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# WESTERN STORY

AUG. 2  
1936

## MAGAZINE

15¢

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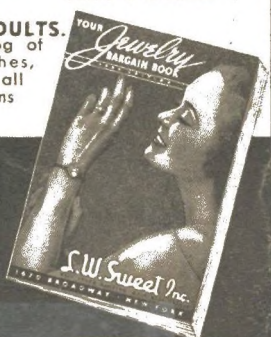
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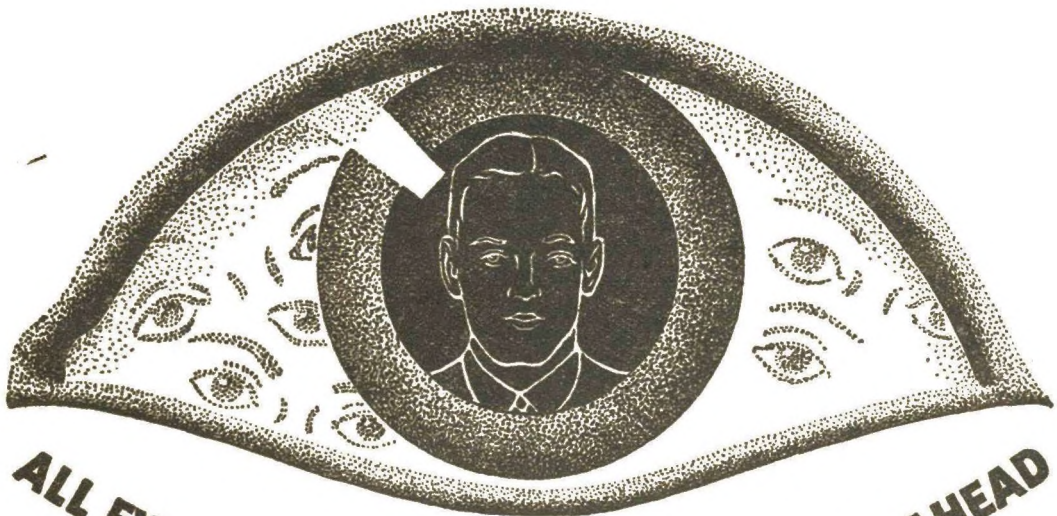


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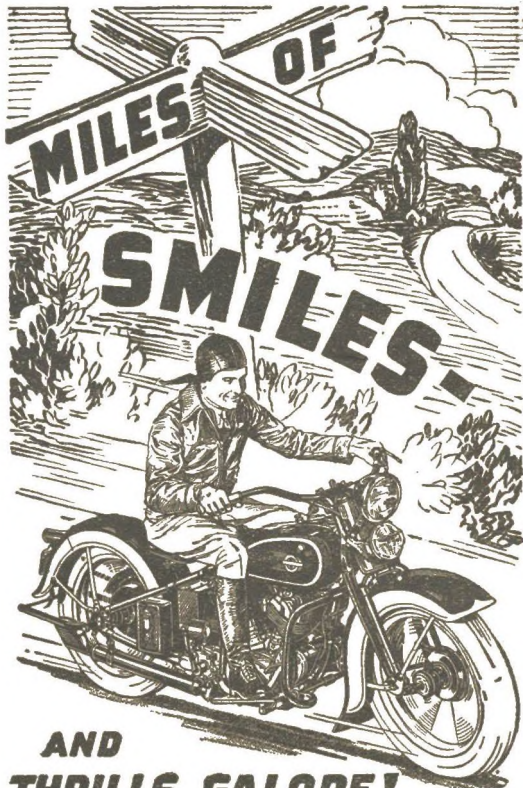
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# NO MAN'S SLAVE

By HARRY R. KELLER

IN his hut lay "Lobo" Torey,  
Stark and dead, stark and dead,  
With a gun wound, grim and gory,  
In his head.  
Tortured by a drunken slaying,  
"Mike the Mex" had done the slaying;  
Then into El Hoyo desert  
He had fled.

Mike the Mex was Lobo's flunky,  
Starved and thin, starved and thin,  
With the pathos of a monkey  
In his grin.  
Though his boss had been a bully,  
Harsh and cruel, Mike knew fully  
That the gringo's law would hang him  
For his sin.

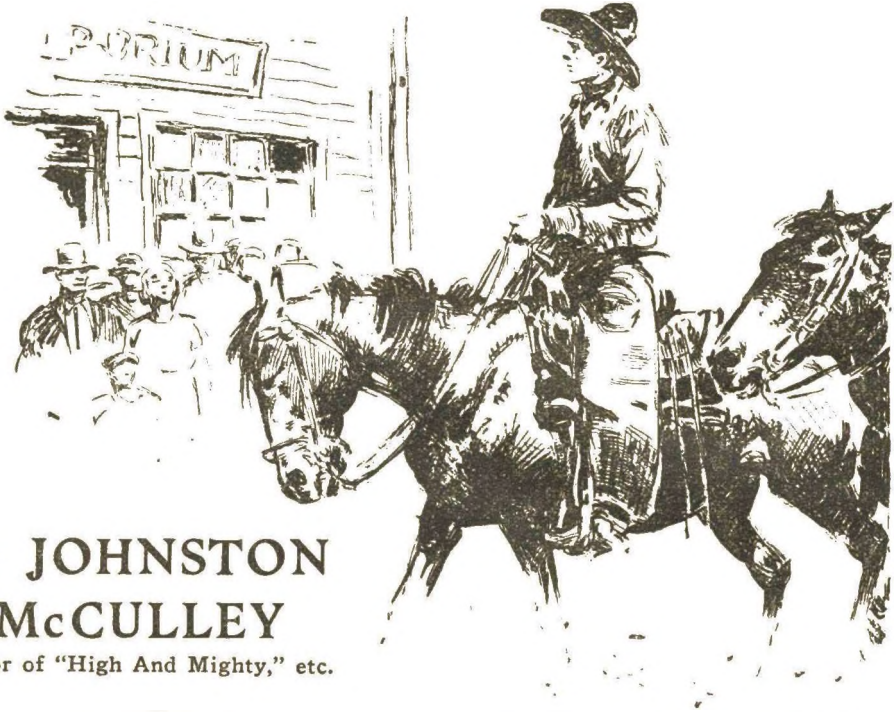
But the buzzards of El Hoyo  
Circled near, circled near,  
Where he crouched in an arroyo,  
Dumb with fear.  
And their grisly, silent wheeling  
Set his frenzied senses reeling,  
For their slow wings spoke a promise  
Dark and drear.

He would choose the gringo scaffold,  
Looming high, looming high!  
He would leave those gaunt birds baffled  
In the sky!  
Crazed with thirst and madly mumbling,  
Mike the Mex went blindly stumbling  
To the village of El Hoyo—  
Back to die.

But El Hoyo's sheriff met him,  
Kind and grave, kind and grave:  
"Lobo's dead; we don't regret him.  
You were brave.  
We have learned he was a bandit.  
The reward? You'll surely land it.  
Bless the buzzards! Be henceforward  
No man's slave."



# CIRCUS COWBOY



By **JOHNSTON  
McCULLY**

Author of "High And Mighty," etc.

## CHAPTER I.

### VACATION AT HOME.

**T**IM FORD sat in the open doorway of the fancy stock car just ahead of the caboose, with his feet hanging out and swinging, as the local freight train rattled and bumped over the rickety roadbed of the branch line.

An odor of hot grease and hot metal came from the jarring wheels and the stench of soft-coal combustion rolled back from the chugging locomotive ahead, but they were not strong enough to dispel entirely the fragrant aroma of sage in the air.

Tim Ford, generally a complaining sort of cuss, was not complaining

at all because the stiff wind blew cinders and dust and gritty sand into his face and down the open front of his shirt. He seemed to be enjoying what most other men probably would have considered discomfort.

Dog-gone! It sure was good, being back here where there was room for a man to stretch without bumping into somebody and plenty of air for him to breathe—nice, clean air with only natural aromas in it.

The odors of sawdust, sweating animals and circus gear were missing for once. Not that Tim Ford was averse to them—he liked them a lot. But this was something like getting back home for a vacation after a long season of hard work elsewhere.

He puffed a cigarette, hummed an





old range song and smiled, all at the same time. The eyes which had squinted quizzically at life for forty-five years surveyed now a panorama of sun-drenched, sage-dotted acreage which stretched away for endless miles with the black heat waves dancing across it, to the purple hills in the distance. Back there, Tim Ford knew, there were cool, green canyons and grass-covered slopes where horses and beef critters roamed and fed.

A lot of people, Tim Ford was aware, and some of them reputed to have intelligence, thought this was an ugly country and wondered why anybody lived in it. But it suited

Tim Ford. And he had seen all kinds of country, from one end of the land to the other—villages and towns and cities—during the time that he had been with the Super Amalgamated Circus.

He removed the cigarette from between his lips, yawned and stretched his arms, and glanced back into the padded stock car. Everything was all right. In one end, a spotted pony stood beside a magnificent sorrel. They were used to riding on a train. They were the pet mounts of Dave Jackson, star of the Wild West section of the Amalgamated.

In the other end of the car were several packing cases and crates,



circus blue in color, each stamped with Dave Jackson's name and that of the show. They held Dave Jackson's circus gear. Tim Ford could pack and unpack them in the dark. He had been Dave Jackson's right-hand man for four years. He took care of the gear, cared for Dave Jackson personally, and nobody else ever was allowed to care for Dave Jackson's two pet mounts.

The circus season was over. But no winter quarters for Dave Jackson this year! He was coming back to the range, for some mysterious reason unknown to Tim Ford, and he was bringing his two pet mounts and Tim Ford with him.

He hadn't told Tim much about the reason for this unusual move.

"Tim," he had said, "I'm goin' to spend the winter back in the home country. You want to come along?"

"You couldn't manage without me, Dave," Tim Ford had replied. "When do we start?"

So Dave Jackson had arranged for transportation, and they had done a lot of traveling, and finally here they were, within an hour of their destination. The car was to be set off at the little Arizona village of Rio Vista.

**W**HILE Tim Ford surveyed the passing scene from the door of the stock car, Dave Jackson was riding in the caboose, talking to the conductor and rear brakeman. He was twenty-eight, tall, slender and lithe, a resplendent figure in attire which represented what an ace circus cowboy should wear. From his fine hat to his fine boots, that costume had cost plenty of money. It was circus, all right! You didn't see men dressed like that working on the range.

"Yeah, I've been away from here for about six years," Dave Jackson

was telling the trainmen. "My dad owned half the Three V outfit. When he died, I sold the interest I inherited from him to Bill Blasell, his old partner, and pulled up stakes."

"Old Bill Blasell owns all the Three V now, huh?" the conductor asked.

"Yeah. He and my dad started the outfit. Blasell wanted me to stay on after dad died, but I just couldn't. I'd been a rodeo winner, and the roar of the crowd had got into my blood. So I drifted into the circus game, and made good, and stayed there."

"I'll say you made good!" the conductor praised. "Been makin' plenty of money, too, huh?"

"Yeah. But I already had plenty. Dad left me well fixed. I didn't waste what I got for his share of the Three V outfit. Salted most of it away. I've had a grand time with the circus. But this"—and Dave Jackson waved his hand to indicate the country they could see through the dirt-streaked window of the caboose—"well, this is home, I reckon. The only real home I ever knew. I was born and raised hereabouts. I'm glad to be back."

"You goin' to stay long?"

"Can't say. I decided to spend the off season here 'stead of back East as usual. Want to freshen up. I might pick up some good horses for the show, too, and train 'em a bit. We always need good new stock."

"That Three V sure was a great outfit once," the conductor declared.

"Once?" Dave Jackson showed his surprise.

"Yeah. Somethin's been happenin' to it. Don't know what, exactly, but I've been hearin' rumors. Some sort of range ruckus, I reckon. And old Bill Blasell—I understand he's pretty sick. Got hurt about a



year and a half ago, and didn't mend right."

"He's one fine old gent," Dave Jackson said.

"I saw him at the Rio Vista depot once, with his daughter, Nancy. She's a pippin!"

"Nancy?" Dave Jackson grinned. "I can't see her as a pippin, but then I've been lookin' over the best of 'em everywhere the last few years. I was raised with Nancy Blasell. My mother died when I was six, and Nancy's mother raised us both. She was a fine woman—died about four years ago. When I went away, Nancy was about sixteen and had skinny legs and arms. And freckles! She was as awkward as a newborn calf."

"Everything and everybody changes," the conductor said.

He turned to his desk and way-bills, and Dave Jackson looked through the dirty window of the caboose again and did some thinking. He felt that trouble was in the air.

**D**URING his absence, Blasell had written him at long intervals, but only scraps of news. His wife had died, his daughter Nancy was getting to be a fine young woman, he'd built a new barn—that sort of thing. But this last letter he had written—

Dave Jackson took a soiled envelope from his pocket and drew a crumpled sheet of paper from the envelope. He read Bill Blasell's letter again:

Dave, lad, I wish you could come home for a spell. I just can't handle things by myself, and I'm sorry to say there's nobody I can trust. I ain't got any son, only a daughter. She's fine, my Nancy is, but it's not like as if she was a man. Can't you come to see us when the circus season is over, and stay quite a time? We need

you, boy, or I sure wouldn't bother you. Maybe you could get things straightened out.

That was all. It certainly didn't go into details, but Dave Jackson gathered that his father's old partner was in some sort of serious trouble. Bill Blasell wasn't one to squawk for help unless he needed it badly.

Dave Jackson had made a quick decision, had written he was coming, and later had wired the time of his arrival, knowing his telegram would be sent out to the ranch, fifteen miles from town. He hoped it had cheered Bill Blasell.

"'Bout half an hour more, Mr. Jackson," the conductor warned.

"Thanks. I'll go into the car and see how Tim Ford and the horses are gettin' along."

**H**E crawled up through the cupola of the caboose and went over the top to the next car. A trapdoor in the car roof was open for ventilation, and Dave Jackson dropped down through it, hit the floor on his toes, and went to sit beside Tim Ford.

"Almost there, Tim," he said.

"Yeah? Be glad to get away from this blamed railroad," Tim Ford replied. "I notice you've got your gun buckled on. Is it goin' to be that kind of a home-comin'?"

"I don't know, Tim. It seems that Bill Blasell's in trouble of some kind, but he didn't write anything except that he needed help. We might be steppin' into a ruckus."

"It's sure been a long time," Tim Ford said, "since I've mingled in a range ruckus. Course, I've mingled in a circus ruckus now and then, which ain't so bad. But there's nothin' like a good, old-fashioned

range ruckus to get a man's fightin' blood boilin'. Reckon I'd better open my war bag and get out my own hardware."

"Leave it till it's needed," Dave Jackson ordered.

"Whatever you say, Dave. But I'm aimin' to keep my knife in my belt."

"That'll be all right, Tim."

Tim Ford had one eccentricity which made some men wonder. He had a long, double-edged hunting knife of fine steel which he carried in a leather scabbard attached to his belt on the left side.

He used the knife for almost everything. It was handy when there was a rope or strap to be cut, and it worked to advantage on a plug of chewing tobacco. Also, with its needlelike point pressed against a man's ribs, it was a great persuader. Tim Ford knew that many men who will face a gun and sneer at the latent death in it will flinch at sight of a knife.

The train chugged on. The locomotive whistle cut the air with a screech. Dave Jackson leaned from the car door and looked ahead at a long curve. In the distance beside the track was a cluster of sun-blistered buildings.

"There's Rio Vista," Dave Jackson said. "We're home, Tim. Anyhow, I am."

"So'm I," Tim Ford declared. "I came from Montana, and this here is Arizona—but, what's the diff? I'm home anywhere there's brush and burs, dust and sand, horses and beef critters."

Dave Jackson looked ahead again. "Seems to be quite a lot of folks around the depot," he remarked.

Tim Ford grinned. "Always is, when the circus train rolls in."

## CHAPTER II.

### NEST OF ENEMIES.

THE train clattered over the switches and stopped near the depot. The caboose was cut off and left. The train went on, backed into a switch and spotted Dave Jackson's car, pulled up, got on the main, and backed to catch the caboose again. Then the locomotive whistle gave a toot of warning and the train went clattering on westward and out of sight.

Dave Jackson and Tim Ford jumped down out of the car and stretched and looked around. The depot was about a hundred feet away, and at least a score of men were gathered at the end of the platform. Dave Jackson had anticipated an amount of hand shaking and back slapping, but nobody approached.

"I asked Blasell in my letter to send in a wagon to carry our stuff," Dave Jackson said to Tim. "That's probably it at the end of the platform with the mule team. The mules are wearin' Three V brands. We'll ride the horses out to the ranch."

"This here reception committee seems afraid of us," Tim Ford said. "Maybe they ain't ever met up with a famous gent like you before."

"Oh, some of the old Three V boys probably will be showin' up soon," Dave Jackson replied. "We'll probably have a tough time keepin' sober. While we're waitin', we might as well get the stuff out of the car."

They had a horse chute in the car, an easily-handled unloading chute borrowed from the circus, and they started getting it into position. When it was secure, they led the two mounts down it and tied them to a post. The men by the depot



watched, but did not come near. Dave Jackson wondered at that.

They tumbled the packing cases down the chute and dismantled the chute itself. As they were finishing, an old man came hobbling up to them.

"Well, if it ain't Dave!" he squeaked.

"Grandpap Hyams, you old so-and-so!"

"I was busy at the store, Dave, or I'd been here sooner."

"Busy in the saloon, you mean," Dave Jackson said, grinning at him. "It sure seems like old times seein' you, Grandpap."

"I'm to take your stuff out in the wagon, lad," "Grandpap" Hyams explained. "I'll drive over here, so's loadin' will be easy. You want to travel with me and lead them horses, or ride 'em?"

"We'll ride," Dave answered. "This is Tim Ford, Grandpap. Tim, open that case and get out our ridin' gear."

Grandpap Hyams stepped closer, as some of the men at the depot finally began approaching. His watery eyes were blinking rapidly, his thin chin bobbed up and down and made his scraggy beard jerk in grotesque fashion.

"Keep your eyes and ears open, lad," the old man whispered. "Some-thing's wrong hereabouts. Just be wise and act natural."

"What you mean?" Dave asked.

A loud voice roared at them:

"Get busy there, Grandpap! Fetch your wagon around and get it loaded."

Dave Jackson glanced up quickly to see a middle-aged, swarthy man, short and thick in body, swaggering toward him. Dave disliked him at sight. And he resented the tone he had used to old Grandpap Hyams.

"Just who are you?" Dave demanded.

"I'm Jeff King, the Three V foreman. You're Dave Jackson, I reckon. Nobody could mistake you, with that circus get-up you've got on. Them clothes don't suit this country."

**D**AVE JACKSON glared at him. "I've probably spent more years around the Rio Vista range than you," he replied. "I wear what clothes I please, and I don't like remarks about 'em."

"The hombres hereabouts don't care for dudes much," Jeff King said.

"Why, you big hunk of cheese!" Tim Ford exclaimed, starting forward. "Who are you to talk to Dave Jackson like that? Get back in your stall!"

"That'll be enough from you, stranger!" King warned.

"You're louder than a ringmaster and ain't got as much manners as a guy in the stake gang," Tim said.

"That'll do, Tim," Dave Jackson put in. He turned to face the Three V foreman again. "Did Mr. Blasell send you in to meet me?"

"He told me to see that a wagon was here to haul out your stuff, and I sent Grandpap Hyams with one. I came in myself just to see the sights."

"Meanin' me?"

"Well, you're sure a sight with them fancy clothes on. Look like a desert sunset. We're regular, hard-workin, cowpokes hereabouts, not circus fakes. Wild West star, huh? A soft dude——"

"Let me at him, Dave!" Tim Ford begged.

Dave waved him back and took a step toward the foreman. "So you think I'm a soft dude?" he asked. "We'll take that up later, Mr. King, at the ranch. We can load the

wagon without any of your help. Grandpap Hyams can drive it. Tim and I will ride our own horses. I know the trail. Now, Mr. Jeff King, you can get the hell away from here and take your bad manners with you! You're foulin' up good air."

Jeff King curled his lips, then turned and walked back to the others. Dave Jackson motioned for Tim Ford to open a packing case which contained their horse gear.

"Well, what the——" Tim began.

"Careful!" Dave Jackson warned. "Hold yourself in. I don't know what this means, and we'll go slow till we get our bearin's. Grandpap Hyams started to warn me about somethin'. Get our ridin' gear out, Tim. While you're at it, you might as well open your war bag and get out your six-gun, too."

"So they think you're a soft dude!" Tim Ford said, chuckling. "Maybe they think I'm a push-around, too. If they only knew what a tough bunch the show crowd can be when gents get to talkin' out of turn."

"We haven't got the show crowd with us now, Tim."

"Wish we had! If we had only Rio Grande Riley with us, the three of us could mop up this bunch of cowpokes before next mealtime."

They opened the packing case and got out bridles, saddles, saddle blankets and other gear. They took the blankets off the spotted pony and sorrel and packed them in the case, then made their mounts ready for the trail. Grandpap Hyams drove up the wagon.

Jeff King and a few of the others approached again and kept in the near vicinity, watching and listening. Dave supposed that was to keep Grandpap Hyams from saying anything. He helped Tim Ford load

the packing cases into the wagon, also the crates and loading chute.

"Stop at the saloon, Grandpap, and we'll have a celebration drink," Dave Jackson said.

Jeff King barked: "You hit for the ranch right away with that wagon, Grandpap. No stoppin' anywhere! I'm givin' the orders for the Three V outfit. Get goin'!"

Grandpap Hyams's old eyes flashed, but without a word he got upon the wagon seat and started his mules. Dave got on the sorrel and Tim mounted the spotted pony, and they rode past the group and the depot and went up Rio Vista's dusty street.

THE store and saloon were adjoining buildings in Rio Vista. Dave stopped at the hitch rail in front of the store and dismounted, and Tim Ford dismounted beside him.

"There's no rust," Dave said. "It only fifteen miles to the ranch, and it's not noon yet. Let's do some smellin' around here in town."

"Ain't smelled anything so far but skunk," Tim Ford replied.

"This situation may be serious, Tim. Somethin' sure is wrong. Haven't seen a man I know, except Grandpap Hyams. I'll learn a lot when I get a chance to talk to him. Learn the whole thing from Bill Blasell when we get to the ranch, I reckon."

As they entered the saloon, they glanced back down the street and saw that the men who had been at the depot were riding toward them. Dave went into the saloon with Tim Ford close behind him. The man behind the bar was a stranger to Dave, and the dozen men in the place were strangers, too.

A home-town boy who had gone out into the world to become a star



performer at a big salary, would be expected to treat the townsmen. Dave Jackson intended doing that now. But he heard horses being stopped out in front, and waited for the riders to come in.

He stood at the head of the bar with Tim Ford. The bartender put out a bottle and glasses. Dave and Tim poured their drinks. Men lurched in from the street, Jeff King with them.

"I'm buyin' for everybody in the house, gents," Dave Jackson said. "Everybody to the bar!"

None answered him. None started forward. They looked at him blankly. Here was an intentional insult which could not be allowed to pass unnoticed.

"Maybe you hombres didn't understand," Tim Ford said, his eyes blazing and his fists doubled, as he stepped out from the bar a few feet before Dave Jackson could stop him. "This here is Mr. Dave Jackson, star of the Wild West section of the Super Amalgamated Circus. He's invitin' you to have a drink with him. I might mention that such an invitation'd be considered an honor anywhere in the country. It's a double honor for you hombres, 'cause this is Dave Jackson's old home. You're a hell of a bunch of friends and neighbors! If it was me, I'd see you choke before I'd buy you a drink!"

"That's enough out of you, little man!" Jeff King snapped.

"Yeah? You're the local tough guy, maybe." Tim Ford walked toward him before Dave could prevent it. "You tryin' to make big talk to me, you poor hick?"

"Get back to the bar, or I'll slap you down!"

"You'll slap who down?" Tim Ford barked, walking on. He did not offer to touch the gun he had

buckled on down by the depot. But his right hand made a swift move, and something flashed in the light, and Jeff King felt something sharp against his stomach.

The Three V foreman glanced down quickly, and his face went white. He gulped, licked at lips suddenly dry when he caught sight of the knife.

"One little flip, hombre, and your insides are outside," Tim Ford said, pleasantly. "Nobody can insult Dave Jackson while I'm around."

"That'll do, Tim!" Dave said. "Come back here."

"Whatever you say, Dave." Tim Ford sheathed the knife as quickly as he had drawn it, and stepped reluctantly back toward the bar.

"Gents, the drink offer is withdrawn," Dave Jackson said. "I drink only with my friends. I can't imagine what you gents have against me, but I'll dangled well make it my business to learn."

"We don't like dudes and circus fakes around here, and we don't like men who use knives," Jeff King said.

"I'm bettin' you don't!" Tim Ford told him. "And remember this, hombre—I can throw a knife as well as slit with it. I can put the blade through your right forearm before you can draw your gun. If you don't believe it, try."

"That's enough, Tim," Dave Jackson said. "Let's take our drinks."

### CHAPTER III.

#### MET ON THE TRAIL.

THEY drank, then rolled cigarettes, taking their time about it, acting as though oblivious of the presence of others. There was silence in the room save for a nervous scuffing of boots on the rough floor. Dave Jackson

finally touched Tim Ford on the arm and led the way to the door.

He wanted to avoid serious trouble, and he had the feeling that Jeff King and the others wished to force it on him. Dave did not want to make a move of any sort until he had gotten to the ranch, and had seen Bill Blasell and learned what was going on. To get to the ranch safely was the first thing.

He could not understand the obvious enmity of the Three V foreman. Dave's father had helped build up the Three V, and he had been born and raised on it. So he was entitled to some consideration as a native product. Everybody on the range knew that.

"Thousands and thousands of folks," Tim Ford was muttering, "cheer and throw fits when Dave Jackson does his stuff under the big top. He's a hero, he is! But when he gets back to his own home town—man!"

"We'll find out the rights of this, Tim, before we make a move."

"Unless they force us to make a move before we find out."

"We've got to guard against that. So you be danged careful, and watch your temper."

"I could have slit that big ape!"

"Why the devil didn't Bill Blasell give me a hint in his letter 'bout what's goin' on? Bein' ignorant, I don't know how to act," Dave Jackson complained.

"What you goin' to do, Dave?"

"We'll hit for the ranch, and get there as quick as we can. Bill Blasell may be needin' us. And we sure want to get some information from him."

As they went to their horses, men surged from the saloon and stood on the walk watching them. The pair

mounted and rode slowly up the street toward the north trail. The others did not mount to follow, as Dave Jackson had half expected they would.

On the trail, they touched with the spurs. The big sorrel and spotted pony were trained arena horses, pampered and petted animals when with the circus, but that did not detract from their speed, stamina and sure-footedness. They traveled along at a good rate of speed.

"I've been expectin' to overtake Grandpap Hyams drivin' the wagon," Dave Jackson said, when they were out from town about five miles. "He couldn't have traveled fast with that heavy load. But, where's the wagon?"

"Can't see it on the trail ahead, and we sure can see for some distance," Tim Ford replied.

"I'll bet they sidetracked Grandpap back in town, got him and the wagon out of sight till we were on our way. They were afraid he'd tell me somethin'. Let's get on to the ranch, Tim."

They rode on, the sun blazing down at them and a high wind swirling the fine dust about them. They pulled down their hats and pulled up their neckcloths to their eyes, sagged in their saddles and jogged on.

FROM the crest of a hill, where they stopped to give their mounts a short rest, they could see the winding trail for miles ahead. It ran down a long slope, curved, went through a narrow rocky pass, then on into a broad valley where cattle fed on the slopes.

"The Three V is just out of sight around that last bend," Dave Jackson said. "It'll be fine, seein' it again."

"Maybe," Tim Ford told him. "If what we ran into back in town is



a sample of your home-comin' reception, maybe it won't be so fine."

"If Bill Blasell's in trouble, I'll go the limit for him, Tim. But everything seems to be in a fog. Won't be cleared up, I reckon, till we get to the ranch and learn what's what. Let's be ridin' on."

They covered a few more miles, and came finally to where the trail narrowed to go through the little pass. In the shade cast by a ledge of rock, two riders were waiting.

Dave and Tim eyed them as they approached, and both made sure their six-guns were handy. Dave did not know the men ahead. One was tall, swarthy, and sat his saddle gracefully. He wore a sombrero with a carved-leather band, a beaded vest, gauntlets with long fringe on the cuffs, a silk shirt and neckcloth.

"Must be a rival circus hereabouts," Tim Ford muttered.

The second rider was heavy and middle-aged. He had a black mustache that was heavier on one side. His eyes were narrow and glinted, his expression surly.

"Howdy, hombres!" Dave Jackson said, as they drew near.

"Howdy!" the heavy man growled.

Both Dave and Tim had a feeling that they did not wish to ride past and have those other two at their backs. The taller man, however, straightened in his saddle, lifted a hand, and showed white teeth in a smile.

"Ah! It is Señor Dave Jackson, the famous circus cowboy, is it not?" he asked.

"The Dave Jackson part's all right," Dave said, as he pulled rein with Tim Ford beside him.

"Allow me, señor—I am Carlos Ortega, the big man of the valley, as you might say."

**WS-2B**

"Of this valley?" Dave Jackson grinned. "I happen to know all about this valley. Last I heard, Bill Blasell was the big man hereabouts."

"Perhaps you have not heard for some time, señor?" Carlos Ortega intimated. "I know about you, señor. You have been gone for six years, and there have been many changes. The Three V—it is a fine cattle outfit. But, some time ago, I bought the Bar Box, which you probably remember, and also the Diamond Star and a couple of smaller outfits. So I am, as you see, the big man of the valley now. This man beside me is Señor Sam Potter, my valuable assistant."

"Well, howdy!" Dave Jackson said. "Let's be ridin' on, Tim."

"One moment, señor, please!" Carlos Ortega said. "I understand you are on a visit to your old home."

"That's right."

"Ah, señor, a visit to an old home is delicious, unless it is prolonged. You will spend perhaps a week or so?"

Dave Jackson's eyes gleamed as he leaned forward in the saddle. "I'm intendin' to spend the winter here," he replied. "Maybe I'll pick up a couple of good horses and train 'em for the circus. You got any objections?"

"Who am I, señor, to have objections? And why should I have?"

"That's the point—why should you have?" Dave asked. "I was born and raised on this range. It's my real home. Six years and all the changes around here can't change that. You seem to be hintin' that you don't want me around here."

"If I suggest, señor, that your visit to your old home be a short one, it is only because I am concerned about your welfare," Carlos Ortega

said. "You are a great rodeo performer, señor. It would be a shame to deprive the public of your exhibitions."

**T**IM FORD boiled over. "What are you gettin' at?" he demanded. "You tryin' to make big talk to Dave Jackson? We had a hombre somethin' like you start a season with us a couple of years ago. At the end of a couple of weeks, some of the boys started walkin' straight at him one night, and he turned and walked right away from 'em, and kept right on walkin'."

"That's enough talk from you!" Sam Potter said.

"So you're aimin' to take me on while your fancy boss takes on Dave Jackson—that it?" Tim Ford snapped. "Well, dog-gone! It looks to me like there ought to be a few more changes in this part of the country."

"Hold it, Tim!" Dave ordered. He looked straight at Carlos Ortega. "I don't know what you're meanin' by your hints," he said. "And maybe I don't care a cuss. I'm here to visit Bill Blasell at the Three V. I'm here as long as Bill Blasell wants me, and I'm here to play any game he wants played and ain't able to play himself. Is that clear enough?"

"Something tells me, señor, that we are not to be very great friends," Ortega insinuated.

"And somethin' tells me, right out loud, that I ain't carin' to be friends at all," Dave replied. "If you hombres are ridin' toward town, ride right along. We ain't turnin' our backs on you till you're out of six-gun range."

"Señor!" Carlos Ortega's eyes flamed.

Sam Potter started to drop his

right hand off the pommel of his saddle. Tim Ford saw the move.

"Don't do it, hombre!" Tim barked. His six-gun had appeared in his hand, and he was holding it ready. "Dang me, if I ever did see such a country! How you ever expect her to grow, if you insult and threaten visitors?"

"We shall meet again, señores!" Carlos Ortega declared, angrily. "Come along, Potter."

Sam Potter did some glaring at Tim Ford, then wheeled his pony and rode away slowly beside Ortega. Neither of them looked back. Dave Jackson and Tim watched until they were some distance away, then turned their own mounts toward the ranch.

"This sure has me puzzled," Dave declared. "So this Carlos Ortega owns all the valley except the Three V, huh? But why should he object to me visitin' my old home? And why did Bill Blasell's own foreman act toward me that way?"

"Me, I'm commencin' to miss the boys," Tim Ford declared. "I've got a feelin' that maybe we'll be wishin' we had the gang near us. We'll be yellin, 'Hey, Rube!', and there won't be anybody to answer and help us in a ruckus. I wish Rio Grande Riley had come along with us."

"Whatever this is, we can handle it alone," Dave replied. "Have to, as a matter of fact. Let's see if we can get the rest of the way to the ranch without havin' a run-in with anybody else."

They galloped around a curve and saw the buildings of the Three V a short distance ahead. In a few minutes, they were riding at a canter down a twisting lane bordered with trees. They could see a man fussing around down by the bunk house, and a couple near the corral. Otherwise, the Three V seemed deserted.



## CHAPTER IV.

AT THE THREE V.

**D**ISMOUNTING in front of the sprawling ranch house, they tied their mounts to posts and went up the steps to the veranda. The men down by the corral had glanced at them and then had gone about their work.

At this door, which he had entered so many times as a child and growing man, Dave Jackson knocked and waited. It seemed strange to be here at the Three V and realize that he was only a visitor. He grinned nervously as he turned and glanced at Tim Ford, who had kept back by the railing.

There was a wait. As Dave was about to knock again, the door was opened. A young woman stood there—a girl of twenty-two who came close to being a beauty.

"Is— Can it be Nancy?" Dave Jackson asked.

"It is! You're Dave, of course. You look pretty much the same."

As matter-of-fact as that! Nancy Blasell evidently had forgotten their close comradeship, that they had both been born in this house, had been raised together.

"This is Tim Ford, my right-hand man," Dave said.

Nancy nodded. "Come on in," she said.

She went ahead of them through a little hall and into a big living room. She looked healthy, full of life, yet her manner was listless.

Tim Ford dropped into a chair, and Dave remained standing beside a table.

"Nancy girl, how—how's everything?" he asked. "How's your father?"

Her eyes filled with tears. "He's

sleeping now. He had one of his bad spells an hour ago."

"You sit down and make some fast talk," Dave said. "I want to know what's wrong. I didn't get treated very well in Rio Vista this mornin'. Your foreman, Jeff King, didn't make me real welcome. And we met a couple of hombres in the trail, who said they were Carlos Ortega and Sam Potter——"

"What did they do?" She looked up quickly.

"This Ortega told me he owned almost all the valley, and gave me a hint to cut my visit short. What's it all mean, Nancy?"

"Do you care much, Dave?"

"Why shouldn't I care?"

"Well, you—you're a big man, I suppose. And we're only a couple of people out in the middle of nowhere tryin' to raise beef critters."

"Stop that!" Dave interrupted. "You ain't your old self at all."

"Dad sent for you," she said. "I'd never have done it. He wrote the letter one day and got Grandpap Hyams to sneak it out and mail it."

**S**NEAK a letter out of his own house? What on earth is goin' on around here?" Dave demanded.

"Why should you care? You sold out your share to dad and went away. You had to see the world. You didn't realize what that meant to dad. He looked on you as—well, almost as a son. He wanted you to stay and help run the ranch. He thought you'd have the finest outfit in the State some day. And it broke his heart when you made him buy your share, and went away. But you had to be a circus cowboy. You liked to hear the band play and listen to the crowd cheer."

"Oh, cut that!" Dave said. "I'm

back, and ready to help. Tell me where to start, what the trouble is. What's it all mean?"

"We got along as usual till dad got hurt," she said. "He was hurt pretty bad, and the doctor had to give him medicine to ease the pain. Dad's been in bed the most of the time this last year and a half."

"Who's this Jeff King?"

"He came from New Mexico. Dad hired him, and made him foreman. He was a good hand, and knew the cow business. And now—well, he seems to have us in his power somehow."

"How could he, dang it?"

"Dad didn't notice when it started, and I was so worried about dad that I didn't pay much attention to ranch business. Jeff King began getting rid of the old hands. One by one, they quit and drifted away, and Jeff King would replace them. When dad got bad, Jeff King got him to write a note saying that he put King in full charge."

"That old game!" Dave broke in.

"This Carlos Ortega came here and began buying in the valley. I think Jeff King is working for him more than for us. The Three V has been going to pieces. Grandpap Hyams is the only one of the old-timers left here."

"How about the business end?" Dave asked.

"All I know is that last year we about broke even, and this year there was a big loss."

"Loss? The last two years should have been good. I watch the cattle business, even if I am with a circus."

"Jeff King tends to the business. Dad signs papers, and does things like that, whenever Jeff King asks him. I haven't been able to do anything about it."

"Well, why don't you consult some of your friends?"

"Carlos Ortega bought out most of them, and they moved away. I saw a lawyer in the county seat, but he couldn't help. The old sheriff's dead, and the new one doesn't know much about things, or doesn't care."

"And your dad ain't able to do anything?"

"It's the spells he has, Dave. The doctor doesn't come any more—says he can't do anything."

"What kind of spells?"

"He just—just passes out, Dave. Sleeps heavy. His mind doesn't seem to work right. I don't mean he's insane—his mind seems to be a blank at times."

"When does he get these spells?"

"A little after he eats, usually. He generally seems better first thing in the morning."

"And this Jeff King's got all the old hands fired and put in his own men?" Dave asked. "He's really runnin' the Three V to suit himself, and you think he's maybe too friendly with this Carlos Ortega?"

"Yes, that's it. But maybe it's nothing but suspicion. I haven't proof of anything, Dave."

"Why haven't you fired him?"

"I threatened to do that, once. He laughed. Said I was only a girl and didn't understand business, and that he had the paper dad signed which gave him the right to tend to things. And he said, too, that if he went all the men would go with him, and that we wouldn't be able to get any more, because they'd be run off."

"Oh, he did?" Dave Jackson's anger was commencing to mount. "Looks to me, Nancy, like the old game. Your dad's helpless, and maybe this Carlos Ortega wants the Three V. It'd be the old game to break down the outfit and then try to buy it cheap."



I THOUGHT it was that old game, too, but I guess it isn't, Dave. I spoke to Ortega about buying us out. I thought maybe we should sell, that I should take dad away where he could get proper medical treatment. But Ortega didn't want to buy."

"That sounds funny."

"Not even at a bargain price. Had all the property he wanted, he told me."

"Does this Carlos Ortega ever come around here?"

"Oh, yes. He seems to think I should fancy him."

"Why, the——" Dave checked himself. He began pacing around the room. He stopped in front of her again. "Nancy, somethin' is wrong, of course. Somethin's crooked. I wish I'd known it before. I'd have dropped everything, even in the middle of the season, and come right here."

"It's nice of you to take an interest," she said.

"Nancy! Don't talk to me like that! Gosh, we—we were boy and girl together. Your mother raised me!"

"Your father and mine built up the Three V," she broke in. "They thought it'd belong to us some day. They even thought, I suppose, that we'd be married some day and live on here." She laughed a little. "But, as soon as your father died, you had to get away. If you'd just gone traveling to see the world for a year, it wouldn't have been so bad. But you went into a new life, cut us off completely——"

"Nancy! I'm here now——"

"Too late to do much of anything, I think," she said. "Somehow, Dave you aren't the hero to me now that you used to be. But I shouldn't be talking like this in front of Mr. Ford."

"Listen! He isn't 'Mr. Ford,' he's 'Tim.' A finer hombre never lived. He's in on anything I'm in on. He's watched over me like an old hen over a chick. He's guarded me and —— We're pals! And we're both here with our sleeves rolled up, ready to help."

From an adjoining bedroom came the sound of a man's voice.

"It's father. He's awake," Nancy Blasell said. "I'll tell him you're here."

She disappeared into the bedroom, and Dave Jackson beckoned Tim Ford to his side.

"Somethin's mighty wrong, Tim," he said. "Even you must see that. Knowin' everything hereabouts as I do, I can tell——"

"We've got a ruckus on our hands," Tim Ford broke in. "Lead me to it!"

Nancy Blasell opened the door. "Come on in," she said.

Tim Ford followed Dave into the room. Bill Blasell was propped up in bed with pillows behind his back. His face was thin, white, his eyes large and shining.

"Dave!" he muttered. "Boy, I'm glad to see you again! How fine you're lookin'. Just like your father did at the same age. I—I'm glad you came home, lad."

"I'm here to do anything I can, sir." Dave knelt at the side of the bed and took Bill Blasell's hand, and looked at him searchingly. "Glad you sent for me."

"Did I—send for you? Forgot it, I reckon. But I'm glad I did."

"I've still got your letter. You just tell me where to start in. This is Tim Ford, the best pardner a man ever had, and he's spoilin' for a ruckus."

Bill Blasell's hand groped, his eyes closed. "Sleepy," he muttered.

**D**AVE JACKSON got up and stepped back. He glanced at Tim, and Tim nodded his head. They tiptoed toward the door, and Dave motioned for Nancy to follow him into the living room.

"What is it, Dave?" she asked. "You look so strange. Dad—he isn't——"

"Not that," Dave said. He stepped up to her and put his arm around her shoulders. When she tried to draw away, Dave held her. "Listen, Nancy! One look was enough for me, and for Tim, too. I've been out in the world, remember, where a man runs against such things."

"What do you mean, Dave?"

"Your dad—— He's doped. Drugged! They've been keepin' him that way maybe so's they could handle him. Who does the cookin' now?"

"A chink. Jeff King hired him."

"That's probably the answer."

"Why, if he'd do a thing like that to my dad—— I'll go into the kitchen and——"

"Whoa!" Dave said. "Not so fast. I've got a scheme. We mustn't let them know that we're wise till we can get your dad all straightened out. Let 'em think he's gettin' the dope regular. How is he fed?"

"The cook gets a tray ready, and I carry it in to dad."

"All right. Keep on takin' the tray as usual, and get rid of the food somehow. But don't let your dad eat a bite, or drink a sip, that you don't know's all right. We can figure out some way for you to cook his food yourself."

"That'll be easy," she replied. "The chink lives in the bunk house, and he cooks for the hands, too, at the cook shack. He's away from the

house a lot after he does the morning cleaning."

"This is maybe goin' to be a touchy game," Dave said. "We want to learn what's at the bottom of it. And we want to keep from a show-down till we know everything, if we can. Understand?"

"Yes, Dave."

"And you're trustin' me?"

She looked straight at him. "I have to. There's nobody else to trust. But you—well, you're something like a stranger, Dave. You've been away so long, and with different kinds of people. Maybe I'll get to trust you fully again, sometime."

"Got a place where Tim and I can bunk?"

"Your own old room, Dave."

"That's fine! Our things are comin' out in the wagon Grandpap Hyams is drivin'."

"Put your horses in the corral or barn," she said.

"We'll manage. You stop worryin', now. Tim and me—we can take care of ourselves, and we're here to help you and your dad."

"You'll only get into trouble, Dave, perhaps. And since you've no real interest——"

"No real interest? Just 'cause I don't own any of the Three V any more? Why, Nancy, I—I don't understand what you're talkin' about. Why, your dad, and you, and the Three V—are home, the only home I've got! Bein' away six years with the circus—I was just away workin', let's say. And now I'm back—home!"

"Yeah, and as far as trouble's concerned, we love it, miss," Tim Ford added. "I was complainin' because I thought it'd be a mite tame here this winter. Be glad for a little excitement."

"You just do as I say, Nancy, and back up any play we make," Dave



told her. "We'll get at the truth of this thing first, then maybe there'll be some fireworks."

## CHAPTER V.

### A LITTLE FIST WORK.

THEY unsaddled at the corral, turned their horses in, and put their gear in a little adobe shed by the corral gate. The two men who had been working near the corral had disappeared, also the one who had been loitering around the bunk house. Nor did Dave and Tim Ford see anybody when they made a tour of the out-buildings, Dave wishing to renew his acquaintance with the old place.

"We're about as welcome around here as a blizzard in June," Tim Ford remarked, as he rolled a cigarette. "I sure wish we had Rio Grande Riley and some of the boys from the show right here with us now. They'd appreciate bein' here, too. A lot of 'em don't have much fun worryin' through the winter."

"Well, they ain't here," Dave Jackson said. "The main thing's to help Bill Blasell and Nancy. They're standin' alone against the crowd, except for us. You can bet Carlos Ortega and his gang will try to get us out of the way, too. Never wander far from your six-gun and that pig-sticker of yours, Tim."

"I'll have 'em right by me, awake or asleep," Tim Ford promised.

"I'm wonderin' what game's back of all this. That's what we've got to discover, Tim. They're wreckin' the Three V, all right. Probably stealin' Bill Blasell blind, and him helpless. Accordin' to the ranch books, I'll bet, nary a Three V cow's had a calf this season."

"It looks like the old freeze-out game, but the girl says she suggested

sellin' to Ortega cheap, and he didn't want to buy."

"Yeah. Maybe he figures there ain't any sense in buyin' what he can get for nothin'. Maybe the Three V is payin' the expenses and Ortega is takin' all the profits. That'd be easy, if Jeff King, the Three V foreman, is really Ortega's man."

"We'll have to do some smellin' around," Tim Ford decided.

"If Bill Blasell feeds up a few days without gettin' any dope, he'll be able to take command," Dave said. "Anyhow, we'll make him see what's goin' on, make him kick out this Jeff King and his crowd."

They returned to the house and sat on the wide front veranda. Jeff King and the men who had been to town with him came riding home, and went to corral and bunk house, giving no attention to the pair on the porch. Other punchers came riding in from their work. Men began doing the evening chores. And finally old Grandpap Hyams drove his wagon down the long lane and turned toward the house.

Dave Jackson and Tim left their chairs and went down the steps to meet the wagon. But Jeff King and a couple of the men came hurrying up to the house, and were there when the wagon arrived.

"A lot of junk a circus man travels with," Jeff King said, his lips curling. "Where are we goin' to put it?"

"Them two cases have our clothes in 'em," Dave pointed out. "We'll put 'em in my old room here at the house."

"You and your friend aimin' to live in the house?" Jeff King asked.

"We are."

"Only a sick old man and a girl who——"

Dave Jackson whirled and faced him. "You rat, Nancy Blasell is the same as a sister to me," he said.

"We were raised together. Your job's bein' foreman, ain't it? Runnin' the ranch? Suppose you run it, then, and don't worry about the house. That ain't part of your job."

"Seems to me you're talkin' pretty big," King replied. "You ain't got any standin' here, as I can see. You don't own any share of the Three V."

"Yeah, and you seem to be talkin' pretty big for a hired man," Dave barked back at him. "Anyhow, I'm a guest here, and that makes me rank you. I can see, King, that we're goin' to have some trouble. You're askin' for it. Oh, I understand the situation! You've got some friends at your back. But that ain't botherin' me any. I want some of this stuff in my old room, I said, and the rest we'll put in that empty adobe storehouse by the big barn. I was fool enough to bring a bunch of presents for the Three V punchers. And I've got some of my circus stuff, so's I can keep in practice."

**J**EFF KING growled something to the two men, and they put the two cases Dave designated on the porch. Then Grandpap Hyams, who had remained on the wagon seat and hadn't said a word, drove to the empty adobe storehouse, and Dave and Tim followed the wagon.

"We can store this stuff for you. You don't have to bother," Jeff King said.

"I'm in charge of the stuff as belongs to Mr. Dave Jackson," Tim informed him. "That's a part of my job, keepin' track of it and checkin' it in and out. Nothin' is goin' wrong with this stuff and makin' me lose a good job."

They unloaded, with a couple of the Three V men helping. It was almost dark, and appetizing odors

came from the kitchen. The evening meal was almost ready.

"I don't want any of this stuff touched—understand?" Dave snapped, when the work was done. "You're foreman here, King, so I'm holdin' you responsible."

"Oh, it won't be touched. There ain't any circus actors on the ranch. All he-men hereabouts."

Dave stepped up to him, and Tim Ford closed in also.

"King," Dave said, "you're tryin' an old game. You're schemin' to get me into trouble and maybe muss me up some—or worse. You can have trouble any time you want it, King—but we'll be fair about it. I don't aim to be ganged. And you impress me as the kind that wouldn't care to fight fair, man to man."

Jeff King whirled toward him with a snarl. "You're talkin' yourself into more trouble than you know," he said. "I'll be havin' a settlement with you before we're done."

"I've got time now, before supper, if you're feelin' that way."

"I'm goin' to the house and see Mr. Blasell about this!" King raged. "I'll see if a gent like you can come here and upset everything and interfere with me and my work."

"I'll go right along with you, King, and so'll Tim Ford. Let's go. Maybe you'll get your walkin' papers."

"Oh, I don't think so! Mr. Blasell gave me a written power of authority to act for him while he's sick, and not even his own daughter can go agin' it. I wouldn't even have to ask him about it if I wanted to order you to saddle up and get off the ranch."

"All your orderin' wouldn't make me do it!"

"If I told the men to throw you off——"

"Why, you big ape!" Tim Ford

howled, barging forward. "Dave, let me handle him. I can't stand around and let a mug like him insult you and get away with it."

"Easy, Tim!" Dave warned. "King, we'll have a little talk tomorrow, when we've both cooled down some."

"That suits me."

"And now I'll help old Grandpap Hyams put up his mules."

"You needn't bother. Some of the men'll help him."

"But I want to talk to the old-timer."

"Not just now! Grandpap, get busy with them mules! Then get to the cook shack and eat. Stir yourself! You're gettin' more worthless every day."

Old Grandpap Hyams had got down off the wagon seat and was preparing to unhitch the mules. Now he whirled angrily, and his old eyes blazed.

"You stop usin' that tone to me, Jeff King!" he squeaked. "I was a better man in my time than you'll ever be. I'm gettin' sick of your browbeatin' ways. I was all alone here without a friend, 'cept the old boss and Miss Nancy, just stayin' on and tryin' to watch over 'em. But I ain't alone now, you betcha! Dave is home. And I'll danged well say 'howdy' to him if I feel like it."

"You're fired!" Jeff King roared. "Roll up your blankets, get that crowbait horse you own, and ride! You got paid a week ago. I'll give you what's comin'. Hurry and get off the ranch!"

"I—I'm fired?" Grandpap Hyams stammered. "Why, I—I was the first puncher Bill Blasell and this boy's daddy ever hired. I've been with the Three V since she started."

"Do your weepin' in town! Get goin'!"

Dave Jackson stepped forward

again. "Just a minute!" he said to King. "You can't do this! Grandpap Hyams—— Why, he bounced me on his knee when I was a baby. He should be given easy jobs to do, and let sleep in the sun beside the bunk house. He——"

"I'm foreman of the Three V, and I'm givin' the orders around here," King bellowed. "I said he's fired, and he's fired!"

Jeff King glanced around quickly. In the gathering gloom, a dozen of the men had approached quietly, and now were standing a short distance away, watching and listening. Jeff King grinned at them and turned back to face Dave Jackson.

"My order stands," he said. "And it won't do you any good to run to Bill Blasell. He ain't in any condition to decide anything, and everybody knows it. Just waitin' to die."

Then, Dave Jackson hit him.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A LADY IS MENTIONED.

**T**IM FORD had seen it coming, and was prepared. He had his six-gun in one hand and his long knife in the other even as Dave Jackson struck. And Tim managed to get in such a position that the Three V men could not interfere without encountering serious trouble.

Dave struck twice, and Jeff King measured his length on the ground. The men had started to surge forward, but Tim Ford's menacing gesture stopped them.

"Throw some water on him, and he'll be all right," Dave Jackson said to the men. "And tell him that, if he's lookin' for trouble with me, he knows where I can be found. Or anybody else who feels like talkin' out of turn. We won't have any



belittlin' remarks about Bill Blasell while I'm around."

The men were growling, but none made a hostile move. They were ready for their supper, and none packed a gun. They were not dangerous at the moment.

Grandpap Hyams seemed to be in a trance. He was standing aside and muttering:

"Fired! Ain't got any other home! Don't know which way to turn—only a few dollars——"

"You ain't fired, not by a danged sight," Dave Jackson told him. "You come up to the house with Tim and me, and we'll see about this."

He put his arm around the old man's shoulders and started leading him away, while Tim Ford covered the retreat, still holding gun and knife ready for instant work. But there was no need. The Three V men were starting to work on their foreman, to bring him back to consciousness. The circus cowboy, they found, packed a wallop.

"Fired," Grandpap Hyams kept muttering. "Why, Dave lad, I wouldn't dare be fired. I'd never live to get to town, if I went away alone and out of a job. I—I know too much."

"Yeah, and I want to know all you know," Dave told him. "We'll have a good talk after supper."

When they reached the house, they found that Nancy Blasell had been watching the trouble from the end of the porch. Dave said nothing, except that Jeff King had fired Grandpap Hyams, and had made a remark which had caused Dave to smash him a couple of times.

"Oh, Dave, now there'll be trouble!" she said.

"I can face it, and so can Tim."

"But it may touch us, Dave," she

said. "I'm afraid of Jeff King—of all of them."

"You aim to let him run your dad's ranch?" Dave asked. "Where's your old spunk? You've sure changed some. Can't you trust me to handle things?"

"Let's not talk about it now," she said. "Come in to supper, and bring Grandpap Hyams with you."

"How's your father?"

"He's awake, and better than he has been for weeks," she said. "I told him what you said—about the food and all, and he understands."

"That's fine! Don't say anything to anybody else." He indicated that not even Grandpap Hyams was to know. "Just do like I said, and you'll find your dad a lot better in his mind every day."

"Your coming seemed to help him," she admitted.

**A** SCOWLING Chinese served the evening meal, and they talked of ordinary things as they ate, Dave knowing that Oriental ears are sharp. Then, Grandpap Hyams lit his pipe and sat in a corner, seemingly in a daze, Tim made a cigarette, and Dave and Nancy went into the bedroom.

Bill Blasell could understand what Dave told him. Dave explained about the drug situation as he saw it. Nancy left them and went back into the living room, and Dave sat on the edge of the bed and lowered his voice.

"You want me to straighten things out, sir?" he asked.

"There's nobody else to do it, Dave."

"I think I've got things pretty well sized up. I've got a plan. Nobody must know it but us—not even Nancy. It's got to be worked just right, or it'll flop."

"I'm trustin' you, lad."

"Whatever happens, be careful what you eat and drink. The drug will wear off, then you'll begin to build health. But don't let 'em know the drug's wearin' off. Let 'em think they're still keepin' you dopey. And watch and listen. Can you do that?"

"I'll do it, Dave. I understand. I—I seem to be feelin' a lot better. Oh, lad, I wish you were here to stay! I wish you were in your father's boots—my partner. And I always had hopes of—of you and Nancy——"

"I understand, sir. We'll see how things work out. Got to get everything straight around here first."

"Take back half the Three V, lad. Pay me when you can—or never. Take hold of it and——"

"Not just now, sir," Dave interrupted.

"I—see. You don't want to buy in—on a losin' outfit."

"It's not that. The Three V ain't any losin' outfit. And I could buy in and pay cash, sir. I saved almost all you gave me for my share, and I've been makin' big money for several years and savin' the most of it. I could pay cash for half the valley."

"Then it's 'cause you don't want to be here with us? You want to keep on with the circus."

"Please try to understand," Dave said. "If I bought in this minute and kicked Jeff King out, he'd take all the men with him. We couldn't get other punchers, for Ortega and his men would scare 'em off. Round-up comin' along pretty soon, you know. The ranch'll need every hand. I've got a plan, I said. Listen to me, sir, please."

Dave talked slowly, distinctly, and he could tell by the sparkle in Bill Blasell's eyes that he understood perfectly.

"That's fine—fine!" Blasell muttered.

"Not a word to anybody—not even Nancy. It'll take some doin', this plan of mine. Somethin' may happen to upset it, but I hope not."

"I wish you were my workin' partner now, boy," Bill Blasell said, as Nancy came back into the room. "It's a man's work, runnin' a ranch like the Three V."

"And Dave likes to play," the girl said. "There's not much glamour in running a ranch and living like a sensible, dependable citizen. You can't hear the band every day and have a crowd cheering you."

"You hate the circus, don't you, Nancy?" Dave asked.

"Because it took you and wrecked you, Dave. I was just a kid of sixteen when you went away, and—I'm not ashamed to say it—in love with you. I thought you were about the greatest thing in the world. But you're just a boy playing at life, Dave."

"I see! You think there's no real men with the circus."

"Is it a man's work?" she asked.

"Well, maybe not. But we've got a great bunch. If you only knew some of them——"

"I'm afraid I wouldn't be impressed. Let's not talk about it, Dave. A man has the right to choose his own life. Perhaps you're wise not to get yourself tied down."

"Nancy!"

He took a step toward her, and a surge of feeling went through him. But she laughed a little and waved him back.

"We must get out of here and let dad sleep," she said.

So they went back into the living room, where Tim Ford was trying to explain to old Grandpap Hyams just what Dave Jackson did under the big top.

SOMEbody knocked on the door, and Nancy hurried to answer. Dave Jackson then dropped into a chair beside the table and shot a warning glance at Tim Ford. Deeming it wise under the circumstances, both had kept on their guns in the house.

But the knock at the door had not meant Jeff King and some of the men, and trouble. It was Carlos Ortega who came swaggering into the room, smirking and bowing to them all.

"Ah, Señor Dave Jackson!" he said. "I have ridden over from the Diamond Star to see you, señor, and tell you how sorry I am."

"For what?" Dave asked.

"Because of what I said and how rudely I acted when we met on the trail. But you are a man of the world, señor, and can understand. You and the charming Miss Nancy were boy and girl together. Your fathers were partners and built this property."

"That's right."

"And I—I am proud to say that I have a romantic interest in Miss Nancy." He turned and bowed to her. "When I learned of your visit, I grew jealous and afraid, señor. I feared a rival who would outdo me. So I forgot myself, señor, and spoke and acted rudely. I ask your pardon."

"Don't mention it," Dave said. He was grinning slightly at Nancy's embarrassment.

"In town to-day, I received a letter which informed me that fear of rivalry from you is foolish, señor. I was concerned when I heard you were coming for this visit. I have a distant friend who knows a man with the Super Amalgamated Circus, and wrote to him, asking about your affairs."

"You had a nerve!" Dave said.

"And word has come back to me, señor, that I need not worry—that you have a romantic interest of your own elsewhere."

"How's that?" Dave asked.

"I thought it would be strange if such a dashing young man, the pet of the public, did not have some attachment." Carlos Ortega's teeth flashed in a smile. "Do you know a certain Madame Delphine with the circus, señor?"

A peculiar expression came into Dave's face. All in the room noticed it, particularly Nancy. Tim Ford gurgled and seemed at the point of choking.

"Madame Delphine——" Tim began.

But Dave motioned for him to be silent, and he choked again and kept quiet.

"Yes, Ortega, I know a Madame Delphine, and know her quite well," Dave said.

"So I am informed, señor. And so I fear your rivalry no longer. No doubt this Madame Delphine is beautiful, charming, all that a man could desire in a woman. You are fortunate, señor."

"How delightful!" Nancy Blasell said. "Let's see her picture, Dave. Surely you have one with you."

"I'm afraid not."

"No? Perhaps you carry a picture of her in your heart."

"No doubt Señor Jackson will be eager to return to her close society," Ortega put in. "Even a visit to a boyhood home cannot make a man forget an affair of the heart, eh, señor?"

"Dave, do you want me to handle this yappin' ape?" Tim Ford burst out.

"Let him alone, Tim. He's all right."

"Yeah, but Dave——"

A fist thumped against the front



door. Nancy got up and started across the room. But the door was thrown open before she reached it, and Jeff King stalked into the room with half a dozen of the Three V punchers behind him.

## CHAPTER VII.

### GRANDPAP RIDES AWAY.

**K**ING and his men were holding their six-guns ready. For Dave Jackson or Tim to attempt to draw would mean that shooting would commence. Nancy Blasell gave a cry of surprise and fear and backed against the wall. Carlos Ortega acted startled.

Jeff King merely glanced at Dave and Tim, motioned for his men to watch them, and went across to Grandpap Hyams.

"I fired you," King said. "What I say goes around this ranch. You had a friend stand up for you, and you've had a meal here in the ranch house, but you're still fired. We've caught up your horse and rolled up your blankets for you. Your outfit's out in front, waitin'. Here's the few dollars wages you've got comin'. Hit the trail!"

"Now, see here——" Dave began.

"You keep out of this, Jackson!" Jeff King barked. "You know what discipline means. I've fired this man, and he goes. If a foreman changed his mind about things every time somebody made a squawk, he wouldn't last long."

"Dave, are we goin' to let this hombre——" Tim began.

"Keep quiet, Tim!" Dave ordered.

Nancy stepped out into the middle of the room, head up and eyes flashing. "You'll not do this, Jeff King!" she cried. "Grandpap Hyams was here before I was born. He taught me how to ride—held me on a pony the very first time. He's

a part of the ranch—the last of our old hands."

"I'm sorry, Miss Nancy, but he's fired!" King replied. "If I'm the foreman around here, my orders have to be obeyed. Either what I've said goes, or I walk out of the job, right this minute."

"Perhaps we'd be better off if you did," she said.

"I'll take the men with me, if I do. I know where we can all get jobs, and they like to work under me. You'd have a hard time gettin' a crew by round-up, I reckon."

Nancy looked wildly at Dave, then turned away. Dave got to his feet, looking down at a cigarette he was fingering.

"It's right tough on the old-timer," Dave said. "But a foreman's got to be foreman. As long as King's the foreman here, his orders should be obeyed. I don't like him much, and we had a little trouble, but I'll stand by him to that extent."

Jeff King was plainly surprised at this decision. He had expected trouble from Dave Jackson. Tim Ford's eyes bulged with astonishment, for he had been expecting Dave to give the signal for battle. Nancy whirled toward Dave, her face aflame.

"Dave Jackson!" she cried. "What kind of man are you? Grandpap Hyams helped raise you. He taught you how to use a rope, how to do everything around a ranch. It was his teaching, as much as anything, that made a rodeo star out of you. And now——"

"Oh, I'll take care of Grandpap!" Dave said. "I'll see that he gets along all right." He walked over to the bewildered old man. "Grandpap," he added, "you ride like you've been told. I want you to take this money I'm givin' you and go to Rio Vista. Put your horse in

the public stable, and go to the hotel. Understand? I'll come in to see you in a day or so, maybe to-morrow."

"I'll do whatever you say, Dave."

Dave had taken some currency from his pocket, and now he pressed it into the old man's gnarled hand. He wished he could whisper encouragement and instructions to him, but that was impossible without Jeff King overhearing.

"When I come to town, Grandpap, we'll have a long talk," Dave said. "You just take it easy around town, and enjoy yourself."

**G**RANDPAP HYAMS got up and hobbled across to the door like a man half dazed. Jeff King followed at his heels, and Dave and Tim came after, with the Three V punchers watching them closely. Nancy rushed out after them.

"Grandpap!" she called. "You don't have to go, no matter what anybody says. This is your home as long as you live."

"I reckon it'll prevent trouble if I go," Grandpap Hyams told her. "I don't want to cause any trouble. And a little rest won't hurt me, maybe. I'm gettin' pretty old, and I've been workin' a long time. But I—I reckon I'll be some lonesome."

"You spend that money I gave you, and I'll see that you get plenty more," Dave called. "Have a good time. I'll see you soon, Grandpap."

Grandpap Hyams got into his saddle and gathered up the reins. He looked up at those on the porch, and the light which streaked through the open door fell upon his face. There was an expression of bewilderment in his old face, but he was trying to smile at them.

"Well, I—I'll be goin'," he said. "Good evenin', all!"

He clucked to his horse and

started off down the lane toward the dusty road.

Nancy Blasell sobbed and rushed back into the house. Standing at the porch railing with the mystified Tim Ford beside him, Dave calmly made a cigarette. Jeff King and his men marched away through the night toward the bunk house.

Carlos Ortega, the usual oily smile upon his lips, stepped up beside Dave. "Señor, you are a very sensible man," Ortega said. "It was a moment when you could have started serious trouble. And it might have resulted badly for you, eh?"

"Maybe," Dave replied. "Of course, Ortega, my only interest in the Three V now is—well, old associations and the Blasells bein' my lifelong friends—"

"I understand, señor."

"Which is probably a good thing for some folks, I'm frank to say. I can see what's goin' on, and I understand you, and don't think I don't. You're boss of the valley, with the exception of the Three V. And the Three V is bein' looted and wrecked, somehow. Oh, I'm wise, Ortega! It's an old game—breakin' a property down and then buyin' it in cheap. But Miss Blasell was tellin' me you didn't want to buy the place even at a bargain price. Why not, Ortega? Ain't that your game—to get the Three V and run this whole range?"

"Perhaps." Carlos Ortega grinned. "But why buy a place, señor, when you can wait a short time and marry it?"

"So that's your game!"

"Possibly it is none of your concern, señor. There is Madame Delphine."

"Yeah," Dave said. "There's Madame Delphine."

"Dave——" Tim broke out.

"You keep quiet, Tim," Dave said. "Well, Ortega, you ought to have an easy time carryin' out your plans. You're dealin' with a girl who's bewildered, and a sick old man. Reckon I'll get me some sleep. Good night! Come along, Tim."

They left Ortega on the porch and went back into the house. They could hear Nancy weeping softly in her father's room. Dave hesitated at the door, then went on into his own old room with Tim.

"Now, Dave, what in blazes is all this?" Tim Ford demanded. "You ain't yourself, but some other guy."

"You get ready for bed," Dave said. "I've got some writin' to do before I turn in."

**D**AVE unpacked one of the cases and got out writing paper and pen and ink. Sitting at the table in the middle of the room, he wrote rapidly. Tim Ford undressed and got ready for bed, and stretched out to smoke numerous cigarettes and watch the star of the Super Amalgamated as he scratched pen over paper.

"Me, I never before saw a wild cat turn into a mouse," Tim said. "Dave Jackson takin' it on the chin without swingin' in return! I reckon we don't belong out here in this country, Dave. We're soft and citified."

"You mean you think I am."

"Dang it, I can't understand!"

"I've got a plan, Tim. I'm workin' a scheme."

"Yeah? And part of it's to let 'em kick out that old man and walk all over you, huh? You smashed that Jeff King, remember, and don't think the hombre's forgotten or forgiven it. He'll be makin' some kind of move."

"I'm expectin' that, Tim."

"And what are you goin' to do if he does?"

"We'll wait and see what happens."

"Dang my hide if I can figure you out, Dave. This bein' your old home, and Blasell what he's been to you, and that fine girl——"

"I know what I'm doin'," Dave interrupted. "You just trail along, till I can explain."

"I'm for goin' on the warpath."

"And have King go away with the men, just when they're needed, and finish wreckin' the ranch? We may go on the warpath yet, but we'll pick our own time."

"That stuff about Madame Delphine!" Tim snorted. "I yearned to use my pig-sticker on that Carlos Ortega. Him writin' somebody and gettin' a line on you!"

"I don't want you to go sayin' anything about Madame Delphine around here, Tim. Remember that!"

"Anybody asks me, you're gettin' fleas in your brain," Tim declared. "What's all that writin' you've been doin'? Your will?"

Dave grinned. "My will's already written and on file with the circus lawyer. I've been writin' letters and some business papers. But I'm comin' to bed now."

"And we came here," Tim Ford said, "to spend the winter and enjoy ourselves. I thought we'd anyhow get mixed up in a ruckus."

"We are, aren't we?"

"I don't figure I'm mixed up in any ruckus unless I'm doin' some of the fightin'," Tim Ford replied, as he turned his face to the wall.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### NEWS OF TRAGEDY.

**D**AVE JACKSON was first out of bed at dawn, but Tim Ford crawled out an instant behind him. They dressed, and went through the house to the



kitchen, where the Chinese cook already was at work, and drank coffee and ate beef, eggs and batter cakes.

Nancy came into the kitchen as they were finishing, to get the tray for her father. Dave looked at the tray meaningly, and she nodded. Her manner was far from cordial. She seemed to think that Dave should have done something the night before to prevent the ejection of Grandpap Hyams from the ranch.

Nancy hurried away with the tray, and in the bedroom disposed of the food in a jar, to be carried out later when the Chinese cook had left the house. She would get her father's real breakfast herself then, too.

Dave and Tim went into the living room and started toward the front door. It was opened suddenly, and Jeff King came into the house with four of the punchers behind him. They were all armed, alert, prepared for trouble.

"Jackson, I want you to come to Blasell's bedroom with me," King said. "There's somethin' to be settled."

"Soon as I say 'good-mornin'' to my horses and tend to 'em," Dave replied.

"They've been tended to."

"Dang your hide! Nobody feeds or tends to them horses but me!" Tim Ford raged. "It's my job."

"There was a reason," Jeff King said. "We wanted 'em ready for ridin'. And your stuff is loaded on the wagon, Mr. Dave Jackson, except what you've got here in the house. We'll toss that on soon as we've seen Blasell."

"What's the idea?" Dave asked.

"You and your friend ain't wanted around here. You're leavin', pronto! Understand? Be glad I let you leave without mussin' you up first."

"Just why are you sendin' me

away?" Dave demanded, motioning for Tim to keep from boiling over. "Afraid I might learn too much and take some cards in the game?"

"That's enough! You're botherin' me and interferin' with ranch work. That's excuse enough."

"Maybe you wouldn't talk so big without friends at your back."

"Maybe not, but my friends are there. Ain't got much time to waste on you, either. Let's go in and see Blasell."

Tim went along with Dave, and four of the Three V men followed King. They crowded into the bedroom, where Nancy was busy trying to make the pillows more comfortable for her father.

"This won't take but a minute, Mr. Blasell," Jeff King said. "Hate to bother you with it, but thought I'd better. I'm sendin' this man Jackson off the ranch."

"Sendin' Dave away? Why?" Blasell asked.

"We can't be bothered havin' a circus dude around. If he stays, there'll be trouble. The men don't like him and don't want him here."

"But he came for a visit. This is his old home."

"He's got to go, at once. His visit's over. Either he goes now, or I go and I take all the men with me."

"I spent money gettin' out here and bringin' my horses and gear," Dave said. "I expected to stay the winter and practice some new tricks, and maybe train another horse."

"You can do that at the show's winter quarters," King said. "This here's a workin' ranch, not a trainin' ground for a circus. I ain't here to argue about it. I'm *tellin'* you to leave. Your horses are waitin'."

"Let me at him, Dave!" Tim begged. "I can work on him with my knife before any of these apes can draw a gun."

"Easy, Tim!" Dave warned. "Take a look! The apes have their guns drawn already. Mr. King ain't takin' any chances. This ain't exactly a scene for a sick room, King. We'll step outside and settle it."

"It's settled. You're leavin'," King replied. "I'm puttin' it up to Blasell right now."

"Well, I—I don't know what to say," Blasell whined. "The ranch work must be done. I can't have the men leavin' now, with me helpless."

"That means I'd better be goin'," Dave said. "All right, sir! You're the boss. Tim, go to our room and pack our stuff. I'll say good-by to Mr. Blasell now."

"Dave!" Tim Ford cried. "Ain't you goin' to put up a fight about this? Are you goin' to let these hombres——"

"It'll cause Mr. Blasell and the ranch trouble if we stay," Dave interrupted. "Get our stuff ready, Tim."

WITH a look of disgust in his face, Tim Ford turned and left the room without another word, and at King's gesture two of the Three V men went along to keep guard over him.

Dave went up to the bed and took Blasell's hand.

"It's been good to see you and Nancy, even for a day," he said. "You hurry up and get well, sir. I'll write often, and I'll be seein' you again."

"Good-by, lad, and take care of yourself," Blasell said.

He seemed almost exhausted, but he gave Dave Jackson's hand a pressure that told he was not, and told Dave other things also, particularly that the situation was understood.

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Dave turned away, and found Nancy confronting him.

"So you're going to run away!" she said, her eyes flashing.

"Your father said——"

"Father's sick, and we're helpless. You're going to run away and leave us in our trouble. Dave Jackson, the great circus star—his skin is too valuable to be risked. You're letting Jeff King run you of. He ran Grandpap Hyams off last night. Now, it's you and Mr. Ford. We won't have a friend left——"

"But, if I stay, it'll only mean a fight, and all your men will leave. The work won't be done."

"Don't bother to make excuses, Dave. Nothing can excuse cowardice."

"Why, if you think that——"

"Good-by, Dave! I wish you luck. Don't stay any longer, please. I'll try to remember you, Dave, as the man you were once—or as I thought you were."

She turned her back.

Jeff King twisted his lips in a smile, and motioned toward the door. Dave Jackson bowed his head and went out into the other room.

They carried out the stuff and put it into the wagon, then walked to the corral.

"I'll have the wagon driven in and the stuff unloaded at the depot," Jeff King said. "I'm keepin' my hands off you, Jackson——"

"Make it man to man, and try to put hands on me!"

"I've got orders to let you go without mussin' you up any," King said, stepping nearer and speaking in almost a whisper. "But let me give you just one hint—keep right on goin', and don't come back. Wise hombre, you are, huh? Then you know we'll make it hot for you if you try to mix in our business. Get goin'!"

"Dave!" Tim begged. "Let me smash him just one, and t'ell with what happens afterward. Even if they shoot me down, let me at him just once!"

"Easy, Tim! We're ridin'."

Dave Jackson got on his big sorrel, and Tim Ford, growling his disgust, got on the spotted pony. They rode away down the lane without speaking, and turned into the road. Not once had Dave Jackson looked back.

"Dang it, Dave, I can't stand this!" Tim Ford cried. "To see you takin' everything——"

"Stop it, man! I've had a devil of a time holdin' myself in. They'll be payin' for it later, never fear. I told you I had a plan, and this bein' ordered away fits in with it fine. I was wonderin' how I could get away and do what I want to do without arousin' any suspicion."

"What's the plan?" Tim asked.

"Tell you later. It'll knock you cold. Just now, we must get to Rio Vista and talk to Grandpap Hyams, who knows a lot. We'll get a freight car and ship our stuff to the county seat."

"Here comes somebody tearin' up the ground and rippin' with the rowels," Tim Ford interrupted.

Along the trail toward them came a horseman at top speed, bending low in the saddle as he rode. Seeing them, the rider began pulling up his horse. Dave and Tim stopped. When the other was close enough, they saw he was a stranger. He skidded his horse to a stop near them.

"Howdy, gents!" he called. "I'm just makin' for the Three V with the news about Grandpap Hyams."

"What about him?" Dave asked, alarmed.

"They found him about daybreak beside the trail more'n half way to

town, his horse standin' beside him. He's been shot."

"Shot!" Dave cried. "Dead?"

"Alive when found. They took him in to Rio Vista. I'm ridin' out to the Three V to tell 'em."

The rider went on, using the spurs.

"Maybe some at the Three V won't be surprised at the news," Dave said, as he pulled up his neckcloth and pulled down his hat preparatory to some hard riding. "So they tried to kill Grandpap. He knows too much, I reckon."

"Now maybe you'll fight that gang of apes!" Tim Ford said.

"We'll fight 'em, don't worry. You'll have plenty of fight before we're done. Let's ride like hell now. I want to talk to Grandpap Hyams. And let's do a little silent prayin' that he'll pull through."

## CHAPTER IX.

### SHOW-DOWN.

**G**RANDPAP HYAMS had been taken to the little Rio Vista hotel, and the town doctor had worked over him. Grandpap was conscious when Dave and Tim arrived, and able to talk.

"Freak shot," the doctor said. "An inch either way, and it'd have killed him instantly. He'll live, if he gets good care."

"Can he be moved to the county seat?" Dave asked.

"I reckon, on a cot in the baggage car of the train."

"I want him taken there and put in the railroad hospital," Dave said. "You make the arrangements and go with him. I'm footin' the bill. I want to talk to him a bit now, alone."

The doctor and Tim went out of the room.

"Dave, lad, I was afraid of it," Grandpap said. "I know a lot about



their business. Looks to me like Ortega talked to King last evenin' before he went to the house, then King came in and made me ride, and somebody was waitin' to plug me."

"You got any ideas?" Dave asked.

"I'm thinkin' it was Sam Potter. Shot me from behind a rock as I came ridin' along. I fell off my horse. When I came to, my pockets had been turned inside out. The man who shot me was just leavin'. He was mutterin' to himself, and I know danged well it was Sam Potter. But I can't prove it. He emptied my pockets to make it look like robbery, I reckon. Thought I was dead and rode away."

"Did he take all your money?"

"Even the money you gave me, lad."

"Then maybe we can pin it on him," Dave said. "Listen, Grandpap! I'm havin' you sent to the county seat to the hospital. I'll be along a little later and see you there. They kicked me off the Three V this mornin'. Sendin' my stuff in by wagon. Don't talk any more, now. Leave everything to me."

The train came through in about an hour, and Grandpap Hyams, stretched on a cot, was put into the baggage car, and the doctor got in to travel with him. Dave Jackson walked back along the street with Tim.

"We're hangin' around Rio Vista till the wagon gets here with our stuff, which'll be some time this afternoon," Dave said. "I arranged for the car, and we'll load the stuff and ship to the county seat. This evenin', we'll do some ridin' in that direction. No car here decent enough to ship the horses in. It's only about twenty-five miles."

"You've got somethin' in mind, Dave," Tim accused.

"A lot of things. Grandpap thinks

that Sam Potter shot him. If he shows up around town, Tim, I want to get him into a poker game."

"For why?"

"Just before Grandpap left the Three V, I gave him some money, didn't I? It was currency I had in my pocket, Tim. The last cash the Super Amalgamated paymaster gave me. Understand?"

Tim Ford flashed him a swift glance. "Oh, yeah! I understand," he said.

"Let's take the horses to the public stable and take care of 'em. We'll get 'em out after we load the car."

"Yeah, and we'd better have 'em ready at the hitch rail in front of the saloon, I'm thinkin'," Tim Ford said.

**T**HEY put the horses up and cared for them, and drifted down the street again. In the store, saloon, and down at the depot, they killed time until the wagon came in from the Three V. Then they were busy getting the stuff into the freight car, which would be picked up by the local in the morning. It was almost dusk when they finished.

A few men had drifted into town from the range, and more came with nightfall. Some of Ortega's Diamond Star men were among them, as Dave had expected. Ortega himself did not ride in, but Sam Potter did. He swaggered around the saloon, asking questions. Dave and Tim drifted into the saloon and stood at the head of the bar. They had got their horses from the stable and tied them in front.

Sam Potter advanced toward them, with a couple of other men close behind him.

"Understand you're leavin' us, Jackson," he said to Dave.

"That's right. My stuff's goin'

out on the mornin' freight. I know when I've got enough."

"I understand you sent Grandpap Hyams to the county seat."

"Yeah. Maybe they can patch him up," Dave replied. "Felt I should do somethin' for him. He helped raise me."

"Who do you suppose shot him?" Potter asked.

"How do I know? Maybe somebody thought he was packin' a few dollars, and wanted it."

"Was he able to talk much?" Sam Potter asked. He showed just a shade too much interest.

"Nothin' to speak of," Dave replied. "He's pretty old to stand a shootin' like that. Lost a lot of blood before they found him. Well, it's a long time till mornin'. Who wants to play some poker? You, Potter? Here's a chance to get some circus money."

Some of the men standing near laughed. Potter signified his willingness to get into a game. Tim sat in also, and they picked up a couple more men, both Diamond Star punchers.

They used a table not far from the front door, with a kerosene lamp hanging over it to give a bright light. A bottle was brought from the bar, and preparations made for a long session.

"Cash money game," Dave said.

No chips, that meant. Cash money on the table when a bet was made. And so the game began.

Dave Jackson maintained a fire of conversation as he played. Tim Ford was silent and watchful. Sam Potter and the other two seemed intent upon getting as much of Dave's money as possible. The others in the place drifted up to the table, watched, drifted away again.

"Goin' back East, Jackson?" Sam Potter asked.

"Goin' to the county seat first, and make arrangements for a real car to ship my horses in. They're valuable nags."

"Expect to see Grandpap Hyams there?"

"If he's still alive, I aim to talk to him," Dave replied.

Potter's eyes narrowed at that. Tim Ford dealt, and the betting began. Dave seemed to be betting wildly, like a man trying to loosen up a game. He found himself pitted against Potter at the end.

It was what Dave had been waiting for. Potter had indicated that he held a good hand, one he would back to the limit. So Dave raised every bet, and kept the money coming to the middle of the table. He glanced down at each bill Potter tossed on the pile.

**S**UDDENLY he put his cards face downward on the table, put his hands on the table's edge, and bent forward slightly.

"Potter!" he snapped.

"Yeah?"

"The Super Amalgamated Circus has a paymaster who handles a lot of money. He gets new money when he can. He's a nut about money, I reckon. Keeps a record of serial numbers, talks about counterfeits in his sleep——"

"Well, what of it? Let's get on! You goin' to raise me again?"

"Think you've got me beat?"

"It'll cost you another twenty to see, hombre," Potter replied, laughing.

"What I was goin' to say about the paymaster, Potter, was that he's got a little rubber stamp, and he stamps each bill with it in the corner. Three little letters: S A C—the initials of the show. Watches to see if he ever gets any of the money back and——"

"What's that to me?" Potter asked. He was looking Dave Jackson straight in the eyes.

"Last evenin', when Grandpap Hyams got kicked off the Three V Ranch, I gave him some money and told him to spend it in town. It was money I'd got from the show paymaster, Potter, stamped like I was sayin'. But somebody shot Grandpap and robbed him. They got that circus money. And that last bill you tossed on the table, Potter, has the paymaster's stamp on it. How come?"

Dave's meaning was plain enough. There was sudden silence around the table, and some men began moving quietly away. The others in the room grew silent, too. Sam Potter's face went white, then burned. He let the cards he was holding slip out of his hand. Thus the two sat, facing each other, each with their hands flat on the table.

"Are you intimatin'——" Potter began.

"I'm sayin', Potter, that you shot down Grandpap Hyams from ambush and robbed him. That money proves it. If you're aimin' to do anything about this, Potter, start!"

Tim Ford was watching the two Diamond Star men in the game. Dave was watching nobody but Sam Potter. And the latter made a quick move, swerving aside, jerking his hands off the table, going for the six-gun he carried.

Dave Jackson kicked the chair from beneath him and lurched to one side also. His gun barked at the same instant Potter's flamed. A bullet brushed Dave's sleeve. His own bullet crashed into Sam Potter's breast.

Then, side by side, Dave and Tim were backing to the door, holding off the others in the place, several of them Ortega's men.

"You saw him draw, gents!" Dave called. "And you saw what he got when he did it. If his friends want any of the same, come and get it!"

He muttered something to Tim Ford, and they turned and dashed to the hitch rail. A jerk untied the reins. They vaulted into their saddles in the best circus manner, put a few bullets around the saloon door to deter those who would have rushed out after them, swung down on the off sides of their mounts like arena performers, and went dashing down the street and into the darkness.

A few shots cracked behind them, but the bullets flew wild. They raced past the little depot and across the railroad tracks, and took the trail to the county seat. At the first hill, they brought their horses down to a walk. They could hear no sounds of pursuit.

"Well, that there was somethin' like!" Tim Ford said. "It's about time we were gettin' in a few blows. We've been standin' with our hands down and takin' it on our chins long enough. Them apes!"

## CHAPTER X.

### TWO WEEKS OF WAITING.

THEY made a leisurely trip to the county seat over a rough trail, and went at once to the hospital, where they learned that Grandpap Hyams had stood the journey well, was receiving the best of care, and was sleeping.

They checked in at the little hotel, slept for a few hours, got up and devoured an enormous breakfast, and got busy. When the car arrived on the freight, they unloaded it and put their gear in storage and took their clothes and personal effects to the hotel. The horses were put into a boarding stable, Tim Ford informing

the stableman that he would care for them and exercise them himself.

Dave Jackson mailed some letters, wrote and sent several telegrams, and got hold of the new sheriff and took him to see Grandpap Hyams and listen to a recital of fact and suspicion. He also located a young lawyer who seemed better than the average cow-country attorney, ascertained that he was honest and fearless, and conferred with him.

Tim Ford remained in the background during all this, asking no questions, but wondering considerably. He was having the time of his life strutting around town and singing praises of Dave Jackson, basking in Dave's reflected glory. He exercised the sorrel and spotted pony and made them show their paces and tricks for the entertainment of the townsmen.

The sheriff had placed a guard over Grandpap Hyams, in case the wrong sort of visitor called. For they were aware that news had traveled to Rio Vista that Grandpap Hyams would recover from the gunshot wound. Certain persons, fearing they might be imperiled through such recovery, might seek to make that recovery uncertain.

There was a week of this, during which time Dave Jackson did not take Tim into his confidence at all.

"Eat, sleep, and prowl around!" Tim said. "That's what we do. What are we here for, Dave? I don't yearn to spend the winter in this hick hotel. Why don't you make a deal with some ranch, so's we can live on it and do some horse trainin' and such?"

"We came out here to do that on the Three V, Tim, and that's where we're goin' to do it."

"Yeah?" Tim Ford came to life.

"I'm workin' out a plan. I ain't sayin' anything 'cause it might put

the jinx on the whole scheme. I'll know in a few days how things are goin' to come out."

They were sitting on the front porch at the hotel. Down the street came the old railroad-station agent. He waved a yellow envelope at Dave.

"Telegram for yuh!" he called. "Couldn't make head or tail of it. Must be in code."

Dave Jackson seemed unduly excited, and the agent acted like this was a great moment in his life. He seldom had a telegram to deliver. As he hobbled away, Dave looked at the envelope and turned it over and over. Finally, he seemed to gather courage enough to open it. He glanced at what it said, and gave a whoop of delight. He smashed Tim Ford between the shoulder blades with a palm which stung.

"Tim, you're goin' to be tickled pink!" he declared. "I ain't tellin' you anything now. You can go right on bein' curious. Another week or so, man, and you'll be singin' for joy."

"Another week, huh? And I ain't to know nothin'?"

"You can know this much—we're goin' to get the Blasells out of their trouble, and maybe have a war doin' it. Blasell knows what I'm plannin'. I was able to make him understand. But I warned him not to tell even Nancy. This thing I've planned—it's got to hit all at once with a smash, or it's no go."

"After all this here mystery and playin' around, you'd better make good with me, Dave. I ain't to be trifled with. You fail me, and I'll start lookin' around for a new boss."

**D**AVE JACKSON was busy during the next week. He had many conferences with the lawyer, the sheriff and others. They acted like men sharing a



secret, and Tim began getting hot around his collar. Everybody seemed to be in Dave's confidence except him, and he resented it.

"If I'd tell you everything now, it'd spoil the surprise," Dave said. "You just play around town, and wait."

A Three V man came prowling around the county seat one day, and Tim Ford located him in a saloon.

"I reckon you came to town for news, hombre," Tim said. "Well, sir, Grandpap Hyams is goin' to get well. Me and Dave Jackson are still here. When we'll leave and where we'll go is known only to Mr. Jackson himself. Our horses are fine, and I don't think it's goin' to rain. You get up into your saddle now, like a good boy, and ride right back and tell Carlos Ortega and Jeff King that, huh?"

"Say——"

"And no argument!" Tim snapped at him. "You know what we do to spies around a circus? Man, it'd make good readin'! You hang around town more'n an hour longer, and I'll danged well show you."

"What right have you got——"

Tim Ford slapped him up against the wall and tickled his stomach with the point of his knife. The Three V puncher wilted.

"Me, I make my own rights," Tim said. "I've told you all the news here, so suppose you tell me some. How's everything at the Three V?"

"S-same as usual," the puncher stammered. "The old man's still sick. We'll be havin' round-up in a couple of weeks."

"You reckon there'll be much to round up?"

"I—I don't know nothin'. They just sent me here to learn how Grandpap is comin' along."

"They seem to be a heap interested in an old puncher they fired,"

Tim Ford said. "Right considerate of 'em, I'd say. You tell that Jeff King hombre that I'm hopin' to meet up with him again some day, and slap him down. What did they think about Sam Potter bein' killed?"

"He had it comin', I reckon. Too slow on the draw."

"You're young yet," Tim Ford said, inspecting him critically. "Might have time to reform. But you're sure travelin' the road to perdition now, bein' hooked up with that outfit. Well, get goin'!"

The Three V man left town in a hurry, and Tim Ford drifted back to the hotel to find Dave sitting on the porch again. And as before, an excited station agent came hobbling down the street waving a yellow envelope.

Dave Jackson ripped this message open at once and read it swiftly. He folded it and tucked it into his coat pocket, and grinned at Tim.

"The waitin's almost over, old-timer," he said. "You can shave and bathe and prepare for the party. This evenin', I'll be tellin' more."

He left Tim on the porch and hurried away, to see the sheriff and the lawyer again. Tim remained sitting there nodding to the townsmen who passed, and wondering what was going to happen. He was commencing to feel excited without knowing why he should.

**T**HEY ate the evening meal, and dusk descended. The plaza of the county seat blossomed with kerosene lamps on posts and in front of the business establishments. A few people wandered around listlessly. The county seat was not very active except when court was in session.

"Let's wander down to the depot," Dave Jackson said.

"Yeah." Tim got up and stretched. "Almost time for the evenin' freight to get in from the junction. There's some excitement—watchin' a hick branch line freight come in!"

"Oh, you want some excitement?" Dave asked, grinning. "Man, you're goin' to have some."

"Still promisin'," Tim Ford commented. "When are you goin' to commence makin' good?"

"It won't be long now," Dave said, grinning again.

They reached the depot and sat on an empty crate on the platform. The old agent was fussing around like a man with the weight of the world on his shoulders.

"Gosh all!" he told them. "Three cars to be spotted off the freight."

"Yeah, business must be rushin'," Tim remarked. "You ought to see the Super Amalgamated roll in once. Three trains 'stead of three cars. Best horses in the world! Best hombres, too! Old Rio Grande Riley bellowin' around and showin' off in front of the folks. Man!"

"Couldn't handle three trains here," the agent said. "Ain't got side-track room."

"Don't worry, hombre," Tim said, grinning. "There ain't any chance of the Super Amalgamated bookin' in here this season. We'll give you time to build more side tracks."

Down the track, a locomotive screeched, and a headlight glowed around a curve. Dave Jackson tossed away the remnant of a cigarette and stood up, hitched up his pants and tightened his belt. Tim Ford got up beside him.

"Where's the excitement?" Tim demanded.

Dave grinned. "Let's watch the train," he replied.

The train stopped on the main and was cut in two. A brakeman's

lantern signaled, and the locomotive pulled part of the train onto a side-track. It stopped again, unhooked and left three cars, went on to the main again, and switched back to pick up the caboosse.

The three cars had been spotted opposite the depot. Two were stock cars, and seemed filled with horses. The third was a bunk car such as are seen with railroad-construction trains. Tim Ford had just time to notice that the three cars bore the name and emblem of a well-known Eastern railroad, when he heard a wild hail:

"Well, here we are! Tumble out, roughnecks! Where's Dave Jackson? He's supposed to meet us."

Tim Ford gasped his surprise. Then he howled:

"Rio Grande Riley! You old son of a gun!"

Across the track and toward the platform, led by the giant "Rio Grande" Riley, came twenty men, all Wild West riders for the Super Amalgamated.

## CHAPTER XI.

### CIRCUS COWPOKES.

**D**AVE JACKSON and Tim Ford were surrounded, engulfed, slapped on their backs until their skin smarted, had endearing bad names howled into their ears. Rio Grande Riley stepped aside with Dave for a moment's conference, then turned back to the men.

"Unload!" he barked. "Feed and water! Grub line! Snap into it, roughnecks!"

The switching done by the train had attracted the attention of townsmen around the plaza, and they began drifting toward the depot. Their calls soon brought others. The people of the little

Arizona county seat were treated to a spectacle of unwasted motion and circus discipline.

Chutes were put at the car doors, and horses were unloaded. A picket line went up. Water and food for the animals appeared from somewhere. A fire was started, and a circus cook got coffee started and began cooking stuff in huge cans. Blankets were stripped off the horses and stowed away in packing cases from which came bridles and saddles and other gear. The horses were made ready for the trail.

The men began eating. Rio Grande Riley bellowed orders continually, and between orders talked to Dave Jackson.

"All the men understand the situation," Riley said. "We're ready. I brought twenty of the best, Dave. Everybody wanted to come. Real work back on the range for a season, at range wages! Man, they jumped at it! We'll harden up and learn some new tricks. But what's this about round-up?"

"Late this season," Dave explained. "On purpose, I think, so they can do some dirty work."

"Everybody seems to know everything except me," Tim Ford complained.

"Here it is, Tim," Dave said. "I wrote the show and Rio Grande and outlined the case here. I'm hirin' this bunch for the off season."

"I've got it! Jeff King and his men can quit, and to blazes with 'em!"

"That's part of it."

"There's goin' to be a ruckus!" Tim Ford danced with excitement.

"Probably a good one," Dave said. "Jeff King's goin' to have a chance to see some circus dudes and circus softies, as he called 'em, in action."

"Circus softies, eh?" Rio Grande

roared. "This bunch? Hold my head till I laugh. Every roughneck in the bunch itchin' for a fight."

The lawyer called Dave. He went into conference with him. The sheriff appeared and joined them. Then the two were introduced to the circus men.

The meal was finished. Gear was packed away. Personal war bags were loaded on a mule-drawn wagon which suddenly appeared, having been engaged by Dave in advance. Packing cases were taken from the car and put on another wagon. A buckboard appeared also, and the sheriff and lawyer got in, waved to Dave, and drove away.

Rio Grande approached Dave, jerked his body stiffly erect and saluted:

"Ready to move, sir," he said.

"A welcome drink at the big saloon," Dave directed. "Tim, get to the stable and get our horses."

**T**IM FORD hurried away gleefully. Dave swung up behind Rio Grande. The others mounted. Like a section of cavalry, they rode across the tracks and along the railroad to the plaza, where they dismounted at the hitch rails in front of a big building ablaze with light.

The townsmen were agog. These riders wore the costumes of circus cowboys. Their mounts were paint ponies, their saddles rather fancy. One of them rode carrying a lance on his stirrup, attached to which was a pennon of scarlet, bearing in gold the name of the Super Amalgamated.

But there was a practical look about the gun belts, holsters and guns they carried. And while they were more graceful in movement than most range riders, there was nothing soft-looking about them. It

dawned upon the townsmen of the county seat that these were all picked men, champions in ranch work, the best riders and ropers in the land. And Dave Jackson, from the local county, was their star!

They drank, sang and fussed around for half an hour or so, rolled cigarettes, fraternized with the townsmen. Then Rio Grande got a nod from Dave Jackson and roared above the din:

"Mount!"

They hurried from the saloon and got into their saddles. Tim was there with the sorrel and spotted pony. He and Dave mounted and rode beside Rio Grande. The latter barked a few orders, and, like a cavalry detachment, the score swung into formation and trotted along the side of the plaza and out of the town.

"I'm missin' the band," Tim Ford complained.

They passed the two wagons, which had started ahead of them. They jogged along at an easy but steady pace, and finally caught up with the buckboard carrying the sheriff and lawyer. Dave spoke to them, and the riders went ahead.

Several times they stopped to rest their mounts, and at each of these stops Dave outlined what he had planned, until they understood thoroughly. In time, they approached Rio Vista.

Tim Ford scouted ahead. Rio Vista slept. Not even the saloon had a light burning. The troop went through the little town slowly and out on the trail which led to the Three V.

They encountered nobody. It lacked a couple of hours to dawn when they neared the Three V ranch buildings. Dave Jackson led them off the trail and to the bottom of a coulee, where they dismounted to

wait. With Tim Ford and Rio Grande, he returned to the trail.

Shortly before dawn, the buckboard approached, and Dave talked to the sheriff and lawyer again, and gave them instructions, and the buckboard drove on. Then the three returned to the waiting men. Rio Grande remained with them in the coulee, to move along it and get nearer the house. Dave Jackson and Tim Ford went back to the trail and rode along it briskly to the end of the Three V lane. The buckboard had stopped there, out of sight from the house.

The first streaks of dawn were in the sky when Dave and Tim rode down the lane. Smoke was coming from the cook shack and from the ranch house. A few men wandered out of the bunk house, to wash faces and hands at the pump, and go about the morning chores.

**D**AVE and Tim galloped up to the front of the house. They dismounted and tied their horses. The men at work by the corral and barn recognized those two mounts immediately, and spread the news of the return of the pair.

Dave knocked on the front door. There was a wait, then Nancy Blasell opened it.

"Dave!" she gasped. "You've come back. Now, there'll sure be trouble."

"So your father hasn't told you anything. Good!" Dave said.

"Told me what, Dave?"

He entered with Tim and closed the door, and shot the bolt.

"Don't want to be disturbed," he said. "How's your father?"

"He's fine, Dave. The last two weeks he's improved wonderfully. I've been careful about his food and drink. He's tried to act dull and drugged when any of the others



were in the room, but I think they're commencing to suspect that he's getting much better, instead of worse."

Dave was halfway to the bedroom with Tim at his heels. Nancy ran ahead of him.

"Tell me——" she began.

"Got to see your dad quick," Dave said, and opened the door.

Bill Blasell was awake and propped up in the bed. He greeted Dave with a wide smile.

"Howdy, lad!" he said. "How's everything?"

"Plan's all worked out, sir. We're ready for the show-down. Here's some papers you can look over. Stuff 'em under the pillow out of sight if anybody comes in."

Before they could say more, somebody was pounding on the front door. Dave grinned at Nancy.

"I suspect that's Mr. Jeff King, comin' to kick me off the ranch again," he said. "Let him in. Let anybody in who's with him, too. And don't worry about what's goin' to happen."

"I want to know what——" the girl began.

"Do as Dave says, Nancy," her father directed.

She hurried into the living room, and Dave sat on the edge of the bed, and Tim Ford stood against the wall with his thumbs hooked into his belt, so he could get at either his gun or knife quickly.

They heard Nancy open the front door, heard a stentorian voice, then boots thumping the floor. The door of the bedroom was thrown open, and Jeff King came rushing in angrily with three of the Three V punchers behind him.

"Jackson, I thought I told you not to come back here," King said.

"Possibly you did. What of it?"

"You won't get away as easy again. What are you doin' here?"

"Visitin' with Mr. Blasell just now."

"Well, get out! We don't want any killers around here. You shot down Sam Potter over a card game and——"

"Reckon you might as well tell the truth of it," Dave said. "I discovered he'd shot Grandpap Hyams and accused him of it. He went for his gun, but was a mite too slow. Grandpap Hyams is fine, by the way. He'll be out of the hospital and back in the bunk house in another ten days."

"Not the Three V bunk house!"

"Yeah, the Three V bunk house. Grandpap had a lot of interestin' things to tell the sheriff. Everybody'll maybe hear about 'em later."

"Come on, Jackson, and get out of here!" King said. "You're botherin' Mr. Blasell."

"Why, Jeff, I'm enjoyin' his visit," Blasell said. "I'm askin' him to do as he planned, stay here all through the winter season."

"You are, huh?" Jeff King said. "Do we have to go through all that again? I'm takin' him and his pardner out of here right now, and maybe he'll be taught this time that we mean it when we tell him to stay away."

**S**QUEAKING wheels and the pounding of hoofs took Jeff King to the window. Some vehicle had come up the lane and stopped in front of the house, but he could not see anything more from the window. Somebody knocked on the front door, and Nancy hurried into the living room again.

"As long as I'm foreman around here——" King began.

"But you ain't foreman any more," Bill Blasell interrupted. "I don't like the way you've been runnin' thinks. Dave's foreman now."

"Oh, he is? This circus dude?"

Tim Ford stepped away from the wall. "That's enough of that kind of talk, you ape!" he snarled. "I've held my hand 'bout as long as I can."

Jeff King whirled toward his men. But the door opened before he could speak, and two men came in. On the vest of one was a gleaming star which designated him as the sheriff.

"Howdy, Mr. Blasell!" the sheriff greeted. "A little early, but I've got some business that can't wait. You never met Lawyer Wilkes, I reckon. Got them papers handy?"

"Here they are." Blasell handed over the papers Dave had given him, and at which he had glanced. "Give me a pen."

While King and his men looked on in bewilderment, Blasell signed his name a few times, and the lawyer muttered a notary's lingo and Bill Blasell said, "Yes."

Then, Dave Jackson faced Jeff King, while Tim moved nearer to indulge in violence if necessary.

"King, you're fired!" Dave said. "I'm half owner of the Three V again, back here where my dad meant for me to be. That's what these papers are about. I'm buyin' in and takin' charge. Roll your blankets and get out!"

## CHAPTER XII.

"HEY, RUBE!"

**E**VEN in his moment of rage and with three of his men at his back, Jeff King knew better than to start trouble with the sheriff standing beside Dave Jackson and Tim Ford. He wanted to get out of the house, call the other men to him, and get word to Carlos Ortega of what was happening.

"Fired, am I?" King snarled. "We'll see about that! What are

you tryin' to put over?" He turned to the sheriff. "Mr. Blasell's sick. Out of his head half the time. He ain't responsible, don't know what he's doin'. This man Jackson is puttin' over somethin'——"

"Dang your hide, don't say I ain't responsible!" Blasell roared from his bed. "For more'n two weeks, I ain't been gettin' any of that dope you were havin' the chink feed me. We've been tossin' his stuff away, and Nancy's been cookin' my food and givin' me my drink."

Jeff King's face turned almost purple. He whirled to the door and darted through, and his three men followed him. They rushed out of the house and down toward the corral, King howling for his men to gather. They came from bunk house and cook shack, from corral and barns.

The lawyer remained with Blasell, and the sheriff hurried out with Tim Ford, Dave following them. Nancy followed Dave. He had almost reached the front door when she called to him. He stopped and turned back to her.

"Dave, I—I didn't understand," she said.

"Nothin' much to understand. I couldn't put up a fight when I was here before without havin' King and the men walk out and causin' a lot of trouble. So I let him keep on runnin' things a couple of weeks until I could get my plan through."

"But, Dave! You being half owner again, and acting as foreman, doesn't change matters much. If King takes the men away with him, and the work season coming——"

"You watch through this window," Dave interrupted, grinning, "and maybe you'll see somethin' interestin'. I've got to hurry now."

He hurried out on the porch, where Tim Ford and the sheriff were

waiting. The three went slowly down the steps. Down by the corral, Jeff King was talking to the men. Some of them went back into the bunk house and came out buckling on their guns. King spoke to them again, and then, with him at their head, they started up toward the house.

One had remained behind. Now, he vaulted into the saddle of a horse which had been made ready for the day's work, bent low, and rode swiftly toward the trail.

Dave Jackson stepped out on the driveway. With all the power of his lungs, he gave the circus call for help:

"Hey, rube!"

King and his men came on, and the rider he had started to the Diamond Star to warn Carlos Ortega ripped with his rowels. But there was a sudden thunder of hoofs. Out of the near-by coulee came a score of men mounted on fine horses. One of them carried a pennon on a lance. They made a captive of Jeff King's man as he tried to swerve aside. Above the drumming hoofs could be heard the stentorian voice of Rio Grande Riley:

"Hey, rube! Right at 'em, rough-necks! Dave needs us. Round 'em up!"

**K**ING and his men came to an abrupt stop, astounded. The riders came on at top speed. Rio Grande Riley barked an order, and they spread out and charged along the lane. King's men turned and started to run back toward the bunk house.

"Round 'em up!" Rio Grande was howling.

The men were yelling as they rode. Ropes began circling over their heads as they ran nooses. One of King's men became panic-stricken

and fired. One of Riley's men was shot, and another was wounded.

Men howled and cursed, horses skidded and wheeled, ropes sang through the air and fell and were jerked taut, men sprawled helplessly on the ground. There was no more shooting. The surprise had been complete. King and his men were rounded up, roped, hustled to the ranch-house porch.

"Here they are, Dave," Rio Grande reported. "I think we've got 'em all. Is this the King hombre who thinks all circus men are softies? I've a notion to——"

"Easy!" Dave commanded. "Just line 'em up. I'll get the book and pay 'em all off in cash. Then you can see that they get their blankets and ride."

"They'll ride!" Rio Grande promised. "A fine bunch of hoodlums, pretendin' to be cowboys and range riders! Been takin' their wages under false pretenses, I reckon."

Rio Grande and his men watched the prisoners carefully. Dave went into the house to get the pay book. Standing on the top step, the sheriff addressed the prisoners:

"You men get out of the county as fast as your nags can carry you! I've got evidence enough to send most of you to the pen. I'm lettin' you go if you clear out. If I ever catch any of you in this county again, you'll get slapped into jail."

"You ain't got any right——" King began.

"Shut up!" the sheriff barked at him. "I'm not lettin' you go with the others, King. I'm holdin' you till we decide what to do with you and some of your friends, particularly Carlos Ortega."

"Carlos Ortega? He's my friend, yeah, as you'll learn," King said. "He's a big owner——"

"He's a big crook!" the sheriff in-

terraptured. "You and Carlos Ortega had plenty to do with the shootin' of Grandpap Hyams, I'm thinkin'. Also with keepin' Mr. Blasell doped and gettin' him to sign papers. We know how you've been robbin' the Three V right and left——"

"Big talk don't mean much."

"Shut up, or I'll turn my back and let these boys from the circus handle you," the sheriff threatened.

Dave came from the house with the pay book and a bundle of currency and a sack of coins. He paid off the men, King last. King was taken down by the corral by two of the men, to be guarded. The others were taken to the bunk house to get their belongings. They were allowed to catch up and saddle their own horses. The sheriff confiscated all their weapons.

"You won't be needin' guns in this county," he said. "After you leave it, I ain't carin' how many you have. Ride!"

The majority of them seemed glad to get away with nothing worse than this. They went down the lane and into the road, and turned toward Rio Vista.

Dave showed the ranch layout to Rio Grande. And now most of the men attacked the morning chores. They took turns raiding the cook shack, ate heavily, frightened the Chinese cook with their glares. After breakfast was over, Dave fired him.

"Got a circus cook comin' with the wagons," he said. "He knows how to feed this bunch of rough-necks. Now, you make tracks!"

**D**AVE and Tim Ford, the sheriff and lawyer, ate in the ranch house a breakfast which a smiling Nancy Blasell had taken pains to prepare. They gulped the food, for they were in a hurry. The work was far from done.

"We may have some trouble at the Diamond Star," Dave said. "Ortega may get wind of this and be ready for us, but the men can handle the situation."

"I'll go ahead in the buckboard with the Law, and be waitin' near," the sheriff said. "Try not to shoot up too many of 'em. It's a big job writin' out official reports."

"What are you going to do, Dave?" Nancy asked, timidly.

"Clean up the whole valley, Nancy, so's we'll have the right kind of neighbors. Everything's planned, and all we have to do is carry out the plans."

"If there's to be trouble——"

"Shucks! Rio Grande and the boys eat trouble. And here's Tim Ford grievin' because he can't get into a big ruckus."

"But you——"

He glanced at her swiftly. "I'm generally lucky," he said.

The sheriff and lawyer drove away in the buckboard. Rio Grande Riley chose two men to remain behind and guard the Three V while the others were gone. On a mule he owned, and with his belongings in a big bundle fastened behind the saddle, the Chinese cook started for Rio Vista, jabbering imprecations.

"Dave, I think he's cussin' you out," Tim Ford said. "You want me to put a bullet past his head?"

"Let him cuss," Dave replied, laughing. "We've got more important hombres to consider."

Rio Grande Riley and his men were looking to their riding gear, inspecting their six-guns, tightening their belts. Some of them were carrying rifles now, also. Dave and Tim Ford went out and got into their saddles.

"Let's ride!" Dave said.

They went to the road, then cut across country toward the Diamond

Star, where Carlos Ortega made his headquarters. He owned the Bar Box also, but kept only four men there, as Dave had learned. The other two small outfits he had bought were worked from the Diamond Star.

Over a rolling hill went the cavalcade, down into a winding gulch, Dave showing the way. He knew every foot of this country, had ridden over it as a boy. He knew how they could get close to the Diamond Star ranch house without showing themselves.

But one of Ortega's men, abroad early to look for some missing colts, saw them. He was not near enough to make out their identities. But the scarlet pennon intrigued him, and the militarylike formation the riders maintained, and he guessed they meant no good for Carlos Ortega. Undoubtedly, they were heading for the Diamond Star, too.

The rider cut down a hill and ripped with the rowels to get top speed out of his mount and carry the alarm. Dave and the others rode on slowly through the gulch, cut up over another hill, and went down a slope studded with stunted trees.

Then they were into another depression which curved toward the Diamond Star ranch buildings. Dave raised his hand and ordered a halt. He and Rio Grande Riley dismounted and crawled up to a place from which they could see the ranch house. They saw men hurrying around by the corral and among the outbuildings. The ranch bell was ringing, which meant all Ortega's riders were being called.

"They're wise," Dave said.

"Yeah, I reckon they're expectin' somethin'," Rio Grande replied.

"It may be hot work, Rio Grande."

"Who cares?"

"If you're regrettin' the deal we've made, and want to back out——"

"Dave Jackson, I've known you for quite a spell," Rio Grande interrupted, "and that's the first downright silly remark I've ever heard you make. Let's ride!"

They descended and mounted again. Dave explained the layout to the men. They went on for a distance under cover, then suddenly emerged within three hundred yards of the ranch house, with level ground free of obstructions between it and them.

They quickened their pace. They could see Ortega's men gathering near the corral. Some of them were hurrying to get mounts saddled.

"Hey, rube!" Rio Grande cried.

They spread out, and charged.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### DAVE ACTS IN EMERGENCY.

**J**EFF KING had been brought along, fastened in his saddle, his wrists lashed behind his back. One man had been assigned to guard him, with instructions to shoot him if he attempted to escape. The instructions had been given by the sheriff.

The sheriff and lawyer, in their buckboard, came driving into the Diamond Star lane now, and stopped to await results. Jeff King's guard took him over beside them.

The others charged on. But Carlos Ortega did not get in a panic as Jeff King had done. He had been warned by his man, and this charge convinced him that these men were enemies. He knew only that something had gone wrong, that this was an invasion by a hostile force.

Guns began barking down by the bunk house and other outbuildings. Bullets flew past the heads of the circus cowboys. But in that mad



charge they made elusive targets. One checked his horse and slipped quietly from the saddle to nurse a wounded leg. A horse went down, but the rider landed on his feet and ran on, his gun out and belching.

Two of Ortega's men sprawled on the ground. The others were running for cover. Some got into the bunk house, and Ortega and three of his men into the ranch house itself. Ropes were singing and falling, and men were being jerked to the ground. The wild howls of Rio Grande told his men what to do.

Somebody began firing from a window of the ranch house, and Dave felt a bullet brush his left arm. He charged toward the end of the veranda. Tim Ford and another man got to a place where he could not be seen from the window.

The three dismounted and got upon the porch, watching the front door. The riders were rounding up Ortega's men. Ortega had only twelve at the Diamond Star, and four of them were down. The battle was soon over.

The prisoners were herded to the porch. Rio Grande's men searched the buildings for others, but found none. Ortega and his three men were still in the house, but were quiet. The sheriff drove the buckboard down the lane, and Jeff King was brought along behind it.

It was the sheriff who pounded on the front door.

"Come out, Ortega, and bring those men with you!" he ordered.

The front door was opened, and Ortega and his men came out.

"Drop your guns!"

The guns were dropped. Carlos Ortega stepped to the railing.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked. "You are the sheriff, it seems. Why do you let these men raid my ranch?"

"They're my deputies, every one of them."

"What does it mean, señor?"

"Your game's up, Ortega. First, your men are goin' to hit the trail. Get your nags and stuff and get out of the county! It's jail for you if you don't. I've got plenty of evidence. Want to pay 'em off?"

"Why should I pay them off? What right have you to send my men away, with the busy season coming on? How is it you carry out the orders of this circus clown?"

"Let me at him!" Tim Ford begged.

"I'm handlin' this now," the sheriff said. "It's up to you, Ortega, how it's handled. Do as I say, and it'll be better for you. Pay off your men! They've got to ride. I'm givin' them until dark to get out of the county. They can just make it if they ride south."

"If I do not see fit to do so?" Ortega asked.

"Do as I say, in everything, or go to jail!" the sheriff snapped. "I've got evidence enough to send you up for twenty years. Grandpap Hyams started us on the right road to get it."

"Evidence that I have done what, señor?"

"Robbed the Three V blind through your man, Jeff King. Kept Bill Blasell doped and got him to sign papers. Had a hand in tryin' to bump off Grandpap Hyams, so he couldn't talk. Grandpap is willin' to overlook it. The Three V has been the heaviest sufferer, and its owners are willin' to let you go—providin' you do certain things."

"What things?"

"Pay these men, first, and the ones you've got at the Bar Box, so's they can ride. If you don't, they'll be made to ride anyhow. Make it quick!"

CARLOS ORTEGA returned into the house, with two of the riders guarding him. He came out with a book and a metal box. With as few words as possible, he paid off his men.

"Riley, have some of your boys see that these hombres get their own mounts and stuff and get started," the sheriff ordered. "Now, Ortega, we'll get at the rest of it. You do the talkin', Dave."

"It's soon said," Dave Jackson replied. "Ortega, we don't want a man like you in this valley. We could send you to prison, but that'd mean a delay and a lot of litigation, and we want to get things settled. I'm buyin' you out."

"You are what, señor?"

"I've gone through the records. I know what you paid for this place, and for the others. I'm addin' a little to that price. A lot of valuable stuff on the range is really Three V stock anyway. I've got the papers all ready, and here's a lawyer. We close the deal now."

"And the money, señor?"

"I had quite a lot left after I bought back my half interest in the Three V. And Rio Grande Riley and some of the boys have been savin' their circus wages, and they've come into the deal. I've got certified checks in my pocket, Ortega. I'm payin' as soon as the papers are signed."

"Perhaps I do not care to sell."

The sheriff stepped up again. "All right! I've got warrants here, Ortega. Close this deal and get out, so the air'll be purer hereabouts, and I won't serve the warrants. Refuse, and I take you to jail, and all your men along with you for witnesses."

Carlos Ortega shrugged his shoulders. "It seems you are holding the highest cards, señor," he said. "Let us get at the business, please."

The papers were read and signed, and Dave Jackson handed over the certified checks. Property Ortega could take with him was designated, and was to be loaded into a wagon and delivered at the Rio Vista depot, and shipped. Ortega wrote a note, and two of Riley's men started for the Bar Box with it, calling in the men Ortega had working there.

"Riley, you'll handle the Diamond Star," Dave said. "I've arranged at the county seat for a bunch of good, honest punchers to report to us soon as word gets back we're ready for them. We'll have a full crew for all the outfits within four days, in time for the heavy work."

The Diamond Star riders drifted away toward the county line as quickly as they could get ready. The Bar Box men came riding in, learned what had happened, were disarmed and paid off and sent away also.

"We're goin' to combine the Diamond Star, the Bar Box and small outfits, and name the works the Super Amalgamated," Dave explained. "Riley's goin' to quit circus business along with me, and manage the new outfit. Some of the boys will stay on, and some go back to the show in the spring."

"And we're goin' to raise and train stock for the show," Riley added. "I made a deal with the Super Amalgamated before I left. The riders can winter here and work and keep in condition. It's a fine set-up."

**B**UT Carlos Ortega did not seem to share their enthusiasm. He was rather morose as they rushed around, loading his stuff on a wagon, sending his men away, saddling a horse the deal allowed him to retain.

Ortega knew that he was fortunate to get away like this, with money in his pocket. He realized

that had been allowed because Dave Jackson wished to avoid the months of confusion which would have ensued if everything went into court. But resentment burned within him, and his eyes gleamed whenever he looked at Dave.

"Riley, I want one of your men to ride along with me," the sheriff said. "He's to watch Ortega. I'm takin' him to Rio Vista and seein' that he keeps right on goin'. Your man can come back from there. And you, Ortega, want to keep goin'. You'll be picked up if found in the county after to-night."

"Am I to be ordered around like a tramp?" Ortega snarled.

"Get on your horse!" the sheriff barked at him. "Ride behind the buckboard with that man guardin' you. And don't try to make any bad move, or you'll get it!"

The sheriff and lawyer got into the buckboard after shaking hands with Dave, Tim Ford and Rio Grande. Carlos Ortega, his face a picture of rage, got up into his saddle. The man assigned to guard him began untying his horse from a hitch post at the end of the porch.

"Señor Jackson, I have you to thank for all this," Ortega said. "Perhaps it is not the end."

"Your threats don't worry me any, Ortega," Dave said.

"Perhaps this will worry you, Señor Jackson!"

Ortega had been disarmed of the six-gun he had been wearing. But he had another weapon beneath his coat. And now he brought it out, and the sun flashed from it as he jerked it up. It spat flame and lead.

Caught off guard, Dave tried to get out his own gun. But a bullet smashed into his upper right arm and whirled him halfway around with the impact. Ortega wheeled his horse, threatening those nearest

with his gun. He prepared to fire at Dave again.

There was another flash, and it was not caused by gunfire. A streak of fire seemed to shoot through the air, but it was only the sun revealing the course of the knife Tim Ford always wore and which he could use so well.

Carlos Ortega's gun dropped from his hand as half a dozen of the men were whipping out their weapons. He reeled in his saddle, threw out his arms, crashed to the ground.

"That ape!" Tim Ford said. "Tryin' to go gunnin' for Dave!"

"He won't ever go gunnin' for anybody again," Rio Grande reported, after a quick look. "That makes it simpler, I reckon. His men will sure scatter now, and there won't be any danger of Ortega gettin' some of 'em together and takin' to the hills. That was a right handy cast of the knife, Tim."

But Tim was hurrying to Dave's side, and the others followed him.

"Through the flesh of the upper arm," Dave said. "Nothin' to get worried about. Rio Grande, you've got a few wounded men scattered around, and they'd better be patched up. Only one of our boys. None of 'em bad hurt, I reckon."

"I'll tend to it, Dave."

"Tim, you hit the trail for the Three V, takin' a couple of the men with you, and tell 'em there that everything's all right."

"Yeah, I'll tell her," Tim said, grinning and starting for the spotted pony.

"I'll be along, in a couple of hours."

WHEN he rode down the Three V lane with two of the men, his right arm in a sling, Nancy Blasell was on the porch, waiting.

The men went on to the corral. Tim Ford, who was near the end of the porch, grinned and followed them.

"Tim told us everything, Dave," Nancy said. "Oh, I'm so glad everything's worked out. This'll be a peaceful, prosperous valley again. And you can be a range man and a circus man both. Tim said how Rio Grande was planning to train stock for the show here, and you'll be training men, I suppose."

"Oh, I reckon!" Dave admitted.

"Your arm——"

"Nothin' to worry about."

"You come right in the house and let me dress it right," she said.

Dave went in to see Bill Blasell first. Extending his left, Dave shook hands. A smile of complete satisfaction covered Blasell's face.

"You take it easy and get well now, old-timer," Dave said. "Nancy thinks she needs to fix up my arm."

In the living room, he sat beside the table, and Nancy got hot water, bandages, iodine, and began work.

"I hope you'll like it being home again," she said.

"No question of that!"

"But won't you get lonesome? No big crowds, and the band doesn't play here!"

"I can get along without a band.

Rio Grande and the boys will keep me from gettin' lonesome."

"Oh, yes, of course. But I meant—— Well, Dave, what of the future? Are you going to bring that Madame Delphine out here to the ranch after you marry her? Will she like it here?"

"Delphine would hate it," Dave said.

"Oh, Dave! What are you going to do, then?"

"I'm just goin' to forget Delphine."

"Isn't that—rather heartless?"

Dave grinned. "Honey——" he began, and she looked up startled. "Somebody was havin' fun with that Carlos Ortega, I reckon, when he wrote tryin' to find out things about me. Madame Delphine is the fat lady in the circus sideshow. She's around six hundred on the hoof. And she's old enough to be my mother. Me, I don't feel quite up to a romance with Madame Delphine."

She flushed, her eyes sparkled, she laughed outright. She was very close to him as she prepared to put on the new bandage. And Dave Jackson had one good arm left, and had been trained to act quickly in emergency.

So he knew just what to do—and did it.

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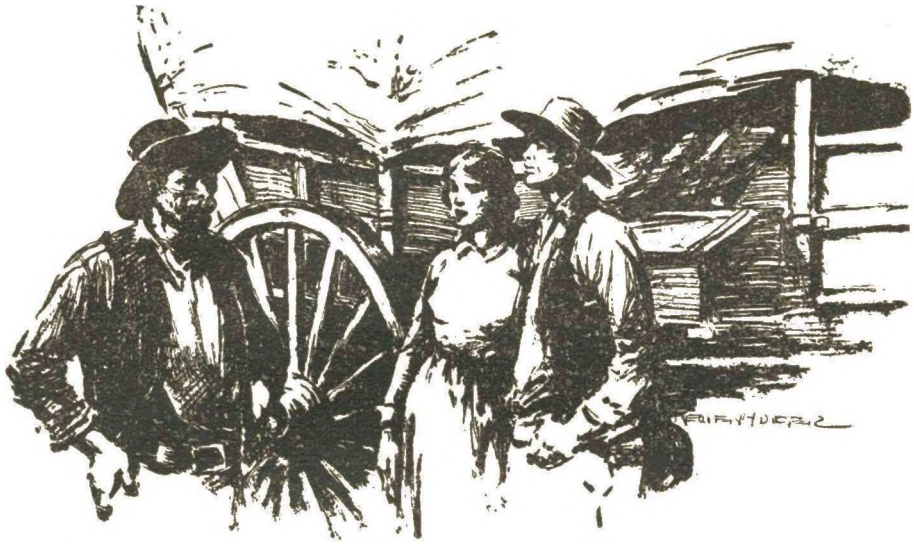
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# The Promised Land

By VON CORT

Author of "Gun Smoke Sawbones."

**F**OX TRUITT grinned at his newly washed and shaven image in the cracked hotel room mirror. With his black whiskers removed, he didn't look so bad. A bit of walnut stain covered the revealing pallor of his skin where the beard had been, and the bushy growth on his upper lip had been duly trimmed and tamed down to a pair of respectable but elegant "longhorn" mustaches. Pleasantly he bent in front of the stingy looking-glass, and, out of the tail of his eye, surveyed the jim dandy San Francisco hair cut. Joe Moss, the livery stable owner down the street, had given him that. Truitt winked a sly eye at the mirror and turned toward the low window. It was a long time since he had been quite so pleased with his own exterior. As for the inner man, he'd

never been prone to waste much thought on *him*.

From the window of the Eldorado Hotel, where he stood, he surveyed the panorama stretched out beyond the uneven string of mangy clap-board houses that comprised Broken Wagon. To the west the foothills of the Rockies rose starkly in the clear afternoon air, presenting their resentful barrier against invasion from the east where low grasslands billowed in rounded hillocks like a petrified ocean with occasional storm crests of sagebrush and juniper.

But the ground was already growing stony, with an occasional rock jutting out the farther west one's eye wandered, and the crossing of the river at Broken Wagon had truly earned its name. Truitt could now see the short line of wagons moving their laborious way westward in the



distance, rocking and swaying over the uneven trail. Two or three hours more, and they would come into the town and curse its name. Fat farmers from the East, with money sewn into their belts; innocent, naïve, thinking of Apache Indians as their only dangers. They would need guides, dependable, honest men with nerves and muscles of steel. Fox Truitt twirled his mustaches, and had a last glance at himself before he descended to the roaring saloon below. Never in his life had he looked quite so respectable.

Joe Moss was shoeing the dun mare as Truitt reached the livery stable. He straightened up as Fox entered, and gave him an appraising look. "Yes, sir," he said. "What can I do for you?"

Truitt slapped himself on the knee and let out a guffaw. "Reckon you can finish shoeing that hoss of mine." He grinned as the big man wiped his sooted brow in bewilderment. "What a man you are! Don't even know your own customers!"

Moss looked him over, then went on with his work. "Who'd ever have thunk it?" he commented. "You look so downright honest, you even fooled me."

"Here," said Truitt, and drew out his purse, "I'll pay you now. I figger I may have to come right early in the morning and get her."

An understanding glance shot from the livery man's eye. "I sabe," he said, pocketing the money. "You aim to sneak your party out before dawn, so nobody'll see you guide them. Pretty slick, Fox! Pretty slick!"

**F**OX TRUITT was standing on the hotel porch, watching the stars come out one by one as the last flare of red sank behind the silhouetted mountains, when the first

wagon came into town. The horses lay wearily against the leather as they dragged the heavy vehicle over the stony ground.

A sandy-haired, square-shouldered youth, astride a fuzztail mustang, rode side guard, and urged the tired animals on with frequent cracks from his rawhide whip. A mere slip of a girl held the reins, sitting stanchly erect in the flickering light of the lantern that swung from the front bow of the wagon. Beside her sat an old man, obviously her father. It was a hefty wagon, built solidly of oak, and with strong, thick-spoked wheels. Apparently it had come thus far without mishap. Every so often the young fellow would glance at the girl and his confident air would change for one of tenderness; when his eyes went to the old man, pity ruled them.

"Babes in the woods," said Truitt to himself. "As green as the grass on the hills, and just as easy to pluck. They've got good clothes on them and decent horses," he chuckled. "And likely as not, plenty of cash to buy more with. Man!" he said half aloud as he watched them swing in and stop at the livery stable. "It'll be a cinch! Yes, sir, a cinch!"

Behind him, inside the hotel, the noise increased as the oil lamps were lighted and a steady stream of customers crossed the gallery—gold miners, trappers and immigrants. The flaring yellow light and painted girls lured them and made them spend their hard-earned money with light hearts. Truitt went inside for a final drink before sauntering over to the stable. At the bar he stopped and almost wheeled on the spot.

With his elbows leaning leisurely on the mahogany, a tall, eagle-eyed trapper was surveying the crowd. His lean face shone with revengeful

purpose as though he were searching for some one. An ugly scar flamed across his left cheek and added a sinister aspect to his looks. Without taking his eyes from the crowd, he reached back for his glass and tossed down a couple of fingers of the raspy tarantula juice that passed for whisky in the Eldorado Hotel. He seemed to be examining the populace one by one.

With forced nonchalance Truitt called for a drink and waited for the gaze of the scarred one. Presently the man looked straight at him, and Truitt felt a chill race up and down his spine. He himself had put the scar on that cheek, and the costly furs of many months' hunting had been his.

The trapper's glance passed, and Truitt breathed easier, rubbing his newly shaven chin with relief. But could he be sure that the trapper had not recognized him? Was it perhaps a ruse? His hand wandered reassuringly inside his vest to where a derringer snuggled against his armpit. He'd go out into the dark and wait for the man to come out. Then a shot in the back, and he'd feel real safe.

Slowly, leisurely, he made his way between the girls and the gaming tables and reentered the gallery that ran the full length of the building. Carelessly he stalked to the end and ambled around the corner. There was enough light from the stars to see any one emerging from the hotel; not enough to distinguish features, but there was no mistaking the trapper. He'd cut an outstanding figure anywhere, tall and lanky as he was, with his eagle-beak nose and long flowing hair.

Truitt puffed on a fresh cigar as he waited in silence, a ready hand on the derringer. Several wagons had pulled in now, and he saw camp fires

bob up in the dark on the other side of the houses across the street. Here and there the *plink-plunk* of a banjo rose in the still night air, accompanied by chants in husky voices. From the livery and blacksmith's came the roar of bellows and clanging of metal on metal.

"Oh, my darling, oh, my darling,  
Oh, my darling Clementine,  
You are lost and gone forever,  
Oh, my darling Clementine."

"Red Lucy" was singing inside the barroom, and "Drunk" O'Neill was banging away on the tinny piano. Several voices joined in the chorus. Inadvertently Truitt's foot tapped out the time on the weathered boards.

**D**OWN the street a couple of drunken cowboys swayed along, stumbling over their own feet, growling at each other in their peculiar, guttural voices. A couple of women crossed the street, followed by their men carrying suitcases. They disappeared through the hotel entrance. It would be good to sleep once more in a soft white bed before starting the long trip across the mountains. Who could tell, perhaps it would be the last time they slept in a bed!

"But I kissed her  
Little sister  
And forgot my Clementine."

Truitt stiffened, and the derringer slid halfway out from under his coat. The trapper had come out. Truitt threw his cigar behind him. A shower of tiny sparks eddied between the rocks and died down. He pulled himself into the shadow and cocked the hammer.

"Pardon me, mister, but can you tell us where we'd be likely to find a parson?"

Truitt whirled, his hair on end. The derringer slid back into his vest and he caught his breath with a little sucking sound.

"Huh? What's that?"

There they stood before him in the starlight, the two young ones from the first wagon. He, tall and firm-muscled under his deerskin jerkin; she, small and lithe, standing straight up and down, apart from him, but near enough to feel that she belonged. Their soft moccasins had deadened the sound of their footfalls as they came up the street.

"You see," said the young man, "we aim to get married afore we start over the mountains."

The girl stirred a little as he spoke, and in the sparse light Truitt saw a tiny smile come to her soft white oval of a face.

"Yes, yes," he said, still a bit bewildered. "A parson?"

"She lost her ma two weeks ago," the young man went on. "The Apaches got her near Buffalo Bend. They ain't no tellin' what to-morrer'll bring. That's how it is. We just figger on getting married."

The idea was outlandish. To ask for a minister in a place like Broken Wagon. Fox Truitt rubbed his chin and stared at the two before him.

"Well, now," he said, "I'll tell you folks. We're kind of short on preachers in this here town. But how about a justice of the peace? We got one. He can wed you, if you like."

The youngster looked questioningly at the girl. "What do you say, Mamie?" he asked, his deep voice suddenly toned by an uncertain tremble.

She looked up at him, and her hand found his. "Whatever you say, Kit," she answered without hesitation.

For a moment they stood in silence; only the stars looking down

on them. Some one came out of the barroom, and the song blared out in all its loudness.

"You are lost and gone forever,  
Oh, my darling Clementine."

Truitt cleared his throat. "Come," he said, "and I'll show you where the justice lives."

They followed him down the street toward the cabin where "Snaky" Alcott, the peace officer, lived. Truitt, during the walk introduced himself as Jim Ledger and learned that he was in the company of Kit Langdon and Miss Mamie Payson, long ago of West Virginia.

At the livery stable the girl's father, Hiram Payson, a solemn, gaunt man, joined the little procession. Truitt swore silently as they found Snaky Alcott's cabin shrouded in darkness. They pounded on the door with vigor, but without result. Probably drunk, thought Truitt. The evening was still young; there might yet be hope.

**I** THINK I know where to find him," he told the others. "You people sit down on the porch and I'll go fetch him."

"Look here," protested Kit Langdon, "we don't want to cause you no trouble."

"Tain't nothing," insisted Truitt and left, headed straight for Daley's saloon. No sooner had he reached the swinging doors than they flapped open and a man was thrown backward into his arms.

Fox Truitt helped him to his staggering feet and steadied him. "Snaky," he said, "come on down to your house. I got some business for you to do."

"Get out of my way," stuttered the peace officer excitedly. "I ain't got no time. Lemme at the fellow who threw me out!" He pushed

Truitt aside and made for the door. "Hold on," said Truitt, and grabbed him by the coat. "Them folks is waiting for you to wed them."

"Well," shouted a voice from the inside, "did you get enough, or are you coming back for more?"

Alcott struggled toward the door. "Lemme at him! Lemme go!"

"Come on," insisted Truitt. "You got better things to do!"

"Here," said the struggling peace officer suddenly, tearing the badge from his coat. "You do it. You marry 'em. I deputize you to do it."

Before Truitt could protest, Alcott freed himself and left the other gaping, with the star in his hand.

As he hurried down the street, a loud crash from the saloon made him turn around. The justice of peace had come flying out again, this time to lie still on the board walk a string of curses his only signs of life.

They found a ragged old Bible among the fighting peace officer's effects. So it came to pass that Fox Truitt, the star prominently displayed on his coat, under which his derringer reposed, married as man and wife, to have and to hold, for better or worse, in sickness and in health—one, Kit Langdon to one, Mamie Payson. Truitt couldn't read, so the old man Payson opened the Good Book per chance and read the piece about the traveler from Jericho who fell among strangers and robbers and who was finally saved by the good Samaritan. Then Truitt pronounced them man and wife, and a horse trader and a gold miner who had passed in the street were called in as witnesses by Mr. Payson and signed their marks on a piece of paper with Kit's and Mamie's names. Suddenly awkward, the two youngsters had shaken hands all around and then gone,

hand in hand, to spend the night at the hotel.

Truitt, after having closed up the cabin and left Snaky's star on the table, walked old Payson down to the wagon camp.

"That livery stable owner was talking about how you know a quicker road across the mountains," began the old man. "He said you sometimes worked as a guide."

"Sure," answered Truitt, jiggling the coin that Kit Langdon had given him after the ceremony. "Sure's my name's Jim Ledger. I know a faster and better way to the promised land than most."

"If you'd guide us, we'd pay you well," went on Payson. "We got a good wagon and horses. They can stand rough going. I'm hankering to see that promised land of California afore I die. I been thinking, since my wife— Well, I'm an old body and I reckon I aint got long to go."

"I'll guide you," said Truitt.

They had now reached the camp and come into the red glow of the many fires that splashed the wagon wheels and canvas with crimson.

"I was thinking," said Payson, and looked his companion over, "of that text I just read about the traveler on the road that fell among robbers."

"Yes?" said Truitt, and felt something snare his throat.

Payson kept looking him over and measuring him on all sides. Finally a smile spread on his old face, and he laid a gentle hand on Truitt's shoulder. "I was thinking mostly of the good Samaritan. Come, let's make some coffee."

THE dawn was still gray, and a veil of hoarfrost covered the grass and rocks as the Payson wagon pulled out the next morning. A sleepy orange sun edged over the

horizon and threw long vague shadows ahead of the travelers. Behind the Paysons came another, smaller wagon, drawn by mules. A farmer family from the Ohio had found it wise to join up and take advantage of the short road, and the Paysons had been glad to have the company. The more, the slower, perhaps; but also the safer.

Kit Langdon rode close to the wagon to-day, and once in a while, when they thought no one was looking, the two youngsters held hands. They were apart from all the others now.

With a glance back at the sleeping town of Broken Wagon, Fox Truitt turned to his party and made a mental survey of the men. There were two men in the Carlson family, and one young boy of thirteen. There were two women, one young and one old, and a little girl.

Truitt contemplated the heavy, naïve faces and laughed at their childish blue eyes. He dismissed them with a shrug. They'd go first, with surprise on their slow faces; then, when Kit and his father-in-law came up to see what had happened, he'd plug them before they had a chance to think. The whole thing would be a cinch.

What none of them saw, riding steadily on their trail, doggedly keeping them in sight without being seen himself, was a tall, wiry trapper on a lean horse. He had a nose like an eagle's beak, unkempt shoulder-long hair, and purpose in his far-seeing eye.

The ground rose steadily, and the air became thinner and cooler. The little flock plodded on, trusting in their guide. Forever challenging them was the long, jagged line of blue that looked like a solid cloud bank hugging the horizon—the Rockies. Imperceptibly, day by

day, it would grow or it would recede, depending on the weather. Sometimes, in the morning, Kit could swear that they were within half a day's ride of the mountains; then, at night he would feel as though the horses and wagons had gone backward like crabs and the rock-set horizon was farther away than ever.

"Tell us something about California, Mr. Ledger," Mamie Langdon asked Truitt one night as they were gathered about the fire. "Tell us about the rich farm land and the strange trees. The sun always shines. Ain't that so?"

And Fox Truitt talked. Told them of the land that they would never see. He fabled about farm lands and fruit trees and sunshine, picturing it for them as best he could, for he had never seen the place himself. Only fools went over the mountains to California; but he did not tell them that. His eyes wandered over them, one by one, as they sat in the flickering red glow of the fire, mouths open, eyes glued on him. The two children were leaning in their mother's lap, eyelids drooping, their last look awarded the speaker before strong arms lifted them, and carried them to the wagons. Always he would end up, looking at Mamie Langdon sitting with her husband's hand in hers, asking interminable questions. Soon they would all be dead, these innocent fools who trusted in God and strangers.

"You must come and visit with us when we get settled in California," Mamie was saying. "You must come often and stay long. The latching string will always be loose."

He had no ready answer for that. He wanted to chuckle softly to himself, but found that he couldn't, and wondered why.

One of the Carlsons had an old



guitar, and they took to singing their old-time songs. They always sang before they went to sleep. There was one song that old Payson always wanted to hear just before they turned in. Truitt had no ear for music, but this tune kept haunting him during the restless hours of the night. It was a sort of hymn; a hymn about the promised land where all good people went. It sickened him with a queer feeling he had never known before. Sometimes, when the old man asked for the song, Truitt got up and walked out, out into the dark. But he could not walk far enough to escape the words, and before his mind was forever the picture of hopeful faces about the dying fire, dreaming of the promised land. What had happened to him? Had he gone mad?

**T**HE night the first flurries of snow came floating on the north wind and breathed its chill warning on them, he and Kit Langdon remained by the fire after the others had gone to rest.

"The trail is getting cold," said Kit after a long silence. "There ain't even a sign of the Indians."

Truitt did not answer for a while. He caught the tiny shade of doubt, perhaps mistrust, in the other's voice.

"Not even the Indians know this trail," he answered. "Only I know it."

"Do you?" said the young man suddenly.

Truitt laughed to make the other confident, but could not tell whether he succeeded. There was an air of unrest about Kit Langdon as he rose to go to the wagon.

Fox Truitt looked after him. "To-night!" he said to himself. "To-night!"

He had the first watch. In the

light of the embers, he took out his derringer and examined it. His rifle, lying across his knees, needed oiling. When he was through oiling it and looked up, some one was staring at him from across the fire. His heart jumped and skipped several beats as he saw the long lean, eagle-nosed trapper looking down on him. The uncertain light licked the long scar on the man's left cheek.

Finally Truitt got his breath. "You come sudden," he said, finding no other words.

The trapper smiled and reached his long arms toward the heat of the fire like a giant vulture stretching its wings before settling. "I come quiet," he remarked softly. "Didn't mean to scare you. Howdy!"

Behind him Truitt saw the trapper's horse, standing at a distance by the trailing rein. The animal was unshod. That's why he hadn't heard it, or perhaps it was the echo of that infernal song in his mind that had prevented him.

Slowly Truitt's hand strayed up near his chest, his fingers itching nervously for the grip of the derringer. The trapper settled himself and lighted a pipe.

Desperately Truitt tried to read his face, to see if he was recognized, but the trapper's countenance revealed nothing. His weather-bronzed skin was an inscrutable mask in the poor light. The dancing flames threw queer little moving lights and shadows over his face, making it look like wrinkled parchment.

"It's a lone trail," he said at last, in the taciturn way of his kind.

Truitt's mind raced, trying to catch the implication, if any, in the remark. "Yep," he finally answered, "it is."

"Going to Californy, I s'pose," said the trapper.

Truitt nodded.

The trapper sucked on his pipe and meditated for a spell. "You been on this trail afore?" he asked, breaking the silence as a distant wolf howl echoed in the hills.

Truitt's pulse was quickening now, perspiration starting to press out under his hat brim. What was that infernal trapper leading up to? Why was he asking all these questions? Did he, like Truitt, know that the trail ended nowhere? That it petered out amid the banks and drifts of the eternal snow where hunger and frost rule—that there was no trail.

"Certainly," lied Truitt, biting his lip. "Would I be taking these folks over the mountains if I hadn't been to California this way myself?"

The trapper's expression never changed. "No harm meant," he said slowly, boring his eyes into Truitt's in his peculiar manner. "Only it's a hard-going trail, and I thought I was the only man who knew it. I reckon I was wrong."

Fox Truitt felt dizzy. The other's words rang in his ears, and his temples hammered like Indian war drums. So there was a trail—a path to the promised land!

**T**HE trapper pulled his blanket around himself and curled up by the fire. His long body remained still as a log. He slept without sound, and once, when Truitt added a few chips to the fire and stirred it up a bit, he sat up instantly and looked about; then, without a word, he lay down and went to sleep again. After an hour and a half, he got up and folded his robe. "I go," he said.

"At this hour?" asked Fox Truitt.

"To see my traps," answered the other, moving toward his horse.

Truitt watched him disappear into

the dark. "What are you trapping up here?" he called after him.

"White fox," answered the trapper without looking back.

Soundlessly, with the quick agile motions of a cat, Truitt rose and sneaked after the trapper, his rifle cocked.

The uncertainty was driving him mad. Was the man playing a game with him? Had there been a mocking smile behind that inscrutable leathery face on the other side of the fire?

Light, downy flakes of snow came dancing out of the night and tickled his face, blurring the view as he strained his sight trying to catch a glimpse of his quarry. Now and then a tiny lump of snow, fallen from the hoofs of the trapper's horse, indicated that he was on the right track; but no one was in sight. Once he thought he detected a fleeting shadow disappearing behind a giant boulder, but apparently it was nothing. The trapper kept dissolving into thin air and snow flurries.

Again Truitt seemed to sense a movement among the rocks on the hilly slope along which he was passing, when suddenly, with a howl that shook him to the very marrow of his bones, hell broke loose behind him.

Whirling, he saw a group of silhouetted riders sweep over the hilltop and dash down toward camp. Feathered heads and lances swirled through the air. Whoops and savage yells rent the stillness. Automatically Truitt took aim and sent a bullet after the raiders. When he reached the wagons, his rifle still smoking in his hand, everything was in a turmoil. Bewildered, the immigrants were stumbling from their sleep, firing their guns at the Indians.

As suddenly as they had come out

of the night, as abruptly they departed through the whirling snowflakes, whooping and shouting as they drove the stampeded horses and mules before them. A mass of tangled reins and broken tethers were the only signs left.

Cursing heartily, the men reloaded their rifles and stood waiting for the redskins to return, but no attack came. Hopeless, speechless, they faced each other, knowing full well the significance of what had occurred. Without draft animals they were stranded in the vastness of the mountains. They could not carry enough food along to chance it on foot. The women and children would perish, then the men, one by one.

Truitt felt all eyes upon him and squirmed under their glances. They looked to him, their guide, in the emergency. He had been on guard when the raid had come. Out of his carelessness, their predicament had arisen, yet he saw no malice in the eyes of the men, not even in the blue eyes of Kit Langdon.

"Some sudden," was all he could say, standing there in their midst like a wet dog. "Some sudden!"

In the pause that followed, one of the Carlson men put some wood and chips on the fire that now flamed against an ocher-smear'd, chilly eastern sky. Finally Mamie Langdon smiled at him. "I guess it couldn't be helped," she said, and leaned against her husband. "Sure *was* some sudden."

Truitt saw no fear in her eyes as she stood there before him, just as she had stood the night he had married her to Kit—for better or worse, in sickness or health.

Kit's face was serious with the full importance of the situation. "What d'ye reckon we had better do?" he asked slowly.

THE women had begun cooking breakfast, and the men felt once more secure, seeing a routine chore performed with such calm. After all, they weren't dead yet. Surely, there must be something that could be done.

"Look!" shouted old Hiram Payson suddenly. "A rider!"

They turned and saw the trapper come at them in a slow gait, his horse carefully picking its way among the stones. The tall, spare man sat oddly slouched in the saddle, a shadow of painful drowsiness darkening his face. He was a dozen paces from the wagons when he suddenly slumped forward and slid to the ground.

The horse stopped at once and whinnied nervously. The broken shaft of an arrow in its master's side told a story more eloquent than words. Kit and Mamie were already at his side, lifting him gently, while others got blankets ready by the fire. One of the children commenced bawling and was promptly slapped in the face by a kind but heavy hand.

As they nursed the trapper, and Payson, who was quite a hand with wounds, removed the arrow and bandaged the gaping hole it left, Fox Truitt's eye wandered to the horse, which stood faithfully at attention a short distance from the fire. Not until the trapper had opened his eyes and whistled softly to it, did the animal pay any heed to the oats that Kit brought it. There, in that lone horse, was escape from starvation. At night, when they were all asleep, Truitt would sneak away. Perhaps he would also have gold—gold that would be utterly useless to starving people.

An hour later, with the somewhat recovered trapper in their midst, they held council.

"It's a cinch," said the wounded man, "that them Indians ain't going to give back the horses and mules. So you folks better empty yer purses if yeh got any, and send some one back to Broken Wagon for some more horses and mules. I got one good cayuse. Yer welcome to use that, any of yeh that knows the trail."

One by one they all turned to Truitt.

"Mr. Ledger knows the trail," said Mamie Langdon, "if he's willing."

There was a silence in which Truitt met the trapper's stare and found no recognition there. Kit Langdon finally spoke. "I reckon Mr. Ledger knows the trail all right, and it ain't that I want to appear distrustful, but—well, he's kind of a stranger after all."

"Don't blame you none," said Truitt, an odd feeling taking his breath away. "I *am* a stranger. So far's you know I might never come back."

Again Mamie spoke, her clear eyes smiling. "Shame on your thoughts, Kit Langdon. Who'd leave poor folks to starve and die like this? No, sir, I know an honest man when I set eye on one, and he's that."

Kit mumbled something, and Payson came forward. "She's right!" he exclaimed. "Mamie never was mistook on people. Here!" he said, opening his clothes and removing a heavy money belt. "Will you go for us and get horses, and forgive us for doubting you?"

"A lone rider should get there easy in two days," commented the trapper. "Ride old Carrie for all she's worth. She can stand it."

Truitt felt the heavy belt in his hands, but could not look at it. Neither could he see the others clearly, Payson, Kit and Mamie and the Carlsons, as they stood around

him awaiting his answer. A strange wet film blurred his eyes, and the same queer sensation that had moved him the night he saw Kit tenderly press the first husbandly kiss on Mamie's lips, moved him now.

Suddenly an impulse to sling the money at their feet and tell them what fools and idiots they were, tore at him like hot rage; but still he stood, the money in his hands, his lips quivering with lack of speech.

"And God ride with you," added Mamie, "and protect you, that we all may see the promised land."

"Amen," said the others.

WHEN Truitt, two long days later, again saw the bustling town of Broken Wagon, it had somehow changed its aspect. No longer did he feel that he belonged. At any other time he would have headed straight for the Eldorado Hotel without a doubt as to his purpose there; but now, as the trapper's mare slowed down to an ambling gait through the street, his mind was in a turmoil. An invisible bond stretched out from the very horizon behind him and held his being with an unfamiliar feeling of responsibility. In a daze, he looked upon the accustomed sights with strange eyes.

Riding past Snaky Alcott's cabin, he found himself turning in the saddle, staring after it till his neck grew tired. Did he see two figures waiting for him in the deep shadow of the porch? One tall and broad! Another small and slender! In sickness and in health, till death do us part. Suddenly he faced about and shook his head disturbedly. For certain, he *was* going loco!

The horse stopped undecidedly in the middle of the street between the Eldorado and the livery stable. Some one touched his stirrup. With

a start he looked at the man. It was Joe Moss.

"Back already, huh," said the stable owner and looked Truitt over. "Must have done a pretty good job. You don't look none the worse for wear."

Truitt met his eyes hazily, and his brow wrinkled. "The horses and mules," he announced slowly—"Indians stampeded every one of them. They'll starve to death. They're helpless."

Moss blinked at him mirthlessly and shook his big, shaggy head in understanding. "That's one way of putting it," he commented. "Foxy, you're a hard customer. Yeah, man. Now, you ain't forgetting who put that bit of business your way, are you?"

Truitt had no answer to make, did not seem to hear the other's words. He spurred the mare and started down the street without looking back. Moss stared after him, his mouth ajar, his eyes pinched to a vicious squint.

"So that's the way the wind blows," he grated. "So that's it? Well, mebbe we can do something about that."

By nightfall Truitt had a good cavvy of horses and mules, and a waddy to help him trail-herd them. He had had a few hours' sleep and Carrie had been fed and rested.

"Be ready at dawn," he told his rider before he left him in charge of the animals at the horse trader's corral. "We'll start with the first light. We got far to hustle."

Still feeling like a stranger in town, Truitt headed for the Eldorado and entered the barroom. Making his way through the crowd, he soon found himself at the faro table. His first bet was one of the silver dollars that Kit had given him the night of the wedding. He hesitated before playing it, but it won, double and triple for him. After that there was no stopping him. His luck soon drew the attention of every one in the establishment. Here and there an eye gained a light of suspicion. But however closely they watched, the man seemed to be playing fair and square. It was uncanny.

When at last he staggered from the table at midnight, weary with a luck that he could not understand, his pockets were heavy with coin. Outside, the night cooled his brow,



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and he smiled in the dark as he thought of how the immigrants would stare getting their money and more back. He seemed to walk on air as he headed down the street, not sensing the stealthy movement in the shadows ahead of him.

"Reach for it," said a voice suddenly. Whirling, Truitt fired after the sound with the derringer, which, out of old habit, he had been carrying in his hand.

**T**HE world seemed to blow to pieces next to his ear, and he felt a stinging pain in his left shoulder. A man thudded to the ground and leaned with a groan against the house in the shadow of which he had stood. But guns began spitting flame from across the street as Truitt, clutching his shoulder, took it on the run. From shadow to shadow he sprang, gasping for breath as he tasted the salt flavor of blood in his mouth.

"They're helpless," he stuttered as he ran. "They'll starve to death without horses."

One by one lighted windows sprang up in the night and dark forms moved cautiously out on

moonlit porches. The pursuers dodged behind the houses, but Truitt knew well enough that they were far from through with him.

Presently he made the corral, his legs beginning to feel wobbly. The hired waddy sprang from the fire where he'd been sleeping and stared in amazement at his boss.

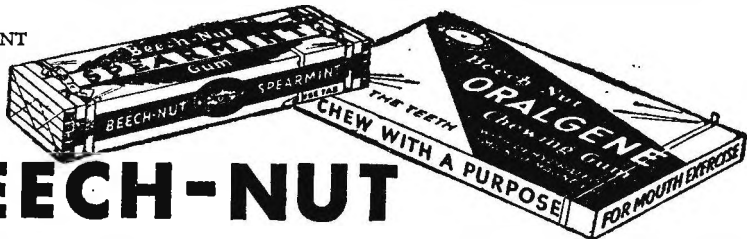
"We're lighting out now," declared Truitt. "We ain't got a minute to waste. I got a pack of two-legged coyotes on my heels."

"But your shoulder!" exclaimed the man. "You can't ride a mile the way you're fixed. You're bleeding like a stuck pig!"

"Neved mind that," cried Truitt. "We'll fix that on the way. Now, pronto, pronto hombre! Get a move on!"

On the morning of the sixth day after he had left them, they saw him coming over the last hill—a small herd of mules and horses and two men. The immigrants were silent with gratitude as they walked out to meet their rescuer. Then Mamie suddenly grasped Kit's arm and gave vent to a cry of dismay. One of the riders had sagged queerly in the sad-

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dle. As Kit reached him, after a breathless run, Truitt fell over on his broad shoulders.

"They're helpless," Truitt kept mumbling. "They'll die without them horses. Git along. Git along."

"He's been saying that over and over," explained the waddy as they laid Truitt on blankets by the fire. "He was loco with the fever from that wound; but there warn't no stopping that hombra. I reckon he's about done for."

The man was right. With moist

eyes they stood around him where he lay with his head in Mamie's lap. With ebbing voice he asked them to sing that song about the promised land, and they were singing it now. No longer had he a desire to walk away out into the dark where he could not hear them.

"He'll never see California again," said Mamie, the tears rolling down her cheeks; but when they saw his last expression, it seemed to all of them that he must have looked into the promised land.

*A New Serial,*

*"BRAND OF THE C BIT,"* by *ARTHUR HAWTHORNE CARHART,*  
*Begins in Next Week's Issue.*

SEA-FARING BIRDS

SEATTLE'S water front was all agog recently when the power schooner *President* came in with a more than usually salty tale. Captain Thomas L. Thompson was the bearer of the strange occurrence.

"We came in toward Hecate Strait about one o'clock in the morning," he said. "We had been running in heavy fog for about three hours, and it was so dark you couldn't see a boat length ahead. We were nearing land and we stopped to take soundings.

"I came forward from the wheelhouse as Nels Walberg started to cast the lead. The next thing we knew there were bird cries all around us in the dark and we could hear the rustle of what sounded like a million wings.

"The birds were like mosquitoes, there were so many. They seemed to be so tired they could hardly fly, and they settled down on the decks and masts and over the wheelhouse. We picked them up and threw them overboard to make a path back to the wheelhouse, but more settled where they had been.

"They started going down the hatch into the fo'c's'le and the boys below threw them out as fast as they came in and finally closed the hatch. They got into the engine room and the engineer was driving them out of corners for all the next day.

"Then they started laying eggs on the deck. We got six of the eggs to bring home with us. We lay off the land taking soundings until daylight, and the birds sat on the boat all night. They flew away at dawn and we came on into Queen Charlotte Sound, homeward bound."

Captain Thompson believed the birds were of several varieties of forked-tailed petrel which frequent northern waters. They were about the size of gulls and the eggs were three quarters of an inch long and pure white.

# Trouble Shooter

By H. C. WIRE

Author of "Danger Fighter," etc.

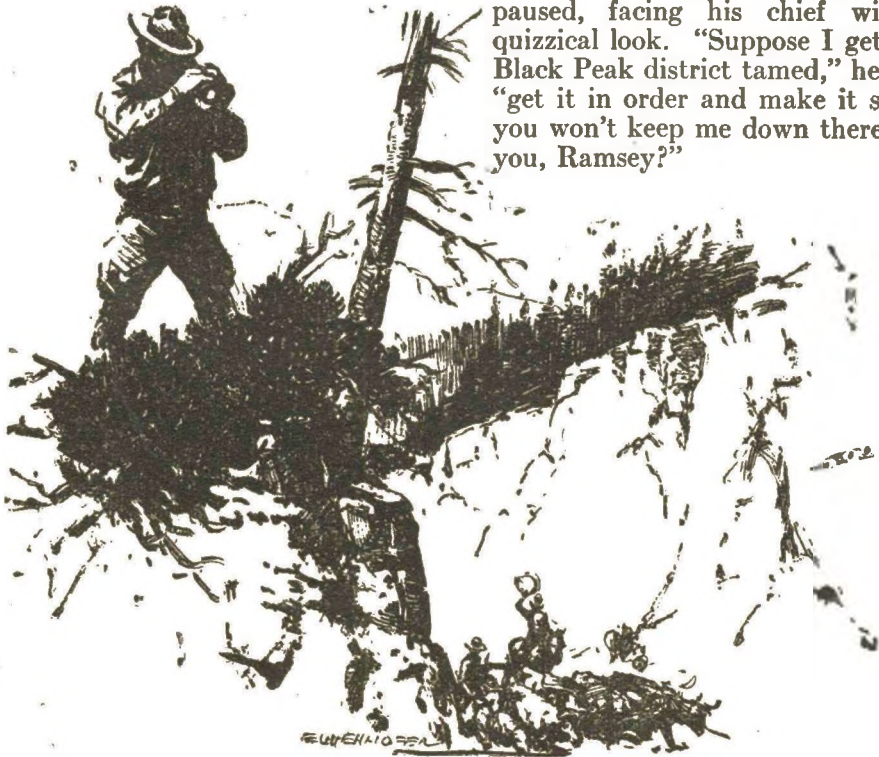
**G**REGG was killed at Black Peak station last month," Forest Supervisor Ramsey was saying. "Old Grant Vail set off another fire down there and burned five hundred acres of timber. Maybe he shot Gregg; maybe he didn't." Ramsey was standing behind his office table, a short gray man in uniform, hammering the table top with a hard fist to emphasize each point. "What I'm telling you, Walt, is to take no chances. There's trouble in that

district—more than we know about. If you go down——"

Walt Burnet grinned as he interrupted. "Never mind the warning. You talk as if I just joined the forest service yesterday. If I go down there I expect trouble, sure. With Mexico only five miles away, and Grant Vail fighting us at every turn, I don't figure this will be a vacation trip. When do you want me to start?"

"Right now."

"Good. Suits me." Walt picked up his straight-brimmed hat and scarred, worn gloves. Then he paused, facing his chief with a quizzical look. "Suppose I get that Black Peak district tamed," he said, "get it in order and make it safe—you won't keep me down there, will you, Ramsey?"



For a moment the supervisor didn't answer. His gray eyes considered the tall lean figure in front of him thoughtfully. Walt Burnet wore no uniform; except for the campaign hat, he might be a cow-puncher, or a border drifter. A pair of rain-darkened chaps covered faded blue jeans. His boots were scuffed. A colorless cotton shirt had many patches of his own sewing. Everything about him spoke of a life lived in tough places, doing tough jobs. Even his lean face with high cheek bones, weathered skin and dark-brown eyes had taken on the set mask of his solitary work and living. Yet Walt Burnet was a young man.

Five years ago Supervisor Ramsey had taken him into the Coronado Forest as a ranger at large—sort of trouble shooter in the service. Walt Burnet, he thought, had the stuff that would carry him up to the top. But to-day, Walt was still where he had started, a trouble shooter, wanting no permanent district, sidestepping any job that would take him out of the saddle for even a week.

"The Black Peak district," Ramsey said at last, "will always be a tough spot. It ought to satisfy you, Walt. I'll say frankly that I hoped you would go down there, settle this trouble, and stick."

"Behind a desk!" Walt grinned. "No, thanks."

Ramsey shrugged. "Mighty little desk work a man would ever do in that place. But all right. One more thing I should warn you about, maybe. Grant Vail has a daughter, as wild as her old man, I've heard, and I have a hunch Gregg may have got himself tangled somehow. Understand?"

"You ought to know by this time," Walt said, "that I don't tangle so easy." He raked his hat

onto his brown hair. His spurs made jingling music as he turned and left the office.

He picked up Black Peak late that afternoon. All day he had traveled southwest, skirting the base of a curving mountain range that ended eventually in Old Mexico. He followed no trail, and, depending upon supplies at the Black Peak station, he carried only a blanket and a sack of emergency rations tied behind his saddle.

The quickest way into the mountains would have been through San Ruiz Pass, which he had seen around noon. Another pass, the Guadalupe, notched the range ten miles ahead of him. But he was using neither of these routes for they would be watched. It was always his method to appear in a troubled country unexpectedly, gather his information, lay his plans, hit hard and fast before any man there had time to think twice.

NOW, with the dark cone-shaped peak rising like a sentinel behind the first ridges of the range, he turned north toward it. In an hour he had left the easy traveling of the desert. By sundown he was threading a deep narrow canyon with sides that rose in sheer cliffs for hundreds of feet above him.

Here in this gorge the darkness of night came swiftly. Walt drew rein and studied ahead. He had wanted to gain open country before making camp, but his black horse was stumbling, and this was all unknown ground.

He moved on again, came to a little pocket where great slabs of rock had fallen from the cliff walls, making a barrier that lined the narrow canyon bottom. Behind the rocks was a flat place—room enough

for himself and his horse. He rode in, dismounted, and had turned to loosen his cinch, when suddenly his long body stiffened, motionless.

With hardly a sound, a rider had come padding up the ribbon of sand. The soft thud of footfalls passed. There was a moment of silence. Then they came back again. Directly abreast of the rock barrier, they halted.

Walt lowered his hands. With his left he felt up along the smooth neck of his horse and took a firm grip on the bridle close to the bit. His right hand slid a .38 from its holster.

Minutes passed. Only the occasional creak of leather, as the mounted man shifted in his saddle, told that he was still there beyond the wall of slab rock. Walt scowled in the dark. What was this now? Ramsey's warning jolted in his mind: "There's more trouble in that district than we know about." Ramsey wasn't guessing.

The sudden flare of a match stabbed through the darkness. It died next instant—too short a time for the man to have lighted a cigarette. At once, from down the narrow canyon there came a rapid thud of footfalls, and listening, rigid again, Walt figured that at least half a dozen men were approaching the lone rider.

Talk came to him faintly in the soft flowing tone of the Mexican tongue. It wasn't until the group had come close and halted that some one snapped in English, "Not up here, huh?" The voice was savage and rasping.

"No tracks now," a Mexican answered.

"Some fool prospector, maybe," the hard voice growled. "Well, shove on. You keep ahead. If you see any one, shoot first and look

afterward. We ain't takin' no chances!"

Spurs jingled; the padding sound of animals had started up again when the white man's voice suddenly rapped out: "Say! Hold on. Here's some tracks! They go——"

Walt Burnet heard no more. He didn't wait. Making no sound, he fitted his toe to the stirrup, drew himself upward. Next instant he whirled the black and sent him in one great lunge out through the barrier of rock.

In the canyon he caught a glimpse of the Mexicans, bunched, wheeling, and among them the one white man mounted on a tall gray. Then the black's plunging run carried him on down the twisting ribbon of sand. Bent low, giving the horse free rein, Walt twisted and fired twice toward the orange-colored flashes. There was a shout of Mexican voices, followed by a snarling yell in English. Only the tall gray seemed to be coming on in pursuit.

Walt faced forward. Into the black's flattened ears he said, "Stretch out, you!" And the willing beast stretched.

Rapidly they pulled away from the pursuing gray shape. When the canyon broadened and became rocky, Walt held in a little. He could hear nothing behind him. The night was silent. The man had not come on.

Rubbing one hand up along the black neck, he said gratefully: "Thanks, old boy! That was close. Wonder if Grant Vail knows what's happening down here these nights? Six or seven Mexicans led by a white man, sneaking up from the border—into Vail's range!"

He looked at his watch. Nine o'clock. He'd like to know where that bunch was headed for. But he would have slim chance of trailing

them now. Better take the Guadalupe pass, he decided, get inside the mountains, and work from there.

SOME time between midnight and morning he gave his horse and himself a two-hour rest. He was riding again at dawn, up through the high Guadalupe notch, then down through a country covered with scrub piñon, and always the barren pinnacle of Black Peak was his guide.

It was still forenoon when the Vail ranch came into view unexpectedly. The gray scrub pine ended. He drew in and stared across a flat bench toward adobe buildings sprawled against the steep base of the mountain.

The Vail wineglass brand was one of the oldest in the country. These buildings went back to Spanish days, and Grant Vail had ruled his kingdom here in a lordly Spanish manner. Walt had never seen the place before, and, as he looked, a scowl gathered between his brown eyes; for he had expected a big crew of men, a lot of animals, a show of activity. Instead, the layout looked run-down, almost deserted; no cattle were fattening in the pasture where a stream crossed the bench beyond the ranch houses; in the corrals were only three runty horses.

Leaving the scrub piñon he moved forward at a walk, passed between a stable and a bunk house, and came upon two Mexicans standing there, watching.

He halted. "Vail here?"

They stared at him in stony silence, then gave slow, wordless shrugs.

Walt rode on, puzzled and wary, seeing no other human as he approached one end of the main building. It was in the shape of an L, with a wide veranda along the back

side. Honeysuckle screened the end toward him, and it was not until he had passed it that he heard voices. In the same instant, he caught a movement of figures in the deep shade. Then he saw a girl and a man.

Whether the man had had her in his arms, or was only trying to get her there, Walt didn't know. It might have been a struggle upon which he had broken in. Yet it might have been a love scene.

He swung to the ground and drew off his hat. "Sorry," he said. "I'm looking for Grant Vail."

In a heavy lumbering step, the man came toward him out of the shadows. His hair under a black cow-puncher's hat was short and dark-red. His skin was a flushed pink, the kind that never takes a tan. He was huge, bull-necked.

"What you wantin' with Vail?"

Walt let that savage rasping voice register in his mind a moment before answering. It was familiar.

"Suppose I tell you, brother," he said at last, "that it's none of your business." He had dropped his reins and stood there at ease, with his arms hanging loosely. But the handle of his .38 was within six inches of his long fingers.

He had paid no attention to the girl, until now as she took a quick step forward. His eyes shifted from the man briefly. What he saw brought them back for a further look. She was small, browned, thoroughly alive.

She reached the redhead's side and stopped there, laughing up at him, taunting him. "I guess that will hold you!" She whipped a glance at Walt. "Good for you, stranger! You're the first man I've ever seen put Red Dowd in his place!"

Deep crimson flooded into the

man's pink skin. He grabbed the girl's arm. "Nola, you——"

She jerked from him. Her slim figure in copper-riveted blue jeans, stitched boots, and blue cotton shirt looked like a boy's, and she showed the strength of a boy now. Her eyes that were as blue as turquoise blazed with angry fire. "Keep your hands off me, Red! I told you that before."

Suddenly pivoting, she said to Walt, "It's my father you asked for. I'll get him." She moved down the veranda, and, without a backward glance, the man she had called "Red" Dowd followed her.

"Daughter," Ramsey had said, "as wild as her old man." Walt grinned at her departing back. A little wild cat, he'd say!

HE saw her stop at a recessed entrance into the house. Dowd was talking, bent toward her. Once more he tried to take her arm. But a small hand flashed upward, and the slap that landed on Dowd's face sounded like a pistol shot. His head jerked up. A door slammed, and the girl vanished. For an instant Dowd stood, uncertain, then wheeled and went striding down toward the ranch stables.

Walt put his hat on again, and a little later, when the girl came back with Grant Vail walking at her side, the man's eyes lifted at once to the headgear.

"Ranger, huh?" he said. "Might have known I wouldn't get more than a month's peace down here. What's the matter with you fellows, anyway? Nobody wants you. Nobody sent for you. So just climb on that horse of yours and get out!"

Walt said nothing, letting the old man unload first. Grant Vail may not have been so old in years; it was

the hard, battling life he had led that had aged him, putting creases like deep scars across the brown leathery skin of his face. He was a small man, gray-haired, blue-eyed like his daughter.

When he had run down and paused for breath, Walt asked easily: "Why not give the rangers a chance, Vail? Maybe you need them and don't know it. Let's talk it over."

"Talk!" Vail snorted. "You fellows are good at that! Rules and regulations. Why, you young pup, I was runnin' cattle before you were born! You've got nothin' to talk to me about!"

Walt shrugged. He turned to his horse, flipped the reins up over the animal's neck. Then he faced the pair standing together at the edge of the shaded veranda. His eyes went to the girl, and he saw that her lips were pressed together in a hard little line; she looked as angry as her father.

"Suit yourself, Vail," he said. "There'll be no more talk. No more orders. Only get this straight: There'll be no more fires down here, either—you burning timber to get clear grassland. You've got the best range in southern Arizona already. And what have you done with it?" He curved an arm over the ranch layout. "If this isn't a run-down outfit, I never saw one! You're standing there flat-footed broke this minute, I'll bet. But you'll never see there might be some better way of saving your grass instead of ruining it!"

The girl's lips parted. He saw a change come over her face. She was staring at him, listening, and the angry expression was gone.

His words were still for the man, but he continued to look at Nola Vail. "That isn't all," he said.



"Killing a forest ranger down here last month didn't end your troubles with the service. It only started them."

Suddenly, as he watched, the girl's eyes darted past him down toward the corrals, and her body stiffened.

He reached back to his saddle horn, swung up and covered the lot in a quick look. Red Dowd, mounted, was talking to the two Mexicans. The animal beneath him was a tall gray.

According to the reports, Ranger Gregg had been killed at his Black Peak cabin—apparently called to the door and shot. His horse had been found near by, saddled. But Walt Burnet had a different hunch.

He had seen the dead man's diary. The last entry in it had said that the telephone line was not working; he was going to ride it and find the break. Had he ridden the line, maybe, and found something more than that?

Putting his horse into a lope along the three-mile trail that led east between the Vail ranch and the Black Peak station, Walt considered his hunch. Already the things he had discovered in this country were beginning to make a pattern. There were the riders last night. There was this Red Dowd. There was the Vail ranch, with not a sign of anything on the hoof. And then there was the girl, Nola. She could do things to a man. Red Dowd wanted her, and she didn't want him; that was plain. Perhaps Gregg had wanted her, too.

**W**ALT rode on thoughtfully. Dowd might have killed Gregg over the girl. But the redhead's game here looked like something more than that.

Black Peak station had only one

building, a log cabin set at the edge of timber, with a fenced meadow below. The door was open. Swinging down in front of it, Walt took one step across the frame and brought himself to a sudden stop.

The inside was wrecked. Chairs, table and the stove had been overturned. Shelves had been torn down. Papers were piled in the middle of the floor, and going on in, he saw where a match had been dropped, yet hadn't caught. He stood with a dull rage filling him. A warning, was it? Rangers weren't wanted! His hands clenched. Until this moment the Black Peak assignment had been just another job, but now it was something else. He'd clean up this district, stick here if it took the rest of his life.

Stopping only long enough to set the stove in place, boil coffee, and grab a handful of crackers from his emergency ration bag, he climbed into the saddle again. Guided by the strand of telephone wire overhead, he struck east, working on his hunch.

Last night's hidden canyon had twisted north from close to the Mexican border. If this forest service line, on its thirty-mile stretch to headquarters, continued east long enough, it would lead him into that same canyon somewhere deep inside the range.

There was no trail. The wire was hung by insulators from pine trees or from knobs of rock when it spanned the gorges. It made rough going for a man and a horse. But it continued straight cross-country, holding east, until at the end of an hour's hard travel Walt suddenly pulled his black in and sat staring ahead.

He could see the end of the forest in front of him, and beyond that nothing but blue sky. He got down, went on afoot, and all at once looked

over the rim of a two-thousand-foot cliff. A slashed and broken country lay below, miniature bad lands of red rock, black tongues of lava, streaks of gray that might be either brush or scrub piñon.

Reaching up to a leather case strapped against his saddle horn, he pulled out a pair of field glasses, turned and focused them downward.

Off toward the south the powerful lenses picked up the deep twisting canyon that he had been in last night. He followed it slowly, came to a narrow throat almost closed by great chunks and slabs of loose rock. Above that was a basin. Abruptly his movement stopped.

Cattle were being bunched down there. They weren't grazing; there's a difference in the way they act when men are around. It was several minutes before he discovered the riders. Two were working along the edge of the gray piñon. Even as he watched, one of them darted in, came out again hazing a cow along toward the little bunch.

"Neat!" he said. "Rustling in broad daylight!" Without the glasses a man would never see what was going on there far below. The set-up was perfect. A hundred small ravines of the bad lands branched out into the Black Peak range, and down these Grant Vail's cattle were being drained off as easily as the flow of water.

Once more Walt brought the basin and narrow throat into focus. To-day the cattle were being gathered. To-night they would be shoved down the canyon. To-morrow they would be in Mexico.

As he stood fixed, staring, the slabs of loose rock that choked the throat remained in the center of his vision. If he only had half a dozen sticks of dynamite! The glasses came down from his eyes. There

must be powder cached at the station. He still had time.

But nightfall darkened the forest as he back-tracked over the way he had come, and then, as the log cabin loomed ahead of him, all thought of cattle was swept from his mind.

LIGHT showed behind the square window. A shift in the evening breeze brought the sharp odor of smoke. Next he made out a horse tied at the hitch-rack. Then as if his approach had been heard, the door swung back and a figure stood there against the lighted opening. It was Nola Vail.

Puzzled, wary, Walt rode in.

"Who is it?" she called. "The ranger?"

"Yes," he answered.

She moved back. She was standing in the center of the small room when he dismounted and reached the doorway. The girl was alone.

Walt stared past her, sweeping his eyes around the cabin. He had left this place wrecked. Now it looked as if nothing had ever happened. All the shelves had been nailed up against the logs, with papers and books neatly arranged. The floor had been swept. The table was under one window with a red-and-white checked oilcloth spread over it, chairs pushed up and places set for two. Something was cooking in a kettle on the stove. He had never walked into a room so homelike.

His gaze came back to the girl. "You did this?" he asked. "Why?"

She came toward him and stood looking up. This wasn't the girl he had seen earlier to-day, and called a little wild cat. There was no anger in her face now; her lips were warm, smiling. He saw how softly her dark hair swept back from her forehead, catching the lamplight in

golden glints when she moved. Her nearness stirred him, and her words sent a dull throbbing through his veins.

"I was sorry this happened, that's why," she said. "You didn't deserve to come into a place that had been so torn up." Her blue eyes danced. "You see, for two years I've been hearing about a man named Walt Burnet—how he settled that trouble up in the north district, how he tamed a gang of rustlers over in the San Simon. News travels and I've heard quite a lot. And to-day I met him. He is about what I'd hoped for—some one who could get things settled here, too, and so I hated to think that the wineglass cowboys had wrecked his cabin." She sobered, adding after a little pause: "My father didn't tell them to do it. He isn't so bad, really. It's only— Well—" A troubled look filled her eyes. She didn't finish.

"What?" Walt asked.

"Just what you said to-day—he is flat-footed broke. All the past years have gone against him. That's what makes him fight everybody—you, the forest service, every one who comes on the ranch. He's backed against a wall. You don't understand."

"Maybe I do," Walt answered. "For one thing, he's losing cattle, isn't he?"

"Yes, steadily. He isn't able to hire more than two regular hands now, and they can't watch everywhere. How did you know?"

Walt shrugged. "Guessed it, maybe." He looked down into her troubled face. "Nola, who is Red Dowd?"

"Red? Just a man who used to work for us. He's over east somewhere now, but comes back every

week or so." There seemed more, but she didn't say it.

"Because of you," Walt put in. "That it?"

She nodded.

Once more, tensely aware of her nearness, Walt stood looking at her, saying nothing. She was real. He suddenly knew that here was one girl in a million. "Were you in love with Gregg?" he asked.

"Heavens, no!" she answered strongly. "We didn't like him very much; we fought him. But none of the wineglass cowhands killed him. You've got to believe that. My father had nothing to do with that, either. You must believe it!" One of her hands caught his right wrist, gripping it hard. "Please," she begged. "Tell me——"

**W**ITH no warning whatever, the cabin door burst open. There had been no sound. Gun leveled, Red Dowd stood covering them.

Walt Burnet had seen the killer's look in a man's eyes before, but never a more cold, savage face, with mouth twisted, muscles bulging over clenched jaws. He saw that the hammer of Dowd's .45 was pulled back, trigger finger pressing. He stood rooted, with the girl still gripping his wrist.

With a lunging step, the man came in. His gun stabbed at Walt's middle. Reek of raw liquor came on his snarling breath. "The great Burnet! Heard about you! Smart forest ranger, like Gregg, huh? Want to know what happened to him? Make one move and I'll show you!"

He turned his burning eyes on Nola Vail. "Get ready. You and me're traveling!"

Her hand dropped. She drew a quick gasp, started to say something.

"Shut up!" Dowd snapped. "I've fooled with you long enough. Told you once I took what I wanted. Got what I want out of this country and I'm leavin' it. And you're goin' with me!"

Rigid, waiting for his chance, Walt watched the savage face. But the chance never came. Suddenly the heavy gun barrel slashed upward, caught the point of his jaw, sent the room spinning around him. Blindly he made a grab for his own weapon. Hard metal crashed down onto his head. Everything went black. The third blow came as he was falling, and in the instant that blackness engulfed him completely he heard Nola scream.

That terrified sound was still ringing in his ears as he came back into numbed consciousness. But his eyes opened onto a dark and empty cabin. Cold night air blew in through the doorway. Painfully turning his head, he saw that the fire in the stove had died.

There was a rope around his arms and legs. Yet the job had been hurried, for the loops that held his wrists gave a little when he strained against them, and in a few minutes' tugging he had his hands free. He was lying face down. The hard lump of his .38 was beneath him. Rolling, he hunched into a sitting position, pulled the rope from his legs and got groggily up onto his feet.

His head was clearing. It was only his body that refused to work right. He stumbled outside. Nola's pony was gone. His black had moved down to the corral and was standing there, dozing.

Walt reached the animal. Cold night air, and the action of walking brought life flowing into his numbed body, and by the time he had led his horse to a tool box beside the cabin,

both body and mind were working again.

Dowd, he was sure, had taken the girl and headed toward the basin where the Mexicans were gathering rustled cattle this afternoon. The man was crazy. And yet he must have been planning this play for some time—getting Vail's cattle, selling them below the border, then taking the girl by force if he had to. Once he got her down into Mexico, he could lose himself easily enough. But there was a chance to head him off, even now.

Working fast, Walt opened the tool box, saw axes and shovels in the racks, then sticks of dynamite, caps and a roll of fuse on a shelf. He thrust six powder sticks into his coat pocket, put the caps gingerly in a pocket of his shirt, turned and hung the roll of fuse on his saddle horn. Mounting, he put the black horse into a dead run.

THE way was so familiar now that there was no need to watch the telephone line for a guide. In time he saw the expanse of open sky through the pine trunks, and with no stop, swung south along the deep canyon rim. When it began to shelve off into lower levels, he followed the slope, still keeping back in the trees, until suddenly there was a break, and he drew in with the basin on his left less than a quarter of a mile away. Swiftly he pulled the glasses from their case, flipped the night lenses over the eye-holes, and took a long searching look.

Starlight flooded the open bottom. As objects came up close to him, hugely magnified, he picked out the gray tongue of piñon, the broad sand flat—and then a bunch of cattle moving rapidly across his vision. In a moment, they had passed. Five

Mexican drivers rode into view behind them. Next instant Walt had shoved the glasses back into place and was urging his black on down toward the throat; for Red Dowd was trailing the Mexicans, with Nola riding her roan between him and his men.

It was going to be close. Reaching the canyon just below the throat, he flung himself from the saddle, grabbed the coil of fuse from the horn and knelt at the base of the great cracked slabs of rock that formed the throat walls. Quickly he thrust five sticks of dynamite far back into a narrow fissure and piled them there. The sixth, he slit with his knife, fitted a cap to one end of the fuse, inserted it into the opened stick, and then laid that on top of the others.

Now the thud of hoofs and the faint lowing of cattle stirred the night silence. By that sound he judged how far off the drive was, and cut his fuse short. Lighting it, he leaped again into his saddle.

There was an overhang of rock with deep shadow that sheltered him as he moved away from the throat and out along the widening walls of the basin. Soon the cattle came into view off on his right, making a dark blot against the sand bottom. He halted, swung his black's head toward the herd, and sat gripping his .38 in its holster.

The blot drew nearer. Shapes of separate animals became plain, then the forms of the Mexican riders, and at last Nola, and Red Dowd on his tall gray.

Walt waited. The herd flowed on. It was past him, with the mounted figures abreast of where he sat when the whole mountain country rocked around them in a tremendous thundering blast. A thousand echoes multiplied the roar. A grinding

crash came from down toward the canyon throat.

The cattle had wheeled into an instant stampede, charging back upon the riders. Mexicans yelled, pivoted, and rode lashing their mounts in front of that unchecked flood of animals. But Walt Burnet was no longer watching. He had seen the gray and Nola's roan split off from the rest, turn and leap into an angling run toward his side of the basin. Red Dowd was behind the girl, forcing her pony ahead.

If he heard the pounding of hoofs behind him, the man must have thought it was only the stampeding cattle. Walt was racing beside the gray's rump before Dowd turned to look. For one brief second, his face went blank. Then as he grabbed for his gun, Walt's arm rose and the .38 chopped downward.

Dowd reeled under the blow. A lunge of their horses carried them together, stirrups touching. With a sweep of his long arm, Walt hooked Dowd around the neck, hauling his black to a sudden stop at the same time. The gray raced on. Dowd came from his saddle. His heavy weight pulled them to the ground.

WALT got his arm free and struck again with the gun barrel. Dowd was digging at his own weapon. As it came from the holster, Walt caught it with his left hand, thrusting his thumb in front of the hammer. He felt Dowd squeeze the trigger and the hammer fell, biting into his thumb with quick pain, but he had blocked it from the firing pin. There was no report.

Savagely Dowd jerked again. Metal bit once more into Walt's flesh, cutting to the bone. A third fall of the hammer would break it. Walt gave him no chance. A full-armed swing was behind the .38

aimed squarely into the man's face. The butt caught Dowd's jaw; the barrel smashed him between the eyes. His huge body shuddered, gave a convulsed heave, lay still.

It wasn't until Walt had leaped up that he was aware of Nola, afoot, running toward him. Her face was dead white against the darkness. She reached him, almost stumbling over Dowd's motionless form.

"Walt!" she cried. "Walt!"

He caught her in his arms and hugged her close. "Honey," he said. "It's all right now. But quick—let's get out of this hole!"

Walt Burnet had been gone three days when Supervisor Ramsey received a call over the repaired telephone line from Black Peak station. There was a grin in the voice at the other end.

"Just letting you know that everything's O. K.," Walt was saying. "Got me a killer that I'm sending up to you. Got me a friend, too, named Grant Vail—good fellow when you know him." The grin changed into a chuckle. "And I've got me a wife! You win, Ramsey. I like this place. I'm going to stick around here!"

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### NO HORSE AND MULE DEPRESSION

**E**VEN the horse and mule trade is picking up," says the secretary of the Horse and Mule Association of America, Wayne Dinsmore. Modern machinery has not entirely taken place of the animals formerly used on the ranches. In fact, there are fewer tractors used to-day than at any time since 1920. Throughout the United States the horses and mules at work aggregate fifteen million.

"Conservatively speaking," says Secretary Wayne, "sales of harness to take care of horses and mules on farms should amount to six hundred thousand sets or their equivalent in harness parts. It is apparent that annual sales of saddlery in the central and Southern States alone should be over twenty-five million dollars."

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### WHITES VS. INDIANS

**T**HE president of the archery club at Berkeley, California, made a statement recently, to the effect that white men can outshoot their red brothers. The reason for this is purely scientific, rather than entirely skill, for the white man's equipment is far superior to that of the average Indian equipment.

However, shooting at a target and shooting at wild game are the best tests of marksmanship. It has been found that, when it comes to bringing down wild game, the Indian is quicker and has a peculiarity of slinging his arrows that makes him the winner. If a white man were hungry and depended upon wild game for sustenance, only an empty stomach would be the result of hitting the bull's-eye on a man-made target. So, for all practical purposes—and we must be practical—the red man takes the booty.



# Interesting And True

By H. FREDRIC YOUNG



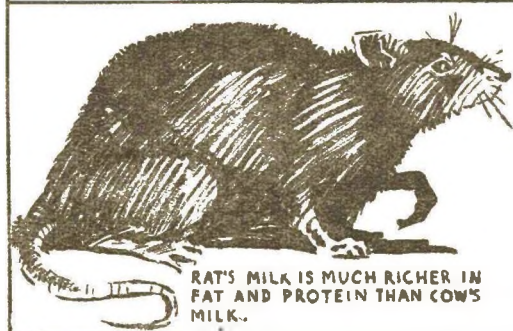
NAVAJO INDIANS PUNISH A TRIBESMAN BY PLACING THE CULPRIT INSIDE A RING OF OLD CHIEFS, WHO MAKE FACES AT HIM, SCOLD AND INSULT HIM.  
BY JACK WILSON, THOREAU, N. MEX.



STOCK ACTUALLY BECOME ADDICTS TO LOCO WEEDS, WHICH WILL EVENTUALLY MAKE THEM PERMANENTLY CRAZY



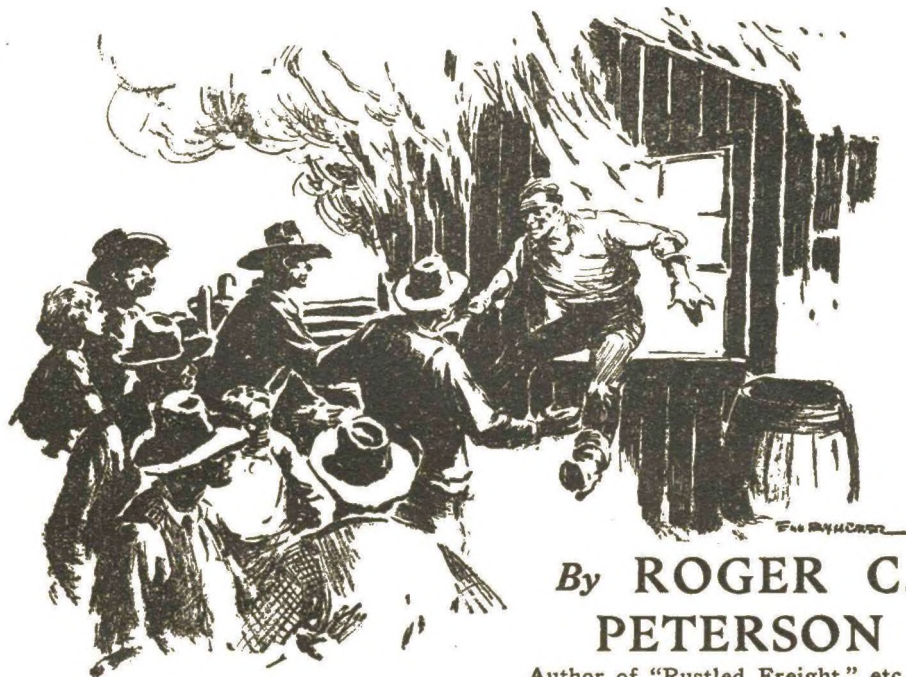
THE AMERICAN CROW IS A NEAR RELATIVE OF THE SOUTH AMERICAN BIRD OF PARADISE.



RAT'S MILK IS MUCH RICHER IN FAT AND PROTEIN THAN COW'S MILK.

Mr. Young will pay one dollar for any usable Western "Interesting And True" features which readers may send him in care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Return postage must be included for suggestions found unsuitable.

# Beaver Snapped



By **ROGER C. PETERSON**

Author of "Rustled Freight," etc.

**T**HE State game inspector, about to step into the warmth of the railroad station at Sagamore, out of the raw November wind, heard his name called.

"Mr. Chambers!"

The inspector turned. "Oakley!" he cried. "I'm glad you showed up, boy. I had intended coming up to your camp, but got a telegram calling me back home."

Ray Oakley, the young game warden of the Sagamore forest reserve, laughed as he shook hands. "I'm playing in luck. I just happened to come into town and heard you were here. I hope your train isn't on time as I've got something I want to talk to you about."

"Twenty minutes late," the in-

spector told him. "Shall we go inside?"

Oakley glanced through the window and shook his head. "Too many people in there."

The attention of Chambers focused on the candid blue eyes of the warden, and Oakley explained:

"Inspector, somebody is stealing beaver from the game preserve."

Chambers frowned. "Are you sure?"

The warden nodded. "I've pulled four traps already and I've found other signs of poaching. But I'm blessed if I can get a line on them. Do you suppose"—he hesitated—"that you could send somebody up to help me for a while? I can't keep on watch both day and night."

The inspector's frown deepened.

"I wish I could, boy. But it just happens that we're short-handed right now. Two deputy wardens down sick, and another called back East by the death of his father. I'm afraid you'll have to get along the best you can alone, for another two months, anyway."

Oakley agreed resignedly, watching a load of baled hay which had pulled up alongside a box car, opposite the station. He nodded to the three men on the load.

The inspector asked. "Do you think this poaching is extensive at all?"

"I'm afraid it is," Oakley told him. "I've found——"

He broke off. In a bound he was across the tracks. "Look out, Mallet!" he called to the man loosening the ropes on the hay wagon. "That load's going to fall!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when a top bale pitched off and burst wide open across a rail.

Oakley sprang to hold the other bales that were toppling.

A man cannoned into him, hurling him backward with such force that he barely kept his feet. As he regained his balance, he saw a dozen bales cascade over the broken one on the track.

He demanded, scowling, "What's the big idea, Riker?"

"I didn't mean to bump you, warden," the man explained. "I was just going to help you steady the load."

Oakley dismissed the matter with a shrug. "Well, it's your hard luck."

He stepped back upon the platform beside the inspector, and the latter asked in a low tone: "Did you notice the gray color in the middle of that broken bale?"

Oakley nodded grimly. "I've heard it was a trick of Horton's to

put moldy hay in the middle of his bales. He's shipping a lot of it this year, too. Rented a baler and has bought up the hay on several of the ranches around here."

"Horton?" the inspector asked. "Is he the long-faced fellow driving the team?"

"Yes," Oakley answered. "He's a rancher up here near the——"

The whistle of an approaching train cut short the sentence.

The inspector smacked a fist into a palm. "I nearly forgot the thing that I particularly wanted to see you about!"

Oakley brought his superior's luggage from the waiting room, and Chambers explained as the train drew in: "I'm trying to get together a book on game preservation. I remember that you took some fine pictures of wild life last year, and I wonder if you'll be good enough to help me out with the illustrations?"

"Be glad to," was Oakley's hearty response. "Anything special you want?"

"Anything you can get," the inspector told him. "Try and get some of those beavers they're stealing from us."

Oakley's face lighted with a grin. "There's one old fellow that would make a swell frontispiece for your book. I'll see if I can't get his photograph."

**W**ARDEN OAKLEY was on his regular survey of the game preserve. It was all of it rough, wooded country. Most of the trees stood bare. Only the conifers retained their foliage at this season. Chipmunks, scampering up the broad trunks, scolded at the man, swinging their pert heads from side to side. Wild life was all about him, some of it timid, some of it bold, having grown used to him.

Oakley never used his saddle horse on such a survey, as did many wardens. It took longer, but he believed he did a better job on foot.

It was afternoon before he reached his main goal, on Otter Creek. This once fast-flowing stream had been checked by the numerous beaver dams built across its course. One of these lay directly below him. Two beaver lodges stood back of it in the deep water, while another had been built close to the bank.

Screened by brush along the rim, the warden scanned the creek for signs of poachers, but could discover nothing suspicious. Two beavers were swimming toward the lodges, carrying small branches of aspen in their mouths. Suddenly they caught his scent and, almost without a ripple, sank from sight, leaving the aspen cuttings to float on to the dam.

"Just my luck to come without my camera," Oakley lamented. "That would've made a good picture for Chambers's book."

He walked on down to the edge of the creek. He passed many stumps of aspen, poplar, and willow, all showing marks of beaver teeth. Suddenly he heard a splash close at hand, then another and another.

"Now, what's that?" he asked himself, peering along the bank. "Sounds like a beaver and a trapped one!"

He sprang up a well-defined trail, which led along a water-filled canal which the beavers had made to float their food down from the hillside. There he saw a big beaver struggling in a trap.

Oakley's brows were a straight line above his angry eyes. The chain of the trap was fastened to an iron pin driven deep into the bank. "Those dirty thieves!" he muttered, and with his knife quickly cut a

forked branch from a tree. He grasped the chain and pulled beaver and trap out on the bank. The animal lay quiet, showing no fight; but Oakley wasn't taking any chances of a bite from those powerful teeth which could cut down a tree. He placed the forked stick over the back of the animal's neck and sprang the trap.

The freed beaver slipped into the water. Oakley picked up the trap and went on. He found two more at different dams, but still no sign of the men who had set them.

The sky was darkening, and he thought: "Looks like we're in for our first snowstorm. Coming late this year. But the weather seems too muggy for snow."

He left the bank of the stream and circled a wooded knoll above. From this shelter he could view the largest dam on the creek. It stretched from bank to bank, long and narrow. Five lodges lay behind it, rising some four feet above the still surface of the pool.

Suddenly the smooth water splashed and broke with the flashing bodies of fast-swimming animals.

Oakley tensed with excitement. An otter! The beavers' archenemy! The warden did not notice the splash of a big raindrop on his hand. His whole attention was centered upon the battle below him. He saw the other break to the top, a long snaky shape of dusky brown. A big beaver was at its heels, following its every move.

Oakley grinned as he thought, "Old Samson himself! That otter should've picked out a day when the old boy wasn't home. What a fighter he is! And there come the rest of the clan!"

Twisting and turning, dodging in and out among its foes, the otter finally managed to escape. He clam-



bered up the bank to waddle into the safety of the brush, with Samson taking a farewell nip at his heels. Oakley had a special affection for this gallant old broad tail, and had followed Samson's fortunes closely for the last two years. The beavers milled about in the water until satisfied that their enemy was gone. Then, one by one, they sank from sight to enter their lodges.

Oakley chuckled. "I wouldn't have missed seeing that for all the rice in China. That otter knew when he'd had enough. What a picture it would've made! And I had to leave my camera at——"

He broke off. Rain! When had it begun raining? The camera wouldn't have been much good after all. He gathered up the traps and hurried home.

**O**AKLEY wakened to a black dawn and the gentle patter of the still falling rain. Ordinarily, he would have turned over and slept a few more hours, but this time he could not.

"I've sure got the jitters," he muttered, pulling on his clothes. "If I don't put a stop to this poaching soon, it'll drive me loco."

He made short work of his breakfast, donned oiled slicker and hat, and set out down the trail that led to the big dam. All about him the evergreens stood, drenched and drooping, nodding their pointed heads to the wind that lowed among them.

Suddenly a dull roar broke above the beat of the rain. He stopped, ankle-deep in a mat of dead leaves to listen, and thought:

"Sounds like the creek is running the banks."

He proceeded to his observation post on the knoll. Here he stopped short in amazement. The beavers

were cutting their dam. And Samson appeared to be bossing the show. Oakley watched with awe a sight that was seldom seen by man. The rain had swelled the lake behind the dam to twice its normal size. The tops of the beaver lodges were a scant two feet above the surface. Along the crest of the dam, the water shot over in a roaring cascade, which threatened at any minute to break the barrier.

About fifty feet out from the bank, seven beavers worked furiously at a section that appeared to be the weakest. Biting, tearing, pulling and digging at the mud and sticks, they finally managed to open up a gap in the dam a few feet across. The pressure thus relieved, there would be far less risk of the whole dam going out and possibly taking the lodges along. Careful of the undertow, the beavers milled about for a moment, then by different ways made for the shore.

Oakley watched the big brown body of Samson cut a line in the water toward a runway that led up the bank. "What a leader that old boy is!" the warden marveled. "I'll bet he's on his way right now to fell some trees to plug the gap when the water goes down."

Samson had climbed up the bank and sat for a moment looking at the other beavers, as they, too, left the water and entered the woods along the stream.

"He's the king of this layout all right. Wonder how he's going to now——"

Oakley's thoughts jarred to a stop. The ground under the big beaver had suddenly exploded. For the instant, the warden was as bewildered as Samson himself. Then Oakley saw the steel jaws that had closed on the animal's hind leg.

With an exclamation of fury, he

sprang down the slope. Beaver and trap were a twisting, whirling blur as Samson fought to tear himself free. He rolled down the runway into the water.

"Thinks he'll get rid of it by diving," thought Oakley. "He'll be up again in a moment."

All at once the water was boiling as if some battle was going on below the surface. Instantly Oakley understood and acted. A pole trap!

This style of trap was designed to drown the beaver. A notched sapling was slipped through the ring on the trap chain, then the pole was driven into the mud. When the beaver, trying to get rid of the trap, would dive, the ring would slide down to catch in the notch, holding the animal under the surface until he drowned.

Oakley was down the bank in a flash. He seized the trap pole, the end of which thrust above the water close to the bank. He shook it back and forth to loosen it. He felt the tug of the chain at the bottom as Samson fought his shackles.

The warden knew that a beaver could stay under water for nearly twenty minutes. But his greatest fear was that Samson, trying to tear free, would injure his leg.

Oakley braced himself and got a good hold on the slippery pole. He jerked upward, again and again. At last the pole came free. Careful not to let the trap ring slip off the end, he hauled the sixty-pound beaver out on the bank.

**S**AMSON lay for a moment, his bright, beady eyes fixed on the man. Then he sat up on his haunches and began to comb the heavy fur on his chest with his front claws.

The warden choked, so much did the action resemble a dumb plea for

mercy. He knew that a beaver almost never fights its captor, but accepts fate, striving only to ward off the death stroke with its hands.

"I'm not going to hurt you, old fellow," Oakley promised. "But I'll have to tip you over while I spring that trap."

A minute later, Samson was free. He slid into the water and sank with a slap of his great tail. Oakley turned away, more moved than he would admit to himself. If he hadn't been here——

That night he lay in his bunk, gazing out of the window at the storm clouds as they broke away, revealing the stars. For hours he had been racking his mind for some means of apprehending the poachers. So far, they had outguessed him at every turn. Would they ever make a slip-up so that he could get a line on them? He was now convinced that they had a lookout that kept him spotted.

"There's only one way to catch those buzzards," he thought, "and that is to hide out by the dam, both day and night. They'll be showing up pretty soon to look at their traps. Yes, sir, that's what I'll do. I'll take along blankets and grub to-morrow, and stay on watch all day and night."

He was at the knoll before daylight the next morning. He saw with surprise that the break in the dam had been plugged during the night. Some of the beavers were putting the finishing touches on their work.

He kept his post throughout the day, snapping an occasional picture of the animals as they worked and played below him. When night drew on, he built a fire in a hollow and cooked his supper.

To Oakley, that night was one of the longest he had ever spent in the



woods. Many times he caught himself dozing off. He was stiff and cold from the raw winter wind. In the morning the grass was white with frost and his discomfort had all been in vain. He had gotten neither sight nor sound of the thieves.

In the first gray light of dawn, he walked down to the dam. An idea for a picture had come to him. It was Samson's habit to sun himself on top of his lodge. If Oakley could set the camera there, so that the old patriarch would snap a close-up of himself, it would make a wonderful picture. It took some calculating and a hazardous journey along a fifteen-foot pole, laid from dam to lodge top, to get the camera set. But Oakley finally had things arranged to his satisfaction, and tramped home to breakfast and a few hours' sleep.

The sun was sinking behind the western hills, when the warden again returned to his lookout. He made his approach as carefully as any Indian, keeping under cover all the way to the knoll.

"By golly," he growled to himself, "if those rats spotted me this time, they have the eyes of a ferret!"

When he reached the top, he crawled forward on hands and knees, to look down on the creek. He leaped to his feet with a cry of rage and plunged down the slope. By a cutbank was a wide pool of blood, still fresh. All around were signs of a slain beaver.

"The rats got another!" he sputtered. Could it have been Samson? Surely, the old boy was too wise to be caught a second time. But Oakley was uneasy until he saw a familiar head at the farther end of the pool.

He walked carefully along the bank. Suddenly his glance narrowed as he studied the ground. He

stooped to pick up a short piece of sapling and poked it into the dirt close to the water's edge. Instantly the sandy soil shot upward, and the jaws of a hidden trap closed on the pole.

OAKLEY exploded. "They had the nerve to reset their trap, and leave all this evidence around! Maybe they got wind of me, and had to leave in a hurry. But how could they?" Savagely he jerked out the trap. "This has got to come to a show-down pretty soon, or I might as well turn in my badge."

The warden's thoughts were bitter while he poked about the bank for other traps. But darkness set in rapidly, and he had to give it up before he had gone far. He had started home, when he suddenly remembered his camera. He found it had been tripped, but thought grumpily:

"The way my luck's been running, I suppose the picture's fozzled, too."

That night Oakley paced the floor of his cabin, his mind more troubled than ever, as he reviewed the situation. He stopped to jerk down the window shade, and growled: "I'm getting so jittery over this poaching, that every time I make a move I imagine somebody's watching me."

Suddenly, he cried out, his eyes shining with a new thought. "Why didn't I think of that before? Those hills on the other side of the creek! A man up there with a pair of field glasses could spot me a mile away. I'll sure scout those hills to-morrow. Now I've got something to work on."

He started to get ready for bed when he noticed the camera on the table. He opened it up and pulled the roll free. "I might as well develop this to-night. If Samson

didn't take a good picture of himself, I'll have to try again." He finished his work, hung the film up to dry, and rolled into bed.

He was ready to start on his scout of the hills the next morning, when he thought of his camera. "I'd better take it along," he concluded. "I might be able to get another snap of Samson. Wonder if I got anything yesterday."

Oakley held the strip of film up to the light and frowned. "Did I make a double exposure on that last one? But when did I ever take a picture of a couple of men? And what's this thing in the corner? Looks like a boulder on top of a lodge! Well, it won't take long to make a print."

A little later the warden was staring at the glossy square of paper in his hand, bewildered. "What in— Why, those are— But I never took a picture of—"

Oakley stopped with a gulp. That boulder in the corner! It wasn't a boulder. It was the tail of a beaver. Oakley's eyes began to glow. And that was the top of Samson's lodge. The old fellow himself had taken the picture.

By this time the warden's thoughts were racing, putting together stray facts, memories, small items that hadn't seemed important before.

"I have it!" he cried aloud. "I've got the whole thing! It's plain as print!"

He flung out of the house and dashed for the small pasture, where he kept his saddle horses.

At his first sight of the Sagamore railway station, Oakley felt a sharp disappointment. There were no box cars on the switch track. Then, on the other side of the building, he saw an empty hay wagon near the open door of the freight shed. Quickly he

slid from the saddle and tied his horse to a ring on the station platform.

"I'm in luck," he muttered. "Horton and his men are inside getting warm."

A minute later he entered the shed and was eagerly scanning the bales of hay stacked on either side of the door. Suddenly his eye lit, and he looked about for a hay hook. After some search, he discovered one hanging on the wagon outside. As he started back into the shed with it, he thought:

"I'd better spike their guns." Keeping an eye on the station, he ran back and pulled out the wagon hammer, thus releasing the horses' doubletree.

**I**NSIDE the shed once more, he pulled down a bale from the third tier and snapped the wires on it with a twist of the hay hook. It broke apart, and his hand thrust into the middle of the hay. He drew out a gray object and stared down at it. "Wrapped in birch bark!" he thought. "So that's the way they do it. Wonder if they put more than one to the bale."

Oakley was stooped over, his hand searching through the hay, when he heard a sudden swish behind him. Before he could turn, he received a stunning blow on the head. For an instant he wondered if the piled hay above had toppled over on him. He fell forward across the broken bale, realizing that it wasn't hay that had hit him. He had made a bad mistake. Horton wasn't in the station. He was in the freight shed.

Dazed, unable to move, Oakley was dimly aware of figures above him, of guarded whispers. Soon there was a crackling sound and the closing of a door. Involuntarily he

relaxed, feeling himself slipping toward oblivion. Then something seemed to grip him. What was that? He sniffed, drew a deep breath—and stiffened with realization. Smoke! He rolled over, got on hands and knees, shook his head, fighting his way back to consciousness. Those scoundrels had set the hay afire!

He staggered up and groped his way to the door, his eyes beginning to smart from the smoke. As he had feared, the door was fastened on the outside. Oakley turned about to look along the length of the shed. Flames were crawling up between the wall and hay, and the heavy, acrid smoke was rolling in billows under the roof.

He heard yells of "Fire!" outside, but help couldn't come in time to do him any good. He dashed the length of the shed toward the small windows in the end. They were set so high in the wall that he had to drag up some of the baled hay to reach them.

Oakley was never very sure how he got through the window. Shirt in tatters, face torn by the glass, he dropped to the ground on the outside and dashed around to the front of the building. He was greeted with yells of astonishment from the crowd that was gathering.

The warden gave one look at the old-fashioned fire apparatus that was trundling into view and knew that there was no saving of the shed or its contents.

His glance swept the crowd. His arm shot out, pointing, as he cried:

"Don't let Horton and his men there, get away!"

As if this astounding order weren't sensation enough, Oakley snatched a piece of scrap iron from the ground and tore loose the hasp of the padlocked door. As he rolled it open, the smoke poured out over him. He

disappeared into it at the instant that flame burst through the roof.

The amazed spectators saw their warden plunge into view again, tumbling a bale of hay before him. He stood a moment, clearing the smoke from his eyes, then stooped to scrutinize the bale. He shook his head, whirled and dashed back into what was now a roaring furnace.

In a moment he appeared with another bale. Men closed in on him, friends who were determined to stop this apparently insane conduct. Oakley saw them coming and disappeared once more before they could lay hands on him.

Behind him, the frame of the doorway crashed in flames. A gasp of horror rose from the crowd, followed by another of astonishment, as a third bale of hay came hurtling through the blaze and smoke. After it, stumbled a choking, half-blinded man.

"Get those bales away from the fire!" he shouted.

"Oakley, have you gone absolutely batty?" somebody demanded.

The warden made no answer as he stooped to examine the bales. His singed, blackened face lighted up with joy.

"Two of them!" he yelled. He whirled on the crowd. "Have you got Horton and his men?"

"We got 'em," one lantern-jawed individual responded. "They tried to get away, but somebody'd pulled their wagon hammer. But for Pete's sake, Oakley, what's this all about?"

Warden Oakley promptly proceeded to satisfy the curiosity of the crowd on that point.

SO you see, Mr. Chambers," Oakley explained to the inspector a week later, "Horton and his hired men smuggled the pelts into the next State where there's no

closed season on beaver. The baled hay was a good idea, while it lasted. And they were clever about it. They used black wire on the bales that were all hay, and white wire on the ones that held the smuggled pelts. When I saw the faces of Jig Riker and Bill Mallet on the picture that Samson took, I remembered the incident of the broken bale, that last day you were in Sagamore. I noticed then that the bale had white wire around it."

"And," remarked Chambers, "the reason that fellow bumped into you was because they didn't want you to see what was inside. By the way, have you got that picture here?"

Oakley showed it to him and the inspector asked, "They just happened into the range of that camera?"

Oakley nodded. "You see, Samson was on top of his lodge, sunning

himself, when those fellows broke from the brush on the bank. Of course, he made for the water. That's when he hit the string that snapped the shutter."

Chambers looked at the section of the beaver tail showing in the corner of the picture, and laughed. "The old fellow didn't take such a good photo of himself."

Oakley smiled and drew another snapshot from the drawer. "How does this one strike you?"

Chambers whistled. "Boy! That's a beauty! Sitting right on top of his lodge, big as life. It's the thing for the frontispiece of my book. And I can give him quite a write-up, too."

Oakley's eyes twinkled with mischief. "You might recommend him for a deputy warden's badge, while you're at it."

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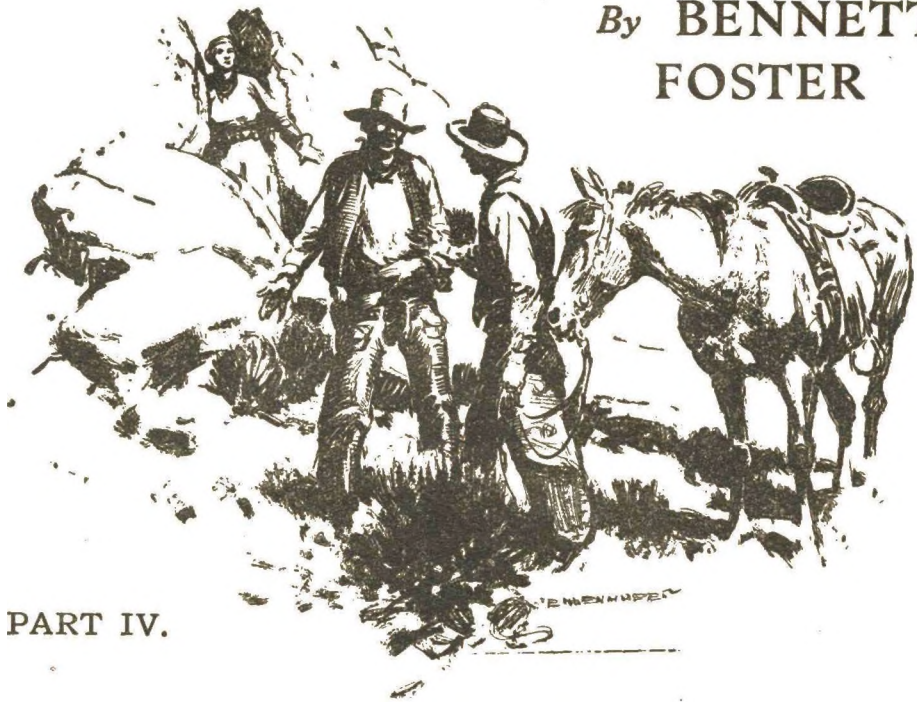
#### FAMOUS CLUBHOUSE WRECKED

**T**HE date set for the heyday of cattle barons is about 1881. It was then that some of these men who did so much toward building up the West, erected a clubhouse known as the Cheyenne Club at Cheyenne, Wyoming. Of late years this building has been owned by the Chamber of Commerce of Cheyenne. Hundreds of cowboys and cowgirls have gathered here to pay their entrance fees to the annual frontier days celebration, collected their prize money, if any, and gathered together in amicable groups to discuss roping, and riding and other subjects that cowboys and cowgirls do talk about.

This old building of a thousand memories has been torn down to make way for a forty-thousand-dollar modern structure of stores and offices which will house the Chamber of Commerce. Many relics of the old days taken from the former building were turned over to the State Historical Museum. Among these mementos was a painting called, "Paul Potter's Bull," bullet-riddled by shots from a pistol fired by the late John Coble, one of the well-known early-day ranchers. It was during a Cheyenne Club celebration that this display of marksmanship took place.

# Free-range Venture

By BENNETT  
FOSTER



## PART IV.

**F**OR many years ranchers had been fencing in range land that was actually public domain and using it for their individual herds. An order comes from Washington declaring all such lands free range and all fences down. To Cody Venture, U. S. deputy marshal, falls the unpleasant task of enforcing the order. "Big Tim" Auliffe, owner of the TA and an old-timer, has a particularly large area fence-inclosed. The order means disaster for Tim. His near neighbor, Bradford, is stocked with Chihuahuas—a lean, half-wild breed. Open range means that they will overrun the range and starve out the TA cattle—heavy, with a big strain of shorthorn. Bradford, an Easterner and ignorant of the ways of the West, insists that the

order be enforced. To make matters worse his foreman, Clay Stevens, is a scamp and an enemy of both Venture and Auliffe. The latter brought Venture up from boyhood. He cannot believe that Cody will turn against him. Cody serves the notice, and Big Tim refuses to recognize it. Timmy, his daughter, sides with her father against Cody. Business calls Cody to Wilcox and he leaves in an uneasy frame of mind. Stevens and his partner, Burt Randall, plan to profit by fence removals on TA.

When Cody reaches Wilcox he finds a letter from U. S. Marshal Pendergast calling Cody to Tucson. Cody goes there. Pendergast tells him that the government is letting contracts for fence removals and that deputies must protect fence

pullers. Bradford is to have contract for his district, and Cody knows that that means war between the TA and the Seven Slash, Bradford's ranch.

Cody returns to Wilcox, then pushes on back to Bowie where Scott McGuire, deputy sheriff, tells him of the holdup of a Southern Pacific train just below Rodeo and the loss of the Douglas pay roll. Cody can't see why he must be dragged into it, but Scott insists, and Cody goes with him to organize a posse. The posse starts out on what seems a wild-goose chase, but at Rustlers' Park they narrowly escape an ambush. One of the posse, Juan de Cespedes, is killed. The posse, all except Cody, return to Bowie. Cody insists upon going on alone. He camps in a cave. A storm comes up suddenly. His horse nickers and Cody grabs his gun expecting the enemy, but the visitor is Timmy. Against her wishes she is forced to spend the night in the cave. Before Cody is awake in the morning, Timmy slips away.

Later in the morning Timmy goes riding. Hearing a shot, she investigates and meets Clay Stevens. He tells her he can fix it up about her father's fences if she will be nice to him. Furious, Timmy repulses him. He retorts that he knows that she spent the night in the cave with Cody. Timmy spurs her horse homeward. Cody meets her. He realizes that something has upset her, but she refuses to explain.

Big Tim visits the Seven Slash and quarrels with Bradford about the fences. Mad with anger, he returns to the ranch and fires his cook, Bill Longee.

Later Big Tim quarrels with Timmy, and she packs up and goes into town to stay with her aunt, Maria Summerford.

After Timmy has gone, her father drinks continually. Stevens attempts to remove the fences, and Big Tim protests. The sudden arrival of Cody Venture saves Big Tim from being shot from ambush. Bradford arrives on the scene. He sees through Stevens's game and discharges him. He goes, taking all the hands with him.

Some time afterward, while under the influence of liquor, Big Tim attends a party and quarrels with Bradford so bitterly that the party is broken up. Later that night, Bradford is found on the road seriously wounded. Big Tim is arrested and charged with the crime. Cody works night and day to find the guilty man, as he is sure Big Tim would never stoop to such a dastardly crime. He suspects Stevens, but before he can make any charge he must find some proof. Assisted by Felipe de Cespedes, brother of the dead Juan, he starts looking for sign. Cody tries to tell Timmy that he is doing his best to clear her father, but she refuses to listen.

## CHAPTER XII.

### PAY-ROLL MONEY.

**C**ODY VENTURE'S business in Wilcox kept him busy for several days. There was an accumulation of mail in the United States commissioner's office. There was one warrant to serve in a civil suit. There were other things to look after. Bradford had been appointed commissioner, but Bradford was in Bowie, hovering between life and death, unconscious, and Cody had no immediate boss.

During those three days Cody received telegrams from McGuire. He had asked the Bowie deputy to keep him posted, and McGuire was faith-



ful to his promise. Bradford had not improved, McGuire wired. Timmy Auliffe was still nursing him. Nothing had turned up—nothing worth mentioning. McGuire did not advise Cody in his telegrams of the fact that he had sought out Timmy Auliffe and talked to her about Cody Venture and Cody's discovery. Scott McGuire was a warm friend of the younger man. He took it upon himself to set Timmy right. Timmy had listened and said nothing, and Scott was not sure whether or not he had helped Cody's case.

On his third day in Wilcox, Cody received his monthly check. The check came in the late mail and, the bank being closed, Cody was forced to cash it at a store. He took his money, bills for the most part, and stuffed them into his wallet, thanking the merchant for the accommodation. As he left the store and started down the street toward the commissioner's office he saw a familiar figure step from the door of the land office. It was Clay Stevens.

Cody did not hurry his pace, but Stevens, apparently seeing Cody, waited for him beside the door. As Cody came abreast, Stevens spoke. "Venture!"

Cody stopped. "Well?" he said.

"What you goin' to do about them fences in the Chiricahuas?" Stevens demanded. "They come down yet?"

Cody shook his head. "Not that I know of," he answered. "Bradford contracted to pull them an' Bradford isn't able right now."

Stevens grunted. "Takin' a damn' long time," he announced. "I thought you marshals was in charge of that."

"We are," replied Cody. "You seem mighty interested, Stevens."

"I am." There was a hint of triumph in Stevens's voice, a self-satisfied smirk on his face. "I got

a lot of cattle that could use the grass behind those fences."

Cody's face was blank. "Cattle?" he drawled.

"D Cross is the brand," said Stevens. "I just filed on the head of Bonita Canyon, in case you're interested, Venture. I'm goin' to run stuff clear down the west side of the mountains."

"I see," Cody drawled. "Settin' up as a rancher. You branch out sudden, Stevens."

"I want them fences down!" Stevens was enjoying himself. "I'm entitled to a share of the grass behind 'em, an' I aim to have it. Hear me, Venture?"

"You talk loud enough," replied Cody. "I reckon the fences will be pulled in good enough time."

"By heavens, they better be!" Stevens blustered. "I'm goin' to write to Washington about it. I'm goin' to write Pendergast, too."

"I would, if I was you." Cody kept his temper. "Anythin' else you got on your mind?"

Stevens was not making the headway he had expected. He was trying to bullyrag the deputy marshal; wanted to make him angry. He had not succeeded. He opened his mouth to answer but closed it without speaking and shook his head.

Cody nodded. "I'll see you, some time," he drawled, his voice expressionless. "Don't forget to write those letters."

Turning away from Stevens, Cody went on down the street. Just below the land office he saw Wig Parsons. Wig was standing on the sidewalk. As Cody passed, Parsons turned his back.

There was turmoil in Cody's mind. Clay Stevens a ranchman! Clay Stevens filing on the land at the head of Bonita Canyon, right above the TA. D Cross cattle in the valley

mixed with the Seven Slash. There wasn't a chance for the TA.

Cody could not understand it. He knew that Stevens had been a moneyless puncher. He knew that Stevens was in disrepute in the country except with a certain element. He couldn't set up a cow outfit on nothing, yet those D Cross cattle had come from the THS, had been bought and delivered in Mexico. Cody had Felipe de Cespede's word for that. Where had Stevens got the backing?

ONCE again at the commissioner's office Cody sat down in a chair behind the desk. Mechanically he pulled out his purse and opening it, counted the bills inside. Three of them were bright new twenty-dollar notes. He put the bills back in his purse. Clay Stevens and Wig Parsons!—he thought.

Cody shook his head. He couldn't get an answer to the puzzle.

Later that evening he received a telegram. The customs men at Naco had answered his query. Duty had been paid on three thousand head of cattle at Naco, three thousand head bought by the Seven Slash. They had no further knowledge of any cattle crossing the border. Cody folded the telegram and put it away. He had yet to hear from Douglas and Nogales.

With the work fairly well cleaned up at Wilcox, he was free to return to Bowie. There was nothing further to keep him at headquarters and, anxious to get back, he wired Pendergast that he was leaving Wilcox. In the morning he took the train east.

When he arrived at Bowie he found that Scott McGuire was out of town. Cody went from the deputy's office directly to Doctor

Harper's and there made inquiry concerning Bradford. Harper was more reassuring than he had been.

"He had lost a great deal of blood, Cody," said Harper. "He hasn't turned the corner, and he is very weak, but he has a better chance than he had a week ago, though."

"Has Scott talked to him?" demanded Cody. "Have you found out what he knows about who shot him?"

Harper shook his head. "We haven't dared excite him," he said. "He's just about half conscious. Perhaps in a day or two——"

"You let me know when he's able to talk at all, will you?" asked Cody. "I want——"

"Certainly," agreed Harper. "If he makes it through, it will not be entirely my efforts that have done it. Timmy Auliffe stays beside him almost constantly. The only time she leaves him is when she goes to see her father. I tell you that girl just wouldn't let him die!"

"Could I see Timmy a minute?" Cody requested.

Harper nodded and went back into the house. Presently Timmy Auliffe, her face impassive, appeared at the door.

"Well?" she said.

"Timmy, I——" began Cody.

The girl looked at him. His troubled face, the gray eyes filled with grief, touched some responsive chord in her mind. "I can't talk to you now, Cody," she said.

Was there a tinge of kindness in her voice? Cody was unable to tell. He blurted out what he had to say. "I'm goin' to clear Tim," he told her. "He never shot Bradford. It was somebody else. I got ideas. I'm goin'——"

"Timmy," Harper called from inside the house.

The girl turned. Cody caught at her hand, seized it.

"You got to believe me, Timmy!" he urged hoarsely. "You——"

"I must go now," said the girl hurriedly. "I'll talk to you when I can, Cody. Do what you can for Big Tim."

She was gone.

**F**OR an instant Cody stood on the porch of Doctor Harper's home, then turning, his face alight, he walked down the steps and started toward the Alcatraz. His heart was lighter than it had been for weeks.

Bud Jessop always had any news that was in circulation. However, he had very little to tell to-day. While Cody was in the saloon Bill Longee came in and bought a quart of whisky. Bill, apparently, had some money—a thing almost unheard of. After the old man had gone out Cody commented to Jessop on the fact.

Jessop explained Bill's affluence. Tim Auliffe had rehired Bill as cook at the TA.

"Tim bosses the ranch from jail then?" inquired Cody.

Jessop nodded. "Johnny Bowen's runnin' the place," he said. "He comes in for orders."

Cody said, "I see." He wondered if Tim Auliffe had given Bowen orders to remove the fences.

Jessop answered that question without being asked.

"Bein' in jail's had a mighty soberin' effect on Tim," said Bud. "He's changed a heap. When he first was throwed in it seemed like all the country was against him. Now there's been some change. Lance Blount come in, an' he backed Tim up, right to the hilt. Seems like some more are changin' over too. Tim's give Bowen orders to pull

down them fences of his, an' now pretty near every man you talk to says what a damn' shame it is that an old-timer like Tim has to lose what he's got."

Cody nodded. "Is Bowen pullin' the fences?" he asked.

"Not yet he ain't," answered Bud. "Leastwise he hadn't started yesterday."

"Well," said Cody, "a lot can happen in three days. What happened to the boys Tim had at the place?"

"Still there," answered Jessop.

"An' has Bill parted company with Bar Fly?"

"Not so as you could notice it. They're thick as thieves. Scott swears he's goin' to run Bar Fly out of town but he never gets around to it."

Cody laughed and pulled out his tobacco. The little cotton sack was empty and, with a word to Bud that he would be back, Cody left the place and went across the street to a general store.

When he had purchased his tobacco, he found that he had no change and proffered a bill from his wallet. It was one of the new twenty-dollar notes. Abe Meyers, the storekeeper, took the money back to his till. Presently he returned, still carrying the note.

"Where did you get this, Cody?" asked Meyers, looking curiously at the young marshal.

"In Wilcox," said Cody readily. "I cashed my pay check there. Why, ain't it good?"

"Good enough," said Meyers. "There's somethin' funny about it, though. I checked the serial number with the list we got on the Douglas pay-roll money. This bill is one of 'em."

"What?" Cody fairly snapped the word.

"It's part of the Douglas pay-roll money," reiterated Meyers.

Cody produced his purse again and took the bills from it. "Let's see," he said.

He accompanied the little merchant back to the office and there, with the list of serial numbers from the Douglas pay roll in his hand, he checked the bills in the wallet. Three of the bills had numbers corresponding to those on the list. When he had finished Cody looked at Meyers.

"Don't say a thing about this," he warned. "I've got to go to Wilcox and see who paid this out. I know where I got it, and it ought to be easy enough to do."

Meyers promised silence, Cody paid for his tobacco with another, old, bill, pocketed his change and went out. As he walked down the street back toward the Alcatraz, puzzling over the recent development, an idea struck him, and he stopped short.

The bills he had came from Wilcox. He had seen Clay Stevens in Wilcox. Stevens had been affluent, if appearances meant anything. Stevens was starting an outfit. Stevens had a lot of D Cross cattle. Clay Stevens—Cody frowned. He was jumping to conclusions. Better go slow. Better take the regular order of procedure. Go to Wilcox, find out who had paid for goods with those bills. Track the thing out step by step. Cody went on down to the Alcatraz. As he approached the saloon he saw Bill Longee come out the door. Bill was carrying another bottle.

**I**N the Alcatraz, talking again with Bud Jessop, Cody decided to wait for Scott McGuire. He wanted to talk things over with the older man. The pay-roll robbery

really belonged in McGuire's jurisdiction. Cody decided to wait until Scott returned.

Later in the afternoon, while Cody was killing time near the blacksmith shop, he saw Mrs. Summerford coming hurriedly toward him. Maria Summerford was angry; it showed in her walk and her expression. Cody rose as she arrived.

Maria wasted no time on preliminaries. "Where's Scott McGuire?" she demanded.

Cody shook his head. He didn't know. "Can I do anything?" he asked.

"You'll have to." Mrs. Summerford scowled. "That Bill Longee and that drunken sot they call Bar Fly are down by Doc Harper's an' they got a fiddle an' accordeon. They're makin' the day miserable. You better stop it."

Cody promised that he would.

As Maria Summerford had said, he found Bar Fly and Bill Longee close to the hospital, sitting in the shade of a paloverde, indulging in what they fondly believed to be close harmony with violin and accordeon. Both were drunk, just drunk enough to argue, and Cody, threatening to put them both in jail, jerked them to their feet and started them up the street. With that done, he turned to leave but saw Timmy Auliffe at one of the windows of Harper's house. The girl beckoned to him, and Cody hurried toward the house.

Timmy met him at the door. She was filled with repressed excitement, so stirred that she could hardly talk coherently.

"Mr. Bradford has just been talking to Doctor Harper," she said, her voice low. "Oh, Cody, I know father didn't shoot him!"

"What does he say?" snapped Cody. "Can I see him?"

"Not yet. Doctor Harper won't let any one in to see him for a while. He says he turned back to see father again that night. He started back to Gantry's. He didn't meet father. Mr. Bradford says that he doesn't remember seeing father at all. He was riding toward Gantry's and he heard a horse coming up. He stopped. He says that he saw the horse but he couldn't see the rider's face. He remembers that the man fired a shot at him and that he fell from his horse, and that's all. It couldn't have been Big Tim!"

"He didn't see the rider?" Cody had caught the contagion of Timmy's eagerness. "He didn't see his face?"

"No, but he did say that he was sure it wasn't father!"

"Huh!" Cody jerked out the ejaculation. "Sure, is he?"

"Yes."

"Don't build too much on it, Timmy," warned Cody. "He's a sick man an'—"

"But his mind is clear. I was in the room when they were talking, Cody. He kept looking past Doctor Harper at me."

"Hm-m-m!" Cody's eyes left the eager face of the girl. He almost shook his head. He could see what Bradford was doing. The Eastern man liked Timmy. Cody had Harper's word for that. Bradford was trying to shield the girl's father and through him the girl.

"It will clear Big Tim," Timmy said earnestly.

Cody nodded. "There's some other things that will help," he said carefully. "I found a trail that ran beside Big Tim's to the ranch. I don't—"

"Scott McGuire told me about that," interrupted Timmy.

"He did?" Cody looked his surprise.

"Yes, Scott said——" Timmy stopped and blushed. Cody, staring at his boots, did not notice the sudden rush of color. Scott McGuire had bluntly told Timmy Auliffe that Cody loved her, and that she was treating him like a dog.

"There's lots of funny things happening," drawled Cody, talking more to himself than to Timmy. "Some of that pay-roll money has turned up. Clay Stevens——" He stopped short, recalling where he was and what he was saying. Timmy Auliffe's eyes were suddenly bright. She, too, had recalled something.

"I've got to go in, Cody," said the girl.

Cody nodded. "I reckon," he said lifelessly. "Just keep stickin', Timmy. This talk of Bradford's will help, an' we're workin'—Scott an' me."

Timmy turned. She took a step in through the door and then stopped, turning again. "I know you had to do what you did, Cody," she said softly. Then, before Cody could move, the door closed.

**C**ODY went back downtown. Though he should have been thinking of other things, of the pay-roll money and of Tim Auliffe, he was thinking of Timmy's last words and the tone in which they were spoken. Cody's face was expressionless, but his spirit was in the clouds.

As he passed the Alcatraz he was recalled to the present. Bud Jessop with some profanity, was putting Bill Longee out of the door. Bar Fly was already in the street.

"You goin' to do anything about this, Cody?" demanded the perspiring Jessop. "These two sons are makin' damn' nuisances of them-

selves. You better put 'em in the jug."

Cody grinned. "They got their liquor here, Bud," he observed mildly. "Seems to me like you ought to stand for 'em a little." Cody walked on, leaving Jessop swearing and staring after him.

At the jail Cody stopped. He went in, asked the jailer to let him see Tim Auliffe, and was escorted by the man to Tim's cell. When Cody was inside, the jailer departed. Big Tim looked much better than when Cody had last seen him. Abstinence and the fact that once again men were rallying about him, had helped Tim. Cody walked over, sat down on the bunk, and spoke.

"It doesn't look so bad, Tim," he said. "Bradford talked to Doc Harper. He says that it wasn't you that shot him."

Big Tim sat down. His shoulders sagged suddenly and his face worked as he controlled his emotions. After a moment he found his voice.

"Thanks, Cody," he said.

Cody nodded, his face averted from the old rancher. Cody's own emotions were pretty close to the surface.

"Who did Bradford say done it?" asked Tim after a moment.

"He don't know," answered Cody. "Tim, you were where Bradford was shot, all right. Scott an' me trailed you straight to the ranch from there, but somebody else was there, too. Somebody was with you, about a hundred yards away, and opened the gate for you and let you in to the TA. I followed the trail."

Big Tim drew an incredulous breath. "You sure of that, Cody?" he demanded.

"Sure," said Cody. "After he let you in the gate, he closed it and then headed back into the hills."

"Did you trail him there?"

Cody shook his head. "I missed several things," he said wearily. "I didn't back trail from where Bradford was shot and I didn't go on from the fence. I overlooked my hand twice."

Tim Auliffe sat down on the bunk. "When can I get out of here?" he demanded.

Cody shook his head. "I don't know," he answered frankly. "I don't know, Tim. There's a lot to be done yet." He paused and thought for a moment, then faced the big man.

"Tim," said Cody Venture, "I think this hangs on one man. If you are out of here he'll mebbe get suspicious. With you in jail he may make a break that we can use. Are you willin' to stay here for a while an' side us?"

It was a hard thing to ask. A harder thing to answer. Big Tim Auliffe took a deep breath. "You're not sure, Cody?" he asked softly.

"Not sure," agreed Cody. "We might clear you with what Bradford has said and that trail I found; we might not. Remember Scott found a gun that had been used, in your saddle pocket, an' we trailed you straight to the ranch. A jury might think that Bradford was out of his head. I want it clear, Tim. Clear and clean. If you stay here, you'll mebbe help catch a murderer."

Big Tim Auliffe nodded his gray head. "I've stood it a while, Cody," he said slowly. "I'll stand it a while longer. I want it clear an' clean, too."

Cody got up from the bunk. Tim, too, arose. Cody called the jailer to let him out and, as the man came down the corridor, Big Tim's hand descended on Cody's shoulder and Big Tim's voice boomed.

"Stay with it, kid," said Big Tim.

On the way to the door Cody



stumbled over a rough spot in the corridor. Cody was not seeing very well. It had been a long time since Big Tim Auliffe had slapped him on the back and boomed, "Stay with it kid!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### BILL LONGEE'S MEMORY.

IT was late that night before Scott McGuire came in. Scott had been north, toward the Peloncillos, investigating rustling. He had accomplished nothing, he was tired, short-tempered and irascible. Cody was waiting at the one-room adobe that Scott called home, when the deputy sheriff arrived. He unsaddled and put McGuire's horse away while Scott cleaned up and ate a bite of supper. The meal over, Cody outlined his latest findings to McGuire.

"It looks mighty queer," Cody told him. "Here's Clay Stevens with a cow ranch an' money, when a couple of months ago he was a broke puncher. Here's me gettin' some of that Douglas money in Wilcox. I don't know as I told you, Scott, but the time we had that fight in Rustlers' Park I run onto two trails after we'd split up. They went into the rocks up above Bonita an' I lost 'em. There's a heap of things that point that one way."

"You told me about the trails," answered McGuire, sucking meditatively on a cigarette. "Go on an' do your thinkin' out loud, Cody. I'll put in a chip whenever I want to ante."

"Well," drawled Cody, "here's Burt Randall receivin' cattle down in Mexico, Seven Slash cattle. I got a wire from Naco, an' the customs has no record of anythin' but three thousand head of Seven Slash. Where did the D Cross come from?"

"I don't know," answered McGuire.

"Neither do I. Burt an' Stevens was thick as thieves. Where's Burt? He's just left the country, but before he went he burnt his bedding."

"Burnt his beddin'?"

"Yeah." Cody fished in a hip pocket and pulled out a charred piece of wool. Passing it over he continued. "Felipe and I found that in the fireplace at the Seven Slash bunk house the night that Stevens an' all his crew quit Bradford. Kind of queer, ain't it?"

McGuire examined the piece of cloth. "Hm-m-m," he said.

"Now I'd like to find Burt," pursued Cody. "He received cattle from the THS down below Naco. I'd like to know if these D Crosses paid duty."

"And if they didn't?"

"It would be some help. Remember Tim's fences got to come down. The Chihuahuas outside will take the grass away from Tim's cattle like it was greased."

"An' if they hadn't paid duty then they'd be impounded an' held by the government until the duty was straightened up. I see," mused McGuire.

"It would help Tim's grass," offered Cody.

"It would," agreed McGuire. "That's sort of by the way, though, ain't it? What about the rest?"

"Well," Cody's drawl slowed, "there's a heap of the rest. There's Bradford bein' shot after a quarrel with Tim. There's tracks we found to the TA. There's the gate that was opened for Tim to go through. There's the gun in Auliffe's saddle pocket. There's Stevens takin' up a homestead above Bonita Canyon an' figurin' to run cows all along the Chiricahuas. There's Stevens with an ambush for Auliffe at the fence.

Damn it, Scott! I can't help but think it all hooks together."

"Mebbe it does," said Scott McGuire, meditatively. "But where are you goin' to break in, Cody? You got nothin' definite to hook on to. Where you goin' to start?"

Cody dropped his dead cigarette. "I thought," he said slowly, "that I'd start at the beginnin'."

"An' where's that?"

"Some place above Bonita Canyon," Cody replied decisively. "That's where the Douglas pay roll went, I'm dead sure."

"You figure then," drawled McGuire, "that it's Clay Stevens. You think that he was behind the pay-roll robbery. You think that he's the man that shot Bradford. You think he's usin' that pay-roll money to stake him in his ranch. You don't like Stevens, Cody."

"No," agreed Cody. "Do you?"

"I don't," McGuire answered, frankly. "You might be right about the pay roll an' him bein' in on that. I don't know. But about Bradford I got some other ideas. Tim Auliffe an' Bradford were at outs over this fence business. They had a fight. We find Bradford shot an' a plain trail to the TA. We find Tim drunk, not able to say where he was an' a gun that had been shot, in his saddle pocket. It looks mighty like Tim to me."

"You're forgettin' the other trail, an' that Bradford says it wasn't Tim."

"Bradford is mighty weak. He might be out of his head, an' he might be protectin' somebody."

"I'll agree to that," Cody nodded. "I thought of that, too. Just the same, I can't see it that way. I want to find Burt Randall."

"An' where you goin' to look for him?"

"Some place in the rocks above

Bonita," answered Cody. "I'm goin' up to-morrow."

"An' I'm just damn' fool enough to go with you," answered McGuire. "You go on to bed, Cody. I'm tired an' I want to turn in."

Cody nodded, got up and retrieved his hat. "I'll see you in the mornin', Scott," he said.

Cody went back to the room he had taken at the hotel, undressed, and turned in. For a while he lay awake, thinking things over, trying, definitely to substantiate the hunch he had. There was a wealth of clues to work on, but they ended in a blank wall. Cody finally pillowed his head on his arm and slept.

WHILE Cody Venture and Scott McGuire talked and considered ways and means in Bowie, two other conversations were taking place. One was between Maria Summerford and her niece. Maria took Timmy to task. The girl, worn out by her duties in Bradford's sick room, was pale and wan.

"You look like a drowned rat, Timmy," announced Maria, frankly. "You got to get out more. You've worked and fretted about all this until you're just a shadow."

Timmy nodded. "I've been in quite a while," she agreed. "I'll go to the ranch to-morrow, Aunt Maria."

Maria Summerford sniffed. "You ought to stay out there," she said. "You have no business tyin' yourself down in a hospital."

"I couldn't let Mr. Bradford die," Timmy said slowly. "I couldn't. People think that father shot him. If he died——"

Maria put her arm over Timmy's shoulders. "He isn't goin' to die," she comforted. "He'll be all right and so will Big Tim. You go on to bed now, dearie. You're wore out."

The other conversation was at the TA, between Bill Longee and his friend and coworker, Bar Fly. After his explosion from Bud Jessop's saloon, Bill had collected the groceries he had come to Bowie to buy, loaded them in his two-wheeled cart, and urging Bar Fly to accompany him, finally got his inebriated friend in with the load. Bill drove grandly out of town, got the mules straightened out for the TA, and lolled comfortably in the seat.

The two were late getting to the ranch. Supper was over and Johnny Bowen, Curly Archer and Rance Davis were more than a little wroth with the cook. To avoid trouble, Bill turned the mules into the corral without unhitching, and he and Bar Fly sought the shelter of the cookshack. Johnny Bowen, swearing that he'd be damned if he would do the cook's work, left the mules as they were. With the other two punchers he went to the bunk house, after promising Bill various and sundry punishment in the morning. From behind his barred door Bill listened and made uncomplimentary noises.

Johnny and the other two had been gone for some time before Bill unbarred the door. It was hot in the cook shack, and the heat had put Bar Fly to sleep. Bill, made of sterner stuff, kept awake and drank a little extract. When he opened the door the night air cooled off the shack, and Bill felt the need of conversation. He shook Bar Fly until he was awake.

"Le's play some music," suggested Bill while Bar Fly rubbed his eyes. "You got your accordeen?"

Bar Fly didn't have the instrument.

"Well," said Bill agreeably, "le's sing."

He tried a note or two, found that

Bar Fly had gone back to sleep, and ceased vocalizing long enough to shake the man awake again.

"You're drunk," said Bill sternly. "Drunken bum, Bar Fly!"

Bar Fly, used to such appellations, paid no attention.

"I'm goin' to take you home," announced Bill, seized by a drunken vagary. "Drunken bum! Got no business at the TA."

He fortified himself with a drink of vanilla. Bar Fly nodded in the corner. Bill, firm in his belief that he was doing the right thing, went out of the door, carrying a lantern. The mules were in the corral, still hitched to the cart. Bill opened the gate and led them out and to the cookshack. The ranch hands had unloaded the cart and the bed was empty.

It was necessary for Bill to awaken Bar Fly again. This he did with some labor. After he had Bar Fly awake he took several more drinks. He shared his bottle with Bar Fly and got that individual to a state where he could get to the cart with some aid. Bill climbed in the cart and started the mules.

**N**OW, with wheels rolling under him, Bill was struck by another notion. The Seven Slash needed a cook. Bill knew that. He knew that the Seven Slash crew had quit, and that Felipe de Cespedes and three others were holding down the ranch. Drunkenly, Bill resolved to be a good Samaritan. Here was Bar Fly. Bar Fly could cook; Bill himself, had taught him. What could be more reasonable, more friendly to all concerned, than to take Bar Fly to the Seven Slash and thus give Bar Fly a job and the ranch a cook? It was a good idea. Bill started the mules west.

The moon bathed the cacti and

the tall grass in silver and sent long dark shadows sloping to the west. The shadow of the cart and mules was gigantic. Bill Longee opened the TA gate in the west fence while Bar Fly snored.

Bill left the gate down. He drove on, the wheels turning softly on the sod and sand. Occasionally Bill re-enforced himself with a drink. Gradually Bill was reaching the point of intoxication he had achieved on the day Tim Auliffe fired him. The tired mules walked steadily along. Bar Fly, unable to maintain his balance, toppled from the seat into the back of the cart, and Bill let him lie there.

Bill had forgotten his original idea now. It was simply a pleasant, moonlit night, and Bill was taking a ride. He pulled in the mules, consulted his bottle, and sat on the seat staring around. Something was working in Bill's mind. Gradually the alcohol that he had just taken, worked up to his brain. Just at the edge of recollection, Bill looked back. Bar Fly lay in the cart, the moonlight striking his pallid face. To Bill it recalled another face. Burt Randall! Burt Randall, dead in a draw with the back of his head shot away. Bill screamed. The mules sprang forward under the lash of the blacksnake and Bill's scream. Like frightened rabbits they stretched to the ground, making time. Bill clung to the seat, riding that rocking, lurching vehicle. The road stretched straight to the Seven Slash and the mules held to it.

Felipe de Cespedes, asleep in the Seven Slash bunk house, was awakened by the arrival of the cart. Bill was still yelling, so hoarse now that his voice was almost a whisper. The mules ran into the corral fence and stopped, throwing Bill back into the cart with Bar Fly. When Felipe

and his men, guns in their hands, piled out of the bunk house, Bill was lying there, still trying to yell, and the mules were standing, panting, their heads down.

IT took Felipe some time to get to the root of the matter. Bill Longee, Felipe was convinced, had the delirium tremens. He pulled Bill from the cart, uncovering Bar Fly who still slept. Bill was chattering hoarsely of Burt Randall, of Burt Randall, dead.

"His brains oozin' out!" screamed Bill, and fought against the hands that restrained him.

It was all confusion to Felipe. They carried Bill to the bunk house, lit a lantern and tried to quiet him. Bill would not quiet. He chattered of an arroyo and of Burt Randall, dead in that arroyo, of being fired from the TA, of how sorry Tim Auliffe would be; of his prowess as a fiddler. It was all confused.

Felipe, resourceful, produced a quart of tequila as a last resort. He gave Bill a big drink from the bottle, and then another. Bill quieted under the effect of the drink. He was over the edge now, beyond recollection. Restrained by Felipe and the three men Bill ceased threshing on the bunk and gradually quieted. Finally he slept, his mouth open, and the fumes of alcohol pouring from it.

Felipe sat down. Bill Longee had seen something, Felipe was convinced. He remembered that Cody had found a piece of blanket in the fireplace when he and Cody had first come to the ranch. He remembered that there had been the initials, "B. R., on that blanket. Felipe scratched his head and reached a decision. Bill Longee might be seeing snakes, but in the morning he, Felipe de Cespedes, would take a

look around. He would examine the arroyos close to the Seven Slash.

The four men comprising the Seven Slash crew, ate breakfast at four o'clock. They did not disturb the sleeping Bill Longee or Bar Fly. With breakfast finished, they saddled and, obeying Felipe's commands, paired off.

Felipe and his partner, Carlos Garcia, took the country to the south and east of the ranch. There was, Felipe believed, no use in going on west. Whatever Bill had seen was between the Seven Slash and the TA. The other two Seven Slash riders were instructed to search the draws north and east of the ranch.

It was some time after ten o'clock before Felipe made the discovery. Riding down an arroyo near the TA fence he saw the glint of an empty bottle. Rain and wind had long since washed away the wheel tracks of Bill Longee's cart, but Felipe rode toward the spot where the sun struck the glass. He recognized the type of bottle, a square, high-shouldered extract bottle, but that meant nothing to him. What did strike and hold his attention as he came closer was a small white object. Felipe called Carlos and got down from his horse. When Carlos arrived, Felipe was down on his knees, scooping away sand. As he straightened up Carlos could see what Felipe had uncovered. Carlos crossed himself swiftly. There in the little depression that Felipe had made were the bones of a man's hand, stripped of flesh by vultures or coyotes. It lay there, mute evidence of what was underneath. Water, rushing down the arroyo, had stripped the sand partially away from the deep-buried body.

"Go to the house and bring a shovel," Felipe commanded.

Carlos nodded, climbed to his saddle and spurred up the draw.

## CHAPTER XIV.

BURT RANDALL.

CODY VENTURE and Scott McGuire didn't get away from Bowie as they had planned. During the night there had been a fight in the native town across the tracks. A man had been cut with a knife and Scott had official duties to attend to. It was noon before Scott was ready to go, and he decided that they might as well eat dinner before they began their trip.

While the two ate, the noon train came in. As they left the restaurant they saw Verne Richards approaching. Richards, the sheriff of Cochise county, was a small man, square and weather-beaten. He wore a gray goatee that jutted forward like the bow of a clipper ship. His eyes were blue, with sun wrinkles at the corners, and he perpetually chewed tobacco that leaked down on the gray goatee. Cody liked Richards. Every law-abiding citizen of Cochise County liked Richards.

The sheriff saw his deputy and the young marshal and approached them. He greeted the two, shook hands, and smiled faintly at Cody.

"Kind of had your hands full down here, ain't you, Venture?" he said. "I had a talk with Pendergast an' he said you'd been busy."

Cody nodded. "Pretty busy," he answered.

"You got your fence business 'tended to yet?" asked Richards.

Cody shook his head. "They'll be down shortly," he answered. "I think we maybe got a lead on that Douglas pay-roll business, Mr. Richards. Some of that money turned up in Wilcox. Scott and I are going to look into it to-day."

"That's why I'm down here," Richards said. "I was in Wilcox yes-

terday. Some of that money was there."

"That's where I got it." Cody squinted his gray eyes and looked at the sheriff. "You know who had it, Mr. Richards?"

"It narrowed down to a few," answered Richards carefully. "Who were you goin' to look up, Cody?"

"We were goin' up into the country above Bonita," answered McGuire. "You know, Verne, when we run into them fellows up there, two of 'em got away into the rocks. Cody saw the trails. We worked out that country pretty careful a time or two, but we didn't find a thing?"

"An' you think you can now?"

Cody nodded.

"Hm-m-m," said Richards. "I think you can, too. You know there's been a filin' made on the head of Bonita?"

Both Cody and McGuire nodded their heads.

"Well," Richards spoke casually, "I'd come over to see the fellow that made that filin'."

"Stevens?"

"Stevens," agreed Richards.

"Did he spend that pay-roll money?" McGuire lost his customary drawl.

"No." Richards shook his head. "But it seems like some of the men with him did. Either of you boys know Wig Parsons?"

"He used to work for the Seven Slash," Cody said slowly. "I think he's with Clay now. I saw him in Wilcox the day I left."

Richards turned briskly. "Well," he announced, "we might as well get at it. I want to go up to Stevens's place. You boys can come along."

"We were goin' there," replied McGuire. "We—— What the devil is this?"

The exclamation was caused by the appearance of a little crowd in

the street. There were horsemen and a wagon, all surrounded by curious townspeople. Cody recognized one of the riders. It was Felipe de Cespedes.

THE three officers hurried toward the crowd, broke through, and stopped beside the wagon. Felipe had seen them coming and had dismounted. He grinned flashingly at Cody and nodded to McGuire and Richards.

"I'm bring something in to you," he said. "We find something."

"What have you got in the wagon?" snapped McGuire.

"Mebbe"—Felipe looked around—"better go some place where we don't have so many."

"The wagon yard," said Cody.

Felipe nodded. Richards and McGuire faced the crowd.

"We won't need you fellers," said McGuire pointedly.

Cody led the way to Summerford's wagon yard. The wagon, flanked by Felipe and his men, and with Richards and McGuire walking beside it, followed. At the gate to the yard the crowd stopped. Felipe, the wagon and the men with it, went in. Cody swung the gate shut. Outside curious men applied their eyes to the openings between the gate palings. Well toward the middle of the yard the driver halted the wagon and the mounted men swung down.

"Well?" said Richards, facing Felipe de Cespedes.

Felipe eyed the sheriff. "Las' night," he said, speaking slowly, "Bill Longee an' Bar Fly come drunk to the ranch. Bill was scared, an' Bar Fly was asleep. Bill talks much about Burt Randall. He says that Burt's head is shot open an' his brains leak. I think Bill is loco. He talks about arroyos, an' he's getting fired an' play the fiddle,



an' it is all mixed up, so I give him two more drinks an' he goes to sleep. Then I sit down an' I think that Bill maybe see something in an arroyo. So this morning me an' my men ride the arroyo east of the house and me an' Carlos find this."

Felipe pulled back the tarp that covered the wagon bed. The men, Richards, McGuire, and Venture, looked at what was revealed. They stepped back quickly after that first look and even the weathered face of Richards was a little white.

"It's Burt, all right," McGuire stated, his voice shaken.

Felipe was meticulously rolling a cigarette. He finished the process, lit it and puffed once. "An' if he's got brains they leak out all right," said Felipe. "The back of his head is all gone."

Richards stared at Cody and McGuire. "What could 'a' done that?" he asked. "Who——"

"I don't know," said Cody. "I can tell you this, though. Felipe an' me was at the Seven Slash. Stevens an' the whole crew had quit Bradford, an' we helped him out a little. We found a piece of blanket in the fireplace at the bunk house, an' it had Randall's initials on it." He reached in his pocket, produced the charred cloth and held it out to Richards.

Richards took the piece of blanket in his hands and examined it. "It looks like," drawled Verne Richards, looking up at Cody, "that we'd mebbe have a little somethin' else to ask Stevens when we find him. Somethin' besides what Wig Parsons was doin' with those bills."

They adjourned from the wagon yard, leaving the stolid Carlos on watch. There were things to do now; other things than to saddle horses and ride to the Chiricahuas. Scott McGuire set about summon-

ing the justice of the peace and a coroner's jury. Verne Richards and Cody walked down the street. They had gone but a short distance when Doctor Harper joined them. Harper had been looking for Cody.

"Bradford's feeling pretty good to-day," he said. "He wants to talk to you, Venture."

"And I want to talk with him," agreed Cody. "Can Sheriff Richards go with me?"

Harper nodded. "Bradford wants to clear up this thing about Auliffe," he said. "It will do him good to get it off his mind."

"We can go right with you," said Richards, eying the doctor. "Scott won't be ready for a while, an' this other thing can wait."

Cody nodded, and turning, they accompanied the doctor.

ON the way to the house Harper spoke encouragingly of Bradford's condition. "It looks as though he'll pull through," said the doctor. "The wound was never infected. It was the loss of blood that hurt. Timmy Auliffe has stayed right there and nursed him and that has helped a lot. Bradford has been fretting all day because she's gone."

"Gone?" Cody echoed the word.

"She went out to the ranch," said Harper. "She needed to get out. She's been kept in mighty close."

The three went into the doctor's home. Harper cautioned them against exciting Bradford or asking too many questions.

Bradford lay on a bed near the window. His face was waxen, pallid, the lips colorless. His hands, lying on the coverlet, were white and thin, and the veins stood out in colorless ridges. Bradford moved his head and smiled faintly as the

men entered. Mrs. Harper rose from a chair and bustled out of the room.

"This is Sheriff Richards, Mr. Bradford," said Cody, nodding toward Richards. "Doctor Harper said you wanted to see me, and I brought Richards along."

Bradford moved his eyes, but said nothing. He was husbanding his strength. Cody spoke again. "Doctor Harper said you wanted to make a statement about what happened," he said. "Would you like to have me write it down?"

Now Bradford spoke. "Yes," he said faintly. "I'll sign it."

Harper hurried out to return with pen, ink, and paper. Cody moved a table close to the bed and sat beside it. When Cody was ready Bradford began.

"I left Gantry's," he said, pausing between the words. "I had gone quite a distance when I decided to turn back and see if I could not talk with Mr. Auliffe again. I wanted to talk with him about our ranches."

Cody's pen scratched busily as Bradford paused. "You wanted to tell Tim Auliffe that there could be some sort of agreement made about a line between the places, didn't you, Mr. Bradford?" Cody asked.

Bradford said, "Yes."

Cody wrote again. "I've written that in," he announced.

Bradford's weak voice continued. "Auliffe was intoxicated when I saw him earlier in the evening. He was quarrelsome, but I hoped that we could get together."

Again Cody wrote while the man on the bed paused.

"I'd ridden back perhaps a quarter of a mile," Bradford spoke again. "I heard a horse coming and I stopped and called to the rider. There was no answer, but the horse came nearer."

The pen scratched on the paper. "Yes?" said Cody.

"The man came up." Bradford seemed to gain a little strength. "I could see the horse and the outline of the rider. I am positive that it was not Tim Auliffe. I asked who it was. He didn't answer, but leaned forward on the horse and fired at me. I fell and struck the ground. I heard more movement and then I must have fainted."

"And you're sure it wasn't Tim Auliffe?" Richards interjected the question.

"Sure," agreed Bradford.

"Do you have any idea who it was?"

"No," said the man on the bed.

Cody finished writing. "I've said here that you make this statement of your own free will," he announced. "Will you sign it now?"

"Will it clear Mr. Auliffe?" asked Bradford.

"It'll help," said Richards.

"I'll sign it."

Bradford's hand was limp, but he managed to hold the pen and scrawl his name.

"Doctor Harper and I will sign as witnesses," Cody announced.

Harper signed his name and straightened up. "In about three weeks you will be out of here helping round up the man who shot you," he informed Bradford cheerfully. "All you need now is to get some strength. Your wound is healing fine."

Bradford essayed a wan smile. "Where is Miss Auliffe?" he asked.

"She's gone out to the ranch," said Harper. "I told her she had to get out for a while, and you are coming along so well she took a vacation."

"She is a fine girl," said Bradford, and closed his eyes.

AS they left the doctor's house Richards spoke to Cody. "It don't look like there's any more need of holdin' Tim," he said. "There's some things that's got to be cleared up, such as that gun in Tim's saddle pocket, an' Tim's trail from where Bradford was shot, but I think that we can get the J. P. to set bail an' turn Tim loose. What do you think, Cody?"

Cody hesitated. "I thought that maybe with Tim in jail, the fellow that really did this might get careless," he answered. "If you say so, though, I guess we could turn Tim out."

"I do say so," Richards was positive. "Jails ain't good for old-timers like Tim. We'll see about it."

When the two reached the main street they found Scott McGuire waiting for them. He had two telegrams for Cody, and told them a coroner's jury had been impaneled. The message were from the customs men at Douglas and Nogales, answering his inquiry concerning the D Cross cattle. There was no record at either place. Cody showed the wires to Richards and McGuire.

"It looks like there'd have to be a round-up of Seven Slash an' D Cross stuff," Cody said. "I think I'll wire to Nogales an' have the chief inspector come up here."

Richards nodded.

"You seem mighty anxious about it," said McGuire. "I reckon you'd like to find all them D Crosses was smuggled cattle."

"I would," Cody said seriously. "It would just about save Tim's bacon if the D Cross stuff was impounded for duty."

"Go ahead an' wire the inspector," said Richards. "You say you're all ready, Scott?"

McGuire nodded, and the three

men walked on. As they reached the jail where the jury and the justice of the peace were waiting, Cody showed McGuire Bradford's signed statement. McGuire nodded after he had read it. Richards told his deputy that he intended to have bail set for Tim Auliffe.

"I can fix it with the district attorney all right," said Richards. "He ain't been overly active in this case anyhow."

There was some friction between the sheriff's office and that of the district attorney. Cody and McGuire were silent.

The jury viewed the remains of Burt Randall, heard the testimony of Felipe de Cespedes and Carlos Garcia, and listened while Cody told of finding the remnant of Randall's blanket in the Seven Slash bunkhouse.

Under instruction of the justice, the jury brought in a verdict, finding that Burt Randall had come to his death at the hand of a person or persons unknown to them.

With the jury dismissed, Verne Richards still had business for the justice of the peace. He asked for and received a John Doe warrant for Randall's murderer, and produced Bradford's statement with the suggestion that Tim Auliffe's hearing be reopened.

The justice of the peace was willing. He reopened the hearing, admitted Bradford's statement as evidence, and heard Cody's statement concerning the other trail to the TA. When that was done the justice set bail for Tim Auliffe.

Cal Summerford willingly signed Tim's bond, and Meyers, the storekeeper, agreed to be the other signer. The bond signed and posted, Scott McGuire released Tim Auliffe from his cell and brought him into the little office.

**T**IM and Richards shook hands. Auliffe was silent. He could not comprehend his release, and Richards and Cody explained the situation. When Tim finally realized just what had happened, he shook hands with Richards again and expressed a desire to see Bradford.

"I've come to know he's a white man," said Tim Auliffe. "I'd like to thank him."

"You can't see him now," said Cody. "Doc Harper just let us in for a minute, long enough to get this statement. Mebbe in another week you can see him, Tim."

Auliffe nodded his shaggy white head and considered Cody thoughtfully.

Richards took charge of the conversation. "I think you'd better go out to the TA an' stay there, Tim," he said. "This ain't all cleared up, an' you're just out on bail. I'm goin' to stay here a while an' see what I can do. Cody's got some ideas he wants to work on."

"Where's Timmy?" asked Big Tim.

"She's at the ranch," answered Cody. "I think like Mr. Richards does, Tim. You'd better go out there."

Auliffe nodded. "I'll go out tonight," he said decisively. "Cody, I give Johnny Bowen orders about the fence. I told him to start takin' it down."

"I heard," said Cody. "I don't think that Johnny's done much about it yet."

"I will," promised Auliffe. "I'll start right out. I reckon I was wrong about you, Cody. I reckon —" Auliffe broke off. It was hard for him to confess his fault. He eyed Cody doubtfully.

Cody took a step and seized Tim Auliffe's hand. "We'll say nothin'

more about it," he said swiftly. "You're all right, Tim."

Tim Auliffe looked away, one hand brushing his eyes, then he turned back to the men in the office.

"I'm a blame old fool," he grated. "One thing you boys won't have to worry about. I ain't drinkin' no more."

"That's good, Tim," Richards said cheerfully. "Now I reckon we better clear out of here. You'll want to start to the ranch before it's any later, an' I want to get organized. Let's go."

As they left the office. Scott McGuire parted from the group to arrange for the burial of Burt Randall's body, and Cody and Richards walked down to the livery barn with Tim Auliffe. Tim got a horse from Summerford. When the horse was saddled, the big man climbed up slowly and looked down at the two men on the ground.

"I ain't goin' to forget this," he said. "I——" He leaned down, shook hands with Richards and Cody, then turned his horse and started out of town.

When Auliffe had left, Richards and Cody looked at each other.

"Damn' good lesson," Richards said. "I—— Hell, Cody! There's only a few old-timers left."

Cody nodded. "I'm goin' to send a wire to Nogales," he announced. "When do you want to pull out, Richards?"

Verne Richards looked at the sun hovering over the Dos Cabezas. "Early in the mornin'," he answered. "Is there anybody you want to take along?"

"I'd like to take Felipe," answered Cody. "His brother Juan was killed, you know, an' it seems kind of like Felipe ought to go."

"Get him," said Richards. "I'll see you at supper."

## CHAPTER XV.

## THE POSSE RIDES.

IT was evident to Cody Venture that Verne Richards, wise in the ways of the border country, contemplated a serious expedition. Richards organized a posse. He did very little talking about it, and he didn't tell the men he chose just what his objective was, but he made careful selections. When the sheriff, his deputy, and Cody ate their supper together, Richards casually mentioned the men he had selected. Besides Cody and Scott McGuire, there was Wyatt Brown and Cal Summerford. In addition Cody had spoken to Felipe de Cespedes. Richards said that he wanted another man.

"You must figger on a battle, Verne," said McGuire.

Richards shook his head. "I'm takin' men enough to fight a battle if I have one," he said. "What I want is men that know the country an' men I can depend on. The county's got a little money, an' it might as well be spent on deputies."

After the meal the men adjured to Bud Jessop's Alcatraz Saloon. McGuire and Richards, with Jessop and Meyers started five-cent-ante poker. Cody and Felipe watched the play. Felipe had sent his riders back to the Seven Slash with the wagon that had brought in Randall's body.

The game lasted late. No one seemed to want to go to bed, in spite of the hard day that probably lay ahead. No one was winning or losing a great deal of money, but both players and spectators were enjoying the session. About eleven o'clock Verne, dealing, declared that this was his last hand. He had dealt the cards and picked up his hand just as a horse slid to a stop

outside the Alcatraz. Johnny Bowen, disheveled and dust-covered, came through the door. The men at the poker table came to their feet.

"Timmy ain't at the ranch," snapped Johnny Bowen, wasting no words. "She ain't been there all day. Tim sent me in to tell you."

They all gathered around the TA rider. Bowen's story was short. He and the other two TA riders had been working at the fence all day, removing wire and posts. They had come in to the supper that Bill Longee had prepared—Bill and his crony Bar Fly having returned to the TA some time while the men were out. After supper there had been a pitch game in the bunk house which Tim Auliffe's arrival had interrupted.

Tim had asked at once for Timmy and a hasty search about the place had disclosed that the girl had not been there. Immediately, Tim had sent Bowen to town with the news, and he and the other two men, with lanterns, started searching the country north of the TA, hoping to find some trace of the girl.

Bowen had scarcely finished talking before general activity struck the Alcatraz. Cody went to the livery stable and found that Timmy had left early that morning, bound for the TA. She had been riding Cry Baby, and the hostler had seen her leave town.

A brief interview with Cal and Maria Summerford disclosed the fact that the girl had not returned from the TA and that they had not seen her since breakfast. Cal had supposed that Timmy had decided to stay at the ranch, and so neither he nor his wife had been unduly alarmed.

"You know the horse she rode?" asked Richards.

Cody replied that he did.

"Know it well enough to trail it?" Richards was insistent.

"I think so," answered Cody. "Cry Baby has a narrow heel on the nigh front foot, and he toes in a little. I've shod him for Timmy."

"Do you know anybody Timmy might visit out that way?" asked Richards.

"There's Lance Blount," said Cody doubtfully. "She might go to his place, but if she went there she'd turn more cast an' go around the mountains."

"Tim will find her if she's along the road," said Richards reassuringly. "Now let's get goin' an' meet Tim."

CODY led the way out of the Alcatraz. The men saddled horses in the livery barn, Cal Summerford joining them there. Wyatt Brown was aroused, and he, too, joined them. With horses saddled, they secured additional lanterns from Meyers's store and, lighting them, started out of town, taking the road that ran south.

They spread out on both sides of the road, forming a long line. Cody, because he was familiar with Cry Baby's tracks, held the road. Next to Cody was Brown, and on the other side was Felipe. Beyond Felipe and Brown were Scott McGuire and Summerford, and beyond those two were Johnny Bowen and Richards. So, like flickering fireflies, they rode south.

They did not find Timmy Auliffe. In several places Cody was able to identify Cry Baby's tracks. At these spots he called the others to him so that they too might familiarize themselves with the distinctive prints Timmy's horse had left. They rode slowly, examining the road and the country about it, now and then checking restive horses and listening,

hoping to hear a call. They heard nothing, found nothing.

When the little party of horsemen had traversed eight of the twenty miles that lay between Bowie and the TA boundaries, they saw lights approaching. It was Tim Auliffe and his two men.

Tim Auliffe was half crazed. The big man, his eyes red and his face strained, could scarcely talk. Again it was Richards who took command.

"She's turned off the road some place," Richards said grimly. "As soon as it's light we'll find the place. Right now the thing for us to do is to head back to town in a bunch. We don't want to cover any tracks she's left. Maybe we've done that already. Let's go."

Riding wide of the road they returned to Bowie.

Morning was streaking the sky when they reached the town. They left their lanterns at the livery, consulted with Bud Jessop about sending out other searching parties later in the day, and again started out over the ground they had covered. Big Tim Auliffe and Cody Venture rode side by side, just out of the ruts that were the road, watching the ground, trying, searching with anxious eyes, to discern signs that they could recognize.

It was Cody who first saw Cry Baby's tracks and definitely identified them. He called the others in and they consulted, then rode on. Again it was Big Tim who found the trail proving that Timmy had come that way, but it was Felipe de Cespedes, far to the left of the others, who came upon a patch of smooth sand, stopped and raised a shout.

The party closed in swiftly. Felipe pointed to what he had found, and Cody and Big Tim, dismounting, searched the place. They found in



the firm sand a track of a horse with a narrow heel. Farther along were other tracks. There was a mark where a front foot pointed in. They went on and in another open spot found more sign. Tim faced Cody and questioned him with his eyes. Cody nodded.

"It was Cry Baby," he said definitely. "He come this way."

Felipe, adept at tracking, added his word. "She was ridin'," said Felipe. "The horse stays in line an' does not wander."

Verne Richards raised his eyes toward the hills, now beginning to be tipped with the sun. "We'll work it out careful, boys," said Verne Richards. "It looks like she headed to the Chiricahuas."

"Likely she went to the Blounts." Cody afforded Big Tim what consolation he could give. "She probably changed her mind and decided to go to Lance's place instead of going home."

Big Tim nodded, but his eyes were worried.

"Why don't you go to Blount's, Tim?" questioned Richards. "You'll find her there."

Big Tim shook his head. "I'll stay with you," he said slowly. "If we strike her tracks in a trail that goes to Blount's I'll ride ahead."

Richards nodded, and again they took up progress.

**T**HEY traveled rapidly. When the trail broke they separated. These men were expert. Where a shod hoof had slipped on a rock, where Timmy had twisted aside to avoid cat's-claw or mesquite, where Cry Baby had torn out a mouthful of coarse grass in passing, they saw the sign. Only solid rock would baffle them. They

swung under Rough Mountain, and Cody, McGuire, and Richards, drawing together, looked at each other.

"She ain't headed for Blount's," said McGuire, low-voiced, giving expression to the thought uppermost in the minds of the other two.

"Can't you go through this way?" questioned Richards.

"You can bet it isn't a good trail," answered Cody.

"Mebbe——" Scott McGuire began.

"Mebbe she got an idea like we had," said Richards. "We might attend to our other business on this trip anyhow. If we find her up here we can send her back with Tim an' go on."

Cody and McGuire nodded, and once more they swung apart.

Beyond Rough Mountain the trail was more difficult to follow. Timmy had meandered from one high point to another, searching the country, and the men that followed her wasted time. Finally they came to the maze of rocks above Bonita Canyon, definitely lost the trail, and stopped. By that time it was noon. The sun was straight overhead. The posse dismounted and gathered about Richards. Consultation followed, each speaker being careful of what he said, fearing to alarm Tim Auliffe.

"She went through the rocks," said Richards, speaking absently. "She sure come in here."

"Timmy always liked it up here," said Cody, looking at Big Tim. "She might have decided to come up here just for the ride."

"But where did she go from here?" Big Tim blurted the words. "She didn't go to the ranch. She wouldn't have gone to Blount's from here. Where is she?"

"Clay Stevens told me in Wilcox," said Cody steadily, "that he'd homesteaded above Bonita. There's a little park down below the rocks. That's likely where he'd build his cabin. We'd better go down there. If we find anybody we can ask them if they've seen Timmy. Mebbe her horse fell with her, an' she's afoot."

Richard took the suggestion. "We'll do that," he said. "Lead out, Venture. You know the way."

They mounted again and, with Cody in the lead, left the rocks and started west. Within half an hour they came to the little mountain park.

There were buildings in the park, or rather the beginnings of buildings. Logs had been cut and laid for foundations, and as the Bowie men rode in, a man came from behind one of these sites and advanced toward them. Cody recognized the man as a former Seven Slash rider, Bill Lackey.

The horseman stopped, and Lackey came up, a question written on his face. Richards made known their errand.

"You seen Timmy Auliffe?" he asked. "She started out from Bowie yesterday mornin' headed for the ranch. She didn't get there. We followed her trail up to the rocks an' then lost it. Seen her?"

Lackey shook his head. Cody was watching the man intently. There was something in Lackey's eyes that Cody didn't like.

"I ain't saw her," said Lackey. "She ain't been through here."

"Is this Clay Stevens's place?" asked Cody, glancing about the park.

Lackey nodded. "I reckon," he said shortly.

"Clay here?" Richards took up the questioning.

"Naw."

Cody looked at Richards. "We might as well go on," he said slowly. "There's nothin' here. If you see the girl shoot a couple of times, will you, Lackey?"

Lackey nodded. "You comin' back?" he asked. Was there a tinge of anxiety in his voice?

"Not unless we hear you shoot," answered Cody, before Richards could speak. "We're goin' to work on down to the TA fence an' then back north. Then," he spoke more slowly, "we'll come back an' comb out the rocks if we have to move 'em one at a time."

Both Richards and McGuire seemed about to speak. Cody caught Richards's eyes. His own carried a warning Richards refrained from voicing his thoughts.

"But——" McGuire interposed.

"Come on!" Cody's order was rough. "Come on, Tim!"

**W**ALKING JOHN started across the little park. Perforce the others followed. The trees at the far side of the park closed around them. Silently Cody moved his hand, beckoning. Richards and McGuire spurred close. The others, following, watched the movement.

"He knew something," snapped Cody as Richards reached his side. "I watched his eyes. I'm goin' back an' watch him. You go on a piece an' then circle back."

Richards nodded. "I thought he was shifty," he said.

Cody swung Walking John. The others continued straight ahead. Their horses clattered over a little rock slide. Cody dropped from Walking John, tied his neckerchief over the horse's nose, and leading him, started back. Where the trees

began to thin he stopped, tied the horse, and then afoot slipped back toward the clearing.

For a time, from a vantage point behind a big pine, he watched the little opening. He saw nothing. Then suddenly Bill Lackey appeared, leading a horse. The man looked about the park, mounted, and started up the hill. Before he was out of sight, Cody went back to Walking John and mounted. For a moment he thought of spurring after the others and recalling them. Then he decided against that move. They would return shortly, in any case. Cody pulled his book of cigarette papers from his pocket. He would leave a plain trail, plain enough for any one. He didn't want to lose sight of Lackey. Tearing off a paper he impaled it on the spiky branch of a little tree and then rode on toward the park.

He did not cross the open park. Instead he circled it, now and again removing a paper from the book and putting it in a conspicuous spot. On the far side of the park he turned toward the rocks. He took pains now. Lackey might not be a fool. He might be watching his back trail. Cody picked a high spot, dismounted and went toward it. He climbed up the rock and searched the surroundings with his eyes. He was rewarded. He saw Lackey's horse rounding a pinnacle that sprang up from the barren rhyolite. Cody piled rocks in a little mound, put a cigarette paper under the top stone where it fluttered white in the little wind, and, mounting Walking John, rode toward the spot where Lackey had disappeared.

Again, cautiously, he dismounted and stole around the rock. Again he saw the rider he was following.

Again he piled rocks conspicuously and went on.

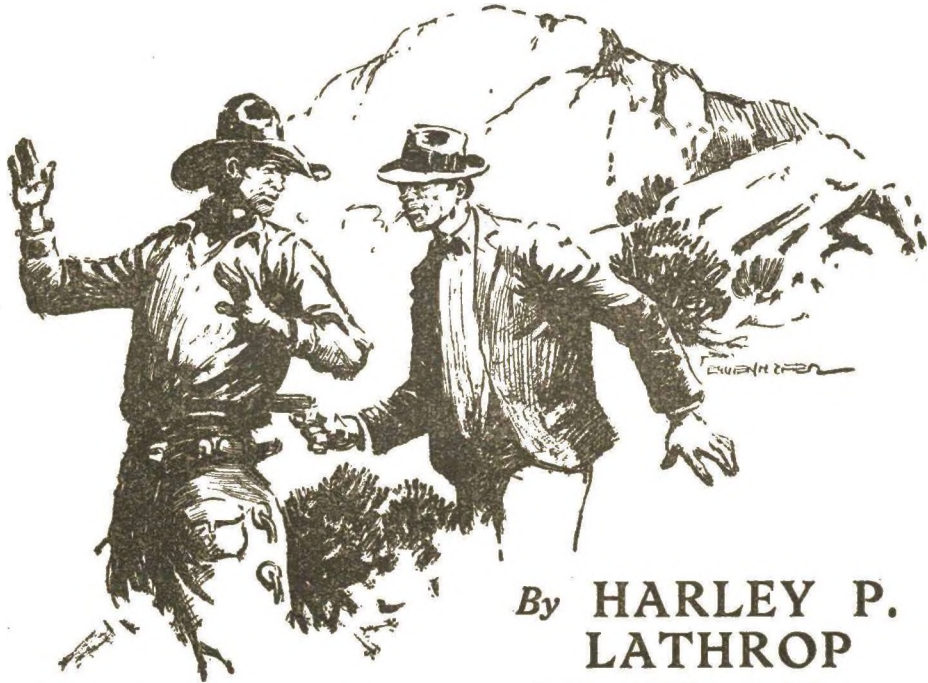
Now he progressed afoot. He left Walking John tied to a little knob of stone that was a natural and convenient hitching post. Ahead he could hear a horse scrambling over rocks. He must be close to Lackey's destination.

It seemed to Cody that the horse was making a great deal of noise. He stopped and looked around. There, just ahead, the wind and water had carved a gargoyle from the stone. Cody raised himself a little and peered over the edge. Two hundred yards away he could see two men—Bill Lackey and another. Lackey had dismounted from his horse. The two were arguing, as was evident from their gestures. Cody watched them. As he watched he saw another figure emerge from a crevice in the rock wall before which the men stood. A woman! Timmy Auliffe! The man with whom Bill Lackey argued turned to the girl, put his hand on her shoulder and shoved her toward the crevice. Timmy reeled under the force of that shove, but caught herself before she fell.

Behind Cody, Walking John nickered. He had rubbed off the neckerchief that bound his nose. That whistle was answered twice! The horse that Lackey rode lifted his head and neighed, and from somewhere to Cody's left and the rear, not one but two horses bugled.

Lackey whirled around. His companion seized Timmy and half carried her into the crevice in the rock wall. For an instant Lackey stood, then he too dived for the crevice, and from behind Cody Venture came a shot, another, and then a fusillade. The posse, following his trail, had encountered something!

# SPOILED HORSES



By **HARLEY P.  
LATHROP**

Author of "Hilltop Lady," etc.

**R**IDING home that April afternoon little old Andy Green knew he was in a jack pot and was undecided just how he got there and what to do about it. The idea never occurred to him that his horses might be at the bottom of the trouble. To his way of thinking both Fan and Red were the essence of perfection. No man owned a better pair of ponies.

Andy, however, was the only person of this opinion. Every one else considered the horses next door to worthless, and this was, in a manner, true. For example, take the mare, Fan:

Fan had everything a good cow horse needed. She was fast, sure-footed, and would follow a cow with

the unerring precision of a hound on scent. She knew what to do on the end of a rope, too. Yet, in the face of these admitted qualifications she was a thoroughly spoiled chunk of horseflesh. Let anything prick her right flank, a spur, a jutting sliver of rock or a projecting end of bush, and, after one disconcerting sidewise leap, Fan would explode like a Chinese cracker.

Andy had devised a method of riding the mare with his right leg stiffly outthrust to act as a sort of shield. Not that this trick was by any means sure fire. In the open, it served very well. But riding Fan through brush, especially at night, was about as risky a proceeding as riding a chunk of dynamite through a match factory.

With Red, Andy's other horse, the story was entirely different. Red was a powerful animal, active, gentle, and he could handle a cow at the end of a rope like nobody's business. But like his running mate Fan, Red also was a complete washout. He was a confirmed circler, which, all things considered, is undoubtedly as irritating a fault as a range horse can have.

Like all horses suffering from this sort of complex, Red staged his best show in a close country. Head him in any certain direction after entering a brushy pasture, and shortly he would begin an imperceptible veering to the right. So smooth was his technique that his rider, unless he was extremely watchful, would eventually find himself back exactly where he started. Riding old Red, providing he was not in company of another horse, demanded too much concentration. One had to steer him constantly if he wished to reach his destination.

Now in a country where horses play an active part in the everyday scheme of existence, men are prone to rate their neighbors by the quality of their horseflesh. A spoiled horse means a black mark. In a good-sized string, one spoiled horse may be condoned. But two out of two, as was the case with Andy, is entirely too high an average. It denotes lack of character in the owner. So, as a consequence, Andy just didn't measure up.

"A weak sister! You can tell that by his horses," was Doug Hodgee's grim outspoken comment whenever Andy's name cropped up. Doug was Andy's nearest neighbor, a good stockman, and a good hand with horses himself. So his opinion was accepted without reserve, and in time the belief became general.

The truth of the matter was no

one else knew Andy very well, anyway. He'd drifted in the previous year during the height of the big drought when stockmen were turning cattle back to the banks right and left. Andy had saved a little money. Not much, but enough, he figured, to get by on until conditions improved. So he made a deal with the bank to take over three hundred-odd heads of cows which had been turned back to them, assuming at the same time an overhanging mortgage of five thousand dollars. The bank appeared only too eager to shift the responsibility.

"You stay with the cattle, and we'll stay with you," the cashier, with whom Andy concluded the deal, promised.

Andy leased a pasture which was largely cedar brake, fixed up bachelor quarters in an abandoned cabin that lay up a draw a quarter of a mile from the county road, and settled down to dry-nurse the cows.

Somehow, he brought them through. However, it took every cent of his savings, and on top of that he was forced to dispose of practically everything he possessed save his own rigging and a battered old spare saddle he kept for emergencies. There were even times when he stinted on his own meals in order that Fan and Red might have oats. But that was Andy all over. He'd starve himself any day rather than see his beloved horses go hungry.

Yet on the April morning he started into town to arrange about renewing his mortgage, Andy felt like a million dollars. And who wouldn't? With the drought broken, cattle were climbing steadily in price. Right now the cows lacked only a little of representing the face value of the mortgage. One more year and—well—he'd have the world by the tail with a downhill pull.

Andy's first faint premonition of trouble came when, shortly after noon, he walked into the bank and saw a stranger seated behind the cashier's desk. The new cashier was busy examining a line of stationery a salesman was displaying. Upon catching sight of Andy, he waved the salesman to one side.

"Suppose you come back after the bank closes," he suggested. "I'll have a chance to look your line over without being interrupted then."

The salesman started packing his samples, and Andy introduced himself. "I come in to see about gettin' my mortgage extended," he explained.

"Oh, yes, Andy Green," the cashier said, drumming the desk with his fingers. He was a likable chap, this new cashier, and he didn't much relish the task that confronted him. But he had his orders from higher up.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Green," he said at length, "but the bank has decided to liquidate several of their accounts, and yours happens to be one of them."

It took Andy several seconds to determine just what the cashier was driving at. "You mean I got to sell the cattle?" he finally gasped.

"That's about the size of it," the cashier agreed mildly. "Unless, of course, you can negotiate a loan elsewhere."

Andy cogitated. He, of course, had no way of knowing that the bank's decision to call his loan hinged entirely on his growing reputation as a weak sister; or that he had achieved this reputation simply through owning two spoiled horses.

"You may pull out of this in better shape than you think," the cashier resumed when Andy remained stolidly silent. "At the present price

the cattle should about cover the face of the mortgage, and the two horses ought to bring enough to take care of the back interest. You probably won't owe anything at the wind-up, and that's something."

This time it was plain enough that Andy was shocked. He had no illusions concerning the bank's right to foreclose on the cattle. They held the mortgage, as that was their prerogative. Moreover, the cattle belonged to the bank in the first place. But by the same token the horses were his—and always had been.

"You mean I got to sell Fan and Red, too?" He gulped trying to swallow a growing lump in his throat.

"I wouldn't know the horses by name," the cashier admitted, wondering a little at Andy's sudden show of agitation. "The mortgage simply specifies a sorrel and a bay."

Andy cast back. He remembered now describing his horses to the former cashier. But this was his first intimation they had been included in the mortgage. "I'll—I'll drop back a little later," he said thickly, and, pushing past the salesman, who was still putting away samples, he went outside.

More than anything else, Andy wanted to be alone and think. He regretted losing the cattle, of course. But his greatest concern was the threatened loss of Fan and Red. Somehow, he must devise means to salvage them from the general wreck. He crossed the street, and, entering an empty restaurant, slumped moodily down on a stool and ordered coffee.

Presently a second man came in and took an adjoining stool. He ordered, glanced at Andy, and said carelessly:

"Why didn't you jump right down that cashier's throat when he said he

was goin' to sell you out, fella? The only way to get along with those banker birds is to hand 'em the hard-boiled stuff."

Peering over his cup, Andy recognized the stationery salesman. He was a slim fellow, with sharp black eyes and a rather hard-looking face. Andy didn't cotton to the man much, yet he couldn't help but feel that some sort of an explanation was in order.

"It's like this," he said, setting down his cup. "I really ain't got any kick comin' about the cattle. I simply took a chance on the bank stayin' in behind me and lost. But havin' my horses grabbed off me is somethin' else again. I raised 'em both. And, to tell the truth, mister, I'd about as soon lose both arms as Fan and Red."

"Well, if you're that crazy about 'em, why don't you take a run-out powder?" the salesman suggested idly. "You could have 'em a long ways from here by the time the bank woke up."

Here was a solution Andy hadn't thought of, and the idea held a certain amount of appeal.

"I got a good mind to, at that," he declared. "I got a mind to cut loose from everything and light out for San Pedro in the mornin'."

"San Pedro, huh? Well, all I got to say is you'd be biting off a considerable horseback ride. San Pedro's over a hundred miles east of here."

"It's only about seventy across country," Andy corrected. "And it's brushy all the way, too. I could make it without a soul seein' me."

The salesman considered this assertion, glanced sharply at Andy, and then seemed to lose interest in the conversation.

Andy wandered outside. He didn't go back to the bank. He

lacked the heart just then. Instead, mounting old Red, he set out for home. He rode slowly, sunk in a brown study, and it was nearing dusk when he reached the trail leading up the canyon to his cabin. He was unlatching the gate when a passing car drew to a stop.

"Hear what happened in town a while back?" the driver called excitedly.

"No," replied Andy pausing. "What?"

"The bank was robbed—that's what. Seems the cashier had some bird in after hours who turned out to be a holdup man. He stuck up the cashier, then let in his partner. Together they cleaned the place and left town. That was between four and four thirty, and the robbery wasn't discovered until they found the cashier, bound and gagged, just a while back. The law's gettin' busy now, but, with all that start, it looks like the bandits will make a clean get-away."

Pondering over the robbery as he rode the quarter mile, uphill stretch to his cabin, Andy failed to see where it affected him any. Of course, there was a possibility that, with other things to worry about, the bank for the time being would forgo their intention of selling the cattle immediately. But given all the time there was, where would he get the money? He couldn't even redeem his own horses.

Andy didn't have much appetite for supper. His throat still felt dry and oddly constricted. However, he fried himself a little bacon and managed to force it down. He was wiping the last of his supper dishes when a single sharp report came echoing up the canyon.

Possibly fifteen minutes later he heard some one coming up the trail toward the cabin. Somewhat cu-



rious, for visitors, even in the daytime, were few and far between, Andy hastened to the door.

"Your name Green?" a stranger called to Andy who stood framed in the doorway.

"Sure," replied Andy, failing to recognize the voice. "Come on in." He set out the single chair, and, turning, went into the lean-to kitchen after a box. When he stepped back into the room again, he looked squarely into the muzzle of a .45 automatic. It was the first time Andy had ever gazed into the business end of a .45 at such close quarters, and the muzzle looked as big around as a rain barrel. He dropped the box with a little clatter.

"Back up against the wall!" the man behind the gun snapped brusquely. "And if you don't want to get blasted, keep your hands in sight. You know who I am?"

Crowding the wall until he could almost feel the partition give, Andy studied the stranger fearfully. He was a thickset, swarthy man, with opaque black eyes and thick lips that looked ready to curl into a snarl at the slightest provocation. His clothes proclaimed him from the city. Thinking fast, it didn't take Andy long to arrive at a conclusion.

"I reckon you're one of those fellows that stuck up the bank in town," he hazarded.

"You heard about it then?"

"A man I met down at the gate told me," Andy explained. "I figured you'd be a hundred miles away by this time."

"You and me both, pal," the bandit said in a flat voice. "But one horse went lame, and the other stepped in a gopher hole and broke its leg. So we pulled into the brush, and after dark circled town and came out here. You shot off your mouth once too often to-day, and my part-

ner had sense enough to find out where you lived in case we needed you."

Andy's jaw slackened with surprise. "Why, I never——"

"What about that fellow you talked to in the restaurant?" the bandit snapped. "Didn't you tell him you could make it to San Pedro without bein' seen?"

"Oh?" A gleam of remembrance lighted Andy's eyes. "I thought he was a salesman."

"Well, that's where you and the cashier both made a mistake," the bandit sneered thinly. "That guy was a finger, see? He went in to case the bank and got a break when the cashier fell for his stall."

"Where's he at?" Andy asked.

"Never mind," said the bandit. "Now let's can this chatter and get down to cases. I want to make San Pedro without bein' seen, and you're elected. You either get me there or else——" He fingered the automatic suggestively.

Considering briefly, Andy could see no clear way out of this present jam. However, he did think of one possible obstacle. "There'll be three of us, mister," he said, "and I only got two horses."

"Two'll be enough," the bandit growled. "Let's get goin'."

They went outside, Andy in the lead, the bandit's gun boring a cold little spot between his shoulder blades. The moon had risen, and the canyon was almost as light as day.

With the bandit supervising his every move, Andy saddled both horses. He put his own saddle on Fan, flinging the battered old spare across Red's back. As he cinched the spare saddle home, Andy discovered there were but two good strands remaining in the girth. He pursed his lips at this, but said nothing.

When the horses were both saddled, the bandit ordered Andy to lead them to the edge of a wooded dell. "The dough's buried back of that third tree," he said. "Rake it out and tie it on my saddle."

Andy discovered the second bandit huddled on the ground, near where the moneybags were only partly buried. He was entirely covered with a robe and apparently asleep.

"Never mind him," the bandit growled when Andy hesitated. "Dig out those two sacks."

Andy pulled at the nearest sack, and, at the first tug, the robe slipped down revealing the face of the bogus salesman. It was ghastly in the moonlight. Both eyes were wide open and staring, and there was a round powder-blackened hole squarely in the middle of the forehead.

Utterly incapable of further motion, Andy remained frozen. It was clear, cold murder.

"Get busy," the bandit snapped, prodding Andy into action with his gun. "Ain't you ever seen a dead man before?"

His thoughts racing, Andy forced himself back to work. If he was any judge, his number was up. This thickset, swarthy bandit was as lethal as a rattlesnake and as treacherous. As soon as they were within striking distance of San Pedro, or possibly before, the bandit meant to shoot him down without compunction. His only chance, so far as Andy could see, would be to jump Fan into the brush at the first opportunity and trust to luck. Providing she didn't immediately go crazy, he might make it.

Later, however, as he was fastening the second of the two currency-laden sacks to Red's saddle, this re-

mote possibility became a thing of the past.

Uncoiling the rope that hung from Fan's saddle, the bandit flipped the noose over Andy's head, and, after ordering him to raise his arms, jerked it tight around his body.

"Just as a reminder, cowboy," he warned grimly. "In case you run me into trouble, I'll have you where I can blast you first." He mounted then, tying the free end of the rope to his own saddle horn. "Climb aboard!" he ordered Andy. "We'll have to leave that other five grand for some one else."

One foot in the stirrup, Andy paused inquiringly, and with a thin-lipped chuckle the bandit flirted his head toward the body. "I'm talking about Slim down there," he said callously. "The bankers association of this State offers a five thousand reward for bank robbers, dead or alive. The first man to find him will get the reward."

They started down, taking a trail that led up the draw. As they continued upward, the canyon gradually narrowed finally, pinching out on a mesalike, brush-covered flat. The brush, largely mountain cedar, grew somewhat higher than a man on horseback, and the turgid, dark-green foliage seemed to soak up the moonlight like a sponge.

Choosing a well-defined trail, Andy pushed onward, the bandit keeping close behind. They rode silently, the only sound being an occasional clink of shod hoofs on stone and the creak of saddle leather. A mile passed. Then another and another. Sometime after midnight, they came to a gate. Andy pulled up abruptly.

"I reckon," he said half turning, "we best wait here till daylight."

The bandit, who during the entire ride, had kept Andy under constant

surveillance, glowered suspiciously. "What's the big idea?" he demanded.

Andy pointed down the fence line to his right. "That's east," he said, "the way we want to go. But if we turn now, we'll run into a chunk of broken country a horse can't cross even in daylight. What we got to do is keep on north till we head Hodges's draw. From there, we can turn east and have plain sailin' with nothin' but brush and a few fences all the way to San Pedro."

"All right, then let's push on," the bandit snapped. "What you want to hang around here till daylight for, anyway? You got something up your sleeve?"

Andy dismounted, but, instead of reaching for the gate latch, took a deep breath and turned to face the bandit. "Mister," he said, and there was no mistaking the anxiety in his voice, "just take a look at that brush yonder. It's twice as thick as what we've come through. Then look at my horse. She's scared to death of it. She's startin' to sweat right now."

"Well, what of it?" snapped the bandit.

"Just this," said Andy, arguing desperately. "In daytime, when I can see to pick my way, I can ride her through brush all right. But dark as it is in there now, she wouldn't go a quarter of a mile before she'd throw a fit. And what would happen then? Likely, you'd think it was my fault and fill me full of slugs. I'm figurin' for myself, mister. I got to get you safe to San Pedro if I want to save my own skin."

Obviously impressed by Andy's sincerity, the bandit let his eyes rove over the distant expanse of brush. It was dark and grimly forbidding even in the moonlight. He let his glance drop back and rest on Fan.

She was sweating profusely and blowing little gusty drafts through her nostrils. The bandit knew practically nothing about horses, but it was impossible to mistake these signs.

"I believe you're telling the truth, cowboy," he said. "We'll wait here for daylight."

After that, time dragged. Squatted in the lee of a bush, neither man spoke. The bandit remained alert and watchful while Andy, still roped to Red's saddle, brooded morosely. He wondered if, after all, he hadn't made a mistake by persuading the bandit to remain here until daybreak. It was only delaying fatalities. Still, he reflected, but without much faith, while there was life there still was hope.

Daylight finally broke—gradually, like the lifting of a blanket. A heavy mass of clouds lay banked in the east. The morning would be cloudy, Andy thought, with no sun by which to set a course. The bandit was first to his feet.

"Let's shove on," he growled.

Leading their horses through the gate, they mounted and headed north. As they progressed, the brush became increasingly thick. Soon Andy was perspiring almost as profusely as his horse. It was a tricky, difficult task to negotiate this sort of country on Fan, even by daylight. Possibly an hour passed. Then an abrupt break in the dark-green wall ahead signified they were approaching a canyon.

"Yonder's Hodges's draw," Andy said over his shoulder. "We've hit it a mite below where it heads up, but that's all right."

He rode close to the edge of the draw and stopped. The canyon rim broke sharply at this point, and the sides, pitched at almost a straight up-and-down angle, were covered

with loose shale. The bottom of the canyon was overgrown with brush. Andy pointed up the draw.

"That way is due east," he said. "All we got to do is follow this draw to the end and keep on goin' till we reach San Pedro. A greenhorn could make it."

"Providing he didn't get lost," the bandit said thoughtfully.

"How could he?" demanded Andy. "The sun'll be up by noon, and he could set his course by that."

The moment the words left his mouth, Andy realized his mistake. He saw a slow resolve harden the bandit's face as it dawned on him that he no longer need rely on any one else's guidance.

In a sudden panic, Andy cast about for some way of escape and his eyes encountered the frayed girth holding old Red's saddle.

"Look," he said quickly, pointing downward, "your girth's about to pop. There's only two strands left."

Postponing his lethal intent for the moment, the bandit leaned sideways and attempted to see beneath Red's belly. When he was well off balance, Andy drew in his breath with a convulsive gulp and sank his right spur home in Fan's flank.

It was undoubtedly the most vicious jab the mare had ever received, and her reaction was all that might be expected. She tensed into a quivering lump, then exploded in one high, sidewise leap.

However, Andy was prepared. The instant he felt Fan contract, he wrapped his legs about her barrel and grabbed the saddle front and back. Everything hinged on Red's frayed girth. If the remaining two strands held, Andy would be jerked from his seat and left dangling at the other's mercy.

The show-down came while Fan was at the height of her leap. The

rope, running from his body to Red's saddle horn, sawed into Andy's ribs as if it would cut him in two. For what seemed like eternity, the pressure increased. Then, with a sudden twang, the two strands broke. From the tail of his eye, Andy saw the bandit spill sidewise to the ground and the saddle, freed of its weight, come flying toward him. He turned loose all holds then, kicked himself clear, and, landing on his neck and shoulders, went rolling downward, the spare saddle raising a cloud of dust behind.

As soon as he reached the canyon floor, Andy freed himself of the rope and crawled into the brush where Fan, who after lighting on all fours and sliding gracefully to the bottom, had already disappeared.

Possibly ten minutes later, after tying the thoroughly subdued Fan to a paling fence, Andy knocked at the back door of the Hodges ranch house. A woman answered.

"Land sakes!" she exclaimed after a sharp glance. "If it ain't little Andy Green! You look like you'd been in a fuss with a wild cat."

"Yas'm, Mrs. Hodges," Andy agreed mildly. "Me and Fan went over the edge of the canyon a while back, and I got mussed up a little. Is Doug home? What I come for is to borrow his gun."

"No, Doug ain't been home all night. I don't guess you heard about it, havin' no phone, but the bank was robbed yesterday evenin'. Doug's out with one of the posses. They seem to think the robbers are hid out in the brush somewhere south of town. He started to go by for you, but he figured that ridin' a spoiled horse you'd just be in the way."

"Yas'm," Andy said meekly. "But about that gun."

"Doug took his rifle with him," Mrs. Hodges explained. "We got a shotgun, though, and some buckshot shells if that'll answer."

Turning away a moment later with the loaded shotgun cradled in one arm, Andy had another thought.

"About them two robbers, ma'am," he said, softly, "you might telephone town and have 'em send a posse out to my place. The slimest one of the two is there dead, and I'll have the other rounded up before

long. Right now, he's out in your pasture bareback on old Red, and thinks he's headed east. But you know how Red is, ma'am. He'll have him circled right back to the gate where they went in before that bandit knows what's happening."

Andy patted the shotgun and grinned. "And I aim to be there waitin' for him," he concluded. "Them robbers is worth five thousand dollars apiece, and I sure can use the money."

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### HEAVY CHICKENS

**W**HETHER the owner of the chicken which a hotel keeper bought made a practice of feeding his chickens heavy food is not known. But the fact remains that a particularly healthy chicken which the hotel keeper opened up had its crop filled with seven stove bolts, four nuts, two fence staples and one wire nail.

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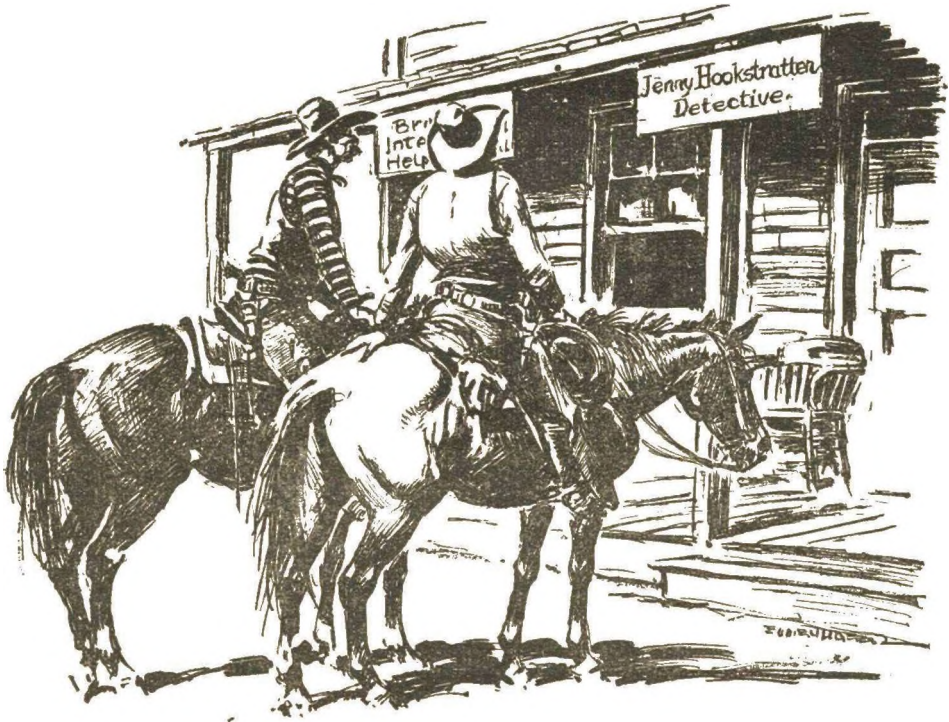
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# BRAVE AND INTELLIGENT

By **GLENN H. WICHMAN**

Author of "Hep Foretells The Future," etc.

**M**E and my partner, "Hep" Gallegher, were on our perennial hunt for something to do. Hep never could stay put very long in any one spot; he was as restless as a Colorado mosquito. While he'd followed the cow business ever since he'd been old enough to ride, the itch to try some other line of human endeavor was eternally with him. He'd already tried ten or a dozen different occupa-

tions, but had always ended up within a week or so by coming back to cow nursin'. Yet hope sprang eternal in his bosom that one of these days he'd make a connection where, instead of using his muscles, he could use what he called his brains.

"My head will be my eventual salvation," he said to me as we rode up to a little place called Butler's Ford. "Now here's a new town. I've never been here before. No-

body knows me. I'll ride in here as fresh as a daisy. The past will be buried, and I'll be all ready to tackle life just as though I hadn't already tackled it. I'll carve me out a career."

"The beef critters ain't done so bad by you," I reminded him as we jogged down the street. "At least, they've kept you from starvin'. What particular brand of lunacy are you thmkin' of indulgin' in this time?"

Gallegher began heating up. "It's you, George, that's the lunatic. Always contented to stay in the same old rut. If somethin' was to happen to the beefsteak-on-the-hoof business you'd wither up and blow away. Look at me! I'm as enterprising a fella as you ever laid an eye on. Can turn my hand to anything in an emergency—and on two minutes' notice. If the price of prime steer meat was to go down to an eighth of a cent a pound, I'd start a newspaper or become a lawyer or open up a bank. It pays to be versatile and have a lot of irons in the fire."

Hep's voice trailed off, but his mouth still stayed open. We were by this time halfway down the street of the town. Gallegher's horse had come to a halt and he, himself, was looking with astonishment at a little building which fronted on the board walk to our left. New signs, the paint still fresh, had been nailed onto the two posts that supported the roof of the veranda. One of them read:

JENNY HOOKSTRATTEN  
DETECTIVE

The other one read:

BRAVE AND INTELLIGENT HELP  
WANTED

"Well, I'll be durned!" muttered Gallegher. "All mornin' premoni-

tion has been hoverin' over me like a buzzard over a dead calf. I knew that somethin' good was goin' to turn up, and, by Jiminy, if it ain't!"

"'Brave and intelligent help wanted,'" I repeated. "That lets you out. 'Jenny Hookstratten, Detective.' Never heard of a woman goin' in for such an occupation out in this country."

"Destiny spelled with a big 'D' has led me here," said Gallegher. "I ain't too hot at the notion of workin' for a woman, but shucks! That sign was put up there for my own particular benefit. Brave and intelligent. Opportunity's knockin' and wants to come in. This oughta be a job that'll call for pure reasoning."

"Pure or impure," I told him, "you'd better forget about it. There's a barroom across the street with some beer in it, and I got four-bits in my pocket that ain't workin'."

"Beer?" repeated Hep, and temptation was upon him. "Nope. You can go and drown yourself if you wanta, but not me. I'll go in and give this lady sleuth the once over."

**G** ALLEGHER shoved his horse over to the hitch rail and dismounted. I hesitated between going with him or going for the beer. But, seeing that he was my partner, and seeing that he usually needed looking after, I went with him. We shoved open a screen door and stepped inside the building that had the signs on it. It contained but a single room. There was a table and four or five chairs. A woman had been sitting behind the table when we came in, but she got up. A very large woman who wore tortoise-rim glasses and looked as severe as a couple of blizzards. Her armament would have done credit to a Mexican bandit; she wore not



only a couple of guns, but two bowie knives.

"Ma'am," said Hep as he stood there with his legs apart, his thumbs notched in his belt, and a scowl on his face that was meant to show how tough and determined he was, "ma'am, I notice you've got a sign tacked up out front."

"Certainly, I've got a sign," replied the lady. "I'm Jenny Hookstratten, and if there's anything I can do for you, just go right ahead and tell me."

Gallegher found it hard to smile, but he did smile just the same. "I was thinkin' of doin' somethin' for you, madam. You make mention of wantin' somebody to work for you."

The lady detective started to laugh, and then she must have thought better of it. Anyway, she no more than started to laugh than she stopped. "Well, I declare!" she finally said. "Forty men, at least, have looked at that sign durin' the past two days, and all of 'em thought it was a joke. They think I'm a joke. One of these days they'll wake up and find that I ain't a joke. *Sit down!*"

The last two words had come out like a couple of revolver shots. Me and Gallegher jumped. Hep took a few steps backward and sat down in a chair, purely by accident. If the chair hadn't been there, he'd have sat down on the floor. Pretty soon we were all seated. The woman wanted to know what our names were, and we told her.

"Gallegher," she asked, "what are your qualifications, if any?"

Hep appeared to be somewhat puzzled, but the look passed. "A fella once told me I had an instinct for figuring things out. Sort of human bloodhound."

Jenny Hookstratten snorted.

"Maybe it was on account of your ears!"

Now, Hep Gallegher had always been sensitive about his ears, owing to the fact that they were too large for the rest of him. His face started to get red, which was a bad sign.

"Listen, ma'am," I said, "me and my partner didn't come in here to have our anatomy insulted. Gallegher thinks he wants to be a detective. If you don't think he ought to be one, that'll be fine with me. I'll take him out of here."

The woman looked at us over the tops of her glasses. Then a change seemed to come over her. Slowly she shook her head. "Maybe I was mistaken. You see, Gallegher, I've been laughed at so much since comin' to Butler's Ford that it's warped my judgment. I thought you two gents had wandered in here just to make light of me. Of course, now, if you're serious——"

"I'm not," said I, "but my partner is. He's itchin' to be brave and intelligent."

Jenny Hookstratten looked hard at me and growled: "Get on out of here, then! Gallegher and me'll make our arrangements in private. Scat! Begone!"

"Madam," I respectfully answered, "I've looked after Gallegher now for ten years. We've shared the same blankets, the same disasters, and the same brands of nonsense. We've even had our skulls dented at the same time. Hep's probably ridin' for a fall. If so, I wanta be around to pick him up."

**T**HE lady detective didn't like this very well, but she gave in. "I suspicion," she said to me, "that you have more sense than your partner. But, heavens knows, that's not sayin' very much. But Gallegher's the kind of a man who'll

get things done. He'll jump over obstacles like he was a kangaroo. You, personally, would never jump over anything. You're lazy, shiftless, good for nothing——"

Gallegher had brightened up until his face looked like a new dollar. "That's tellin' him, ma'am!" he declared. "I was sayin' the same thing to him as we rode into town. From now on we'll ignore him entirely. I'm ready to go to work this minute. If it's a job of deducin' you want done, just let me know the particulars and I'll be at it."

"Spoken like a man," said Jenny Hookstratten. "Gallegher, do you happen to know a gent who calls himself Preacher Dougan?"

Hep Gallegher shook his head. "I'm a stranger here. Don't know a soul."

Jenny explained the matter: "Preacher Dougan owns the Yellow Jacket Bar, which is directly across the street. I've been here now in Butler's Ford for a solid week, trying to lay my hands on him. He eludes me. Dougan has holed up in that saloon like a rabbit in a haystack. He hasn't even put his head out the door. They bring his meals to him from the chink hash house, and he sleeps in one of the back rooms. Your first job, Gallegher, is to bring me Preacher Dougan." The lady detective let out a great sigh and rolled her eyes upward until only the whites showed. Then her mood changed, and so did her expression. Her eyes snapped, and her jaws closed so hard that the muscles showed on either side.

"Bring him to you?" repeated Hep. "Do you want me to literally drag him over here?"

"Not exactly," said Jenny. "I want you to get him out of the saloon, take him some place, tie him up, and then come and tell me. I'll

go to him. That's simple and clear—ain't it?"

"Sure," admitted Gallegher.

"It's neither," said I. "It's neither clear nor simple. This bird'll naturally object to bein' kidnaped. He'll raise a squawk. He'll bring the forces of law and order down upon our heads."

Jenny Hookstratten snapped her finger at me. "Kindly remember, George," she said, "that I've hired your partner, not you. If you want to stay here and keep your mouth shut—all right! If not, I'll throw you out!"

"That's tellin' him," chuckled Hep.

Jenny Hookstratten continued: "Kidnaping is no crime, provided the end justifies the means. In this case, Gallegher, it more than justifies it. It'll take the cunningest kind of planning on your part. I feel sure you're capable of it. That's why I've hired you. I'll leave the details for you to arrange. There's a deserted nester's shack down the road a little way out of town. I suggest that you take Mr. Dougan to that. When I've laid my hands on him I'll give you fifty dollars."

Hep threw out his chest and swelled up like a hop-toad. "It's as good as done, ma'am."

"Havin' got that settled," I said, speakin' to the lady detective, "would you mind explaining something to me? From where you sit to the spot that this Preacher Dougan inhabits can't be much over a hundred and fifty feet. If he's hidin' in the saloon, why under the sun don't you go over there yourself and drag him out?"

"Me!" screamed Jenny. "Me! Me go into a saloon! Why, who ever heard of a lady goin' into such a place!"

"Certainly!" put in Gallegher like a parrot. "Whoever heard of it!"

"Well," I persisted, "what's this Preacher Dougan done that he needs to be run off with?"

**J**ENNY didn't think much of that question, either. "That, my friend," she stormed, "happens to be a professional secret!"

"Happens to be a professional secret," repeated Gallegher.

"By all that's reasonable," I yelled, "why can't the local star totter attend to this job?"

"Because," replied Jenny, "the Butler's Ford constable and you are very much alike. Both of you are pure mahogany from the collar bones up." She turned then to Hep: "Mr. Gallegher, I ask you to attend to this matter with energy and dispatch. Don't tell Dougan that you're workin' for me. Don't hurt him any more than you have to. Be firm, but don't injure him so that he can't be fixed up. Be cunning, like an Apache. If everything comes off well, I'll see that you have a steady job for life."

Hep got up and swept the floor with his hat. "Ma'am," he replied, "Gallegher always gets his man!"

Jenny Hookstratten waved us outside, and we went. First to the livery stable with our horses, and then to a restaurant, where we laid in enough victuals to last us for half a day. Finished with that, we hunted up the empty nester's shack.

"Listen, Hep," I pleaded for the last time as we stood on the board walk and picked our teeth, "don't you reckon we'd better drift on outta here before you get yourself hanged?"

"The rope won't ever be wove that'll hang me," said Gallegher. "I'll betcha that within forty-eight hours I'll be the most-talked-of gent in this valley. Did you ever meet

a more upstandin' woman than this Jenny Hookstratten! Now there's a woman with a strong mind!"

There was nothin' much for me to do except lapse into a dignified silence. We went down the board walk and into the Yellow Jacket Saloon. As we passed through the bathing doors I saw the lady detective watching us from across the street through a window. She waved and then turned her back.

Two men were behind the bar. A half dozen loafers were scattered around here and there in the bar-room in various states of sleepiness. It was early afternoon, and the whole town was drowsy. Most of the loafers were snoring. Of the two men behind the bar, one was a regulation bartender. The other was tall and thin, and dressed in black. He might have been anything from an undertaker to a bitter-root medicine man.

Just as me and Hep came up to the counter, the tall man said to the bartender: "You might as well take yourself a siesta, Gus. There won't be much business. I'll wait on the trade."

"Thanks, Preacher," replied the barman, and promptly started for one of the rooms that were in the back of the saloon.

"That's findin' out things!" whispered Hep to me outta the corner of his mouth. "This is the bird we're after."

"A remarkable deduction," I snorted, and tossin' my four-bits on the counter, ordered beer.

"Make it three beers," put in Hep. "Mister, I'll ask you to join us."

"Now that's darned kind of you," muttered the saloon man. "Don't care if I do."

Preacher Dougan impressed me as being one of those cautious, careful sort of fellas who look a long time before they leap. He appeared to

be about as dangerous as a donkey. There was a sad, patient light in his eyes, and his drooping mustaches resembled a couple of branches on a weeping willow tree. It was a little hard to imagine what kind of a crime he'd committed.

Preacher Dougan took his time about drawing the beers, but eventually he had them out on the bar. We nodded at each other and drank, smacked our lips in satisfaction.

**B**Y the way," said Dougan, "ain't you the two men who dropped in a while ago and talked to the detective lady across the street? I was lookin' out the window and happened to notice you."

"Certainly, you saw us," admitted Hep, displaying more sense than I thought he was capable of. "We dropped in there and then dropped out again. Saw the sign about help wanted. Of course, we didn't know it was a woman who ran the outfit. Imagine a couple of guys like us workin' for a woman!"

"Uh-huh," grunted Preacher Dougan. "By the way, Jenny Hookstratten didn't happen to make any mention of me, did she?"

Gallegher squinted up his eyes, furrowed his forehead, and tried to look as deep and cunning as possible. "Without knowing your name, mister, I couldn't tell you."

The saloon keeper then introduced himself, and we introduced ourselves. He even drew us a couple of more schooners of beer for nothing after Hep had said that the lady detective had made no mention of his name.

"Why do they call you Preacher?" I asked.

Dougan came very near blushing. "Well, I'll tell you," he said. "I've always been a moral sort of a guy and sometimes I like to make

speeches. It's nothin' to be proud of, I suppose, but I've got no use for trouble. I carry a gun on general principles but, bless my soul, I'd hardly care to shoot anybody. I treat people fair and they treat me fair. Of course, there're times when somebody tries to take advantage of me." Dougan's gaze had wandered. He was looking up at the ceiling. The lazy light had come out of his eyes and they were as hard as flint. The look passed instantly, and he was smiling again. "People treat you fair if you're fair to them."

It struck me that Preacher Dougan was the oddest saloon keeper I'd ever encountered. Obviously there was something the matter with him. "This Jenny Hookstratten seems to be a remarkable female," I said, because the conversation had dragged and somebody had to say something.

"Very remarkable, yes," sighed Preacher. "Very——"

After a while the bartender came back from his siesta. By that time all three of us were pretty full of beer.

"Dougan," said Hep, "I trust you've got a room in back where the three of us could sit down in comfort and put our feet on the table."

Preacher waved his hand at the opposite side of the barroom. "There's plenty of empty chairs here and plenty of tables to put our feet on. Ain't seen business so dull in a month——"

"Privacy's what I crave," interrupted Gallegher. "Some place where the three of us can sit down and swap lies and nobody'll disturb us."

Dougan scratched his head and yawned. "Not a bad idea. I get so infernally tired of hangin' around in here that I think I'll go nutty."

Hep pricked up his ears. "Listen, Preacher, why don't we go down un-

der the trees by the creek and take a snooze? The afternoon breeze is blowin'."

Dougan considered the matter, and it was easy to tell that he was mightily tempted. But discretion came to his rescue. "Nope," he said. "It can't be done. A week ago I could have done it, but not now."

Gallegher tried to pry the reason out of him, but didn't have any luck. We had another beer, and then Dougan led the way to a room in the back end of the barroom. It was a little room and had a poker table in it and a few chairs. There were two doors, one that led into the saloon and the other into the back yard.

**W**E sat down and plunked our feet up on the table. Preacher sat between me and Hep. Gallegher was looking at the back door, and it wasn't hard to tell what was in his mind. A short distance behind the Yellow Jacket Bar ran a creek. Trees and brush came up nearly to the back door. The nester's deserted shack that Jenny Hookstratten had mentioned was a little way up the creek from the town, and not much more than on the outskirts of it. Brush surrounded it, and only the peak of the roof could be seen from the road.

"Did you boys ever hear the story about the two Irishmen?" asked Dougan as he stretched himself and closed his eyes.

"You mean the one about Pat and Mike?" queried Hep.

"Yeah," muttered Dougan. "Funny—but that happened to be their names. You've heard it, then?"

"All Irishmen," I put in, "are named either Pat or Mike. But don't let that bother you. Go on. Let's have it."

The saloon keeper was growing more drowsy with every passing sec-

ond. "Pat and Mike——" he began, and that was the end of it. Dougan's voice played out, he gulped a time or two, rested his head on the back of his chair and then began to snore.

"The buzzard's gone to sleep," hoarsely whispered Gallegher across the table.

"Let him sleep," I whispered back. "It'll be good for him. We oughta do the same thing."

And that's the way it happened. If I'd kept my own eyes open, things might have been different. But I made the bad mistake of closin' 'em. I was dreaming something about a train when a loud *thump* woke me up. The damage had already been done. Hep had hit Preacher Dougan on the head with the barrel of his Colt! Just as I opened my eyes, Gallegher had one of his hands clapped over the saloon keeper's mouth, and with his left arm was keeping the man from falling out of the chair.

"Knocked out colder 'an a stuffed turkey," chuckled Hep beneath his breath. "Sh-u-u-sh!"

We listened, but no unusual sounds came from the barroom. Evidently the blow hadn't been heard.

Gallegher eased Dougan out of the chair and down onto the floor.

"If you've killed him," I gasped, "we'll get our necks stretched."

"Ah, he ain't dead," Hep cheerfully assured me. "In an hour and he'll be up and around and as frisky as a chipmunk. What we've gotta do is to get him down to that shack before he wakes up. That oughta be easy. This town's as much asleep as he is. Grab a hold of him and we'll carry him out of the back door. Wait a minute. I'll take a look first."

Gallegher stuck his head out the rear door, which wasn't locked, and in a moment came back with the information that the coast was clear. One thing sure, it would be better to take Dougan down to the shack than it would be to leave him here. The loafers in the saloon had seen the three of us go into that room, and, if Preacher was found there with a dent in his skull, a necktie party would be in order.

Hep grabbed Preacher by the shoulders, and I got hold of his feet. He was as limp as a rag, and hard to carry. A moment and we were out the door and in among the cottonwoods. Apparently no one had seen us. For a hundred yards we carried the saloon keeper and came to the creek bank. Here we put him down so we could rest. For all his thinness, the man was heavy.

Gallegher cackled with delight. "Finally," he said, "I've come into my own. I've always told you, George, that I was cut out for somethin' better 'an dogie chasin'. All my brains needed was a chance. Here I've trapped me a prime scoundrel."

"Not much to be proud of," I told him. "The fella went to sleep and you socked him. Even a sheepherder could have done as much as that."

WE carried Dougan up the brush-covered creek bank to the nester's empty shack. It was a filthy place and hadn't been cleaned out in years. Just as we went through the door Preacher began to stir and to make funny noises with his mouth.

"Comin' to," muttered Hep. "We'll have to tie him up." So we laid Dougan on the floor and tied him hand and foot. "You stay here, George," ordered Gallegher, "and I'll

shake a leg up to Jenny Hookstratten's office. Already I can feel the fifty dollars jinglin' around in my pocket."

No sooner had Hep gone than Preacher opened his eyes. He tried to sit up, but couldn't. Then he saw me standing there by his feet. Gradually his wits gathered and he spoke:

"What's happened, George? I got a feelin' that somebody tossed a ton of brick at me."

"Retribution has finally caught up with you, Preacher," I told him. "You're a wanted man, and now you've been found. By the way, what's the amount of the reward?"

"Reward!" sighed Dougan. "Mister, you make me laugh."

"Well, anyway," said I, "we've got you."

"A couple of snakes in the grass," muttered Dougan. "If my arms were free, I'd break every bone in you."

For the next ten minutes we called each other names, and then there was the sound of approaching footsteps. I went to the door, and there came Jenny Hookstratten and Hep. Both of them were half running and nearly out of breath. I stepped aside so that the woman could enter. Gallegher followed her into the shack.

"There on the floor, you see——" proudly began Hep, but he got no further.

Jenny had interrupted him by yelling at the man on the floor: "Preacher! Preacher! Why, you ——"

Then a most surprising thing happened. Jenny Hookstratten turned upon me and Hep. With one swing of her fist she hit me right on the point of the jaw. I'd never felt such a blow. I went over backward and hit my head on the wall. There

wasn't any fight left in me, even if I'd wanted to fight a woman.

"Madam!" shouted Gallegher. "What's the meanin'—"

This time she interrupted him by bringing her two clenched fists right down on the top of his head at one and the same time. Hep's knees folded, and he sat down on the floor. Gallegher was too stunned and astonished even to open his mouth.

Jenny had already pulled one of her bowie knives. "If you boys either move or say a word," she hissed at us, "I'll slit your throats!" Then she got out some stout cord that she carried in the pocket of her riding skirt and tied us up. Finished with that, she tied bandannas over our mouths. Then she picked Preacher Dougan up in her arms and ran out of the shack with him.

Mc and Gallegher lay there in the nester's shack all night. Try as we would, we couldn't get loose. It was along about ten o'clock the next morning when we heard some one coming. In a moment two people had come in and stood there looking down at us. Durned if it wasn't Jenny Hookstratten and the saloon keeper. They had their arms around each other and looked as happy as a couple of doves.

"Boys," said Dougan to me and Hep, "I have it in my heart to forgive you for kidnapin' me with thoughts of robbery and murder. It was a foul deed and I would have

died had not this brave woman rescued me, this brave woman who is now my wife. We were married last evenin' over in Holtville, but if it hadn't been for you, we might never have been married. Boys, I'm a timid man when it comes to the women. A month or so ago I met this brave lady down in the next county and proposed marriage. She accepted me, and then, like a craven, I ran out on her. But she knew my heart better than I did. She followed me, opened an office here and set up a business. Still I avoided her. But, thanks to *you*, my eyes were again opened to her sterling and exemplary qualities—"

Preacher Dougan was wound up for fair. He'd probably have continued to talk for an hour had not his bride stopped him. "Listen, dear," she said, "you've told them enough. All is forgiven and forgotten. All that remains to be done is to turn them loose and give each gent a good swift kick in the pants with the warnin' never to come back to Butler's Ford again."

Nothing more was said, but in a remarkably short length of time me and Gallegher were ridin' out of town. Each of us was fifty dollars richer than when we'd come to the place. Mrs. Preacher Dougan had slipped it to us on the side.

"There's no understanding women," said Hep.

"Nor you, either," I told him.

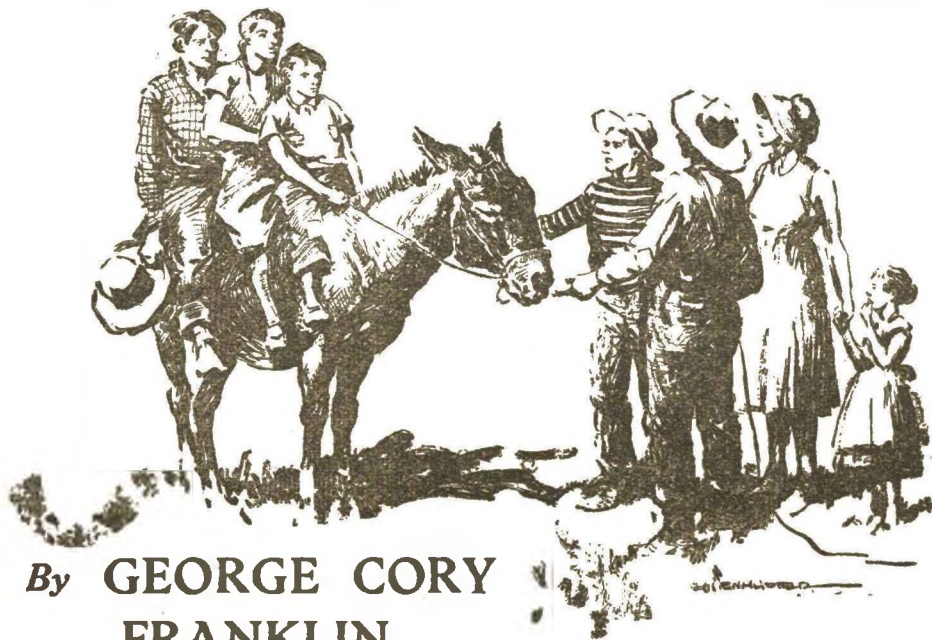
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### EASTERN PRAIRIE DOGS

**I**T has been proved that the prairie dog fares as well in the East as in the West. A resident of Middleboro, Massachusetts, has a fourteen-acre animal farm. To this farm he imported from Texas less than a dozen prairie dogs, which, since their arrival, have multiplied to one hundred of them. Thus it would seem that the only reason that these animals are so prolific in the Western plains is because there is more room out there.



# THE BURRO



By **GEORGE CORY  
FRANKLIN**

**T**HE one animal that actually played the most important part in the settling of the inaccessible areas of the West, has been given very little attention by writers. Yet volumes of fact might be written around the sagacity, loyalty, and hardihood of the burros that packed the prospectors' camp outfits into the trailless wilderness, made stores and trading posts possible, and helped to open up the richest camps in the Rockies.

Like the early horses and domestic cattle, our American burros came originally from Spain, where they were called *borricas*; and like the horses, some of them escaped and became wild as mustangs; interbreeding among the bands resulted in a smaller animal, the same as the plains ponies were descendants from the larger horses of the Spaniards;

then when the value of the burro as a pack animal was discovered and they were captured and redomesticated, no attempt was made for a century or more to breed them up.

Shortly after the Civil war, however, some larger Jacks were brought up from the South, and the result of this new blood became apparent in the stockier, heavier bodied burros that became the famous pack animals of the Mining camps.

In the early '70s, a burro that weighed more than four hundred pounds was considered very large. Most of those used by prospectors weighed about three hundred and fifty pounds.

Long before gold was discovered in the Rocky Mountains, trains of burros carried merchandise up from the southern coast, to be traded to the Indians along the streams that empty into the Rio Grande between

Sante Fé and the head waters of the Colorado. These trains of from thirty to one hundred burros moved slowly; each animal usually carried about one hundred and fifty pounds on these long trips, although double that amount was sometimes loaded on them for short packs of two or three miles.

Normally a loaded burro will walk about three miles an hour, and since such trains rarely made over fifteen miles a day, they were not under the packs for more than five hour at a stretch. Their tough little hoofs were seldom shod by the early pioneers, although later, when burros were used for packing supplies through the rugged fastness of the mountains, and ore from the mines down to the settlements, burro shoeing became an art among frontier blacksmiths.

Small saddles of every description were fitted to their backs. The most common type was the cross-tree, which was merely two flat pieces of wood shaped to fit on either side of the back, and held in position by two cross pieces fastened with wooden pins and rawhide thongs. A breast strap passed around the shoulders, under the neck, and a breeching around the hind parts, together with a cinch, completed the outfit except for the ropes, with which the load was held in position. The back of the burro being straight with no withers, it is absolutely necessary to have both breeching and breast strap in order to hold the saddle and load in place.

No more patient and faithful animal than the burro ever served man. He will live uncomplainingly on the sparse bunches of grass to be found between the rocks on a mountain-side. He will stay near an isolated camp for weeks, and, in the winter time, when the snow is too deep for

him to paw it off the grass, as a horse or mule can do, he will eat aspen bark, the paper from tin cans, anything he can find about a camp, including dynamite, if a stick is carelessly left where he can find it. Bacon rind is considered a choice tit-bit, and sourdough bread will win his affection completely. He is a natural born beggar, and can put a more pleading note into the queer sucking sound he makes with his nose than any other domestic animal that asks man for food.

Burros are natural nomads. They will stay faithfully near the master who is kind to them for weeks or even months, but, when a trip has been decided upon and the burros are brought in and loaded with the camp outfit, they show every evidence of joy over the promise of adventure and change of scene. As soon as the packs have been loaded and the direction to be taken indicated, they start off playfully, nipping at one another, perhaps bucking a pack off in their exuberance and excess of energy. A sharp word or a cuff on the neck is usually sufficient to sober them down, and by noon of the first day they will have become lazy trail loafers, stopping to pick a mouthful of tender grass, or to hunt for wild onions, of which they are especially fond. This is the happiest time for them as well as the men who use them.

The length of the drive is usually regulated by the feed, water, and the abundance of game, and perhaps for days at a time the camp will not be moved. The burro shows his approval of this life by becoming fat, lazy and playful, attempting tricks, not only upon the other animals, but upon the men as well.

They are the best possible means of transportation for the prospector,

and will carry heavy loads over places where a horse or a mule would refuse to go at all. If the prospector succeeds in finding pay ore, he may want to pack timbers to his mine. In that case he cuts them the required length, fastens the ends of two of the pieces, one on each side of the saddle, and the burro drags the timber to the new work. When the rich ore has been sorted and sacked, the burro carries it down the mountain to where it can be reached by wagons, or in modern times by motor trucks and transported to a mill or smelter.

In early days, young, strong burros were in great demand and readily brought a good price, usually thirty or forty dollars each. But when some rich strike caused a stampede for a distant camp, all prices soared and a good "jack" might sell for a hundred dollars. Now they may be bought for two or three dollars, or taken for nothing in parts of the West where bands have become wild and no one claims ownership.

Probably none but the old-timers fully appreciate the value of these little animals and what they can accomplish. Their strength is greater in proportion to their weight than that of the horse or mule, and no other animal is more faithful and yet asks so little in return for a hard day's work. They make ideal pets for children who know how to handle them, but should never be given to an impatient or cruel child, for the burro is smart enough to return bad treatment in kind, just as surely as he will show appreciation to a gentle or considerate master.

Frequently, men, who owe a large part of their success to the faithful burros that have shared their hardships, have made provision for them as long as they live. Several such

cases have come to the writer's notice.

One miner, who made a big stake in Creede, bought a small ranch and had comfortable little sheds built for his burros. He keeps a man there winter and summer, in order to be sure that the animals are cared for. Several times a year he visits the place and seems to get more pleasure out of the fact that Jack, Rowdy, Bill, and Pete remember him and come to be fed dainties from his hands, than he does out of any other friendships.

There was another case where a man, whose sturdy little burro won a grubstake for him by packing five hundred pounds of concentrates a distance of two hundred feet, on a bet, with the odds at ten to one, was able with the money won to complete a cross-cut he was driving, and open up a rich vein. Later when he had become wealthy, he made a contract with a livery stable to care for the burro as long as it lived.

One of the most noted cases of rescue work in the West was accomplished by the use of burros. A mining village in the San Juan Basin was devastated by flood. There were many people injured so badly that they could not be moved. All trails and roads were swept away. The food supply was low, and it would take weeks to rebuild the road so that wagons might enter the camp. Burro Shaw, a packer, volunteered to take into the camp all the food the charitable people provided. This, he did with the aid of half a dozen burros, making their way over trackless wastes between broken rock and tangled timber.

In several Western towns monuments have been built to these small heroes of transportation and, those who know the burro, feel that the tribute was well earned.



**F**OLKS, we told you last week that we were going to give you the low-down on some of these authors, so we'll start in with that old veteran, Frank Richardson Pierce.

Frank was Eastern born, but doesn't remember very much about the East, because, when he was five months old, his mother and father dumped him into a covered wagon and started out for Kansas. When he was still a small youngster, he made a five-hundred-mile trip in a covered wagon with his parents through the West, and it is probably this early traveling that started him on the way, for, although he is permanently anchored in Seattle, he is still trekking here and there. Somehow, that boy never stays put very long. We guess that the good wife, Mrs. Pierce, puts a long leash on him, and after he's been gone from home a certain length of time, she pulls in the rope, and then little Frankie sits down at his typewriter and writes a fascinating yarn about some of the places where he has been. He's visited all the important

mining camps from the Mexican border to Fairbanks, Alaska, and long before Death Valley was converted into a dude summer resort, he crossed that.

The only un-Western thing we ever heard of him doing was riding a motor cycle. He and his bride went on their honeymoon, she sitting behind, while fearless Frank guided the craft onto little used roads through the Northwest.

Frank Richardson Pierce has worked in logging camps, stone quarries, orange packing houses, and once he worked—he says he worked, anyway—in an insane asylum. We trust he was not one of the inmates having an illusion that he was working. He has fired boilers, served as shellman on a navy gun crew, and once came out steerage from Alaska with several hundred Oriental salmon cannery hands.

During the periods when rover Pierce was tied close to home on a short rope, he thought he'd like to be a lawyer. Then came the day when he took inventory of his travels and decided to write stories about them.

Now and then he sneaks away from his typewriter, tiptoes past the watchful Mrs. Pierce, and goes hunting or fishing. As a watcher of sports, he enjoys boxing, rowing, and football. Now and then he takes a mule pack train into the mountain country, and he declares that next to that, he likes flying—you know, lunch on the coast one day, breakfast in New York the next.

Mr. Pierce is over six feet tall, has black curly hair, blue eyes, and a dimple in his chin. It's the dimple that fascinates every one he meets, and, although we know he has one of the best dispositions in the world, we never dare mention this dimple out loud in his presence. We are a little bit afraid of these big he-Westerners who drop in on us from time to time, and we make it a point to be very polite to them and not to rile them in any way. Maybe one reason we're so polite to "old man Pierce," as he calls himself, is because we remember that saying—"A dimple in the chin, the devil within." So far we've had no occasion to believe this true in his case.

And now we'll have something about Palomino horses, which he calls "Ysabellas." It's Dick Halliday speaking:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Three years ago I started in on an intensive search of the history of the 'Ysabellas.' I traced them from the new world, through history, past the days of chivalry, into the annals of barbarism and folklore, even into mythology. Now the job is done and a bunch of Texas and California horsemen have formed the Palomino Horse Association and Stud Book Registry.

"We aren't seeking for fame and fortune, not advertising, simply trying to raise these fine horses and

make them into a distinct, registered breed of their own. It may take us fifty years to do the work, but we have made a start and we intend to see the job through, for that's the Western way. Plenty of hard work ahead of us—plenty of disappointments and perhaps some heartaches as well, but the 'Golden Ones' are worth it, so we think.

"Few folks know that these horses are known as 'Ysabellas,' sometimes as 'cremolos' and in old legends dug up for me they are referred to frequently as 'The Golden Ones.'

"We Westerners find that a palomino has an intelligence and docility which marks him out from all other range-bred animals. I will say one thing—as a cowboy, I never rode a *poor* palomino. All the palominos I ever saddled were good ones, smart, intelligent, bold, and friendly, the kind that come into the wagon at night to bum biscuits from the cook and the boys. Do they get them? Don't ask such ridiculous questions.

"If the readers of The Round-up want to meet us, then trail along to Santa Barbara, California. This month we foregather with silver-mounted saddles and the finest palominos that the West can breed. We are going to parade with the Governor at our head and all mounted on horses, the least of which would be fit for an emperor to ride.

"I have one on the ranch now. The smallest palomino in the West—La Chispa De Oro—our mascot, and it would take her weight in gold to buy her. She is so smart that she does the tricks I've taught her by herself, without being told. She is only four feet—twelve hands high, but she thinks she is at least seventeen hands high and that the entire world revolves around herself alone."



# MINES AND MINING

By

J. A.

THOMPSON



This department is intended to be of real help to readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.

Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be answered in this department in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.

**H**EADING for the fascinating wild, mountainous region of north central Idaho, one Ira Buckley, of Chicago, Illinois, is pointing his steps toward one of the richest and most highly mineralized sections of the Northwest. That's gold country out there, Ira. Real gold country.

"For a number of years I have had it in my mind to take a gold prospecting trip somewhere in the north central Idaho sector," writes Buckley. "This summer I am going to be able to realize that long-planned-for quest for yellow metal. Anything you can tell me about that region, its past mining history, present opportunities, and so forth, will be deeply appreciated by this ardent Western Story Magazine reader, and his pard."

Always glad to oblige with mining information, Ira. Besides, Idaho is one of our favorite gold mining States. It always has been.

The golden treasure box of north central Idaho during its first bonanza heyday supplied a steady stream of millions of dollars' worth of yellow metal that was historically important to the country. It helped materially to replenish the war-depleted treasury of President Lincoln. The great emancipator owed much to north central Idaho's lavish mineral wealth.

Lewis and Clark, the famous explorers, are generally credited with being the first white men to have reached the wild uncharted region of the Salmon River. In 1805, they followed the Lemhi down to its confluence with the latter stream, but were unable to negotiate the difficult canyon of the Salmon. They were skirting a million-dollar-gold ground that year.

It wasn't, however, until the fall of 1860, that a Captain E. D. Pierce, an Indian trader from Walla Walla, Washington, founded the settlement that still bears his name, and was the first established mining camp in

Idaho. February of '61 found three hundred miners in the new district. By July of the same year more than five thousand pioneers were prospecting the country. Lewiston was staked out where the Clearwater joins the Snake. This happened to be a violation of a treaty then in force which the U. S. army had entered into with the Nez Perce Indians.

But where fortunes in yellow metal are the lure, the treaty, like many others that figured in the mining history of the West, became a mere scrap of paper. Treaties still have that habit. It's world wide.

Among the first gold prospectors to Pierce and the Orofino district it was the common, and, as events proved later, correct belief, that the section was simply the edge of a much larger gold-bearing area extending over and along the Clearwater and Salmon River Mountains, explored at that time.

It wasn't long before the boys were taking out dough in the higher brackets from the easily worked bonanza diggings around Elk City, Newsome Creek, French Gulch, and Dixie; not to mention the rich Florence district that brought one thousand rough and ready prospectors stampeding to the golden gravels of Miller Creek as fast as they could get there. Florence is way up in the mountains—more than a mile above sea level. Winter strikes early there, and it strikes hard.

That first winter in Florence caught several hundred men snow-bound in an isolated mountain mining camp with provisions scarce. By January the only item of food stuff available was flour—and not a very good grade, either—at two dollars a pound. It was May before

pack trains loaded with grub could approach within ten miles of the staving settlement. Gaunt, winter-weary men, their belts tightened against their slim waists, backpacked the precious food over the mountains for forty cents a pound for the gruelling, ten-mile trek.

That's the sort of stuff those early prospectors were up against. But they found the gold—in north central Idaho. In one year—1866—these hardy miners, with nothing better than gold pan, rocker and sluice boxes, took out nearly eight million dollars worth of yellow metal from the gulches along which they camped.

When the first boom was over, the general inaccessibility of the region, lack of roads for the transportation of heavier mining machinery and milling equipment necessary to develop the lode discoveries, caused a temporary slump in the activity of the section.

But don't make the mistake, Ira, of thinking for one moment that you are heading into a defunct gold mining area. Far from it. With the recent general revival of mining-mindedness in this country, and the increase in the price of gold, the old camps are humming again. Men are exploring new canyons, new mountain gulches that the old-timers might have overlooked.

The gold hunt is on again, with the pack in full cry. Right now, virtually all those old districts are the scene of feverish activity. New discoveries are being made. The United States forest service is cooperating in putting through, as fast as funds and man power become available, new roads, and well-blazed mountain trails to the farther reaches of the interior.

North-central Idaho is a swell bet, Ira.



# The HOLLOW TREE

Conducted by

HELEN RIVERS

It is a natural impulse and it is a good impulse to desire to wander and to roam. Not too much, of course. But the desire to go places and see things should be and is in all of us—in all of us who amount to anything, at least, for traveling educates us, and changing our geographic location often is of great benefit to health, mind, and economic well-being. A wise man once said, "A rolling stone gathers no moss," but a wiser man, we think, added, "but a standing pool stagnates."

If you are one who would travel, it is a mighty good thing to have man's best asset along the way, and at your destination. We mean, of course, friends.

If you would like a friend or friends in a certain section, write to Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, and she will put you in touch with readers who want to correspond with folks in your part of the world.

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.

Address: Helen Rivers, care The Hollow Tree, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.



**T**HE Yuba River lands of the Sierra country of California offer an outdoor living and the opportunity of making a stake. "Indian Valley Folks" are here to tell you all about life in the open in the Far West.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

About a year ago my brother and I were looking for advice on a homestead in Oregon. We left Colorado and started westward. We got as far as the Yuba River and found a little gold in the old Yuba, so we stayed here.

Sometimes we take out quite a lot of gold and then again hardly anything, but we are able to make a living and we find camp life great compared to living in a city. It sure is surprising how many you

see making a living at this kind of work. We get from \$29 to \$34.75 an ounce for our gold and sometimes we make three and six dollars a day and then again, of course, we might not make but fifty cents. But it sure beats working in a coal mine as my brother did before coming here. It doesn't cost much to live here and it sure is a great life. I would advise any one who is not making a decent living now to get out and enjoy a life of this kind. Gold is fairly easily found here, and there is not too much hard work attached to it. We run a dip box for top soil and pan the bed rock. We live in tents at the present, but we plan to build us a cabin as soon as we can get a permit from the government, as this is all forest reserve land.

If any one wants advice or information about this part of California, I will gladly give all I can. I sure hope you-all will drop me a few lines as it gets a little lonesome here sometimes. We are still in-

terested in a homestead in Oregon, so please, Oregon homesteaders, write to us.

INDIAN VALLEY FOLKS.  
Care of The Tree.

Charles is one of Uncle Sam's boys stationed in Hawaii.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I'm twenty-two, and my home is in Middleton, Massachusetts, but just now I'm in the army, stationed at Hawaii. Having traveled some—Central America, United States from coast to coast, and to the Hawaiian Islands—I've seen quite a lot and would like very much to hear from any one who likes to travel. I'm interested in all branches of science, but, best of all, chemistry, and I'm also interested in photography. I have collected many pictures of interest that I will be glad to exchange.

CHARLES CAMPBELL.  
Company A, First Sep. Chem. Battalion,  
Schofield Barracks,  
Territory Hawaii.

From Saskatchewan comes a new Pen Pal seeker.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a lonely lad of twenty-three summers, and my favorite hobby is letter writing. I was born and raised on a farm, but my ambition is to become an author and poet or else an actor. I have sung over the radio and also from theater stages in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. At present I am on my father's farm near Churchbridge, but plan on taking a trip for the third time into the United States this coming summer.

I love all outdoor sports, especially baseball, swimming, horseback riding and football. I like to dance and sing and yodel the traditional songs of the ranges. I love music and play the violin and Hawaiian guitar.

L. E. ANDERSON.  
Churchbridge, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Here is a small ranch that may be rented on shares.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

There is no place that beats the State of Washington for climate, health, and opportunity. There are many small ranches to be acquired in this vicinity for very little. This is a good locality, situated on beautiful Puget Sound, and near Seattle,

Tacoma, and Bemerton. I am an elderly woman alone on a twenty-acre ranch, and the work is too much for me. I can give some honest, reliable couple a splendid chance either to acquire outright or rent my ranch on shares. Please inclose a stamp and do not write unless you are really in earnest, as I am a very busy woman.

MRS. B. L. GILSON.  
Olalla, Washington.



Indian Valley Folks will be glad to tell you—all just what to expect if you decide to try life in the open along the Yuba River of California. Wear your friend-maker, membership badges, folks, and get in touch with these chechahcos of the West.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering be sure to state which you wish.

Folks living in the out-back country are invited to correspond.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am especially interested in getting some letters from people in the isolated parts of the Western country—lonely cow camps, people who operate pack-mule trains into the isolated mountain regions, or any one leading a similar outdoors life. I have lived in the Colorado Rockies and I am very much interested in the mountains of California. I am a widow, thirty-two years old, and I am fond of all outdoor sports. I love horses and like to ride horseback.

MRS. MARY WELLS.  
C/o General Delivery,  
Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Montreal is a city you-all will want to corral a Pen Pal from.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am seventeen years of age, a bit tomboyish, and love all sports, especially swimming. I would like to get in touch with

girls between the ages of sixteen and seventeen throughout the Southern States and particularly Texas and Wyoming. Though I have lived in the large city of Montreal for the greater part of my life, yet I have spent considerable time traveling through Canada and am able to give interesting travel talks on most of the large cities.

BETTY D. REID.

5928 Clanranald Avenue,  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Here's an English hombre.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am appealing for Pen Pals who are interested in art and lyric writing, also photography. All are welcome to send samples of their work, and in return I will send some of my own. I have traveled to several continental countries including Germany, Russia, Italy, and the Balkan States.

ARTISTIQUE.

Care of The Tree.

You girls from the Southwest are asked to speak up.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a girl of fifteen, looking for some Pen Pals around my own age. I would especially like to hear from cowgirls living on ranches in Arizona and other parts of the Southwest. My hobbies are drawing, singing, playing the guitar, and hiking. I am also very fond of horses and wish I could have one of my own to ride.

I will exchange snapshots with all who care to, and promise to answer all letters.

ROSALIND TACK.

R. D. 2, Box 163,  
Matawan, New Jersey.

Here's a Canadian Pen Pal for you folks.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am asking for Pen Pals from all corners of the earth, and I promise to answer all letters. I am twenty-three years of age, a teacher by profession. I suppose getting letters from all parts of the world is one way of traveling when the real thing is out of the question. However, I enjoy horseback riding, having ridden two hundred days out of three hundred and sixty-five last year.

ERNA BOGUSCH.

Bellevue, Alberta, Canada.

Donald is a sports enthusiast.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am very anxious to correspond with any Pen Pals in any State in America. I am a keen motor cyclist, and follow road racing in the British Isles. I have visited nearly every part of Great Britain and Channel Islands. I am interested in all kinds of sports, and I would like to hear something of the life and sports of your American people. I promise to answer any letters I receive from anywhere.

DONALD ALEC WALLIS.

Saxonhurst, 220 Westbury Avenue,  
Wood Green, London, N. 22, England.

This hombre would like to corral plenty of Pals.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a young man of twenty-five. I sure want Pen Pals, and will some real cowboy please write me? I am a lover of the great, open spaces, and the West. I am making a tour on the stage this summer, and maybe—who knows?—I might be lucky enough to meet some of my Pen Pals! I have been on the radio, stage, and screen. I will answer all letters, so let 'em fly!

STANLEY SANDRA.

6940 Broadview Road,  
Brooklyn Station, Cleveland, Ohio.

Advanced stamp collectors will be interested in this.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

A Canadian, aged thirty-one, very fond of all outdoor sports, desires correspondence, particularly with advanced stamp collectors in the United States and all British Dominions and Colonies. Prompt replies promised.

A. D. DESEURIE.

2719 Yonge Street,  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

From Detroit comes this Pen Pal seeker.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a boy twenty years old, interested in all outdoor sports, and I can tell a lot about hunting and fishing here. I will exchange snapshots.

ANDREW P. MICHAELS.

8040 Vanderbilt Avenue,  
Detroit, Michigan.



# WHERE TO GO And How To GET THERE

By JOHN NORTH

We aim in this department to give practical help to readers. The service offered includes accurate information about the West, its ranches, mines, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. We will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to us, for we are always glad to assist you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

**T**HE Southwest is holding its first World's Fair this year in the Texas Centennial Exposition, now being staged in Dallas. This colorful celebration, which commemorates one hundred years of Texas independence as a republic and a State, is attracting many visitors from near and far. Eager to take in this affair, George W., of Rochester, New York, is planning to join the throng which is heading for the Lone Star State.

"Never having visited a big world's fair, Mr. North, I'm mighty anxious to pay a visit to the Texas Centennial which opened on June 6th. I may not be able to get down to Dallas, however, until fall, so can you tell me how long it will be open? I'd also like to know just what to expect in the way of exhibits and entertainment. As Texas is a big cattle-raising State, I should think there'd be some outstanding livestock exhibitions and would expect something in the way of cowboy



sports, such as a rodeo. Am I going to be disappointed?"

Not on your tin type, George. You can bet your new sombrero on that. And even if you can't get away until fall, you need not miss this big Southwestern show, for it will last until November 29th. Just as other world's fairs have featured science, the arts, or some other major phase of progress, the Texas Centennial Exposition is presenting as one of its principal features an Agrarian Way, along which five great buildings house the largest agricultural and livestock exhibit ever assembled in one place. And when one remembers that not only has the whole history of the Lone Star State been permeated by cattle influence, but that Texas today has more cattle, cowboys and horses than ever before in her existence, this emphasis seems right and proper.

But although the cattle industry is prominently featured, proper attention is also given to science and manufacturing, for the leading industrial concerns of the nation are participating in the Texas Centennial Exposition on a scale involving the expenditure of millions of dollars.

One of the major sections of the exposition is the cultural center, erected by the city of Dallas, which includes museums of natural history, horticulture and fine arts, an aquarium, a hall of domestic science,

and an outdoor amphitheater and symphony shell. Music is also given a prominent place by the presentation of opera, famous orchestras and bands, and the National Folk Festival.

Nor will you be disappointed, George, in the program of sports. Football games, rodeos, polo games, field and track events and boxing and wrestling are all included in the calendar of events. You'll also find a midway presenting the latest in

thrills, amusements, and eating places.

One of the outstanding features of the exposition is the daily presentation of the "Cavalcade of Texas." This gigantic dramatization portrays four hundred years of the colorful history of the Lone Star State, during which time flags

of six nations have flown over Texas soil—Spain, France, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the Confederacy, and the United States. More than three hundred actors take part in the pageant, acted upon a stage three hundred feet wide, and before the footlights flows a real stream, with replicas of the boats of the first explorers of Texas floating in its waters.

We feel safe in predicting a mighty thrilling time for you at the Texas Centennial, George.

Bound also for the Southwest to take in a colorful celebration is Wilfred P., of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

## SPECIAL NOTICE

### A RECIPE FOR SQUAW DISH

After a day of motoring, of hiking over a mountain trail, or of fishing in a rushing stream, the sportsman welcomes some sizzling hot grub which may be easily and quickly prepared over the camp fire. In the opinion of many old-timers that tasty Western stand-by, Squaw Dish, is hard to beat. Readers may obtain the recipes for this favorite camp dish by writing to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

"All my life I've been greatly interested in the American Indian, Mr. North, and it has been a pet plan of mine for many years to go down to Gallup, New Mexico, to see the Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial. This year I'm making the grade, and wish you'd tell me not only a bit about that affair, but also what sights are to be seen in that section, as I expect to spend several weeks there."

When each year during the last week of August, Gallup becomes host to thousands of Indians who gather for the annual Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial, this town stages one of the most glamorous of spectacles. More than twenty tribes are represented, and during the three days and nights of this affair each tribe presents its favorite dances, chants and ceremonials. It will be an experience you'll never forget.

Readers who are planning to attend the Texas Centennial should write to John North for an address from which full information about this big Southwestern fair may be obtained. He will also tell you where to write for a copy of the special Centennial road map, issued for the benefit of visitors to the Lone Star State.

Nor will you forget the interesting and fascinating Indian country which surrounds Gallup. No people on our continent are more vigorous, more picturesque, and more independent than the nomadic Navajos who roam the great mesas around this New Mexico town. To the east of Gallup are also Pueblo villages: Zuni, the largest in New Mexico, and famed Acoma, perched atop its four-hundred-foot rock. Not far away is El Morro National Monument, often called Inscription Rock.

However long you tarry in Gallup, you will not lack for sights to explore in its vicinity, Wilfred.

While some hombres trek to the Southwest for their vacations, others, including Bert K., of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, journey in the opposite direction.

If you want to know where to go and what to see in the Sunshine State, you should obtain copies of the two interesting pamphlets "Two Weeks in New Mexico" and "Roads to Cibola." Ask John North where to write for this free literature.

"I've heard such wonderful things about the Umpqua Valley of Oregon, Mr. North, that I'm going out there to see it for myself. My program is to scout around, doing a bit of fishing and camping, meanwhile, keeping my eyes open for a likely site to settle down on. Can you tell me what I'll find in the way of a lake out from Roseburg? And if I should stay into the fall, could I expect good hunting?"

The answer to both your questions, Bert, is yes. Eighty-five miles by trail from Roseburg, in the eastern part of the Umpqua Valley, is located beautiful Diamond Lake, set among the mountains, at an elevation of 5,180 feet above sea level. This sheet of water is alive with Rainbow trout of large size and gameness, and for an outdoor vacation spot, you'd journey far to find its equal. If you prolong your stay into the autumn, you will find the valley a happy hunting ground, indeed, for it abounds in deer, mountain lion, timber wolves, bobcats, and coyotes.

The Umpqua Valley is known out in the Beaver State as the "end of the homeseeker's trail." Here in a great unspoiled playground, one can live, work and play in the healthy outdoors. John North will be glad to send interested readers an address from which a free pamphlet describing this Oregon valley may be obtained.



# GUNS AND GUNNERS

By  
**CHARLES E.  
CHAPEL**

First Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps



Address inquiries regarding firearms, marksmanship, and hunting, to Lieutenant Charles E. Chapel, "Guns And Gunners," Street & Smith's WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Ave., New York, N. Y., and inclose a stamped, addressed envelope.

**R**IFLE and pistol marksmanship are a lot like golf. Golf in an individual game which can be practiced without any one else being present. It is an outdoor pastime, it is healthful, and not necessarily expensive in its own right. Most important of all, it can be enjoyed from adolescence to the grave with a steady increase in ability and personal satisfaction in one's progress.

So it is with shooting. We know old graybeards who are getting at least as much kick out of their weekly matches as they did when they were firing the old lever action, black powder rifles back in the 90s, and we know youngsters still in grammar school who are regularly pulling down medals for pistol proficiency.

Neither golf nor marksmanship will ever command the cheering crowds and brass bands that characterize the ballyhoo of football, but they do merit and enjoy the intelligent respect and enthusiastic interest of those who value real sportsmanship, healthy recreation, and service to one's community and

nation. Let us all work to promote the popularity of marksmanship, knowing that in so doing we are contributing to national security and the eventual solution of the crime problems.

Here are answers to only a few of the hundreds of questions that came to our desk to-day. All were answered by mail, but the most interesting queries are answered here for you.

Too long shotgun barrels.

T. D. B., McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania: The reason a shotgun barrel that is too long is not efficient is that the excess bore merely adds to the friction between the outside pellets and the barrel, thus increasing the stringing of the shot, and reducing the uniformity of the shot pattern.

Choke and velocity.

M. M. K., Cleburne, Texas: Choke of a shotgun affects muzzle velocity. A full choke gives maximum velocity; a modified choke causes a falling off of ten feet per



second, and a cylinder bore has a falling off of forty feet per second at a range of forty yards.

#### The most powerful hand arm.

L. G. S., Seattle, Washington: The world's most powerful and accurate hand arm is said to be the Smith & Wesson .357 Magnum, with a velocity of 1,512 feet per second, using the 8 $\frac{3}{4}$  inch barrel. Another claim is that the accuracy of this gun is maintained with the widest range of ammunition ever chambered in one pistol or revolver. Included are the .38 Special Mid Range, the .38 Special, the .38 Special Super-Speed, and the .38-44 Special, all of these having less velocity than the .357, but more than most weapons of their own class.

#### Long barrels again.

A. C. H., Moberly, Missouri: If you are a hunter who aims, instead of points, a thirty-inch barrel may not be so handy, but it is decidedly more accurate in the 12-gauge than a shotgun with a handier but less aimable barrel, especially for water fowl, turkey, and pheasants.

#### Reloading the Krag.

R. C. B., Oakland, California: Yes, you can remove the bullet from a Krag cartridge and substitute thirty-five grains by weight of the

M-1 Service powder with safety, but we do not encourage promiscuous reloading experiments. Aside from possible danger, the quality and quantity of the powder is often not suited to the bullet and gun used for its discharge.

#### Stop watch for matches.

L. W. J., Des Moines, Iowa: We advise you to buy a stop watch that will keep time like an ordinary watch, and also serve as a stop watch with checks not merely to seconds but also to fifths of seconds. A reliable stop watch of this description can be bought for about ten dollars from various watch dealers, sporting shops, and gun sellers.

#### Medals for shooters.

H. S. A., Clinton, Nebraska: This magazine had considerable experience in buying medals for our mail marksmanship matches. We found that the ordinary manufacturing jeweler does not have facilities for quantity production of shooting medals at economical prices. Instead, we discovered that there are about three companies that specialize in medals and trophies designed especially for shooters. One of their decorations is certain to be more appropriate than a medal or loving cup that it used one week for a bicycle race and the next week for the lightweight boxing championship of the oyster fleet.

The U. S. Rifle, (Enfield), Model 1917, Caliber .30, in excellent condition, is sold to citizens of the United States, by the government, for \$8.85, under certain conditions which will be explained to readers sending a stamped, addressed envelope.

# MISSING

This department is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

**WARNING.**—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

**GOMOLA, STEVE.**—About twelve years ago he was in Herminie, Pennsylvania. Has not been heard from since. Dad is in a State Hospital. Mother can't last much longer. Her last wish is to know whether Steve is living or dead. He would be about thirty years old. Has blond hair. Any one knowing anything of him, please write to Anna Gomola, Yukon, Pennsylvania.

**CRONAN, JAMES.**—He is my brother. In 1911 I saw him in Mason City, Iowa. Have not heard from him in many years. Would be forty-two years old. Has blue eyes and brown hair. Any news of him would be greatly appreciated by Thomas Cronan, Camp Clatsop, Warrenton, Oregon.

**JORDAN, MRS. ALTA NAN, or ROBERT DAVIS.**—When fifteen years old, Fred Allen Jordan left his home. He is now thirty-three and an engineer, as his mother always wished him to be. He is married and has a baby girl, Alta Nan, and a little boy, Donald Allen. Fred is now known as Jack Allen Jordan. He has three sisters. He would be very happy to hear from any of his people. Any Jordan who is kin to Jack, please write to Mrs. Jack Jordan, Box 853, Globe, Arizona.

**THOMAS, WALTER, HUGH, BENJAMIN and EVERETT.**—They are my brothers and I have not seen or heard from them since I left home in 1906. They were then in Green Valley, Florida. We were all brought up in Coffeyville, Kansas. Any one knowing the whereabouts of any of them, please write to George Thomas, 21 North Second Street West, Brigham City, Utah.

**FRAKES, GEORGE L.**—Better known as Tom. He was a C. & O. employee in Huntington, West Virginia. He has been missing since February 8, 1936. Is five feet seven inches tall and weighed one hundred and twenty-seven pounds. Has blue eyes and gray hair. Would be forty-one years of age. He left a wife and two small children. Any one knowing his whereabouts, please notify Mrs. Frakes, 437 Woodland Avenue, Lexington, Kentucky.

**MICK.**—When did you see Billy Bogs? Last heard of him he was near Flea Creek. Why don't you write to mother? D. M. B.

**VEZINA, GEORGES.**—Would be about fifty-five years of age. Used to be a house contractor in Shawinigan Falls, Quebec, Canada. He left his home in 1923 and has not been heard from since. His six children in Montreal would be glad for any news of him. Please address Antonio Vezina, 1240 Clark Street, Montreal, Canada.

**TAYLOR, MARVIN.**—When last seen he was working in Little Rock, Arkansas, with his brother. Their home is in a little town in Oklahoma. Marvin, if you see this, write to Tennessee, care of Western Story Magazine.

**BOWDEN, HARRY.**—Sometimes known as Thomas Homan. When last heard from he was in New Orleans, Louisiana. That was in November, 1934. He is a German Jew. Would be about twenty-two. Harry, if you see this, write at once. A lot has happened since I last saw you. Your many friends in Macon would like to hear from you. Any one knowing his whereabouts, kindly write to Brannon H. Hutchinson, 613 Mulberry Street, Montgomery, Alabama.

**DE VOLL, FLORA.**—Get in touch with your husband. Am working for the government and have a good job. Write to D. D., care of Western Story Magazine.

**OETH, CHESTER.**—Was last heard from in Los Angeles, California, in 1930 or '31. Any one knowing the whereabouts of this man, please write to his brother, Virgil Oeth, Box 653, R. 3, Turlock, California.

**HILL, MRS. Maude.**—Formerly of Chicago, Illinois. In 1931 she moved to Russell, Arkansas. She married Ted G. Garrett of Chicago, in 1932, but they separated shortly afterward. Have heard that she is living in or near Kansas City, Missouri. Her son John is with her. Any one knowing her, kindly bring this notice to her attention. Norris Wolverton, 6306 South Eggleston Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

**STROH or STROLL.**—Would like to hear from any persons of this name or any one having heard of the name. My parents were Swedish. Father died before I was born, and mother when I was seven months old. I was born on July 27, 1903, in Kansas City, Missouri. When mother died I was placed in an orphanage and taken in adoption shortly afterward. Would be very happy to find any relatives on either father's or mother's side. Please write to C. H., care of Western Story Magazine.

**WINSLOW, G. W.**—He is my father. I was born in Richmond, in Houston, Texas, on June 18, 1918. I was left in care of Mrs. C. C. Warren to dispose of as she saw fit. The affidavit was signed on June 20, 1918. The witness was Sack Smith. Any one knowing the whereabouts of any of these persons, please communicate with Marie Conley, 42 North Chester Street, Bakersfield, California.

## MISSING DEPARTMENT

**LICHTY, MIKE and LENA.**—Your old Clear-water friends, Steve and Gertie, now live on R. 1, Winner, South Dakota. Write to them.

**GORDON, WILLIAM RUDD.**—Who left his home about four years ago. Has not been heard from for seventeen months. On June 19, 1936, he was twenty years of age. He was in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, when last heard from. Has worked in a store in Baltimore, Maryland. Was also employed around boats on Lake Erie. Travels around with a friend, John Sevre. Am not sure of the spelling of John's last name, nor do I know anything about his home. Gordon, your mother and sister long to hear from you. Any one knowing this young man's whereabouts, please write to Mrs. Rudd, 4320 North Vancouver Avenue, Portland, Oregon.

**BURDICK.**—Would like to hear from any Burdick who is a descendant of the late A. A. Burdick, of Alma, Nebraska. Please address Gertie B. Foster, R. 1, Winner, South Dakota.

**HANSEN or HANSON, CAMILLE.**—Am trying to help a young man locate a relative of this name. Thirty-five years ago she placed him in a home for foundlings. Her home at that time was in Rushville, Nebraska. When he was six months old he was taken in adoption. He is now married and has a family. Any news of relatives on his mother's side would be much appreciated. Kindly send any information to Dick Foster, General Delivery, Scottsbluff, Nebraska.

**VIOLA.**—Please write to "French George," care of Western Story Magazine. I last saw you in New York City just before Christmas in 1929. You were then living on Second Avenue.

**CAMPBELL, FLORENCE LORETTA.**—She was taken in adoption by Elmer and Jennie Kimball when she was six months old. Would be about twenty-three now. When last heard from, the Kimballs lived on a ranch near Calhan, Colorado. They had no other children at that time. Florence had dark wavy hair and dark eyes. Dear daughter, if you see this, write to your mother. She can explain everything. Any one knowing anything of this girl, please write to William Sigler, R. 1, Broadway, Rockingham County, Virginia.

**EDWARDS, THOMAS BENJAMIN.**—He is my brother, and I have not seen him for thirty-nine years. When last heard from he was somewhere in Oregon. If living he would be sixty-seven years of age. Has blue eyes, fair complexion and brown hair. Was getting bald. He is six feet tall and weighed about one hundred and seventy pounds. Would be happy to hear from him. Please address George M. Edwards, Neposet, Illinois.

**MINTHORNE, H. H.**—Nicknamed Bob. Was last seen in Klamath Falls, Oregon. Would be about forty-nine years of age. Is five feet four and a half inches tall. He served in the Canadian army in the World War. Is slightly deaf. Please send any information regarding him to Walter Minthorne, 1640 Nebraska Avenue, Salem, Oregon.

**SEYMOUR.**—Please do not worry, and take care of yourself. We understand, and are all right. We want to get a letter to you, so try to get an address to us. Will communicate with you by air mail. Mart, Marilyn, and Mother.

**LOCKE, FRANK L.**—Six years ago last January he disappeared from Clinton, Oklahoma. He is my husband. Since he left I moved to Oklahoma City. He has blue eyes and brown hair. Is blind in one eye. Seven toes are missing as the result of amputation following severe frost-bite one winter in Arizona. Is six feet two inches tall and weighed around one hundred and eighty-five pounds. Would appreciate any word of him. Please write to Mrs. Laura Locke, 105 Sixth Street, N. E., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

**POSTON, W. D., JR.**—Usually called Bill. Is twenty-three years old. Has brown eyes and light-brown hair. Is five feet six inches tall and weighed one hundred and thirty-six pounds. He left his home in Shelby, North Carolina, in January, 1936. His wife and children need him very much. Any one knowing his whereabouts, please write to Mrs. W. D. Poston, Belmont Mill, Shelby, North Carolina.

**EGGERS, CLARENCE.**—Would be about thirty-nine years of age. Was born in Takilma, Oregon. His nose is quite scarred. Any one knowing his present address, kindly advise Mrs. Charles H. White, 652 North Second Street, Grants Pass, Oregon.

**BRADY, PAUL PETER.**—If living he is past eighty years of age. Used to be red-headed. Was tall. Part of index finger of right hand was missing. Any one having any information regarding him, please get in touch with his daughter, Mrs. H. H. Henderson, P. O. Box 572, Downey, California.

**BOSTWICK, J. O.**—Who left South Bend, Indiana, where he had been living, on March 17, 1934, for Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is a very dear friend, and I am much worried at not hearing from him as he said that he would write as soon as he arrived in Pittsburgh. Any one having any news of him, kindly write to Miss Flora Williams, West Point, Georgia.

**PAGE, SHELVERTON or EDDIE.**—Three years ago he was in Denver, Colorado. Have not heard from him since. Likely to be with some vaudeville company. Write to your uncle, same address, Atlanta, in connection with your grandmother's estate.

**KROSE, JOHN C.**—In May, 1922, he was in Mesa, Arizona. Please communicate with Mrs. G. M. N., care of Western Story Magazine.

**COSTANZA, NICHOLAS C.**—The babies and I need you. All is forgiven. Please write. Address me at 847, or care of Western Story Magazine.

**YATES, MARY ALICE.**—This was my mother's maiden name. She was the daughter of William and Margaret Yates. About fifty-five years ago she left her home, which, I believe, was in Pickaway County, Ohio. She had three sisters, Minnie, Lara, or Lurrie, and Blanche, and one brother, Fred. These last named would all be about sixty years of age now. As far as I know, they lived in, or around, Circleville and Mount Sterling, Ohio. There are also two cousins, Theodosia and Ariel Brown, daughters of Newton and Mirinda Brown. Any one knowing anything of any of these persons, please write to Mrs. Tempest M. Walker, Fairground Road, Painesville, Ohio.

**CRUZ, BEN.**—Sometimes known as Ben della Cruz Flores. He is an old friend whom I have not seen in seventeen years. At one time he lived in Stockton. He left there for the island of Guam. He has a brother there engaged in the jewelry business. Any word of him would be much appreciated. Please address Mrs. Maud Kristie, La Honda, San Mateo County, California.

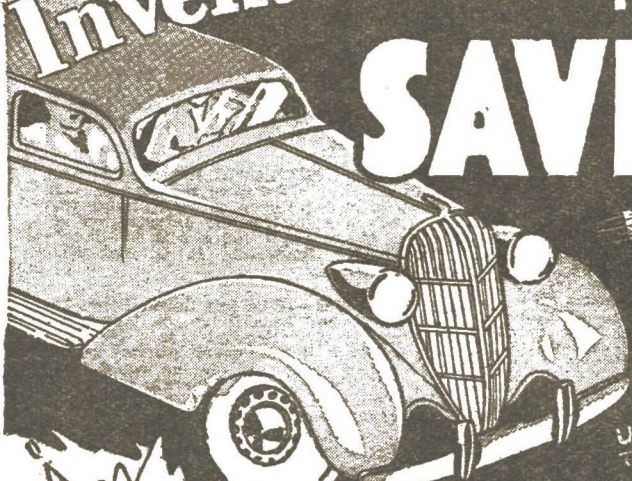
**NIELSON, MISS.**—Her given name is not known to me. She is a registered nurse, and she took care of my wife during her last illness. The last heard of her she was in Midwest, Wyoming. That was in 1926. My ten-year-old daughter would be happy to hear from her. Please write to Rosemarie Paddock, R. 2, Oxford, Wisconsin.

**CORWIN, GEORGIA and DOC.**—Of Burlington, Iowa. When last heard of, Doc was in Brooklyn, New York. Kindly send any information as to their whereabouts to Pearl Cunningham, P. O. Box 466, Niles, California.



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