

STREET
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SMITH'S

WESTERN STORYIO MAGAZINE

JULY 22, 1939



GUNHAND'S REP a book-length novel by **C. K. SHAW**

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New another change is taking place. An old established industry—an integral and important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—it is thousands of cases being replaced by a truly astounding, simple invention which does the work better—more reliably—AND AT A COST OFTEN AS LOW AS 1% OF WHAT IS ORDINARILY PAID! It has not required very long for men who have taken over this valuable invention to start profitable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

Not a "Gadget"—
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has been sold successfully by busi-
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veterans.

Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never dreamed of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by dealers of great corporations—by their branches—by doctors, newspapers, publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to convince a man that he should use an electric bulb as light his office instead of a gas lamp. Nor do you have to sell the same business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at this very moment—and the desirability of having the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

Some of the Savings
You Can Show

You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for \$11 which formerly could have cost them over \$300. A building supply corporation pays out over \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,800! An automobile dealer pays our representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense of \$88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these field reports which hammer across dazzling, convincing money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

EARNINGS

One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A man working small city in N. Y. State made \$10,805 in 9 months. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$5 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

Profits Typical of
the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, \$3.81 can be your share. On \$1,500 worth of business, your share can be \$1,167.00. The very least you get as part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth \$6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth \$67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get in 3 years. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

This Business Has
Nothing to Do With
House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply sell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the investment without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail to get even a hearing, our men are making deals running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

No Money Need Be Risked

In trying this business out. You can measure the possible business and not be out a dollar. If you are looking for a business that is not overworked—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the better return from a business, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can set foot—regardless of size—that is a business but does not have any price cutting to contend with as other necessities do—that because you control the sales in exclusive territory is your own business—that pays you on some individual sale; that may mean make in a week and sometimes in a month a time—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, get in touch with us at once for the rights in your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and if it turns out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, set the coupon below—but send it right away—no wait if you wish. But do it now. Address

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WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

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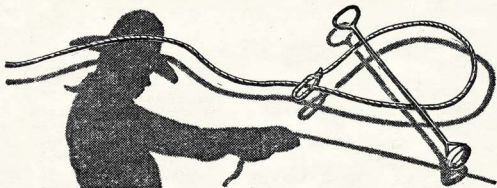


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The Roundup

SO great has been the interest of our readers in the work of C. K. Shaw that it is with pride as well as pleasure that we offer what we consider her finest story yet, *GUNHAND'S REP*, as our book-length feature next week.

C. K. Shaw is a true daughter of the West. Her life's history is part of the fascinating romance of a pioneer family which moved ever westward seeking the freedom of new range. Her people are real people and their problems relevant to the vast open spaces where courage and stout hearts mark the breed which has contributed so much to the history and romance of our country. Fortunate are we who can live and thrill to, through her stories, the stirring dramas of those heroic men and women who made the West.

"I was born," writes C. K., "on a homestead in The Strip, and I mean The Cherokee Strip of Oklahoma. From there my father pushed on to Oregon. Arlington was the end of our railroad journey, and our household goods were unloaded from freight cars onto the sandy banks of the Columbia.

"My uncles were there with big freight outfits to move us on inland to our new home. There was a top buggy and a driving team to convey mother and me. Joyfully we climbed out of the sandy Arlington Canyon to flats and great sweeps of range that was later to be the wheat fields of eastern Oregon. Condon was our stop for a few years. We lived fifteen miles from the town and in those days fifteen miles was a long trip. I had my own horses and saddle. My feet would not reach down to the stirrups, but father would tuck them in the leather and away I would go, free as the Indians.

"It was many years before I saw a train again, not, in fact, until the line was extended from Arlington to Condon. This encroachment on our freedom sent my family farther back, and this time we pierced the heart of the great Oregon range country. There was a general exodus of the family and soon we were again settled in a country that knew no railroads or had ever heard of a highway. Your mail arrived according to the conditions of the road, likewise your doctor and your law. There was a sheriff over the mountains, but in winter he was not accessible.

"The old-timers in the section considered the service good. They used to send to Walla Walla for their law.

They had considered themselves well off when the railroad reached The Dalles. With it then only taking two weeks to get in a load of supplies, sugar and coffee were dished out freely. Highways have come since those days and the big cattle companies have gone, but the railroad train is still over the mountains and even now there is plenty of open country.

"If I say anything of my earlier life at all it must be of ranches, for all my people were cattle people and seemed to move en masse from one range to another. Texas, Montana, Oklahoma, and Oregon has found them settled down at one time or another."

In our July 8th issue, when we featured Jay Lucas' *KILLER OF THE CANYONS*, we wanted to give you this squib concerning the author, but space just didn't permit.

Lucas ranks as one of the old-timers on the Mogollon Mesa of northern Arizona—that's the wild country where the big canyons are, and it's pronounced *Muggy-own*, he tells us, with the accent on the last syllable. Before that he was on cow ranches along the Mexican border, as well as the noted Big Bend country of west Texas. He used to be called "Skeeter" in those days, but he forgot to stop growing at six feet so they had to drop that. When ordering a new gun belt, he gives his waist measure as thirty-one. From all of which we'd guess that he knows a little about cattle and cowboys and such things, if he's not plain dumb. About his novel, *KILLER OF THE CANYONS*, Jay wrote:

"I put in several years of my mispent life as a professional mountain-lion hunter, with hunting grizzly bears and trapping lobo

wolves as a side line, and smaller furs not overlooked in winter when they were prime. I've worked a lot of experiences of my own into this yarn. That canyon is still as deep and as wild as it ever was, with just as many lions in it. A month ago a forest ranger discovered a big new natural bridge down in that country. Those rangers are about the finest crowd you'd find anywhere, and good friends of mine, but I couldn't help getting a big kick out of that find. Next we know some bug hunter will find a lot of new, unexplored Indian cliff dwellings up the walls of that canyon. When he finds old lion bones in 'em, he'll inform the scientific world that the cliff dwellers ate lion meat for breakfast. Danged if I'll spoil the fun by telling him that an old cliff dwelling was a handy place for me to spend a night or skin a lion in."

Jay has been threatening for years to take a trip down East to see the editors, but he just knows he'd get run over by a street car or have something terrible happen that way, and he hasn't yet got up the nerve. He's quite a timid cuss. Why, he's even admitted that he's felt slightly nervous tackling a wounded grizzly with a six-shooter, and he afoot in thick brush!

To the thousands of readers who have thrilled to *THE MUSTANGERS* and his many other fine stories, Bennett Foster's name on a serial is headline news. We're sure that *BLACKLEG*, which begins in next week's issue, won't disappoint you.

Other authors on the tally book for next week include Peter Dawson, Tom Roan, R. Edgar Moore, Harry F. Olmsted, S. Omar Barker, and Kenneth Gilbert, whose serial, *TAMANAWOS GOLD*, winds up with a weird and breath-taking climax.

HOW A FREE LESSON STARTED BILL ON THE WAY TO A GOOD RADIO JOB

I HAVEN'T HAD A RAISE IN YEARS -- GUESS I NEVER WILL -- I'M READY TO GIVE UP

BUCK UP, BILL, WHY NOT TRY AN INDUSTRY THAT'S GROWING -- WHERE THERE'S MORE OPPORTUNITY

MARY'S RIGHT -- I'M NOT GETTING ANYWHERE. I OUGHT TO TRY A NEW FIELD TO MAKE MORE MONEY

LOOK AT THIS -- RADIO IS CERTAINLY GROWING FAST -- AND THE NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE SAYS THEY TRAIN MEN FOR RADIO RIGHT AT HOME IN SPARE TIME

I DON'T THINK I COULD LEARN RADIO THAT WAY -- BUT THEY'LL SEND ME A SAMPLE LESSON FREE. GUESS I'LL MAIL THE COUPON AND LOOK INTO THIS

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J. E. SMITH, President National Radio Institute Established 25 years

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J. E. SMITH, President National Radio Institute, Dept. 90D, Washington, D. C.



YOU SURELY KNOW RADIO. MINE NEVER SOUNDED BETTER

THANKS. I'VE BEEN STUDYING ONLY A FEW MONTHS AND I'M ALREADY MAKING MONEY IN MY SPARE TIME. THAT'S NO EXTRA THIS WEEK

OH BILL, I'M SO GLAD YOU SENT FOR THAT FREE LESSON AND PROVED TO YOURSELF THAT YOU COULD LEARN RADIO AT HOME

YES, I HAVE A GOOD FULL TIME RADIO JOB NOW -- AND A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD IN RADIO



J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 90D, National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

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GUNHAND'S REP



By C. K. SHAW

GUNHAND'S REP

BY C. K. SHAW

CHAPTER I

THE RAID ON THE MARY MURTHA

THE little town of Teton, Wyoming, swayed and flapped under a beating spring storm. The Danby House trembled, and three men in a room on the second floor drew closer together that they might talk without lifting their voices over the noise of the storm. They were Fenny Crevling and his two sons, Craig and Harvey.

Craig had the crowded features and thick build typical of the Crevlings. His moody eyes were dangerous. Nobody ever back-slapped Craig until they saw how he was feeling. Harve, ten years younger than his brother, was thin-flanked with a friendly face and a wide grin. Everybody pounded Harve on the back and asked how he was stacking up.

The windows in the room rattled. Drafts sucked at the flame of the lamp, twisting it crazily and blackening the globe. Fenny Crevling tipped forward on the thin soles of his fine boots and threw words at his youngest son.

"I've always had a notion you was no damn good! You got the yellow eyes of your mother's tribe. I reckon seeing them eyes was what made her hold out to name you Harvey. You got a loose way with you like her folks. Yeah, I'm talking about your mother's people, no matter if you are finicky on the subject! They were a mush-mouthed

bunch. For the last time, are you helpin' Craig and me to get back this money that was stolen from us?"

Fenny Crevling raced a hot, angry glance over the lean body of his younger son. A true Crevling conserved his strength in a squat frame and thick shoulders. There were no rangy builds among them—at least among the ones that were worth a healthy damn.

As was usual when trouble crowded him, Harve had gone dead white. "I'm not joining you and Craig," he said. "Maybe this money in the till of the Mary Murtha Saloon was stolen from you during a crooked card game, but you knew it was crooked before you went in. You thought you could outcrook them. Now you've lost and you—"

"Be careful!" Fenny's guttural tones warned him.

Harve felt his stomach turn over. He dropped his glance. He couldn't look at his dad and pull back his lip like Craig could. He felt the sweat break out. There was something about Fenny Crevling when he hunched his thick shoulders and snapped his black brows together over a saddle nose that parched his youngest son's throat.

"You're a Harvey from those yellow eyes of yours clean through to your gizzard," Fenny raged. "And you got a strip down your back to match your eyes!"

That was the worst thing Fenny had ever said. Harve's mind went blank to all but one word. Yellow!

He looked to Craig for help. Surely Craig would step in; he always had. He seemed to know when his kid brother's stomach was pitching like a cold-backed bronc.

Craig walked over and crashed the window up. The storm roared in. Old Fenny bawled at him to shut the damn window. Craig turned away, leaving the wind to tear in like a demon.

"If you want it shut, shut it," he bawled back.

This was Craig's way of helping, Harve knew. His older brother was pointing out the way, urging him to stiffen his spine and lam words back at the old man.

FENNY banged the window down and swung on Harve with a fresh burst of wrath. "A quitter, that's what you are—a quitter! I never thought I'd live to tack that name on a son of mine!"

Craig Crevling's big fists clenched, his powerful muscles swelled and shortened. He looked at his brother, waiting for Harve to call the dance. His dark eyes drove home to the kid that this was once when he himself must do some fiddling.

Harve's throat contracted. Sweat formed on his forehead in rolling beads. His dad had called him yellow! A quitter! Craig's eyes were burning into him, driving him. The kid stiffened. He lifted his head and forced himself to face his dad. Fenny Crevling only laughed. His eyes repeated the accusation. *Quitter! Yellow!*

Harve's face went pasty. Strength went out of him and he slumped down upon the bed. Craig's fists slowly unclenched, his breath escaping in a gust. He stood a second, looking at the slumped figure. Fenny wasn't laughing now, he was very still.

"Harve," Craig said finally, resting a hand on his brother's shoulder, "there's no reason for you to come in on something you're dead set against, but dad and me aren't letting that gambling house crook us out of eight hundred dollars. We're getting it back. You be out back of the Mary Murtha with the horses in ten minutes."

"Yeah," Fenny growled, "if you're too cold-collared to help Craig gun down the room, be in the alley with the horses. Come on, Craig, let's get going while this storm is rattling the town."

He flipped a mask from his pocket, tried it, shoved it back. "See that you're there with the horses," he snapped. "There's some swift guns in that joint and once we get our jack we won't want to tarry."

Craig gave his brother one swift, encouraging look from the door. "Be there with the nags, kid. An' keep to the shadows."

The door banged shut and the steps of Fenny Crevling and his son were swallowed in the storm. Harve wiped the sweat from his brow with his shirt sleeve. He was sick to his soul with the feeling of failure. He knew Craig was sick, too, for Craig had always somehow managed to take over his kid brother's fights. Harve had talked to him about this at times, but Craig had refused to take it seriously.

"You're just a bang-tailed kid," was one of his ways for making Harve quit worrying. "You'll collect plenty of sand when the need comes."

But the need had come and he hadn't collected the sand!

Fenny was sick, too, despite all his scorn and anger. Harve knew that. His dad was proud of him in a way, proud of his fast trigger. The Crevlings were mostly too

thick-fisted for gunmen, and his dexterity had come from his mother's blood. Harve knew he was faster than Craig with the iron, but he had never let his brother discover this, feeling somehow that he shouldn't be better than Craig in anything.

He drew his gun from its holster, handling it as though it were something strange. Up to this time he had never conceived of turning it on a human being. He had never been able to look on death, even think of it, without a chill.

Harve put the gun back into its holster, wondering how much time he had wasted. Already Craig and his dad might be moving up on those fast guns. At least he must not fail in the small part he was to play tonight. He raced through the hall and deserted lobby to the barn the Crevlings kept as their own. Securing three saddled horses, he rode to the head of the alley back of the Mary Murtha Saloon. He walked the last block. A jagged flash of lightning suddenly split the sky, laying the rain-washed town open to the eye. Harve ducked in among the horses, hoping he had not been seen.

The alley was ankle-deep with mud and the buildings on each side made a canyon for the wind. The horses pulled back and slowed his progress. Harve was sweating when he got the three horses to a trot, actually sweating in the chill wind. The knowledge nauseated him. He was sweating because he was afraid. His dad had been right, he was yellow. Tomorrow when he talked this over with his brother, old Craig would say any man would sweat walking through knee-deep mud, but he wouldn't be fooled. After tonight, neither of them would be fooled again. They would call a spade a spade; Harve decided on

that as he edged the horses close to the back door of the saloon. He was through with alibis for his cowardice.

For a moment he leaned against his horse, trembling, his fingers twisting at the mane. Nothing could make him like death and war and swaggering gunmen. A man could be above those things, bigger and better—but suddenly his nervous fingers ceased movement and it struck him what a coward he was. What a quitter! His dad and Craig had been robbed, and they were going back like men to recover their losses. And here he was, shivering out back in the alley and holding the horses for them after the work was done. And he could shoot circles around Craig. Those fast guns his dad had spoken of wouldn't look so fast stacked up against his. Harve knew that; he knew it deep down inside. That gun was a part of him. It had been hard lately to keep Craig from realizing his kid brother could make him look like he was tied to a post if he wanted to cut loose with speed.

"Get 'em above your ears!"

THE command, uttered from the interior of the Mary Murtha, came in a pause in the storm, and Harve recognized Craig's voice. He had known Craig would take the heavy end of this job, leaving old Fenny to count out the money from the till. Harve stubbed his toe against a big rock near the door and chills raced up his spine. His first thought at hearing that voice had been that it was a man waiting for him.

Things seemed to run smoothly in there. Harve could hear the clink of money. He opened the back door to a wider crack. Fenny was backing toward him now, a sack in one

hand, a gun in the other. Then, with chilling abruptness, the front door was kicked open and a gust of wind and rain poured in. Fenny Crevling stiffened in his tracks.

"Keep 'em up!" It was Craig's voice, bull-like and commanding.

A gun barked down the echoes of his voice. In a second right-handed hell had burst loose. Fenny was almost to the back door, but he was shooting now, trying to hold the mob off Craig. Harve felt for the big rock against which he had stumbled, and fastened down the reins of the three horses. Then, chilled and numb, he opened the back door and stepped inside. At that instant a bullet shattered the lamp and the room plunged to blackness.

"One down!" whooped a voice, and Harve knew the fallen man was Fenny. He had seen his dad pitch to the floor in that last instant of light. Two steps carried him to Fenny, and he dragged him to the open door and the horses. He yanked Fenny erect and told him to climb on and hit out. Then he swung back.

For a second it struck Harve that the room was vacant, coffinlike almost, for the echoes and storm didn't count. The quietness of the guns stood out. Then he caught a shuffle of feet during a lull of the storm. Men were closing in on Craig, moving cautiously in the dark.

Harve leaped with a wild yell that the Crevlings called the kid's Comanche war whoop, and his gun exploded. It ripped out lead enough for a pair of sixes and the room seemed to rear up and fall back in a cursing wave. A thick body hurled toward Harve.

"Get out!" came Craig's hot whisper, and the two brothers backed for the door.

Craig's big body was damp with blood and Harve had to help him to his saddle. Once the kid turned his rapid-fire weapon on the milling room, shooting high, but holding them while he helped old Fenny, who had not been able to mount. The old man slumped weakly in the saddle.

"You've got to stick, dad," Harve charged him. "We can't leave a horse here. We got to all three keep to the saddle!"

"I'll stick, son," Fenny Crevling groaned, and spurred his horse away. Craig had reloaded now and plowed a last round into the doorway as he and Harve followed Fenny. The lightning had died away and the rain was coming down in sheets. A block's lead was as good as a mile. The storm would take care of sound and sign.

At Russ Creek they stopped at an old cabin to examine wounds. Craig's were through his thick shoulders, bloody and numbing but not serious. Fenny was shot through the chest and stomach.

"Let's get on to the ranch," he whispered. "Not much chance of a posse following; nobody cares what happens to that crooked gambling joint, but we don't want to be careless. Help me back to the saddle, Harve."

Craig nodded for the kid to obey. He knew old Fenny was hard hit and that they better get him home. Before they reached the ranch they were riding at a walk, and Harve was supporting the only half-conscious old man.

Harve helped Fenny into the front room of the house and eased him down to the sofa. Then he ran out, jerked the saddles from the horses and slapped them away in the dark. Harvey knew the sheriff would be at the ranch, come day-

light. Cal Bevins wasn't one to stand for a stick-up, even of a crooked gambling house.

Craig met Harve at the door as the kid piled the saddles on the porch. "Dad's bad hit," he said. "He wants you."

"Let's get hot water, bandages!" Harve whispered, his voice shaking. He knelt beside his father.

"I'm checking out, son," Fenny Crevling said weakly. "I couldn't let you and Craig down by cashing in on the ride. But now—" He had to stop. His dark eyes clung to Harve's gray face. "I was wrong about you, son, and damn glad I was. You and Craig won't have no trouble running the old place . . . Harve, boy, say you—" His voice gave out and he lay waiting for his younger son to speak.

HERE was death! Harve's throat was locked with the horror of it. The thing he feared most was coming to his dad. He kept his lips gripped, determined to hide his cowardice from this old man who faced the end with stoicism. Craig stood at the head of the couch. He leaned down and touched his brother's shoulder.

"Say a word to dad, Harve," he urged. "He can't hold on much longer, kid, and he don't want to go without knowing that you're not holding hard feelings over what was said. You can't refuse him this, Harve—"

Refuse! It burst on Harve Crevling what old Fenny was waiting for. He reached for his dad's hand, and shaken, broken words tumbled from his lips. "I never felt hard. It's that I can't stand to see you go dad! I want you to stay here—*dad!*" The stark, glazed look that came over Fenny's eyes stayed further speech.

"He's gone," Craig said quietly.

"An ordinary man would have died back yonder in the saloon. Fenny wasn't ordinary. You sent him over happy, kid. Don't feel too bad. Death is only a change of range. You and me will fog along all right."

Harve tried to make his muscles iron like Craig's, tried to stem the tremor of his lips. Craig, with his shot-up body, dragged up a chair and told his brother to sit down.

"I'm proud of you, kid," Craig said. "Proud as Lucifer. If you hadn't toed into that fight, I'd be stiffer'n a board right now with a lot of mouths a-saying how another Crevling had come to a bad end. But, Harve, I'll never get you into another squeeze like that. Are things right between us?"

"They're right, Craig."

Harve wouldn't take the chair, for there was work to be done. Craig said they would bury their father. When the law came nosing around, they would say that old Fenny had gone to Colorado. In a month or so they would announce that he had died there.

Harve wondered if Craig had forgotten his own wounds. How would they explain those? "Sheriff Bevins won't believe us," he objected.

"Maybe not, but he won't open his bazoo too wide. He should have run that crooked gambler out of town a month ago. But remember one thing, kid, no matter how things bust, you weren't in that stick-up. Remember that when Sheriff Bevins arrives."

CHAPTER II

THE LAW STRIKES

THE lantern rubbed against Harve's overalls and sent shadows bobbing crazily as he returned to the house after digging a grave for old Fenny. Craig was waiting. He had done his best

for Fenny. The fine leather boots were removed and the gray, wiry hair was slicked down with water. They wrapped a blanket around the body and Harve carried it alone.

"There's a lot of strength locked away in that game-rooster build of yours," Craig declared. "Dad'd be proud to know you packed him alone."

They came to the south side of the knoll overlooking the house, and Harve stopped beside the grave. The ground was rocky.

"The north side would've been easier digging," Craig observed.

"I think dad would like guarding the house this way. Besides this side gets more sun."

"Damned if you haven't fine feelings like a woman, Harve. No wonder you've always shied away from fights," Craig declared. "Some gents are going to take an awful beating through figuring those fine feelings of yours are a yellow streak."

Harve wrapped the blanket tight and let the body down into the grave. It was like handling a block of wood. This was merely the vehicle that Fenny Crevling had used for sixty years. The spirit was gone. That thought helped a lot and gave Harve strength to shovel the earth into the grave. Craig rose from a boulder where he had been sitting and swung the lantern in a circle to be sure all sign had been removed. He kicked a few rocks about to make things look natural.

Craig's strength was ebbing now that the burying was over. He leaned on Harve as they returned to the house. His face was ghastly under the lamplight as he stretched out on the sofa.

"If the law don't believe our story, it can lump it!" he growled. "The town won't be het up over the stick-up. Besides we didn't get no

money. Dad dropped the sack when he went down."

Harve started a fire in the heater, for the rawness after the storm was penetrating. Craig growled that a fire and a cup of coffee would fix him up. It would take more than a few gun wounds to humble Craig. He was still a threat and when the sheriff came, Craig would sneer at him the same as he used to at old Fenny.

But Harve's ears still echoed the roar of those guns in the Mary Murtha Saloon. He was still cold and trembling inside. The old familiar sweat bathed his body as he went to the kitchen to make coffee. It dampened his upper lip and brow. He was badly worried. Craig had been having trouble with the law lately, especially with Deputy Cary Christo. Christo would do his best to push this charge.

Harve's jaws ached from the way his teeth were gripped, but he got a fire going in the kitchen stove and took some water from the bucket in the corner. He noticed his hand shake as he poured beans from the sack into the coffee mill nailed on the wall. He jumped at a step behind him.

"Gosh ding," said a sleepy voice. "What for you grindin' coffee so early? 'Tain't only just streakin' day yet."

Ephraim Bock dipped some water into the washpan and sloshed cold water on his face. He sputtered into the roller towel and gave his hair two strokes through with the comb he took from the shelf beneath the small looking glass. He lifted the lid to the stove and with a couple of pokes had the fire roaring. Then he took over the coffee making.

Eeph, the Crevlings had called the kid since the evening he had rid-

den up behind his dad on an army mule. They had had no saddle and the bridle was held together with wire. Eeph's dad had worked for Crevlings in Ohio, and had crossed the plains to go on working for a Crevling. He had unloaded his son that first evening and told Harve briefly that he would wait till Fenny got home before he started to work. Not knowing the place, he would have to ask a few things before he began. Harve had been twelve and Eeph six at that time. Now Harve was nineteen and Eeph thirteen.

Eeph was an angular youngster, with jagged points here and there, but his body was as flexible as an old bridle rein. His hair was a light, sun-bleached yellow, and his upper teeth looked big and prominent when he grinned. He helped cook, did chores and hunted rabbits. Although he could spin a rock from his bare fingers with surprising skill, a sling-shot was his favorite weapon. One always hung from his hip pocket.

"Where's Fenny and Craig?" Eeph asked Harve. "Where are you all goin'?"

"Craig has been wounded," Harve answered. "Bring the coffee to the front room."

A pan clanged from Eeph's fingers. "Gun wounded, you mean?"

"Yes. Rustle the coffee fast."

Craig was lying looking at a framed picture of their mother when Harve returned. Harve followed his glance to the woman in the gilt frame. Her hair was in so many fancy curls he never quite got used to her look, but otherwise he liked the picture.

"You're like her, Harve, line for line," Craig said, looking at his brother, "and our mother was prime stuff. Remember when dad would be gone how she'd hug us tight, al-

most scared out of her wits, when Injuns rode the ridge. Still, if any ventured too close she'd get down the rifle and stand her ground. You're like her, Harve. You'd go a long way to keep peace." Craig's eyes glowed. "But after that everybody in hell better take notice!"

HARVE had not been listening. He had glanced out the window. The ridge above the house was outlined against a pale sky. Riders were coming on horses that seemed to have spent their speed. Harve sat down close to Craig.

"Sheriff Bevins is coming. Rushing things, isn't he?"

Craig's brow darkened. "I reckon Cary Christo is at the bottom of it." He hid his gun under him and settled back. "Let me do all the talking," he ordered. "I'll dry 'em up!"

Eeph came with three tin cups hooked over his finger and the coffee-pot by the handle. "Coffee in the settin' room is fancy," he began, then he saw Craig. "Gosh ding," he breathed, "I thought maybe you'd let your gun go off and messed up a finger. Get a swig of this coffee under your belt!"

Craig took the tin cup with a nod of thanks to Eeph. He drank down the steaming black liquid.

"Get what I'm going to tell you straight," he said to the boy. "Make no mistake when the sheriff gets here. I rode up alone, you and Harve got up and dressed and bandaged my wounds. I was ambushed on the way home from town."

Eeph nodded slowly. Craig was his idol, and he realized that it was important at this time that he did not let him down. "I'll stick to that story till hell freezes over and skate on the ice," he promised solemnly.

Craig smiled faintly and half rose

to watch the men dismounting at the door.

"Wonder why Deputy Christo isn't there shining his badge?" he asked of Harve, but there was no time for an answer. The sheriff had stepped in the door.

"Get your hands up—both of you!" the lawman ordered. He looked at Craig like he was a mad coyote that needed killing. "I said, get 'em up!"

Harve and Craig lifted their hands.

"Close in, boys," the sheriff ordered. "Shoot if they make a wrong move. Harve, we don't know that you're in on this killin', but you'll be counted in if you start slingin' a gun to help Craig."

Killing! The word traveled in an icy shock up Harve's spine. He saw Craig's face go set and white.

"You're talking something we don't know a thing about," Craig said in a level voice. "I left town at sunset, before the storm—"

"Never mind the lies and don't slide down to reach that gun under you. Keep your paws hoisted. You held up the Mary Murtha and killed Deputy Christo. You and him had trouble. The holdup was a fake job so's you could cover the killin' of Deputy Christo."

Craig Crevling lunged from the sofa, his hand going under him and coming up with a gun. The courage to ride roughshod into the very gates of hell was in his eyes. He had read his doom in the sheriff's words and he didn't mean to let them take him alive.

The three men with the sheriff lunged to the lawman's support and one of them brought a clubbed gun down on Craig's head. His gun exploded harmlessly, and, already weak from loss of blood, he crashed

to the floor. While he was still down, they yanked away his gun and snapped on handcuffs.

Eph sprang onto one man's back, beating him with his fists. It took three cracks to the side of the head to tame the lad down. Harve stood without power in his muscles, his blood turned to water. They had forgotten him when Craig lunged. He could have thrown a gun and stood them back until his brother escaped—if he hadn't been clutched with fear. Now it was too late. The sheriff was towering over Craig, making sure the cuffs were secure.

"He'll swing high and dry for this murder!" Bevins promised, then he turned to Harve. "I'm glad you didn't horn in, kid. I never figured from the start you was in on it. You ain't got that mean strain that runs in the real Crevlings."

Craig came back swiftly to an awareness of the situation. Cords along his jaws tightened when he looked down at the irons on his thick wrists. His glance swept across to Harve.

"Things will come out all right," he said. "I'll be back to help with the calf roundup."

"Your next roundup will be in hell, Crevling," declared the sheriff.

HARVE watched them take his brother away. Craig's shoulders sagged from physical pain and weakness, but his last act had been a long, hard glance of courage. Not even a flicker of reproach for the loss of that golden second which might have meant escape.

The sheriff had questioned Harve and believed his story. He even spoke a rough word of sympathy, urging the kid to get hold of himself.

"Bevins doesn't know I'm a

damned coward," Harve thought as he watched them take Craig.

"Gosh ding!" croaked Eeph, fighting back sobs. "I betcha Craig takes their jail apart and scatters it to the gosh-ding winds!"

Craig Crevling's trial moved swiftly. Testimony was brief and to the point. Three men swore they had recognized Craig's voice, and a dozen chipped in with odd bits of evidence. Harve wondered how Craig could sit like an iron man, never flinching. Just before he took the stand in his own behalf, he spoke to his younger brother.

"No use keeping up the lies. They knew me. Things would have been Jake if Christo hadn't been killed. He wasn't in the room when I entered; he must have come in when the front door opened." Craig's eyes darkened with speculation. "That front door was supposed to be safe!"

Then Craig stepped forward and announced that he was changing his plea to guilty. He held up the Mary Murtha, he said, to get back some money that was stolen from him. He did the job alone, but for a stranger he had picked to take the money. Fenny Crevling had started for Colorado the day before the holdup.

"Somebody threw into that fight with a mighty fast gun," the sheriff said flatly. "Fenny, I reckon, though I never classed him fast."

But nobody pressed the charge against Fenny Crevling. Even Swan and Alec Berg, the two who had given the most damaging testimony against Craig, wouldn't swear the man who took the money from the till was Fenny.

As soon as the last witness was heard the judge arose to sentence the prisoner, for the town was wind-

ing up this trial in a manner that would be a lesson to the next man. Judge Morrison was a pompous gentleman who loved to hear his own voice.

"The Crevlings have had a lot written into their family tree," he rumbled, "good and bad—mostly bad. Mostly the Crevlings are a black-browed breed."

Craig smiled, all his white teeth showing. "Shut up and pass sentence so's these folks can go home to supper," he ordered. "I'm hungry myself."

The judge cracked his gavel down on the table. "Hang him by the neck and do the job right!" he thundered. "Tomorrow morning at eleven!"

Harve stood up woodenly. He hadn't believed until that instant that they would sentence Craig to die. He had tried to build up for the worst, but that had been more of a nightmare. Now it was a reality. Craig was to die at eleven o'clock the next day. Harve started to move toward the judge, but Craig touched his brother's arm.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, kid," he whispered. "A Crevling can lose, but he never crawls."

Harve came back to himself. Craig, sentenced to die, was steady as Gibraltar. He was getting under the wavering, weaker member of the family, bolstering him up. Harve set his jaws until the tremor was gone and his face felt stiff and numb. He walked beside Craig with his chin in the air. Eeph was beside them as they marched back to the cell and he, too, had stemmed his trembling. Craig glanced at them both and nodded appreciation.

"Get back to the ranch," he ordered. "Get some air in your lungs, some food under your belts and

some sleep. We're going through tomorrow with our necks unbowed."

CHAPTER III

JAILBREAK

HARVE sent Eeph back to the ranch to water the stock in the barn, then he went to the jail to wait until the sheriff came with Craig's supper. The orders were that the prisoner was to have no company. Harve knew the deputy on guard would hold to that, so he did not ask to go back to the cell. When Sheriff Bevins came Harve asked if he could talk with his brother. The lawman nodded to his deputy to let Harve stay. Like everyone in town, he seemed to feel sorry for the younger Crevling.

"Ten minutes," Bevins said to his deputy and left.

Craig stepped close to the bars so they could talk without being overheard. Harve spoke first. "Craig, at the trial you said you didn't see Deputy Christo in the saloon. You told me you thought that front door was safe. Maybe I killed Christo."

Craig's fingers wrapped over his brother's on the bars. "Shut up! I mean I thought the front door was safe because . . . because of the storm. *Shut up tight!*"

"And let you die!"

"It'd mean two of us swinging if you spilled your insides. Keep your lips buttoned. I'll hang, but what the hell?" Craig loosened his grip on Harve's hands and rolled a smoke, steady as iron. He looked up with the old Craig grin. It wasn't often that he used it; that was why it was so valuable. "I can hustle down to hell without a worry," he grinned. "When somebody gets to pushing you too far, I'll just whisper my ghost back and watch you wipe the wise look off

their faces. When you're digging into somebody, kid, and feel a draft on the back of your neck, you'll know ol' Craig is stringing along with you."

Craig could talk like that about death—and mean it. He could smoke and joke, knowing that a rope was waiting for him. Harve stepped to the front to spot the deputy who was out in the yard smoking. Then the kid swung back to the cell.

"If I were sitting in there and you were on the outside, you'd be doing something," he whispered. "You'd be waiting ready to take the town apart. Craig, what'll I do? Who'll I see?"

Craig's eyelids lowered, he shook his head. "Don't see nobody, don't do nothing."

Harve met his glance. "Then I'll figure something out alone. If you die, I die with you. I'm not sitting back while you swing!"

Craig drove slow, solid words at the kid. "Harve, it's too late. Tomorrow morning won't be nothing but the closing of a gap that's been open since I was born. You've—"

Harve straightened. The deputy was returning. "I'll come blasting in here by myself at midnight. Be watching!"

Craig's whisper caught him as he was turning away. The older man's eyes were alight with pride. "Harve, you son of a gun! Listen! See Bat Wilson, a stranger that hangs around the Mary Murtha. He's looked me up a couple of times. He might have ideas."

"The sheriff said ten minutes," called the deputy. "Better lift your cowhides, Harve."

"I'll ride out to the ranch, I reckon," Harve called back to his brother as he was leaving. "See you—later."

HARVEY CREVLING had never hung out at the Mary Murtha like Craig and Fenny, still the men at the bar were not surprised that he'd be putting a drink under his belt on this evening. With a brother swinging the next morning any man would hit the bottle. A respectful silence greeted his entrance.

Bat Wilson was at the bar, his long body in a graceful slouch. He had been in town a week or ten days, and Harve knew him by sight. Wilson nodded when Harve paused near him.

"Howdy, bud," Wilson said languidly, his lean, corrugated face giving way to a smile. That smile was indifferent but friendly, and it brightened an otherwise drab countenance.

"Howdy," Harve answered quietly. "Thought you were leaving town last night."

"I was, kid, then I thought I'd stay and see the excitement tomorrow. I'd got kind of acquainted with your brother, kid." Wilson's lazy smile spread and he nodded for the bartender to fill the glasses of two men drinking with him. He lifted his own glass, studied it nostalgically. His friends raised theirs and waited for him to speak.

"Here's to a pleasant trip for Craig Crevling," he said, "a damn good fella gone wrong. Drink up to a neat, swift trip for old Craig—no bungled jobs."

Every eye was on Harve after Wilson had begun his toast, yet later no man could say they saw his hand move. There came a blending of motion, a tipping of the lean body forward, and three streaks of flame.

Rat, tat, tat!

Three glasses were shattered from three hands. Whiskey doused empty fingers, but no blood was

spilled. Not a scratch was on any of the trio that had lifted glasses to drink to that toast. The three stood with blank faces. The pale eyes of Bat Wilson had an awed look. He came to quickly and made a feint of taking a drink. Then he swung on the bartender.

"Damn you fella, you didn't fill my glass—why you didn't even set me up a glass! Here's Bat Wilson standing at the bar empty-handed. Wait till my friends in Georgia hear of that!"

Harve Crevling had holstered his gun. His eyes were yellow slits of fire. "That's one toast you'll never drink," he said, and walked from the room.

He walked on and on through the darkening streets. So Craig thought that fellow might be useful, a man who leaned against the bar and drank a toast to Craig's own death. Harve went to the shack where he kept his horse, then rode by the livery stable to drop a hint that he was leaving for the ranch. He intended to be back at midnight, but the town wouldn't know that.

He was ready to ride away when a lazy voice asked him to hold up a second. Harve looked around. Bat Wilson was reaching for leather, languidly cinching a saddle on a tall bay horse.

"I'm riding your way, kid," Wilson said, pulling to the saddle and smiling across tiredly as though he needed sleep. "Too bad Craig didn't see you untangle that death-tooter from leather back yonder in the saloon. It'd 'a' warmed his heart, Mine isn't beating regular yet. You see, kid, I met Craig first off when I hit town, and right off he had his mouth open singing the praises of his kid brother. I eased him down several times." The lean man chuckled. "I guess Craig knew his

brother. Kid, for a fella that can go around looking damn near timid, you're the swiftest piece I ever cut. Go on, ride where you were going. I had a hunch you came to see me in the Mary Murtha, the way your eyes focused when they struck my physiog. Let out what you had to say an' don't stutter. Time is flitting—that hanging is at eleven o'clock."

Wilson was sloping in the saddle, filling a paper with tobacco. Now he was pulling the string on his tobacco sack with his teeth.

"You see, bud, I knew what you were there for, and I wanted to prove to the town we weren't weeping on each other's shoulders. Besides, I wanted to see how you'd take that toast." He held out his hand. "I know your pedigree from hell to breakfast now; you'll do! That peace-loving way you have is a great asset. It'll help a lot in springing Craig from that death cell."

HARVE'S hands were sweating, the reins were slipping through his palms. Bat Wilson was like a freezing draft at his side. The smile skimming his lips came and went as he prattled on, taking the thing as another day's work. The job ahead wasn't breaking any sweat on him.

"If I can keep him from seeing I'm trembling," Harve thought. "If he just doesn't discover I'm a coward and pull out on me."

"I'm against killings," Wilson was saying. "Still we can't go into a jailbreak chicken-hearted. There's a time for all things."

"There's a time for all things," Harve agreed, looking straight ahead. "I'm against killings, too."

Bat Wilson had substantial ideas and he was smart at guiding the

conversation. He glanced sharply at Harve a couple of times, then he'd remember something and his smile would cover his face again.

Harve, they decided, was to stay out of town until midnight. Bat Wilson was to return, check out of the hotel, and let it be known he didn't have a stomach for seeing the hanging. At midnight he would have three fast horses, Craig's, Harve's, and his own, back of the general store.

Wilson told Harve many mistakes were made by keeping horses too close to the jail. It tipped your hand. Any posse could follow a mounted man. The smart thing was to keep the mounts a little distant and ride quietly away during the confusion.

Harve saw nothing wrong with the plan. He was to drop the guard at the jail from the window and get the keys. Then he could unlock Craig's cell and bring him to the horses. Wilson said with the pretty way Harve shot there would be no danger of creasing the deputy too deep. Not when a fella could spill three glasses from three different hands quicker than Billy-be-damned and not draw a drop of blood.

"Don't get yourself seen," Wilson cautioned as they were parting. "Drop that deputy, douse the light and unlock the cell." He gave Harve a derringer that had a small bore and told him how to keep it from sounding like a clap of thunder in the dead of the night. "A man coming from sleep won't be sure it was a gun he heard, and by that time you and Craig will be gone."

Harve felt less nervous. The sweat dried some on his body. Craig wasn't going to hang in the morning. Creasing that deputy would be nothing but good solid shooting, and he wasn't afraid of his

The town was in an uproar when Bat Wilson cut into the jail to give the Crevlings a chance to reach the horses.



ability with a gun. The plans settled on, Wilson was laughing over a Texas story, then he was shaking hands and telling the kid to start the works promptly at midnight. The town would be dead from the neck up at that hour. He rested long fingers on Harve's arm.

"I look for things to go hunky-dory, but if they start squeezing down on you, keep wading in. Remember you're packing plenty of strength on your hip."

"I'll keep wading in," Harve promised.

A FEW minutes before midnight, Harve was at the jail. He had the derringer in his hand as he slipped up to the window. The gun was wrapped in a gunny

sack, an added protection that Bat Wilson had recommended. Harve was hoping to deaden all sound and make the escape from the jail without rousing the town.

The deputy was sitting slumped in his chair, the quietness of the hour dragging his lids down. Then Harve heard a cough and a stir from a cor-



ner. The sheriff spoke. The deputy shook himself awake and rose to hand the sheriff a match. For a second they were both in line.

Two men—that meant a pair of bullets laid along a life-and-death line. This was not a cold job of shooting like he had planned, not just waiting for one man to turn right. This meant a second shot.

But for the gun in his hand, Harve would have been shaking. A gun had always poured strength into him. He swept his right hand for his holster and dropped the derringer. For close shooting like this he needed his own gun.

He was too tense for careful thinking as the sheriff came an inch more to line. Both were now in fair view. Harve's mind went blank, his body chilled to ice and he pulled trigger. Twice, but it made one great echo. That roar brought him back to life. It meant the town would be awakened. He lunged into the jail, blew out the lamp and jerked the key chain from the deputy's clothes. Then he leaped for the cell.

"Steady, Harve," came the cool, unhurried voice of Craig.

"Wilson is back of the store with horses!" Harve choked, and they were out of the door into the night.

"Back of the store, eh?" Craig snarled as they ran, the town rising up at their heels. "Got himself a nice safe spot, huh?"

Harve didn't have time to remind Craig it was decent of Wilson to help them at all. Bullets were whipping at them now and it looked like they might be cut off from the back of the store. A rifle boomed from across the street and the closeness of the bullet told that the marksman had sighted them. An open space lay ahead of them. Craig pulled up. It was death to cut that starlight path.

Then from the back of the store Bat Wilson cut into the fight. Coolly he fired three times and with that many shots he throttled three rifles that were covering the open space. Craig and Harve darted across in safety. Wilson had the reins over the horses' heads, he was at Craig's stirrup to help him in the

saddle, for Craig was still in bandages.

Then Bat Wilson hit leather and streaked away in the lead. His tall bay horse hit the alley and vanished. Harve rode close to Craig, calling to him to leave the shooting to him. But Craig had a rifle from the saddle and was working the lever. Some punchers who had been drinking at the Mary Murtha had grabbed horses and were in hot pursuit.

Wilson cleared the alley and reached a clump of trees. Now he was free of the town. From that position his gun laid down a blanket of lead on the heads of the punchers. They yelled and spun their horses for shelter. Wilson had done a clean job of thinking himself to safety and he was now drawing his friends after him. He let Harve and Craig have a good lead for the hills before he leaped his bay horse to follow them. He laughed as he caught up with them.

"Now, fellas, we'll hook on our wings and fly," he yelled.

The long-limbed bay horse again took the lead. The noise of the town fell behind. Craig called for a change of direction that would allow them a mile of travel down a sandy canyon and then into the waters of Mud Creek. That should take care of their trail.

As they splashed along in the ankle-deep waters of Mud Creek, Wilson spoke. "Never heard a squawk out of that gabby sheriff. I was looking all the time for a bellow from his leather lungs."

"The sheriff was in the jail house with the deputy," Harve said.

Wilson leaned from his saddle toward the kid. "You mean you got to the sheriff and deputy both?"

"Yes. I sacked the derringer, wasn't sure of it for close shooting."

"Then," the tall man grunted, "that blast I heard wasn't one report—it was two." He shook with laughter. "Two shots, one echo, two men down. That's shooting!"

Craig curtly ordered Wilson to shut up. Harve wondered why his brother didn't say some word of thanks to this man who had helped them, but Craig had sunk into one of his black moods. Bat Wilson evidently sensed it and paid him the respect of silence.

They foxed a few more miles of trail and then Craig and Wilson were to ride for Utah as swiftly as horseflesh could take them. Harve was to return to the ranch.

"So you won't be connected with this jailbreak," Craig said. "You aren't the kind to spend your life skulking from one shadow to another. Go back, face them down an' make them believe you wasn't in it. If they went to the ranch and you were not there, your ticket would be written, same as mine. Go back an' stay with Eeph—"

Harve rode close to Craig's stirrup. "I'm selling the ranch and meeting you. We'll start again together," he said resolutely.

Craig glowered at this defiance, but Harve could see that he was pleased. "All right, kid, the Orange Cliffs country. I'll leave a message for you with Hennessy in Green River."

CHAPTER IV

THE CREVLINGS MOVE ON

HARVE rode his tired horse up to the home ranch as day was breaking. Eeph came loping to meet him.

"Take my horse to the back field and drive him into thick brush so he won't be found," Harve ordered before the boy had a chance to speak. "If there's a posse here when

you get back, say I been home since ten last night."

"A posse!" Eeph's eyes bugged out on his face and his mouth stayed open.

"Yes. Looking for Craig."

Eeph pulled in his eyes and closed his mouth. A grin crept to his lips. "I'll rub the sweat marks off that Kingpin horse, and no posse will get me tangled in my story. That sheriff a-tryin' to hang Craig! Who the hell does he think is runnin' this country, him or the Crevlings?"

Eeph was back and he and Harve were finishing breakfast when the sheriff and a posse of five men arrived. Harve was gray and shaking when he met them. Eeph felt for the sling-shot in his hip pocket and went into the kitchen for three smooth stones. He fitted his fingers around each, testing its trueness before he stowed it in his pocket.

Hard-faced old Sheriff Bevins looked things over from the doorway. At his shoulder was a slim-jawed, hatchet-faced man, a stranger to Harve. A gun hung from this man's thin waist, another bulged under his arm. He, too, looked things over, but much more thoroughly than the lawman. With eagle eyes planted beneath deep, shelving brows, he studied Harve, the table, the chairs, and even beyond to the bedroom.

Sheriff Bevins had a bandage around his head and his eyes were feverishly bright. "Your breed," he snarled at Harve, "has always depended on bull strength, but you're a Crevling with brains. You shot blazes out of a town last night and now here you are claiming to know nothin' about it. You'd look better if you'd pull that gun and start it roarin' than pretendin' to shake and cower. I knew what to watch in

Craig, but you had me fooled. 'Take his hardware, somebody!'"

Two men stepped up. Harve made no move to stop them. He was glad when he could sink into a chair. "What are you after me for?" he asked.

"You didn't spring Craig out o' jail last night did you? A slick, clean break with never a dot of sign left!"

Harve looked at him. Then the posse hadn't hit the trail. "Good!" he cried, springing to his feet.

Eeph edged up to him. "You mean we ain't got to go to no hangin' bee?" he asked.

"You'll go to a hangin' bee," the sheriff promised. "You'll get to see this gent dangle!"

Harve wasn't awed by the words. He was thinking of his brother. Craig had gotten away completely, the sheriff wouldn't be so full of rage otherwise. "Good," he said again, half to himself. Then, "You can't take me, sheriff, I've been home all night."

Sheriff Bevins was studying him intently. "You look plumb relieved," he mused. "You don't look guilty, but that ain't nothin' to go by—"

The lantern-jawed man waved toward the bedroom. "Didn't do much sleepin' last night, did you? Not so much as lay down? And you ain't had them clothes off, neither; the day creases is in them plain."

Sheriff Bevins' face hardened again and his glance sharpened.

Eeph edged along the table. "Five times last night, maybe twenty-five, I come down from the attic and tried to get Harve to go to bed," he said, his kid's voice an excited falsetto. "He just set right there in that chair!"—the boy stabbed a finger at an old armchair.

"He just set and set and set! He set till I built the fire this mornin'. I guess he was kinda spooky about death and all." He lifted his head proudly. "I bet Craig pounded his ear and slept sound as ever all night. You can't spook him!"

Eeph was taking his hand in and out of his pocket as he talked, handling three smooth stones. Once he reached back and felt to make sure his sling-shot was still there. "You was talkin' through your hat about hangin' Harve, wasn't you, sheriff? Gosh ding, what'd you hang him for 'less it's 'cause he ain't as proddy as the Crevlings. Old Fenny has threatened to lam him lots of times for that, but Harve can't help not being like Fenny and Craig."

THE room settled to a tense waiting. Eeph looked around, grinned uncertainly, then began taking away the breakfast dishes. The sheriff looked toward the lantern-jawed man.

"We might see," this cadaverous stranger suggested, "whether the Crevlings buy barley in sacks."

The sheriff stared as if the words did not make sense.

"The sack outside the window from where you and your deputy was shot had barley in it. We'll see if the Crevlings feed barley."

Two of the men went to the barn. Eeph continued to carry away the dishes.

"I'm glad they ain't hangin' Craig," the boy said to Harve, "even if I ain't never seen a hangin'. Now if it had been a stranger I'd 'a' felt long-faced over the cheat." He listened attentively when the men returned and said there was no sign of barley in any of the feed boxes or bins.

"Gosh ding, no!" Eeph exploded.

"Old Fenny never bearded a good horse with barley!"

The room was quiet. Harve stood with his hands shoved deep in his pockets, his jaws clamped. For a moment no one spoke.

"I guess we got young Crevling wrong," the lantern-jawed man said finally.

The sheriff looked at Eeph. "Make some coffee and throw some sow belly in a pan," he ordered. "I could stand some food."

"Craig must have joined a gang of gun-fannin' artists," a posseman remarked. "Downin' two men with clean creases is purty shootin'."

While they were eating, the sheriff spoke to Harve. "I'm glad you wasn't messed into none of this. You're well rid of that brother of yours. What you plannin' on doin'?"

"I'm selling everything and going to hunt for Craig," Harve said quietly.

The sheriff sprang to his feet with an angry oath. The lantern-jawed man rose too and his bony fingers pressed warningly into the lawman's shoulder.

"I reckon your brother might try to get you word where he is," the stranger said.

The sheriff's eyes lighted.

Harve faced them. "If he does, you'll never know it!"

The thin fingers again clenched the lawman's shoulder. "We wouldn't expect you to rat on your brother, Crevling," the stranger said.

One of the ranchers in the posse edged up to Harve. "You spoke of sellin' the ranch." His nostrils were thinned, his eyes eager and greedy.

Harve nodded.

The fellow walked about, taking quick puffs on a cigarette. Finally he strolled back to Harve and of-

fered five thousand dollars for everything, land and cattle and horses.

"That's a steal," Harve answered him.

The man shrugged. "It's all I can manage. I thought you might be needin' ready cash."

"I'll take it. Providing I can skim the band of three horses."

The rancher frowned, but nodded. "Your Kingpin horse will be one, I reckon."

"Yes. We'll fix up the papers now."

When the sheriff and his men went to the yard for their horses, Harve asked a question of the man who was buying the ranch. "Who's the stranger?"

The fellow's eyes flitted away from Harve's. "That's Buzzard Meeks. You see, kid, Craig is a bounty man now, and the Buzzard has collected more pelt money than any man in the West."

Harve knew of the Buzzard, a free lancer, traveling about on the trail of men with a price on their heads. Where he circled there was sure to be prey; that was how he had gotten his name. Harve's body was cold with sweat. He hadn't thought of Wyoming putting a price on Craig's head: It hadn't taken Buzzard Meeks long to light. He must have been in the neighborhood.

HARVE and Eeph watched the party ride away, their eyes following the thin scarecrow of a man, the most hated and feared bloodhound of the trailer pack.

"I watched his Adam's apple bob up and down while he talked," Eeph whispered, "and I kept sayin' to myself, 'Choke, will you! Choke!'"

When the men had ridden over the ridge, Harve turned to the lad.

"I'm leaving Wyoming for good, Eeph. You like it here; you better get a job with—"

"I reckon they grow the grass just as green some'r's else," the lad cut in. "When do we leave?"

"My trail isn't going to be a safe one, Eeph—"

"Then you'll need me fer a lot of things. Take lyin', you ain't no danged good at it. You've got too much conscience."

"Who told you that?"

"Fenny. He said too much conscience ham-stringed a gent. I'll keep my pockets full of rocks and if that Buzzard bird starts follerin' us, I'll shy one at his Adam's apple."

Harve smiled at the kid. Eeph was only thirteen, but his head came to Harve's shoulder, and Harve was tall for nineteen. "I'll be glad to have you, Eeph," he said.

"Sure, and when we get in a tight squeeze, you kinda act like a guy with a conscience and I'll act like a kid that ain't bright. They'll never spot us for outlaws."

"We're not outlaws."

"Gosh ding it, you busted open that jail, didn't you, and I just now lied to the sheriff, didn't I? That makes us the same as Craig."

"Not you, Eeph—"

"Gosh ding it, I'm not goin' to be left out," Eeph said indignantly.

Harve suggested that they had better begin thinking of their trip. He looked off to the ledges of rocks along a shallow canyon dropping back from the barn. He and Craig had hunted there when they were kids.

"Cottontail Canyon is full of memories," he said almost to himself as he and Eeph walked up the trail.

"An' rattlesnakes," Eeph added cheerfully. "That third rim is alive with 'em."

CHAPTER V

LOSING THE BUZZARD

HARVE CREVLING and Eeph rode away at midnight and covered the first hundred miles with no rest. Then they traveled nights and laid up days. Cutting through a chaos of mountains clothed in pine, spruce and fir, they came to a treeless area.

They angled close to the edge of the Red Desert, hit Utah, and crossed to Colorado. Then they made a rapid wide circle back into Utah. It meant long weary miles out of their way, but Harve had caught the sign of a circling vulture.

Eeph's geography was sketchy, but his sense of orientation was keen, and he wanted to know why they were making that wide circle.

"Buzzards fly high and keep a sharp eye," Harve answered him.

"Lucky for that ol' Buzzard's maggoty hide, he didn't catch us," Eeph said, fingering a smooth rock. He was always watching for rocks. He would have had his saddle pockets loaded down if Harve hadn't objected.

"A man has to have ammunition," Eeph argued, going over his stock and throwing the least symmetrical stones away. He rolled one in his fingers.

"See that knot on that tree?" he asked Harve. He let fly and nicked his mark. "Didn't hurt that tree none," he said, "but it'd put a dent in that ol' Buzzard's Adam's apple."

When their tired horses reached the Castle Valley country, Harve called a day of rest. The Orange Cliffs of Green River, Utah, weren't far away now. Bat Wilson was to leave word at a store in Green River. Harve didn't anticipate any difficulty. Wilson had seemed certain

of all details when he gave the directions.

In the Castle Valley country the trails were brief, petering out on the merest pretext. If you met a man in the wild section he rode toward you with his hand near his gun. Occasionally Harve asked a question of one of these travelers. With the Buzzard circling around, he didn't dare show in any town for information.

They reached the Orange Cliffs, and at Green River a cold-eyed man keeping a certain saddle shop told Harve to ride on into the mountains to Dad Brown's. It was evening when Harve and Eeph found the cabin that seemed to have lost itself in the high hills. Dampness from a nearby spring shrouded the place, and the air was chill.

"Creepy as the grave," Eeph whispered, crowding close to Harve.

An old man appeared in the trail leading into the brush.

"Goin' far or been there?" he asked without much interest.

"Looking for Bat Wilson and Bill Bender," Harve answered. Bender was the name Craig had decided to use.

The old man stared at Eeph. "Who's the kid?"

"Eeph Bock. Bender knows him."

"Bat Wilson went through here with a thickset feller, but he never mentioned no kid would be trailin' him."

"The thickset fellow is my brother," said Harve. "This boy has been with us most all his life."

"Keep ridin' down the trail," the old man said. "You'll hit somethin' that calls itself a town—it's got a saloon, and I reckon that makes a town in any language. See the fat feller in the restaurant there. He knows Wilson."

They found the saloon with its long skinned-pole hitching rail. A muddy street stretched before it and three lean-tos were built away from it.

They slid off at the hitching rail where five horses were already sleeping and stood close together for a moment. A thin cold rain was falling, and the gray sky promised an early darkness.

"We'll let the town come to us," Harve whispered. "Just us being around will be suspicious."

"I only hope the town don't come to us in too big bunches," Eeph whispered back. "I'm some spooked. I'll be glad when we get to Craig."

Harve seconded the boy's wish, but not audibly. The place had a sinister aura, an intangible suggestion of menace that chilled him. He loosened his gun in its holster, and Eeph, marking the act, felt in his hip pocket to be sure his sling-shot was handy.

MEN kept on with their drinking as Harve and Eeph entered, but over glasses they gave the pair keen inspection. Harve walked on into the lean-to where coffee and eats were being dished up. A fat man wearing a flour-sack apron took their order, and Harve and Eeph had their first square meal in three weeks. Twice Harve caught the fat man looking at him. The second time Harve spoke.

"I'm looking for Bat Wilson and a thickset fellow, Bill Bender." Harve was handing the fellow a bill to pay for the meal as he made the statement in a voice too low for the other diners to hear.

Taking the money, the man drew Harve and Eeph aside. "Who's this kid?" he snapped.

"A boy that was always with the Benders. Eeph Bock is his name."

"The name is Eph-ra-im," when she's all unfolded, mister," Eeph added.

"I've already sent a man to ask Wilson about the kid," the fat man told Harve. "When he gets back things will be fine—or they won't."

Harve nodded. "We'll wait here in the restaurant."

In an hour the fat man came and told them to ride five miles back the way they had come. When they came to a lone tree guarding a right-hand fork, they were to take that trail and keep riding. Wilson would be waiting for them.

Five miles of retracing their way. Bat Wilson was cautious, Harve thought. Saddle weary and anxious to see Craig, he had a feeling of resentment. At least, though, the rain had ceased and the west was clearing. It seemed lighter than when they had entered the saloon. They had covered only about a mile of their way when they heard the hoofbeats of a rider. They drew off into a clump of brush and waited.

Around the trail came a lone figure, thin, lantern-jawed, gun bulging from hip and under arm. Still as stone they watched Buzzard Meeks ride past at a leisurely pace. He was taking it slowly. He knew his prey was ahead and figured he was a safe distance back.

"He's knowed where we was every night," Eeph whispered when the clop of hoofs had died. "He's watched us make camp and brush away signs of our fire in the mornin', laughin' up his sleeve." The boy hugged his horse closer to Harve's.

"He's watched us bed down every night," Harve agreed somberly. Then he snapped to life. "We got to find Craig and tell him to get moving!"

He started his horse up the trail. He was in a cold sweat. This human vulture was almost on Craig; this collector of bounty money! It was said of Buzzard Meeks that he liked to bring his men in dead, thrown across a pack horse like a quarter of beef. Harve knew Meeks would not show openly at the saloon; he would cast about, waiting for night. It would be some time before he discovered his prey was not about.

They reached the fork in the trail and prodded their jaded horses on at a gallop. As they crossed a clearing in the last of the twilight, the bushes cracked along a shallow creek and Craig Crevling came running to meet them. He clamped Harve's hand, his dark eyes taking in his brother's weary face. He shook hands with Eph, too, hauling the kid to the ground.

"I didn't figure Harve could leave you in Wyoming," he grinned.

"Gosh ding, he's needed me!" the boy cried, bringing out a round stone. "This is for that ol' Buzzard bird's Adam's apple."

Wilson came from the shrouding bushes as Harve talked. His sinewy body could move about without noise. The smile faded from his lips when he heard that Buzzard Meeks was on their trail, and he listened silently, realizing time was too scarce to stop Harve with questions.

"I'll get back to that saloon before he figures out I'm gone," Harve said. "You fellows breeze out. I'll lead Meeks back to Colorado."

"Nice head work," Bat Wilson approved.

Craig swung on him with blazing anger. "Sure, letting the kid save our skins is nice head work. Buzzard Meeks would as soon shoot a man as say howdy. When he real-

izes Harve has outthought him, he might do just that—perforate him! I'm not passing the buck to my brother, Wilson. I'm going back and blast it out with that vulture!"

Harve thought Craig was treating Bat Wilson pretty hard. After all, the fellow was risking a lot to get them all away safely. But Wilson didn't seem angered.

"Maybe we should ride back and blast it out," he said without heat.

Here was death talk again, death to the bone. It always crept up these days, even in Eph. Harve planted himself squarely in front of Craig as his brother was turning for his horse.

"Craig," he said, "you're not fast enough to get Buzzard Meeks. You could kill him with your two hands, but his guns would talk a different language. He'd be riding back for the nearest collecting spot with you tied across his packsaddle." Harve's face was gray as he drew the picture. "Buzzard Meeks would get you," he said slowly, "but he can't get me."

Craig stopped dead in his tracks. Never before had he heard words like these from his younger brother.

"I got what it takes to beat Meeks," Harve went on. "Next time you see me there won't be a Buzzard on my trail. I'm going to lose him this time—for good."

There wasn't the threat in his voice that always rode in Craig's, but there was a finality that both Wilson and Craig sensed.

Craig moved his thick shoulders. He nodded. "You could get him," he agreed. "But, kid, you haven't got the stomach for the job. Now me—"

"I'll do the job," Harve cut in.

Craig settled back on his heels. "Harve," he said, "for a no-fight man, you've got plenty on the ball.

But if anything happens to you I won't ever forgive myself."

"Nothing is going to happen, Craig, except to Meeks."

IT was settled that way. While Craig listened, Bat Wilson told Harve rapidly of New Mexico and the Shaniko Powers ranch in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. It was a ranch where an ex-convict was treated the same as any other man. Old Shaniko Powers had served out a ten-year term himself, and he was making it possible for other men who had got themselves in wrong with the law to turn over a new leaf and go straight.

"But they won't know in New Mexico that we are on the jump," Harve argued. "We can get work on any ranch."

Bat Wilson gave him a lazy smile. "Other ranches ask questions. Now me, I'm known down there as an ex-con, but Shaniko will give me work. He knows I'm on the up and up, and that's the kind of men he wants. The Powers spread on Murder Creek, Harve, isn't a hang-out for crooks."

So the plans were made.

Craig was loath to have Harve go, although he realized how valuable time was. He stayed close to the kid's stirrup even after Harve was mounted. "Kid," he said, "if you're not at the Powers ranch by the first of July, I'll be coming back up the trail."

"I'll be there, Craig."

Wilson was nervous to be off, but said nothing, nor did he attempt to take part in the last few words. Craig's manner was formidable. He set his back to Bat Wilson and lowered his voice.

"Harve, I'm a price man now, and Meeks isn't the only gent looking for me. Things could happen. I'm

not expecting they will, but they could. What I want to say to you now is, I know you're going all the way for me. I want you to know that I'm proud of you and that I think you're a real man!"

Harve's breath caught in his throat. "What you afraid of, Craig?"

"Not a thing on this earth or in hell, kid," his brother assured him. "But if I shouldn't be at the Powers ranch when you get there, I want you to know how I felt."

Harve rode away with a confused, anxious feeling. Craig had never talked like that before. He had always had his cowhides clamped down firmly on solid earth, with no inclination for what he would have called "fanciful notions." That night Harve dreamed Craig was dead when he got to New Mexico, and that he was wading through muddy water looking for his gun. He saw Bat Wilson serving out twenty years, wearing stripes, smiling easy as ever. He woke and stared into the darkness.

"Don't it look bumpy when he swallows?" Eeph whispered drowsily.

"What?" asked Harve.

"The ol' Buzzard bird's Adam's apple? It's a good target."

"Go to sleep," Harve ordered. "We're riding fast and far tomorrow."

"Gosh ding, I keep dreamin'," Eeph said restlessly.

Harve took the usual precaution in breaking camp the next morning. He killed all sign, for to do otherwise might rouse the suspicions of Meeks. He traveled east for three days, and twice he saw a lone figure cut a skyline on his back trail. The patience of the man was legendary. That was known to be the way he made most of his captures, sometimes trailing his victims for months.

Buzzard Meeks never, if he could help it, faced his man in the open, and he took any advantages that came his way. He considered a man he trailed no better than a coyote. But while he seldom indulged in gunplay, his ability in that line was established.

EEPH insisted on the fourth day that the only way he could keep a kink out of his neck was to ride backward in his saddle. He tied up his reins, hooked them over the horn, and climbed up, looking out over his horse's tail.

"If that Buzzard bird is on our trail, I'll know it 'fore noon," he prophesied.

Harve had tried to make the lad think Meeks was lost. He hadn't yet imparted to Eeph his intentions regarding the man hunter. During the morning the Buzzard flashed on their back trail and Eeph saw him. As they dropped over the crest of a knoll, Harve drew rein and dismounted.

"Gosh ding, we ain't noonin' in this open space, are we?" the lad asked.

"Eeph, it's time I talked to Buzzard Meeks."

Eeph was very wide-eyed. "You mean gun talk?"

Harve nodded. "I mean gun talk. You stay here with the horses and I'll watch from the top of the hill for Meeks. He has to be put off Craig's trail."

"You mean you're goin' to let him have it as he rides up?"

"Nobody but a skunk fights that way," Harve said sternly.

"Even in pickin' off a buzzard?"

"Even then. Taking life is serious business, Eeph. Don't ever forget that." He tried to keep his nerves to steel as he talked, but the coldness that death at hand brought was creeping over him.

Never before had Harve seen Eeph show any sign of fear, but the kid was shaking now. "Harve, he's a buzzard, a . . . a—"

Harve gripped him by both shoulders. "He's human! Eeph, don't ever argue with yourself that it's right to kill; it isn't. I'm not going to kill Meeks, but I'm going to wound him, put him off the trail for weeks."

The lad brightened. "Wound him from a long ways off. Don't let him get close to us."

Harve tested his rifle, and began walking up the hill. He took a rounding course that would carry him to some tall grass at the left of the trail. There were no trees, but the country was broken and high grass and occasional boulders offered hiding. Along the trail Meeks was riding there was no protection.

The thin figure came on, head sunk on chest, arms flapping, body so loosely strung together it seemed about to fall apart. On and on he came. Harve was stretched out in the grass, his rifle covering the approach. He was going to drop the horse first, then step into the open and crease the Buzzard's skull. Dropping the horse would slow things, and give Meeks a split second to gather himself for battle.

Even from a distance, Harve knew when Meeks' body began to tighten. The head lifted and the dangling arms stiffened. With the sixth sense he was reputed to possess, the man was warned of danger. His hand crept close to the heavy gun at his thigh, his knees tightened against his horse.

Harve knew the only safe thing to do was drop the man from his horse, for that right hand was creeping nearer yet to the loaded holster, and death was locked away in the long fingers. Harve shifted his rifle

from the horse to the man, and Meeks must have seen the glint of steel. The man hunter threw himself from the saddle on the opposite side of his horse from Harve, and rolled from sight in the high grass.

It hadn't seemed there was protection enough there to hide a man, but the thin, earth-stained form of Meeks was swallowed up as completely as though the ground had opened to receive him. A rifle cracked and blood spurted from Harve's shoulder. He dropped closer to the ground. It would be easier to fight now that the Buzzard had opened the pot.

Harve made a long, cautious circle and came up close to the spot where Meeks had landed from the horse. The place was empty, though the grass was crushed where a body had lain. Harve knew then he had lost his man. He burrowed his body into the earth. Buzzard Meeks was working up on him, but from what direction? He watched for the movement of a blade of grass. His glance cut a careful circle and came to rest on the top of the knoll where he had started from.

The slim body of Eeph was lifting from the grass, belt cinched tight over his caved-in stomach, right arm a little back. Inch by inch the kid stood up, then swiftly his arm darted back and out. His right foot lifted in the air and for a split second the awkward young body was transformed to a statue of grace.

From the grass below Harve a yell was siphoned from a surprised throat, and a thin body twisted into the air. Harve's hand dug for his hip gun and it roared twice. The lathlike frame folded from sight. Harve leaped across the space, but Eeph was there ahead of him, and he was pointing to a red mark that

was growing on the forehead of Buzzard Meeks.

"I got him! Right where I aimed. Couldn't see his Adam's apple!"

"If you'd missed, you'd've been killed," Harve said numbly.

"I wasn't thinkin' of that. I just kissed 'er and let 'er sail. I knew if I could fetch him to the open you'd settle his hash."

Harve carried the light body down the knoll and sent Eeph to get the horses. Meeks was badly wounded but he would recover. He watched impassively while his wound was dressed and gave a bloodless smile when Harve told him he would never catch Craig Crevling.

"I didn't figure you for a killer that morning at the ranch," Meeks said. "But when you laid in wait, I thought you was showin' a different stripe." He spoke without malice, feeling of his forehead. "Smart kid," he said, looking at Eeph. "Saved a shootin' fray."

Harve left the man hunter stretched on a saddle blanket and promised to send help back from a town twelve miles ahead. The Buzzard hardly fluttered his thin lids. Harve knew he would be off the trails for many days to come.

CHAPTER VI

DEATH KEEPS A TRYST

THE overhead sun threw slim shadows from two horsemen as they rode toward the adobe known as Frenchy's in New Mexico. They had left a Frenchy's in Colorado, several days back. It seemed to be a favored name along the owl-hoot. The long, lump of earth slabs was as quiet as a monument to the dead when Harve and Eeph approached it.

"Funny how they shovel up mud

and call it a house, ain't it?" Eeph asked. His eyes were ablaze, his tones trembling with eagerness. He knew that reaching Frenchy's meant they were close to the ranch of Shaniko Powers and Craig.

Harve's tired face had taken on life also. "That mud hut is famous," he said, more because he could not keep still, than because he wanted to talk. He was reaching Craig, and there was no Buzzard Meeks on his heels. It lacked three days of being the first of July, and Craig was to wait until the first.

"Famous fer what?" Eeph asked.

"It's one of the old Santa Fe stage stops. Beyond here a ways is where the stage is always held up when she's rolling toward Santa Fe banks with Colorado gold. Yep, this is a famous old mud-hut."

They dismounted and went inside. They wanted a drink and they wanted to ask directions to the Powers ranch. A half-drunk puncher was at the bar, cursing the quality of the whiskey served. He held a glass up with a roar of anger.

"It'd tear the throat off a tin giraffe," he charged.

Then he saw Eeph, his belt cinched over his thin middle, his buckteeth out in a grin.

"Look what this rotten stuff has done to me, made me see snakes with rows of teeth," the puncher whooped. That seemed a good joke and he laughed. Then he approached Eeph with an idea. He held out the glass. "Drink this and let's see it rattle them buckteeth."

Eeph drew away, going pale under his dust and tan. His reluctance pleased the puncher and he grabbed the kid by the collar, holding the glass toward him with his free hand.

Harve Crevling stepped in with the swiftness of a cat dropping from

a tree limb. "Let loose that boy, you bully!" he ordered, and waited only a second to be obeyed. As the puncher pulled his lip back in a growl, Harve took him in the mouth with a blow that cracked the full length of the room. He followed with a second that folded the puncher to the dirt floor.

The bartender whistled through his teeth. "Have a drink on the house," he offered. "You didn't look that potent, mister."

A cry from Eeph spun Harve around. A companion of the fallen puncher was moving from behind a table where he had been waiting for a drink. He was small, wiry, and each of his movements undulated into the next. Harve thought of a snake on the sand.

"We'll finish this fight," the fellow said harshly. "Durango was a particular friend of mine. You beefed him plenty." He stopped where the light was best. The gloom in the room shaded all but the brightest objects. Two gun butts at the man's hips were high spots. "I don't fight with my fists," he said. "I notice you're packin' the makin's on your hip."

His eyes bore down on Harve while he talked, and death lay in the pair of icy wells. He was playing for time, paralyzing his man before the big moment came. Harve had heard of gunmen who won their fight before their weapons sprang from leather, won with their eyes. He remembered old Fenny saying that the thing to do was watch the bridge of a gunman's nose. He couldn't, though, for the whole face was weaving before him. He tried to concentrate and lost himself in thin air.

To Harve this man's intentions were clear. Here was a killer, a shrewd, brainy murderer. Harve

felt his palms grow moist against his overalls, and the old familiar sweat bathed him from head to foot. He was facing a death fight and couldn't move a muscle. He wasn't trembling; he was too numb for that.

FROM the far end of the shadowy room a man stepped through a doorway. He was tall, sinewy, lazy of movement even in a spot like this. Bat Wilson! Harve knew that if Craig were around, his brother would come leaping in to take over this fight. No pair of eyes could paralyze Craig Crevling.

Bat Wilson recognized the slim, dusty figure in overalls, and his body clicked to action. He swept forward.

"Tate!" he hurled the name at the wiry gunman.

Then he stopped and his laugh flowed out. "Tate," he asked ironically, "what kind of flowers would you like at your funeral? This man you're baiting for a fight is Harve Crevling!"

Harve saw Tate's eyes widen and then squint together. Breathing a curse, he stepped from line.

"Crevling?" he whispered.

The name was echoed by the awed bartender. With death moved from his path, the realization that Bat Wilson had spoken his true name flashed on Harve. He and Craig had decided they would call themselves Bill and Hank Bender. Now the country would know he was a Crevling, and Buzzard Meeks would hear.

Bat touched Harve's arm and suggested they step outside. Harve followed him and they passed through the doorway.

"I can't believe my eyes," Wilson said when they were alone. "I never dreamed you'd show up here."

Harve's pulses were drumming. Wilson wasn't crazy. He had spoken in a cool, stinging tone. Something had happened since that evening in Utah.

"Let's have it, Wilson," Harve said dully.

"You mean you don't know?"

It was Craig, Harve knew. Something had happened to him. His lips were stiff and he was surprised to hear his words come evenly. "Let's have it, Wilson. Where's Craig?"

"He's dead." Bat Wilson's lips curled on the words, and peculiar lights hung in his eyes. "Killed holding up the Santa Fe stage a week back."

"Dead!" Harve repeated. He kept looking at Wilson, his eyes cold in their sockets. He was trying to take the blow like a man. Eeph was half sobbing and calling Wilson a liar. Harve reached out a hand to quiet the boy. Craig was dead; he knew it was the truth. Wilson wasn't lying.

"There's something wrong about the stage business," he said. "Craig wasn't a thief."

Wilson shrugged. "They found him by the old tub. Three men were killed in the fracas, two guards and the driver. The country is pretty hot. They found a letter in Craig's pocket with his name on it. Crevling isn't a popular name hereabouts just now."

"Was he alone?" Harve asked quietly.

Wilson stared at him. "Bud, you're either a magnificent liar or Bat Wilson is getting weak-minded. I'm beginning to believe you. A man worked with Craig, a tall, rangy fellow. He got away. The sheriff has been looking for you, knowing you fitted that description."

"How did he know anything about me?" Harve demanded.

"Bud, that Wyoming sheriff has been busy. He's sent word clean to the border that you were trailing Craig, and telling the law to be watching for the pair of you. Your gun rep has preceded you. I reckon I've helped that along, never figuring you'd show up here. But, kid, from watching your face, I don't believe you knew; I don't think it was you working with Craig. Listen! Take my advice and hit for Mexico."

"I'm not running. I'll get a job here, and—"

"A job! You'll be slapped in jail. Kid, nobody would hire a Crevling, not after that stage job with three shot down in cold blood."

"Craig didn't kill those men. He wasn't a killer. I'm staying and looking up the gent that did. Tall, you say, and rangy."

"You're a fool!"

"This ranch of Shaniko Powers is supposed to give men a chance who are down on their luck. I'll try him." Harve looked straight at Wilson as he talked, and Wilson met him glance for glance.

"About Powers," Bat said. "I put Craig up to him as a fellow he could trust. Of course I'm not talking to you against Craig, but—"

"Don't, then!" Harve's mouth was drawn to a taut line.

"The point is, Powers will be slow to take on another Crevling. He'll be here at Frenchy's soon. I'm waiting for him now. He rode out with Dad Emmet, sheriff of this county. If you're hell-bent on staying, take the whole thing in one leap. Brace Powers and the sheriff together when they ride up. And kid, don't forget I'm with you. I advised you to run, and I still think it would be the easiest way, but I like the way

you rear up and show fight. Craig always said you was straight as a die. He bragged you to the skies, thought you were a hell car painted red. He probably went after that gold thinking it would smooth things for you."

TWO men had ridden up to the barn, and Bat Wilson, with Harve following him, went to meet them. "The old fellow is Powers," Bat whispered. "Look out for Sheriff Emmet; he's dynamite on wheels. Here's luck to you, kid. If I can horn into your battle without cutting my own throat, I'll do it. Siding a Crevling wouldn't be much of a pastime in these parts."

"Don't put yourself in the red," Harve said curtly.

Eeph was trailing along like a gangling hound pup, his tragic eyes beating about as though in the entire world there was nothing substantial left. Eeph was another reason why he had to win the battle ahead, Harve thought, as he heard angry words float down the trail.

"I don't like the argufyin' talk them fellers are tossin' out," Eeph said, crowding close to Harve. "Maybe me and you better hightail it fer Mexico."

Harve dropped a steadying hand on the boy's shoulder. "We have to stay, Eeph, and show the world Craig wasn't a killer, that the rangy gent with him did three cold murders and then slunk away leaving Craig beside the stage."

Eeph felt in his pockets to gain reassurance from his supply of stones. "You're gosh-dinged right," he said. "We ain't runnin' out on ol' Craig."

They were close enough to catch the conversation between the heavy-set old rancher and Sheriff Emmet.

The man wearing the star was of medium build and in the prime of tough manhood. Shaniko Powers was heading down the sunset trail.

"I got a notion to bust you in the face, sheriff," roared Powers.

The lawman didn't back up any before the hairy fist that was thrust almost into his face. "You always make a loud yelp to cover up, Shaniko," he said evenly, "but everybody knows you keep a bunch of cutthroats workin' for you. The Santa Fe stage has been held up three times in as many months, and every time some'er's in the sand hills beyond Frenchy's. There's soft footin' there and it's an easy ride to Murder Crick. You talk about your men bein' reformed, but if that bunch is reformed, then I'm a lizard. Some day I'm comin' out to Murder Crick and shoot the air so full of lead you'll choke to death for breathin' space."

Sheriff Emmet turned and saw Harve Crevling. His gray eyes flashed to the bandanna hanging loose at the throat, the fine leather boots, paused at the gun hanging from the slender waist. Its walnut handle was the only dust-free spot on the tall figure.

"Been where you're goin'?" the sheriff snapped. "Or just startin'?"

Harve felt the utter coldness of the eyes. Sheriff Emmet wasn't an easy man to meet. "I'm wanting a job with Shaniko Powers," he said.

Emmet flared to anger. "Another reformed con, huh? Shaniko will weep on your shoulder."

Harve's eyes were unwavering. "The name is Harve Crevling."

Again, as with the gunman Tate Lee, Harve saw that his rep had preceded him. The lawman was suddenly as deadly as though the final count for a duel had been made.

"Crevling," Sheriff Emmet said,

"you're under arrest. Elevate!"

Harve lifted his hands. "I didn't know of my brother's death until ten minutes ago," he said quietly. "I just arrived in these parts."

"Can you prove where you was?"

"No, I cut out all towns, hiding my trail down from Wyoming. This boy here was with me."

Eeph nodded. "We was dodgin' from tree to tree and sleepin' light. We—"

"Dry up!" The sheriff hadn't taken his eyes from Harve. "That your only alibi?"

"Yes, but you haven't grounds to hold me. I'm not your man. I wasn't in on that stage stick-up, and I'm staying here to prove it. Sheriff, I'm going to bring in the man who did those killings. Craig Crevling wasn't a murderer. When we catch the right man we'll find he's a red-handed killer as well as a thief."

A TALL youth who had been listening to everything came from the horse corral adjoining the barn. He had brown hair, long slim hands and deep-mahogany eyes. It was Roy Powers, old Shaniko's son. Roy spat disgustedly into the sand as Harve finished speaking.

"Listen to the coyote yelp," he sneered.

Sheriff Emmet shoved his gun to leather. "Put down your mud hooks," he said to Harve. "You're right about one thing, I ain't got proof enough to hold you. But I'm warnin' you to get out of the country. If you start hangin' around Outlaw Mountain, I'll ride you down like a coyote!"

"I'm wanting a job on the Powers ranch," Harve said boldly.

Roy Powers slid forward. "That's plenty of nerve, Crevling! Your brother got dad to take him on—

now you want on. Better take the sheriff's advice and hit for the line. Murder Crick ain't hirin' you."

Shaniko Powers was standing back. So far he had said nothing. Harve looked into Roy Powers' anger-filled eyes.

"If you're running the ranch, then I won't work there," Harve agreed. "But I'll hear your dad talk before I move on." He looked to the old man. "I had nothing to do with that stage job. I'm wanting work."

Roy Powers' wrath exploded. "You're a damn liar!"

"I don't think he is," came the slow rumble of Shaniko.

"Sure he's lyin'—cold," Sheriff Emmet said. "He wants to get set for another stage job. Remember they didn't get the money last time."

"When I started the Murder Crick spread," Powers thundered, "I said I'd help out gents that was hard pressed. I don't see how anybody could be in a tighter spot than this man. Somebody's got to get behind him or he'll turn robber for sure. I'm givin' him a job!"

Roy Powers turned on his father furiously. "You're a sucker for punishment! After taking a beating from one Crevling, you open the door to another."

Bat Wilson had moved into the tight group. "Powers," he said, "I don't know this fellow very well, but he's never struck me as a bad sort."

Roy spun on Wilson. "I wish you'd get off Murder Crick! You're a good example of a reformed con, with your oily tongue and smooth ways. I'd like to see dad turn you and your kind off the ranch!"

"Shut up, Roy!" ordered Shaniko. "What does a whelp like you that's always been raised with plenty know about hittin' tough luck?"

Young Powers' face reddened,

then went white. There would have been something likable about that face if it did not wear such a look of sullen rage. Harve could see that Roy was very young, probably not over nineteen. Within the last few weeks Harve had come to think of himself as old, though he himself was only nineteen.

"If you got your head set on hirin' this gent, Shaniko," Sheriff Emmet said, "then you're puttin' him at Bull Mountain camp, far enough away so's he can't rob the stage and get to cover in one night. That stage is rollin' gold every load now, and I'm not leavin' a Crevlin' set-in on velvet a few miles from her route. And another thing: Roy goes to that line camp with Crevling." Suddenly his eyes squinted. "And Bat Wilson."

Roy's reddish eyes snapped. Harve saw the glance he sent the sheriff, and knew there was some understanding between the two. "We'll have a sweet time," Roy said grimly.

Bat Wilson saw the look, too. When the meeting broke up with Shaniko and Roy going after their horses, Bat brushed close to Harve.

"I caught that message the sheriff snapped to Roy Powers. I don't think it means good for you," he said in a low, warning tone.

Harve made no answer. A half hour later he and Eeph were riding toward the Powers ranch. Ahead, the horses of the two Powers men and Bat Wilson lifted clouds of dust.

"Eeph," Harve said, "Craig was wrong to hold up that stage. You can't do wrong things without paying for them. Always remember that."

Eeph whanged his heels into his horse's ribs. There were white streaks down his cheeks where tears had furrowed through dirt. "I ain't

Then Eeph stepped into the death duel—with a slingshot!



never goin' to hold up nothin'," he gulped. "If a Buzzard man don't fly you down, the law will salivate you. Just the same I don't like that sheriff or Roy Powers."

"I don't think I like Roy Powers either," Harve admitted, remembering the hate in young Powers' eyes. His thoughts raced as something oc-

curred: Roy Powers was tall, like himself, and of a rangy build.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE DODGE

SHANIKO POWERS managed a word alone with Harve before the three men left for Bull Mountain camp. "Ride a mighty straight road, Crevling," he advised.

"Your rep as a gun-slinger will make men take you slow, and that's good. Sheriff Emmet is a hard man, but he plays fair. He's had enough killin' to make him ride every stranger with long-shanked spurs. An honest man can see them things and hold on to himself."

Harve thanked the old man. "I'll hang on to myself," he promised. "You won't be sorry you took me on."

Eeph wore a forlorn look as he watched Harve ride away. The kid was to help the cook at the home ranch and Harve was glad to have him stay where it was safe. Right now, though, Eeph wasn't feeling too good about being left behind. Harve looked back and waved just as Eeph's right hand darted back over his shoulder and his right foot came up.

Suddenly Roy Powers' hat soared from his head. The youth streaked a hand for his gun and went down on the far side of his horse. After a tense second of waiting, he slid off and recovered his hat. He did not notice the small smooth stone beside it.

"Did you hear a gun?" he asked Harve.

Harve shook his head, repressing his impulse to grin. Eeph had picked up an armful of wood and was walking toward the house.

Bat Wilson looked startled. "What the hell lifted that hat?" he asked.

"Wind, I reckon," Harve said innocently.

"Wind be damned!" Roy exploded, jamming his hat on his head.

THE line camp at Bull Mountain was piled with dust from a recent storm, but Roy refused help in shoveling it out. Duties had been assigned and his

was the care of the cabin. Harve went to the barn to wait for Bat Wilson, who had taken all but three of the saddle horses to the fenced pasture. A mount for each man was kept in the barn. Harve was hunkered on his heels when Bat rode up.

"Didn't find Powers very good company, eh?" Bat asked. He unsaddled, then came out and squatted beside Harve, rolling a smoke.

"Wilson," Harve asked, "who do you think worked with Craig on that stage job?"

Bat Wilson struck a match. Harve noted the steadiness of his hands. "I suppose you figure it might be me," he said finally.

"You're the logical one to suspect."

Wilson nodded. "Yes," he admitted. "But it wasn't me, kid."

"You were mighty free spreading my gun rep."

Wilson faced him squarely. "What do you mean by that?"

"The man with Craig was an ace gunny. He got three men, two of them guards and fast men."

Wilson made no pretense of not understanding. "I see how you take it. Well, kid, after Craig was searched and his identity established, folks began to ask me questions. I spilled a few things. I told how you shot the glass out of my fingers back in Teton. You see, I was forced to admit I'd known who Craig was all the time. I told about the glass-shooting fray, not to prove your gunmanship, but to establish the fact I wasn't overly friendly with Craig. Maybe it sounds pretty cold-blooded, but I was thinking you had pulled for Mexico and I was saving myself. If I had known you wasn't in on that stage job, kid, I'd have kept my mouth shut."

Harve was watching Bat as he talked. He was looking into space,

his eyes steady, his voice even. "Things were tight the next day after that job. I was trying to keep from being connected too closely with Craig. Sounds hard, I know, but when the law is after you it's dog eat dog." He turned and looked squarely at Harve. "Damn me for a loose-mouthed old woman, kid, but don't connect me with the stage job. I'm through with that stuff, and Craig knew it."

"Who do you think was with Craig?" Harve asked again.

Wilson squinted up the trail toward the cabin. "I don't know."

"I said who do you *think*?"

Wilson was irritated at the question. "Thinking who held up a stage where three men were killed is dangerous business, Crevling."

"Wilson, I'm finding that man!"

Bat smoked slowly, watching the blue rings sail away. "Until yesterday I figured you were the gent," he said. "Last night I lay awake relishing the whole thing. I saw things I hadn't seen before, but, kid, if I were to talk and you were to go off half-cocked—"

"I won't go off half-cocked. Maybe we're both thinking of the same man."

Wilson met his eyes. He nodded. "I reckon we are. Crevling, this is dangerous even to talk about. When Roy Powers flared up at you yesterday, I wondered why. And, kid, Roy was gone from the ranch the night of the stage job. Still, he's a night-riding fool, dancing, gambling, and all, so that isn't much. But now I remember how he shouted 'Wolf' at me, until somebody thought of you. Maybe he wanted the guilt pinned on somebody and he wanted it done rapidly so the sheriff would cool off."

Before Harve could speak, Roy Powers called from the cabin that

food was on the table.

"Remember, no kid stuff," Wilson warned Harve as they walked up the trail. "No trying to make him talk at the end of a gun. He'd just admit everything and then when you got him before the sheriff he'd brand you a liar."

"I'll be dead certain of every step I take," Harve promised.

HARVE was given Outlaw Mountain section as his part of the riding. Not that the Murder Creek range ran into the wildest part, but it did cut the edge. From the start Harve knew someone was trailing him. The first night Roy Powers was the only one of the trio who didn't seem to have had any luck gathering beef.

The third day, as Harve rode a ridge, a bullet nicked his hat brim. Then he knew why he had been followed. As he leaped his horse for shelter, he realized someone was trying to kill him, someone whose safety was being endangered by Harve's presence on the Powers ranch.

He circled on the rifleman, but the fellow was wary. There was neither hide nor hair of him during the day. He had taken his best shot and failed; he was not staying around to risk being identified.

Harve brought in a small gathering of beef that night, and Roy Powers sneered.

"Not killin' yourself, are you?"

Harve did not mention that he was averaging more cattle than either Roy or Bat. "I spent some time looking for a coyote," he explained.

Young Powers' eyes narrowed. "A coyote?"

"Yeah, a two-legged one," Harve said significantly.

The conversation was dropped

there. Powers turned to getting supper, and Bat Wilson and Harve smoked and waited. It was their job to tend the horses, and Roy had let them understand he wanted none of their help with his part. After a few moments, Wilson mentioned finding a spring drying on the mesa range and said it meant a dry summer. Harve knew that the spring was in the other direction from Outlaw Mountain. If Wilson were telling the truth, he couldn't have ridden that part of the mesa and fired that ambush shot. That evening it seemed to Harve that Roy Powers was more sullen than ever.

Bat Wilson stretched his lean body, smoked his after-supper cigarette, and said he was going to ride to Wells camp for a game of cards with Tate Lee and Durango. He glanced at Roy.

"Wells camp isn't on the stage road, and this isn't stage night, so I guess you can't object."

"Like to get ugly, wouldn't you, Wilson?" snarled Powers.

"You were put here to watch us, weren't you?"

About an hour after Wilson left, Roy Powers pulled a bottle of whiskey from his bunk. Harve knew that liquor was forbidden among Murder Creek men while they were on the ranch, but he said nothing. After all, Roy was the owner's son. Evidently the whiskey had a mellowing effect, for Roy became a little less sullen and offered the bottle to Harve.

Harve was sitting by his bunk, smoking, when Roy rose and offered him the drink. He took two swallows. Roy began to talk a little, his surly mood leaving him. Presently he dragged a second bottle from cover and told Harve to keep the first. Roy's fingers were clumsy with the cork, and while he worked

at it, Harve poured some of his liquor onto the dirt floor beneath his bunk. As young Powers turned, Harve was just tipping the bottle away from his lips.

Roy was looking at Harve with an air of deep cunning. "Think you're a tough gent, don't you?"

"Tough as you, if that means anything."

Roy nodded. "That means a lot, a whole damn lot, 'cause, mister, I'm tough! I'm a better shot than anybody in these parts figure, might be even as good as folks say you are." He paused. "We . . . we might make a good pair."

Harve said nothing. It looked as though Roy's usual caution was being dissipated by the liquor he was drinking.

"I'm after some real cash," Roy said. "Not chicken feed, nor a hand-out from the old man—real dough." He leaned toward Harve. "Got any suggestions?"

Harve cleared his throat and hedged. "You're too much of a green hand," he said at last. "You never know what a greener will do under fire."

"Oh, I've pulled a deal or two," Roy boasted.

"Did you know my brother, Craig?" Harve asked. He thought he had ruined his chances when he saw young Powers pull to balance and glare at him. It was evident he was trying to think why the question was important.

"Some," he said cautiously. "He didn't talk much." Then he switched back to his other thought. "Got any suggestions for pickin' up easy money?"

"You might try lying behind a sand dune in Black Pass." The words fell softly from Harve's lips. Black Pass was where the Santa Fe stage had been held up three times.

Roy's hand, reaching for his bottle, trembled. He turned slowly to face Harve, swearing below his breath.

"You're a cold hand," he whispered.

Harve held his breath. Powers seemed suddenly to have sobered. Apparently he was his old sullen self again. He hunched down on his box and pulled his hat low over his eyes. What had been said lay between them like a strung wire. Neither was willing to go further. Harve was afraid of appearing anxious. It wouldn't take much now to rouse Roy's suspicions.

THE clattering of hoofs shattered the silence between them. Bat Wilson was returning. Roy Powers swept the bottles from sight and kicked off his boots.

"No whiskey 'lowed on this ranch," he said half drunkenly.

Wilson came in, looked sharply around, his nostrils twitching. Harve was in his bunk, face to the wall. Wilson silently pulled off his boots, blew out the smoky lantern and crawled into bed.

Harve lay without motion, breathing regularly. It must have been an hour later that Powers slid quietly from his bunk. Carrying his boots, he slipped out of the cabin. Harve lifted on an elbow and peered through the window at his side. Roy went down the trail to the barn. Soon he came out with a saddled horse.

Harve called to Wilson, and Bat sat up, diving under his pillow for his gun. He listened quietly to what Harve told him. They had pulled on their boots and were on their way to the barn before he spoke.

"Can't figure the play unless he is riding to Outlaw Mountain to tell his pals you're ripe for the stage job.

Kid, you took a long chance when you mentioned sticking up that stage. Powers might be going to double-cross you some way."

"I was trying to get him to talk of Craig."

"I know, I know," Wilson said a little impatiently, "but after all Craig is gone and you got to go on living. Talk like that is dynamite. I'm glad you woke me, kid. It's up to us to find out what Powers' play is."

Roy's trail did not lead them toward Outlaw Mountain. They followed him to the cabin of an old squatter and found his horse where he had left it at the edge of the brush.

"Cautious for as drunk a gent as you say he was," observed Wilson.

There was a light in the cabin, and the two men dismounted. They circled the clearing on foot, and to the left of the cabin they came upon a second saddled horse. Wilson gave a low whistle when he recognized the animal.

"The sheriff's roan! Kid, this says plenty! That skunk Powers is playing both ends from the middle. He's holding up those stages, and at the same time working for the sheriff as a spy. No wonder the law doesn't investigate him. Smarter than I thought, that young rooster." Bat's tones were no longer lazy, and his tall body was tense.

"Why did he bother to get me drunk?" Harve asked. "Why didn't he just ride over here and tell the sheriff I had propositioned him? His word would have ridden mine down."

"Because he wanted to loosen your tongue so's you'd spill other deals. It would make it look certain you were with Craig if he could pin something else on you. He's a fox, that gent."

Wilson's analysis of the situation seemed logical. Yet Harve wondered why he wasn't entirely convinced. They were discussing the advisability of an approach on the cabin when the door was thrown open and Roy and the sheriff appeared. With rapid, purposeful strides each made for his horse. Young Powers showed no signs of drunkenness. Harve knew then that the second bottle Roy had produced—the one he kept for himself—had not held intoxicating liquor.

Wilson and Harve reached their horses and were hurriedly pulling to the saddle when a bullet zoomed between them. Bat sank spurs and crashed away, but Harve's horse bolted in fright as a bullet cut his hip. There was no time to put back and follow Bat Wilson. A second gun had now whipped into action, and Harve took the only direction that promised safety. It led toward Outlaw Mountain. Shouts and pounding hoofs rose behind him, but he was into brush and boulders and fairly safe. The men kept at his heels for several miles before sound of their pursuit died. Harve made a cautious circle for Bull Mountain camp.

HARVE didn't drive his horse too hard. If Roy Powers were going to return to camp, he would be there ahead no matter how hard Harve tried to beat him. The cabin was dark as he approached; the silence of the dead lay over things.

Harve left his horse at the barn and moved slowly toward the shack. He came to an abrupt halt several feet from the door as he heard a groan from within. It came again, and Harve drew his gun. Hugging it tight against his side, he advanced. As he entered the cabin

his toe touched something soft. He chilled. It was a body.

Harve pulled the door shut, hung a blanket over the one window and lighted the lantern. The tall, lean figure on the floor was Roy Powers. Bending down, Harve saw that he had been shot in the back from close range. Whoever fired the bullet must have been startled as he pulled trigger, for the lead had been tipped upward. It didn't look like a dangerous wound. Powers was beginning to move and mutter.

Harve sprang up from examining the wound as a horse pounded down toward the cabin. He took a stand beside the closed door.

"Harve?" came a cautious call from the yard.

Harve opened the door to admit Bat Wilson. Wilson started back when he saw Powers, then he dropped on one knee beside him. He looked up at Harve.

"Crevling," he snapped, "a play like this will only pile up trouble for you!"

Roy Powers opened his eyes, understood the words. "Crevling," he whispered, "you're too low to crawl!"

Harve was watching the lean face of Bat Wilson. Who had shot Roy Powers? Why had Wilson taken so long to reach camp when he had gotten away in a straight line? He could have been here, waiting beside the door for Roy Powers—

"Get 'em high, Crevling!" It was the sheriff's voice. "High! So you've sobered up enough to realize you talked too much, huh?"

The picture flooded Harve's mind clear as crystal. Talking wouldn't help; words would be like tossing chaff to the wind. He had asked Roy to join him in a stage robbery, and he had learned later Roy was a spy for the sheriff. Now Roy had

been shot in the back. The sheriff's voice showed that he was aching for an excuse to kill.

Harve reached a toe for the lantern he had set on the floor beside the fallen man. He snapped his foot upward and sent the thing into the face of the officer. The lawman leaped to avoid the missile and Harve plowed after him. He knocked Emmet's gun upward, crashing a fist against the sheriff's jaw. As Emmet's head cracked back against the door jamb, Harve leaped into the night and onto a horse standing a foot away.

He was around the shack and vanishing in the darkness when firing awoke behind him. For the second time that night, bullets whizzed by his ears. Soon he was out of range, and a slight shoulder wound was his only reminder of how well that rifle had been worked at his back. He smiled to think of how angry the sheriff would be when he discovered he had been left afoot, for the big horse running so smoothly for Outlaw Mountain was the lawman's own roan. Harve smiled about it, yet it gave him the creeps. Somehow that horse seemed to drag him deeper into the mire. A wanted man escaping on the sheriff's horse, was doubly headed for trouble.

CHAPTER VIII

FUGITIVE IN OUTLAW MOUNTAIN

HARVE didn't have a lot of trouble evading the posse that rode the brush-choked canyons surrounding Outlaw Mountain. Hunting for a man in that maze was like sifting a haystack for a needle. After the second day the hunt died down. No doubt the sheriff had searched that wilderness of cuts and gorges before for men

and knew how hopeless the job was before he started.

Harve butchered a stray steer, prepared enough meat to last him for some time, and buried the hide. He camped in a thicket where the grass was good for the roan. He wondered about Eeph and felt sorry for the kid. He wondered too about Roy Powers and Bat Wilson. Had Wilson really thought Harve shot Powers in the back? He had lots of time for thought, but he always found himself back at the beginning. Who had been with Craig? It could have been Bat Wilson, but somehow Wilson seemed to be telling the truth. It could have been Roy Powers, and that shot in the back could have come from one of the gang from Outlaw Mountain who had seen the kid meeting the sheriff.

Harve kept track of the days with stones in his pocket so he would not miss the eleventh of July. That was the date when the Santa Fe stage would roll through Black Pass with a gold shipment. On that morning he ate heartily of some of the beef cooked over a low fire, and by noon was working down toward the sand dunes of the pass. The stage usually hit there in the shank of the evening, and before it was clear of the three-mile gorge the last of the daylight would be gone.

Harve was in the dunes three miles above the pass when he saw the stage come to view. He had plenty of time to get to Black Pass ahead of the stage. If men were lying in wait for that gold, he intended to know who they were. He was chilly and hot by turns, just thinking of what lay ahead, but stubbornly he held to his course. He had to know.

He was a half mile back in some low hills when he heard rifles cut loose on the stage. It was dusk, but

he could still see the wild plunging of the horses. Soon he was close enough to hear the curses of fighting men. This holdup was all wrong, according to his calculations. It should not have taken place until the stage reached Black Pass at nightfall. Suddenly the firing was over and except for a single man running toward a fringe of brush some distance from the spot where the stage had been stopped, there was nothing to indicate that a raid had taken place. That single man leaped into the brush, and then Harve caught the beat of hoofs.

It had been a daring plan. The stage had been stopped in a flat where there was not even protection for a horse. Men had lain behind low ridges of sand, their horses some distance back in that line of trees.

Harve raked the roan's sides with his spurs, riding hard at the spot where the lone man had vanished. He found there nothing but deeply plowed tracks where a horse had been spurred away in haste. But those tracks headed in a straight line for Murder Creek.

Harve's eyes swept over the country and he saw that the only shelter close enough to have received the fleeing man was the canyon of Murder Creek. With dusk coming on, following tracks would be too slow. He chanced it all on a race. Straightening the roan out, he rode for Shaniko Powers' ranch.

A window was lighted in the house when he came in sight of the place. He left his horse and ran up afoot. The bandit couldn't have beaten him by much, couldn't have had time to destroy all sign. Then he caught a view of the room through the window and saw Shaniko and Roy Powers moving about.

Harve raced on for the barn. Seconds counted, for Sheriff Emmet had

undoubtedly been hiding in those hills along the stage route in the hope of foiling a holdup attempt, and he would find the tracks leading for Murder Creek. Harve went the length of the stalls, but found no steaming horse. It had been foolish to hope the robber would have left this much proof. He knew where young Powers kept his saddle, but the peg was empty.

Harve stood for a moment in the thick barn shadows, sick with the feeling that he had failed again. Pounding hoofs roused him and he ran for his horse. He rode into the night, knowing that the law would chalk up another black mark against a Crevling.

THE country about Outlaw Mountain hummed with a great man hunt the next three days. Harve knew whom they were seeking. On the fourth day he ventured onto a trail leading to the cattle country. Gaunt and watchful-eyed, he proceeded into enemy territory. He had to have some food besides meat, and he had in mind the line camp at Bull Mountain. It was evening when he saw a man ride from shelter onto the trail and hold up his right hand. Slowly the rider approached.

"Crevling?" he asked in low voice.

To hear his name called out after he had spent days trying to keep a posse off his trail gave Harve a shock. "And what if it is?" he demanded.

"I've been guarding this trail, waitin' for you. Bat Wilson wants to see you at Bull Mountain camp—midnight." The rider swung his horse and vanished into the trees. The cracking of brush died away.

Harve rode on. It might be an ambush, but the fellow that had given the message had certainly

borne the stamp of the owl-hoot. He hadn't come from the law.

A light was burning in the cabin as Harve approached, and it was yet a half hour to midnight. Harve investigated the stable and found it held only Wilson's horse. He circled to see if anyone was lying in wait and found the hillside desolate.

When Harve called, Bat Wilson came to the door, hands exposed, outlined against the light. After Harve had entered, Wilson closed the door, took a seat beside the lantern and made no objection to the other man taking the shadow. The smile was completely gone from his face. His lips were tight and his eyes too hot.

"What are you figuring to do about Durango?" he asked abruptly.

Harve waited. Durango was the swartly-skinned kid he had knocked down his first day at Frenchy's. Durango's side-kick, Tate Lee, was the man who had taken up the fight. The pair were friends of Wilson. Harve had seen nothing of them since the day he had arrived.

Wilson repeated the question testily.

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

"You don't know Durango is due to hang—or maybe you don't even know the Santa Fe stage was held up again." Wilson's voice was sarcastic.

"I know it was held up. I saw the man that escaped to Murder Crick. I followed him." Harve spoke slowly. He was watching Wilson's face closely. He saw the words sink in, saw the man's eyes narrow.

"The sheriff knows you were there," Wilson said. "He recognized the tracks of his own horse. He knows you rode toward Murder

Crick. Crevling, were you in that stick-up?"

"Were you?"

WILSON stood up. "Kid, before this thing ends you and I are going to be gunning each other. I'm damned tired of being suspected."

"So am I. Maybe we better settle it here and now." Harve wondered if the level tones were really his. He was making talk that could flash to a death finish any instant.

Bat Wilson's anger dissipated under the kid's coolness. "Roy Powers has dug up an alibi that listens easy. Of course, any alibi stands if it isn't investigated, and the law isn't trailing anybody but you. Durango and Tate Lee were in on that last job, and Tate was killed. The sheriff got Durango, and he's due to hang." He laughed. "I may be a fool for telling you this; you may know the inside story, but when I sent for you to come here I was giving you the benefit of the doubt. Craig was always so sure you were aboveboard. I've chanced plenty coming to meet you, Crevling."

"Then why did you come?"

Wilson's voice was cold. "Because I was a fool! Why did I chip in to help you spring Craig from jail—because I was a fool! Why didn't I cut loose from Craig on the trip down when I saw he was going sour on life? Again because I was a fool. You see, kid, Shaniko Powers gave me my chance to go straight and I feel like I owe something to the other guy. And somehow I'm not convinced you are a killer." He came to his feet, stretching the kinks from his long body. "But there is a way to spot the guilty man. A sure-fire way! Want to hear it?"

"I came here to listen, Wilson.

Maybe I won't believe, but I'll listen."

"Durango is just a kid, about twenty years old. I've known him since he was in knee pants. I know he'll hang without ever opening his lips. Even in hell they'll never cook out of him the name of the gent that got away from that robbery. But if I had Durango with me, could give him the honest picture of this thing, he'd talk. I know that, Crevling. Durango would tell me because he believes in me. Now if you're the guilty man, all you have to do is sit back and let Durango swing. Your trail will be covered. But if you're innocent, then you want to get Durango out of that jail!"

Harve studied the lean face, wondering whether to believe what he was being told. Bat Wilson began to pace back and forth. "I'm sure now Roy Powers is the man. If I could prove to Durango what a skunk Powers is, the kid wouldn't protect him! He'd give us the dope to convict him!"

"See Durango at the jail," Harve suggested.

Wilson scorned the words. "The guards are three deep. The sheriff is seeing to it nobody talks to that kid, nor slips him anything for an escape." He bent to Harve. "If you're guilty of that stage job, you're laughing up your sleeve at me this very minute. If you're not guilty, then you know it's your job to free Durango. That or be a hounded man all your days."

"Spring him with the guards three deep? I'm only one man, Wilson."

"I have a plan." Bat Wilson flipped back a blanket on one of the bunks and showed Harve two small saws. They would cut through steel bars, he declared. Harve would have to hide them beneath the lin-

ing of his boot, and then get himself arrested. The jail was too well guarded for an outside job, it would have to be pulled from the inside. He could slip a saw to Durango and they could walk out, silence the guards. He, Wilson, would have horses waiting for them.

"The sheriff will never suspect you of deliberately getting yourself arrested. It'll be safe," he finished.

"For you, yes," Harve said cynically.

Wilson's wrath exploded. "Then leave the whole play. You seem to be looking for some ax I have to grind when I have none. I'll wait for you with the horses, and that's as far into the noose as I'm going to stick my neck. Maybe, Crevling, you don't want Durango out of jail—*where he can talk.*"

Harve looked at him for a long moment. "Give me the saws," he said.

CHAPTER IX

BETRAYAL

HARVE CREVLING knew they were closing in on him. He could almost feel the hot breath of the man slipping down the alley at his back. He knew he had been seen approaching the jail; he had intended to be seen. Sheriff Emmet was shrewd, and too easy an arrest would rouse his suspicions. But this attempt to free the prisoner was what he expected. That was why he had established a heavy guard.

Harve was in the blackness between the jail and the saddle shop, and ahead of him a man was waiting with drawn gun. Getting yourself jailed when every deputy in the country was on the lookout for you was a cinch—if somebody didn't start shooting.

"Stick 'em up!" The voice trilled a bit too high.

Harve knew the man behind the words was on hair-trigger tension. He felt he was tackling a dangerous killer. Carefully Harve lifted his hands.

"I got him, sheriff!"

Emmet and three men came bounding from their positions. Roy Powers was one of the trio, his right hand held a gun easily. He had a bandaged shoulder. The men led their prisoner inside and clustered about him.

"Thought you'd at least check out fighting," jeered Powers.

Harve watched which drawer his gun was put into and took note of a rifle hanging on the wall. Durango was standing with his dark face pressed to the bars as they led Harve to a cell.

"Your pal didn't make his little game work," Sheriff Emmet told Durango.

The men lingered in the office, talking. They had expected that Harve Crevling would try to get to Durango and now they could relax. One man suggested a drink, and everybody but the deputy guard trailed away. The guard left the jail-house door open and went across the street to talk to the owner of the saddle shop. Harve pulled a saw from his boot and slid it to Durango. There was no time to waste. Bat Wilson would have the horses waiting for them in a few hours.

Durango sucked in his breath softly when he realized what he held. His whisper of gratitude was tremulous with excitement after he heard about the horses. They both set to work with the saws. Everything was going as Bat Wilson had said it would. He had predicted that with the arrest of Crevling, the vigilance of the law would relax. The guard

stayed over at the saddle shop for an hour, standing where he could watch the door of the jail. The town was rippling to the news of the arrest. There had been but three men in the stage holdup. One was dead, two were now in cells; there remained but a hasty trial and execution.

Harve felt cold with apprehension, though the night was hot. The sheriff was jubilant; the whole town was celebrating. Men were spreading the news that young Crevling had been caught without a single shot.

At last the guard returned and came to the head of the dark hallway leading between the cells. "I got myself a nice pair of crooks," he gibed. "A choice team of killers. Hangin' you, Crevling, will be a long breath of relief to the Santa Fe stage drivers." He walked down between the cells, gloating as he rattled his gun in its holster. But he was careful not to touch the bars.

The town grew quiet, lights blinked out. The guard would jerk himself to his feet when he felt sleep overtaking him. He walked into the air to try to ward off weariness. Guard duty had been strenuous while they had waited for Crevling to make his play on the jail. At last he stopped trying to fight his drowsiness. He dropped down on a cot and was soon asleep.

"Now," whispered Durango. "He's snorin' like a hog!"

BOTH men had finished their work with the saws and there was slight noise now as they worked themselves from their cells. The guard sat up as they stepped into the outer office, but a gun cracked down on his skull before he ever came to full awareness of what was going on.

Harve swept his gun and belt from the drawer while Durango jerked the rifle from the wall. They couldn't trust going through the doorway with the light on. To darken the jail might rouse suspicion, but the chance had to be taken. Harve blew out the lamp and they leaped for the door.

A call went up from across the street. "Jail just now went dark!"

Durango and Harve broke into a run. Bat was to wait in a clump of trees behind the saddle shop.

"Wilson is sure lookin' out fer his own taller," Durango complained as sounds awoke behind them. "Wonder why he didn't wait down in Mexico with them horses."

"*Jailbreak!*" rose in a swell over the town. "*Crevling is loose!*"

Harve stumbled over a board in the alley between the jail and the saddle shop. Durango spurted ahead and was several feet in advance of Harve as he leaped from the shelter of the building toward the brush clump that sheltered their horses. As he cut the starlit space, a rifle spoke three times from a darkened doorway across the street, and with each report Durango's body did a violent contortion. He dropped lifeless almost at Harve's feet.

The rifleman turned his gun on the horses in the tree clump, and threshing and plunging told that again he had scored a hit. One animal broke away in a run, the other continued to pound about in the low brush. Harve waited a terrible second for Bat Wilson to take a hand, but Bat's gun was ominously silent. Then as Harve kept on up the alley he recalled that Wilson had said that having the horses there was as far as he would go. Perhaps by now Bat was mingling with the crowd, establishing an alibi.

Durango was dead! With him

had gone Harve's last hope of proving his innocence in the stage robberies. Powers had won hands down! There flashed to Harve's mind something young Powers had said earlier in the evening. He had remarked to the sheriff that he and his dad were staying in town for the night. Harve knew the small box house at the end of Main Street where Shaniko Powers maintained a hang-out for his men when they were in town for the night. He headed for the building, keeping to the shadows.

A light sprang to the front window as he approached the back step. The door was standing wide open for it was a hot night, and that lamp at the front was held by old Shaniko. The oldster's thick gray hair was on end, and he was in his bare feet. As Harve stepped into the low-roofed kitchen the front door popped open and Roy Powers strode into the room.

"*Jailbreak!*" he yelled at his dad. "Durango is dead and that snake Crevling is loose. Sheriff Emmet is gettin' organized, though; he'll get him!"

HARVE CREVLING stepped into the doorway of the lighted room. Roy spun around, his hand dropping, but he never finished the draw. Not that Harve made a hostile move, it was just his tall frame hanging against the dark background. Shaniko set the lamp down quickly.

"Don't make any gunplay," Harve warned. His voice was level. He launched into words calmly, forgetting it was Harve Crevling standing there, a man who was against death and gunplay. His tones shot at Roy Powers, low and accusingly.

"You are the masked man that held up the Santa Fe stage with my

brother, Powers. You've played a smooth hand, but you've pulled the wrong card at last. You got the sheriff stationed in the right spot at this second stick-up, then you stopped the stage again."

He held the two to silence with his eyes, two steady, yellow streaks. His gun was at his waist. "I followed the man that got away in the second stage stick-up, followed him to Murder Crick. You've done a good job of hiding your tracks."

Roy Powers was still pale from the shot he had received at the camp, and now as he faced Harve Crevling he was like a slim, frightened kid. He was remembering the gun rep of this man in the doorway. Old Shaniko came to life with a roar.

"You lyn' coyote!" The old man wore no holster, but his pointing finger was like a dagger. "I know where Roy was the first night the Santa Fe stage was held up. He was ridin' stirrup to stirrup with me and the sheriff. We was over in Cottonwood Crick way. That's why the sheriff was slow gettin' onto the sign. And this last night Roy wasn't out from under my eye for a second. Him and me and a buyer was talkin' on a land deal, sellin' a section south of Murder Crick. We dickered all afternoon and evenin'!"

The words hammered dully against Harve's brain. Shaniko Powers wasn't lying. Roy Powers was speaking now.

"Crevling, you got yourself arrested to free Durango. You must have known he was goin' to talk plenty before he swung. The sheriff saw to it that word got to Bat Wilson that Durango was breaking; he thought Wilson would get the word to you. Emmet wanted you to try and break that jail. But you out-smarted him, you done it different.

You'd 'a' got clean away tonight if Bat Wilson hadn't been across the street from the jail and seen the light go out. He let out a yell, and when Durango hit a light space he cracked him down. Too bad he didn't get you!"

Harve let the words die into echoes, but in his brain they were repeating themselves. Durango was breaking! Wilson knew it. Now Wilson had put Durango where he'd never talk. He had intended putting Harve Crevling away, but the cards had fallen wrong. It was all so clear now. By persuading him to break into the jail, Wilson had sealed the guilt upon him. It was all so clear Harve wondered why he had ever been fooled. It had been Bat Wilson all the time. He had built up most of the case against young Powers. He had tried to kill Roy at Bull Mountain; he had taken an ambush shot at Harve. He wanted them both out of his way.

Harve took a step backward. Roy Powers tightened and his face grayed.

"Crevling, you're never going to leave this room alive. You're supposed to be sure death, but I'm going to get you!"

Shaniko Powers plowed toward his son.

"Get back, dad!"

The old man froze, knowing how delicate is the balance of a gunman the second before he flames to action. His breath caught in his throat, his fingers remained half-curved at his sides.

"Draw!" challenged Roy Powers.

Harve did not move. Roy Powers was demanding he get ready to kill. Powers thought Harve Crevling was a killer—and he wasn't. A moment before Harve could have answered the challenge; now he was chilled and numb. Roy wasn't the man

who had betrayed Craig and sneaked from under a murder charge by placing it on an innocent man. He couldn't kill him. His entire body was still; his right arm was dead.

Why didn't Roy let his hand drop? Why didn't he start his gun to roaring instead of letting seconds tick away. Harve looked over Roy's head at a crack in the wall. Having that crack to focus on kept the chill of his body from spreading to a tremor.

"Draw!" whispered Roy, his voice thinner.

Harve's face was wooden; his hands remained at his sides.

Shaniko's voice crept cautiously between the two men. "Crevling, leave this room, let my son live. Roy is fast but he ain't in your class. He ain't hard like you. You've killed enough men, Crevling. Get out of town before the posse trails you here."

Young Powers began to tremble. His body went lax. "He ain't human!" he cried. "He's cold as a damn frog! He didn't even watch me. He knew he could get me when the instant come!"

Harve looked at Roy Powers. The kid was quaking, though he was no coward. But he had never killed a man and he had drawn on all he had to face a death battle; his nerves had broken under the strain of waiting.

"Get out!" Shaniko Powers belted again. "Roy's just a kid, nineteen; he's no match for a killer like you!"

CHAPTER X

THE BUZZARD LIGHTS

HARVE moved toward the livery stable where the posse was forming. The sheriff had searched every inch of street and had failed to uncover his man.

There was no trace of the prisoner having connected with a horse, still to the law it was evident that he had.

Men were throwing leather in great haste. They were jamming rifles to scabbards and talking about short cuts to Outlaw Mountain. Three lanterns were hanging on nails about the barn, but the light they afforded was not far-reaching. Harve moved up on the gathering cautiously, coming from the back way.

In a circle of yellow light he saw Sheriff Dad Emmet, two deputies, and Bat Wilson. Wilson was wearing a gun, which was not usual with him. It rested on his hip easily though, and the shimmer of its silver inlay matched the steel of his eyes.

"Come back to the office a second, sheriff," he said tightly. "I'm not a man to squeal on a gent that's down; I've been down myself. The law never lets me forget I served a sentence. I wouldn't squeal on Crevling, if I didn't consider him too cold a killer to be let live. We got to get him! Come back to the office a second. I'll give you a lead or two."

Even under the stress of haste, Sheriff Emmet realized Bat Wilson's help would be worth pausing for. He ordered the men to get mounted, and he and his deputies followed Wilson to the little room partitioned off at the front. Harve was moving up along the dark row of stalls. Men were not looking for him here and he slid along unchallenged. He stepped to the crack in the doorway and looked into the room.

A smelly lamp sat on a shelf, a big box for odds and ends of harness was along one wall. Cobwebs hung from the rafters and the smell of musty grain was all over the place.

"Sheriff," Wilson said solemnly,

"I'll ride with you to Outlaw Mountain and I'll sift word among the boys of the dim trails that we want Crevling. Those boys up there trust me even if you fellows down here don't. They know I'm against killing an' they'll help me bring you your man."

Harve stepped inside the room, closing the door softly behind him. He felt no sweat stinging his spine or trickling down his legs. For once he wasn't chilly or numb. He was stepping to a gun fight with every nerve singing with life.

"You won't have to trail me to Outlaw Mountain, Wilson," he spoke out in a confident voice. "The showdown is coming here and now. Step to the center of the room. Out!"

The sheriff and his deputies were caught off guard. They hadn't thought of this cold-blooded outlaw bringing the fight to them, tossing it in their laps.

"Out to the center of the room, Wilson," Harve repeated. "Out or die like a rat."

Bat Wilson slid two steps into the clear; it was that or death. He knew it.

"Don't make any gun moves, you fellows," Harve said to the sheriff and his men. "I'm after Bat Wilson." He stood with his back to the wall, the light falling evenly for him and Wilson. He did not hold a gun; he had stepped into the room with it resting in its holster.

"Wilson," he said, "you've lied from the start. You helped Craig rob that stage and shot your way out alive. Craig wasn't a killer, so he didn't get away. Then you sold the country the idea that I was a great gun artist and that I was in with Craig on that job. I've talked with Shaniko and Roy Powers and I knew you were the guilty man

even before I heard you make that talk to the sheriff about hunting me down. You, who planned it so I would set Durango free! You waited to kill him so he couldn't brand you as the third man at this last stage holdup!"

BAT WILSON had gone gray, but he kept his composure. "You're a better gunman than I," he said. "You'll probably kill me and add one more to your list. But the sheriff knows this is all a lie. Sheriff Emmet isn't easily fooled." His eyes tried to drive fear into Harve. He didn't let his glance waver, but now he made it clear his words were for the law.

"A dying man doesn't lie. I'm about to die, and I say every word Crevling has uttered is a lie!"

"Don't move, sheriff!" Harve cracked the order. With his old craftiness Wilson was trying to make these men fight for him. "I'll get you, Wilson," he threatened coolly. "You'll be the first man I ever killed. Stand still, sheriff! I'll need everything I have to get this man. He's deadly. He's used to killing; that's his way of covering his trail. Are you ready, Wilson?"

Harve felt warm with power, yet he was locked in an icy steadiness. A cool draft touched his face and seemed to remind him to keep to the business before him. He was all Crevling as he stood there waiting for Bat Wilson to indicate the instant for action. That coolness on his cheek—old Craig had said, "If you feel a draft you'll know I'm stringing along." That was Craig, stringing his bets with his kid brother as he always had done in the past.

Suddenly Bat Wilson swerved and went for his weapon.

It was over in the flash of a sec-

ond. Only one shot was fired. The sheriff and his men knew that Bat Wilson had been the first to start to draw, but his gun had failed to clear leather. It puzzled them how Crevling's gun had gotten to his hand. It must have grown there. Must have been there all the time and they hadn't seen it. Wilson crumpled to the floor, blood springing to his lips.

Sheriff Emmet sucked in his breath. His stony eyes paid tribute to the skill of the slender man before him, but his words were gratifying. "Three of us are moving in on you, Crevling. You can't get us all."

Harve shoved his back tighter against the wall. The smoke from his gun was floating up around his face. "Sheriff," he said, "I wasn't lying. I didn't hold up the stage. I helped Durango out of jail, believing he'd talk and clear my name. Promise me an honest trial and I'll hand over my gun."

Sheriff Emmet was braced; he was coming against that drawn gun. He paused a moment to weigh the words that had been uttered. "You'll get a fair trial—and a fair hangin'!"

Then the deep voice of Shaniko Powers filled the room. He looked at Wilson's body and then at Harve Crevling standing behind the smoking gun. He had evidently been at the door as the shot was fired. "Drop that gun, Crevling, or I'll drop you!"

"Not before I get your sheriff!"

The words were final. Shaniko Powers knew that and was careful to make no hostile move. He listened as Harve spoke.

"Powers, will you add your word to the sheriff's that I'll get a fair trial if I hand over my gun?"

"Trial—what's there to have a trial over!"

"I want every inch of Wilson's back trail covered. You might just as well tie a rope around my neck now as to take me before a judge without investigating Bat Wilson's activities. He's the guilty man!"

Sheriff Emmet answered the words. "Crevling, I'll see your trial is fair. I can't see a scrap of evidence in your favor, but I'll check this crazy story you've told. I'll check it honest. After that you'll hang!"

Harve Crevling carefully laid his gun beside the lamp on the shelf. He made no objections to handcuffs, remembering that Craig had once worn them. "There must be a way of proving an innocent man innocent," he said.

"And there's always a way of provin' a guilty man guilty," Shaniko Powers growled.

Roy Powers came close to Harve. "You *could* have had the cards stacked against you," he remarked. "Bat Wilson was the smartest man in New Mexico. I never trusted him and he hated me. But I have a hunch this was a quarrel between a pair of crooked gunmen. Both of you was in the holdups. You both had to have Durango out of jail before he talked. You took the hard end of the job, and then Bat tried to cross you up by killing you both."

Harve made no more attempts to prove his innocence. Everything would depend on what came out at his trial.

EEPH came to visit Harve in jail. The lad was even lankier than when he had come off the long ride from Wyoming. His light hair was more unruly, his shirt sleeves seemed to have shrunk away from his bony hands,

his eyes were hollow and worried. He fingered a smooth stone as he talked.

"I could bean that deputy out there easy as pie. Then I could get his key, and—"

"No, Eeph, the Crevling family has staged its last jailbreak. I'm going through with the trial. It's better than spending the rest of my life like a coyote."

"But they're goin' to necktie you!" Eeph wailed.

"Talking of hanging already, are they?"

"Yeah, this town and the sheriff ain't puttin' no stock in a trial. They all got their minds settled."

Harve looked from a corner of his cell that allowed him a narrow view of the street. It was a hot day with not even enough breeze to lift a grain of dust. "I guess I've grown up, Eeph," he said slowly. "I think I can take death with locked teeth—like Craig. I'd rather hang than coyote all my days. But it isn't possible for Bat Wilson not to have slipped up some place! They'll find some proof, the gold maybe—"

"The stage gold? Not a smidgeon. They're sayin' that you're goin' to die with the buryin' place of it locked inside you. They're shovelin' up the hills where you've rode for it." Eeph dug the back of his fist into an eye. "Gosh ding 'em for a bunch of woolgatherers!"

Harve reached through and touched the bumpy knee. "Eeph, if the trial goes wrong, you take the money that's left from selling the ranch and ride away. Don't ever mention the name of Crevling, and don't ever run foul of the law."

Eeph's lips set stubbornly. "The gosh-dinged law ain't never done me no good!"

The guard had stepped to the door of the hall to say that the visit-

ing time was up. He glanced at the stiff-bodied boy.

"Tough, ain't you, kid?" he asked.

Eeph swung on him. "Gosh dinged right I'm tough. Hell ain't goin' to be no treat to me!"

"Get outta here. I was against lettin' you come in the first place. Rattle your hocks."

Harve's hands were clenched on the bars. "Go on, Eeph," he said. "I'll see you at the trial. We're going to sit together."

"Yeah, like we did at Craig's trial and hear a sway-backed, bullet-headed judge say to hang you!" Eeph jerked away from the hand the guard laid on his shoulder, said a choked good-by, and ran from the jail.

THEY were to have come for Harve at ten o'clock the following morning for the trial, but the guard told him it had been put off. Harve received the news with his face pressed to the bars, asking no questions.

"A stranger rode into town that had business with the sheriff," the deputy said talkatively. "Don't know nothin' of the nature of it, but Emmet said it might be several days 'fore he could get to your trial."

Harve turned away, hope dying. He had thought the delay might mean they had cut some sign against Bat Wilson. The guard laughed.

"You hadn't ought to kick. Gives you a few days longer to live."

Eeph tried to visit Harve that afternoon, but he was hustled away before he could get his foot inside the outer office. The prisoner was not being allowed company. Two days dragged slowly by. The evening of the second, Harve looked from his cell to see four men entering the jail. Shaniko Powers and the sheriff were in the lead, and be-

hind them came Roy Powers and a tall, thin man with a lantern jaw. With a start he recognized Buzzard Meeks.

Sheriff Emmet walked to the cell and unlocked the door.

"Come out and meet a gent you've seen before, Crevling," he said.

Harve Crevling walked from his cell and faced Buzzard Meeks. The man's sunken eyes showed he was deadly weary and weak, as if he had ridden a long trail when his body was too frail for the task.

"You're a hard man to trail, Crevling," Meeks declared. "That wound you gave me laid me up for three weeks. I was slow cuttin' your sign again."

"You're too late," Harve said. "I guess the sheriff has told you Craig is dead." Then his breath caught in his throat. Here was a man with the keen senses of a bloodhound and the brain of a mathematician; here was a man who could uncover the guilt of Bat Wilson.

"Meeks," he said, stepping close to the man hunter, "I don't suppose you're feeling friendly toward me after that bullet wound I gave you. But what I'm going to ask you can be considered as work—work in which you are skilled. There's a reward for the man that held the Santa Fe stage up twice. The law thinks I'm that man, but I'm not. Back-track on Bat Wilson and earn that money, Meeks!"

There was no mirth in the thin smile of Buzzard Meeks, but his lips did part from his yellowed teeth. "My business has always been with Bat Wilson. Craig Crevling was just a side issue. I followed you, knowing you'd lead me to Wilson. You did, but Wilson is dead."

Harve looked into the sunken eyes and his heart began to hammer.

"Then you have proof that Bat Wilson was a killer."

"Absolute! He was the coldest man at coverin' his trail in three States. He let the grave keep his secrets, that's why he was hard to trail. He helped Craig Crevling hold up that Mary Murtha Saloon, I'm sure of that, for the deputy was killed by a man guarding the front door. The only thing I can't figure about that job is who helped spring Craig from jail. The sheriff and deputy were creased neat as a pin, and if Bat Wilson had been swingin' the job they'd both been dead as hammers." He looked meaningly at Harve. "I can't figure out who that gunman was."

Shaniko Powers brushed the thin form of Buzzard Meeks toward a chair. "Set down 'fore you fall down, man!" Then the rancher turned to Harve. "One thing is a fact. You couldn't have worked with your brother on that stage job since Buzzard Meeks was trailin' you all over Utah at that date, knew where you bedded down every night!"

Harve felt the glow of hope warming his blood. "And if you'll give Meeks time, he'll find I didn't work on this second job!"

Sheriff Emmet took a hand in the conversation. "Meeks has proved that, Crevling. When you come out o' that jail just now, you walked out a free man. New Mexico ain't got no count against you. Buzzard Meeks has found the gold from the last robbery."

MEEKS sketched briefly his method for locating the gold. Again and again he had backtracked to that spot from which the bandit had taken to horse after the holdup. He followed the most direct route to Murder Creek,

sizing up hiding places, figuring how dark it was at the time, and how quickly the cache could be made without leaving sign. Murder Creek was the only logical place. A man could dismount in water if hard pressed, thrust the gold under overhanging branches, and leave no vestige of evidence. He had found the gold in just such a spot.

"And I know *you* didn't put it there," Sheriff Emmet chimed in, "'cause I know the tracks of my roan that you was forkin'. That horse kept to a fast route to the Powers ranch an' didn't take to no water."

Eeph had been at the edge of things, and now he was hopping about, nicking bark from trees with stones, his wide mouth stretched in a deliriously happy grin. He paused to listen to the sheriff talking about the reward money on the head of Bat Wilson, and how Harve Crevling was the man who had earned it. Harve insisted Buzzard Meeks had a better claim, and the thin man said he might consider taking half of it due to the trouble Harve had made him. Hospital bills and all.

Shaniko Powers shook hands heartily with Harve. "When I meet a man like you, Crevling," he said, "it pays up for all the others that have come to Murder Crick just as a blind, like Wilson. I hope you stay, my boy."

Roy, too, shoved out his hand and seconded his father's wish.

"You said you and Roy were dickering with a buyer over a section of your land, Powers," Harve said. "Why not sell that land to me and I'll try and help a few fellows along that are down on their luck?"

Sheriff Emmet cut in with a sharp protest. "Start another ranch for

ex-cons? Then I turn in my badge!"

"Somebody has to help them, sheriff. Where would I have been if Shaniko hadn't given me a job? I'll not make you any trouble. I never was one for trouble, sheriff."

Sheriff Emmet shook his head in mock foreboding. "Then I hope no troublesome gents ever ride my way. You've played about the fastest tune this neck of the woods ever marched to. Still, I reckon, if you had a bunch of cutthroats workin' on your spread, you'd come close to handlin' them. By jabbers, I might make you a special deputy."

As Eeph and Harve walked away from the jail the purple in the evening shadows was softening the harsh lines of the buildings. Eeph sniffed.

"Good ol' night smells, ain't they?" He glanced up at a single star in the sky. "Maybe some'er's Craig is sayin', 'Gosh ding that Eeph, why didn't he come in from rabbit huntin' in time to get the chores done 'fore dark?'"

Harve laughed with him. "Craig will be glad we're on the right side of the fence with the law," he said. "And, Eeph, Craig didn't kill that deputy the night the Mary Murtha was held up. Wilson was watching that front door. Craig whispered to me at the trial that he had thought the front door was safe. Wilson did that murder, but he was going to let Craig swing for it."

"Yeah, and then he had us a-ridin' the hoofs offn our horses keepin' Meeks off his trail, 'cause we thought he was after Craig." The lad screwed up his face. "Harve, I wonder if I oughta tell that Buzzard man I'm sorry I beaned him with a rock. Gosh ding, I hope I'm not gettin' a conscience that will ruienate me."

The Story of the West



UNDAUNTED by unexplored wildernesses, by savage tribes and their attacks, General William Ashley's great fur venture swept on. Ashley, who was himself possessed of great courage, foresight and ingenuity, led his army of trappers on many history-making expeditions. Much of the unfolding of the West's uncharted areas was due to the explorations of the dauntless mountain men in his employ.

Unlike the other fur companies which sent their traders among the Indians, Ashley struck a new note in the business by establishing the policy of inducing the

redskins to come to a big rendezvous and do their trading.

In the year of 1825 Ashley sent out messengers to the various tribes, and the Salt Lake Rendezvous that winter at the present site of Ogden City was one of the greatest gatherings of its kind known to mountaineers. Hundreds of trappers from all parts of the West came to avail themselves of the opportunity for profit, agreeable company and climate. Many of the older men brought their squaw wives and families of children. The total number of trappers was some seven hundred.

told in pictures and text by **GERARD DELANO**



In midwinter a tribe of the Snakes (Shoshones), numbering over two thousand, invited themselves to the gathering. They brought their families, livestock and other property and set up their tepees. The Snakes were good fighters and fur gatherers, but poor providers and inveterate beggars. They were usually friendly to whites, but were counted as being treacherous. They were not particularly welcome at the camp, but were utilized as hunters of buffalo and other meat animals.

The Snakes were assiduous "medicine" makers. They set up a huge medicine

lodge in which both whites and reds whiled away much time by having their futures read by the medicine men or high priest who was named "O-mo-quá" and who really seemed to have remarkable ability as a prophet and clairvoyant.

The Great Rendezvous was a gala occasion. There was plenty of drinking, and contests of all kinds were held. Probably the most popular pastime was that of horse racing. Both trappers and Indians competed for the honors and plenty of beaver skins changed hands according to the outcome.

NEXT WEEK: NIGHT CAMPS ALONG THE TRAIL

Treacherous Trails

TO the experienced Westerner, whether stockman, freighter or stage driver, the uncertainty of the rivers is something to be taken into consideration at all times. He has learned that an hour or two of extra travel one day may save him a week's delay or a dangerous ford. In parts of the country where bridges are seldom seen or do not exist at all, the traveler must depend upon his best judgment in fording streams.

A perfectly dry sand arroyo may become an impassable torrent within a few minutes. Often the names they bear tell of the disastrous experience of some unwary traveler. "Flood Creek," "Hardscrabble," "Hellroaring," "Troublesome," "Sand-roll Wash," "Johnson's Woe"—to name a few streams that are well known for their treachery.

At times a trail herd may be crossing what appears to be a dry water course. The sun is shining in a cloudless sky; the spring floods, caused by melting snow in the high mountains, may have long since passed; yet within a few seconds a wall of water may come charging down, sweeping all before it.

The explanation, of course, is that hours before there has been a violent rainstorm along the back range. Sometimes severe storms and even cloudbursts occur on the head of one stream, while a parallel watercourse only a mile or two distant gets only a trifling sprinkle. Knowing this, those who have seen these sudden changes take no chances. There is an axiom that says, "It's easier to carry a bucket of water than to swim out of a flood." Remembering this, the wise camper will pass up the tempting spot of green meadowland near the bed of a stream and spread his blanket on the high ground, even though the weather is dry and there is apparently no danger at all.

A case in point occurred on the Concho not long ago. Two cattlemen led their pack mules across an innocent-looking stream and camped on the high ground. A troop of cavalry appeared shortly after, and the soldiers laughed at the caution of the Westerners. The young lieutenant in command ordered the mess tent put up under a tree convenient to the water supply.

During the night the cattlemen were awakened by the shouts of men and the sharp orders of officers. A flood was sweeping the tents away, and the overconfident soldiers were glad to put in the rest of the night around the campfire of the cowboys.

Hardly a summer passes but that cases of drownings are reported along Western streams. Few, if any, of these would occur if people would exercise common sense in making their camps.—*George Cory Franklin.*

BLUE POSSEMAN



By SETH RANGER

BLUE POSSEMAN

BY SETH RANGER

WHENEVER a new bunch of CCC boys arrive from the East coast I go down and look them over—for two reasons. First, as a forest ranger on the Olympic Peninsula, I know I'll have some of them working under me. Secondly, and this is a strictly personal reason, I like to pick out the live wires, the lads who know where they are going and who think of the CCC as a step, and a mighty helpful one, along the way.

Most of the boys have high ambitions, though some haven't made up their minds just where they are going. Quite a few have ambitions so high they won't talk of them. They're afraid they'll be laughed at.

Now when you laugh at a youngster's ambitions you do one of two things, damage him plenty, at a time when he needs counsel and help, or make him fighting mad. In either case you should be taken out and shot.

As soon as I saw Jim Brady in the line of Palefaces—my private name for the incoming boys—I knew he had gone to someone, explained his hopes and ambitions, and been laughed at. He was fighting mad. His skinny fingers were half-clenched, and his lean jaw set. His hard, gray eyes were sullen and defiant. He would have carried a chip on his shoulder, except that it was so bony it would have fallen off. He had slums and crowded tenements written all over him.

Jim Brady stood about five feet eight inches and weighed around a

hundred and twenty-five pounds. Fifty pounds of hard flesh would round him out nicely. As the sergeant asked him questions he answered sharply, with a ring of defiance in his voice. He treated the army officer in command the same way. I put him down as a city kid who had had trouble with the police and hated all law, authority and discipline. That kind can give plenty of trouble, but we usually get them straightened out.

Early the following morning the boys were lined up. The sergeant and I stood side by side facing them.

"This is Dave Logg, the ranger who runs the Indian River forest, the sergeant said. "He's got some light packing to do this morning and he'll break you in. You'll each pack a hundred pounds to the top of that mountain."

Eyes lifted to the mountain, then turned back to the sergeant's face. Jim Brady was the only one who had anything to say. "A hundred pounds at a time?" he asked.

"Sure," the sergeant roared. "You don't want to have to make two round trips do you?"

I picked Brady and thirteen others and marched them up to the ranger cabin. "You pack thirty pounds," I told them, "and you don't pack 'em to the mountaintop. The sergeant has to have his joke, you know."

Well, thirty pounds seem like a hundred when you're soft. As soon as the weakest in the lot showed signs of folding up, I said something about feeling tired myself, and or-

dered a rest. Hell, I never could see any percentage in hammering away at a kid's spirit. Let 'em think it's the ranger and not themselves who's folding up. Later, when they are hardened up, they won't hold it against you.

I faked a job that would take Jim Brady along with me. I kind of wanted to get acquainted with that young fellow. While the others were pushing on to the ridge over a good trail, we followed a game trail to the site of a bridge I had planned.

WE sat down on the bank of Ladder Creek and watched the water tumble down in a series of falls. Jim Brady kept looking around. Everything was new to him, and old to me. Yet he noticed little things I didn't see.

"What do you plan to make of yourself, Brady?" I asked.

"What's it to you?" he said curtly. Unconsciously he pressed his back against a rock, as if he, fighting alone, were holding off a mass attack.

"Plenty, Brady," I answered. "And I should get mad at you and tell you a few things, but I won't. I figure when a man is in your state of mind, there's a reason for it."

"I'm tired of being laughed at," Brady said bitterly. "Everybody gives me the laugh."

"I've never laughed at a man in my life," I told him. "I'd rather laugh with him."

"You're going to be out of luck," he said shortly, "because I've quit laughing."

"Then we won't laugh," I agreed. "If you feel like telling me what you care to make of yourself, I'll try to give you work that will do you some good. Some boys want to be rangers; others loggers; truck drivers, telephone linemen; some want flood-

control work. We try to help them along."

"There's nothing in the CCC that'll help me out," Brady declared. "Nothing except hard work and plenty to eat. I wish we had been packing hundred-pound loads to that mountaintop." He looked at me challengingly, but I could see he wanted to unburden his mind, take one more chance at trusting someone to take him seriously. "I want to be a dick," he said suddenly, "a city detective in case you don't know what a dick is."

I could see why people laughed. Jim Brady was the poorest physical candidate for the police force I had ever laid eyes on. All the dicks I had known had learned their profession the hard way. They had started as uniformed policemen, walking a beat. They had to be physically powerful to handle tough characters. They had to be big men, too, though it's been my experience the little men are usually the ones who give the orders.

I could see Jim Brady watching intently for my reaction to his statement. "Well, go ahead and laugh," he challenged.

"There's nothing funny about that," I said. "Why shouldn't you be a dick?"

His face softened a little. "I've wanted to be a dick since I was ten years old," he explained. "I started reading detective books and magazines. Then I sold papers and took a how-to-become-a-detective course. I learned to observe and to take advantage of little things that were important."

I was to remember that, later on. "I almost got in on a fight once," Jim continued. "I was sixteen then, and the dicks were making a raid on a gang in a café where I washed dishes. A dick was shot, and I

picked up his gun and started after the man who'd killed him. I had a hunch I could find where he was hiding. Johnny Fremont, another detective, took the gun away from me and said, 'Beat it, son. When you grow up if you still want to be a detective, come around and see me.'

"And he laughed at you when you grew up?" I asked.

"No," Jim answered. "Johnny Fremont wouldn't have laughed." His face sobered. "But he was dead, killed in a raid a year ago. A bandit by the name of Pedro Montez got him."

I'd read about Pedro Montez. He was a cool one, and slippery as an eel. He kept clear of the girls and his family, so the police couldn't trace him that way. He laid low, striking suddenly when he needed money, then going into hiding again.

"That was a tough break," I said.

"I wasn't thinking about my loss," Jim declared. "I was thinking what a swell guy the detective force lost. As soon as I was twenty-one I went down to headquarters and asked for an application blank. It struck 'em funny. I told them I'd wipe the laugh off their faces some of these days, and then it would be my turn to laugh. They roared louder than ever."

"What did you do then?"

"I wondered where a kid who was busted could put meat on his bones and strength in his body," Jim continued. "Then I saw a news reel with a lot of CCC boys building trails, and I knew that was the answer. I enrolled." His face grew hard with purpose. "Either I'll go back there and give 'em the last laugh," he said solemnly, "or I'll leave my bones here."

"I don't think it will turn out that way," I said. "You aren't the kind who wants cheap revenge. You'll

be too busy planning ahead to think about the kicks you got in the past. Well, let's get going. It isn't good to cool off too much after a pack. You're liable to stiffen up."

We crossed the creek and I made some notes on the bridge site and started up the game trail to a ridge. We stopped halfway up. It was quiet, the faint lapping of the creek blending with the lazy breeze that rustled the fir crowns.

"What's that noise?" Jim asked suddenly.

"Bluejay," I answered.

"Look at that one sitting on a tree limb and yelling his head off." Jim pointed and at that moment the bird fluttered away. "There he goes! What's he squawking about?"

"He's a sort of forest policeman," I explained.

"Blue coat and all," Jim said. For the first time I saw him break into a really hearty laugh. "A harness bull."

"If there's anything wrong in the forest," I said, "he'll know about it. If a cougar or bobcat is stalking prey, the jay warns the victim about it. And you should watch a deer take alarm and hightail it out of the country when he gets a warning. It's the same with smaller animals. There's no escaping jays. They flit from limb to limb, and since they can fly faster than anything can run, they don't let up until the intruder is out of the country."

"They make great dicks," Jim commented.

JIM BRADY talked to me a lot about his hopes and ambitions in the days to come. He would drop up to my cabin in the evening, always with a string of questions to be answered. Often he would leave a detective magazine, or a western

with a good crime story in it, for me to read.

"If the sheriffs on the Olympic Peninsula ever organize a posse," he said once when he'd been in camp about three months, "tip me off. I want to get in on it."

"There wouldn't be a chance," I told him. "They never take Three C boys for possemen. We'll use you to find lost people, put out fires, and rescue folks caught in slides, but I'm afraid man-trapping is out."

For six months Jim Brady worked hard and ate like a horse, but he didn't seem to put on much weight. He got heavier, of course, but he looked as skinny as ever because the increased weight went into hard flesh and muscle.

The gang he came out with returned home when their enrollment was over, but Jim enrolled again. I was staying through the winter and included Jim in a small detail. It's just as well to check trails and bridges when the rains and the slides come. A stitch in time often saves nine in the forest, also.

Jim began to put on weight at once since we did no work in real bad weather unless an emergency developed. He got several newspapers from Seattle and kept track of all the important crimes.⁷ He filled a little book with notes on the traits of the various criminals who were in the headlines. I don't know why he thought it was necessary to make notes, for he never seemed to forget any sin of commission or omission the headline crooks made.

Again and again he said, "So and so didn't do that job. He doesn't do things that way. It looks more like the such and such mob to me." And usually he would be right when the police, G-men, or sheriffs solved the crime.

We were listening to a ten o'clock

newscast one night when suddenly the announcer said, "Shortly after closing time this afternoon, the State Bank of Hardridge was held up. The cashier, who tried to give the alarm, was instantly killed. Local police believe an Eastern gangster engineered the crime, which was handled with clocklike precision. The bandits are heading for a remote hide-out in the northern California mountains. They are heavily armed and a battle is expected. Sheriffs' posses are closing in all mountain roads. Chief Davis, of the Hardridge police, believes the leader is Ray Watson, a notorious bank robber."

"Ray Watson didn't do that. He never holds a bank up after business hours," Jim Brady said quickly. "That's Pedro Montez's work sure as hell. You know, most banks have an open side door for late customers. Pedro Montez uses that side door. Another thing, he isn't headed east. He's headed north, into Oregon."

"You seem to know all about Montez," I said, a bit disparagingly. "I should know him," Jim Brady countered. "He killed Johnny Fremont."

"Montez must have been seen heading east into the mountains," I argued, "or the police wouldn't be so sure."

"An old Montez trick," explained Jim. "He makes it a point to be seen. He stops in a gas station and asks directions. The attendant notices that he seems nervous and remembers the directions he asked for. Farther along the road, Montez nearly runs into a pedestrian who'll remember him. Then he doubles back and loafs along until he's well out of the region. From then on, he really moves. He's a driving fool."

I picked up the telephone and got the sheriff's office. "It may not be

worth much, sheriff," I said, "but here's a good-line on the Hardridge bank robbery."

"Let's have it," the sheriff answered, "though Hardridge is a long way from the Olympic Peninsula."

"It isn't the work of Ray Watson, but a man named Pedro Montez," I said. Then I went on and gave Jim Brady's reasoning.

The sheriff was impressed. "Brady may've worked out a solid case, at that. I'll wire the Oregon officials and suggest they watch out for a man answering Montez's description, too. With the whole West coast looking for him, and the roads bottled up, he won't get far."

"According to Jim Brady, they usually cork the bottle after Montez has passed through the neck," I warned.

FOR thirty-six hours the bank robber, whoever he was, was reported all the way from the Mexican to the Canadian Border, and as far east as the Rocky Mountains. Innocent citizens, held for questioning and fingerprint checks, roared with wrath. Telephone and telegraph lines hummed, but the quarry had vanished.

"They're checking on stolen cars, of course," Jim said. "Montez is a great car changer. Here's what he does: He carries books listing the license numbers of whatever State he's in. As soon as he takes a car, he gets a line on the owner in directories. Then he's all primed with seemingly truthful answers to questions if he's stopped. The chances are he used an Oregon or Washington car in California, and stole a California car when he left the State."

I got the theory—confusion. Confusion in license numbers; confusion in doubling back; confusion in being

seen, then vanishing. "They won't get him now," Jim predicted. "He's in his hideout."

But that was once that Jim was dead wrong.

The bank robber didn't change the stolen cars often enough, and an alert Washington State patrolman stopped him for questioning. The next thing the officer knew, a blast of heavy vapor drenched his face and he was passing out. A fellow patrolman, in a combined ambulance and radio car, revived him.

"That fellow I stopped," he gasped, "wasn't Ray Watson. It was Pedro Montez. The instant I realized it, he gave me a blast from some kind of a gun."

A report of the incident was broadcast and the chase was on. Montez parked his California car and shifted to an Oregon car which happened to be visiting in Olympia. The bandit was moving fast, too fast. In trying to follow back roads he got mixed up and took the wrong road out of Olympia. Instead of following the easterly side of Puget Sound as he had planned, with the intention of hiding out in Tacoma or Seattle, he got onto the Olympic Highway which runs northerly and follows the Straits of Juan de Fuca, then swings in a southerly direction along the Pacific Ocean. This loop road would bring him back to Olympia again if he stayed with it, or he could stay on a coast highway and eventually reach California.

Perhaps this was his plan. But someone had seen the quick shift to the Oregon car and had telephoned the license number to the police.

We got all this over the radio. Jim Brady was wild with excitement. "They're headed this way, Dave," he yelled. "Let's get into this. I owe Montez plenty. He killed Johnny Fremont."

I had to put him off some way, so I told him we'd wait until we heard from the sheriff. We tuned in on a radio program and I relaxed. Jim Brady paced up and down the floor, muttering, "I've got to get into this some way. *I've got to.*"

Shortly before midnight, the announcer interrupted the program with these words. "A man believed to be Pedro Montez, a notorious gangster, is dead tonight. Hotly pursued by State highway patrolmen, his car left the road and plunged into thirty feet of water at the base of a cliff. He is believed to have had at least one companion with him. The bodies have not been recovered."

"Come on, Dave, let's go!" Jim said excitedly. "I'll believe Pedro's dead when I see the remains. I got a hunch he was alone in the car. When he's crowded, he sheds his pals. He thinks a lone man has a better chance of escaping than a mob."

WE got into a light truck and drove hell-bent for the highway. There were several patrol motorcycles parked near the scene, an ambulance, and a wrecker. Somebody said they'd sent for a diver. We could see the headlights of the wrecked car burning underwater and mud sharks swimming in front of them. It was an eerie scene.

"His lights picked up the curve too late," the man who had brought the wrecker said. "You can see where he jammed on the brakes twice and burned rubber on the pavement."

Jim and I looked at the rubber marks. They were long and deep. "Nothing queer about them," I said, "he was sure trying to slow down a car on a curve."

"And that's what gave him an idea," Jim murmured thoughtfully.

"What do you mean?"

"He knew he was on a single road, running through a wilderness, with few cross or parallel roads for doubling back. He knew he was sure to be trapped, so he put the car over the curve and took to the timber, knowing it would be concluded that he had drowned and his body carried away by the tide."

"You've been reading detective stories, young man," the wrecker operator scoffed. Somebody laughed and Jim flushed. I couldn't see it, because it was too dark, but I knew his face was red. The wrecker operator was encouraged by the laugh. "Look at them rubber marks. He wasn't foolin' when he put on the brake. He was up against it."

Jim was getting used to laughs by now. He could take it. He walked over to a patrolman. "Here's what happened," he said. "Montez was looking for an out. He almost went over this cliff. He stopped the car just in time, then went on. Pavement is dry and tracks don't show unless the brake's jammed on. So he reasoned he could turn around approach the curve at fair speed, jump off and let the car go over. Then he'd hide out in the timber and wait until the excitement died down. After that, he would fade from the scene."

The patrolman wasn't much impressed, but he took another look at the rubber marks. "That could've happened," he admitted. "Other cars have passed since then. They all swing wide, and their tracks would cover any faint marks left by Montez's tires on the second run at the curve. Still—"

"A posse strung through the back country would capture him," Jim argued. "He thinks he's put it

over, and is taking things easy now. Later, he'll travel fast."

The officers bunched and talked things over, but nothing was done. They didn't know Montez as well as Jim Brady did, and Jim's theory sounded crazy. It would've sounded crazy to me if I didn't know the kid's thoroughness in detective work.

A truck with the diver and his gear arrived from Seattle at dawn and set to work.

"Where's that Three C detective?" the wrecker operator asked me. "I want to see the expression on his face when they send up Montez's body."

I looked around for Jim. He had vanished. I went down to the beach thinking that maybe he had gone down there and was searching the rocks on the chance Montez had really been in the car, had been thrown clear, and made his way to land. I studied the beach for a half mile in each direction. There wasn't a sign of him. The fool kid had gone into the timber, hunting Montez.

I decided to wait for a report from the diver before doing anything. It took him quite a while to set up his gear. The air pump was left on the highway, and he was lowered over the cliff. The first thing he reported was the swiftness of the tide. "I have all I can do to stand against it," he said. "That body's miles from here. The door's open on the driver's side, and one shoe's caught on the inside door handle. Caught, I'd say, when Montez fought his way out." Jim would declare the shoe a *plant*, I knew.

They sent down cables, which he attached. Then he was hauled up. After a while the wrecker lifted the car to the highway. It was a mess. There was a submachine gun in it, some ammunition, and a bag. "Look," the wrecker operator said,

"she's still in high gear. If he'd driven the car over and jumped, it would prob'ly have been in second gear."

"But look at the hand throttle," a patrolman countered. "Three quarters open. A man doesn't drive curves with a hand throttle unless he's crippled. And Montez was no cripple. Jim Brady was right. He jumped. He stood on the running board, opened the throttle, steered until he had her lined up right, then jumped. He's up there in the woods."

"And Jim Brady's up there with him," I added. "And don't think because there was a machine gun in the car that Montez isn't armed. He always carried a spare in case one jammed. Jim said so."

Just then there was a yell from the sheriff. "Say," he demanded, "did one of you boys take my .30-30 rifle?"

None of them had taken it. I knew Jim Brady was armed now. The knowledge didn't make me much happier—a .30-30 against a machine gun!

I WAITED until the possemen arrived and a plan of action had been worked out, then I slipped into the woods. My idea was to trail Jim if I could, and give him a hand. Or at least stop him from doing something crazy.

But I didn't trail him. He had waded creeks and left no trail. He didn't propose that I should haul him back to safety. I knew this region and I didn't ease up until I'd topped a lofty ridge commanding a lot of country.

Up here there was a fair breeze that carried the heady odor of snow-fields and countless firs. The sweep of timber began directly below the ridge and ran boldly to the deep, blue

salt water. It was so dense that the roads and even small communities were hidden.

Not much chance of finding a man in such country, you'll think. Well, a man takes the easiest way, and I eliminated a lot of territory at once—the low areas, where the swamps are deep, certain stretches of country where the brush was dense. A desperate man might plunge into the brush, but after vines had wrapped themselves around his legs for a hundred yards, and after he had squirmed through thickets of small trees growing closely together, he would feel his strength draining rapidly and turn to the easier going.

I couldn't see any of the posse, but I knew the men were moving slowly through the lower country—tense men, and alert, expecting to hear the blast of a machine gun at any moment.

They acted like beaters, driving the game ahead of them. The deer came first. Strong bucks racing up steep mountain slopes at incredible speed, then the slower, daintier does and fawns.

Forest rangers are calm men by nature, but as the time passed and there was no sign of either Jim Brady or Pedro Montez, I got nervous. That kid down there, without help, stalking one of the most desperate criminals in the nation, got under my hide.

Noon came and passed, and still there wasn't a sign of life. The posse was advancing slowly, forming a net of human meshes, but not exposing a man unnecessarily. I noticed brush stirring as someone got into a tangle or tried to flush Montez into the open, but I saw no man.

About three o'clock I went into action. I'd spotted either Montez or Jim—just a glimpse and nothing

more. I kept under cover and raced along the ridge, hoping to get in close.

Suddenly the day-long silence was broken by the clatter of a machine gun. I saw lanes of flying twigs and leaves as the bullets ripped through forest. Then silence.

I reasoned Montez wouldn't fire unless Jim Brady had tried to get the drop on him. He wouldn't want to expose his position to a posse he knew was closing in. Well, the fat was in the fire now. They might get him, but he would take plenty of them with him.

There was a chance that he didn't know I was above him. I made the most of it, closing in rapidly toward the spot where the machine gun had cracked. I worked cautiously to a mass of scab rock, then looked down. Two hundred feet below me, Jim Brady was stretched out on a rock.

I looked for a sign of life, and there was none. Then I saw Montez's machine gun and caught a flash of the man's head, immediately below the rock on which Jim Brady was sprawled.

As I sighted along my rifle, hoping to smash the machine gun with a shot, Jim suddenly slipped from the rock. He struck Montez with stunning force, knocking the machine gun from his hands. They went to the ground, but were up again instantly, slugging ferociously.

Three different times, Montez leaped back and tried to drag a gun from a shoulder holster and each time Jim swarmed all over him. He knew if Montez got that gun he was done for. I watched the fight over the sights of my rifle, ready to get in a shot if it could be done without harming Jim.

Suddenly I groaned. Montez, warding off Jim's blows with his left hand had drawn the weapon. Then

Jim swung. He put everything he had behind the blow. I could hear the crunch of hard fist against bone, and saw Montez drop heavily. Jim Brady went to the ground with him and got Montez's gun.

"Nice going, Jim!" I yelled down. He looked up, startled, then grinned. "Where the hell did you come from, Dave?"

"A belated guardian angel," I answered. Then I climbed down. I built a smoke signal to draw in the posse, while Jim held a gun on Montez who showed signs of rousing.

WITH the posse to take turns breaking trail through the brush, it took just an hour to reach the road with Montez. There was a large, dark man, waiting at the temporary base the State highway patrol had established.

"Hello, Montez," he said. "I flew out to California when I heard somebody had stuck up a bank. Looked like your work. Caught a night plane north when I heard you were in these parts."

"If there's a reward," I said, "it goes to Jim Brady, here. He captured Montez single-handed."

"Do you mean to say he went into that forest and captured Montez unaided?" the detective exclaimed.

"That's what he did."

"Well, shake," he said, showing his hand at Jim.

"Hell, Stuart," and Jim Brady grinned. "I'm Johnny Fremont's friend."

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Stuart. He got kind of red. "You're the kid we handed the laugh about a year ago. Wanted to be a detective. Well, I guess the joke's on me. Go ahead and take a thousand-dollar laugh. That's the reward."

"I've made up my mind not to laugh at other folks," Jim returned, "not even when it's the last laugh and I have it coming. When my enrollment is finished I'm coming back."

"Why not come right now?"

"No," Jim said, shaking his head. "My tussle with Montez taught me one thing: I need a little more weight for the rough-and-tumble stuff. I think I'll put it on out here."

"Good idea," Stuart told him. He still gazed curiously at Jim. "And you went out there and got him without help—"

"I did have some help," Jim admitted. "Help I'd counted on from the start—a blue posseman." Then he pointed to a chattering bluejay who'd given us merry hell all the way to the highway.

THE END



BIG FOOT



By S. OMAR BARKER

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THE cave was no more than a small, dark space under the lip of a bluff overlooking Deer Creek. It had been formed, not by wind or water, but by some ancient fault of the rock, so that crooked cracks and crevices reached at all angles back into the sandstone behind it.

The den-hunting she-coyote had chosen it because it was snug and dry, but mostly because it was dark and well hidden. A stunted nine-bark bush, its roots cramped into weather seams of the sandstone, half concealed the opening and the leafy tops of quaking-aspens growing on the steep slope below screened it still farther. Altogether it should have been a perfect hide-out in which to raise a batch of pups.

Thanks to Big Foot's bump of curiosity, it proved to be quite otherwise. When the she-coyote left her four fuzzy pups cuddled together at the back of the cave, the parting touch of her nose warned them to stay there. It was not her habit to leave them except at night, for daylight is the time of danger for such creatures of the wild as men like to kill. But her last night's hunt had been a failure, and with such a family to nurse, the she-coyote was famished.

She intended to visit a little *vega* just a few minutes' trot up the canyon, where she might dig out a gopher, or at least snap up a few grasshoppers to take the edge off her hunger. She wouldn't be gone long.

Big Foot knew he was supposed to lie where she had left him until her return, for in children of the wilderness the instinct for obedience is strong. But so is curiosity. In the streak of sunlight at the mouth of the den Big Foot happened to spy movement.

His greenish-yellow eyes widened with interest. The movement was nothing more than the shadow of aspen leaves that continually quake and quiver, so naturally it continued.

The pup, of course, didn't know about that, but he decided to find out. Wabbling to the entrance with an instinctive crouch of caution, he poked an inquisitive, oversized paw at the quaking shadows. Failing to pin them down, he presently began to pounce on them with both front feet. This brought him out onto a narrow shelf of rock sloping steeply to the brink of a twenty-foot sheer drop.

From below came strange, thuddy sounds that made him forget the moving leaf shadows. He felt a certain urge to flee back to the shelter of the cave where his litter-mates still lay docilely huddled, but curiosity and a certain inborn spirit of bravado, urged him first to investigate. His paws skidded a little, but presently, by literally leaning back on his tail, he was able to peer down over the brink, his fuzzy ears cocked.

If he had remained quiet, Matt Hitson, riding a brushy cow trail though the willows along the creek,

would never have spied him. But whether it was uneasiness from looking down so far, or the strange, strong man scent that drifted up to his little black nostrils, something prompted the coyote pup to whine, before he turned to scramble back into the shelter of the den, and the cowboy heard him.

RETURNING from the gopher meadow, the mother coyote stopped in sudden dismay at the man scent on the wind and the scuffing sounds of boots along the rock shelf near her den. Swiftly she sneaked around the top of the cliff above, then yapped sharply several times, trying to toll him away.

It was too late. Already Matt Hitson was crawling back along the precarious approach to the den, congratulating himself that now there was one family of coyotes, at least, that would never grow up to steal newborn calves or slaughter deer.

Hitson heard the she-coyote's yapping, and for a half an hour he lay hid in the willows, watching for her return to the den, his rifle ready. Frantic though she was, however, the she-coyote, with all the wisdom and weariness of her kind, located the enemy and kept out of sight.

At intervals Hitson could hear her querulous yapping, first here, then yonder, but never could he catch a glimpse of her. Finally he gave it up and rode on up the canyon for a roving tally of his cattle.

It was dusk when the she-coyote finally crept cautiously into her den. She nuzzled the pups which Hitson had killed, and whined.

To her astonishment there came an answering whimper from somewhere back in the black crevices behind the cave. Instantly the tone of her whining changed to urgent anxiety. At the man's approach,

Big Foot, more alert than his litter-mates, had scrambled swiftly as far back into a long, crooked crevice as he could go, there to lie quiet until the danger had passed. Now, he had got himself wedged in the narrow turn of a crack and was stuck there.

When he began to yap and howl the she-coyote became frantic. She dodged swiftly in and out of the cave. She paced around and around its narrow space. Fear, anxiety, persuasion, scolding all mingled in her whining. She clawed and dug at the rock until her paws bled, but it was no use.

Finally the pup's hysterical squalling wore down to a whimper, and then, by the simple expedient of backing up a few inches, he freed himself. After half a dozen trials and errors he wormed his way out by bracing his big paws against the sides of the crack up where it was wider.

His first thought now was for his supper, but the she-coyote had other ideas. She snatched him up and with a firm but gentle grip on the loose skin of neck and shoulders, carried him out of this den of disaster, heading for a dense fir thicket far up the north fork of Deer Creek.

There in the dry rot under an old windfall she dug out a new nest for the pup and let him suckle. Not until the next night, when hunger drove her forth, did she leave him.

FROM birth the coyote pup's big feet had foretold unusual size for him, and getting all his mother's milk gave his growth an even bigger boost. Plainly, if he survived the enmity of man, he was destined to be a whopper even among mountain coyotes, which are larger, bolder hunters than their brethren of the plains.

By the time Big Foot was three months old he was following his mother on nightly hunting tours, digging mice out of old rotten logs, even catching a cottontail now and then with her help.

At six he was the taller of the two, the blackish ruff of coarse, doggy fur across his shoulders and the darkness of his points making him look even bigger than he was.

In late October he put puppyhood definitely behind him by pulling down a mule deer yearling. Not alone, for at this business mountain coyotes usually work in pairs.

Many times before he had chased deer without catching them, and once he had arrived just a few minutes late to find his mother and a snaggle-toothed veteran that might have been his sire, snarling over the carcass of a small doe they had just pulled down.

Like most of his kind, Big Foot would eat anything from grouse to grasshoppers, from chipmunks to chokecherries, but now the taste of venison, hot with recent life, stirred every instinct of the true wolf in him.

His own first kill was not easily made, and it came near to having fatal consequences. Heretofore when he had chased deer he had lost them from over-eagerness. Their first spurt of frightened speed always carried them out of sight.

Trailing them by the track, Big Foot would run ahead of his mother, and thus, in his puppy ignorance, follow whatever fresh deer scent he came upon. In a country well supplied with deer this meant that he was forever chasing first one animal, then another, tiring out none of them.

But this time, when the yearling deer went bounding over a ridge and the two gray hunters started after

it, the old she-coyote snarled a warning at Big Foot when he tried to pass her. Despite his size the pup was respectful of his mother's fangs.

It took only a few such threats to make him understand that no matter how fast he *could* run, he must follow her lead. Thus, though they did not sight the deer again for an hour, and though they crossed other tracks just as fresh, when they finally did jump the yearling once more it was the same deer they had started after.

On this second spurt the yearling outran them again, but not so easily. They followed persistently, until its strength spent, the young deer took to the water of Deer Creek. There they caught up with it.

The mule deer put up a valiant fight, slashing at them with sharp front hoofs, dodging away through the alders and whirling suddenly to slash again. But in giving the coyotes fangs and a taste for meat, Nature had stacked the cards against their prey. By the ancient law of fang and claw, Big Foot became a killer, not merely of rats and rabbits, but of game far bigger than himself.

THE incident had nearly fatal consequences the next night when the two coyotes returned to feed on what was left of their kill. At the first whiff of man scent the she-coyote circled the carcass suspiciously, at a safe distance, her action warning Big Foot, as plain as words, not to go near it.

For a few minutes Big Foot obeyed. His nose agreed with hers that there had been a man about, and therefore danger. Yet there lay the inviting carcass, apparently just as they had left it.

Big Foot whined hungrily and started to it. To ward him off, the

she-coyote cut across in front of him. Something in the urgency of her action made him turn and follow her reluctantly away. Some sixty yards distant, he turned for one last sniff at the feast he was unwillingly forswearing, and a low growl rose in his throat.

A bobcat had emerged from the spruce across the creek, coming directly to the carcass. Even in the wild, the eternal feud between the dog and cat tribes persists. Big Foot whirled and came loping back, his hackles raised.

For an instant the cat's tufted ears flattened above a snarl of defiance, then abruptly it turned and ran in long bounding leaps for the timber.

Big Foot did not follow. Like the glutton he was, his sharp fangs ripped out stringy chunks of deer meat, which he bolted down with a minimum of chewing.

When the pain first hit his stomach he stopped eating and sidled away suspiciously. The next instant he was rolling on the ground in agony, and the next, vomiting violently.

If Matt Hitson himself had put poison in the deer carcass, it would have meant the end of Big Foot, for Matt would have used the proper dose. But he had neglected to instruct the kid who was riding for him in the use of strychnine.

Doubtless the kid had figured that if a little was good, more was better. In one gluttonous mouthful Big Foot had swallowed enough poison to kill an elephant. It was the overdose that caused instant vomiting, so that most of the strychnine was disgorged before it had time to take effect.

It was by such a narrow margin of chance that Big Foot survived his first—and last—dose of strychnine. For days he lay up in a thicket, too weak to hunt, too sick to eat, almost

too sick to crawl to the creek for the water his fevered insides craved. Now, too, he was alone. At the sight of his frantic spasms, the she-coyote had fled in a panic of fright, and she did not return.

When Big Foot was finally able to travel again, the rich scent of spoiled venison came drifting to him on the up-canyon breeze, but hungry as he was, it did not tempt him. A raven, wiping its beak on the limb of a tree, overlooking what little remained of the mule deer's carcass, saw Big Foot give it a wide berth as he skulked past, on his way down-canyon in search of a *vega* where he might snuff out a meadow mouse to sustain him until the weakness left him so that he could hunt big game again.

The brain in Big Foot's longish skull was small, but there was in it a certain shrewdness. His overdose of strychnine had taught him a lesson. Hereafter he would touch no meat, however inviting, so long as there was man scent or man sign anywhere around it.

As the months passed and he grew, not only in size but also in hunting skill and cunning, Big Foot increased his list of forbidden food to include any and all meat not of his own killing. Nor would he return to a carcass for a second meal, even though no human had come near it, for now he was a mighty hunter, able to run down a deer almost whenever he chose.

IT was this constantly increasing slaughter of deer by Big Foot and others of his kind that aroused their only enemy of consequence to declare a ruthless war on mountain coyotes.

Riding the great timbered backlands of his Deer Creek range, Matt Hitson noticed the unusual number

of coyote kills in its narrow canyons, and reported the matter to the State game warden.

"There's one big feller in particular," Hitson said. "I keep seein' the tracks. I ain't got time to monkey with traps my ownself. I used to put out poison for 'em, but since I got them two collie cow dogs, I don't want no strychnine put out on my range for fear they'll git ahold of it."

"Don't worry," the warden reassured him. "We're against the use of poison like the devil is against water, anyway. We'll send a trapper."

"Better send a good un," advised the stockman. "These mountain coyotes ain't sneakin' scavengers that'll go around pickin' up any ol' bait they come acrost. They're red meat hunters—an' they're smart."

There was no doubt that Steel-trap Jones was a good trapper. Sixteen years of outwitting wolves on big cow and sheep ranches of foothill and plain had taught him some pretty shrewd tricks. But his experience with the deer-killing coyotes of the mountains had been limited, and his first two weeks in the Deer Creek country got him riled.

"Balls o' fire!" he complained to Matt Hitson. "Since the middle of August I got out forty-odd of the sweetest sets a feller ever brushed with a branch an' I ain't ketched but six coyotes, five o' them jest pups. Month or two like that an' my trappin' reputation won't be worth a cud o' chawed terbaccer!"

"Ketch that big foot I seen the track of last winter," said Hitson, "an' it'll boost your reputation plenty, Steel-trap."

"I ain't seen no sign of a track," grunted Jones. "Must of been a dog. I'm goin' to write to Elyit, an' see if he'll transfer me somewheres where a feller kin ketch somethin' besides skunks and porkypines."

"Never mind your reputation," wrote the warden in reply to his complaint. "I doubt if the coyotes have ever heard of it, anyway. Keep after them."

"After 'em, huh?" was Steel-trap's dry comment. "When I git through there won't even be none left for seed!"

The reason the trapper had not come across Big Foot's track was simply one of those unaccountable twists of coyote nature which now and then prompt them to enjoy a change of scene. On such a summer ramble Big Foot had fallen in with a snaggle-toothed old she-coyote following a herd of sheep into the high country.

Himself past three years old now, Big Foot probably didn't actually recognized her for his mother, but there was enough of familiarity remaining so that they readily struck up a companionship.

Too dull-toothed and stiff in the joints now to hunt deer, Big Foot's mother followed the sheep for easier prey, and the young coyote went along for no reason at all, or perhaps because of the novelty of slaughtering these slow, stupid creatures so much easier to come at than deer.

Besides the sport of slaughtering several times more meat than they could eat, Big Foot enjoyed bedeviling the Mexican herders' dogs, turning on them whenever they chased him too far out of sight and gun range of their master, taunting them at night with wild, unearthly *yip-yapping* from some fir-shadowed hill-top.

DURING those weeks he learned the meaning of a rifle. A dozen times the herder shot at him, but always on the run, and sheepherders are notoriously poor shots. The worst injury

Big Foot suffered was a shallow bullet rip along his ribs, no more than skin-deep, but it taught him to clear out fast whenever he saw a man raise a rifle.

Following the sheep down that fall, Big Foot ventured farther out of the mountains than he had ever been before. When the canyons widened into valleys and roads and houses appeared, he began to get nervous and dodgy. Automobile headlights threw him into a panic. Plainly this was not proper country for a coyote.

Remembering the dark, timbered canyons and ridges of Deer Creek, he was seized with an urgent homesickness. One evening at early dusk he started home. With some reluctance the old she-coyote followed him.

It was in Big Foot's mind to head directly for Deer Creek, but the novelty of a new food delayed him. From a sheltered cove rose a strange, enticing fragrance, along with the now familiar smells of human habitation.

Drawn by the irresistible curiosity of his kind, Big Foot loitered to investigate. That night the two coyotes romped in a homesteader's orchard like a couple of pups, gorging themselves on windfall apples.

Despite the slight bellyache they gave him, Big Foot delayed his return to Deer Creek to visit the orchard again. This time there were no apples on the ground. Expecting a storm, the homesteader had gathered them, burying a few hundred pounds of winter varieties in the ground.

Even though two feet of fresh dirt covered the fruit, Big Foot's keen, black nose readily located it. By now familiarity had made him a little contemptuous of human scent, and the temptation was great. Next

morning the homesteader found his pit dug open, and apples strewn for yards around.

At early dark the next evening, Big Foot spent a pleasant hour skulking the rimrock above the cove, taunting the farmer's dogs into frantic fits of barking. At moonrise he was in the orchard again, circling the refilled pit cautiously.

Something about its too perfect smoothness made him suspicious, but his appetite for apples was insistent. He reached out a paw to give the heaped-up dirt a tentative scratch before setting in to dig.

At the vicious snap of steel he sprang back. For a brief instant the trap's jaws pinched the ball of his foot, then slipped off.

The rest of that night Big Foot traveled fast, leaving the she-coyote far behind. At sunup he topped the main divide at the head of Deer Creek and, from the rim of an old burn, looked out and down upon the great spread of wilderness whose timbered slopes and twisting, meadow-dotted canyons meant home to him. The feeling it gave him seemed to call for expression. Pointing his long, sharp nose to the sky, he let 'er rip.

Out on the daily round of his trap line, Steel-trap Jones paused to wonder just what that sort of a coyote howl might mean.

"Tain't no huntin' nor matin' call, nor no dog teaser, nor no rally to a kill," he mused. "Jest some ol' he admirin' the sunrise, I reckon."

Stirred by thrilling memories, Big Foot began at once to cruise for deer sign. Within an hour he had a two-year-old doe on the run. For Big Foot it was a happy homecoming.

For Steel-trap Jones it was a challenge. That afternoon he came upon what was left of Big Foot's kill in a little swale on Deer Creek. He made

out the tracks of two coyotes, his pale eyes widening at the size of one of them. Evidently Big Foot was back.

The trapper made his sets with infinite care, not at the carcass, but back twenty, thirty, even forty yards away. One, on a deer trail, he left entirely unbaited. Under another he buried a cube of rancid dry salt pork.

On bushes near the other two he trickled a few drops of a liquid scent bait concocted from coyote gland juices and certain chemicals. All of them he covered so naturally that no human eye, certainly, could have detected their presence. By midnight a light skiff of snow had made the sets perfect.

BUT Big Foot did not return. He was too busy dodging the horns and hoofs of a six-point buck over on Aspen Creek. Even with the help of his mother and a yellowish young she-coyote who had heard him yapping on the chase and joined him, it was a prolonged and bloody battle. It was Big Foot, finally, whose fangs slashed the life blood from the buck's neck.

Every few days for weeks thereafter, Steel-trap Jones found a fresh kill somewhere, with Big Foot's tracks around it. Persistently and ever more carefully he made his sets, but while some of them picked up coyotes, Big Foot still cruised the woods scot-free, a mighty hunter, killing when and where he willed.

One night, trotting an old cow trail on one of those apparently aimless, circling cruises that coyotes like to make, Big Foot paused at a "scratching station." The yellow she-coyote circled wide and stopped, careful always not to get too close to the arrogant, dark-furred leader.

But the old she-coyote crowded

carelessly past him. Within a yard of Big Foot's nose she stepped square into a buried steel trap.

With a startled snarl Big Foot leaped sidewise out of the trail. For a brief moment he circled his dam as she lunged against the trap chain. Then growing fear seemed to burst inside of him and he fled in panic. It was the last he ever saw of the old she-coyote that had suckled him.

Thereafter, though it is the instinct of his kind to follow trails, Big Foot warily avoided them.

When, late in December, Steel-trap Jones, pulled up his traps to go to a less snowy assignment for the balance of the winter, Big Foot was still at large. For him that winter was filled with fresh venison and the joy of free, adventurous living.

Once, toward spring, he started across an open park at the wrong moment, and Matt Hitson got in a hurried shot at him that literally threw dust in his eyes as he fairly turned himself inside out to leap back into the timber.

Toward April the yellow coyote left him, seeking a den. Throughout the spring and summer Big Foot ranged wide, even dropping down for a taste of apples again that fall, and enjoying the sport of jumping on haycocks in a moonlit meadow to scare out the mice.

In October, Steel-trap Jones came to Deer Creek again. He made a fair catch of trap-ignorant pups, but the roving track and deer kills of Big Foot still taunted him almost daily.

"I'll git that Big Foot booger if I got to stay here all winter," he vowed to Matt Hitson.

But the game department had a huge area to patrol and could not afford to keep a trapper in one place all the time just for half a dozen

remaining coyotes. With December's first snow Jones got orders to move.

It was the night before Jones picked up his traps that Big Foot let his interest in the faint, alluring scent on a scrubby jimbush betray him. The trap had been there since October. All man scent had vanished, and what little might have remained on the buried trap was muffled under four inches of fresh snow.

Stepping softly, as was his habit, Big Foot suddenly felt the footing give under his paw. Swiftly he drew it back, but too late. The trap closed securely on two front toes.

For hours he fought the trap frantically, biting at it so viciously that he broke a tooth. Then, as the night cleared into a crisp, sharp coldness, the pain seemed to leave his steel-pinched toes, though the leg above still ached.

Now he no longer lunged against the chain. Toward daylight, he lay crouched close on the ground and chewed at the feelingless, frozen toes below the clamp of steel. When there was nothing left of the pads to chew on, Big Foot saw sunrise reddening the east and heard the soft thud of approaching hoofs somewhere off in the timber. On the breeze came the now familiar scent of the trapper.

With frantic, resurgent fear, Big Foot lunged back against the chain. To his surprise his foot slipped free. When Steel-trap Jones arrived a few minutes later, the big coyote was gone.

IT was harder, running down deer with a limp. Big Foot felt a sense of bafflement when sometimes, after hours of running, he had to give up the chase and prowl for rabbits or mice. But often, even

yet, he made his kill of venison, sometimes alone, sometimes with the help of the yellow female and her one surviving pup.

That next September Steel-trap Jones practiced all his trapper's cunning in vain, so far as Big Foot was concerned. Yet so well did it work on the rest of the scant remaining population, that by November Big Foot could range almost the whole Deer Creek country without crossing the scent of more than one or two coyotes besides the yellow mate who still cruised with him.

"Except for ol' Big Foot an' his mate," Steel-trap Jones reported to his chief, "I've got the deer killers plumb cleaned out."

How it finally did happen, neither Big Foot nor Steel-trap Jones ever quite knew. By one of those strange coincidences that so often mean life or death to the creatures of the wild, the trapper was riding the rim of a deep canyon one November day when he spied movement on a cliff ledge over across the canyon.

Dozing in a shallow cave, Big Foot had happened to choose this moment to stroll out into the sun to stretch himself and sniff the breeze for possible danger. The danger was there, but the wind was wrong and he did not smell it.

It was a long shot. Steel-trap Jones rested his gun against a tree and took careful aim. As echoes whipped the cliff he saw the big, dark-furred coyote suddenly crumple on the narrow ledge. Quickly the trapper focused field glasses on him.

"Big Foot all right," he grunted with satisfaction. "Deader'n a dunked doodle bug. Maybe I better pop him ag'in jest to make sure."

But as the trapper raised his gun the coyote's body jerked with a sudden spasm of muscles and rolled over the ledge out of sight.

For hours Steel-trap Jones tried to figure out some way to get over there to it. Then, with dusk coming on, he gave it up and rode on in to camp.

It was three days later that Big Foot, dizzy and weak from hunger and the shallow but stunning rip of a bullet across the top of his head, managed somehow to drag himself by a crooked, precarious route down to water at the bottom of Box Creek.

The drink seemed to strengthen him a little, but not enough, even, to catch a rat that he managed to chouse out of a stick nest.

Too dazed and hungry now to remember his wariness of trails, Big Foot limped slowly down the trail that led to Deer Creek. He had traveled a quarter when suddenly he stopped and stood sniffing anxiously.

Somewhere not a yard away, his nose told him, was a chunk of buried meat. By every law of his cunning wisdom, that meant a trap. For a moment the old way held him, for he could see plainly where the earth had been disturbed. But though fear is strong, there are times when hunger is stronger.

Caution forgotten, Big Foot advanced and began to dig for the bait

that Steel-trap Jones had cunningly buried under one of his traps.

Miles across the mountain, Jones came riding into Matt Hitson's ranch, leading his pack horse.

"Yessie," he told the ranchman, "I sure figger I finished him. Never could git to him to make sure, but I rode two days without pickin' up no sign. So last night when I picked up that yaller she that's been runnin' with him, I jest figgered I'd got the job done, an' taken up my traps.

"Y'know, Matt, ol' Big Foot an' me been foxin' around so long, when it come right down to it I kind o' hated to draw bead on him. But with him done for, I'm pullin' out. Won't be no more coyote trappin' needed on Deer Creek, I figger, for three, four years."

In an old cow trail near where Box Creek joins the Deer, Big Foot dug feebly but boldly at a spot where a trap had been, but was no longer. He was quite unaware of the three to four-year reprieve Steel-trap Jones had given him. He was thinking now only of this chunk of rotting meat that would give him strength enough to live, perhaps soon to cruise and hunt again, and sometimes howl at dusk or dawn, taunting the two-legged enemies who could not cut him down.

THE END



GUN CRAZY



By **JOHN COLOHAN**

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LIGHT from swinging oil lamps laid a soft radiance across the musty interior of the Shoshone County courtroom. It was long past dark, but a murder trial was ending here tonight, and there was not a vacant seat in the narrow, high-ceilinged room. The foreman of the jury, standing in the box, glanced at a man with a withered, useless arm who sat in the spectators' gallery and then at the grave-faced judge upon the bench.

"We find the defendant—not guilty," he said.

Brett Hardison, frontier newspaperman, came to his feet abruptly. Tall, greyhound-lean, the newspaperman stood for an instant with hard and scornful eyes fixed on the twelve men in the jury box. Then, with a cynical twist to his lips, he turned away in time to escape the surging mass of spectators. Wide shoulders swinging, he made a pathway through the crowd as bedlam broke out behind him.

He was the first man on the courthouse steps, and the long, dimly-lit street stretched wide and empty before him. He followed wooden sidewalks to the edge of town, to the ancient ramshackle building which housed the newspaper plant that Brett Hardison had bought just a month before, and here he turned into a lighted office. A slim girl with honey-colored hair was writing at a desk. She put her pencil down as Hardison came into the office. He looked at her inquiringly. It was long past closing time.

"I had to know," Linda Marlin explained. "How did it come out?"

The newspaperman made a little cynical gesture. "Not guilty," he said. He tossed his hat on a desk and lowered his lanky frame into a chair. "I've seen some funny things here and there. But never anything like that verdict."

The girl regarded him steadily. "You haven't been in Shoshone very long," she said.

"What does that add up to?"

"Just this," explained Linda Marlin. "You don't know this country very well, and you don't know how people feel about Lige and Link Craven. Even men who happen to sit on a jury. They're afraid of the Cravens; they're afraid of Lige because they know he's a gun-crazy killer, and they're more afraid of Link, even though he never wears a gun. Those two have just about got this valley cowed."

Brett Hardison shook his head. "You'd have thought the jury was reporting to Link Craven instead of to Judge Wilson on the bench. Link had a front-row seat."

He reached for a pad of yellow paper, began to write in savage pencil strokes:

GROSS MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE

In one of the strangest verdicts ever brought into a Shoshone County courtroom a jury of cowards tonight found Lige Craven not guilty of the murder of George Bender, in the face of overwhelming evidence that Lige Craven was guilty beyond all doubt—

Linda Marlin put on her coat. Now she came across the office to

look down over Hardison's shoulder. She spoke at last, slowly. "Are you going to publish that?"

"That and more," answered Hardison.

"Then you're a fool," the girl said sharply. "I've tried to tell you the Cravens are dangerous men. Lige Craven is a killer. He's killed three men in three years. And Link Craven is worse because he does the thinking for both of them. You've been in town a month and you've made them your enemies already. What good will it do?"

For a moment, under the soft lamplight, Brett Hardison's face looked old and worn and bitter. "I've lived in tough towns before, Linda," he said gently. "But never in one where I was afraid to print the news the way I saw it."

SOMEWHERE in the town a revolver sounded once, followed by a whole fusillade of booming shots.

"Better go straight home," Hardison advised. "It sounds like the Cravens might be celebrating."

"I can take care of myself," Linda said stiffly. "Good night."

"Good night." Hardison turned around in his chair, watching the girl go through the door. He had bought the *Shoshone Herald* just a month ago, and Linda Marlin had been working here when he took over. He had found the girl invaluable; she seemed to have the affairs of a whole county at her fingertips.

She closed the door behind her and Hardison turned back to his task. He wrote on and on, swiftly. Engrossed in that scathing article taking shape under his hand, he didn't hear the door open at his back. Not until a sharp voice spoke behind him did he know that he had a visitor.

WS-6C

"Turn around, mister," the voice said harshly. "Be damn careful. I've got you covered."

Hardison turned slowly. A man in chaps and levis stood with his back to the closed door, a leveled six-gun in his hand. He was tall and wide of shoulder, and he was trying to carry off this affair with the assurance of an old gun hand, but Brett Hardison saw at once that the thin and haggard face beneath the sagging black sombrero was the face of one hardly out of boyhood.

And the youth was wounded! He had his left hand thrust inside his shirt. The newspaperman saw that the whole front of the shirt was wet with blood. His gaze shifted back to the boy's face. There was something instantly familiar about that thin, desperate countenance.

Hardison got it all at once. "You're young Bender," he said. "George Bender's son. You were a witness at the trial."

He had placed the wounded youth now. This was the son of that man for whose murder Lige Craven had been acquitted less than an hour ago. The youth with the gun nodded grimly.

"I'm Lance Bender," he said.

"What do you want with me?" asked Hardison.

"I shot a man tonight." Lance Bender's voice was brittle. "Killed him, I reckon. Stob Ashbaugh. He's a Craven hand, and the Cravens are after me. They've got me cut off from my horse. But I'm not going to jail."

There was a Frontier model Colt in a drawer of Brett Hardison's desk not six inches from his hand. He could have reached for it, but he knew he didn't want a gun against this wounded boy. He spoke gently. "Where do I fit into it?"

"You set right there," Lance Ben-

der told him. Keeping Hardison covered, he crossed the office to the door of a smaller room which had served the previous owner of the paper as a bedroom. He kicked the door open with his foot. "Keep right on writing, that's all you've got to do. I'll be out o' sight, but I'll have a gun on you every second. Mebbe they'll stop in here to find out if you seen me tonight. All you got to say is no."

YOU make it sound easy," said Brett Hardison. He picked up his pencil, turned to his work again. His back was to the bedroom now, and he couldn't see young Bender, but the thought of a .45 muzzle trained on him kept interfering with his train of thought, and the words he wrote didn't seem to make much sense. Lance Bender spoke again, insistently.

"Don't forget—I got a gun on you all the time."

"No," said Hardison. "I won't forget that." He sat still, pencil poised. "Listen, Lance, I'm a newspaperman. As long as we're going to be here together, you might as well tell me what happened. It'll make a story for the *Herald*."

"It's a damn quick story," Lance Bender said bitterly. "I was walking by the Stockman's Bar tonight and I see Lige Craven in there. He had a glass of whiskey in his hand and he was laughing—laughing because he'd killed my dad and got away with it. I must have went plumb crazy. Next thing I knew I was in there with a gun slammed in Craven's ribs. Lord knows how I got the drop on him; he never saw me, I guess. I was crazy mad, didn't hardly know what I was doing—"

"What happened?"

"Stob Ashbaugh was at the bar drinking with him. I see Stob go

for his gun. He shot me through the hand. The left hand. Then I downed Stob. Killed him, I guess; I never stayed to find out. My horse was at Miller's barn. I cut through alleys, doubled back to the barn. Lige Craven and a couple of others were already there. They had me cut off from town. Then I see your light—"

Brett Hardison was making idle pencil marks across yellow paper. This was bad. If that youngster holding the gun on him had killed Stob Ashbaugh it was plenty bad. Understanding the provocation, the lanky newspaperman's sympathies were all with young Lance Bender.

He could sense the desperation in the young cowboy's voice. "I'll never go to jail," Lance Bender repeated. "Lige Craven killed my dad in cold blood, and a jury turned him loose. They said it was a shoot-out. That was a lie—my dad wasn't even wearing a gun that morning. The gun they showed at the trial didn't belong to him. I'm sorry it was Ashbaugh I got. I wish it had been Lige Craven—"

Brett Hardison had not been in this part of the country long, but he was familiar with the background of the Bender case. The Craven brothers were cattlemen, range hogs spreading wide and wider. They had quarreled with George Bender over certain water rights he owned at Crystal Springs. The dispute had ended in murder.

Brett Hardison spoke softly. "I'll tell you something, Lance. Today I found out that your father was the same George Bender who owned a ranch down in New Mexico ten years ago."

"That's right," Lance Bender said. "We moved out o' that country eight years back, after my mother died. Came up here."

"You were just a kid ten years ago," Brett Hardison said. "I wonder if you'd remember a young fellow your dad lugged home in a buckboard one day. This young fellow had been robbed and shot and left for dead in a dry gulch fifty miles from nowhere. Your dad found him and brought him home, and your mother nursed him back to health."

"I remember," Lance Bender said. "His name—"

"His name," said Hardison, "was Brett Hardison. You're looking at the back of his head right now. I just found out today that your father was that same George Bender. You can put the gun away now, Lance. You'll never need a gun to deal with me."

"You mean—"

Brett Hardison picked up the pencil again. "Someone is coming down the street," he said. "Stay back there out of sight."

The newspaperman was scribbling industriously when his office door was booted open unceremoniously and two men stamped into the room. The last two men in all the world that Brett Hardison wanted to see at this particular time. The Craven brothers, Lige and Link.

LIGE CRAVEN, a rawboned man in levis and flaring bat-wing chaps, took up his position at the door, to stand on braced legs with a pair of beady eyes fixed intently on Brett Hardison behind the desk.

Link Craven, a gaunt skeleton in scarecrow clothes, kept on until he stood before the desk. Hardison had heard that Link Craven, the elder brother, did all of the talking and most of the thinking for the pair. Lige Craven did the fighting. Lige Craven was gun-crazy, Linda Marlin had said.

Link Craven's right arm, injured in an old gun fight, hung useless at his side. He put his left hand on Hardison's desk. "You were at the trial 'today, Hardison," he began harshly.

Brett Hardison looked up at him. He knew that this gangling skeleton of a man who never packed a gun was considered the more dangerous of the pair of brothers.

"I was there," he said.

"You heard the jury turn Lige free?"

"I heard that. Yes."

Link Craven's voice was softly menacing. "You've been somewhat careless in the things you been printing since you bought the paper," he said. "Things about Lige and me. I thought I'd speak to you. If you keep on it's liable to turn out bad."

The newspaperman's gray eyes glinted dangerously. "You're in the cow business, Craven."

"Yes."

"Stay with your cows," Brett Hardison advised. "I'll take care of this newspaper. I want no help from you."

Link Craven's bony left hand beat a tattoo on the desk. "Be careful what you print. This is a warning, Hardison; it won't be repeated."

He turned his back on the newspaperman and started for the door. Halfway across the office he stopped. For an instant he seemed frozen in his tracks, then he strode across the room to stand in silence, looking down at a red film brushed across a white doorknob. He wiped a thumb through the reddish film, held up his hand.

"Blood," he said.

He whirled to face Brett Hardison. "Young Lance Bender shot one of my men tonight. He got a slug through the hand, but he managed a getaway, even though we had him

blocked off from his bronc. It was somewhat puzzling, but I see now what happened."

Hardison was noncommittal. "That so?" he inquired.

"That's so," Link Craven said flatly. "That blood's a give-away. You hid him, Hardison; you've got him hid right now!" Sharp eyes buried deep in the bony face were ranging over the office. They came to a full stop on the bedroom door behind Brett Hardison.

"In there!" Link Craven croaked triumphantly. "Lance Bender's in that room right now! Go in and get him, Lige."

Several things happened then, simultaneously. Lige Craven's lips curled back in a snarl, and his hand dropped to the black gun at his hip. He took one swinging step across the office toward the bedroom. Brett Hardison moved with him. Hardison's right shoulder sagged, and his right hand came up to clear the desk. A gun was covering the two brothers. The newspaperman's soft voice flicked out across the room.

"Stay right there where you are, Lige," he said, and turned icy gray eyes on Link Craven. His voice was cool, unmoved. "Where in hell, Craven," he inquired, "did you get the idea that you could search this place?"

The black gun hanging in line had stopped Lige Craven in his tracks. Link Craven's gaunt face twisted venomously. "Damn you, Hardison!" he snarled, his voice rasping in his throat. "You had better keep clear in this! Stob Ashbaugh's dying up in town right now and Lance Bender's wanted by the law."

The lanky newspaperman's eyebrows lifted mockingly. "The law," he murmured. "I guess you forgot to show your badge, Craven."

"I'll show you a badge," Link Cra-

ven said viciously. He whirled on a heel. "Go get Sheriff Alton, Lige. Tell him young Bender's hiding in the *Herald* office. Tell him to get right up here! I'll stay till you get back."

Lige Craven lingered an instant, regarding the black gun hanging level in Hardison's hand. "Try that trick on me another time, mister," he said angrily. Then he looked at his brother. "I'll be back pronto."

THE door swung shut behind him. Link Craven braced his skinny shoulders against the wall and stared at the newspaperman malevolently. Hardison's face was a stony mask, but behind the mask his brain was whirling furiously. He was recalling an old debt, long unpaid. Lige Craven had gone for the sheriff. In minutes now he would be back with the lawman and young Lance Bender would be under arrest for the shooting of Stob Ashbaugh. For murder, it might be.

"Have you finished your business here?" he asked Link Craven curtly.

"I'm waiting for the sheriff," Craven answered.

Hardison made a little gesture with the gun. "You can wait outside. I'm busy. If you're through here, get out."

The gaunt man's eyes were snaky as he stared at the swinging gun. "*Bueno*," he said in a voice choked with wrath. "I'll wait outside, Hardison. But I'll wait."

He jerked the door wide, slammed it shut behind him. Outside, Brett Hardison saw him take up his position by the big square window where he could see clearly everything that went on within the lighted office.

Brett Hardison picked up the pencil. He found his pocketknife and put a new point on the lead, all the

time aware of Link Craven's malevolent glare fixed on him through the window. Deliberately, as he was sharpening the pencil, Hardison dug the point of the blade into the flesh of his left hand and watched blood start and flow in a tiny stream along his palm. He pulled the pad of yellow paper toward him and began to write. His head was turned away from the view of the man outside the window. And as he wrote Brett Hardison began to talk, in a voice scarcely more than a whisper.

"Listen to me, Lance," he said softly. He was scrawling meaningless words across yellow paper and speaking in a voice loud enough to carry to the ears of the wounded boy in the bedroom and yet not loud enough to reach the man beyond the closed door. "Link Craven is right outside. Lige Craven has gone for the sheriff. Do you hear me?"

Lance Bender's answer came, low-voiced: "I hear you."

"The sheriff will be showing any minute," Brett Hardison said. "I'm going to put the light out, lock the office, and start uptown. As soon as the light goes out, you head for the back door through the printing shop. The door is locked, but the key is in the lock. Get outside and lock the door behind you. Understand?"

There was a surge of hope in the boy's voice. "I understand."

"Good. Wait in the yard behind the shop. When you see lights go on you'll know the sheriff is searching the place. When the lights go out again, that means he's through. Unlock the door then and come back inside. Wait here for me."

"I'll never forget this, Hardison. I'll pay you back—"

"Kid," Brett Hardison said softly, "this thing was paid off long ago. Keep your chin up!"

HE stood up then, picked up his hat and slapped it on his head. He tilted the swinging overhead lamp and put it out; did likewise with the smaller lamp bracketed on the wall. He went out and closed the door behind him, turning a key in the lock.

Heading toward, he passed Link Craven without a word, but he had covered less than half a block when he met Lige Craven and Deputy Sheriff Tug McGlone hot-footing toward the newspaper building. The moonfaced deputy put out a hand.

"What's this I hear about Lance Bender hiding in your office, Hardison?" he demanded.

"What did you hear, McGlone?"

"Enough," the fat little deputy stated grimly, "to make me want to take a look inside."

They went back. Link Craven still stood guard before the office. Hardison unlocked the office door, led the way inside, lit the swinging lamp. The fat little lawman strode across the office, struck a match at the bedroom door and stepped inside. In a matter of seconds he came out again. "Empty," he said.

Ten minutes later, McGlone and the two Craven brothers stood in the middle of the office. The building had been searched top to bottom without result. The fat deputy scowled, looking at Link Craven.

"What was all this about blood on a door?"

But Hardison took the answer upon himself. "I jabbed a knife in my hand," he said, holding the hand up so that the deputy might see the tiny gash. "It bled considerably. Link Craven saw some blood on the doorknob and started adding up the figures. It looks like he got the wrong answer."

"Looks that way," Tug McGlone grunted.

Politely then Brett Hardison saw the three men to the door and ushered them out into the night. He stood in the doorway, watching, until they were half a block away. Then he put out the office light and followed after them.

He followed, partly, to allay any lingering suspicion that young Lance Bender might be hiding in the building. But he had another and more important reason: He had to find out, and at once, how badly Stob Ashbaugh had been wounded. For, if Ashbaugh should die, that haggard-faced young cowboy playing his game of hide-and-seek with the law would be facing a murder charge.

WITHIN ten minutes after he had quit the newspaper building, Brett Hardison had the answer to the first, most urgent question on his list. He met bearded little Doc Hendryx heading toward the Stockman's Bar, and he stopped the doctor just outside the swinging doors.

"How's Stob Ashbaugh making out, doctor?" he inquired.

Hendryx gave him a professional scowl. "Bullet smashed a couple of ribs, but quite a hole, but missed the lungs. He's lost some blood."

"He's—not going to die?"

"Die!" The little medico snorted.

"You couldn't kill that big plug-ugly with an ax!"

It was a load from the shoulders of Brett Hardison who had definitely cast his lot with Lance Bender in tonight's affair. It was still bad enough, for Stob Ashbaugh was a Craven man and the Cravens would be riding the vengeance trail. But it wasn't murder.

And Brett Hardison had started

back toward the newspaper building when it occurred to him that it might be wise to seek a little legal advice before young Lance decided his course of action. He was passing the Park Hotel, and, remembering that old Judge Clark, Shoshone's leading and only conscientious lawyer, had rooms in the hotel, he decided on a sudden impulse to acquaint the old lawyer with the facts of the case.

He turned into the dimly lit, empty lobby of the hotel. There was no one behind the desk, but Hardison had had occasion to visit the elderly lawyer once before, and so he knew the location of his rooms. He went upstairs, followed a long and shadowy corridor, knocked softly on a door. No answer. When a second, louder knocking failed to bring results he tried the knob, but the door was locked. The judge, it appeared, was out.

Hardison was following the dark corridor back toward the stairway when from behind a closed door with a pencil line of light beneath it he heard a voice that stopped him in his tracks. That voice belonged to Link Craven. It wasn't the voice that stopped Hardison so much as it was the fact that Link Craven was talking about him.

"That Hardison jasper is spreading out," Link Craven was saying. "He made fools of both of us tonight."

Brett Hardison pulled up in shadows in the hallway. He caught the fragments of words in a voice that he knew belonged to Lige Craven. "I'll take care of him. No man can wave a gun at me—"

Someone had entered the lobby below. Lingered in darkness in the corridor Hardison could hear the click of high-heeled boots coming across the lobby floor and he heard

someone starting up the stairs toward the second floor. He had only a moment then to make his choice, and he decided in an instant.

He took two steps along the corridor, found a doorknob and stepped into the darkness of the hotel room next to that one now occupied by Lige and Link Craven.

He had made his move on impulse, taking the chance that the room into which he had dodged would be empty. At once he knew that he had made a mistake. Lights from the street lamps on the corner shone into the room, and Brett Hardison saw that the bed was occupied. He could hear the soft breathing of a man asleep.

Jingling spurs told him that someone was coming down the corridor now, and the newspaperman knew that he was trapped. He had to wait. The footsteps seemed to stop just outside the door of the room in which he had found refuge, and for one breathtaking instant Hardison thought that the man outside was coming into the room. Then he heard knuckles rapping on a door and Link Craven's voice call: "Come in."

The situation was ticklish. The man in bed was sleeping soundly. Hardison lingered, his lanky frame pressed against the wall, waiting until he was sure the corridor was clear outside before he quit the room. He heard voices through the thin partition, and then suddenly he forgot his desire to leave.

LINK," the newcomer was saying excitedly, "Lance Bender is still right there in that newspaper building. I hung around like you said and I was peeking in a window when someone lit a cigarette. It was Lance Bender, sure as hell!"

"Is Hardison still there?"

"He went uptown. He wasn't back yet when I pulled out. The building's dark as the inside of a cow. I went around in back and there was blood on the doorknob there."

"I told you what happened, Lige," said Link Craven. "Young Bender ducked out the back door while McGlone was searching the building. Then he come back."

In the darkness of that room where Brett Hardison stood with his body glued against the wall the man in bed turned over and for an instant the newspaperman thought that the sleeper had awakened, that he had discovered the presence of an intruder in his room. Hardison stood motionless, lips locked tight in a little grin. If that gent in bed was awake this might prove awkward.

But nothing happened, and after endless time the sleeper began to snore, and the sound was soft music in the ears of Brett Hardison. He had lost track of the conversation in the other room; now he began to pick up words again. Link Craven was doing the talking.

"We'll go down and get the sheriff," Craven was saying. "We'll search the place again. Only, this time, Lige, you'll be waiting out in back. If young Bender tries his little trick again—"

Lige Craven's voice carried through thin walls, soft and deadly in its intent. "If he tries that trick again, Link, we'll never have no more trouble out at Crystal Springs."

There was the sound of chairs being shoved back, of boots shuffling on the floor. A door opened and closed, and there was movement in the corridor. Hardison knew that the Cravens were quitting the room.

Patiently he waited until the sound of footsteps had faded beyond the stairway.

The Cravens were going to search the newspaper building again. Only this time they were going to employ a slightly different technique. This time Lige Craven would be stationed out in back while the search progressed. Lige Craven, a gun-crazy killer, would be waiting out in back for a wounded, desperate boy.

At last Brett Hardison quit the room, closing the door softly on its still-sleeping occupant. He went down the staircase, through an empty lobby, out into the street. Outside he saw no sign of the Craven brothers; already they had dropped from sight. Manuel Gomez, handy man at the hotel, was coming down the street. Hardison stopped him, spun a silver dollar in his hand.

"A favor, Manuel," he said. "Half an hour from now I want you to go down to the sheriff's office. Tell Sheriff Alton that Lance Bender is down at my place and that he wants to surrender. You understand?"

The Mexican nodded, grinned as he took the dollar. "Si, Señor Hardison, I understand."

"Remember," said Hardison, "you are to wait thirty minutes by the watch."

"I understand. Thirty minutes."

IT would be a matter of delicate timing now, Brett Hardison thought. He kept on down the street to the newspaper building, unlocked the door and let himself into the office. In the bedroom he struck a match and saw Lance Bender lying on the bed. The match flickered out as Hardison spoke softly. "How goes it, kid?"

"Fine," said Lance.

"How's the hand?"

"Hurts like hell." The young puncher grinned wryly. "But it's all-right. I've got it bandaged."

Darkness enveloped them. "The sheriff will be here pronto," Hardison said. "I want you to surrender, Lance."

"Surrender?"

"I had a talk with Doc Hendryx. I have his word for it that Stob Ashbaugh is all right, that he'll be as good as ever in a month. You've got to face this sometime, Lance. You can't hide out forever just because you happened to shoot a man."

The youngster's voice was dubious. "Mebbe you're right."

"I'm right," Brett Hardison said. "I tried to stir up Judge Clark but I couldn't find him. We'll turn him loose on your case the first thing in the morning."

"You say the sheriff's coming?"

"Any minute," said Hardison.

In darkness the minutes crawled. Hardison rolled a cigarette, touched flame to it. He had sent word to the sheriff by Manuel Gomez, but that was for the record only. He knew that the sheriff would be here before Manuel saw him. He sat watching the glowing end of the cigarette in the darkness.

"You locked the back door?" he asked.

"Yeah. Left the key in the lock."

"That's fine," said Hardison. A sound had carried to his ears—the sound of boots beating a tattoo on wooden sidewalks. He ground out his cigarette. "Reckon that's the sheriff now. When he knocks on the door, Lance, you go out and surrender. It's the best way."

Men were outside the building now. A fist was pounding on the office door.

Brett put an arm on Lance Bender's shoulder. "Make your play, kid. There's the sheriff now."

"Where are you going, Hardison?"

Hardison was standing. His hand brushed the heavy gun at his hip. "I thought," he said softly, "I heard something out in back."

And swiftly the newspaperman slipped through the dark office and felt his way into the printing shop. In Stygian darkness he moved around the big press, past the long type table, and then he was at the back door of the building. He found the key and turned it in the lock. He opened the back door quietly.

Even as the doorknob turned under his hand he had a picture of what lay beyond the door—a littered yard inclosed by a high board fence reaching back to the alley, a woodshed shoved up against one corner of the fence, a mound of piled-up boxes where an assassin might lay in wait.

The moment of crisis passed. Brett Hardison stood on the raised back porch beyond the door and looked out over the darkness of the yard. He could feel the nerves crawling along his spine, and he could feel the dampness of perspiration in the hand that held the gun, but nothing happened. He pulled the door shut behind him.

And then a voice rasped out of shadows, a vague, disembodied voice:

"Grab your gun, Bender! I'm coming after you!"

BRETT HARDISON had waited for that voice, that single moment of warning. Now, with the knowledge of what he had to do already charted beforehand in his brain, the news-

paperman spun suddenly and leaped clear of the raised porch and landed in the soft dirt of the yard.

Orange flame licked out at him as he leaped, but the bullet missed, and he heard the thud of lead smashing into the wooden wall behind him. He was on his knees now in the dirt, with the porch between him and that gunman he had located so far only by the sound of the single shot. Wrapped in darkness he rested his gun on the top of the porch. He waited.

But that other man could not wait. That other man, who thought he faced a wounded, desperate boy, had not the patience for this kind of fighting. He came erect all at once, a huge shape materializing suddenly out of shadows along the fence, with roaring oaths on his lips and the gun in his hand spouting flame as he charged in toward the porch.

And hot flame met him as he charged, flame that stabbed out of darkness to stop that charging man and send him rocking back on his heels with a horrible, blood-choked oath bubbling on his lips. He went down in a heap, just as Brett Hardison leaped to his feet.

And then the sheriff was there—big, stoop-shouldered Sheriff Alton, standing in the printing-shop doorway and peering out into the yard. He had a lighted oil lamp held high in one hand, a gleaming gun in the other. Brett Hardison moved toward him.

"What in hell goes on?" demanded the sheriff.

"A prowler," Hardison explained. "He took a shot at me."

The sheriff came down the porch steps, the flame in the lamp flickering in the night breeze. He lowered the lamp until light fell across that shapeless figure on the ground.

"Prowler!" the sheriff said. His voice was filled with awe. "Hell! That's Lige Craven!"

But Hardison wasn't looking at the sheriff. He was looking at Link Craven, standing now in the printshop doorway with the lamplight falling across his gaunt, high-boned face. He was watching the play of emotion across that bony face—surprise and incredulity melting suddenly into blind and raging fury.

And Brett Hardison knew in that moment that he had made an enemy who would not forget so long as both of them were alive. It didn't matter. Tonight he had balanced an old debt to a man now dead, a man murdered by that same Lige Craven who lay in soft dirt in the yard. And newspapermen were

used to make enemies.

"Lige Craven!" he said at last. He tried to seem surprised. "Now, what in hell was he doing in my yard—and taking pot shots at me?"

Presently they were all gone, the sheriff, Lance Bender, and gaunt Link Craven, and all of those others drawn to the scene by the startling news that Lige Craven had been killed in battle. They were all gone, and Brett Hardison was seated in his office, with a pad of yellow paper spread out before him and a pencil in his hand.

He wrote: "*Lige Craven Killed.*" And then he stopped. He was a newspaperman, and he had a stirring story at his fingertips. He shook his head regretfully. It was tough. He had the inside story, but he couldn't put it down on paper.

THE END.



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Guns and Gunners

By PHIL SHARPE

The trend in firearms today is toward the more moderately priced weapons. Each year sees every arms manufacturer bringing out new models, and invariably the majority of these are directed toward the "average man" who cannot afford or does not care to invest in equipment in the customary high-price brackets.

One of the finest double shotguns on the market is the Winchester Model 21. It is, however, a high-priced gun. For more than two years Winchester has been experimenting with a new gun in the low-priced field, and at last this double gun is ready.

To be known as the Model 24, this gun will retail at something under \$30, and it is the first time Winchester has ever tried to produce a double-barrel shotgun in that price class. It is well designed and constructed, the frame being streamlined to make it neat in appearance and easy to carry.

This Model 24 is an all-steel gun,

with no castings used in its construction, as is customary on the majority of low-priced double guns. A suitable malleable cast-iron frame is amply strong to handle even the heaviest of loads, but must of necessity be built somewhat heavier than is convenient to handle. The use of steel forgings for the frame enables the manufacturers to reduce weight. The top lever is forged on the gun instead of being made of the usual steel pressings, and the forearm lug is electrically welded to the barrels instead of being soldered. This is the only double-barrel gun on the market with this welding which insures added strength and durability.

Firing pins are retracted by the first opening movement of the top lever, thus making the gun easy to break down by pulling these firing pins from the indent in the primers

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and preventing sticking. It has speed-lock firing pins, giving exceedingly fast lock time. All springs are of coiled wire, making them sturdy and dependable. The forearm is of the popular beaver-tail effect usually acquired only on the more expensive guns.

According to information from the factory, this gun will temporarily be supplied in 12 gauge only with 30-inch barrels, right barrel modified, left barrel full choke. It is, of course, a hammerless take-down double-trigger gun with solid matted ribbed barrels chambered for the $2\frac{3}{4}$ -inch shells and regularly equipped with an automatic safety.

So you want an automatic rifle to handle .22 shorts?

At last this is ready. Winchester has just announced a new Model 75 automatic which I have been using experimentally for some six months. This one sells for approximately \$17 and is the lowest-priced .22 automatic ever built to handle the popular, inexpensive .22 short cartridge.

The new rifle weighs about $6\frac{1}{4}$ pounds and has a tubular magazine in the stock loaded through the right side of the stock with a capacity of twenty cartridges. In our tests we found it extremely accurate and learned that it would handle either the standard or high-speed loads without any change in adjustments. We fired several hundred rounds in rapid-fire practice one afternoon without the slightest trace of a jam.

One of the excellent features of this little unit is the ease with which

it can be taken down for cleaning. This is of major importance in any auto-loading rifle. There is always a certain amount of powder smoke coming back through the action which mixes with oil, and in extensive shooting this may gum up the action slightly.

In this new rifle one merely presses a bolt lock on the rear of the receiver and withdraws the entire bolt assembly as a single unit, with no parts to fall out and become lost.

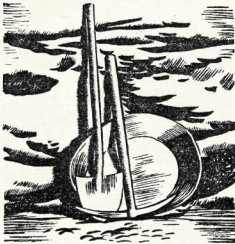
The barrel can readily be cleaned from the breech if desired.

The gun has a 24-inch barrel and is a take-down. It is equipped with a new design of safety on top of the receiver, where it can be quickly handled.

A lot of inquiries come in concerning .22 lever-action rifles. To the knowledge of your firearms writer, there is only one on the market—the Marlin Model 39. This was originally known as the Model 1897, but has been greatly improved in the last three years. It will handle short, long, and long rifles without change, and has a magazine capacity of twenty-five shorts, twenty longs, and eighteen long rifles.

Another inquiry we frequently get concerns firearms laws. This we are unable to answer. It would be an to make a collection of firearms laws of different States, since they vary so greatly. We can only suggest that you visit your nearest police department or sheriff's office and learn what the restrictions may be in your community.

This department has been designed to be of practical service to those who are interested in guns. Mr. Sharpe will gladly answer any question you may have concerning firearms. Just address your inquiries to Phil Sharpe, Guns and Gunners Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Be sure you inclose a three-cent stamp for your reply. Do not send a return envelope.



Mines and Mining

By J. A. THOMPSON

The color of minerals is one of their most striking physical characteristics. The eye appeal of a bright rock of unusual color is instant. Quite frequently it is a spot of mineral color glinting in the sunlight that attracts a prospector's first attention as he works his way along mountain streams or up draws where rock exposures are prevalent.

Clayton M., of Tampa Florida, asked for data on an important means of field mineral identification when he wrote us: "Got a lot of help on identifying minerals and valuable ores in your recent article on different hardness of minerals. How about color? Isn't that a big help to the practical prospector, too?"

You bet it is, Clayton. Take gold, for instance, the metal primarily sought by most prospectors today. The average man knows that it is

extremely heavy, that it is so soft a needle point can be struck into a tiny flake of the stuff leaving a small hole or pin prick. And gold is malleable. Under hammer blows it merely flattens out and does not crumble to a powder as do most minerals. That's how the familiar gold leaf is made, by hammering small bits of pure metal into leaves of incredible thinness.

Yet ask almost anybody suddenly to name the first distinguishing physical feature of gold that comes to mind and the answer will be that it is yellow. Color, the eye appeal, is so vivid that it has impressed itself on the average person's mind as the outstanding characteristic of the substance known as gold. There is probably some psychological explanation of this mental association, but for practical prospecting purposes its importance lies in the proof it gives of the definite part color can play in ready field identification of minerals.

Once you have spotted the yellow mineral, a few easy tests for the other physical qualities of gold will quickly determine whether it is the real McCoy or not.

Similarly, there are other metallic mineral, a few easy tests for the pectors recognize almost immediately by color and appearance alone. The beautiful emerald green of malachite, an important ore of copper, is one example. The gun metal black of magnetite, an iron ore, and the peculiar bluish-gray metallic shine of galena, a lead sulphide ore that often contains handsome values in silver associated with it, are two more cases in which color is the first outstanding feature that will attract a prospector's attention.

There is the deep to sky blue of azurite—azure-blue—so prominent

an identification of this particular copper carbonate ore that the name of the ore itself is taken from its color. The peculiar brick red of cinnabar, the ore of quicksilver, is one of the leading identifications of that mineral. Cobalt-bearing rocks are apt to be stained anything from a delicate to a deep pink. Nickel ore outcroppings commonly show a distinctive green shade—not the deeper green of copper ores, but a definite pale apple green coloration. However, these latter are stained caused by surface changes in the ore due to weathering and exposure and are not always the color of the actual ore itself. But they do afford striking color indications of the presence of the metals and may lead a prospector to subsequent discovery of a rich and workable deposit of the metal itself.

Copper nuggets are sometimes found in stream gravels in mineralized country, and though they may be coated with a patina of green copper carbonate, this can be readily scratched off with a knife and the true identifying salmon pink color of the metal itself exposed. As with the copper nuggets, remember that a number of minerals tarnish when subjected to the long continued action of the atmosphere and surface waters. Therefore in determining the color property of any mineral always be sure that a freshly exposed surface is used for the examination, either by scratching below the tarnish, or breaking

off a piece of the specimen to produce a fresh, clean fracture.

Remember too that some minerals show changes in color in the same species, due largely to minute changes in chemical composition, or impurities in the specimen. For instance zinc blende, a sulphide of zinc and an important zinc ore, may range all the way from white through a cloudy yellow and brown to a definite black. As found, it is commonly black, and known as black jack. Yet pure zinc blende, or sphalerite, is a *white* mineral. The darkening is due to increasing quantities of iron replacing the zinc in the original composition of the pure ore. Other minerals also show a decided color range at times.

Therefore, although color is perhaps the first physical property of striking importance to be recognized in the identification of many metallic ores and minerals, other corroborative characteristics should always be noted and checked against when there is any doubt as to the determination by color alone.

To Oscar M., Binghamton, New York: Trap rock is not a definite mineral but simply a general term given loosely to all dark, fine-grained igneous rocks such as basalt, dark lavas and so forth.

To G. P., Bristol, Connecticut—Coast lands below the high tide line are not subject to claim staking.

● We desire to be of real help to our readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.

Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be published in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.



The Hollow Tree

By HELEN RIVERS

IN our introduction this week we want to call attention to another open letter we have received. This one is from John McCormick and his point is one which we think all members of the Hollow Tree should heed. He says, "Would it not be a great help to caution all members of the Hollow Tree to leave a forwarding address if they move after their letters have been published? I have had several letters returned with the post office stamp 'Moved. No Address.' The latest was a letter I wrote to Mrs. Bertha Jackson, 86-47 126th Street, Richmond Hill, New York. It is a great disappointment to have a letter returned for this reason and it seems to me that members of the Hollow Tree should be careful to leave forwarding addresses. Don't you agree with me, Miss Rivers?"

Yes, John, we certainly do agree with you and sincerely hope that all Pen Pals will read this and heed your suggestion.

All tried-and-true pals write to Franklyn—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I would appreciate it very much if you would publish this letter in the Hollow Tree. I'm sorry to say that I have answered about thirty letters which were published in the Tree and have not received one answer. I am twenty-five years old, a chef by profession, and my hobbies are collecting match covers, post cards, writing letters and trading recipes. I promise to answer all letters faithfully and will send a picture to all those who want one. Come on, boys and girls, all over the world and write to a lonely chef. Franklyn E. Becker, Box 4, Susquehanna, Pennsylvania

Marvie is sweet sixteen—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Here is a letter from a lonely girl who lives in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains. I am six-

teen years old and my hobbies are collecting stamps and photos and I will exchange pictures with anyone. I can tell you all many interesting things about Oklahoma, so come on, Pen Pals, and write me a few lines—I'm sure we can become real good friends.—Marvie Holland, Rt. No. 1, Watts, Oklahoma

Send H. A. these songs—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I would like to get the words of the following songs. If any of you Pen Pals know them, will you please send them to me? The songs are: "The Rolling Tennessee," "We Shall Know Each Other Better When The Mists Have Cleared Away," and "Mother Dear, Your Boy Is Wounded."—H. A. Eaton, Hornbrook, California

Here are two little Aussies out to corral some pals—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Can you make room in your Hollow Tree for my girl friend and me? We would so love to have pen friends in all parts of the world who read Western Story, our favorite magazine. Beth is seventeen years old and I am twenty. We are both interested in most everything and love writing letters. Here's hoping lots of people will write to us.—Beth Cocking, Poewood Hill, Castlemaine, Victoria, Australia, and Evelyn Bealoe, 127 Graham Street, Castlemaine, Victoria, Australia

Tell Private Marshall all about the U. S. A.

Dear Miss Rivers:

I would like to hear from anyone interested in art and music. I am also interested in hearing about the United States and ranch life, too. I enjoy sports, especially swimming, boxing, cross country running, and sprinting, and football. I'll answer all sincere letters.—Private A. H. Marshall, 2330101 "D" Coy., 2nd Bu., Q. O., Cameron Highlanders, Sandhurst Barracks, Ahmednagar, India

Horses are Ruth's primary interest—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Will you please print my plea in the Hollow Tree? I am a lonely girl sixteen years old who would like to correspond with boys and girls

from the United States and Hawaii. I am interested in dancing, swimming, skating, and especially long to be a good horsewoman. Come on, everybody, and answer my pleas.—Ruth Heggart, Box 96, Pembroke, Ontario, Canada

Harold is lonesome in a big city—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Though I live in this big city, I get mighty lonesome. Letters from north, south, east and west, especially those from Liverpool, England, will be greatly appreciated and will be answered on the day they're received. I am seventeen years old and English by birth. Hiking, swimming, sailing and rowing are my chief sports. My hobbies are collecting snapshots, cowboy songs and pictures of ships. I would like to hear from boys and girls between the ages of fifteen and eighteen. Here's hoping I hear from some new Pen Pals in the near future.—Harold Robertson, 1270 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, New York

This English soldier will tell you about his travels—

Dear Miss Rivers:

As you can see by my address, I am a soldier, and since it's rather lonely in this part of the country, and I have very few friends at present, I would like some Pen Pals. I want to see before enlisting in the army and have some interesting things to write about. All ages of either sex are welcome, so come on, pals, and sling your ink this way. I will send photos to the first twelve who write. Here's hoping for a lasting friendship.—Gunner F. Stirzar, 19720th A. T. Reg., R. A., Marne Lines, Catterick Camp, Yorkshire, England—

Mollie wants some more correspondents—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am sixteen years old and would like to hear from boys and girls between the ages of fourteen to nineteen. I already have some Pen Pals, but would like to have many more from any part of the United States and all other countries. Come on, pals, I'm sure you will enjoy writing to me.—Maggie S. Wright, 1718 Sibley Avenue, Jackson, Mississippi

Grover writes songs—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a lonesome soldier in the Hawaiian Islands who would like to hear from Pen Pals. I am twenty-one years old and my favorite pastime is writing songs and short stories. I will exchange snaps with all who write, and I promise to answer promptly.—Grover Hoefler, Company C, 35th Infantry, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, T. H.

Write to this lonely cowhand—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a lonely boy seventeen years old and would like some Pen Pals. My hobby is collecting stamps. I will answer all letters.—Earl McLean, BRT-W Ranch, Deaver, Wyoming

Gertrude's favorite pastime is writing letters—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am sixteen years old and would like to hear from anyone in their teens. I enjoy dancing, hiking and fishing, and my favorite pastime is writing and receiving letters. I also collect stamps. I promise to answer all letters, so

won't you please sling some ink at this girl who finds joy in writing letters?—Gertrude Fuerst, Rt. R. No. 2, Hayward, Wisconsin

Calling all folks living along Rt. 30—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I have been reading Western Story Magazine since 1914, but this is the first time I have written to you. I am planning a trip to Washington this year using Rt. 30, and would like very much to hear from both ladies and gentlemen from Chicago to Oregon. I am thirty-seven years old, like hiking and having a good time. Come on, folks, young or old, and write to me. I will tell you more about myself when I hear from you.—Charles Beckerstaß, 510 Adam Street, Steubenville, Ohio

Violet will tell you about Maori customs—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am seventeen years old and would like some Pen Pals from all over the world. I am very fond of sports and my hobby is writing letters. I can tell all those interested about the Maori customs and about New Zealand itself. I will answer all letters promptly and send a snap to all who write, so come on those of you who want an honest-to-gosh Pen Pal—I'll be waiting.—Violet A. Scott, c/o G. P. O., Hawarden, North Canterbury, New Zealand

There's no end to Lorenza's interests—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am fourteen years old and very much interested in gathering friends from everywhere. I love all sports, especially swimming, tennis, basketball, baseball, volleyball, dodgeball, bicycling, hiking and camping. As a hobby I collect rocks, leaves and flowers. Cooking, sewing, drawing, craft work, nature study, reading and writing are my favorite pastimes. So come on, boys and girls, and fill my mail box.—Lorenza May Wyckoff, 132 East Blackwell Street, Dover, New Jersey

Send lots of letters to William—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I have written to quite a few Pen Pals whose letters appeared in the Hollow Tree, but have not received any answers. If any of them see this, I wish they'd write now. I am a lonely Marine and have quite a lot of time in which to write letters, but at present have no one to write to. My favorite sports are swimming and basketball. I will answer all letters and exchange snapshots.—(F. M.) William H. Metzger, M. E., N. A. D., Iona Island, New York

Walter is a baseball fan—

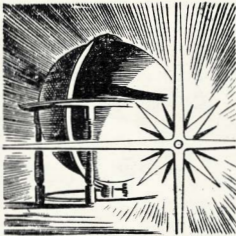
Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a lonely boy sixteen years old and I would like to hear from boys and girls my own age. My hobby is writing letters and my favorite sport baseball. I will answer all letters promptly and will exchange snapshots.—Walter E. Shaver, 1007 E. 14th Street, Houston, Texas

Queenie is interested in the West, too—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am seventeen years old and would like to write to a cowgirl who would tell me all about ranch life, cowboys and horses. In return I will tell her all about England and we could exchange snapshots. My favorite pastime is reading.—Queenie Coomber, Chafford Park Farm Cottages, Forcombe, N. Trinbridge Wells, Kent, England



Where to go and how to get there

By JOHN NORTH

Harry Salter, of Duluth, Minnesota, is considering a move to the South. He writes, "Can you tell me something about the inland part of Florida, around Ocala, in Marion County? Can men of modest means get a location there and make a living on a small truck patch?"

I can tell you a lot of pleasant things about Marion County, Harry, and I'm sure you'll like the neighborhood. Ocala is the county seat of Marion County and has a population of about ten thousand. It is located inland in about the middle of the State, between Gainesville and Lakeland, and can be reached by railroad and bus, as well as by automobile.

The town is really beautiful, with its streets shaded by great live oaks and magnolias, and flowers blooming everywhere. The climate is ideal,

and the cost of living is surprisingly moderate. The land around Ocala is rich and rolling, and crossed with streams and dotted with lakes and springs, some of which are mineral and have medicinal value.

It is a country of year-round outdoor life. There is some of the best fishing in the world to be enjoyed in Lake Weir, Orange Lake, and in the Ocklawaha, the Withlacoochee or St. Johns Rivers, and if you want bigger fish, you are within an hour's drive of the Gulf of Mexico to the westward. In the fall there is fine hunting during open seasons for quail, duck, doves, turkey, and deer, to mention a few types of game.

Marion County is a land of opportunity for the farmer, having some of the most fertile land in Florida, and its soil and climate are suited to a great variety of crops. It is one of the State's most outstanding agricultural sections.

Fine orange groves which produce the highest-quality fruit dot the countryside, but it also has large acreages in vegetable crops, such as beans, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and other truck vegetables. Among the more staple crops are corn, peanuts, potatoes and others. Tobacco has been introduced and the farmers are making good money with it. Also, tung-nut orchards are being planted, and this county promises to become a great center for this highly profitable orchard business.

Then, for the many people who are looking for lighter work than farming, there is poultry raising. This has been highly successful in Marion County and one of the big packing plants has a branch here which provides a daily cash market for all types of livestock, chickens and eggs.

Land is still fairly reasonably priced here, and there is plenty of

it for the settler. It is a fine place to investigate.

Lester G., of Seattle, Washington, wants to know just how much homestead land there is left in Alaska, and whether it is any good or not.

The answer to this is that the government has recently announced that there are still millions of acres of land which may be homesteaded free by American citizens. Much of it is close to the government-owned railroad, and is good agricultural land. Any person meeting the requirements may have as much as one hundred and sixty acres of this land free.

While the government at one time selected a group of farmers, financed them, and guided their operations in a colony at Matanuska, Alaska, it does not make a regular practice of financing homesteaders, nor does it pay transportation nor furnish tools.

There are roads, schools, and other conveniences of civilization in the towns of Alaska, and there are markets for all the fruit, vegetable and other crops that are raised there. Alaska still offers great opportunities for any man who can farm and who is willing to work hard.

Harry G., of Dayton, Ohio, is interested in Colorado for health reasons. He writes: "I have been advised to seek a high location out West, and to stay outdoors for a year. The doctor said that Colorado Springs would have about the type of climate I need, but he couldn't tell

me whether or not I would find anything to interest me while I was getting well. I like the outdoors, so would you please tell me what there is in Colorado Springs for me to do outdoors?"

There is plenty to do the year round, Harry. First, that location is at the foot of Pikes Peak, has plenty of year-round sunshine, plenty of warmth by day and fine, cool mountain breezes sweeping down at night.

The city is a jumping-off place for all kinds of outdoor activity. It is accessible to thousands of miles of streams and lakes, all well stocked with trout and other fish, and which may be fished for trout until the end of October. In fact, the late-fall fishing there is considered the best of the season.

Bird hunting starts in the middle of September, with the season opening with grouse and prairie chicken. The deer season opens in October, when there is also duck shooting to be had.

For those who prefer hiking and camping to the more strenuous hunting, there are mountain trails without number to be explored throughout the year, as well as fine auto roads through the mountains. There is a fine road all the way up Pikes Peak which gives a view of sixty thousand square miles of mountains and plains scenery. All in all, there is plenty to see, plenty to do, and room to do it in, around Colorado Springs. Drive out and put your car to good use while you are there.

● We aim to give practical help to readers. Mr. North will be glad to answer specific questions about the West, its ranches, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. He will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to him, for he is always glad to assist you to the best of his ability. Be sure to inclose a stamped envelope for your reply.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.



Missing Department

RENNIE, ROBERT—He is my father, and I would like to get in touch with some of his relatives. He was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, on February 29, 1868, and is believed to have been lost at sea. If any of his relatives see this, please write to Stephen Rennie, 583 Express Avenue, Paris, Arkansas

DELBERT, BURGESS—He is my brother, and we have not heard from him since he left home in 1923. In 1925 he was working for the Portal Telegraph Cable Co. in Portland, Oregon. He is thirty-eight years old and has brown hair and blue eyes. If anyone knows his whereabouts, please write to Mrs. Paul Kingston, Captain, New Mexico

RICHARDS, DICK—He is my brother-in-law, and when last heard from he was in Miami, Florida. If anyone knows his whereabouts, please communicate with Mrs. Florence Nelson, P. O. Box 1599, Miami, Florida

DRISCOLL, TIMOTHY JOHN—He left Tottenham, London, England, about fifty-three years ago, and when last heard from was living in Waterbury, Connecticut. He had three sisters, Mary, Elizabeth and Ellen. Ellen Driscoll Hedges died on January 2, 1939. Her last words were, "Please find my brother Timothy." If he should see this, or if anyone knows his whereabouts, please get in touch with me. I am Ellen Driscoll Hedges' daughter, Mrs. Frank Strand, Suite 4 College Block, Ellice Avenue, Winnipeg, Canada

WRAY, ROBERT—He was in Garo and Sterling, Colorado, a year ago. Might possibly be in Wray, Colorado, now. If anyone has any information concerning his whereabouts, please write to Morris Pipes, 2121 Proctor Street, Dallas, Texas

McGRATH, DAVID—"I am your daughter, but I don't think you have ever seen me. I am twenty-one years old. My mother's initials are L. M. W. If you see this, won't you please write to me? It will make me so happy." Or if anyone knows my father's whereabouts, will they please write to Mrs. Kellar Clarno, Wedderburn, Oregon

SMITH, FRANK VAN—He is my father, and when last heard from in 1918 he was on a farm near Hutchinson, Kansas. He is about seventy years old. Anyone knowing his whereabouts, please write to his son, Ralph Sanford Smith, 419 Pennsylvania, Vallejo, California

SCOTT, LIZZIE MAY—She left her home in Jackson, Michigan, in 1890, and was last seen in Detroit in 1891. She was going to Buffalo, New York. She is about sixty-five years old and her marriage name is unknown. "Lizzie, if you see this will you please write to your sister, Alice?" Or if anyone knows her whereabouts, please write to Mrs. Alice Scott Hawkins, 3329 Seymour Avenue Road, Route No. 2, Jackson, Michigan

LINJA, GUST—He has been missing since January, 1927. He may be using the name Gust Hill or Gust Line. He was last heard of in Herman, Michigan. He is thirty years old, five feet eight inches tall, and has brown hair, blue-gray eyes that are slightly crossed, a fair complexion and poor teeth. He has an American spread eagle tattooed on his right forearm and a cowgirl on his right upper arm. He speaks Finnish as well as English. He might be in the army or navy. His mother would like to hear from him, so if anyone has any information concerning his whereabouts, please write to Mrs. Jennie Linja, 906 Prospect Street, Hancock, Michigan

WILLIAMS, CHARLES WESLEY—He is my brother, and I haven't heard from him in six years. He left Florida supposedly to go to Texas. He is five feet four inches tall and has black, wavy hair. "Charley, we want to hear from you. Mary and William are both dead. We would like to settle papa's estate, so please write to me." Or if anyone knows his whereabouts, please notify Mrs. Anna Lou Youngblood, P. O. Box 278, Bay Harbor, Florida

STRIGON, LEO—He was last heard from about eight months ago, at which time he was working in the M. L. Tobin furniture store, 666 Fifth Avenue, Brooklyn, New York, and was living at 11½ Prospect Place, in Brooklyn. He is sixty years old, five feet nine inches tall, weighs about a hundred and seventy, has blue eyes and a scar on his neck. He is a cabinet maker by trade. Anyone having any information concerning his whereabouts, please write to his wife, Mrs. Leo Strigon, 25 Fourth Street, Bangor, Maine

RUK, ANDREW—He was last seen in Tacoma, Washington, in 1918, and has not been heard of since. If anyone knows his whereabouts, please write to his brother, Valentine W. Ruk, Route No. 3, Box 674, Olympia, Washington

PARKER, GRACE—She was last heard from in July, 1933, at which time she was in Charleston, South Carolina. She might be living in Columbia, South Carolina. Anyone knowing her whereabouts, please notify Robert Gardner, 41 South Raymond Avenue, Pasadena, California

HINES, JAMES—I am his daughter and would appreciate hearing from any of his relatives. Mrs. J. I. Love, Route No. 4, Friendship, Tennessee

MILLER, RAYMOND—He is my son, and has been missing since September, 1935. He is thirty-seven years old, has light brown hair and blue eyes. "Raymond, we all miss you so much. Dad has good work now in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and could give you a job now. Do let us hear from you." Or if anyone knows his whereabouts, please write to his mother, Mrs. Charles Miller, 945 North Fourteenth Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

WALTERS, JACK—He was born in South Wales, Great Britain, and last heard of in Vancouver, Canada. "The youngest son of your eldest brother, David, is eager to correspond with you. Kindly write." Or if anyone has any information about him, write to S. G. Walter, 2 Cross Street, Dyffryn, Goodwick, Pembrokeshire, England

DUVAL, ANNIE—She is my daughter, and I haven't seen or heard from her in eighteen years. The last time I saw her she was in Stringtown, Oklahoma, and a long time after that I heard she was in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. She is about five feet tall and has black eyes and hair. She is married and has four boys, Herman, Thurman, Virgil and Jesse. My name, when last my daughter and I were together, was Wyrick. I have since remarried, and my name now is Yokum. I have done everything to find her, and if anyone knows her whereabouts and notifies me, I'll be grateful. Mrs. Emma Yokum, Route No. 6, Meridian, Mississippi

HAYNES, CORDNER CABLE—"I have heard nothing from you since your father and I were divorced in 1917. I heard you might be in Kansas City, Kansas. I think of you all the time, and have tried so hard to find you all these years. If you see this, please get in touch with me." Or if anyone knows his whereabouts, write to his mother, Mrs. Edith Collins, 2591 Vallejo Street, Denver, Colorado

KEEFE, JOHN—He has been missing for five years. When last heard of he had shipped out of Boston for a trip to Texas, and later was supposed to be in Seattle. He is five feet eight inches tall, has hazel eyes, black hair, slightly gray on the sides, and a dark complexion. He is thirty-six years old, is tattooed on both arms and chest. If anyone has any information about his whereabouts, please write to Mrs. W. Richmond, 257 Emerson Street, South Boston, Massachusetts

McLAUGHLIN, MRS. JOSEPH—She is my sister-in-law, and when last heard from was living on Birch Street, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. She moved after that, and I lost her address. If anyone knows her whereabouts, I wish they would please notify me, Theresa Lamontagne, 1948 Denonville, Cote St. Paul, Montreal, Canada

McCLEARY, HAROLD—He is my son and was last heard from in 1921. At that time he was working for the Houston Brothers on the Derrick-boat Alaska. If anyone knows his whereabouts, please write to his mother, Mrs. Chris Sorensen, R. R. No. 1, Box 148, Cumberland, Wisconsin

BRYANT, ROY—He is my cousin, and his last-known address a year ago was 2032 Curtis Street, Denver, Colorado. He may be living near Twin Falls, Idaho. If anyone knows his whereabouts, will they please communicate with me, Mrs. Jessie L. Bryant, 169 East Seventy-fourth Street, Shreveport, Louisiana

GIBSON, ROBERT HARRY—He is my father, and he left Washington eight or nine years ago. I do not know any members of his family, but I would like to contact them. I am eighteen years old and was born in Spokane, Washington. My mother died when I was a baby. If anyone knows my father's whereabouts, or any of his family, will they please write to Robert Gibson, Jr., French Creek, Idaho

NOTICE—I had a missing notice published in the Missing Department some time ago. I was trying to locate my two daughters, Rosa and Elizabeth Dishman. Since the notice was published, I have changed my name and address. My name was Mary Dishman, but now is Mrs. Mary Kelly, and I am living at 3415 South Durland, Capitol Hill, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

SARTAIN, WILLIAM CHARLES—He is my brother and has not been seen or heard from since he left Fresno, California, in 1931. He is thirty-four years old, five feet nine inches tall, and has brown eyes and hair. "Charles, if you see this, please write to me. Father was killed six years ago. Everything has changed." Or if anyone knows his whereabouts, please notify me, Mrs. H. F. Collins, 7532 Altava Place, E. Oakland, California

DENEGRI, PHILIP—He is my brother and I haven't seen him since he was seventeen years old. He is sixty now. He was last heard of in 1917, at which time he was employed by the Savage Poultry Company in Ohio. If anyone knows his whereabouts, please notify his sister, Mrs. Phoebe Garria, 715 Garfield Street, Springfield, Missouri

● There is no charge for the insertion of requests for information concerning missing relatives or friends.

While it will be better to use your name in the notices, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to anyone who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

TAMANAWOS GOLD



By **KENNETH GILBERT**

Part Four

TAMANAWOS GOLD

BY KENNETH GILBERT

The Story So Far:

ACCORDING to the Northern Indians, evil spirits hover over the Lake of the Horned Moon. Deputy Marshal Jim Doom, who is bringing in a prisoner on a murder charge, scoffs at such "Injun superstition" and compels his Indian guide to continue paddling when the breed wishes to portage the canoe and take the overland trail.

Just as they seem to have navigated the lake successfully, the canoe is ripped open by a half-buried boulder. The prisoner, Vance Brennan, escapes, and after an exhausting swim in the icy water, he reaches the beach of a little valley walled in on three sides by towering cliffs.

The sole inhabitant of this valley is a young boy who, since the departure of his foster father, Dan Chavrell, for the "outside" some months before, has been living alone except for his pack of wolf dogs. Chavrell, a prospector, had been Brennan's father's partner and had believed a fortune was to be found near the Lake of the Horned Moon.

Klondike Brennan had lost track of Chavrell, but had continued to try to locate the lake. A few months before, he had been murdered and Vance, his son, had taken up the search. His own arrest on a false charge of having murdered the man suspected of killing Klondike, had shortly followed.

The boy, who calls himself "The Kid," agrees to help Brennan try to find the hidden treasure. The Kid informs Brennan that the valley is visited at regular intervals by a band of Indians and that they are due to come again very soon. He also believes there is another stranger in the valley.

At Brennan's request the Kid takes him to the cave which the Indians visit. A stream of lime water runs through the place, which is filled with weird, statue-like figures. Brennan discovers that these are the bodies of dead Indians which have become coated with calcium.

On their return to the Kid's cabin, Brennan is astounded to find Jim Doom

who had succeeded in getting ashore from the capsized canoe. The deputy has been shot by a bushwhacker whom he believes is Brennan. The latter is unable to convince Doom that, having no gun, he could not have fired the shot.

While Brennan is trying to track down the bushwhacker, Doom goes berserk with fever, sets the cabin on fire and dashes into the woods. Brennan and the Kid finally get him under control. With the cabin burned down, they are forced to hole up in the cave, although the Kid warns Brennan that the Indians are due any day now.

CHAPTER XVI

HIDE-OUT

THERE was a fire in the cave, and the smell of broiling caribou steak seeped into the nooks and crannies of the place. Outside, the sun moved through a sky filled with haze, and the Kid, coming to the screening curtain of the waterfall for a last look about, saw the sign in the heavens and predicted rain. There would be a storm before the moon came full again, and after that there would be settled weather.

"A storm," declared Brennan, "is goin' to make it tough for the hombre who's lookin' for us in the valley. Since the cabin burned, he'll have no place to hole up, and he acts like a gent who's travelin' light, without any sort of outfit."

Doom slumbered profoundly by the fire. The story of how they had brought him from the place where they had found him in the woods, was one of heart-breaking hardship. Brennan had packed him the full distance and, although Doom was a

small man, his dead weight made a difficult load. But before sunup they had reached the place, convinced that they had not been seen.

Now they could stand a siege, if necessary. The gravest problem was grub. With two of the wild pack dead and armed only with Doom's six-gun, Brennan and the Kid were handicapped. But the Kid argued that the remaining two wild dogs must eat; they would still hunt caribou and, even as he had done many times, Kanok would make them share the kill.

Before sunup, Brennan and his young companion had even carried in many armfuls of wood. The Kid, fortunately, still had plenty of matches. Dan Chavrell had left him that bequest at least.

"We may be snug enough here," declared Brennan gloomily, "but it's the life of a wolf. We live in a den and we run by night! Maybe we'll learn to howl at the moon!"

He looked at the little deputy lying beside the fire. "Goin' to wake up soon. Sleep has done him good. Reckon he's goin' to make the grade, and after this he'll be harder to kill than ever!"

Doom's eyes opened and he sat up with a sudden grimace of pain as the wound in his side reminded him that it was still there. He blinked at the fire, at the Kid, and at the wolf dog lying outside the circle of light, greenish eyes steady and watchful. Lastly he stared at Brennan.

"Think I'm hard to kill, hey?" he demanded with some of his old truculence.

Brennan grinned down at him. "Thought that would rouse you up. Grub's ready. Figure you can muckle a caribou steak?"

Doom regarded him suspiciously. "Where are we? How'd I get here?"

"We're still in the valley," replied Brennan. "You're here because I packed you in on my back!"

"Seems like you go to a heap of trouble," Doom retorted. "For what reason, I can't make out."

"Maybe," Brennan answered, "I can't let a white man die even if he does believe I'm a murderer. But at least you know I didn't bush-whack you. You saw the gent who did that."

The officer seemed impressed and puzzled. "Somethin' funny about this business. Brennan, I *might* be wrong about you. All this doesn't seem to make sense to me. What you hope to gain by all these favors? You know I'll never let you get away so long as there's a murder warrant out for you!"

"What do I get out of it?" repeated Brennan. "Why, maybe it's because I don't want your blood on my conscience. Maybe it's because you're the one man above all others I'll need when the time comes—if I'm lucky enough to find what I'm after!"

Doom pondered that but shrugged his shoulders hopelessly. "More riddles. This is the damndest place I ever got into! Do *you* savvy all that's goin' on here, Brennan?"

"Not all—but it's plenty clearer than it was!"

"All that's clear to me is that one of us is crazy!" rasped Doom. "Gimme some of that meat, Brennan!"

The latter handed over a spitted caribou steak, smoking hot. "Easy now!" he cautioned. "Been a long while since you've had grub. Don't want to kill you off too sudden, because there's some questions maybe you can answer!"

Doom grunted. "Figured you didn't go to all this trouble about

me just for nothin', Brennan! Well, let's have it!" He began to gnaw ravenously on the meat.

YOU'VE been around some in Alaska," Brennan began. "Ever hear of any ore that looks like this?" He fished out the white pebbles from his shirt pocket and held them up for the deputy to see.

Doom stared at them intently and shook his head. Brennan slid back the pebbles, yet he did not seem disappointed.

"Figured that'd be your answer," he said, "because I never saw stuff like that either, and I prospected with Klondike Brennan almost from the time I learned to walk. But I reckon you do know plenty about Injuns. Doom, did you ever know which tribe it was that Cultus Joe belonged to?"

The deputy frowned thoughtfully, and slowly chewed and swallowed the last of the meat before replying. "Didn't belong to any tribe, I reckon. But his mother was a Thlinget squaw, name of Althan Mary. Joe always said his dad was Bart Thrane, who hit it big on Eldorado Creek durin' the Klondike rush. Bart was killed in Dawson twelve years ago by a drunken claim jumper. But I always figured Joe was a liar because I knew Bart well—and he wasn't the squaw-man type. When the Klondike played out he went into the Porcupine country—" Doom broke off and stared at Brennan suspiciously. "Damnation, Brennan! What you gettin' at, anyway? All this begins to come back to me. Thrane's pardners on that Porcupine trip were Dan Chavrell and your dad, Klondike Brennan!"

Brennan's eyes snapped. "You

sure about that, Doom? I was too young then to pay much attention to what Klondike was doin'. Say, this *is* beginning to get warm. It was only a hunch, but I was tryin' to find out somethin' about Cultus Joe—and now this pops up. You say that his mother was a Thlinget named Althan Mary?"

Both men turned swiftly at an exclamation behind them. "What's wrong now, Kid?" Brennan asked sharply.

"Why," faltered the boy, "that . . . that name you just said. Althan Mary. I've heard it before! It sort of startled me."

Brennan weighted this. "Probably you heard Dan Chavrell mention it," he reasoned. "He must have heard Cultus Joe tell that lie about Bart Thrane. "Well, now, Doom! We know the Thlingets are a whalin' big tribe, and probably in the old days they just about ran things in Alaska. You ever hear of any strange clan among 'em, sort of a secret society, that might want to hang onto old beliefs that had been handed down for generations?"

Doom grinned scornfully. "You fallin' for that *tamanawos* stuff, too, Brennan?"

"What if I am?" demanded the other. "It comes to me now that there must be somethin' real at the bottom of it, else it would never have started. What do you know, Doom?"

The deputy shrugged and scowled thoughtfully. He felt of his injured side gingerly, but it was apparent that the meat was already putting new strength into him. "Why," he replied, "I recall hangin' a couple old Injuns at Birch Flat in the old days because they murdered another old siwash in some kind of a *tamanawos* row. We always figured it was a scrap over a trap line, but we

were never sure. All we knew was that they busted into the shack where this feller was hidin' and knifed him. They didn't try to deny it, just said he wouldn't go with 'em. But they wouldn't tell where or why they—"

He broke off suddenly as the cavern echoed with a ground-quaking, booming sound. Despite his injury, Doom jumped to his feet. Brennan and the Kid stood up also.

"Must be thunder," ventured Brennan. "The Kid allowed the signs were right for a storm."

The great wolf dog put his nose in the air and mourned dolefully. "What in hell does *that* mean?" demanded Doom nervously.

The boy faced them with widened eyes. "It wasn't thunder," he whispered. "Kanok isn't afraid of thunder. That . . . that came from inside this cave!"

THE Kid is right," Brennan said slowly. "That happened inside."

"*Tamanawos* stuff!" jeered Doom, but his chuckle was nervous. Brennan shrugged, his face sober.

"Jim, you may have called the turn that time." He turned to the boy. "Kid, you stay here and keep watch. I'll get me some torches and go back there"—he indicated the inner depth of the cave—"for a look-see!"

"Alone?" asked the Kid uneasily.

Doom looked up with renewed suspicion. "Brennan, you up to some trick? I don't aim to let you out of my sight, if I can help it. Maybe you've figured that this cave leads out of the valley. Might be high time for a getaway!"

"Doom," Brennan said disgustingly, "can't you ever forget your job? There's no law in this place except

what we make ourselves. If you're able to walk, you're welcome to come. You may see somethin' that'll pin back your ears and do you good. I've been back there before, alone, and I don't hanker to do it again, but I'm plumb curious about what we heard. Maybe it was an earthquake. This cave wouldn't be so good if one hit us."

Doom rubbed his chin. "You make it sound fine, Brennan. Sometimes I'm of a mind that you're on the square, and then again I know that the first and foremost thing you have in mind is to keep from goin' back to Three Below and face the music. Can't say I blame you for that; no man should rightly be in a hurry to go to his own hangin'."

He stood up straight and tested his legs. "I can make it," he announced. "But if you mean everything you say, Brennan, then fork over that gun! Reckon I can shoot it as straight as you can. I'll have me two prisoners when I leave this place; you and that killer out there who plugged me!"

"I'll keep the gun and run things myself for a spell," retorted Brennan. "What I can use, though, are more shells. You got any?" He swung out the cylinder and showed the two loaded cartridges remaining.

Doom shook his head. "Rest of the ammunition was in my pack, and that's lost in the lake. Had a couple extra in my pocket and I reloaded after blastin' at that killer the first time. If I'd had the gun," he added bitterly, "I could have plugged him when he was atop that windfall last night!"

"That," replied Brennan, "was a tough break for both of us. Because we didn't know who the dogs were after. Figured it might be you, and, to save your life, we sent Kanok in.



The fury of the storm seemed certain to destroy not only the canoe, but Brennan as well.

But it only gave that killer a chance to get away."

HE busied himself with some of the dry branches they had brought inside, splitting the ends of them with the Kid's knife.

"I'll let you carry the light and walk behind," he told Doom when they were ready. He thrust the torch into the fire until the end flamed, and handed it to the other man. "That way," he said ironically, "you can keep watch on me. Besides, the light won't be in my eyes." To the boy he said, "You can send Kanok if we get lost or the torches go out. I've a hunch that we'll be back soon."

They moved away toward the inner cavern and Brennan kept the gun in his right hand, although for what purpose he could not have told. "Dead Injuns couldn't hurt anybody," he told himself. But the feel of the gun was heartening, and so was the presence of Doom, even though the little deputy was none too steady on his feet.

But they made it, and once more Brennan stood in that queer chamber while Doom, awestruck, and for once jolted out of his usual composure, held the torch high and stared in amazement.

"That mean anything to you?" asked Brennan at last. "Is it too wild a guess that the old Injuns you hanged at Birch Flat might have been part of this same clan? That the buck they knifed knew he was headed for this place?"

Doom made an odd sound in his throat. "Brennan, it might be! Those are plenty dead Injuns there, covered by that coatin' of lime. Some of 'em may have been here hundreds of years, judgin' by the size of 'em. But what's the meanin' of all this?"

"Haven't got that part straight yet," Brennan admitted. "But they must be Thlingets, because that's the biggest tribe in these parts. Birch Flat can't be more than ten days' mush from here. You say Cultus Joe's mother was a Thlinget. Then *he* must have known about this place. Maybe he didn't know the exact location of the cave, but he didn't want to take a chance crossin' this Lake of the Horned Moon and runnin' into the gang. No wonder he wanted to quit and take the overland trail to Three Below!"

"Sounds logical to me," affirmed Doom. "What else you figured out?"

"The Kid says these Injuns come here twice a year," explained Brennan. "All old-timers. Well, now, let's add up and see what we get. Cultus Joe might have been a breed, although he looked like a full-blood to me. If *he* knew about this, then who else would know? Why, such pals of his as Cash Hazlitt and Bill Garret! I'll stick to that guess until I find somethin' better."

"Go on," Doom urged.

"Joe claimed his father was Bart Thrane, and we're both agreed that probably was a lie. Seems like I once heard Klondike say that Bart brought his wife, a white woman, with him when he came North, but that she died. Anyway, Bart was once a pardner of Klondike and Dan Chavrell. Doom, you figured you had a motive for my killin' Hazlitt because he left Klondike to die on the trail. But I couldn't have proved Hazlitt did that, and you know it; and I'm not likely to kill a man in revenge for somethin' of which he might be innocent. More I think of it, though, I *did* have reason to kill Hazlitt, because I'm convinced now he did want to see Klondike dead! But somebody saved me the trouble."

The little deputy was listening intently.

"Likewise, if my hunch is right, Dan Chavrell was due to go," Brennan went on. "But he'd taken to the wilds and couldn't be found. The Kid believes he's dead, that he drowned in the lake; but I'm not so sure about that. Only that he's probably dead."

"Brennan," Doom said thoughtfully, "you're on a trail, sure enough! But you overlook one thing. In my experience as a lawman, I've usually found that the reason one hombre kills another is either to get revenge or get himself rich. There's no sign of revenge in this business far as I can discover, and I'm damned if I've seen any sign of gold! What is the motive?"

Brennan shook his head. "There's a motive in everything, and there's one here—whether it can be found, is something else again. Doom, I've been up against a blank wall. You're older and wiser in the ways of crooks than I am. If you'll forget who I am and who you are for a time, maybe we can pull together and get the hang of this thing. Even the Kid is tied into it in a way he doesn't suspect. You hear what he said about rememberin' the name of Althan Mary? That sort of hit me between the eyes, but I didn't want to let on—not yet, anyway. But he told me that Dan Chavrell had taken him when he wasn't much more than a baby, from some Injuns who were down and out. Doom, one of those Injuns *might* have been Althan Mary!"

Doom, look surprised. "Brennan, you tryin' to make out that the Kid is part Injun?"

"Hell, no! But I've got a hunch who he *might* be— *Look out, Doom!*"

Brennan yelled the warning and caught the little deputy in his arms, jerking him back so hard that both stumbled and went sprawling. At that moment a tremendous fragment of the calcareous roof of the cave which had been banging like an upside-down toadstool, detached itself and fell ponderously, hitting the spot where Doom had been.

CHAPTER XVII

DOOM MAKES A BARGAIN

THERE was an echoing roar of thunder that almost deafened them, then the amplified murmur of the falling water beat upon their eardrums. As he went down, Doom let go of the torch, which fell sputtering on the rock. Brennan's first thought was for light and he sprang for the dying torch, caught it up and fanned it until it flamed once more. Doom lay groaning where he fell.

"Sorry," Brennan said shortly, "but it had to be done that way. That water makes so much noise I never heard that rock crack away; just happened to look up and see it comin'. You hurt much, Doom?"

The little deputy's comments became articulate and somewhat sulphurous, and Brennan felt relief. If Doom could still swear, he couldn't be injured seriously. "Between bullets and gettin' battered around on rocks, I'll be lucky if I pull through this a whole man!" Doom complained. He sat up and felt of his wounded side. "Can't even feel *that* any more. I hurt worse in a dozen other places now!" Yet he managed to get to his feet.

"That," said Brennan, indicating the fallen mass of rock, "is the thing that made the thunder we heard. Or one like it. See! There's pieces all

around over there. They've been lettin' go for ages. Probably most of 'em strike at the foot of the falls and break up in that pool, and the water carries 'em away underground."

Doom squinted knowingly at the arched roof. "I done a lot of hard-rock minin' when I was young," he declared. "A good shot of powder here would bring the whole thing down." He stared at the pool where the water sucked away underground as though the river was pouring into a huge drain pipe. "A real big hunk of rock," he went on, "could land in there and plug that hole. This cave would be a good place to get out of if that happened!"

"Well," retorted Brennan, "that won't happen because there's no powder nearer than Three Below, I reckon. Wait! You hear that?"

There was a long-drawn-out cry that broke into echoes of confused sounds. It gave them a weird eerie feeling for a moment until Brennan analyzed it.

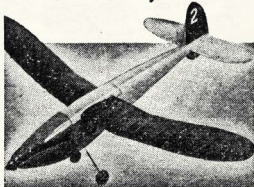
"The Kid!" he guessed. "He heard that crash and wants to know if we're all right!" He sent back a reply and his voice boomed in the great chamber like a cannon. The vibration of the sound brought a light shower of rock flakes cleaved from the roof.

"Hey!" Doom exclaimed softly. "We'll make no more noise in this place. Like as not the hollerin' we done to make each other heard was what brought down that big hunk of rock!"

"Then let's get out," Brennan suggested. "We've found out what we wanted, anyway. What you after now, Doom?"

For the little deputy had bent over and, by the light of the torch which Brennan had handed him once more, had picked up one of the splinters of rock broken from the

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large mass which had fallen. He looked at it curiously and stuck it in his pocket.

"I'd like a keepsake of this place," he explained. "I don't aim to be back, if I can help it!"

THEY hurried toward the outer cavern and, halfway to the fire, the Kid met them with Kanok. The boy's eyes were round with apprehension until he saw that both men were unharmed.

"What happened?" he demanded.

Brennan explained. "Leastwise it wasn't *tamanawos*," he ended reassuringly. "Kid, you didn't even stop to fix yourself a torch."

"I had Kanok to lead me," the boy said. "Brennan, I . . . I'll be glad when we can get out of this place!"

"We're movin' out of this valley," declared Doom, "as soon as I'm fit to travel! Then I'll bring back a posse from Three Below and run that killer down, if he's still alive."

"Doom!" Brennan cried sharply. "What're you talkin' about? You mean to say you know a way to get out of this valley?"

Doom shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't say that, did I? But nothin' is impossible, son, and I've been in tight spots before. I'm inclined to string along with you, Brennan, but you've got to give me your word that you won't make a break for it no matter what happens. What you've done so far makes me think maybe I can trust you. But it's got to be a pact, and the Kid, here, will hold you to it. That right, Kid?"

The boy looked indecisive. "I'll stick with Brennan, no matter what he does!" he blurted finally.

"Thanks, Kid!" Brennan's voice was warm. "But it's a bargain, just the same. Fact is, I've told Doom

many times I wouldn't run out on him, but he won't believe me. You got my word, Doom!"

"Then the first thing you do is fork over that gun of mine!" commanded the deputy.

Brennan hesitated a moment, then handed him the six-shooter. "You've made the play," he warned the deputy. "If you've got some trick in mind— Well, let it ride. You know I'm doin' this for the Kid as much as for myself. I started to tell you my hunch back there when the roof came down!"

Doom grinned as he slipped the gun into its holster. "Brennan, you ring like a piece of good steel at every point!" he approved. "Just wanted to make sure that you meant it. No, there's no trick. I've got a real surprise for you, son. Unless that killer out there has found your old .38 rifle, the one Klondike carried and which you had when I arrested you, I reckon I can tell you where to find it!"

"What's that?"

"Fact," the little deputy said laconically. "I'd have carried it myself, but I didn't want to clutter myself, especially as I had my handgun. When that feller plugged me, I knew he was usin' a black-powder .38, and that's why I thought it was you who did the shootin'. Thought you'd found the gun. Maybe the killer found it, or maybe he's got one of his own. Anyway, I'd have sworn there isn't another rifle like that in these parts except yours and the one Dan Chavrell had. Everybody knew Dan and Klondike had the same kind of guns so they could trade shells! When it's dark you can hunt for it. Reckon I couldn't travel that far right now."

"But how did you come to get it?" Brennan demanded, mystified.

"Never mind that right now. I'll tell you where I hid it, and you can't miss the place. Let's get back to the fire and tackle some more of that meat. I feel like I haven't eaten for a week."

They stood there in the tunnel, the place alive with flickering shadows as the light from the torch leaped wildly. Kanok, standing motionless at the knee of the Kid, suddenly growled warning. For the first time, then, they saw that all the time they had been talking he had been facing toward the distant fire, beyond which was the entrance to the cave. Kanok had found something in one of the slow-moving air currents that he did not like.

COMING at that moment the dog's signal was like the sudden clang of a bell that jangled their taut nerves. At once the Kid became the tense, wary wilderness creature he usually was. He bent over and said something to Kanok, and the huge wolf dog at once moved on stiffened legs down the tunnel toward the fire. The boy followed him.

"Wait, Kid!" Brennan called. He took the torch from Jim Doom, threw it on the cave floor and stamped out the blaze. "No use making ourselves targets if anybody is waitin' down there. Now we'll stick close together, and let the dog lead. But take it easy!"

They came closer to the fire in the cavern without mishap and now they stopped while the boy sent Kanok ahead. The dog's misgivings seemed to have about vanished, but he was still somewhat disturbed.

"Nothin' wrong here," declared Jim Doom as they came up finally. "Brennan, you got me walkin' on eggs, too, with your all-fired nervous-

ness! Let's rouse up the fire and eat. I tell you I'm starved!"

"Doom," retorted Brennan, who had been looking aroused, "you're likely to be hungrier before you eat again! Our grub's gone!" He pointed to the pile of wood where the Kid had left the caribou meat taken when the wild pack made its last kill. "Seems like there's other appetites in this valley besides our own!"

"That wolf dog!" charged Doom. "Bet he grabbed it while we were gone!"

The Kid turned on him angrily. "Kanok would starve before he'd steal meat from us!" he declared. Brennan nodded his own belief of that.

"Well," said Doom, "it's gone, anyway! Maybe," he added half-jokingly, "this is more *tamanawos* stuff. You reckon the ghost of that there caribou—"

"Stop it, Doom!" snapped Brennan. He knew that his own nerves were getting ragged. It wasn't that he was scared or even uneasy, he told himself. It was just this feeling that he was fighting the unknown that got a man. Every happening now that could not be explained seemed at once to take on some sinister significance.

The Kid and the dog moved to the entrance of the cave and disappeared. They came back presently, the boy's eyes on the ground as he tried to make out tracks.

"Plenty trails," he said, "but I can't make 'em out well because the ground is mostly bare rock. But it *might* have been the pack that slipped in here and stole that meat. They must be hungry now and game has probably taken to cover since it heard all the shooting that's been going on."

"How's the weather?" asked Brennan.

"Big storm coming," was the boy's discouraging reply. "She'll hit before dark. You'll have a hard time traveling tonight unless she blows herself out. I could take Kanok and go with you."

"No," Brennan said definitely. "I'll take this risk alone, Kid. If Doom were only fit to travel—but he's not."

Brennan stared thoughtfully at the fire, then shrugged his shoulders.

"Kid, I'm startin' now! Can't wait for that storm to strike. Once I get out of this place unseen, I'll be all right. Got to have that gun."

"If the wild dogs were just here, then they can't be far away now," the Kid protested. "They'll likely pick up your trail before you've gone far. And they'll hold you in a tree, storm or no storm."

"Lend you my six-gun," offered Doom. "Them dogs ought to be killed anyway!"

Brennan shook his head. "I'd hate to kill *any* dog, and right now it seems those wild devils have helped us more than they've hindered. They've helped feed us and they've kept that killer on his toes. No, Doom, I'll have to chance keepin' clear of 'em. Now, where is this place?" He listened intently while Doom gave him directions.

CHAPTER XVIII

TWO FINDS

FIVE MINUTES later Brennan stood at the mouth of the cave, peering through the curtaining mist that came from the falling water. The space between the foot of the cliff and the fringe of the forest seemed empty and lifeless enough, but through the sheet of water, Brennan saw the heavily-over-

cast appearance of the sky. There were rolling black clouds, and now and then a puff of wind swirled the spray and mist in his face.

The Kid and Doom stood behind him. The boy gripped Brennan's shoulder. "Good luck, pard!" he exclaimed softly.

Brennan grinned fleetingly, then looked serious again. "Kid," he said, "if anything happens that I don't get back, I want you to talk things over with Jim Doom. He's got some of my ideas, and maybe he can help you. Meanwhile, try to remember all the things you can that happened before Dan Chavrell took you from those Injuns. May be mighty important."

The Kid nodded. Brennan turned to the deputy.

"Doom," he said as though trying to disguise his own nervousness, "you don't figure I'm tryin' to make a break for it, do you?"

The little officer wagged his head solemnly. "I'm givin' you free rein. I've got your word. Anyway, if you're crazy enough to make a break *now*—and can get away with it—I'd figure that it was in the cards to be that way!"

"So long, then?"

Brennan took one more quick look about; then he ran swiftly through the waterfall and to one side, where he paused. Unless a watcher had been eying the very spot at that moment, it would not have been possible to see exactly how he had appeared so suddenly from solid rock. He took another quick look around and saw nothing. His next dash carried him to the woods. He wanted to wave to Doom and the Kid who, he knew, were watching, but it might have betrayed them. Anyway, he'd made it, and that was enough.

But he knew it was going to be tough going, even though he had

started ahead of the storm, for the blow was near at hand. There was an uneasy moaning of wind in the tall spruce, and the blackness of the sky shrouded the forest in twilight. He was not sure about time, but guessed it could not be much past early afternoon, yet it was as gloomy and dark as though night was approaching. Moreover, the strong sunlight which lay behind the black clouds filtered through in spots until the very air had a greenish-yellow tinge that was unearthly and disquieting.

"Those dogs are likely to stay close to shelter," he reasoned. "And that goes for our unknown friend. Only a damned fool would be out at a time like this. But that gun of Doom's would feel mighty good if I had hold of it now. Reckon it never occurred to him that he may need it worse than I do—if that cave is discovered."

Brennan took a gait that carried him swiftly on one of the innumerable but faint trails which networked the valley. As he went he puzzled over how Doom came to have the gun and how he had been able to bring it ashore from the wreck of the canoe. For some reason of his own, Doom had been silent on that point. Brennan's mind was full of conjecture, but there was no use troubling himself with guess work. "It'll be enough," he reasoned, "if I find it. There's a fifty-fifty chance that the stranger has beat me to it."

The location Doom had given was on the shore of the lake. It could not be far from the very point where Brennan himself had landed. How he had ever missed seeing Doom then was a mystery which could not be readily fathomed and which was important only if it had bearing on what the deputy had hinted—that he knew of a way to escape. Either



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Doom was bluffing about getting out of the valley, or he was not yet ready to trust Brennan with that secret.

Although he had not slept for many hours and much time had passed since he had eaten, Brennan had no sense of fatigue. Grub and rest could wait. He kept to his hurrying pace and distance flowed under his trotting *mukluks*. It could not be much farther to the lake, but he knew he would be lucky if he reached it ahead of the blow, for the wind-driven clouds were lower now and the breeze was freshening rapidly. He came to a clearing beyond which lay the last belt of timber between him and the lake, and at that moment he saw the band of caribou.

There were five of the ghostly gray animals and they were bunched as they came toward him. Instead of trotting in single file as they should in following a trail, they seemed anxious to stick together. Perhaps the storm threat had made them uneasy, but as they came into the clearing, Brennan saw all stop, as though at a signal, turn and look back at the woods they had just left.

They paused for only a moment, then, shaking their antlers, the reindeerlike creatures began trotting toward him. His first hunch was that the remaining two of the wild dogs were chasing them, but he had heard no drawn-out wail to indicate that the pack was hunting once more. The caribou saw him at last, whistled alarm and turned aside. But he noticed that they did not go back in the direction whence they had come.

The significance of this struck him hard. Though the caribou were frightened at the sight of him, they feared something else more—and that menace apparently was between him and the lake.

Even as he realized this, the storm hit. There was a stronger blast of wind, and suddenly pelting rain struck his face. Then came a down-pour driven with all the force of a terrific gale.

BRENNAN had expected to be caught thus, but he had no intention of holding up until the storm passed. It might last for hours, maybe all night. While it endured, the possibility of running into ambush was lessened, for even the wild dogs probably would not be abroad in such weather. Yet the fierceness of the blow was so overwhelming that he had to lean forward, with shoulders bent, in order to make headway. In that position it was impossible for him to see what lay ahead. At any moment he might run into whatever it was that had frightened the caribou, but he kept floundering on until he discovered that he had somehow missed the dim trail.

But he still knew where the lake was, for by now he could hear the thunder of waves beating against the face of cliffs. The brush was a veritable jungle that caught at him and did its best to hold him back. It was man-killing labor, but everything depended on the element of time. As he came closer to the water, Brennan recalled the directions Jim Doom had given him.

"You'll see a big cedar snag not far from the beach," Doom had said. "Half of it is busted off and lyin' on the ground, but the stump is hollow and there's a big crack down one side. Your gun's in there, muzzled down on a piece of bark so rain won't run into the barrel.

"I'm trustin' you more than you may think," Doom had added. "That gun is important evidence, Brennan. That's why I took such

all-fired trouble to get it ashore. Once you get hold of it again, I may have trouble provin' you killed Cash Hazlitt. But I'm takin' that chance because you gave me your word—and you're the son of Klöndike Brennan."

Yet Brennan wondered if it was that pledge alone which had moved Doom to trust him. It seemed a long risk to take if Doom believed he was really a murderer. Maybe the happenings had served to implant doubt in the officer's mind. "But he'll go through with it just the same," Brennan reasoned, "unless the proof is clear-cut that I didn't kill Hazlitt."

The roar of seething water was louder now. The lake lay just ahead beyond the timber. Then there came one of those peculiar moments in the storm when it seemed that the wind all but stopped, veered into wild cross-currents and resumed in fury where it had left off. But in that interval Brennan halted and swung about in sudden alertness. For, unless he was the victim of delusion, he had smelled wood smoke!

Only a whiff it was, thin and vanishing in the strong wind, but he was sure he had not mistaken it. "Smoke all right," he told himself. "Maybe," he mused, "it was a break for me that I got off the trail. Reckon I must have swung to the right when that happened. Smoke came from the left. If I hadn't got off the trail, I might have run slam-bang into whoever it is!" One stroke of luck, and yet it might be all important, for the unknown tender of that fire could not know that he himself had been discovered. All Brennan wanted now was to keep clear until he possessed himself of the rifle, if that was possible. Then the odds against him would drop amazingly.

Brennan plunged through the last

of the dense brush and trees and knew that luck was still with him, for he had come out on the flat where the frowning cliff walls were broken. The lake, seething with white foam as the wind ripped across its surface, was before him, awesome and impressive.

THE fury of the waters drove home to him recollection of what the Kid had said, that old Dan Chavrell might have been caught out there and perished. No small craft could have lived long, and there was no shore except at this one point where a landing could be made. Great logs, the remnants of broken trees which had been carried into the lake by the river, were pounding and smashing against rocks on the beach. They rose and sank in the battering waves, their sides stripped smoothly of limbs or bark. One of these caught and held Brennan's attention, and suddenly made his pulse quicken in a thrill of discovery.

"A canoe!" he breathed to himself. "Our canoe," he exclaimed a moment later. For, as the thing was lifted high in the water, he could see a long gash on the bottom, where that knifelike rock had ripped through. Almost at the same moment he saw what he believed was the snag Doom had described.

But right now that canoe was all important. The gun could wait a little while longer. Brennan broke into a run toward the beach, and a rolling wave hissed over the rocks and reached for him. He braced himself and stood there until the force of it was spent, then dashed ahead again. This time he gained the wrecked canoe.

He caught hold of one end and lifted it. Many times he had carried an ordinary canoe across a port-

age, but this was heavy and water-soaked. Only the knowledge that he must have it, that life itself might depend on rescuing it, sustained him when it seemed too much for his strength. The one swift glance of inspection he was able to make told him that the craft was hardly damaged beyond that rip in the bottom. When she had capsized the load had been spilled out and she had floated. With an effort that tapped the limit of his resources, Brennan got one end swung around and the craft righted. Then came another wave.

But now the canoe was pointed away from the rolling comber, and the force of the wave lifted the craft and drove it ahead, with Brennan clinging to it. The craft fairly shot through the air, riding the crest, and when the wave sank it was let down on the shore. No sooner had the wave gone than Brennan was dragging the canoe still farther up the beach, and by the time another roller came, he had it beyond reach of the water.

He stood for a moment, breathing heavily and filled with exultation at having been able to save the canoe from wreckage. Yet he was not satisfied. He pulled the canoe deeper into the brush, knowing that the heavy downpour would wipe out the mark of the craft's keel in the sand. Maneuvering the thing behind a log, he covered it with limbs blown from trees. Somebody would, literally, have to stumble on the canoe now before it would be discovered. It would be a job repairing the thing and they'd need paddles, but that could be managed.

The thought came that he didn't even need to tell Doom about finding the canoe, but he put it from his mind. "Maybe he hasn't come clean on everything he knows here," Bren-

nan reflected, "but at least he gave me a chance. If I find the gun I'll know he was on the square!"

He moved toward the snag. It looked just as Doom had described it. Brennan thrust his hand deep in the heart of it—and touched cold metal. When he drew the gun out he had a sudden lift of hope that made him want to yell in triumph.

Carefully he pumped the shells out that he might count them. Five! He slid them back into the magazine. He wished that there were more, but was thankful that Doom hadn't unloaded the gun after taking it from him at the time of the arrest.

THE old black-powder .38 was more than a mere weapon to him. There were ways, he had heard, of proving which of several guns of the same caliber had fired a certain bullet. Had they saved the bullet or bullets which had killed Cash Hazlitt? "If they have," reflected Brennan confidently, "this gun should prove I didn't kill him."

It was an all important point, but he had a hunch that he couldn't rely on it. Doom was the old-time type of peace officer who would proceed on direct evidence and not bother himself with new-fangled ideas about the individuality of guns. In Doom's mind the case was clear cut. Hazlitt had been killed by a .38, and Vance Brennan was the only one in the vicinity of the murder who had such a gun. That would be enough for Doom.

But in Brennan's shirt pocket was the bullet he had taken from Doom's side. "If *that* bullet came from the same gun that killed Hazlitt, we'd know who did the job!" It was a remote hope at best. Probably the surgeon who had taken the deadly missiles from Cash Hazlitt's body had thrown them away. It was a

hundred-to-one chance that they were gone.

Who else in these parts save old Dan Chavrell had that kind of gun? Chavrell was probably dead in the lake, his gun with him. But there *was* somebody else in this valley who had a .38.

"Makes a man dizzy tryin' to figure it out," he told himself. "Anyway, I've got a gun now, and I can do a little huntin' on my own account!"

He swung around sharply then, for again there came to him, acrid and pungent, the disturbing smell of wood smoke. But no longer did he have that feeling of wariness. Confidence had come back. Finding the gun had done something for him.

He made sure that there was a cartridge in the barrel, then, with gun swinging loosely from his hands, he started off in the direction whence it seemed to him that the smoke came. He had a stack of blue chips at last and could sit in on the tough game.

But the play was being crowded by oncoming dark. The storm roared as fiercely as ever, yet the gloom of the overcast sky was deepened by real twilight. The cave was a long way off and tonight there would be no light by which to travel, not even from the stars or the moon which, no longer horned, was nearing fullness. There were plenty of ways in which a man could stumble into trouble. Yet this time, instead of running away, Vance Brennan was looking forward to meeting trouble.

CHAPTER XIX

DRUMS OF DEATH

HE held to what he thought was a general direction. The going was bad. There was no possibility now of following one of the trails, for the wind and the



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rain had temporarily wiped them out.

Water streamed off Brennan's face and he was bedraggled and drenched to the skin, but somehow he did not feel cold or miserable. For the first time he had the sensation that the shadowy foe, so real and yet so intangible, was taking form and substance. "It's one thing," as he explained in his thoughts, "to scrap with somethin' a man can get hold of, instead of fightin' unseen ghosts." Not that the enemy had yet been revealed, but Brennan knew that he was getting nearer, that he was "catchin' up," as he phrased it to himself.

But when fifteen minutes and then a half-hour of careful hunting had elapsed without his so much as catching another whiff of the tell-tale smoke, he began to feel less confident.

He stopped, sheltering himself under a tree, while he tried to piece the thing out. He was sure he had not swung around; he had picked an almost direct route and stuck to it. "That cussed wind is tricky," he reflected. "It could pick up smoke and swirl it in any direction. Chances are I've been travelin' the wrong way all the time."

Yet as he waited there, peering around in the coverts, it seemed to him that the surroundings were familiar. Not far to the right was a hurrying stream which had become a foaming torrent. And when the wind pulled back the curtain of rain, Brennan caught sight of low cliffs nearby. "Hell!" he exclaimed. "I'm not far from the Kid's cabin—or where it was!"

At once there came to him a possible explanation of the smoke he had smelled. Under the ashes of the burned cabin fire might smolder for days; perhaps even the rain

hadn't quenched it. But if there was no fire there, then the smoke revealed the nearness of a possible enemy. Before he did anything else he had to determine the origin of that smoke.

Twilight was thicker when he came to the place, fighting his way through the battering rain squalls. He took one look and decided that his first hunch had been correct. So far as he could make out, this fire had been dead for hours.

But he lingered as a new thought struck him. If he poked around in the ashes he could discover—if they were still warm—whether the rain had put out the blaze recently. At the same time he thought of old Dan Chavrell's cache. Brennan had intended for curiosity's sake, to return to this place with the Kid and have a look at the white pebbles which the old man had treasured. Now chance had given him the opportunity. He stood his gun against a nearby tree and began groping in the ashes with his hands.

But the embers were long dead, he decided, for no warmth remained. "Somebody is around, snuggin' up to a blaze," he decided. He saw a depression in the center of the ruins, and dug there. As he pawed away the sodden ashes he saw the fire-stained pebbles, discolored by the heat.

He picked up one, studying it, and the thought struck him that this hoard of Dan Chavrell's was not quite the same as the white pebbles he himself had found in the cave.

Or were they? They were shaped differently, he saw. Then he realized that, after all, they were the same, but that the heat had split them open. Fire, he remembered, is particularly destructive to limestone.

Brennan rubbed one of the fragments on his sleeve, clearing away

the wet ash. Suddenly his jaw sagged and he got up, looking around as though fearful that somebody had sneaked up behind and surprised him. For there was a dull glint underneath the whitish coating deposited by the calcareous water, and Brennan, seasoned prospector that he was, knew it was gold!

AFTER that first moment when the discovery hit him with almost physical impact, the simple and natural reasons or explanation leaped to his mind. So far as he could see, it was not pure gold but ore so rich that it was almost a nugget. Where had it come from? Dan Chavrell had undoubtedly found them in the cave, but what had caused them to be located there? Had they been gathered by the old Indians whom the Kid had seen? Such things *might* be part of the Thlingets' *tamanawas*, but Brennan believed that his own idea was nearer the truth.

That falling roof, which broke away at intermittent intervals as water crept through the seams of rock and split away great fragments. He had seen evidence of quartz along the walls of the tunnel, and the roof quite apparently was limestone. "Hell's bells!" he mourned. "What a blind fool I've been. Any chechaeco prospector knows that gold often occurs where there's a fault of limestone and quartz! There it was, plain before my eyes, and I couldn't see it!"

He remembered now that Jim Doom—an old-time hard-rock man—had looked queer as he picked up one of the shattered flakes of that cavern roof. Doom either knew or suspected that it was rich in gold. But if Vance Brennan found it out—so must have been Doom's logic—what would happen? Brennan was tractable enough, even though he was under a charge of murder.



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Maybe it was because he still had confidence that he could clear himself.

But let him learn that there was a veritable treasure trove in this cave. Doom would reason, and there might be trouble. "Wiser than an old sled dog!" thought Brennan. "How much more does he know," I wonder?"

When those blocks crashed to the rocky floor they were mostly shattered into tiny pieces. In time the calcareous water coated the bits, hid their identity. Maybe old Dan Chavrell had split one open accidentally, or he might have suspected the truth by examining samples which had not been coated by the water. There was no telling the size of the deposit; there was no way of knowing how much of the rich ore Dan Chavrell had collected and which now lay under these ashes.

"But Dan Chavrell and Klondike knew the stuff was here," surmised Brennan. "Maybe some Injun brought out a sample, or they got wind of the story. And Klondike knew Dan would find it in time. *That's* what he meant by the *tamanavos* gold that I was to share. "Half of this belongs to me; half to the Kid if old Dan is dead."

But on the heels of that came realization that he was jumping to conclusions like a rainbow trout after a succulent fly. "Whose gold is this, after all? Maybe the old Injuns know about it, and claim it. But under the law if they haven't staked their claim and filed on it, the ground is open to the next man. Maybe the Kid might grab it, but right now, Mr. Brennan, your own rights aren't worth an empty cartridge! Can't seem to remember that you're an outlaw, and only on parole because Jm Doom figures you can't get away!"

But at least this secret was his. The Kid was entitled to know the

truth—but why should Brennan tip his hand to Doom? This stranger is the valley must have got wind of the *tamanawos* gold, but probably he was still trying to find it.

Apparently the bushwhacker didn't know of this cache under the burned cabin. No use of digging it up and trying to move it. The stuff was better off right where it is. Anyway, this much of it belonged to the Kid because Dan Chavrell had collected it. Brennan knew that he couldn't touch a single nugget—not unless he wanted to insist that because Chavrell and Klondike had been partners, he was entitled to half of everything old Dan had found. And he wouldn't do that.

BRENNAN stuck the sample in his already sagging shirt pocket along with the pebbles he had picked up in the cave and the bullet he had cut from Jim Doom's body; and it seemed to him at the moment that, although he was in the presence of riches, that battered lead bullet was worth more to him than if it had been ten times its size and all pure gold.

With the ashes smoothed and the signs of his digging already partly washed away by the rain, Brennan stood up and looked around. He was confident no one had seen him, and yet the importance of his find gave him the nervous sensation of being the subject of knowing scrutiny by some hidden enemy. There was nothing more to do now. He had the gun, and night was close at hand. The cave was a long way off; it would be night before he reached it.

Now there was no further evidence of smoke to put him once more on the trail of the unknown. The rain was beating upon the

ground like the sound of running feet, the trees groaned and swayed in the blasts which came rolling across the forest almost like waves rolled across the treacherous lake. There seemed to be a rhythmic thudding in that steady pound of the rain, and it caught his attention so that he found himself listening closely.

By and by it dawned on him that the muffled thumping was timed too regularly to be caused by the rain blasts alone. His quickened senses determined that the sound seemed to rise and fall with the gale, that it came from the same direction.

It reminded him somewhat of a willow grouse drumming in the spring. That was it—a *drum!* He listened with a growing feeling of awe and bewilderment. Drum? Whose drum and why? Then abruptly came the answer.

"The old Injuns the Kid told about!" he breathed. "The *tamanawos* men! They're here—in this valley!"

CHAPTER XX

KILLER'S RENDEZVOUS

INSTINCTIVELY he moved over and picked up his gun, for no immediate reason, save that there was something vaguely menacing in that ceaseless beat of the hidden drum. It gave him the acute feeling that he was a trespasser upon forbidden ground, that he had spied upon secrets which had been old even before white men came to this northern land. He had scornfully declared more than once that "no Injun ever lived who can make my back hair stand up." Yet despite the feeling of confidence which the gun gave him and his assurance in his own ability to fend for himself,

there was something spine-tingling and sinister in the very atmosphere.

"Brennan, old son, you lettin' this *tamanawas* nonsense make an old woman out of you?" he demanded. It might be that; it might be that the things he had seen in the cave, stark reminders of death, the uneasiness which even the Kid could not shake off, the terror which he had seen written in the face of Cultus Joe—all these by their insistence might have swayed his calm self-possession. Not that he was alarmed by the presence of Indians alone. It was the feeling that there might be something else of which he was not aware that stirred him.

The drumming in itself didn't signify much. "Any time a few old Injuns get in a panic, they want to whang a drum and dance," he reassured himself. Perhaps this storm, which old-time natives might believe was a manifestation of evil spirits, had roused them. Maybe they were drumming to keep up their own courage while *mesatchie* or evil things roamed abroad. "Any kind of nonsense like that," Brennan reasoned.

He almost forced a laugh—but it would not come. His throat felt dry. "Son, you've always bragged that you meet trouble halfway. Now's the time to make good. You're goin' to have a look-see at maybe a new kind of trouble, whether you like it or not!"

For he wanted to see what manner of thing this was that the Kid had feared. The storm would be his protection; it was probably that the *tamanawas* men weren't aware that anybody was near. They wouldn't be on the watch. Anyway, for Brennan, curiosity was greater than any instinct of caution, although he believed he was taking no risk at all.

As he started for the place where they should be, it occurred to him that maybe the presence of these Indians was what had alarmed the caribou he had seen. If the Indians had a fire, then that would account for the smoke which he had detected in the wind. That would still leave the unknown marauder unaccounted for in the valley. "Maybe *that* hombre has heard the drum too and is goin' to take a peek. Nice thing if we get jammed up together!" That would be all to the good. More than anything else Brennan wanted to know the identity of the bushwhacker who had managed to conceal his whereabouts so completely.

He kept going longer than he had anticipated. Possibly the Indian drum had a far-carrying power that was surprising. He had heard that in the old days drums had been used to carry messages over long distances. Poking through the wet brush and beneath great spruce trees where the gloom of night already lay thickly, Brennan came at last to a hogback ridge, beyond which lay one of the grassy vales with which this forest was dotted. There was a reddish blow on the darkened tree-tops down there, and as he crept to the top and looked over, he saw the camp just below him.

A glance told him that it was rude and temporary. There was a large lean-to thrown up on the windward side of a fire. A few old men, probably three or four, squatted inside this shelter, while probably as many more were going through the halting, shuffling paces of a dance back and forth in front of the fire. Just inside the lean-to was the drummer, and to one side of him, apart from the others, sat two oldsters taking no part in the ceremonies.

Yet they seemed important, for

the men weaving about in the dance kept circling past and saluting them—and Brennan saw the glint of steel in those uplifted hands.

AS he stared in fascinated wonder, he saw the others inside the lean-to rise and move forward to join the dancers. These newcomers, however, wore crude masks hewed from cedar and painted grotesquely. They looked like hideous demons from some other world as they swung about, the fire-light showing up their terrifying visages. But still those two old men seated back of the drummer did not move or show any signs of emotion.

"Take an Injun to understand the meanin' of this business," Brennan decided. But somehow his gaze kept returning to the pair who sat there without stirring. He thought of what Jim Doom had told him about the killing at Birch Flat, and he thought, too, with a shudder of horror, of those grisly, lime-coated images in the cave, figures that had once been flesh and blood, but were now cold stone. Perhaps that pair of old-timers sitting there so lethargically had been elected. All of the Indians looked old enough to have been dead long ago, but that pair was the oldest. Perhaps they knew their time had come, and that they were bound for the cave. He mused

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over that thought, trying to fathom the symbolism of it.

But it was beyond him. Probably no white man knew or ever would know, for this was a brotherhood in *tamanawas* whose secrets must never be revealed to others not of their own race.

Those old siwashees could be plenty tough, Brennan knew. The dancers carried knives, and they might have other weapons as well. Brennan realized that quick death would be the portion of anybody caught spying on them.

"Those five shells in the old gun might not be enough, if that happened," he thought somberly. These were no ordinary Indians who might be found hanging around gold camps or trading posts. The pact of *tamanawas* which held them together was something which hurled back time to 2 more savage age. Besides, they would know they could kill a white man, plant him in that cave and nobody would ever find him. Maybe old Dan Chavrell had got a hint of their customs, and that was what scared him, like the Kid had said. But whether it was because of *tamanawas* or because they had other reason for their ghastly rituals, they were killers at heart, and Brennan looked upon them again with growing revulsion. More and more the dancers, particularly those who were masked, seemed like devils conjured from some dark and unseen world.

"Like to toss a few sticks of powder down among you!" he muttered and stood up to draw back farther behind a screening tree.

He had just noticed that the storm seemed on the verge of blowing itself out. It would pass as quickly as it had started, and it struck Brennan just then that he had wasted enough time.

These Indians must have canoes secreted in some cove in the lake, probably well hidden so that they

could not be found. Or there might be a trail out of the valley, one that even Dan Chavrell had never found. But there seemed no practical plan by which that secret could be learned. The only way it could be done was to trail the Indians while they were leaving, but Brennan foresaw trouble in that plan. If the Indians knew there was any other living person in the valley, white or red, they would hunt him down and kill him. Dan Chavrell and the Kid had been mighty skillful to keep clear of this band.

"Lucky if they don't stumble onto the canoe I hid," he reflected. "If they do, then it's goin' to be a battle to see who lives long enough to get out of this cussed valley!" But further conjecture was cut short when he saw a change come over the ancients by the fire.

The beating of the drum ceased and the dance ended. There was a new kind of activity down there, and he saw the meaning of it at once.

They were making ready to leave. Brennan was well aware that there could be but one possible place where they would head for, and that was the *tamanawos* cave under the waterfall, where the Kid and Jim Doom waited unaware of this new menace.

BRENNAN berated himself for not thinking about the certainty of that at the beginning. He had delayed here, needlessly, it seemed, while darkness thickened and slowed him. No doubt the Indians had a trail of their own which would take them to the cave by the most direct route. It would be necessary for Brennan to fight through brush and down timber if he hoped to get there ahead of them, and he shuddered at the

thought of what would happen if he did not get there first. Let them come upon the Kid and Jim Doom on the cave and the two would not have a chance. These Indians were armed, but even without arms, they could, by their numbers alone, overpower the man and boy.

The rain stopped with a final flurry of pelting drops, but the wind remained as strong as ever. As he pulled away from the hogback and began the swing around the camp of the *tamanawos* men, Brennan saw the masses of cloud breaking in the sky. Maybe the Indians knew this would happen. Maybe they foresaw the moon, when it did shine through, as a propitious sign for their evil mission.

The moon was not yet full; there had not been time enough for that since the dusk when, coming down-river in the canoe, Brennan had seen it as a thin rind with horns as sharp as those presumably possessed by the devil himself. The Kid had said that the Indians never appeared until the moon reached fullness, but it was a point, Brennan realized, over which there need be no quibbling. "The big thing," he told himself, "is that those devils are here. They make their own *tamanawos* rules anyway as they go along."

The moon was not yet up, but in the rain-washed sky the stars shimmered with a strange clearness as though they were millions of eyes staring down upon this deep wilderness and waiting for the inevitable drama to begin. While Brennan watched the *tamanawos* men at their rites he had shivered from his wet clothes in the chill wind, but the going now was rough enough to work him into a sweat. The thickets were dark and he had to fight his way almost blindly through

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them, so that it seemed he was merely crawling. Unless he got ahead of the Indians he could not hope to reach the cave before they did.

"Damnation!" he raged when a hidden ground-creeper tripped him with a crash of breaking brush. "Might snap a leg here or twist an ankle and have to wait until those devils caught me. If the wind is right they should have heard *that* noise a mile!" His surest hope, it seemed, was to find the trail which they would be following. Unless that had been wiped out by the storm, as had the others, it would mean quick and easy going for him.

Likewise he realized that he might walk into trouble from another source. With the storm ended, the wild dogs probably would set out on their hunting, hoping to round up a stray caribou. If he didn't walk into them, there was always the possibility of coming on that lone rifleman, under circumstances not to Brennan's liking. The man could hear him coming, merely wait and, when Brennan was close enough, blast him down. But those were risks not to be avoided and there was no use worryin' about 'em. Brennan kept his head down and plunged ahead.

A full mile beyond the point where the *tamanawas* men had camped during the storm, he came upon their trail, or at least upon a trail which he assumed was the one they would use, for it was plain and the footing good. He felt like yelling in relief after that terrific battle with the jungle, but instead he saved his breath and hit a still faster stride.

He was ahead of the Indians; he knew he must be. It was hardly possible that the oldsters could have made ready and struck a swifter pace than his. Nor did he see signs that



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