Western Story Magazine

Every Week

Mar. 16, 1929

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Slashing at Shim with her quirt, she was off at a gallop—

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Let me tell you in my big free book how I can train you quickly for jobs leading to salaries of $60.00 to $200.00 a week. NOT BY CORRESPONDENCE NOT BY BOOKS. But, on real Electrical machinery in 90 DAYS you don't need advanced education or Electrical experience. EARN WHILE YOU LEARN. Free employment service for life after you graduate. AVIATION electrical course included free if you enroll now. Clip coupon TODAY and mail it to me for my BIG FREE Book. It tells you an amazing way to get into a big pay field

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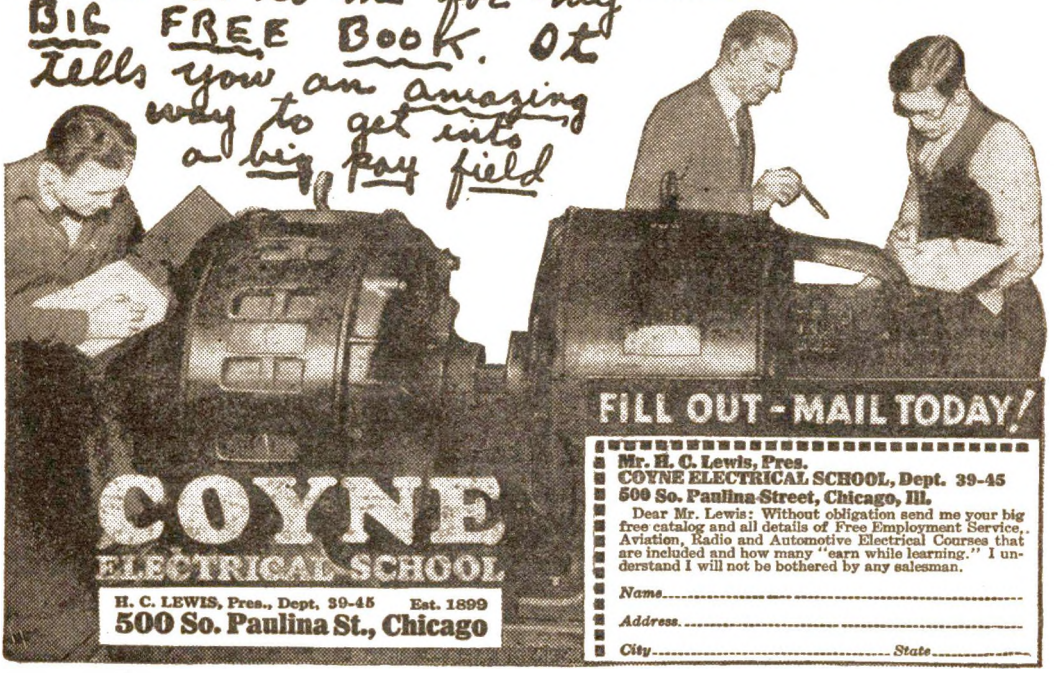

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MAGAZINE

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EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXXV Contents for March 16, 1929 No. 3

ONE NOVEL

TWO SERIALS

FIVE SHORT STORIES

MISCELLANEOUS

DEPARTMENTS

Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $7.50. Foreign, $8.50.

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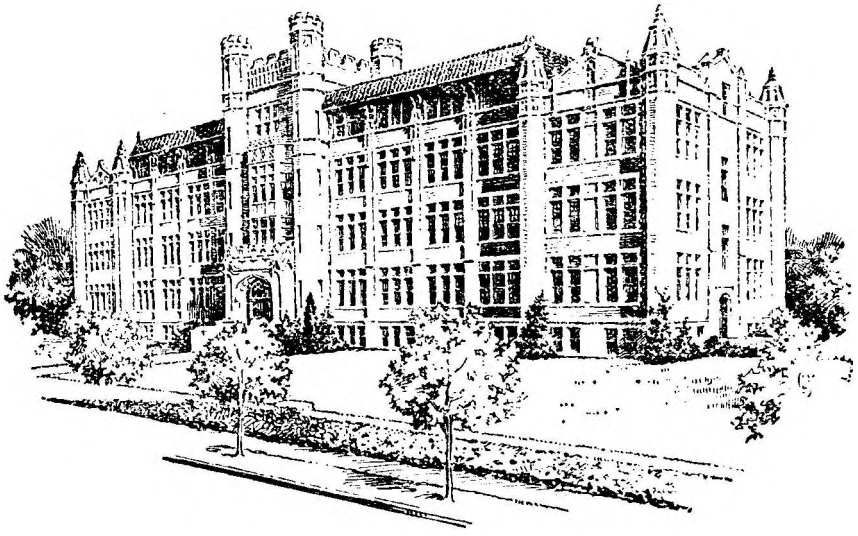

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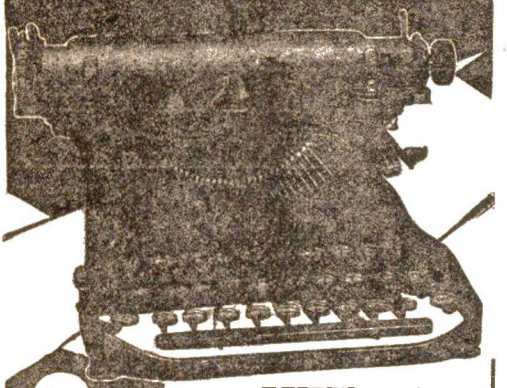

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MORE MONEY *for* YOU *—at once!*

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This offer is *time-tested*—it can without exaggeration go on record as a *Guarantee* Back of it stands a thoroughly responsible company — a recognized manufacturer in the *direct-to-wearer* field — a financially dominant leader. You can repose full confidence in this organization and the proposition it makes you.

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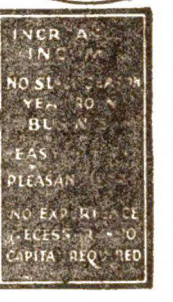

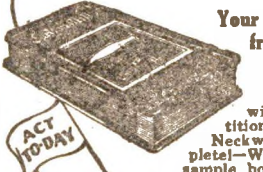

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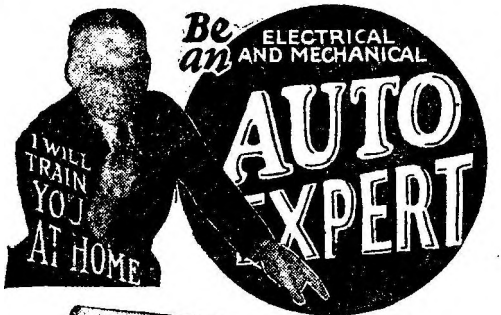

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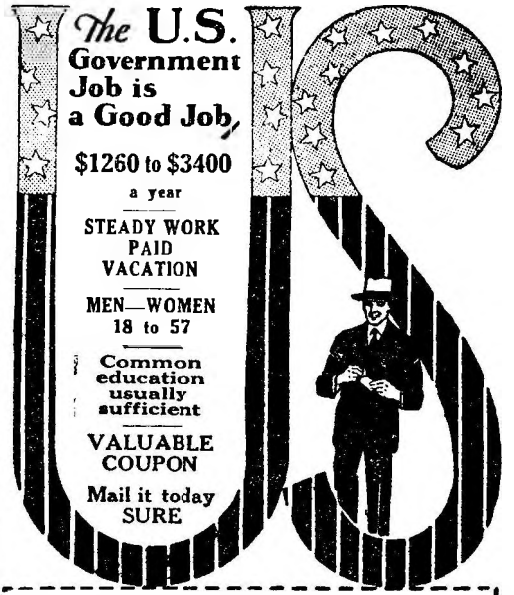

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Without cost or obligation, send me your free book "The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship." Also include a free copy of the new N. S. T. A. money-back bond that assures me a definite addition to my income within three months after completing training—or a complete refund of tuition fee.

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$1000 A WEEK

"Before taking the N. S. T. A. Course, I was making $200 a month, but could see no future. Last week my earnings amounted to over $1000." O. D. Oliver, Norman, Okla.

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Can It Be An Accident When Man After Man Raises His Pay—Each One Taking The Same Identical Steps? If You Are One Who Aspires to Earn REAL Money—If You Want To Get Out Of A Monotonous, Low-Pay Job, Find Out About This Tested Plan For Increasing Incomes. It Has Raised More Salaries Than All The "Pull" And Luck In The World!

Get a Copy of This Amazing Book Free

LET'S be practical. You want to make more money. . . . A few years ago the three men pictured above were in the same situation. They had the urge to increase their pay—but didn't know how to do it.

Take Mark Barichievich of San Francisco as a typical example. Not long ago he was working in a restaurant, struggling along on a salary that was actually as low as $8 a week! Naturally he was keenly dissatisfied—but like so many other men caught in blind-alley jobs, he could see no way out.

And then something happened! A certain book fell into his hands. Between its covers he discovered certain facts and secrets he had never dreamed of! Within a short time his pay jumped to $50 a week. And to-day he makes as high as $125!

Remarkable Salary Increase

A lucky accident? Not a bit of it! OTHER men who have increased their salaries after reading these vital facts are numbered in the thousands! For example, C. W. Birmingham of Ohio read it and his salary raised from $15 a week to $7,500 a year. . . . Wm. Shore of California made $3,000 his first 5 months . . . and C. V. Champion of Illinois became president of his company at over $10,000 a year!

Your Income Multiplied or You Pay Nothing

N. S. T. A. is now offering, to every man who wants to increase his income, an amazing Double Money-Back bond that assures you a definite stipulated addition to your income, within three months after your training is completed—or the course costs you nothing. This daring offer is possible only because of the success of thousands of members. Send coupon immediately for full details.

The Secret of Big Pay

How did they do it? What did the books show them? Just this:—Every one of these men realized that Salesmanship offers BIGGER rewards and delivers them QUICKER than any other line of work under the sun. This vital book "The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship" revealed to them the real TRUTH about the art of selling. It blasted dozens of old theories and told them exactly how the great sales records of nationally-known star salesmen have been achieved. And not only that, it outlined a simple plan that will enable almost any man to master scientific salesmanship without losing a day or dollar from his present position.

A Few Weeks—Then Bigger Pay

There was nothing "different" about these men when they started. Salesmanship is just like any other profession. It has certain fundamental rules and laws—that you can master just as easily as you learned the alphabet. And through the NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION METHOD—an exclusive feature of the N. S. T. A. system of SALESMANSHIP training—you can acquire the equivalent of actual experience while studying.

Free to Every Man

If we were asking several dollars a copy for "The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship" you might hesitate. But it is now FREE. So get your copy now. Learn the real facts about the selling profession, and about the tremendous demand for trained salesmen in every line, to fill city and traveling positions paying up to $5,000 and $10,000 a year. (Last year this association received calls for over 50,000 N. S. T. A. members from Wholesalers, Manufacturers and Jobbers.) A copy is yours for the asking, and your request entails no obligation. Simply fill out and mail the coupon above. Do it now!

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I Offer You $15 a Day

Make $15 a day selling this wonderful new household article that has taken the country by storm. It is CED-O-BAG, a moth-proof, damp-proof, dust-proof, germ-proof storage bag for clothes, blankets and furs. It is the greatest, fastest selling household article that has come on the market for years. Every housewife wants one, buys on sight.

CED-O-BAGS are made from rubberized fabric which has been chemically treated. They are patented. Nothing else like them. Instead of a small, easily torn paper bag or a clumsy, expensive cedar chest, a CED-O-BAG provides adequate space for two to four garments. And yet, with all of these distinctive advantages, CED-O-BAGS are priced for quick sale.

Ced-O-Bags Offer Big Profits

There is a chance for you to clean up a lot of money in your town at once just by taking orders for CED-O-BAGS. L. H. Green went out and made a clear profit of $12 in one afternoon. J. V. Davis took five orders in one evening and was $5 richer. Edith Phillips made $53 in one week's spare time (evenings). You can do as well or better.

No Experience Needed

You don't need experience or training. Every home in your town is a live prospect. All you have to do is show the housewife a CED-O-BAG and take her order. We deliver and collect. You get your profits at once, and move on to the next house and take another order. Everyone buys. George Jones took 22 orders in two days' spare time and had a clear profit of $22. Twenty-one agents report an average profit of $3 an hour.

How Much Money Do You Want?

Would you like to make an extra $100 or $200 a month, in your spare time? Would you like to gather a lump sum of $500 or $600 in a couple of months? If you would, here is your chance. Mail me the coupon and I will tell you all about this money-making proposition. I will show you how you can make $15 a day or more in this easy, pleasant, engaging work. I will show you the way to quick profits—big profits. Mail the coupon now.

C. E. Comer, The Comer Mfg. Co.
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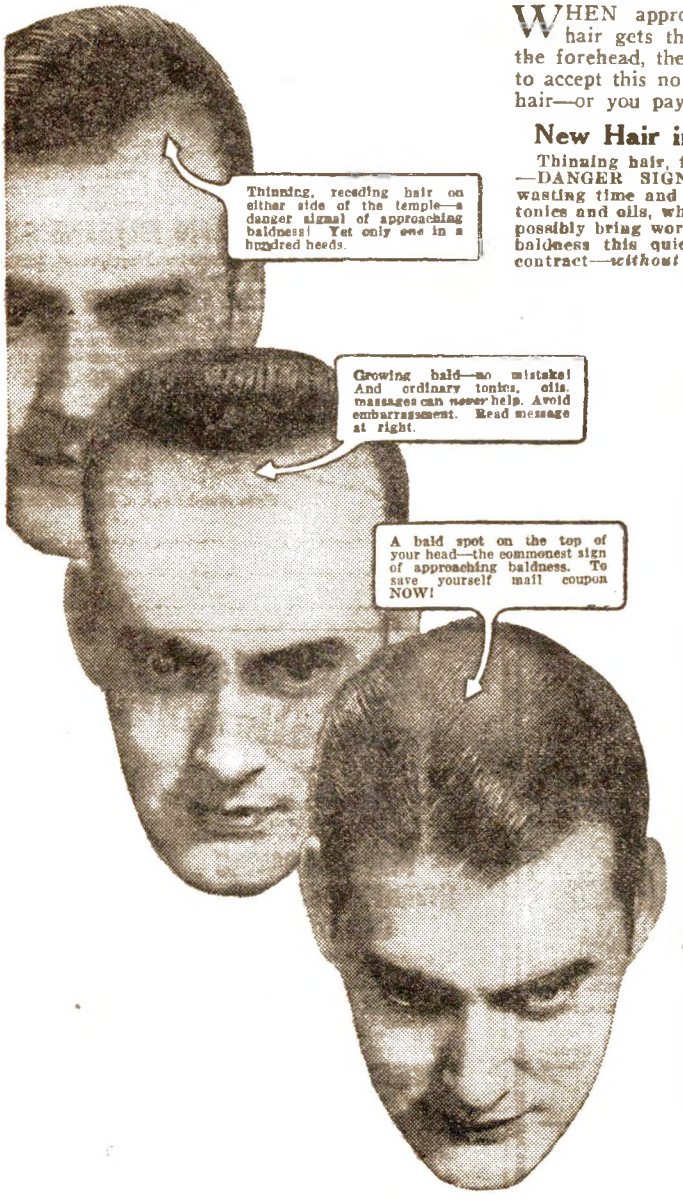
Where do YOU want to Grow New Hair?

Decide NOW! Let me cover that spot with new hair in 30 days, or I'll mail you a check—I'll be the LOSER, not you!



WHEN approaching baldness threatens—when hair gets thinner and thinner on the temples, the forehead, the top of your head—*that's* the time to accept this no risk offer. I positively grow new hair—or you pay NOTHING!

New Hair in 30 Days—Or No Cost!

Thinning hair, falling hair, dandruff, dry scaly scalp —DANGER SIGNALS ALL! Stop delaying. Stop wasting time and money on ordinary salves, massages, tonics and oils, which you *know from experience* cannot possibly bring worth-while results! Save yourself from baldness this quick, easy way—through my iron-clad contract—*without risk!* For I GUARANTEE to end dandruff—stop falling hair—grow new healthy hair in 30 days—or *I don't want a penny of your money!*

Why does baldness begin to appear? Why do ordinary tonics fail to help? In most cases of baldness the hair roots are dormant—*sleeping* through lack of nourishment. And tonics fail to help simply because they treat only the *surface* skin. To make a tree grow you don't rub "growing fluid" on the bark. You get to the roots. That's the simple secret of my scientific treatment. It goes *beneath* the surface —nourishes dormant roots directly —stimulates them to new activity— encourages quick and healthy growth of new, vigorous hair.

At the Merke Institute, 5th Avenue, New York, many people have paid as high as $100 for results secured. Now you can secure equally beneficial results at home for only a few cents a day—AT MY RISK. You *grow* new hair where you *need* new hair—or I pay, not you!

Coupon Brings FREE BOOK Explaining Treatment Fully!

Some cases of baldness are hopeless. I admit it. But so many thousands have benefited through my remarkable treatment that the facts are certainly worth knowing. Mail coupon for vitally interesting FREE booklet, giving the complete story—and, in addition, telling all about my iron-clad contract, which enables you to take the treatment without a penny's risk. No obligation. Sign and mail the coupon NOW! Allied Merke Institutes, Inc., Dept. 423, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

Allied Merke Institutes, Inc.,
Dept. 423, 512 Fifth Ave., New York City.

Please send me—without cost or obligation—in plain wrapper, a copy of your book, "The New Way to Grow Hair," describing the Merke System.

Name.....
(State whether Mr., Mrs. or Miss)

Address.....

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

(My age is.....)

I'll Pay Your Bills

and give you a steady income for the rest of your life if you will take care of my business in your locality. No experience needed. Pleasant easy work can be handled in spare or full time.

No Investment Needed

I furnish all capital—I set you up in business, advertise you, and do everything to make you my successful and respected partner in your locality.
Partner may be either man or woman.

All I ask is that you have ambition and can devote a few hours each day to distributing my famous products to friends and a list of established customers. High grade food products, teas, coffees, spices, extracts, things people must have to live.

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As my partner I furnish your groceries at wholesale. Big FREE supply contains over 32 full size packages of highest quality products. Quality backed by $25,000.00 bond.

Iron-Clad Guarantee to YOU of $15 a DAY Steady Income

I don't want you to take any chances. I guarantee your income. Send coupon at once for my signed guarantee of $100.00 a week for full time or $3.50 per hour for spare time work. I go 50-50 with my partners and give valuable premiums.

I Furnish You Chrysler Coach

This is part of my FREE outfit to you, Chrysler closed car to use in our business—it is yours to keep—no contest.

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Health-O Quality Products Co.

Dept. 1093-CC Health-O Bldg. ,

CINCINNATI, OHIO.

C. 1929 by C. W. V.D. M.

Easy for you to make big money
I look out for welfare of my partners

$42.13 in Six Hours

Jack Foster reports $42.13 in six hours; Ruth Haufman with no previous experience made $101.25 her first week. A. Pelletier earned $117.50 the first five days. Hundreds of other partners doing as well.

SEND COUPON AT ONCE for APPLICATION

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Health-O Bldg., Cincinnati, O.

Without obligation on my part, send at once, application for territory and details of partnership offer, free food products.

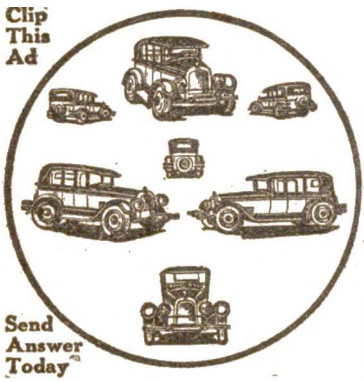
Name .....

Address .....

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

Win Nash Sedan

Or $2,750.00 in Cash



Someone who answers this ad will receive, absolutely free, a fully equipped 7-Passenger, Advanced Six Nash Sedan, or its full value in cash ($2,000.00). We are also giving away a Dodge Sedan, a Brunswick Phonograph and many other valuable prizes—besides Hundreds of Dollars in Cash. This offer is open to anyone living in the U. S. A. outside of Chicago.

Solve This Puzzle

There are 7 cars in the circle. By drawing 3 straight lines you can put each one in a space by itself. When you do this send me your answer right away.

$750.00 Extra for Promptness

In addition to the many valuable prizes and Hundreds of Dollars in Cash, we are also giving a Special Prize of $750.00 in Cash for Promptness. First prize winner will receive $2,750.00 in cash, or the Nash Sedan and $750.00 in cash. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be awarded each one tying. Solve the puzzle right away and send me your answer together with your name and address plainly written. $4,500.00 in prizes—EVERYBODY REWARDED.

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"What? Learn Music by Mail?" *they laughed*

"Yes," I cried, "and I'll bet money I can do it!"

ONE day after lunch the office crowd was in the recreation-room, smoking and talking, while I thumbed through a magazine.

"Why so quiet, Joe," some one called to me. "Just reading an ad," I replied, "about a new way to learn music by mail. Says here any one can learn to play in a few months at home, without a teacher. Sounds easy."

"Ha, ha," laughed Fred Lawrence. "do you suppose they would say it was hard?"

"Perhaps not," I came back, a bit peeved, "but it sounds so reasonable I thought I'd write them for their booklet."

Well, maybe I didn't get a razzing then! Fred Lawrence sneered: "The poor fellow really believes he can learn music by mail!"

"Yes, and I'll bet money I can do it!" I cried. But the crowd only laughed harder than ever.

During the few months that followed, Fred Lawrence never missed a chance to give me a sly dig about my bet. And the boys always got a good laugh, too. But I never said a word. I was waiting patiently for a chance to get the last laugh myself.

My Chance Arrives

Then came the office outing at Pine Grove. After lunch it rained, and we had to sit around inside. Suddenly some one spied a piano in the corner. Fred Lawrence saw a fine chance to have some fun at my expense.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, "our friend Joe, the music-master, has consented to give us a recital."

That gave the boys a good laugh. Some of them got on either side of me and with mock dignity started to escort me to the piano.

"Play 'The Varsity Drag,'" shouted Fred, thinking to embarrass me further. I heard a girl say, "Oh, let the poor fellow alone; can't you see he's mortified to death?"

The Last Laugh

I smiled to myself. This was certainly a wonderful setting for my little surprise party. Assuming a scared look, I began fingering the keys, and then . . . with a wonderful feeling of cool confidence . . . I broke right into the very selection Fred asked for. There was a sudden hush in the room as I made that old piano talk. But in a few minutes a fellow jumped to his feet and shouted, "Believe me, the boy is there! Let's dance!"

Tables and chairs were pushed aside, and soon the whole crowd was having a whale of a time. I played one peppy selection after another until I finished with "Crazy Rhythm" and the crowd stopped dancing and singing to applaud me. As I turned around to thank them, there was Fred holding a tenspot right under my nose.

"Folks," he said, "I want to apologize to Joe. I bet him he couldn't learn to play by mail, and believe me, he sure deserves to win the money!"

"Learn to play by mail!" exclaimed a dozen people. "That sounds impossible! Tell us how you did it!"

I was only too glad to tell them how I'd always wanted to play but couldn't afford a teacher, and couldn't think of spending years in practice. I described how I had read the U. S. School of Music ad, and how Fred bet me I couldn't learn to play by mail.

"Folks," I continued, "it was the biggest surprise of my life when I got the first lesson. It was fun right from the start, everything as simple as A-B-C. There were no scales or tiresome exercises. And all it required was part of my spare time. In a short time I was playing jazz, classical pieces, and in fact, anything I wanted. Believe me, that certainly was a profitable bet I made with Fred."

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Sagebrushed!

By Kenneth Perkins

Author of "Buried Waters," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A GIRL AND A GRIZZLY.

WHEN a steer was going to bolt, Dad Burnett's daughter could always tell. The critter would roll its eyes, glance away toward the timber, straighten its tail, then a moment later curve off at a gallop.

Hannah Burnett would wheel her little cow horse, dig her heels into its flanks, and untrack in hot pursuit. A little later she would be back with the recreant.

But on one occasion the trick was not so simple. A mild old mossy-horn that had never once attracted any attention succumbed to an inexplicable bovine whim to explore a heavily timbered draw. Six other steers came to the momentous decision that it would be wiser to follow that one mossy-horn than the other thousand silly critters plunging down the canyon.

In the dust the girl did not see what had happened until the drags were half a mile up the draw, stumbling out of the brush toward a divide.

The cowgirl gave chase, heading up through the piñons at a run, then coming into the open at the draw's upper end. When she caught sight of the fugitive steers she had the impression that the leader must have enjoyed quite recently a banquet of loco weed. Its tail stiffened out, its nostrils snorted frantically, and its six-foot spread of horns lowered, tossed upward, swept the air. The terror-stricken steer seemed to be brandishing its weapons against an imaginary, or at least an invisible, enemy.

Hannah Burnett discovered the cause of the trouble a moment later.

Her wise little cow horse shied, threw up its head, and sniffed the air in frightened snorts. Try as she would to urge the mount across the open stretch of rock, she could not get out of the timber. The steer was heading toward her, horns lowered, eyes red and bulging. Then, just before reaching the girl, it wheeled, headed for the divide, attained the rim of a cliff, wheeled again, and sought vainly for a pass up the walls of the little ravine.

It was obvious that the frantic animal wanted to keep on bolting and that it could find no stretch of open ground.

After this exhibition of panic it plunged off in a series of straightaway bucks along the edge of the cliff. It skirted the rim of cliffs, which was in reality the divide, for a good half mile, and then the girl found out what it was all about.

Her horse had shied, and the steer had gone locoed from the same cause. A huge, bulky form crashed out of the brush and fell like the jet-black shadow of a boulder across the bolting steer. There was a momentary glimpse of tossed horns, a humped back, cloven hoofs flying in the air, and a hunched mass of black fur, of snow-white teeth, of tiny, crimson eyes.

The end of this drama had come speedily. The steer plunged to earth with its haunches gashed open, then rolled over the edge of the cliff and disappeared.

At the same moment the girl saw a giant grizzly standing upright like a man, waltzing about and facing her, its mouth crimson stained.

The cow pony, needless to say, reared just as the girl drew her six-gun. With a frantic swing, the bronc whirled, "turning on a dime" like a trained performer. Its movement was so sudden that it hurled the rider against the overhanging bank. The girl was partly unseated, thrown to the other side, and as her pony lost its footing and curved back with a jerk to stay on the trail, she was thrown.

She rolled down the steep embankment in a shower of sand and stones, then hurtled over a ledge with arms outstretched, into a clump of mesquite far below. Nor did she stop there. She kept rolling. The bank steepened, then shelved off easily to a wash-out of sand.

The girl looked up, her eyes swimming, her head throbbing with pain. Where was her gun? Up there in that mesquite brush perhaps. But she could not climb for it. A twelve-foot bank of smooth granite, as perpendicular as a wall, prohibited that move. And, in the second place, the grizzly was swinging down in easy, slouching strides. It was heading for that very clump itself, as if it wanted to get there first.

No, the grizzly did not want the gun. It wanted that most detested of all its enemies—a human being.

The girl did not know what bones in her body had been broken in that fall, nor could she wait to find out. She dragged herself to her feet. And then she ran. And while she ran she felt no pain, despite her fall. She ran with the speed of a deer toward the opposite

wall of the arroyo into which she had fallen.

The grizzly came slouching along after her. It looked as if it were taking its time, swinging down over the steep bank, shouldering its way through the chaparral, hurdling easily over big boulders. But easy as its gait was, it was going about twice as fast as she, who was racing frantically at top speed.

Hannah reached the canyon wall, scrambled up a rocky slope, and found herself smack up against another one of those perpendicular banks. But this time, unfortunately, it was a bank of adobe. By leaping up she was barely able to grasp the ledge, hang there by her arms, and then chin herself. Then the loose adobe to which she was clinging gave way and she fell back.

There was the giant bear, not twenty yards away, bowling along toward her!

She picked up a large rock, hurled it, caught the beast square on its massive chest. It let out a snarl of rage which was like the snore of a man, or, rather, the snore of fifty men. It made the air of that little gulch vibrate.

Again the girl leaped for the rim of the bank, and kicked wildly in an attempt to shin and drag herself to the brim.

This time she made it.

But when she got up there, with the old black giant directly below her, she did not know just how much she had gained. She found herself on a narrow ledge of adobe and loose rocks, with no possibility of climbing any farther. And, worst of all, she saw underneath an overhanging strata of quartz two little bear cubs! Now she knew what she was up against. She was cornered by a grizzly that was fighting for its young.

She uttered a terrified scream. It had not occurred to her to scream before. She was not the screaming kind. Furthermore, she had been too busy. And, besides, this scream was not going to help much—unless it scared the giant grizzly. The herd and her father's crew of cowmen were on the other side of the divide, and the rumbling of the cattle along the trail would have drowned out any piteous little human call from her direction.

But now she screamed. The grizzly did not seem to mind the sound in the slightest. It might have been deaf. It rose up on its hind feet, one of its forepaws hanging listlessly in front of its chest, in the peculiarly innocuous way that bears have; and the other reaching up to the ledge and raking as if it were reaching into a bees' hive for honey. It used the massive, awkward-looking leg with the prehensile cleverness of a man.

But flattening herself against the bank behind her, Hannah was just able to stay out of reach. The bear gave another of those nose-tearing snores of rage, and then stuck its other paw up. If she could shinny up that rock the grizzly could step up easily with one swing!

Hannah, however, had picked up the largest rock she could find—a good sharp lump of jagged quartz, which she crashed down with all her might upon the grizzly's nose.

The beast fell back—roaring with pain. A combination of grunts and sniffs and snores made the valley echo as the shaggy old giant rolled on the ground and pawed madly at its injured nose.

Then it looked up, its eyes two tiny coals of fire. It was a stubborn, slow-thinking old beast, who seemed to be very much set in its ways. And its diminutive brain harbored but one intent—to "get" that detestable thing up there on the ledge. The smell of a steer's blood, it is said, will infuriate a grizzly. And this old monarch of the Coyotero Range could smell steer's blood now, for it was smeared all over its nose. Besides this there were those two

precious cubs huddled far back there where the mother could not see them.

The grizzly came waddling along once more, stood up at its full height, cuffed madly at the empty space just above that ledge of rock, and was about to hurdle up to finish the job when another rock caught it smack between the eyes.

It rolled back. Then, once again, with a dogged persistence, it made another charge, and again fell back with a sharp crack on the tenderest spot of its anatomy—the nose.

This time the grizzly sat up on its haunches—a massive black shadow, sniffling, grunting ferociously, licking its nose, pawing at it as if it had been stung by hornets. What sort of an enemy was this frail, slim little thing up there on the rock ledge? It had a kick that was much more telling than the kick of a wild horse fighting for its foal, or the horn of a cow defending its calf.

The old grizzly was dazed, flabbergasted. For a few moments it sat there watching out of murderous and blazing little eyes. And then it began to prowl up and down in the stream bed, keeping its pointed head directed toward the girl as it passed her, swung around, and passed her again. It was like an owl's head, always facing a designated spot.

After a little of this pacing, like a sentry, back and forth, the giant climbed to a big boulder and sat there, watching, waiting.

The sun was setting. Long purple shadows filled the narrow arroyo. Hannah, having come to the conclusion that she was being besieged, began to call out, hallooing at the top of her lungs. But her father's herd was rolling along, a good mile away now, and there was not a cowhand in the whole outfit who could have detected that small, distant sound coming across the divide.

The only being in that vast, silent domain that seemed to be at all affected by her frantic screams was the grizzly itself. It tumbled down awkwardly from its perch and started waddling back and forth below her again—at a respectful distance—in the stream bed. How long it was going to play the part of sentry the girl did not know, but she had a fairly reasonable conviction that when darkness came it would change its tactics.

Hannah Bennet stood up, a large rock in each hand, waiting for the attack, wondering if she could aim at that sensitive nose when it was dark.

And the grizzly waited—probably wondering the same thing.

CHAPTER II.

"FOLLOW ME!"

THE owner, Dad Burnett, had brought his big beef herd successfully to the end of its long trail. A few miles to the west, where these little sierras terminated abruptly on a desert plain, there was a shipping station called Forlorn Camp. On the railroad maps and time tables it had something of the dignity of a town. But it was a town with but a single house. Aside from that one shack, with its long, galvanized-iron roof, there was nothing in sight except a track siding, a water tower, and a few acres of corrals and loading pens.

The herders got their thousand head of cattle into these pens without any trouble beyond the ordinary and inevitable confusion of clattering horns and hoofs, and churned-up dust clouds, concomitants of punching steers into track-side pens.

And it was not until a good part of the herd, straggling back for a mile or two, had been shoved down out of the pass, that old Dad Burnett began looking for his daughter.

The bow-legged, grizzled little cowman had been too busy during the first part of the ceremony to notice that his daughter had not yet arrived. The immense dust cloud made a red haze

against the low sun, and it was impossible to distinguish the riders as they came down on the flanks of that long march of cattle. Finally, as the old rancher saw that his men were going about their work in an orderly, systematic way, he thought of his daughter.

"Where's Hannah?" he asked of the first rider he met.

"Farther back, I reckon, chief." The chief looked up the pass where the cattle were still being shoved down, closing up the spaces at which they had been strung out during the march. "She was ridin' at swing the last time I seen her."

Old Burnett swore. Since she was a child in pig-tails, he had always indulged his daughter in her desire to ride herd with the cowboys. It was merely a pastime for her, old Burnett reflected. It was not work, but play. But on this occasion the herd was so large and the success of their undertaking in shoving the stuff across the mountains to the shipping station meant so much, that the girl had entered into the work with the vim and enthusiasm of the oldest cowhand. Her father's whole fortune was invested in these beeves. She had been riding all day, keeping the cows properly spaced, chasing after a bolting steer, punching up the drags. "A tarnal nuisance, that little girl!" Dad Burnett muttered. "I told her to stay up at point where I could keep an eye on her. The spring wagon is where a woman belongs."

"She'll be showin' up directly, chief," some one said.

But the last lagging bunches of drags were being shoved down through the pass, and although the dust cloud was still thick, and the setting sun was veiled in heavy curtains of alkaline mist, Dad Burnett was pretty sure that his daughter was not there.

He made a rapid tour around the whole mass of the herd which the cowboys were keeping bunched about the loading pens. And he asked each man the same questions. Where was Hannah? Where had she been riding when last seen? Why hadn't these fool waddies kept their eyes open?

Finally one of the drag riders threw some light on the subject. But it was a very unpleasant light.

"I seen her chasin' up into a draw after a parcel of drags, chief," he explained. "That was three-four-five miles back yonder."

"You didn't see her come back?"

"Not exactly. I thought she'd come back. I rode up into a draw on the opposite side of the canyon and punched back a few critters. Took me a long time. When I joined the herd again I figured plain enough the little girl was with you-all. Farther up along toward the point, see, chief? Who wouldn't've figured that a way? I couldn't make out every rider. Figured the girl was up there with you-all. Natural way of figurin'."

"Ten thousand crawlin' tombstones!" the owner gasped. And his exclamation was echoed in various lingoes and several shades of profanity. "She's been throwed somewheres—that's what!"

"Throwed is right!" some one shouted. "Look yonder! There comes her little paint, a-draggin' his reins!"

A volley of exclamations, gasps, shouts, went up from the whole gang. But the father could say nothing. The relief of vocal utterance was not granted to him. He sat there in his saddle, his eyes drained of color, his bewhiskered jaw gaping, his face, even in that sunset light, a dead gray.

"We got to put up a posse and hunt, chief, soon as the cows are all corralled!" It was the foreman, Jud Shim, who proffered this advice.

Jud Shim was a burly, black-eyed man, a splendid cowman who knew the business from branding to canning.

But Dad Burnett now turned to his foreman as if to rend him to pieces. He consigned the cows to a place hotter

than the Coyotero Desert, then cried: "You stay here, Shim. You won't be no use huntin'. You're worryin' about the herd. Well, I ain't! The rest of you cowprods follow me. We'll search every gully and draw. Comb the mesquite. Bring lanterns. The girl's lyin' up in them mountains somewhere, helpless and waitin'!"

"Leavin' me to handle a thousand steers, chief!" Foreman Shim exclaimed, "It'll take twenty men."

But Dad Burnett and the whole crew were galloping off up the canyon.

Their expedition was a futile one. The drama up there in that gully between a girl and a grizzly bear had come to an end long before the Bar-B-7 herders came within a mile of the scene.

The bear did not wait for darkness —which was the strategy the girl most feared. Instead, after watching its prey for some minutes, and sniffling and grunting as if it were brooding over the stinging blows she had delivered to it, the grizzly went prowling off down the stream bed.

Hannah thought that the beast had decided to forsake the fight until she saw it scampering up the side of the gulch toward the ledge upon which she was standing. At that point the ledge was higher, but the banks were not so steep. The grizzly reached the ledge and came along, a little more cautiously this time, but obviously with a more definite resolution.

There was the girl armed with another rock, standing on the narrow ledge, while the bear came galloping toward her, scuffing back the sand and stones. She hurled her rock, but it only hit the grizzly a glancing blow on the back. The enemy ripped off another snarling roar, and stood on its hind legs, towering a good six feet of giant sinew and shaggy hair. One forepaw hung, the very picture of uselessness, while the other was raised ready to box.

The girl caught one glimpse of the glazing little points of light which were its eyes, and the grunting, reddened mouth. She screamed as if with a last desperate prayer that her father and his cowboys would hear her.

But her father and his men who were searching for here were still miles away. Scattered through the brush-filled draws, they were hallooing intermittently, reining in, listening. She did not hear them. Nor could they hear her.

And now, as the giant grizzly towered above her—almost within arm's reach—she jumped.

She landed in a heap in the stream bed below, confidently expecting the bear's full weight to come tumbling down on her back.

It came down. She saw a huge splotch of shadow fall across the sand as she dragged herself to her hands and knees. At the same moment she was aware of the sharp crack of a rifle.

As the bear fell, the mass of fur and bones and iron sinews went rolling along, knocking her aside like a ninepin. And then it stumbled in the stream bed, lifted itself up, and looked back, standing on three legs. One of its paws was hanging wounded. It gave a strange whimper, partly of pain, partly of astonishment, and partly, no doubt, a call to those two little cubs up there on the rock ledge who were now free to come out from the crevice. It was as if the mother bear said to her young: "Come on and follow me, now that you have the chance. I'm not going to fool with the human any longer. Always ringing in a cold deck—these humans. Let this be a lesson to you!"

Thus, followed by her two scampering cubs, the giant grizzly limped off at a good fast slouch into the thick timber.

Hannah Burnett was not the screaming kind. Nor was she the fainting kind. But she must have fainted then. For when she began groping desperately in her mind for what had happened, she found herself enveloped in

two brawny arms and staring into a dilated, red sun. In her daze she had the fear that those arms were about to squeeze out what breath and life there was left in her. It was a grizzly's way.

But the arms, although they were like steel bands, seemed to be inexplicably gentle.

She looked up, and the dark silhouette of a man began to take color and form against the light. The face she saw was a grim, rangy-looking face, with wolf-like eyes, raw-boned cheeks, unshaven chin, a fierce scowl.

But to Hannah Burnett it was the face of an angel.

CHAPTER III.

A MAN'S MAN.

BEFORE Dad Burnett had ridden twenty minutes from the shipping station the search was over.

The father, riding with one of his older cowmen, drew rein, dropping from a fast gallop to a walk. The two old cattlemen stared up the canyon at a gaunt, unkempt-looking hombre leading a black horse. On the black horse was the slim, forlorn figure of Hannah Burnett.

The father waved his sombrero in the air and hallooed, whooping with joy. His men came galloping out into the main canyon from the side draws, and they too set up a cheering and yipping.

But the old cowman riding at Burnett's side did not cheer. He was staring from under his bushy white eyebrows, squinting fiercely against the red light of the sunset.

"Well, I'll be caterwopously darned!" he cried. "I can't understand it!"

"Can't understand what?" Dad Burnett laughed as they rode on to meet the couple. "The little girl was throwed —that's all. And that there stranger is bringin' her back."

"But look at the stranger, chief—the stranger! Take a look at him!"

"I see him! A man's man! Rangy-lookin' hombre. And by the way he's holdin' her hand and she's smilin' at him, seems like they're pretty good friends!"

"Good friends!" the old cowman exclaimed. "Then listen to this, chief: That there desperado is 'Butch' Felton, or I'm a liar! And what I mean—Butch Felton, the outlaw!"

Dad Burnett curbed in his horse and glanced over to his old *segundo*. "What-all are you handin' me, Rufe?"

"The unvarnished truth. It's the killer which every sheriff in Nevada and Arizony is gunnin' for."

They were within fifty yards of the couple now. Dad Burnett was in a hurry to take his daughter in his arms. And he was doubly anxious to do so now. Just how she had fallen into the hands of this desperado he did not know. And just why the fellow was bringing her back—torn and scratched, was a mystery. All he knew was that this whole meeting was going to be, as they say, a "hair-line play."

He whispered quickly to the old herder: "Tell the other boys to surround him. No shootin'. No showdown. We'll wait till I find out just what sort of a game this hombre's rollin'. And if he's a killer like you say—then we'll nab him quiet and gentlelike."

The herder rode off, giving the order to the rest of the men as they came down out of the draws. Dad Burnett meanwhile walked his horse cautiously toward the stranger and the girl.

"What in tarnation's happened to you, child!" he exclaimed when he saw her scratched face and torn clothes. "You look kind of raveled and frayed out."

"Tumbled down a cliff, dad, that's part of it," Hannah answered, sliding from her saddle and running to her father. The latter dismounted and took her in his arms. "And this gentleman," she continued, "brought me home."

The father looked up at the rangy young hombre. "We're thankin' you for that, stranger. My name's Burnett, Benijah Burnett, owner of the outfit down yonder."

He did not offer his hand. He yanked nervously at his mustache and waited for the stranger to return the compliment by revealing his own identity.

"My name's Felton," he said. "Butch Felton."

Dad Burnett stared. He could not quite understand what the fellow was about—coming into the middle of that circle of law-abiding men.

There was a momentary duel of glances between the tall, unkempt youth and the little cattleman. They were like a gaunt wolf and a terrier sizing each other up.

Providentially the girl spoke before anything happened.

"A grizzly got after me, dad. Killed one of our steers. I lost my gun when I was thrown. The grizzly had me easy. You didn't hear me scream?"

"You mean you was caught with a grizzly—and no gun!" the father gasped.

"Wouldn't have been much of a fight, dad, except"—she looked up with adoring eyes at the man who had saved her—"except that Mr. Felton jumped some lead into it at long range. Didn't kill it. It was a mother bear. But," she added, with another admiring glance, "he could have killed it easy enough if he'd been of a mind to."

A very definite and abrupt change came over the old stockman. His snapping bright eyes softened; a smile came to the grim, wrinkled mouth; he thrust out his hand, which was trembling with emotion.

"I'm sure proud to shake your hand, Mr. Felton," he said. His circle of cowboys—who until now had been keeping a rather safe six-gun distance—closed in around the group. "If you saved my daughter, you're a friend of mine from this day on. Come on, boys, shake his hand. He saved our little girl. He's a plumb heroic gentleman and longhorn!"

They all crowded around, offering their congratulations. Even the old herder who had been the first to reveal the stranger's identity joined in the handshaking, which ceremony, however, was consummated without any of the usual back-slapping. The congratulations were heartfelt, but distinctly respectful.

"Mr. Felton," the father said after the girl had finished her report, "we'd admire to have you ride back with us to the railroad. We're shippin' our cattle on the Santa Fe Spur, and after they're loaded we'll celebrate. A barbecue."

Felton seemed to think this over for a moment, his black brows contracting until they met across his hungry, wolfish eyes.

"Ain't got much time," he said finally. "But I'm sure hungry a whole lot. Hog hungry don't half express it."

"And I'm goin' to reward you for bein' a hero. Ask me anything—and it's yours. Yes, sir, up to half my herd!"

"Didn't drill that grizzly for a reward," the other answered.

"Eat first and think it over," the father said.

Triumphantly the outfit returned to Forlorn Camp. It was a time for celebration. A beef herd of a thousand steers represented a lot of money—and a lot of work. The work of the past few days shoving the stuff across the low sierras to the shipping station had been the climax of a hard season. Other outfits had lost much from drought and rinderpest and rustling, so that the price of beef had gone up. Cattle on the hoof brought twenty dollars a head. Burnett's entire fortune was tied up in this one venture, and once he had the stock safe in the loading pens and ready for

shipment, he was confident that all his troubles were over.

For an hour or two the whole Bar-B-7 crew was busy loading steers into the long train of stock cars. Three inches of sand were spread over each car to keep the steers from slipping. Seventeen head were loaded into each car, then the bull bars were drawn and the sliding doors closed.

On the opposite side of the tracks from the loading pens there was a small shack called Pete Moki's Joint. Pete Moki was an old Indian who served mulligan stew and Spanish tamales to the train crews of the railroad. All day he had been barbecuing hunks of beef; they were wrapped in gunny sacks and buried behind his shack over a heap of coals. And now he brought forth his feast.

While the Bar-B-7 men were loading the cattle aboard the stock train the old Indian was busy with his squaw getting the supper ready. One guest, however, came ahead of time. It was Butch Felton.

Felton did not sit at the long pine-board table alone. Hannah Burnett, taking advantage of her father's preoccupation with the loading, slipped into the shack and sat down at the table opposite her rescuer.

Butch Felton was not very talkative. He answered her questions in monosyllables. It was quite apparent that his one desire now was to get food, and lots of it. The girl gave up finally in her attempts at starting a conversation, and just stood there, watching him adoringly. Then suddenly a herder came in and told her her father wanted to see her outside.

"You consarned, romantic, sheep-headed little silly!" he cried. "Don't you understand what I been tellin' you? That there hombre is a bandit."

"I don't believe it!" the girl said.

"Oh, you don't! Well, maybe you think ole Rufe lies? Rufe's worked for me for ten years. And what he says is generally right. He's seen this desperado in a gamin' town over by Nogales, and a barkeep told him that he had a price on his head dead or alive. It's all I can do to keep the boys from takin' a pot shot at his back when he ain't lookin'. They wouldn't dast do it facin' him. You can see what a gun fighter he is just to look at him. Now lay offn him, and fall in love with some one else."

He ordered the girl to get into the caboose, which was to be their quarters during the night's ride north. "And don't get out till I call you," he warned her.

He then went into the chow shack. His manner changed abruptly. This fellow, Butch Felton, outlaw or not, had saved his daughter's life. His past history was no business of Dad Burnett's. And if there was a price on his head, old Burnett was not going to try and get it. Nor was he going to allow his men to get it. The stranger had been offered the hospitality of the outfit and Dad Burnett was anxious to reward him in any way possible for bringing Hannah safely home.

"Been thinkin' over what I said back yonder?" Burnett asked genially.

"Said about what?"

"About a reward."

"Any Mex would have shot that grizzly, pardner," Felton replied. "I ain't in line for any reward."

"You don't need any help—of any kind? You looked powerful lonely and hungry when you first cut our trail."

"Haven't eaten for three days."

"I can fix you up a food pack," the old rancher said. "And maybe you can make use of a good pack horse? You look kind of gaunted."

"No use for a pack horse. Nor for my own horse, either." Then he added cautiously: "If you want to do me a good turn, pardner, I'd like my horse taken back to your ranch."

Burnett nodded readily. "I'm ridin' up north with my little girl and a few of my cowhands. The rest of the outfit are goin' back to the ranch with the most of the horse cavvy. I'll see that your cayuse is treated like a race horse." He looked anxiously at the young man's face. He could not quite make out what his game was. "But ain't there somethin' else I can do, kid—to help you out of whatever trouble you're in?"

Butch Felton thought this over for some time, his brows again merging into one streak of jet-black across his bronzed forehead.

"If I was sure I could rely on your keepin' your mouth shut——" he finally began.

"You saved my little kid," the father said.

"Could you hide me aboard that stock train?" Felton asked. "I mean, somewhere so that your foreman and the train crew and your cow-punchers won't know?"

"Is *that* all the favor you can ask of me?" the old stockman laughed.

"It'll mean a lot—provided you can keep your mouth shut."

"It meant a lot—your savin' my little kid's life."

The foreman, Jud Shim, entered at this point with the announcement that the stock was all loaded. About ten men of the outfit had been appointed to ride with the train. They had exchanged lass-ropes and saddles for lanterns and spiked poles, turning from cowboys to cow-punchers. A few of the remaining were to ride home to the Bar-B-7 Ranch with the cow horses. The rest were to be paid off and discharged.

"The train can't pull out till a southbound freight passes us in an hour," the foreman explained. "Meanwhile, they're goin' to switch our train to that long sidin' down yonder across the bridge."

"An hour will be just long enough for the boys to have their bust," Dad Burnett said. "Invite 'em all in. It's to be a celebration. Barbecue's ready, and I had the cook bring along a barrel of nose paint. Tell all the hands to throw back their ears, moisten their valves, and forget their troubles."

The foreman was about to leave when old Burnett gave him one more order. "And tell Hannah to come in and join us. I told her to stay in the caboose till called for." He reflected that as soon as this hombre, Butch Felton, was out of the way, his daughter might be relied upon to act like a sensible human being.

A moment after the foreman had gone, Dad Burnett and the stranger left the little shack, crossed the tracks, and went behind the row of stock cars. It had grown dark suddenly, and there was little danger of their movements being seen.

"We've loaded nine horses on the train," Burnett said. "They're in the car behind the tender. There's a couple boxes and barrels with harness and feed up front. I was in there a little while ago myself. You can hide behind them boxes without bein' kicked around. If I stuck you in one of these cars with seventeen longhorns you'd have a powerful rocky ride."

Both men glanced up and down the length of the long train, and observing no one except a man with a lantern a hundred yards down the line, Butch Felton leaped up into the horse car. Dad Burnett slid the door in place after him.

Burnett then hurried back to the chow shack.

The cowhands had already seated themselves on the benches at the long table. Three of the train crew had joined them.

"It'll be a good hour, engineer said," the station master announced. And at the same time he handed Dad Burnett a telegram. The station master, who was also the telegraph operator, baggage

superintendent and train dispatcher, was the only inhabitant of Forlorn Camp besides the chow-stand keeper and the latter's squaw. In one end of the chow shack was a table, telegraph instrument, dispatches. "This here dispatch come while you was out in the corrals, Mr. Burnett," explained the official as he handed over the message.

The old stockman read the dispatch slowly, coming to the very end before he realized its purport.

Big scheme afoot to rustle entire Bar-B-7 herd advise Burnett watch out for suspicious characters send rider into Low Sierra trail to warn him if he has not yet arrived Forlorn Camp with herd.

PHOENIX STOCK DETECTIVE AGENCY.

Dad Burnett looked up at the operator with a grin. "You're just a little too late handin' me this. But there ain't goin' to be no wholesale rustlin' of my herd now," Burnett added, laughing. He read the dispatch to his men amid jeers and yipping. If there had been rustlers back there in the Low Sierras hoping to get the big herd, they had been very thoroughly disappointed. The herd was now safely packed on the stock train and the sliding doors closed and bolted.

But all of a sudden Dad Burnett's triumphant face sobered. He checked himself in the midst of a hearty guffaw. Two thoughts struck him at one and the same time. Two characters appeared in his mind's eye: his daughter—and Butch Felton.

"Where's Hannah?" he burst out.

The yipping of the men stopped abruptly.

"Why, she's in the caboose," some one answered.

"I know. But I told Shim to send her back here for our blow-out!" the father cried.

"She ain't been in here!"

Then an old herder piped up excitedly: "Say, chief, do you reckon that road agent—Butch Felton—had anything to do with——"

The stock train was already backing up to the siding. The cars had been slowly clattering past on the badly ballasted track, sending out a rhythmic rumble as the trucks crossed the battered rail ends. Before Dad Burnett had succumbed to that paralyzing fear —the fear for his daughter's safety— the last of the train, which in this case was the engine, had passed the chow shack.

"The train's goin' to wait on the sidin', Mr. Burnett," one of the train crew said. "Your daughter is as safe on board the hack as she is here. No need to worry about her."

Dad Burnett did not answer. An intangible dread had gripped him— something that he could not lay his finger on: except that in some vague way he connected it with Butch Felton. And in like manner he connected Felton with his daughter: They were both on that train!

Without another word, he jumped from the table and ran out into the night.

A bunch of his cowboys followed him, all scrambling out pell-mell, stampeding like a bunch of sheep through the narrow door.

Old Burnett was running hatless down the tracks in the full glare of the engine headlights. The stock train had gathered a certain momentum as it backed over the little bridge a few hundred yards beyond the farthest loading pen. It was too much momentum, if the engineer proposed to stop it at the siding.

But it did not stop at the siding. It did not even switch off the main track. It kept going, backing south in a bee line until it struck a downgrade which led through the foothills of the Low Sierras.

The realization of the truth struck old Dad Burnett like a blow. There was his entire herd, his fortune, his

daughter, being rustled off before his very eyes!

Yelling and waving his arms like a madman, he went racing down the tracks. He was a comical little jumping-jack silhouetted against the glare of the headlights.

The train was not yet backing down the grade faster than a man could run. In fact, old Burnett might have caught up with it. But when the engine backed around a bend and the glaring white band from its headlight swept off to the side, Burnett was running in pitch darkness. When he reached the trestle a few hundred yards south of the station, he stumbled and fell.

His herd was gone. And so was his daughter!

CHAPTER IV.

CUT WIRES.

JUST as his cowboys, stampeding along the tracks, caught up with him, Dad Burnett picked himself up.

"My little girl, my poor little girl!" the father cried in dismay. "She's gone —rustled off—with the whole herd! Where's Shim! Where's the rest of you! Who done it! Butch Felton! My poor little kid!" Then, after this incoherent jumble of cries, he burst out with the command: "Saddle up, men! Come on. Get to your horses—pick up the fastest, and we'll chase 'em!"

The whole crew trooped back to the station on a run. When they got to the corral there was light enough from the chow shack for Burnett to look over the remaining members of his crew.

"Shim ain't here!" he cried.

"The rustlers most likely tied him up and threw him aboard," some one suggested.

"The engineer! He was in cahoots with them!" Burnett cried, turning upon one of the train crew.

The latter shook his head. "It can't be, Mr. Burnett. Pickens is reliable. He's an old hoghead of an engineer, but he's reliable. Been on this run for twenty year. They must've brained him. Couldn't see who was in the cab —what with facin' them headlights."

Burnett ordered them all to saddle up.

"There's five more of our own crew missin', chief," one of the cowboys said. "Gonzales, Pedro, 'Tin-can Jo'—and the two Lukon brothers."

"It's clear enough," Burnett said as they were picking out their horses from the cavvy. "It's Butch Felton that engineered this—and he used some of my own outfit! I mean those half-breeds who signed up with me when we was puttin' up the herd back at the ranch."

"What are we goin' to do, chief? We can't catch that train."

"Better telegraph down to Cimarron," one of the train crew suggested. "They can't get very far south without passin' that station."

"Peg Leg" Martin, the station master, hurried back into his shack to send the dispatch. He came thumping out just as Burnett and his posse were swinging up to their saddles.

"Wires have been cut!" he called in a loud voice to the posse. "Must've been cut right after I got that message for you, Mr. Burnett. This don't sound too good."

"Then you mean we can't telegraph to Cimarron!" Burnett exclaimed in despair .

"Not till I find out where the wires was cut."

"We ain't waitin' for that. I don't reckon the train will wait, either. It'll most like go sailin' right past Cimarron —and not a soul in town will know that anything's wrong."

"That ain't likely. If the operator down at Cimarron sees a stock train backing down past the town without his havin' any dispatches explainin' how come, he'll get suspicious."

"Suspicious after the train's left—same as happened to us!" one of the

Burnett crew shouted back. "Come on, chief, let's get goin'."

The chief was already wheeling his horse, and heading out of the corral. He shouted that the train dispatchers and engineers and the whole railroad didn't assay two ounces of sense to the ton. He would catch that train himself —racing it on horseback. "If our horses can't make better time than a freight train loaded with a thousand steers, then we ought to be ridin' burros!" he yelled.

Finding a trail across that arroyo south of Forlorn Camp delayed them a good hour. It was a deep gash cut into the face of the earth, and by the starlight it was impossible to lead their horses to the gorge bed until they came to a clear trail. Then when they reached the bottom they found themselves in a pitch-dark maze of giant boulders. It too them some time before they found a trail leading up the opposite side.

When they reached the track bed again the stock train was nowhere in sight. They could hear a distant, muffled rumble of wheels echoing through the narrow gulches, but how far away it was they did not know.

For three hours they followed the tracks. It was harder riding than the worst kind of mountain trail. It was an old track-bed made of locomotive cinders. The ties, to which the rails were fastened by lag screws, had churned for months, pumping the ballast, so there was no possibility of riding a horse between the tracks. The posse rode along in single file on a narrow trail below the track bed, which at times cut off into deep arroyos and side draws.

Repeatedly the leading rider, Dad Burnett, drew rein, searching for a trail. At one time he checked his horse to a standstill. His posse, struggling along at wider and wider distances, caught up with him. He had dismounted.

"What's wrong, chief?"

"My horse pretty near stumbled over a man," was the answer.

The rest dismounted and crowded around in the dim light. On the trail directly in front of their chief was the fireman of the stock train, bound and moaning.

One of the cowmen held a flask to his mouth, another untied his arms. After a few moments the man stood up, a ragged figure, torn by cactus, blackened by cinders.

"They threw me off," he moaned weakly.

"Who threw you off?"

"A couple bandits. Saddle-colored breeds—that's all I could make out. One of 'em stuck a gat into the engineer's ribs, and made him speed up the old hog. Another tied my arms and made me lie down on the floor of the cab. It was like that while we crossed the trestle at Forlorn Camp. Then when they got the hang of how to work the engine, they tied up the hoghead himself. We rode for miles, then they told me to stand up. When I obeyed they cracked me one on the jaw and I went hurtlin' out of the cab. When I came to I was lyin' here in the ditch."

"Where's the engineer?" Burnett asked.

"Most like they threw him out farther down."

Burnett ordered two of his riders to take care of the firemen and once more he led the way at as fast a run as his horse could make, following the trackway.

A mile farther on they found the engineer. He had rolled into a clump of mesquite, and lay there with arms bound behind his back, as helpless and dilapidated as his fireman.

"What in tarnation were you lubbers doin'?" he cried in a rage. "We backed past the station with the throttle back on the last notch. Like to have pulled the draw-bars out by the roots! I was bein' stuck up with a gun in my ribs, and you men hollerin' and yippin'!"

"No matter what's happened so far!"

Burnett shot back. "It's what's goin' to happen. My little girl's on that train!"

"Well, she won't get very far!" the engineer snapped. "They'll smash that old hog to pieces. They was scoopin' all the coal we had into the box, and when I last seen it there was enough steam on the pin to blow themselves across the divide! And on a grade where I always drift, at that!"

"You think they'll pass Cimarron?" Burnett asked anxiously.

"They won't pass nothin' and they won't get nowheres. All they know about an engine is to shove the throttle and pour in coal. They ain't got any one workin' the handbrakes on the cars. I could tell that by the way we was jerkin' along. You'll find your herd and your girl and the whole outfit out in a ditch afore they get within ten miles of Cimarron."

Although this news suggested rather grim eventualities, it seemed to put new hope into Burnett. "Come on, boys, let's keep up the race. If they're tryin' to take my herd into Mexico, and can't even run an engine, we'll catch 'em!"

He designated a man to take care of the engineer, and with the rest of his riders he set out once more at a break-neck gallop along the trail.

For another three hours the posse of cowboys followed the winding railway through the maze of canyons and mesas toward the south. And then the engineer's prophecy—that the rustlers could not manage that old diamond-stack hog—seemed to have come true.

Winding out of a narrow draw, the riders heard the distant rhythm of wheels once more. There was no telling how far away the train was. The acoustics of the gulches and granite cliffs were deceptive. But the rolling stock made a thunder clatter over the old, worn-out tracks. The rust-eaten rails, badly bolted and spiked, had been worn down at the ends where a maximum of space had been left to allow for the violent changes of temperature in the desert air. At each rail end the trucks rattled and banged. The long train of cars, loaded to capacity, could be heard for miles.

The pursuers caught sight of the train winding along like a black snake in the bed of the canyon far below them. They increased the speed of their horses, urging them along the rocky trail in the starlight, winding down through one gulch after another, until they came out on the flat expanse of the bottom lands.

Here they could gallop their mounts across wide stretches of mesquite and sage and sand. They had lost sight of the train again, but they knew it was starting in on the pusher grade at the southern end of the canyon. It was a certainty now that the pursuers were lessening the distance that separated them from the train. When the rustlers tried to make that rattle trap diamond-stack push the loaded cars up that grade they would find out that bronchos are better for rustling purposes than a locomotive.

Sure enough, they heard the distant rhythmic clatter of wheels dying down. They could hear the snorting of the engine, the diminishing puffs echoing back through the long reach of the canyon, and finally they heard the long, hoarse roar of escaping steam.

These sounds, distant and muffled as they were, drifted back clearly between the granite precipices of the canyon, as if the train were scarcely a mile away. But as the posse galloped on—one mile, two miles, five miles—the train was nowhere in sight. The hoarse rasping of steam dwindled away. There was no sound of rolling trucks or wheels crossing the rail ends, or of clattering draw bars. The train, which for hours had disturbed the serene silence of those desert mountains, seemed to have completely vanished in one of the deep gorges.

Then, some time between midnight and dawn, the posse rode up into a narrow pass, and old Dad Burnett, riding far in the lead, galloped his mount almost headlong into a locomotive.

The eager and frantic old man had caught sight of some coals and a dull flare of light in the middle of the tracks —but these were partly obscured by the locomotive itself. The headlights had been put out, and so had the lamps in the cab. And in the long train of stock cars behind, there was not a sign of light or life.

Dad Burnett waited for his men, and bunched together, with guns drawn, they rode down the entire length of the train. Dad's first desire being to get to the caboose, where he had last seen his daughter.

The caboose was dark. There were the embers of a fire in the old cannon stove, which was ordinarily used by the train crew to heat coffee and fry eggs. But the caboose was empty.

And every car of the train was empty. The sliding doors were all open, and the bull bars down.

Not a horse, not a steer, not a human being was anywhere in sight.

CHAPTER V.

THREE RIDERS.

THE country west of the track between Forlorn Camp and Cimarron was a hodgepodge of mesas and rimrock hills, cross cut with deep canyons and arroyos. It was as if the crust of the earth had been lifted, cracked open, and then dropped back again in a gigantic heap of débris.

A winding pass with a floor of sandstone and scattered boulders led into the heart of this desolate country. Some distance from the railroad—about three hours' travel for a fast-driven herd—there was a bowl-shaped canyon. Its walls were perpendicular masses of denuded granite and grotesquely carved formations of shale. Into this bowl the Bar-B-7 cattle were driven at a breakneck run.

Here the point riders, driving the vanguard of steers with shouts and a terrifying hum of spinning lariats, let the herd spread out. Bunches went galloping off, spending themselves in racing up the slopes of the canyon sides, swerving back when they reached the cliff, and drifting on aimlessly into the canyon bottom. The rest of the herd came pouring down into the bowl in the same manner, so that the general movement was like that of a stream trickling down through its bed until it reached a dam and formed a pool. In a short space of time the whole herd was milling slowly about in this natural corral, which was the bottom land of the canyon.

Meanwhile three riders had reached the farther end of the canyon.

One of these riders was Hannah Burnett.

She was riding stirrup to stirrup with a man who held the reins of her horse in his hands. Hannah's hands were bound by the wrists and hitched to the pommel of her saddle. The man at her side was one of the vaqueros of her father's ranch, a half-breed with furtive, mouselike eyes.

The third rider kept a horse's length ahead. He was the man who had helped build up this herd. He was the one who understood cattle from the time they were weaned on oleomargarine to the time their horns were cut. He was the man who knew the cattle business from the job of stray man searching unbranded calves to the job of sticker in the stockyards. In a word, it was Jud Shim, foreman of the Burnett Ranch, a man who thoroughly knew his business.

Hannah's feelings as she rode behind this man whom she had known for three years as her father's most trusted confidant were peculiar. Her emotions were not exactly those engendered by fear. She had been dazed by the suddenness

of the tragedy—too dazed to understand exactly what it was about.

It had all happened before she knew it. She was riding in the caboose. A vaquero came in. She ordered him out, and upon his complacent refusal, she screamed. He covered her with a six-gun. And then the foreman, Jud Shim, entered, bound her hands, and left her under guard of the half-breed.

After what seemed an eternity the train stopped. The cows were unloaded, and finally the foreman stepped into the hack and ordered the girl to get out and mount a horse. "I'll see that you ain't touched," he had promised. "We ain't kidnapin' you—don't think that. We're just keepin' you so you won't tell what you've seen and heard."

A few moments later, when she was mounted on a horse, she remembered seeing the long, empty train pull out. All lights had been extinguished, but by the starlight she had seen one of the rustlers jump from the engine cab as the train gathered momentum.

There followed then the long ride across the hills toward the southwest.

And here, hours later, the girl found herself in this hidden canyon, a prisoner, lost in what seemed to be the most forlorn corner of the earth.

The foreman drew rein when they reached a knoll at the end of the canyon. He waited until the vaquero and the girl joined him and then he spoke.

"We got to hold the stuff here till sunrise," he said.

"What do you mean, Shim?" the vaquero asked in alarm. "That's losin' an hour."

"We can afford to lose more'n that. We've given 'em the slip crossin' the lava beds back yonder. They can't find our tracks till daylight. That means we got nigh onto a whole night's head start on 'em."

"But a herd can't travel as fast as a posse of horses," the other objected.

The foreman pointed southwestward through the mouth of the canyon. The vaquero looked. And his prisoner, the girl, looked. She saw a vast starlit plain cross-hatched with cuts and arroyos which at that distance looked as black and fine as pen-and-ink marks. These were the Bad Lands.

"Them arroyos are deep enough to hide cattle," the foreman said. "And what little dust there is in the beds won't give us away. It'll mix in with the alkali clouds the wind is blowin' across the plain. We can shove the herd through them draws safely. Lookin' across the plain you wouldn't see hair nor hide of a single steer. Main thing is we got to close herd the stuff. Can't do it in the dark. If any drags get away it'd take a week findin' 'em, that's sure."

"But what if they figure out which trail we took?" the vaquero asked apprehensively. "A bunch of riders could catch up with us, no matter how fast we punched the stuff."

"They could catch us if they knew the trail we took," the foreman admitted. "But they don't know. Which I mean in plain terms, we're stayin' here till sunrise. The men have been ridin' all yesterday and they're fallin' asleep in their saddles."

"I don't like the racket a little bit."

As a matter of fact, Foreman Shim himself was not completely satisfied. There was a certain point which troubled him: One of the horses was missing.

That in itself was no great loss. They had two extra horses. Of course, in an ordinary drive each cowboy takes along a string of five or six ponies. But this was not an ordinary drive. Shim was content to have a single horse for each man. But he reflected that on loading the stock at Forlorn Camp he had counted nine horses in the little cavvy Dad Burnett had ordered shipped with the beef herd. One of those horses was missing.

In the confusion and hurry of unloading the herd stock there in the lonely canyon where they had stopped the train, no one had bothered about the missing horse. It was the last thought in any man's mind to pursue wandering horses. Each man grabbed a saddle from the car, swung it aboard the first bronc he could get hold of, and that was all there was to it.

"Probably bolted off somewheres," one of the men had suggested, when the loss became known.

"He wasn't that kind of a horse," the foreman had answered. "He'd've stuck with the others."

"Maybe lopin' along at the tail of the herd now." This was another suggestion. "Stoppin' on the way to browse. He'll show up by mornin'."

And they let it go at that. But the fact disturbed Shim, for the simple reason that his fear made him imagine all sorts of contingencies. Some one might have been on that train besides the handful of half-breeds he had enlisted in his plot. Some one might have been in hiding—on the brake beams, for example. And then when the train was stopped that some one might have taken advantage of the clatter and racket of the steers being punched out of the stock cars onto the rim rock on the ground. In that confusion he could very easily have got one of the horses. He could have accomplished the deed under the very noses of the men who were unloading the little bunch of cow ponies.

The thought was a fly in the ointment. Although the chances were a hundred to one that the missing horse had merely drifted off somewhere during the confusion of getting the herd under way, Shim could not get the fear of some mishap out of his mind. The consequence of an enemy being on that train would be fearful to contemplate. Such an enemy would be able to trail the herd until he saw the direction they were taking. He could then go back and give the alarm. Such an enemy might even have heard the rustlers discussing the trail they proposed to take!

For the present, however, Shim put the matter out of his mind. The herd was now bunched up in the floor of the canyon, milling slowly around—a vast expanse of shadowy backs and horns. It was quite apparent that the steers were restive after their long thirst-inducing drive over the alkaline plains during the preceding day, then their ride in the cars, which resulted in stiff and swollen legs, and finally the furious driving to which they had been subjected from the railway to the edge of the Bad Lands. A water hole might have quieted them, but there was no water hole on the route by which Shim had taken them. He was wise enough to know that the trails of all cattle thieves lead to water holes, and hence to their capture. The trail he had taken was the last that any rustler would have been expected to take.

"Tell the men they can rest until sunrise," he ordered. "Two of 'em stay up at the top end of the canyon. Tell 'em to sing to the cows. They're beginnin' to growl. The rest of the gang will stay down yonder guarding the canyon's mouth. And tell 'em if any cows get through that pass we'll never find 'em again."

The vaquero departed, and for the first time Hannah Burnett found herself alone with the foreman who had proved himself traitor.

He pressed his horse over to hers, and untied her hands.

"There you are, little woman," he said with a sardonic geniality. "You ain't a prisoner any more. You're a guest, and we'll treat you that a way if you act like one. Meanwhile, remember this here is your herd. I'm goin' to sell it across the border, but you'll get the benefit same as me. We'll spend it all down yonder. We'll have a good

time—you and me together. We'll live like——"

He did not finish the sentence. For as soon as the girl found her hands free, she reached out and struck the grinning foreman a resounding crack on the face.

Shim reeled back half out of his saddle. He was too surprised at the suddenness of the blow to make any other move.

"I'm to be your guest, am I?" the girl cried. "I'm going to enjoy the money with you—you, my father's hired man! You double-crossing thief! You're far worse than the meanest half-breed Injun that ever blotched a brand! My father put all his trust in you, and you turn around and strip him of his whole fortune—and steal his only child into the bargain! And then you tell me we'll spend his fortune together—you thief!" She was screaming her tirade into Shim's ears, but he did not listen. As soon as he recovered from the shock of that blow in the face, he leaned toward her, took her arm in a viselike grip, and yanked her from her saddle while she was still speaking. Resistence was impossible.

She found herself lying in a heap in the sand almost under the very feet of his excited horse. And as she tried to struggle upright, dazed, her head spinning, she heard his suppressed, biting voice:

"All right! I'm satisfied! You won't ack friendly—then I won't. One chance is all you get—and you've thrown it away." He began to storm and rage as his anger mounted. "We'll drag you along with us as extry freight, that's what! You won't ride, you'll be packed on a horse. What I ought to do is to leave you here tied to a tree so's the coyotes will take you off my hands! Good mind to finish you right here and now with my gat—except that it'd stampede the cows!"

He leaped down from his saddle, and yanked her to her feet. He still held the rawhide romal with which she had been bound to her pommel, and swinging her roughly around, he began to tie her hands—this time wrenching them tightly behind her back.

But he never finished this operation, so purposefully begun.

The girl heard the hoarse bark of a gun from somewhere far behind her. She felt the tall form of her captor sag forward as if from some sudden impact, falling against her back. His weight sent her staggering forward. And she found herself free.

One glance behind her told her that Jud Shim had fallen face downward on the sand. A second glance revealed a peculiar ripple, like a gentle wave, passing across the sea of backs and horns in the bottom lands just below her. And then abruptly the steers stopped milling, every terrified member of the herd facing the mouth of the canyon.

Hannah knew what was coming, and without pausing another moment, she turned and fled.

She leaped down from the hummock of sand where Shim, in order to be safe from the herd, had taken her. Then, with the speed of a deer, she ran across the floor of the canyon to the nearest wall.

As she ran she was aware of a fusillade of gunfire behind her. Shim was emptying his revolver into the brush from whence had come that slug of lead that had drilled him.

His own fusillade, sending out white streaks of flame, echoed up and down the length of the deep canyon. It was too much for the herd, already waiting tensely for a repetition of that first terrifying shot.

The whole mass sprang forward, bolting at the same instant, like an army that had been given the bugle call of defeat and flight. And the stampede was on.

CHAPTER VI.

STAMPEDE.

THE man in the mesquite brush was Butch Felton.

He paused just long enough to assure himself that Hannah had crossed the floor of the canyon and reached the wall, where she was climbing up well out of reach of the oncoming herd; and then, realizing his own danger, he turned and ran, crouching, tearing through the brush toward his horse.

It was not his own horse. It was one of the Bar-B-7 cow ponies which had been shipped on the stock train, and which Felton had grabbed during the confusion of unloading. He had led it off into the brush under the very noses of two of the rustlers, while the latter were picking out their own mounts and saddling them. Butch Felton had not waited to saddle up. He had sneaked off into the brush, using the pony to shield himself from view, and then, as the steers were being punched out of the stock cars, he had vaulted on the little cayuse bareback.

Trailing the herd for miles at a safe distance, he had arrived at the bowl canyon, and then circled the cliffs. He wanted to find out how the land lay before attacking. He had waited until the men were on foot, tethering their broncs at the mouth of the canyon, and then spreading their blanket rolls. Except for the ride in the stock train, those rustlers had been in the saddle for twenty-four hours. This was the reason they were taking advantage of that one hour before sunrise to get some rest. One man had been left on guard near by, mounted on his horse, singing a mournful song to the restive herd. At the upper end of the canyon two others were mounted, and singing in the same manner.

Felton had noticed, as he surveyed the whole situation, that whenever these three men, riding night herd, pressed their horses too close to the steers, the mass would warp inward, each steer terrified at the slightest sound—even the clunk of a horse's hoofs on the ground.

Felton had also noticed other signs of imminent trouble. He knew something about herd psychology. Despite the fact that the critters were ready to drop with fatigue, they would not bed. He had seen them slowly milling. Then he had heard that ominous sound which every cowboy fears—the low "growl"—as if the herd were a single gigantic animal brooding over its wrongs. He guessed that if they bolted they would most probably head downhill, that is to say, toward the mouth of the canyon. They were obviously watching the two riders at the upper end, and warping away from them. The opening in the upper end was a narrow black fissure in the side of the canyon. The opening at the lower end was a large gateway giving out upon what seemed a flat expanse of desert. Once the cattle bolted toward that plain they would scatter in a hundred different directions, following the innumerable draws. This was the eventuality that the foreman had been particularly anxious to avoid. It would mean several days' loss in rounding up the drags again.

And one other detail Butch Felton took into account before he fired that first shot: Hannah Burnett was safely ensconced on top of a high sand knoll in company with her captor, the foreman.

Butch Felton tethered his horse to a tree bole in a side draw, and crawled through the mesquite brush until he reached that knoll.

Then he fired that first shot.

The foreman had completed the rout. When he emptied his six-gun in a frantic attempt to fire at his unseen enemy, a roar of thunder seemed to come out of the very heart of the canyon. A cloud of mist was churned up, blotting out the dim stars. For a few moments

there was utter darkness, chaos, and a deafening rumble of pounding hoofs, clattering horns, and steers hurtling over chuck holes and bawling as they were trampled to death.

Just as that curtain of darkness fell, Butch Felton hurried back to the draw for his horse, groped in the choking mist, unhitched the tethered reins, and then leaped once more to the bare back.

By its own instinct, the frightened little bronc untracked at a breakneck gallop, heading for the canyon's mouth a hundred yards ahead of the stampeding herd.

For a moment Butch was clear of the dust cloud. In the dim starlight he caught a glimpse of three men leaping from their blankets and racing madly for their horses. He saw the horses tearing themselves free of the limbs to which they were tethered, wheeling, and bolting off. Then came the solid wall of thundering hoofs and lowered horns, like an avalanche.

One man vaulted to his horse. The other two stumbled and the avalanche of hoofs went over them. The rustler who had been riding at the canyon's mouth had already wheeled his horse and was galloping through the granite gateway toward the open. As he rode, he turned and emptied his six-gun into the vanguard of steers. He was like King Canute trying to stop the tides of the ocean.

Then as he fired his last futile shot, his horse stumbled in a gopher hole, went over in a somersault, regained its feet, and plunged on to safety. But the rider was left behind.

The second rustler who had succeeded in getting a horse was firing over his shoulder in the same manner. Butch Felton was galloping along by his side, almost stirrup to stirrup with him. The rustler dropped one of the steers, and the two behind it stumbled, somersaulted, then a dozen steers piled up. The heap of bawling, kicking animals made a wedge which divided the mass of steers plunging on from behind. These two masses were divided again, as Felton raced on. One bunch followed him into a draw. Darkness enveloped them. The little cow pony which Butch was riding stumbled. Butch plunged forward as if something had hit him in the solar plexus. But the pony regained its feet as the rider yanked up its head. Thus horse and rider plunged on in the darkness.

Bit by bit the thunder in Felton's ears began to die down. The herd had split into twenty different streams. Behind him came a bunch of fear-maddened brutes—so close that he felt their horns shoving against the croup of his horse. Another mile of this breakneck race and the rattle of horns was silenced as the steers began to string out. There was still the heavy pounding of hoofs on the rocky stream bed. But this diminished. The concerted din broke up, softened. Finally there was the tattoo of pounding hoofs strung out at long intervals, as the steers began to peter out.

The stampede had spent itself.

When the dust cleared, the stars had dimmed and long bands of gray light were reaching out from the mesas in the east like the fingers of a hand. Felton rode out of the stream bed and climbed to the level of the plain. From this point he could look down into the arroyos that split the plain in all directions, as if the crust were dry-caked mud broken by the desert heat into innumerable, irregularly shaped patterns. The arroyos below were filled with wandering bunches of five, ten, twenty steers which had spent their strength in the race. It would take a long time, Felton reflected, to get that herd together again. It would virtually mean another round-up, with stray men riding out for miles into the Bad Lands.

But it could be done. There was no doubt about that. And Felton was sure

that it could be done without much fear of molestation from the rustlers. Three of them had been killed in the stampede. Felton had wounded the leader. The two remaining were heading off across the broken top of the plain toward Mexico. And it did not look as if they intended to stop. Finally, they dived down into one of the arroyos which led south, and disappeared. Felton never saw them again.

Now that the tumult was over, Felton turned back, heading for the mouth of the bowl canyon where the stampede had started.

His one thought was to find out what had happened to that girl. He was reasonably sure that she was safe, for he had left her on that high point of sand which was like a fortress in the canyon bed.

But now that he was able to go back, fear welled up in his mind. He was by no means certain that she was free from her captor. Felton had aimed at the foreman with the intent of winging him. He had not shot to kill.

If he had known what was really happening to Hannah he would have regretted his conservative method of playing in this desperate game.

CHAPTER VII

A CLEW.

WHEN Dad Burnett and his faithful cowboys found that empty stock train they had the first definite clew as to the whereabouts of the stolen herd. Somewhere between this point and the Forlorn Camp station the steers had been unloaded. But that was a pretty slender clew at best. The distance between the two points was far. And to ride back over the rough ground which they had traversed, hunting in the darkness for the spot where the herd had been unloaded, seemed a hopeless task.

But there was no time to lose. They could not wait until sunrise. Besides, by carefully examining the ground on either side of the tracks it was fairly certain that they would find where the train of stock cars had been stopped. The sand all about would be scuffed up where the steers had been punched out of the cars. Thus, the posse turned about and retraced their steps, half of them riding on one side of the tracks, half on the other.

As a matter of fact, Shim had not unloaded the herd in the sand. He had chosen a point where a long ledge of rim rock extended along the sides of the tracks. And it is to be doubted if the pursuers could have detected the spot in that meager light. But the foremost rider on the western side of the tracks found something which put a very abrupt and satisfactory end to their search.

No one had noticed this clew on their first trip down for the simple reason that they were following a trail on the opposite side of the tracks. Furthermore, they were not on the look-out for clews. They were on the look-out for that train.

But now on the return trip they found it. It was a piece of white paper, stuck into a telegraph pole with a bowie knife.

In the dim starlight it made merely a tiny speck of a high light, and it was only because the riders were hunting so vigilantly for a clew that it was seen at all.

The others rode up, and one man lit a match. He read it aloud:

"Bar-B-7 herd is being punched down Dead Wolf Gulch to Bad Lands. Get on their trail good and pronto. If they reach the Bad Lands first you'll never find——"

The missive was unsigned and unfinished. Evidently the writer had been in a hurry. Dad Burnett and his men surmised that some one—an enemy of the rustlers—had been on that train.

He had probably heard the rustlers talking over their plans, and had just had time enough to stick that paper in the telegraph pole without being found out.

"It was Jud Shim that wrote this," Dad Burnett avowed. "He was on that train. If he weren't on it, then we'd've found him back there at the station—or else they'd've bound him and thrown him off the train same as they did the engine crew."

"Is it Shim's writin'?" one old herder asked.

"Can't rightly tell. It's scrawled too fast. I know Jud's writin', but he most like scratched this off in a powerful hurry. It's Jud all right. He's saved the herd for us, boys, and if we get goin' fast, we'll most likely save my little girl!"

Thus, with their spirits running high, the whole band wheeled their mounts and headed off at a fast gallop across the rim rock and the long plain of lava toward Dead Wolf Gulch.

They traveled at a forced run the whole journey. It was a long, killing ride over slabs of granite and interminable stretches of lava. The rustlers had chosen their route well. If it had not been for that little note it would have been impossible to find the tracks of the herd. Of course, if the posse had waited for daylight they could have found the trail. The trail of a herd cannot be hidden—even if they are driven over hard-packed sand, or through dry stream beds, or across stretches of ground covered with pine needles. These are the routes chosen by horse thieves leading small bands of horses. But a herd of a thousand steers will leave an unmistakable trail behind them.

The riders, however, looked for no more signs now. They galloped their horses to the utmost of their endurance, relying implicity on that single little clew—the note which ordered them to follow to Dead Wolf Gulch.

It was sunrise when the posse reached the bowl canyon.

There was no doubt in their minds as they gazed into the deep purple shadows of that bowl that they were on the right track. The herd had been here. The sand was churned up as if ten herds had been driven through it during the night. The mesquite brush was trampled, clumps of it were torn up by the roots. Furthermore, the general destruction gave the ground the appearance of having been a battlefield: down toward the end of the canyon the astonished riders could see the carcasses of steers littered about.

"As a cowman, that hombre Butch Felton makes a good bandit!" one of the riders exclaimed as they all drew rein and surveyed the devastation. "It don't look like he knew much about punchin' cattle. It's plain to be seen that the herd stampeded."

"No doubt about that," said another cowboy. "Look yonder! There's bunches of drags strayin' off into the creek beds."

"If they stampeded out that a way—which is what they did—then Butch Felton ain't goin' to take that herd to Mexico," another said. "It's my guess the cows are scattered all through the draws down yonder, which it'll take a week roundin' 'em up again."

"Come on, men!" Dad Burnett cried excitedly. "Don't set here and palaver. I ain't lookin' for the herd. I'm lookin' for my little girl."

They went through the canyon at a fast run. Then Burnett, who was in the lead, curbed in his horse with such suddenness that it slid to its haunches.

"It's Shim!" he cried at the top of his voice.

The others rode up. The next moment a circle of horsemen drew rein about something that was lying half hidden in the brush.

Jud Shim, the foreman, had crawled down from his fortress of sand, and

like a poisoned rat, had searched out the first protection from the growing light.

Dad Burnett dismounted and knelt by the prostrate figure. He held a canteen to Shim's lips, and shoved an arm under his shoulders.

"What's happened, Jud?"

"What's happened!" the wounded man gasped, turning his gray face up to his former boss. "You can see what's happened. They stampeded. Three of those murderous coyotes were trampled. See 'em yonder." He pointed toward the granite gateway of the canyon.

Sure enough! The posse saw the bodies of three men lying among the trampled steers.

"We see that. But you—you're hit."

"They shot me and left me here for the sun to finish me."

"The murderous, double-dealin' reptiles!" old Burnett cried. "And the little girl—where's my little girl! They took her, Jud! Is she safe? Tell me that, Jud!"

"Wait, chief, and I'll tell you everything. Give me another swig!" He struggled up to a sitting posture and then turned his gaze upward to the circle of men who had dismounted and surrounded him.

"Butch Felton—he done it," the wounded man said. "He and his gunmen took me prisoner on the train and made me come along with 'em. Then when we reached this here canyon I figured I could save the herd by stampedin' 'em. Which I did. And they shot me—Butch Felton, he shot me when——"

"But the girl—little Hannah—where is she, Jud? Tell me that!"

"I don't know. They took her."

"Took her where!" the father gasped.

The foreman's pale eyes roved across the rim of the canyon and back again in a blank scrutiny of the faces about him. He seemed confused. The game he was playing was a desperate one. The girl was free. Shim had seen her climbing up the sides of that canyon. She was probably up there somewhere, hiding in the chaparral on the rim. If she knew her father had entered the canyon she would come down and reveal the truth.

Shim's only chance was to put the posse of cowboys on the wrong trail as quickly as possible. He pointed a trembling finger toward the Bad Lands, which were now revealed in the red light. The scattered bunches of drags were sending up a faint mist of alkali as they moved.

"Over yonder, chief," said Shim, his voice choking. "They took the little girl with them. I seen 'em headin' south toward Mexico—two of 'em with the girl in tow. They'd given up the herd. But the poor little kid——"

"Which draw did they follow?" the father interrupted in a frenzy of fear.

"The one down there with the three red boulders. You'll find——"

But the father had already leaped to his horse and was off at a furious gallop.

Most of the men followed, but two remained to take care of their erstwhile foreman, who was quite obviously badly hit.

"Help me to a horse," the wounded man said. "You two boys ride double. Go on after the chief. You'll find some riderless horses down there in the draws."

The two herders, accustomed to taking orders from the foreman, obeyed, one of them giving up his horse.

"You all right now, Jud?" they asked, after lifting him to the saddle.

"I'm all right. You go on down and help the chief. I'm ridin' back to yon gulch, where there's a water pocket. Got to have water. This here wound is givin' me a powerful thirst."

"We'll ride with you, Jud. You look kind of groggy."

"Go on down to the chief!" the fore-

man snapped savagely. "You heard me. I'm takin' care of myself. Got to have water."

He wheeled his horse, clinging on with both hands to the pommel and riding low crouched, as if he were asleep in the saddle. The two herders watched him a moment, then mounting double, they rode off toward the Bad Lands in search of another horse.

Jud Shim rode up into a narrow gulch and found a mule-deer trail leading to the canyon rim. Despite the fact that every step the horse took sent a spasm of pain through his thigh, Shim urged the mount to a gallop. He was in a hurry. Everything depended now upon whether he could find the girl before her father found her.

As he rode a grin began to congeal on his pasty face. He had sent the posse into the maze of draws and arroyos down there where the Bad Lands began. The girl would not be wandering around on foot down there. That was certain. His grin deepened. It made his face a mask of malignant triumph.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WHERE IS MY DAUGHTER?"

DAD BURNETT and his riders had scarcely passed through the narrow gorge which was the opening of the bowl canyon when they saw a rider heading across the flat top of the plain toward them. He had to cross the deep stream-ways which cut the plain in every direction, and in doing this he would disappear for a moment, riding down one of the adobe banks, then up again on the other bank, emerging once more into view.

"It's one of my horses," old Burnett affirmed. "But who the rider is I can't rightly make out." Then he added ruefully: "It ain't Hannah, that much I see!"

"It's that road agent, Butch Felton," one of his men cried. "I can tell by his tall, peaked sombrero he wears that it's he."

"Then how come he's ridin' up this a way?" Burnett exclaimed.

"Don't know. But it's the coyote himself!"

The men quickened their pace, fearing that the oncoming rider might change his mind when he discovered just what he was heading for.

Once more Butch Felton disappeared in a narrow draw and then popped up again, evidently raking his spurs. The posse rode down into a draw and across to the opposite side. As they reached the upper level, the whole bunch were riding abreast of each other. It was a formidable-looking line which deployed when the riders galloped out across the small stretch of flat ground.

Whether Butch Felton had changed his mind or not they did not know. For they gave him no chance to turn and flee. They rode him down, every man galloping his mount at a breakneck pace, and the whole gang deploying so as to surround the lone horseman.

Dad Burnett fired into the air as a warning, then when he was near enough, he shouted:

"Draw rein right where you're at, hombre, and throw up your hands."

Butch Felton had no reason to disobey. He had recognized the posse long before they had recognized him. As soon as he saw that bunch of riders coming out of the canyon he realized that Dad Burnett and his herders must have found that note on the telegraph pole, and that they had finally arrived on the scene.

"I'm puttin' up my hands, Mr. Burnett," he said as they surrounded him. "Although I don't rightly know why you're givin' me such an ornery good mornin'."

"You'll have a more ornery mornin' afore we're through with you!" the old man cried vehemently. "There's lots of questions we'd admire to have you an-

swer, and the first is: Where's my daughter?"

"I was just ridin' back right now to find out," Felton answered.

"Ridin' back where?"

"To the canyon. I saw her on a hummock of sand when the herd was startin' in on its buck-jumpin' and boltin'. I reckoned she was safe enough high up like that. Look here," he burst out suddenly, "she didn't get caught in the stampede? You didn't find her trampled——"

"We ain't seen nary a soul in the canyon, exceptin' the carcasses of a bunch of steers and three breeds, and likewise my foreman, who says you plugged him in cold blood."

"Sure I plugged him!" Felton said lightly. The circle of men about him gasped at the cool way this outlaw admitted his crimes.

"Take his gun!" Burnett snapped out.

Felton made a move as if to bring down his arms, but he realized a dozen men were covering him. One of them pressed his horse up against his and frisked him of his two guns.

"The girl! Where's the girl?" they all began to ask at once. "What did you do with her? Make him tell, chief! He's lyin' to us! He knows where she's at. Throw a rope around his neck and drag him from his horse! Drag him over the rocks. Hang him to yon piñon! Come on, boys!"

One of them uncoiled his lass-rope and was spreading a loop.

"Wait now, men!" Dad Burnett shouted, holding up a fist that was trembling with his frenzy. "Time enough to lynch him. First we got to find my little girl!"

Butch Felton had lost something of his nonchalance—a state of mind which had been due to his satisfaction with what he had accomplished. He had dispersed the whole gang of rustlers, scattered the herd so that the thieves could not get away with it into the Bad Lands, and he had shot down the master criminal of the whole bunch. That was a good night's work. But this news of the girl's disappearance worried him. In fact, he was more than worried. He was definitely alarmed. And added to that, these fool buckaroos seemed to be brewing some practical joke, in which he, Felton, was supposed to be the butt.

"The girl's around somewheres," he insisted, still keeping his hands raised. "Climbed out of the canyon, maybe. Look all over—up yonder on top of the mesa. If you didn't find her in the canyon, then she got away. That's all there is to it. Ran away from that cutthroat—your foreman."

"The smoothest liar I ever did see!" old Burnett yelled.

And his men chimed in:

"Knows his time's come, so he's spinnin' lies as fast as he kin talk!"

"Come on, chief! We'll finish him first. Then we'll search up yonder for the girl."

"What's this joke!" Felton cried hotly. "Find the girl and then have your fun!"

"I'll give you one minute more, hombre? Tell me where my daughter is. It's one minute afore we hang you!"

"Hang me! What's this talk of hangin'? Are you all daft? I got your man for you—Shim, your foreman. If he ain't dead yet—then why don't you hang him?"

This was received with yells and jeers. Here was this stranger, a renegade, asking them to believe his word against that of the foreman whom they had known for years. The jeers turned into guffaws—guffaws which, however, had a deadly undertone.

"Go on, Tim, throw the rope!" they cried to the cowman who had been spinning out the snarls of his lariat.

"One minute more, Felton!" came the incisive tones of Dad Burnett.

"It'll take more'n a minute to explain how I been workin' on this case. Maybe

it looks like there's lots to explain." Felton began to speak excitedly. By the flushed, grim faces of the men around him he knew that he was on dangerous ground. A lynch posse is impatient when it comes to long explanations. Twenty-four hours of trailing, first punching a herd through clouds of alkali, then following them in a wild pursuit, had heated the men's blood to the murder point. The psychology of that gang of riders, like the psychology of any lynch posse, was to hang the first man they suspected, guilty or innocent.

"Let me explain things!" Felton pleaded. "I was sent down here by the agency at Phoenix because of the rustling that's been goin' on in other cow camps. I've been hangin' around the gamin' dives—can't you get that?—pretendin' I was on the wing, hunted by sheriffs—so's I could mix with the renegades. I got wind of this racket which was to rob you of your whole beef herd. I trailed you after you'd left the ranch——"

"My girl!" Burnett broke in frantically. Nothing else could filter into his distracted mind. He had forgotten his herd. He had forgotten the fact that this stranger, Felton, had saved his daughter when she was cornered by a grizzly. All he wanted now was to find her and take her in his arms. He had not heard a word of the excited, incoherent pleading of the prisoner.

"I tell you, I lost sight of her during the stampede!" Felton shouted in a rage. "The stampede was headin' straight for me. I had to turn and ride for my life. Thought she was safe. I told you all that!"

"That much is most likely the truth, chief!" some one said. "He don't know where she's at. We're wastin' time. Let's finish him and then hunt for her."

"Yes, it's the truth, I reckon; the only word of truth he's spoke!" Dad Burnett cried in despair. "All right, Tim, give him the rope. We can't lose any more time."

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE LAST MOMENT.

UPON fleeing to the rim of that canyon during the stampede, Hannah Burnett was like a wild creature terrified by nameless deeds. The thunder of the stampeding herd had increased her panic. The gun fight between her captor and that unknown enemy hidden in the mesquite brush was by no means as reassuring as it might have been. Her first impression, naturally enough, was that one of Shim's own men had turned against him. A gunfight, a man dropping before her very eyes, the thunder of stampeding steers, the desolate country of which she had no knowledge whatsoever—these were enough to break any girl's nerve.

On the rim of the canyon she found herself on the flat top of a rocky, sage-dotted mesa. She had no idea where she was. The gray dawn revealed a limitless expanse of Bad Lands to the west. And there is no landscape this side of the mountains of the moon so grim, so awe-inspiring as the Bad Lands. To the terrified girl it seemed as if a cataclysmic earthquake had crumbled the breast of the earth, leaving a scene of utter devastation.

The girl fled on, climbing over heights of rock, running across stretches of black lava, stumbling in crevices, climbing up again, dazed, fear-ridden, almost out of her mind.

In her confusion she did not know which way she was going. The blood-red sun rolling up over a giant mesa meant nothing to her. She was too bewildered to surmise that back there toward the east—many miles away—there was the railroad, and Forlorn Camp. She was lost. And like any one lost and in a panic, she kept no definite course. She circled back, and, finally,

as she was dragging herself up the steep slope of a barranca into which she had fallen, she saw a horseman riding toward her.

Overcome with terror and fatigue, she just stood there staring, dumb—waiting like a bird in a nest watching the approach of a serpent.

Then, as the rider galloped his horse toward her, she saw that it was the foreman, Jud Shim.

She was shocked at the ghastly pallor of his face. His eyes, drained of blood, were like the burning eyes of a wounded wild beast. It seemed to the girl as if she were living once again her dreadful experience with that grizzly bear. But this time the enemy was a man.

"Now I've got you!" Shim cried, yanking his reins. "You won't get away this time, I'll tell you that much!"

He had a six-gun in his hand and was pointing it down at her. She was about to turn and jump once again into the narrow crevice behind her, but something in the man's eyes warned her not to move.

"If you move, I'll shoot," he said savagely. "Maybe you think I won't shoot? Well, don't make that mistake. If you live to tell your father what's happened, I'll be lynched. You savvy that? Maybe you think I'm foolin'! Maybe you think I ain't desperate!"

His hand was shaking as he spoke. His lips were trembling so that he could scarcely mouth his words. As she looked up at him it seemed as if his face turned a shade paler. Abruptly he slid from his horse. He could not sit in the saddle, holding that gun. He had to hold to the pommel with both hands. And now the excitement of finding the girl had been too much for him.

As his feet struck the ground he uttered a groan. He was unable to walk. He sank down before her, and then sat there, holding the reins of his horse in one hand, and the six-gun in the other.

"Your father's down there now, combing the draws for you!" he muttered. "If I dumped you it would save me!" The girl could scarcely make out the words. But their purport was clear enough. It was revealed with unmistakable clarity in his burning eyes, and in the deadly grin on his mouth. "That'd relieve my mind—killin' you. Ain't no one else knows what I've done—except them half-breeds, and they're well on the way to Mexico. But I ain't goin' to pull this trigger. I'm goin' to give you another chance. You're goin' to ride up to the Big Mesas on this horse—with me."

"I'll go!" the girl moaned. "I'll go wherever you say. I won't run away. I can't. I'm exhausted. I'll go—but only don't fire that gun. Put it away! I beg of you!"

"That's better," Shim muttered, his lips tightening. "Much better. But I'm keepin' the gun in my hand—ready."

He tried to struggle to his feet, but he sank back. He lay there, propped against a rock. He was the picture of rage and helplessness. He was like a wounded snake glaring up at its enemy, ready to strike with all the power remaining in its mangled body.

The girl stood her ground a few yards away, looking down at her captor. She saw clearly enough that he was ten times more dangerous now, wounded and helpless as he was, then when she had last seen him.

He was mumbling incoherently to himself, cursing his wound, cursing the man who had put that lead slug into his thigh. "But he'll pay!" he cried, raising his voice to a snarl. "They'll lynch him. I told 'em it was Butch Felton that stole their herd. That evens our score."

"You told them that Butch Felton ——" The girl gasped. She could not finish the sentence. Instead, she looked down with a scathing contempt upon her

captor. It was as if she were looking down upon some reptile which she wanted to step on—if she could only have summoned courage to come close enough.

"That kind of riles you—aye!" he laughed. "Well, go ahead and rile! But don't take a step toward me—and don't dast take a step t'other way. I'm ready with this gun; better keep that in your mind!" His head lolled back, the sun casting a lurid flush over the pasty, drawn features. "When I rest a minute—then you'll get aboard that horse, and I'll get up behind you. Then we'll——"

He stopped abruptly. A sound in the brush startled him, making him jump violently. The fright left him shaking all over like a palsied old man.

The girl saw what it was that had scared him: nothing but a horned toad scurrying through the dry chaparral.

"What's over yonder?" he asked thickly. His jaw hung open so that the words were only half formed. "What was that sound?"

The girl looked back at his face. It was hideous in its fear. She eyed him cautiously, like a cat watching a mouse.

"You heard somethin'?" he repeated in a shaking voice.

"Yes. I heard something."

"What was it?"

"You mean in that clump of sage behind that boulder?"

"Don't know where it was," Shim whimpered. "Sounded like a man crawlin' up to us."

From where she stood the girl could see the horned toad, flattening itself against the lava, blinking. It semed to wink knowingly at her.

A smile came to the girl's face. "Yes," she burst out suddenly. "They've got you! It's a man crawling up behind you."

Shim's eyes bulged. He was beside himself with fear. He had seen that lynch-mad posse. He knew that his life would not be worth a snap of the finger if he were caught. Some one in the brush! Some one seeing him there, holding the girl a prisoner! His wet forehead wrinkled into deep corrugations. His ghastly lips tightened back in a grimace of terror.

Again he heard the crackle of twigs in the brush. This time he knew just where the sound came from. His gun went up and he brought it down repeatedly in a series of shots.

The girl counted those shots. Some abnormal sense of accuracy bred of her desperate position enabled her to count six sharp detonations. Then she heard the trigger clicking on an empty shell.

She leaped for the reins of the horse, yanking them out of Shim's hand by throwing her whole weight backward.

Shim came to himself, struggled up, staggered forward, reaching out his arms with fingers clawing like a maniac that wants to tear some living thing to death.

But the girl had vaulted to the saddle, and slashing at Shim with her quirt, she was off at a furious gallop.

A posse was moving single file toward the mouth of the canyon where there was a dead piñon. The men were walking their horses, a grizzled, stocky old man in the lead, a herder following at a few paces, holding a rope. A tall, gaunt figure of a man came next, his hands bound, his head with its shaggy mane of black hair bared to the red light. The loop end of the lariat was slung about his neck.

Following in single file up the steep trail, ten or a dozen men led their horses. They reached the tree. Dad Burnett turned to face the prisoner, who had meanwhile been pouring out a volley of excited, frantic sentences—to which the old stockman was completely deaf.

But as he faced his prisoner now,

Dad Burnett experienced a momentary qualm. What if this man knew where Hannah was? What if he were keeping it as his last card—in order to save himself? If they lynched him, a precious secret might be killed with him.

"I'm goin' to give you one last chance, hombre," Burnett said in a voice that was almost pleading. "Where is she? Speak up!"

Again the hapless prisoner protested vehemently, frantically, that he had told the truth, and every bit of the truth. He had lost sight of her during the stampede—the stampede which he himself had started in order to scatter the rustled herd.

Dad Burnett shook his fists in the air, and then brought them against his ears as if he would go mad if he heard any more of those cruel lies.

The cowboy had thrown his lariat over the dry limb of the piñon. "Come on, men!" he shouted.

"Just hold it, Tim, one minute!" old Burnett cried. "If we kill him, we may never find my little girl!"

A growl of impatience went up from the gang. Their chief did not seem to know what he wanted. He wanted to kill this man, and he wanted to do it in a hurry so that he could go in search of his daughter. And now he was wavering at the last moment.

But just what his next command was to be they never knew. For at that moment one of the cowboys let out a triumphant yell:

"There she is, chief! There's the little kid! There's our little Hannah, ridin' for us like mad! Down that hill! Ten thousand tombstones—she'll break her neck!"

"It's Hannah, all right, chief!" shouted. "*Now* can we hang this bird? Are you satisfied?"

"Sure, I'm satisfied!" Dad Burnett cried, leaping to his horse. "Go ahead, give him the rope!" Then he was off, waving his sombrero with a frenzied cheer.

"All right, men!" the big cowboy named Tim cried. "Tally on!"

Butch Felton began to shout protests. His pleading and oaths had turned to the last frantic cries of an innocent but doomed man. His voice was choked off abruptly. The blood surged in the veins of his temples. His jaw drooped and the tongue which had pleaded so desperately for his life was thrust out, swollen, useless. The red sky turned black before his eyes. Voices of men rang in his ears in a confused din. Close to him black forms, silhouetted against the darkening background of sky and mesa, were bent and laboring, like seamen toiling at a rope. It was like a hideous nightmare.

"Once again! All together now!"

And in that strange crescendo of ringing sound, of the voices of men rising and falling and clanging like anvils in time with his own surging blood, Butch Felton heard a distant, piercing cry. Somehow it was soothing—for it was soft and far away. It seemed to come from another world—a world of life, drifting into this region of blackness and death.

"Hold on now, boys!" some one in that line of laboring men cried out. "The girl's callin' to us! She's ridin' right past her father. Didn't even stop to look at him. She's wavin' her hat at us right frantic. Screamin' her lungs out!"

The prisoner felt the convulsed muscles of his neck relax. A breath of life-giving air seemed to pass across the choking lump in his mouth which was his tongue. His legs, which had been in violent motion like those of a man running on a treadmill, kicked against stones and earth. Then his knees sagged and he fell forward on the ground.

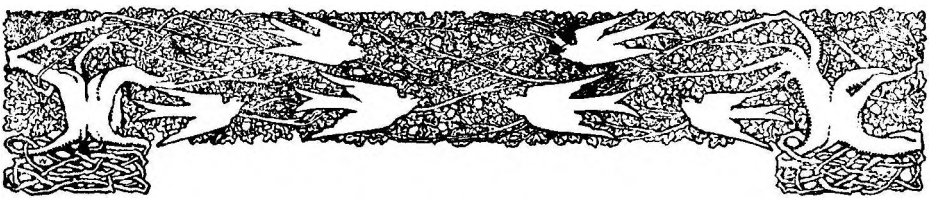
Butch Felton looked up after what seemed to be a dive into the depths

of eternity. Time had passed. How much he did not know. Eternity can not be measured.

The grizzled, deeply lined face of Dad Burnett was bending over him. And by the side of that face was another—the pale, oval face of Hannah Burnett.

"She's told me everything, kid," he heard the old man say. "All those things you was yellin' to us which we consarned jackasses thought was lies—well, she's proved 'em as truth. I'm shakin' your hand, boy."

Hannah took Felton's other hand and held it in the same eager embrace, as if she feared he might still be taken from her. She said nothing. It was not necessary. Butch Felton knew by the close, almost painful grip that he had won his long fight. More than that, he knew that he had won the girl.



BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Ruby-throated Humming Bird

(Archilochus Colubris)

BE sure that you do not mistake the hawk moth which is often seen flying at twilight for the ruby-throated humming bird.

Just as the cherry blossoms have shed their petals and are beginning to bud their fruit, the humming bird makes its appearance. And you must look sharp to catch sight of this tiny fellow, for he is almost constantly on the wing, at least he seems to be.

From the tip of his long, slender bill to the end of his tail, he measures but three and one-quarter inches. His back of shining green blends well with the leaves or twigs of any tree. His brilliant, red throat offsets a dull, gray-green breast. When the sun shines upon him, his colors take on a rich luster.

The nest of the humming bird is a tiny and compact affair placed on a small branch, sometimes high out of reach and often close at hand. The body is made of fern wool laid upon a layer of scales that fall from the buds of spruce trees, mixed with bits of plant down like the gone-to-seed dandelion. Moss from the cedar tree protects the outside of the nest. Inside, the edge is soft and loose, the entire structure not being more than an inch deep, which affords poor protection for the young family. But Mrs. Humming Bird has solved that problem in a rather unique way. Just as we build an extra room to our houses when the family increases, so she builds the nest up as her offspring increase in size.

But two pure-white eggs are laid in the tiny nest. When they are hatched, the baby birds—whether male or female—resemble the mother, who does not carry the patch of carmine which her husband boasts. Her throat and the throats of her children show only the pale gray-green dotted with a few dark spots.

From Florida to Nova Scotia the ruby-throat is found in the summer, while winter sends it flitting southward to Mexico and Central America. Only eighteen out of over five hundred known species make their homes in the United States.

The Lost Anthill Mine

by Arthur Preston Hankins

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

FALLING for a clever plot of his wily uncle, Esau Badger, wealthy young Radford Karval equips an expedition to seek the lost Anthill Mine. Among the documents "planted" by Esau are a map, the photograph of a beautiful girl, and a warning against Tom File and his gang.

Radford's outfit includes Pardee, his old cook, two punchers, and a guide, Henry Maitland. Proving untrustworthy, Maitland is dismissed. Radford is kidnaped by File's gang. They offer to exchange him for the map, but their messengers fail to return. Radford, freed by the picture girl, Merry Roane, who calls Esau her "daddy," returns to camp.

Esau appears, with his two allies, Bartolo and Geofredo, leading File and his gang. Rad, now suspicious, learns that Esau won the map, made by the old Spanish padres, from File by cheating at cards. Esau supplies the gang with provisions and sets them free, but unarmed. He then coolly suggests to Rad a little confidential talk.

CHAPTER XVIII.

COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENSE.

"FIRST," chirruped Uncle Esau, "permit me to make the introductions. Barto, you and Geofredo step this way and meet my favorite relative, Mr. Radford Karval."

The introductions were performed with due gravity, Pardee, Noxie, and Dailey being included. Throughout, Merry Roane sat and gazed off through the trees, a whimsical smile on her lips.

"And now," said Uncle Esau briskly, "to business."

"Yes, to business," echoed Rad.

"Radford, my boy," his uncle proceeded, "I have but one explanation to offer for the innocent little joke I played on you. This is it, in a nutshell:

"Ever since you can remember you have known of me as a man with a bad reputation, a gambler, a forger, a swindler, and probably worse. Therefore, I considered it entirely out of the question to approach you with the lost Anthill Mine proposition in an ordinary, businesslike manner. You would have thought it only another one of my innumerable schemes to separate people from their money, and would have fired me off your ranch. So I put on my little act, with the aid of the Señors DeLarra and Garrido, to make you have

confidence in the project and take up the search for this old Spanish mine, believing that you were doing so on your own initiative.

"My boy, I have faith in this mine. It's the biggest thing in my life. I wanted you to share in the find. I hadn't the money to go ahead myself. It took my lone thousand-dollar bill, what we got from the sale of the roadster, and every cent that Geof and Barto could scare up, to get us as far as we have come.

"We are ready to go ahead with you and find the lost mine, and make an equitable division of the profits. You are amply outfitted to take care of the entire party, doubled though it now is. You may not have known it, but that's the truth. We saved you from the File gang. And on that we rest our case. I have nothing more to say."

"But I have something to say," said Rad crisply.

"Then say it to Merry Roane," advised Esau Badger, turning away as if the interview, so far as he was concerned, was closed.

Rad felt a hand on his arm, and looked around to find the colorful girl standing close beside him.

"Come, take a little walk through the woods with me," she said softly. "I have been retained as counsel for the defense, it seems, and I've a great deal to say to you before you pronounce judgment. Will you come?"

"I—I'll hear what you have to say," Rad replied; and, feeling very foolish, he walked beside her into the dark, green forest.

They said nothing until the camp lay behind them a hundred yards. Then the girl stopped abruptly and seated herself on a large, flat stone.

"Sit here beside me and we'll have a heart-to-heart conference," she begged. "There's a lot that ought to be explained, and it seems that it's up to me to do it."

Rad obeyed her, maintaining a stony silence.

For some little time, the girl gazed at the ground, then spoke without looking up.

"Do you know, Rad," she said, "that you are about twenty years older than your Uncle Esau?"

"Do you mean a scientific test would prove that he has the mentality of a boy of five, while I have that of a man of twenty-five?" Rad asked.

"Hardly that," she replied, with a quiet smile. "A mental test would probably prove daddy to be twenty, and you forty. In other words, you're too old for your years, and he's too young."

"I'm afraid you're talking in riddles. Tell me, before we continue this mental business, why do you call my uncle 'daddy'?"

"Because," she replied, "the romantic, adventuresome, make-believe old thing is the only daddy I've ever known."

"Do you mean that——"

"Yes, your uncle raised me from the age of five, Radford, when my own father was killed in a poker game in Torreon, Mexico. And now I'm twenty-two. My mother died when I was born. My father was a professional gambler, like your uncle."

"Raised you!" Rad gasped. "I never heard about you before."

"Daddy never let any of his relatives know anything about me," she explained. "I'm his pet secret. But I've known about you for years and years."

"Were you legally adopted?"

"Oh, yes."

"Er—that is—what have you been doing all your life?"

"Living on a big cattle ranch in Mexico, traveling about with daddy sometimes, attending a private boarding school in El Paso, and going to college. Daddy kept me on the ranch, which is owned by a friend of his, and had me taught by a governess until I was fourteen. There's where I learned to ride

and be a tomboy. Then he sent me to the boarding school in El Paso. After that I went to the University of Texas, from which I was graduated this spring."

"Well, for the love of Mike!" cried Rad. "Esau Badger did all that for you?"

"And a great deal more, Rad. He has sacrificed much for me. My father was his dearest friend, and when he was dying he asked your uncle to take care of me. With what devotion he has done so, only he and I can tell."

She looked up at last, and her brown eyes were swimming.

"Rad," she said, "I think I am the only person in the world that really knows Esau Badger. He may have been a crook in his time, but he has never revealed that part of his past to me. Others have told me, though. I know he's a gambler and a—a confidence man, we'll call it—but he's a square-shooter for all that. My real father could not have been kinder than he has been to me. I'm for him, first, last, and all the time, against the entire world. You'll be, too, when you know him better. Barto and Geof are devoted to him.

"He's just a boy, Rad, who has never grown up. Full of the spirit of adventure, living in a realm of make-believe apart from the common herd, there was scarcely any other outlet, in these prosaic times, for his imagination except the reckless course he chose.

"He loves to best people by his wits. I don't imagine he cares a great deal —now, anyway—for the profit he may make from his wild schemes. He spends most of his money on me, so far as that goes, or gives it to friends and acquaintances who seem to need it. Or, for that matter, anybody who asks him for it. No, daddy cares nothing for the money after he's got it. It's the novelty of getting it that appeals to him. And he has never, to my knowledge, swindled or won from a man who couldn't afford to lose."

"I see you're strong for the old boy," Rad laughed, watching the play of sunlight in her raven hair. "But tell me—why did he play this childish trick on me?"

"My explanation of that is the same as the one he gave you," she told him. "He honestly believed that you wouldn't listen to him if he tried to induce you to outfit an expedition to search for the lost Anthill Mine. So he schemed and schemed, and at last hit upon the spectacular idea that he eventually carried out.

"But I knew nothing about it, Rad, until I had left El Paso, in response to a wire from him, and joined him and his two Spanish friends on the desert. Then, chuckling with delight, he told me what he had done. And since it was then too late to expostulate with him, I—I just joined in the game and helped to carry it to this point. I'm somewhat adventurous myself, you see, so it wasn't hard.

"And I'll confess more: I've gambled. I've dealt stud poker, faro, and keno, and spun a roulette wheel in a regular gambling house. Also, one time when daddy and I got terribly hard up, I told fortunes in a circus sideshow.

"There! You now know the extent of my depravity! Will you accept me as a sort of artificial cousin? And will you forgive Daddy Badger for something he couldn't help doing? For I firmly believe he couldn't help starting you on this journey by sort of kidding you into it. All the zip would have been taken out of it for him if he had interested you by merely putting the thing up to you as a prosaic business proposition.

"Will you believe me when I tell you that daddy is mightily fond of you? And will you believe me further when I say that he is doing this all for me? He has a silly premonition that he isn't

going to live much longer. He wants to leave me with plenty of money, he says.

"After all, Rad, what harm has been done? The lost Anthill Mine is a reality, a good, sound, sporting proposition. Oh, the lure of it makes me frantic! I've wanted to seek it ever since Daddy Badger told me about the map. But we couldn't, until—until daddy hornswoggled you into taking up the quest. Are you sorry, Rad, now that you've come this far and realize that you haven't been swindled in the least?"

"I—I suppose not," the young man thoughtfully replied. "I guess, since you've put it up to me the way you have, everything will be—er—all right."

"Attaboy!" she praised him, and impulsively took his hand. "Just say nothing at all about it to daddy, and let matters ramble along. Will you?"

"You're going on to the end with us?" asked Rad.

Her eyes grew round. "Of course," she said. "It's been my consuming ambition for several years."

"Then—then I guess we'll let things rock along," he told her, and his face was red with guilt.

As they walked side by side toward camp, they crossed the line of march taken by the File gang when they started their long journey back to Carpenter. The girl stooped suddenly and picked up something from the ground.

"Why, what can this be?" she asked.

It was a rectangle of pasteboard, rounded at the corners. Merry turned it over, to discover that she was gazing at a photograph of herself.

"Well, of all things!" she cried. "Where did this come from?"

Radford Karval's ears were burning. "I—— It must have—— That is, I think File's men must have taken it out of my pocket last night, when they were searching me for the map. I was—unconscious at the time."

She stared at him, dumfounded.

"Whoever had it probably threw it away as the gang left. I've been so busy I hadn't missed it."

"But where did you get it?"

"It was—er—left by Uncle Esau in the cabin he occupied at The Buckeyes after he—disappeared. And I just sort of—well, appropriated it."

"And you've been carrying it ever since?"

Rad wriggled. "Well, yes."

She looked at him oddly. "Why?" she asked. "You didn't know whose photograph it was, did you?"

"Not exactly. But—— say, you're embarrassing me. Cousin Merry. Please don't ask so many questions." He took the photograph from her unresisting hands and pocketed it defiantly. "It reminds me of somebody I know," he added—which was now quite true. "So I—took it."

'Oh!" said Merry Roane vaguely, as her long lashes screened her eyes. "I'll see what Daddy Badger has to say about it. He doesn't ordinarily leave photographs of me lying about promiscuously."

CHAPTER XIX.

DINKA DADDY.

LATER, Rad and his uncle took counsel together as if no friction had ever existed between them. The day was so far advanced that they decided to let the stock rest for the remainder of the afternoon and the night to come. Early next morning they would proceed as if the party, from the start, had consisted of all hands who now composed it.

Rad spent the afternoon in getting better acquainted with his "artificial cousin," and considered that his time was well employed. Merry Roane made no mention of having as yet interviewed Esau Badger concerning the photograph, and they avoided the subject by tacit agreement.

In that chilly period that follows

dawn in the mountains they broke camp and hazed the string of pack mules into the Southwest. For three days more they zigzagged from east to west, through forbidding canyons and over mountains that taxed the animals to the utmost. Then Uncle Esau announced that they were drawing close to the forgotten plateau, and might even come upon it the following afternoon if all went well.

This perked up the weary travelers considerably, and they went to bed that night eager for the morrow, and what it might bring forth.

It was at eleven o'clock next morning that Rad and his uncle rode abreast to the top of a little hill and sighted the goal. The plateau was spread before them, seemingly as level as a tabletop, except for the small hills with which it was studded here and there. It did not look lemon-colored now, as it had from the pass back in the mountains. It was yellow with sun-cured grass, but the bright glare had vanished.

Suddenly, Rad lowered his binoculars and pointed. "See something just this side of the plateau?" he asked.

"By George!" exclaimed Esau Badger, after a long scrutiny through his glasses. "It's smoke!"

"Nothing else." Rad agreed. "Rising straight up in a thin stream. A camp fire, no doubt."

"There used to be the remnant of a tribe of Indians living somewhere in this country," said his uncle. "Sort of a pariah outfit, belonging to no reservation. Yaquis, probably, or with Yaqui blood in their veins. We're not so very far from the Mexican border, you know. We didn't run across them when we made our unsuccessful trip in here. But this wilderness is like the heart of Africa, Rad, so it must be that little tribe that is responsible for the smoke. I'm willing to bet there are no other white men within a hundred miles. That is, provided my estimable friend Tom File has kept to a true homeward course."

"These renegade Yaquis are bad medicine, aren't they, Uncle Esau?"

"Well, they have their flighty moments," was the old gambler's dry reply.

"We'll have to investigate that smoke before climbing to the plateau."

"Yes. Mark that little hill on the left of it. And the tall pine on its right. We'll set our course between them. The smoke may not be rising by the time we reach there."

They rode down and galloped to rejoin the party.

Radford's estimate of his queer uncle's character was undergoing a decided change. Esau Badger made a commanding figure on his big, black horse. He sat the saddle like a veteran rider. His years pressed lightly on his well-knit shoulders. His knowledge of woodcraft and of how to take care of himself and others of an expedition such as this was phenomenal. His courage and endurance were indisputable. And now that Rad realized that the man was not all selfishness, that his one great ambition in life was to further the well-being of his adopted daughter, he grew actually to admire him.

About half-past three that afternoon Esau Badger called a halt. The pack train was nearing its goal, and he and Rad had decided to steal forward alone to reconnoiter.

They rode ahead through a grove of oak trees for perhaps a quarter of a mile. Then they dismounted, left their horses, and pressed on afoot.

Presently, they heard a doleful voice singing in a monotonous tone. They listened a while, but could not distinguish the singer's words. So they walked ahead cautiously, their six-shooters out and cocked.

Soon they were crawling, for they had entered a patch of scanty chaparral. There were more trees beyond it, and these they presently entered. They had

not progressed more than thirty steps through the woods when Esau Badger held up a hand for silence. They halted, listening intently.

The monotonous, croaking voice continued its singing. And this is what the listeners heard:

"With a long fumba laddie,
Comba knocka dinka daddy,
Comba dinka toodle addy,
Comba long Tom Brown!"

Again and again the nonsensical strain was repeated, and then suddenly the hidden vocalist changed words and tune:

"Bugaroo tim-a-lally,
Bugaroo! Bugaroo!
Bugaroo tim-a-lally bugaroo!"

And this was repeated for five minutes or more without cessation.

"Can that be the Yaqui tongue?" Rad whispered.

His uncle's thin lips gave him a grave, slanting smile. "I don't thing so," he replied. "That last is somewhat familiar to me. I'd call it the Gypo tongue."

"Gypo! That means nothing to me. Are the Gypos a tribe of Indians?"

"One of the wildest in existence," chuckled Uncle Esau. "They're railroad construction men. Lower the hammer of that gun and come on."

A few seconds more and the two were peering out into the clearing in the timber. Axed stumps were all about, where trees had been felled. White tents stood here and there. They saw a pile of pack saddles and saddlebags, boxes, cross saddles, and other evidences of a more or less permanent camp. A pleasant little creek twinkled past the clearing. Not far away was a barbed-wire corral, in which sleepy mules lay about or rested on three feet.

From a couple of joints of pipe extending upward from a small cookstove a thin curl of smoke was rising. On a table, made of hewn saplings, were pots and pans.

The singing ceased as the pair stood staring. The short, fat man who was the author of it waddled to the stove. He stooped and opened the oven door. Out floated the fragrance of baking bread.

He wore a jaunty, white, cook's cap on one side o his head and a white apron, this wilderness baker. He pulled out his bread pans, turned them around, shoved them into the oven again, and closed the door. Then he seated himself on a wooden grocery box, and proceded to enliven the slow hours with song:

"Bakin' bread and a-washin' dishes
Ain't no job for a guy that wishes
That he was a skinner on the gumbo line——
Bugaroo tim-a-lally,
Bugaroo! Bugaroo!
Bugaroo tim-a-lally bugaroo!

"Born with the ribbons in me chubby hands,
At five I was givin' thirty mules commands,
At twelve I'm drivin' zebras on foreign strands,
But at fifty I'm a flunky in the dread Bad Lands.
Oh, I want to be a skinner on the gumbo line——
Bugaroo tim-a-lally,
Bugaroo!"

Esau Badger stepped out into the open spot and cleared his throat as the singer paused to gnaw off a chew of plug tobacco.

The camp cook leaped up from the canned-corn box as if a cannon cracker had exploded under him. His left hand grasped one side of his soiled white apron and whisked it forward, while his right dived for the six-shooter on his hip.

"Good Lord!" he gasped, as the old gambler stood smiling at him, placidly waiting for him to finish his gun play. "Youse're white! At foist I t'ot youse was a Yack. Love o' ladies, where'd youse come from, bossman?"

"From over the hills and far away," said Badger. Then, calling to his nephew to join him, he went and familiarly seated himself on a box marked "Tomatoes."

"Who are you, and why?" he asked the staring cook, whose browned right hand was stroking a six-weeks' growth of grizzled beard in comical amazement.

"Me name's Gaffney," the man replied. "George Henry Gaffney. But de gang calls me 'Dinka-daddy' Gaffney. And sometimes 'Bugaroo.' And den ag'in jes' 'Bug.'"

"The gang?"

"Yeah—Cap'n Henderson's outfit."

'And who, please, is Captain Henderson?"

"Engineer fer de Sout'western & Coast Railroad dat's figgerin' on buildin' a new line t'rough dese jungles from Arizony to de broad Pacific. We're on de preliminary survey. I'm de cook fer de outfit, and I wish I wasn't—dat's all. Too lonesome, dis job—and de woods is full o' hostile Yacks. Love o' ladies, but youse guys scairt me, bossman! I t'ot it was a bunch o' Yacks lookin' fer fresh stew meat. How on earth did youse git here? An' wot're youse up to?"

"We're connected with a scientific expedition," replied Esau Badger offhandedly. "But listen: Do you mean to tell me that it is proposed to build a new railroad through here?"

"If dey c'n git her t'rough. Dat's wot Cap'n Henderson is tryin' to find out."

"Captain Henderson and his party are out in the field at present?"

"Yeah, bossman. Dey woik from morn till night, as de fella says."

"How on earth did you get your outfit in here? And how many are in the party?"

"Dere's seven of us, includin'. me. We come up de valley o' de Fresco River to de headwaters, den cut acrost."

"I knew there was a possible way in by that watercourse," mused Uncle Esau. "But, man, there are stretches of chaparral, fifteen feet high, extending for miles and miles along that route!"

"Sure dere is. We boloed our way t'rough like Filipinos. It took two mont's."

"Heavens! You cut a trail through those endless seas of chaparral! I can't believe it."

The fat cook shrugged. "Ast de cap'n," he offered.

"You surely couldn't have brought along enough supplies to last you until the work is done," said Uncle Esau.

"Sure not," replied Dinka-daddy. "Why, man, we got a clear trail t'rough to Fort Kelsey, and we got pack trains comin' and goin' once a week. Dis ain't no ladies' macaroon bridge party, bossman. It's a job. Wot might dey call youse two?"

"I beg your pardon," returned Esau Badger politely, rising to his feet. "I am Doctor Esau Badger, of the Southwestern Institute of Natural History. This is my nephew, Mr. Radford Karval."

"Charmed," grunted Dinka-daddy. "Will I see youse ag'in?"

"Oh, yes. We're going back to our outfit now, and we'll bring it up soon. Like to camp here to-night, beside your friendly little creek."

"Bust yerselves, far as I'm consoined. And de cap'n'll be rejoiced to see youse. He's a good scout, but hard as nails."

Badger and Rad returned to their horses and rode back to the outfit.

"Hope to thunder Tom File doesn't hear about that new route into this country," mused the gambler as they rode along. "I can scarcely believe the evidence myself. Why, my boy, if that road goes through, we'll have to search for the Anthill Mine under the eyes of a thousand men! Unless we work fast and turn the trick before the job starts. And that's our only play."

CHAPTER XX.

WORTHLESS FREIGHT.

WHEN Rad's twenty-mule outfit wove its slow way to the engineers' camp beside the little creek, they discovered that the day's work was over for these trail-blazers of civilization. The corral now inclosed a number of saddle horses, and the young men who composed the party were laughing and shouting and dousing their heads in water. Dinka-daddy was busy over his little stove, and a long table, made of packing boxes and green cuttings from the forest, was set for the evening meal.

A middle-aged man in khaki, puttees, and a Stetson hastened forward to make the newcomers welcome. He was followed by a younger man with a bronzed, handsome face, and a genial manner.

"I'm Captain Henderson," announced the foremost, offering a capable hand to Esau Badger as he dismounted. "This is Doctor Badger, I presume?"

Esau Badger gravely inclined his head as he accepted the welcoming hand of the chief engineer. He presented Radford. Then the other man, who was about Rad's age, stepped up, and Captain Henderson introduced him as Austin West, his first assistant.

"Dinka-daddy failed to find out how many principals were in your party," said Henderson, "but I told him to be sure and have grub enough for half a dozen extras. So such members of your outfit as you may name, doctor, are to dine with us this evening. We want to make you feel at home at once, you know."

"That's mighty kind of you," said Esau Badger. "There'll be only three. My nephew, myself, and—— Where's Merry, Rad?"

At this point Merry, in her startling garb, rode up from the rear of the pack train, and the two engineers stood staring at her. Then suddenly the young assistant, Austin West, uttered a sharp exclamation and stepped toward the girl on the white horse.

"Has the heat got me, or what?" he gasped. "Aren't you Miss Roane, of this year's graduating class at the University of Texas?"

A look of recognition and a pleased smile lighted Merry's pretty face.

"None other," she replied, leaning from the saddle and offering a ready hand. "And you're Austin West, of the College of Engineering."

"I'm surprised that you remember me," said West, blushing furiously as he wrung her hand.

"And how about your remembering me?" laughed the girl.

"Oh, I was just West—one of the mob. But you were Merry Roane. Everybody knew Merry Roane, by sight, at least."

"And reputation, perhaps?"

"Undoubtedly. A reputation that would make most girls dizzy. Well, if this isn't the limit! I never expected to see a white woman out here in this waste—but *you!* It's staggering!"

"Quite a pleasant little reunion," Esau Badger remarked. "Now suppose you two drop the old settlers' get-together movement and allow me to present Captain Henderson to my daughter. My daughter by adoption, to be more exact. My dear, Captain Henderson."

Merry rode forward and shook hands with the chief engineer, and then any further conversation that the five might have indulged in was interrupted by a wheezy yelp from Dinka-daddy:

"Grub pile! Come git it! Swaller and tickle the trail!"

"That means us," laughed Captain Henderson. "Doctor, can't you just leave it to your men to select a camping place, and you three come to the feast while it's hot?"

"I'll leave it to Rad," said "Doctor" Badger. "Just tell Pardee to use his own judgment, Rad, my boy, and hurry back

to us. You might take Merry's horse and mine with you while you're about it. Flip out of the saddle, my dear. We're dining with Captain Henderson this evening."

Silently, Rad took the bridle reins of the two horses when Merry had swung to the ground. It was natural for the engineers to assume that Esau Badger was in command of the expedition, since he had introduced himself to Dinkadaddy as Doctor Badger. Rad wondered as he led the two animals toward the pack train if his uncle had deliberately brought this about. He did not fully trust the old schemer as yet. Certainly, that would be a clever way for Esau Badger to force Rad into relinquishing control of the expedition to him, at least, while they were in touch with the party of engineers.

Rad was a little resentful, and his resentment did not abate when he saw Merry walking toward the engineers' camp with an arm linked in Austin West's. West had been entirely too admiring and eager and red-faced in greeting his university acquaintance. In short, Radford was a little peevish over the way everything had turned out.

When he rejoined the three, the introduction of the others of the party had been performed. There were four of them, hearty, clean-cut lads, presentably neat, polite, overflowing with the time-honored hospitality of the outlands. Rad was introduced to them as the gathering stood about the long table, and proceeded immediately to forget their names. His eyes and thoughts were on the old college chums who were standing side by side behind their camp chairs, chattering, oblivious to everybody else.

Then they all were seated, and Dinkadaddy was bustling about with steaming pans.

"Doctor" Badger was immediately forced into a string of magnificent lies that caused Rad to gasp at his versatility. Surely, any one with only a layman's knowledge of archæology, ethnography and paleontology would have imagined Uncle Esau to be thoroughly grounded in these sciences. No wonder he was able to skin his fellowmen out of their cherished shekels!

Rad remembered, however, that his uncle had once accompanied a scientific expedition into a remote region in South America, and was aware that he had a receptive and cataloguing mind. They were now hunting for fossils of a certain period, Rad learned; and he resolved to be a dumb-bell on the subject and to pose merely as the financial angel of the undertaking.

When this subject had been exhausted, they talked of the proposed new railroad, and of the nomad tribe of Yaquis that occasionally visited the country. Then, unexpectedly, Captain Henderson asked of Esau Badger:

"By the way, Doctor Badger, did your party wander to the west of here to-day or the day before?"

"Not a mile," readily replied the apocryphal scientist. "We came direct in from the northwest, by the compass."

Captain Henderson looked in a puzzled way across the table at Austin West. "Then who in the dickens made those footprints, Aus?" he asked.

The assistant engineer shrugged indifferently and continued his conversation with Merry Roane.

But Esau Badger's thin nostrils were twitching. "What do you refer to, may I ask?" he questioned.

"Well, this afternoon," replied Henderson, "West and I came upon a number of hoofmarks about three miles south of camp, close to where we were at work. There were the smaller tracks of mules, too, and we were more than ever puzzled. We followed them up, wondering if the Yaquis were nosing about again. Then we came to a spot where the horses had been halted, and what do you think we found there?"

Uncle Esau shook his white head.

"Footprints made by high-heeled, cowboy boots," said Henderson. "And the Yaquis invariably wear a sort of moccasin, or go barefoot. Our only deduction could be that there were other white men in this wilderness."

"Well, we're not responsible for those tracks," returned Badger lightly. "It's rather interesting, though."

But the pucker between his studious gray eyes told Rad that he was not a little worried.

And the pucker deepened when, after walking down the creek to the camp that their men had made, Pardee met the three and mysteriously motioned them to follow him. He led them to the place where the pack bags were piled.

"I was aimin' to redistribute the pack, Rad," said the cook, who recognized no other overseer. "You know, balance it up among all the mules, considerin' that we've used up a lot of supplies."

"I understand," said Rad. "Well, Pard?"

"Well, I discovered this," said Pardee, kicking a pack bag. Look inside her, Rad. We ain't even looked in that bag since we left the desert. And the same way with thatun, and thatun, and thatun"—he pointed.

Rad stooped down and lifted the canvas flap. The bag contained a wooden case, its label showing that it was supposed to hold canned peas. But a board had been ripped from its top by Pardee, and Rad saw that the box was filled with dirt.

"Three more bags faked the same way," said Pardee. "Beans and flour gone, too. The only answer is that Tom Pile's got more grub than we thought when we turned him loose."

"But who did this? And when?" cried Rad. "File had no chance to get at the pack after he was captured."

"I been thinkin' it over," returned Pardee. "They was short o' grub all along. That guide, Henry Maitland, knew it. So at night, some time, he lifted this stuff and cached her beside the trail fer File to pick up when he come along."

"But File's gang didn't have it when Uncle Esau and his friends got the better of them," Rad protested. "Lou Dailey went through their pack when he went for their stuff and horses to the camp by the waterfall."

"I know all that," Pardee argued. "But I decided that was jest a temporary camp—a place to take you to till they was able to trade you for the map. There was only two mules there, you'll remember. They must o' had more pack animals, Rad. And these they left at their other camp, together with those supplies, when they went out that night to raid us. Then Miss Roane sneaked in and put a crimp in their plans, and they took you to the temporary camp at the falls. So now they've got that extra grub, and may be on our trail again this minute."

"The footprints!" cried Rad, looking at the girl and her foster father.

Esau Badger nodded grimly. "I guess Tom got in ahead of us, after all," was his comment. "It struck me, when he left us, that he was taking defeat pretty calmly."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LOCKED TRAIL.

A SICK, groaning mule kept Bill Noxie and Lou Dailey busy for half the night. The animal's condition had improved by daylight, but Rad thought it best not to burden him with a pack until the middle of the day. All the burden bearers needed rest, anyway; and the expedition was so close to its goal that a half day, one way or the other, did not amount to much.

When their early breakfast was over, Rad, his uncle, and Merry Roane paid another visit to the engineers' camp, to bid them good-by and thank them for their generous welcome. The party was

on the point of riding into the field, with levels, transits, and other instruments of their calling over their shoulders, and lunches tied behind their cantles.

Afterward, the three returned to their own camp and lazed away the remainder of the glorious mountain morning.

Pardee served the midday meal at eleven o'clock, so that packs and saddles were on and the expedition was ready to move forward shortly after noon.

Their camp was perhaps a quarter of a mile from that of the engineers. They had decided that their best route lay in following the creek for a mile or more before crossing it. The going was better here than on the other side, Captain Henderson had told them, and they might save time by keeping to the bottoms for the distance mentioned.

As they neared Henderson's camp, they missed the familiar figure of Dinka-daddy Gaffney at his customary task. Thinking nothing of this, however, they pressed on until Merry came galloping forward from her place in the rear of the pack train, shouting to Radford and her uncle.

"There's something wrong back there in the captain's camp," she told the two men. "I heard strange sounds coming from one of the tents, as if somebody was suffering. You'd better investigate. Maybe the cook has had an accident."

Rad and Uncle Esau turned their horses' heads and rode back, with Merry following, while the outfit moved on up the creek bottoms.

The sounds that the girl had mentioned were plainly distinguishable as they entered the camp, now that the thudding hoofs had passed out of hearing. Mumbling, moaning, croaking sounds they were, as if a man were trying to shout with his mouth full of something. They hastened from one tent to another, and finally located the source of the disturbance.

They found the fat, grizzled cook lying flat on his back in one of the canvas inclosures. He was bound hand and foot, and there was a gag in his mouth, with a bandanna handkerchief tied over his face to keep it in. He rolled his eyes at them and relaxed from his struggles as they bent over him, hastening to free him.

They helped him to a sitting posture when the gag was out and his limbs had been freed.

"Your friends, the Yacks?" asked Esau Badger.

"Yacks, nuthin'!" stormed Dinka-daddy, rubbing his swollen wrists. "It was white men. I'm cleanin' up after breakfast—see?—and all of a suddent —*bam!*—sumpin' landed on me cantaloupe. Down I goes—stars an' hummin' boids an' fragrant blossoms! But jest before I swim off—see?—I gets a slant at one o' me vile assailunts. He's white—a cow-puncher, if his rags mean anythin'. Den I'm out, and I don't chirp no more till I hear yer outfit passin' t'rough. Love o' ladies, wot a crack I took!"

"What did the fellow look like?" asked Uncle Esau thoughtfully.

The cook shook his head, which caused it to ache, and he ceased with a groan.

"He was kinda diaphanous lookin'," he replied. "His face looked like a jellyfish. His arms and legs were forty feet long, and still stretchin' when I floated off into daisyland. But I reckon he was jes' a common, ordinary stiff, at dat."

"A big, flowing, dark mustache?" he was quizzed.

"I couldn't sketch um fer youse, pal. I was oozin' out."

"Was your six-shooter in that holster on your belt?" asked Rad.

Dinka-daddy clapped a hand to the empty holster. "Dey got me rod!" he gasped.

"I guess that's what tempted them,"

Badger observed. "Let's look about and see if anything else is missing."

They helped the cook to his feet and he followed them on wabbly legs.

"Mr. Webster's Winchester is gone!" he howled, as they finished exploring in one of the tents. "He never took it out wid um, because he's de level-man, an' he couldn't pack her and his level, too. He carried a hip rod, like me."

And from another tent Dinka-daddy claimed that a .45 automatic pistol had disappeared. It was part of his duties to make the beds and clean the tent interiors, so that he was familiar with all the engineers' belongings.

"Mr. Philips never packed dat rod," he claimed. "He had a six, an' he carried her in a holster. Dat automatic was a present dat was slipped to un by a well-meanin' party w'en we're dashin' outa Fort Kelsey to tame dis Yack-infested wilderness. Say, I'm wonderin' who come here collectin' trophies dat way! D'ye savvy, bossman?"

But Uncle Esau had no reply to make to that; and after a little the three galloped off to overtake the pack train, believing that the File gang had at least three more weapons to aid them in their unjust cause.

Eventually fording the creek, the expedition passed through a belt of timber and came out in a fairly open country, with the forgotten plateau rising before them, perhaps five miles distant. Esau Badger now called a halt, and there followed a consultation and a careful study of the ancient map. They reached the conclusion that they were several miles to the east of the indicated trail. So when they started, they switched back gradually, headed toward the southeast and the impressive wall of the plateau that swam in a heat-haze before them.

Soon they were on ground that was familiar to Esau Badger, and from here on the traveling was comparatively easy. As they neared the plateau, Rad observed that that side of it, at least, was all but perpendicular. It was about two hundred feet in height, and the wall was of fluted rock in which appeared an occasional scrawny bush, struggling for life in the unkind mooring ground. The only place that offered passage to the top, so far as Badger knew, was farther to the southeast. So they threaded their way along the base of the high rock wall, weaving in and out at the wall's dictation.

And presently they halted before a natural shelf that slanted upward along one side of a deep crevice. Water was indicated on the map as lying in the vicinity of the beginning of the trail. They found it, a bubbling, cold spring, after a little search. They camped near it for the night, planning to begin the ascent of the trail next morning.

The camp buzzed with talk and speculation that night. Nevertheless, all were watchful, and they took turns at standing guard throughout the later hours. But they were not disturbed, and at six o'clock next morning the saddles and packs were on, and Uncle Esau, with Merry close behind him, rode into the old trail and led the way along the crumbly slope.

He did not tell the others that their greatest danger from the File gang lay just ahead of them. For Tom File was familiar with this trail, having accompanied Esau Badger on his first expedition into the country. The gang might easily handle them here, he figured, provided they had gained the plateau ahead of them. And this advantage he was confident Tom File had achieved.

And now the entire train was in the crevice, worming a slow way upward along the slanting shelf, with a precipice ever growing deeper on one side, and a perpendicular wall of rock on the other side. The shelf, breathtakingly slanting in places, crumbly in others, and then as firm underfoot as they could

wish, was from four to ten feet wide. The packs scraped the perpendicular wall in many spots, and often the mules sent showers of loose stones clattering down the precipice as they hugged the wall, their tiny hoofs frantically scrambling for a foothold.

And then, when they were halfway to the summit, a huge boulder came roaring down from above and landed in the trail, sending one pack mule over the lip to go screaming to his death, and cutting the outfit in half.

Esau Badger and his adopted daughter were the only human beings on the upper side of the obstruction.

Then the crack of a rifle awoke the echoes, which went crashing back and forth from one wall to the other of the crevice.

Next instant, Rad was off his horse and desperately trying to press past the quivering mules that were between him and the boulder in the narrow trail.

CHAPTER XXII.

TRAPPED.

AS he began his perilous attempt to pass the excited animals, Rad's first thought was of Merry Roane. The huge boulder had lodged directly in the trail, and it filled the path from the upright wall to the precipice on the other side. It stood as high as a mule's withers, so there was no possibility of getting any of the shavetails past it. And beyond it, with the foremost portion of the pack train, were Merry and her foster father!

There were six mules between Radford and the boulder. They were in an exceedingly narrow part of the trail. Rad must get beyond them, scale that boulder, and join the two on the upper side. Once more came the sharp crack of a rifle. Were the File gang firing on the two?

Rad laid a hand on the lean rump of the mule just ahead of his saddle horse. The animal, excited by the crash of the boulder, the firing, and the uneasiness of the mules ahead of him, trembled as it felt Rad's touch.

Its left-hand pack bag was pressed tightly against the perpendicular wall. Under it, a large stone protruded, occupying all of the space between the pack bag and the trail. The other bag overhung the precipice. To pass the mule in the three-foot path was a precarious undertaking, if not an utter impossibility.

There was but one way to accomplish it, Rad saw in a flash. To crawl under the right-hand pack bag, past the mule's right legs, would leave only a foot of ground for him to move along. At any moment the frightened animal might begin to lunge about and knock him over the edge into the yawning chasm. He must crawl under the mule's belly and take a chance on being kicked or trampled by the erratic hybrid. It was his only chance.

Gently, he fondled the mule's rump and spoke to him encouragingly. Then he lowered his hand over the hip joint, down the thigh, and along the quarter to the hock. The mule quivered, but did not offer to kick. Next moment, speaking in an even tone again, the young man lowered himself to his knees, and crawled round the hind legs under the animal's belly.

The mule began to dance with fright. Rad spoke again, and reached forward to touch one of its front legs. At the touch, the mule reared on its hind legs, and made as if to turn about in the narrow trail. But mules are wise animals, much safer than horses in precarious situations. Seeing that he could not turn, it subsided and stood a-tremble while Rad crawled under it, around its front legs on the wall side, and stood upright in the trail ahead of him.

Again and again he went through the same performance with other mules, and then he came to a wider part of the

trail, where to pass on the wall side was possible.

All the time, the firing was continuing at intervals, and he heard shouts from his own men and Uncle Esau's Spaniards from the rear. And now he had passed the six mules and reached the rock. A glance showed him that it would test the strength of the entire party to dislodge it from the cuplike depression into which it had settled. How File and his four men had managed to dislodge it from its resting place above the trail, and send it crashing down, was a question that Rad did not trouble with at the time.

It was roundish, and his first efforts to climb on top of it were futile, as he could gain no foothold. Then he heard panting behind him, and looked about to see the herculean Bartolo DeLarra, who had come forward along the trail in the same manner that Rad had.

"Just a moment," Bartolo said without emotion. "I'll give you a lift; then you can help pull me up."

He linked together the brown fingers of both huge hands and stooped. Rad laid his foot in the hammock which they made, and next moment the muscular Spaniard shot him to the top of the stone. He turned about, allowed Bartolo to take hold of his wrists, and, though the man was exceedingly heavy, Rad succeeded in helping him up to his side.

The first thing of which the two became aware, when they faced the trail beyond the obstruction, was that the foremost part of the pack train had vanished around the bend. They slid down the up-trail side of the rock and trotted along the narrow shelf, their six-shooters drawn and ready for immediate action.

When they had rounded the sharp turn they saw the first half of the pack train moving forward, slowly climbing toward the top of the plateau, with their goal not far ahead.

But Merry Roane and Esau Badger were not leading the way for them, and were nowhere to be seen.

At that moment there came another rifle shot from the other side of the crevice, and a bullet flattened itself against the stone wall on their left. It had passed between them. A round ball of white smoke hung in the air on the other side of the knife-blade canyon, indicating where the shot had been fired.

"Down on your belly!" cried Barto. "Make a smaller target. We're standing against this wall like bandits in front of a firing squad."

They threw themselves flat in the trail and searched the other side of the crevice with quick glances for a sign of the enemy. But they could see no moving thing.

"Crawl ahead," the Spaniard enjoined. "See that low place in the trail? Get into it."

Another bullet spatted against the wall as Rad, seeing the wisdom of Bartolo's plan, began crawfishing his body forward. He could think of nothing but Merry Roane and her possible danger as he wriggled swiftly along. He reached the trenchlike depression that Bartolo had seen. It offered ample protection, for it was an elongated gouge in the trail where a patch of soft stone had yielded to many years of running storm waters.

Bullets were thudding fast all about them now, and a fusillade of rifle shots was ringing from the other side. Rad felt his right leg jerk; and when he crawled into the trench and wormed his way forward to make room for his companion he found that he had lost a boot-heel.

Bartolo DeLarra had not fared so well. A bullet had torn its way through the back of his left thigh, making an ugly, bleeding groove in a boneless area.

They were well protected now, with a tiny wall of stone about a foot in height at the outer edge of the trail. Barto

wiped his forehead and lay panting from his exertions.

"Lucky thing, this groove in the path," he remarked presently. "They'd have got us out there in the open. My leg burns as if I'd been branded. But it's nothing serious. The question is now, what has become of Badger and the girl?"

"It's possible that they made the top of the plateau," said Rad. "But it seems improbable that the File gang could have failed to hit them or their horses. This is a beautiful mess! Our outfit cut in half, and Uncle Esau and Merry missing! What on earth can we do?"

For answer, Barto lifted his voice and called lustily up the trail:

"Badge! Oh, Badge! Are you there?"

There came no answer.

"I thought maybe they'd found a cavelike opening, or something of the kind, and slipped into it, letting the pack mules go on by themselves."

"Their not answering," said Rad, "seems to prove that they've made the plateau. Either that or——" He hesitated, dreading to voice what was in his mind.

"Been shot and fallen into the trail or into the canyon," Bartolo finished for him.

Rad nodded gloomily.

The firing had ceased, proving that there was nobody in the trail on whom the outlaws could draw a bead. The air was close in the crevice, and the sun beat down unmercifully on the prone men in the water-worn trench. Not a sound disturbed the eternal quietude of this rocky wilderness. Rad squirmed about in search of a cool spot, but the sun-splashed stones had no such gift to offer. Through breaks in the little wall the two peered out cautiously across the crevice, but saw no movement on the other side.

"Keep a sharp lookout," said Rad. "This is somewhat of a deadlock, it seems to me. They can't shoot at us, and we can't shoot at them."

"But you and I, at least, have a little the best of it," returned Bartolo. "We can slip out when darkness falls."

"I think they'll be trying to sneak out of their fortress soon," was Rad's surmise. "They can't get a shot at us, and my uncle and Merry are either done for or have escaped them. So I'm thinking they'll be making a try to get at Pardee and the rest of the boys back there on the lower side of the boulder. And they'll have to move from where they are now to do this, on account of the bend of the trail."

"Yes," said Bartolo DeLarra; and he started to add something more, but interrupted himself by suddenly firing three swift shots through his opening.

Rad was instantly alert again. He had seen nothing.

"What was it?" he asked.

Bartolo muttered his disgust. "The old trick, I guess. Hat on a stick. And I fell for it. There are airholes in that sombrero, though, I'll bet."

Another long silence followed this speech, and the atmosphere seemed more stifling than ever when they were not conversing.

"That boulder they rolled down into the trail must have been balanced up there," Rad said finally, to break the strain. "Otherwise, the five of them scarcely could have moved it. But if it was set on a flat rock surface at the edge, they could prize it loose with rifle barrels, perhaps."

DeLarra nodded. "File came into this country with Badge when he made the first try to find the mine,' he said. "I suppose he discovered this balanced stone on that occasion. He's foxy. He had this trap all planned out, provided he failed to get you before you reached the Anthill country."

"I'm worried about Merry and my uncle," Rad said presently.

"Don't," was the Spaniard's practical advice. "It won't help any. And old Badge is a wonder at taking care of himself. You don't know anything at all about your uncle yet."

"There's one thing certain," offered Radford. "If we can't get out of here till dark, they can't either. That trick they played with the hat on a stick makes me think they were testing us out, to see if we are prepared to stop them if they try to make a break. They may have thought, you know, that both of us were wounded and not able to take care of ourselves."

"Yes, that was the idea," Bartolo agreed. "And if they haven't got three indications in that hat to prove that we're on the job, I'm terribly out of practice. The one thing that I do well is to shoot a six-gun. I hit that hat all three shots. If only there'd been a head in it! Tom File's, for first choice!"

"Look!" cried Rad, a moment or two after DeLarra had ceased speaking. "Up the crevice! I saw a tiny movement behind that outjutting brown rock just above that clump of sage bushes! I'm positive I did!"

"It may be," returned his companion thoughtfully, "that all of the gang are not hiding opposite us. That hadn't occurred to me before. Could this fellow you saw rake us with cross-fire from his position, Mr. Karval?"

"Hardly. But he might, if he managed to slip a little farther up that side of the crevice."

"M'm-m! Too bad we haven't our Winchesters. That's too far for any luck with a six-gun. But if you see him again——"

He was interrupted by a sudden rattle of rifle shots from directly across the canyon; and once more, for some unknown reason, lead was spattering in the trail and against the sun-baked wall.

Then the echoes were sent galloping from side to side by a yell of agony.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHO ROLLED THE STONE?

SWIFTLY Radford and DeLarra glanced back along the trail, but they could see nothing because of the sharp bend. The firing was continuing across the crevice, and immediately the Spaniard centered his attention on the other side, hoping that one of the gang would expose his body.

Presently three stabs of orange flame leaped from the muzzle of his revolver. Across the canyon, Rad saw a man spring suddenly erect, weave backward and forward, and then collapse in a heap on the edge of the wall. He struggled grotesquely, and finally rolled over the edge in his death throes. His body went bumping down the precipice like a bundle of old rags.

"There's one of 'em that'll take the long count," calmly observed DeLarra, as he pulled the pin that tripped his cylinder, and clawed out the empty cartridge cases.

Rad made no remark. His eyes were on the back trail, and his thoughts on whoever had uttered that frightful yell of agony.

Then around the bend staggered Phil Pardee. Again the rifle shots rattled on the other side of the V-shaped depression. It was plain that Rad's old friend was wounded from the way he ran, but he was fighting on desperately and making time. In his right hand was clutched a Winchester.

DeLarra's weapon spoke again. Then he sternly admonished Rad:

"Get on the job! Never mind Pardee. They're showing themselves to shoot at him."

Rad withdrew his glance from the wounded man struggling up the trail so bravely and thrust his six-shooter through the niche. He saw hatless heads across the canyon, bobbing up and down. As one appeared a shot rang out, and a little ball of smoke rose lazily

above it. Then it ducked out of sight again, and another arose beside it.

"Shooting gallery," grimly observed the Spaniard. "Rattle it into 'em, Karval!"

As he finished speaking, he fired two rapid shots. And now Radford, holding his Colt in both hands and aiming carefully, was waiting for another head to bob in sight.

Suddenly three heads appeared simultaneously, and Rad fired as many shots as the weapons across the crevice stabbed the hot air with orange spurts. On the heels of the echoing reports came a single, distant crack from up the canyon. And over on the other side a yelp of pain rang out.

At that instant, Philip Pardee floundered into the groove and dropped, panting, thrusting his rifle at Radford.

"They got me!" he blubbered. "Through the body, Rad. I guess I'm nicked for the big slide. But I—I wanted to—to get that Winchester to you."

"You take the gun, DeLarra," said Rad quietly. "You're a better shot than I am. I'll see what I can do for Pard."

The Spaniard took the hot rifle and laid it in the niche, squinting along the death line of the barrel..

"That shot from up the canyon," he said, as Rad began ripping open Pardee's shirt.

"Yes? Who fired it?"

"Either Badge or the girl," DeLarra replied, watching carefully for signs of the enemy. "Rang up a bull's-eye, too. Did you hear the squawk over there? Badge is a marvelous marksman, and, if it's he up there, he's got a fine chance at 'em. And Merry Roane can shoot, too."

"Got any water, Rad?" Pardee muttered.

Radford sighed. "Not a drop," he reluctantly confessed. "Sorry, Pard. But try to buck up a little. I don't think you've got a death wound. The bullet went clean through your breastbone and out under your shoulder. You're not going to die. I've got the bleeding pretty well stopped. Just rest and forget it."

Then Rad realized that he was speaking to unhearing ears, for the old man had fainted.

He left him and grasped up his Colt again, though there was no sound of firing now.

An hour passed, with the rattle of Pardee's breath and his unconscious groaning the only sounds. Both Radford Karval and Bartolo DeLarra were suffering intensely from the want of water, for the blazing sun was a scourge. They did not talk because to do so was painful, and seemed to make them thirstier. They saw not a movement on the opposite slope. And the up-canyon marksman made no further demonstration.

"This can't go on forever," remarked the Spaniard finally. "I wonder what the rest of the fellows are doing, down the trail. They can't get their part of the pack train out unless they back up the animals, one at a time, until they come to a place where they can turn 'em. But it seems as if they ought to make some move—— Look!" he broke off suddenly, pointing a huge brown finger slantwise across the gulf.

Rad immediately saw two figures traveling along stealthily at the crest of the opposite wall. They were half bent and moving slowly, with rifles over their shoulders. They were stealing up the crevice, weaving in and out among the rocks.

"Bill and Lou!" breathed Rad excitedly. "They're coming to help us. By golly, DeLarra, if they get in on this we'll almost have those birds surrounded!"

"No fooling!" returned DeLarra exultantly. "That ought to smoke 'em out. Those two, and whoever's shooting from up the canyon, will have 'em

between a cross-fire. And we'll get a pretty crack at 'em when they dash from cover."

Just then there came a voice bellowing across the crevice, proving that the barricaded gang had no knowledge of the new menace that was approaching from the east.

"Well, yeh got about enough?" it asked in a triumphant tone.

"Enough of what?" DeLarra instantly shot back.

"Yeh ain't thinkin' very careful today, are yeh, Barto?" came the retort, unmistakably in the voice of File. "Listen here, greaser: Yeh sent Ebb into the canyon, with a bullet through his bean, didn't yeh? Well, that's one of us. I'm here, 'cause I'm talkin'. That makes two. Yeh must know that another o' my boys got nicked a little, 'cause yeh musta heard 'im beller. And, altogether, yeh musta seen three heads over here when we was snipin' at that fool cook o' yourn, an hour or so ago. That makes five, Barto. Can yeh count?"

Bartolo DeLarra made no reply to this. There were scowling lines on his swarthy brow, and he was plainly puzzled to know what Tom File was driving at.

"Don't git it yet, eh?" came the outlaw chief's derisive call. "Well, greaser, if they're five o' us here across the canyon from yeh, who rolled that stone into the trail that split yer outfit in two? We was pluggin' at Badger an' the gal same time the stone rolled down, wasn't we? So we hadta be here when it happened. So figger out who rolled her down, Barto!"

A silence fell, and DeLarra turned and gazed solemnly at Rad. "He's right," he said. "The excitement seems to have robbed us of clear thinking, Mr. Karval. The shots at your uncle and the girl began immediately after that rock landed in the trail. You and I know that none of File's gang have had a chance to sneak from this side of the canyon to the other since the war began. So all five of them were over there when the stone came down. What's the answer, anyway?"

Rad stared at him in bewilderment. "I thought that it was impossible for the five of 'em to dislodge that huge stone," he muttered. "So—so others must have done it! And it required more than five men, too. Say——"

He was interrupted by another shout from the enemy:

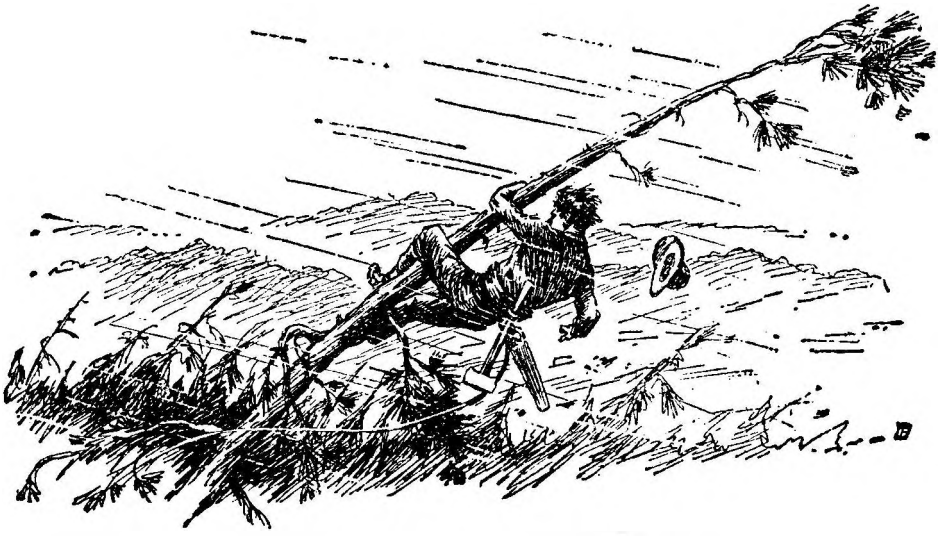
"If yeh could see up above yeh, yeh'd maybe be able to figger her out. Heavy, heavy hangs over yer heads, boys! And it's comin' down—comin' down right clost!"

"Great Scott!" suddenly burst from Barto's lips. "It's just occurred to me—the answer to this puzzle! *The Yaquis!*"

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

A NEW USE FOR ELK HORNS

HERETOFORE the trophies of the chase have been used as a decoration for the interior of his property by the hunter, but here is an instance of their more public display. A fine pair of elk horns were found by a motorist in a canyon along Warm River, Idaho, together with the skull of the elk. The horns still bore the polish they had acquired during the wanderings of the animal through the forest and brush, showing that its death had been comparatively recent. That its life had not been uneventful was also shown by the fact that in one of the prongs was a bullet hole with the bullet imbedded in the horn. That time it had made good its escape. It is doubtful, however, if this form of motor decoration will be allowed to become popular.



The Giant Killers

by Howard J. Perry

THE shriveled veteran cook of the West Coast Logging Co., "Peewee" Potter, drowsed on the chopping block behind the cook shack. It was mid-afternoon and the one time of day that Peewee could call his own. In another hour a hundred timber beasts would come in from the woods, dog-tired and hungry, and there would be no rest then.

An October sun filtered through the smoky haze and bathed the sleeping camp in a mellow glow. In the distance, the staccato chatter of the donkey engines broke the stillness, and the intermitent call of "Timber!" was followed by the thunderous crash of a stricken forest giant. From the pig pen below the cook shack came the raucous cries of a flock of quarreling crows.

Down the camp street, formed by two rows of weathered shacks, strode the lanky figure of a boy. He was dressed in the conventional garments of a logger —calked boots, overalls cut off just below the knees, and a heavy woolen shirt. On top of a thatch of red hair rested an old felt hat.

As he approached, he caught sight of the sleeping cook and walked toward him.

Apparently, Peewee was awakened by the crunch of his heavy boots, for he cocked one eye open and fixed it on the boy with questioning interest.

"Is the foreman around?" the youngster asked. There was a note of firm confidence in his voice.

Peewee opened his other eye. "Nope. But he'll be in from the woods most any time now." He studied the other for a moment with his faded blue eyes. "D'ja walk in from town?" he asked.

"Yes, and it's some hike." The newcomer grinned broadly.

"Lookin' for work, I s'pose?" Peewee's seamed face remained expressionless, but there was a faint twinkle in his watery eyes.

The boy nodded. "They told me you were short a high climber up here."

"Did they tell you anything else?" The cook bared his almost toothless gums in a twisted smile.

"Nothing, only that I should hurry up here if I wanted the job. Why?"

Peewee removed himself from the chopping block with a hitch. Thrusting one gnarled hand into his pants pocket, he explored its depths for a moment and finally drew out a small hunk of chewing tobacco. It was not more than a half inch in diameter. He turned it over in his fingers and studied it speculatively. Then, as if he had come to a conclusion, he reached in another pocket and pulled out an old knife. Opening its stained blade, he meticulously severed the piece in half. Poking one section into his mouth, he replaced the other with the knife in his pocket. For several moments he mouthed the tobacco with apparent enjoyment.

"Waal," he drawled at last, squinting up at the boy. "'Course they wouldn't tell you much. That's not their business at them 'ployment agencies, an' if you wasn't such a kid, I wouldn't either." He paused and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

The boy waited. A look of puzzled curiosity was in his eyes.

"But, seein' as you're mighty young an' healthy like, take my advice an' look some 'eres else for a job."

The other laughed. "The way you talk, old man," he said, "this place must be unhealthy. However, I came up here especially for this job, and I'll take a chance." His eyes narrowed slightly and his mouth became firm around the corners. "But what's so dangerous about this place?" he inquired.

"It ain't dangerous, it's just plain dynamite. This here outfit is the dangdest highball camp I ever did see, an' I ain't no spring chicken in the woods." He pointed a crooked forefinger at the boy and shook it. "Do you know what happened to the other climber? 'Course you don't. They didn't tell you at that 'ployment agency. Well, I'll tell you. He was yanked clean out of a tree by an overspeeded donkey. He'll be in the hospital for a long time, too. An' it wasn't the engineer's fault neither."

Peewee paused and hitched his trousers. He glanced apprehensively around and lowered his voice as he continued.

"It's all Shad Barker's work. Shad's the boss, an' he's a man driver an' a man killer. He's highballin' this outfit 'thout reason. Maybe Old Jameson, the owner, don't know it. He spends most of his time up there in his camps on the sound, he an' that kid o' his. If somethin' don't happen around here purty soon to change things, there's goin' to be trouble a-poppin'."

The boy had listened to Peewee with fixed interest. When the old man finished, he laughed again.

"Barker's getting out the logs, isn't he?" he asked. "Maybe that's what—what Jameson wants."

"Maybe he is, an' again maybe he isn't," Peewee replied cryptically. "He drove the outfit last year an' when the log push was over there wasn't many more sticks than a haywire, one-side outfit could turn out. An' him highballin' all the time!" Peewee ended disgustedly.

"Well," replied the youngster, straightening. "I guess I'll take a chance."

Peewee's wrinkled face twisted into a surprised grimace.

"You mean to tell me you're goin' to apply for that job?" he asked. It was quite apparent that he had thought the boy would back down on his decision to stay after hearing of the conditions in the camp.

"Yes, I'll stick around," replied the youngster. "I came up here for that purpose and—and well, I'd like to see just how Barker highballs his camp."

Peewee caught the firm decision in the other's voice. He looked at him in open astonishment for a minute. Then the toothless grin appeared again and he stuck out his hand.

"Well, kid, you've got grit, an' I wish you all the luck, but you can't say I didn't warn you."

The other took the proffered hand and shook it warmly, saying, "Thanks, and I'm sure glad you gave me the dope." Then he added significantly, "I may be glad that you tipped me off. Now I'll hit for the commissary and wait for Barker."

As he walked away, Peewee stared after him for some time. Then he turned and hobbled into the cook shack.

Outside of the commissary at the farther end of the row of buildings, the boy was brought to a sudden halt by a string of oaths that ripped through the thin walls. The voice was hard and brutal.

"Listen, Joe." There was no doubt but that it was Barker speaking. "You're the timekeeper here, but that's all. You do what I say, or it won't be good for your hide. The next time any one gets hurt, ship 'em out, but don't let me catch you sendin' any one out with 'em. We're loggin', not runnin' a hospital. If they die on the way, let 'em. There's a lot more timber beasts where they came from."

There was a momentary pause, then the voice continued. "Did a new climber show up here?"

"Not yet!" The reply came in a colorless voice.

"Well, gosh-all-mighty! I told that employment office to shoot a man up here this morning. We're nearly caught up with the trimmed spar-trees and we've got to have a man at once. If they don't get one here to-day, I'll put the whistle punk on. He's been practicin' climbin' for quite a spell an' he ought to last a few days. Punks are cheap anyway."

The youngster outside stepped to the door and opened it. A gorillalike form across the room turned and faced him; coal-black eyes, sinister and cruel, made a flashing appraisal of the boy.

The youth paused and nodded, a smile on his face.

"Are you Shad Barker, the foreman?" he asked.

The burly man leaned back and hooked his elbows on the top of the counter. His thin lips curled with a sardonic sneer. "Yeah, what of it?" he snarled.

The boy smiled again, but his blue eyes were grave and almost cold as he met the other's heavy scowl. "I'm a climber," he announced evenly. "They told me you needed one."

"They did, did they? I guess they forgot to tell you I sent for a man, not a kid."

A faint trace of color mounted the boy's cheeks. The smile, however, never left his mouth. "Oh, I don't think you'll have to worry about that," he replied confidently. "I've done high climbing before."

"Perhaps you have," retorted Barker. It was quite evident that the boy's coolness irritated him. "But you've never climbed in a camp like this. This ain't no kindergarten."

The sallow-faced timekeeper, who had been busy with some papers, looked up quickly and watched the two.

"I'll take a chance," the youngster returned. It was said with such casual assurance that Barker started.

"You're darn tootin' you'll take a chance," he exclaimed hotly. "An' you'll know you're workin' for a real outfit here. We make loggers or we break 'em."

The boy's eyebrows arched. "Break them?" he queried.

A vicious light crept into Shad Barker's eyes. He walked across the room and picked up an iron rod used for poking the fire. It was an inch in

diameter. Grasping it with both hands, the muscles on his forearm bulged and the bar slowly bent in an arch. The foreman flung it down.

"Just like that," he laughed coarsely. The malicious gleam in his eyes heightened. "Do you still feel like takin' a chance?"

"I sure do." The reply was instant and the youngster's jaw seemed to harden.

"What's your name?" asked Barker.

"Dan—Dan Johnson."

Barker turned to the bookkeeper. "Put him on, Joe, and remember what I told you about wastin' any time on 'em if they can't stand the gaff." He whirled and strode out of the room.

For a few moments Dan Johnson remained motionless, then he walked over and picked up the iron rod. He tested its strength. Even in its curved condition he was unable to spring it a fraction of an inch. When he looked up, the timekeeper was grinning at him.

"An' I've seen him do worse than that to loggers," he said. "He's the most powerful man I've ever known, an' I've been around the woods a lot."

"He's sure got the strength," admitted Dan. "He's a brute for power, but he'll get his some day. They all do."

"Not Shad Barker," declared the other. "He's too clever, and there ain't a man whose got gumption enough to stand up to him."

Dan shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "Well, if you'll show me where I sleep, I'll wash up."

The bookkeeper walked around the counter and from the doorway pointed out a bunk house. "You can roll in there," he anonunced. "The other climber left his stuff, but he won't be needin' it again for a while."

"Thanks," said the boy as he started away.

The next morning Dan Johnson was in the woods early. The high climber in a logging camp is on his own time, but he must keep enough spar trees topped and ready, and be on hand to take care of any repairs or changes that are needed on any of the spars in use.

The camp was operating two sides, which means two loading crews were operating in different parts of the woods. With an experienced eye, Johnson saw that there would be no changes in the high lead blocks that day, so he went on into the woods to spot the trees already marked for topping.

By noon, he realized the truth of Peewee's statement that the camp was being highballed. Never before had he seen such fast logging. Human life was constantly in jeopardy and the men panted and swore in a mad frenzy as they struggled to keep up with the pace that had been set by Shad Barker. At night, when the mulligan car rocked and swayed toward camp, the men dropped weary and grumbling on the row of benches lining the sides.

Throughout the day, Dan had seen nothing of Shad Barker, but on the trip back to camp he learned more of the brutality of the fellow from the work-driven men. Yet he noticed with some surprise that their comments on the boss were not spoken openly but mumbled out of the corners of their mouths.

The next day, however, he had an opportunity to witness the foreman's methods of handling the men. He was passing by the loading donkey when one of the logs coming down the hillside fouled, tangling up the choker.

Barker stood on the landing at the time. When the accident happened, he shouted to the chaser below him to free the choker, garnishing his demand with a string of curses.

The main line was still held taut by the donkey and the chaser flung an apprehensive glance in the direction of the engineer fearing that the cable would pull loose if he attempted to step in and release the tangle.

Instantly, the foreman flew into a

rage. "Get in there, you worthless scoundrel!" he shouted. "Get in their with your mud hooks and get that choker loose or I'll come down and break every bone in your body."

The chaser leaped forward and struggled with the choker, but due either to his fear of the cable slipping or the lack of sufficient strength, he was unable to work it loose.

Again, with a furious exclamation, Barker jumped to the ground and ran forward. With a mighty sweep of his arm he brushed the chaser aside and turned and grabbed the choker. His great body seemed to tie into a knot as he jerked. The choker came free. It was a superb display of superhuman strength.

Signaling for the engineer to slack the main line, Barker turned on the chaser. Without a word, his big fist shot forward and crashed on the other's jaw and the chaser went down in a heap.

Dan's face went suddenly white with anger. He saw Barker step forward and raised his calked boot. In three leaps, the boy was up the side of the hill, and with a vigorous lunge he struck the big foreman with both hands just as his boot was about to land on the prone figure on the ground.

Taken by surprise, Barker lost his balance and pitched forward to the ground. He was on his feet the next moment, but Dan had picked up a stout stick. He swung it menacingly above his head.

"If you come a step nearer, Barker, I'll let you have it," he cried, his voice quivering with rage.

For several seconds Barker stared at the youth before him. Then he looked at the loading crew. The men were standing silent, but their grim faces warned him where their sympathy lay. He looked back at Dan and then he laughed. It was a hoarse, bitter laugh, cold and mirthless.

"Some little fightin' cock, eh, kid?" he cried. "Well, who asked you to butt in on this?"

"No one, Barker," replied Dan, lowering his stick slightly. "But I'm not going to stand by and see you beat a man for something he couldn't help." There was a determined ring in the boy's voice.

Barker's eyes narrowed and flashed. "Listen, kid," he hissed. "You're ridin' for a fall. I'd like to hand it to you now, but maybe there'll be a better time." He turned and walked back to the landing.

The chaser had risen to his feet and was rubbing his jaw.

Dan dropped his stick and continued up the tracks. Behind him, he heard Barker cursing the crew as they swung back to work.

That night after supper, Dan sat on his bunk filing one of the spurs of the climbing irons. Presently there was a step outside and the shrunken form of Peewee suddenly appeared in the doorway.

Dan looked up and smiled. "Come in, Peewee," he said. The cook shuffled across the room and hitched himself onto a chair. He extracted a corncob pipe from a shirt pocket and lit it. For several minutes he sucked on the abbreviated stem, his eyes fixed on Dan.

The climber resumed his work on the spur, but after a few moments he became conscious of Peewee's stare and flung the little fellow a questioning look.

"What's troubling you, Peewee?" he asked. "You look like you'd been to a funeral."

Peewee removed the pipe. His watery eyes were grave.

"I ain't been to no funeral, but I kinda feel like I'm goin'," he sighed. His face was almost comical in its dolefulness.

Dan burst into a laugh. "Come on, Peewee," he urged. "Spill it! You

look like you've got a heavy burden on your mind."

"It ain't my burden, it's yours," retorted the other.

"Mine?"

"Yeah, yours. I just heard the fellows tellin' 'bout the crazy stunt you pulled to-day." The cook leaned forward and pointed the stem of his pipe at Dan. "Gosh, kid, if I was you, I'd hotfoot out o' this camp to-night."

A puzzled frown appeared between Dan's eyes. "You mean I should quit?" he asked.

"Sure thing," asserted Peewee. "You're whole now, but you won't stay that way long. Barker's goin' to get you an' get you right."

Dan's eyes sobered. "Yes, I guess I did lose my head to-day," he admitted. "But I don't think Shad Barker's small enough to hold it against me. He wants to get logs out, and I hardly think he would intentionally cripple his men."

Peewee snorted. "Say, kid, you don't know nothin'," he ejaculated in disgust. "I've seen more of this outfit than you. Barker's soul's so small it'd rattle in a flea's belly. No one ever did what you did to-day an' got away with it." He became prophetically serious. "I tell you, son, he'll get you for it, an' that fellow don't show no mercy."

Dan laughed and rose. But his blue eyes were somber, with a strange, defiant light in their depths. "Well, anyway, Peewee, I sure appreciate your interest," he said.

"Interest, nuthin'!" exclaimed the old man angrily. "I don't want no 'preciation. I want you to use common sense." He slid from the chair and started for the door. There he paused and turned on Dan. "You can't say I didn't warn you, kid," he added.

"No, Peewee, I won't be able to say that," laughed Dan.

For several moments the cook stared at the youngster. Then he shook his head hopelessly and went out.

In the days that followed, Dan had an opportunity to witness a logging operation under high pressure. From the time at early dawn when Peewee roused the men from their deep slumber with the clanging triangle until the mulligan car creaked and groaned into camp at night, they were driven under the merciless lash of Shad Barker.

The demoniac foreman was everywhere at once. He seemed to be alert to every detail in the operations and should a pair of fallers be delayed five minutes in their work, his great hulking form would appear and the men would quail under his fierce tirade.

The loading crews worked in a dangerous frenzy of speed. At times the thick main-line cables snapped with such force under the full steam of the donkey that the great logs leaped clear of the ground as they were yanked down the hillsides. Let a line break, and Shad Barker would be on the spot almost instantly, flailing the men verbally and occasionally stepping in himself to use his brute force on both men and work.

Bad weather set in; but terrific wind storms that caused the forests to tremble made no difference to the crew. Work never let up. Human life was cheap. Shad Barker was highballing his camp.

As far as Dan Johnson was concerned, the foreman openly ignored him. But the boy was ever conscious of being closely watched by the big man. Never did he go up a tree, or climb amid the tangle of guy ropes and high-lead blocks, that he could not look down and see the sinister face of Shad Barker upturned. There were times when he felt like a mouse cornered and watched by a cat.

But Dan was careful to avoid giving the foreman a chance to find fault. The boy was a master in his work. His lithe body revealed its supple strength when he was clinging two hundred feet

above the ground, changing the position of a block that often weighed more than half a ton. He was catlike in his agility, and often his clear thinking and his quickness combined to save him from dangerous falls.

In camp at nights the men treated him with courtesy, but showed a strange aloofness accentuated by prophetic glances and shaking of heads, and several times he overheard some remark that echoed the warning that Peewee had voiced. It was as if he were a marked man and these loggers were but waiting for the inevitable.

Then one night, as the men were leaving for camp, the woods boss announced that the high-lead block would have to be changed so that the yarder could work from another angle in the morning.

It would be a matter of a half-hour's work, and the engineer remained to assist. The rest of the crew went into camp and Dan walked over to the spar tree and formed a loop in the guinea line. This was a small cable used for the quick ascent of a rugged tree. Stepping into the loop, Dan signaled the engineer to hoist him.

The donkey started at slow speed and the boy was hauled upward. At the top, he swung over and planted his spurs in the thick bark, first throwing his belt around the tree and securely tying the end to the ring in his belt. For the next thirty minutes he labored with the big block, aided by the donkey engine. When the block had been shunted around to its new position and fastened, Dan stepped again into the loop in the guinea line.

He signaled the engineer to slack away. As he did so, he flung a casual glance down at the donkey engine. Instead of the engineer at the levers, he saw Shad Barker standing by the drums. The foreman was leering up at him, his ugly face twitching with anticipation. The boy looked around and saw the engineer going down the track toward camp.

At the same moment, Dan dropped. It was not the easy precipitation he was accustomed to, but a sudden releasing of the line. He threw his arm around the cable, but the next instant he was checked in his descent with a violent snap that almost knocked the breath out of him. In that plunge of perhaps twenty feet, the momentum of his body was too great to withstand the shock of the unexpected stop.

His arm was yanked from the cable. He pitched over backward, his foot slipping through the loop. Then he was brought up with a terrific yank as his ankle caught momentarily in the bight of the guinea line.

A hundred and eighty feet above the ground he dangled by one leg. Almost stunned by the abrupt jerk, he retained enough of his senses to immediately stiffen the muscles in his leg and foot; but in that photographic instant he realized he could maintain the tensing but a very few minutes.

Dan glanced helplessly down at Shad Barker. He stood with one foot on the friction lever, a diabolical grin on his face. The full knowledge of Shad's treachery dawned on Dan. The foreman had deliberately perpetrated the trick, and the vicious gleam in his eyes told the boy that the man was fully conscious of his predicament.

A harsh laugh rolled up from below. "Better say your prayers, kid," Shad yelled. "She's stuck, and I can't release this drum."

Dan set his teeth. No drum ever stuck, and he plainly saw that Shad made no move, but remained motionless, his foot on the friction lever that operated the brace.

The muscles in his leg and foot began to knot. It would be only a matter of minutes now before they would give way and his foot would slip through the loop in the line that held him. He

clawed at the tree, but he hung too far out. Below him the ragged stumps and broken branches at the foot of the tree invited certain death.

His ankle suddenly slipped through the loop. He concentrated on the muscles in his foot. He was thankful for the stiff, high toe cap on his boot. It was the only thing that saved him now.

Again he looked toward Shad. The foreman was watching him keenly. It would do no good to appeal to him. Barker had said he would get him, and he had. Dan wished that he had been a little more cautious and had heeded Peewee's warning.

He was about done. His foot ached excrutiatingly. His body began to go limp and his ears pounded from the pressure of blood.

He felt himself going downward, but not falling. Above the roar in his ears he heard the clanking of the donkey drum. He was fifteen feet from the ground when the cable suddenly seemed to give way entirely and he crashed like a plummet. His body turned partly over and he struck on his head and back. Consciousness snapped out like a light.

The stars were wheeling overhead when Dan opened his eyes. Just how long he had lain there, he did not know, but night had fallen over the forest and a chilling wind was sweeping up from the valley below.

His mind was fairly clear, but his body ached and throbbed, and his back felt as though it had been pounded with a sledge. He listened intently. Only the sibilant wheeze of escaping steam from the donkey engine came to his ears.

Several times he tried to rise, but the pain was so torturing that he sank back. He began testing the various parts of his body, and sighed with relief when he discovered that he was not paralyzed.

Finally, after a long rest, he made a supreme effort and succeeded in dragging himself to his knees, and then to his feet. He swayed dizzily and clutched at a near-by stump for support. Every muscle in his back seemed to have been torn apart, and he gritted his teeth to keep from crying out.

He must get back to camp. Barker had evidently left him for dead. At the thought of the foreman, Dan felt a wave of uncontrollable anger sweep over him. He shuddered as he recalled his narrow escape. What had been Barker's motive? Had he let him down at the time when he would have fallen and dropped him the last fifteen feet just to injure but not to kill him?

Dan pondered on these questions as he started painfully down the trail toward camp. He moved slowly, stopping at times, and grasping every stump and tree along the way for support.

When at last he finally stumbled into camp, he discovered that it was later than he expected. The men had gone to their bunk houses and only a few lights were still burning. He made his way to his own shack and as he started in he heard some one approaching through the dark.

Going in, he fumbled for a match and lit the lamp on the table. Turning to close the door, he saw Peewee on the threshold, a puzzled look on his face.

"M'gosh, kid, what happened to you?" the latter cried, coming forward.

Dan slumped weakly onto his bunk, his face twitching with pain.

"Shad got me, Peewee," he muttered.

"What's that you say!" exclaimed the cook. "When? How?"

Dan told the story, and when he finished the cook stared at him for a long time in silence. Finally, he nodded his head. "I knowed it. I knowed it," he mumbled. "That's his way. He didn't want to kill you, but he wanted to break you." His voice trembled with emotion, and he clawed in his pocket for his pipe and jammed it in his mouth. "An' it

looks like he did," he added. Then he became all action. "Better lie down. I'll get some liniment an' fix you up the best I can." And without another word he hurried from the room.

In a few moments he was back and with the tenderness of a woman removed Dan's shirt and applied liniment to his aching muscles, his eyes streaming with tears from the strong ointment. At last he pulled the blankets up over the boy and stepped back, the bottle in one hand and his pipe in the other. He surveyed Dan questioningly.

"Feel better?" he asked.

Dan nodded. "Thanks, Peewee. I sure do." He smiled weakly up at the old man.

"Well, you get a good sleep and we'll see how things are in the morning." He turned and blew out the lamp. "Go to sleep now, and be dang thankful you're alive," he said, as he went out and closed the door.

For a long time Dan lay thinking over the events of the past few hours. When he recalled the accident of the tree, he shuddered at the thought of his position dangling above the ground. Then a sudden horror sent a cold chill through him. Again he pictured himself swinging above the ground, and again he trembled violently. The full truth of the whole thing swept over him. He had "gone yellow."

An inarticulate cry escaped him. He had known climbers who had fallen and lived, and they had gone that way. Their courage broken, their nerves shattered, they had never climbed again. Going yellow was the worst fate of a high climber. Fear—potent, haunting fear of height!

Dan clenched his fists. No! He wasn't yellow! He struggled to calm himself, and once more he imagined he was hanging from that line, but that same ghastly terror seized him at the very thought.

His body went limp and his heart rose to his throat, choking him with grief. Yes, he had gone yellow! Shad Barker had broken him!

And at intervals throughout the night he would wake with a start, his heart pounding; the horrible specter of fear gripping him.

Getting out of his bunk the next morning was a long and painful procedure; but once he was on his feet, he was gratified to discover that he could hobble along.

He was late, and the men were already preparing for the woods as he started toward the commissary. He might as well face Barker and get it over. Just what the foreman's next move would be, Dan could not predict, but he did realize that it would be hopeless for him to try to climb.

The timekeeper was alone in the commissary and announced, without raising his head from his time sheet, that Barker had already gone into the woods. Dan waited for the other to give him some idea of what was expected of him, but the timekeeper continued working without further comment.

Dan turned and left the room. Outside, the tow-headed whistle punk came toward him. He was nothing more than a youngster. Dan had liked him from the first.

"Shad told me this morning that I could start climbing right away," he announced. Dan caught the eagerness in his voice and knew that the boy was inwardly thrilled, though his face wore an expression of deep concern. "He—he said you wouldn't—you wasn't going to climb any more," he continued awkwardly.

Dan smiled grimly. So Barker knew, did he? Then the foreman had gone out deliberately to break him.

"Yes, Steve, I guess I'm through," he replied, forcing a grin.

For a moment, the other studied him sadly. "Gosh, Dan, I'm sorry! What happened? Did you get hurt? Shad

said you had a little accident, but he didn't explain how it happened." He stopped and his face colored confusedly. "Shad—Shad told me to tell you—you—you could take my job as whistle punk." He blurted this out as though it were something he really dreaded to say.

Dan flung him a quick look of surprise.

"But I won't climb if you want to, Dan," the boy hurriedly added. "I don't want your job."

Dan's jaw set. Barker wasn't satisfied to break him, he wanted to humiliate him, too. There could be nothing more insulting than to offer a high climber a whistle punk's job.

He saw the worried look on the boy's face. "That's all right, Steve," he said. "You go ahead and take the job, but you've got to remember this is rotten weather for a beginner. Be darn careful. I had planned on helping you learn the ropes better, but if I stick around, you can come to me and I'll do all I can."

The youngster's face beamed. "I'm sure glad to get the chance, but I wouldn't do it if I thought it would hurt you."

"No, it won't hurt me," Dan assured him. "And I'm glad you've got the opportunity to climb. Now, go ahead and remember what I said about being careful."

"Shad told me I was to go on tomorrow," said the boy, starting away. "He'll have to get a punk first. Are you going to stay in camp?"

"I don't want to, but maybe I'll have to, Steve," Dan replied.

"I hope you do," the other called back as he hurried toward the mulligan car, which was ready to leave.

Wishing to be alone with his thoughts, Dan took the trail leading down to the river. The water was still low and the banks were piled high with logs waiting for the big drive which would be made as soon as the heavy rains struck the mountains.

He walked out on a log jam and sat down disconsolately. On the farther bank of the river he could see the logs of another outfit. For a long time he sat immersed in his thoughts. Things had certainly worked out wrong for him. He had come up to this place for a definite purpose and, instead of accomplishing it, he had lost everything. The thought of it made him shiver with bitter despair.

So Barker had offered him the punk's job! The colossal malevolence of the foreman was astounding. It was as if Shad knew that he would have to remain, and to go on as a whisle punk would be the worst kind of humiliation. But perhaps it would be just as well to leave, though he would be going out a broken climber.

He stared absently at the end of a great upturned log before him for a long time. Suddenly, he became conscious of the imprint of the brand cut into the surface near the back. It was a large O. He looked around quickly at the ends of other logs. They bore the W. C. mark, the West Coast Logging Co.'s brand. Getting to his feet, he started across the logs, studying the ends of each. Then he came to another marked with the O. It was close to the edge, too. He noticed also that the log was what is termed a "clear," which is the name for highest grade logs. Clears were scarce and always brought a bigger price. He hurried back to the first log and saw that it was also a perfect one, free of deep knots.

For the next fifteen minutes, Dan studied all the logs in the vicinity and found sixteen more clears marked with the O brand. All of the marks were off center. He discovered that there were very few clears with the W. C. mark on them.

At last he stopped and studied the low water in the river and the logs on the

other bank. Then he turned and started for camp.

Peewee was chopping wood behind the cook shack when he came up. The cook paused and looked at him.

"Gosh, I'm glad to see you, Dan," he said. "I went over to your shack an' found you missin' an' I figgered you'd gone out. How you feelin'?"

"Better," said Dan grimly.

"But you don't feel like climbin'?"

"I'm not climbing any more, Peewee," Dan announced.

"What?" exclaimed the other. "You're quittin'! Why——" But he stopped abruptly and scrutinized Dan's face. He must have read something there, for he dropped his eyes and fumbled for his pipe. After he had set his teeth firmly on its stem, he glanced up at the other again, his eyes saddened. But he looked down instantly and reached for a stick of wood.

Dan knew what he had seen. He smiled wanly. "Yes, Peewee. I guess I've gone yellow. You were right about Barker."

The old man drove the ax viciously into the stick of wood. Dan heard him mumbling a few choice and descriptive words.

"Barker's putting on Steve as climber," Dan announced. "And Steve told me this morning that Barker said I could have the punk's job."

Peewee straightened. "By gravy!" he cried. "You ain't takin' it?"

Dan nodded.

"What?" exclaimed the other. "Why, you'll be the laughin'stock around here. That's just what Barker wants. You're playin' into his hands."

"I know," admitted Dan. "But I've got to."

"What d'you mean, 'got to'?" demanded the other quickly. He reached for his pocket. "I'll let you have enough to get along with till you find another job."

Dan laughed and shook his head. "Peewee," he said, "you're a real friend, but it's not money I want. But you can answer some questions for me."

"Go ahead an' shoot 'em."

"Has there been any high water this summer?"

"None to speak of," said Peewee, his face puckered curiously.

"Not enough to carry any logs across the river?" asked Dan.

"Gosh, no!"

"And what's the outfit over there?" Dan pointed to the other side of the valley.

"That's the Olson bunch."

"What do you know about them?" was Dan's next question.

"Oh, Olson's a fellow without any too good a reputation," replied the cook. "Been loggin' for two years over there." He grinned up at Dan. "Say, why all these questions?"

"I can't tell you now, Peewee, but maybe I will soon." He laughed bitterly. "It'll be rather funny for me to be a whistle punk. It's been a long time since I held down that job."

Peewee's face screwed up with a mixture of perplexity and surprise.

"Well, you eat up punishment like those pigs down there go after swill," he declared.

Dan grinned at the simile and turned. "I guess I'll hunt up Barker now and see about the job." He limped away, leaving the little cook gaping after him.

He found Shad Barker in the heavy timber snarling at a pair of fallers who had misjudged the wind and had dropped their tree with the tip across the tracks.

Dan waited until the foreman finished. He saw Shad dart him an appraising glance when he came up, but the big man feigned ignorance of his presence!

Having completed his verbal assault on the fallers, Shad started away without as much as another look at Dan, but the youngster stepped forward and

confronted the foreman. Inwardly, he felt bitter rage surging up at the very sight of Shad, but he choked it down, and his face was innocently bland.

"Steve told me this morning that I could go on as punk," he said evenly.

The other stopped. "Yeah—that, or pull out," he grunted and started on again.

"I'll take it," replied Dan. "I'll be on the job in the morning."

Shad Barker turned and looked at him again. There was the faintest trace of suspicion in his black eyes. His upper lip curled. "Even a punk's job is man-sized here," he retorted, and went on.

Dan started back toward camp. Barker had made no mention of the occurrence of the night before, and Dan wondered just what was in the foreman's mind. Was it possible that such viciousness, bordering so close to murder, was only a passing incident to Shad Barker? It seemed inconceivable that a man could be swayed by such vindictive savagery. And did he still have a subtle reason for putting Dan on as a punk? The boy's blue eyes hardened. Well, Barker could hardly do any more damage. He had succeeded in breaking him. At the thought, Dan's bitterness toward the foreman again welled up and his fists clenched involuntarily. Then he wilted as the agonizing realization that he would not climb again swept over him. He could not go back broken. It was far better to remain and stand the taunting ridicule of Shad Barker and the silent pity of the men.

But he still had one more card to play. The discovery of the Olson brand on the logs that morning was a fine piece of luck. If things broke right for him now, he could get even, but it would be a rather hollow victory before the thought that he would be useless as a high climber.

When Dan went into the woods the next morning and took his place at the whistle wire that stretched through the timber, he soon discovered he was not to be disregarded by Shad. Whenever the foreman appeared, he found some excuse to hurl a volley of curses at him, punctuating them with insinuations that made the hot blood rush to Dan's cheeks. He struggled with himself to restrain his anger.

Dan watched the efforts of Steve as that youngster worked on the spar trees. What he lacked in experience, he made up in sheer nerve. There were times when Dan gasped at the chances the boy took. But always Dan felt that sickening horror creeping over him when he saw the climber poised on the crest of a swaying spar tree. He fought with this feeling, but it prevailed in spite of every effort and was a constant and poignant reminder that he had gone yellow. Then it was that the smoldering fire of hatred toward the foreman seethed within him and seared his heart with a longing for vengeance.

At night he remained aloof from the men. He knew how they felt toward him. He was giving Barker a chance to prove before them his boast of being a man breaker; and it was making it none the easier for them.

Dan spent much of his spare time on the river. He would slip away down the trail after work and he soon discovered the appearance of the O brand on clear logs that had been shot into the river by the West Coast outfit the day before.

Then, one night, while he was climbing over the piles of logs, he heard the dull thud of metal against wood in the dark just ahead of him. The sound came from a point just below the end of a log shoot.

Stealthily, he crept forward until he made out the figure of a man moving about over the logs. Keeping at a safe distance, Dan followed and saw him stop and turn on a flash light before the face of a big log. The light was

snapped off and, this time, Dan saw the man swing something over his head and again the thud came to his ears.

There was no doubt in Dan's mind what the other was doing. Here was the fellow who was branding the West Coast's best logs with the Olson brand. Dan smiled at the thought of the clever trick. The logs would be driven down the river together with the Olson logs on the other side. When they were sorted, Olson would get all those with his brand and would have no difficulty in identifying the stolen logs due to the brand being on the outer edge.

The figure ahead had now started away and Dan followed just close enough to keep it in sight. Apparently, the man had finished, for he cut across to the trail leading up the hillside. Halfway up this he turned to the left over broken ground. Here Dan almost lost him in his attempt to follow without making any noise, but he picked him up again going through some second growth. On the other side of this clump of trees, Dan perceived a small shack loom up, and the other headed toward it. He went inside and the boy hurried forward, sneaking around to the rear.

It was an old building not more than ten feet square and might have been used for a tool house at one time. Peering through a crack, Dan saw the light flashed on and instantly he made out the features of Shad Barker.

The foreman was stooping over a hole in the floor, and Dan saw him thrust a branding wedge down between the boards and then slide a loose board back over the aperture. Shad got to his feet quickly and snapped off the light. Dan crept back into the shadows as Barker came out and hurried away up the hillside.

Dan waited five minutes to make certain Shad would not return, then he went in and struck a match. Lifting the loose board, he reached down and drew out the branding wedge. A hurried glance showed him the embossed O on the face. Without waiting, he took the iron and started down the trail toward the river. He wanted to determine one thing to prove his conclusions.

He traveled along the river nearly a mile before he found a shallow bar where he could cross. As he came back up the other side, he studied the end of every log he came upon. They were all Olson logs and he noted with a smile that each O was almost centered on every log.

After inspecting more than fifty, he turned and retraced his steps. As he approached camp, he slipped around behind the bunk houses until he came to his own, then he hurried in and hid the wedge under his bunk.

Lighting his lamp, he searched until he found a pencil and paper. Sitting down, he drafted a message. Then he turned in, and as he pulled his blankets snugly up over him he chuckled to himself.

Early the next morning he sought out Peewee and drew him aside.

"Listen, Peewee," he said. "I'm going to ask a big favor of you, but if you do it, I'll promise you that you won't have to wait until you die to get your reward."

The diminutive cook squinted up at Dan. "Shoot, kid," he said. "Anybody but you, an' I'd be dog-gone suspicious, but I'll take a chance."

Dan drew out the message he had written the night before. He handed it to Peewee. "I want you to take this into town at once and give it to the telegraph operator, but don't let any one see you go."

"Has it anything to do with Shad Barker?" Peewee asked, quickly turning the folded paper over in his hands.

Dan grinned and nodded.

"An' does it pertain to his misery?"

Again Dan nodded. "I'm sorry I can't tell you about it now, but if you

do what I say, you'll probably learn something by night."

"I'm on," replied the other quickly. "I'll hit out at once."

"Thanks," said Dan. "You won't be sorry."

Peewee started away.

"And, Peewee," Dan said. "I'll help you with your work to-night so you won't be behind."

The cook flashed him his toothless grin and continued on his way.

A heavy storm was rolling up from the southwest and Dan went back and got his mackinaw before starting for the woods.

Before the men had started work, the wind was whipping over the forest in a terrific gale. The giant firs bowed before its force and great branches were hurled downward.

By noon the storm had gained in momentum until it lashed the forest in its fury. When the fallers and buckers came in from the heavy timber at noon they were grumbling loudly. In any other camp they would not be expected to work under such conditions. One of the scalers had narrowly escaped being crushed by a heavy branch which crashed down from a tall fir. Constantly alert to the danger, they had necessarily slowed their work, and Barker had stood over them most of the morning.

While Dan was hurriedly eating, Peewee passed by him and paused for a moment.

"I did it," the cook whispered.

Dan smiled his approval, and when he went back to the woods his heart felt a little lighter.

By mid-afternoon the wind had reached its height. Dan watched the woods crew apprehensively. They were working under trying conditions, and he expected every moment to see some one carried out. Shad was either mad or crazy to let them work on a day like this. The tension grew on him until he felt as though he wanted to step in and call the men into open revolt. It would not be hard, he realized, in their present harried state of mind.

During one of the lull periods when he was waiting for the choker setters to set the choker, he happened to glance across to the opposite hillside. His eyes came to rest on a great tree set off from the others that had been trimmed the day before by Steve, the new high climber. It had not been topped, and the bushy tuft still remained and was now catching the full sweep of the wind. It bent almost to the breaking point before the storm.

Suddenly, as Dan gazed, he saw the thin form of Steve starting up. For a moment he gaped with open mouth. He rubbed his eyes as though uncertain of his vision. The climber continued slowly up the tree and Dan made out his ax and saw dangling from the rope attached to his belt line.

Surely the youngster was not going to top that tree in such a storm? It could not be done. Even if he could manage to climb to that whipping tuft, when it came off there would be no telling what might happen. It would split long before he sawed it through and when a top split—Dan shuddered. The belt line either broke and sent the climber over backward or he was severed at the waist.

Something seemed to snap within Dan. Instantly, he galvanized into action. With a leap he started off across the deadfall.

The hook tender yelled at him, then he looked in the direction in which Dan was running and cursed. The rigging slingers and choker setters also paused to gaze at the boy on the tree; their faces set; their eyes hard.

Ahead of Dan was a small shed used for storage of tools. He made for it. He had left his climbing spurs and felt there. He found them and strapped his belt on as he ran. Cutting through a stand of second growth, he lost sight of

the spar tree. When he came out on the other side, he saw the youngster, now nearly up to the tuft, but he had stopped and seemed to be merely clinging on. The spar tree was rocking like a ship's mast in a heavy swell.

As Dan drew nearer, he heard the voice of Shad Barker.

"Go on up and top her or I'll beat the life out of you when you come down," the foreman yelled.

Dan saw Barker standing on the hillside above. He was shaking his fist angrily toward the youth on the tree. Curses rolled from his month. Apparently, he was unaware of Dan's approach from the lower side.

Now within twenty feet of the spar tree, Dan paused and looked up. Steve still clung to the tree, his belt line pulled up tight. His face was blanched and his eyes were wide with a strange fright. Before the onslaught of the terrific gale, the spar tree threatened to surrender and snap off. At each back lash the youngster's body was almost jerked from the tree. Suddenly, one of his spurs tore loose. He tried to drive it in again. It was a clumsy effort and not unlike that of a novice who is climbing for the first time.

A pang of misery stung Dan. He knew what had happened up there. The kid had gone yellow. The pitiful sight above him sent a paroxysm of rage through his whole being. He forgot himself. He forgot everything but the youngster on the tree—and Shad Barker. Gosh, how he hated him! His bitterness toward the foreman leaped all bounds of reason. He saw Shad only as a killer, brutal and ruthless.

Unnoticed by the foreman, who continued to hurl his curses and threats skyward where the helpless youngster clung, Dan strapped on his spurs. The next instant, he sprang to the base of the spar tree. His belt rope whipped around the great trunk. He caught the free end. The bight flipped upward. In another moment he was up ten feet, then fifteen.

A wild yell rose from Shad Barker. "Johnson, you white-livered cuss, come down out of there or I'll break you in two!" he shouted.

But Dan paid no attention. He was going up with the sure, swift strokes of the master climber, his eyes focused on the helpless boy above him. Halfway up he felt the full force of the wind. It was terrible in its power, and he wondered how Steve had been able to hold on as long as he had. He never once thought of himself. Everything seemed driven from his mind but the idea of getting to the boy above him.

In another few minutes he had reached a point just below Steve's feet. He swung around to the far side of the tree and drew his body close to the bark. In a flash, he whipped the bight of his belt line out and upward. It curved around Steve's body and struck just above his head. Instantly, Dan leaned backward and held it in position, following almost immediately with a couple of long leaps that brought him level with Steve.

For the first time, the youngster saw him; but it was with the unnatural stare of a frightened animal that he looked at Dan.

Dan pulled himself close and with one hand reached out and shook the boy by the shoulder. "Come on, Steve!" he shouted. "Snap out of it! You're all right! Grab a hold of yourself and get down."

The boy continued to stare at him. Again Dan shook him, this time roughly. "Let's go, Steve!" he shouted, at the same time dropping his rope around the boy. "I'll go down with you. It's easy."

Steve seemed to wake up when he felt the security of Dan's belt line holding him. He smiled weakly and tightened on his own rope. He set his spurs and started downward, slowly and cau-

tiously. Dan accompanied him, keeping the pressure of his belt line on the other.

Below them, Dan heard a triumphant shout. He glanced at the ground and saw that most of the crew had collected beneath and were calling up encouragement to him.

It was a slow descent. Dan kept up a flow of words to bolster the youngster's broken courage. As they neared the ground, the men rushed forward and with outstretched hands caught Steve and lowered him. The boy collapsed in their arms.

Dan dropped on his feet and immediately unstrapped his spurs. He straightened and unbuckled his belt, just as the great form of Shad Barker pushed through the men. The foreman's face was livid with rage. He came at Dan like an angry bull.

"I told you I'd break you in two if you went up that tree," he snarled, reaching out for Dan with his fingers bent like claws.

Dan backed away. He saw that the foreman was determined. At the same time, his hatred for the other exploded within him. A wild, exultant fury seethed in his breast. In that instant, he realized that he had regained his courage. He had climbed again, and his confidence had returned to him.

Barker was almost upon him. His great arm suddenly reached out to clutch him.

The men backed away.

Dan waited for just a second. His lithe body tensed and a cold gleam flashed from his blue eyes. The next moment his fist shot out and landed flush on Barker's jaw. It cracked with the report of a snapping cable.

Shad Barker went back on his heels. The men gasped. The foreman's face wore an expression of complete surprise. With a hoarse cry, he sprang forward again, his great hands reaching out to grab the youngster, but Dan ducked, and side-stepped, and again he planted his fist into Shad's ugly face.

Dan breathed a prayer of thankfulness for his knowledge of boxing. If he could keep out of Shad's reach, he had a chance, but this was not a canvassed ring or level floor. He would have to be mighty careful.

The second blow barely stopped the foreman. He rushed upon the boy and his great fist flayed out and struck Dan on the side of the head. The latter felt as if he had been hit by a swinging log. He reeled and almost went down, but the legs that had been toughened by years of climbing now stood him in good stead.

Shad saw his advantage and again plunged forward to grapple with the youth, but Dan was too quick. His fists lashed out and crashed into Barker's face. They were well-timed blows and cut through the flesh. Blood streamed down Shad's face. His mouth was twisted into a fiendish snarl. He shook his head like a wild beast and doubled up his fists. He pitched forward, throwing his arms with tremendous force.

Dan stepped in. Shad's blows went over his shoulders, but his forearms struck Dan with bonebreaking force. Fortunately, as he was almost knocked off his feet on one side, Shad's other blow brought him upright again.

Once inside, Dan drove his fists again and again into Barker's jaw, before he stepped away. No ordinary man could have stood up under such well-directed punches, but Shad shook them off as if they had been mere taps.

Dan was beginning to weaken. It was useless to try to stop the big foreman by landing on his face. He decided upon another attack. He was dancing around him now, first ducking, then backing away as Shad lurched after him, struggling to get his hands upon him. Dan knew that if the foreman succeeded it would be all up with him.

Then as the big man left an opening, Dan shot his fist to the other's heart. Once more he struck that spot before he had to back up and dodge a powerful swing from his opponent. He saw Shad blink under these blows, but he did not weaken.

Around and around the two went, Dan always retreating, pausing when the opportunity offered to lunge in with those drives to the heart. The men watched the battle fascinated. Dan's exhibition of boxing was new to them. They had expected him to be crushed instantly by Barker's power.

Now Dan's attack was beginning to tell on the big man. His heart was beginning to waver under those steady blows. He paused, and his eyes narrowed to cunning slits. The next moment, he sprang forward, both his feet leaving the ground at the same time and his arms outstretched.

Dan tried to avoid the rush, but his foot caught on a loose stick and he went over backwards. A hoarse cry rose in Shad's throat as he pounced upon him.

The force of the foreman's great body upon him nearly knocked the wind out of Dan. He tried to wriggle free, but he felt the other's fingers working down to his throat.

If Shad ever succeeded in getting that hold, it would be the end. Dan had to think quickly. He doubled up his knees and brought one foot into the pit of Shad's stomach. Dan straightened out his leg with all his strength, and the foreman's body rose. He landed a few feet away, and before he could return to his victim, Dan was on his feet.

Immediately, Shad leaped up and was after him. Dan's fists lashed out again to the heart. He was putting everything into his blows. He had to stop the foreman now or never.

Suddenly, he saw Shad's knees bend. He launched another attack on the foreman's heart. The big man struggled to straighten up. His battered face still bore that snarl, but his eyes had lost their fire of passion. He threw out his arms and tried to reach the boy. It was a weak gesture.

Dan saw his advantage. He did not wait. Stepping in, he rained pistonlike blows on the other's face and body. They landed with thudding violence.

Barker's arms lowered. His knees bowed. For a moment he stood like a giant tree that had been cut but held for an instant before toppling.

Once more, Dan swung his right and left with all the force within him.

Shad Barker's eyes went glassy. His great frame gave a convulsive jerk. With a guttural cry, he pitched forward at Dan's feet.

Instantly, the men gave an exultant cry and rushed forward, but a shout from below them on the hillside made them turn.

Dan looked, too, and he saw the wizened form of Peewee struggling up the hill, followed closely by a well-dressed man.

Dan grinned and stepped forward as the two came up. He stuck out his hand. The stranger grasped it.

"Gosh, dad!" Dan exclaimed. "I'm sure glad you came."

"I'm glad I did, too, son," replied the other. Then he looked at the prostrate figure of Shad Barker. The foreman had rolled over and was staring vaguely up at the two. The men had backed away, and were watching the newcomer with surprise.

Peewee, who had stood with a puzzled look on his face, fumbled for his pipe. "What d'you mean, 'dad'?" he asked Dan. "Thought your name was Johnson?"

Dan grinned. "No, it's Jameson, Peewee," he said. "I changed it when I came up because I didn't want any one to know who I was."

Jameson turned on his son. "Did you do this to Barker?" he demanded.

Dan nodded his head. "Yes, dad. I

didn't tell you in the telegram that he had tried to kill me. He did succeed in making me turn yellow, but I guess when he sent Steve there up the tree I got back my courage. I'm sure glad I knew how to box."

"And you say you found this fellow branding our logs for Olson?" continued the other.

"Yes, and I've got the branding iron in my shack," replied Dan.

Jameson swung on Shad. The foreman was sitting up, wiping his face with his sleeve.

"Shad," said Jameson angrily, "I've had a suspicion about you since last year's clean-up. I wanted to come up myself, but the kid here asked for a chance to look into this. I've always treated you right, but now you're going to get the limit." He glanced up at the man. "Take him into camp, boys," he ordered. "And be sure he's locked up and placed under guard. The sheriff is on his way up here."

The men sprang forward eagerly. There was almost a hungry greed in their actions as they yanked the foreman to his feet and started away.

Jameson walked over to his son. "Well, boy, you've proved you've got the stuff. What do you say to staying up here and finishing this work yourself?"

"Great, dad!" exclaimed Dan. "I'm on."

THE KODIAK MYSTERY SOLVED

FOR a long time, Kodiak Island, off the coast of Alaska, has been a source of supersitious mystery to the native population of the place. Many tales, terrifying as they were untrue, were told about the upper valleys. And, under Russian occupation of the island, the tales reached the high point of the horrible.

With the recent explorations of Father Hubbard, a geologist of Santa Clara College, California, however, the mystery surrounding the interior has been solved. In spite of the stories of gigantic bears and thunder gods that he heard on every hand, Father Hubbard pushed into the interior with one companion, and explored the whole mountainous region, hitherto untouched by the foot of the hardiest prospector.

His explorations reveal the fact that the interior is one gigantic glacier. From a hundred mountain valleys glaciers have moved into a massive central ice lake, which is fifty miles wide. After encountering a large river and waterfall, the explorers climbed through a mountain pass, behind which was a labyrinth of pinnacled peaks, very steep and snow covered. It must have taken many a volcanic upheaval to create such a confusion of canyons and gorges. In fact, so rough is the going over the rugged interior that only an aërial map could ever show its real contours.

One of the strange disclosures of the trip is that, while game is plentiful on the shore line of the island, the interior is practically devoid of it. Even birds do not visit the timberless hills. Father Hubbard sums up the situation thus: There are no bears in the region because of lack of food; no birds as nature is always frozen, and nothing except glaciers to account for the thunderous and mysterious noises that the natives describe.

The Winged Horse

by John Frederick

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

THE LAMB," of many aliases, is hired by Colonel Loring to protect his range from the Montagues. The youth invades the Montague stronghold, meets lovely Louise Patten, and rides off with Jim Montague's famous black stallion.

The Montagues now make a counter-proposition, which The Lamb accepts, with the colonel's consent. He finds that old Monty Montague knows his history, and perceives his resemblance to some unmentioned person. Warned by Monty not to double cross him, and hated by Jim, The Lamb joins the Montague household. He finds Louise strangely neglected by the young men, and learns that Big Jim wants her. Louise wears an emerald brooch given her by Will Dunstan, who has since died.

The Lamb is designated to fight "Lefty" Fargo, sent by the colonel to do battle with Jim Montague, and defeats him. Later, he learns the Montague plans for despoiling Loring's range.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON THE HILLSIDE.

NOW that the strategy of the camp of Montague had been revealed, "The Lamb" was in haste to get the news to his friends. No time had as yet been fixed for the raid; perhaps it would come the very next morning, and if he could place the information in the hands of the colonel, the hunters would be caught in their own trap.

He left the house after supper, and walked out into the night. He found the sky had cleared through the zenith; a broad, white moon was up; and the world was one of black and silver. Just east of him he looked at the broad back of the mountain from which he had promised the colonel he would send his signal. No doubt that eyes were straining from the Loring camp, this night, to make out the glow of the double fire.

The Lamb drew his belt tighter, making up his mind to start. He pulled out his watch; the moonlight was sufficiently bright to show him that it was only half past seven, which would give him ample time to get to the mountain and send the signal, and even confer

with the colonel, yet return in time to be in bed at an hour so seasonable that no questions would be asked.

He nodded to himself, and dropped the watch back—not into the secure watch pocket, but into the larger pocket at the side of his coat. His mind was traveling too far before him to be troubled by details.

The door slammed; the voice of Milligan came up behind him.

"You done a great job to-day, kid. You got yourself a home here, by what you done! What about it? You ain't sorry that you came over, eh?"

The Lamb did not answer.

He merely said, after a moment: "The old mountain looks pretty cold, eh?"

"With the moon on the snow," admitted Milligan. "When spring comes up this way, it ain't so bad."

"No, I guess it wouldn't be. The boys still ride that trail even this weather, don't they?"

"They gotta. Look at the way some of the old cows will work up hill in the snow. They know that somewhere or other they're gunna find a place where the snow has slipped, and that'll give 'em easy feeding."

"I never thought of that."

"You ain't a puncher, kid, or you'd know that."

"Maybe. It's a twister, that trail."

"Sure it is," said Milligan. "But it ain't bad going."

"Ain't it? But even in good weather, with no snow on the ground, one of your boys took a tumble off of it last year."

"You mean Bill Dunstan?"

"I guess that was his name. I dunno."

"Sure, he took a tumble. I dunno how that happened. Bill wasn't a drinkin' kind of a gent. But the best hoss will stumble goin' down a trail, and the best puncher will sometimes sit too loose in the saddle."

"Where'd he fall?"

"Oh, along there where the trees thin out. You see? Where the black of the trees thins out a little. The poor feller, he done a real Brodie. He went down about five hundred feet and hit a nest of black rocks."

"I think I've noticed them. Big fellers!"

"They are. Bad as shark's teeth to fall into. That's where Dunston dropped."

The Lamb was quiet for a moment, and then he answered, in rather a hushed voice: "We all gotta find trail's end. We all gotta come to it. Dunstan was his name, was it?"

"It was. He was a good kid. Young. Eighteen, or not much more, I guess. Everybody liked him. Even 'Big Jim' took to him. Jim was away, when the accident happened. He took on quite a lot, for him, when he come back and heard the news."

"Wouldn't seem like Jim would be much busted up by anything, would it?"

"No, it wouldn't. But I heard him say that Dunstan was the makin's of the best cowboy that ever rode on this here range. Which is talkin' pretty wide and high, when you come down to it, because we got some men around here!"

Milligan moved off toward the stable. The Lamb turned out of the house yard, across the bridge, and hastily swung away through the snow.

It was hard going down the hillside. He had to balance as though on skates, for every now and then the snow-crust would quiver, and then lunge away from beneath his feet. But when he came to the valley, the going was very good. The crust of the snow held him up, and he could make good time across the hollow and to the rising land beyond. So he started the ascent of the mountain.

Here he kept to the trail. The surface of it had been badly chopped by the hoofs of horses, and the split toes

of cattle, and the churned snow had frozen hard again in the most difficult shapes for a pedestrian to cover. Nevertheless, he stuck to the trail, for there alone the sign he left behind him might not be noticed.

He passed the naked region, where only black heads of brush here and there jutted up above the surface of the snow. He entered the region of scattering trees; and a steer heaved up from its bedding-down place and stood snorting, puffing out its breath in white clouds of alarm.

So he came to the verge of the solid pine woods, and then he paused. The trail jerked here about a corner of the mountain's shoulder, and he looked down on a bristling mass of dark rocks beneath him. At this point, then, Bill Dunstan's horse had stumbled, and Dunstan himself had been cast from the saddle and rolled down to his death.

There was no question about the violence of the fall, since it was a very steep shelving slope—so steep that an expert hardly could have climbed it!

The Lamb sighed. Then, absently, he kicked a tuft of frozen snow from before him. The lump rolled straight over the brim and went bounding down with enough violence to start a small current of snow dust behind it. When it came to the midway point, it turned to the right; the snow dust turned to the right, also, and dropped down to the level beneath with a flash of powdered silver.

The Lamb looked after it blankly.

Then he started, as a thought drove home in his mind. He caught up a fifty-pound rock whose nose rose above the snow on one side of the trail, and tumbled this down the slope in turn, aiming it with the greatest precision at the group of black rocks beneath. The bulk of this stone broke through the crust of the snow on the slope; it started a small slide, and, before his eyes The Lamb saw the stone bound to the right, and the sliding snow split and turned to either the right or the left.

A moment later, he heard the stone strike with an audible thud, well to the right of the black rocks. The snow crunched down to either side; the black rocks had not been touched by either snow or stone!

At this, The Lamb looked up to the sky with suddenly set teeth; and then looked down again at the slope.

However, he was not yet sure. He went a little above the bend and immediately below it, and tried pitching and rolling weights down the hill; but in no case would they reach the black rocks. The conformation of the slope just above was such that it acted as the prow of a ship acts on water, turning it deftly to one side or the other. And yet the angles were so gradual that the thing was not apparent to the naked eye.

The Lamb returned to the very point of the bend and there he folded his arms behind his back and stared fixedly down.

He was quite certain of one thing, now. No matter how Will Dunstan had died, he had not perished by falling from this point upon the black rocks beneath. He *could* not have fallen upon them, had he chosen to leap out into the air with all his might, bent upon destroying himself.

How had he come to die upon those rocks, then? In what manner had he slipped upon them?

From above, he could not have fallen, except from the trail. And yet there he had been found, his head crushed, dead from the fall!

The Lamb turned and looked darkly toward the house of Montague, which arose above its trees in the distance, looking like a black hand which was raised in signal of arrest.

Then he went up the trail, and into the black of the pine woods. When he had rounded the shoulder of the mountain, the house of Montague was

straight behind him, and thoroughly well hidden; straight before him, although he could not begin to see it, he knew the house of Colonel Loring stood. Therefore, he descended through the woods until he came to a partial clearing. There he made a fire. It took a good deal of work to raise a bright flame, but he managed it with patience, searching out dried bits of bark, and furnishing himself very largely with the inside rind from the stump of a tree. In this manner he worked up two small fires, with a little space between them.

He allowed them to burn for a scant two or three minutes, during which time he remained in the shelter of the woods.

He grew nervous. He pulled out his watch, glanced at it, and made out that it was eight thirty. One hour ago he had left the house, and this was very fair progress.

He returned to the fires, extinguished them thoroughly with snow, and then went straight down the side of the mountain toward the valley. It was difficult work. Only here and there the moon gave him good light; he was continually slipping, and crashing into the wet sides of trees. When he reached the valley floor beneath he was in a very bad temper indeed, but he scarcely had issued into the open when he saw a horseman coming toward him.

The colonel it was, beyond a doubt, but The Lamb slipped back into shelter to make sure.

The rider came straight on across the snow, his horse hanging in its stride, now and again, as its feet slipped; but when he had come very close, the man halted and remained for a moment looking fixedly up the mountainside, in the direction from which the fires could have been seen.

He raised a hand, pushed back his hat, and scratched his head as if in perplexity, and so the moon had a chance to shine fair and full upon the face of Jack McGuire!

CHAPTER XXX.

JACK MCGUIRE.

BUT McGuire did not linger. After that moment's inspection, he pulled the head of his horse about, pointed it down the valley toward the house of Montague, and disappeared. From behind him, The Lamb most grimly watched his departure, fingering a Colt the while.

Of all the men in the house of Montague, there was none whom he liked so little as Jack McGuire. The man was a brute, with the sign of his brutality stamped broadly and deeply upon his face. Moreover, McGuire hated him, and had showed it plainly. Great uneasiness possessed The Lamb. He bit his lip and shook his head; very greatly he would dread returning to the house of Montague and facing the inspection of McGuire, and of other eyes.

How could he explain the condition of his boots, or the bark stains which undoubtedly would be on his coat?

He would have to trust to the night, the lateness of the hour, the indifference of the sleepy men, to cover these details, and pray that he might come in for no lasting inspection.

In the meantime, another rider came out of the woods on the far side of the valley, halted for an instant, and then came on with his horse at a trot—a long-legged horse, and a short, heavily built rider. This surely was the colonel, on one of his well-bred horses.

And the colonel it was. The Lamb hailed him before he stepped out from the shadow of the trees. Colonel Loring swung quickly to the ground and advanced with hand outstretched.

"I—I'm darned glad to see you here, young man," said he. "I have never seen a face that meant more to me!"

"Hold on!" murmured The Lamb. "You thought that I'd double crossed you to-day, when I met Fargo for them?"

"What else was I to think?" asked the colonel.

"And that I'd lighted those two fires sort of to draw you in?"

"It might have looked that way. I knew that Montague would pay a good price for me."

"Of course he would," agreed The Lamb. "But not to me. As for Fargo, s'pose you look at it this way. It's hard to train a dog not to eat raw meat."

"Fargo was an old enemy. I heard that—afterward!"

"How is he?"

"Living, thank goodness, but pretty sick."

"Does he blame his hoss?"

"He blames his hoss, of course. He says that the cards beat him, and not the play. But let Fargo go. I hope he lives. If he don't—he's been taking his chances; and he's been paid for it in cash, as much as he asked!"

In the moonlight, the boy could see the colonel's wry face, and by that he could judge that the price had been very high indeed.

Loring went on: "When I had the chance to get Fargo, I thought I'd better. I figgered that maybe he was the man to get rid of Jim Montague for me. Then you'd come back to me. And no matter what the Montagues tried, with Jim gone, and with you and Fargo working for me, we'd clean 'em off the range."

"Is that what you want?"

The colonel snorted like a horse.

"Nothin' else," he assured the boy. "They've hounded me; give me a chance to hound them!"

The Lamb shrugged his shoulders.

"And when we make up the final accounts, kid, you'll get your share of the pickings!" exclaimed the colonel warmly.

"Let that drop. I'll pay myself," said The Lamb bitterly. "Suppose you tell me about the way the boys are holding up?"

The colonel hesitated. Then he said: "I'll keep nothing from you. They're pretty sick. 'Shorty' and Muldoon will fight the thing through with me, but the rest of the boys are pretty sick. They lost most of their heart to-day, when Fargo went down. We all thought that Fargo couldn't be beaten. He had that sort of a reputation."

"Oh, aye," murmured The Lamb, "the best of 'em drop when the cards are wrong! The others want to quit?"

"They want to quit bad. They're hunting around for excuses. They whine about everything. They growl at the sort of hosses they gotta ride. They growl at the sort of chuck they gotta eat. All that any of them wants is a chance to exchange a couple of pretty mean words with me, so's they'll have an excuse to quit me cold."

"Leave Muldoon to handle 'em, and you stay close."

"I tried that. They raise the dickens then because they say that I take it easy, while the ranch goes along short-handed! They're pretty sour. They're as sour as vinegar!" exclaimed the poor colonel.

Then he added hastily: "If we can do something quick, kid, there's a chance. They still got the shame of men inside of 'em. They'll fight if they're crowded into it!"

"Can they hold off a week?"

"Not more than three days. They'll bust loose on me almost any time. Muldoon lies and swears and promises; but he ain't got any heart in what he says, and they can see that he's only talking through his hat. Kid, you sent for me. Do you find things right at Montague's place?"

"They figger that they got you cooked, and salted, and buttered for swallering!"

"They got reason for that idea, too."

"They're going to start for you some break of day."

"The house?"

"They'll not tackle the house, they say. Big Jim has a better idea. They'll slide in and get the heads of the passes between the hills, and then they'll bag your gents as they come in off of the range."

The rancher exclaimed in surprise.

"Aye, that's an idea," said he.

"You could stop that."

"Sure. By keeping a boy on the top of the Black Hills, day and night, to send out smoke or fire signals to call in the men. But even then, they'd be between us and the house."

"They can't do a thing to you. Scatter your gents in the rocks and the brush, and the Montagues will never run you out into the open. They're Injuns. They ain't white!"

The colonel sighed.

"I wish I could have you for that time," said he.

"You'll have me for that time, I hope," said the boy. "There's only one thing that keeps me hangin' about the Montague place, and that's my own business."

"Your own business?" echoed the colonel.

"Why, it's a sort of a little matter about a dead man. That's all there is to it!"

The colonel hesitated. But his own affairs were too pressingly important to allow him to diverge from them for any length of time. He said: "What day, kid?"

"I dunno. Pronto, though."

"This morning?"

"Maybe."

"It cuts me short!" said the colonel bitterly. "But I'll do what I can. I'll stand the watch myself till morning."

"Put your boys to sleep and go to sleep yourself," The Lamb assured him. "There ain't going to be a step taken toward your place until the early part of the dawn. It may not be to-morrow. It might be next month. But I don't reckon on that long."

"But suppose," said the colonel softly, "that we was to round 'em up between the mouth of the valleys and the house, and pepper 'em from both sides?"

"Then," said the boy calmly, "there'd be only a lot of dead Montagues left under our noses, and a lot of live Montagues runnin' like scared dogs down the valley."

The colonel drew in a very long and slow breath.

"I can sort of taste it," he said huskily. "I can sort of taste it."

Then he began to laugh, and there was also a husky noise beneath that laughter that made the boy think of the sound a dog makes in its throat when its teeth are fixed in the flesh of an enemy.

"I've had it a long, long time," explained the colonel, ashamed. "They've had their knives in me. If I only had a chance to get back at 'em——"

"Work steady, and mind the law," said The Lamb. "That's the best way, I take it."

"What care have they for the law?"

"Not much. But always to play safe!"

The colonel jerked up his head.

"It stands this way—if they do what you tell me they'll do, I'm gunna bag 'em, and make them remember this day. And then—you and me will have something to talk about together, son!"

"That's the finish," said The Lamb. "I'm due back."

"Does anybody suspect you there?"

"They've all been suspecting me. But there's only one that still won't believe that I'm with them. That's Jack McGuire."

"Be careful! Be mighty careful of that breed," said the colonel.

"You know him?"

"Oh, but I know him a long ways back! He's a cross between a carrion buzzard and a bloodhound. There never was a better man on a trail, son; keep him off of yours."

The Lamb touched the handles of his Colt instinctively.

"Thanks," said he. "I'll keep that in mind, colonel."

"If they get a doubt of you," explained the colonel, "you're dead. And I'm ruined. If you can keep the wool over their eyes until they tackle me in the way they've planned, then we'll bucket 'em to pieces without no trouble at all."

"It'll be a barbecue," said The Lamb.

"Then—good night, son!"

"Good night," said The Lamb. He paused and added: "You couldn't drop a word in the ear of Muldoon, could you? He's pretty hard on me, just now."

"There's nothing I'd rather do. If he and the rest of the boys knew that you were down there working for me, they'd be greatly bucked up. But as sure as one of 'em knew, the rest would all know; and as sure as they all knew, then the word would get straight down to the Montagues."

The Lamb agreed. They parted at once, and as the colonel started back for his ranch, The Lamb turned up the valley, keeping close to the edge of the trees, where their steep shadows would cover him. However, he saw nothing in the open, and he came straight back to the Montague house without hearing human sound. He crossed the bridge unchallenged; only at the rear door of the house a voice barked out of the darkness suddenly, and Jack McGuire stood beside him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ONE WATCH MISSING.

THE warning which the colonel had given him fitted exactly with The Lamb's own sense of things, and, therefore, he did not doubt a most pointed danger from McGuire. Moreover, he felt from the first an absolute repulsion for this dark-browed fellow.

"Where've you been?" from McGuire.

"Walkin'."

"Walkin' where?"

"Where I felt like goin'."

"Is that any answer?"

"It's all you'll get."

From the hand of McGuire a flare of light sprang into the face of The Lamb. Then the lantern was slowly lowered, so that it shone on the clothes of the wanderer.

"You've been in the brush," said McGuire.

"Of course I have."

"What for?"

"Walkin' the idea of 'Lefty' Fargo out of my head."

"Hey?"

"You wouldn't understand. Pork and beans is about as far as you could get. I had Fargo on my mind. I wanted to walk him out of it, so's I could get some sleep."

"Bah!" said McGuire. "That's likely, ain't it?"

"What's likely?"

"That you'd be nervous about anything. There ain't any nerves in you."

"Are you through?" asked The Lamb suddenly. "Because if you ain't, I am."

"I'm night watch," said Jack McGuire, and he grinned with triumphant pleasure.

"You're crazy," said The Lamb.

"Am I?" answered McGuire. "I'm the crazy kind that's gunna toast you on the coals, kid. I'm telling you that! Go on in. I'm tired of talkin' to you!"

With that, The Lamb was released, and he went into the house with a gloomy and downward head. All was far from what he could have wished it to be.

The door of the big dining room was open. He saw blue wisps of cigarette smoke mixed with heavy clouds from many pipes. Some of the boys were in there talking over the day, and he

paused to listen. For he had an idea that he might hear something of importance about himself.

A drawling, nasal voice was saying:

"She was about a four-year-old. She was layin' down in a bare path, and the heat of her belly was turnin' the dirt to mud under her feet. The snow and the sleet was caked across the hollers of her back and I seen that her vitals would be freezin', the first thing she knew. I was dead fagged; I'd been tailin' 'em up all day till my arms was about pulled out at the sockets. My pony was gettin' a little smoky, too. There'd been several pairs of horns throwed his way, that day.

"But I got down and got after that old fool of a cow. I worked like the dickens. Her tail cracked; I thought I was pullin' it in two. But, finally, with her bawlin' her head off, I heaved up the rear end of her; she stumbled onto her feet, and swung around on me. That spilled her down on her knees ag'in. But she was so ornery mean and mad that she come up ag'in and after me. I dived for the pinto. Dog-gone him, but he side-stepped me, and then bolted. I lit out for the next tree. It was about five miles off, seemed to me, and that dog-gone cow run like a greyhound after me. I was more greyhounder than her, though. I got so all-fired light that just her breath was enough to blow me along ahead of her. I didn't weigh no more than a dead leaf. So when I come under that tree, I heaved myself up and caught hold of a branch about thirty feet offn the ground, just as the critter's horns split the seat of my trousers.

"The bawlin' that cow done then was more'n I ever heard the like of before. She horned the tree. Her bellerin' shook the snow off the branches. But pretty soon the pinto come wanderin' along that way pawing off the crust of the snow and chawin' at the grass. He seen me and started laughin', and when the cow seen him with his mouth open, she histed her tail and tore after him. I clumb down out of the tree and started for——"

"I remember a time when I was down in the Big Bend," broke in another voice, "and while I was there, I met up with a gent by name of 'Cozy' Dolan."

"Was that Dolan of the Double Bar Y?"

"Naw, that was his cousin. This gent had a broken nose. Come to think of it, Fargo was the gent that busted his nose. Dropped him, and then stepped on his face. Polite, was Fargo."

"He ain't gunna use no more bad manners!"

"Nope! The Lamb seen to that when he wrapped the barrel of that Colt around his head. I seen it sink right in. If Fargo ain't brained, his skull is made of Inja rubber."

"Why didn't the kid blow the roof offn his head?"

"Why? I dunno."

"Aw, I do! You take The Lamb, suppose he was to chaw up all the fightin' men on the range, what'd there be left for him to do? Nothin'! He'd have to sit around and twiddle his thumbs. He'd have to go out barehanded and jump into a cave full of rattlers, or sashay up and bat a grizzly mama on the nose. So he's savin' up the good men on the range. You get a good book and you can afford to read it twice over, can't you? He's got that idea. Keep workin' on the gunmen, till the scars begin to sort of overlap. Says The Lamb: 'A scar beside a scar is neighborly; but a scar on top of a scar is dog-gone beggarly!'"

The Lamb moved on. There was a rough friendliness in this conversation which was all that he could ask.

He went to his room, lighted the lamp, and sat down on the edge of his bed, to think. The crisis was gradually approaching, now. In this one day, he had met and beaten Lefty Fargo and

had thereby established himself in the esteem of the Montagues. He had heard the careful plans of Big Jim Montague for the attack. He had told those plans to Colonel Loring. But, most of all, he had learned that Will Dunstan had not fallen to the black rocks in the manner by which he was supposed to have met his death. Yet report had it that the body had been found there, and the horse of Dunstan had been discovered grazing along the edge of the trail above just as if nothing had happened.

It seemed a perfect deduction that Dunstan had been bucked from the saddle, or in some manner lost his seat and then had fallen to the big rocks below. That deduction was wrong, as The Lamb had proved. And even if Will Dunstan had leaped with all his might from the trail straight out into the air, his falling body must have struck the bank and shelved either to the right or to the left.

The Lamb pondered upon the mystery gravely.

But there was one inevitable conclusion that seemed to stare him in the face. If Dunstan could not have fallen there from the trail, then either he had fallen to some other place and been dragged there; or else he had fallen from his horse upon the rocks, and the horse afterward had gone grazing up the mountain to the trail just above the accident.

But that hypothesis was not tenable by any except the wildest chance. The slope was sheer. The way around to the trail was both long and difficult, leading up through thick trees at the end, and it was asking too much of the most agreeable imagination to think that it could see the pony climbing of its own will.

The remaining deduction was the most interesting of all. If the horse did not get up to the trail of its own volition, then it was led there by some human hand. And it would not have been placed there except to cover murder!

Murder had been done, and Will Dunstan had died by the hand of some man.

The Lamb stood up straight and glared fiercely before him.

Then, mastering himself, he began to undress, pulling off coat and shirt automatically, frowning all the while.

His wet boots stuck to his socks; but at last, after much soft swearing, he was ready for bed, and picked up his coat to take his watch out and wind it—the last act of every day.

The coat felt a shade light to his touch—and the watch was not in the watch pocket. He tried the side pocket. It was not there. With an exclamation of annoyance, he began a systematic search, through his trouser pockets, through his coat and vest, even the shirt breast-pocket in which he kept his sack of tobacco.

The watch was not there, and suddenly The Lamb's eyes widened and filled with fear.

He shook his shoulders, like a dog getting out of water, then he rolled a smoke and took a turn up and down the room, whistling noiselessly, forcing his thoughts to other things. Only when the cigarette was finished, he sat down again, folded his arms, and looked straight before him, with a piercing concentration. And with all this direct effort, he could recall nothing, except that he had noted the time in the woods on the mountainside.

He picked up his clothes to dress again; but he dropped them afterward. After all, he dared not risk another expedition into the night, when the first one had been performed at such extreme cost of danger.

When he had determined upon this, he brushed the affair from his mind, rolled himself in his blankets, and stretched upon the bed.

Sleep came slowly down upon him.

He heard the creaking of the old house in the wind; he heard the voice of the wind itself in a lonely monologue that passed continually from the north to the south. And still from time to time the electric spark leaped in his mind—Will Dunstan had been murdered, foully murdered, and only he, of all men in the world, knew it!

At last, the darkness of sleep closed over his mind, and not a dream visited him from that moment until the full light of the day dropped in through his window.

It was no very strong light. The sky was sheeted across, again; the snow fell, slowly, wavering down in almost perpendicular lines. And when he looked out the window the lightest puff of wind was strong enough to raise a white cloud, like a cloud of dust, and drive it far away. The woods smoked with that flying snowpowder, and all the hills were pure and soft with new white. He dressed in haste. He was overdue, he felt, on the mountainside.

Overdue, indeed, for Jack McGuire was long before him at that post!

CHAPTER XXXII.

A HALF-BREED TRAILER.

TO Jack McGuire had been given the one talent which he despised; he could follow a trail almost like a wild animal. If the nose of a dog and the sight of a hawk had been combined, that union hardly would have produced more flawless work upon the trail than was exhibited by McGuire.

But he knew that the Indian is in this respect incomparably beyond the white; he knew that his own talent was directly derived from his Indian ancestry, and he felt that every exhibition of skill that he made upon the trail really was a confession of the baser mixture in his blood.

Therefore, he refused to do work which required a continual exhibition of his special talents. It was only on special occasions that he would draw upon his peculiar skill, as he drew upon it now. For McGuire had learned to hate The Lamb, as inferior and spiteful natures are bound to hate those who are above them. The half-breed usually inherits the faults of the races which are united in him. And, whatever may be his other virtues, he never is magnanimous.

So it was with Jack McGuire.

He had to dress the wound on his head once a day; and the time he chose for that work was naturally the morning. So that every day was given a bitterly unpleasant beginning. He never lay down at night or rose in the morning without promising to himself a cruel and a lasting satisfaction for the wrong which The Lamb had worked upon him.

Sometimes, in the earlier days, he had told himself that when he could take The Lamb at a serious disadvantage, then with knife, rope, or gun he would attack him and destroy him, and gain both glory and sweet revenge by that action.

But after he witnessed the fall of Lefty Fargo, he confessed that the man was beyond his reach.

It was malice deeply felt for The Lamb that awakened McGuire long before the dawn began on this morning. The pain of that envious hatred throbbed in his heart, and he got up half stifled from his bed and sat in the dark, smoking a cigarette, and scowling as the glow of the fire ate up the tobacco to the butt. Then he pinched out the coal, and looking through the window he saw the first pencil stroke of gray in the east. Or, rather, he saw that the mountains had turned to a more visible blackness.

When he was sure of this, McGuire went outdoors, where it was easier to breathe. Houses were to him prisons. The fullest arch of the sky was necessary to enable him to be his best.

It was long, long before the day's work would begin. He scowled at the thought. And then he remembered how he had seen the double eye of fire upon the side of the mountain the night before, and how that double eye had suddenly gone out.

Utter malice against The Lamb had roused him so early; mere chance sent him out to examine the fires. But how his heart would have leaped, had he guessed that the two impulses were working together to the end which he prized most dearly!

He went to the corral. Most of the horses were up; the last of those who remained lying, now pitched to their feet and lurched around the inclosure, while he spread his loop. He roped a gray that belonged in the string of Milligan, first of all. Finally, he caught a tough little roan, his proper horse, and saddling that wicked mustang, he led him into the open, then mounted. The roan was full of "kinks," and they had to be worked out; but Jack McGuire could have ridden a mountain lion without a saddle, and he warmed up the roan with whip and spur in the semidarkness of the dawn.

Then he rode out across the bridge and journeyed down to the valley.

The snow was beginning to fall, slowly, fluttering down so softly, indeed, that it felt like the touch of feathers on his leathery face, on his hands.

McGuire hated it. It was covering up trail!

He went straight to the point at which he first had seen the two bright eyes of the fire. Then he worked into the woods.

The dimness was altered; the gray morning was there, and although the light was not good, still it was sufficient for the half-breed to begin his work. Just as an eager scholar strains his eyes late in the evening, too intensely drawn on to pause and make a light.

McGuire scouted up the valley and down a little way. Then he entered the woods, leaving the horse with thrown reins in the open. He moved in a little circle, scanning the snow, the trunks of the trees, the branches around him. He worked slowly, for the light was insufficient; but he worked with all his senses.

His step was as light as the step of a hunting cat; his foot came down toe first, in a gliding movement; and now and again he paused, while his dark, bright eyes flashed from side to side. He was smiling. In the intense joy which this occupation gave him, every faculty was aroused to a tingling delight. So that the dark ugliness of McGuire left him, and he appeared beautiful.

He stole through the first circle. He went halfway through the third when, under the verge of the trees, he found tracks in the snow.

He dropped upon his heels instantly, and leaned above them. The fresh snow almost had filled the hollows. He blew, and the white fluff was driven out.

The impression that remained was wonderfully fresh and clear, with the snow crumbling a little at the upper edges, as a mold in coarse sand will do. The delight of the half-breed in this discovery was such that he stretched his hands out to it, like a miser over his gold, like a frozen man to the heat, like a child to a pet.

Then he saw that this was the impression made by a man's foot; that the foot was clad in a cowboy's boot; that the boot was new—because of the crispness of the pattern of the heel—that the boot was equipped with spurs; that the spurs had small rowels.

He sat back a little, and smiled again, and swallowed; as though he were tasting and retasting his pleasure.

Then he stood up and made a stride, bringing his foot down parallel with the imprint in the snow. He took an-

other and another. Then he went back and had regard to the corresponding series of impressions left in the snow by the stranger.

He could make other deductions—that this man was of more than middle height; that he was in weight probably between a hundred and seventy and a hundred and eighty pounds. Unless his stride was longer or shorter than his inches suggested!

He was a young man, too. For a youth lets his weight rest longer, springing on the toes; while an older man keeps the heel down more, and does not use the spring of the toe so much.

McGuire discovered these things. Then he went on the forward trail far enough to make sure that the pedestrian had gone straight on down the valley. At the end of that valley the half-breed saw the house of Montague rising up darkly against the blossoming eastern sky.

That home trail could be followed at leisure, at another time. But now he turned back and made a cut for sign in a big loop. Straightway, he found his own tracks, where he had ridden home the night before, and crossing them, at a slight angle, those of a rider coming, and a rider going. He dismounted. The same horse had made those prints, he discovered when he had blown the newly fallen snow out of the sign. There was a bar across the left fore shoe for proof that he was right.

Some one, then, had ridden across his line down the valley.

When? And had he anything to do with the pedestrian? Or was it the same person—who had, perhaps, thrown the reins off his horse on the edge of the woods?

He compared, carefully, the trail of his own horse with that of the trail which crossed it; and he made sure that the two must have been made at almost the same time.

This was a small point. But he was overlooking nothing. In the composition of a trail story, the details are not picked and assembled beforehand. Out of a thousand incoherent and trifling things, two or three may point in a significant direction.

He followed the line of the horse trail close to the woods. There the horse had halted for a little while. The man had not dismounted. That was proved, because if he had done so, the horse either would have stood motionless, or else it would have ranged a little to one side or another; probably it would have edged in toward the trees to nibble at the brush.

However, instead of this, he found that the hoofprints were scattered close together, as though the animal had shifted from foot to foot, restlessly, as a horse will do, when there is a weight in the saddle. At length, it had swerved sharply around, the snow was scuffed deeply away where the forehoofs had rested last—and the horse had gone off, across the hills—in what direction?

The half-breed followed for a little distance—far enough to see that the general line of the rider extended toward the house of Colonel Loring.

However, as he had failed to follow up the trail of the pedestrian, so he failed to follow up the trail of the horseman. He had made sure that they were not the same. Now he wanted to learn, if he could, why they had met, since met they had, to judge by the thick swarm of foot marks near where the horse had been held immobile.

And did either of these men have anything to do with the double fire, which, like the eyes of a great, angry snake, had glared out through the dark woods at Jack McGuire the night before?

He mustered his information, ran over it in his mind, made sure that it was all lodged securely in his memory, and then he went forward into the woods, carefully following, in the grow-

ing light, the back track of the pedestrian, into the trees.

It was perfectly simple for McGuire. The light was quite clear now, and he was able to take the track back to a point high up on the side of the mountain, where he found that the trail spread again, and left many footmarks in a small clearing. From that clearing, he could look out over the heads of the trees, and so doing, he was able to make up his mind that it was at about this point that he had seen the fires glowing.

However, there should be ways to make sure. The surface of the snow looked regularly crusted, except that toward the center there was a slight depression. He leaned and touched it—behold, the snow was soft and unjoined! He dipped his hand deeper, and withdrew it with a smear of soot upon the tips of the fingers!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TIME REGAINED.

HAVING first touched the telltale soot of the fire, McGuire straightway removed the upper surface of the snow and laid bare the fire level. It was small. There were only a few charred sticks.

That would have been enough for most searchers, but McGuire was not content. He began to move again over the surface of the snow, patting it with his hands, until it gave way a trifle. At that point he worked again, and uncovered another fire site, exactly like the first. For the last heat of the embers had slightly melted the snow which had been heaped upon them and the roof of the little cavern gave way under the weight of his hand.

He had found the two fires which had gleamed at him the night before, and a certain peace fell upon the soul of Jack McGuire. For this had been the sole task which he had set himself in leaving the house. It was now time to return, if he were to get to the Montague place in time for breakfast and the start of work.

But still he lingered, for there was much that he wanted to do. For one thing, it would have satisfied the very cockles of his heart to know the identity of the man who had laid this fire.

There was already no hope of tracing him down the valley, because the fall of the snow had by this time covered every trace of a footfall. However, he kicked at random in the snow about the fires, in the hope of turning up something of interest, and presently his toe connected with something that flew away in a yellow-gleaming arc and struck the trunk of a tree with a slight crash.

He followed, almost overawed by such luck, and picked up a thin, gold watch. The crash had smashed the glass covering of the face to bits, but the blow which his toe had given the watch had started it running again.

He held it to his ears. At first, in his excitement, he could not hear a sound. But presently he made out the clicking of the smooth and perfectly balanced escapement, softly muffled by the skill of the maker.

The half-breed grinned with joy. Keen as his senses were, cunning as his hands could be, there was a patient and wise craft represented by this watch that his strong fingers, or the fingers of all his race never could have rivaled. He held it on the hard palm of his hand, smiling down at it, rejoiced. It was as though he expected that small voice to spell out to him the name of its owner.

He saw the second hand turning with a rhythmic flow; he marked that the watch face told the hour of half past eight. But, most of all, the dainty workmanship of the second, the minute, and the hour hands fascinated him. So odd did it seem to him that human wits could have found such splinters—that

human patience and craft could have shaped each tiny morsel to an arrowhead!

Let those arrows point him, then, to the owner of the watch!

The watch said half past eight, though it had been stopped for a long time. Having been plunged into the snow, perhaps the intense cold had stopped it —by congealing the oil—in a very short time. The hands now marked, therefore, the approximate hour at which the owner had dropped his watch, and had built these fires.

In fact, McGuire could distinctly remember that he had seen the gleaming of the double eye at about that time!

When he was reassured about this, he put the watch inside a twist of paper, arranging it so that there was no pressure against the hands, and when he had done this, he put it carefully into his pocket. Then he started up the back trail from the fire.

It led onto the trail above him, where it angled around the mountainside. The trees successfully shut away the snow up to that point; on the trail itself, the footmarks disappeared, but they seemed to have turned off from the lower side, as though the walker had been climbing the hill.

McGuire sighed. There would have been much interest in pursuing those tracks in the snow; but at that moment there was a downward flurry so thick and white that it was like the waving of dense moth wings about him; and he knew that one such moment as that would be enough to obscure the deepest of tracks.

This thick rush of snow faded. He could look again over the tops of the trees and down to the white of the valley with its border of black pines; and in that valley he saw a horseman coming from the direction of the Montague place. He looked again, and knew that this was the great black stallion which had been the pride of Big Jim—which now was the property of The Lamb.

The bitter heart of the half-breed swelled again with fury and with envy. He even reached for his rifle, and a question leaped instinctively into his mind: What was this idler doing abroad, so early in the morning, and why had he come there?

It was not that he immediately connected The Lamb with what he had found. For the moment he had even forgotten the details of the return of The Lamb the night before; only deep, bitter malice kept McGuire watching, until he saw the rifle of the lonely rider uncased, flashing like a sword in his hand, then tipping to his shoulder.

Cowering for an instant in dread, the half-breed stared upward. Certainly, a rifle would reach to him—but no, the rifle barrel—he could tell at even that distance—was not pointed at him, but at some loftier object.

He saw neither spurt of fire nor tuft of smoke. But he did mark the wide-winged flight of a hawk, tipping smoothly into the teeth of the wind, and he saw that hawk drop suddenly over to one side and turn clumsily in mid-air like a creature of the pedestrian earth, and then hurtle downwards—a mere lump of flesh and feathers.

The Lamb was practicing his hand. And, with a swift guess, the breed estimated the distance to the hawk from the boy, and shuddered. There was something miraculous in the swift and accurate shot, to him. It did not occur to him that there was any large element of luck or of chance in such shooting, but he told himself that The Lamb could strike what he pleased. Skill and magic lived in the magazine of his rifle!

With that in his mind, McGuire was seized with dread lest the boy should encounter him alone in the wilderness. He could remember, now, the insolence with which he had spoken to this destroyer of men the night before, and

the fear that fell upon him was colder than the cold which is pressed against the face of the earth by the accumulated weight of the winter snows.

Down the side of the mountain he scurried as a squirrel scurries, frantically crossing a clearing among the trees when it dreads lest the yellow eye of the lynx be concealed among the brush.

He gained the bottom of the slope and there found that his horse was waiting heedless of the brush before him, where he might have nibbled here and there, but with downward head, glazed eyes, hanging lip, completing the sleep from which its master had roused it this morning.

The half-breed sprang into the saddle, and roused the mustang to full gallop at the same moment. He angled the swift little horse straight up the valley under the lee of the trees, then pulled him across the flat, with the snow flying up in clotted lumps and thin mists above his head, and drove into the verge of the pines on the farther side.

There he paused, chilled to the marrow of his bones. And again and again the picture of the death of the hawk sprang back into his mind, made clearer, and magnified with dreadfulness, until it seemed his own winged soul that had been smitten in the midst of the snow-streaked sky and brought tumbling down through the air.

But no great black horse came up the valley.

McGuire bit his lip with relief, and his blood began to stir again, stimulated with the old malice, the old hatred, which is the most potent mover of the heart.

The valley was empty and his way home was secured.

Yet he chose to enter into the woods and there work his path snakelike among the trees, weaving constantly back and back toward the Montague house.

At last he felt that he was sufficiently past the danger point at which he had seen The Lamb to come to the edge of the trees again and look out. When he did so, he saw nothing still except the wide, flat face of the valley.

Then, far up the mountainside, he saw the beginning of a small snow slide, widening from a narrow trail to a broadening front, cutting down to the blackness of the mountainside. It struck a belt of strong trees, and the movement was at once extinguished there.

That was all the half-breed saw, before he turned the head of the mustang definitely toward the ranch house, and rode fast for home, and for breakfast.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ON THE TRAILER'S TRAIL.

THE half-breed had lost all sight of The Lamb because the latter had turned straight aside from the floor of the valley and gone into the trees.

He was not urged to this change of direction because he wanted to escape from the fall of the snow. His skin was not perhaps as leathery as that of the half-breed, but now he was on a trail the pursuit of which excited him so much that he forgot such paltry details as the weather.

He went steadily up through the pines, the ground rising gradually before him, until he came to that point where the downward sweep of the mountainside definitely joined the more gradual lift of the valley floor. And there he found the big, black rocks which, the day before, he had noted from the trail above.

It was not actually a clearing, but the trees were sparse, here—growing more thinly than on the edges of the valley or than higher up the slope of the mountain itself. And the reason for this thinness was simply the continual downward-brushing hands of the landslides, and the shower of great boulders which, from time to time, thundered down the

mountain and heaped themselves along its foot.

In such a spot as this, where the rocks broke down and kept back the trees, there was sure to be a good deal of grass growing in thick, rich lines and ridges, here and there. And the wise cowboy would have to look into such corners for strays from his herd.

He looked up the slope, and he made out that the bulge of the mountainside above the rocks, almost imperceptible from above, was absolutely indistinguishable from below.

At this sight, his heart quickened a little, for it was a notable confirmation and reënforcement of his theory.

Suppose, then, that Will Dunstan had been murdered by a blow—a blow from behind as he rode by these rocks. Then the murderer, glancing up, would see the trail above him—for there was the trail in plain sight, a narrow shoulder stretched across the white of the mountainside. Surely there was nothing more natural than for a man to put two and two together. There was the trail, here were the rocks. The dead man had perished, therefore, by a fall from the trail! How many have died in the same way before him!

And with that thought the killer arranges the body among the rocks—makes sure that blood appears upon one surface—tears the clothes as though rocks had rent them on the descent—throws dust and pebbles upon the prostrate form—places it in a crushed and limp position, as though the weight of the fall might have broken many bones and brought instant death.

Then the destroyer takes the dead man's horse, winding back with it to the foot of the trail, and climbs up to the point above. There he leaves it, with thrown reins. The thrown reins will keep it there; and yet they might have been thrown unconsciously by the hand of a man pitched suddenly from the saddle!

There is a degree of certainty that comes to one, now and then, like the solution of a proposition in geometry; it is not only felt to be truth, but the ocular demonstration of the truth is there before the eyes.

With such a perfect conviction, then, The Lamb regarded his surmise. But still he wished to make surety doubly sure. He dismounted. There was the stump of a tree near by, rotted in the center, surrounded as always by a rim of hard, sound wood. A slab of that rim he tore away and, using it for a shovel, he removed the snow which extended before the front of the rocks.

He discovered, at once, that there was a healthy thickness of grass beneath, growing in the interstices of a species of soft soapstone, as it seemed to him, which came to the surface.

He cleaned away a considerable surface until he came, at length, to the imprint of a horse's hoof. He paused to admire the distinctness of the imprint in that yielding rock surface; he even could make out two or three of the nail holes in the shoe! He could tell that it was a hoof for the off forefoot, as well.

Idly analyzing the mark, he made sure that few ordinary cow ponies could have left that sign. They had not feet of such a size; they had not the bulk to stamp such a mark into the rock, soft though it was.

He leaned above it, still half idle in his interest. The Lamb was no miracle worker, no Jack McGuire of the trail. There was a tiny spot of red in the indentation which the shoe of the horse had made.

It was like a blood stain; and blood had been shed here!

He straightened with a sudden shudder, and a sickness at the heart, and glanced over his shoulder into the woods.

Then he returned to the mark of the hoof.

For it seemed to him now that the

red stain had a mysterious meaning—though, of course, blood of the last autumn it could not be.

He scratched at the red, and the color crumbled to nothing beneath his touch, but there came away on the nail of his finger the tough fiber of a leaf. It was a bit of autumn leaf, then, that had been imprisoned there on the rock by the stamp of the horse. Aye, now he could remember that the girl had told him the death of Will Dunstan occurred when the autumn leaves began to fall!

And the imprint of this hoof had been made at that very season of the year. It was the horse which Dunstan rode that had made the mark, then; or the horse of one of those who found the missing body; or else it was the horse of the murderer which had made this mark.

One thing at least The Lamb could do. It was true that many horses wore shoes of almost the same size, but usually there was a slight difference between one and the other. This shoe, for instance, was certainly of a big spread and of a heavy make. And he could reasonably hope that if he found the horse which made such a mark upon the ground, the rider of that horse would have been one of the cow-punchers who had found the body, or else Dunstan—himself—or the murderer!

And, at that last hope, the heart of The Lamb rose in him.

He took from his pocket an old envelope, opened it, and made a tracing of the shoe. So perfect was the imprint in the rock that the tracery came out clear and perfect, also!

He folded the envelope, so that the tracery might be on the inside of it; then he carefully restored it to his pocket.

He continued to clear away the snow, but he found nothing else of importance. Here and there the surface of the yielding soapstone seemed to have been scarred, but he could not find anything that could be called a distinguishing mark.

When he determined that it was useless to hunt here any longer for sign, he took the trouble to shovel the snow roughly back in place, with the assurance that the present downfall would soon cover all the remaining sign of his presence at the spot.

That was an item of some importance, for the murderer might still live near—he might even be on the Montague place! And, if that were the case, a morbid curiosity would perhaps bring him back to the spot again and again. What if the man returned and found such evidences?

The Lamb remounted the black stallion and rode out from the trees, turning up the valley.

He went on until he came to the spot at which he had left the woods, after lighting and extinguishing the fire. Then he left the stallion and climbed up to the site of the fires, for he was reasonably sure that it was there he last had looked at his watch, and it was there he might find it again, in the snow.

In the clearing, the snow had covered everything over with a fine, thick powder. It was very dry with the cold. A mere breath lifted it into the air again. And through this he scuffed about here and there.

In a few moments, he began to realize that it was a hopeless task. And he retired to the side of the clearing, like an actor from the center of the stage, in order to think for a moment, and make some sort of a plan, if he could, before resuming the search.

To go over the snow inch by inch would take hours. Perhaps even then the search would fail, for he could not be sure that he actually had lost the timepiece here. He must remember when he looked at it last.

He sighed; and, like most thoughtful men, he looked down, and upon the

crisp surface of the snow at his feet he saw a neat little round impress.

It was the very size of his lost watch!

And if a watch were dropped here, just such an impression it would be apt to make upon the crusted surface, for here the thickly spreading branches of the pine tree sheltered the ground from any precipitation, except that which might be blown or drifted beneath it. And the windless fall of this morning fluttered straight down to the ground.

He leaned to peer at the spot; and then, just behind it, he saw something glittering in the dull morning light even more brightly than the crystals of the snow surface. He touched them, and prickles of sharp glass came away, clinging to his finger tip.

Then, greatly excited, he swept into his palm all the broken shards that he could find. One fragment was a quarter of an inch wide and from this he could make sure that it was in fact a watch crystal!

This was beyond any human doubt a relic of his watch, and yet he could have sworn that nothing he had done could have broken the timepiece. Certainly, a fall into the snow would not have been sufficient!

There was a footprint not a foot from the spot where the watch had fallen. He made one of his own beside it, and instantly his heart leaped into his throat, half choking him. For that footmark was not his own!

It was a shorter shoe, a broader toe, a heavier heel that had driven into the snow here. And, in that instant, The Lamb knew that he had been followed to this spot, and that his watch must surely have been found and broken, and carried away.

He went sick with the knowledge of it, for he understood most surely that the bearer of that watch could easily learn from it his identity—the identity of The Lamb himself. And once that was known, perhaps the Montague ranch would be no safer to him than a den of rattlesnakes.

He stumbled down to the edge of the trees, and the sight of the black horse was more to him than a safe-conduct signed by a king or twenty sheriffs of that Wild West.

For the stallion meant secure flight, and the whole panic-stricken heart of The Lamb yearned suddenly to swing into the saddle, and ride, and ride, in a straight line, away from the curse which lay on these mountains, and into some other region where the air was freer and purer.

He even grasped the withers, sprang up to the saddle, and turned the head of the stallion away.

And then he remembered!

He remembered Colonel Loring's fat, ugly face, and the invincible good humor of that rancher's spirit, his courage, his gentleness, his peculiar wisdom. And he had devoted himself to that cause.

But the other and the greater impulse which drew him back was the cause of Will Dunstan, who had been murdered, surely, there by the black rocks.

So, fighting against himself, his better nature slowly conquering the worse, he turned the head of the big horse again.

At this, the ears of the black flicked forward, as though he well knew the road toward him. He whinnied softly, and pressed at a half-canter against the bit.

The Lamb let him have his head. And forward they flew up the valley, with the clots of snow leaping up, and hanging for a moment like small white birds above their heads. The wind of that gallop made the falling snow whip at the face of The Lamb; it roused his blood, and it raised his heart; and so he came on a sweating horse into the stable yard of the Montague place.

Milligan, with his smiling lips and his bright, unsmiling eyes, met him.

"Hey, where you been this time of day, sleepy?"

"Workin' some of the belly off of the hoss," returned The Lamb carelessly, and went on into the stable without looking back. But he did not like that question, nor the penetrating glance of Milligan which he could feel behind him, probing at his back.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE LAMB AND THE COOK.

BREAKFAST was a silent meal. The room was dark, for the window-pane was clotted with the light, new-fallen snow; and yet there was no lamp. There was no needless expenditure of oil in the house of Montague. So they ate in the dimness, consuming beans, porridge, hot cakes and molasses, coffee, bacon. They had quantites of food; they devoured it in dark discontent, their eyes clouded with sleep, their faces bent over their plates, so that one looked up and down the table at a long double row of tousled heads. From them issued harsh, guttural voices, like the talk of Indians.

"Gimme some salt!" "Sling the beans down this way!" "Chuck a lumpa bread across here!"

They finished with an elbow on the table, a fist propped against a cheek-bone, a tin cup of black coffee clutched in the other hand. This powerful nerve poison they took joyously, as a far-gone victim takes his cocaine; they felt the stimulant working in them, and they were roused, not to cheerfulness, but to angry interest in life and in the world about them. They glared at one another with baleful eyes; they snatched at the food before them. But like savage dogs which have felt the teeth of one another before, they kept their surliness within certain bounds.

At the head of the table, old Monty Montague kept watch, looking here and there, drinking coffee, tasting no food, hating the others for their youth and their appetites, but glorying also in their strength, as in the sharpness of so many swords.

Then in came the half-breed, Jack McGuire; and the old man scowled and smiled upon him at the same time. He was ashamed of having introduced bad blood into his household; but the qualities of the half-breed were so valuable, at times, that he would not have dreamed of sending him away. McGuire took a place, lowered his head a little more than the others, and began to feed with a wolfish rapidity. He was by far the last to sit down; he was by no means the last to rise. And this quality also the head of the house admired with all his heart.

But the last of the lingerers were finished, finally. The cook came and leaned in the doorway, with a wreath of evil-smelling kitchen smoke about him.

"It's clearin' off," he announced.

"The coffee's like mud!" answered old Monty Montague.

"Is it?" said the cook.

He picked up the nearest cup from the table and swallowed the cold dregs he found in it.

"That ain't bad," said he. "It's too good for them, of course. But if you want better coffee, buy it. Fire and water won't tell you lies about what its worth! Where's The Lamb? He ain't showed up."

"Are you givin' me news?" asked Monty Montague. "Ain't I been watchin' for him?"

"I ain't gunna pamper nobody in this house," said the cook. "I got my job to do. I've waited food for him before. This here is the last time, I tell you! I'm through with it!"

He scooped an armful of dishes from the table. And just at this strategic moment, The Lamb appeared. The cook glared at him, looked at Monty, and then he burst out: "You're too late, kid. You get no chuck this mornin'."

"Aw, I didn't come in for chuck," said The Lamb.

"Nor no coffee, neither."

"I can get along without coffee, too," said The Lamb.

"Then whacha want here?"

"I wanta have a chat with you," said The Lamb.

"The boys is turnin' out for work," said the other. "You could go and chat with them."

He grew more insolent, seeing that Monty Montague made no remark during this dialogue.

The Lamb made a cigarette in his usual dexterous manner, and sat down at his ease, crossing his legs as he lighted the smoke.

"The way a gent overloads his stomach is something terrible," said The Lamb.

"Aye," said the cook grimly, "there ain't any lie in what you say there."

"Look!" said The Lamb. He gestured toward the great platters which had been heaped and now were empty, and only streaked here with beans, there with cold bacon grease. "Enough chuck there to feed ten hosses."

"If hosses would eat meat," said the cook.

"They will," said The Lamb.

"What?"

The cook paused, a great stack of dishes upon one arm, the other greasy fist planted upon his hip.

"A hoss eat meat?" he repeated challengingly, and he looked to Monty Montague, as though inviting him to be a witness to this absurdity.

"I disremember where it was," said The Lamb, "but there come a time when I was sort of tired of hearin' the yammerin' and the chatterin' and the noise of folks, and I figgered that I'd go off and have a time alone in the hills."

"The chatterin' of guns didn't have nothin' to do with helpin' you to make up your mind?" suggested the cook, with a sour grin.

"I disremember all the details," said the boy, with perfect good nature. "I tell you what. Sort of a longin' to get away from the trails was on me. I hankered for still places more'n a dog ever hankered after a bone."

"You might have tried a jail," said the sour cook.

"I did," answered The Lamb, nodding genially.

"Hey?"

"I tried a jail, but there was a couple of doors with squeaking hinges in that there jail."

The cook was silent, grinning in pure expectancy, now.

"So I took off them doors, one night," said the boy. "I figgered on oilin' 'em. But then I remembered that I didn't have no oil. So I left the jail, and went out to get some oil. But it was late at night, and all the stores was closed. Dog-gone absent-minded, I am."

"Sure!" said the cook. He laughed. "I bet you forgot to come back to the jail, even!"

"Well, sir," said The Lamb, "you sure are a mind reader, partner. That's exactly what happened. Which I dunno how you come to guess it."

"Was that the night your hoss ate meat?"

"Nope. I borrowed back my hoss from the sheriff and took a ride off to sort of enjoy the cool look of the moon on the snow, because it was this time of the year. We went along for a couple of days——"

"Enjoyin' the moon, all the time?" put in the cook sagely.

"And the silence. And pretty soon a couple of posses rode along to find out what for I'd took down them doors and not put 'em back? But I was in that kind of a frame of mind, I sure hated conversation. So I rode on. They give me an eight-day run, off an' on. They come so close to me a couple of times that they scared the nap off

of my hat. And I got right down low in food. There was plenty of water, or of snow that would do for water, but there wasn't much chuck, except a lot of jerked beef that I'd got off of a rancher that was willin' to loan it to me. And for three days I dined off of my belt, an' tough chewin' I found it; and I fed that hoss, four times a day, little chunks of the dried meat. He was plumb skinny. His hips looked like the hips of a ten-year-old cow in February. But dog-gone me if he didn't keep a lot of his strength."

"Is that a fact?" murmured the cook, his eyes staring.

"There's a couple of sheriffs that'll tell you how that mare of mine come through the chase. They had some pretty close views of her—all from the rear."

"Dog-gone my eyes!" cried the cook. "That's the out-beatin'est thing I ever heard tell of."

"I thought you'd like to know about it," said The Lamb. "Time might come along when you'd get tired of other gents and want to take a trip yourself and avoid all kind of talk, even with sheriffs."

The cook laughed deeply.

"I dunno but I might," said he. "That hoss didn't get sick, did he?"

"No. And a delicate, high-bred mare she was, at that!"

"Aye, aye! It was her, was it?"

"It was," said The Lamb, and sighed. "But every hoss and every man has gotta come to the end of the trail."

"They do," agreed the cook grimly. "I remember even old Jeff Parker, he went down, at last. Him that I thought never would break or rust. Wait a minute till I hustle in some chuck and we'll have breakfast together. You knew Jeff Parker?"

"Him? I was in the Panhandle with him!"

"You was there?"

"Sure."

"At the time he fought Buck Marston?"

"I was about fifty feet off."

"The dickens! I always thought there was nobody else there."

"Sure, they say that. I wasn't writin' for the newspapers, them days!"

"I'll be back in ten shakes," cried the cook. "Wait a minute, kid! Dog-gone me if I wouldn't pay a hundred in gold to hear the facts about that fight!"

He disappeared; the kitchen door slammed after him, and then began a great clattering of pans in the kitchen.

Said Monty Montague: "You really was a friend of Parker?"

"I never heard of him before."

Monty smiled; and The Lamb smiled back; a sweet understanding passed between the two of them.

"He'll carve you up small, if he finds out you're lying," said Monty Montague.

"A man can't live forever—not even Jeff Parker," said The Lamb.

And the old man laughed in his rasping way.

"You was put together so's you could have your own way—even into a snake's hole," said he. "I'm glad that I got you here with us!"

"Thanks," said The Lamb.

Then the patriarch leaned across the table.

"But if you was to try to outsmart *me*, son," said he, "Heaven help you, because no man would be of much use to you!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LAMB, THE LADY AND HIS LORDSHIP.

AS the cook had announced, the sky had cleared; and after that rather involuntary breakfast, The Lamb walked out into a dazzling world. There was not air enough to flutter away the snow which his walking knocked up; there was not air enough to make the tips of the pine trees tremble; and it was not the wind but their own weight

which caused little streams of crystal fineness to slip from the loaded branches and glimmer to the ground.

The Lamb's step was silent, as though he moved upon feathers. Or at the most, there was only the faintest of whispers as he strode forward.

A very pleasant and bright day it was. To look down into the level floor of the valley was to be blinded with the reflected light. And even the forest was seamed and streaked with gashes of the most startling white. Snow was king. It threatened to overheap everything in another day; and the cook was shoveling out a great trench behind the kitchen door.

The Lamb drank in this cheerfulness with head thrown high and with eyes almost closed, but he kept moving at a brisk pace, for the cold was extreme. His breath came forth as white clouds of steam, which almost instantly was converted into a haze of suspended ice crystals. Moving briskly, he came out through the trees at almost the same point where he had met and talked with Louise Patten before; and here he found her again, and His Lordship, leaping and floundering through the snow.

He warned her hastily: "You'd better take him in. This cold will get at his lungs, most likely."

"I'm only giving him a breath of air. I'll take him in before the cold drives into him," said she. "It's a lovely morning."

She glowed with beauty and high health. The Lamb turned in beside her, and they went on a few steps, with His Lordship diving through the drifts and plunging above them like a porpoise gamboling before the prow of a ship.

The Lamb began to feel absurdly happy, and wonderfully alone with her. He had a strong sense of possession; of superior age; or vaster experience. He wanted to kick the snow from before her and clear her way. He wanted to help her over the inequalities of the path.

Then he knew, suddenly, that he was in love, and that admission passed through him warmly, and with a sudden weakness; so that he felt his strength was disintegrating.

He swore beneath his breath, and looked up to find her regarding him gravely. He apologized.

"I've been used to sashayin' around mostly with hosses and mules," said The Lamb. "Out here in this part of the world, the animals wouldn't understand you was talkin' at all, if you didn't cuss a little. So it gets into your brain, y'understand?"

She nodded. She understood perfectly. But why should he swear now? At the snow?

"At myself," said The Lamb, "for bein' more foolisher than a six-months calf. Here I am walkin' along with you in the top of the morning and getting dizzier than measles and jaundice rolled together."

"About what?" said she. "Is the snow bothering your eyes?"

"You bother my eyes," said The Lamb bluntly.

She looked straight at him, without answering. He continued to explain.

"I get taken this way, once in a while. It don't mean anything. I'm harmless. Usually, I don't even talk about it. But for a couple of nights it keeps me awake, and gets me moony in the daytime. A miserable feelin' it is," said The Lamb.

She was as grave as could be.

"I've heard that it is," said she.

"You never was in love?" asked he, impersonally.

"No. Not really."

"It's a cross," said he, "between seasickness and a pitchin' hoss, when he fishes for the sun, and your heart jumps higher than the hoss wants to go. Food don't have no taste. I tell you what. A gent feels like the way that a cow

sounds when her calf has been fetched away from her and turned into veal."

Louise Patten, listening to this singular exposition, laughed and nodded.

"You don't mind me talking?" said he.

"No. Not a bit," said she. "I'll never hear another man talk like this, I know."

"You won't," he agreed with her. "Mostly, they're took sudden, cowpunchers. But they take themselves pretty serious. They begin to propose. Sometimes I've known it to last out more'n a week of miserableness. There ain't anything more foolish than love," said The Lamb.

"I don't suppose there is," said she.

"There ain't," he insisted needlessly. "There'll be a spell now for a few days when thinkin' about you will plumb make me ache, and every minute I'll have you in the back of my mind. Unless I can talk you out!"

"No doubt you can," said she, and she smiled at him with such a friendly manner that The Lamb gasped. His grim face contorted.

"Don't do that ag'in," said he.

"What?" she asked him, perturbed.

"It's like this," he explained to her carefully. "A girl looks pretty mysterious and high-in-the-air to a puncher. There is no more writing on her face than there is on the face of a stone; and so, a poor cowboy, he turns her out dressed up in his best ideas. Look at me! I'm sprainin' my eyes and my brain to look high enough up to see you; and the next minute I'm on the edge of askin' you in to work in my kitchen, and roll biscuits for me, and patch my duds, and all of that! There ain't any sense in a man, when he's taken this way. But it's a sort of a fever," The Lamb assured her.

"Is it?" said she, as one willing to be instructed.

"It is," he repeated. "Thank goodness that the crisis comes pretty quick and the temperature goes down with a slam. Whisky is a pretty good way of breakin' it. Whisky has cured a lot of colds and love affairs for me, only that here on this job I can't drink. All I can do is to talk. If you don't mind?"

She laughed cheerfully at him.

"Every cow-puncher under sixty," said she, "doesn't feel polite unless he asks a girl to marry him. It's his way of making conversation."

The Lamb stopped and touched her arm.

"D'you think that this is conversation?" he asked her darkly.

Her eyes opened a little at him.

"Oh no," said she. And she repeated it, breathlessly. "Oh no! I don't think that about you."

He resumed his walk beside her.

"I'm glad you don't," he said. "Because we'd better leave action out and stick to words. Suppose we change the subject. There's the barn. Let's go in and speak to the hoss."

She went obediently beside him, and this ready yielding to his suggestion caused the heart of The Lamb to soften more than before; and he was aware of a decided shortness of breath; and an odd unsteadiness of lip, so that he grinned like an idiot, at nothingness.

They reached the stall of the black stallion. He was at his manger, burrowing his head into a great feed of hay, but at the first word of his new master, he whirled lightly about it.

"Great heavens!" said the girl. "What a cat he is on his feet!"

"Keep back your dog, or he'll put a hoof through His Lordship."

"Down!" said the girl. "Down, silly boy!"

The bull terrier sat down, with her hand upon his head, and he pricked his ears and canted his head wistfully to one side, with a bull terrier's own stupid hungering after trouble and after love. For the bull terrier is the knight errant of dogs. He is as useless as any knight

in plate armor; and he is as glorious and as true.

"What have you done to that great black demon?" asked the girl, as the stallion nibbled at the hand of The Lamb with tenderly mischievous eyes.

"Oh, I ain't done a thing to him."

"And yet you've made him safe?"

"Why, safe enough for me."

"I don't think that he'd hurt a soul," said she, and straightway she laid her hand between the stallion's eyes.

"Great guns!" breathed The Lamb, and struck her arm away just as the great teeth of the horse flashed and clicked like a steel machine.

"It's only for you, then?" asked the girl.

She had not changed color; she merely seemed curious and interested by this display of tigerish ferocity.

The Lamb took her hand in his, and held it to the muzzle of the stallion.

"This ain't an apple, you old fool," said he. " This here is a friend. Understand?"

With flattened ears, with flaring nostrils, the great horse sniffed. Then he turned with a jerk of his head and went back to his hay.

"We'll try again, later on," said The Lamb. "The old fellow is mean to-day!"

"But he loves you!" said the girl, and she smiled at him with melting eyes.

"He's only a hoss," The Lamb said brusquely to her.

He led the way out of the stable, gloomy, preoccupied. For he felt that her gentle ways, and her friendly manner, and the intimate trust of her glance were by no means making his way an easy one. However, he hardly could teach her how she should treat him.

He determined to go back to the house at once, and so he would have done, had not His Lordship, at that unlucky instant, sighted something in the snow—or was it only a flurry in the snow itself, at the verge of the ledge? Away he went with a shrilling yelp, a white thunderbolt.

On the verge of the danger he swerved and tried to save himself, but the stiff crust of the day before now was replaced with a stuff as unstable as feathers. That light surface snow gave instantly beneath him, and His Lordship toppled over the edge of the cliff and disappeared!

To be concluded in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

FEATHERED FOES OF FIRE

A LARGE bush fire, which recently occurred near Mannville, Alberta, has demonstrated the fact that wild birds are not less brave than human beings in any emergency that threatens their young. And a report of the natural resources department of the Canadian National Railways has emphasized instances of the courage of the older birds in protecting to the last the nests which held their offspring.

In spite of the strenuous efforts of firefighters at the blaze in question, it was possible to save only three out of seven nests of geese and only one duck's nest out of twenty. One goose, it is said, actually returned to her nest and endeavored to beat off the flames with her wings. And the sole surviving duck, when found over her young the day after the flames had been extinguished, was unable to fly, since her wing feathers had been scorched by the heat.

A Nightmare Ride

By Derk Rider

Author of "Top Hand, Was He?" etc.

IT was half past two in the morning when "Buck" Freeman, of the Circle Dot, got in, very willing to call it a day, both for himself and his tired horse, as he was exhausted.

As he entered the bunk house, contented snores from his cowboys associates rose on the air, and Buck himself made hasty preparations for joining them in the land of dreams.

He had just sat down on the edge of his bunk and was taking off his coat when he discovered a sealed envelope pinned to his pillow, carefully addressed in a flowing, feminine hand to "Mr. Buck Freeman!"

"What the dickens!" muttered the cowboy. "Who's a-writin' to me at this time o' night?"

He rose and went to a south window where bright moonlight flooded in, his tall, powerful figure moving noiselessly. He did not bother to light the kerosene lamp, for Buck's keen, grayish-green eyes possessed the sight of an eagle.

Now he broke open the envelope and began to read, and as he did so, the rather grim annoyance in his frank, bronzed face changed to astonishment and then to delight, for here was a miracle indeed!

A note from the lady of his dreams. Evidently, she had asked his special pal to pin it here. She wanted his assistance. For she was in trouble.

The note ran:

I need help, Mr. Freeman, and I don't know who to trust but you. I hear you will be in about two o'clock. As soon as you get this, ride down to the stretch of wire fence that cuts off the quicksand from the north pasture. I'll either be there myself or else on the middle post you will find a note from me explaining all. Sorry that I cannot say more now. LUCIA GREY.

Buck Freeman's eyes flashed with an eager joy that completely destroyed the fatigue caused by three days' and almost three nights' of hard riding.

He had been sent to get a deed from a dying man, and had barely arrived at the distant ranch in time to get it, for old Harroway had died five minutes after he set his witnessed hand to the deed which Buck's employer, old Colonel Oakes, was so anxious to get.

To-morrow the cowboy would be in the saddle again, taking that deed on to the courthouse for registration.

Hastily, now, he resumed his coat, and made sure that in its inner pocket was the treasured deed; he dared not leave it behind him, for never again could Harroway's signature be obtained. Buck was all the more nervous about the deed because, should it be lost unregistered, Harroway's heirs would claim that there had been no sale. They could get a better price for the property, for since old Harroway had promised to sell to Colonel Oakes at a fixed figure, certain minerals had been discovered on it. But the dying Harroway had kept his word to the buyer, and the heirs were correspondingly bitter.

Buck snatched up his Stetson, ran down to the corral and got himself a fresh horse, a Roman-nosed gray.

No sooner had he forked his fractious animal than a violent argument ensued between them, but Buck was in a most impatient humor, and this argument quickly terminated in his favor and horse and man flashed down the trail in the moonlight.

Buck did not follow the usual route to the quicksand. He used a short cut which took him over difficulties that might have broken the neck of a less expert horseman.

Between his short cut and his hard riding, Buck made exceptionally good time in reaching that stretch of wire which prevented the notorious quicksand from absorbing any more of the Circle Dot's cattle.

For uncounted centuries the quicksand had lain hidden in its lair—a sinister threat to all, a relentless monster to any who blundered into its sunken maw.

Bordering north on a swamp and fed with swamp water, this quicksand met the edge of the solid earth invisibly; there was no telling where the irregular danger line lay. Hence, the wire was a necessity to protect the lives, not only of cattle, but of men, so an area twice as large as the quicksand's territory had been fenced off. This rendered any approach to the fence absolutely safe.

As Buck flashed along, the spidery lines of the fence stood out sharply and, while still some distance away, he saw a white handkerchief pinned to the middle of the top wire.

She had come and she had gone; he was late!

The shock of this disappointment was severe to the cowboy; moonlight, romance, and Lucia, those three would have blended gorgeously! Still it was much, very much, that she had written to him. Her note would explain, and perhaps this second note would call him over to her house.

With all the eager impatience of a lover, Buck spurred his already running horse toward the white signal on the fence; almost he fancied he could smell the violet perfume Lucia used!

As the rowels jabbed him, the angered horse bounded forward toward the fence, felt the ground quiver under him, leaped again in sheer terror, sank to his hocks, floundered forward again in frantic energy, and sank—belly-deep!

The astounded Buck, unable to comprehend this evil miracle of the quicksand changing its bed since he had ridden up to this very fence two weeks

ago, unable to believe he was in the sunken trap's actual center, was for the first second more amazed than alarmed.

But as he tried to wrench his unhappy horse around, and felt him sink deeper yet, the cowboy's keen vision suddenly grasped, even in the tricky moonlight, just what was wrong.

The quicksand had not moved, but the wire fence had!

Treacherous hands had with careful malignity secretly reset the fence, a very simple task, leaving the wire back of the quicksand, instead of surrounding it!

Buck, his eyes on the handkerchief, had, in the confusing moonlight, spurred his horse at top speed into the masked hill's hidden mysteries.

The gray horse struggled again, but Buck checked its efforts. He knew that the horse was doomed, any movement would only sink it more quickly, and he must use it as long as he could for a support, although his heart bled for the gallant animal, companion in his misery.

Of all things in the world, Buck's greatest horror was a quagmire; his father had die in one, and none could be more bitterly aware than the cowboy how hopeless the situation was, for he had helped to set the original posts around this quagmire, and knew what toll it had taken of the Circle Dot's cattle before the fence was set.

That note had been only a cynical snare. Lucia had had nothing to do with it.

Some one, knowing the probable time of Buck's return, had crawled in after the Circle Dot punchers were asleep, and pinned the note to Buck's pillow. The handwriting had seemed feminine, yes, but he had never seen Lucia's own handwriting. What a fool he had been —yet how could he have suspected?

If he tried to jump from his horse's back to firm ground, he would only plunge into immediate destruction, but he would by no means give up hope. As an initial effort, he sent out the Western S O S, a certain number of shots, carefully timed. But as the first report cracked through the air, there came what seemed a saving miracle of coincidence.

High up on the hillside, a horseman burst from a scrub thicket of chaparral, and came charging down toward the quicksand.

Buck instantly recognized the long, red, poker face, the slouchy figure; it was Jord Rankin, a Bar Forty cowpuncher, and Buck's unconquerable belief in the general decency of humanity sent hope high into his heart, for here was rescue. It was an omionus detail that Jord Rankin apparently knew that the wire had been moved, for he halted his horse at a safe distance from the sunken octopus. Buck, now sitting backward in his saddle, called huriedly:

"Throw me your rope, Jord, and don't be long about it."

"I don't intend to be long," Jord Rankin said smoothly, "because I imagine in any argument between yuh and me there won't be much time. I'm comin' straight to the point, 'cause it's the only thing to do. I want that deed that yuh brought home with yuh tonight; that same paper yuh're aimin' to carry on and have recorded. I see yuh ain't packin' but one gun. Tie that deed to yore gun, then pitch yore shootin' iron with the deed over to me. Throw hard, so it'll be sure not to get into any of this deadly mess. Minute I get 'em I'll take my rope and snake yuh outa trouble. Kain't save the horse —too late."

"I can't give yuh the paper," said Buck hurriedly. "'Tain't mine, it's a trust."

"Oh, rats, trust!" sneered Jord Rankin. "Who'll trust yuh, or even recollect yuh, when yuh're ten feet un-

der that sand? Ain't yuh got no sense? Better for me to have the paper, and for yuh to live, than for yuh and the paper both to sink, old Oakes gettin' nuthin', either way."

"What good would old Harroway's deed do yuh?" argued Buck in desperation. He was loath indeed to give up his gun and the deed together, for he felt sure that when Jord Rankin pulled him out, he would make time away from there—and what could an unarmed, horseless man do?

"What do I want with the deed," repeated Jord Rankin. "I don't want it at all, but I've been paid to get it off yuh by somebody higher up. Pretty smart of me to take advantage of my knowin' that the Triangle bunch had moved the wires back of the quicksand, hopin' to swallow up a few more of yore cattle. They had a safe enough time doin' it, for hardly anybody ever comes down this way now, but I remembered it was done, and so I thought out that idea of the Lucia note, and got somebody to fix it up for me. Yuh were an easy one, Buck, plumb easy! Now throw me that gun and deed together! I ain't trustin' yuh with that .45! No—don't go for that gun, Buck. I got yuh covered from my hip, and if I drill yuh there won't be no evidence against me, for yuh and the bullet will sink down into that sand."

The trapped cowboy's thoughts raged furiously, one logical thing Jord had certainly said—that if the paper went down into those deadly depths with the rider who had brought it over so long and so difficult a trail, the Circle Dot's owner, Colonel Oakes, would lose it anyway! But if Buck traded his own rescue for the gun and deed, something might yet be done—though Heaven knew what!

Such hope was frail enough—mere spider web, but it was the one thing which held out any chance. Buck Freeman said slowly:

"Well, Jord, I reckon I'll have to come across with what yuh want."

"Get busy," said Jordon. "Look where yore boots is gone already."

Buck nodded, and a minute later, gun and deed landed safely at Jord Rankin's feet.

Without dismounting, Jord swung over, picked up the gun and the paper, straightened up, satisfied himself it was the deed, and pocketed it. He smiled slowly, rode swiftly around to the reset fence, and, it being on safe ground back of the quagmire, tore away the handkerchief with the mothlike paper clinging to it, and pocketed both. He laughed.

"This here second note, Buck, wa'n't nothin' but blank paper!" Riding back to his former place, he continued in slow, cool tones:

"I've heard tell Lucia thinks yuh're handsome! She won't think it no more. Everything goin' yore way, wa'n't it? The owner dependin' on yuh, always, wa'n't he? They say yuh're top hand there now, and goin' to be foreman some day. I say yuh won't be nuthin'. Yuh're goin' where yuh belong, down below! Good-by, cowboy!"

He turned his bay horse.

Buck called after him in a low, quiet voice:

"One minute, Jord."

At the tense power in those tones, Jord wheeled his horse and snarled:

"What do yuh want?"

"If there's a spark of manhood left in yuh, shoot me," Buck said, through white lips. "It's all I'm askin' yuh, and, like yuh said, 'there'll be no evidence.'"

Jord Rankin's answer was a coarse laugh; wheeling again, he galloped furiously away. Another shot might bring some one on the scene, and he was in no mind to risk it. Yet he need not have guarded against that, for not a human being beside himself and the trapped cowboy would be in hearing

of any gun fired there—now or even during that night. But since he could not know this he galloped brisky away.

The drumming of Jord's running horse died in the distance. Over swamp and quicksand the wind mourned and far across the swamp came the keen howl of a lobo. In his horror of the depths waiting him, the slow, cruel creeping up of the quicksand there, Buck Freeman almost decided to leap for solid earth; then his reeling reason managed to stop him, for that way lay sure death, while if he clung to the last fear-haunted minutes, some one might happen to pass by here.

His frantic gaze now saw a movement in the chaparral, and there came to him the bitter thought that one of Jord Rankin's cronies was hiding there, watching the slow extinction which was coming to the cowboy.

In this, however, Buck Freeman was wrong; the stirring in the thicket was not one of Jord's associates. The movement was caused by one of life's dominant laws—that one act breeds another. For when Jord Rankin crashed out of the chaparral where he had been waiting with crafty patience for several hours, he woke into life some bedded strays from the main herd of cattle.

They came near being stampeded by him—but as it was they merely blundered up, recovered their placidity, and stood sniffing the swamp water and the lush smell of swamp grasses.

Hunger and thirst stirred in them, and presently they burst cover; a fat, spotted cow with knobby horns, and, rolling along behind her, a black bull, red-eyed, heavy, and sullen.

A hope, at once vital and exquisitely tormenting in its supense, flashed up in the cowboy's heart, for *if* the cattle came close enough to the edge, and *if* he could reach one of them with the rope, the animal would, of course, snake him out of the trap in which he was now fast.

With an expert eye, he measured the distance from where they would drink to where he sat in the saddle, and realized that it was at least ten feet more than his lasso could possibly carry.

Twisting swiftly around in the saddle, he disengaged his horse's reins. With these he pieced out his rope, although he well realized that lengthening the lasso might mean the ruin of his own aim in throwing it, because of the destroyed balance of the rope.

And, still more unhappily, he realized that, as there was no fence to keep back the cattle from the danger line, either bull or cow, in attempting to drink, might blunder directly into the quagmire, and merely add one more drop of misery to the occasion.

He could only wait and see, while under him the wretched gray plunged deeper and deeper.

The cow came first, suddenly frolicking along in a way most undignified for her mature years. When she reached the edge of the quicksand, where a pool of water tempted her as easier to reach than that down in the swamp, she was barely within lassoing distance; but Buck, who had watched her approach with desperate anxiety, decided that there was no time to linger.

He made his cast, only to find that the clumsy lines on the end of his lasso spoiled his aim! The rope fell short, and the cow, with a wanton shake of her head, wheeled and lumbered away.

The miserable man sobbed out a cry of stabbing disappointment, for it seemed likely that the bull would chase off after her; but the black bull only gave her a lordly glance and came rolling on, looking impressive enough in the moonlight, which glinted on his curved, pearl-shaded horns. He was also tempted by the little pool, as being easier of access than the swamp

water, though as he came toward it he saw what seemed an unmounted man crouching on the sand. But for the horseless man the range cattle have only contempt; they have fear for centaurs alone. So with a little bellow of scorn, the bull in all his magnificent strength, came on over the edge of the water, while Buck wondered in agony whether he would wade out into it far enough to be seized by that underground octopus, the sand.

But the bull halted where the cow had drunk, and slowly he began sucking up the water in the moonlight pouring around him.

Buck hoped that this time he had the feel of his mended rope better, and, steadying his nerves with the firm assertion that this time he would win, he made his second cast.

Now the running noose fell true. It dropped over the bull's horns: the alarmed animal snorted, wheeled aside, and plunged away in a clumsy gallop.

Buck instantly felt the thrill of the tightening lariat. The next moment he was torn from the almost sunken horse, snaked wildly and roughly over the perilous quicksand's surface, and snatched out on the sound earth.

It was as rough a rescue as a man ever had, and he was glad enough to turn loose his lasso, and let the bull go blundering on with the rope dragging at his heels.

Bruised and shaken, with the breath almost jolted out of him, Buck sat up and looked around him. He was alive and safe, and somewhere on this solid earth was the man who had got away with the deed for which Buck was responsible!

The loss of that deed would mean the wreck of his employer's plans, and Buck shuddered at the thought of meeting Colonel Oakes with a tale of his own folly in being so easily entrapped. But if anything were to be accomplished in this emergency, it would be a case of brains more than of mere brawn.

The cowboy rose to his feet and stood there in the moonlight, thinking hard. It was not for himself that Jord Rankin had taken that deed; it would not benefit Jord, except that it would help him to curry favor with the fellow who did want to destroy it, Kinneyhorn, owner of the Bar Forty!

Buck, knowing this, reasoned that Jord would go straight to Kinneyhorn's house, for he would have to deliver the deed into the latter's hands in order to prove that he had done his work.

Of course, if the deed reached Kinneyhorn, that ended the matter, for he would destroy it, pretending he had never heard of it. On the other hand, being mounted, Jord would have to go around until he came to the fork of the river where the shallows permitted a crossing; but if a man on foot chose to risk a plunge from the bluff, and a swim across the turbulent currents of the near-by river, he might by this short cut arrive at Kinneyhorn's first.

The fact that the river had a heavy undertow and was known to be dangerous, and that he himself was not a crack swimmer, in no way interfered with Buck's plan.

If he drowned, he would at least drown trying to justify the trust that his owner had in him.

To the river's edge, then, went an enraged and disgusted cowboy, his tight boots and high heels making his limping, hurried run an utter misery.

Once there, he took off his boots, tied them around his neck, discarded his coat and chaps, and plunged directly into the flood.

The river tore at the swimming man with a furious violence of strength, and to Buck it almost seemed as if there were a malignant purpose in that mighty water.

Even as the quicksand had sucked at

him, so now the undertow dragged him down, and Buck fought until at last, in despairing exhaustion, he said to himself that the river would finish what Rankin had begun!

Yet he did manage to gain the shore, his feet touching earth again, thanks to the whirl of an eddy that helped to shoot him toward shallower depths.

Breast-high, he pushed on to the shore and flung himself face down, lying there for a couple of minutes in sheer exhaustion.

Then he staggered to his feet again, for on the left, over that large rise, lay a little valley in which was situated the Triangle outfit, and in the outfit were those very men who had dragged back that fence in the hope of destroying more of the Circle Dot's cattle.

Well, he would get even with them if he could, by helping himself to one of their horses. Buck felt pretty sure he could manage this, for it was now that time in the morning when every sleeper hugs his sleep the deeper because so soon he will have to wake. Already, thanks to his desperate short cut, he had gained a good many miles on the traveling Jord.

It took him only a little while to reach the corral, unguarded in the white moonlight. He investigated the barn, found himself a saddle and bridle, a promising horse, and would probably have got away in peace and comfort had it not been for a couple of pet geese belonging to the lady of the ranch house.

The idle brains of these fowls contain only one idea, suspicion, and by the time Buck had saddled and bridled the horse that he wanted, and let it out into the corral yard, they had discovered him.

They set up a hideous clamor, which in turn waked a couple of watchdogs, and the baying of the dogs precipitated instant trouble.

No less than five or six armed men piled out of the house, and, seeing Buck racing away, they fired first, with a view to investigating afterward.

Flashing down the roadway on the speedy bay that he had selected, Buck heard the malicious whine of the bullets as they passed his shoulder, and one cut his ear; but newly awakened men, just out of bed, do not find it easy to hit a man flying down the road at a rate of almost a mile a minute, and no other bullet even clipped him. Yet he knew that behind him would soon be the thunder of mounted pursuit and that his hope of safety would lie either in the speed of his horse or in throwing his pursuers off the track.

Therefore, he made haste, after he had left two or three miles behind him, to cross a stretch of malpais so rough that only sheer desperation would induce a man to take it at a gallop, but Buck was long past any consideration of his own neck or that of the horse he rode. For this reason, his trailers, even when mounted, soon gave up the game, feeling it better to lose one horse than their own lives.

Through his mad riding, Buck arrived at the Kinneyhorn ranch house while its occupants were still wrapped in innocuous slumber.

Leaving his stolen horse where he could get him again very quickly, and discarding his boots once more, the cowboy made his way toward the ranch house, crawled into the living room with burglarious precision and dispatch, and was about to adventure through it in search of a gun when he heard the clamor of Jord's arrival.

Jord's violent pounding on the door followed. Then came an inquiry from Kinneyhorn himself who came downstairs, cross and sleepy, asking indignantly who was disturbing his slumbers at this ungodly hour of night.

Buck intantly hid himself in a closet, first seizing a big glass pitcher which was standing, empty, on the center

table. If they did not come in there, he reflected, he would have to go in pursuit of them, spoiling his present plan of compaign, for this was Kinneyhorn's combined office and living room. However, come in these they did, and Kinneyhorn lighted the dingy gerosene lamp which squatted upon the center table.

By the lamp's somewhat discouraged light the two men began to dicker.

The astonished and enraged Buck heard Jord coolly tell Kinneyhorn that he had bribed Buck to give him the deed, and had paid him five hundred dollars for it, after which the said Buck had skipped out!

"And, therefore," argued Jord emphatically, "yuh gotta pay me not only what yuh promised for gettin' yuh the deed, but five hundred extra for them plunks that I gave Buck Freeman."

At this a violent argument ensued, in which Kinneyhorn poured out a wealth of protest, but Jordan held the firmer purpose of the two and clung to his demands. The closet in which Buck was hidden was at the south end of the room, while at the north end was Kinneyhorn's safe, in which, as Buck guessed, Kinneyhorn kept his valuable papers and from which he would probably have to get any money that he paid to Jord.

Buck planned that if for any reason Kinneyhorn rose and went toward the safe—which Buck figured that sooner or later he must do—he would fire his projectile, the water pitcher, at the lamp.

It was hardly wise to do this as yet, because Kinneyhorn was sitting with his face squarely toward the closet in which Buck was hidden, and Kinneyhorn was notoriously fast on the draw; he had indeed come down, on being aroused, with a gun belted around him. For the history of Kinneyhorn's life had been such that he was not at all keen about night interruptions when unarmed. If he caught a glimpse of Buck and the pitcher, he would drill him instantly. The unarmed Buck would stand no chance whatever.

But as soon as Kinneyhorn went to the safe, and the light had been smashed out, then it was Buck's purpose to follow and tackle Kinneyhorn, whose location he would know exactly, and get his gun. Kinneyhorn, fat and scant of breath, would be the easier man to handle of the two.

Moreover, Buck did not see how Jord Rankin could very well fire in the direction of the safe without risking a bullet through Kinneyhorn, and thereby killing the goose that laid the golden eggs.

Squinting through a crack in the ill-made closet door, Buck could see that both Kinneyhorn and Jordon were getting exceedingly worked up over their argument, but there was that in Jord Rankin's cold, determined face which still proclaimed him as the likely victor, and in the end, this proved correct.

Kinneyhorn, under Jordan's threat of returning the deed to his rival, threw up his hands at last.

"Darn you!" snarled Kinneyhorn, "you know well enough that I got an inklin' of the minerals on that place, and you got me on the hip! This is a regular holdup!"

"I ain't carin' by what name yuh call it," retorted Jord Rankin, in calm and steely tones, "jest so yuh fork over what's comin' to me. I paid out those five hundred plunks to Buck Freeman, and he's off havin' a good time on it, and I ain't aimin' to be that much outa pocket jest for yore amusement!"

Off havin' a good time on 'em, am I? thought the enraged cowboy. Jest wait till I once get out o' this closet, I'll give yuh some good times!

Kinneyhorn continued:

"I don't know whether I've got that much money in my safe, but I'll look and see."

"If yuh ain't," said Jordan calmly, "I'll take yore note for it, any time; it's good as gold."

Not at all placated by this compliment to his financial standing, Kinneyhorn waddled over to his safe, and, stooping, began to work at the combination.

This left the backs of both men turned to Buck Freeman, and in that propitious moment, Buck acted.

Softly he began to open the closet door on its hinges. It flung forth none of those creakings and warnings which doors so frequently give. It happened that Kinneyhorn had oiled that very door twenty-four hours previously.

Jord Rankin was staring at Kinneyhorn, who was more than busy with the combination. As to the lamp, it was to the right of Jord Rankin, unscreened by anything, and leaving a clear line of air for action.

Buck Freeman had been a good thrower from his earliest days, and his aim was even better now than it had been when he was a boy. He had knocked off the most prize apples from the top of trees unerringly, and had even "chunked" a squirrel down from an oak.

He fired the glass pitcher at the lamp with the precision of a bullet. It hit the smoking light with a resounding smash, shattering the chimney, and knocking the lamp itself from the table to the floor, where it went out.

Almost simultaneously with the lamp's thud, Buck Freeman reached the safe, seized Kinneyhorn behind his fat neck, jerked him over backward, and grabbed his revolver.

Kinneyhorn, jumping to the conclusion that he was being attacked by Jord, howled out in furious accents:

"You scoundrel, you let me go! There's just enough money in the safe to pay you, and not a cent more! Ouch —glug—you gain nothin' by robbin' me!"

"It ain't me that's got yuh," yelled Jord Rankin; "yuh might ha' knowed that, by the knocked-over lamp. What would I be puttin' that out o' business for?"

"Then don't fire, Jord, don't fire!" yelled Kinneyhorn. "Whoever this felluh is, he's right here with me! You'll shoot us both!"

Jord Rankin made no answer; he was hastening to the door, and Buck Freeman heard him. Buck fired at the sound; the room echoed to the deafening roar from the gun Buck had acquired from his unwilling host.

Orange flame stabbed the darkness, and orange flame answered from Jord Rankin's side.

It entered the terrified Kinneyhorn's head to yell for help; then he remembered there was that night no one in the house but himself, and the cursed the baile which had taken away his people, that baile which rheumatism had prevented his being interested in.

Kinneyhorn flattened himself to the floor, bewailing mentally his two hundred and fifty pounds, for it seemed to him that no matter how close he hugged the planks, he would, assuredly, sooner or later be found by a bullet.

Over his prostrate body, the men were changing places in the room; it was hard to tell which was friend and which was foe, and certainly neither of the guns had any friendly sound about them as they belched and roared, flame lancing flame in the darkness.

Then silence.

To Kinneyhorn, there was something shocking in that silence, something sinister, deeply alarming.

Which of those two had survived in the scuffle—the man to whose crime he was accessory, or that outsider who had butted in here, and had overheard them in that illegal deal about the deed? Much as Kinneyhorn minded losing his money, it hurt him even more that there had been a witness to his "trade"

with Jord Rankin, and he hoped with deep sincerity that the intruder—whoever he was—had been drilled. Better still, if it were both, for in that case, he, Kinneyhorn, could get the deed from Jord Rankin's body for nothing! He could say, readily enough, that there had been an attempted burglary, and that he had shot the men there in his living room for attacking him while he opened the safe.

And yet that dread silence continued!

Kinneyhorn felt at last that he could stand it no longer. Summoning his courage, he scrambled to his feet, struck a match, and applied it to a second lamp on the mantelpiece, although his hairy hands shook as he did so.

The light flared up. Kinneyhorn, staring wildly around the room, saw Buck Freeman leaning against the wall, gun in hand, and Jord Rankin, lying on the floor, resolutely repressing even the smallest groan, although he was in deep agony.

"Thanks for turning on some light again," Buck said coolly to Kinneyhorn. "And now that this little palaver seems to have come to a temporary end, I'll ask yuh to stand by, Kinneyhorn, and for the present mind yuhr own business while I see if Jordon has that paper that he got from me by a cowardly trick, and *not* by the money that he told yuh he paid me. Later on, Kinneyhorn, maybe I'll talk to yuh about the kind of deal yuh was makin' with Jord. Don't yuh leave this room; yuh ain't got no gun now, and I've got one, and its reloaded. Now yuh, Jord! Feelin' good?"

"My leg's broke, and my cartridges is spent," Jord Rankin said in sullen despair. "I reckon it's up to yuh to murder me, Buck, if yuh feel that way."

"If I feel that way, I won't call it murder, you poisonous coyote!" said Buck dryly. "How do yuh reckon a man should feel who's been left in a quicksand to die, after the felluh on shore promised to haul him out?"

Jord Rankin made no reply. Though utterly cruel by nature, he had courage, and he was pulling it together to die like a man. Buck went on contemptuously:

"But I feel more like leavin' yuh here for Kinneyhorn to nurse than killin' yuh. Them that encourage sidewinders in the house, like Kinneyhorn has done, should nurse 'em when anything goes wrong with the said sidewinders! And now that deed, if yuh please, yuh yellow snake."

Rankin surrendered the deed, and then Buck said with a grin:

"And now a little refreshment for yuh, Jord! I've got a note here which yuh took the liberty of writin' in the name of Lucia Grey. Right here is where yuh eat it!"

And eat it Jord Rankin did; it was more to his taste than dying.

This over, Buck Freeman turned to Kinneyhorn.

"Now lookit, Kinneyhorn," he said, "if any more of our cattle is missin' through yore outfit, which we suspect yuh're workin' in with the Triangle, we'll know who to saddle it on, because yuh want to remember that any felluh who would buy a deed to destroy it has done committed a penitentiary offense. Watch yore step."

Twenty minutes later, Buck Freeman on the borrowed horse struck a fresh trail. When Buck drew near the home ranch, he turned the gelding loose with a kindly slap.

"Go yore way, old felluh," he said. "Mustn't ride yuh too close to the ranch house, as yore tracks up here ain't wanted! Go home and good luck to yuh!"

Next morning when the chant of the cook, "Come and get it! Come and get it," in a high-pitched tenor voice,

announced breakfast, Buck came yawning from his bunk.

The foreman eyed him sardonically, and inquired, "How much sleep do yuh want, anyway? These here owner's pets is sure the ones who have an easy time of it!"

"Yeah?" drawled Buck. "Well, I reckon yuh know."

"Did yuh get the deed," inquired the formean. Buck nodded and showed the paper that he was to take up to the owner after breakfast.

The foreman said, as Buck yawned again, "Yuh didn't have no argument with nobody about it, did yuh?"

"No argument at all," Buck said. "but I had some funny dreams last night—a dream of walkin' on quicksand, and of men that ate letters, and I dreamed three times about the quicksand fence. Now, what's that a sign of?"

Sharply eying the condition of Buck's boots, the foreman said slowly. "Reckon that it's a sign that after breakfast two of the felluhs go over there and have a squint at that quicksand fence. That right?"

"Yeah, that's right,' Buck said, and applied himself with ardor to hot coffee and grub.

FIRE FIGHTING FROM THE AIR

FORESTERS everywhere have found the airplane an increasingly valuable factor in their work of exploring new regions, spraying insect-infested forest areas, and, even more important, fighting forest fires.

Ever since 1919, army planes have been used by the forest service for the purpose of detecting and scouting fires. While it was decided last spring to contract with commercial companies for planes for this work in the future, air corps officers will continue to advise on problems which come up in connection with this.

The duties of the air patrol are both exacting and dangerous. After every severe electrical storm, a pilot must set out, with an observer, to search for treacherous smoke columns. The observer carries a map of the ground to be covered and, when a fire is sighted, he marks the location on his map, then takes careful notes regarding the size of the conflagration, as well as the direction and intensity of the wind. One copy of these notes he puts in a little canvas bag, weighed with sand, which he drops at the nearest lookout station. The guard stationed there reads the direction and immediately telephones orders for men and materials with which to check the fire.

Often this warning is all that is needed to check a blaze, but if the fire has reached dangerous proportions before being sighted, the airman's duties are more complicated. Usually the work is divided. Some aviators go immediately to the nearest town for men and supplies, while one pilot is assigned to report the progress of the fire.

This scout must fly not more than a thousand feet above ground so that he may have a clear view of operations. Traveling a hundred miles an hour at this height in strange and mountainous country is no slight task. Then, too, the unequal heating of the air above the fire causes rough going. In spite of all difficulties, however, the scout takes careful notes of the territory and drops his message, which is relayed to headquarters and acted upon.

Fire fighting from the air is still in the experimental stage, but, so far, the coöperation of airmen with land-bound forest rangers has had gratifying results.

Shorty and the Cave Man

By Ray Humphreys~

Author of "Strange Birds," etc.

THE boyish-faced deputy sheriff of Monte Vista, "Shorty" McKay, was chuckling as he bent over the desk, putting his flowing signature to a letter he had just written. As he folded the paper and started to place it in the addressed envelope, he laughed aloud.

"Boy, oh, boy!" he exploded. "Ef this won't be rich! I kin jus' see what'll happen. Oh, gee, oh, gosh!"

But Shorty could not exactly see what was going to happen, due to the fact that his back was to the open office door. A form towered in the doorway, and, as Shorty's burst of merriment subsided, a deep, rumbling voice thundered through the tiny office.

"Waal, yuh laffin' hyena, what's so danged funny?"

Shorty wheeled around his chair.

"Oh, hello, boss," gasped Shorty, seeing Sheriff Joe Cook glowering at him from the doorway. "Why, I jus' writ a letter in answer to an advertisement I seen in a magazine, an' I was kinda smilin' to myself a little thinkin' what would happen when——"

Sheriff Cook came in and banged the door behind him.

"Yuh was jus' kinda smilin' to yuhrself a little thinkin' what would happen when whoever yuh writ that letter to would open it an' try to figger out what kind o' a cross between a peanut an' a pecan wrote it," supplied the sheriff, sitting down heavily. "Waal, ef all that uproar yuh was indulgin' in was jus' a little smilin' to yuhrself, I'd hate to be within five miles o' yuh ef yuh ever really laffed out loud! It would sound like the time the road crew blasted the shoulder offen Mount Massive, I reckon!"

Shorty quickly sealed the envelope he held in his hand.

"I'm sorry ef I was laffin' too loud, boss," said Shorty contritely. "I thought I was all alone an' it struck me kinda funny."

"Thought yuh was all alone, eh?" repeated the troubled sheriff, turning a woebegone look on his deputy. "Waal, it's nice fer me to know that while yuh

may seem to share my grief while I'm around here, yuh turn yuhr mirth loose an' laff like a dog-gone calliope every time I ain't near to hear yuh! I guess yuh ain't botherin' none about my troubles, after all. My worries don't keep yuh awake o' nights like they do me. The load o' sadness that is pressin' down on me——"

Shorty slipped his letter into his pocket.

"What's wrong now, boss?" he asked with genuine concern.

"What is wrong now," said the depressed sheriff, "was likewise wrong yesterday, the day before yesterday, the day afore that, an' every day fer the past two weeks—as yuh waal knows. In other words, 'Flannel Mouth' Haskell. That's what's wrong—Haskell! *Haskell!*"

"Oh," said Shorty, relieved, "jus' him—jus' Haskell, eh?"

"Yeh, jus' Haskell," cried the sheriff, with great sarcasm, "jus' Haskell, Shorty! That's all—jus' a blamed, loud-mouthed, nerveless, reckless, darin', willful, dangerous bank robber, that's all! Jus' a wild hombre who has sixty-five hundred dollars in stolen currency from the Monte Vista Second National Bank in his claws, that's all! Jus' a noisy, underhanded, slick, insinuatin' outlaw that we has been unable to ketch, that's all! Jus' a bird who is about to cost us our jobs, seein' that election is comin' on an' he's makin' monkeys outta both o' us! Yes, that's all!"

Shorty blinked at the sheriff's sudden climax.

"What's he done now, boss?"

"I'll show you blamed fast," snorted the sheriff, fishing in his breast pocket. "He ain't satisfied with writin' insultin' letters to the Monte Vista *Clarion* about us an' nailin' up sarcastic challenges to us on deserted ranch houses an' mail boxes, but now he's gone an' taken to—but read that!"

The sheriff handed Shorty a tight roll of heavy wrapping paper.

"Waal!" exclaimed Shorty, as he unrolled the paper, which turned out to be a sort of placard some two feet square. On it, in heavy, bold, black letters, was a scrawled message. It said:

> Sure, vote fer Sheriff Cook fer reëlection. He kain't ketch me. He's daid from the Adams Apple north. Hooray fer Sleepy Cook!
>
> FLANNEL MOUTH HASKELL.

"Waal, what do youh know about that!" muttered Shorty.

"I know this much about it," snapped Sheriff Cook. "I jus' brought that one in fer a sample. I found it under my reëlection card nailed to a telephone pole jus' west of Cherry Creek. I found about fifteen more o' 'em, likewise nailed right under my telephone pole announcements. He must have spent a heap o' time makin' them homemade posters to make a fool outta me."

Shorty shook his head.

"He wants yuh beat an' the other candidate elected sheriff," said Shorty, "because he ain't scared o' the other feller. He is afraid of us. He wants us beat at the polls next week so that he can——"

"An' he'll jus' about defeat us," roared the sheriff, shaking a fist at Shorty. "Everybody that sees one o' his insultin' taunts pasted up under my election posters is goin' to figger that Haskell is right, that we kain't ketch him, that we are daid from the neck up, or else that we are hand in glove with Haskell, pertectin' him—although his taunts would make that view seem unreasonable. But, one way or another, he's aimin' to beat us, an' then—good night shirt!"

Shorty got to his feet briskly.

"I'll go out an' investigate to see ef any storekeeper in Monte has sold Haskell or any one else a lot o' this

heavy wrappin' paper like he's writin' his homemade posters on," said Shorty. "That's one way o' checkin' matters. I'll be back pronto."

The sheriff waved him away wearily.

"Waste o' time," groaned Cook, "but go ahaid!"

Shorty departed. He mailed his letter first so that it would catch the early train out. Then he checked up on the storekeepers. None of them would admit selling the particular kind of wrapping paper that Flannel Mouth Haskell was using to insult the sheriff. Some of the merchants suggested that the fugitive might be getting it in Alamosa, Salida, Center, Wagon Wheel Gap, or any one of half a dozen other valley towns. Shorty, frowning, made a complete circuit of the stores in vain. It was a shame that a famed outlaw like Flannel Mouth Haskell, ex-convict and gunman, who had been positively identified when he had held up the Second National Bank two weeks before, could remain in the San Luis Valley, defying capture and making sport of Sheriff Cook's campaign for reëlection to office.

Shorty finally returned to the sheriff's office with a suggestion for his boss.

"Sheriff," he said, "I couldn't locate no one sellin' that brown wrappin' paper like Haskell is usin', but I got me an idear that we kin use. Thar's an ol' sayin', yuh know, that yuh got to fight fire with fire. An' that's what we kin do. This feller Haskell, livin' up to his name an' reputation, is shootin' his mouth as usual, braggin' like a dog-gone banty rooster. What's to prevent us from doin' likewise? We'll do some fancy braggin' that'll put his boastin' in the shade. We'll go hawg-wild braggin'."

The tired sheriff's eyes narrowed.

"Oh, will we?" he asked pointedly. "An' what will we brag about, Shorty? Actions speak louder'n words, I've always heard. We ain't got Haskell; therefore, we ain't got nuthin' to brag about!"

"Oh, yes, we has!" said Shorty airily. "We'll do some fancy boastin' about how we're *gonna* git Haskell. We'll jus' throw aside the mantle o' secrecy that generally shrouds our sleuthin' an' take the whole dog-gone world inter our confidence, explainin' that when we gits ready to land on our man, after collectin' all the evidence agin' him, we'll jus' go out an' arrest him like this!"

And Shorty snapped his fingers loudly.

"Bah!" said the downcast sheriff. "Yuh make me tired with yuhr half-baked idears. Ef Haskell don't make a complete laffin'stock outta us with his braggin' we'd complete the job by our own horn-blowin'! Nope, that idear ain't a idear, at all. Fergit it as quick as yuh kin!"

But Shorty, appearing to accept the sheriff's decision, refused to forget his pet idea. Two days later, the Monte Vista *Clarion* printed another insulting letter from Haskell, the slick bank robber, in which Haskell further baited the Monte Vista officers. He wrote:

> Vote for Cook for reëlection as sheriff. He's a good old soul. He needs two more years in office to ketch up on his sleep. Let the dead rest in peace. Yuhrs,
>
> HASKELL.

The *Clarion*, supporting Cook's opponent for the office of sheriff, took delight in printing Haskell's sarcastic notes, both as an item of news and a matter of political policy. The next day, however, the *Clarion* carried a taunt from the other direction. This ran:

> As deputy sheriff of Monte Vista under Sheriff Joe Cook, I hereby announce that I will go out and gather in one Flannel Mouth Haskell, bank robber, as soon as I can find time to devote a few minutes to that easy and

utterly safe job. Just now I am busy on more important matters. A braying jackass, the poet said, never bites. Any boy scouts, campfire girls, school-teachers, tourists, or church aid societies that desire a pleasant afternoon outing in the hills are welcome to accompany me when I go for him. Absolutely no danger; short, easy trip; good time assured to all. SHORTY MCKAY, Deputy Sheriff.

While Flannel Mouth Haskell, in his hideout, may have been furious when he read Shorty's letter, there was no question about Sheriff Joe Cook's emotions. He was worse than furious. He tore up his copy of the Monte Vista *Clarion* and then went to the Healey and Owens drug store and purchased five extra copies of the newspaper and indignantly tore them into bits. Later, after cornering Shorty at the intersection of Main and Pecos Streets, he read the riot act to him and proceeded to almost tear Shorty's vest off in ripping the shiny deputy's badge from that zealous subordinate. In vain, the perspiring deputy sought to argue. In vain he protested. The wrathful sheriff would listen to nothing as he confiscated Shorty's beloved badge of office.

"Talk o' brayin' jackasses—go look in the nearest mirror!" raved Sheriff Cook. "I tol' yuh not to do no braggin'—an' all yuh do is go an' disobey my strictest command! Goodness knows I've exhausted every effort to git Haskell, an' yuh go publicly announcin' that yuh'll git him when yuh git time from more important matters! All yuh're doin' is blowin', an' everybody knows it, an' is givin' me the royal hoss laff. Gimme that badge, dang-hang yuh!"

After that public denouncement right on the main street corner of Monte Vista a lot of folks expected Shorty to just curl up and die from remorse and chagrin, but those who anticipated that were not very well acquainted, it seemed, with the late deputy sheriff. Shorty didn't appear to take his discharge seriously at all. In fact, he announced through the columns of the *Clarion* that he was still on the job as far as Flannel Mouth Haskell was concerned, deputy sheriff's commission or no deputy sheriff's commission. He added, in his new letter to the paper, that he would "gather in" Haskell easily as soon as he got around to it. His last paragraph was snappy. It ran as follows:

> Therefore, I again invite those who enjoy a nutting trip to come with me and gambol in the woods. While this is the wrong time of year fer hickory nuts, pine cones, or acorns, we will gather in one Flannel Mouth Haskell before the hungry squirrels git him. Everybody bring lunch, cameras, and umbrellas for the sun. SHORTY MCKAY.

When Sheriff Cook read that letter in the paper he almost keeled over. He smashed one perfectly good office chair to kindling wood, pretending that the chair was Shorty. After that, he opened Shorty's desk and tossed all the late deputy's private papers and belongings out the window. Later, under cover of darkness, Shorty carefully recovered them. Among the articles so tossed out of the window was a small box which had arrived that day via parcel post. Shorty had tried to intercept it at the post office, but had been too late to do so. The sheriff had not opened it, however, and Shorty, finding it beneath the window with his other belongings, sighed in great relief.

Haskell's reply to Shorty's invitation soon appeared in the *Clarion:*

> To Shorty McKay and those who would accompany him on proposed nutting trip in woods, I would suggest that instead of lunches, cameras, and sunshades, as the lately fired deputy sheriff suggests, you-all bring three automatic rifles apiece, a couple of good, heavy cannon, some dynamite, two dozen submarine bombs, a troop of cavalry, four army tanks, and enough undertakers to handle the rush—when you come for me.
>
> FLANNEL MOUTH HASKELL.

Meanwhile, election day was approaching and Sheriff Joe Cook was practically on the verge of a collapse. He realized too late that he had done wrong in firing Shorty, for now he had no control whatsoever over his ex-deputy. If he had retained him, he could have lured him to the office and locked him up in a cell, thus silencing him. As it was, Shorty was going "hawg-wild" bragging now, and the sheriff had no way to stop him. And while every one knew that Shorty had been "canned" as a deputy, still the general public seemed inclined to accept his repeated declarations of his intentions regarding Haskell as official communications from the Monte Vista sheriff's office. Shorty had been so closely connected with Sheriff Cook as a deputy that most folks could not disassociate the two now, hence Shorty's boasts were put down as Sheriff Cook's views.

"Two brainless, bragging' fools!" cried Sheriff Cook in despair. He was bemoaning his fate to his close political cronies as election day loomed. "One is as bad as the other! Haskell braggin' he won't be took an' Shorty braggin' that he'll take him—an' nuthin' more deadly flyin' back an' forth than words which are provin' boomerangs fer me. I've tried every trick I know to locate Haskell—I've tried to ketch him puttin' up his insultin' posters under my announcements on the telephone poles an' country fences; I've tried to trace his dog-gone letters to the *Clarion;* I've investigated every hide-out in the country that I know of; I've enlisted every suspected crook in the county under promise o' great reward ef they'll help me git Haskell—an' all I git is the hoss laff every time one o' that pair o' braggin' fools bombards the other with empty boasts!"

Eddie Owens, who was running for county commissioner and was considered the brightest politician in Monte Vista County, nodded.

"Yuh got to git Haskell quick, afore election, or yuh're a gone baby!" he told the sheriff. "This duel o' conceited words between Haskell an' Shorty has aroused so much public interest that it'll do one o' two things—it'll ruin yuh ef yuh don't make good Shorty's boasts; but it'll likewise elect yuh with a overwhelming majority ef yuh do make good Shorty's braggin's an' nab Haskell."

The sheriff slumped in his chair.

"Make good Shorty's boasts," he repeated sadly. "My gosh, Owens, that's impossible! I guess I'm as good as licked right now! I've done no personal brayin' about this case. I fired Shorty fer bein' so lippy—an' now yuh say I gotta make good his brags?"

Shorty, meantime, had not been idle. In the *Clarion* office print shop he had had printed just fifty placards, which were works of art. He had labored long over the exact wording of them. Then he had gone out personally and posted them up in widely separated parts of the adjacent country. The sheriff and his political friends, hearing of the new publications, inspected the one nearest to Monte Vista—a poster that glared high up on the sandstone cliff just above the steel bridge over Little Cherry Creek.

This poster said—in loud, black type—briefly and plainly:

FLANNEL MOUTH HASKELL,
Somewhere in Monte Vista County:

This is to finally and officially inform you that at exactly 2.18 p. m. the day before election I will arrest you here without trouble or bloodshed, badge or gun. I still have a State game warden's commission entitling me to exterminate varmint from the State of Colorado. I still have my handcuffs, too. I will arrive to tap yuh on the shoulder and click my handcuffs onto you like I would catch any yellow coyote. I have decided to take you unarmed and without harmin' you on condition that you reveal the place where you have been hiding out. This is fair warning o you.

SHORTY MCKAY,
Deputy State Game Warden.

The sheriff's face flushed as he read the notice, and his political friends, Doc Healey, Eddie Owens, and Tom Egan, sputtered like Fourth of July firecrackers—but that was all. The poster was too high up on the slick stone cliff for any of the stout readers to reach it and tear it down. Egan, a bit more canny than the rest, suggested that perhaps Shorty had some method in his madness, after all, and that by some strange whim of fate he might catch the crook the day before election, thus assuring Sheriff Cook's triumph at the polls next day.

"Aw, go chase yuhrself, Egan!" cried Sheriff Cook hotly. "Look at what that nut says in his announcement. He says he'll have him at exactly two eighteen that day. That's worthless braggin', fer I know an' yuh know that Shorty ain't got no more idear whar that Haskell is than we has! That's just some more boastin'!"

But the very next day Haskell answered Shorty's challenge, via the *Clarion:*

> I have read your insulting remarks directed to me, and I accept your proposition to take me without a gun or trouble, provided I'll show you my hangout. Sure I will—if you take me. I might inform you that at 2.08, when you say you expect to nail me, you'll be a lot nearer heaven than you ever were before. You better have your prayers all said and your cemetery lot picked out.
>
> HASKELL.

The sheriff, reading that letter, sent posthaste for Shorty, meaning to quiz him on just what he meant to do, after all. But Shorty was not to be found in Monte Vista by the sheriff's messenger. No one had seen Shorty for several hours, it was said. A check-up at the livery barns showed that Shorty had departed with his horse earlier in the day. It began to look as if Shorty, buoyed up by his own bragging, had gone out to meet the outlaw somewhere. The sheriff grew worried. Accompanied by Owens and Egan, he rushed first to the Cherry Creek bridge in the wild hope that Shorty might be there, under his poster; then to Shorty's lodgings, where he prevailed upon the landlady to admit them to Shorty's room. There was nothing significant there, except—Shorty's pair of six-guns which rested in their holsters on his belt, slung over the top of a rocking chair.

"He's gone unarmed, as he said!" exploded Tom Egan aghast.

"Mebbe he took his rifle," suggested Eddie Owens.

"No," said Sheriff Cook hopelessly; "thar it stands!"

The three men looked at each other in amazement.

"Waal," said Sheriff Cook miserably, "I guess he's gone out to keep his date with that gunman—unarmed, as he promised! It's his end, ef he has! Haskell may be a blowhard, but he ain't no child to be took by an unarmed man. Pore Shorty! Gents, I guess he's through. An' I guess I'm through as sheriff o' Monte Vista! A killin' of an ex-deputy won't help me get no votes to-morrow! I reckon this is the sad end o' all of it—an' Shorty!"

"We gotta trace Shorty," said Egan. "Ef we could do that, an' drag him in afore he's kilt——"

"We'll go down an' see the editor o' the *Clarion,*" said Sheriff Cook weakly. "Shorty's been awful thick with him lately, since I fired him as deputy. Mebbe—jus' mebbe—he might know whar Shorty has gone. It's a desperate chance—but we might as waal see about it. It's one chance in twenty million, gents!"

Meanwhile, however, Shorty was not quite dead. At just about the time that Sheriff Cook and Tom Egan and Eddie Owens had started for his lodgings in town, Shorty had dropped off a lathered pony near a deserted mining shack just beneath Rabbit Ear Pass, in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, west

of Monte Vista. Shorty had tied his horse to a dead tree and sauntered on up toward the weather-beaten shack whistling a gay tune and swinging a jingling pair of bright handcuffs. He stole a quick glance at his watch. Early!

After that, for all of ten minutes, Shorty sprawled on a grassy slope in the sun just to the right of the deserted cabin. On the cabin, glaring in the sun, was one of Shorty's challenging posters to Flannel Mouth Haskell. Shorty stared at it idly for a few seconds and then rolled over on his back and proceeded to steal a few winks of sleep. It was very still, and the sun was warm. Shorty was tired after his long ride. He relaxed, yawned, closed his eyes, and——

At exactly the appointed time a shadow slipped from one tree to another fifty yards down the mountainside. A mountain jay flew chattering in alarm to a higher perch. Shorty's pony tossed its head as the shadow, taking the form of a man, approached and inspected horse and saddle quickly. Then the man spoke aloud.

"No shootin' rods here, anyway!"

Up the slope, dodging from rock to rock, tree to tree, stump to stump, went the stranger. Still, Shorty rested, eyes closed, his breathing almost a snore. At length the man scurried around the deserted cabin. The next second, with a sneer on his face, he was looking down the shiny barrel of his six-gun right at Shorty.

"Wake up thar, sap!" he commanded loudly.

Shorty struggled up to an elbow, yawning.

"Take yuhr hands outta yuhr eyes an' stick 'em up!"

Shorty, portraying great astonishment, did so. He blinked at the sudden awakening. Then, recognizing the man with the gun, he smiled.

"Why, hullo thar, Flannel Mouth!"

"Hullo yuhrself! Whar's yuhr rod?" snapped Haskell suspiciously.

"Rod?" echoed Shorty. "Why I didn't bring none. I said I wouldn't bring a gun. I mean to have yuh without trouble."

"Oh, is that so?" snorted Haskell, with a grim smile. "So yuh didn't bring a rod, after all! But I see yuh did bring yuhr nice, shiny handcuffs to put on me, didn't yuh? How did yuh figger I was goin' to be took by yuh, anyhow? Was yuh goin' to knife me?"

"I have no knife."

"Rope me?"

"I have no rope," said Shorty. "I meant to take yuh by talkin' to yuh, Haskell, an' advisin' yuh that crime never pays. I want to ask yuh to mend yuhr ways. Yuh surrender nice to me, an' I'll click my cuffs on yuh an' take yuh inter jail; an' after yuh've served, say, ten or fifteen years in the pen fer this last robbery, yuh kin get out an' start all over ag'in—a new life, a respectable life."

"Say!" cried Haskell suddenly. "Are yuh crazy, or are yuh plannin' some smart trap fer me? Yuh ain't got a posse hidin' around here to close in on me, have yuh? Yuh don't mean yuh actually figgered to take me without a gun—by talkin'?"

"I have no posse," said Shorty.

"Waal, yuh are as crazy as the sheriff claims yuh are!" exploded the perplexed outlaw. "But yuh jus' keep yuhr hands up, sap. I'm takin' no chances with yuh, brother! I've called yuhr bluff. Yuh said yuh'd be here, so I was prompt. I expected a battle. I hardly thought I'd find yuh asleep when I got here. Yuh either has cast-iron nerves or cast-iron brains! An' yuh brung yuhr handcuffs fer me, jus' as yuh promised to do! Ain't that sweet an' thoughtful o' yuh? Now lissen, cuckoo, I ain't stayin' here to swap chin music with yuh while some

posse may be closin' in on me. I'd like to know how yuh knowed I was in this part o' the county, anyway? But I don't have no time to waste lissenin' to yuhr lyin' answer. I'm gonna blow a nice clean hole right through yuh with this ol' .45!"

Shorty shook his head vigorously.

"I've kept my word to come up here right at a certain time an' unarmed, too," said Shorty; "but yuh're forgettin' yuhr part o' the program. Yuh're yaller, after all. Yuh said that yuh accepted my proposition to show me whar yuh been hidin' out, provided I came as I said, unarmed an' with nuthin' but handcuffs, an' now yuh're backin' down on that. Yuh ain't a real crook, because a crook's word is always good, they claim. Yuh're afraid."

Flannel Mouth Haskell gasped at Shorty's accusation.

"Afraid?" he shouted. "Afraid o' what? O' yuh? O' a man with his hands in the air, an' no gun anyhow? Why, yuh're crazy!"

A crafty light came into Haskell's eyes.

"But I will show yuh whar I been hidin' out ef yuh think I oughter keep my promise!" he went on angrily. "An', come to think o' it, that will be a good place to git rid o' yuh without wastin' a bullet an' makin' a racket. Yuh keep yuhr hands up, but kick those handcuffs down toward me—that's it. Know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna put these cuffs on yuh, sap, an' yuh're gonna wear the jewelry to heaven when yuh go—which will be blamed soon. Hold out yuhr hands, an' no foolishness now!"

Haskell snapped a bracelet on one of Shorty's wrists. Then he clicked the second on Shorty's other wrist.

"Whar's the key?" he demanded briskly.

"In my breast pocket."

Haskell got the key. He threw it as far away as he could. Then he searched Shorty carefully for a duplicate key, or anything else he might have. He pocketed Shorty's money and package of cigarettes. Then he poked him in the ribs with his gun.

"Move on," he said sullenly. "I'll keep my word to yuh, sap—but yuh won't ever tell nobody whar my hang-out is. Dead men tell no tales. Giddap! Go straight down the mountain until I tell yuh to stop. Hurry up! My, them handcuffs look nice on yuh!"

The pair went down the mountain. An eighth of a mile down, Shorty, at Haskell's direction, turned abruptly to the left. Soon a trail appeared. Up the trail they went. It was a short trip. A cave loomed in a cliff just ahead. A heavy log joined the mouth of the cave to the mountainside. Under the log was a deep chasm. The bandit chuckled as he saw Shorty's astonishment.

"That cave was inhabited only by bats fer a good many hundred years, sap, until I found it an' managed to cut down this pine, doin' such a nifty piece o' timber fallin' that the tree fell right across the draw inter the mouth o' the cave. Purty swell, eh? An' that draw is about three hundred feet deep—straight down. How fast do yuh suppose yuh kin drop from the log to the bottom o' the big ditch? I've kept my word—I've showed yuh my hang-out. An' now, now, yuh brainless sap——"

Haskell, his hands on his hips, leered at his captive.

"Now, yuh crazy loon, locked up in yuhr own handcuffs, yuh step off that log quick, or I'll push yuh off!"

"Waal—ef I has to," stammered Shorty, and he stepped out on the log. He hesitated. Then, instead of stepping off into space, as Haskell had directed, Shorty darted across the log, quick as a flash. He disappeared into the dark, yawning mouth of Haskell's cave. The startled bandit ripped out

an oath and ran across the log in pursuit. His gun was out again.

"Come back here, yuh skunk!" he whooped. "Yuh're trapped. Thar's no other way out. Yuh'll jump, or I'll drill yuh——"

Meantime, an excited group of horsemen were plunging up the road toward Rabbit Ear Pass. In the lead rode Sheriff Joe Cook, sparing neither spurs nor quirt. Beside him, white-faced under the sheriff's tongue-lashing, rode Eddie Moore, the editor of the Monte Vista *Clarion*. Behind Moore were Eddie Owens, Tom Egan, Art Wachter, Luke Parslow, "Red" Feeney, Johnny McLachlan, Bert Clark, and several others—all armed to the teeth. The horses were lathered and winded.

"Lawd help yuh, Eddie Moore, ef yuh've lied to us, or ef yuhr hesitation at the office delayed us so that we're too late to save Shorty!" panted Sheriff Cook for the hundredth time since the galloping cavalcade had roared out of Monte Vista. "I swear it'll go hard with yuh! Yuh're so darn mysterious! Yuh ain't come clean. Yuh wouldn't let out a word until I put my gat on yuh—an' I kain't figger yet how yuh know Shorty was up here at the pass or how Shorty figgered he'd be sure to meet Haskell up here. I've asked yuh over an' over to explain, an' yuh won't. Ef we are too late, hombre, I won't be responsible fer my wrath an' grief."

The harassed newspaper editor shrugged.

"Go as far as yuh like," he growled, trying to ease himself in the rocking saddle. "See if I care! Shorty promised to shoot me if I cracked wise to any one about his plans. If I have to be drilled I don't care which one does it. I'd as soon be shot anyhow as ride another ten thousand miles in this saddle—oh, ouch!"

No one paid any heed to Moore's remarks.

On up the mountain road thundered the posse, silent, grim. The sheriff, in the lead, was talking to himself. He had a lot at stake. He wanted to save Shorty, of course, but he also wanted to save his own face. It would be nothing short of a disaster to have Shorty slain on the eve of election day and have a murder in addition to unsolved robbery to besmirch the sheriff's record. On, on, on—went the riders, low over their horses, eyes strained, guns alert.

"No use in riding our horses off their legs," protested Eddie Owens finally. "If Shorty had such a big head start on us we won't arrive at the pass in time to help him, if——"

"Shut up!" shouted the sheriff, and Eddie Owens did.

Another half mile and the road grew steeper. The sun, going to rest behind the far range, was gilding only the highermost peaks now. The rest of the mountains lay in purple shadow. The white ribbon of road ceased to glare up at the riders. The night winds whipped down from the snow patches on the upper crests. The speed of the posse decreased considerably. Tired animals and a steeper grade did not encourage a faster pace.

"My poor legs!" cried out Editor Moore suddenly. "They're skinned alive! My back! My blistered hands! My——"

"Shut up!" roared the sheriff angrily, but the next second he whistled shrilly. "Heads up, men," he cried. "Here comes a hoss! Shorty's, by golly—an' riderless! Great guns! Where is he?"

The posse, deploying across the road, stopped the runaway pony. They examined it carefully, and the broken reins mutely told a story. The sheriff took off his hat.

"Hoss has been tied up an' busted loose," he announced. "Hoss must o' been bad scared to bust loose like that,

too. I reckon thar's been heck to pay ahaid somewhar. Come on, men!"

Again the posse moved, but only briefly. There was another shout from the sheriff as two men appeared in the road beyond. One wore a white bandage on his head. The other, hatless, waved at the posse.

"Why, it's Shorty!" cried the sheriff, pulling up.

"An' that reprobate Flannel Mouth Haskell!" added Tom Egan.

And three minutes later Shorty was in the midst of the posse. So was Shorty's prisoner, the bandaged, downcast Mr. Flannel Mouth Haskell, bank robber. Shorty, grinning, handed over a neat package to Sheriff Cook. That was his first move.

"Thar's the dough from the Second National robbery," he said briefly. "Haskell says it's all thar. I found it in his cave hang-out a bit back up the mountain. We was both goin' to ride in on my hoss, but he got scared when he saw the white bandage on Haskell here an' reared an' busted loose an' blowed, so we started to walk in—never expectin' a reception committee like this to meet us. How come yuh knowed we was in this part o' the woods, boss?"

A weak voice answered before the sheriff could.

"I had to tell 'em, Shorty," groaned Editor Moore, "they put a gun on me. I had to tell 'em I thought you had gone to the pass. I violated your confidence so far. I didn't tell anything else."

"Good fer yuh, Eddie," said Shorty heartily; and then, as the possemen stared at him, open-mouthed, Shorty explained.

"Boss, I tol' yuh that we had to fight fire with fire. So I fought braggin' with braggin'. I made Haskell here think I was a sap, as he was kind enough to call me. When we had exchanged a lot o' challenges through the press an' I figgered he was ripe, I had fifty posters printed sayin' I'd ketch him under one o' the posters at a certain time an' promisin' to bring nuthin' more than a set o' handcuffs to do it—no gun, no bloodshed, no trouble—provided he would in turn show me his hang-out. As yuh may recall, he answered that challenge, kinda acceptin' my suggestion, but warnin' me that I come at my own risk.

"In acceptin' that challenge o' mine he gave himself away, fer he indicated jus' what general locality he was in by quotin' the time from the poster he had read. Yuh see, I had all the posters the same, except as to time. I started out with 2.01 p. m. on the fust, an' went right on down around the clock. The one he read had said '2.08 p. m.,' so checkin' my list, I knowed he had read the one I had nailed to the deserted shack near the pass—back yonder. He couldn't figger how I knowed he was around thar, but he meant to call my bluff, I guess. I took a big chance that he wouldn't read two o' the posters, but I figgered—rightly—that he was stayin' pretty low until after election an' wouldn't stray far enough to see two o' 'em.

"When he arrived, I pretended to be asleep. I let him git the drap on me. I talked to him, convincin' him I was a plain fool. When he announced he meant to drill me I recalled to him that he had promised to show me his hang-out. I had made my handcuffs conspicuous in my challenge an' kept them in plain sight when he caught me. So he put 'em on me, as I hoped he would. I goaded him inter showin' me his hang-out, an' when he commanded me to jump off into a chasm I darted inter his cave. He came after me, but I rapped him on the head as he entered the cave, bouncin' a piece o' wood off his block; then I grabbed him, disarmed him, recovered the money, an' started in with him."

Haskell rubbed his bandaged head.

"Like to have busted my skull!" he complained bitterly. "Jus' a dog-gone smart Aleck, that's all!"

The sheriff's puzzled look vanished.

"Shorty, yuh took a awful chance, I reckon, but yuh won," he enthused. "I see what yuh did. Yuh had the key to the handcuffs an' yuh jus' unlocked 'em once yuh had a second in the cave."

"Haskell got the key an' throwed it away," said Shorty, bringing the sheriff's perplexed frown back again. "I had no extra key. But, yuh see, boss, the handcuffs were phony ones. I sent fer 'em the other day—that day yuh caught me writin' that letter an' laffin' so hard over it. I had my plan to ketch Haskell purty well mapped out in my mind then. The handcuffs are trick ones fer stage use. They lock smart enough, but give a little tug an' they springs open. That's what fooled Haskell. He rushed inter the cave expectin' to have easy pickin's on a handcuffed man, but I wasn't handcuffed—an' instead o' me he saw a coupla comets an' some stars!"

The sheriff fumbled in his pocket.

"Speakin' o' stars, Shorty," he said kindly. "I have yuhr star right here. Yuh better pin it on. I prefer to have it known that a deputy o' mine caught Haskell rather than a dog-gone game warden. An' I might say, Shorty, that after the news o' this ketch gits around, as it sure will, an' I am reëlected tomorrow, why—o' course I'll reappoint yuh as my deputy fer the ensuin' term. How's that?"

A RIVER'S MISSING LINK

IT is not often that portions of rivers disappear overnight, but such was the case, early this fall, at Trappers' Lake, above Meeker, Colorado. On a certain Friday night, the headwaters of the White River—consisting of an overflow from Trappers' Lake—were functioning as usual; on Saturday, attendants of the lake discovered that three miles of the river were missing.

At first, the precise extent of the loss was not known. Those who found the hole through which the water had disappeared searched along the dry river bed for some time before they discovered another hole in the side of a hill, through which the water emerged and continued its course. The explanation advanced for this phenomenon is that the river, at the point of disappearance, suddenly cut into an underground passage or lake, caused by a shock or slipping of the earth, the water seeking the easiest path for its procedure.

While it was rather more than a mild shock for residents of the Trappers' Lake region to wake up and find part of their river misplaced, it was even worse for the fish that inhabited the river itself. Thousands of trout were left stranded in the dry river bed and perished. Neither men nor fish had been prepared for this sudden freak of nature.

Red and True

By Robert J. Horton

Author of "Randolph Rides Alone," etc.

THERE was no reason, Rant Pelham told himself as he sat on his little front porch watching the glory of the desert sunset, no reason why he shouldn't be absolutely contented. No reason whatsoever or at all! He had title to three hundred and twenty acres of land. Good feed on it—gamma and bunch grass—and a big spring that was always wet. He had a nice bunch of cattle and there was an abundance of open range back in the Wizard Mountains. He had a good house, and behind it was a garden—fed by the overflow from the spring—and pepper trees, mesquite, and paloverde surmounted by a tall, graceful, spreading cottonwood that was a thing of beauty. And from his front porch he had as fine a view as any man, born and reared to the West, could desire.

And here he sat with his brows wrinkled while the crimson ran riot in the western skies, the buttes blushed a rosy pink, and the purple mountains seemed to march across the desert on a carpet of cloth of gold.

On a chair beside him were a number of magazines. "Bud" Fields, who worked for the T C outfit back in the foothills, had brought them to him from Redstone. Bud did things like that—little favors to show his friendship for Rant. And Rant had spent some time on the magazines at the end of each day, with the result that he became obsessed with a vague feeling of discontent, of something missing in his promising young life He as much as told this to the middle-aged Mexican woman, who did his cooking and looked after his house while her spouse helped Rant with the ranch work. She had grinned mysteriously and shook her head rather foolishly, he thought. Well, he was a fool to discuss his affairs with her, but—dog-gone it!—a man had to talk to *some* one.

This evening Rant had been toying with a motion-picture magazine. He

seemed to favor that particular publication and its colored pictures of motion-picture stars and near-stars. He had even cut out one color picture and tacked it up in his room. Silly, of course, but he needed a bit of color on his walls. And the near-star whose picture he so favored had the most wonderful shade of red hair he had ever seen!

Rant, who was tall, gray-eyed, bronzed, and blond, favored red as a color. Perhaps the sunsets intrigued his fancy, or the red stains on mineral rocks, or the blushing blossoms of the cacti in flowering time; anyway, he had a leaning in that direction. And he found himself thinking of the picture in his room at odd times when he should have been devoting his mind to his business. It was disconcerting, it was puzzling; but it was also positive. And now Bud Fields, short, sunburned, blue-eyed, and bow-legged, came riding along on his way to town and reined in his horse in Rant's front yard.

"Yeah, you ranch owners have a cinch," was Bud's sarcastic greeting.

"You're jealous," said Rant with a mocking glare, as he got up and motioned to the T C puncher to dismount. "You haven't got nerve enough to start out on your own hook, you little, fox-faced, bow-legged runt. Where you going?"

"Me?" said Bud, simulating surprise. "Why, I'm goin' to town. Redstone needs me to-night for there's a dance. No Bud, no dance, that's what the girls all think. I hate to disappoint 'em. Sweet little mammas! Rant, I can knock 'em dead. I ain't good-lookin' like you, but I've got personality—see? An' to-night I figger on slingin' a wicked hoof with the new red-haired girl that's workin' in Adams' store." He winked in a preposterous manner.

"What's that about a new red-headed girl?" asked Rant, betraying his interest by hurrying down the steps.

"Oh, *James!*" called Bud, wrinkling his nose. "My best tuxedo suit an' my patent-leather chaps—I'm goin' to the dawnce. Your ears are up like a burro smellin' water, Rant. Didn't think you had it in you—you bein' a natural-born mean, stingy, selfish woman-hater what would rather make love to a bank book than to slip a smile to the prettiest girl that ever——"

"Shut up!" roared Rant. "I was just curious when you said a new girl, and red-headed. I'm curious about red-headed girls." His thoughts flew to the picture on the wall in his room. He scowled at Bud belligerently.

"So?" said Bud with a beaming smile. "You don't say! An' what's the matter with dark-haired girls? What's there so great about you that you should be so all-fired finicky? Look at Annie Lawton. Square as a die, sweet as rain in summer, shaped like a dream too good to come true, eyes of a sainted devil, lips like red roses, hair like ripe chestnuts, graceful an' dainty even if she *does* sling hash in the Okeh restraw, an' head over heels in love with a big hunk of cheese like you! You make me sick, Rant; you sure do."

Rant's face had gone a trifle red, but it may have been with anger. "When you're ready to glue your flat brain on your own business again maybe you'll unfold the plot as to what's doing in Redstone to-night," he said icily. "Never mind the red-headed girl——"

"Oh, her!" Bud broke in. "She's for me, Rant, old hoss thief. That's because she's just up from Los Angeles an' appreciates my sprightly conversation. I can talk to 'em, Rant, an' don't you forget it. I can *talk* to 'em! She's a good-sized girl an' I like 'em big. Rosy cheeks, with a small herd of pretty freckles on her little pug nose. Violet eyes. The finest colored head of red hair I ever glimpsed in all my sweet, sober, young life! I aim to knock 'em for a row of perfectly good tin roofs

hoofin' it with her to-night. Which reminds me I'll have to be movin' on. I'll bring you back a book to read, worm, an' tell you all about it."

"Yes?" said Rant absently. "I ought to go into town myself, and that's a fact." Bud was good at describing, at that. "Lot of stuff I need, or got to order at Adams' store," he went on thoughtfully. "Ought to be tended to. I'd have company, riding in with you, even if you *are* a pest."

"Are you tryin' to tell me you want to go in?" asked Bud.

"Yes, I guess I'll go along," decided Rant innocently. "Just herd your impatience till I get my horse. But I believe you're a liar!"

Redstone was a desert town, half adobe and half wood and brick, with one short, dusty, main street, an oil and gas station on the through road, and a grove of pepper trees. It was a source of supplies for the scattered ranches in the south and the few small mines in the Wizards. But it boasted a good dance hall and that drew trade and made up for all its deficiencies. It was twelve miles from Rant Pelham's place and Rant and Bud made it without exerting their horses in a little over an hour.

After they had put up their horses, removed their chaps, and Bud had changed from riding boots into shoes and had donned a collar and tie, they sought the main street, lighted only by the gleams from the windows of the buildings and the stars, and strolled to Adams' store. It was there that Rant claimed to have business, and Bud accompanied him with a willingness which was nothing short of eager.

Just inside the door Rant stopped short, squinting in the yellow lamplight, and stared. Bud hadn't lied! In fact, Bud had been meager in his description of the girl who furnished the target for Rant's stare. He knew at once that she was the newcomer Bud had spoken of; that she was three times as good-looking as Bud had hinted; that Bud had no words at his command which would adequately describe that glorious head of hair in which the fire of sunset, the blush of the rose, and the pink streamers of dawn seemed commingled until the effect was one to make Rant Pelham gasp. Why, her hair had that of the girl's in the picture in his room looking like a sorry error of the color presses. And Bud—the little, sawed-off runt—was talking to her free and easy, actually kidding her!

Rand Pelham drew up to his full six foot two and edged up to Bud on the outside of the counter, stepping hard on the little cow-puncher's polished toe.

Bud's speech broke off abruptly and he shot a glare of rage and reproach at Rant. But he could not ignore his presence, for the girl was eating Rant up with her violet orbs which changed color so many times in the space of half a minute that Rant forgot what he had come to buy and order.

"Excuse me, Miss Lynn," piped Bud. "I can see it makes you feel embarrassed to have a gent try to stare you out of face like he's doing. This person is one Rant Pelham, Miss Lynn. He's got a shack an' a farm down south of here an' I let him ride up with me because he's scared to ride alone because of the lizards."

Rant had winced at the word "farm," but he recovered as Miss Lynn smiled and held out her hand.

"Glad to know you, I'm sure," she cooed. "Mr.——"

"Pelham," said Rant stoutly, taking the hand and holding it. "Rant Pelham's my name. I have a *ranch* down below here and run cattle. I buy my supplies here and so I suppose—I suppose we might as well get acquainted. You aim to stay here long?"

She withdrew her hand and smiled again. Bud found it was his turn to stare and he did so, from one to the

other, in a thorough and unabashed manner.

"I shall be here all summer," said Miss Lynn. "It's—it's a change, you know." She shrugged. "I get tired of the city. It must be wonderful to run cattle that way. Where do you run them to, Mr. Pelham?"

Bud's jaw dropped and then he forgot himself and snickered.

Rant bent a frown upon him, taking his eyes from Miss Lynn's face and hair for the first time.

"I run them in the Wizards——"

"Oh!"

"——until they're hefty enough, and then I ship them. I have a nice place down there. In time—it takes time, you know—I expect to have one of the finest ranches in the country."

"Oh, yes, it takes time," Miss Lynn agreed. He was certainly well set up and good-looking, she told herself. And she'd heard these cattlemen were all wealthy. Young too.

"Yes, it sure takes time to get one of the finest ranches in the country," drawled Bud. "Tell her about your nice big cottonwood tree, Mister Pelham."

Rant's foot descended a second time and Bud all but yelped.

"You're going to the dance, Miss Lynn?" Rant inquired politely.

"Why, I hadn't thought much about it, Mr. Pelham," she answered, tucking in a stray lock that shone like burnished copper. "I came up here for quiet—being so tired of the city. I love the—the great outdoors. My grandfather had a farm in Iowa and I guess I inherited a—a love for the simple life, Mr. Pelham. I'm a great lover of nature, Mr. Pelham. But, of course, with my position in the store, I can't very well ignore the town's social affairs."

"That's the girl, Miss Lynn, you ——" But Rant's foot automatically shut off Bud's speech and the puncher ground his teeth.

"Quite true," said Rant gravely. "I hope you will save me a dance or two, just a few. I—there's something I'd like to tell you."

"Really?" said Miss Lynn coyly, while Bud gasped. "I'm not reserving any dances in advance, Mr. Pelham. I shall look for you, of course. Did you want something? We're about to close but——"

"I won't keep you," said Rant. "My order can wait. I can leave it with Bud, for that matter, and he can fetch it out in the morning. I'll see you at the dance, Miss Lynn."

She noticed his teeth, white and even, as he smiled.

"Don't forget," she called after him as he floated out the door on air. At least it seemed that way to him.

Bud followed, his face a conflicting study in expressions in which anger, awe, and scorn strove for the mastery.

"You long-eared, flat-footed fake!" he accused, when they were outside. "What do you figure on doin'—stringin' that dame along like you did Annie Lawton? Finest ranch in the country! An' she ate it up! I'll put her wise quick enough if you try to put it over on her. Swell way to treat a city girl that ain't wise to the desert. What was the big idea in leaning on my foot that a way, you big clown?"

Rant gripped his arm. "Bud, I've found out what's the matter with my ranch and me," he said in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes?" Bud was surprised and curious in spite of himself. "Then why don't you give the ranch up to some tenderfoot who don't know no better an' give yourself up to some asylum!"

"Bud, I know just what's the matter," Rant insisted. "I know just what's lacking down there, Bud. What I need is a wife!"

Bud Fields jerked his arm free, stared at his companion for a few moments, and then laughed loud and long in scorn.

"Don't forget, Mr. Pelham," he smirked. "Don't you forget!"

The Okeh restaurant was a reeking confusion of the odor of the day's special menu, corn beef and cabbage, of smoking kerosene lamps, of humanity, and what-not. It was a small place with a counter only and intolerably hot.

Rant Pelham and his friend Bud entered, perched on stools before the counter, wiped their brows with bandannas. Hardly had they done so when through the swinging door at the foot of the counter entered a vision of lovely coolness in a neat white apron.

Annie Lawton was a sparkling brunette. She was all Bud Fields had said in face and form, and then some. Moreover, she was an excellent definition of efficiency in the flesh.

"Lo, Annie," Rant greeted. "Most powerful warm."

"Might almost be called hot," she retorted. "What'll you pair of desert rats have?"

Rant looked up; but he saw merely banter in her eyes. Bud had seen something else, and he shrugged. Rant was a fool. All he needed was branding, and Bud believed Miss Lynn would attend to that.

"That's sort of rough on us rats to call the turn to our face," said Bud, grinning.

"Ham an' eggs," said Rant.

"Funny thing, Annie," said Bud, turning partly on the stool so Rant would not be able to get in any footwork. "You know Rant isn't half so sprightly up here in his talk as he was a while back down in Adams' store."

Rant swung around, his jaw dropping in amazement, his eyes glaring at this audacity on the part of his friend.

"Oh, Rant never *did* talk much up here," said Annie lightly. "He comes here to eat. Was you going to do the same?"

"Uh-huh," said Bud. "I'll take the same. Miss Lawton, is that *red* cabbage you're serving this evening?"

"Some of it's red," replied the girl. "Why?"

"Then I reckon Rant will want to change his order," sang Bud cheerfully.

Rant's face, already reddened by the sun and winds of the desert, flamed violently. But he managed to wink at the girl behind the counter. "It's Joe McCann's place," he said, with a nod toward Bud. "I haven't understood a word he's said since he got in an' grabbed a few cactus cocktails."

The waitress laughed, but she threw a meaning look over her shoulder at Bud as she went out to fill their orders.

Rant turned a face to Bud now that was white. "Listen, bo," he said in as earnest a tone as a man can use. "We've been friends a long time an' all that, but if you're figuring on making a sap out of me you're going to do just two things: bust our friendship for good, an' get a good beating even if you are little. I mean it."

And Bud, who liked this big fellow better than his meals, saw that Rant *did* mean it.

"I reckon I won't have to make any sap of you," he jeered; "but there's maybe an hombre in this town who *will*."

"You're not worrying me, you half-wit," Rant retorted. "Meaning who'd do it? You didn't mention any names."

"I might as well tip you off, I suppose," said Bud grudgingly. "There's a gink workin' in Joe McCann's place what's been here at least a month. He's big. He's supposed to be behind the bar, but he's outside of it half the time cleaning up an' polishing off the customers. He don't pick any easy marks, either. He's—ah—you'll excuse me for mentioning it, but he's been runnin' aroun' some with this Lynn lady. *I* believe he likes her."

"That'll do for you," scowled Rant as their orders came.

He was silent during the meal and silent afterward when he went to the hotel to slick up a bit. He was sorry he had not brought better clothes. He was sore at Bud who, in turn, felt that he had a grievance and went down to McCann's place to nurse it just a trifle.

But both the friends brightened when they found themselves in the dance hall, which, as it happened, was over Adams' store. This would hardly deserve mention were it not that this coincidence was to figure greatly in the evening's proceedings.

Rant arrived among the first. He hung around with the crowd near the door until the hall filled and the trio of musicians struck up for the first dance. He still waited. He was one of the first to see Miss Lynn, she of the glorious, flaming hair, arrive. He lost no time in hanging up his hat. He approached her at once.

"Good evening, Miss Lynn." He bowed. "Shall we start?"

"Why," she said, appearing to be flustered. "It isn't usual here, is it, to dance the *first* dance with a gentleman you've only just met?"

"Why not?" he said with a flashing smile. She noticed his teeth. "You said you didn't save any dances an' I'm on the spot to see I don't miss any. You must dance great, too."

"Well," she wavered, looking down at his polished boots. Did they dance in those? "All right."

They glided out on the floor and Miss Lynn, of Los Angeles, discovered in about two minutes that sundry reports to the effect that cow-punchers and other Westerners were naturally awkward was a fallacy. Rant was naturally graceful and on divers trips to Kansas City and Chicago, shipping cattle, he had learned much about the terpsichorean art.

"Gee, you're a sweet dancer," she complimented him. "You throw a wicked boot."

"You'd be surprised at the things I can do, Miss Lynn," he retorted with a grin. "I knew you'd be there with the pitty-pats, comin' from a big city an' all that. There's something I'm wondering about most true an' powerful hard."

"Oh!" She was interested. "What is it?"

"What's your first name?" he asked. "I'll bet it's a pretty one."

She looked at him slyly. "You're a fast worker," she said. "If this was Hollywood, I'd call the bouncer. Oh, well, we all have to be children, you might say, out here in the desert. I mean, the big open spaces make you feel different, an' everybody seems to call each other by their first names."

"That's right," he voiced. "I didn't mean to be fresh or rude. I'm straight."

"I can see that—straight and tall. You're awful tall, Mr. Pelham." She looked up at him with wide, babyish—not *too* babyish—eyes. "My name's Gloria," she whispered in his ear.

"I knew it would be a knockout," he said gallantly. It was the sort of a name he would have selected for the lady on his bedroom wall, he decided. "My first name's Rant, an'——"

The music ceased. Before they had reached a chair a crowd was circling about them and Rant either had to tear the lady's arm off or let her go.

It was a husky crowd of males and there were two who towered above the others. These two eyed each other with looks which were both speculative and combative. For one of these had taken possession of Gloria Lynn as soon as Rant had released her. The latter knew instinctively that he was looking at the man of whom Bud had spoken—the man from McCann's. The other only knew he was looking at a possible rival.

The two best places for trouble to start—are saloons and dance halls. Rant knew this from long Western experience. He thought he scented trouble

this night and as he danced the next number with Annie Lawton, he watched Gloria Lynn's partner covertly. He was big, all right, and he looked tough. After this examination Rant ignored him.

Two numbers afterward, Rant pushed his way through the crowd about Gloria Lynn and took her out on the floor. He won a dark look from the big fellow.

"You're sure popular, Gloria," he breathed in her ear. "I reckon you're the most popular girl that ever came aroun' here. You know I've got something to tell you."

"That's what you said this afternoon," she returned softly. She was not immune to flattery; and she had sensed the delicious stimulant of rivalry about her. "Do you want to tell me now?"

"I suppose I might as well," he decided. "I just want to tell you that you knocked me dead at first glance. Of all the colors I like best in a girl's hair, it's a deep, glowing auburn like yours."

She *did* look at him then. "Well, there's nothing slow about you, big boy," she said with conviction.

"Remember what I said about asking your first name," he reminded her. "I'm straight, an' I'm saying what I think. It doesn't make you sore does it?"

"No—I guess not." She was thinking about his ranch, the cattle running around; rich probably. You never could tell. And he certainly *was* a magnificent speciman of a man.

"I'm glad of that," he told her, "because there's something I wanted to ask you, if you'd just step out on the little balcony above the steps after the dance."

She thrilled. Another proposal. And with such speed! Most of the proposals she had received were not attractive. But this was another type of man. Ranch, and cows, and good looks.

She agreed.

"It's like this," he said, when they were out in the open air with the stars hanging over them; "I lead a sort of lonely life down there, although a busy one. I—there are no girls in my life—or—weren't till now. I want to see you quite regular, girlie, an' I don't mean anything but the best by that. 'Twon't do no harm, us being friends. An' I'll be thinkin' of you to-morrow an' the next day. There's just one thing—well, this is asking a lot, I reckon. But wouldn't you give me just one little lock of your hair, it being—well, to remind me? So's I can put it up there in my room?" He was thinking of it by the picture.

Miss Lynn regarded him gravely. No, it was no joke. "I'll go you, big boy. I'm game for anything once an' I'm changed, like, out here in the open. Come."

She led him down the rear outside stairs. These ended at the rear door of Adams' store, which kept open till dawn selling soft drinks and various eatables on dance nights. They went in and on the wall in a small room was a looking glass. Gloria opened her vanity bag and took out a small pair of scissors.

"Let me do it," he suggested eagerly. "I'll get a wee bit in the back, under like, where it wont' show."

"Well, buddy," she said in a tone of resignation. "I'll tell the world you're something new." She handed him the scissors and he bent delicately to his task.

"New barber in town?"

Rant turned, carefully stowing the lock in his pocket.

"Did you say barber or bartender?" he asked the big man who faced him.

"Syd Cramer, you shut up!" Gloria exclaimed.

"Well, you can't blame *me*," he said. "Kind of a novelty to see this buckaroo, packing a gun an' everything, cutting a girl's hair. I should think in this hot weather that gun would be sort of heavy, too."

"Well, it is—*sort* of," Rant drawled. "But my kind usually packs 'em. Wouldn't feel dressed if we didn't. As to bein' heavy, I'm thinking that an empty shell out of this here gun would be heavier than your brains."

Rant saw the leap and the lightning fist coming. It paused and hung in the air. Rant's draw had been a marvel. Gloria had stepped away, breathless.

"You're mighty brave, pulling a six-shooter on a man that's not armed," Cramer sneered.

"I reckon it isn't bravery, stranger; it's just plain chivalry—if you ever heard the word. I don't aim to let you start no fight in front of a lady."

Gloria Lynn found her voice. "Syd Cramer, you get out of here! You're not bossing me or prying into my affairs. You just beat it!" And she slapped him in the face.

Cramer laughed, but as he turned away his look was for Rant, and it shot a message the desert man understood.

"I won't have trouble," said Gloria in some excitement. "I don't like guns, either. I'm taking no chances, big boy. I won't dance with you again to-night, and I won't dance with Syd Cramer, either!" She stamped a dainty foot in emphasis.

"All right, girlie, an' I can't say as I blame you," said Rant. "I reckon I'll just ramble aroun' an' see you to-morrow."

He held out a hand and she took it. Then she went back up the stairs.

In many ways Rant Pelham was a simple soul. The incident of the lock of hair proves that. And he was also credulous. So he walked casually through the store, up the street to his hotel, and sat down on the bed to think, and smoke, and, incidentally, knot that lock of hair in a corner of his handkerchief.

After a time he took off his gun belt and weapon and put them under his pillow. He blew out the light in the lamp, went out and sauntered leisurely down the street to Joe McCann's.

His first flashing look about the place showed him Syd Cramer, white-coated, returned to his position behind the bar. This was as he had expected. He also noticed Bud Fields watching a game in progress at a table near the stove. This did not surprise him, for Bud was a suspicious cuss. He must have been suspicious in this case or he would never have left the dance.

He moved over to the bar. Cramer ignored him until he had served some others. Then he came down and smiled all over his coarse, fat face.

"Why, here's the barber!" he exclaimed amiably, flashing a light glance at Rant's right hip.

"An' you're the bartender," said Rant, just as cheerfully. "I discarded my gun," he added casually.

"Oh, that's all right," said Cramer, looking him in the eye. "You don't want to take that little business up there too much to heart. Guess there ain't many dames out your way an' I don't blame you for gettin' all het up when you see a fresh one."

"No, there aren't many out my way," said Rant pleasantly. "Not many with the kind of hair I was cutting to-night."

Cramer laughed; but it wasn't a friendly laugh. "So that was it! Her hair! An' you was takin' a sample! Well, it's probably dyed, at that." He slapped the bar smartly.

"What's that?" The question came sharply.

There was a mean look in the other's eyes. "I remarked that it was probably dyed."

"You think so?" purred Rant. "I don't object to you kiddin' *me* to a certain extent, but an insult to the lady don't go."

"You'd have to prove it's an insult," said Cramer, his eyes narrowing. "I think *you* was doin' the insulting. I

reckon you was cuttin' that sample to stick it in alcohol an' see if it came out the same."

"I reckon that's the sort of a thing that you ought to say on my side of the bar," said Rant. "Unless—*you're afraid to come over!*"

Now there had been lots of fights in Joe McCann's place. In fact, Joe was becoming tired of it when he took a trip to Los Angeles and saw a husky working over a bunch of roughs in a place that was rougher still. He inquired as to this individual and learned he had been some sort of a sparring partner of Jack Dempy's but was now doing lighter work. Here then, thought Joe, is a way to preserve peace in my establishment. He approached this tough individual and made a proposition which was at once accepted, as the person in question was partial to tough towns. Which is how Syd Cramer had come to McCann's place the month before and established such an excellent record that there now was only one fight where there had been three or four before.

Cramer must have been untying his apron strings while he talked, or he had a trick knot, for the apron had not reached the floor before he had sailed over the bar.

Rant struck as he came; but Cramer landed with a duck to the left, braced like lightning, and hit Rant on the jaw, knocking him clear across a table which upset and landed him in a clutter of chairs, table, poker chips, and flying feet.

He sat up, looked about as if he had perhaps misplaced something, then came to his feet with a bound, drove in an exchange of blows, staggering Cramer with a left, dropping neatly into a chair from a right return.

Cramer jumped for him and was neatly tripped by Bud Fields' boot. "Fair play!" shouted the little puncher. "Down's down!"

Cramer swung around to kill Bud, but by this time Rant was on his feet and he stung his antagonist behind the left ear turning him twice around, and, on the second turn, putting him neatly on the floor with a jar that spilled claret all over the place.

No mere brawl, this.

Cramer was six foot and weighed a hundred and ninety pounds; Rant was six foot two, with the wide, heavy shoulders and tapering waist of the rider, and weighed a hundred and eighty pounds. Thus, Cramer had the advantage both in weight and experience. But as the fight progressed at terrific speed, with scores from the dance hall crowding in to see what was afterward said to be the worst, or hardest mauling bout in the history of the town—as the fight progressed all over the place, with first one man down and then the other, it developed that Cramer did not have such a great advantage after all. Of late years he had been indulging a bit and his muscles had not the bite to them that they once had. Rant was hard as nails. Moreover, Cramer had won his fights of late with a single blow. But this time he couldn't seem to knock Rant out!

So it had to come. Rant gradually wore his man down. They were covered with blood. Their clothing was torn. The place was strewn with table legs, broken chairs, and enough red, white, and blue chips to make a flag the length of the street!

Cramer came on in a last desperate rush and landed his blow fairly. It lacked the steam, and Rant merely shook his head and drove his left to Cramer's jaw with an impact which put the pug on the floor. He landed hard; so hard, in fact, that the stovepipe was jarred loose and Bud Fields received a shower of soot.

The fight was over. It was never forgotten. Rant started for home, alone, within half an hour, a sorry-looking victor.

As the acute memory of the fight, and the result, began to wear off on the ride southward, Rant came to think more and more of the cause of it. He had known Cramer and he would have trouble as soon as he looked into the man's eyes and saw him take possession of Gloria Lynn in such a proprietary manner. Later, when he had secured the lock of hair—a whim in the first place—and they had met again, he knew they would have to fight it out. Well, he, Rant, was not in town every day and he decided to have it out lest the other secure an advantage by claiming he had returned to his ranch to avoid the encounter.

So much for that.

Then had come the culminating insult. Cramer sure had insulted the girl by even suggesting that her hair was dyed. He'd *never known* any woman to have dyed hair. Put it in alcohol! He should have killed Cramer! But, just the same, Rant's thoughts took a sudden and startling trend on his way home. A wee suspicion had been sown in his mind by Cramer. It was but fair that he should make the test so he would have no such suspicion—fair to Gloria.

Such are the workings of the mind of a young man who has all the time in the world to think.

Yes, he would make the test.

He had some alcohol on the ranch and he poured some into a glass that morning and dipped in the bob of hair.

He watched. He leaned down and looked closer. Then he sat down and stared. From a glorious, coppery, lustrous, glowing auburn, the lock had changed to a sickly, straw-colored tuft.

For a long time Rant Pelham sat deep in thought. The impostor! And getting him into that fight when the fellow was right after all!

He went quietly about the task of washing himself and changing his clothes. Then, on a fresh mount, he started for the town of Redstone. In due time he arrived there and went to Adams' store. In his hand were a few straw-colored wisps.

"Miss Lynn?" said Adams in response to his inquiry. "Why, she's gone. Asked a lot of questions about you, too, before she left. Wanted to know how big your ranch was and how many heads of cows you had running —heh! Guess you made a hit with her, but she left sudden. That Cramer feller you beat up last night went, too. He's a sight. Reckon he figured he couldn't hang aroun' here any more."

But Rant had walked out, smiling, before he had finished. Outside, Rant tossed some wisps of straw to the hot breeze. Then he walked down the street to the Okeh restaurant. It was past the breakfast hour; too early for dinner. The place was vacant.

Annie Lawton came through the rear door, cool and sparkling.

"'Lo, Annie," said Rant.

"So you're now a prize fighter," she bantered. "I suppose you came for raw meat instead of ham and eggs."

"Nope. I didn't come to eat, Annie."

She raised her brows. "Then you must have come for sympathy or congratulations," she decided. "Which?"

"I come to ask you to go to the next Saturday night dance with me, Annie."

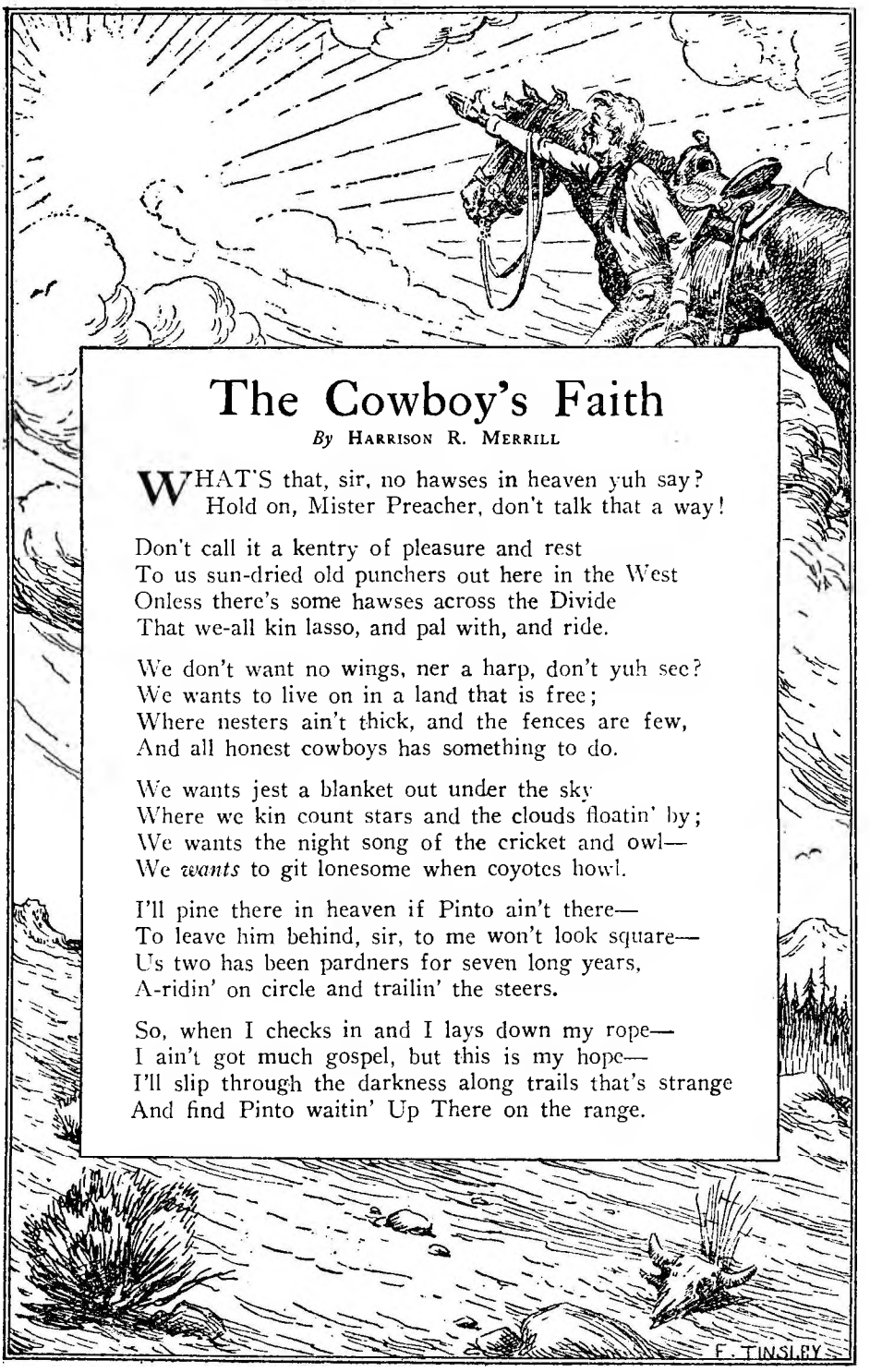
The girl flushed. "Why—why are you asking me, because of what happened last night?" she demanded.

He laid a hand on hers and looked into her eyes. "I'm asking you because you're real, Annie, straight and true. I needed something like this to wake me up—you ought to understand. Maybe I can make it plainer later."

She looked at him with a well of light in her eyes.

"It isn't just the dance, Annie," he said softly, drawing her face down over the counter. "I want you to go—go other places with me. Down south there some time. Will you go?"

"I'll go," she whispered happily.



The Cowboy's Faith

By HARRISON R. MERRILL

WHAT'S that, sir, no hawses in heaven yuh say?
Hold on, Mister Preacher, don't talk that a way!

Don't call it a kentry of pleasure and rest
To us sun-dried old punchers out here in the West
Onless there's some hawses across the Divide
That we-all kin lasso, and pal with, and ride.

We don't want no wings, ner a harp, don't yuh see?
We wants to live on in a land that is free;
Where nesters ain't thick, and the fences are few,
And all honest cowboys has something to do.

We wants jest a blanket out under the sky
Where we kin count stars and the clouds floatin' by;
We wants the night song of the cricket and owl—
We *wants* to git lonesome when coyotes howl.

I'll pine there in heaven if Pinto ain't there—
To leave him behind, sir, to me won't look square—
Us two has been pardners for seven long years,
A-ridin' on circle and trailin' the steers.

So, when I checks in and I lays down my rope—
I ain't got much gospel, but this is my hope—
I'll slip through the darkness along trails that's strange
And find Pinto waitin' Up There on the range.

No Help from Nobody

By Christopher B. Booth

Author of "The Stake Pullers," etc.

UP the sharp rise of the narrow, abandoned trail plodded an ancient, undersized cow pony, refusing to be hurried by the constant urge of thumping heels against his bony ribs. Saddle, bridle, and even rider, seemed to be in competition with the horse for out-and-out worthlessness.

The saddle was obviously a combination of several; the stirrups did not match, the pommel had been broken off, and the frayed cinches looked as though they might fall apart at any moment. The bridle, too, was a most sorry affair, amazingly patched together with odd pieces of scrap leather and some baling wire.

A battered, weather-stained sombrero, much too large for him, crowned the head of the rider, so large, indeed, that it wabbled loosely with the motion of his body. The flannel shirt, faded and patched, was such a ludicrous misfit that it, also, must have been the property of some previous owner. The shoes were equally disreputable; the sole of one had ripped loose from its stitching and was wrapped about with twine.

The rider's name was Michael, and those who knew him called him "Mickey."

At the sharp right-angle turn which marked the summit of the trail, the horse stopped dead in his tracks, for no ascertainable reason other than plain, ordinary cussedness.

"Giddap!"

Mickey pounded his heels impatiently against the pony's sides, but without the slightest effect; the animal only planted his legs more firmly, stiffened his ugly neck stubbornly, and refused to budge.

"Git goin', yuh onery, good-fer-nothin' crow bait; this balkin' business is becomin' right smart too frequent—and don't I wish I was somewheres I could put hands on a cocklebur!" exclaimed Mickey.

But there were no cocklebur, and

any number of previous experiences discouraged the hope that the aged cow pony would stir until he got the notion to do so. Mickey gave a sigh of helpless resignation, shifted his weight in the nondescript saddle, and pushed back the enormous hat which had shadowed and concealed his face.

He was only a youngster, seventeen or eighhteen, with eyes more somber than those of a boy should be. Poverty and tragedy, both had stamped their cruel mark upon him.

Swinging one leg over the saddle pommel, he put the wide-brimmed hat over the crook of his knee, and stared moodily across the ragged fringe of hills while he waited for his temperamental steed to get in a traveling mood.

The old Jenkins Trail, scarcely ever used these days since a wider and more level wagon road had been cut through Fiddler's Notch, was a tortuous route over Sawtooth Mountain, constantly doubling back on itself as it followed the line of the cliffs, so that from where the boy sat he could look down on another level of the trail below.

Sound travels far and the human eyes can see a long way off in the silent distances of the open country, and the boy was range bred. Despite his moody preoccupation, his ear caught a faint sound which he instantly recognized for what it was—the click of a shod hoof against the rock-paved floor of the trail below him.

A flicker of interest broke through the somber film of his gray eyes. He often rode this trail himself, but it was the first time within months that he had met with any other traveler. Usually, it was some tenderfoot, stopping at the dude ranch down in the valley, who had got lost; once one of them, for the simple service of giving a few directions, had pressed five dollars upon him —the largest amount of money he had ever possessed.

Mickey, listening with sensitive ears, became aware that there were two horses approaching, but it was some minutes more before he saw the crown of a black hat, dented into a three-cornered peak and heavily powdered with dust, come bobbing into view above the rise of the lower trail. An instant later both the man and his mount were visible, a second horse with an empty saddle being led.

"That feller's been doin' a heap of hard ridin'," murmured the boy; "kinder queer anybody in such a powerful hurry should hamper hisse'f with an extra hoss. Howsoever, I reckon it ain't none of my business."

At this particular point of the lower trail an underground spring found escape from the mountainside, trickling into a depression of the rocks and forming a natural water hole. This made the spot a logical place for a pause in the journey across the top of Sawtooth Mountain, and it was, consequently, a matter of no surprise to the watching youth that the man with the two horses should pull up, dismount, and begin removing the saddles.

Mickey continued staring down from the upper level, mildly interested; suddenly his mouth sagged open and a dazed expression appeared on his face. His cheeks paled slightly and his hands began to tremble, and yet the gleam which shone in his eyes was not fear. Excitement, perhaps, but certainly not fear.

"Them's gov'ment mail sacks he's got tied acrost that empty saddle," he whispered. "Hit—hit's 'The Two-gun Kid'! Yeah, I bet'cha hit's 'im, all right!"

Just as abruptly, and with no more reason that he had for stopping, the balky cow pony decided to proceed on his way down the mountainside; in fact, he got into motion with such surprising vigor that his rider lost his balance and saved himself a spill only by a feat of really skilled horsemanship which revealed that beneath an exterior of un-

ambitious listlessness he could think and move quickly in an emergency.

Down the steep, winding trail they went. Again the boy's face was shadowed by the ridiculous hat; his hands no longer trembled, but they were clenched so tightly that the knuckles stood out in rigid knobs. Apparently, he was steeling himself to a purpose which called upon all the courage he possessed.

Stealthy approach was, of course, impossible; nor did he attempt it. Probably it would have been doubly dangerous, for the notorious Two-gun Kid had a reputation for being prepared against surprises, and would be doubly suspicious of any subdued sounds that might hint of stalking.

The narrow trail turned again, suddenly widened into a tablelike space, and Mickey found himself face-to-face with the two-horse traveler. The latter was tall, young, and disconcertingly grim of countenance, with a dangerous coolness of eye, a warning hint of a deadly gun-hand in the careless lightness with which his slim fingers hovered just clear of the weapon protruding from an ornate holster.

At sight of the boy on the decrepit cow pony, unarmed and harmless, the man abandoned defensive caution, and began chuckling; an amused grin melted the harshness from his face.

"And where did you come from?" His drawl was by no means unpleasant to the ear.

"I been up there settin' some traps." Mickey pointed in the direction of the mountaintop.

"Yeah? So you're a trapper, huh? Havin' much luck at it?"

"None to speak of, mister. Reckon I ain't so good at hit as my dad was. Now dad was powerful lucky at trappin'; I guess it was a gift, sort of."

The man with two guns, one swung at either hip, did not miss the past tense.

"Your old man's cashed in his chips, eh?" The question was more sympathetic than might have been expected from one who was reputed to hold human life so lightly as The Two-gun Kid.

A jerk of the head was the boy's answer.

"Got any folks, young 'un?"

"I ain't got nobody."

The two-gun rider began taking some provisions from his saddle pack.

"Yuh look like yuh could stand some grub, young 'un. I was getting ready to fry some bacon and bust myself a can of tomatoes. Nothin' like tomato juice fer cuttin' the trail dust out of a feller's throat. Slide down, gather up some brush for a fire, and we'll eat."

Silently, Mickey dismounted and began picking up dried twigs, but when the fire had been made and the bacon was cooked, he shook his head emphatically when the other motioned that he was to help himself.

"I ain't hungry." His voice sounded rough and uneven.

"Say, ain't yuh a queer one! Yuh're so hungry yuh're nose is twitchin'. Don't be so backward, young 'un; pitch in an' swaller some of this grub. I'll bet yuh ain't et a darn thing since breakfast—have yuh now?"

"Somehow, mister, a feller don't seem to git hungry—when he's got somethin' on his mind."

"Got things on yore mind, huh?" The two-gun rider chuckled. "Well, sonny, mebbe it would relieve yuh some to get 'em *off* yore mind."

The boy had swept the big hat back from his face, which was tense and set, and his eyes glittered with excitement and recklessness.

"I wouldn't dast git it off my mind—not to jest anybody. But I kin talk free—to you. Lissen!" He had edged closer and his voice became subdued to a hoarse whisper. "I'm tired of bein' pore an' not havin' nothin', an'—I know where to git some easy money, some big money."

"Yuh don't say!" drawled the two-gun man, but the pleasantness of his expression had vanished with a return of the grim, hard look to his countenance.

"Know where Snake Creek is?"

"I'm listenin', young 'un; keep right on talkin'."

"There's an old coot pannin' fer gold on Snake Creek. Most folks says he's crazy, fer nobody ain't see the color of no pay dirt he's ever struck—nobody but me."

"Yeah?" The eyes of the two-gun man became slightly more narrow.

"He's got pokes and pokes of it," Mickey rushed on breathlessly. "Yaller gold!"

"Aw, g'wan!"

"I tell yuh, I seen it! I weren't aimin' to spy on him—at first. I'd busted a saddle cinch and I was aimin' to borrow somethin' ter fix hit. I seen him—through the winder—an' he was jiggerin' with that gold, and weighin' it, and he was talkin' to his dorg, an' I heard him say there was a hundred ounces."

"Now, ain't that interestin'!" drawled the two-gun man. "What's the idear, young 'un?"

"That gold could be got easy, mister; but, yuh see, I ain't got no gun—not since this here crow bait of mine stumbled and dad's old .45 I'd been packin' was busted. I wouldn't need no help from nobody—if I had dad's old six-gun. I kin shoot, an' that ain't jest braggin' neither."

"Killin' a man wouldn't hold yuh back from gettin' that gold, eh?"

Mickey's eyes did not waver; his tight-drawn lips twisted slightly.

"Nobody don't care nothin' about me," he answered, "so why should I care about anybody?"

The two-gun man was silent for a moment, his hard eyes boring steadily into the ragged youngster's tense face.

"I reckon, young 'un, yuh're makin' a little proposition that you and me should throw in together. Kinder risky, ain't it, bracin' a stranger like this?"

A thin smile flitted across Mickey's mouth.

"Not when I'm knowin' my stranger, mister. I spotted yuh from the upper trail and seen them gov'ment mail sacks. Ain't no mail ever carried acrost *this* trail, and so I figgered—I figgered who you was. And when I rode on down and seen yuh was packin' a pair of rods, I knowed who you was—The Two-gun Kid. The black hat, too; they don't wear that kind in these parts."

The man's thumb was hooked lightly over the top of his holster belt; his long, supple fingers hovered near the butt of his .45, and as he continued staring into the boy's face, he began shaking his head slowly.

"Better get notions like that out of yore head, young 'un, before it's too late. Killin' ain't a nice business, son, no matter what way yuh look at it; sometimes—and a lot uh times, if yuh want to know—I wish I hadn't never downed a man. Now, yuh take that feller yuh've been tellin' me about—a harmless old geezer who ain't never harmed anybody—and yuh're plannin' and schemin' to get hands on some gold——"

The boy broke in with a shrill laugh.

"Lissen to the sermon—from The Two-gun Kid! I know yore game, all right! Tryin' to talk me outta hit and then takin' that gold fer yourse'f!"

"Mebbe a gun fighter can preach a better sermon about killin' than a preacher, young 'un."

"I don't want to hear no preachin'; all I want to know is if you and me does business together." The boy's voice was sullen, scornful.

"So yuh really got the nerve to go through with it, huh?"

"Try me and see!"

"And any killin' that's got to be done—you'll do it, eh?" The two-gun man

jerked his head grimly. "All right, we'll see." He turned away and bent over to reach for his can of tomatoes.

The gleam of excitement in Mickey's eyes became more intense. Without a word of warning, he leaped, flinging himself upon the other's back, and the unexpectedness of the attack was his best weapon. Down the two went to the rock floor of the trail. Toppled face foremost, the man was at a disadvantage and the boy was lightning-quick; he knew that his was no match for the man's strength and that this was his only chance.

By the fraction of a second, Mickey's hand was first to the butt of the .45, barely visible from beneath the edge of the man's hip. He flicked it out of the holster and brought it down in a dull, thudding blow against the back of the man's head, precisely at the base of the skull.

With a groan, the latter ceased struggling and went limp. Where the gun had struck with wicked force, a sickening flow of crimson gushed forth. Mickey's breath sucked through his clenched teeth with a hysterical sound and his hands were trembling with the reaction as he began pulling the gun belt around so that he might get at the buckle. A moment later he was in possession of both guns, and had the holster swinging from his own hips.

"I done it!" he exulted in an awed whisper. "I got him—The Two-gun Kid!"

But he did not waste much time in gloating triumph. Caution told him that a completely helpless Two-gun Kid would be a good deal safer customer to deal with, for the notorious outlaw had a reputation for squirming out of tight places against overwhelming odds, and there was no telling how lasting the effects of the stunning blow would be.

He raced to one of his prisoner's horses, unfastened the lariat that swung from the saddle, and proceeded to do a hasty but none-the-less thorough job of trussing the fellow up.

"I reckon yuh won't git loose from that, Mister Two-gun Kid—and I reckon yore killin' days is over," murmured Mickey. "Yuh're goin' to git hung—and I'm goin' to be there when they string yuh up!"

A long half hour dragged past and the unconscious man had not stirred, except for the rise and fall of his broad chest, making it apparent that he was still alive. The boy began to be troubled. It might be days before any other traveler came over the Sawtooth Trail and, if the Two-gun Kid remained indefinitely unconscious, there arose the problem of how he was going to get the dead weight of some hundred and seventy pounds into a saddle and lashed firmly in place. Horses have a distinct aversion for that sort of thing, and it would be difficult to manage, even with one of the animals blindfolded.

While Mickey debated what he should do, the man stirred, groaning dismally, strained ineffecutally at his bonds, and twisted his head around, blinking dazedly as though his mind were befogged. At sight of his youthful captor, standing with his feet planted wide apart, one hand resting upon each of the two confiscated .45s, his face became contorted with rage. But with no more than a single, snarling exclamation, his anger seemed to desert him and he grinned feebly.

"You danged little fool——"

"Shet yore mouth!" snapped Mickey. "I am to do all the talkin' that's goin' to be done fer the present. Thought I was a sap, didn'tcha, Mr. Two-gun Kid? Well, I made a sap outta you, all right enough!"

Another feeble, sickly grin from the man. "I ain't denyin' that yuh done just that, young 'un, but——"

"Shet yer mouth, I said," shrilled the youngster. "Six months back you shot a feller at Dawson's Gap—shot and

killed him without givin' him no chance, and fer no more reason than that yuh was suspicious he might be one of the posse that was after yuh that time.

"That feller was my dad, Mister Two-gun Kid, and ever since I been waitin', and waitin', figgerin' old Sawtooth was too good a hideout fer yuh not to come back sooner or later. Yeah, I been layin' fer yuh—an' now I got-cha! How do yer like it, Mister Two-gun Kid, bein' took by a young feller like me who didn't even have no gun on him?" The exultant tumult of words came to a breathless halt. "Now I'm goin' to cut the rope from around yore laigs so's yuh can climb aboard a hoss—an' one move outta yuh, an' I blow the top of yore head plumb off yuh."

The captive groaned again, for the bonds about his body were lashed viciously tight.

"So yuh was stringin' me about that feller on Snake Creek, and the hundred ounces of gold, eh?"

"Shore I was stringin' yuh—and you swallered it, too!"

"Well, young 'un, that sort uh makes it fifty-fifty, fer I ain't the Two-gun Kid."

Mickey's lips curled scornfully. "I've heard tell yuh was a slick and slippery article, but I ain't fallin' fer none of yer tricks, so yuh might jest as well save yer breath."

"I'm givin' it to yuh straight, sonny, and if yuh'll take the trouble of lookin' at the under side of my vest, I reckon mebbe I can convince yuh who I am—namely, Buck Callahan, of the State Rangers.

"Yuh see, young feller, what got the notion into your head that I was the Two-gun Kid was seein' them mail sacks. Now, as a matter of fact, I shot it out with the Two-gun Kid shortly after sunup this mornin' and downed 'im. I been after him a week."

"That bein' the case," Mickey shot back quickly, "where's his body? Yuh won't git no reward unless yuh fetch in the body."

"Smart kid, ain'tcha?" the man grunted. 'Well, if yuh're wantin' all the details, I winged 'im, and he took to the river, down at the foot of the mountains. The rapids got him and carried him beyond reach, but, yuh see, he'd throwed off his gun belt fer easier swimmin'. I reckon the Two-gun Kid's hardware and the word of a Ranger is good enough fer anybody around in this part of the country."

"But that ain't no ranger's hat," the boy persisted.

"Mine got lost in the chase, young 'un, and only a danged fool would be ridin' in a boilin' sun with no hat on. This is the Two-gun Kid's hat, sure. Come on, now, yuh stubborn little mule, and take a look at my credentials."

Mickey looked uneasy, but his skepticism remained anchored to one more circumstance.

"If yuh are a State Ranger, why didn't yuh tell me who yuh was right off?" he demanded.

"Aw, that's easy to answer, sonny, plumb easy. Yuh put it up to me cold that you and me was to go after that gold, and that even a killin' wasn't to stop yuh. Well, I was aimin' to see how far yuh'd go, fer if yuh meant to go through with it, sonny, yuh had the makin's of another dangerous outlaw and it was my business to stop yuh 'fore yuh got started.

"Come on, now, take a look at my badge and my papers, and then cut me loose so's I can hit the trail. Yuh ain't no outlaw in the makin', so I'm satisfied; the real Two-gun got his in the river, and I guess yuh ought to be satisfied, too."

The boy came closer, slipped his hands through a maze of rope until his fingers were beneath the other's vest, and brought forth a badge which proclaimed that the wearer of it was a

member of the State Rangers. Slowly he fumbled at his pocket for a battered old jackknife with a broken blade. With the blade open, he stood for a moment, hesitating, and then began shaking his head.

"Mebbe it's all straight, mister, but I reckon I won't be takin' no chances," he said stubbornly. "Mebbe yuh're a ranger, like yuh claim, and have jest got the Two-gun's hat and his hardware—and mebbe yuh're the Two-gun Kid who shot a ranger and took his badge. It's jest as broad as it is long, so I reckon I better not be takin' no chance. If yuh're a ranger, mister, you wouldn't take no chances either."

The crafty pretense of the other's good humor vanished.

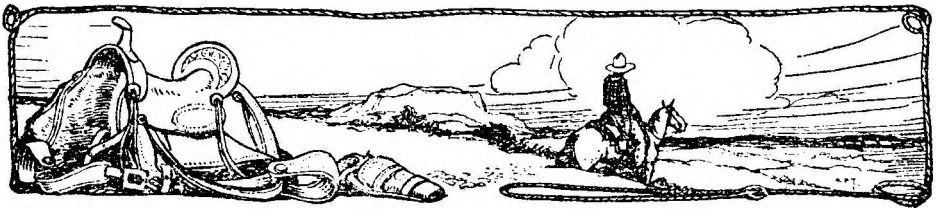
"Yuh smart little feller, yuh ain't so dumb as yuh look!" he snarled. Then he smiled, but the smile was bitter as he stared at the slender, ragged lad who had captured him.

"Think of it!" he muttered. "Taken in by an onery-lookin' little maverick like you!" He paused, shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I suppose the end had to come sometime. I know when I'm beat. Cut the leg ropes and I'll go along with yuh and make no fuss."

"Yuh better, Mister Two-gun Kid, fer I kin shoot—and if yuh don't believe hit, jest try me and see."

"I'll take yore word for it, young 'un," drawled the Two-gun Kid. "I'll wait and take my chances of breakin' jail; that's one of my specialties, yuh know, breakin' jail."

"We got a right good sheriff at the county seat," Mickey retorted grimly, "and he's got a specialty of keepin' fellers from breakin' jail." His knife slashed the rope about the outlaw's ankles, and his hand rested warily upon one of the guns. "Climb into one of them saddles and I reckon we'll git goin'."



THE DEER AND THE MELON

THE words "cutting the melon" have always had a very special and favorable significance in financial circles, so it is amusing to read the reports which have recently come from Texas that the deer in that delightful part of the country have also decided to sample the fruits of the other man's labors.

The depredations of the Texas deer have been made on the watermelon patches. It is complained that the deer invade the patches in droves, split the melons open with their forefeet, and then—with the most astounding common sense and good taste—proceed to eat them. If the thoughtless deer merely split the melons open and then left them untouched, there would certainly be ground for two opinions on the matter.

As many as twenty deer have been observed invading the melon patches, all animated by a single purpose, and the farmers have become so alarmed that they are obliged to sit up at night to guard their crops. They cannot shoot the deer because the latter are under the protection of the State game laws, and, taking everything into consideration, the farmer might reasonably be excused for thinking that, in his particular line of business, "there ain't going to be no rind."

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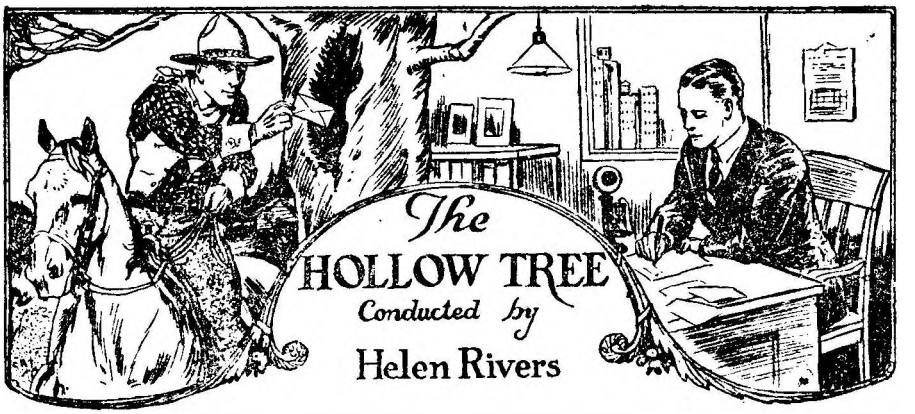

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

RANGELAND for a thousand ranches extends to the southwest of the caribou range in the Great Slave Lake district of Mackenzie. To the north and east of the great lake is the range of the caribou, and to the south and west is the open-range country of the Far Northwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: To the northeast of the Great Slave Lake in Mackenzie is the caribou range, with its thousands of herds of caribou. And to the southwest of the lake there is open rangeland for thousands of homesteads suitable for mixed farming, and a thousand ideal locations for stock ranches.

Folks, just take a look at that Great Slave Lake, with its hundreds of square miles of overstocked fishing ground—food for millions! Forty miles south is Alexandria Falls, a wonderful sight in its untrammeled beauty. You all know something about the Peace River district, just south of the Great Slave Lake country. Well, folks, up this way they call me "Peace River Slim." The Peace River country is my stomping ground, but I'm here to say that it won't be so many years before the young hombres, the pioneers of to-day, will be making the great rangeland of Mackenzie their home range.

You ask what does an old trapper think about as he crouches in the snow beneath the overhanging spruce boughs and cooks his dinner of broiled venison and tea! Well, these things I have just mentioned are some of the things he thinks about. And perhaps some day you will be able to trek from Vancouver via Prince George, Hudson's Hope, Fort St. John, Hay River, Great Slave Lake, Fort Norman, McPherson, Circle, Fairbanks, Seward, and back to Vancouver by the inside trail. That would be the thrill of a lifetime! And now you know why we are happy to live in our primitive way—with our eyes and our hearts in the future!

PEACE RIVER SLIM.

Care of The Tree.

Old-timer of the Eastern trails.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I was born in a log house in the Green Mountains of northern Vermont, a hill billy, and at an early age moved with my family to Maine. At the age of four I had my first adventure—a hike in the forests, all alone, and I kept fifty people busy searching for me about four hours. Several years later, we were in Bradford County, Pennsylvania, and at the age of thirteen I was riding a mustang and had aspirations to become a cow-puncher. And about this time I met up with a cowboy from Kansas.

My travels have taken me from Maine to Ohio, but never West, although I hope to see that great country some day. Wherever I

have traveled, I have explored the hills and gullies for minerals, the streams for fish, and the forests for their hidden treasures. I have boiled and eaten Indian turnips, and I have endured the hardships of the trails. This is what I call living! I have walked nine miles in the forenoon to borrow a fox and wild-cat hound, and have gone fox hunting in the afternoon and coon hunting at night. That is what I call a real day! I trailed a wild cat for fifteen days, last winter, walking from ten to thirty miles a day. The eleven-mile hike back with the cat was just about the easiest walking I did on that trip.

Well, now, hombres, I reckon it's your turn to spin a yarn about the West and answer one query I would like to ask, and that is about the first rudiments of roping. I am no mean hand at throwing a knife, but roping is quite a mystery to me. While I've often watched expert rope spinners, I could never quite determine what kept the loop open. And although I trained, for three years, to be a circus performer, rope spinning is one of the arts I know nothing about. I hope to corral a few of your rope artists.

ARCHIE C. RANNEY.

Care of Standard, Windsor, New York.

Throwing the lariat.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a hombre who craves adventure, and I hope to travel the West before long. I'm another hombre interested in throwing a lariat, and I hope that some of the cow-punchers of the Gang will give me some hints on roping. I'd like to hear from cowboys of California, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Wyoming, but, of course, I'll be glad to hear from anywhere, and from anybody. Chief among my hobbies are horses and guns.

Well, hombres, get your pens a-scratching and shoot some letters my way, for I have some interesting things to talk about, too.

VAN.

Care of The Tree.

Looking for a homestead pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I want to find a square-shooting hombre, preferably twenty-five or over, who'd like to file on a homestead. I've noticed that several hombres are looking for homestead pards, and I want to put in my say right here and make a bid for one of these here pards, too. I've investigated all available homestead land, and I believe I can pick out about the best location that the West has to offer. I have a truck and a lot of equipment to start with. If I can find a good hard-working pard, I believe I can assure him that we'll meet with success.

I'd like to hear from you homestead-seeking folks.

BUD C. THORNE.

Box 51, Madisonville, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Whether the trail leads over a beaten track or across the unexplored rangeland, a pard is always welcome. Let the little friend-maker badge help you to find the right pard.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

Oklahoman.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'd like to get out farther West and take up a homestead this spring. Let's hear from some of you homesteaders west of the Rockies. I want to know where the good homestead locations are. Any one interested in Osage County, northern Oklahoma, is welcome to fire away with his questions. Pawhuska is the county seat.

J. BAYLESS.

Pawhuska, Oklahoma.

Minnesota hombres, looking for pards.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We were raised on a ranch in a wild part of the West. At the present time we are living on a farm just outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and my brother and I are both looking for pards. We have four hundred acres, and everything in fine shape. I am fifty-two, and my young brother is thirty-five. If we could both find pards, it would mean that we could remain on the farm, but if we have to shoulder the place alone—just the two of us—well, you can see where we'd have to dispose of some of the old ranch, which we don't want to do.

Pards, we'd like to hear from you.

WILLIAM AND MARTIN.

Care of The Tree.

...see what this strange book has done for others!

"Worth $10,000"

"Instantaneous Personal Magnetism" has led thousands to success beyond their fondest hopes. For example, J. P., Inglewood, Calif., writes: "I would not part with it for $10,000 if I could not get another!"

Becomes Manager

Not only *personal* popularity, but *financial* success comes automatically to those who master Shaftesbury's secrets. L. G., Sacramento, Calif., writes: "I have been advanced to manager of our new store!"

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Shaftesbury's secrets are said to have altered the course of international affairs! Queen Victoria, Gladstone, Cardinal Gibbons and two Presidents of the United States, listened eagerly to this "Man of Mystery."

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Magnetic Power—as revealed by Shaftesbury—has been the starting point of more than one brilliant career. For example, E. Garrigue of the Metropolitan Opera House, writes: "I would not sell the insight it gave me for $1,000."

I'll loan you these secrets of MAGNETIC POWER for 5 days *FREE*

SEE FOR YOURSELF ...BUT DON'T SEND A PENNY

HERE is one of the most remarkable offers ever presented to the American Public—an opportunity to BORROW, *without cost* or risk, a book so singular that formerly, only people who could pay $25 to $50 were able to secure secrets that it contains.

A strange book! A book so uncanny that it often alters the whole course of its readers' lives and gives them Magnetic Personality almost *instantaneously*.

Folks are rarely the same after scanning its glowing pages! Suddenly they waken to a vital new power surging within them. A power that attracts friends as a magnet attracts steel—a power that revitalizes the body with electrical health and enables them to forge ahead with *double* speed—a power that can sweep away all obstacles and bring the most priceless gifts that life may bestow.

A Thrilling Experience!

When you receive your copy of "Instantaneous Personal Magnetism" by the world-famous Edmund Shaftesbury—*now loaned to you for 5 days* FREE—make this test! Shut yourself off in a room! Then commence to read! Almost from the first page you become aware of a subtle "something" you cannot call by name.

Yet that is only the beginning! In the days that follow, you are conscious of being guided by a powerful, unseen force you never knew you possessed. Mysteriously, you have quickly become more attractive in the eyes of everyone.

People suddenly seek out your society and become eager to talk with you. The world becomes anxious to *help* you and see you succeed. This way you actually *draw* power from others—for even the wealthy and influential are as clay in the hands of one who has mastered the secrets of Magnetic Power and Personality.

But the most surprising thing is the fact that even your closest friends cannot fathom the change that has come over you. They marvel—utterly baffled—while YOU sit back and smile to yourself at their bewilderment! Just picture *yourself* in such a situation!

Fascinating Beyond Words

The first half hour you spend with "Instantaneous Personal Magnetism" will open your eyes to things you have probably never dreamed of. Step by step, it reveals *HOW* to develop Magnetic Personality; *HOW* to use certain Oriental Secrets; *HOW* to read people's feelings by watching their lips; *HOW* to control others by a glance; *HOW* to attract the opposite Sex; *HOW* to use Magnetic Healing—all explained in such a simple way you *unconsciously* start using these secrets at once, without effort or exertion!

Limited Offer—Act NOW!

Right now—under a special LOAN offer—you can read and absorb the full benefits of Shaftesbury's marvelous discoveries for 5 days absolutely FREE. Merely mail the coupon below without *one penny* and we'll send you a copy of this remarkable 400-page volume, gold embossed and handsomely bound in rich burgendy cloth. When it arrives, delve into its vital pages. See exactly what a new world it opens up. Then if you are not amazed and delighted at the end of 5 days, return it and pay us nothing. Otherwise keep it as your own and remit special price of only $2 in full payment. You risk nothing, so act at once. Mail the coupon NOW! **Ralston University Press, Dept. 86-F, Meriden, Conn.**

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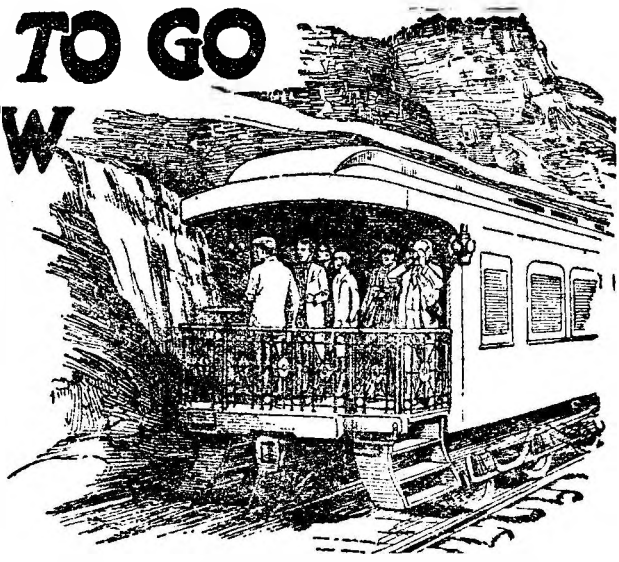
WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE



By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

A HOMBRE, one E. G., from way down East in Portland, Maine, is thinking of starting a trek Westward to try his fortune at dairying out under the Oklahoma sun. "Can you tell me what part of the State offers the best advantages for this type of farming, and about feed and pasturage for the cows, Mr. North?" he asks. "I have been advised to try Pottawatomie County."

E. G. will find Pottawatomie County an excellent place to launch his new venture. The short, mild winters there make expensive barns unnecessary, for a good shed open to the South will serve as adequate shelter for the animals. The grazing season extends from about April 1st to November or December. Wheat fields are often pastured from December 1st to March 1st. By seeding a few acres to wheat in the early fall, say, the first of September, cows can be run on that until the wheat fields mature. Then about March 1st turn back on the early seeding and pasture it till the grass is ready. In that way the cows can often be kept on green pasture practically the year round.

You will be able to grow nearly every kind of feed especially adapted to dairy cows in this part of Oklahoma, E. G. Cowpeas grow on all soils and make a big tonnage of excellent hay. Alfalfa gives three to five cuttings on all better soils. Peanuts on sandy soil make a ton of good hay to the acre, besides thirty to fifty bushels of nuts. Cottonseed, one of the best concentrates for dairy cattle, is a home product. Even on the poorer grades of tillable lands, the grain sorghums make a good tonnage per acre. Whether cut and fed in the stalk, or converted into silage, with a little cottonseed meal they constitute one of the best and cheapest dairy feeds. These three feeds are produced extensively in Pottawatomie County, Oklahoma.

Another Westbound hombre, D. G. H., of Independence, Kansas, expects to hit the trail for the Lone Star State

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and wants information about Waco and the surrounding country. "I want to know especially about the climate, Mr. North, the amount of rainfall, and the educational advantages in that city. Is there a good college or university located there or near there? If so, tell me what and where it is, and all about it if you can."

D. G. H. is heading for a mighty good place. This town of sixty thousand, situated in the very heart of Texas, is one of the largest inland cotton markets in the world. It is a manufacturing and jobbing center of first importance, and has extensive lumber interests. The average rainfall is thirty-seven inches, D. G. H., and there are on an average about two hundred and eighty nine clear days during the year, while the mean annual temperature is sixty-nine degrees.

Waco is very proud of its educational facilities. In addition to its excellent public schools there are several well-equipped private schools. For higher education the city has Baylor University, which is recognized as one of the leading universities in that part of the country. If D. G. H. will write to this college, the authorities will be glad to send him further information, I am sure.

The country surrounding Waco is a rich agricultural section, with one of the most fertile soils in the world. Naturally, with such a soil and sufficient rainfall, abundant crops are produced, the principal ones being cotton, corn, oats, and feed stuffs. Dairy herds and poultry are seen everywhere. More and more the attention of the trained farmer has been directed toward purebred stock, and cattle, hogs, and sheep from around Waco have taken many prizes in the stiffest competition.

Any of you fellows from down Waco way have anything you'd like to tell this migrating Kansan about your town?

R. E., of Iraan, Texas, has volunteered some real first-hand information to all you hombres who want to try your luck in the well-known oil fields down in his State.

"A man who wants to get in this game," R. E. advises, "should try to land a roustabout job. There he will help dig ditches, clear locations for wells, learn connection work, and sometimes will run casing in the well. He will also learn how to put in tubing and sucker rods, in fact, get a general schooling in the little end of the work. This job pays from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty dollars a month.

"A man may work up to gang foreman, when he has to show the men under him how to do the things he has learned. The next step up is a promotion to farm boss, who has several gangs under him and must also keep up the production work, et cetera, of his leases.

"A raw hand in the oil fields sometimes starts in dressing tools. If so, he will have to help rig up the machine he is to work on, fire the boiler if they are using steam for power, look after and keep his engine in shape, grease the machinery, help dress the bits, run pipe, splice drilling lines and sand lines. His work is to help the driller in every way he can to get the hole finished. Tool dressers earn from six to fourteen dollars per day. In the old days a man had to dress tools for two or more years, and be a mighty good hand, before he would even think of drilling.

"Next," says R. E., "comes the driller's job, which I think is the backbone of the oil industry. A driller must know how to rig up the tools and drill the well in the least possible time and with the least trouble. He earns from eight to sixteen dollars a day, according to the field he is in. Say the well is to be one thousand two hundred and fifty feet. They will start spudding with a fifteen-inch bit, drill three hundred feet and get water, then drill through this water sand

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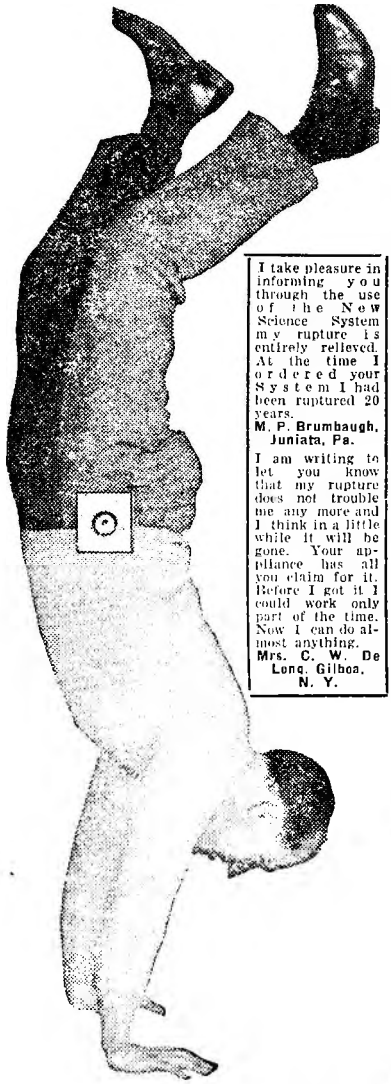

I take pleasure in informing you through the use of the New Science System my rupture is entirely relieved. At the time I ordered your System I had been ruptured 20 years.
M. P. Brumbaugh, Juniata, Pa.

I am writing to let you know that my rupture does not trouble me any more and I think in a little while it will be gone. Your appliance has all you claim for it. Before I got it I could work only part of the time. Now I can do almost anything.
Mrs. C. W. De Long, Gilboa, N. Y.

SCIENCE now advises discarding cruel steel springs, barbarous leg straps, and other harness that press against the rupture and thus prevent nature from healing it. A new sensible method has been perfected, after thousands of test cases, called Magic Dot—entirely different from any other way. Instead of "pressing" it "seals" rupture, and of course allows users to run, jump, bend and cough in perfect safety.

Breathes Air

With this 1-25th oz. device is a new kind of pad, air-porous and washable. It actually breathes air, and cannot slip off the rupture —a feature, you'll frankly admit, that is lacking in your present appliance. In fact, it is so superior and different that it is praised by physicians as "an entirely new departure." Users report they have forgotten they are wearing it. But don't buy it yet.

See It First

By a special arrangement you can now have it sent to your home without obligation to wear it. Don't send a penny or order it now. Just mail the coupon for full description of "Magic Dot" and details of this unusual offer. Act now for quick relief. Write your name and address on the coupon and mail it today!

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and put a twelve-and-one-half-inch pipe in the hole. This pipe prevents the water coming back up the hole and causing it to cave. At five hundred feet they will get more water sand and put ten-inch pipe in the well. At nine hundred feet they use eight-and-one-seventh-inch pipe, and at one thousand two hundred feet six and five eighths.

"They expect to get oil at about one thousand two hundred and fifty feet, but at this depth they get oil sand. This is drilled for one or two feet at a run. If they drill through the oil sand into water, this water must be plugged up or it will give quite a bit of trouble. The plugging is usually done by means of a lead plug or lead wall, whichever is the most practical. It consists of fastening a chunk of lead the same size as the hole on the bottom of the hole and drilling it on until it is battened out enough to keep the water from coming through. One or several plugs may be used.

"Our well is not ready to pump. A string of two-inch tubing is run to the bottom of the hole, with a series of valves and anchor working barrel on the bottom; this is connected to the storage tanks and a string of sucker rods is run into it with cups to pump with on the bottom. Then the top is packed in such a manner that the oil cannot come out and the rods will work free."

In addition to all this practical information about the oil fields, R. E., being a generous hombre, offers to answer questions about any of the fields he is familiar with, so letters from any of you who crave more knowledge on the subject will promptly be forwarded to him.

GHOST CITIES OF THE WEST

FEW things are more mournful and pathetic to see than those that have been deserted. An abandoned motor car by the roadside, while it never fails to provoke a smile, usually gets also the tribute of a sigh. A deserted house invariably wears a mournful air and inspires the observer with mournful thoughts, and for sheer somber sadness there is no sight so sorrowful as a deserted ship. The mind has difficulty, however, in grasping a deserted town, though there are many such, and prefers somehow to think of it as having been destroyed at one fell blow by some disaster of nature. Think of being the last person to leave a town, to go away, with many a backward glance, and leave one whole small world with no one to wave you a farewell!

Such, however, was the experience of one man recently, the last inhabitant of the town of Leadfield, in Inyo County, California—one of those ghost cities whose light failed with the failing of gold. In the winter of 1925, Leadfield, a little mining city spread on the sands of Death Valley's border, was as prosperous as any town in the throes of a spectacular mining boom. The crowds of persons who follow on the trail of gold flocked there in thousands, and the more hopeful talked bravely of a tourist resort on the desert's edge, railroads, population, and prosperity.

The dream city rose like magic in the imagination of these optimists—and then the dreams crumbled and the citizens came back to earth—and sand. For the gold field was soon worked over, the outcrop exhausted, the miners went broke and strayed off, in groups and singly, looking for new worlds to conquer, and the town was left with its ghosts of the past and its dead hopes to bury. The last inhabitant, a watchman, recently left the ghost city in charge of a final shipment of mining machinery. There is a certain pathos in the fact that the destination of both was said to be the town of Searchlight.

POWERLESS in the clutches of a desperate rustler band, father and daughter traveled southward to their doom. Hopelessly they eyed the moonlit reaches of the desert as they rode, seeing only shadowy clumps of sagebrush. Then, suddenly, to the west, a sage patch seemed to move!

Who was the shadowy rider who paralleled their dark trail? Was he friend or foe?

Read the answer in

Rider of the Shadows

By KENNETH PERKINS

This complete novelette appears in the April issue—out March 15th—of

FAR WEST STORIES

The Illustrated Western Monthly

Other stories in this issue include:

Coiled Peril

By CLINTON DANGERFIELD

The story of a man who wanted to believe in men, and of a snake that proved a guardian angel.

Buckskin Blights His Boss

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

No less amazing than the curse that Buckskin placed upon his unfeeling ex-boss were its consequences.

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New throughout. *New* beauty, *new* style, *new* comfort. *New* curving lines, *new* side wings—*new* contrast of *plain Blue Velour* arms and ends against *Blue and Taupe Figured Velour* seats, backs and wings. Rich and distinctive. New *low* CREDIT price, too—$49.95. $1 down. Year to Pay. 30 Days FREE trial. This striking suite has the *same quality, same workmanship, same sturdiness* as suites selling for $85 to $90 CASH. Think of it—you save almost ONE-HALF—all because of a new Spear idea.

And here's the new idea. The davenport is 63 inches wide, instead of 72 inches. (You'll have to measure it yourself before you believe it's not as large as the $85 models.) Removable cushions have been eliminated—thereby gaining a new smartness of line.

Simple—isn't it? Why wasn't it thought of long ago? Just think how easy it is to save folks $35 on their living room furniture. Smaller homes, smaller rooms are coming into vogue—smaller suites, too. *This one is slightly smaller in size—but bigger in real comfort and* BIGGER IN VALUE, *too!* We cut corners on costs without sacrificing quality—cut our profit, too!—to give you bigger value and make more friends for Spear.

Davenport, rocker and wing chair have comfortable side wings. The delightful curved backs invite lazy lounging. The sturdy hardwood frames are in rich Brown Mahogany finish. You will love the way the serviceable blue and taupe Figured Velour is tailored over the backs, wings and trim seats—so smooth and snug. For contrast there is plain Blue Velour over the roll arms and outside ends. Beautiful, serviceable!

30 Days Free Trial

Inner construction—5 coil springs in seat of each chair, 18 coil springs in seat of Davenport, together with high quality, sanitary, interior upholstering materials, thickly padded backs and seats—guarantees perfect comfort and long wear.

Note the size of these pieces: Davenport—width overall, 63 in.; between arms, 52 in. Arm Chair and Rocker—width overall, 33 in.; seats, 21 x 19 in.; height of backs from seats, 24½ in. Read these measurements over again. These pieces are the ideal size for the modern home! Send only $1. Use them for 30 days FREE. If you don't believe this Suite the greatest bargain of 1929, return it and we will refund your $1 and transportation charges both ways.

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Send me at once the 3-piece Overstuffed Velour Suite as described above. Enclosed is $1 first payment. It is understood that if at the end of 30 days trial, I am satisfied, I will send you $4.00 monthly. Order No. DA 4310. Sale Price $49.95. Title remains with you until paid in full.

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