. He's a friend of ours. And don't think I don't appreciate it, Todd. If I thought Windy bushwhacked that old man, I'd turn him in myself. But I swear he didn't do it. Just after we stepped out of the Cloudy-in-the-West that night, he complained he'd lost that heel, but I put him on his horse and shoved out. Somebody found that heel and left it at Spence's place to cinch the killing on Windy, and that's the gospel truth."

"I believe you," said Todd. "But I'll know for sure some day if you're lying or not. Sooner or later whoever ended Spence will give himself away. But you two take down those fences, savvy?"

"We savvy," said Molney. "And we'll do it."

Windy grumbled, but he gave in. Todd left the two yanking staples from posts as he rode away, presenting a back that would be easy target for a rifle. No shots came, but a hail did—from Windy Raikes.

"Who is the other feller besides you that knows about my heel being found outside Spence's window?" he yelled.

Todd's face was bleak. "Him? Why, the fellow that killed Spence Carmony," he called back. "I'll tell you his name sometime."

There was one remaining fence rebel—Emily Reese—and Todd was more afraid to deal with her than he had been with Raikes and Molney. Not because of any fear of Juck Dollar, but of the girl herself.

CHAPTER V

BULLET FOR A RUSTLER

TODD found Emily Reese in Levis, man's shirt and boots, repairing a corral gate. The girl could not afford to keep a hand, and her only companion on the ranch was Aunt Molly Pritchett, a distant relative.

When Todd rode up, the girl regarded him exactly as she had at their first meeting in Tipton—as someone with whom she was barely acquainted.

"I wish you wouldn't come here, Todd," she stated.

Todd's face hardened. "The call is strictly on business." He looked at a bunch of her thin cattle in the corral. "Business concerning my grandfather's estate and the bank. You've got no grass here, but there's plenty in Hell's Far Canyon. Why don't you turn your cattle out, Emily?"

"Juck Dollar advised me to keep them here," she explained. "Juck's

loaned me money to buy feed, and it's only right I should take his advice. I'm not hurting anyone. Keeping my cattle here means all the more grass for the others in the canyon."

"All the range has to be open if this scheme is to work. Your cattle are tramping the range inside your fences bare, killing the grass. On free range what hurts any part hurts all of it. And if Juck's loaned you money, so did Spence. If you ever hope to get your ranch back on its feet, you've got to send your cattle where there is feed."

"It's true; I do owe the bank a lot more than I owe Juck," Emily admitted. "I was willing to put my cattle out with the rest, but Juck says if a girl turned cattle out on the range, people would steal every head she owned."

"Juck doesn't trust anyone where you are concerned, does he?" asked Todd. "I'll guarantee no one will steal your cattle, and I'll guarantee that by fall you'll be paying off at least half your debts. Juck means well, but he doesn't know cattle."

Emily stood staring across the barren pastures of her ranch. "You're right. Juck is no cattleman. If you represent the bank, you have a say-so in how my ranch is run. When you ride back to town, you can open the east line. Most of my cattle are down there, and they'll drift to the canyon. I'll ride tomorrow to let down wire on the other sides."

Todd nodded. Then, his face grave, he said: "There's no forgetting what happened five years ago, Emily?"

"I meant what I said in town, Todd," Emily told him. "I look on that as only insurance. A wise child doesn't touch a hot stove twice. I never blamed you for leaving. You

don't blame anyone for being as they are. You were one kind of person; I was another."

She swung to go toward the house and then turned. "Please don't come back again, Todd. If you see Juck in town tell him that I've decided to turn out my cattle."

TODD rode along the Tipton trail until he reached the east line of the Reese fence. Nearly fifty thin, hungry cattle were drifting along it. Dismounting, Todd began pulling out staples, tacking the dropped wires close to the ground to make a safe crossing for stock. It was dusk when he finished and walked toward his horse. The cattle were already stringing through the wide gap he had left.

As Todd swung into his saddle a sudden angry hail came from a rocky hill above him. He glanced up to identify Juck Dollar. The marshal, Todd realized instantly, would mistake what he saw. He'd think he had caught Todd taking down Emily Reese's fences without permission. Or maybe Juck, with his notoriously poor eyesight, didn't even identify Todd; maybe Juck thought he saw a rustler stealing a bunch of Reese cattle. A shot came down, sending a spurt of earth some yards to Todd's side. Whatever Juck thought, Todd realized that this was to be a shooting affair.

A gun battle with the simple-minded old fool was the last thing on earth Todd desired. With the advantage of dusk and Juck's failing eyesight, Todd decided to make a run for the cover of a nearby deep arroyo and explain later. But as he spurred his horse along the slope, the shots began to come close. One of Juck's bullets grazed the rump of Todd's horse, starting the animal to pitching.

Todd got the horse running again. Then, just before he dropped behind the protecting bank of the arroyo, a bullet hit Todd in the left side. He had been hit hard, judging by the paralyzing weakness that spread almost at once through his body. Even in the arroyo he was not safe from Juck's gun; the marshal shifted position to empty his rifle again.

Todd escaped finally over a ridge and, stopping, placed his wadded neckerchief as a sponge for the blood flowing from the wound. Before long he realized he would be unconscious, and to make sure that he would keep his seat, he used his lariat to tie himself in the saddle. His horse might possibly deliver him in Tipton.

AFTER what might have been one or several hours of jolting, painful travel, Todd awoke to find his horse whickering sociably across corral bars; he himself had collapsed over his saddlehorn. Lifting his head, Todd saw the light of a nearby house. He had barely enough strength to fire his six-shooter through the end of the holster. A dog came rushing down with a savage barking, a big white bull that Todd identified as Emily Reese's. Weakened by the drain of blood and bullet shock, he had forgotten that he was inside Emily's pasture, and that his horse might return to the Reese corrals.

A lantern held by Emily shone in his face. Aunt Molly Pritchett stood nearby, a rifle in her hands. At the girl's cry of alarm, Todd tried to reassure her by sitting up in the saddle, but the effort only made him faint away again.

Emily led the horse to the house and together the two women got Todd into a bed. Then Emily took

Todd's horse to race off to the nearest ranch to send a messenger for Doc Warms. Warms, a health seeker from the East, was a far better doctor than Dry Mesas would ordinarily have, a progressive physician who kept up with the advances in medicine, delivering babies, it was said, with one eye in the latest medical journal and the other on his job. It was lucky for Todd that he was to have a man like Warms to attend him.

"The end justifies the means," Warms announced cheerfully after his examination. "It looks as if we might have to cut off a leg. What will you say to that?"

"I will say to you to go to the devil, doc," said Todd weakly.

"All right," Warms said briskly. "No sawing off a leg, but something worse; taking out that bullet. And then a very long time to get well, Todd—if you ever get well."

Todd was already weaker than he had ever been in his life, but he was far weaker after Warms had extracted the bullet.

Then the doctor went away and left Todd alone. When he awoke it was morning, and Emily Reese stood by the bed.

"Todd, it was all my fault," she cried. "Juck Dollar came in late last night and said that he had shot a rustler he caught shoving cattle through my fence."

"I guess Juck wasn't much sorry," remarked Todd. "He thought I had it coming to me anyway."

"You mustn't say that, Todd," Emily protested. "And you must forgive Juck; he was only trying to protect my property." The girl suddenly knelt by the side of the bed and sobs shook her. "Juck only thinks he hates you. I tried to hate you too. When I couldn't, I pretended to be indifferent, but last

night when you came in hurt I knew it was no use. I still love you, Todd. I always did. I know now that I could never marry anyone but you."

Todd guessed he must be dreaming this. "You mean, Emily, you still care a little? After that quarrel of ours five years ago I tried to tell myself I didn't care to tie myself down to anyone and that I wanted to be a drifter the rest of my life. But there's never been a day of that five years that I didn't regret leaving Dry Mesas."

Weakly Todd reached out a hand to stroke Emily's soft brown hair. Something that had been frozen in him for a long time came loose. "I'll never go away again unless you want me to, Emily," he said huskily. "I know you think now that you can never forget that I did go away. When I get well I'll change your mind on that, if it takes me fifty years. But I'll not stay here to be a sick child on your hands. Doc said it would take maybe months for me to get over this. I'm having them take me to Spence's house."

"You'll stay here," Emily insisted. "It was my fault that you were shot."

"No," he said. "It wasn't your fault or Juck's. And anyway Doc Warms said he couldn't be traveling out twenty miles to call on a patient."

Todd went away two days later, lying on a mattress in a wagon, to go to bed in his grandfather's big house. A married couple was engaged to attend to him. For a month it was nip and tuck whether he would live at all, and it was two weeks after that before Doc Warms let him receive visitors.

They came in a stream, all of the Dry Mesas people. The old-timers, Reb Kinsey, Go West Greeley and

Longhorn Kelso, the latter full of brags that his longhorns were acting like a bunch of mother hens, leading the Dry Mesas cattle where grass could be found. Dan Clond brought bundles of magazines and newspapers, and Al Button came to play stud every afternoon. Every other day Emily drove in from her ranch, bringing some of her own or Aunt Molly's cooking to tempt an invalid's appetite. Even Windy Raikes and Morg Molney came. Juck Dollar, however, steadfastly stayed away.

THE long summer days had become the shorter ones of fall by the time Todd left the big shady porch of the house to begin riding again. It had taken him long months to get well, but the time had not been wasted. The days of idleness had given him time to think, to turn the murder of Spence Carmony over and over in his mind, and to puzzle out a solution, which he told to no one.

Todd had a visitor from outside Dry Mesas, Lon Ransdell, Spence Carmony's oldish banker friend from Bell City. Ransdell stayed for three days, riding two of them with Todd to look at the Dry Mesas cattle. Those they saw had plenty of flesh on their ribs. Desert range, as Spence Carmony had maintained, was good range when the area was large enough so that some portions of it were sure to have rain. Evenings, the two went over the sack of bank records and notes which Todd produced from the dry cistern. Ransdell studied them, jotted down columns of figures, which he added.

"You could get about ten years in the pen for hiding these records," he remarked, grinning, "but I'll be jiggered if you didn't do exactly right. Spence left that bank in good shape

once the fences were gone. If the cattle continue doing well, the depositors and the money Spence borrowed from me can be paid in full this fall."

"They'll keep on doing well," Todd said confidently. "Down on the river this winter they'll get hog fat. Clond has had his cattle up on the Mesas all summer, saving all of the valley range for cold weather."

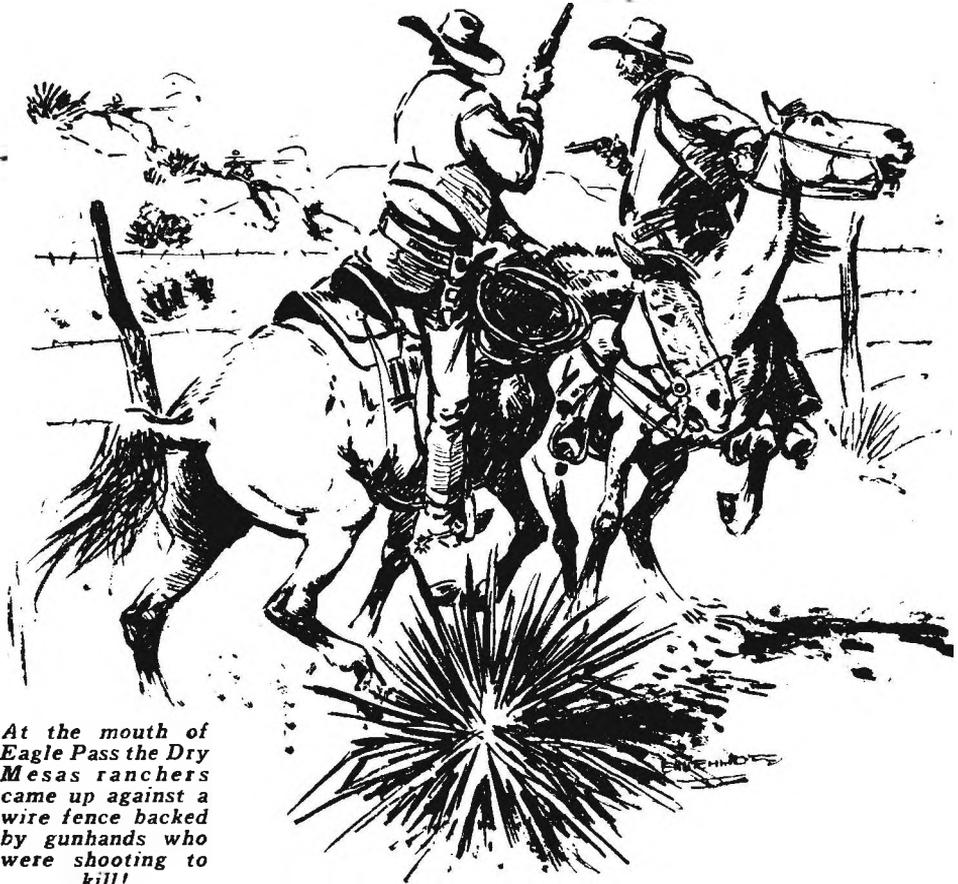
Ransdell nodded. "When the cattle are moved to the valley I'll bring buyers and we'll show these papers and reorganize the bank. I'll provide whatever capital is needed on condition the bank is run by some man that sees red whenever he looks at a fence. How about you taking the job? I mean it," he went on earnestly as Todd laughed outright. "You know cattle and you know this country, and there's enough of Spence's blood in you to ramrod a bank. You think it over, Todd." He rose. "Well, I'm leaving to catch a train. Is there any hope of ever finding the murderer of your grandfather?"

Todd became serious. "Plenty," he said grimly. "I always had a suspicion of the man, but while I lay there in bed one day the proof came to me. Just a little thing I remembered."

"What was that little thing?" asked Ransdell curiously.

"The smell of horse sweat on a man," said Todd. "I'll tell you about it a little later, when that hombre sticks his neck a little farther into a hang noose. And maybe another man's neck in the same gallops rope."

ROUNDUP, with two chuck and bed wagons and with every available rider on the Mesas, was in full swing, and Todd went out to



At the mouth of Eagle Pass the Dry Mesas ranchers came up against a wire fence backed by gunhands who were shooting to kill!

help. Dan Clond had hired a dozen cowboys as his crew. Clond had an opportunity to sell beef, and was moving his cattle herd to the valley a week or so ahead of the others for the inspection of the buyers.

The cattle gather, stretching out over the vast country inclosed by Hell's Far Canyon, the Snake Hills and the Hatchet Mountain Land Grant, lasted for weeks. Besides gathering cattle, the roundup served to wipe out the enmities that had grown up with the fence battle, bringing back the strong friendship of old days. Emily Reese, representing her ranch, rode with the men. Juck came out often, badly disgrun-

tled at seeing the fat on the Reese cattle. He and Todd merely nodded, although Todd had nothing against the marshal. Dollar was a thick-headed fool, but what he had done had been for the sake of Emily Reese.

Cleaning up the last remnants in the lower breaks of Hell's Far Canyon, the riders started the trek toward the valley, moving the stock in two long columns. Juck Dollar left his marshal job to accompany them. Pole Star, Longhorn Kelso's old moss-horned brindle steer, stepped out in the lead as was his right.

Close to Eagle Pass, in the range of precipitous, rocky hills that

formed the mesa rim above the valley, a cold wind swept down on them. A short day's drive through the pass, however, would see them in the warmth of the valley. Slowly the lines of cattle moved on, raising long snaky columns of dust, until Todd, riding at point with Go West Greeley on the lead herd, pulled up short at sight of a line of fence stretched across the trail leading into the pass.

"Whoa up!" said Go West. "Somebody has done shut the gate against us. Don't they know fences is plumb antediluvian in this country? Who'd fence in them worthless rocks?"

"Al Button owns this place, doesn't he?" asked Todd. "Traded the ranch he won off me for it this summer?"

"That's it. Ever'body wondered what Al wanted this place for; 'tain't fit to raise horny toads. But what's he been up to?"

What Al Button evidently had been up to was building a fence. Four shiny wires stretched across the gap that led to Eagle Pass, the only passage through the rugged hills which stretched in an unbroken line between Hell's Far Canyon and the big Hatchet Mountain Land Grant.

"Maybe," said Todd as a rider emerged from the base of a cliff, "Al is going to explain."

Under the same cliff from which Al Button had emerged was a camp with a cook fire raising smoke. A dozen saddled horses were tied among stunted trees some hundred yards from camp.

Back along the lead herd the riders, Reb Kinsey, Longhorn Kelso, Windy Raikes, Go West Greeley, Juck Dollar, Emily Reese, and others, sensing trouble, were loping up to investigate.

CHAPTER VI

GUN CHALLENGE

"WHAT'S this?" demanded Reb Kinsey harshly as Al Button pulled up on the other side of the fence. "You don't think you're actually going to hold us back, do you?"

Button grinned. "This is private land, Reb, and I ain't allowin' trail cattle to ruin my range. But I'm willin' to be reasonable. Five dollars a cow would be about right to pay the damage you folks would do by crossin'."

"Would it now?" growled Go West Greeley. "Hod dang it, one five-dollar bill would cover the damages a earthquake could do to this worthless range. You know we've got to cross over your land to get to the valley."

"What's the idea, Al, of this highway robbery?" demanded Longhorn Kelso. "You know we got no money. And that we wouldn't pay it to you if we had it."

"Them that pays can pass," returned Button. "Them that don't pay stays off my land; Pretty-boy Dan Clond paid me after he'd squawked a lot. And I warn you, don't try to stampede your cows through here at night or try to cut this fence. I got a bunch of tough gunmen hired to protect my fence and my range."

They cursed him heatedly, but Al Button only chuckled.

Windy Raikes turned on Todd. "And this is what we git from follerin' your advice. You was the one that got rid of the Dry Mesas fences. Well, now, it's up to you to git our cows through."

"Hol' on," protested Reb. "Todd ain't to blame."

"Why ain't he to blame?" argued Juck Dollar. "Your cattle would

have made it through the summer with the fences up. As it is, Dan Clond's cattle helped clean up all the grass on the Mesas. All Todd done was help Dan Clond."

"Juck, be reasonable," Emily said sharply. "We've no time to quarrel; we've got to get our cattle through one way or another." But tears had appeared in the girl's eyes. Todd was noticing. Just when they saw daylight ahead, they ran into disaster. Already the raw cold winds were sweeping the Mesas. Without feed, cattle couldn't get through the winter. Todd wasn't to blame for Al Button's fence, but Windy and Juck were right: it had been Todd who had brought down the fences.

Todd beckoned Al Button aside, out of earshot of the others. "You know what, Al?" he said. "I'll make a bet you let these herds through."

Button stared suspiciously. "What makes you think so?"

For answer Todd pulled from his jacket pocket a chunk of leather, Windy Raikes' worn-over boot heel.

Button started. "So that's where that heel—" he began, and then fell silent, to fasten his small shrewd eyes on Todd's face. "What you driving at, Todd?" he snarled.

Todd put the heel back in his pocket. "You ought to know."

BUTTON hesitated, opened his mouth to speak, and then without a word rode back toward his camp.

"We're going through, Al!" called Reb Kinsey determinedly. "You can't run any bluff on us."

Al did not stop. "If you think it's bluff, come ahead," he flung over his shoulder.

Reb Kinsey dismounted to approach the fence, and instantly Button's gun crew dropped behind boul-

ders to slide rifle barrels over the tops of the rocks. A shot zinged into the post close to Reb, but stubbornly he began kicking a wire loose. Todd hastily swung down to grab Reb and force him back on his horse.

Al Button's men, eager to throw lead, opened a general fire; but they were shooting at cattle instead of the riders. A longhorn fell kicking, and at that Kelso let out a bellow and began emptying his rifle. The drivers retreated to cover, and in a few seconds a battle was on in earnest, men trading shots across the new fence while the cattle scattered. A dozen cows were beefed in the savage exchange of shots, but as dusk fell the ranchers realized that it was hopeless to try to blast a way through with guns. As Button had pointed out, he had a tough crew, and the moon was rising early to handicap a night attack.

The shooting stopped with darkness and the ranchers drew back to the camp made by the drivers of the trail wagons. But before darkness had fallen, Todd saw Al Button leave his camp, and head east for the valley. It was what Todd had expected.

It was an angry group that milled about the cook fires, heatedly proposing all sorts of desperate schemes. All ran up against a stone wall: the fence Al Button had built did not come under the general fencing agreement for Dry Mesas. His ranch was all deeded land, and legally he had a right to protect it from trespass. Which stopped the ranchers, since Button's land offered the only route to the valley. To the north lay the gorge of lower Hell's Far Canyon, impassable because of its precipitous walls and treacherous currents. South, was the fenced Hatchet Mountain Land Grant

owned by Dan Clond's uncles.

Juck Dollar suggested that they drive south to try to pass through the Grant, but Todd, seeing the situation more clearly than the others, knew that the Clonds wouldn't allow the herds to cross their property.

"You men," Todd ordered, "stay where you are until you get word from me. I'll be back by morning and I think your cattle are going through, one way or another."

And with that, leaving his errand a mystery, he slipped away afoot to head toward the precipitous cliffs that lay north of the pass. Clambering up the wall with difficulty, he circled to drop into a little grassy swale back of the Button camp, where the men had picketed their horses. He could have led a party of men over the same route to pull a surprise attack, but that was no solution. In the fight the ranchers would be on the wrong side of the law. Button's men were gunhands, but they would be defending private land.

Slipping in among the horses, Todd got up to one gentle animal and, fashioning a hackamore from a length of rope he had brought, wrapped around his waist, led him out to the pass entrance. Riding bareback through the pass, he dropped from the mesa into the warm air of the protected valley to head for the Mexican Ranch owned by Dan Clond.

TODD was well acquainted with the big old Mexican-style house of the ranch, having lived there several winters as line rider. The house had been the headquarters once of an extensive Mexican hacienda. The structure, serving both as Indian fort and community dwelling place for over a hundred employees, was the usual flat-roofed adobe building of

its type, containing several big courtyards surrounded by rooms.

Tying his horse outside the walls, Todd entered the first courtyard, now used as a corral. The rooms about this quadrangle had formerly housed peon workers, but were either deserted now or used as stables. Around the next courtyard were rooms which had formerly been the living quarters of the hacienda owners. These were now used by Dan Clond and his cowboys. Half a dozen rooms were lighted. Todd, looking into the nearer windows, saw the Clond cowboys, some playing poker, some sitting about yarning. Their number surprised Todd; Clond had had a dozen men in his crew on roundup, and he had not only kept them, but added several more.

Crossing to what he guessed to be Clond's own quarters, Todd heard Button's sneering voice inside. A look through a window showed Button and Dan Clond wrangling over a two-handed game of stud.

Todd flung open the door and, stepping inside, shut the door behind him, putting his back to it. Both men started, Button nervously rising halfway to his feet, and then sitting down again.

Clond recovered quickly. "Hello, Todd," he said jovially. "Just in time to take a hand."

"Yes," agreed Todd, "just in time to take a hand. I had a hunch Button would hurry to see you after I showed him that heel off Windy Raikes' boot. Figured you two were in cahoots. It was a slick scheme, Clond—using the mesa range all summer and fall to save your river range. And then having Button build that fence so only your cattle could reach the river."

Clond waved his hand. "Not me," he said. "I'm no hog. This river

range is open to the Dry Mesas ranchers. Of course, getting their cattle here is up to them."

"No; it's up to you," Todd disagreed.

"Sit down and take a hand, and forget it," urged Clond amiably. "You and I got no quarrel."

Al Button, his thin lips skinned back from his teeth, looked at Todd. "I know him better than you do, Clond," he said. "He means business."

"Al," said Todd, "I've come to make a deal. Unless you open that fence and get rid of those gunmen, I'm accusing you openly of the murder of Spence Carmony."

BUTTON licked his lips, then laughed uncertainly. "Windy Raikes killed Spence. "Ever'body knows that."

"No," Todd said, "it wasn't Raikes. It was you. Here's the rest of the deal I'm offering: take down that fence and I'll give you thirty days to leave the country. After those thirty days I'm taking your trail. And when I come up with you, Al, there won't be any arrest—just a bullet in either you or me."

"That's crazy talk, Todd," said Clond. "All the evidence points to Raikes. You seem to forget Al was playing poker with us the night Spence was killed. Al wasn't gone from the game long enough to ride out to your grandfather's place and back, even on that race mare of his."

"I figure different," said Todd. "Al didn't leave to get money to meet your bet. Instead he rode his race mare out to kill Spence."

"In five minutes?" Clond scoffed. "He hasn't got that fast a horse. Nor has anybody else."

"Al took more than five minutes.

He was gone what you made us believe was five minutes. You moved your watch back while he was gone, Clond, to make it appear that Al had been away just under five minutes. I suspected you from the first, Al, partly because you made too much fuss when Windy Raikes wasn't held for murder. But when I was in bed getting over Juck's bullet, I remembered something queer about that night—something that made me sure about you. When you came into the saloon with the money to meet Clond's bet, you had a strong smell of horse sweat on you."

Al Button's jaw dropped; then he recovered quickly and forced a laugh. "Wouldn't that be funny?" he snarled. "You on the witness stand tellin' a jury you smelled horse sweat on me?"

"It wouldn't seem funny to a cow-country jury," Todd told him. "They'd take it real serious, wondering how a man could smell of horse sweat after walking a block to his room and back. What do you say, Al? Do you take my offer of thirty days' start?"

"Am I crazy?" Button demanded contemptuously. "I don't bluff that easy. Even if you killed me it wouldn't help those ranchers. That place in the pass is really owned by Clond."

"I guessed that, too," said Todd. "He's the one that wants to stop those cattle."

Clond's eyes were hard and mean. All his good humor was gone. "I don't mind admitting it, Todd. Dry Mesas and this river range together will make one good big ranch. I've wanted 'em for a long time, and I'm getting 'em this winter."

"Thanks, Clond, for showing your cards. I thought you might. Al showed his cards this evening when I produced Windy Raikes' heel. Al

had been wondering hard why nobody had found it, and when he saw that chunk of leather he was plumb caught off guard and as much as admitted the murder. Clond, your scheme was slick; figuring when Spence was ended the bank would go bust and you'd bid the Dry Mesas outfits in for a song. But when the burned bank papers saved the ranchers from being sold out, you thought up this scheme to ruin 'em by holding their cattle off the valley range. I'm making both you killers a proposition," he whipped out. "That's for the both of you to shoot it out with me, here and now."

Clond sat stiffly erect, looking at Todd in astonishment. "You mean you'd tackle both of us?" he demanded, raising his voice even louder than his surprise would warrant. "Shoot it out with two men?"

"That's it, you polecat. I'm taking both of you on—here and now. You're both wearing irons. Start usin' 'em."

"I believe you mean it," said Clond, still in an unnaturally loud tone. "But that's a crazy way to settle anything. One or two of us and maybe all three would be ended. Al and I aren't taking your offer to shoot it out."

LEANING back in his chair, Clond grinned insolently at Todd. Button's eyes shifted momentarily to the nearest window, and at the same instant Todd heard the faint creak of floor boards in an adjoining room.

It came to Todd suddenly that he had walked into a trap. Button might have suspected that Todd would show up, and Clond's men, while loafing in their bunkroom, had been keeping a quiet watch. The courtyard might be filled with waiting guns.

Todd whipped out his own six-shooter to cover Clond and Button. They sat quietly while he slid along the wall to reach a door that he knew led into a narrow passage connecting with a small patio, not over twenty feet square. Opening the door, he slipped into the passageway. Behind him there was a confusion of voices. Clond's, shouting orders, rose above the rest.

The guns would prevent Todd's retreat through the moonlit yard; nor did the small patio surrounded by blank walls offer any escape. Reaching it, Todd crouched for a moment behind a half-fallen buttress of adobe bricks slanting up to support a sagging wall. Then gathering himself, he ran up the buttress on hands and feet, to make a flying leap for a roof parapet. Someone caught sight of him and six-shooters crashed, but safe on the roof he grinned to himself.

He had raced over these flat roofs as a boy and knew them better than Clond's men who were climbing to the roof tops and spreading out through the courtyards to cut off his escape. As one of them lifted himself above a parapet in the moonlight thirty feet away, Todd fired. The man gave a yell, either hit or badly scared, and plopped back to the ground.

Racing to the roof above the courtyard, Todd fired down at men running across it. In a panic they ducked for cover. They had expected to bring down a fleeing fugitive, but instead he was lingering to give them a fight.

Men called cautiously to one another, while Todd, emptying his six-shooter, reloaded and crossed a wide expanse of roof to drive half a dozen men in another yard to cover. After which he hung from the parapet of

an outside wall to drop to the ground and race to his borrowed horse. As he kicked the animal into a run, he became the target for rifles opening up on him from the roofs. Shots clicked through the mesquite about him, while Clond yelled to his men to get horses saddled for pursuit.

TODD turned toward the river, racing along the stream to turn up a brushy ridge. After an interval the sound of hoofs came from the big ranchhouse, and he kept on, stopping only when he had worked his way several miles upstream, not far from where the river emerged from the mouth of Hell's Far Canyon.

The moon was high, and hidden in the brush Todd watched the river bottom for possible pursuers. A bunch of cattle were bedded below him, and he eyed them bitterly. They would be Dan Clond's cattle who, after having helped graze the Dry Mesas bare, now had the river range to themselves.

Then he was leaning forward in the saddle, staring intently at an animal grazing a little apart from the bedded cattle. A big steer with a tremendous spread of horns. None other than Pole Star, the old brindle pet of Longhorn Kelso's. Pole Star had wintered in this valley long before the coming of fences. Trust a tough old longhorn to look after himself and get to where there was grass. But he had been in the lead of the herd stopped by Al Button's fence. How had he gotten here? Not through a break in the wires, and certainly not the way Todd had come, up a cliff which Todd had climbed only by using hand holds.

There was one way to find out: back-tracking those big, splayed-out hoofs. That would take daylight, and patiently Todd waited out the

hours, tramping up and down to keep warm. At dawn he was riding again, on the old longhorn's trail. It took him straight into the nearby mouth of Hell's Far Canyon. Old Pole Star had made it down somehow through the lower gorge of Hell's Far Canyon through which nothing on four legs had ever been known to travel.

Todd frowned at the gloomy, unlighted box of the canyon walls and then grinned as he gazed back at the spot where he had left Pole Star feeding. No real cattleman could help but feel affection for the old-time Texas longhorns who were the foundation for all the cattle industry on the Western mountain and plain grasslands. Pushed by trail drivers, they pioneered the way into Indian country, into blizzard-swept northern ranges and into burning desert lands.

Todd raised his hand in salute to the old steer before he headed into the canyon, following the big tracks.

CHAPTER VII

DOWN HELL'S FAR GORGE

RIDING along the river, snaking a way between the walls of lower Hell's Far Canyon, Todd back-trailed the big hoofs. A few miles of twisted going and the canyon narrowed and its walls became high straight-walled cliffs against which the river washed, leaving no banks. Above was a half-mile stretch which cattle had never been known to travel. The river was a swiftly falling trough of churning water, smashing against great fragments of cliff or circling in treacherous whirlpools. As for the walls themselves, even a mountain goat could not travel them.

But Pole Star had passed through here either by land or water. Todd,

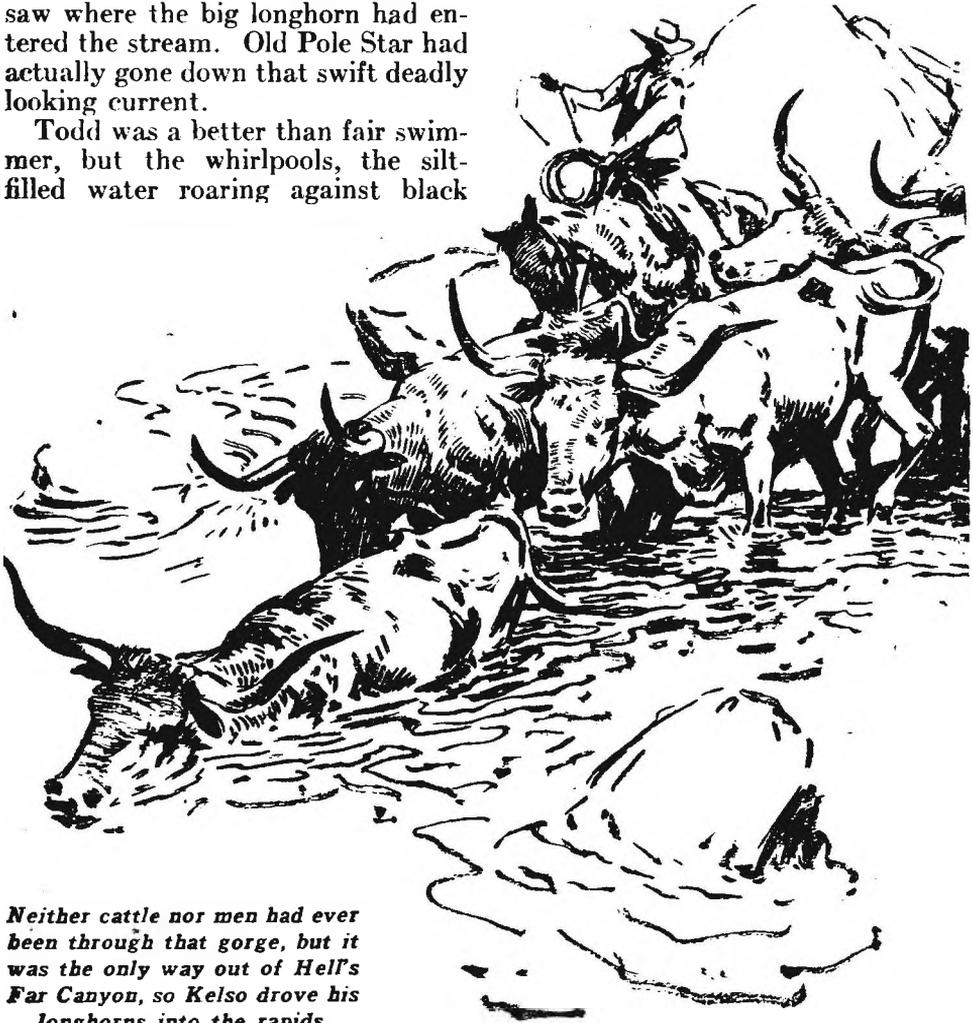
back-tracking the big hoofprints, saw them disappear on a bank just below the stretch of rough water. The old longhorn had swum down that dangerous passage.

Todd stared unbelievably at the whirlpools and foam-crested cascades. Still not convinced, he shucked himself of hat, boots and gun belt, and in bare feet did a neat bit of cliff scaling, working his way upstream along narrow ledges until the gorge widened once more and banks appeared along the stream. Descending to a gravelly beach, he saw where the big longhorn had entered the stream. Old Pole Star had actually gone down that swift deadly looking current.

Todd was a better than fair swimmer, but the whirlpools, the silt-filled water roaring against black

snags of rock made him hesitate. There was only one way, however, to test the path Pole Star had used.

The current tossed Todd like a chip, whirled him about, and then abruptly shot him against the opposite cliff wall. Prepared to battle desperately to keep from being smashed on rocks, Todd amazingly found himself borne swiftly down a narrow chute of comparatively smooth water that lay under the cliff, a separate channel from the main one. It felt much like slid-



Neither cattle nor men had ever been through that gorge, but it was the only way out of Hell's Far Canyon, so Kelso drove his longhorns into the rapids.

ing down a long icy hill on a sled. At the end of the chute Todd had to battle a bit to cross the river again and land a little below the spot where old Pole Star's tracks had appeared.

Todd built a fire to steam out his clothes. He was jubilant. Trust

ranch to come in to the ranchers' camp. On the mesa a cold wind was freezing a slowly falling drizzle on the coats of cattle and horses. The cattle, held loose-herded, were drifting about hunting feed.

Juck Dollar and Reb Kinsey had just returned from an all-night ride



an ornery old longhorn to provide the answer. You simply stepped into what looked like certain death, but turned instead into a chute-the-chutes ride.

Leaving the horse, Todd clambered to the rim and crossed the rocky hills of Al Button's worthless

to the Hatchet Mountain Land Grant, where they had asked Dan Clond's uncles for passage for the herds. The Clonds had given a polite but firm refusal. They didn't allow outsiders' stock to cross their range. They had even refused their nephew, they declared.

EMILY REESE, who could tell a hungry man when she saw him, hastily produced a big plate of beef and beans, biscuits from a Dutch oven, and a cup of coffee, and put them before Todd.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

He grinned a little at the downcast figures around the fire. "Been out for a morning swim. We're on the move again. Kelso's Pole Star pointed the way for us to reach the river. Pole Star, right now he's down in the valley, wrapping his tongue around a breakfast of knee-high grass."

Juck Dollar grunted. "What sort of crazy talk is that? No critter ever got down to the valley along that gorge—except a fish or a bird."

"Pole Star did. He traveled along the bank until it played out above that stretch of rapids, and just dived in. I did the same thing, and Pole Star and I are still both alive. Pole Star showed us the way."

Longhorn let out a long yell. "Pole Star, hey? What I been tellin' yuh? Longhorns is the only cattle fit for this country."

"Yuh mean this cussed country is only fit for longhorns," grunted Reb Kinsey. "What's the next move, Todd?"

"Driving back a couple of miles to drop down that side canyon into the gorge. Button's men will figure we've given up."

They hazed the cattle into columns again to shove them back over the trail they had come, in the face of the cold drizzle. On the canyon rim the wagons were abandoned, and supplies and bedrolls packed on horses. Both Todd and Dollar had tried to persuade Emily to return to Tipton, but the girl had refused resolutely.

That night the cattle were held in the sheltered bottom of Hell's Far Canyon to be worked at daylight along the rough bottom of the gorge. It took them half a day to travel a few miles under cliff walls slick with rain. At noon Kelso's longhorns leading the strung-out lines of cattle were on the gravelly bank where old Pole Star had taken his plunge. Looking at the stretch of water below, the ranchers frankly questioned Todd's sanity. They had enough faith, however, to risk a few of Kelso's longhorns, shoving them into the stream, with Todd on a huge boulder out in the current ready to haze them into the channel under the opposite cliff.

Silently the riders watched the cattle toboggan down the chute of swift, smooth water and land safely far below. Then, with a whoop, they spent the afternoon in forcing bunches of reluctant cattle into the water. The riders followed them.

Kelso's longhorns were already traveling on for the canyon mouth. The Herefords, footsore from the rocks of the canyon bottom, limped slowly after them.

Less than a mile from the valley where the canyon boxed up again, Kelso's advance bunch of fast-stepping longhorns met a sudden burst of shots that brought riders racing down the canyon. They had run into a fresh obstruction. On one side the river swept against a cliff; on the other, where a flat bank had been left under another cliff, a waist-high solid barricade of boulders had been piled. Behind these were the gunmen who had halted them at the fence.

BUTTON'S bunch, discovering that the herds were moving along the gorge, had quietly come up by way of the canyon mouth to

block further passage. Again the guns of both parties sounded off in a hot exchange of shots that got nowhere. Behind cover of that stout barricade a dozen men could have held back an army. A few cattle shoved into the stream were promptly beefed by the gunmen.

"This canyon bottom don't belong to anybody," Juck Dollar declared heatedly. "They've got no law behind 'em in holdin' us up."

"No, but they're doing it," Reb Kinsey pointed out. "And they can hold our cows in here until they starve. Unless we git around in back of 'em. But I'm too old to climb that cliff in the dark."

"There's a better way than that," declared Todd. "Going back up canyon to rope together a raft of drift logs to float down past those buzzards tonight. Six of us ought to be enough to jump those fellows from the back. Six that can swim. That raft maybe might smash against a rock and come apart."

"I'll be one o' the six," said old Reb Kinsey. "I got fins growin' from my ribs same as a fish."

"Yeah, but can you swim?" persisted Todd.

"Swim, heck!" said Reb. "If I could swim there wouldn't be any fun to the trip."

Leaving half of the party to keep up an intermittent hail of shots against the barricade, the others retreated up the canyon to gather drift logs and lash them together with lariats in a raft that looked barely sturdy enough to float in a mill pond.

After supper there remained the matter of picking the crew to go with Todd. The three old-timers, Kelso, Kinsey and Greeley, could have been kept back only by tying them hand and foot.

Morg Molney came up to Todd. "Put me and Windy down for two to go," he said. "Your granddad wrote off a debt of mine a long time ago when I lost my wife. I've never forgotten what I owed him for that. This is still Spence's fight—to keep us ranchers on our feet. And Windy, he wants to go mainly account people still think he was gutless enough to bushwhack Spence."

"You both can go," said Todd. "And they won't be suspecting Windy after tomorrow."

To float past the barricade would take only a few minutes, but they judged it safest to land in the canyon mouth and walk back. The six were allowed to sleep until past midnight, then, huddled on the logs, with two men armed with poles to steer the craft from rocks, they shoved off. The crude raft spun around in more than one whirlpool, and bumped up against boulders to settle low in the water, but it lasted until in the quiet water of the canyon mouth Reb dropped a loop of rope over a rock. The six, carrying their rifles, stepped ashore to head back up canyon.

Todd, acting as advance scout, ran into the horses of the men at the barricade, hobbled on a grassy slope. There followed a long wait for daylight.

At last light was seeping into the canyon, and a cook fire flamed to life in the camp of the Button gunmen. Slowly the six ranchers began crawling toward the barricade. At full daylight the rifles of the other Dry Mesas cattlemen up canyon opened fire. The guards at the barricade replied and the remainder left their breakfast to rush for the rock wall. Reb Kinsey growled suddenly and with one yell as warning, slammed a shot at the group.

SHOCKED momentarily, the gunmen at the barricade recovered to turn to battle the men behind them. Before they could locate their attackers, two of their number were hit, and the rest ran desperately for better cover. At once the ranchers up canyon made a rush to gain the upper side of the rock wall.

The crash of rifles mounted to a thunder between the canyon walls, but the fight was destined to be short. Harassed by guns in front and back, Button's group had no stomach for the battle. After two more men were hit, the others yelled frantically that they quit. The guns fell silent and the ranchers, disarming the prisoners, turned them over to Juck Dollar as deputy sheriff. Neither Clond nor Button was among the number. Nor were any of the crew Todd had seen at the Mexican Ranch.

Of the six men from the raft one had been hit in the fight—Windy Raikes. He lay on his back, with Morg Molney bending solicitously over him.

"We'll pack you down to San Pasqual to the doc, partner," promised Morg Molney as Todd and the other raft passengers hurried over.

"Hit too deep," said Raikes weakly, staring up at Molney. "I won't be down on the river with you, Morg," he added with grim humor. "I'll be spendin' the winter in a warmer climate." He shuddered and lay still.

Morg looked sorrowfully down at the man whose faithful follower he had been for years. "I wisht he could be cleared of that Spence Carmony killing," Morg said at last. "All of you 'ceptin' maybe Todd thinks Windy pulled that bushwhack."

"He'll get clearance," said Todd. "Listen to me, all of you. Windy

had nothing to do with that murder. Reb, you remember that poker game the night granddad was killed? And the bet Clond made that Al wouldn't get back in five minutes? Clond and Button rigged up that bet as alibi for Button. Clond turned his watch back to allow Button a few extra minutes to ride out and fire that shot through Spence's window. They were in cahoots on that murder. Clond thought it up to bust the bank so he could buy up the Mesas ranches at receiver's sale."

"So that's the way it was," said Longhorn Kelso, astounded.

"That's the way it was. Al as much as admitted it. Maybe Clond's uncles rate too much money for him and Button ever to be convicted, but it's not going into any court. Those two dodged a fight with me last night, but they won't dodge the one I'm riding down to start now."

"Clond's crew will be down there with him, Todd," said Reb Kinsey. "We'll ride with you. What happened to Spence Carmony is as much our fight as it is yours. The sooner we go the better. Juck and Emily can stay to guard these prisoners."

IN silence they shoved down the rock barrier, and led out their horses. Emily, watching them, crossed to Todd.

"Where are you going, Todd?" she asked.

"Riding for a settlement with Button and Clond. They were the ones that killed granddad. We'll likely run into a fight. Clond's ready for trouble; he's got all of fifteen men with him."

Emily moved closer and laid her head against his shirt front. "Todd, if you've got to ride, you've got to. But when you ride, I want you to know that what happened five years

ago is as if it never happened."

Todd put his arms around her and drew her close. "I hope you'll never be sorry for saying that. Ransdell tried to talk me into taking charge of a reorganized Tipton bank on capital that he's furnishing. What would you say if I did?"

"I'd say I'd be proud of you," said the girl. "You've already taken Spence's place; it was you who brought our herds through the summer and cleared the way for them to get to the valley."

As the men rode down canyon, Juck Dollar, guarding the prisoners, bellowed a demand to know where they were going. They did not answer, but Emily did.

"They're riding for a settlement with the men that killed Spence Carmony. Clond and Button."

"What!" exploded Juck. "Then why didn't they ask me to ride with 'em?"

"I think it was because they didn't want the law interfering. I'm riding after them, Juck. I want to be there if anything happens to Todd. I'm marrying him, Juck."

Juck scowled at her. "You're old enough to know your mind by this time. You sure you want him?"

"I've never stopped wanting him," Emily said, her eyes shining. "My only mistake was in ever letting him go. With a man like Todd you've got to dab a loop on him when you get the chance and hold him until you tame him down."

"Want him that bad, do you?" said Juck. "All right." His mind returned to the riders that had disappeared around a bend in the canyon. "Blast them fellers," he said aggrievedly. "Leavin' me here to watch prisoners. We'll just let these men scatter to blazes while both of us ride down there."

"You're following to stop them

from settling with Clond and Button?" the girl asked.

"No!" bawled Juck. "I'm followin' to help in that settlement."

CHAPTER VIII

PAID IN FULL

TOPPING a low ridge a half mile from the headquarters of Clond's Mexican Ranch, the Dry Mesas riders saw more than a dozen horsemen a few hundred yards out from the ranchhouse jogging toward them. Clond and Button led them, perhaps riding out to make sure that the fight in the canyon was going satisfactorily. Sighting the approaching ranchers, the little cavalcade halted abruptly and then wheeled to race back for the walls of the big ranchhouse.

At this headlong retreat the ranchers yelled and spurred straight down a brushy slope in pursuit. The race was short. Clond's group won, galloping through the big double gates which were entrance to the first of the several courtyards. Slamming shut the gates, the riders dismounted to climb hastily on the flat dirt roofs, intending to open fire from behind the parapets.

Todd, anticipating this maneuver, shouted to the men behind him and led them into the brush to make a half circle of the walls, entering into a former courtyard which had been made over into a cattle corral.

Todd halted his horse below a projecting roof viga, shoved his rifle through a gap in the parapet and hoisted himself up after the weapon. After him swarmed the Dry Mesas ranchers, a few using their saddles as steps, others climbing makeshift ladders of poles.

To meet this attack, several of Clond's men were already running across the roof tops. The leader of

these and Todd fired at each other with six-shooters that exploded almost as one. A slug sang past Todd to snatch at the top of the sombrero of Reb Kinsey, who had just clambered up after Todd. Todd's shot struck the Clond man in the middle and he staggered back, to topple over a parapet into a court. The others fled before the charging Mesas ranchers, who were fanning out to scatter the fire from the defending rifles. But Clond's men refused to meet them; a half acre of dirt roofs was more than they cared to defend, and abandoning the roofs, they dropped into the big courtyard, where the owner and cowboys had their living quarters.

Todd, with Kinsey at his heels, headed straight for the same courtyard. Reaching it, Todd first stuck his head up over a parapet overlooking the yard, and ducked barely in time to escape a hail of buckshot. He raised his hat on the end of his rifle, and the second barrel shattered the crown of his headgear. Then he raised up, rifle in his hands, to get the man with the emptied shotgun, but now the courtyard was empty. Clond, Button and the whole crew had taken cover in the thick-walled rooms, to fight from behind doors and deep-set windows.

"Holin' up," Kinsey growled in disgust.

More men were coming over the roof tops, Go West Greeley, Longhorn Kelso, Morg Molney, Hoot Gray and his brother, all of them to fire down into the rooms about the big yard. In return came a savage hail of shots.

AS a little lull came in the guns, Clond's voice rose. "We better call this off before some of us get hurt," offered the rancher. "We're willing to surrender Al Button to go

on trial for killing Spence."

"You're willin' but I ain't, blast you, Pretty-boy!" squalled Button from another room. "There won't be no trial, you fool. They'll string me up from a roof beam here. You ain't throwin' me to the wolves, Clond, and coming clear yourself. You're in as deep as I am on the killin' of Spence Carmony. Deeper."

"It's too late for a trial for either of you," Todd said bleakly. "Unless you both sign a confession that you planned Spence's murder. Your uncles have too much money for slick lawyers to get you clear, Clond. But that offer I made against you and Button last night still stands. One against two. It only took the guts of a rabbit to bushwhack a helpless old man; maybe you're brave enough now to step out against me."

"No," refused Clond. "But if you want fight, you'll get your fill of it."

Again the guns crashed from windows and from the roofs. Bullets, however, weren't reaching the men barricaded in the rooms. Impatiently Todd dropped into another yard and returned with a long-handled shovel to begin digging a hole in the roof over an inner room once used as a granary.

"You got a idee," said Reb Kinsey as he knelt to begin tearing away the brush and poles that supported the dirt top. "Only way to git out o' a den of coyotes is to gopher in after 'em."

When they had a hole large enough to admit a man's body, Todd squeezed himself down through it, dropping to the earth floor of the windowless room. Rats ran squeaking out from underfoot. Reb lowered the rifles to Todd and followed. In the next room sounded the reports of guns fired by a group un-

aware of the closeness of the two Dry Mesas men. Todd tried the door into the room, but it was nailed shut.

Dropping his rifle, six-shooter in his hand, he charged to smash a shoulder against the door. It gave way and Todd tumbled through to sprawl on his hands and knees. There were four men in the room. As they turned, warned by the crash, Todd still on the floor, fired at them point-blank, his six-shooter spurting thin flame while Reb Kinsey's rifle exploded over his head. At close range they could not miss. Two men were hit and the other pair in their panic foolishly fled into the open courtyard. Promptly guns from the roof struck at them, killing one outright, sending the other down by his side. The man, using his dead partner as a barricade, aimed at Morg Molney, who had raised into full view on the roof. Go West Greeley's old buffalo gun bellowed in the nick of time to save Molney.

THE rooms about the court were strung in a series, with connecting doors. Todd, with Reb Kinsey at his heels, entered the adjoining room. It and the next were empty, but in the third they had better luck. Two men were in it, Al Button and a Clond rider. Button and Todd fired together, both missing in the dim light, but as Button slipped behind the other man to use him as a shield, he moved near a window. Sharp-eyed old Longhorn Kelso on the roof promptly sent in a shot that smashed Button down. Todd leaped on the rider Button had used as cover, clubbed down with his six-shooter and, felling him, pushed on into the next room.

Again the rifles smashed out a jagged harsh thunder over the ranch-house roofs. Clond, with half of

his men put out of action, realized that the battle was hopeless.

Hemmed in with his remaining men, Clond left them and slipped away to pass through a series of rooms, hoping to get away unobserved. Instead he ran squarely into Reb Kinsey and Todd Carmony in the room adjoining the one in which they had met Al Button. Entering it, Clond at once saw the two and started to leap back, firing wildly, his bullet plowing a furrow along Reb's leg. Whether it was Reb's or Todd's gun that hit Clond would never be known, but the rancher staggered back, a loud cry welling from his lips. Sagging against a wall, he flung away his pistol and raised his hands.

"I give up," he said. "You can't shoot a man without a gun." Then going to his knees, he fell alongside an open doorway looking out on the courtyard.

"A skunk is a skunk to the last," observed Reb, shoving Clond on out into the courtyard with his foot.

Clond's men had quit and the guns abruptly stopped. Juck Dollar, followed by Emily Reese, had opened the outer gates to ride in just after the guns fell silent. Riding into the courtyard, Dollar saw the scattered bodies and, as always, thought first of the girl.

"Don't come in, Emily," he called over his shoulder and dismounted.

"Here's the law," Longhorn Kelso greeted Juck sarcastically. "Quit firing, boys. Let the law have what's left of them buzzards."

Button had crawled from the room in which he had fallen, hunting open air. Emerging into the sunlight of the courtyard, he saw Clond lying groaning a few feet away. Weakly Button raised his voice.

"You listen to me, Dollar," the

gambler called. "I'm done for, but I want it known it was Clond planned that killing of Spence Carmony. Todd Carmony was right; that watch was a trick that Clond figured out."

"You're a liar," called Clond, but he knew that he was hopelessly condemned in the eyes of the Dry Mesas ranchers. Edging forward a little, he picked up the six-shooter he had flung away and pointed it waveringly at Button. Maybe he thought that if he silenced the malicious tongue of the gambler he could be saved; or perhaps it was merely a last attempt at revenge.

In his failing sight it was doubtful if he even saw Todd, who had bent over Button to prop the gambler up against the wall, coming by that act of mercy directly in line with Clond's gun.

IN the confusion Juck Dollar was the only one who saw Todd's danger. Realizing that it was too late to shout a warning, the marshal leaped forward to put his big blocky body between Todd and the leveled weapon. As he rushed at Clond, Dollar's long-barreled Colts was sweeping from his holster. His and Clond's weapons exploded simultaneously. The rancher's head snapped back against the wall, while Juck plowed to a stop, a dazed look spreading over his face. Then, slowly, his big body went to his knees, while Emily, who had disregarded his order not to come into the yard, ran over to kneel by the marshal's side. Juck stared up at the girl through glazing eyes.

"Emily," he said weakly, "if Todd don't take good care of you, I'll come back outn the grave to settle with him."

"Juck, don't move. don't talk,"

the girl cried. "We'll get a doctor for you."

"No time for a doctor," gasped Juck. "Listen to me, you men: if you git in any trouble over this fight, all of you were deputized by me to arrest Al Button and Dan Clond for the murder of Spence Carmony. That ought to clear you." He heaved a great gusty sigh and his eyes closed as if he had gone to sleep.

Todd, looking down soberly at the grizzled face of the marshal, lifted Emily gently to her feet.

"He took a bullet that was headed for me," Todd said slowly. "Maybe he meant it as return for that shot he once put in me; or maybe he meant to make you a present of a worthless cowpuncher. Whichever it was, we'll never know anyone who was more real man than Marshal Juck Dollar."

Old Longhorn Kelso, who had seen too much bloodshed in his life to be moved by the little ruckus in which he had just taken a prominent part, dangled his legs over a roof edge and pulled up a pants leg to examine a lanky calf that was oozing blood from a bullet gouge. He examined the puncture indifferently, spat tobacco juice on it as first and last aid, and was pulling down the pants leg when he suddenly let out an indignant bellow.

"What's wrong? You hurt bad?" called Go West Greeley from the opposite roof.

"Naw; 'tain't that!" Longhorn bawled. "I jist noticed this cussed boot o' mine needs resolin' and I bought this pair on'y three year ago. But whut kin you expect when they taken to makin' leather outn the hides of these yere dang thin-skinned, gutless breed o' white faces?"

THE END.

The wailing chant of Chinese women meant death—and death could solve or deepen the hideous mystery that terrorized that boom town.



BOOM-TOWN VENGEANCE

BY HARRY SINCLAIR DRAGO

YOUNG KI BENTON sat at his desk in the sheriff's office going over a stack of newspapers—exchanges from all over the State, which the editor of the *Gazette* regularly saved for him, and one of his best sources

of information—when he saw Jesse Oatman, Lander's equally young prosecuting attorney, run across the street from the courthouse. Even at that distance he sensed the prosecutor's excitement. Oatman stuck

his head in the door a moment later.

"Ki, it's happened, just as I told you it would!" he exclaimed without waiting to catch his breath. "Bret Canby's blown things wide open. Roper has closed the Exchange. He's busted, and so are a lot of other people. I—"

"Wait a minute," Benton broke in on him. "Suppose you cool down and let me get this thing straight. Just what happened?"

"Huh!" Oatman snorted, annoyed because his news failed to stampede Ki. "The night shift struck water in Jumbo Extension. All the lower workings are flooded out. Canby had the news ahead of time, as usual. He unloaded before the price tumbled. I tell you, they're talking about stringing him up!"

Benton realized that the situation was dangerous, but he refused to get excited. "What about Roper?" he asked.

"He's threatening to fill Canby full of lead at the first opportunity. I warn you, he's capable of doing it. You know his record."

Benton nodded. "I know Canby's record too. They're here strictly on their good behavior. They know that. So far, they haven't done a thing that I can put my finger on."

"Huh!" Oatman exploded. "I suppose you're going to sit there and tell me Canby was just playing hunches! You know as well as I do that every time news had come down from Piute Basin—good or bad—he anticipated it."

"He was being tipped off all right," Benton admitted. "But I don't know how. Do you?"

"I wouldn't be wasting words with you, if I did!" Jesse whipped out testily. "I don't have to know how it was done to know it was crooked!"

Benton pushed back his chair, a vaguely amused smile on his young face. "I'm afraid you'll have to come up with something stronger than that before you start issuing warrants, Jesse. But if that's the way you want to play it, I'll have to serve them, of course."

Oatman did not wait to hear any more.

"I came here expecting to get some help," he declared as he stamped out. "If you feel that way, I'll get to the bottom of this myself."

Benton caught him at the door. "Don't take that slant, Jesse. I know you're right; this thing is loaded with dynamite. But we won't get anywhere if either one of us goes off half cocked."

Oatman bristled defiantly, but he checked his angry retort. He could not forget that several times in the past the young sheriff's sober judgment had saved him when his own rashness had him headed for disaster.

"All I want is evidence enough to get an indictment," he said as he left. "I'll give you twenty-four hours to get it."

Benton returned to his desk, shaking his head. "To hear him talk, you wouldn't think I'd been trying for days to get the low-down on Canby's game," he told himself wearily.

He put away his newspapers and jotted down a memorandum for Andy Simms, his chief deputy. He had many claims on his time these days. Lander was no longer a busted cow town. As things went in Nevada, the town was old. It had a railroad and telegraph line, but it had settled down into obscurity until Golden had made his big strike in Piute Basin, eighty-five miles to the north. That first gold strike had been followed by a second, and a

third. The town had begun to boom. In short order the news flew over the State, and the rush was on.

KI BENTON was familiar with the records of most of the men who answered the cry of "Gold!" It was largely the same crowd that had been moving around Nevada for ten years. Shad Roper, resplendent in his diamond studs and checkered waistcoat, had arrived early and begun to deal in mining stock. A big man, edging on toward fifty, with a breezy affability that few questioned, he immediately began to prosper. Tall, handsome Bret Canby and his soft Southern drawl had drifted in two weeks later.

Ki had been interested in them from the first, for they arrived with copper-riveted reputations for trouble and an unpleasant knack of always leaving someone holding the bag. Candelaria, old Belmont—a dozen gold camps had known them, and wherever they had appeared they had been arraigned against each other, their implacable hatred their chief virtue. In a free and easy way, they continued to be regarded as honest men, despite their years of ruthless scheming and legal larceny, simply because they had been cunning enough to keep clear of the law.

Canby had begun to buck Roper's game at once. Benton got his first indication of what was to follow when the Southerner plunged on Jumbo Extension two hours before the news arrived by stagecoach that a veritable jewelry shop had been uncovered in the new workings. Six days later he was again ahead of the news when they lost the main vein in the Black Prince Mine.

Roper, convinced that Canby was getting news from the North faster than the lumbering stage could bring it, established a pony express so that

he might be informed of whatever happened as quickly as expert riders and the best horse flesh could flash it to him. It had failed to stop Canby's amazing run of luck.

"Twenty-four hours," Ki grumbled to himself. "Every man in this town has been trying to figure this thing out for weeks, but I'm supposed to come up with the right answer in twenty-four hours. . . . Indictments! Chances are that what Oatman will need will be a coroner's certificate."

He closed his roll-top desk with a bang, preparatory to going down the street. Little Andy Simms, his deputy, hurried in just as Ki was ready to leave. Andy's freckled face was unusually sober. He deposited a gun on the little table at Benton's elbow.

"I took that off Roper," he announced. "Canby and him just met head on in the Lander House bar. Takin' this gun won't stop trouble for long—"

Benton had risen. His face hard and flat, he stared at Andy incredulously.

"Have I done somethin' wrong?" the little deputy demanded.

"Andy—this means murder. If Roper gave up his gun as easy as that, he had a reason. He was putting himself in the clear—" Ki grabbed his hat and started for the door as Simms whistled his surprise. "And Oatman thinks he's going to indict them for fraud! You can't indict a dead man."

"Ki, where are yuh goin'?"

"I'm going to warn Canby to leave here in a hurry!" the sheriff threw back over his shoulder.

ON his way across town Benton passed a long line of freighters, bound north across the desert for the camp in Piute Basin. It wasn't

all tools and mining equipment. Lander was making a handsome profit on food and clothing and every pound of supplies reaching the Basin. Piled high on one wagon were crates of live chickens, ducks and squabs. Drillers and muckers were earning top wages in Piute Basin, and living high.

A skinner picked up a rock and shied it at the squawking ducks, cursing them for the racket they were making. Benton knew the man.

"Who's getting all that stuff, Wash?" he called out.

"That chink eatin' house! Guess they catch their own rats. Ain't had to haul none of them yet!"

Ki made his way through the dust the big teams had picked up. He knew the sweating mules, the long lines of heavily laden wagons and the hoarse shouting of the skinners spelled prosperity that was real. The trickery and manipulations of men like Shad Roper and Bret Canby could not destroy it.

Several weeks back Canby had rented a comfortable cabin at the edge of town and hired a local Chinese to cook for him. When Benton reached the place, it was the Chinese who opened the door.

"Hello, Charlie," Ki greeted him. He knew Charlie Toy Kee in the way that he knew most of the several hundred Chinese who lived in Lander's Chinatown. "Is the boss in?"

"Yes, Missa Sheriff," was the grinning response. "Him home. You come in, sure."

Canby appeared from a rear room. He gave Ki a shrewd glance. "How are you, sheriff?" he said pleasantly. Benton caught the glance of dismissal he flicked at the Chinese. Charlie did not take the hint.

"Let's make it to the point," Ki said. "There's a train leaving Lander this evening for California. You better be on it, Canby."

Canby considered his answer for a moment.

"Are you telling me to take it—or just advising me to go?" he asked quietly. "I didn't know I had stepped outside the law."

"I don't know that you have. So I can only advise you to leave town. It'll be better for you and the peace of the community. Roper is busted. If that was your game, you've won. There's nothing to hold you here now."

"I'm afraid I can't agree with you there," Canby returned. "I have a little business here yet—and it's rather important."

"All right," Ki agreed. "You're on your own."

"That's the way I prefer it," Canby assured him. He put his hand on the door. Ki turned to leave, but Charlie Toy Kee stood there grinning his opaque, inscrutable grin.

"Missa Sheriff, you stay dinner? Roast squab—lemon pie. Velly good."

"No, I'll have to be running along," Ki said. He had the feeling that Canby could have choked the grinning Oriental for his invitation.

IT was a shrewd surmise. Canby waited only for Benton to leave before he turned his wrath loose on the Chinese.

"After this, when anyone comes here, I'll do the talking," he whipped out. "When I tell you to clear out of the room, you get! What was the idea in asking him to stay for dinner?"

"Him velly smart man, Missa Benton," the Chinese protested, and

his grin was gone. "Me think mebbe so you listen to him, you catchee good idea."

"So that's it, eh?" Canby's laugh was as contemptuous as he could make it. "You're also of the opinion that it would be a good thing if I left this country in a hurry. I'm afraid I'll have to disappoint you. Benton doesn't know that I had to kick back most of what I made to your slant-eyed friends, whoever they may be. Not that I'm beefing about that; I got the cut I was promised—"

"Then, Missa Canby, this all the same mebbe good time for you to go." Toy Kee's tone was cold and threatening, but Canby laughed.

"I don't scare worth a cent, Toy Kee. This little trick worked here, and it will work somewhere else. I'm not leaving Lander until I find out how you and your chink friends stacked the cards so neatly."

"Mebbe so my friends find way to stop you." Charlie Toy Kee's deeply lined face was a forbidding yellow mask. Canby read the menace in the slitted eyes, but he refused to heed it.

"We'll see," he said. "You shake up something to eat now."

From the window he caught a distant glimpse of Benton as the latter turned up the side street that led to the rear of the courthouse.

"He didn't come here just to warn me that I can expect a slug in the back if I don't watch my step," he mused. "Curiosity is killing him, and he can't find a thing to put his finger on."

Canby was slightly mistaken, for in the few minutes Ki had been in the cabin his suspicions had focused sharply on several things that he could not put out of his mind. And yet as he sat in Jesse Oatman's office

a few minutes later and related what had happened, his theories seemed so vague and shadowy that he hesitated to mention them.

"Then you had your trouble for nothing," Jesse said. "Was warning Canby to leave town your idea of helping me to make a case?"

"Maybe it was at that," Ki muttered. "You'll laugh, but a couple of things struck me as mighty queer. Charlie, Canby's servant, asked me to stay for dinner. It didn't sound right. The average Chinese is a good servant; he doesn't overstep his place. It was up to Canby to ask me to stay, if he wanted me to."

"And you're going to make something of that?" Oatman scoffed. "Charlie Toy Kee has been around this town for six years or more. He's harmless."

"I didn't say he wasn't," Benton said with a trace of exasperation. "But that cabin is dirty—nothing in its place. That's not the way a Chinaman looks after you if he's really working for you."

Oatman sat up in his chair suddenly and gazed at him soberly. "Ki, you're serious about this. Are you trying to tell me that Charlie isn't working for Canby—that he's involved in all this mysterious business?"

Benton nodded. "That's about what I'm trying to say. I've had that cabin watched for days. Charlie is the only one that comes and goes. Over the hill two or three times a day to Chinatown, with his market basket."

"Isn't that where you'd expect him to go?" Oatman shot the question as he often did on cross-examination. "Isn't that where we all go when we want a freshly killed duck or fowl or vegetables?"

Benton's patience began to wear

thin. "Don't sit there trying to frown me down with your superior intelligence," he grumbled. "That Chinaman has been lugging something home that wasn't in his market basket."

Oatman's silence was too much for Benton. The sheriff jerked himself to his feet.

"Why, hang it, Jesse, I could tell the second I stepped into Canby's place that the atmosphere wasn't right. He gave Charlie the nod to clear out of the room. But Charlie stuck there, and Canby could have killed him for it. That pair hate each other's guts, and there's only one reason why they should. They're in this together—up to their necks!"

Oatman shook his head. "I'm sorry, Ki. It all sounds pretty incredible."

"All right," Benton said. "I'll get along. But I'm going over the hill this afternoon and talk to old Hing Fong."

"Let me know if you find out anything," Oatman said. "By the way, I was in Marshal Bondash's office a few minutes ago. He tells me that Roper has got himself pretty well liquored up already. I asked Bondash to keep an eye on him."

Benton nodded. "He'll find Andy hanging around too."

OLD HING FONG, as fat as a Buddha, sat drowsing in the sun in front of his little herb shop as Ki Benton made his way down the main street of the Chinese quarter. Several hundred Orientals huddled together here in the clutter of adobes and ramshackle buildings that clung to the northern slope of the sand hill that separated the section from Lander proper. A few yards below the road flowed the sluggish, brown Humboldt River, ir-

rigating gardens that were incredibly green and productive.

At this time of day the Chinese quarter presented a deserted appearance, but as Benton strolled down the dusty road, he could see men working in the gardens. In one-eyed Quan Soo's pond ducks and geese were paddling about excitedly. Quan Soo himself sat on a bench plucking a fat white goose. In the shed beyond, a boy with a long pole was keeping a flock of pigeons in the air.

Thinking that Quan Soo had seen him, Ki waved a greeting. Quan only bent his head and continued to pluck the goose.

Benton did not call out to him. He was well aware of the man's aversion to facing white men, even old acquaintances who had proved their friendly interest in him; for the accident that had cost Quan his right eye had laid his face open from forehead to chin and left him with a hideously scarred and misshapen countenance that was less than human. Years back, he had attempted to peddle his poultry from house to house, but he had soon given that up; women preferred to buy his wares without having to gaze upon his ugliness.

"Poor devil," Benton muttered, "I don't suppose he's been uptown in five years."

It might have been his imagination, but the sheriff had the feeling that Hing Fong was not glad to see him. In the past, the old man had always been friendly enough. Today, he politely parried the questions he was asked and Benton could get nothing out of him.

Above the shutters in the places across the road eyes were watching them. Benton wondered about it. He had been here before without his presence attracting more than casual

attention. Without being able to explain why, the feeling grew on him that the hour and the heat of the sun were not alone responsible for the deserted street and the lowered shutters.

A Chinese shuffled by without looking up and turned into Bow Foo's fantan parlor. And now Ki was aware that the attention of the watchers across the road was divided between himself and Bow Foo's place. He didn't hesitate. Determined to get to the bottom of this, he said farewell to Hing Fong. A few steps brought him to the door of the fantan joint.

He was not prepared for what followed, for as he was about to step inside, Bret Canby backed into him. Bow Foo and a little knot of angry Chinese had followed the white man to the door. It explained his reason for backing out of the place. The Chinese fell back at sight of Benton, and Canby whirled to come face to face with the sheriff.

Their surprise was mutual. Something swept across the Southerner's face for a fleeting second and left it hard and wolfish.

"I didn't know you went in for this stuff, Benton," he remarked with open hostility. "Or maybe official business is your excuse for being here."

Benton measured him with his eyes. "If a man needs an excuse for showing up in Chinatown, that's good enough for me. What's yours?" Canby was caught without an answer. "It couldn't be that unfinished business you mentioned this noon?" the sheriff prodded.

CANBY had recovered his wits. "That unfinished business is *my* unfinished business, Benton," he said thinly. He knew he had underesti-

mated his man; that the sheriff knew some mysterious link connected him with these yellow men. He wanted to get away without saying too much, but he knew he had to give some explanation.

"I don't know that it's any concern of yours, but that chink of mine has disappeared. I was here looking for him."

He brushed past Ki. The latter let him go without comment and turned to Bow Foo. "What seems to be the trouble here?"

"Him crazy like hell," the Chinese protested, wiping his perspiring face with his sleeve. "He say me tell him where he find Toy Kee. I say no see. He say smash thing up damn bad if I no tell him. You makee look, Missa Boss? Charlie Toy Kee not here."

Benton regarded him with a shrewd scrutiny for a moment. "Where is he, Bow Foo?"

"No sabby," was the ready answer.

The other yellow faces were equally blank. From long experience Benton knew he could get nothing out of them by trying to force them to talk. That Canby and Toy Kee had had a falling out was of far greater interest to him than the latter's present whereabouts. He took it for granted that the pair had quarreled over the division of the spoils of their game.

He was turning away when Bow Foo said: "You catchee Toy Kee, he go lock-up?"

"No," Benton assured him, "I'd just like to have a little talk with him."

He was anxious to get back to town. He wanted to hear what Oatman would have to say to him now. As he saw it, there was no longer any room for argument. But as his

long stride took him up the hill, a dozen questions assailed him.

He refused to believe that Charlie Toy Kee had been anything more than a go-between. But a go-between for whom? Maybe for some group of Chinatown gamblers or for Bow Foo himself. Bow Foo's record was bad. Canby had gone to the fantan joint to look for his man and the watchers across the way had been unduly interested in his presence.

"They must have known what he was there for," Ki said to himself. "Looking for that missing chink wasn't the whole of it."

He knew that vacant, tell-nothing look with which these Chinese hid what they were thinking. Fear was the one thing it could not hide. He hadn't seen any sign of fear in their slitted eyes.

"They're certainly not afraid of Canby. It's the other way around, if anything," he thought.

He wasn't overlooking the chance that Canby might not have been the only white man involved in the scheme that had driven Roper to the wall, and to test that possibility, he turned Lander upside down. He felt that he could answer this and a good many other questions if he could only establish whether that scheme had originated in Canby's mind or been born in some cunning Chinese brain.

ON reaching the prosecutor's office, Benton was disappointed to be told that Oatman had driven out to his father's ranch on the Little Humboldt and would not be back in town before late evening. At his own office, he found Andy Simms and Steve Bondash, the town marshal, waiting for him.

"We took Roper home and put

him to bed," Andy told him. "I never saw him so plastered."

"Best thing could have happened," Bondash declared. "Time he sobers up he'll have cooled down considerable."

At the Lander House, where Benton took his meals, the talk was all of the day's doings. Fresh word had just come in from the Basin. The situation in Jumbo Extension was serious.

"Struck an underground stream, that's what," an old hard-rock miner at Benton's table averred. "This country's full of 'em. The Jumbo may be like the Sheba Queen. May never be able to pump her dry."

As Benton sat there listening to the old-timer, a rock shattered a window in Roper's closed exchange. It was quickly followed by others. By the time Benton reached the scene there wasn't a pane of glass left in the place. The street was thronged with little groups of irate men, many of whom had lost their original stake as well as their paper profits in Roper's failure.

"We ought to tar and feather him and run him out of town!" a man growled.

"Canby's the skunk that ought to git the tar and feathers, damn him!" another cried.

Benton's presence soon put an end to that sort of talk. Bondash and Simms joined him a few moments later. They cleared the street, and nothing further happened.

"We'll stick around a while," Benton said.

By midnight, he was satisfied that the town had quieted down.

"You better turn in," Andy Simms suggested. "I'll sit around and gas with the boys a while longer."

Benton took the advice but it seemed to him that he had been

asleep only a few minutes when a mad banging on his door awakened him.

"Open up!" an excited voice shouted. "This is Jesse! Canby's been murdered! They just found him a few yards from his cabin with his head split open!"

On their way to the scene of the crime Benton told the prosecutor what had happened in Chinatown that afternoon. Oatman wasn't interested.

"This is no time for interesting theories," he said in blunt dismissal. "I've got to deal with facts."

They viewed the body together. Canby obviously had been struck down from behind by a hatchet in the hands of a powerful assailant. An immediate search of the vicinity failed to reveal any trace of the weapon. The murdered man was wearing a money belt. With the arrival of the coroner, Oatman had the belt removed and turned over to the sheriff for safe-keeping.

"We better step inside and see how much there is here," Benton advised.

Oatman agreed; he wanted to search the premises anyway. The money belt contained less than three thousand dollars, not more than a fourth of what Oatman estimated Canby had made in the past few days. He believed they would find the balance hidden about the cabin. Benton thought otherwise, but he held his tongue and let the prosecutor lead the search.

They failed to find anything.

"This was robbery as well as murder," Oatman observed. This was his first important homicide, and he was making the most of it. "The place looks as though someone had gone through it in a hurry."

"It looks just as it did this noon,"

Benton remarked. He knew Jesse's mind was made up; that the young prosecutor didn't propose to be argued out of the conclusions he had reached. It didn't change what Benton was thinking. "The body was cold when it was found," he went on. "The killer had plenty of time to remove Canby's money belt—if that was what he was after," he observed as he wrapped up the belt in a piece of newspaper. "It's my opinion that this is all Canby got out of the deal—that he could keep, I mean."

Oatman bristled angrily. He knew what was in the sheriff's mind without having it put into words.

"I'm not interested in your opinions, Benton," he said heatedly. "The facts are too plain. If this murder has been made to look like a Chinese hatchet slaying, it was only because Roper figured he could throw suspicion away from himself and possibly make it appear as though little Charlie Toy Kee had done it." A snort of disgust was his answer to that argument. "Why, that little chink would have had to climb up on a box to strike Canby down!"

"All right," Benton said resignedly. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to take Roper into custody at once and hold him on suspicion of murder."

IT was morning before Shad Roper sobered up sufficiently to realize that he was a prisoner in the county jail. He was delighted at the news that Canby had been murdered, but he was still so fuddled that Andy Simms could not get anything out of him. Andy returned to the office where Benton sat with his feet propped up on his desk and hat

pulled down over his face. The sheriff had been up most of the night.

"He's still in a fog," Andy grumbled. "Here comes Oatman."

Benton straightened up, and a moment later the prosecutor hurried in, his manner brisk and important.

"This thing's going to his head pretty bad," Benton thought.

"I want to have a talk with Roper," announced Oatman.

"I'm afraid it'll be a one-way conversation," Andy put in. Oatman started to bristle.

"Take the prosecutor back," Benton advised woodenly. "If he wants to talk to the prisoner, that's his privilege."

Ten minutes of trying convinced Oatman that he would have to come back later to get an intelligent statement out of Roper. Relations between Benton and himself had become so strained that he did not pause in the office on his way out. But just as he reached the door, however, Steve Bondash appeared. Steve called him back.

"Have a look at this," he invited, placing the package he carried on the sheriff's desk and unwrapping it. It contained a bloodstained hatchet, obviously the weapon with which Canby had been murdered. "I found it in the woodpile behind Roper's house," Steve told them.

Oatman almost chuckled in his moment of triumph. He turned to Benton. "I guess this settles it," he declared. "I've got a shut-and-closed case now. The jury won't be out half an hour."

He missed it by only a few minutes. The defense attorney tried hard, but the twelve good men and true who sat in judgment refused to believe that the murderer might have planted the hatchet in Shad

Roper's woodpile, knowing suspicion was bound to fasten on him. They were equally deaf to the suggestion that Roper would have used a gun and not a hatchet if he had killed Canby. They were not even convinced that Roper had been as drunk as he pretended, agreeing with Oatman that his drunkenness might have been only a clever subterfuge. Roper had made the threats. He alone had reason for wanting Canby dead.

Three days later Benton took the convicted man down to the penitentiary at Carson; there, after a brief period of grace, to be hanged by the neck until he was dead.

KI BENTON returned to Lander to learn that Charlie Toy Kee's body had been found floating in the Humboldt. His throat had been slit. It was murder, but Ki refused to regard it as just the usual Chinatown slaying, and though he could discover no confirming evidence, there was no doubt in his mind that Toy Kee and Canby had met death at the hands of the same slayer. He felt the Chinese had been slain because he knew too much. Obviously, Roper had not killed him. It only went further to convince Benton that the trial had been a farce.

News of Roper's conviction had been noted around the State. Going over a stack of newspapers that had piled up in his absence, Benton saw a number of references to the case.

An item in the *Jericho Enterprise* made his pulse leap. He reread it several times before he clipped it out. Light was breaking on him in a hurry. Borrowing a pair of field glasses, he caught up a horse and rode out of town. After crossing the river, he swung around to the north and by following the willow brakes

along the Humboldt soon was in a concealed position from which he could observe the life of Chinatown.

His attention focused particularly on the pens and sheds of the one-eyed Quan Soo. An hour's patient watching told him all he wanted to know. He knew at last how Bret Canby had got his tips, and he was equally certain that big Quan Soo had killed the Southerner.

Oatman, knowing that Benton was back in town, dropped into the sheriff's office as he was returning from lunch, intent on patching up their differences. Winning the Roper case had made Jesse an important man in Lander. He found Benton studying a newspaper clipping with deep concentration.

"There's no reason for carrying this thing any further, Ki," Jesse began. "Why not forget it? The case is closed."

Benton shook his head. "The case isn't closed as far as I am concerned. The thought of Roper swinging for another man's crime doesn't make my flesh creep; I know he's always been a bad actor. But I've got to stop it if I can. You've been wrong all the way, Jesse, and I'm ready to prove it." He indicated the clipping he had been studying. "Listen to this: 'The conviction of Shad Roper for the murder of Bret Canby in Lander brings to mind the fact that Roper stood trial here eleven years ago for a brutal attack on a Chinese named Quan Soo. A Chinese syndicate was operating the Imperial Mine. Roper had sold the property to them. In a quarrel over money, he almost decapitated the Chinaman with a shovel. He pleaded self-defense and was acquitted.'"

Oatman read the clipping for himself.

"Quan certainly waited a long time for his revenge, but he sure got it," Benton said.

"Well?" Oatman queried. "I don't see the significance of this. It wasn't Roper who was murdered."

"He will be in a few days." Oatman winced, but Benton wasn't stopping now. "It's facts you want, so I'll give you a few. And if you're not busy this afternoon, I'll prove them to you. All these years that Quan Soo has been hiding out down in Chinatown, he's really been waiting for Roper to come along. When Roper and Canby showed up, he knew how things stood between them, and when Shad began playing in mining shares, Quan knew he had him. He had his game all worked out. Through Charlie Toy Kee, he made Canby a proposition, and they went to work. Charlie knew his secret. That's why Quan killed him."

"Go on," Oatman said with amused patience. "Tell me why he killed Canby."

"I'm coming to that. Quan Soo wasn't interested only in hacking the life out of Roper; he wanted to take his money away from him first. He did that easy enough. Then Canby got greedy. He put the screws on Quan. I suppose he threatened to expose him—"

"So Quan Soo killed him and then planted the hatchet in Roper's woodpile, I presume," Oatman laughed.

"That's exactly what he did, and then he left the rest to you. If you'll come along with me now, I'll prove it to you." Benton picked up a light sporting rifle and dropped a few cartridges into his pocket.

"What's the gun for?" Oatman asked.

"I want to present you with a little evidence," Benton answered. He did not amplify the terse statement.

IN company with Oatman Benton returned to the spot on the river from which he had watched Quan Soo's place that morning. The big man was feeding his ducks. Overhead a flock of his pigeons wheeled gracefully in the blue sky. The pigeons returned to their loft and Quan padded back to the house.

"Looks peaceful enough to me," remarked Oatman.

"We may have to wait a little," Benton told him.

The afternoon wore on, and nothing happened. Benton began to think that what he had witnessed that morning was not to be repeated today. A few minutes later, however, Quan Soo emerged from the house and went direct to his pigeon loft. Soon after he had disappeared inside, a small wicket on the river side of the loft was pushed up and a sleek, solitary bird strutted out on the little platform. The wicket fell then, and as it did the pigeon took off. It wheeled overhead several times, getting its bearings; then suddenly it struck off for the north.

Even Oatman had begun to understand by now. Benton's gun barked and the bird tumbled earthward.

Quan Soo heard the shot and saw the pigeon fall. His wild fierce cry of rage tore through the stillness of the afternoon. Beside himself, a torrent of high-pitched unintelligible Chinese pouring out of him, he pushed his old boat into the narrow river. Halfway across he saw Benton step out of the willows and pick up the dead pigeon. Instantly he spun the boat around and headed back for the opposite shore.

Benton called to him, but Quan Soo did not even bother to glance back. Leaping ashore, he fled to the

house as quickly as he could run.

"He knows he's been found out," Benton said. He offered the pigeon to Oatman. A small capsule was tied to one of its legs. "Is there any doubt in your mind now about how Canby got his information?"

"No. Carrier pigeons." Oatman's face had a sober, strained look. "I suppose that explains why I've often seen a crate of them being shipped up to the Basin. I thought they were just for food." He pulled himself together with an effort. "Let's get over there."

They had to go all the way back to the bridge. Twenty minutes later, when they pulled up in front of Quan Soo's place, they found a crowd of gibbering Chinese there. Several old women were wailing. Ki Benton knew what that chant meant.

In the kitchen Quan Soo's lifeless body dangled from a rafter. He had taken a short cut out of his troubles. Benton cut the body down. Oatman was shaking so that he was not any help. It was plain to him that he had made a horrible mistake.

"Better look around while we're waiting," Benton said.

In a tin trunk they found the rest of the money made in the mine speculations. It left nothing unsolved. Oatman mopped his face desperately.

"You take charge here, Ki," he got out with an effort. "I've got to get a wire off to Carson. Thank God it will be in time!"

Benton nodded. "That's the thing to do, all right. Somehow I almost hate to see this poor devil get cheated of his revenge at the last minute this way. But that seems to be the luck of the Chinese."

RANGE SAVVY

by CARL RAHT

Although there are some rich mines in Texas, there are no mining claims in this State, due to the fact that the



public domain is State owned, and Federal mining laws do not hold. There is a mine at Shafter, in the Big Bend, that has produced forty million dollars in silver and has thirty-two miles of underground workings. The mine worked continuously for fifty years without a complete shutdown.

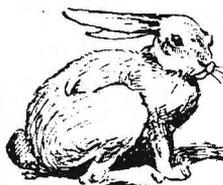
Beef cut into thin strips and hung in the sun until dry is known as "jerky." In the arid ranges of the West it is a staple food because of its convenience in handling. A rider can spend endless



hours in the saddle with a pocket full of jerky to chew on. In camp, with a little flour, lard or grease, and water, he can have a dish tasty enough for any hungry man, if he knows how to pound the jerky with a stone so it will be tender.

The herbivorous jackrabbit, the least aggressive of the Western mammals, owes his continued existence partly to a physical peculiarity—the fact that his forelegs are much shorter than his hind

legs, which have tremendous driving power. Almost any running dog can give



the fleeing jackrabbit a hard race on level ground, while some of the fleetier breeds, such as the greyhound, can make a capture. But the rabbit is not easily caught. Once he finds himself pursued, he maneuvers his flight toward the nearest hill or rise of ground. Here, due to the shortness of forelegs and the driving power of the hind ones, he can get that necessary leeway that enables him to win the race for life.

Some nature lovers mourn the passing of the wild animals of the West, but not all of those now extinct are worth mourning for. The fossilized skeleton of a bat, with a wing spread of fourteen inches and measuring five inches from nose to tail tip, was found in a Wyoming quarry



in the geologically fruitful Green River beds. The age of the fossil was estimated at sixty million years, which is forty million years older than that of any other bat skeleton definitely identified in the Western Hemisphere. The bat lived in the early Eocene Age. The skeleton suggests a highly evolved mammal resembling the swift-flying bat of today. This valuable specimen has been purchased for Princeton University.

Mr. Raht will pay one dollar to anyone who sends him a usable item for RANGE SAVVY. Please send these items in care of Street & Smith, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Be sure to inclose a three-cent stamp for subjects which are not available.



There was one desperate chance to win the stage race to Butte, and Clay Farnum himself had the reins on that last terrible pitch down the mountain trail.

TROUBLE-SHOOTIN' TEAM

BY NORMAN A. FOX

THE kid was no more than fourteen and he was trying hard not to cry as the whip curled about his bare legs and he danced in the dust of Dalyville's main street. Humiliation and anger twisted his freckled face, but gameness was there, too. The only tears were in his voice as

he taunted his tormentor, a fancy-dressed, wasp-waisted man, lean as the lash he wielded.

Sitting slaunchwise in his saddle, Clay Farnum saw it all, a growing wrath in his gray eyes that demanded an outlet in action. He was a tall, wiry man in dust-shrouded

range garb. A stranger here, he'd expected trouble at trail's end. And he'd found it, he reflected grimly, though not in its proper guise.

"Your kid?" he asked casually.

The man with the whip swung black, bushy-browed eyes Clay's way. "Tarnation—no," he snorted. "A sneakin' brat that's snooped around my place once too often." The whip cracked again and this time the kid cried out.

Even as Clay Farnum catapulted himself from the saddle he had time to remember that there'd likely be trouble enough in the Bitter Root without looking for it. But his hurtling body was crashing into the wasp-waisted man, smashing him to the ground. Instantly Clay wrenched the whip away. Clawing at the fellow's collar, he pulled him erect, shook him.

"Grab that whip, younker!" Clay shouted. "Go ahead! Give this galoot a taste of his own medicine!"

And that was when Clay saw a bearded, hulking brute of a man with the stolid face of an ox rushing forward, huge arms upraised, murder in his eyes. Desperately Clay reached for the gun at his hip. But he didn't need it. Drawn by the fracas, townsmen were rapidly gathering and they swarmed over the bearded man, dragging the bellowing, cursing giant backward.

"Keep out of it, Krevinski!" one warned. "Can't you see this is a two-man deal."

That was all Clay needed. Thanking the crowd with a nod, he forced his squirming prisoner to his knees while the kid, snatching the whip, plied it with gusto as the wasp-waisted man howled. Four—five times that whip cracked, then Clay called a halt.

"Go give yourself a *whoosh* in the horse trough, sonny," he advised and

looked at his prisoner. "And you—Find somebody your own size next time you use a whip!"

Hate twisted the other's knife-sharp face—searing, enduring hate. "Your hand, stranger," he conceded at last. "But we'll meet again. Come on, Krevinski."

WITH the bearded giant siding him, the wasp-waisted man elbowed through the growing crowd and strode away. Clay eyed his audience, a slow grin spreading that made him look the youngster he really was.

"Show's over, gents," he observed. "Can anybody tell me where I'll find Cooper Wing? Got business with him."

Men stared at one another in speechless surprise, murmuring. A little bowlegged oldster, mostly mustache, found voice first. "Cooper Wing? Yuh'll find his stage-line office down the street. But hod dang it, man—that was Cooper Wing yuh just mussed up!"

Clay whistled, his face puckering. Cooper Wing! A fine start this was! But he grinned again as he swung on his heel and headed in the indicated direction. He had no trouble finding Wing's office. A large sign—BITTER ROOT STAGE LINE—identified the building and a spanking new Concord, nickel-buckled harness gleaming, stood before the place.

Cooper Wing was enthroned behind a massive desk when Clay shouldered inside. The giant Krevinski lounged in the shadowy background. Both men started and their amazement gave Clay first chance to speak.

"Look," he said, "I'm here on business. What happened down the street is done and past and I hope you'll look at it that way. Me, I got a letter from you, Wing. I'm

hoping to ride one of your stages—”

Wing came to his feet, eyes blazing. “A stage driver, eh?” he snarled. “For unmitigated brass, you’re a top hand! Mister, I’ve written lots of letters lately. I need drivers but I’ve sent for twice as many as I’ll want. You’re one that’s fired before you’re hired!”

“But—” Clay began.

“Get out!” Wing thundered. “Get out while you’re in one chunk!”

For a moment Clay hesitated. Then he shrugged, grinned his slow grin and backed through the doorway. Gaining the street, he almost fell over the freckle-faced boy he’d sided.

“Gosh, mister,” the boy said worriedly, “you come to work for Wing, huh? You sure made a mistake helpin’ me! But if you can tool a wagon, you’ve got a job.”

“You own a stage line, son?” Clay asked with mock earnestness.

“Nope, but my ma’s runnin’ one since pa got killed and grandpa got crippled buckin’ that skunky Wing line. I’m Jimmy Griffin and Six-hoss Griffin is my grandpa.”

Clay looked at the boy with new interest. He knew of the Griffin Line, supreme here until Cooper Wing had come. And he knew of Six-hoss Griffin whose name was legend in all the Bitter Root Valley from Missoula down to where Gibbon Pass sawtoothed into Idaho.

“Let’s go,” he said.

THE boy led Clay to the street’s east end where a ramshackle barn huddled with a corral adjacent. The Griffin Line office was in the barn and Clay sniffed the odor of hay and horses with a nostalgia that still lingered when he faced Martha Griffin. Young Jimmy told his story excitedly.

“I’m obliged to you,” Martha

Griffin said when the youngster finished. She was a rawboned woman with graying hair, plain as a plowhorse but just as dependable-looking. “If you want a driving job, you’ve got one.”

“Reckon I could qualify,” Clay decided. “Mostly, though, I’ve been a cowpoke. But—”

Mrs. Griffin had studied him as he spoke. “I like your cut, Clay Farnum,” she interjected. “So I’m going to give it to you straight. The Griffin Line is just about licked. Tomorrow will tell for sure. Still interested in working for us?”

“Might be.”

“Six-hoss Griffin, my father-in-law, built the line,” she continued. “Mail and passengers helped pay the way, but our express contract is what really counts. Now we’ll maybe lose it. It expires tomorrow and Wing’s line has equaled our bid. But the express office in Missoula is giving us a chance because of our good service in the past. They wrote and said they’d split tomorrow’s express between us and Wing. Whoever delivers to Butte first gets the contract.”

“I saw some of Wing’s rolling stock,” said Clay. “It’s ace high.”

“And ours isn’t,” the woman admitted. “They’ve got more change stations, too. It’s a long pull north to Missoula, then east and southeast to Butte.”

“But I heard the Griffin Line used to cut straight over the Sapphire range, the Skalkaho way. That cuts off fifty miles, maybe. Why go the long way?”

“You don’t know the Skalkaho,” she said grimly. “Two ruts snaking along a ledge, that’s what it is. Only two men had stagecoach savvy enough to run it—Six-hoss and his son, my Jim. They ran it once too

often. Jim was killed; Six-hoss had his legs crippled—and worse. Look over there—”

She pointed through the doorway into the corral. Clay stared, strode outside for a better look. There stood a coach, its paint rubbed thin by wind and rain, its canvas curtains tattered, its wooden brake blocks hand-fashioned. It was old and the man perched on the driver's seat was older, a wisp of a fellow with a seamed, friendly face. He waved a hand at Clay.

“Passenger?” he asked. “Want to ride up here? I'm pullin' out for Butte pronto.”

He cracked an imaginary whip at six imaginary horses and suddenly Clay was sick inside, for he knew that more than Six-hoss Griffin's legs had been injured on Skalkaho. He'd never seen the oldster before, but he was seeing the ruin of a legend, the downfall of a hero and it filled him with a consuming pity.

“He's like that off and on,” Martha Griffin whispered at Clay's elbow. “Money will fix his legs, but the doctor says his spells were caused by shock and only shock will cure him. Six-hoss can't remember that last ride over Skalkaho.”

Clay nodded, raised his voice. “There's no hosses hitched to your

rig, old-timer,” he said steadily. “Can't you savvy?”

Bewildered, the oldster stared. But the blankness gradually faded from his eyes and he passed a hand before them shakily. “Plumb sorry,” he muttered confusedly. “Guess I had another spell. Martha—Jimmy! Who's this hairpin?”

“A friend,” said his daughter-in-law. “He's proved that and I'm hiring him. And since he's showed more sand than our measly crew combined, I'm having him tool through to Butte tomorrow and win that race for us.”

“It won't work,” Six-hoss groaned. “You've got to listen, Martha. Hoist me up here in the mornin' and I'll tool this rig over Skalkaho. Shucks, sometimes I don't have no spells for days. It's our only chance of—”

“Don't listen to him,” the woman warned Clay, low-voiced. “I'll always believe Wing caused that smash up somehow. That's why Jimmy spies on Wing whenever he can. The man's ruthless and Krevinski, his bodyguard, is a killer. Some say he was run out of Russia for some bloody business. Six-hoss is wild to try Skalkaho, but it is too dangerous with Wing on the prowl.”

But Clay Farnum was scarcely lis-



“GREAT WITH A SANDWICH”
“PLENTY FOR A BIG THIRST”



Pepsi-Cola is made only by Pepsi-Cola Company, Long Island City, N. Y. Bottled locally by authorized bottlers.

tening, for he'd made a decision and sired an idea. It was wild, loco—but it might work! It took nerve and stagecoach savvy to run Skalkaho. He, Clay, had the nerve. Six-hoss had the savvy if his mind stayed clear. Could those two assets be combined? Could he tool a Concord over the mountains with Six-hoss pointing the way? It was worth a try!

Yet with the idea growing, Clay wondered at his own interest in this matter. A man had to work, but there was no call to commit suicide for a salary's sake. He remembered Cooper Wing who hated him and Krevinski who'd made Russia too hot to hold him. But he remembered something else as well, a thing he'd always admired—courage.

Jimmy Griffin had courage. He'd proved it. His mother had courage, too. Shucks, she belonged in a kitchen making pies, not running a back-to-the-wall stage line. And Six-hoss Griffin, the cripple who wanted to run Skalkaho, had all the nerve a man needed. Clay Farnum had a hunch he'd never regret siding these folks.

"Listen," he said. "I've got an idea—"

THE express company's rules for the race stipulated the rival coaches must leave at six sharp for Butte. Both were ready before dawn: the swanky Concord of the Bitter Root Line, Wing himself at the ribbons, surly Krevinski beside him, and the battered wagon that was the Griffin Line's best. Clay Farnum would drive, but Six-hoss Griffin had been hoisted to the seat, too. An hour of argument had finally sold Clay's scheme to Martha Griffin.

Express was loaded at the general store whose owner was also Daly-

ville's express agent. There was an odd assortment of packages, and Clay, stowing the Griffin share inside the coach, grinned as he hefted one.

"A clock," he guessed. "I can hear it tick. If we want to time our run, Six-hoss, we can open the package."

He had his foot on the hub to mount when young Jimmy materialized from nowhere, breathless and excited. "You've got to be careful, Clay," he panted. "Me, I listened at Wing's window again last night. That Mex hostler ma fired last week told Wing that grandpa was honin' to run Skalkaho way. Wing's plumb worried. I heard him and Krevinski talkin' it over."

"We'll keep our eyes peeled," Clay promised.

"Say, what's a Nihilist, Clay?" the boy asked abruptly.

"A which? Come again."

"A Nihilist. Wing was sayin' they couldn't risk things on a half-baked scheme. Krevinski just laughed and said he hadn't been a Nihilist for nothin'."

"Can't seem to dab a loop on the word, son," Clay confessed. "Must be Russian for skunk. I—"

Six-hoss palmed a massive watch. "A minute to six," he warned.

There was just time to wring Jimmy's hand, slap his back. Then Clay was on the seat, reins in hand. There was no band music, no starting pistol. But despite this lack of fanfare, the race was no less earnest, for the stage supremacy of the Bitter Root hung in the balance. The line Six-hoss Griffin had spent a lifetime building was doomed if he lost this contest.

"Six—straight up!" the oldster snapped.

They were off—coaches rumbling,

horses straining. Just for an instant the eyes of Cooper Wing and Clay Farnum locked across space—a challenge made, a challenge accepted. Then Wing was swinging his rig north toward Missoula, the long, safe way, and Clay was tooling his Concord toward Skalkaho.

South by east the road twined, the dawn-misted Sapphires rearing before them and brawling Skalkaho Creek flashing in that first light. Soon the road was tilting upward and Clay was scanning the sky apprehensively. Something akin to thunder muttered dismally in the hills beyond.

The Skalkaho run! Steep grades and hairpin turns with wheels kicking gravel over the edge of eternity. Cliff and sky and canyon. Cork-screwing ruts that passed for a road, sparks flying from striking hoofs, brake blocks squealing in wild protest. Here was the road that had claimed Jim Griffin and almost finished Six-hoss. Here was hell's own highway, a challenge to a man's driving skill.

AS trees blurred past and sand boxes clacked over the wheels, Clay was increasingly thankful Six-hoss was beside him. The oldster was clear-eyed today, ladling out advice whenever it was needed. "Ease up on this turn. Let 'em out a bit now, steep climb ahead. Keep your foot near the brake, son. Easy. Easy."

Clay's scheme was working! Combined efforts became an endless routine that made the spectacular commonplace. And they were gaining time, Clay reflected jubilantly. But his exultation was offset by a nameless fear that grew with the miles. Cooper Wing meant to win this race. He had gone north, but still his shadow touched them.

And Krevinski? What in tarnation was a Nihilist, Clay wondered? He had as much schooling as most in the range country. The word was in the recesses of his memory, but he couldn't quite reach it.

Six-hoss' voice tore him from his thoughts. "Watch out!" the oldster screamed.

Brake blocks ground against the rims. They'd rounded a bend and disaster lay ahead. A slide covered the trail. Screeching to a stop, Clay dismounted. There was nothing to do but shovel, and shovel he did while the sun climbed higher. Finally they wormed through to toil upward again.

They'd lost precious time and Clay grew frantic at the thought. But they were to lose more. Within five miles they found another slide and another beyond that. It was afternoon when Clay thrust the shovel into the boot for the third time. "This is Wing's doings," he muttered dismally. "It was dynamite we heard—not thunder. Somebody's up here starting these slides."

He didn't look at Six-hoss as he said it. He knew what this race meant to the oldster. But when Six-hoss spoke, Clay swung his head in horror, recognizing a greater disaster. The oldster's seamed face was placid.

"You reckon Martha'll have biscuits for supper?" he asked. "I shore crave some biscuits."

There was no mistaking that blankness in Six-hoss' eyes. Now when there were wasted minutes, precious minutes, to be regained, now when Clay needed the old fellow the most, Six-hoss was having another spell!

Clay shouted at him, even cursed him, hoping desperately to bring the oldster out of it as he'd done yester-

day. But Six-hoss' wandering mind was not to be recalled. A sense of bitter futility strong upon him, Clay gave it up.

He had to carry on alone. Six-hoss was still beside him, but the old man might have been miles away. Clay drove "blind," thankful one minute because no more slides blocked them, cursing the next as death grinned without warning at a turn.

ONWARD and upward they drove, flashing past a water falls, seeing Skalkaho Creek dwindle near its source. And Clay was silent, knowing the futility of talking to this living dead man at his side.

Cooper's hireling here in the hills had probably circled to Dalyville, Clay was thinking. He'd be satisfied that he'd delayed the Griffin coach overlong. And Clay was savoring what little comfort there was in that thought when he rounded a turn and ice stiffened his spine, for a felled tree blocked the narrow road!

Clay's foot fumbled for the brake, an instinctive action. His arms tensed to haul on the lines, stop the coach, another instinctive action. It was too narrow for a quick stop. Too late Clay realized that by stopping he'd slew the Concord around and over the edge of the cliff!

And then, amazingly, Six-hoss was advising him. "Over the tree!" he was bellowing. "Drive right over it!"

It happened too fast for thought. But in that split second of uncertainty, Clay realized that Six-hoss' spell had miraculously passed. So Clay headed the coach straight onward, praying none of the horses would stumble, tangle in the harness, praying the old coach would hold together. Wood shuddered, groaned.

Clay felt his head snap like a whip's end. And then they were over the tree.

A man was leaping from the cover of a stunted bush, gun in hand. A bullet grazed Clay's neck, another tore a splinter from the coach. But the road was straight ahead, and with his rifle Clay risked a backward shot that sent the man staggering four steps forward to pitch over the canyon's rim.

It was over that quickly. Easing the Concord to a stop, Clay sleeved sweat from his brow. "Your savvy saved us," he told Six-hoss. "Me, I'd have tried to stop and backed us over the cliff."

"My savvy!" Six-hoss echoed. "You don't understand. Doc said a shock would cure me, and it has—for good! Seeing that tree, just like the other time, did it. You see? That's the way they got me and Jim! I made the mistake you almost made—tried to stop. I was tossed from the coach as it struck a ledge, but Jim went to his death. Running into the same set-up made it all come back to me. Son, give me them reins!"

Obediently Clay changed places, helping the cripple make the shift. And then, over the mountain's top and on the first of the steep pitches leading downward, the Concord flew. Clay, awed by the miracle that had mended Six-hoss in part, witnessed another, greater miracle—the wizardry of this man's driving.

Here was skill beyond skill. The heart and soul of Six-hoss Griffin was in this rite and his enthusiasm was contagious enough that the heart and soul of Clay Farnum went into it, too. Gone were the doubts and misgivings that had beset him. Hope flamed again, for the race was not yet lost and Six-hoss Griffin, the Six-

hoss of old, was at the reins!

Thus they wheeled down the mountainside, regaining lost minutes before they came to the last pitch. Shadows lengthened and dusk sifted its purple powder over the hills, but there was light enough to see another road snaking below them, the main road they'd join for the last straight lap into Butte. Clay scanned it anxiously. Wing should be on it about now. A spring bubbled on a crest overlooking the road and Six-hoss chose to stop.

"We'll change hosses at Georgetown after we hit the main road," the oldster explained. "But these cayuses has earned themselves a drink. We can find out at Georgetown whether Wing's passed or not. We'll beat him yet!"

Clay leaped from his perch to stretch his legs and have a drink. He filled his sombrero to fetch it to Six-hoss who still chuckled happily.

"I gotta win," Six-hoss was saying. "It'll mean money to fix my legs. It'll mean money to buy things Martha and Jimmy have been doing without lately. And it'll be worth it just to see Wing's look if we beat him. I betcha it'll be like a bomb busted in his face!"

A bomb!

SUDDENLY Clay was spilling water over his boots. Suddenly his legs were freezing when he wanted to run, put distance between himself and yonder Concord. For one word had unlocked his memory, brought back something he'd gleamed one winter when he'd been snow-locked in a line shack and had read everything in the place. A bomb! Now he remembered what a Nihilist was—a Russian anarchist, a maker of bombs!

It was clear—horribly clear. Wing

hadn't wanted to pin all his faith in dynamite-sired landslides. He hadn't been sure, either, that the trick that had wrecked one Griffin coach would wreck another. He had had a sleeve card as well. That ticking package in the coach wasn't an alarm clock. *It was an infernal machine timed to work if everything else failed!*

And with the horror of it engulfing him, Clay finally made his legs obey him. "Run!" he cried. "Run for your life, Six-hoss!"

Clay, himself, was running as he shouted, but suddenly he was wheeling, sprinting toward the coach. For crippled Six-hoss couldn't run! Clay had forgotten that in his terror. But now he remembered and he dived for the coach, groping through the express packages for the one that contained death.

He found it and it was still ticking! He might have submerged it in the springs, but that would take precious seconds and perhaps only a few seconds were left. So he hurled it, hurled it in the only direction he could, down to the road below. And just as the package left his fingers, his horror transcended itself for, bursting into view around a bend was the Bitter Root coach with Cooper Wing and Krevinski on the driver's seat.

The wild shout that welled from Clay was drowned in a deafening roar as the infernal machine, striking the road, exploded. Blinding smoke boiled and wafted away to give him one sickening glimpse of the stage being hurled over the bank.

Clay leaped to the seat of his own stage, snatched the reins from the thunderstruck Six-hoss, sent the coach careening to reach that blasted stretch of road, remembering only that those below might need him.

There was ironic justice in Krevinski stopping a bomb of his own making and Cooper Wing likewise deserved such a fate. But Clay didn't think of that. Not then.

Krevinski was dead when they reached the wrecked coach. But, amazingly enough, none of the horses had been killed, for the bomb had struck behind the coach. And Cooper Wing had only a cut on his cheek. He had clambered up the bank from the wreckage and he stood now, wrathful, belligerent, shaking his fist as Clay leaped to the ground.

"This is the finish of the Griffin line," Wing stormed. "I'll sure report to Missoula that you started heaving dynamite when you saw I had you beat. You savvy what this means for you, Griffin?"

"It's my turn to talk about unmitigated brass," Clay said hotly. "Jimmy heard you and Krevinski talking last night. You know dog-gone well how we come by that bomb, Wing!"

"And who's going to believe a kid?" Wing sneered. "I say you tossed a stick of dynamite."

A LOW moan from Six-hoss dragged Clay's eyes upward. And suddenly Clay was seeing defeat in the oldster's slumped shoulders, defeat with victory in sight, defeat after all those perilous miles.

"He's got us licked," Six-hoss said. "It's a matter of one man's word agin' another's. Folks is gonna remember how bad I wanted to win and they'll likewise remember that I've been outa my head at times lately. You can savvy how the express company'll look at it."

"They'll look at it," said Clay and his slow grin spread, "the way

I tell 'em. You see, I'm a trouble shooter for the express company. They sent me down to make sure the race was run square."

Wing's jaw dropped. "You . . . you an express company man!" he stammered incredulously. "But—"

"You misunderstood yesterday and you wouldn't let me talk," Clay reminded him. "I said I had a letter from you. I did. It run down the Griffin Line so I come expecting trouble at the race. That's why I said I wanted to ride one of your wagons today. But you kicked me out so I rode with Six-hoss here. The way things smelled from the first I figgered it wasn't Griffin who was the skunk, so I kept my mouth shut and saw for myself."

There was no doubting Clay's sincerity. Defeat and frustration were in Wing's eyes—and bitter hate and a desperate hope as well. "There's still one way of winning!" he grated and his hand clawed for a gun. He was fast—fast enough to thumb a bullet before Clay's weapon cleared leather. But Clay, feeling the air lash of one bullet, the nip of another, triggered once, swiftly, accurately. Cooper Wing sagged, his eyes glassy.

Clay pouched his gun, smiled at Six-hoss who shook his head thoughtfully. "Things is comin' a mite fast for me to get the savvy of 'em," the oldster observed. "But it seems a man reaps what he sows. I'll thank you to scratch a little dirt over them skunks, amigo, and hurry the chore. The Griffin Line's got express to deliver and it's plumb behind schedule."

And Clay Farnum turned to the task with an abiding satisfaction, knowing he could report to his boss that the right man had won the race.

"Dick can't ride, huh?" Windy yelled. "Well, he'll ride that race tomorrow and it'll be square or the whole Bar H will take to smoke!"



'RIDE 'ER, BUTTON

BY C. K. SHAW

The flower of the Bar H manhood set whittlin' on the sunny side of the blacksmith shop, gassin' about the dry spell, the Black Horse mystery, and tomorrow's race between Gumboil Georges and Judge Rollins, who is no more a judge than I am a baboon. Champ Garrison, our boss, jumped up and started foggin' dust in a circle, cussin' Gumboil Georges.

Him and Gumboil was friends, havin' ate from the same roundup chuck wagons for fifteen years.

"Windy," Champ bellers at me, "Gumboil is goin' to lose his Ten Springs section in that race!"

That was my own opinion, too. Judge Rollins had itched for that land for years, and now he'd got Gumboil to bet it on the county race.

Gumboil owned a little dust-colored mare that had won the race for two years, and he'd come to think she couldn't be beat. The Gentle Annie was speedy, and no rank three-year-old caught in off the range was goin' to skin her if the race was on the square, but—

"The fact that Gumboil ain't discovered what the trick is," I says, "shows that Judge Rollins has the bulge on him."

Old Champ cut the dust faster.

Dick Muller, the button me and Bluey Beck was gentlin' to manhood since he was left an orphan, changes the subject by piping up about the Black Horse mystery. "Maybe," he says, hopeful, "some morning the Bar H will wake up with a strange black horse in the stable."

Nobody but the button cottoned to the idea. This hombre with a weakness for black horses would leave his tired one and pick up a fresh one without askin' nobody's permission. Later the owners could trade back. The gent's thievin' jobs was small potatoes like stickin' up the Marthy Saloon for a quart of whiskey, or breakin' into a store for a fancy necktie. Last week he'd stopped the Quakin' Asp buckboard and took off some groceries and tobacco. Sheriff Ham Nolen didn't get lathered up over the deal, sayin' he was busy savin' life and limb.

"Ham Nolen ought to do something about that jasper tradin' horses the way he does," Champ said.

"Speakin' of the devil," chirps Alf Newell, and sure enough there was Sheriff Ham Nolen ridin' up through the buckbrush of the gully.

"Didn't I tell you this was goin' to be a momen-te-ous day?" I asked Bluey.

"Did you?" Dick asks curiously.

"What's momen-te-ous about Ham Nolen?"

"Look at the way he sets his saddle, straight as a ramrod. He's mad as a wet hen."

"He does look riled," Champ admits.

HAM rode up and got out of the saddle and set down in the nice fall sunshine. He never was one for standin' even when he was tired of settin'. It was my hunch he'd just dropped in for a visit because it didn't look as though he had much on his mind.

While Ham was still restin', we got some more company. Gumboil Georges and Judge Rollins rode into the cottonwood lane. I reminded Bluey that I had said this would be a momen-te-ous day, and his left eyebrow lifted higher than his right.

The sight of the pair reminded Sheriff Nolen of something unpleasant he'd forgot. He rested his elbow on his knee and leaned his chin on his fist.

"That race," he groaned. "Gumboil Georges didn't show the sense of a sheep in bettin' that watered section on a horse race." He lifted his head with a sudden flare of anger. "Listen, you fellows, don't mix into the bettin' on that race. Judge Rollins has it fixed to win, or he'd not be racin'. I'll have trouble enough with Gumboil and his boys without the Bar H buttin' in." He looked at me. "Do you hear?"

"The Bar H knows how to mind its own business," I answered, kind of stiff.

"Maybe it does, but will it?" Ham snaps back.

Gumboil Georges and the judge rode up, and Gumboil got down with a grunt. Rollins eased his two hundred and forty pounds of beef from the saddle and said, "Good day, gen-

lemen," in his usual bass key.

"Howdy, Gumboil," Champ said to his old friend. He was sympathetic, as though the Ten Springs section was already waterin' Rollins cows. "How's the Gentle Annie?"

Gumboil loved to talk about his little mare. "In the pink!" he answered prompt. "A regular shootin' star! Swift as a dart in her last work-out. Homer said—" Homer was Gumboil's grandson, and mentionin' the kid's name seemed to take all the starch outta him. "Homer's got the mumps," he added dismally. "He can't ride the race tomorrow."

"My grandson from the Broken Arrow in Arizona is going to ride for me," Judge Rollins announced. "Abbington is his name, and, gentlemen, he's the smartest rider I've ever seen. He's smart all the way around the track, every inch of the way! He's smart at the post and smart at the finish. A great little rider!"

He peddled us some hot air about the kid ridin' a race when he was five. I never heard the word "smart" used so many times in such a short space. It was plain why Gumboil had beads of sweat rollin' down his cheeks like marbles. If the Gentle Annie had to pack a grown man around that mile track, she'd have to be a bullet to beat a horse carryin' a twelve-year-old kid. I could see the other Bar H boys were takin' it hard, too. Whittlin' got up such speed you had to bat your eyes to keep them from bein' put out by flyin' chips. Champ was foggin' the dust in a bigger circle, terrible wrought up over what had misfell his old friend.

SUDDENLY it come over me like a bucket of cold water why Gumboil Georges was at the Bar H. I nudged Bluey, but he looked at

me with eyes as blank as two horse collars. He never was good at deductin'. Gumboil had now managed to choke Judge Rollins off on how smart his grandson was, and began talkin' on how he'd lose the race and the Ten Springs section if he couldn't get a lightweight jockey to ride. Then he looked at me and said:

"Windy, will you let Dick ride the Gentle Annie tomorrow?"

The Bar H rose off its heels and put away its jackknives. The ranch was proud of the kid it had helped to train. Proud of the way he could rope and ride and come down a hill without throwin' his horse off stride and still lay in the crooks of a steer. Proud of the way he set the mild buckers, helped at the snubbin' pole and worked at the brandin' fire. From old Champ down, I could see the Bar H was ready to back the button to the last ditch.

I done some fast thinkin'. Black Wing, the horse Judge Rollins had entered in the race, had been sired by Oregon Chief, a blocky stallion that had never produced a speedy colt, and his mother, so the judge claimed, was a range mare. That made Black Wing eligible for the race, the only requirement bein' that the entry be county bred. Nobody had ever remembered seein' this Black Wing as a colt, so he was something to guess about. I made my guess, and it was that no colt of Black Wing's blood could outrun the Gentle Annie. But I wasn't forgettin' that Judge Rollins had bet a pile of money against that Ten Springs section. I didn't want Dick mixed into any crooked race. I was kinda glad when Ham Nolen spoke up.

"Call the side bet off on this race," he says.

Judge Rollins held back on a laugh

so hard his belt buckle shimmied. "I'll run Black Wing in the county race tomorrow," he announced in a voice that echoed in your ears, "and I'll win. Winning will just be a formality for Abbington, a mere formality. Then I'll demand the deed to that Ten Springs section. I am within my rights, am I not, sheriff?"

"Yeah," Ham admitted sourly.

Then the judge swelled up and waved a hand toward Dick. "That kid," he said, "is too scrawny to ride a race. He'd probably fall off the first half mile. He couldn't even ride in Abbington's dust—"

AT that point I stopped the old windbag. "You're squealin' too loud," I says, and shook my fist under his nose, which was beginnin' to realize it had stuck itself into trouble. I couldn't hit a man his age, so I caught him by the shirt front. From the way it ripped it must have been cheap material.

"Scrawny, is he, huh?" I asked. "Fall off the first half mile, will he?" I bobbed Rollins back and forth, though two hundred and forty pounds on the hoof is a big handful. I let go of him kinda hard and he rolled back against his horse.

He squawked for Ham to arrest me, but the sheriff just told him to be more careful not to hurt folks' feelin's. Then old Champ reared up with a statement about Dick bein' the best rider in the State and that there was plenty of Bar H money to say so.

Judge Rollins shook his fists at everybody. "Let the kid ride, then!" he shouted. "Abbington will make a monkey out of him!"

Dick had been kickin' my shin steady, beggin' for a chance to ride the race. "Let me ride, Windy!" he cried. "I've breezed Annie for Ho-

mer three times. I know how to handle her!"

I looked down at the kid. He did seem a mite under weight as he stood there in his calico shirt and overalls and a big hat creased like mine. He had a belt cinched around his middle which didn't look much thicker than a pencil, but I knew he wasn't puny by a jugful. I was plumb sure he could kick the Gentle Annie around the track as good as any kid his age, but I was thinkin' of the crooked work and that section of watered land. Judge Rollins would go to any length to get his fins on that land. I glanced at Bluey, knowin' he'd be figurin' the race was jobbed. Bluey's eyes was powdery gray, and it always speaks unhealthy for somebody when Bluey's eyes lose all their blue that way. He wasn't pullin' in his horns in the face of Judge Rollins' challenge.

I hitched my belt. As far as me and Bluey went, we'd seen too many fights through to get up a fever over another, but lettin' the button mix in was different. Still the kid had to learn.

"Rollins," I said, nailin' him with a glance, "Dick will ride that race tomorrow, and if you want to see a real smart kid handle a horse, just watch the way he kicks the Gentle Annie home with the bacon."

The sheriff set down and held his head. "There you go jumpin' in with your spurs on," he yelled at me. "Windy, you know that race won't be on the square!"

"Yes, it will," I said so quiet everybody listened. "It'll be on the square or me and Bluey will leave Rimrock toes first."

"It will be a fair race," shouted old Champ, "or the whole Bar H will be served up at a mass funeral. Rollins, nor nobody he imports, better try any crooked work!"

The swell went out of Rollins' cheeks and he shrunk in the chest zone. "The race is on the dead level," he said in his bass key.

THE next day as we rode into Rimrock, Dick got lots of advice.

"Annie's a slow breaker," Simp reminded him. "Don't get a rash if you have to eat a little dust to start."

"But after she hits her stride, give her plenty of gad," old Champ growls. "She's lazy."

"Yeah, ride at them that second lap with everything you got," Alf Newell puts in. "Annie is fast, but you got to work your way."

We'd gone over a lot of ways Rollins' crowd might try to job the race, but hadn't settled on none. We was all keepin' our eyes peeled, though. We found Rimrock on its tin ear over the race. There was eleven entries, but Black Wing and Gentle Annie was the favorites. Both these horses was now stabled at the Star, only nobody had seen Black Wing. He was in a box stall, and Jackal Nevins was guardin' him very mysterious.

Me and Simp and Dick went over to a restaurant while Bluey stayed at the stable to keep an eye on things in general. Dick favored apple pie a great deal, but he knew he couldn't eat more than one piece before the race. There was a stranger at a table near us and somehow he got Simp to come over and talk with him. He was drinking and mighty pleased with himself. He kept tellin' Simp how easy it was to make money when you was smart. I didn't like the fellow's mug, which dished in over the bridge of his nose, and I could see Simp didn't like him neither, though he hated bein' unsociable to a stranger.

The fellow took a long swig and

leaned close to Simp, talkin' too soft for me to hear. I saw Simp pick up his ears. Purty soon he spears me a look and I step over.

"Where is your home range?" Simp was askin'. "How long did you say you'd been here?"

The gent set his bottle down and asked what my business was. I said me and Simp was friends. It was evident that the fellow didn't trust my mug no more than I did his, for he shut up like a clam. Simp got up to leave and the stranger showed an ugly streak.

"Leavin', huh?" he asked. "Found out what you wanted to, so now you're leavin'!"

The way that liquor seemed to fan from that fellow's brain was a sight to behold. His legs wasn't cold steady when he rose, but he was sober enough to figure out a lot of things in a few seconds. His main beef was that me and Simp had pumped him. He dug at his hip for a gun yellin' at Simp that he was a snake.

Simp is able to handle his own fights, but I always lend my experience, for he's the youngest man on the Bar H. As I stepped up beside Simp, the stranger decided to ventilate me. He looked at me from an ornery pair of peepers, his brain gettin' more twisted every second, and I knew we was in for a blow. I let loose a right from my boot heels, and hit that fellow so hard his gun did a flip flop and near caught by the trigger on the hangin' lamp. His feet went in the air, and he hit the floor like so much corned beef. His head strikin' a chair didn't make him feel any better.

The gun had gone off in its flip, and just as I was shoulderin' the gent to pack him into the back room, Ham Nolen comes rushin' in all pur-

ple and mad because I'd started what he called trouble.

"I told you twenty times not to go off half cocked, Windy Bill Wicks!" he shouted. "Who is this guy, and why did you paste him?"

Motionin' us close, Simp whispered: "I think he's the Black Horse mystery man!"

"Huh?" barks Ham, forgettin' about keepin' down trouble and reachin' out after the gent. "What makes you think so, Simp?"

Well, the stranger had whispered about how easy he got his money, and a few other things Simp couldn't exactly recall. "But I do know he spoke of a black horse as being part of his game," he finished.

We laid the fellow on a table in the back room, and it was plain he wouldn't be able to talk for a while. Ham said if the fellow woke up in jail, he'd be too suspicious to talk, so we decided to leave him where he was until after the race. Bill Harney, the restaurant man, said he'd keep an eye on him. It was race time, and we had to get over to the Star.

EVERYBODY was at the stable to follow the horses to the track. Gumboil led Annie out, proud as could be. She was a neat piece of horse flesh, shinin' like satin. She was a mite blocky through the hips, and her legs could have been longer, but still she looked like a racer. She had a smooth head and honest eyes, and didn't put on fancy manners. Judge Rollins watched Annie being led out and let out a big laugh.

"She belongs on the plow, Gumboil!" he called.

Then we all set ourselves for a sight of Black Wing. The door to the box stall was opened, and a black head set with fiery eyes popped to view. Then two cuttin' forefeet

pawed the air and Jackal Nevins dodged and began to talk in his sing-song voice.

"Easy, Black Wing, easy boy. Down like a good boy. Down."

He led the horse out, for Black Wing was not an unmanageable animal, just high-spirited. And even though I don't think any more of Jackal Nevins than I do of his boss, I will say he knows how to handle horses. He soon had the black on all four pins and prancin' for the benefit of the crowd.

I felt my heart crowdin' my Adam's apple. Black Wing was the swiftest-looking thing I'd ever run an eye over. Never before had such a speedy get-up in horseflesh touched Rimrock soil. Slender legs, gaunt flanks, a proud head tossin' on a graceful neck.

"If that animal ain't lightnin' on four legs," I says from the corner of my mouth to Bluey, "then I ain't never seen speed rolled into a horsehide."

Simp and Bluey just stood lookin', tense as two bobcats on a limb.

"The colt is a throwback," I said. "There ain't a whisper of Oregon Chief's blocky hips, nor his mother's stringy shoulders. He's a throwback clean to a comet. We ain't got no way to figure his speed. As far as his sire and dam are concerned, he might as well be a dark horse."

"Uh-huh," Bluey admits.

But Simp Wells sucked in his breath, so fast he choked. "What do you mean—a dark horse?"

"One that's imported blind for a race," I answer.

Simp's fingers bit into my arm. "Windy, I'm the prize lame brain! I'm crazy!" He lowers his voice. "I'd been thinking so much about the Black Horse mystery that I thought the stranger in the restaurant made a mistake. He said he

was making a pile of money off a dark horse, only I thought he meant black. *He didn't say black—he said dark!*"

I looked at Bluey, and busted out in a sweat of quick thinkin'. That stranger knew something about a dark horse and was going to make a pile of money. That horse must be Black Wing. That meant Judge Rollins had entered an outside horse in the county race. We'd caught up with the trick! I got goin' fast an' hoofed it over to Sheriff Nolen.

"Hold everything!" I yells. "Black Wing wasn't bred in this county, he's not Oregon Chief's colt!"

A blast of dynamite couldn't have done a better job of blowin' off the lid. Judge Rollins was soon yellin' himself purple, threatenin' to arrest me for slander and darin' me to prove anything. When I told him about the stranger in the restaurant, a palish hue spread over his sweaty face. I knew Bluey had already gone to fetch the stranger, but in a couple of minutes he was back—alone. Unknown parties had whisked the gent away.

Judge Rollins shouted that the whole thing had been a frame-up to keep Black Wing out of the race. Sheriff Nolen believed me and Simp, but the law couldn't act without rightful proof. Without that stranger, we didn't have much of a case. A few fist fights flared, but the sheriff got his blood-curdlin' threats to take hold, and so we started for the race track. The war wasn't over; it was just hangin' fire.

GUMBOIL GEORGES rode with me and Champ, an' he was feelin' mighty blue. He wasn't fool enough to think Annie could win over the bolt of lightning that Judge Rollins had entered in the race. Ham Nolen stopped us as we rode up to

the track, and said out his piece.

"Don't start this fight all over!" he warns. "Maybe Black Wing ain't a county-bred colt, but you got no proof. The judge has papers that says he was sired by Oregon Chief. I got to respect them papers, which same I intend to do with tooth, nail and a couple of sixes."

It was a windy day and the dust was thick. Rimrock's half-mile track was new, but it had been in purty good shape until Kim Bennet drove a band of sheep across it. The county had floated it since, but that only seemed to have made the dust deeper.

First off come two saddle-horse races, with seventeen punchers straddlin' leather and goin' after the honors. Dick and me was standin' by the new judges' stand and the kid forgot his worries watchin' the race.

"Dick," I says as the dust rose up in a fog and the judges yelled 'Go!' "Nobody can win all the races he goes into. Sometimes the best of us lose. Today Black Wing is goin' to uncork some speed that will make Annie look like she was tied to a post. Don't lose your head. If you can't win first place, come in a strong second."

"But Black Wing isn't a county horse!" Dick complains.

"Nope, but Ham ain't got no proof to work on, so the race will have to be run."

The kid took up a notch in his lower lip and stuck out his chin. "Judge Rollins is a crook!" he says. "I don't like Abbingtion neither. Did you see his fancy white pants and silk cap?"

"I 'spect he knows horses," I answers. "But white pants never won a race for nobody."

Dick looked gloomy into the dust clouds that now hid the runnin' horses. Everybody was yellin', but

you couldn't see beans when the bag was open. The horses fogged up the back stretch behind a thick curtain, and for a time you couldn't even see the high board sign that the Star livery stable had put up to advertise. The horses headed into the home stretch wrapped in dust and everybody yelled because nobody knew who was leadin'.

Dick didn't let a peep out of him and I got worried. "Button," I says, "half the battle is bein' a good loser—even when you're slickered."

Dick took his eyes off the dust cloud and looked up at me. His lip curled up at the corner, the way it does when he's thought of something. I have usually found the things he thinks of at such times is apt to mean trouble for me and Bluey.

"Don't worry about me cavin' in," he says. "No kid in white pants and a silk cap is goin' to outsmart me."

"That's the kind of chin music I like to hear," I comes back, though his voice worried me a little. "Black Wing is just naturally got more speed than Annie—"

"Not fifty percent more," the kid cuts in.

"Nope, not that much edge, but—"

"Judge Rollins says fifty percent is with the jockey. We'll see."

THE judges called the county race and me and Dick hiked it for the startin' line. Gumboil had Gentle Annie there and I give Dick a leg up.

Abbington was atop of Black Wing and you could see the kid knew how to ride. He looked over the eleven other entries and complained to his grandfather that it was a shame he had to ride with such plow horses. Black Wing leaped over against Annie, and Abbington yelled

at Dick to keep his glue works out of the way of good horses. I could see the kid was a chip off the old block.

Bluey gave Black Wing a final glance and looked to me. "Got any ideas?"

I didn't have none. Ham was sittin' his horse over near the judges' stand, and his hands were mighty close to his six-guns. The judges looked nervous, they had brought their rifles from their saddles and had them across their knees.

"I ain't got no ideas within the law," I answered Bluey.

"Have you got any outside the law?"

"Now, Bluey, you and me is raisin' a boy and we can't start shootin' up the law and the judges' stand. It would be a poor example for Dick."

Bluey wasn't convinced, but just then the race started, so we canned the gas.

Black Wing went out in front like a comet. Dick was second, losin' ground fast, but he didn't seem rattled. He pulled in to trail and I saw him reach out to pat Annie on the neck. Then the dust rose too thick for me to see.

Gumboil Georges and his boys was bunched with us Bar H'ers and we was doin' some tall yellin'. Gumboil shouted in my ear.

"Dick has even more spunk than Homer. I'm glad he's up." Then he swallowed hard. "Course I can't expect too much of Dick and Annie."

"Nope," I yells back, "Annie ain't got the chance of a snowball in a hot oven." Then I give my attention to the race. The dust line was growin' longer. Black Wing was showin' a purty pair of heels; you could see that by his dust. Dick

was fallin' farther back, and then there wasn't any second blotch of dust, just Black Wing and the main band.

They fogged up the back stretch, and Abbington began to take Black Wing back. He saw he could ride easy and win. They come on and soon was thunderin' down to pass the stand on the first lap. Everybody yelled. A black horse come out of the fog to flash by, then the other eleven entries plowed past. I couldn't tell Dick and Annie from any of the rest. The second lap was on.

The sheriff was ridin' around amongst the crowd, his hands near his hip guns. But you could see he was concentratin' on Gumboil Georges' boys and the Bar H. Ham knew that black had the speed to win the race and so he wasn't expectin' any trouble from Judge Rollins. A winnin' crowd never kicks up a row.

"Windy," he barks at me, "I know you've bet your shirt on this race, but it won't do you no good to squawk when the money changes hands. That goes for everybody."

Gumboil Georges was the hardest hit. That section of land he had bet had a crick fed by ten springs and was worth a pile of money. To feel

he was bein' crooked out of it was too much for a peaceful man to stand, and Gumboil wasn't especially peaceful. He was now watchin' that cloud of dust fog around the track with squinted eyes and his rifle in the crook of his arm. Old Champ had his rifle too, and so did Alf Newell. I hadn't took my rifle off my saddle, but just to be on the safe side, I'd slid an extra six under my belt. Bluey was wearin' his two aces and his eyes was as gray as the air.

Ham had rustled three deputies, but he was nervous as a loco horse. I knew he'd hate to cut down on us boys, but accordin' to his light, Judge Rollins had the law on his side. So Ham kept ridin' back and forth close to our bunch, and as the race headed into the home stretch, I saw him take up the final notch in his belt. He slid sideways in his saddle and hunched forward, ready for action.

HOOFs was shakin' the ground. H throats was splittin' and dust was foggin'. One horse was headin' down the stretch alone, then in the bat of an eye, a second horse was movin' down to give the leader a race. Nobody knew exactly how it happened, but of a sudden there



TOPS 'EM ALL!

BIGGER DRINK • BETTER FLAVOR

Pepsi-Cola is made only by Pepsi-Cola Company, Long Island City, N. Y. Bottled locally by authorized bottlers.

was two horses thunderin' home.
Two!

The Bar H let out a whoop as a single man. That second horse would be the Gentle Annie! Somehow, Dick was kickin' her down for a finish race.

"Come on, Annie!" boomed Gumboil, the old rasp back in his voice. "Come on, girl! Run, sweetheart, run!"

Down the stretch they come, the two of them. Every jump that second horse was closin' the gap. Dick was comin' from behind, makin' a race for first money. Both boys was throwin' everything they had into that last dash, you could tell even though you couldn't see their tense bodies and flailing arms.

"Come on, Dick!" yelled the Bar H. "Give 'er all you've got! Pound her home! Lift her along, kid—lift her along!"

I thought my throat would bust. That second horse had moved up to the leader's flank. There wasn't no gap between them any more. Then they flew past, two horses runnin' like a streak and two boys lined over their necks. The tape was busted and a yell like had never shook the judges' stand before went up.

In that last instant as they flashed by us, we had been able to see which was which. Then was when my breath cut off slick as a whistle. The lead horse was a little dust-colored mare—the *Gentle Annie!* That horse that had moved up from behind had been Black Wing!

Gumboil was pounding my back and punchin' me in the ribs. "We was yellin' for the wrong horse! That was Annie in the lead all the way!"

I took off on a lope for the judges' stand.

Dick had won. Lookin' a mite pale, he was trottin' Annie up be-

fore the judges. Ham Nolen pushed up to me and Bluey and said he was deputisin' us both to help keep down trouble from the Rollins crowd. Ham wasn't nervous none about tyin' into that bunch; in fact he seemed willin'. He was some dazed though, shakin' his head toward Dick.

I was dazed myself, but I soon come out of it when I saw the Rollins crowd surgin' forward. Judge Rollins' jaws was flabby, but he was able to cry out that he'd been robbed. He yelled at the judges not to turn over none of the bets. Then he tore down to see his grandson.

Abbington tumbled off Black Wing, and the kid was fair frothin' at the mouth. In a half-bawl he said the race had been jobbed. "I was in the lead all the way!" he cried at the judges. "All the way! Then, suddenly, there was a horse out in front of me."

"That's the way most races are lost," one of the judges commented. "By some other horse getting in front of you."

Abbington called Dick a bone-head and any other name he could think of, and Dick was all for pastin' him one, but I told the button Abbington wasn't worth a punch. Besides Ham wanted to keep down trouble and I was a deputy.

Ham got the Rollins crowd under control, or at least under the rifles and six-guns of his deputies, and ordered the judges to pay off the debts. Rimrock prided herself on settlin' all bets fair and square.

DICK said he was hungry, so him and me and Sjmp headed down town for a few slabs of apple pie. Everybody was yellin' and runnin' their horses, so we slipped off by ourselves. I hadn't took time to speak to Dick about the race, but I

done so as we was walkin' across the street to the restaurant.

"That was a nifty ride you made," I says.

"It was a beaut," Simp Wells adds. Simp and Dick was close friends, even though Simp was older than the button.

Dick's lip curled up at the corner in the funny little smile that always makes me feel like I'm settin' on a keg of dynamite.

"When we jumped them away at the start," he says, "Abbington whacked Annie across the head with his quirt and yelled at me that I was a bonthead. I guess he thought he was cutting it fine when I fell in and trailed him. I bet he's wondering now who the bonehead is."

"Yeah," I says, "he probable is." Dick was still smilin' and me and Simp bunched in close to hear what he had to tell.

"You know that high board sign on the back stretch," Dick says. "By the time I got there, I saw Annie couldn't win. She was running her heart out, but that Black Wing was too fast. I took back behind the bunch and when the dust was real thick, I pulled in behind the board sign to rest her. When the dust of the second lap fogged up, I

jumped her out on the track. I sure burned up the trail, for I knew as soon as that smart Abby sighted me through the dust, he'd make a race for it."

The kid shook his head. "That black is swifter than the wind. I was talkin' into Annie's ear and givin' her the quirt all the way down the stretch, but the black kept edging up. But Annie was fresh and she's got a stout heart—so we made it."

I was too flabbergasted to squeak, but finally I did get my jaws to workin'. "Dick," I says, "you was matched against underhanded men, so you sorta had to use a trick to win. But if them had all been county horses, you'd have had to win or lose accordin' to the speed of your horse."

The button looked at me, his eyes straight as a die. "Sure, Windy, I know that. But you and Simp had found out Black Wing wasn't a county horse."

Simp pounded him on the back. "Bully for you, kid," he roars as proud as if he'd been the one to outwit that bunch of crooks.

"Let's get along to the feed wagon," I says. "Maybe a couple of slabs of pie will make me feel stronger."

THE END.



When Nothing Dewing came out of the desert it meant that something big was about to break.



GOLD BAIT'S A DEATH TRAP

BY PETER DAWSON

FROM the wide, shady portals of the stores at the end of Sweetwater's street, the winding trail up out of the desert lay plainly within view for ten miles of its length. That afternoon Cy Neal, swamper of the Desert Rose, was the first to recognize the identity of three specks, the leader topped by a strange shape, that were two gray burros and a black mule packing up the trail's gentle climb.

"It's Nothing Dewing, by ding!" Neal opined to the other loungers along the saloon's front. "That's his

umbrella! I'd better get in and tell Driscoe."

Ned Driscoe, owner of the Desert Rose, was more than a little interested in the news his swamper brought him. He was so interested, in fact, that he sent the swamper and one of his house men on errands. Before the two burros and the mule and mule's rider had entered the end of the street, a crowd of some twenty men was waiting in the shade there on the walk. The day was hot, and George Belden, sheriff, was grumbling and wiping the sweat off his

pock-marked face when, with Driscoe's house man, he joined the others.

"Why in tarnation did you drag me down here at a time like this, Ned?" Belden complained.

"Wait and see," the saloon owner replied. He nodded toward the three animals now passing the houses at the town's outskirts. "That's Nothing Dewing headed in here. Get it?" His sly wink wiped the irritation from Belden's face.

The lawman's glance went down there. His first instinct was to laugh at what he saw. Then he sobered, remembering certain things Ned Driscoe had told him of the approaching figure. The man on the mule would have appeared ludicrous riding the street of any community but a desert one. His lanky, bib-overalled frame didn't straddle the mule's back, but sat a cushion of burlap sacks with both broganed feet hanging down one side. A battered, brown Stetson was tilted back on a graying head, and the face below the wide-brimmed hat was long, cadaverous and burned almost black by the sun.

But the strangest touch of all, the thing the swamper had recognized from a distance, and the thing that now took the sheriff's eye, was a big black umbrella the mule's rider held opened over his head as protection against the sun's fierce glare. The black cotton canopy's stick was long, and a big glass ball formed the handle.

This was Nothing Dewing, prospector, desert rat, lone wolf of those far purple reaches that stretched from Sweetwater's low mesa to the foothills of the Superstitions.

PRESENTLY Driscoe stepped to the edge of the walk and hailed the prospector, now turning in off

WS-6F

the street toward the saloon's awning. "Hi yuh, Dewing! Any news?"

Nothing Dewing's impassive gray-eyed glance settled on the saloon owner. He pulled the mule in at the hitch rail, slid from the animal's back and deliberately folded his umbrella. Only when he had tied the mule's reins to the rail did he speak, having first spat in the dust.

"News? Well, George Avery's quit his dry farm, pulled out for good from the looks of things. Stinkin' Wells is dry as a bone, and I was caught yesterday without water. Ran into the dangedest hail storm you ever seen out by the monuments. Poked holes through my umbrella, so I'll have to get it fixed."

Driscoe smiled perfunctorily, knowing Nothing Dewing's roundabout approach to any main subject. He queried: "Anything else?"

"Come to think of it, there is." Nothing's right hand dipped into his overall pocket, took something from it and tossed it casually across to the saloon owner. "There's more like it," he drawled. "Two or three men could get out a hundred ton a month."

In Driscoe's hand lay a fist-thick piece of quartz impregnated with countless threads of pure gold. An onlooker peering over Driscoe's shoulder let out a whoop and threw his hat in the air. That started things.

It was ten minutes before the crowd would let Nothing Dewing go long enough for him to step into Driscoe's office with the saloon owner, the sheriff, and Mell Whitlow, lawyer, the latter the second man Driscoe had sent for on learning of Dewing's arrival. In those ten minutes, Nothing Dewing had received more attention than in any other like space of time in his life.

He'd been slapped on the back so hard his spine hurt, he'd been bought two drinks of whiskey at the bar, and he was now smoking one of Driscoe's Havana cigars, a luxury he'd never before experienced, for he was a frugal man.

He was satisfied with everything but the presence of Belden, a stranger, which set him to wondering what had happened to his old friend, Sheriff Fred Carson. Then he figured out the answer: there'd been an election during his three-month absence from Sweetwater. Well, maybe Fred was getting too old for the job.

Driscoe was at his desk as Whitlow, the lawyer, forced the office door shut on the crowd outside. Driscoe sat staring at the ore sample Nothing had given him as though fascinated. Nothing's habitual impassiveness had long ago deserted him. He was smiling broadly. Here was the moment he'd lived for, a moment more precious for the forty futile years he'd spent toiling in the desert's trackless waste.

He drawled: "You staked me, Driscoe, and now we're partners. To the devil with your third interest in what I've found. You get half, providin' you'll put up a couple hundred dollars more to take a crew in there to do some mean shovel work. We'll both be so danged rich we won't know what to do with our money! There's enough for ten men, a hundred!"

Nothing was relishing this. He spoke the truth, fantastic as it sounded. Now he was looking closely at Driscoe to see how the man took it.

HE found the saloonman's reaction a peculiar one. Driscoe laid the ore sample on the desk, tilted back in his chair and carefully bit

the end from a cigar, avoiding Nothing's eye. Belden, too, acted peculiarly, turning his back on Nothing and going to the window to look out onto the rear alley. Only Mell Whitlow's face took on the broad smile Nothing had expected to appear on Driscoe's sallow one.

It was Whitlow who finally spoke. "Well, Driscoe, haven't you anything to say?"

Driscoe's ample bulk moved nervously in the chair. He lifted his hands outward in a helpless gesture. "What can I say? Nothing's got it wrong, is all."

"Wrong?" A frown came to Nothing's gaunt face. "What've I got wrong?"

Without answering, Driscoe turned in his chair and leaned over the small safe set against the back wall. He opened it, searched through a drawer, took out a paper and tossed it onto the desk in front of Whitlow. "Read it, Mell."

Nothing Dewing remembered that paper. It was the one he'd signed six months ago, when Driscoe grubstaked him, their agreement on shares to apply to any claims located as the result of Nothing's contemplated sojourn in the desert. An acute sense of foreboding settled through the old prospector. Something was wrong here, way wrong. Why was Driscoe acting this way when he should be throwing his hat through the ceiling with the news Nothing had brought him?

Nothing looked at Whitlow and saw the lawyer's face taking on color. At length Whitlow laid the paper back on the desk, looked at Nothing and asked: "Do you know what you signed here, Nothing?"

"Grubstake paper," Nothing said. "I don't mean that. Do you know its terms?"

"Hoddang it, I ought to! A third

share for Driscoe, two thirds for me. That's what I'm sayin'. Without Driscoe's money I couldn't have held on long enough to get this thing goin'. He's entitled to half."

"But did you read this before you signed it, Nothing?"

"You know dang well I can't read!"

Whitlow looked at the saloon owner. "Well, Driscoe?"

Driscoe shrugged. He seemed embarrassed, at a loss for words. When he found his voice he spoke awkwardly, haltingly: "What . . . how'm I goin' to say it? It's Nothing's word against mine." Abruptly he held up a hand, motioning for silence. "Wait, I've got it! Mell, you remember the bat Nothing went on before he left here?"

Whitlow nodded, and Nothing, bridling, said: "What's my drinkin' habits got to do with that there piece of paper?"

Driscoe ignored Nothing, went on for the lawyer's benefit: "Nothing came to me that last night and said he was onto something pretty good. He wanted two hundred dollars. He'd been after me to stake him other times. I turned him down. Then he went whole hog and named that proposition there, the one we both signed. I'm a gambler. I took a flyer on it. Now that it's payin' out I look like a thief!"

Nothing stepped up to the desk, growling belligerently: "Let's have it, Driscoe. There's somethin' here that's got a powerful stench! What's wrong?"

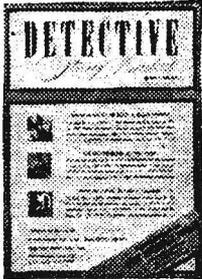
"Nothing," Whitlow said, "you signed a paper giving you only ten percent of any claim you located on Driscoe's grubstake."

"Ten percent!"

Nothing stood dumfounded. He remembered the night he and Driscoe had signed the agreement. He'd had a few drinks, but not enough to dull his wits. The agreement had

\$8⁰⁰

VALUE FOR
25 CENTS!



● The most amazing collection of its kind anywhere is the new Street & Smith DETECTIVE STORY ANNUAL!

Only 25c for this 160 page, 8½ x 11, profusely illustrated book with a heavy paper cover that will stay fresh on shelves. No advertising in it anywhere.

But—the best news is the yarns themselves . . . and their authors. The top men in the field, Cornell Woolrich, Frank Gruber, Steve Fisher, Cleve Adams, and others, are represented with four smashing book-length novels, three novelettes. . . . You've never seen such stories at any price, anywhere!

Imagine—novels that would ordinarily sell for two dollars each—now all yours for only twenty-five cents. This is just about the best bargain you'll ever strike in top detective fiction.

If your dealer can't supply you, fill out the coupon below.

DETECTIVE Story Annual

79 Seventh Avenue, New York City

Here's a quarter. Kindly send me my copy of DETECTIVE STORY ANNUAL.

Name

Address

City..... State.....

been two thirds for Nothing, a third for Driscoe. And Driscoe had made him the proposition; he hadn't gone to the saloon owner.

Nothing knew now how it had happened. Sam Stallman, the assayer, and Driscoe's brother-in-law, had let it slip how high his test on Nothing's samples had run that last trip to Sweetwater. Nothing had been all set to go back at the thing alone, letting no one in on his secret. Then Driscoe had offered him money that night, money that would see the mine paying in three months instead of a full year. Nothing hadn't been able to resist the offer. He'd willingly signed the agreement. He'd bought lots of equipment with Driscoe's money, gone back into the hills and worked his guts out.

RAGE, his helplessness and the untruth of Driscoe's reluctant story to Whitlow now blinded Nothing to everything but the need of making the saloon owner eat his words. If he'd been packing a gun he'd have gone for it. Instead, he reached for the nearest heavy object, the ornate gilt pen stand on Driscoe's desk. He snatched it off the desk and drew back his arm, intending to smash in Driscoe's face with it. But as his arm whipped back a hand closed on his wrist and wrenched his arm downward until he fell to the floor. Standing above him, twisting the pen holder from his fist, was the new sheriff.

Belden drawled: "Easy, grandpaw! Unless you want to wind up in the cooler!" He released his hold as soon as he'd relieved the old prospector of his crude weapon.

Nothing struggled to his feet, gray eyes blazing his hatred. He looked at Whitlow. "Mell," he said softly. "I've been robbed! That ain't the agreement I signed!"

"You were drunk!" Driscoe snapped. He had not stirred out of his chair.

Nothing swore saltily. "I was robbed, swindled, stole blind because I couldn't read!"

"Whitlow, that agreement's legal, isn't it?" Driscoe asked.

It was Mell Whitlow's turn to lose his temper. He was a friend of Nothing's. He thought he saw exactly what had happened, for he believed Nothing's statement. Yet he was helpless. His fists knotted.

"I suppose that's why you sent for me, to get in here and witness this thing? Yes, your agreement's legal, Driscoe. No loopholes, nothing you can be brought into court on." He turned to the prospector, and his eyes showed faint amusement behind their anger. "But, Nothing, there's something you can do. If you've made a strike, don't fill out location papers. Don't give Driscoe even a smell of this gold until you've come to me to draw up a new agreement!"

With a last glare at the saloon owner, Mell Whitlow turned and stalked from the room, slamming the door behind him.

Nothing looked at Driscoe, drawling: "There's your answer. I can wait."

Driscoe's look was one of righteous indignation. "So can I! No one's ever said what you have about me and got away with it, Dewing. Get out!"

It wasn't until he was untying the mule's reins from the rail outside that Nothing fully realized his predicament. He'd packed out forty pounds of ore from his new mine. That, plus about fifty cents in change in a wallet in his pocket, plus his two burros and his mule, represented his total resources. He was licked! He was an old man facing as

bleak a future as any he could imagine unless he gave in to Driscoe, and he'd never do that.

Instead of going to the hotel, as he'd planned, Nothing curtly dismissed the hangers-on who wanted conversation and took his burros and his mule to the feed-barn lot, turned them loose and paid the kid hostler a quarter for the use of the barn loft as a bedchamber. Raking together loose hay for a mattress, he lay down in the hot loft.

Driscoe had about run Sweetwater these last few years, and the peaceful town had lost some of its former cloak of clean honesty in the face of the saloon owner's various political connivings. Like Driscoe bringing the railroad in here, for instance, when its direct route lay across the desert twenty miles to the south. Driscoe had financed a special delegation back to Tucson to see the railroad board and convince them that they'd be losing nine tenths of Arizona's cattle freighting if they didn't swing north to take in the Sweetwater range. Driscoe, of course, was profiting from an auction house and a packing-company agency he'd had the foresight to gamble on in the belief that the railroad would come through. The man didn't miss many bets.

Thinking of the railroad, unable to go to sleep even though he was weary to the bone, Nothing finally worked loose the stubborn thread of an idea that seemed to have no end until desperation drove him to accept it as a last resort.

ONCE the idea was firmly set in his mind, all the tautness seemed to ease out of Nothing's long bony frame, and he dropped off into a deep sleep. He better than slept the clock around and climbed down from the loft, his bag of ore samples

slung over his shoulder and the umbrella under his arm, at eight thirty the next morning.

He spent the rest of his change on breakfast, ignoring the restaurant owner's several jibing remarks about his new mine and the grubstake agreement. Appetite appeased, his long stride took him down the street and up the outside stairway of a building to Mell Whitlow's office. The lawyer was just opening up.

Nothing heaved the bag of ore samples to Whitlow's scarred desk and said: "Mell, I need money. There's three hundred dollars' worth of gold in that sack. Will you take my word for it and give me a hundred for it without havin' it assayed?"

Mell Whitlow preferred action to words. He said simply: "Wait," and left the office and went down the stairs. From the front window, Nothing saw him cross to the bank. In three minutes the lawyer was back again with a tight roll of paper money.

"There's three hundred, not one," he said, handing it to Nothing. "All I want is to see it buy some poison for Driscoe."

Nothing took the money. "It will," he promised, and left.

At the feed barn he paid a week's board for his burros and the mule. Then, because he was restless to put his idea into motion, he went down the side street to the railroad station and bought a ticket for Wayside, a station fifty miles across the desert. From the veranda of the hotel, an hour later, he noticed the departure of three riders from the end of the street, heading into the desert. Ned Driscoe was one of the trio.

At two o'clock, Nothing boarded the westbound local, carrying only his glass-handled umbrella. He had considered leaving it behind to have

it fixed, but in the end decided against it, for the umbrella had become as necessary to his desert travel as the brogans he wore.

The three-hour ride across the desert, the smoke and ashes and heat of the hot coach, was more irksome to him than a much longer distance in a saddle. He had developed an imperviousness to nature's discomforts, but an intolerance to any that were man made, and the train ride took a lot out of him. He was grumbling profanely under his breath as he got down out of the train at Wayside, and his good temper didn't return until he happened to look down the alley behind the loading corrals and see a roan horse he recognized as the one Ned Driscoe had ridden out of Sweetwater six hours ago.

"They sure fogged it across here," he mused, and set about his business.

By the time the stores closed, at six, Nothing had made several purchases. He had bought a fifty-dollar horse, an ugly, big-headed brown gelding, a used McClellan saddle, a generous week's supply of grub, and a new Winchester .30-30 carbine, along with a box of shells. He saddled the gelding and slung his provisions from his saddle in a flour sack; the carbine he left suspended likewise by a thong. He went to the town's only restaurant and put away a meal big enough for two ordinary men. Then, in the first gathering cool of the evening, he openly rode out of Wayside, taking the trail west, his long black umbrella tucked under his left arm.

He noted with satisfaction that the slender sickle of a new moon was scheduled to dip below the jagged horizon to the west in a little over an hour. And he listened with a feeling akin to ecstasy to the distant hoof mutter of several horses behind him on the trail as he stopped once

to adjust a latigo. That would be Driscoe and his men, he was sure.

THAT long night saw Nothing Dewing cross forty-five twisting miles of the desert, another ten in a devious way into a low range of hills far to the north and west of the point he'd left the trail. He pushed the gelding brutally, until it couldn't match the speed of his own walk. At this point he took his possibles from the saddle and turned the gelding loose to wander back to its home corral. He buried the saddle, slung the flour sack over his shoulder, and went on with carbine and umbrella in one hand.

An hour after dawn he was walking up the draw and to the foot of the limestone cliff with the hole of the mine tunnel in sight above a broad ledge a hundred feet overhead. He judged that his night's travel had given him four, possibly five, hours of grace before he was interrupted at his work. He walked a hundred yards up the draw to his rock cairn where he'd cached water, dynamite and tools. Gathering dry cedar, he built a fire and cooked his breakfast, wolfing it down hurriedly. Then he set to work, climbing to the tunnel mouth.

Nothing had been wary these past six months. Always in coming here he took a full day to scan his devious back trail and make sure he wasn't followed. And over half his time had been spent in sacking and hauling the mucked rock from the mouth of the tunnel to a wash half a mile below his camp. He did this in order to avoid a muck dump giving away the location of his mine. He was thankful when the tunnel had been worked deep enough to muffle the jarring explosion of dynamite. Using dynamite had hastened the work of boring through the lime-

stone to the main vein of quartz. Now, into the quartz. Nothing was taking out free-milling ore that made his eyes widen each time he looked at it. Even the long freight haul to the railroad would use up but a fraction of the ore's worth. He'd been telling Driscoe the truth when he said they'd both be rich.

But he'd run into one complication, and had referred to it in telling Driscoe that several hundred dollars more would have to be spent at shovel work before the mine could be operated. The day before Nothing had left for Sweetwater he'd come close to being buried alive. His last shot of giant powder, deep in the bowels of the cliffside, had loosened several large boulders from a wide overhang fifty feet over the tunnel mouth. Inside the tunnel, Nothing had heard the crashing thunder of those boulders as they fell to the broad ledge below the tunnel opening. He'd gone out there, and his knees had trembled when he realized how narrowly he'd escaped seeing the whole overhang fall and bury the mouth of the tunnel under tons of rock and earth. He knew then that the overhang would have to come down and be shoveled off the wide ledge at the tunnel's entrance before he could dynamite again.

Today he ignored the overhang's threat. He went into the tunnel, around its sharp bend and to its end, where his lantern's light shone against the yellow sparkles of pure gold in the quartz he was working into.

He had brought along a single jack, dynamite and fuse. He drilled four widely spaced holes whose points slanted together for a wedge blast that would loosen several hundred pounds of the ore. Pushing the fused sticks of giant powder into the holes, he mudded them over and left the fuses dangling down the wall.

Aviation's Leading Annual



★ ★ ★

65 SEPARATE AVIATION FEATURES

- 8 FULL-COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS (size 8 1/2 x 11 1/2") OF THE LATEST MILITARY AND COMMERCIAL AIRPLANES
- 29 PICTORIAL FEATURES, HUNDREDS OF EXCLUSIVE PHOTOGRAPHS
- 8 ARTICLES ON MODERN AVIATION BY NATIONALLY KNOWN EXPERTS
- 10 THREE-VIEW DRAWINGS OF MODERN FIGHTING PLANES
- CLOUD CHART, ANATOMY OF A SUMMER STORM AND A CHART ON CLOUD ANATOMY
- DOUBLE-PAGE MAP OF U. S. AIRLINES

As a technical reference book for schools and library, as well as fascinating, valuable aid for the student, this AIR TRAILS ANNUAL is approved by the nation's leading experts in aviation and educators.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

AIR PROGRESS

79 SEVENTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N. Y.

Inclosed is 25c (30c for Canada).
Kindly mail me a copy of AIR
PROGRESS postage free.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY.....STATE

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Then he went back to the ledge and climbed down to his camp. An hour later, when his visitors arrived, he was filing his ax, the echoes of steel on steel ringing up the narrow corridors of the draw.

He heard their stealthy approach even before Ned Driscoe, a gun in hand, stepped from behind a big outcropping a hundred feet away and called: "Set still, Nothing! You're covered!"

Nothing sat very still, ignoring his rifle, which was almost within reach.

"Take a look behind!" Driscoe ordered.

Nothing looked. George Belden stood less than two rods away, a shotgun cradled under his arm. Across the draw, also armed with a Greener, was one of Driscoe's house men.

"Here to collect the other ten percent, Driscoe?" Nothing asked.

Driscoe, approaching, gave a mirthless, low laugh. "You guessed it." He motioned to the sheriff. "Tie him up, George. I'm goin' up there to take a look." He swung aside and started climbing the narrow trail that led upward to the ledge in front of the tunnel mouth.

PRESENTLY Nothing lay stretched out on his own blanket, bound so tightly he could move only his shoulders and bend his knees. Once he said: "Belden, do me a favor. Open up that umbrella and stick it so's it's shadin' me. It's goin' to be powerful hot layin' here."

But Belden's reply was a curt, "You'll last without it." The sheriff was looking upward along the path, watching Driscoe coming along it.

The saloon owner's eyes were wide and staring as he approached Belden.

"You won't believe it, George!" he announced in an awed voice.

"The shaft's lined with gold! There's buckets of it! Wagon loads!" He looked down at Nothing. "Thanks for the drill work, Dewing. We're goin' to blast out enough to pack home with us."

Nothing swore acidly, much to the amusement of the trio. Then he seemed to remember something. He said: "Don't set off that dynamite, Driscoe. You'll be the same as murdered if you do. My conscience won't let me see it happen."

"See what?" Driscoe laughed. "Us murdered? You'd give your share in this mine to see it happen."

"I ain't foolin', Driscoe. See that overhang up there, right over the ledge. It's due to bust loose and fall the next charge of powder that's let off! It'll fall and we'll be a month muckin' away the rock."

From Driscoe's expression, Nothing knew that not a word he'd said was believed. Yet his conscience was clear. He'd warned Driscoe, and what happened from now on was none of his affair. These three men were so greedy to get their hands on some of the yellow metal from the tunnel that nothing could stop them.

Driscoe finally nodded toward the trail. "Let's get goin'," he said, and led the way.

Nothing called more warnings after them. When they wouldn't listen he exercised his extensive vocabulary of profanity. He wriggled on the blanket and worked at the ropes until he was wringing wet. But the men went on, paying him no attention until, with a last mocking wave of a hand, Driscoe disappeared out of sight into the tunnel above.

Only then did Nothing lie back and rest, letting the smile he'd so far suppressed come to his gaunt face. He was hot, the ropes cut cruelly at his arms and legs, but he was feeling good. He'd done everything

within his power to stop Driscoe and his men, and his conscience was like a baby's. He had known exactly what would happen when Driscoe arrived and discovered the dynamite packed in its holes, ready to be touched off. Driscoe wouldn't believe his story of the overhang.

For a moment Nothing was worried. The overhang would give way with the shock of the generous charge of dynamite; he was sure of that. But now he wasn't sure that the trio in the tunnel were the only ones who would suffer under the fall of those tons of rock. What if more of the cliff face loosened under the earth shock? Where he lay, he was safe, for the overhang was on a line a full fifty yards beyond him. But there were other such rock masses, smaller to be sure, hanging dangerously close overhead. And, even if he lived through the destruction caused by the blast, how was he going to loosen these ropes and keep from dying of thirst and baking under the sun's fierce glare?

Here was something Nothing hadn't counted on. He'd been so intent on the destruction of the man who had cheated him that he'd given little thought to what was to happen afterward. With a slow dread taking him, he waited.

Hardly a minute after he lay back, his glance directed above, he felt the solid pound of the blast shake the hard rock under him. The muffled explosion sounded out from the tunnel.

Suddenly, with a report as loud as an artillery piece, the overhang gave way. Majestically, the wide, bare outcrop tilted downward and started falling. It gathered little momentum in its hundred-foot drop, but the terrific weight of the big rock slab scraped loose tons of rotten limestone from the cliff face in its

short travel. Gray dust geysered outward and hid the falling rock from Nothing's sight. The earth shook under him again as the rock mass thundered onto the broad ledge before the tunnel mouth. Then it was over, a little loose rock and earth sifting down the talus slope to settle in a cloud of dust along the bottom of the draw. After that came a silence more emphatic for the thunder that had preceded it.

AS the dust fog cleared, Nothing saw how well his plan had worked. He'd tolled Ned Driscoe out here into the desert, left his sign open to follow, let himself be taken and bound at the point of a gun, and even gone so far as to warn his enemy of the disaster that would overtake him if he gave way to his greed. Driscoe hadn't listened. Nothing Dewing had a clear conscience. Now the cliff face above the tunnel mouth was blocked to a depth of twenty feet by a massive pile of broken rock. Driscoe and his men were trapped and would die a lingering death from suffocation, their cries echoing back along the tunnel and unheard outside.

For a moment Nothing was ashamed and overpowered by a self-loathing. He'd committed murder, a triple murder. To keep from thinking about it, he muttered, "Get out of this if you can, Dewing!" and rolled onto his side again to test the ropes.

They had been tied to stay. Try as he would, his groping fingers could neither loosen one winding or reach a knot. Finally he lay back, exhausted from his efforts. Once more he looked to the cliff face. He was trying to forget that the sun would blister even his toughened skin before it dipped below the draw's western rim this afternoon. He was

trying to forget that he would, in all probability, die here before another day was out.

"But I sure took care of Driscoe," he drawled.

Suddenly he saw something he had so far missed. It was a way to remove those tons of rock and rubble from the mouth of the tunnel. And, seeing it, he felt a momentary lifting of spirits.

There was no need for any delay in beginning operation of the mine. The broad ledge directly below the tunnel was massive and would hold up the slide for centuries if never disturbed. But now Nothing saw that it was possible to dynamite the ledge away.

"Blast her out and she'll let that slide down away from the tunnel," he said aloud. Then he laughed ruefully. "But who's going to blast it? Don't look like it'll be me!"

So he had to lie there, seeing a way of rescuing Driscoe and his men, seeing that it was possible to take ore out of his mine immediately, where before he'd had to face the prospect of months of work clearing away the overhang, which he knew would sooner or later block the entrance. The day wore on, the sun climbing to its zenith and baking him mercilessly. In all his desert years, Nothing hadn't felt a sun so hot, so unbearable.

He thought his imagination was playing him tricks when he smelled something burning, something that smelled like wool. Painfully, he hunched over onto his other side to see what it could be. He couldn't find anything at first. But still the pungent odor of burning wool assailed his nostrils.

"The danged sun's fryin' the blanket," he decided at last, but knew this couldn't be the answer.

All at once a curl of smoke drifted

before his eyes, close to his face. He cocked his body around, hunching downward. Then he saw what it was, and a hoarse laugh welled up out of his parched throat.

DRISCOE had thrown Nothing's umbrella aside so that its handle lay over a sack of flour, the glass ball at its end a foot above the blanket. The concentric rays of the sun, gleaming through the glass, had been focused at a point on the foot of the blanket, which was now smoldering from the intense heat.

Nothing's laugh had been the sign of his sudden recognition of how he could use the burning power of those glass-directed rays. Quickly, bending his knees and hunching his shoulders down, he worked his way to the foot of the blanket. He lay on his side, chin on chest, moving his body until the bright, small circle of light was shining squarely on a winding of the rope. Then he lay there, feeling the heat eat through his clothes and against the dry skin of his belly.

When the rope had smoldered through it gave way with a snap. Two more windings fell away with it. Now Nothing could move his hands. In five minutes he was sitting under the umbrella's merciful shade, untying the last rope that bound his ankles together.

Nothing worked as he'd never worked before that afternoon. He swung a single jack until his arms and shoulders hurt to the touch. But by dusk he had drilled two dozen holes under the ledge's lower face and was capping his giant powder. An hour after dusk he lit his fuses.

The concussion of the blast that shot the ledge away knocked the prospector to his knees. In his eagerness to see the working of his plan,

scanning the darkness, he'd stood too close. But though his senses were reeling, he squatted there and watched the ledge drop to the bed of the draw with a thunder that must have sent its echo miles out into the desert.

He got a shotgun and picked his way up over the loose rock to where the tunnel opening ought to be. When he was on a level with it he thought he had lost. He couldn't find the opening!

Then several rocks abruptly rolled down the face of the slope to the bottom of the draw. He heard the sheriff's gasping voice say in a breathless whisper: "Air, boss! We're saved! Drag Cash up here!"

Presently they came crawling out of the hole, George Belden first and Driscoe next.

"Leave him in there awhile," Driscoe was growling. "He's gettin' air now. I want to get down there to Dewing." It was obvious that Cash, the third man, was lying somewhere along the tunnel unable to move.

Nothing sat where he was, the shotgun across his knees, and waited until they crawled past, barely eight feet below. Belden was unarmed, having left his shotgun in the tunnel. All Nothing had to fear was the gun in Driscoe's holster. He lifted the Greener to his shoulder and drawled, "I'm up here, Driscoe!"

Belden stopped in his tracks, lifting his hands. Ned Driscoe's heavy frame lunged in a frantic backward wheel. His gun exploded suddenly in his hand as he fired wildly in the direction of Nothing's voice. The bullet went wide, and Nothing's finger eased away from the trigger, working against his impulse to send a double charge of buckshot into the saloon owner's body. He stood up, let the hammers down, took the gun

by the barrel end, and swung its stock down on Ned Driscoe's head as the saloon owner fired his second shot blindly into the night.

NOTHING DEWING reached Sweetwater with his prisoners as dusk was settling across the desert two nights later. Driscoe and Belden were riding double on the back of Driscoe's saddleless roan, their legs roped under the roan's barrel. Cash, the house man, was likewise roped to his mare's back, his hands tied to the horn. Nothing brought up the rear, forking Belden's horse.

The old prospector ignored the crowd that quickly gathered along the walks to witness the strange parade coming along the street. He went directly to the jail, to find that

Year-round Reading Pleasure

● You enjoyed the stories in this magazine. And isn't it a good idea to keep on enjoying them—throughout the year?

And a subscription would make an ideal gift to friends for birthdays . . . for going-away presents . . . or for convalescents.

But whether it's for yourself or someone else, fill out this coupon—now! It's good insurance for topnotch fiction that will come to you all year in regular dividends of reading pleasure.

WESTERN STORY
79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.
Dept. My-K1

Inclosed please find \$4.00 for a year's subscription to Western Story.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....

Fred Carson, Sweetwater's ex-sheriff, was temporarily serving as deputy in Belden's absence.

"Now ain't this fine!" Nothing drawled as he shoved his prisoners into a cell and motioned Fred Carson to lock the door. "How do you like the inside of your own jail, Belden?"

Sweetwater's sheriff cursed Nothing soundly, while Driscoe raged: "Get my lawyer down here, Carson! Dewing stole a paper off me last night. I demand you arrest him!"

Carson looked at Nothing. "Sure I did," Nothing said, and took a folded paper from the small pocket on the bib of his dusty overalls. "Here, Fred. Take it. Read what it says. If you don't already know what's happened, I'll tell you about it."

Fred Carson scratched his head. The hint of a smile came to his face after a moment's hesitation, and he said: "You read it, Nothing. I busted my glasses a year back and ain't been able to see any writin' since."

"You never wore glasses!" Driscoe exploded from beyond the cell bars.

"Your memory's poor, Driscoe," Carson replied. He nodded to Nothing: "Go ahead and read it. After you finish we'll burn it. I'll remem-

ber what it says so's in case you ever want proof you can come to me."

"But he can't read!" Driscoe cried.

Nothing was enjoying this moment of triumph. He schooled his face to seriousness, ignored Driscoe and held up the paper. He squinted at it and began:

"This here says that Nothing Dewing and Ned Driscoe is to be partners in any claims filed by Dewing while grubstaked by Driscoe. Driscoe's share is to be a tenth of any proceeds comin' out of said claims. Nothing Dewing is ninety percent owner, and—"

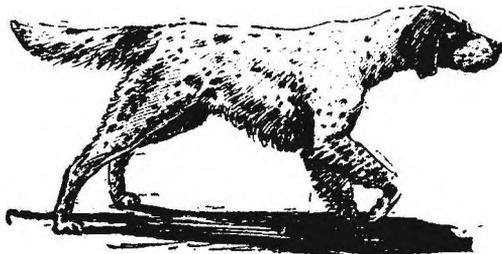
"He's lyin'!" Driscoe's harsh voice cut in. "He's got it twisted!"

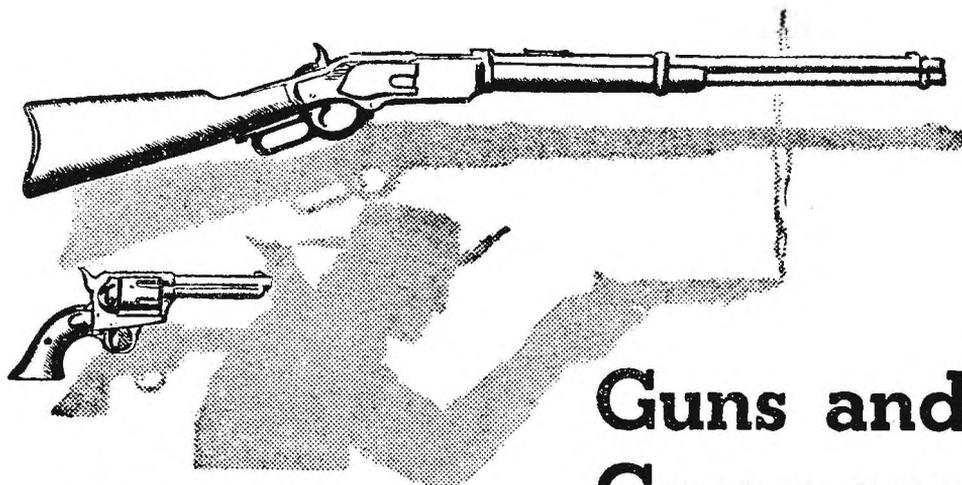
Carson shrugged his shoulders. "You heard what he read. And I'm his witness. Heck, he couldn't read it backward, could he?" Flicking a match alight on his thumbnail, he touched the flame to a corner of the paper as Driscoe's harsh oaths rang incoherently in the oell.

In the front office a minute later, Nothing told his friend: "You're actin' sheriff until Belden gets loose, ain't you, Fred?"

Carson nodded, grinning broadly. "Which'll be about ten years from now." His face went serious and he said reprovingly: "You could at least have held that paper right side up, Nothing."

THE END.





Guns and Gunners

By PHIL SHARPE

THE old West will always stand out as one of the most historic eras in the development of the United States. I've always been intrigued by the development of this country and the important part that our old pioneers of yesteryear played in it.

A good example of my interest in the early history of America is a relic of pioneer days—a rather simple device known as a chair.

This unique chair which recently came into my possession is made entirely of Western steerhorns. There are twenty of them used in it, for the arms, for legs, for the back and decorative braces. I have traveled from coast to coast and border to border and have visited forty-two of our States but I have never before seen a chair of this type.

And that reminds me that this

department is truly a Western department insofar as we can make it. We try to give you firearms information, but we're always interested in the old West. Some time ago we covered the subject of buffalo hunting as it was done for profit in the days when buffalo roamed the Western prairie in large quantities. That day is gone but many people want to know why such tremendously powerful guns were used. They recall "historical" reports of Buffalo Bill, that famous character who is more prominent in fiction than in fact. Buffalo Bill Cody did a great deal of his hunting, accord-

● The following list of literature is available to our readers: STRAIGHT SHOOTING, SNAP SHOOTING, WINCHESTER AMMUNITION HANDBOOK, SAVAGE, STEVENS, FOX, COLT, SMITH & WESSON, HARRINGTON & RICHARDSON, 3c each; MOSSBERG, MARLIN, 2c each; WESTERN AMMUNITION HANDBOOK, 5c; REMINGTON ARMS AND AMMUNITION, 6c; and a large three-pound bundle of assorted catalogs, 30c each and 38c west of Chicago. None can be sent to Canada. Postage stamps are accepted.

Application blanks for membership in the National Rifle Association may also be obtained from Mr. Sharpe. These requests for literature MUST be addressed to: Phil Sharpe, 34 Richards Street, South Portland, Maine. Be sure to print your name clearly and inclose a three-cent stamp with your request.

ing to rumor, by riding horseback into a herd of buffalo and shooting his game from a few feet distant with a Colt revolver. Bill Cody got them with a shot in the neck from a range of just a few feet.

Buffalo were not hunted professionally from short range.

A buffalo hunter of yesteryear, a man who hunted merely for hides, had a very definite purpose in mind—to get results. At that time he had a great many things to think of. It was necessary to kill his game and it was necessary to do it in a way which would make it possible for his hunting company to handle the game properly after he had shot it.

The idea of riding into a herd of buffalo and shooting them in the neck once in a while was a lot of spectacular fiction. A hunter first sought out the game. This took time. After he found the herd, he gradually crept up on it, and used an old Sharps buffalo rifle at a range at *not less* than three hundred yards, and frequently at least five hundred. He used a powerful gun, and he hand-loaded his own ammunition to get the best results. Lead was expensive and difficult to transport. Accordingly the buffalo hunter took extreme care in handling it.

It would, of course, have been possible to creep up closer to the herd, but the hunter had a great many things to think of. Buffalo are dumb animals. If a hunter were able to take them at a distance where they could not possibly hear the bellow of a heavy rifle, he could take

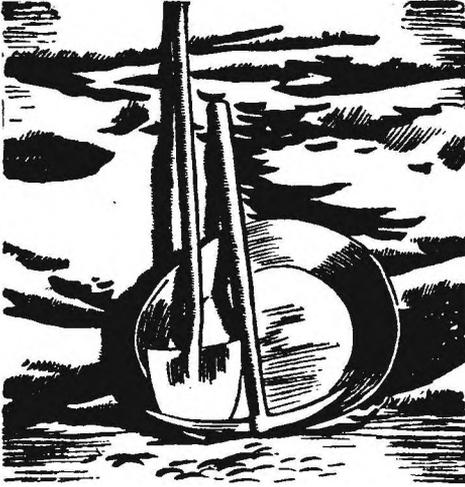
from twenty to thirty animals out of a single herd before they got wise and stampeded. If the buffalo could not hear the report of the rifle, a dying animal's bellows of agony would be merely a curiosity to them. They would mull around it—and then try to deliberate the cause of the agony.

Why did the hunter drop all the animals as close together as possible? There was a good reason for that. The hunter himself did nothing but find and shoot the buffalo. A crew of skinners would do the remainder of the work. If the herd stampeded and they were only able to handle one or two buffalo, the great expense would hardly be worth while. And if the animals were dropped at intervals varying from one half to two miles apart, this would add a great deal to the cost of transportation of the skinners and their equipment.

One final thing: What did the hunter do with the carcass? The answer to that question is that friendly Indians always followed the buffalo hunter. They were not interested in the hides but the meat was another matter. To them it was food.

Why was the buffalo almost exterminated in a few years? This is really quite simple. The bull buffalo, like the male of various species, is a rather tough hombre and is more or less worthless. Accordingly the hunter took only the choice cows. When several thousand hunters each kill off a few cows, it isn't long before a breed becomes extinct. That's what almost happened to the buffalo.

● This department has been designed to be of practical service to those who are interested in guns. Mr. Sharpe will gladly answer any question you may have concerning firearms. Just address your inquiries to Phil Sharpe, Guns and Gunners Department, Street & Smith's Western Story, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Be sure you print your name clearly and inclose a three-cent stamp for your reply. Do not send a return envelope.



Mines and Mining

BY J. A. THOMPSON

IN lode, or hard-rock mining, the "milling" of gold ores means treating the rock, usually at the mine, to recover its actual yellow metal content. Ordinarily straight gold ores are not as difficult to treat as ores of other metals because they do not require the tremendous furnace heat of smelters and smelting to make them give up their gleaming, golden value. Easier and, comparatively speaking, less expensive methods can be used.

Ore in which the gold occurs as tiny particles of metal, free-milling ores, need only to be ground by heavy machinery to suitable fineness, following which the thin pulp of ground-up rock is passed over amalgam plates (metal plates coated with mercury). The gold combines with the mercury to form a hard, gray amalgam. The valueless pulp washes out to a tailing bed and is discarded. When the plates are

loaded with all the gold they can carry, the amalgam is scraped off, and retorted, the volatile mercury being condensed and saved for re-use and a spongy mass of almost pure gold is left behind.

That, in skeleton form is the ideal handling of gold lode ore of the free-milling variety. Thousands of gold mines have operated and milled their gold ore on those basic principles in the past. Many mines from small properties on up do so today.

However, not all gold lode ore is of the simple, free-milling type. But it may nevertheless be rich in gold and decidedly worth mining. Such ores, known as non-amalgamating ores have to be treated by other methods.

S. S., of York, Pennsylvania, has queried us on the subject of treating gold lode ores. "My mining experience," he wrote, "has chiefly been coal and iron, but I am interested in all types of hard-rock or underground mining, particularly gold. For the benefit of myself, and maybe others who have only a vague notion of how gold is finally obtained from the gold-bearing rock, I would appreciate some description of this in your department."

All right, S. S. Hope you're listenin'.

Ores that won't amalgamate generally fail to do so because the gold is either in intimate association with some other mineral, frequently a sulphide of iron or other metals such as pyrite, sometimes antimony or even arsenic, or because the gold has a rusty coating or is in combination as in the tellurides. Now and then it is the presence of graphite or other greasy mineral substances that cause the trouble.

These gold ores require, in addition to grinding, treatment in cya-

nide solution tanks (which dissolve the gold), or the newer flotation methods (which lift the gold particles to the surface of a special liquid in a heavy, artificially created froth) before the gold can be recovered. In the case of the cyanide solution, the gold is later precipitated out of the liquid. In flotation methods the gold-carrying froth bubbles are skimmed from the surface of the tank, the bubbles dried and the gold or gold concentrates recovered in that way.

As with all other kinds of metallic ores, the type of treatment that will give the best and most economical results for any specific gold ore is determined mainly by the character of the ore itself. In any event low-grade ore, that is ore containing two or three or even up to five dollars in gold a ton, can only be milled successfully, regardless of type, when there is a tremendous quantity of it that can be handled on a large scale in plants of huge tonnage capacity. Also the ore must be fairly uniform in grade and character, and it need hardly be added that the initial outlay for such a plant runs into a great deal of money.

Higher-grade simple ores on the other hand may often be treated profitably in smaller plants with a lower investment outlay per dollar of output. Where the gold is very rich, complications may again set in, as in such cases it is, more often than not, necessary to employ more than one recovery process, if a high per-

centage of the total gold content is to be obtained. In very rich ores the tailing from the first process, usually amalgamation, generally carries enough gold to make a secondary further treatment advisable—and profitable.

The fact that this secondary treatment was often neglected, or owing to the type of ore sometimes impractical or impossible under the then existing conditions, is the reason tailing piles of old formerly worked, rich gold mines have been given a lot of attention by the modern prospector during recent years. In many cases this attention proved quite worth while. Some of these old mine dumps have returned handsome profits when reworked by modern gold-ore treatment methods, and hunting for good ones has become an interesting, but more technical side of today's revived activity in gold mining and gold prospecting.

Often the size of the gold particles in the ore influences the method of treatment that will give best results. Coarse gold, for example ordinarily will not dissolve in cyanide in the time usually allotted to dissolve fine gold. Therefore, if coarse gold is present it should be removed first by traps or other devices. Similarly, if the gold occurs in extremely minute particles, the ore must be ground very fine to liberate them and expose them to the dissolving action of the cyanide, the froth bubbles of flotation, or contact with the mercury on amalgam plates.

● We desire to be of real help to our readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.

Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be published in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.



The Hollow Tree

By HELEN RIVERS

We've been getting bushels of mail from the boys in uniform lately, and it looks like the Hollow Tree will have to celebrate an Army and Navy Day, too, some time in the near future; that's about the only way we can see to make a dent in the ever-increasing stack of mail. We have several boys in the service with us this week, the first being Private Van Over from out in Fort Custer, who writes:

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am not a "lonely soldier," but I do like to correspond with people and would like to hear from those who enjoy it, too. I am twenty-one years old, like sports of all kinds, music and good reading. Boys, girls and other soldiers are all welcome to write.—William Van Over, Pvt. Hqs. & M. P. Co., 5th Division, Fort Custer, Michigan

Ruth lives in historical Santa Fe—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I, too, have answered many requests from Pen Pals and have never received an answer, so may I break into the Hollow Tree now? Maybe this way I'll get more results. I live in the colorful city of Santa Fe and will tell about the many points of interest here, and about our annual Fiesta. I would like to hear from Pen Pals from twenty to sixty and will try to answer everyone.—Ruth Barrison, 234 Irvine Street, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Joseph is waiting and hoping—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I have been a reader of Western Story for many years and the Pen Pal department has always interested me immensely, so I would appreciate it very much if you would publish my name in your column. I am twenty-five years old, was in the army for a while, but am now working for myself. The sports I like best are boxing, swimming, baseball, tennis and roller skating (in rinks). I can write interesting letters on the subject of horses, and in the army

was classed as an excellent horseman. I would like to correspond with girls and young men around my age from all over the world, if possible, but I particularly want to hear from someone in St. Louis, Missouri, my home town.—Joseph Arbeiter, 326 McPherson Avenue, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

Answer Ruth pronto—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I've been reading your Hollow Tree for quite a long time, and I'd like to have Pen Pals from all over the world from seventeen years of age up. I am seventeen years old, and my favorite sports are horseback riding and hiking, and I like to sing. I promise to answer all letters and here's hoping I have good luck.—Ruth Eschenko, Kief, North Dakota

Send Harold lots of cheery letters—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a young man twenty-four years old who would like very much to hear from some Pen Pals. I have been in the hospital for two years and will be here for some time to come. My hobbies are collecting stamps and keeping a photograph album. I have plenty of time on my hands and promise to answer all letters. So, come on, Pen Pals, let's hear from you.—Harold Johnson, San Francisco Hospital, Ward 23, San Francisco, California

Here's a sincere pal for you—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a bluejacket in the United States navy and hope you will please print my plea for Pen Pals from all over the world. I have only been in the service five months and have already reached one of the goals of my life—I've seen beautiful Hawaii. I am sincere in my wish for Pen Pals and will exchange snapshots with anybody and everybody. So, come on, you future Pen Pals, write soon and receive your snapshot. A letter sent to the following address will reach me at any time.—Lewis Selby Wright, U. S. S. *Phoenix*, Division 4, c/o Postmaster, Long Beach, California

You'll want Diana for a friend—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I wrote you over a year ago and made lots of good friends through your column and now I'm back asking for more. I will exchange snapshots, post cards or souvenirs with anyone who cares to. I am twenty-two and like to dance, swim, bowl, fish, hunt and hike. I love good music, poetry, horses and dogs. My hobbies are collecting poetry and all sorts of odd things, so come on, folks, and write to this friendly Irish gal.—Diana Frances Atwater, West 7th Street, Crisfield, Maryland

Everybody is welcome here—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a sixteen-year-old boy, am interested in all sports, and collect photographs and stamps. I have been reading Western Story for a number of years and would like to have Pen Pals from all over the world, especially foreign countries. So, all you boys and girls about my age, write to me.—Clyde Major, High Bridge, Kentucky

From Wisconsin comes this plea—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I would like to join the Pen Pals in your Hollow Tree department. I enjoy writing letters and want friends from everywhere. I am sixteen years old and enjoy basketball and all other sports, as well as dancing and singing. Won't you write? I promise to answer all letters.—Vera Duehr, Hayward, Wisconsin

Robert can take his music hot or sweet—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a young boy who likes to write letters. I collect souvenirs, photos, and post cards as a hobby, and like classical, swing and popular music. Will exchange photos with anyone who cares to write me.—Robert Deufel, New Brooklyn Road, Williamstown, New Jersey

Shirley writes from the Windy City—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I hope you can find a spot in the Hollow Tree for me, as I would like very much to have some Pen Pals. I am nineteen years old and would like to correspond with fellows and gals between nineteen and twenty-three. I'm interested in all sports, but especially swimming, skating and bicycle riding. I have several hobbies, but the most important are photography and writing and receiving letters. So, fellows and gals, please write to me.—Shirley Krinker, 4626 N. Lawler Avenue, Chicago, Illinois

Calling other lonesome gals—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Hi-ya, Pals! Won't you slip a few lines my way? I'm one of those lonesome girls from out here among the jackpines, and I'd like to hear from other lonesome girls living in the North, East, South or West. I am nineteen years old, a senior in high school, and promise to answer all letters and exchange photos with the first ones who write.—Geraldine Nickeson, R. R. No. 4, Box 73, Menahga, Minnesota

Private Smith reporting for duty—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a soldier in the coast artillery here at Fort Monroe with a year of service, and I would like to correspond with someone and exchange snapshots. I am twenty-three years old and would like to hear from boys and girls of eighteen and over. I promise to answer all letters.—Private Thomas Smith, Battery C 2nd, Fort Monroe, Virginia

Mary has some unique interests—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a young girl looking for new friends and hope that I may find many through this letter. I'd like to hear from boys, girls, men and women of all ages from everywhere. I am twenty-three years old and my hobbies are collecting stamps and exploring old abandoned mines. I also like to take long hikes in the mountains. Perhaps I'll get a chance to tell some of you about my deer hunting trip that I took last year. I live about sixty miles from the Mexican border and about a mile from an Indian village. The Mexicans and Indians are very interesting people and are very friendly. Of course, there are many, many cattle ranches around here. Will you write to me?—Mary Mathews, Route 1, Box 575, Tucson, Arizona

A former National Guardsman sends this plea—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I was a member of the New Hampshire national guard for four years and was inducted into the Federal service for a year's training in September. I am down here at Camp Hulien and wonder if there is someone interested in corresponding with a battery clerk in the army? I will answer all letters and send a picture to the first ten boys or girls who write. I am twenty-two years old and have traveled a lot. I've been to Havana, Cuba, Miami, Washington, D. C., New York City, Detroit, and almost every big city in the South and Texas. I like indoor and outdoor sports and will write to anyone who'll write to me—those who'd like to correspond in Gregg shorthand too.—Corp. Richard Fortier, Battery F, 197th CA (AA), Camp Hulien, Palacios, Texas

Ann sings on the radio—

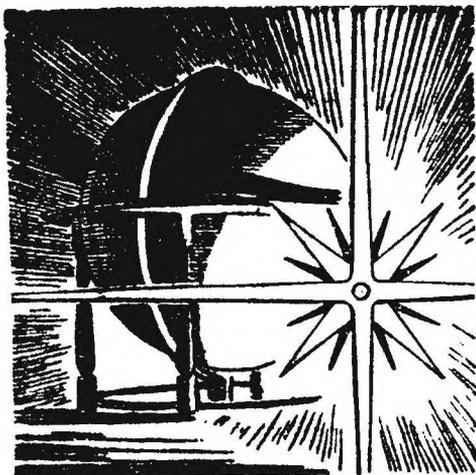
Dear Miss Rivers:

I would like to join your correspondence club. I am seventeen years old and am in the eleventh grade in school. I like all kinds of sports, although I don't take a very active part in them. I like dancing and singing popular songs, which I do on the radio. I will write faithfully and exchange photos if you wish. I would like to hear from boys between eighteen and twenty-five.—Ann Anthony, 215 N. Bellvue, Memphis, Tennessee

Here are a couple of W. S. fans—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Just a plea from two ardent readers of Western Story magazine. We are lonesome down here in the beautiful hills of Tennessee and would like to have Pen Pals from everywhere. We promise to answer all letters and will exchange snaps. Let us hear from you.—N. H. Cureton, 4713 Cowart Street, and W. R. Penland, 1818½ Cowart Street, Chattanooga, Tennessee



Where to go and how to get there

BY JOHN NORTH

No experienced woodsman goes into the back country and intentionally gets stranded—without guns, food or fishline. But when the unexpected happens through accident, illness or the miscarriage of careful plans, a little knowledge concerning some of the edible plants that may be found in the wilderness and can be eaten safely is a very reassuring bit of information to have. In extreme cases it may be the best kind of life insurance an outdoorsman can possess.

The desertwise know that in the semiarid sandy wastes of the Southwest water to quench a man's thirst can be obtained from the barrel cactus, and that the reddish, pulpy fruit of the prickly pear is both edible and sustaining. The ripe fruit can be eaten raw.

If the fruit is still green, boiling it for a long time (about ten hours)

will gradually bring it to the soft, mushy consistency of apple sauce. It is fairly well known that in times of grass shortage, ranchers in some of the more arid sections burn the thorns off prickly-pear leaves and feed them to their hungry cattle. But it is not so well known that these same leaves can likewise be made fit for human consumption, provided the leaves are first roasted in hot ashes. Moreover, roasting requires no water. It cooks the insides of the broad, flat cactus leaves and makes the outer, thorny skin easily removable. The interior is a soft pulp. Not very appetizing, perhaps, though it is sweet to the taste. Anyhow, the important thing is that it will keep a man alive in a pinch.

The white wastes of Alaska, and the frozen frontier of the Far North, are notoriously inhospitable regions as far as living "off the country" is concerned. Yet even there nature has a lifebelt ready for those who recognize it. Edible lichens grow on the rocks, and can be used as human food in country beyond the timberline. Reindeer moss, a sprawling, waxy yellow growth that hugs the ground and grows in thick clusters is widespread on the arctic tundra. In winter, reindeer herds paw through the snow where it lies lightly on wind-swept stretches and graze on patches of this succulent moss. Raw, it tastes like wet soda crackers, soggy and insipid. Boiled for two or three hours, it cooks to a slimy, gelatinous mass. Its appearance cooked may make it hard to swallow, but it is more digestible that way.

This interesting subject of what a man can and can't eat when hard pressed in the wilderness was brought up by a letter we recently received from R. M., of Opportunity, Washington. The query was one

among a list of many others he sent in.

In forest country or in the temperate zones where plants are more abundant, the outdoorsman who knows his "vegetables" has many possible emergency food plants from which to choose. He is almost sure to find at least some of these in their natural locality and proper season. The three main types of such edibles are nuts, berries and plants or roots.

Among the first class are hazel nuts, beech nuts, pecans, and butter-nuts. In the Southwest there are generally piñon trees and piñon nuts at the higher altitudes. In an extremity, even the kernel of the long-leaf pine cone can be eaten. And a pound of nuts has from two to three times the caloric food value of a pound of beef.

Acorns are highly nourishing. They were often a staple foodstuff of some of the earlier Indian tribes. White oak and eastern post oak acorns are the sweetest, but it takes considerable time and trouble to make them fit for consumption. All acorns are too bitter and contain too much tannin to permit them to be eaten raw. They have to be gathered, dried, and the kernels crushed to a fine flour first. The flour then has to be purified by pouring water through it again and again until the bitterness is taken out. When the water runs clear and is no longer yellow, most of the tannin will have been removed. The flour, a slick, doughy mass, is ready at this point.

It can be boiled in water, and the resulting dish is somewhat similar to unsalted corn-meal mush.

Sometimes the Indians, who used acorn mash as a regular article of diet rather than as an emergency item, made the acorn dough into small balls and baked them in green corn leaves in the hot ashes of their campfires. These acorn cakes were said to be very nutritious.

The list of edible fruits and berries is long. Most of them need no special cooking or preparation, but too hearty a use of them may cause stomach upsets. Among the better known are blueberries, both the bush and low-growing varieties (the latter ripen to delicious, full-flavored fruits in many parts of Alaska), blackberries, dewberries, wild strawberries, huckleberries, gooseberries, red and black currants, cranberries, wild red cherries, and so forth. Then there are hackberries, persimmons, wild red plums, and many of the wild grapes. These are just suggestions. They by no means constitute even a partially complete tally.

The plants and roots that can be eaten require accurate identification and need special preparation and cooking in most cases before they can be rendered edible. One exception to the cooking rule, however, is the buirush, or tule, which grows abundantly in ponds and swamps. The roots of these plants, eaten raw, are thirst quenchers as well as being nourishing.

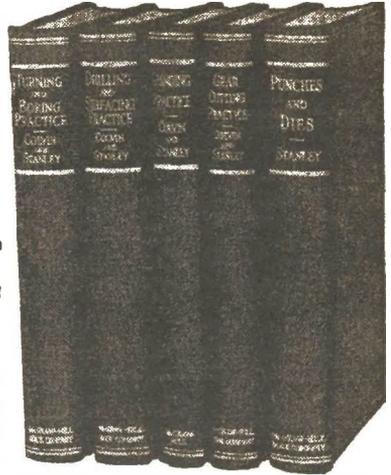
● We aim to give practical help to readers. Mr. North will be glad to answer specific questions about the West, its ranches, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. He will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to him, for he is always glad to assist you to the best of his ability. Be sure to inclose a stamped envelope for your reply.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Increased production means more jobs for MACHINISTS

—and **MORE PAY** for men
who know their work

This home-study course gives you the practical facts on modern machines, up-to-date methods, you need to advance in machine shop work. Take advantage of the other man's experience as found in books, to solve your problems, increase your efficiency, with



AMERICAN MACHINISTS' LIBRARY

5 BIG, DURABLE VOLUMES
2014 PAGES, 1853 ILLUSTRATIONS, MANY CHARTS
AND TABLES

WITHIN the covers of these five books are to be found all the facts that you will want to increase your practical knowledge of machine shop work and to give you the ability to handle all kinds of jobs swiftly, smoothly, correctly. Each of the five volumes contains a complete record of work as it is done today in America's most progressive and efficient shops. The books answer your questions on methods and machines—tell what you need to know about the operation of machines of all types and sizes for the whole range of metal cutting, forming, and finishing operations—show by text, diagram, and illustration the essential points of setting up work.

**COMBINED HOME-STUDY
COURSE AND REFERENCE LI-
BRARY BY PRACTICAL EXPERTS**

FRED COLVIN and FRANK STANLEY, well-known authors of many intensely practical books for machine shop men, have had years of experience, not only in on-the-job practice themselves, but also in keeping abreast of latest methods from one end of the metal-working industry to the other, through their editorial contacts with leading shops throughout the country.

In their books they give you the best of all the data, ideas, methods, and examples coming from these sources—the gist of more experience than any one man could amass in a lifetime of work.

WHAT this Library GIVES YOU

- complete guide for everybody, from shop executives to apprentices, interested in the operation of machines used in turning and boring practice
- essential principles and major problems involved in turning and boring operations
- description of all important varieties of machines, both manual and automatic, and methods of operating them
- data on speeds and feeds, new cutting alloys and materials, use of coolants, etc.
- practical information on grinding machines and abrasive wheels, showing what they do, how to operate them, and how to make best use of them on various types of work
- preferred methods of leading shops, on speeds, feeds, precision grinding, automatic machines, special work, etc.
- training in the various operations performed in drilling and surfacing materials in the machine shop
- valuable data, methods, suggestions, and illustrations from accepted practice, showing plainly how to handle the cutting of materials, the care of tools, methods of production, etc.
- exact, descriptive data on all aspects of gear cutting practice, useful in shops of any size
- essentials of selecting machines, setting up work, and handling operations in reaming, tapping, planing, shaping, slotting, milling, and broaching.

PUTS THE MASTERY OF MACHINE SHOP WORK AT YOUR FINGER TIPS

These five big volumes are clearly written in simple language, fully illustrated, easily understood. With them you get the facts on modern machine shop practice, new machines, up-to-date methods—the complete, practical training course—that you can use to improve your skill and advance your earning power now.

NO MONEY DOWN—SPECIAL PRICE—EASY TERMS

Let us send you these fact-packed books for 10 days' free examination, with no obligation to buy the books unless you want them. Remember that, if you decide to keep the books the special library price represents a saving of \$2.00 on the price of the books if you were to buy them separately. Furthermore, you may have the privilege of paying in small monthly installments, while you use the books. Send the coupon today.

**10 Days
TRIAL
Just Mail
the
Coupon!**

FREE EXAMINATION COUPON

McGraw Hill Book Co., Inc., 330 W. 42nd St., N. Y. C.

Send me the American Machinists' Library, 5 volumes, for 10 days' examination on approval. In 10 days I will send \$1.50, and \$2.00 monthly until the price of \$10.50 is paid, or return the books postpaid. (To insure prompt shipment write plainly and fill in all lines.)

Name

Address

City and State

Position

Company



Missing Department

CARROLL, FRANCIS—He is an old school-mate of mine and I would like to know his whereabouts. He was born in East Montpelier about fifty or sixty years ago, and is the brother of John, William, Thomas, James and Mary. If anyone has any information concerning him, please write to me.—Carrie O. Parker, Box 186, Plainfield, Vermont.

HOBBY, CHARLEY—He is my son and has been missing since 1932. He is forty-one years old, five feet eight inches tall, weighed about one hundred forty-eight and has light hair and dark eyes. He is highly educated in music. If anyone knows his whereabouts, we would appreciate hearing from them.—G. W. Hobby, Box 552, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

HAYDEN, MARY—I would like to hear from any of her friends or relatives. She came to Canada from Ireland about 1885 and married Stephen Young, who was janitor of St. Patrick's Church in Montreal. She died in October, 1937, in Montreal. Anyone having any information about her family in Ireland, please write to me.—Mrs. A. Kelly, 1810 Stout Street, Denver, Colorado.

NOTICE—I would like to find any relatives of Mary Hayden, who was born in Ireland in 1864. She came to Canada in 1884 and married Stephen Young. She died in Montreal in 1937. She had a daughter by the name of Winnifred who was in an orphan's home. If anyone has any information they can give me about her, I would appreciate it.—Winnifred McKay, 818 22nd Street, Denver, Colorado.

BARNETT, CLIFFORD WESLEY—He is my son and was last heard from in 1923 at which time he was in Portland, Oregon. He was born in Burnside, Kentucky, and was twenty-five years old at the time of his disappearance. He has blond hair, blue eyes and is about medium height. If anyone knows his whereabouts, please get in touch with me.—Mrs. Fannie Barnett, Box 62, Burnside, Kentucky.

CAMPOS, ROBERT—He is my son and he left home last June with a carnival man, Patrick Gerry Casey. We have had only one letter from the boy since he left and our reply to it was returned by the post office. The letter he wrote us was postmarked Rialto, California. Robert is sixteen years old, five feet three inches tall, slim build, dark hair and eyes. If anyone knows his whereabouts, please get in touch with me.—Mrs. Fred Campos, 705 N. 25th Street, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

● There is no charge for the insertion of requests for information concerning missing relatives or friends.

While it will be better to use your name in the notices, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to anyone who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Store, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

PART FOUR



Wagon Wheels West

BY WALKER TOMPKINS

The Story So Far:

Westbound along the Oregon Trail from Missouri, Gideon Castle's wagon train is saved from massacre at the hands of the warlike Ogalala Sioux by the arrival of a detachment of Fort Laramie cavalry sent out to meet them. With the soldiers is Monte Webb, a young scout who, learning that Castle's daughter, June, had been taken captive by the Indians, risks his life to visit the Ogalala village and rescue her.

That night Webb overhears a trio of men plotting to murder Castle in order to steal a keg of gold which represents the pooled wealth of the emigrants. One of the conspirators is killed in the ensuing fight, but the other two escape, unidentified. Later, however, Webb discovers that Jute Flathers, the trail guide, is in on the plot and is forced to kill him when he confronts him with his guilt.

Left without a guide, the Missourians persuade Webb to lead them on to Oregon, and he accepts, although he is violently opposed by June Castle's fiancé, Captain Ross Flagg, who is jealous of him.

All goes well until the caravan reaches Independence Rock, where Grote Kettleman, the wagon train's blacksmith, murders one of the emigrants and steals the keg of gold which had been placed in his care. Webb pursues Kettleman, overtaking him at Elkhorn Creek where the blacksmith, trying to cross the stream with the heavy keg of gold, had become trapped in quicksand.

Kettleman loses the treasure keg in the quicksand, but Webb lassoes and pulls him safely ashore. There, Kettleman is about to name the leader of the conspirators, when he is killed by a gunman hiding on the other side of the creek. The ambush-

er's second shot hits Webb and the scout tumbles into the stream and sinks from sight.

CHAPTER XVII

DEATH WARNING

GIDEON CASTLE reined his lather-flecked horse to a stop as a sharp crackle of gunshots sounded above the thudding of hoofs. The captain of the wagon train had tried desperately to overtake Monte Webb, who was riding after Grote Kettleman, but the scout had had too great a lead.

"Them shots are comin' from the gully yonder where Webb went into," muttered Castle, drawing a long-barreled Paterson model Colt from his belt holster. "Danged if that salty jasper ain't shootin' it out with Kettleman, already!"

Spurring his pony, the Missourian sent the animal rocketing toward the rim of Elkhorn Creek. Then he reined up, eyes reflecting his horror as he took in a brief, tragic tableau on the river bank below him.

He was in time to see Monte Webb jerk violently under the impact of a slug. Then he saw the scout pitch forward, to hit the water with a resounding splash.

Castle leaped out of the saddle, realizing the set-up immediately. Grote Kettleman could not have fired the ambush shot from the willow brake across the stream, for the blacksmith's body was sprawled on the river bank at the very spot where Webb had been dropped.

Even as Castle's boots hit the dirt, the hidden gunman across the river opened fire at his sky-lined target and slugs threw gravel against the old wagoner's legs.

Realizing the peril of remaining in full view against the moonlit sky, Castle leaped down the short cut

bank, his own six-gun roaring as he opened fire at the spot across the stream where he had seen the ambusher's gun flashes.

Even as he reached the level of the river's edge, Castle caught a glimpse of the dry-gulcher riding up onto the eastern bank of Elkhorn Creek, a ghostly black figure in the moonlight.

Castle whipped up his gun, then held his fire as he realized that the dry-gulcher was out of six-shooter range. Glancing about him, he saw Webb's Spencer carbine lying at the water's edge. With a yell, Castle holstered his short gun and leaped to snatch up the seven-shot rifle. But before he could slap the stock to his cheek and draw a bead on the dry-gulcher across the river, the man had spurred out of sight beyond the ridge which flanked the stream.

Then, immediately in front of where he stood, Castle saw Webb's body come to the surface of the creek, rolling soddenly as the current tugged at it.

"I'm comin', Webb!"

Castle yelled the words, but he was certain that Monte Webb had been a dead man when he toppled forward into the river. Nevertheless, the old wagoner slogged out into the muddy stream, wading waist-deep as he reached Webb's floating form an instant before the scout rolled under the surface once more.

Working with difficulty because he was holding Webb's rifle in one hand, Castle got a grip on the buckskin collar of the scout's jacket. With superhuman effort, he tugged upward until Webb's head and shoulders were above the river. Then, bracing his body against the gentle tug of the current, Castle headed shoreward, dragging the unconscious scout behind him.

SPENT and gasping, the old man tossed the rifle out on the grass alongside Grote Kettleman's sprawled corpse, and pulled Webb's right arm over his shoulder. At last, bent almost double under the weight he was carrying, Castle waded out on the slimy bank, dragged Webb's dripping body onto the grass, and then dropped gasping alongside the scout.

Staring off through the night to southward, the wagon-train captain saw the ghostly figure of the dry-gulcher as horse and rider swam across the creek to gain the west bank. But, just as Castle snatched up Webb's long-range Spencer once more, he saw the fleeing rider vanish around a bend of the curving river canyon.

A choking cough snapped Castle's attention away from the escaping

dry-gulcher, and he gasped with surprise as he saw Webb roll over, gagging and retching from the river water he had inhaled into his lungs.

Gideon Castle got busy, then. Rolling Webb over on his stomach, he straddled the scout's body and got his hands under his waist. Then he tugged upward and downward in a pumping motion, to assist the unconscious man in emptying the river water from his lungs.

Not until Webb was breathing freely once more did the old man cease his labors of resuscitation. The scout had undoubtedly filled his lungs with air before plunging into the river; that much had been an instinctive reflex. But another thirty seconds under water, and Castle knew that Webb would have drowned.

A few minutes later the scout's

For tender skin and beard that's tough
Those Thin Gillettes sure have the stuff!
You look well-groomed—save dough and time—
Four in a package cost a dime!

Top quality at rock-bottom price

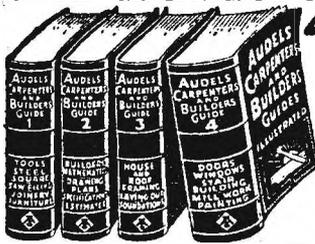


**ALSO NEW
ECONOMY PACK
12 for 27c**

4 for 10c
8 for 19c

The Thin Gillette Blade Is Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

AUDELS Carpenters and Builders Guides 4 vols. \$6



Inside Trade Information for Carpenters, Builders, Joiners, Building Mechanics and all Woodworkers. These Guides give you the short-cut instructions that you want—including new methods, ideas, additions, plans, systems and money saving suggestions. A easy progressive course for the apprentice and student. A practical daily helper and Quirk Reference for the master worker. Carpenters everywhere are using these Guides as a Helping Hand to Enter Work, Better Work and Better Pay. To get this assistance for yourself, simply fill in and mail the FREE COUPON below.

Inside Trade Information On:

How to use the steel square—How to file and set saws—How to build furniture—How to use a mitre box—How to use the chalk line—How to use rules and scales—How to make joints—Carpenters arithmetic—Solving mensuration problems—Estimating strength of timbers—How to set girders and sills—How to frame houses and roofs—How to estimate costs—How to build houses, barns, garages, lunges, etc.—How to read and draw plans—Drawing up specifications—How to excavate—How to use settings 12, 13 and 17 on the steel square—How to build hoists and scaffolds—skylights—How to build stairs—How to put on interior trim—How to hang doors—How to lay—lay floors—How to paint



THEO. AUDEL & CO., 49 W. 23rd St., New York City
 Mail Audels Carpenters and Builders Guides, 4 vols., on 7 days' free trial. If O.K. I will remit \$1 in 7 days, and \$1 monthly until \$6 is paid. Otherwise I will return them. No obligation unless I am satisfied.

Name.....
 Address.....
 Occupation.....
 Reference..... SS43

ANY PHOTO ENLARGED

Size 8 x 10 inches or smaller if desired. Same price for full length or bust form, groups, landscapes, pet animals, etc., or enlargements of any part of group picture. Safe return of original photo guaranteed.

47¢
3 for \$1.00



SEND NO MONEY Just mail photo or snapshot (any size) and within a week you will receive your beautiful enlargement, guaranteed fadeless. Pay postman 47¢ plus postage—or send 49¢ with order and we pay postage. Big 16x20-inch enlargement sent C. O. D. 78¢ plus postage or send 80¢ and we pay postage. Take advantage of this amazing offer now. Send your photos today. Specify size wanted.

STANDARD ART STUDIOS, 113S. Jefferson St., Dept. 771-D, Chicago

eyelids were fluttering open. Still dazed, Webb lay quietly while Castle unlaced his buckskin jacket. Stripped to the waist, Webb's muscular torso revealed a long, red gash across his ribs, under the right armpit—a bullet furrow, where the ambusher's slug had sliced through flesh and nicked bone.

That, then, had been the shot which had knocked Webb out and tumbled him into Elkhorn Creek. Castle shuddered, realizing that his arrival had come barely in time to save the scout's life.

Reaching over to where a whiskey bottle neck glinted from one of Grote Kettleman's hip pockets, Castle uncorked the flask and reamed the bottle neck between Webb's lips.

Choking and spluttering as the fiery liquor coursed down his throat, the scout propped himself up on one elbow and shoved the bottle away from his mouth. For an instant, he stared without recognition at the dripping figure of the man before him. Then his face relaxed, as he recognized his friend.

"Gid," gasped the scout, after a severe coughing spell, during which he rid his windpipe of some more creek water. "Did you . . . did you see—"

Castle nodded, forcing the scout to take another swallow of the whiskey.

"Yeah, I seen the dirty bushwhacker who was shootin' at you, son," he answered. "He got away clean. But we can be thankful I was able to fish you out o' the crick here before you foundered."

STILL shaky at the knees, Webb struggled to his feet and looked about him. Not until he had stared at Grote Kettleman's body, and the nearby carcass of the outlaw's horse, did his mind bridge the gap which had been blanked out by the dry-gulcher's bullet raking his body.

AGENTS SELL NYLON HOSE AND GIVE SILK HOSE 1/2 PRICE

IN Combination Order

WEAR HOSE WE FURNISH
 Sell Nylon Hose, give Silk Hose half price in combination order. Women crazy over Nylon. Agents coinng money with sensational half price combination offer. Supply silk hose replacement guaranteed 4 to 8 months, depending on quantity. Guaranteed by Good Housekeeping as advertised therein. New cars given producers. Look at these exceptional earnings. Onits West, \$39.10 first week; Emma Wall, \$47.87 first week. Rush name and hose size; free confidential facts.
WILKMIT HOSIERY CO., Midway 16-B4, Greenfield, Ohio

"You say . . . the ambusher . . . made his getaway, Gid?"

Castle pointed off to the south, his face grim in the moonlight.

"Lit a shuck like the devil was after him, Monte. You any idea who 'twas?"

Webb shook his head, running fingers gingerly along the bleeding bullet gash on his side.

"All I saw was gun flashes," Webb answered. "The skunk killed Grote Kettleman here. Kettleman was ridin' out here to meet the ambusher, Gid. "I . . . I didn't find out who it was Kettleman was aimin' to split that gold with."

For a long minute, the two men stood staring down at the corpse of the murdered blacksmith.

"I hate to have to break this news, Gid," Webb said finally, "but the creek there got your keg of gold." He went on to describe how he had overtaken Grote Kettleman attempting to cross the quicksand-bedded stream, and how the blacksmith had dropped the heavy cask into the deepest part of the Elkhorn, forever beyond recovery.

"Reckon the loss o' the gold is secondary," Castle said, when Webb had finished speaking. "I . . . I sure hate to go back to the wagons and tell the folks about it, though. All the money lots o' them families had in the world was banked in that little keg."

Monte Webb picked up his rifle and walked over to where his star-faced sorrel was grazing in the grass, undisturbed by the grim shoot-out which had so nearly resulted in its master's death.

"I'll send some of the boys over in the mornin' to bury Kettleman," Castle said, as he and Webb led the scout's pony up the cut bank to the spot where the wagoner's dun geld-

ing was waiting. "In the meantime, I'm wonderin' who that dry-gulcher was?"

Scudding clouds dimmed the full moon, so that visibility was cut down to a point where they could barely see the looming bulk of Independence Rock, a mile to the southward. Against the ebony backdrop of the granite landmark, the white hoods of the Missouri wagons were dimly visible. And somewhere off in the darkness, Grote Kettleman's co-conspirator and murderer was making his getaway across the prairie.

Neither man spoke, as they rode slowly back across the Wyoming plain to the sleeping camp. A vigilant sentry challenged them as they approached from the north, and they recognized Captain Ross Flagg as the man standing watch duty.

"You see anybody comin' back here before we did, Ross?" asked Gideon Castle, as they reined up in front of the army man.

Flagg shook his head, the crossed-sabers insignia on his hat glittering in the moonlight.

"Nobody but you two," he said. "I saw the two of you ride out, hell bent for election, just after Grote Kettleman rode out of here. What was the idea, anyhow? Where's Grote?"

Briefly, Castle described the circumstances of Zeke Prichett's murder and Kettleman's flight with the community gold horde. Flagg's face showed his amazement as the old wagon captain told of Kettleman's death at Elkhorn Creek, and the mystery of the ambusher who had so nearly brought about Webb's death.

A few minutes later, after unsaddling their horses and turning them out to graze inside the corral of wagons, Castle and Webb made

their way to Zeke Prichett's tent, where the dead man's lantern still shed its eerie glow inside the canvas.

"Our ambusher friend has beat us back here, Webb!" cried Castle, as they pushed their way into the tent where Prichett's body lay. "What do you make of that?"

Aghast, Webb stared at a white-painted tail gate of a wagon that had been placed sideways across Prichett's corpse, sometime during their absence.

Painted on the board with black axle grease was a message—a message which both men knew must have been written by the same man who had fired at them from ambush, thirty minutes before:

MONTE WEBB — KETTLEMAN'S DEATH TONIGHT WAS ACCIDENTAL — THE BULLET THAT KILLED HIM WAS MEANT FOR YOU. THIS IS TO WARN YOU THAT IF YOU DO NOT LEAVE THE WAGON TRAIN TOMORROW AND RETURN TO FORT LARAMIE, YOU WILL NEVER SEE OREGON. NEXT TIME MY BULLET WON'T MISS.

The message was printed, giving no hint as to the handwriting of its author.

Webb looked up, to see Gideon Castle's worried eyes fixed upon him.

"Son, that jasper means what he says," Castle said slowly. "You better take his advice an' head back to Laramie, come daylight. Somebody in this train is out to get you, same as they were to get me—"

Webb shook his head. There was a look of bleak determination on his face.

"No, Gid," he said firmly. "I'm stickin'—until we get to Oregon. Because I've got a hunch who's back of this killin' tonight—an' whenever he comes into the open, I'll be ready for him."

CHAPTER XVIII

BUFFALO HUNT

TO Gideon Castle, next morning, went the unhappy task of notifying his Missouri neighbors that the savings which they had converted into gold dust and "banked" in an oaken keg, at the outset of their westward trek, had been forever lost in the quicksand bottom of Elkhorn Creek.

The looks of anger and distrust which the assembled emigrants gave, upon hearing their captain's announcement, quickly vanished when it became known that the theft was due to an error on Zeke Prichett's part, the night before, in trusting Grote Kettleman—an error for which Prichett had paid with his life.

"We won't be travelin' today, friends," went on Castle, speaking to the crowd from the elevated seat of his own covered wagon. "Instead, we'll pause hyar at Independence Rock, to bury the remains of our friend, Zeke Prichett."

Castle mopped his face with a scarlet bandanna, staring out over the silent, despairing crowd before him. The fruits of many years of toil, the proceeds of many a sold homestead back in Missouri, and many a family legacy had been contained in that treasure cask which had been intrusted to their leader for safekeeping until they reached the end of the Oregon Trail.

"I know this is goin' to change the plans of many of you," Castle went on. "Lots of us, includin' Mrs. Castle an' myself, will arrive at our destination plumb broke, so far as finances are concerned. But we're only halfway there. Them as want to return to Missouri can do so. Them as want to turn off the Trail

an' head for Californy can do so, when we git through South Pass."

June Castle, seated on the wagon tongue below her father, got to her feet and moved away from the wagons. It wrenched her heart to witness the grief and shock on the faces of her friends and neighbors.

Making her way toward the lofty wall of Independence Rock, the girl caught sight of Monte Webb in the act of mounting his star-faced sorrel a short distance away from the assembled crowd. It was the first chance the girl had had to see their trail guide alone since they had left Fort Laramie. To June, it seemed that Webb had intentionally avoided her. His consultations with Gideon Castle had always been away from their wagons, at night; and an hour before the start of each day's trek, Webb was always out on the trail,

scouting for Indian signs or otherwise attending to his duties as trail guide.

"Monte!" called June Castle, as she saw the scout gathering up his reins. "Daddy says we're not traveling today."

Webb touched his hat brim, his face bleak as he looked down at the girl.

"No, we ain't travelin' until tomorrow, Miss June," he said. "Me, I'm headin' out to do a little buffalo huntin'. There won't be any buffalo meat to be had, once we get through South Pass and into the desert country north o' Salt Lake. Some buffalo steaks would go mighty good, after the sowbelly an' pemmican an' salt pork we been livin' on."

June paused, disturbed by the im-

MR. BOSTON SAYS: "RARE ENJOYMENT FOR YOU IN MY APRICOT NECTAR!"



HERE'S A DRINK THAT TASTES LIKE MORE— THE SORT THAT WINS YOU FRIENDS GALORE!

For the delicious tang of fresh apricots—in a hearty liquor—try Old Mr. Boston Apricot Nectar! Drink it straight. You'll find a handy drinking cup tops each pint bottle. It's "rich as brandy, smooth as honey."

A Beverage Liqueur prepared by Ben-Burk, Inc., Boston, Mass.

OLD MR. BOSTON APRICOT NECTAR

ALSO BLACKBERRY • PEACH • WILD CHERRY—70 PROOF



Learn WELDING This Easy Way!

AUDELS NEW WELDERS GUIDE

Contains Important Facts and Essential Information!

- WELDING METHODS
- WELDERS
- ELECTRIC
- OXY-ACETYLENE
- THERMIT
- UNIONMELT
- SHEET METAL
- SPOT
- PIPE
- PRESSURE VESSELS
- VARIOUS METALS
- AIRPLANE
- HARDENING-FACING
- CUTTING
- EYE PROTECTION

Just Out!

\$1

Every Welder Should Own This New, Useful Book containing clear, concise, practical information, pointers and facts relating to modern practices in all Branches. Easy to read and understand—over 400 pages Fully Illustrated—flexible cover—pocket size—a Ready Reference that Answers Your Questions accurately—Money Back if not O.K. To get this assistance for yourself, order copy today.

THEO. AUDEL, Publishers, 49 W. 23rd St., New York
 Please mail AUDELS WELDERS GUIDE (Price \$1). If satisfactory, I will remit \$1 on its safe arrival, otherwise I will return the book.

Name _____

Address _____

Occupation _____

Employed by _____ 8843

FREE PRODUCTS

WRITE FOR \$5.00 ASSORTMENT OF FOODS, GROCERIES, SOAPS, ETC. SEND NO MONEY! Rush name and address for big Assortment of FOODS, GROCERIES, SOAPS, ETC.—full size packages, worth \$5.00. Yours ABSOLUTELY FREE! Show these products to friends, neighbors. Take orders for sensational values, more than 200 quality products used in every home. Earn big profits, full or spare time. No experience necessary. Write for FREE \$5.00 Assortment of Products NOW.

ZANGL, 3235 Manmouth, Cincinnati, Ohio



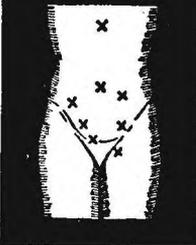
DRAFTING

DRAFTSMEN NEEDED in all manufacturing and building lines—\$30 to \$50 a week and UP. Learn quickly at home in spare time. Selective Employment Service. FREE Bulletin. No obligation. Write immediately!

American School
 Dept. DD47, Drexel & 58th, Chicago

Is Your Rupture HERE?

Why continue to suffer with rupture? Stop your worries and fears. Send for the facts about my perfected truss invention—the Brooks Appliance for reducible rupture—with the automatic AIR-CUSHION support that gives Nature a chance to close the opening. Thousands bought by doctors for themselves and patients.



Sent on Trial—Made-to-measure, individual fitting for man, woman or child. Low-priced, sanitary, durable. No obnoxious springs or hard pads; no metal girdle to rust. Safe and comfortable. Helps Nature get results. Not sold through stores—beware of imitations. Write today for full information sent free in plain sealed envelope.

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO. 408-H State St. Marshall, Mich.

personal, almost indifferent tone in which Webb had addressed her.

“Monte,” she said hesitantly, looking up at him. “You—I haven’t offended you in any way since we left Fort Laramie, have I?”

He laughed softly. “Of course not, Miss June. What gave you that idea?”

June colored under his frank gaze. “Well, I— Oh, nothing, I guess. Only I haven’t seen you or had a chance to talk with you—about the West, I mean—since we started. Couldn’t you take me hunting with you this morning?”

Webb tugged at the fringe of his buckskin gantlets, his pulse quickening at the girl’s request.

“You’re perfectly welcome to ride with me,” he answered, “only—seein’ as how you’re engaged to marry Ross Flagg, and all—maybe he’d better come along, too, don’t you think?”

June glanced toward the nearby camp.

“No,” she said quickly. “Ross is still sleeping, I think. He was on watch duty until after midnight. Anyway, he wouldn’t care. Wait—I’ll bring my pony right away.”

TEN minutes later, the two were cantering away from the Independence Rock camp, unnoticed in the confusion which marked the breaking up of the assembly meeting.

Stirrup to stirrup, the clean, sage-scented air sweet in their nostrils, Webb and June rode steadily to the northwestward, toward the distant, silver-tipped horizon of the Rocky Mountains.

They topped a low, rolling ridge and dropped into a valley beyond, putting Independence Rock and the covered wagons out of view.

“There’s one of the biggest buffalo herds you’ll probably ever see, Miss June,” said Webb, pointing a buckskin-sleeved arm to the northwest. “In fact, you won’t see any

buffalo at all, out in Oregon. And the rate they're bein' killed off, I got my doubts if your grandchildren will ever know what a buffalo looks like, if you don't tell 'em about today's hunt."

The girl laughed, squinting her eyes against the sun glare as she stared off across the rolling plains to where a sprawling brown blot stood out in sharp relief against the gray-green expanse.

"Probably six thousand head in that herd," the plainsman went on, as they pointed their horses toward the herd. "They're just breaking bed ground, an' they'll raise a big dust when they head for the Platte to drink. With luck, I'll be able to shoot enough meat to last the caravan for a week."

As the miles flung back behind cantering hoofs, the conversation of the pair ranged over a wide scope of topics—Webb's own brief years in the California gold camps, his father's death at Gettysburg, the letter of condolence which Monte had received, at Fort Laramie, from President Lincoln himself—

Then, topping a final sage-dotted rise, Monte and June saw the vast buffalo herd directly below them, and fell silent before the breath-taking majesty of the scene.

The shaggy-humped animals, grazing in the lush prairie grass, appeared not to notice the approaching riders. Almost as far as the eye could reach, the terrain was black with moving buffalo—shaggy old bulls, restless cows, scampering heifers, even a few long-legged calves on the outskirts of the herd, keeping close to their mothers.

"It . . . it's beyond description," breathed June, her blue eyes wide with excitement as she and Monte drew rein at the edge of the plain, only a hundred yards away from the

fringe of the vast herd. "Looking at them, I can't blame the Indians for resenting us whites despoiling their hunting grounds."

Monte Webb reached down to draw his Spencer rifle from its saddle boot.

"You stay here, Miss June," he said, squinting tentatively along the polished barrel of the rifle. "Sometimes buffalo herds start a stampede when shootin' begins. In that case, give your pony his head, he'll keep shy of the herd, no matter which way they begin millin'."

June drew a tighter rein, a flush of excitement on her sun-bronzed cheeks.

"I wish I had brought a gun," she said. "I'm a pretty good shot, even if I am a girl. And what a story to tell my grandchildren—shooting a buffalo out in Wyoming!"

Before Webb could spur his sorrel toward the slow-moving herd, a sharp drumming of hoofbeats made him hip about in saddle, his heart leaping with alarm.

"Be ready to ride, June!" he cried warningly. "That may be an Injun, scoutin' this herd. We—"

But the oncoming rider was not an Indian. Webb broke off, as the figure of Captain Ross Flagg shot over the ridge top and thundered down to a jouncing halt between the two riders.

Flagg's narrow face was flaming red, the glinting fires of rage visible behind his slitted lids. And his horse was drenched with lather, indicating a hard ride from Independence Rock.

"June, ride back to the top of the hill!" Flagg ordered, his voice like a whiplash. "I've got a few things to say to this romantic Westerner that won't bear saying in front of a lady—especially the girl I'm going to marry!"

June flushed with anger. "You

have no right to order me to leave like this!" she flared. "If you're angry because I came out hunting with Monte, you've no right to be. I thought you were asleep when we left, and I—"

Flagg reined closer to the girl's stirrup, his face going white as he struggled to check his rage.

"*Do as I say!*" Flagg rasped. "I'll have plenty to say to you, as soon as I've thrashed this blasted buckskin man!"

IT was Webb who spurred his sorrel between them, before June Castle could give voice to the angry words of defiance which sprang to her lips.

"Do as your fiancé says, Miss June!" the scout said calmly. "Flagg here has been spoilin' for a fight ever since the night I brought you back from the Sioux camp. I reckon now's as good a time as any—for Flagg to see what he can do about thrashin' me."

For a moment the girl hesitated. Then, spurring her pony into a gallop, she headed back off toward the hilltop.

Without another word, the two men turned in saddle, nostrils flaring, mouths clamped in a grim line of hate. Of one accord, they dismounted, Flagg unbuckling his saber-hung belt, Monte Webb replacing his buffalo rifle in its scabbard, then unstrapping his belt with its sheathed bowie knife and holstered Dragoon .44, which he hung over his saddlehorn. Then the two walked away from the horses, Webb stripping off his gauntlets and flinging them aside.

Squaring off, the two enemies faced each other like boxers in a prize ring.

"This fight ain't exactly justified, in one way," Webb said, his voice

cool and unruffled. "Not that I won't relish beatin' you within an inch o' your life, Flagg. But would you mind tellin' me what we're battlin' about?"

Flagg had peeled off his blue-buttoned army coat, to expose a lean, wiry torso. Pound for pound, he was a perfect match for the case-hardened frontiersman; in height and reach they were likewise equal.

"You know, as well as I do!" Flagg raged, dropping into a boxer's defensive crouch. "You're trying to steal June from me."

The scout laughed, then sobered as if a mask had been snatched from his face.

"If I thought I had a chance," he shot back, "I'll be hanged if I wouldn't try to give you some competition, Flagg. But I know June wouldn't want a trail-ridin' Westerner who ain't had the schoolin' or polish her husband ought to have. The only thing I regret about her is that she's goin' to marry a yellow-livered—"

With a bawl of rage, Flagg charged in behind flailing fists, forcing Webb to step back before the ferocity of his attack. A jolting right brought crimson spurting from the army man's nose and checked his onrush.

They sparred a moment, and then came together like colliding beasts in a primeval fury of fist against fist, a grunting, twisting, dust-showering grapple as of two wild animals locked in a fight to the death.

CHAPTER XIX

A GIRL'S COURAGE

FROM her lofty elevation overfacing the scene of conflict, June Castle saw the struggling men rolling across the ground, out from under the sifting cloud of dust caused

by their writhing feet. Even at that distance her ears caught the sawing of men's breath, the thud of fists hitting flesh, the scrape of boots on hard earth.

Monte Webb, fighting with the lusty appetite for action which years of clean outdoor living had engendered in him, found reason for amazement in Ross Flagg's capacity for taking punishment.

His eyes swelling shut from Webb's constant battering, his face a raw, bleeding pulp, the army man was giving as good as he got, landing terrific blows to jaw and midriff. Their first flush of hate gone, the fighters gave up their saloon-brawl ferocity and settled into a slugging match, feinting and weaving, blocking punches with boxers' skill, going into clinches from which they broke, grunting with exhaustion.

And then, staring through a disheveled curtain of hair, Webb saw one of his jabbing lefts to the heart take its effect, saw Flagg reel back, face gray with pain, arms wavering.

Webb lunged forward, right fist cocked to land the knockout blow for which he had been maneuvering. Flagg saw the punch coming and rolled his head desperately to avoid the full, smoking impact of the scout's rock-hard knuckles.

Smack! The punch glanced off Flagg's jaw, but it carried sufficient steam to send the army man reeling backward, arms windmilling as he fought for balance.

Then Flagg sprawled on his back in a smoking curtain of dust, and Webb lurched forward, wiping blood and sweat from his palms, his chest heaving with labored breathing.

"You've had enough, Flagg!" panted the buckskin-clad scout, wiping his blood-marked face with his sleeve. "I'm willin' to shake hands an' call it quits—"

Flagg's lips peeled back to expose a fanglike battery of teeth. As
WS—8F



LOOK OUT!...It's An Avalanche of Death

Death for Sonny Tabor, in a sheer wall of water . . . as he faces murder guns and a blasting explosion of dynamite. The money-crazed brain of a rangeland monster weaves a torture web for his destruction, in a bullet-bersek novel, **GUN-SMART SAMARITAN**, by Ward M. Stevens, in April 5th **WILD WEST WEEKLY**.

When fifty thousand dollars went hightailing up the owl-hoot trail, it took more than an hombre with a glass eye, a desperate killer, and a banker greedy for gold, to bring it back again! Read **HOLSTER LAW**, by William A. Todd, in the April 12th issue for the answer.

With renegades and Rangers both aiming to sink hot-lead fangs into Blacky Solone's hide, that trouble-huntin' hombre seemed to need more than wit and brawn to get him out of that fracas! **BULLET BITE**, by James P. Webb, in April 19th **WILD WEST WEEKLY**, will keep you reading till the very end!

It's a thrill-packed month for Western fans in

WILD WEST WEEKLY

10c A COPY AT ALL NEWSSTANDS

he struggled to get up, his spread fingers encountered a biscuit-sized rock and coiled about it.

"I'll see you . . . in Hades . . . before I shake hands . . . with you!" Flagg said hoarsely, getting to his feet with the rock cradled in the cup of his palm. "There isn't room enough . . . for both of us . . . in that wagon train—"

Too late, Webb saw that the army man had a stone in his hand. He tried to duck as his adversary flung the missile with all his force at point-blank range.

The stone smashed through Webb's outthrust guard and jolted hard against his chest, dropping him to his knees with a shower of stars assaulting his vision.

SICK, numb with pain, Webb sank to the ground. On all fours, head slumped between his shoulders, the scout heard his opponent moving to one side, preparatory to launching a murderous kick at his unprotected head.

Then fate intervened, before Flagg could engineer his foul attack. From the hillside overlooking the dusty scene came an ear-piercing scream:

"Monte! Ross! Run for your lives! The buffalo! *They're stampeding your way!*"

Staggering out of the thick dust which had masked his treacherous action from June Castle's eyes, Ross Flagg stared off to the westward. What he saw almost turned his spine to an icicle.

Moving toward the base of the hill like some manner of brown tidal wave came the vanguard of the buffalo herd!

Something—sight of the struggling men out on the plain, perhaps—had touched off the explosion which had turned six thousand

peacefully grazing buffalo into a fast-moving juggernaut of destruction.

Already, Ross Flagg felt the earth trembling under his feet, from the pounding hoofs of that oncoming flood of brown, closely massed bodies. Wheeling, the army man headed for the nearby horses.

Monte Webb, his own ears catching the harsh thunder of the stampede, pushed himself into a kneeling position, struggled to rise, then fell back on his elbows. Through the settling dust, he saw Flagg's lather-drenched horse shy away from the army captain, as he made a frantic grab for the saddler's trailing reins.

Panic-stricken by the roar of the oncoming stampede, Flagg's horse suddenly bolted, stirrups flapping wildly.

Only for an instant did the army man pause, staring wild-eyed at his runaway mount. Then, his gaze swerving from the buffalo herd to the huddled figure of the scout, Flagg sprinted toward Webb's waiting sorrel.

With a hoarse yell, Webb struggled dazedly to his feet. But he was too late. Vaulting into the saddle without touching stirrups, Ross Flagg drove spurs into Starface's flanks and sent the horse rocketing up the hillside toward the safety of the hogback where June was waiting!

Rage shot through Webb as he started his wobbly-kneed flight toward the slope. By no possible stretch of the imagination would he be able to gain the hillside in time to escape destruction under the mangleing hoofs of the stampeding buffalo. And without his guns, it would be impossible to stem the oncoming tidal wave of animals by shooting the leaders—

AND then, glancing up the hill in the direction Flagg had taken in flight, Webb caught sight of a flying figure on horseback, headed down the slope directly at him.

"No . . . no! June . . . go back . . . you can't make it—"

Webb's frantic yell was lost in the thunder of the stampede at his back. He flung himself on, not daring to look behind as he saw June Castle spurring her pony at top speed down the brush-dotted slope.

A moment later she was skidding the horse to a stop beside him, and her firm, strong hand was in his as he summoned his ebbing strength and sprang aboard the horse, behind the saddle cantle. Webb's spurs raked the double-laden pony into action, as he flung an arm around the girl to seize the saddlehorn.

One huge buffalo, head lowered until its nostrils seemed to scrape the earth, shot in front of the pony, barely missing contact with the flying hoofs. Twisting his head about, Webb saw death bearing down hard as the tidal wave of brown backs and clacking horns threatened to engulf them in a pandemonium of sound—

And then it was over, as June's game pony, itself terrorized into an incredible burst of speed, shot up the hillside through the ragged fringe of the stampeding herd.

At the hill's crest, Webb slid to the ground, and helped June from the saddle. Arm in arm, the pair stared off in fascinated horror at the scene below. The place where Monte and Ross Flagg had struggled was now a dust-clouded blur of animals. As if the whole dark-brown mass of the prairie were convulsed in an earthquake, the buffalo herd thundered on toward the Platte, where the wild stampede would end at the river's edge.

Looking down into the girl's face,

4 big fields of OPPORTUNITY for YOU

1. **RADIO-TELEVISION**
2. **DIESEL-AUTO**
3. **AIRCRAFT**
4. **ELECTRICITY**

Take Your Choice

You can completely master any of these 4 big pay trades and increase your present pay by enrolling with National Schools—oldest and largest in the West.

TRAINING PLAN TIME-TESTED

Flexible training plan geared to needs of ambitious men. Complete, practical, pre-tested training method offered to you. Graduates all over America are profiting by National Schools' famous plan of training. Highly endorsed by Leaders of Industry.

RADIO training, all branches, repair, service, broadcasting, sound, public address, studio technique, television, etc.

DIESEL and Gas Engine instruction, ignition, carburation, repair, operation, etc.

AIRCRAFT training in sheet metal construction, fabrication, jig work, forming, bench work, etc.

ELECTRICITY, wiring, line work, meters, installation, etc.

GET DETAILS TODAY

Any man with average mechanical ability can now become trained. A new future opened for you, regardless of your present position in life. Mail coupon right now.

**NATIONAL
SCHOOLS**
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.



MAIL COUPON FOR FREE LITERATURE

National Schools, Dept. 4-B5
4000 So. Figueroa St., Los Angeles, Calif.
Mail free literature. No obligation.

NAME _____ AGE _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____

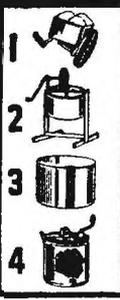
CHECK COURSE

YOU WANT

- Radio
 Diesel
 Aircraft
 Electricity

MONEY MINDED MEN

HOT POTATO CHIPS



Here's your chance—a money-making business of your own. Turn potatoes into newest kind of Potato Chips with my improved outfit. Makes delicious Chips at low cost. A few hours practice does it. Complete outfit includes: (1) Rotary Slicer (2) Mechanical Peeler for quick operation; (3) Vitreous Enamel Frying Vat; (4) Grease Extractor for extracting excess grease. Everything ready to start operations at once. Begin any where—city, village, town. Potatoes cheap and plentiful. Wholesale or retail. Steady year-round business. Groceries, markets, restaurants, taverns do the retailing for you.

START YOUR OWN BUSINESS
Great quantities of Chips are eaten daily. Profit large—usually so. You can start this money-making business on a SMALL outlay of cash. Write for Potato Chip Booklet.
Lang Eakins Co., 540-S High St., Springfield, Ohio

ITCH

STOPPED QUICKLY

Use
D.D.D.
prescription

Quick relief from itching of eczema, rashes and other externally caused skin troubles

35c bottle, at druggists, proves it as money back

You Can Train To **Be an ARTIST**



Trained Artists Are Capable of Earning \$30, \$50, \$75 Weekly. Many of our graduates are now enjoying successful Art careers. By our practical method, famous since 1914, we teach you Commercial Art, Cartooning and Illustrating **AT HOME** IN YOUR SPARE TIME. Write for details in FREE BOOK, "Art for Pleasure and Profit," explains course and opportunities. Describes TWO ARTISTS' OUTFITS included with training. State age.

STUDIO 2157, WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF ART
1115-15th Street, N. W. Washington, D. C.

INDIGESTION

may affect the Heart

Gas trapped in the stomach or gullet may act like a hair-trigger on the heart. At the first sign of distress smart men and women depend on Bell-mus Tablets to set gas free. No laxative but made of the fastest-acting medicines known for acid indigestion. If the **FIRST DOSE** doesn't prove Bell-mus better, return bottle to us and receive **DOUBLE Money Back**. 25c at all drug stores.



SUCTION SPONGE

Cleans Cars New Way!

AMAZING INVENTION! Banishes auto-washing drudgery. Cleans linoleum, woodwork, windows like a flash. Auto owners, housewives wild about it. **HOT SELLER FOR AGENTS AND DISTRIBUTORS.** Hustlers cleaning up big money.

SAMPLE OFFER Samples sent on trial to first person in each locality who writes. No obligation. Get details. *Be first—send in your name TODAY!*

KRISTEE CO., 773 Kristee Bldg., Akron, O.

Monte Webb managed to spread his battered lips into a grin.

"I reckon you and I are even on the life-savin' score, June," he said huskily. "Only I'd a heap rather buck a village full of Injuns than I would run into a buffalo stampede like you just done. I don't reckon I'll ever forget it."

JUNE was about to speak when she suddenly drew away from Webb, to stare off past his shoulder, her eyes ablaze with anger. Webb turned and his eyes darkened. Trotting up to meet them, astride the star-faced sorrel, came Ross Flagg.

His bruised face a battered edition of its former sleek good looks, the army man dismounted, obviously abashed by the iciness of his fiancée's stare.

"You . . . you left Monte down there to die!" June cried accusingly. "I think I'll always hate you for that, Ross!"

Flagg winced, as if a knife had been thrust through him.

"But I thought Webb was knocked out," he protested. "I figured a delay would mean both of us would die, so I— Well, Webb, I'll apologize—if you'll accept it."

Webb glanced around, to see that June had turned to bury her face against the withers of her horse, her shoulders convulsed with sobbing. Did the girl know that her fiancé had employed a rock to finish their fight? Webb doubted it. Flagg's foul tactics had been hidden behind the pall of dust.

And now, Flagg was openly apologizing for his cowardly flight, in June's presence, and was begging Webb's forgiveness. Not to grant it under such circumstances, Webb knew, would be only to brand himself as a poor loser in June's eyes.

"I ain't able to shake hands on it, Flagg," he said finally. "I only

shake hands with a friend, an' I don't reckon you an' me was cut out to be friends. But I got a compromise request to make."

The army man walked forward, to put a hand tenderly on June's quivering shoulder. Without taking his eyes from the girl, Flagg answered:

"I can't do any more'n offer you my hand, Webb. I . . . I must have lost my head down there, when I saw those buffalo heading toward us. June knows I'll do anything in my power to make amends."

Webb's lips compressed as he saw June lift her tear-stained face for the kiss which her fiancé pressed against her forehead. In that moment, he knew that Flagg's glib tongue had restored himself in the girl's favor.

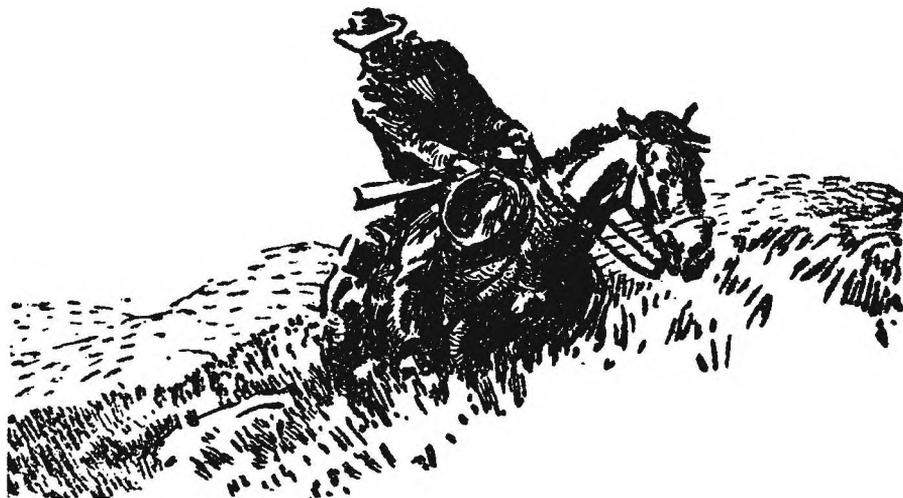
If there's any trouble between us, I am sure it won't be provoked by me."

CHAPTER XX

WEBB'S SUSPICIONS

DURING the fortnight which followed their departure from the halfway mark at Independence Rock, Monte Webb kept himself aloof from all members of the Missouri caravan. His reticence to join the young people at their music and frivolity, at night after the watches were posted and the supper dishes washed, was noticed by the elders, and discussed in the privacy of their family wagons.

But the steely-eyed young Westerner, in whose hands they had



"We've got a long road ahead of us, Flagg," Webb said bitterly. "It would be bad for the morale of the caravan if you and I were open enemies. Will you give me your word of honor not to renew this difference between us—at least until we get to Oregon?"

Flagg's eyes taunted the scout, as he drew June Castle against him.

"So far as I'm concerned, Webb, our score is already settled in full.

placed the responsibility of guiding them safely through to Oregon, was given a tacit vote of confidence by every member of the train. If he chose to keep his own counsel of nights, perhaps it was because of the gravity of his responsibilities. Certainly it was no affair of theirs.

June Castle, however, knew that Webb's change in attitude stemmed from the day of the buffalo stampe, and his fight with Ross Flagg,

and she finally came to the reluctant conclusion that the scout was sulking over the fact that Flagg had beaten him in fair fight that day.

The girl's instinct and judgment told her that such an attitude was not consistent with her appraisal of Webb's character; but the facts were there, and it was obvious that he was pointedly avoiding any contact with her.

But personal associations and worries were secondary to the rigors of the long days which followed, as the caravan of wagons made its intermittent way across Wyoming and through South Pass, moving by fifteen-mile daily treks in the manner of some great inchworm working its way over the Continental Divide.

The vast buffalo herds of the open plains gave way to antelope and elk, and occasional mountain sheep poised on distant crags. Mountain grasses replaced the sage of the prairies, and at night the screams of panthers and timber wolves were more frequent than the familiar yapping of the plains coyotes.

Out of South Pass, the caravan deserted the main Oregon Trail ruts which branched southward toward Fort Bridger and California, and took the famous Sublette cut-off which led them to Soda Springs in the country due north of Great Salt Lake.

From Soda Springs, Webb led the creaking, grimy-hooded wagons northwestward through country later to be known as Idaho, bound for the nearest settlement, Fort Hall.

As was customary, the scout rode several miles in advance of the train, making certain of the next campsite's grass, water and fuel supplies, and keeping an ever-vigilant eye open for hostile Shoshones, Utes or Blackfeet. He was jogging back toward the wagons one mid-afternoon,

intending to supervise the crossing of Whetstone River, when he was met by Gideon Castle.

As a rule, the old Missourian remained with the caravan, either driving one of his own Conestogas, or assisting neighbors in yoking up fresh spans of oxen, repairing damaged wagon wheels or tongues, or the similar routine duties of a wagon captain.

Something special—probably trouble on the river crossing—must have accounted for Castle's riding out to hunt for the caravan scout in this manner, Webb knew.

BUT Gideon Castle brought no bad news, although his ruddy face was grave as he met the returning scout along the trailside. After a perfunctory exchange of greetings, the two headed back toward the crawling dust column which marked the slow-moving covered wagons, some three miles to the southeast.

"Webb, I been aimin' to chaw the rag with you for a coon's age," Gideon Castle finally spoke, peering sidewise at the stony-faced young scout riding at his stirrup. "You got a bur under your saddle, son, an' don't tell me you ain't. What's been wrong with you, the past three weeks?"

Webb shrugged, his eyes roving along the far-flung peaks of the Rockies, as if he were fascinated by the splendor of their snow-covered slopes.

"You used to mingle with the folks, stoppin' to chat with the children an' help oldsters grease an animal's sore hoof, an' sech," the Missourian persisted. "What in tar-nation's got into you, son, since we left Independence Rock?"

Webb turned, and his ice-blue gaze was bitter.

"I *have* had somethin' on my mind,

Gid," he admitted. "I ain't sure yet, but I got a pretty good hunch I know who the skunk was who was plottin' with Jute Flathers an' Alabama Jones that night to kill you an' rob you, Gid. The same skunk who had Grote Kettleman steal that gold from Zeke Prichett, an' who later tried to ambush me over on Elkhorn Crick after the gold was lost in the quicksand."

Gideon Castle tugged at his beard, his gaze fixed on Webb's grim face.

"I been doin' some thinkin', too," the wagon captain said. "Who you figger it was, son? Mebbeso our dedoooin' will jibe!"

The scout hesitated, fumbling at the chin cord of his beaver felt hat, his eyes avoiding Castle's face.

"I hate to name any names until I got more proof—" he began.

"The devil with that!" Castle exploded. "You mean you don't like to hurt my feelin's by talkin' about my future son-in-law, don't you?"

THE two men reined to a halt, staring at each other with mutual understanding that needed no words to elaborate it.

"Yes," Webb said finally. "I'm convinced that Ross Flagg is the man we want—the man Grote Kettleman almost named, before he was shot from ambush that night. The man who wrote that warnin' letter to me an' left it on a board on top of Zeke Prichett's dead body."

Castle's nostrils flared with pent-up emotion. He piled gnarled hands on his saddlehorn, and stared off at the approaching dust cloud, across the hills.

"I wouldn't dare mention my suspicions to June," the old man said finally. "But, hang it, Webb, the signs p'int to Ross Flagg. It looks mighty suspicious that Flagg was out on lookout duty the night you overheard those three men plottin' to murder me, and also the night



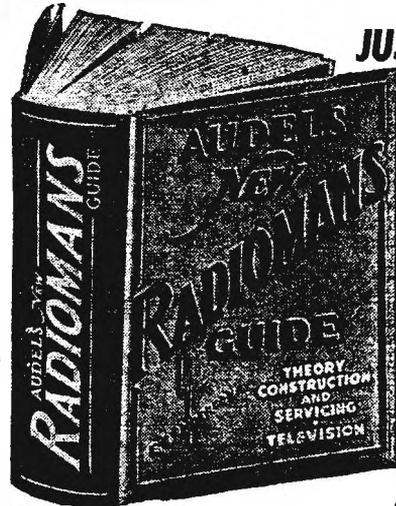
NONE FASTER

NONE BETTER!

Corona Speedline portable typewriters represent the outstanding values, dollar for dollar, among portables. All have famous Floating Shift—standard key boards, and many other features that make typing easier and faster.

See your dealer for free home trial.

MAIL COUPON TODAY!
 L C Smith & Corona Typewriters Inc Desk 4
 707 E. Washington Street, Syracuse, N. Y.
 I am thinking of buying a Corona. Please send me free illustrated booklet.
 Name _____ Address _____
 City _____ State _____



JUST OUT!

EVERY RADIO MECHANIC—Service Man and Student Needs "Audels Radiomans Guide" Just Out! The whole subject of Modern Radio covering the Basic Principles—Construction and Operation—Service—Repairs—Troubles—All Easily Understood. Over 750 Pages.

RADIO 400 Illustrations, Parts and Diagrams—LATE TELEVISION DATA—Valuable for REFERENCE AND HOME STUDY
4 To get this practical information in handy form for yourself just fill in and mail coupon today.
COMPLETE • PAY ONLY \$1 A MONTH! ←

THEO. AUDEL & CO., Publishers, 49 W. 23rd STREET, N. Y.
 Mail AUDELS NEW RADIOMANS GUIDE for free examination. If O. K. I will send you \$1 in 7 days; then remit \$1 monthly until price of \$4 is paid. Otherwise, I will return it.
 Name _____
 Address _____
 Occupation _____
 Reference _____



BELIEVE IN LUCK?-'S

Carry a pair of **GENUINE BRAHMA RED LIVE HIGHLY MAGNETIC LODESTONES!** Legend reputes, Occult Oriental ancients superstitiously carried two Live Lodestones as **MOST POWERFUL MAGNETIC "LUCKY" CHARMS**, one to "attract" Good Luck in Money, Games, Love, Business, Work, etc., the other to "prevent" Bad Luck, Losses, Evil, Trouble, Harm, etc. Believe in Luck! Carry a Pair of these curious Genuine Brahmas Red Live Lodestones! We make no supernatural claims. \$1.97 Postpaid for the two, with all information. \$1.97 and 15c extra if C.O.D. Satisfaction **GUARANTEED** or Money Returned. Order yours **NOW!**

ASTROL CO., Dept. 1861, Main P. O. Box 72, BROOKLYN, N. Y.

NOTICE! Beware of imitations! We absolutely **GUARANTEE** these Genuine Brahma Lodestones are **ALIVE!** We believe they are just what you want, the **REAL THING—POWERFUL DRAWING, EXTRA HIGHLY MAGNETIC!** Fully Guaranteed—Order **TODAY!** Copyright 1941—A. Co.

SONG-POEMS WANTED

TO BE SET TO MUSIC

Free Examination. Send Your Poems To

J. CHAS. McNEIL

A. B. MASTER OF MUSIC

510-SS So. Alexandria Los Angeles, Calif.

\$1.98

5 YEARS Guarantee.

This 5 year Guaranteed American made 1 1/2 size solid gold effort case, with locomotive design back, watch C.O.D. \$1.98. Biggest bargain offered. Two tone simulated gold dial. Sunk second dial. Finely tested quick train lever movement. If you order two we give you one FREE. Agents Wanted. Order **TODAY.** Pay price plus postage on delivery. Money Back Guarantee.



WINEHOLT CO. Box W22 Woodbine, Penna.

MECHANICS

KNOW YOUR CAR

New Fluid Drive Fully Explained!

Ask to See it!



You Need this Book

JUST OUT!

Every operator and mechanic needs **AUDEL'S NEW AUTO GUIDE.** This book saves time, money and worry. Highly endorsed. It presents the whole subject of auto mechanics: 1—Basic principles, 2—Construction, 3—Operation, 4—Service, 5—Repair. Easily understood. Over 1500 pages—1540 illustrations showing inside views of modern cars, trucks and buses with instructions for all service jobs. Diesel Engines fully treated, & fully illustrated. **To Get This Assistance for Yourself Simply Fill in and Mail Coupon Today.**

4 COMPLETE & PAY ONLY \$1. A MONTH

THEO. AUDEL & CO., 49 WEST 23rd STREET, NEW YORK
Please send me postpaid AUDEL'S NEW AUTOMOBILE GUIDE (\$1) for free examination. If I decide to keep it, I will send you \$1 within 7 days; then remit \$1 monthly until purchase price of \$4 is paid. Otherwise, I will return it to you promptly.

Name -----
Address -----
Occupation -----
Reference ----- SS13

Grote Kettleman lit a shuck with that gold. It would have been plumb easy for Flagg to have ridden out to Elkhorn Crick to meet Kettleman that night, an' start shootin' at you after he killed Kettleman to keep him from talkin'. Plumb easy for him to ride back to the caravan without bein' challenged by a sentry, because he was a sentry hisself—an' easy enough for him to have writ that warnin', afore we got back—"

Castle's words made the scout's heart pound with excitement, for the old man's reasoning matched his own reconstruction of Flagg's guilt, to the letter.

"Sooner or later, Flagg'll tip his hand," Webb said. "When he does, I don't aim to be caught nappin'. But if I have to kill Flagg in self-defense, it means your daughter's life will be ruined, Gid. She'll hate me till the end of her days."

Castle shot the trail scout a peculiar sidelong glance.

"I ain't so shore, son," he said cryptically. "Ross Flagg's rushed June offn her feet since she was a little gal in pigtailed back in Hannibal. She ain't married to him yit, an' if he's the type o' scoundrel you an' me got him figgered to be, I'll be hanged if she ever will be!"

Webb gulped hard, as if struggling with a difficult decision. Then, rein-ing over closer to Castle's horse as if afraid the nearby rocks and brush clumps might have ears, the scout said:

"Gid, seein' as how we're exchangin' confidences, I got somethin' important to get off my chest. I know I kin trust you to keep your lip close-hobbled?"

Castle chuckled behind his beard, as the two men gathered up their bridle reins and resumed their way toward the wagon train.

"I'll make it easy for ye, son!" laughed the old man. "You've fell in love with June, only you figger

she's Ross Flagg's proppity so you won't come out in the open with your feelin's. Is that it?"

Warm color rose in Monte Webb's face, suffusing his deep sun-tanned complexion with a ruddiness which brought a loud bellow of mirth from the old man.

"Well, Gid," stammered Webb, "I . . . I reckon you hit the nail on the—"

He broke off, interrupted by a far-off crackle of gun fire. Instantly the two straightened in saddle, heads cocked apprehensively. Then, of one accord, they spurred into a gallop.

"That shootin' is comin' from the wagons!" yelled Castle, his voice rising above the rush of wind in their ears. "You figger there was Injuns hidin' in Whetstone River canyon?"

Webb's face blanched as another volley of shots sounded from beyond the crest of the ridge, up which they were pounding at top speed.

As Castle and Webb topped the rise and reined to a halt, a chaotic scene met their eyes.

Swarming out of the river-bank brush lining Whetstone River came a band of black-bearded, buffalo-coated riders, sweeping out onto the prairie where the wagons were massing up at the river ford preparatory to crossing the shallow stream.

The riders were pouring salvo after salvo of bullets at the disordered wagons, in the manner of an army storming an objective with cavalry, breaking up the platoons of wagons as the Missouri emigrants, taken by surprise and without leadership, prepared to make individual stands.

"Them ain't Injuns!" yelled Castle, as they started down toward the battleground at top speed. "They're white men, Webb!"

"Yeah," answered Webb, hauling

his rifle from scabbard. "Renegades from the Mormon country. I been afraid we might meet up with 'em. They're ramrodded by a salty guerilla named Red Kelson—and they're after that herd o' cattle and our spare horses, Gid. They won't care how many folks they slaughter to get hold of that stock, neither!"

CHAPTER XXI

RENEGADE RAIDERS

SPLASHING at top speed across the shallow ford of the Whetstone, Monte Webb and Gideon Castle separated as they rode out onto the grassy meadow where the pitched battle was being enacted.

The wagon boss was as puzzled and overcome with surprise, as the majority of the emigrants were. But to Webb's frontier-bred viewpoint, the set-up was plain to read. The guerrillas, masses of whom were attacking each of the six groups of wagons in the caravan, were undoubtedly roaming outcasts from the Salt Lake country south of the Utah line.

Webb had heard, from other plainsmen and overland travelers, of the depredations of the criminal gangs who had been ousted from the white settlements of Brigham Young and his followers—riffraff from the California gold camps, the backwash of wanted owlhooters from the East, gunhawks and professional gamblers and half-breed cowpunchers from the Mexican border country. All these had been drawn to the Salt Lake country as if by a magnet, seeking to prey on the hard-working, devout Mormons and the wealth they possessed.

Expelled into the wilderness by the stanch "Saints" who were determined to build a new civilization for themselves in the desert of Utah,

these renegades, under a leader known as Red Kelson, had taken to preying on Oregon-bound wagon trains.

These facts were in Monte Webb's mind, as he slapped rifle to shoulder and started picking out targets among the hard-riding killers who were already stampeding the Missouri beef herd out toward the grassy hills south of the trail's route.

Over a hundred raiders were pitting themselves against vastly superior Missouri forces; but the renegades had the element of surprise in their favor.

Undoubtedly the guerrillas had come charging out of a nearby ravine where they had stationed themselves after Webb had scouted the trail for Indian sign earlier that day. Their first withering fire had emptied a score or more of wagon seats, as Webb could tell by the driverless wagons which were now milling about in circles, drawn by lumbering, panicked ox teams.

Into the thick of the dusty *mélée* Webb flung himself, emptying his Spencer and reloading with grim desperation. The wagoners had ceased trying to form themselves into a ring, to fight off the invaders. Now the elemental laws of self-preservation were in command of the situation, and Monte Webb knew that no shouted orders of his would be heard in the bedlam. It was kill or be killed.

Dust clouded the scene. Riderless horses flashed here and there through the confusion, indicating that the defensive fire of the beleaguered Missourians was beginning to take its toll of the desert raiders.

THEN, as quickly as the attack had come, the whiskered raiders withdrew to the southward, where a small army of outlaws had already

hazed the wagon train's livestock over the first ridge, heading for the broken country in the direction of Great Salt Lake.

Half-hearted cheers went up from the Missourians, as they poured a final volley of lead at the retreating renegades. But Monte Webb, dismounting in the midst of the confused tangle of wagons, knew that the caravaneers had scored no victory.

Emigrant guns had not driven away the whiskered gunmen. Webb knew that. The renegades had attacked the caravan with but one purpose in mind; to run off the rich booty represented by the sleek cattle with which the Missourians planned to stock their farms, when they reached Oregon.

With the stolen cattle would be a score or more of prime saddle horses and a scattering of mules. The slower oxen would be abandoned, probably, to die of thirst in the desert, unless the renegades' headquarters were near at hand.

A vagrant wind lifted the swirling dust raised by the departing raiders, and revealed a scene so awful in its aspect that Monte Webb felt nausea claw at him.

Dead and dying men and women lay about the ground, with the broken bodies of children who had been shot down while tagging alongside the wagons in their bare feet, later to be run down by renegade horses or crushed by the wheels of runaway wagons.

Luckily, the slow-footed oxen could not stampede with the covered wagons; most of the spans had already halted and were placidly grazing.

Remounting, Webb sought out the wagon belonging to Gideon Castle. To his intense relief, he saw the white faces of Mrs. Castle and June

peering through the puckered oval opening in the hood, smoking rifles in their hands.

"The renegades have gone!" shouted Webb, leaning from saddle to seize the old army bugle which Gideon Castle carried on his wagon seat. "All women out! Get fires lighted to boil water and attend to the wounded!"

The strident bugle blast seized the attention of the stunned Missourians, snapped them out of horrified trances to the reality of the catastrophe which had overtaken them. Gradually, the men and boys began gathering about the scout in the middle of the scattered wagons.

Peering down over the sea of tragic, haggard faces, Webb shouted:

"Get these wagons into a circle, men. I don't think the renegades will return, but we must be prepared to resist another attack in case they want to get rifles and ammunition and grub. Tell your womenfolk to attend to all wounded persons before worrying about the dead. I'm dependin' on everyone to keep their heads—"

From the outskirts of the crowd came the strident voice of Ross Flagg, who elbowed his way through the silent throng to glare up at the mounted scout.

"There," shouted the army man, shaking an accusing finger at the buckskin-clad figure above them, "is the man responsible for this massacre, friends and neighbors! As our trail scout, Monte Webb was responsible for clearing our trail for us, and for warning us if Indians or renegades were trying to ambush us! I—"

FLAGG broke off, as he stared up at the leveled bore of Webb's .44 six-gun.

"This is no time for personalities or who's to blame for what!" the scout said grimly. "The fact remains

SPARE TIME TRAINING that helps you SPEED UP PROSPERITY!

Do you want to speed up prosperity—insure your early and large participation in the new jobs, promotions and salary increases—get fullest benefits from business pick-up? You can do it. For months, individual competition will be tremendous. Employers—up against new problems, fighting for survival and profits—will be able to pick and choose. Naturally they will prefer trained men—men who have special ability to offer. If you wish this advantage, simply check the field of business in which you are interested. We will send full information about the opportunities in that field, tell how our complete success-building program helps you plan your future, trains you in your spare time, and works with you all through your career. Send the coupon NOW.

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A Correspondence Institution

Dept. 465-R Chicago

Please tell me—without cost or obligation—about your plan to help me insure and speed up my prosperity, in the business field I have checked.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Business Correspondence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Accountancy | <input type="checkbox"/> Expert Bookkeeping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Salesmanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Law: Degree of LL.B. | <input type="checkbox"/> Business English |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Law | <input type="checkbox"/> Effective Speaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. A. Coaching |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Foremanship | |

Name

Address

Town State

MAKE MORE MONEY

Taking Orders for The NIMROD Line

Earn more every day in the year representing old established firm with a complete line of fast selling necessities: Shirts of all kinds, Ties, Underwear, Hosiery, Raincoats, Sweaters, Pants, Belts, Breeches, Shoes, Ensembles, Sport Coats, Uniforms, Summer Suits, etc. Every item guaranteed. Experience unnecessary.

Write quick for **FREE SALES EQUIPMENT**
NIMROD COMPANY,
4922-BN Lincoln Ave., Chicago, Ill.



★ WORK FOR UNCLE SAM ★

\$1260 to \$2100 year to start. Men, women. Common education often sufficient. Write immediately for free 32-page book with list of positions and full particulars telling how to qualify for them.

Franklin Institute, Dept. R195, Rochester, N. Y.

TYPEWRITER 1/3 PRICE

STANDARD OFFICE MODELS
1/3 MFRS. ORIG. PRICE

Easiest Terms **60¢ A WEEK**

as Low as
All late models completely rebuilt like brand new. **FULLY GUARANTEED.**

No Money Down - 10 Day Trial

Free price-smashing catalog shows all makes in colors. **FREE COURSE IN TYPING INCLUDED.** See catalog before you buy. **SEND NOW!**

INTERNATIONAL TYPEWRITER EXCH.
Dept. 412 231 W. Monroe St., Chicago, Ill.



10¢
A
DAY

Classified Advertising

Photo Finishing—Developing

FREE—ONE ROLL DEVELOPED AND PRINTED FREE. Just to get acquainted, we will beautifully develop and print your first 6 to 16 exposure roll free plus 5x7 inch enlargement free, also sensational, new folding folio to frame your prints, all free with this ad. (Enclosing 10c for handling and mailing appreciated.) Dean Studios, Dept. 1024, Des Moines, Iowa.

8 ENLARGEMENTS AND FILM DEVELOPED. 116 size or smaller. 25c coin; enlarged prints 3c each; special offer: enclose advertisement and negative for hand-colored enlargement free with order 25c or more. Enlarge Photo, Box 791, Dept. 88, Boston, Mass.

ROLLS DEVELOPED—25c coin. Two 5x7 Double Weight Professional Enlargements, 8 Gloss Deckle Edge Prints. Club Photo Service, Dept. 17, LaCrosse, Wisconsin.

Patents Secured

INVENTORS—Don't delay. Protect your idea with a Patent. Secure "Patent Guide" and "Record of Invention" form—Free. Preliminary information furnished without obligation. Write Clarence A. O'Brien, Registered Patent Attorney, 1851 Adams Building, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—WE SUCCESSFULLY SELL inventions, patented and unpatented. Write us, if you have a practical useful idea for sale. Chartered Institute of American Inventors, Dept. 42, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—Reasonable terms. Book and advice free. L. F. Randolph, Dept. 512, Washington, D. C.

PATENT YOUR IDEA—Simple inventions often valuable. Two advisory books—free. Victor J. Evans & Co., 424-E Victor Building, Washington, D. C.

Detectives—Instructions

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. WORK HOME. TRAVEL. DETECTIVE particulars free. Experience unnecessary. Write GEORGE WAGONER, 2640-A Broadway, New York.

Correspondence Courses

CORRESPONDENCE courses and educational books, slightly used. Sold, Rented, Exchanged. All subjects. Satisfaction guaranteed. Cash paid for used courses. Complete details and bargain Catalog Free. Write Nelson Company, 500 Sherman, Dept. E-215, Chicago.

Old Gold Wanted

GOLD—\$25 OUNCE. Ship old gold teeth, crowns, jewelry, watches—receive cash by return mail. Satisfaction Guaranteed. Free information. Paramount Gold Refining Co., 1500-G Hennepin, Minneapolis, Minn.

Help Wanted—Instructions

NEW KIND OF MAN'S SHOE zips on and off. Manufacturer wants salesmen. Big pay every day. Complete shoe line and sales training sent free. Write Mason Shoe Mfg. Co., Dept. MC-29, Chippewa Falls, Wis.

SELL TO EVERY BUSINESS Absolute Necessities—over 2,000 items. Lowest prices. Beats competition. Commissions advanced. Experience unnecessary. Samples Free. Federal, 301-CL, South Desplaines, Chicago.

Magic Tricks, Novelties

MIND-READING via TELEPHONE! Astonishing entertainment mysteries. Never fails. Secret & Cards 25c. Papp, Box 432, Worcester, Mass.

Poems—Songwriters

SONG POEMS WANTED. Free examination. Send poems. McNeil, Master of Music, 510-SS So. Alexandria, Los Angeles, Calif.

that your cattle have been stolen, and are being run away into the hills. The men who stole them have killed many of your loved ones, and must be punished."

Webb saw Gideon Castle pushing his way through the crowd, and he was grateful for the wagon captain's arrival. There was every chance that Ross Flagg might have been able to fan the heat of vengeance in the hearts of the bereaved men about him, to the point where they might lose their heads and demand that their trail guide be lynched. But Gideon Castle, clear-headed and respected leader that he was, would be in a position to counterbalance Flagg's hate.

"Gid, I want you to select one hundred of your best men during the next hour," Webb continued, his voice giving no hint of the concern he felt. "I'm going to trail those renegades, and see where they bed down our stock for the night. It won't be far. When I come back here to the wagons, I want your men armed to the teeth, and as many of them as possible mounted. We've got a big job of vengeance on our hands, friends—as well as gettin' our cattle back."

An aisle spread in the crowd, as Webb spurred his sorrel toward the southward, holstering his .44 as he rode. Soon he had put the caravan behind him, and was following the hoof-trampled trail of the escaping renegades.

Turning in saddle before topping the first rise south of the Oregon Trail, Webb's face grew bleak. The renegades' pitched battle, devastating as it had been, had consumed less than five minutes of time, the gunmen keeping the wagon drivers busy while their henchmen drove off the cattle herd in the rear.

But in those catastrophic five minutes, Gideon Castle's train had been shattered and flung about the

terrain as if by a Kansas tornado. Webb was glad when the intervening hill shut from his ears the anguished cries of dying men and beasts, the wailing of bereaved folk, and the voice of Gideon Castle, shouting crisp orders to bring order out of the chaos.

Webb had no doubt but that many of the Missourians, at first thought, would share Ross Flagg's belief that he, Monte Webb, had been negligent in his duty as their trail scout; that he should have spotted the ambushed raiders in time to have warned the emigrant train.

Later, he might convince them that the outriders who flanked the long string of wagons had the duty of scouting the ravines and sparse-timbered hilltops for enemies lying in wait for the train. No doubt the corpses of the flank riders on the south side of the trail would be found where they had been bullet-dumped from saddle, shot from ambush before they knew that danger was imminent.

But the fact remained, now, that the renegades had made away with a rich booty in the herd of livestock on which the settlers depended to make their start in Oregon; the livestock must be recovered, even if the renegades scattered in the Utah malpais and were never punished. Unless the stock were recovered, this raid, coming on the heels of the loss of their gold, might well convince the Missourians that they should return home, here when Oregon was almost in sight beyond the western horizon.

FOLLOWING a curving boulder-strewn ridgetop to the south and west, Webb had ridden less than two miles from the scene of the massacre when he caught sight of the stolen cattle being hazed into the

Announcing the new

**Silver Star
Western Story Magazine
\$1500
Prize Competition**

CONDUCTED jointly by Dodd, Mead & Co. and Street & Smith for the best Western Novel-Serial of 1941.

The purpose of this competition is to give to new writers—and to those whose talent has not heretofore been sufficiently recognized—a unique opportunity to make a name for themselves in the Western story field. Dodd, Mead & Co., publishers of books, founded in 1839, and Street & Smith, publishers of magazines, founded in 1855, are among the oldest in their respective fields. The winning story in this prize contest, therefore, gives the public absolute assurance of the highest quality in Western writing.

The competition closes on July 1, 1941—and is open to anyone who has never had a book issued under the Silver Star imprint. Write today for full rules about the contest, and address your letters to WESTERN STORY Contest, Street & Smith, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. This is really a wonderful chance for any author of Western stories—so act now!

broken country beyond.

The cattle were almost surrounded by the renegades on horseback, and they were keeping the herd bunched so compactly that the trail drive was virtually an organized stampede, moving at high speed and scheduled to end only when the animals themselves were too winded and hoofsore to continue.

Webb was familiar with this section of the country, having spent his boyhood in Idaho's primitive, unsettled wild lands. He was almost certain, now, that the renegades would be grazing their stolen cattle in Shoshone Basin, a wild area ringed by cliffs and known to be an outlaw nest.

"They'll prob'ly bed down at the entrance of the Basin tonight, where the Whetstone cuts through the cliffs," Webb muttered, heading back toward the wagon train. "With a hundred men, we ought to be able to get most of those cattle back, and send a few of Kelson's badmen to boothill in the bargain. If—"

Webb's sorrel shied violently at that instant, jumping away from a clump of dwarf cedars to the scout's left. Before Webb could see what had alarmed Starface, a harsh voice lashed out of the cedars:

"Elevate, hombre! We got you under a three-way drop!"

Webb lifted his arms, mentally berating himself for having walked into a trap. Out from the cedars came three barrel-chested, bushy-whiskered renegades, leading horses, and each of them holding guns on the scout's midriff.

"Climb down and cool yore saddle, pardner!" jcered one of the trio, a towering giant of six feet seven,

whose cinnamon beard informed Webb that he might be facing Red Kelson in person.

"Take her easy, an' mebbeso you won't get hurt, son!" rasped the red-bearded giant. "We're wonderin' if you're connected with that bunch o' wagons we just jumped. If you ain't, you're safe."

Dismounting, Monte Webb stood helpless as the red-whiskered outlaw strode forward and jerked his .44 six-gun from holster. Glancing over his shoulder at his two shaggy-jawed henchmen who had moved up behind him, the outlaw said triumphantly:

"This is the trail scout who was leadin' them wagons, boys. With my own eyes, I seen this yahoo kill Gordon Anderson an' smash Jack Lafferty's arm, during the fight. An' this is the skunk who put a bullet through your brother's noggin before I give the order to withdraw, Polson."

The killer addressed as Polson stepped up to the red-whiskered man's side, his eyes slitted with hate as he regarded the taut-faced man in buckskins.

"I had you notched in my gun sights, back there on the trail," Polson snarled. "But you was ridin' too fast, an' I missed. But I ain't missin' now, by Satan!"

As he spoke, Polson whipped a Colt .45 from the basket-woven holster at his thigh, and thrust the muzzle into the trail scout's chest. In the same motion the renegade killer thumbed back the knurled hammer for the shot that would smash Monte Webb's heart asunder before he could lower his arms.

With their trail guide a doomed prisoner of lawless raiders, will the caravancers ever reach Oregon? Are Webb and Castle correct in their suspicions of Ross Flagg? Next week brings another smashing installment of WAGON WHEELS WEST!

THE ROUNDUP

Continued from page 6

of a sheepman drinking with two cowmen. Could be. A lion could sleep with a lamb, but far more likely the lamb is in the stomach of the lion when that occurs.

"Forty years west of Dodge City taught me that sheep and cattle interests always clash. In those years I never knew a cowman to drink with any man who was not his friend; I have never known a cowman to admit friendship for a sheepman or woollies.

"Born at Dodge City fifty-one years ago, I have been a cowhand, stage driver, freighter, ranch owner, soldier, and hobo. I have been in thirty States, mostly Western, and know the West in the rough as it was lived and as it is today—and I don't mean California."

In answer to your question, Mr. Hinman, the contest you mention is not still open—but another is under way. Dodd, Mead & Co. and Street & Smith feel that last year's competition was so successful in turning up Peter Dawson's *THE CRIMSON HORSESHOE*, they are jointly announcing another Silver Star-Western Story contest for the best Novel-Serial of 1941.

The purpose of the competition is to give to new writers and to those whose talents haven't heretofore been sufficiently recognized an opportunity to make a name for themselves in the Western story field. The winner of the competition will receive a prize of \$1,500, and the contest is open to anyone who has never had a book published under the Silver Star imprint. The contest closes July 1, 1941, and anyone desiring more specific information and a copy of the rules may obtain them by writing to Western Story Contest, Street & Smith, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Wear the
VITO BELT
for 10 days
at our expense!

Appear
SLIMMER AT ONCE!

DON'T let your friends poke fun at your "bay window"! The successful man of today appears trim-waisted, ready for action... streamlined!

If the Vito Belt does not make that paunchy belt line appear inches slimmer at once... it will cost you nothing!

Take care of that ugly paunch the safe way... with a Vito Belt. Excessive exercise may strain your heart... dieting and drugs may be dangerous.

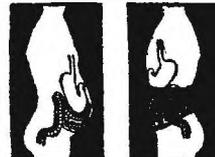
The Vito Belt is made of pure Para rubber, molded to give maximum support. Hundreds of tiny perforations allow air to penetrate. The special lace back permits you to adjust the belt to take care of any change in size.

Illustrated folder and details of 10-day FREE trial offer will be sent in plain envelope on request!

HAMILTON BELT COMPANY, 364 Hill Street, New Haven, Conn.



Waistline fat often stretches abdominal muscles, allowing stomach and intestines to fall forward and downward. The Vito Belt brings welcome support to strained and sagging internal organs and helps prevent constipation and fatigue.



AIRCRAFT WELDING ENGINEERING

DEFENSE INDUSTRIES offer Outstanding Opportunities to properly trained Commercial Welding Engineers (1 year), Welding Technicians (5 months), Aircraft Welders and Arc Welding Operators (3 months). Learn By Doing. Earn Part Expenses—Write for free 64-page Illustrated Book—Down of A Giant Industry. Mention course desired. MILWAUKEE SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING 856-441-N. BROADWAY 5. STATE. MILWAUKEE, WIS.



High School at Home

Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Equivalent to resident school work—prepares for entrance to college. Standard H. S. texts compiled. Diplomas awarded. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. Free Bulletin on request. American School, Dept. H-47, Drexel at 56th, Chicago



When the Itch of
ECZEMA
Drives You Mad
DO THIS...

Use Poslam, as thousands do, it's a concentrated ointment that starts to work right away, no long waiting for results. Apply soothing Poslam Ointment to ease the burning torments of eczema—the price is small—the relief is great! All druggists.

FREE: Generous sample—write name and address to: Poslam, Dept. B4, 254 W. 54th St., N. Y. C.

POSLAM A TESTED OINTMENT

**We Want YOU to Accept
This FIRST Volume
FREE!**

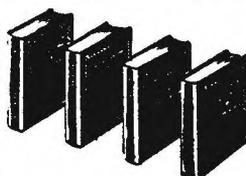
**CLAIM Your FIRST VOLUME By
Simply SENDING US your NAME**

Read this offer carefully. It is the opportunity of a lifetime to own the big set of the STANDARD AMERICAN ENCYCLOPEDIA virtually as a gift! And you do not have to buy these amazing books from a description or from a picture. We want you to actually see for yourself what a sensational value they represent. So—send us your name and we will forward FREE of charge the first volume as a gift to you. Only when you have fully examined it . . . only when you feel that this book can be of vital help to you in your work—in your home . . . only then, decide whether you want the remaining 19 volumes. And here's the most amazing part of this offer. While the present supply lasts, you can purchase the regular edition of this beautiful Encyclopedia for only 49c and the deluxe edition for as little as 69c each. (plus a few cents postage). No home—no office—no school should be without one of these remarkable Encyclopedias. As you thumb thru it, you will find page after page of fascinating, informative, essential facts that will help you and your children every single day of your life. No wonder they've been called "A college education in themselves."

**HERE ARE FACTS
ABOUT EVERYTHING
UNDER THE SUN**

A lifetime of interesting reading — beautifully bound and printed on fine paper. And now you may own this vast mine of information. Let us send you the first volume FREE, without any obligation on your part, and see for yourself what an amazing offer this is. Act today!

**AN AMAZING
GIFT BONUS
You Must Act at Once!**



**CHOICE OF THESE 4
GREAT CLASSICS
FREE!**

- Wuthering Heights
- Pride and Prejudice
- Green Mansions
- House of Seven Gables

With your first gift volume of the STANDARD AMERICAN ENCYCLOPEDIA, you will receive complete details of how you may obtain, for a limited time only, absolutely FREE, your choice of any of the 4 outstanding books illustrated. Don't delay! Write for your FREE first volume and get details of how you may own the University Classics FREE besides the famous STANDARD AMERICAN ENCYCLOPEDIA.

**A SENSATIONAL OFFER FOR
READERS OF THIS MAGAZINE**

20 VOLUMES

Copyright 1941
By the National
Committee for
Education

Full
Library
Size



**Superb Deluxe Edition
If You Want the Best!**

Your free book may be had in the beautiful, maroon, simulated leather, lifetime binding, printed on fine opaque paper from new type. Costs but a few cents more per volume but costs nothing extra to get your FREE book in this deluxe edition.

**Essential FOR YOUR HOME!
FOR OFFICE! FOR SCHOOL!**

- 4,500,000 WORDS
- 50,000 VITAL SUBJECTS
- 4,500 ILLUSTRATIONS
- 5776 PAGES
- 1940 REVISED EDITION
- 16 FULL COLOR PAGES AND MAPS

SPECIAL GIFT COUPON

Dept. M
National Committee for Education
147 W. 22nd Street, New York, N. Y.

Enclose 10c in coin and a 3c stamp to cover packing, mailing, etc.

Send me FREE the first volume of your Encyclopedia and hold the other 19 volumes for me, to be sent according to the terms of your offer. ONLY IF I WISH THEM SENT. With my first FREE book, I am to get full details of how I may receive FREE my University Classics gift bonus. It is understood, the special prices on the other 19 volumes of the Encyclopedia will be only 49c each for the regular and 69c for the deluxe (plus a few cents mailing charges).

NAME _____
STREET _____
CITY _____ STATE _____

Check Binding You Prefer REGULAR DELUXE

The mailing charge is the same for either edition.

HOW TO GET YOUR FREE BOOK!

Simply fill in the coupon below and mail it direct to the National Committee for Education, 147 West 22nd Street, New York City. Check whether you want the regular or deluxe (Life Time Binding) edition. Enclose 10c to cover the cost of packing and handling plus a 3c stamp for mailing. Your book will be sent to you immediately and upon your request, one or more volumes will be sent you each week until your set is completed!



WOULDN'T TAKE \$1,000 FOR COURSE

"The lessons are so simple, I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course."
*S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.



PLAYS ON RADIO

"I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio station. So thanks to your institution for such a wonderful course."
*W. H. S., Alabama.



FOUND ACCORDION EASY

"I've always wanted to play the piano accordion," writes "H. E. from Canada. "But thought I'd never learn it. Then I read about your lessons. I don't know how to express my satisfaction.

Music Lessons for less than 7¢ a day



Here's your chance to learn to play your favorite musical instrument—quickly and easily—in your own home.

YOU thought it was expensive to learn music? That it took lots of money to pay for a private teacher, sheet music and all the other essentials? That it required years of study?

Then here's grand news for you! You can learn to play your favorite musical instrument, any instrument, for less than SEVEN CENTS a day! That's ALL it costs. Not a penny extra for sheet music or anything else. And it doesn't take years, either.

Play a Tune in One Lesson

Actually, you start playing a familiar melody in your very FIRST lesson. Then you go on from one tune to another, until your friends are surprised to hear you play.

You learn to play by *playing*—just as you learned

the English language by speaking it. There is no lost time, no waste motion.

You learn by a remarkable short-cut method! A modern, simplified method that skips all the tedious, old-fashioned study and practice. A method that has literally swept the world, enrolling over 700,000 pupils. It's actually FUN to learn music this easy way.

Here's the Secret

"A picture is worth a thousand words," says the ancient Chinese

proverb. And that is the secret of this easy and fascinating way to learn music at home in spare time. Your lessons come to you in print and picture form. Large, clear illustrations show you every position, every move. And the accompanying text is like the voice of your teacher at your shoulder, explaining, coaching and encouraging you. You can't go wrong.

Send for Illustrated Booklet

See for yourself how easy it is to learn your favorite musical instrument this modern, short-cut way. And how inexpensive. Mail the coupon below, checking the instrument in which you are interested. Do it now. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 3594 Brunswick Bldg., New York City. Forty-second year. (Est. 1898)

Easy as A-B-C

Look at the notes above—they are F-A-C-E. Could anything be simpler? You are already learning to read music. And it's easy to play, too, for a remarkable invention, the "Note-Flinder," tells you just where each note is located on the keyboard.

*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by Professional Models.

U. S. School of Music, 3594 Brunswick Bldg., New York City

I am interested in learning the musical instrument checked. Please send me your illustrated booklet explaining how I can learn quickly at home, for less than 7¢ a day.

<input type="checkbox"/> Piano	<input type="checkbox"/> Mandolin	<input type="checkbox"/> Trombone	<input type="checkbox"/> Piano Accordion
<input type="checkbox"/> Violin	<input type="checkbox"/> Saxophone	<input type="checkbox"/> Banjo	<input type="checkbox"/> Plain Accordion
<input type="checkbox"/> Guitar	<input type="checkbox"/> Clarinet	<input type="checkbox"/> Ukulele	<input type="checkbox"/> Hawaiian Guitar
<input type="checkbox"/> Cello	<input type="checkbox"/> Trumpet	<input type="checkbox"/> Cornet	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Instrument

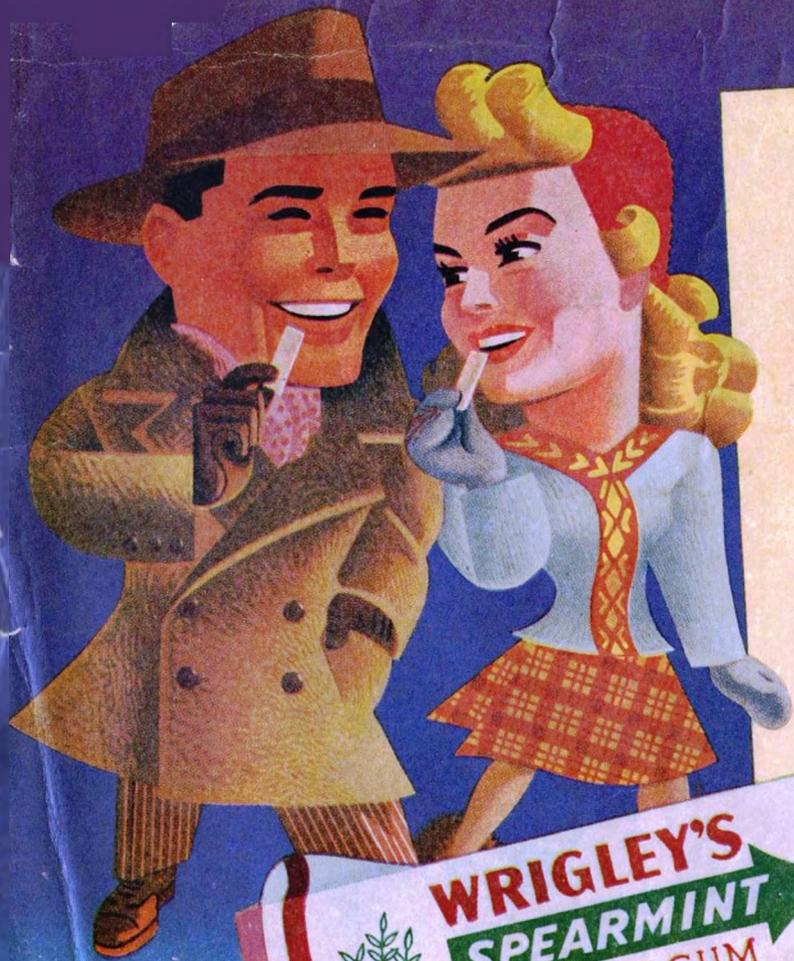
Have you instrument?.....

Name

Address

City..... State.....

Check here for Booklet "A" if under 16 years of age.



The lively, husky,
he-man flavor of Wrigley's
Spearmint Gum is fun
to chew.

And daily chewing
aids digestion, ..helps
brighten your teeth.

Buy some today.

The Flavor Lasts