

# WESTERN STORY

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## MAGAZINE

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NOV. 14,  
1936

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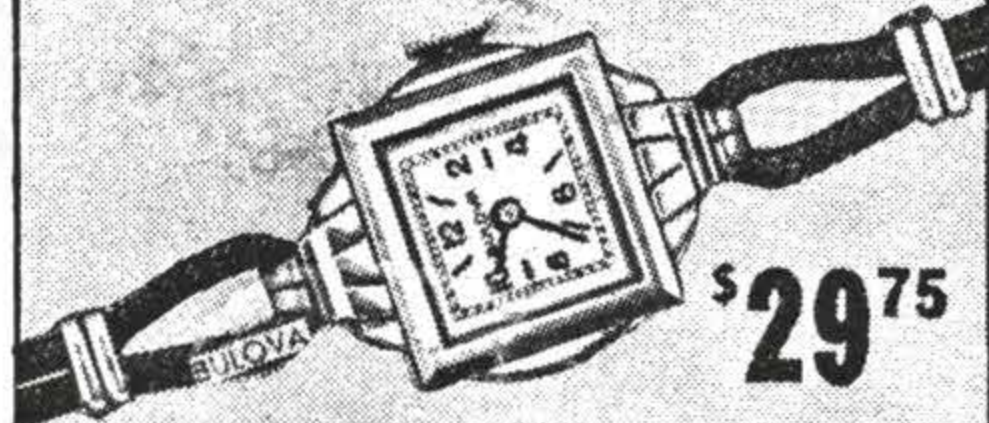
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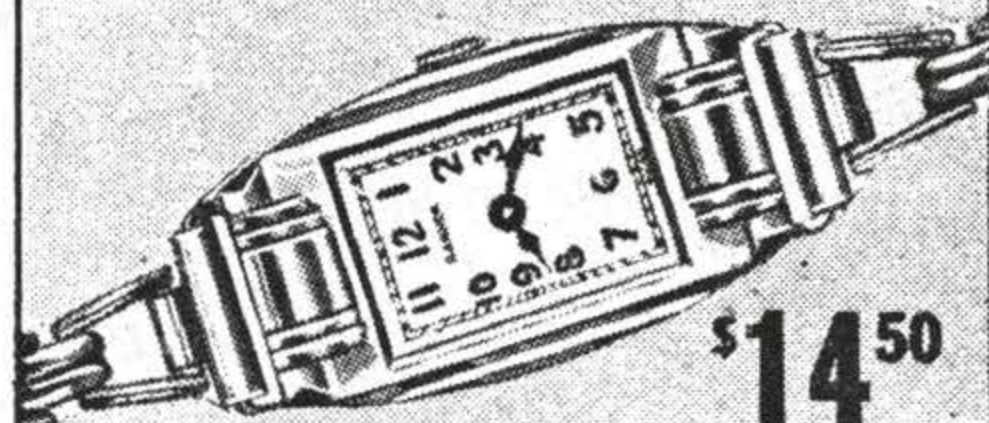
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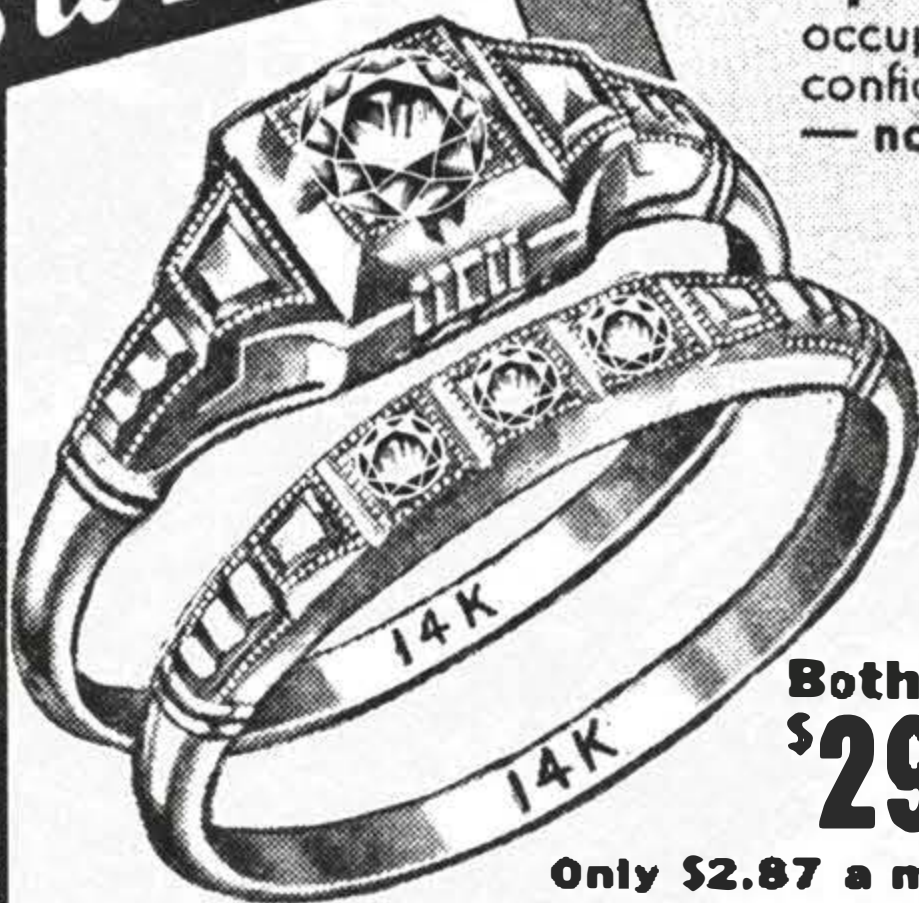


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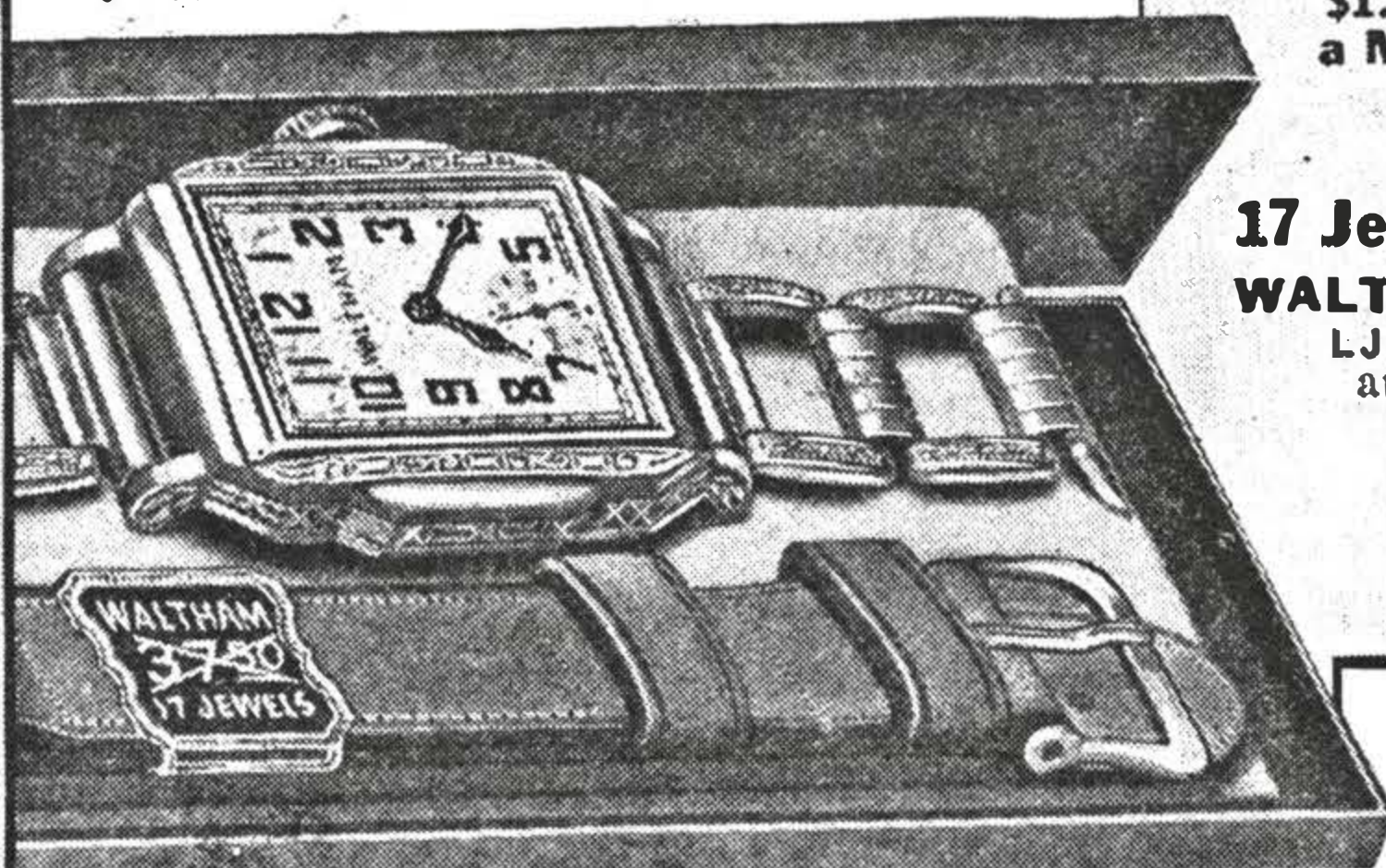


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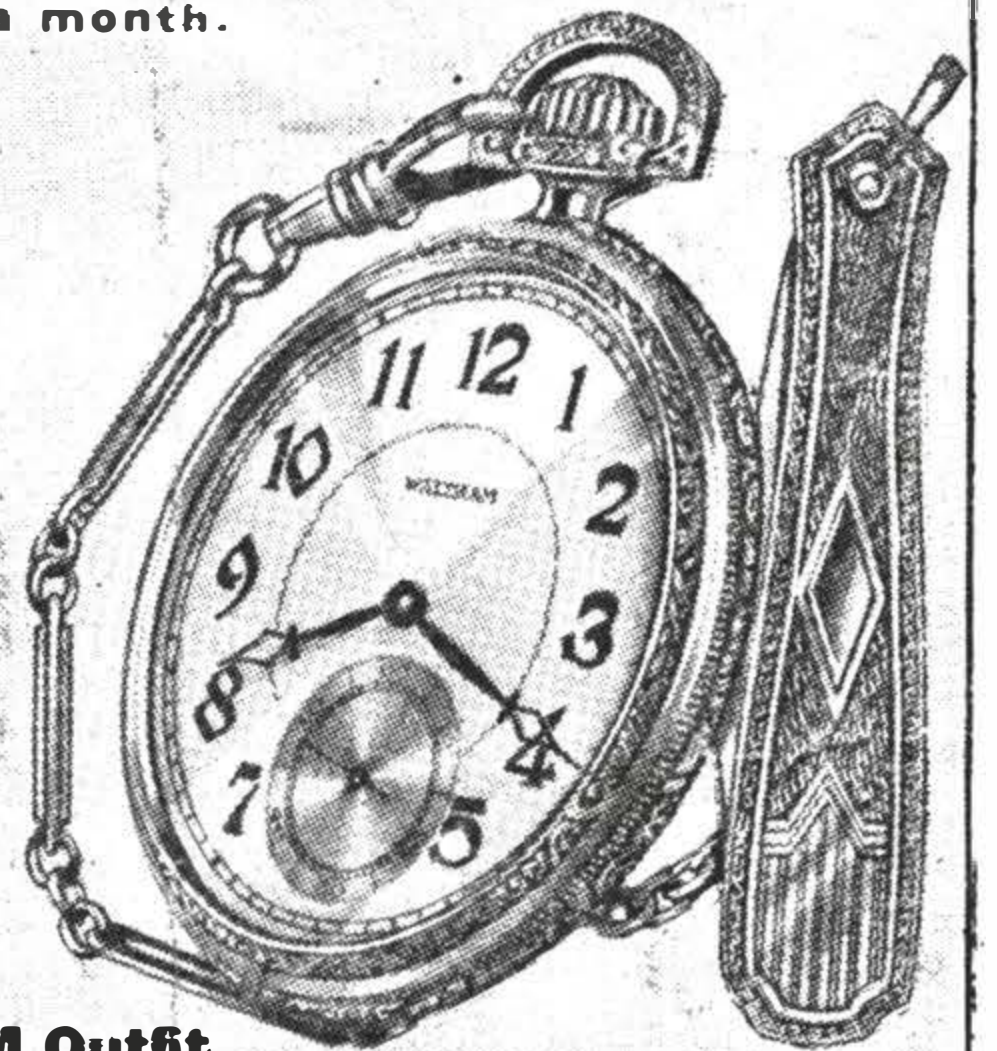


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One *today* upon another *today*—how quickly a decade is built! Youth approaches manhood in high heart, embraces maturity as the period of his conquest, then “remembers with a sigh the days that are no more.”

So life goes—like that. NOW is the only opportunity. NOW is the moment of success. NOW men decide—NOW men win or fail.

Are you one of the men who are wondering today what will happen to them tomorrow? Then

remember this: *If you take care of today, tomorrow will take care of itself.* And one of the most important safeguards you can take is to be certain your *training* is modern . . . that you are adequately equipped to master the problems of 1937. Today, in almost every line of human endeavor, ambitious men are modernizing their training by spare-time study of International Correspondence Schools Courses. Their action is a guide to you — and NOW is the time to act! Complete information on any subject in which you are interested will be sent without cost or obligation. The coupon is for your convenience. Return it *today*.

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Vol. CLII

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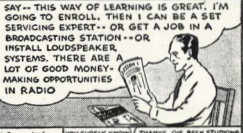


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Fortunately, nature has provided an automatic method of getting rid of these excess Acids. To get rid of these Acids nature provides that your blood circulate 200 times an hour through 9 million tiny, delicate tubes, or filters, in your Kidneys. It is the function of the Kidneys to filter out these health-destroying Acids, and to purify the blood so that it can take energy and vitality to every part of your body. But if your Kidneys slow down and do not function properly, and remove approximately 3 pints of Acids, Poisons, and liquids from your blood every 24 hours, then there is a gradual accumulation of these Acids and Wastes, and slowly but surely your system becomes poisoned, making you feel old before your time, run-down, and worn-out.

## Causes Many Ills

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Dr. T. J. Bastelli

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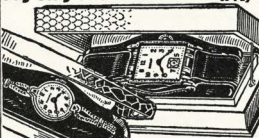


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32x4.75-20	2.50 1.05	32x4.75-20	2.80 1.45
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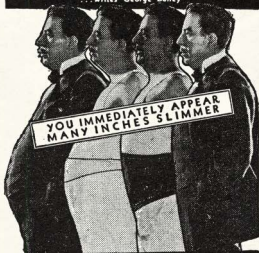
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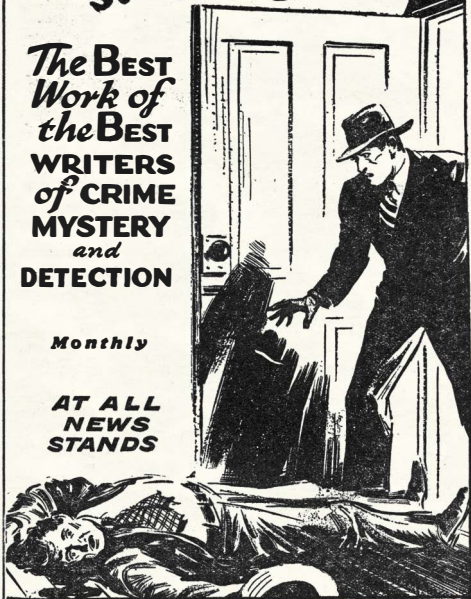
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**AT ALL  
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## THE GRIZZLY BARED

By C. WILES HALLOCK

To "Mike-high" Flat came "Grizzly  
Matt,"

A man of large dimensions,  
With shaggy jowls—who uttered howls  
And hinted grim intentions.

Vague threats he spoke against some  
'poke,

Whose name he didn't tip us,  
And slapped his gun, and talked of fun  
He'd planned—to stir and grip us.

Came Ranny Wight to town one night,  
From Three-star spread, down Rye  
way,

A yippin' glad—but peaceful—lad,  
Which had a shrewd and sly way  
Of springin' jokes and joshin' folks  
When he was feelin' frisky.

He strolled inside Mike's place, and  
spied

Big Matt imbibin' whisky.

With twinklin' eye, and movin' spry,  
Young Ranny stepped up silent  
Beside Big Matt and yanked his hat  
From off his noggin' v'lent.

"Waal, durn my hide!" young Ranny  
cried.

"Take off them whiskers, mister!  
What makes you mind to strut behind  
A phony beard, you blister?"

Matt whirled around with rage profound  
And grabbed his equalizer,  
Plumb roarin' mad. But Ranny had  
Him covered. "Now, disguiser!"  
The bold lad breezed and quickly seized  
Matt's shaggy bush ungentle.  
"You got no cause to deck your jaws  
So dog-goned ornamental!"

Waal, on my oath, that shaggy growth  
Come loose in Ranny's paw,  
And we all stared at Grizzly bared  
With dumb, astonished awe!

"He's Hoss-face Gage, which robbed the  
stage

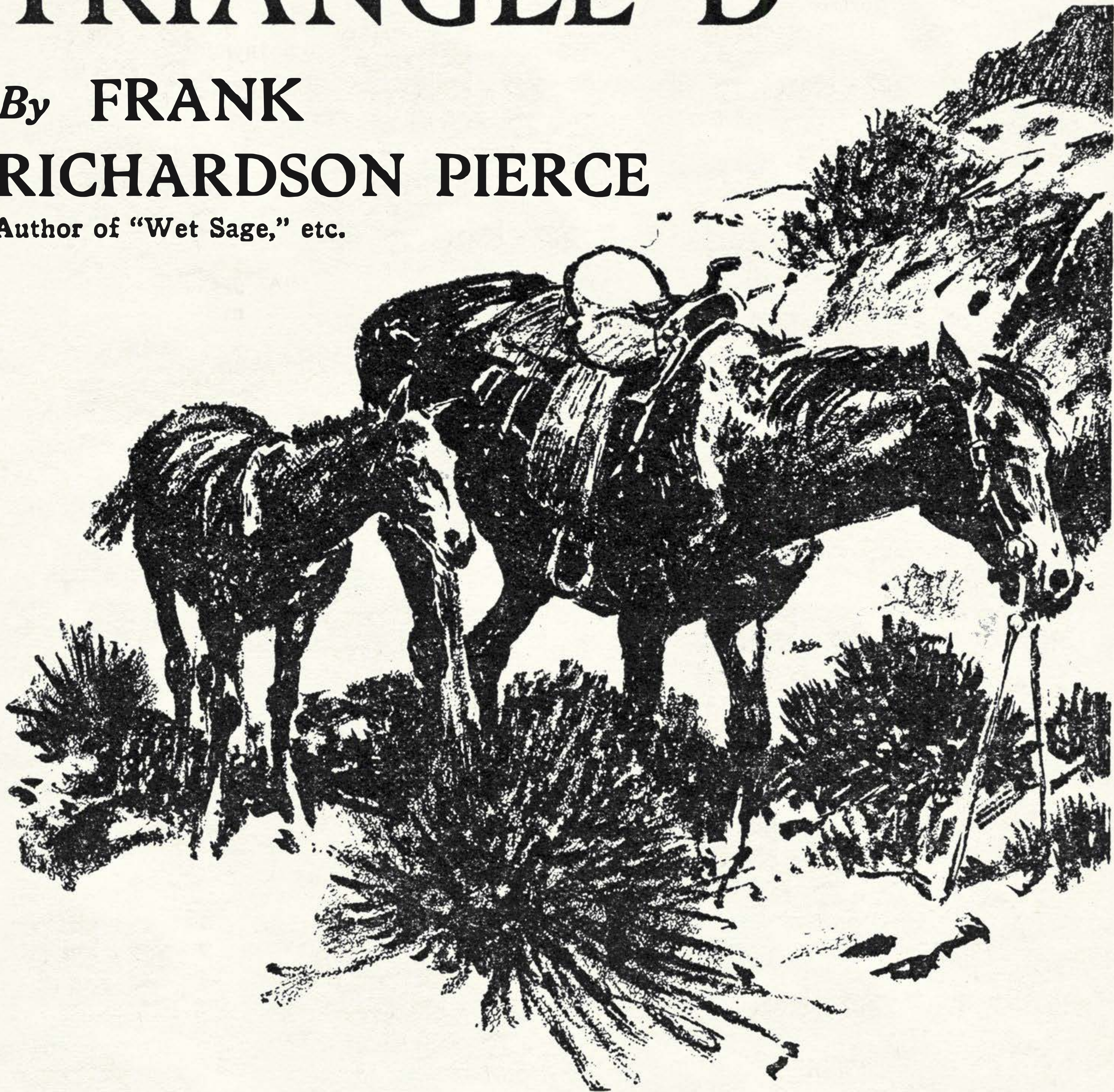
And got this township terrified!"  
Young Ranny said. Which Shuriff Ned  
De Beck's rogue pictures verified!



# ODDS ON TRIANGLE D

By FRANK  
RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "Wet Sage," etc.



## CHAPTER I.

### BLUE-CHIP MARE.

**H**AWK" McCLURE'S big black stallion, Diablo, suddenly whinnied and swerved from the faint trail he was following. "Now what's got into you?" Hawk growled. "Don't you know we've just escaped one of Sheriff Snell's traps and that silence is golden?"

Sheriff Snell had tried for nearly

five years to collect the five-thousand-dollar reward offered for Hawk McClure, the outlaw, dead or alive. Only the finest horseflesh, constant alertness and reckless courage had enabled Hawk and his men to escape the sheriff's numerous traps. The last trap had been set in the heart of the bad lands, and a posse of thirty men had converged on the lone outlaw. Thanks to Diablo's stamina, he had escaped for the present; but he did not consider





himself safe, by any means. Diablo's unexpected whinny might prove disastrous; particularly if deputies mounted on fresh horses lurked in the vicinity.

"No," Hawk said sharply, as he reined the stallion back onto the trail, "you don't go over there in that direction."

Diablo's whinny was answered, first by a mare, then a colt.

"Hold on!" Hawk exclaimed. "That mare's whinny was mighty weak. And what is a colt doing in the bad lands?" He pulled his

high-crowned Stetson down over his bloodshot eyes, and stared.

Day was fading, and the red-and-brown buttes cast long shadows across the parched land. Hawk McClure presented a striking figure as he considered the situation. His coal-black hair was gray with alkali dust, and his hawklike profile stamped him a man capable of facing the worst the desert could offer, and surviving. He stood six feet and weighed about two hundred pounds; every ounce was hard flesh, bone, and muscle, making him look twenty pounds lighter.

Sunlight flashed brilliant lights from the butts of his gold-mounted guns and the ancient Spanish ring



that he wore. The ring, with its exquisitely carved hawk in the act of striking its prey, had given him his nickname. And it was symbolic of his engagement to Marie Alverado, whose father owned a great ranch in Mexico. This same Don Alverado remembered Hawk mightily in his prayers. He prayed that death and disaster would overtake Hawk before he married Marie.

"That mare might be in trouble," Hawk reflected. "Again, she might be bait in another of Snell's traps; but I've got to take that chance."

He dismounted, drew one of the gold-mounted guns, and advanced. Nothing happened to again break the sinister silence of the bad lands.

**C**AUTIOUSLY, Hawk lifted his head above a low ridge and peered down into a small gulch. A black mare with a proud lift of her head stood on three legs. The fourth leg—the left front—was broken. The scarred saddle on her back was proof she had somersaulted, and her leg had snapped as she stepped into a squirrel hole. The absence of a rider hinted at tragedy.

"The rider couldn't have been a deputy," Hawk reasoned, "because he wouldn't have taken the colt along. It's sure queer all around."

There was tragedy in the mare's eyes as Hawk approached. Her kind had always looked to man when in trouble, but perhaps she sensed from the sympathy of his eyes that her case was hopeless. He gently rubbed her nose, then looked down at the leg. There was no doubt of it—the leg was broken.

"And that means a bullet," Hawk muttered.

A shot might center attention on the spot and bring the posse, but Hawk didn't hesitate. A few sec-

onds later it was over. As he removed the saddle, he noticed the brand for the first time.

"Triangle D!" he exclaimed.

The sight of the brand conjured memories of his youth. From his ninth to twelfth year, he had ridden all over the big spread, usually with Ted Dravus, the owner's son. Big, breezy "Poker Jim" Dravus, who owned the Triangle D, had been Hawk's ideal. Poker Jim had taught him the fine points of shooting and poker. He had treated him like a son.

Then Hawk's family had moved, but Poker Jim's influence had remained. "Shoot square; but when you see trouble coming beat the other fellow to the draw," had been the rancher's code. And it was a good code in the West.

Riding under his real name, Jeff Carney, he had been shooting square when an enemy bullet had creased him. Five years later he regained his mind in an insane asylum after a delicate operation. Later, he learned that during the five-year period he had become one of the fastest gunmen in the West and was the leader of a band of outlaws. Owing a debt to the outlaw band, and particularly his chief lieutenant, "Catamount" Larrabee, he had retained his outlaw identity, Hawk McClure.

But Poker Jim's influence was so strong on Hawk's character that he had established a reputation as a square outlaw, and honest ranchers had less to fear from him than from Sheriff Snell, his remorseless enemy.

Hawk examined the contents of the saddlebags. To his astonishment he found a scrawled letter addressed to himself. It read:

DEAR HAWK: I've hunted five years for you and just found out who you are. Poker Jim done more to improve the breed of



cattle and horses than any man in the West during our time. He spent a fortune trying to develop a horse that would win the Cattlemen's Derby, but no Triangle D nag ever came in. That would have busted the average man's heart. But Poker Jim had a big heart, and it could stand a lot of breaking. He was a blue chip. But his three boys all turned out white chips. When Ted Dravus went to the dogs, that busted Poker Jim's heart. The Triangle D was taken over by the mortgage people and Poker Jim was sent to the Branch City Insane Asylum. Maybe he was railroaded; maybe he just didn't care.

Hawk paused in his reading and looked hurriedly about. In the excitement of stumbling onto the mare, colt, and letter, he had lowered his usual caution. The spot was sheltered by low ridges on each side, but in the late-afternoon silence the sound of that shot would travel far.

He continued to read:

Poker Jim gave me this mare, Dulcie. She's a blue chip, like Jim. I fixed it up so he'd have title, and I'd be a kind of guardian. I'm too old to train her colt for the Cattlemen's Derby, but you ain't. So I'm bringing her to you. I'm writing this letter in case I peter out on the trail. If I do, I'll send her on alone, knowing somebody in your hangout will see her and investigate. Dulcie is still Poker Jim's nag, and you're only guardian. You owe him that much, and unless you've turned out to be a white chip—which I doubt like the deuce—you'll fix things up and maybe Poker Jim will die happy.

Yours truly,

JESS LEE.

"But what happened to Jess Lee?" Hawk asked himself. "Did he quit the saddle, hoping to conserve Dulcie's strength so she could go on? Or did he fall from weakness? Jess must be pretty old. He was an old man when I first met him. Still, he was tough."

Hawk's picture of Jess was almost as sharp as that of Poker Jim Dravus. He was a bright-eyed little old man with an amused chuckle,

who always looked for the best in every one. A friend's enemies were his enemies. A friend's achievements were applauded, and their weaknesses and mistakes excused. Remembering this, Hawk knew it had cost the old man much to declare Poker Jim's boys white chips. Jess Lee was always expecting something to turn up, as he expressed it.

Hawk walked along the edge of a sand dune and started the sand to sifting downward. It reached the mare, piled up and gradually covered her.

"Blue-chip mare," he said softly. "And a blue-chip colt, too. If I wasn't a wanted man, I'd take that fellow and maybe win the Cattlemen's Derby, but——"

He crouched suddenly as his eyes caught a movement. A bullet kicked up the sand directly behind him.

"That was a close one," he growled. "I'm in a jack pot!"

ONE man at least had heard the shot that put the mare out of her agony. He had responded, and was ready to collect five thousand dollars for Hawk dead. The man was evidently taking no chances on bringing in the outlaw alive. There had been no demand to surrender. Hawk crawled between two boulders and whistled sharply. Diablo followed. After some hesitation, the colt trailed the stallion.

"I'll figure out a name for you, son, some other time," Hawk said. "It looks as if I'm in for a lively session now."

The shadows deepened in the canyons, and the sunlight faded from the higher ridges a few minutes later. The stillness was broken by a shout.



"Hawk, the jig's up," Sheriff Snell's voice informed him. "When you killed that mare, you fired the costliest shot you ever fired. I've got thirty men surroundin' this little canyon. You can't get clear; so make up your mind. Come out now with your hands up, or wait until my boys can see you and be packed out lashed to a saddle."

"I'll shoot it out with the boys in the morning—if I'm here, Snell," Hawk answered. "S'long."

His retort was calculated to inspire nervousness among the posse. A night, during which every man lost sleep, would not do their shooting ability any good. Hawk ate dry, uncooked food and gave the stallion and colt half of his remaining canteen water.

He waited until the night was darkest, then fastened the colt's halter rope to the saddle horn. He slapped Diablo on the side and started him toward the home range, thirty miles distant. He smacked the stallion's rump with several stones until it broke into a gallop. The colt, yanked along, decided to follow.

High above, he heard Sheriff Snell's excited voice. "He's makin' a break! Let him have it!" Orange daggers stabbed the darkness as men opened fire at the sound. Hawk waited, his face tense and white, fearful he might hear the scream of a bullet-torn horse.

"It ain't Hawk," a deputy bawled. "I got a look. It's the stallion and colt."

"Watch out Hawk don't go out the other end of the gulch," Snell warned. "That's an old trick of the gang—get deputies lookin' at a gallopin' nag and then escapin' the opposite direction." He yelled down at Hawk: "That trick didn't work, did it?"

Hawk did not answer. He skulked among the rocks and brush, seeking a means of breaking through, but finding none. Deputies patrolling the ridges of the gulch were always within sight of each other. He threw a rock into a clump of sage and instantly a sawed-off shotgun riddled the sage with buckshot.

Again silence settled on the gulch. Shortly before dawn it was broken. "I hear sand shiftin' down," a deputy yelled in a nervous voice. "He's tryin' to get out!"

"I'll take care of it," Snell answered. "Don't any man of you leave the place I assigned; then he can't get through."

Snell ran along the ridge to a point where sand flowed slowly from a weathered cliff to the bottom of the gulch. He doubted if any one could climb over that sand and escape from the gulch. Every step started a small avalanche that would either bury or force a man back.

The sound of shifting sand stopped. Perhaps it had started through chance; a gust of wind could do it. Nevertheless, Snell remained on the spot until dawn. Gradually it grew lighter, and the vague shadows of his posse took form and became eager, alert men scenting the kill.

At first no man exposed himself; then an overeager man grew careless. Snell expected to see Hawk's guns spurt lead and the man pitch into the gulch, but neither sound nor movement came.

"He's down there," Snell shouted. "He's got to be down there! I've circled both ridges, and there ain't a sign of his tracks leadin' out."

There was a note of hysteria in his voice. Throughout the night he had pictured himself riding into Grand Junction, the county seat,



with Hawk McClure lashed to a saddle.

"What'd we better do?" a deputy asked.

"We'll line up twenty feet apart," Snell answered, "and comb that gulch." He took up a position on the extreme left. "Turn over every rock that might cover the mouth of a hole, and kick every clump of brush," he directed. "Ready? Advance!"

Their high-heeled boots crunched on the gravel and crackled the dry brush. They rolled rocks over and stamped through the denser thickets. Snell stumbled over several rocky clumps protruding from the sand, skirted a stunted mesquite the size of his saddle and plodded on. Bewilderment filled the faces of the posse when the search ended.

"It's a lead-pipe cinch he ain't there, but he didn't go out on his horse last night," one of them blurted. "I examined the tracks. That stallion wasn't carryin' more'n the saddle. So where in tarnation is he?"

They spent the next hour searching the surrounding areas, then rode toward Grand Junction. Some of the more superstitious men shuddered. If Hawk McClure could escape through their watchful ring, then he could have knifed any one of them had he desired.

## CHAPTER II.

POKER JIM DRAVUS.

LONG after the posse had departed, the stunted mesquite stirred. A man's nostrils protruded above the sand, but the remainder of his face was covered with a thin layer. A head lifted and shook, then hands appeared from the sand and removed a protecting bandage from the eyes. The

eyes roved the canyon for nearly fifteen minutes, then Hawk McClure's grinning face appeared above the mesquite. He looked at Snell's tracks and grinned again.

"I had an idea he'd dodge those rocks protruding from the sand," he mused, "and would naturally miss this brush. Otherwise, he'd have stepped on my face. Look at that gulch! Nearly every living bush stamped down."

He breathed deeply, with relief. The sand sifting across his body had grown in volume each hour. He had buried himself at dawn, and his relief was that of a man who had escaped the tomb.

Hawk salvaged his guns and canteens which he had covered up next to his ribs, emptied the sand from his boots and was ready to travel. In all of his encounters with Snell this had been the closest to death from suffocation or the sheriff's bullets.

Hawk did not hurry. He was too desert-wise for that. Hour after hour, he trudged across the burning sands, drinking sparingly from his canteen and watching a group of peaks on a range of blue mountains.

His hang-out, known as Hawk's Nest, was located among those peaks, but he had no immediate intention of going there. Ten miles from the gulch he reached Quail Springs. The sheriff's posse had visited the spot, and the water hole was almost empty; but Hawk flopped down in the shade and waited. Late that afternoon, he heard hoofs against hard rock. He crawled into a thicket, though he had an idea that he knew the approaching rider's name.

He proved to be a brawny individual whose hands carried big knuckles and whose mouth was



filled with big teeth. His hair was red, and, though his smile was lazy and indulgent, men wise in human nature would have instantly guessed that the man would be a tornado when aroused.

Hawk jumped up, and there was genuine affection in his smile. "Hello, Catamount, you old tramp!" he bellowed.

The concern filling Catamount Larrabee's eyes as he neared the water hole vanished. "Golly, Hawk," he drawled, "I'm glad to see you. Diablo and a colt came in early this morning. I knew you was afoot, and I figured you'd follow the usual plan and wait here until one of the boys could bring you a horse. But I saw Sheriff Snell and his posse of dry-gulchers. They had me worried."

"They had me worried, too," Hawk admitted. "They ran me ragged, but I never was close enough for a good look until it got dark. Same old bunch, I suppose?"

"Yeah, only more so," Catamount said.

"Explain what you mean," Hawk said. Unusual strangers sometimes meant trouble.

"The same old bunch had a Jasper with green eyes and a black mustache," Catamount answered. "Naturally, crouchin' in the brush I couldn't get a good look at him. But if ever I saw a man hunter, it was him. Maybe the governor's out of patience because Snell ain't caught us yet and is givin' him help."

"Green eyes—black mustache. Anything else?" Hawk asked.

"Smokes long black cigars," Catamount added. "Snell called him Castle, Nestle, or something like that."

"I'll investigate him," Hawk said. "Here's a letter I found in the sad-

debags on the colt's mother." Hawk briefly explained what had happened.

Catamount read Jess Lee's letter through carefully. "It looks like your boyhood friend's cut out a job for you. What're you goin' to call the colt?"

"I'm going to give the name plenty of thought," Hawk replied. "Now here's the plan. You clear out for Hawk's Nest and give that colt training. Let's find out if he's a blue or white chip. He's got good racing blood. It stands out all over him. You're as fine a trainer as any man I know," Hawk continued. "Handle him in your own way."

"And what're you goin' to do?" Catamount inquired.

"Can't you guess?" Hawk countered, grinning.

"I think I can," Catamount answered. "You'll be ridin' the fresh horse I brought you and swinging into action. Diablo needs a rest. You've been workin' him pretty steady, what with Snell on your tail most of the time."

The two friends shook hands and separated.

SEVERAL days later, Hawk McClure rode into Branch City. The town was located in the adjoining State, but far enough from the border so that Hawk felt fairly confident that he would not be recognized. Branch City consisted of one main street, flanked by two-story brick buildings, and three cross streets on which had been built smaller structures.

The courthouse would ordinarily have been an imposing structure in any Western community, but it was dominated by a massive brick building located on a bench a mile from town. Well-fenced pastures surrounded the building on three sides.



Some contained cattle, others sheep, and a small pasture had been turned over to a score of horses, ranging from saddle to heavy plow stock. Orchards and a vast vegetable garden completed the unusual establishment. Here were housed the State's insane, and the hospital was referred to as Branch City Asylum. Like prisons, insane hospitals often take the name of the nearest town.

Hawk stopped at the post office to mail letters. None of his band ever risked mailing a letter at Grand Junction. Incoming mail was addressed care of general delivery in towns like Branch City. Members of the band, passing through, picked up the mail. Thus letters from home were often few and far between. Hawk was about to stop at the general-delivery window when his finely tuned sense of danger warned him. He whirled and looked squarely into the coldest green eyes he had ever encountered. In a glance, he knew that this man possessed limitless courage. Certainly, he must be fast on the draw, for his hands moved with the swift grace of a cat's paw dabbing at a mouse. He held a long, black cigar between the fingers of his left hand, leaving the right hand free, Hawk decided, for gun play should it come suddenly.

"Hello, McClure," the stranger said to Hawk's astonishment. "You're thinking the same thing I am—which of us is fastest on the draw. Well, this isn't any place to settle it. We'll leave it one of the West's mysteries for the present."

"Fair enough, Mr.—" Hawk hesitated, stepped closer and noticed by the punctured fabric of the man's vest that he had frequently worn a star.

"My name's Castle," the astounding individual smoothly informed

him. "I'll trot along now. Glad to have met you. I admire talent wherever I find it, and you displayed talent in escaping from Snell's posse. I'd have sworn the human fence he built around you was—shall we say 'hawk-tight'?"

Castle's face betrayed neither friendliness nor enmity. He turned sharply and left the post office, moving off with swift, tigerish strides.

Hawk, fearing that Castle might attempt to arrest him later, made no attempt to pick up any mail. He wanted nothing on his person that might incriminate members of his band. He left the post office, ready for anything, but nothing happened. Life in Branch City moved sluggishly along. A deputy sheriff sauntered up the street, but gave Hawk hardly a glance.

"I've run into some queer people in my time," Hawk muttered, "but Castle takes the cake. He knows there's a five-thousand-dollar reward on my head and doesn't lift a hand to collect it."

Hawk rode out to the asylum and asked to see Poker Jim Dravus. The doctor in charge shook his head gravely.

"I'm sorry, but the patient is in no condition to receive visitors. You are a relative?" he asked, as if inclined to change his mind.

"No; but when I was a young boy he was like a father to me. He left his influence on my character," Hawk replied.

"And he left his influence on many a man's character," the doctor said; "but, ironically enough, his strength and uprightness left his own sons untouched. Do you think you could stand the shock of seeing him?"

"Ask him if he would like to see Jeff Carney," Hawk replied. "I can stand the shock."

"Asking him would be useless,"



the doctor explained; "he wouldn't understand."

**H**E led Hawk down a narrow hall and unlocked a heavy door. The murmurings and mutterings of sixty or seventy men dinned in their ears. Some sat on heavy benches—benches too heavy to pick up and throw; others squatted, with backs against the wall, and several were pushing floor polishers. The polishers were heavy blocks of wood, wrapped with a blanket and fitted with a handle.

The doctor stopped before a door of solid oak. Oak bars permitted a view of the cell-like room beyond. There was a strong bed, and a window protected by a screen of wire capable of withstanding an attack with bare hands.

A big man, his hair snow-white, sat with bowed head and vacant eyes. He did not look up when the doctor spoke. Hawk stared at the big, toil-scarred hands that had taught him to rope and shoot. Even confinement behind gloomy walls had failed to bleach the tan from Poker Jim's hands. As they watched, the hands resting on Jim's knees tightened, and a strange, bright light filled the vacant eyes.

"Ten thousand dollars on Pardner's nose," he shouted. "Yes, on the nose. My boy Ted's riding him."

"Pardner was the greatest horse Poker Jim ever developed," Hawk explained to the doctor. "I heard later Ted was drunk when he rode the stallion in the Cattlemen's Derby and lost the race."

"As far as Poker Jim Dravus is concerned," the doctor said, "the race isn't finished. Listen! If you can stand it!"

Poker Jim stood up. "They're off!" he bellowed in a voice that

could be heard all over the building. "That's the ticket, Ted! Let Gorin's horse set the pace. Ah, they're at the quarter. Don't use the whip, Ted. Don't! Come on! Come on! Close in, Ted. Come on, Pardner! Come on! Pardner! Pardner!" He pounded the door with his fists. His eyes were within inches of Hawk's, but he saw only a mile track, packed stands, and horses pounding over the turf. "Come on, Pardner! You shouldn't have whipped him, Ted. Come on! Come—on!"

Poker Jim stumbled back to the bed and sat down, his hands pressed hard against his head.

"He didn't see the race through to the finish," Hawk said, deeply moved by the tragedy in the old man's face.

"Exactly!" the doctor answered. "And often I wonder what would happen if he did see the finish."

"Do you mean if he saw the finish, it might straighten him out mentally?" Hawk asked.

"I don't know. It might. You see, Mr. Carney, there's nothing organically wrong with Poker Jim's brain. No growths, pressures, or disease that we know of," the doctor explained. "He cracked under a long, terrible strain."

"Three white chips," Hawk said, "would crack any one."

"I've heard others refer to his sons as white chips," the doctor said. "A belligerent little old fellow, Jess Lee, called them white chips. He visited Poker Jim regularly until he was no longer recognized, then he said he was going to do something about it."

"He did," Hawk informed the doctor; "he turned the last Triangle D colt over to me. I imagine Jess left his loyal old bones on the desert, but the colt's safe. And



when he's ready, he's going to run in the Cattlemen's Derby."

"What's his name?" the doctor asked.

"I've just named him," Hawk answered. "It's—Pardner."

The doctor's eyes sparkled. "I think I sense what is in your mind, Mr. Carney. Good luck, and—God bless you."

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE BRANDING IRON.

**H**AWK McClure was the prey of conflicting emotions when he left the asylum. One moment he was hopeful; the next, depressed. He wondered what had become of Poker Jim's three sons, Ted, the favorite, Al, and George. "I'd better have a look at the Triangle D," he reflected.

He checked up and learned that the State Bank held a mortgage on the big spread and that the bank's representative, a man named Gorin, was in direct charge.

"Gorin?" Hawk questioned when he pondered on the matter. "Bull Gorin used to be Poker Jim's greatest rival. Hm-m-m. Now that's something to think about."

He recalled that Gorin made repeated offers to Poker Jim for the Triangle D, but Jim had invariably refused them. Too many generations of the Dravus family were buried on the little green hill above the ranch.

Several days later Hawk McClure rode over a mountain range and looked down on the Triangle D. Resentment swept through him and whipped his normal, easy-going nature to cold fury. He had seen neglect in various degrees at different times, but nothing to match this. Weeds and brush were advancing like an attacking arm over the pas-

tures. Gone were the bands of blooded horses and herds of fine cattle. A bunch of scrub range cattle had broken through the fence and was grazing on what was left of the rich grass.

Here and there, he saw ranch machinery rusting in the fields. The makeshift roofs, carelessly constructed, had fallen aside, exposing the heavier pieces of machinery to the elements. Shakes were missing on barn roofs, and sagging doors admitted wind and weather. Hawk rode slowly around the barns to the house.

In days gone by, the blooded horses and fine carriage of a cattle empire had stopped at the door. It was always ready to swing open, for Poker Jim's father had thrown the key away when he built the house.

It was open now, and rains had warped the floor. Crystal chandeliers swung on rusting chains, and red plush coverings rotted on carved walnut chairs. Swallows flitted in and out of broken windows and built their mud nests at the junction of ceiling and walls.

Hawk lifted the piano lid and touched the keys. This instrument had been pride of the range land in its day. The keys were swollen and stuck.

"I'm going down to the State Bank and raise merry hell!" Hawk declared.

In a calmer mood, he concluded that a man with a price on his head could not afford to raise merry hell at a bank or any other place.

"I can't attract attention to myself, particularly now that Castle has recognized me," he said.

He rode twenty miles to the nearest cabin and made a deal with the occupant to board up the broken windows, clean out the swallows' nests and otherwise put the Tri-



angle D ranch house in order, but the peeling paint and broken roofs were things to be faced in the future.

"Do you ever see Ted Dravus around the old place?" Hawk asked the man when the repairing deal had been made.

"We don't see nobody since old Jess Lee left," the man answered. "If you want Ted, like as not you'll find him 'round the State Bank cryin' for money on Poker Jim's property."

"What does he do with it?"

"Gorin never gives him any," the other replied. "When he ain't hangin' 'round the bank he's at the Brandin' Iron. It's a dance place, and he's stuck on one of the girls."

THE State Bank was located at Marshall, the largest town in the State. Annually, cattlemen from all over the West gathered at Marshall for a convention. They discussed prices, breeds and government regulations, then adjourned to the race track to witness rodeo shows and the Cattle-men's Derby. A banquet and ball followed and the Derby winner and his lady led the grand march.

The town was two hundred miles from Hawk's Nest and there was proportionately less chance of any one's recognizing him as a wanted outlaw. Against that was the grim fact that riders and peace officers from several States frequented its streets, and it only needed one man to yell, "That's Hawk McClure," to start trouble.

Hawk pulled up on the outskirts of Marshall and viewed the town. It had grown some since he had last seen it as a youth. There was a new courthouse and the State Bank occupied a stone building with imposing marble pillars and steps.

"Who lives in the big house overlooking town?" Hawk asked the first citizen he encountered.

"Bull Gorin," the man answered. "He's just about the richest man in these parts. Owns a big piece of the bank, two cattle ranches, and the finest horse ranch in the State. He's kinda took Poker Jim's place, they claim. He's the bank's Man Friday whenever a loan on a ranch comes up."

"You don't say?" Hawk observed. "He's come up in the world, hasn't he? I suppose he is in charge of the old Triangle D?"

"If the bank holds a plaster on the spread, then Bull has all the say. Funny thing about Triangle D," the man continued. "Once Poker Jim had a run of luck. He fixed up a trust fund so that mortgage interest and taxes would be paid for five years. In that way he couldn't lose the property when he struck a bad year. And he sure struck 'em. But the money's all paid out and like as not the property will go down under the hammer this fall."

Hawk had learned what he wanted to know without going to the bank and attracting attention. Obviously, "Bull" Gorin was deliberately allowing the Triangle D to fall into ruin so that he could pick the spread up for a song when it was sold for either taxes or nonpayment of interest. He occupied a key position with the bank, and Hawk had an idea the man applied financial pressure whenever a ranch caught his eye and, sooner or later, picked it up at his own price.

"Civilization is queer," Hawk reflected. "No man in my band would squeeze a man who was down; yet Gorin can do it legally."

Hawk stabled his horse and found a room in a quiet hotel frequented by visiting cow-punchers. He



loafed in the vicinity of the bank that afternoon, hoping to catch a glimpse of Gorin.

Shortly before the institution closed for the day, Castle came around the corner. His green eyes centered on Hawk a moment, then shifted to the bank. "Getting ambitious, Hawk?" he asked in a low voice. "If your band robbed that place it could retire."

"So it could," Hawk answered, "but my band isn't here, and it's too big for me, single-handed."

"Sometimes I doubt if any job is too big for you," Castle said. "Don't take any wooden nickels."

"I savvy you now," Hawk thought, staring resentfully at Castle. "You're trailing me. But why don't you make the arrest and get it over with? Or—do you hope to catch me red-handed?" Castle, he realized, was the type who would never make an arrest until he had evidence to insure a conviction.

As Hawk was about to leave, a rider galloped up, leading a black stallion. Hawk had seen but one finer—his own Diablo. The sight of the animal, with its silver-mounted bridle and saddle flashing silver flames as the sun played over it, stopped half the people on the street. The rider stopped at the bank's private entrance, dismounted, and stood at the stallion's head.

A few minutes later, the door opened and an expensively dressed man appeared. He hesitated just long enough to divert attention from the stallion to himself; then, smiling, with a faint trace of arrogance he crossed the walk and vaulted into the saddle. The stallion danced a moment, reared several times, then galloped down the street.

Hawk McClure had seen Bull Gorin. The years had given the man weight and soft flesh to cover his

big frame. The years had increased his already overabundance of conceit, but they had not softened the hardness of his steel-trap mouth, nor warmed the cold, ruthless light in his eyes.

"Publicly he'd pat a boy on the head and give him a dollar. Privately he would call him a brat and kick his pants," Hawk muttered. "You're well entrenched and you're letting go of nothing. Plucking a handful of feathers out of you isn't going to be easy."

A WEEK passed; nightly, Hawk McClure occupied a table near the wall in the Branding Iron. A dark girl, Juanita Welch, sang songs and danced in an atmosphere thick with tobacco smoke and the odor of spilled liquor. She had large, tragic black eyes and a temper. Her voice was husky and got on Hawk's nerves.

"She's a linnet lookin' for a soft place to light," a cow-puncher informed Hawk. "If you look like ready money, she'll sing to you. But men don't come to the Brandin' Iron lookin' for a wife. They come to forget and get drunk. Juanita's finally decided the best she can do is Ted Dravus. Once, he'd have been a catch, but now—" The shrug of his shoulders conveyed his contempt.

"Does he come around often?" Hawk asked.

He had bought a dozen drinks to win the cow-puncher's confidence, for he seemed to know what was going on, and Hawk wanted to cash in on his investment.

"Oh, Ted shows up when he's busted," the man explained, "and Juanita gives him eating money."

"It doesn't make sense," Hawk argued. "If she's trying to make a good marriage, she wouldn't be wast-



ing time on Ted Dravus." He broke off suddenly.

"Maybe she thinks the Triangle D will pay dividends some time," the cow-puncher explained. "She's dumb. What's the matter with you, friend? Has your enemy come into the joint? If he has, I'll back your hand."

"Did my face betray my annoyance?" Hawk asked, and decided that he should control his emotions better.

"You looked plenty hostile," the cow-puncher insisted.

"He's gone, now," Hawk lied. "Suppose you take a walk and come back later. A man who has business with me has just showed up."

"Sure! Sure!" the cow-puncher agreed. He sauntered away.

Castle came out of the haze and stopped at Hawk's table. "Funny how our trails cross, isn't it?" he said. "May I buy you a drink?"

"No; it's my table," Hawk answered. "I'll buy. It's blasted funny how our trails cross."

The waiter was bringing the drinks when the door opened, admitting fresh air and a tall, slim, handsome man of Hawk's age. He had black curly hair and blue eyes. His face was an odd mixture of strength and weakness. His lower lip was loose, and he sneered at those about him. But it was not the sneer of an arrogant man, Hawk quickly decided; rather the sneer was a defensive gesture to fight off the contempt of the Branding Iron's patrons.

"He's Ted Dravus," Castle observed. "Every one here knows his history. He'll sit down at that table in the corner. In a short time Juanita will join him and pass him a ten-spot. Of course, you know where old Poker Jim is."

"Yes," Hawk nodded.

"The weight of opinion is against me," Castle said, "but I hold that sometimes insanity is a blessing. Poker Jim is still watching the son he hoped Ted would be riding the horse he dreamed Pardner would be." He drained his glass, nodded unsmiling, and left the table.

"I wish Catamount Larrabee was here to give me an opinion of that cuss," Hawk thought. "He seems to know everything that's going on."

It was becoming uncanny. Castle had been with Snell when the sheriff had surrounded Hawk. He popped up at the Branch City post office, appeared at the State Bank as Hawk stood outside, and now he had just enjoyed Hawk's hospitality.

**H**AWK changed tables and sat down within ten feet of Ted Dravus. He saw now that the man was drunk. He was less handsome on close inspection. Dissipation was evident in his puffed flesh and bloodshot eyes. Juanita Welch had returned to the stage and was singing another number. She sang and danced mechanically, and watched Hawk McClure. Somehow she had sensed something sinister in the outlaw's intent gaze and the fact he had changed seats.

Between numbers she hurried off stage and talked in a low, tense voice to a swarthy man whose hand rested lightly on the butt of a six-gun. The swarthy man nodded and approached Hawk's table.

"The management requests you to leave," he ordered. "Will you leave without trouble or—"

"What's your guess?" Hawk retorted.

He walked over to Ted Dravus's table and sat down. "Hello, Ted," he said shortly. "Remember Jeff Carney?"

"Sure! How are you?" Ted ex-



pressed no pleasure at the encounter, and Hawk didn't blame him.

"Let's take a walk, Ted, and talk over old times," Hawk suggested pleasantly.

"I hate the old days. Get out!" Dravus snarled.

"That isn't hard to figure," Hawk said harshly. "You stood high in the world's respect then, as well as your own. It's a long way down from those days to—well, letting a girl who works hard for her money pay for your food and clothing."

"That's a lie!" Juanita panted, approaching so silently that Hawk was not aware of her presence. "I'm paying back money borrowed from him for voice training. Pedro!" She turned to the swarthy man. "Throw him out!"

"I've seen him somewhere," Pedro whispered. "I can't place him. But he's dangerous—a killer. Maybe we had better not arouse him. I threatened trouble, and he didn't budge."

Juanita returned to Ted's table, but the latter waved her aside. "I'll see you later," he said thickly.

"Now get this, Ted," Hawk said. "I stopped at Branch City and saw your father. It was a pretty terrible sight—that fine old blue chip, stark, raving mad. I'm training the last of the Triangle D colts. The last, mind you! Maybe the breeding of fifty years is centered in that colt. Who knows? It's in the laps of the gods. Come out to my place and get hold of yourself. If that colt is what I think, you can clear Triangle D in two years' time."

"He's mine?"

"No, your father's, but I'll turn him over to you," Hawk offered. "However, you can't convey title, in case you're thinking of selling him and going on another bust."

"I don't believe in fairy tales,"

Dravus said in a surly voice. "Buy me a drink."

Hawk's face hardened. "You're going with me whether you want to or not."

"One word from Juanita," Dravus sneered, "and the boys will tear you apart. Go back to your cattle punching or whatever you do. I think I'll take a punch at you for luck myself."

He got up unsteadily and lashed out with his fist. Hawk slapped him off his feet with his open hand. Then the lights went out. Women began screaming and fighting their way to the nearest door. The place was an uproar of overturning tables, chairs, and liquor glasses.

Hawk threw Ted Dravus over his shoulder and started for the door. Some one struck a match, and by its flickering light he saw the swarthy Pedro leaping at him. A gun butt came from somewhere, caught Pedro behind the ear, and he dropped.

Hawk was in a situation now from which there was no retreat. Dravus began to fight back, and Hawk clipped him on the chin with his fist. Two men blocked the way, and again a gun butt dropped them in their tracks. Some one was either helping him, or hitting every one within reach, as a measure of self-protection.

The door led into a narrow alley. Juanita fairly bounced from the shadows and pressed a knife against Hawk's spine.

"Drop him or I'll kill you," she panted. "No one is going to take him from me."

Hawk felt the point prick his flesh, then the pressure subsided. He balanced Ted on his right shoulder, then turned quickly, sweeping the blade aside with his left arm.

He dropped Ted and grasped the girl. She sank her teeth into his



wrist, but he shook her clear and hurled her through an open window back into the thick of the fight. Hawk clipped the semiconscious Ted on the jaw to insure another period of helplessness, then hurried to the livery stable.

"Saddle my horse," he ordered, "and I want to hire a second for a—friend. I'll leave a money deposit for the nag's return, which should be in a couple of weeks."

"Yes, Mr. Carney," the liveryman agreed.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### AT HAWK'S NEST.

WHEN Hawk left Marshall he lashed Ted Dravus to the saddle and rode behind him. All that day Ted rode in sullen silence. The second day he asked a question or two, and brooded. He missed his daily ration of whisky and resented it. In his opinion, the Jeff Carney of his youth had changed and had developed surprising characteristics. Threats left him untouched. Ted tried pleading and got nowhere.

"Just what is your game?" he demanded the third day. "Each night you've staked me out so I couldn't get the jump on you. You've dodged towns, too. You knew I'd yell for help—and get it."

"I hate to see one of the finest families in the West go to seed," Hawk answered shortly. "Maybe it's gone to seed already; I'm not sure, but I'm going to find out. Why don't you straighten up and get that ranch out of Gorin's clutches?"

"You don't know Gorin. He's the most powerful man in these parts," Ted said. "Governors have taken orders from him. He dominates the racing association and—"

"I think he's a cheap four-flusher,"

Hawk cut in, "and when your father was in his prime, Gorin's breed wouldn't have lasted a month in any self-respecting community."

"You wouldn't tell Gorin that," Ted Dravus said.

"I will when I get a chance," Hawk retorted. "Right now, though, you're the important thing. You're a white chip in a stiff game, and I'm hoping you'll change your color to blue."

"And I'm hoping for a chance to beat you to a pulp," Ted retorted. "And I'll get it and—do it."

"Which would just tickle me to death," Hawk said, and meant it.

Several days later, Ted viewed his surroundings nervously. "I'd like to know where you're taking me," he said. "Whispering Calloway runs part of this country and Hawk McClure the rest. We don't want to get tangled up with them."

"Quite right," Hawk agreed. "Calloway would probably shoot me on sight, but I can handle the Hawk McClure outfit."

Ted Dravus snorted.

Late that afternoon, Hawk watched the antics of an eagle high over a ledge. His men, by threatening to raid the eagle's nest, induced the antics—a signal that the lower country was free of officers of the law and that it was safe to approach the entrance.

Hawk blindfolded Ted over his violent protest. "All you've got to do is to hang onto the saddle horn," the outlaw explained. "You're on my horse now. It knows what to do. You'll get wet, but that isn't important."

Hawk rode into a river, turned, then forced the livery-stable horse into a waterfall. The animal bucked and snorted but presently emerged on a trail leading through a narrow canyon. A man with a



rifle across his knees jumped up and closely studied the pair. "He's all right, Kelly," Hawk said, "a semi-prisoner. He's to have the freedom of the valley, but must never pass this point."

Hawk pulled the blindfold off Ted's eyes. He blinked at the brilliant sunlight, then stared at the guard.

"You heard what I said?" Hawk asked.

"Yes. Where am I?"

"You're in Hawk McClure's hide-out, Ted, and I'm—Hawk McClure," the outlaw leader informed him.

Ted Dravus's face lost its color. "You?" He gasped. "You—Hawk McClure. I savvy now. You've brought me up here to murder me. You—"

"Shut up!" Hawk snapped. "Use some sense. I'm not murdering anybody, much less one of Poker Jim's sons. Come over and look at the colt—Pardner."

Catamount Larrabee met them at the fence. He was all smiles and did not wait for an introduction. "Hawk," he exclaimed, "the Triangle D bred a Derby winner at last! I don't mean the Cattlemen's Derby; I'm talking about Kentucky now. Give me three months, and he'll be ready."

"Ready for small tracks and easy competition," Hawk said, "but not ready for the Cattlemen's Derby. He's got to win that one. There's a lot depending on it, and it's only two months away."

"Yeah, I suppose you're right," Catamount admitted. "I always was one to go crazy over a good horse. Yeah, a year's seasonin' and gettin' used to the crowds won't hurt him none."

"Now come over and shake hands with Ted Dravus," Hawk said.

"He's the last of a noble line of cattlemen and sportsmen."

CATAMOUNT swallowed his distaste and shook hands. He didn't think much of the future prospects of the Dravus line, and it was his private belief that Hawk was considerable of a chump to waste his time. "Besides," he thought, "the first time that Jasper feels the need of a drink and his girl ain't around to stake him to the price, he'll try and lead Sheriff Snell to the hang-out."

Hawk was in and out during the months that followed, but he kept an eye on Ted Dravus. Gradually the dissipation left his face, and his flesh grew hard and bronzed.

"He probably is a dead ringer for Poker Jim when that old boy was twenty-five," Hawk thought. "He's getting his chin up, but I haven't noticed him around thanking me for the enforced cure."

At the end of the third month, Catamount reported he had done all he could with the colt. "What he needs now is some experience in actual racin'," he declared, "with crowds yellin' and folks goin' plumb crazy. How're we goin' to manage it?"

"I'm leaving in the morning with Pardner," Hawk replied. "Take Ted, blindfolded, about five miles from the entrance and turn him loose on a good horse."

"You mean to say you're goin' to turn that horse over to that white chip?" Catamount demanded in a horrified voice. "Hawk, that's plumb crazy. He'll sell him—"

"No, because I'll fix it so he can't," Hawk interrupted. "Besides, I think the cuss has seen the error of his ways and will brace up."

"Not in a thousand years," Catamount stubbornly insisted. "The



thing for us to do is to take him where we ain't known and run him ourselves. The clean-up can be turned over to Poker Jim."

"There's more than a clean-up involved in my plans, Catamount," Hawk explained. "There's a man's reason."

"Come here!" Catamount led the way to the fence and whistled. Pardner's thoroughbred head went up with a jerk. For a moment he stood knee-deep in grass eyeing them. "Now ain't that a pretty sight with the mountain behind him! Here he comes!"

Hawk's heart beat faster as the young stallion pounded toward them. The animal's coat glistened in the hard light, the nostrils dilated, and there was more than a bit of the Old Nick in the eyes. Pardner thrust his neck over the fence and rubbed his head against Hawk's shoulder.

"He sure likes you, Hawk," Catamount said. "You always did have a way with nags. I remember when Diablo was on his way to be a killer. In ten minutes you had plumb settled him. Aw, blast it! See how he pushes against you. *Now* will you turn him over to a white chip?" There was triumph in Catamount's voice.

"I've got to," Hawk answered. "And I guess I'd better start now before I weaken."

**H**AWK McCLURE, Diablo, and Pardner reached Marshall in the evening. Hawk immediately put up the horses at the livery stable, then got into his store clothes. He ate hurriedly and arrived at the Branding Iron about nine o'clock. With the exception of Juanita Welch and the swarthy Pedro, he doubted if any one remembered him. The fighting had been

done in the darkness, thanks to the thoughtful soul who had put out the lights.

The cattlemen's annual convention and the race would take place the following week, and already people were arriving. The Branding Iron was well filled. Hawk waited eagerly for Juanita's appearance.

She looked tired, he thought, and her voice lacked fire. He leaned over to the nearest patron.

"Who's her latest admirer?" he asked.

"Oh, a half dozen cow-punchers and ranchers," the man answered, "but she isn't interested. Women are funny. Juanita could just about pick her maverick and slap her brand on him, but she's crazy about Ted Dravus. And he's a no-good——" There were ladies present, and the man finished his indictment in a lowered voice.

Hawk waited until the girl had finished, then made his way to her dressing room and knocked.

"Come in," she invited in a weary voice. She looked up, uninterested, then, recognizing him, her face filled with fury. She caught up a small revolver. "Now, you——" the girl panted.

"Put it down," Hawk ordered, "and let's talk things over. Just how much do you care for Ted?"

"I might say he's dearer to me than life itself," the girl replied. "That may sound melodramatic, but it's true. There is something in the wedding ceremony about richer or poorer, for better or worse. Well, that is the way I feel about Ted. I'd like to see him become the rancher his father was. He's got it in him, but he's weak. I've never given up encouraging him and hoping. But in the end, it doesn't make any difference. I love him, and



that means I take him as I find him and make the best of it."

"Men form the habit of looking for courage among men," Hawk said slowly. "That's wrong. You're the bravest person I've ever met, and you've never lost faith in Ted, either."

She listened intently while he told her about Pardner, and Ted Dravus's quick physical response to Hawk's harsh training methods. "He's as fit as a fiddle right now," he concluded.

"Then it looks as if you never lost faith, entirely," the girl suggested, smiling. "Do you know you're the first one who has been friendly and really tried to help us?" She looked at him a moment, then impulsively kissed him. There were tears in her eyes. "It's hard to carry the burden alone at times."

Hawk patted her shoulder. He understood the kiss, and for that reason appreciated the girl's difficulty for the first time. "It resolves itself to this," Hawk explained. "He's Poker Jim's son and Poker Jim's a blue chip. How much money have you got?"

"About three hundred dollars," Juanita answered.

"Here's three hundred more as a stake," Hawk said. "Take Ted and Pardner and start blazing a new trail when he shows up. Run the stallion at county fairs and small rodeos. You'll make better than wages and expenses. Then come back next year for the Cattlemen's Derby. Win that and—you'll win the Triangle D and perhaps something more important."

"Do you mean—his father?"

"That is my hope," Hawk answered.

"What about Bull Gorin? Every one has to reckon with him; even a girl who sings in a smoky joint like

the Branding Iron," she informed him. "I turned him down. He wanted to take me to a— He called it a party, but I knew it would be a brawl. He's never forgiven me. Understand, I wasn't important, but refusal hurt his conceit. Besides, he wants Triangle D. So—what of Bull Gorin?"

The fear in her eyes was real. Hawk understood. She was afraid that Gorin would strike at her through Ted Dravus.

"Stick to the small places, and I don't think he'll notice you," Hawk replied. "When you show up here, I'll be on hand." He shook hands with the girl. "You'll find Pardner at the livery stable. I'll leave orders for him to be released to Ted."

He started to go, then stopped. "One question. Have you seen a man named Castle hanging around? He has green eyes and—"

"I know the man you mean," she answered. "He left Marshall about the time you did. I imagine he was trailing you, Mr. Carney."

"I imagine that, also," Hawk said.

He waved his hand and left the Branding Iron through the side door.

A block down the street, a familiar figure turned the corner and came directly toward him. It was Castle.

"Hello, Hawk," he said. "On hand for the Cattlemen's Derby?"

"No," Hawk answered; "just in Marshall on business."

"I'll hand it to you—coming here with a price on your head," Castle bluntly observed.

Hawk decided to trick the man into an admission if possible. "The fact that some one is willing to pay five thousand dollars for me, dead or alive, doesn't necessarily mean I'll be convicted of a crime and sentenced to death or imprisonment," he said.



"You're getting right down to fundamentals there, Hawk," Castle answered.

Their eyes met and clashed. Hawk moved on down the street. He knew that Castle had no intention of arresting him—or any one—until he had sufficient evidence to insure a conviction. Hawk grinned, for he had tricked him into admitting it.

## CHAPTER V.

DOCTORED.

CATAMOUNT LARRABEE appeared at Hawk McClure's cabin, and his face wore a puzzled expression. "I want to show you somethin', Hawk," he said. Hawk followed, and Catamount led the way to a ledge commanding a view of the lower country. "Do you see that horse and rider down there?" he asked.

Hawk nodded. "Well, it's a horse and a girl rider. She's been wanderin' around now for two days. She can't be lost, because she covers the same ground. But it don't make sense. Even the buzzards are interested. They figger it's somebody about to die of thirst, like as not."

"Maybe the heat's affected her," Hawk suggested. "Let's go down and find out."

"And maybe she's bait in one of Sheriff Snell's traps," Catamount suggested. "Which calls for goin' down and findin' out."

Two hours later, they arrived in the general vicinity of the girl's wanderings, and she rode toward them at a mad gallop.

"Jumping juniper!" Hawk exclaimed. "It's Juanita Welch."

"You didn't tell her your name was Hawk McClure or where your hang-out was, did you?" Catamount demanded.

"No, but Ted Dravus knows I'm

Hawk, and he has an idea we're located in this region. Snell knows that, too," Hawk argued, "but he don't know the entrance."

Nearly a year had passed since Hawk had turned Pardner over to Ted and this girl, but she looked five years older. Relief filled her eyes when she recognized Hawk. "I'm so glad!" she exclaimed. "Ted said you were Hawk McClure and in this vicinity. I knew if I rode back and forth I'd be seen."

"This is Catamount Larrabee," Hawk said.

Catamount revealed his big teeth in a friendly grin, then bashfully twisted the big fingers of his freckled hands. He had heard a lot about this girl, and he liked her.

They made a camp on the spot, and the girl sat down on a rock.

"No, I'm not married," she said as Hawk glanced at her ring finger. "I've told Ted repeatedly that I wouldn't marry him until he straightened up, though I'd stand back of him. And to do that I've had to go back to singing in smoky—joints."

"So he didn't measure up?" Hawk asked.

"I'm afraid he's a white chip," the wretched girl confessed. "But don't think I'm double-crossing him in coming to you. It's just that I can't stand his treatment of Pardner any longer."

"What's he doing to that horse?" Hawk bellowed.

"We began winning small races as you suggested," the girl explained. "We went from town to town and made better than expenses. Then one of Gorin's scouts saw the stallion run. A week later Gorin showed up. He watched Pardner win a race, then he got Ted in a quiet spot and pumped him. Ted wouldn't pump. He said Pard-



ner was a broomtail, and the first man that slapped a brand on him owned him. That you had branded him with a reversed C. I suppose that stands for Carney?"

"It does for the present," Hawk said. "Go on."

"Gorin insisted that any one could see at a glance that the stallion was a descendant of the original Pardner; that he was a Triangle D horse and should be turned over to him, Gorin, as he was in charge of Triangle D as the bank's representative," the girl said. "But he couldn't get around the fact you had registered him in your name, Mr. Carney."

"I had just such a situation in mind," Hawk admitted.

**G**ORIN got Ted roaring drunk, and he told him that you are Hawk McClure," the girl went on. "That puzzled Gorin. He can't see why an outlaw should be sentimental about an old man in an insane asylum and try to straighten up his white-chip son." In her bitter mood, Juanita was calling a spade a spade and a white chip a white chip.

"What are they doing to Pardner?" Hawk asked.

"After that spree, Ted kept it up and Gorin's been giving him his orders. Sometimes Pardner would win; sometimes lose, but either way Gorin invariably cleaned up." She caught her breath sharply, then added in a low voice. "They're doctoring that beautiful creature. I can't prove it—but I know it."

"Getting ready for a big clean-up at the Cattlemen's Derby," Hawk predicted. "I'm glad you came. The show-down is in sight."

"And it'll be hell with the lid off," Catamount predicted.

"But you can't do anything per-

sonally," the girl insisted. "I didn't come expecting anything so foolish. I thought you might ride over to Deer Crossing—the county fair is on—and get Pardner. Legally he's your horse."

"You don't know Hawk," Catamount said, "if you think he can't do anything personally. He'll be in the thick of it. After all, except you, only Ted and Gorin know he's Hawk."

"Merciful heavens!" Juanita exclaimed. "Isn't Gorin enough? And there's the man with the green eyes—Castle. I saw him at three different race meets, Mr. Carney, and I'm sure he was looking for you."

"Now you ride back to Ted," Hawk advised. "Say nothing of your visit, and leave the rest to us."

When Juanita Welch was out of the country, the pair returned to Hawk's Nest and equipped themselves for a long, hard ride.

"We've no idea when we'll be back," Hawk informed his men. "Possibly we'll show up with the sheriff on our trail. Again, we may not come back until after the Cattlemen's Derby. If we need any help, we'll let you know."

Hawk's eyes shifted from one member of his gang to another. Lean, hard, and fit, deadly cold in danger, he was proud of them. There were no better riders in the West, and each possessed a saddle string of the finest horseflesh. He knew that if he needed help he'd get it.

"I'm taking every cent of money we have," he informed them, "including the nuggets panned on that creek we found. I'm going to need it."

"The total is a couple of thousand dollars," one of them said; "that's only chicken feed at the Cattlemen's Derby. They claim Gorin alone will



bet fifty thousand dollars. If you expect to help out the Triangle D, you'd better let us raise some while you're gone."

"I know of several stages that pack gold reg'lar," another volunteered. "And down near the border there's a bank— Well, if I'd write a check for twenty-five thousand dollars and poke it through the window with my six-gun, the teller would cash it, pronto. A six-gun will identify a stranger at a teller's window quicker than a dozen bank presidents."

"No doubt," Hawk dryly admitted. "But I'll raise my money in my own way. I've an idea that I can struggle along on twenty thousand dollars, or even fifteen."

"Here's a tip, Hawk," one of them said. "Do you remember Skinny Oliver, the deputy who tried to bag us single-handed and wounded three of our men? Well, that won him a job drivin' the Logan-Marshall stage. He brings as much as fifty thousand dollars to Marshall at a crack. Raisin' the money from his stage would be a slick way of payin' off the old score."

"Leave everything to me, please," Hawk said sharply. "But thanks for the tip." As they rode down the trail, Hawk shook his head dubiously. "I hope I made myself clear. They haven't had much excitement lately, and I don't want them cutting loose on their own account."

**T**HE blare of bands and the shouts of hundreds of people greeted Hawk McClure and Catamount Larrabee as they approached Deer Crossing. A night show was running full blast at the fair grounds, and torches twisted into odd shapes in the desert breeze. The shouts of barkers filled the air,

punctuated occasionally by a cow-puncher's six-gun.

"I like to see folks havin' fun," Catamount observed. "I'd like some of it myself, but—" He looked hopefully at his leader, but Hawk shook his head.

They tied their mounts, climbed over a fence and approached the stables sheltering the various racing strings. A uniformed guard stood in front of Bull Gorin's horses, warning the few in the vicinity that the stable was closed to visitors. Hawk waited until a general guard had walked over to Gorin's private guard and, while he was borrowing a match, the outlaws slipped into the stable shadows. Here the horses entered by the smaller ranchers were kept.

Hawk suddenly swept Catamount into an empty stall and crouched. Neither man breathed for several seconds. A lurching, muttering figure passed by and disappeared into the night.

"That's the white chip, ain't it?" Catamount whispered.

"Yes, that's Ted. I felt like taking a swing at him," Hawk answered. "Pardner's stall must be close."

"He'll know me," Catamount said. "Like as not, he'll whinny his fool head off. I feel almost like I was goin' to meet a brother or something! That black cuss sure hit me right where I live."

In his eagerness, Catamount led the way. He stopped suddenly and cursed softly in disappointment, as Pardner failed to recognize him. The stallion stood pressing his superb head against the manger rail. He was pressing hard, as if the contact afforded him relief.

"The devils have doctored him again," Catamount rasped. "Hawk,



I'm goin' out and kill Bull Gorin. Yes, and that white chip, too."

The big fellow was choking with rage and Hawk had some difficulty calming him. Catamount went into the stall and began rubbing the stallion's nose.

"Pardner, don't you remember me? It's Catamount! Does that head hurt a lot. Let me rub it." A moment's silence followed, then Catamount exploded. He wiped the tears of rage from his eyes and untied Pardner. "We're takin' him home now, Hawk, and if you try to stop me, I'll knock you over the head with a six-gun. This horse is just about crazy with pain. They've filled him full of somethin' terrible."

"You can't take him away in his present shape," Hawk argued in a hoarse whisper. "He'd fall before we'd have gone a hundred yards. We've got to leave him and play our hand through."

"I'll come back and get him then," Catamount said quietly, and Hawk knew that he meant it.

"Come on," Hawk ordered.

"Where're we goin' now?" Catamount asked suspiciously.

"We're going to take a fifty-mile ride; then if you want to come back and take Pardner home, I won't prevent you," Hawk promised.

**T**HE fifty-mile ride ended the following day when Hawk and Catamount appeared at the Branch City Asylum and asked to see Poker Jim Dravus. "How is he getting along?" Hawk inquired when the doctor appeared. "Any improvement?"

"He hasn't seen the finish of that race yet," the doctor answered. "Come along; we'll see if he remembers you."

Poker Jim's voice was bellowing, "Come on, Pardner! Come on,

Pardner!" filled the ward as they entered. Almost in awe, Catamount peered through the wooden bars. Poker Jim's eyes were pin points of flame, and he swung his arm as if to sweep his boy and his horse on to victory. Suddenly he dropped back onto the bunk.

Catamount found himself wiping his brow. "That race was real enough to him," he said, "only he didn't finish it. All right, Hawk, anything you say about Pardner goes. Let's drift; this business is gettin' under my skin."

"Not until we talk things over with the doctor," Hawk answered. "We're going to his office now. We are—"

Poker Jim's voice, broken, kindly, and bewildered, interrupted. "My boys, where are they? There's so much I can't understand. If they would only come and explain," he said. He stepped to the bars and called an attendant. "Why do you keep me locked up?" he asked. "I've got to go and look after my stock. I left the colts in the south pasture. Pardner's sons! There were three of them—one for each of my sons. And of the three, one of them will win the Derby."

"Come on," Catamount whispered.

But Hawk lingered, hoping there might be a flash of intelligence that he could nurse along.

Poker Jim lifted his eyes as though looking at something on a high bench. "That's my home up there. The door is always open. I threw the key away. Beautiful, isn't it, with a friendly light in every window? To-night I lead the grand ball, with my wife. No! I forgot; she died when Ted was little. I'll lead the grand ball with the sweetheart of one of my sons on my arm. This day Triangle D won the Derby



and— No, that's wrong," he muttered. "The grand ball is held at Marshall—not at my home. All is confused. I don't understand! I don't understand." Then he jumped up. "Ah, they're at the post. Ride him, Ted; but remember, don't use the whip!"

Catamount reached the ward door in long, swinging strides. And Hawk was at his heels. "You'd think a man out of his head could at least be happy," Catamount protested, "and not have to worry."

"Most of them *are* happy," the doctor said, "and haven't a care in the world."

Hours later the doctor stood up. "Your plan is worth trying, Mr. Carney," he said, "and we'll carry out the scheme along the lines you suggest. Now can't I put you up for the night?"

Catamount shook his head. He wanted to put several miles between himself and this place before he attempted to sleep. He breathed deeply and stretched, when once more they were in the free air.

"You've sure given me a stiff job in this affair, Hawk," he said, "and I only hope I can get away with it."

"I'd do it myself, but I don't want to be tied down. I may have to move and move fast in most any direction," Hawk explained. "Do you remember Blackie, old Kate's colt?"

"Sure. He hasn't got a white hair on him. Pretty cuss, though I always thought he'd look better if he had a white star or something on his forehead," Catamount answered.

"Pardner inherited his grandfather's white star," Hawk observed, "and Providence evidently thought one was enough in this part of the country. I want you to ride to Hawk's Nest and bring Blackie to Marshall. He isn't a blue-chip

horse, but he may prove a hole card in this game, and I want him handy. Our only chance to beat Gorin is to figure out what he's going to do, then beat him at his own game."

"I'll light out first thing in the morning," Catamount agreed. "I'll meet you in Marshall. Now be careful! Sneak into town and hunt cover. I'll pray that Castle, Sheriff Snell, or somebody else don't show up and run you into the hoosegow. This is going to be a two-man job at least and you can't afford to get yourself arrested."

## CHAPTER VI.

### CATAMOUNT PLAYS THE FOOL.

**H**AWK McCLURE felt as if he were riding into a trap when he approached Marshall, but there was nothing he could do about it except retreat, and long ago he had learned that battles weren't won by retreating.

He decided against stopping at a hotel because he couldn't very well take Diablo up to the room with him. Besides, the hotels were crowded with ranchers and cow-punchers, as well as people who had come for the Cattleman's Derby.

"Diablo, old son," he said, "I want you handy in case I have to leave sudden. You can't sleep with me, so I'll sleep with you."

He appeared at the livery barn he patronized whenever in town and told a hard-luck story about his inability to get a room.

"Plenty of room in the hayloft," the livery man assured him. "Help yourself, only don't smoke."

To the liveryman and every one else except Castle, Gorin, Ted Dravus, and Juanita Welch, he was Jeff Carney, a cow-puncher and small rancher. He speculated on the



length of time he could continue to travel under his real name.

As soon as it was dark, Hawk pulled the brim of his Stetson down over his eyes and made his way to the main street. It was decorated with flags and lined with horses at the hitch rails. Here a tough cow pony with battered saddle rubbed noses with thoroughbreds sporting silver-mounted saddles and bridles. In the saloons their owners rubbed shoulders and bought drinks.

Hawk felt himself a lone wolf, and a wary one. He tried to observe people before he was himself observed. He turned his head suddenly as Ted Dravus appeared. Ted was dressed in white riding breeches and white satin shirt. He wore a black Stetson and black boots. It was an effective combination, but the heavy tan failed to conceal the signs of dissipation on his face.

He was alone, and Hawk guessed that Juanita was singing at the Branding Iron. The proprietor could well afford to pay her a hundred dollars a night during the convention. As an old favorite, returned, she would pack them in.

Hawk turned around and followed Ted as soon as he was well past him. Obvious strangers stopped Ted and shook his hand.

"Say, that was a great race you won over at Deer Crossing, Dravus," one said. "Pardner broke a record, didn't he?"

"Yes, he was right that day," Ted answered.

"It's too bad he didn't clean up in the Cattlemen's Derby instead of a small track like Deer Crossing," the man observed with regret.

"Listen, stranger," Ted said, realizing that others were within sound of his voice, "Pardner's going to do it all over again here. What're the odds? We just got in."

"Bull Gorin's got plenty of money that says his Jerry horse will win," the stranger replied, "and Mrs. Gorin's so sure they're goin' to lead the grand ball she got herself a gown. Came right from Paris they say."

"Since when will a stuck-up dame like her stoop to attend a cattlemen's dance?" another inquired. "Up to now, we're dirt under her feet."

"Haven't you heard?" another said. "Bull's fixin' to run for gov'nor, so he told his wife to come down offn her high hoss and get him some votes."

"Put your money on Pardner's nose. He's going to win," Ted insisted, and moved on.

SOME one punched Hawk in the ribs. "Nothing like a little stroll in the cool of the evening to pick up news, is there?" a cold, familiar voice said. "First, you learn Pardner was doctored to win that race at Deer Crossing. That makes him the favorite here, and the suckers put their money on his nose. The smart boys bet otherwise and clean up. Next you learn Mrs. Bull Gorin expects to lead the grand ball. Gorin's horse must win for that to happen. Gorin and Ted Dravus are thicker'n thieves. Dravus rides the favorite, so it looks like dirty work at the crossroads."

The man said exactly what Hawk was thinking. Hawk was annoyed and a little nervous, but he was not surprised.

"Hello, Castle," he said, turning and meeting the steady gaze from the man's green eyes. "You're right on time. I showed myself on the street only five minutes ago."

"I generally know where to find a man I want," Castle said. "Let me buy you a drink."

Hawk didn't know whether it was



an invitation or an order, so he said: "All right. I imagine you figure it this way: Publicly, Ted plugs for Pardner to win; but, secretly, he's betting on Gorin's Jerry and plans to pull Pardner in the Derby."

"Nothing so raw as pulling him," Castle answered, lining up at the nearest bar. "At Deer Crossing the stallion was doctored to win. Here, he'll be doctored to lose. They've got it down to a science. The authorities have tried to catch Ted Dravus and his outfit in the act of doctoring their nags, but no luck so far."

"Well," Hawk drawled, "maybe they feel as you do about things—no use making arrests until you've got the evidence that'll convict. Who're you betting on?"

"I don't intend to bet," Castle answered. "What horse do you like?"

Hawk hesitated, and Castle noted the hesitation, though it was but a shade.

"I'm going down the line for Pardner—right on the nose," Hawk said finally.

"You like your own horse, eh? Well, that's natural," Castle said bluntly. "I suppose you'll fire Ted Dravus."

"Oh, no," Hawk said lightly, "but I'm going to hire a man to watch the horse."

They walked out of the saloon together. Castle left Hawk near the batwing doors. "Glad to have seen you again, Hawk," he said. "I'm sorry you don't feel like saying as much about me." Whereupon the amazing man sauntered down the street, his green eyes studying faces in the crowd.

"Man! Man!" Hawk exclaimed. "What a cool customer! I wonder who he really is? He's a blasted mind reader."

Catamount Larrabee arrived two

days later, riding his favorite saddle horse, and leading Blackie, one of the fastest horses the outfit possessed. He listened attentively to all that had transpired.

"I don't like it, Hawk," he said. "This cuss, Castle, is spreadin' a net and fixin' to catch big fish. Maybe you'd better fool him and clear out before you're caught."

"I'll chance it," Hawk said. "I've got to. He thinks he's lulled my suspicions with his easy-going manner, but he's only sharpened them. Here's an order I've fixed up. You're to take full charge of Pardner. You're to see that he's kept in condition and not—doctored."

"When Ted Dravus was at Hawk's Nest," Catamount answered, "I didn't like the cut of his jib and kept away from him. He don't know much about me. The others, nothin' at all. Maybe I'd better act natural and play the fool."

"You? A fool?" Hawk snorted. "Good luck!"

CATAMOUNT rode boldly out to the track, which was located near the town limits. He asked for Pardner's stall and a passing cow-puncher directed him to it.

"Better not fool 'round there now, though," the man advised. "Bull Gorin's there and doesn't want to be bothered."

It looked to Catamount like a perfect time to arrive. He approached with caution and heard Gorin's terse voice.

"You've got your orders, Dravus," the man said; "carry them out to the letter. You're to boast plenty. Get 'em thinking Pardner's a cinch to win. You're to bet money on it, publicly, then——" He stopped. "Shhh! It sounds as if some one is coming."



Catamount plodded past the door, stopped, and looked around in bewilderment. "I'm lookin' for Mr. Jeff Carney's horse, Pardner," he said to Gorin.

"What do you want with him?" Gorin sharply demanded.

"He gave me a paper what says to help condition him," Catamount drawled, but his eyes plainly warned Ted that if he exposed him there would be trouble.

"You don't need any help in conditioning Pardner, do you?" Gorin said, turning to Ted. The significant note in his voice did not escape Catamount.

"Mr. Carney's kinda funny that way," Catamount interrupted. "It wouldn't make any difference whether I was needed or not. If he thought I was, that'd settle it. So I guess I'll find a place in the hay for my blankets and make myself to home."

Ted Dravus examined the order. "It's the real thing, all right," he said. "And Pardner is his horse. There's no escaping that, either."

"But Jeff Carney, alias Hawk McClure, is an outlaw," Gorin argued.

"But as yet never convicted of a crime," Ted said. "He hasn't forfeited any rights to own property and control that property."

Gorin stared hard at Catamount. He was gawking around in a stupid manner, and a silly grin revealed his big teeth.

"Gosh," he drawled, "I never saw so many folks in my life as when I rid through town. I suppose there'll be more on judgment day, though. Haw! Haw! Haaaaaw!"

"Let the simple-minded fool stay," Gorin whispered to Ted, "or this Hawk might send a smart man down and gum up the works."

By the time Gorin left, Ted Dravus was perspiring. "Aren't you

taking a chance, Larrabee, coming into Marshall this way?" he asked. "There's a price on your head, too, if I'm not mistaken."

"As long as Hawk and the boys are ridin' high, wide, and handsome, I ain't takin' no chances," Catamount replied. "If somebody arrested me, the boys'd tear down the jail to free me. And if somebody, say, reported me to the sheriff—golly, I'd hate to think what Hawk would do to said hombre."

"Well, if you're on the job," Ted finally said, "I may as well drift downtown and see the fun."

"Sure, go ahead," Catamount replied.

Ten minutes later, he was alone with his beloved Pardner. He gave the stallion a good rubdown, then surveyed his work with approval. "No more headaches, old son," he promised, "if Catamount Larrabee can stop it, and he thinks he can. If they doctor you, it'll be over my dead body."

Presently Catamount found a box and placed it outside the stable door. He sat down to reflect on the situation. "Making Pardner the favorite is bad," he grumbled. "We may have to put up two dollars to get one. I like long shots better; you get a run for your money."

"Who doesn't like long shots better?" a gentleman with green eyes asked.

"When'll I learn to quit thinking out loud?" Catamount said.

"My name's Castle," the gentleman said. "I'd like to see this famous horse, Pardner."

"The truth is," Catamount said to himself, "you came out to size me up. I had a sneakin' idear you'd show up, but not this soon." He stood up and grasped the other's extended hand and felt as if he were shaking hands with a tiger.



"Have a cigar," Castle said affably.

"Thanks," Catamount replied. "I'll smoke it later." He was suspicious and afraid it might be drugged. He watched Castle narrowly, while the latter examined the stallion. There was no doubt of it—Castle knew horses.

CATAMOUNT took an hour off the following evening and reported to Hawk. He found him sizing up the various bookmakers and betting commissioners. "You'd think, Hawk," he said, "you had twenty thousand dollars to bet instead of two thousand," Catamount said.

"I've got to raise twenty thousand at least to clean up on this race," Hawk admitted. "The odds are terrible."

"What's the latest?"

"You have to put up five dollars to get four if Pardner wins," Hawk answered, "and it's getting worse. Ted's shouting the stallion is unbeatable, and everybody's trying to get money down on him."

"I'll fix that," Catamount volunteered. "Give me a couple of hours. And, in the meantime, you might see what that girl wants." He nodded his head toward a girl across the street. "She's easy on the eyes and has been looking at you a couple of minutes."

"That's Juanita Welch," Hawk informed him. "Ted's girl."

The girl smiled faintly as he greeted her.

"In a few days, now," she said, "the Derby will be run and—I've got to talk to some one who understands and is sympathetic."

"I'll do my best to understand," Hawk assured her, "and you have my sympathy."

They walked down a shaded

street, away from the noisy crowds. People sat on their porches and enjoyed the cool and peace of the night. Their voices came in low, contented murmurs. Here and there a cigarette glowed.

"Something in me that I resent has come to the surface," the girl said slowly, "and I can't help it. I guess—I'm afraid of life for the first time. I'm nothing but an orphan with a voice and a not very good voice, either. I've always worked and got my education in my spare time. Now I have Ted's love, and I can hold it. But I'm not deceiving myself. I won him because no one else would have him."

"And you've been thinking if he wins the Derby and the Triangle D is returned to its former glory, you might lose Ted?" Hawk asked.

"Yes," she admitted. "The Dravus men have always been proud men. And they married proud women. I'm afraid if Poker Jim's mind cleared up, he wouldn't approve of a singer from the Branding Iron taking a place in the big house. If Pardner wins the Derby and Poker Jim leads the grand march, he wouldn't want Juanita's hand on his arm. He would be thinking of the proud Dravus women who had dreamed of the honor, but never gained it. I hate myself for it," she concluded, "but sometimes I'm afraid—yes, that is the word—afraid a miracle might happen and he would come back from the asylum. There; all of my wretched thoughts are out. How you must hate me!"

"But you don't let those fears influence you?" Hawk asked.

"Of course not," she answered quickly.

"Then who is going to hate you?" Hawk countered.

She had no answer for that, and they walked along in silence until



she suddenly realized she was due to sing in a few minutes.

Near the stage entrance, Juanita suddenly stopped. "There's Ted," she exclaimed. "I'm afraid he's drunk again. I'm going in through the main entrance. I'm too tired and afraid to endure anything unpleasant. Thank you, Jeff Carney; you've listened sympathetically. I'll try and not forget it."

**H**AWK rolled out of the hay the following morning and was greeted by the liveryman, who was in a high state of excitement.

"The bettin' has changed overnight!" he said. "Gorin's Jerry has been made the favorite. Pardner's slipped plenty. He's a three-to-one shot now, and his backer's ain't offering a thin dime." Something had happened. Well, Catamount had volunteered to change the odds. If this was a result of his work, then he had succeeded with a vengeance.

By noon the odds were five to one. And no Pardner money offered. Hawk spread fifteen hundred dollars among several bookmakers and then risked a visit with Catamount. The lanky outlaw was grinning.

"How do you like them five-to-one odds?" he asked. "I told you I'd change 'em."

"How did you do it?" Hawk asked.

"I went from saloon to saloon, and every time I found a bunch talkin' odds I busted right in on 'em. I told 'em while I believed Pardner was a lead-pipe cinch to win, it looked danged queer to me when every cent of money backin' him was covered as quick as put up, and some of the big gamblers was hollerin' for more. I sort of hinted the race might be fixed," Catamount

explained. "Well, you know how it is when you kick a rock in a shale slide. One rock moves and starts a big slide. Inside of five minutes, folks were tryin' to copper the bets that'd been made on Pardner's nose."

"Scared stiff, eh?" Hawk suggested.

"Darned tootin' they was. But where in tarnation are we goin' to get the money to back Pardner?" Catamount asked. "And if we don't raise it, there won't be any money for Gorin to bet against."

"That will be the next order of business," Hawk promised. "Keep an eye on the stallion; I'm going back to the livery stable to do a little serious thinking."

A moment's reflection was sufficient to convince Hawk that he should move to a room at one of the quieter hotels. A man whose address was a livery-stable hayloft was hardly in a position to negotiate a loan. Oddly enough, when he asked for a room, he was accommodated at a hotel which was supposed to be filled.

When Hawk returned to the lobby he found Castle sitting in a chair smoking.

"You got fixed up all right, didn't you?" Castle asked.

Somehow, by the tone of the man's voice, Hawk felt convinced that he had had a hand in the fixing. "Yes, thanks," Hawk replied.

Castle took a couple of puffs on his cigar. "I suppose you've heard they've made Gorin's Jerry the favorite. Bull's pretty nearly crazy, I imagine. He figures Jerry to win, but he wanted him to go to the post a long shot. And at that it looks as if Jerry might win."

"Why?"

"Pardner's rider is on a fine



spree," Castle said. "Well, it won't make any difference in my bank roll." He got up and sauntered out.

## CHAPTER VII.

### TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS.

LATE that afternoon, Hawk McClure sat in his room trying to figure out how to raise twenty thousand dollars in the shortest possible time. His thoughts were broken into by a knock. "Come in," he said, at the same time drawing one of his gold-mounted guns and placing it in his lap. A small table hid the weapon from any one entering the room.

The door opened, and Bull Gorin came in. "You need money, Carney," he said getting down to business, "and I've got it. What do you want for Pardner?"

"Pardner isn't for sale," Hawk answered. "True, he's in my name, but I'm holding him in trust for Poker Jim."

"You can borrow on him and put him up as security for the loan," Gorin said.

"In other words, you intend to supply the money you'll later bet against," Hawk suggested.

"Why not? There's none offered now to speak of," Gorin said. "In the final analysis, it's a horse race. I'm confident Jerry will win. I back my faith with my money. If I make a loan which can't be repaid after the race, I get Pardner. You're confident Pardner will win. Very well, why not borrow the limit on the stallion or any other security and make a big clean-up at the expense of my faith in Jerry? What do you say?"

"No," Hawk answered.

"Then how in the devil do you expect to reestablish the Dravus family on the Triangle D?" Gorin

snapped. "It's going to take money to fix things with the bank. I'm not crazy enough to try to deceive you. I want the Triangle D and expect to get it."

"You may get Triangle D, but the Dravus family will still have a horse. Some of the biggest ranchers in the West have started on less," Hawk said in a tone that settled further discussion.

Gorin shrugged his shoulders. "Very well. If you were a dead-game sport you'd borrow on Pardner. Either you are a short sport, or haven't faith that he'll win the Cattleman's Derby."

"You're entitled to your own opinion," Hawk answered.

Gorin stalked from the room, muttering. "I should turn him over to the authorities," he declared, "but I'm in no position to start a clean-up. I've lived in a glass house too long to risk throwing stones. After this race is over, things will be different. But I'd like to get rid of the fellow before the race; he's dangerous. There must be a way. There's got to be a way. For a while I thought this man Castle might do something. He's been watching him close, but I can't figure that fellow."

Gorin stopped on the street to light a fresh cigar.

"That's Gorin," he heard a rancher inform his wife in a low voice; "he's our next governor, they claim. That is, if nothing happens."

The rancher and his wife moved on.

Gorin almost burned his fingers. He dropped the match and struck another. "That is, if nothing happens," he repeated. He had an odd sense that the man had unconsciously warned him.

"Well, things can happen," he growled, "either through this Hawk



McClure Carney or Ted Dravus. And I need ready money, too, to finance my campaign—a lot of it. With ready money, I can probably take care of any trouble that comes up.” He smoked the cigar down to his lips before he stopped walking, but he had planned everything out to the last detail.

GORIN encountered Ted Dravus on the main street. He almost jerked him into the private room of the nearest saloon. “Listen, Dravus,” he snapped, “you aren’t helping the odds any. As long as you stayed reasonably sober and boasted that Pardner would win, people had faith in you. The stallion had a chance of remaining the favorite. Then a rumor started that things weren’t on the level, and you know what happened. This town’s filled with men who know horses. They know a drunken man isn’t likely to ride a winner. Here’s a package of whisky, stow it in your saddlebags and get out of town. Ride up to Boulder Creek and finish your spree. There’s a cabin a half mile below the bridge, and nobody will see you.”

“That sounds like an order,” Ted said.

“It is. Effective at once,” Gorin said, with a click of his jaws.

He waited until Ted was on his way to Boulder Creek, then went over to the track to look at his racing string. Presently, he saw Catamount Larrabee. Catamount had grown careless, he decided. The lanky outlaw was sitting on a fence with his back to Pardner’s stall, talking to a group of cow-punchers about affairs in Texas. If a man wanted to doctor the stallion, he could slip into the stall and out again unobserved by his guard.

“The situation is promising,” Go-

rin mused. He joined the group, listened a moment, then went on.

Catamount was whittling on a stick. He had stopped his whittling but not his conversation, while Gorin remained in the vicinity. Now he resumed his whittling.

“The finest horse I ever saw, bar one, came from the Texas Panhandle,” he continued, “and that one is Pardner.”

“That Blackie hoss you had ’round here weren’t no disgrace to his ma and pa,” one of them drawled. “Exceptin’ Pardner’s got a star on his for’d, they might pass for brothers.”

“They ain’t even no relation,” Catamount said. “I guess I’d better get back on the job; my boss, Mr. Carney, might show up.”

Catamount waited all day and until midnight, but Hawk failed to appear. “I hope that man Castle didn’t run him in,” Catamount muttered, as he undressed. “This weren’t a half-bad day. Seems kinda good to talk with a bunch that ain’t heard all your yarns and you theirs.”

He awakened shortly after dawn. The barns fairly seethed with excitement. “What’s up?” he asked, running out and dressing at the same time.

“Somebody held up the stage at Boulder Creek bridge last night,” a man shouted. “Gorin just came from town and told one of his men. The driver’s in the hospital. They don’t know whether he’ll live or not.”

“Who brought the stage in?” Catamount asked.

“The horses came in theirselves,” the man informed him. “There weren’t no passengers. Nobody knows how much was took. The money shipment was consigned to



the State Bank, and they're tryin' to get hold of the cashier to find out how much he expected."

"Whoever it was that robbed the stage had better cache the money pronto, or get it in circulation before the serial numbers are known," another observed.

Catamount lighted a cigarette and, for the first time since his arrival at Marshall, his fingers shook. He only smoked half, then he went into the barn and walked back and forth. Finally, he saddled his horse and rode uptown. Small knots of men were talking about the holdup. He saw Castle lurking near one group. He was saying nothing, and missing nothing.

CATAMOUNT tied his horse in the rear of Hawk's hotel and went directly to his room. He tapped on the door with his fingers—a signal that Hawk understood. Hawk opened the door, then hastily closed and locked it. A heap of currency lay on the bed.

"Are any of our men in town?" Hawk asked.

"Yes," Catamount admitted. "I asked a few to drift in. I thought you might need 'em."

"I do," Hawk answered. "Take this money—there's nearly twenty thousand dollars of it—and give it to the boys. Tell them to scatter among the various bookmakers and betting commissioners and get it down, in small amounts, on Pardon's nose."

"I savvy," Catamount replied; "the sooner it's mixed up with other money, the better."

"I don't want any of us caught with even so much as a five-dollar bill on him," Hawk explained. "When you're rid of it, come back and I'll tell you the story." He

fairly pushed the lanky outlaw out of the room.

When Catamount was gone, Hawk went back to bed. He had an idea that he would be receiving callers fairly soon.

Less than five minutes after Catamount's departure some one knocked on the door with the butt of a six-gun.

"Who is it?" Hawk called sleepily.

"Open up!" a gruff voice answered.

He opened the door and several men wearing stars pushed their way into the room.

"What's all the excitement?" Hawk yawned. He made no effort to pick up the gold-mounted six-guns on the table; offered no resistance. "I'm not kicking; you boys have to do your duty. But I'd like to know what's happened," he said.

"You didn't know the stage was held up last night?" their leader asked.

"I've been dead to the world since midnight," Hawk informed them. "Make yourself at home. You can't afford to take my word for it."

They searched the room thoroughly, and one of them examined the bore of his guns. "They've been freshly cleaned," he said.

"Sure, I clean them regularly," Hawk answered, "and if you don't give yours the same attention you're a fool."

"We got a tip you might know somethin' about the holdup, Mr. Carney," the leader said, "and—"

"That's all right," Hawk interrupted; "no honest man objects to questioning and search. I did intend to sleep until noon, though."

At this moment Mr. Castle poked his head through the door. "I can assure you, gentlemen, this man had



no part in the holdup," he said, "but I'm here on another matter."

He drew the leader aside and disclosed his credentials. The leader's eyebrow went up, and he whistled softly. Castle turned back to Hawk.

"I think it for the best interests of all concerned that you be arrested and held as a—well, let's say a material witness in this other little matter I alluded to." The man's blandness was maddening.

"I'd like to know details," Hawk said evenly.

"They will be disclosed at the proper time," Castle informed him. Again he addressed the men. "I ask that you say nothing of this arrest to any one. I want to make it plain that in arresting Mr. Carney it is not to be presumed he is under the slightest suspicion of being involved in any crime that has occurred in Marshall."

The men nodded. The credentials he had shown to their leader had so evidently impressed him, they were, in turn, impressed.

Hawk dressed, and all departed, excepting Castle, taking the outlaw's weapons with them. Castle said nothing, but he was alert and prepared for anything. "May I write a note to my trainer, Larrabee?" Hawk asked.

"Certainly," Castle replied. "I shall, of course, pass on its contents. After all, you're Hawk McClure, leader of one of the most fearless bands of men in the West. And I frankly say that while I wouldn't shrink from a run-in with them, nevertheless I am not seeking it."

"Castle, you wouldn't shrink from anything," Hawk growled. He picked up a pen and wrote on hotel stationery:

DEAR LARRABEE: Early this morning my room was searched on the suspicion I might

be involved in a recent stage robbery. Naturally, nothing was found. But a Mr. Castle has placed me under arrest for reasons of his own. He wishes my arrest to remain a secret, but is permitting me to give you instructions.

By some hook or crook, I hope to be free the day of the race. But if I'm not, carry out my plans as best you can. Above all things, don't interest yourself in my arrest. To win the Cattleman's Derby under the present set-up is a three-man job. But then you're as good as any three men I know, excepting possibly Mr. Castle.

Respectfully,

JEFFERSON CARNEY.

Mr. Castle read the letter through without changing expression. Even the reference to himself brought no comment. "I'll mail it at the post office, or deliver it personally," he offered.

"Mail it," Hawk answered.

Mr. Castle proved a master hand in the matter of the arrest. Hawk realized it had been achieved with smoothness and dispatch. He had waited until the hotel room was filled with deputies, then stepped into the picture. Now, as they walked slowly toward the jail, Mr. Castle was as genial as a perfect host, but Hawk knew the man was ready for any suspicious movement.

At the jail Hawk was assigned to a cell overlooking an alley. With escape in mind, Hawk noted that it was a quiet alley, well shielded from observing eyes. "But this cell has the toughest bars I ever saw," he concluded, after a brief examination. "They were sure made to keep men out of circulation."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### GORIN'S ORDERS.

CATAMOUNT LARRABEE read Hawk's letter over twice. "He called me Larrabee and signed it Jefferson Carney," the lanky outlaw mused. "He didn't



want anything even hintin' at Hawk McClure, in case this got into the hands of the wrong party. So Castle moved in on him. I've been expectin' it."

Catamount's first impulse was to round up the members of Hawk's band and rescue the leader by force. "Sudden surprise could do it," he reasoned, "but that won't win the Cattlemen's Derby. And he's been poundin' that into my head from the beginning. I suppose I'll have to obey orders."

Later that morning, members of the band in Marshall reported. Catamount had distributed the money Hawk had given him among them. They, in turn, had placed it all.

"Towards the last, two to one was the best we could do," one of them said. "So much Pardner money forced down the odds. Now what do you want us to do?"

"Make out like you'd never heard of Hawk McClure, Jefferson Carney and Catamount Larrabee," the lanky outlaw ordered, "but stick around so that I can use you in a hurry if I have to."

"But you ain't goin' to let that Ted Dravus ride Pardner, are you?" one of them asked.

"Hawk's orders," Catamount answered shortly.

That appeared to settle it, though one of them muttered something about Dravus being a double-crosser.

The remainder of the day passed without incident. Rumors flew thick and fast. One report had it that the stage driver was dead; another that the outlaw had been arrested; and a third that the stolen money was already in circulation. Bookmakers would probably put it in circulation in making change. Undoubtedly many of them realized

that they might have some of the stolen currency, but they kept quiet for fear it would be taken and held as evidence.

CATAMOUNT slept little that night and awakened the following morning in a grouchy mood. It was Friday. "And tomorrow's the big race," he grumbled, washing up. "Golly, I'd like to know what things will be like Sunday. Who'll have won. Where Hawk will be. And all that."

Ted Dravus showed up that afternoon, partially sober.

"You'd better lay off the bottle until after the race," Catamount advised.

Ted gave him a resentful glance. "Drunk or sober, there's no better rider than I am," he retorted, "and I'll be on the best horse. Hello, Pardner, how are you?"

The stallion snorted and jumped against the side of the stall. "What's the matter?" Ted demanded, "don't you know me?"

"He knows you sober," Catamount said, "not half pickled. Suppose you keep away until tomorrow, race time? In fact, I think I'll make it a rule, for the good of the horse, that everybody keeps away from him."

"I'm riding that horse," Dravus argued, "and I'll look at him when I feel like it."

"That's a fine way to get a bust on the nose," Catamount warned. "You ain't goin' to get him jittery before the race. Now clear out."

"Why, you—simple-minded hick," Dravus snarled. Then, in a sudden burst of temper, he caught up a hay hook and made a pass at the taller man.

Catamount saw it coming. He stepped inside and smashed his fist squarely into Dravus's face. Ted



Dravus dropped, but Catamount picked him up and dumped him into the water trough.

"Now get out of here, you blasted white chip," Catamount ordered. "And don't show up again until race time. If anybody asks what happened to your face, tell 'em a horse kicked you."

Holding a handkerchief to his face, Ted made his way to the Gorin stable. Bull descended on him like a tone of brick.

"What happened?" he demanded, "I told you to avoid trouble with Larrabee."

"The stallion was nervous. It made me sore, and one thing led to another," Ted answered.

"Here, let me bandage you up, then go upstairs. You'll find a cot. Stay there," Gorin said.

Ted stretched out on the cot, brooded a while, then fell asleep. It was dusk when he awakened, and Gorin was shaking him. Ted was cold sober now, but his head ached.

"Here's some grub," snapped Gorin. "After that"—he lowered his voice—"you're going to doctor Pardner."

"It was agreed that I was to pull him," Ted argued.

"I'm going to talk turkey, Dravus," Gorin said, showing a side of his character that he had never before revealed to Ted. "A man like you, who'd double-cross his own father, wouldn't hesitate to knife me if the mood struck him. There's serious work to be done. My whole fortune is at stake." His eyes grew murderous. "I've waited years for to-morrow, and it isn't going to slip through my hands."

"I can pull that horse, and nobody'll know the difference," Ted argued. "I've done it before."

"You've never done it before so critical a crowd," Gorin said. "No;

you're goin' to doctor the stallion to-night. I'm taking no chances. In fact, I'm going to do it myself, with your help," Gorin suddenly announced. "You're to engage Larrabee in an argument, while I slip into the stable and do the job. One more thing. The stage was held up; the driver's so seriously wounded he may die. I've a fair idea who did it."

"Who?"

"You!"

Ted Dravus turned ashen. "I wouldn't do such a thing," he said desperately. "Why, I was——"

"Where were you?" And for all the softness of Gorin's voice it was a snarl. "Where were you?"

"In the cabin, drunk," Ted said. "I couldn't——"

"You've done some queer things when you were drunk and had no recollection of them," Gorin went on remorselessly. "You were the only known man in the region. They've hanged men on less evidence."

"So that's the club you're swinging over my head?" Ted said.

"Your breed is handled but one way," Gorin said.

"If I held up the stage, where's the money?" Ted asked.

"Who knows? A drunken man loses his possessions. You might have lost the money. Perhaps somebody found it, or knocked you in the head and took it. Either way, it wouldn't help you any if the driver dies. Make up your mind. I'll turn you over to the authorities or—keep you on my pay roll."

"Let's go," Ted answered. He looked frightened and desperate until Gorin gave him a stiff drink.

Ted approached Catamount alone, while Gorin advanced in the opposite direction on the stable.

"I said I'd see Pardner whenever



I felt like it," Ted said, "and I'm here. Just what're you going to do about it?"

"Aren't you satisfied with the bust I gave you on the nose?" Catamount asked in astonishment, "because if you ain't——"

Ted grappled with the lanky outlaw, and the two struck the ground with a crash. He wrapped his arms and legs about the larger man and rolled around the corner of the stable. Gorin came out of the shadows and slipped into Pardner's stall. He was there but a few moments and emerged, breathing hard from a mixture of effort and excitement.

He noticed that Catamount was on top, and he heard Ted grunt from a blow in the stomach.

"Aw, you're drunk again," Catamount complained in disgust. "I don't beat up drunks if I can help it."

He got up, pulled Ted to his feet, and started him on his way with a lusty kick, then returned to his box near the stable door. He brushed his big hands and grinned. "That was settled easy enough," he chuckled.

**T**HE track and stables were thick with cattlemen the following morning, and Catamount risked leaving one of the members of the band in charge and hurried down to the railroad station. He arrived a few minutes before train time and watched the long string of passenger coaches disgorge. Several minutes elapsed, the crowd disappeared, but still Catamount waited.

Suddenly, he hurried to one of the coaches. "Hello, doc!" he exclaimed. "For a minute I didn't know whether you'd come or not."

The doctor turned and assisted Poker Jim Dravus to the platform.

The rancher looked around in bewilderment. "They're coming down the stretch!" he said. "Where's Pardner?"

"Come on, Jim," the doctor quietly urged; "we'll find Pardner." Then he looked at Catamount. "I promised Mr. Carney I would bring the patient to the Cattlemen's Derby and here he is. But where's Carney?"

"To tell the truth," Catamount confessed, "he's in the hoosegow. I haven't been told why they're holdin' him, nor how long. But he sent orders to go ahead with his plans, and that's what I'm doin'. How's Poker Jim?"

"Physically, never better," the doctor answered, "but mentally, no change."

"I've hired a rig," Catamount explained, "and we've got a box near the finish. It might be a good idear to drive around until just before post time, then bring Jim to the box. If he's in the rig, away from the crowds, nobody'll notice him if he starts yellin' 'Come on, Pardner.'"

"That's a fine idea," the doctor agreed. "Can you come along with us?"

"Sorry, doc," Catamount answered, "but I'm busier than a coyote in a hencoop. And if you don't mind, I'll light out right now. There's a hombre I want to see. The rig's in front of the gate. See you at the race."

Catamount legged it up the street and tapped Mr. Castle's lean, hard arm. "I want to talk to you about Jeff, Mr. Castle," he said. "Can't you fix it up so he can take a hand in this race business? Golly, he's needed. He'll give you his word of honor to return after it's over, even if he has to stick his head in a noose."



"I've no doubt he would," Mr. Castle answered, "but, once I make an arrest, I have no authority to release a man. Sorry." He hurried on, leaving Catamount in a depressed mood. The big outlaw scratched his head, then started for the track again. The race would be run within four hours; but a lot could happen in that space of time, he mused.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE CATTLEMEN'S DERBY.

WHILE Catamount was returning to the track, Mr. Castle made his way to the jail. "I've come for my prisoner, Jefferson Carney," he said to the sheriff.

"What," the sheriff exclaimed, "taking a prisoner out of jail on the day of the Derby?"

"There are more important things than the Derby to-day," Mr. Castle informed him. "And no man enjoys a good, honest horse race more than I do."

The sheriff issued the necessary order, and presently Hawk appeared. He looked thinner and somewhat drawn.

"Haven't they been feeding you well?" Castle inquired.

"He got stubborn and refused to eat," the sheriff explained.

Hawk said nothing.

"Walk slightly ahead of me," Castle ordered as they left the jail, "and I won't attract attention by handcuffing you. I've no desire to have a crowd follow us. Turn into the first alley. In that way, we'll miss the congestion on the main street."

Hawk turned into the alley and discovered it was the same nice, quiet alley he had observed from his cell window. He stopped and looked

back at Castle's annoyed exclamation. The man had a cigar in his mouth, and he was feeling in his vest pockets for a match. Both thumbs were engaged in the hunt. It was the first tactical blunder Castle had made since Hawk had met him, but it was enough.

Before he could withdraw his thumbs, Hawk leaped and pinned both arms to his sides. Then he twisted him around and slipped an arm about Castle's throat. "One yell and I'll choke you," he threatened.

Hawk looked wildly about and noticed a storeroom door. He tried it and found it open. Hawk dragged his prisoner into the room and bound him with scraps of rope that lay in a rubbish heap on the floor. The door was equipped with a substantial lock from which protruded a key. Hawk pulled out the key and grinned down at Castle. "Sorry," he said, "but you made two mistakes—the first in coming down this alley; the second in using both hands to hunt for matches."

"It would seem there was a third," Castle added. "I stopped in front of an empty storeroom equipped with a strong lock."

Hawk locked the door and got into the crowd as quickly as possible. He worked his way to the livery stable and asked that Diabolo be saddled. "Sure," the liveryman answered. "You lost some weight while you was away, didn't you?"

"Yeah, some," Hawk admitted.

The moment the stallion was saddled, Hawk started for the race track. He went down back streets because he could make better time and rode almost to the stable without dismounting. One of his men lurking near the stable hurried up. "Take care of Diabolo," he ordered.

"I want to reach Pardner's stall without being seen."

Hawk entered through a window and startled Catamount, whose hand instinctively reached for his guns.

"Hawk! You old tramp!" the lanky outlaw exclaimed. "You're a sight for the gods. How did you make it?"

"Got the jump on Castle and locked him up. If he'll only stay locked until after the race! Is Poker Jim here?"

"Yes. Doc brought him," Catamount answered.

"Where's Ted Dravus?"

"Ain't showed up yet. Hawk, we can't trust that cuss. I've always said so, and nothing's happened to make me change my mind. Come here! Take a look at Pardner. He's in great shape. He's so full of steam it don't seem natural," Catamount said.

**H**AWK went into the stall and rubbed Pardner's nose, then examined his brand. The reversed C had been changed to a Triangle D. "You did a good job, Catamount." He grinned. "In fact, several of them. Now let's have a look at the regulations covering the Cattleman's Derby. There's no other race exactly like it in the world."

The early ranchers had conceived the race for the double purpose of entertainment and improving stock. To prevent outsiders from entering, each horse must have been born and raised within two hundred miles of Marshall. All horses must be equipped with standard saddles. Racing saddles and professional jockeys were barred. There was an unwritten law that only owners or those representing them for a period of one year could ride. This prevented the importation of riders.

As a result of laws, written and unwritten, the Derby was a sporting event of the highest order. The average rider weighed from one hundred and sixty-five to one hundred and ninety pounds. Professional turfmen were always present, eager to buy the best horses in the event. Some world-famous horses had made their original bid for fame at Marshall.

Hawk glanced over the rules to make certain he had forgotten nothing; then, armed with a pair of binoculars, he studied the grandstand. The box Poker Jim was to occupy was still empty. Hawk located Gorin's box. It was decorated with his colors, red and white.

He sent a man off to find some purple and gold bunting—the Triangle D colors—and instructed him to decorate the Dravus box.

"Get out of sight," Catamount suddenly warned; "here comes Ted Dravus."

Hawk stepped behind the door and grabbed the man from behind. He clapped his hand over Ted's mouth, and Catamount tied him hand and foot.

"I'm sorry, Ted," Hawk said, "but I'm going to ride Pardner. There's been no doctoring, and there's going to be no pulling. It's a sad day for Bull Gorin. I'm in hopes it'll be a grand day for Poker Jim."

"What?" Ted spoke thickly, and Hawk partly withdrew his hand from Ted's mouth. "Is he coming?"

"Yes. And maybe he'll see the finish of the race he's been watching all this time," Hawk said. "I want your hat, shirt, pants, and boots. Watch him, Catamount. Loosen up the bindings while I get what I want. If he makes a move, let him have it."



Ten minutes later, Hawk was dressed in Ted's clothes. The outfit from the black Stetson to the black boots was made of the most expensive leather.

"There's one more thing," Hawk said. "I'll take the bandage off your nose. You're not going anywhere."

"I see it all now," Ted fumed. "Your man Larrabee busted me on the nose so I'd wear a bandage—"

"So I could take the bandage and use it to hide my face," Hawk finished. "Well, that's about the size of it. You'll be comfortable here," he added. "Catamount is going to watch the race."

"Hawk had me worried," Catamount informed Ted. "I was afraid he wouldn't show up, and I'd have to wear your bandage and ride that nag. With my red hair I'd have had a tough time passin' off as Ted Dravus."

"And Hawk McClure's going to have a tough time," Ted predicted. "He'll be spotted."

**A**LL right," one of the track officials shouted. "It's almost post time for the Derby."

Hawk was ready, but he delayed, preferring to ride at the end of the line in the parade past the grand stand. He particularly desired to keep away from the Gorin rider, Brady, as long as possible.

His eyes roved the stands as he rode slowly past. "That's Ted Dravus," he heard some one say. "Got kicked in the face by a horse."

Hawk saw Juanita Welch occupying a box filled with entertainers from the Branding Iron. She was pale and tense with emotion and uncertainty—the only one of the gay crowd who was unhappy.

The line moved on and drew abreast of the Gorin box. Mrs. Go-

rin, in a Paris dress, was smiling right and left. Her husband's eyes on the governor's chair had thawed her. She was trying to be everybody's friend and overdoing it.

He shifted his face, as Gorin came into the box, and looked ahead at the Dravus box. He saw Catamount first, then the doctor, and finally Poker Jim, who had just taken a seat. The doctor had to force him to sit down. The old man was in a stubborn mood. Hawk's hope almost died when he looked into the old rancher's vacant eyes.

The dream races in his unhappy brain were real enough, but this race which had substance made no impression. And yet, Hawk knew the margin between a normal and an abnormal mind was so narrow that it took but a slight influence to change the course of a human being's impressions.

The doctor, with his customary patience, was striving to fix Poker Jim's attention on Hawk. "There's Pardner," Hawk heard him say. "There he is! And your boy, Ted, is riding him. It's the Cattleman's Derby, Jim, and you've bet thousands of dollars on Pardner's nose."

As the horses passed the bleachers, a sudden change came over the crowd. Eyes looked beyond the track to an entrance. The murmur that comes from deep admiration swept through the crowd. Hawk turned in his saddle and stared, then a surge of pride swept through him. For a moment, he forgot the race and Poker Jim. He forgot Castle, bound in the storeroom, and Ted Dravus, bound in the stable. He forgot even the danger of exposure in any one of several sources.

Some eighteen men were riding into space reserved for mounted spectators. Their broad shoulders, flat stomachs and bronzed features

would have attracted attention anywhere, but mounted on the finest group of saddle horses most of the spectators had ever seen, they presented an unforgettable picture. In all the West there was but one such group—Hawk McClure's band.

Their eyes were alert for possible danger, but there was an eagerness in them that escaped few—the eagerness of men who have long been denied the excitement of crowds and carnival spirit. They weren't here to play. Hawk knew that. They had heard of his imprisonment and had ridden long and hard to do something about it. But in the heart of each, he knew, was the hope that they might have a few hours of fun before trouble broke over them.

Catamount Larrabee got up as if to join them, then changed his mind and remained with Poker Jim in the box. "They sure gave Hawk a thrill," he muttered. "And come to think of it, my heart kinda pounded. Half the girls here are lookin' at them. And, Golly Moses, the way they're lookin' at the girls. Wouldn't that bunch like to go to the big ball to-night!" Catamount sighed. "I'd like to go myself, but there isn't a chance." He shook his head. "Too many enemies. And the answer to a sheriff's prayer would be to catch Hawk McClure and his band dancing in town."

Catamount changed his seat to one next to Poker Jim. "It's goin' to be a great race," he ventured.

Jim's vacant eyes stared at things beyond normal horizons, and he made no answer.

**S**LOWLY, the nervous horses lined up. Here, one broke from the line; there, a horse reared about and headed the wrong way. Patiently, the starter waited.

Suddenly thousands of voices thundered, "They're off!" The massed cry beat like a wave against the surrounding hills, and it crashed against something deep in Poker Jim's brain. There were vague stirrings, like a man awakening from a heavy sleep. A gleam of interest came into his eyes, then faded, as if the awakening man had fallen asleep again.

"Come on, Jerry!" Those who had bet on the Gorin stallion voiced their plea early in the race. "Get that Pardner horse. He's out in front. Get him!"

A sudden, angry roar came from many. "What's Ted Dravus doin' to Pardner. He's pullin' him! He's pullin' him!"

"The fool!" Gorin snarled. "Why don't he wait? That doctoring will slow Pardner when he gets warmed up. Blast him! Pulling that horse so brazenly!" He turned on a companion. "Is he drunk?"

"He was cold sober when he went into the stable," the man answered. "But why worry? You're winning, and he'll have to stand the gaff from the suckers."

"There might be an investigation," Gorin answered.

Catamount Larrabee was standing in his box, utterly dumfounded. He whirled on the doctor. "Did you see that?" he hoarsely demanded.

"Who didn't?" the doctor answered.

"Doc, once he was creased by a bullet. He was out of his head five years; then they operated," Catamount whispered, trying to give the doctor a case history in ten seconds. "Could the old trouble come back and send him haywire?"

"It might, Larrabee," the doctor answered. "Pardner's in the rear now, but holding his own. There he's coming up. And look at him go!"



Catamount made a club out of his program and began beating the rail. "Come on, Pardner! Come on! You've got the stuff, boy! Get that Jerry horse!" His demand became the chant of thousands of small betters.

"Come on, Pardner! Come on!" a voice in the box muttered.

The doctor reached behind Poker Jim and clutched Catamount's arm, then he pointed at Jim. The doctor's face was almost white with excitement and hope. He was a doctor first, a sportsman second. His patient interested him more than the race.

"Come on, Pardner!" he roared in the old man's ear.

"Don't use the whip, Ted!" Poker Jim pleaded, as he had pleaded countless times in his gloomy room. "Don't!" He got to his feet, and his hand clutched the box rail. "Close in, Ted! You're giving them too much lead. That's it. Now, come on!"

He began beating the rail with his hands, and slowly his face changed from red to purple in his excitement. The doctor started to lay a restraining hand on Poker Jim's shoulder, then thought better of it.

Catamount's anguish was so great, he almost needed medical attention. "Why did you pull him, Hawk?" he moaned. "He can never make it. He's got to make it."

Three horses led Pardner, and Catamount saw Hawk lift the whip. "Don't do it, Ted!" Poker Jim thundered. "Don't touch the whip to that horse." He beat the rail in a frenzy, then changed and began sweeping his left arm, as if to aid in pulling Pardner into the lead.

"Come on, Pardner!" Poker Jim's

voice was lost in the prayer of thousands, but he didn't realize it.

As they thundered toward the finish, cold-blooded betters would have given odds that there wasn't a horse in the world that could catch Gorin's Jerry. Pardner's ears lay back, his teeth were bared, and his marvelous tendons flexed and snapped under his black velvet coat. Twenty feet from the finish he lunged, pushed his nose in front of Jerry's. The crowd expected him to falter, but he didn't. He plumbed the depths of his reserve and thrust his head beyond Jerry's nose and pounded on.

Poker Jim whirled on Catamount Larrabee. "Ted and Pardner won! Don't you understand? After all these generations a Triangle D horse won!" Bewilderment filled his eyes. "You're a stranger." He looked around, stunned. "Where are my friends?"

"Gone to collect their bets," Catamount said. "They'll be crowding around in a minute." Catamount clutched the doctor's arm. "He's all right again! He asked for his friends! The blank look's gone."

"Yes," the doctor answered, "Poker Jim saw the finish of that race at last."

## CHAPTER X.

### THE GRAND MARCH.

**T**ED DRAVUS appears to be having a little trouble with his mount," the announcer said. "We'll have him back on the track in a few minutes, where Pardner will be given the wreath by the queen of the day."

There seemed no stopping Pardner. He sped on and turned into a gate that led to the stables.

While Hawk made a fine bluff at taming Pardner, Catamount legged it out the back way to the stable.

He arrived seconds ahead of Hawk. He cut Ted's lashings and stood him up.

"You won, you understand! Won! And your father's mind is straightened out. Play your part, you rat, or I'll take you apart," Catamount threatened.

Hawk hit the ground and led Pardner into the stable. He stripped off Ted's clothing and threw the garments at him. "Get into them!" he snapped.

"Why'd you pull Pardner?" Catamount asked. "You scared me out of seven years' growth."

"He was running away from the field. I wanted thousands of people yelling, 'Come on, Pardner.' I wanted that plea to penetrate the fog in Poker Jim's brain and sweep him on. The only way to bring it about was to pull the horse," Hawk explained, "and it darned near lost the race."

He got into his own clothes and helped dress Ted. Just as he reached up to pull the bandage off his nose and plaster it onto Ted's, Bull Gorin came through the door.

"Dravus, you double-crossing rat," Gorin panted, "you're not going to run——" Then he caught the significance of the situation. "So Hawk McClure rode that horse. This crowd's going to get a real show. It's going to see Hawk McClure and——"

"Just a minute, Gorin," a crisp voice interrupted. "I'm playing a hand in this game."

"Who are you?" Gorin roared at the intruder.

"Introduce me, Hawk," the man said.

Hawk licked suddenly dry lips. "Mr. Gorin, meet Mr. Castle. He's some kind of a peace officer with plenty of authority behind him."

Mr. Castle did not offer to shake

hands, because both hands held six-guns. "Dravus," he ordered, "go out there and take your bow. Then come back."

"Yes, sir," Ted answer.

"Here he comes," the announcer yelled. "He's got that great horse under control at last. Ladies and gentlemen, Ted Dravus, the present-day representative of a great line of Western men. And his horse, Pardner, the product of generations of breeding and hope."

Ted Dravus sat straight on Pardner and acknowledged the cheers. He saw a beautifully dressed girl come out and place a floral horse-shoe around Pardner's neck, and he saw Juanita Welch standing in her box. Her eyes were filled with tears at the tribute, but there was fear of the future in her face. A proud old man walked toward the winner. It was the Poker Jim the West had long known; Poker Jim, who condoned wildness in his boys, as those before him had done, but who also insisted that they marry proud women. The girl looked as if she had come to the forks of a long, hard trail.

Ted Dravus jumped to the ground and for a moment Poker Jim stood there, smiling through eyes suspiciously moist. "My boy, there's much that I don't understand; much seems strange and unreal. I don't seem to have my bearings, but you are real enough, and—Pardner," he said. "I guess that's all that matters." He opened his arms and hugged Ted.

The crowd thundered its approval.

"For a while I thought my boys were all white chips, but you're blue, true blue, and, in time, the others will find themselves."

"You bet they will," Ted answered. "I'll join you later at the



hotel. I've got to—to look after Pardner now."

"Of course. We Dravus folks never neglect our horses," Poker Jim agreed.

THE stable door was closed when Ted returned, and a track officer was on guard. He admitted Pardner and Ted.

"Now we'll have it out," Hawk said. "Everybody's here. Go ahead, Gorin, and talk."

"This man is Hawk McClure, an outlaw," Gorin said. "He held up the stage, needing money, took the proceeds and bet on the race."

"It looks as if I'll have to arrest you on that charge," Castle said, "unless you can clear yourself."

"I'll clear him," Ted interrupted. "I held that stage up. I was drunk, crazy drunk, and didn't know what I was doing. I've gone pretty low, but not low enough to let another man go to the pen for something I've done. I'll plead guilty, serve my time, then come back here and help dad. The Triangle D is on the up grade and I'm going to get behind and push."

"Can you prove you did it?" Castle asked.

"Yes, Gorin said he saw me and used it as a club. I was forced to divert Larrabee's attention while he doctored Pardner. I had orders to pull the horse if necessary or go to the pen. When Hawk jumped me, I didn't put up too much of a fight. I knew he'd ride to win."

"The man's crazy," Gorin said. "One of my men saw McClure hold up that stage. At the time, Dravus was in a cabin dead drunk. I never threatened him at any time."

"Gentlemen, I'll talk. I never make an arrest until I have evidence enough for conviction," Castle said. "Here is what happened: Gorin,

with a campaign coming on, you needed plenty of ready money. You expected to collect it through the Cattleman's Derby. The odds changed, thanks to Mr. Larrabee, and the Pardner money vanished."

"That's true," Hawk said.

"You wanted money, Gorin, and a club over Ted Dravus. He was getting out of hand, mostly because a girl named Juanita Welch was helping him fight," Castle continued.

"You're right there," Ted agreed.

"You held up the stage," Castle continued, "and cached the money in McClure's bedroom. McClure was furious, thinking you were trying to frame him, but he moved fast and decided to cash in on the situation. This suited you. If Jerry won, the money would come into your hands legally and—safely. It would account for your sudden increase in ready cash."

"You sure do figure things out," Catamount said with admiration.

"Gorin, you saw Larrabee visit McClure and immediately leave. You realized the cash was on its way to the bookmakers, and you gave the sheriff's office a tip it might be found in McClure's room. You hoped that he would be held on suspicion and permit you to work freely. I was afraid he might go gunning for you and spoil my plans, so I arrested him."

"And fixed it so I could overpower you and get away?" Hawk asked.

For the first time, the hint of a grin came to Castle's face. "Yes. I rented the storeroom for that purpose," he admitted. "I left one key in the door and hid the other so that I could unlock the door and walk out after you'd locked me in."

Hawk reddened. Mr. Castle hadn't been careless, after all.

"Very interesting," Gorin sneered. "Let's hear the rest."

"I saw you doctor Pardner, and that completed my case against you," Castle said. "It's been a long, hard case, too. It began when I learned that old Jess Lee was taking the mare and colt to an outlaw named Hawk McClure. When I learned Hawk shot the mare, knowing it might attract the posse, rather than let her suffer, I knew that colt was in safe hands, and I only had to wait and let nature take its course."

"Now suppose you take me to jail, let me put up bail and defend myself against these crazy charges?" Gorin suggested. "And you had better arrest Hawk McClure."

"I'm not interested in arresting Hawk McClure," Castle answered. "I'm employed by the National Jockey Club to rid the racing game of the big-time crooks. And I've just arrested one of the biggest. Come on, Gorin." At the door he paused. "It would be a shame to spoil the festivities. Gorin will be held in seclusion for twenty-four hours."

"Are you going to let Hawk McClure go?" Gorin yelled.

"My business is catching big race-track crooks," Castle answered.

Gorin turned his back, walked over and stared at Pardner a long time. Catamount eased up beside him. "Kinda puzzled, ain't you, to think a horse could win a race after all the doctorin' you done?" he suggested. "Far be it from me to let even a jasper like you work hisself into a lather over such a situation. You didn't doctor Pardner, because Pardner wasn't even here until this morning."

Gorin wanted to yell, "He wasn't?" but he maintained a sullen silence, though Catamount could see his statement had taken plenty of wind from the man's sails.

"Nope," he continued, "Pardner wasn't here. The horse you doctored was Blackie. We'd painted a star between his eyes so he'd look like Pardner. When Dravus jumped me the other night, I knew it was a trick to get me away from the stable door so you could sneak in. I liked to died laughin' after it was over."

IT was pretty fine of Castle to take Gorin away where he couldn't tell the world who we are," Catamount observed hours later, as he looked at his gleaming boiled shirt and store clothes. "Otherwise we'd be high-tailin' it out of the country with the sheriff at our heels, instead of goin' to the Cattlemen's Ball."

Hawk adjusted his necktie and combed his hair. "Castle's a first-rate hombre," he agreed. "If I'm ever arrested, I hope he's the man who does it. Ready?" he asked.

"All set," Catamount answered. "But I'm kinda worried about the boys. They don't know any girls in this man's town, and there are three men for every lady, they claim."

The couples were lining up for the grand march when the pair entered the ballroom.

"Golly Moses, lookit there!" Catamount exclaimed. "Them boys of ours are just natural-born robbers! They've swiped the prettiest girls in the room."

The members of Hawk's band were bunched together in the line; each was smiling into the eyes of a pretty girl who was smiling right back. A group of gloomy town boys stood leaning against the wall directing murderous glances at the outlaws.

"Get your pardners for the grand march," the floor manager called.



"We'll start in five minutes. As is the custom, the march will be led by the Derby winner, Poker Jim Dravus. His daughter will be on his arm. Get your partners for the grand march."

"Sufferin' coyotes!" Catamount exclaimed. "Did that widow-lookin' person give me the eye?"

"If I were you, I'd find out," Hawk answered. He searched the room for a certain lady and saw her. She stood alone near the door, as if uncertain whether to remain or not. There was a wistfulness about her that touched Hawk's heart. He walked over and smiled.

"Hello, Juanita," he said. "Will you march with me?"

"Yes," she answered, "and I want to thank you. I haven't seen Ted since the race. He's been with his father, planning the future—a future which doesn't include the singer from the Branding Iron, I'm afraid. But that isn't the main point. You helped Ted find himself and were responsible for straightening out the mental twist that kept his father at Branch City. We can't let a fine pioneer line die or go to seed, nor ranches like the Triangle D go to weeds. The West needs them, and I'm glad the Triangle D is going on. There'll be proud women

at the big house and thoroughbred horses on its range and—let's get in line, before I start feeling sorry for myself."

"I know how you love Ted Dravus," Hawk said.

"Excuse me, sir," a voice behind them said. "I'm Poker Jim Dravus, and I am told this beautiful young woman is Juanita Welch." He bowed. "My son will not be here to-night. A horse kicked him in the face, as you know. The floor manager made a mistake. He said my daughter would be on my arm to-night. I have no daughter. He meant my future daughter-in-law. Juanita, will you honor me by accepting my arm?"

"Thank you, Mr. Dravus," she answered. She lowered her head and brushed her eyes with the fingers of her free hand.

The floor manager bowed gallantly, then turned to the orchestra leader. "All set, professor," he shouted. "Let her go!"

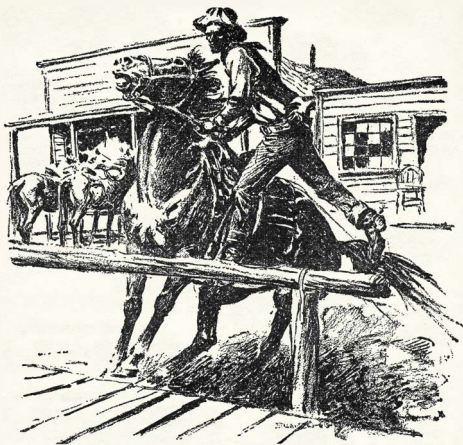
As the long line moved, Catamount whispered in Hawk's ear: "Turn around, you big galoot, and meet a handsome lady. Hurry; the line is movin' fast." Catamount had the "widow-looking" person on his arm, and she had brought along a friend.



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# HOOF DERBY

By RAY HUMPHREYS

Author of "Shorty and the Roosters," etc.

**T**HE thunder of galloping hoofs electrified Pecos Street, and a moment later a hatless, red-faced young man flung himself from the saddle in front of the sheriff's office in Monte Vista. He was to the office door in two long jumps, leaving his sweating palomino horse panting at the hitch rail. Another jump and the excited rider was through the door, like a cannon ball.

"Great guns, Don!" exploded Sheriff Joe Cook, leaping to his feet so fast that he knocked his chair over. "What's wrong? You just about scared me to death coming in here like that? You look like you seen a ghost!"

Don McCaig, one of the Monte Vista county commissioners, pushed his disheveled hair back with a nervous hand. He sank into a chair that "Shorty" McKay, Cook's deputy,



slid toward him. He waited a moment to catch his breath.

"Spill the dirt, Don!" cried Sheriff Cook, fidgeting. "What is it?"

"You know my mother's been visiting for a couple of weeks back East," began young McCaig, in gasps. "Well, she got home this morning—"

McCaig jerked his shirt loose at the collar, evidently for more air.

"You know, too, sheriff, that she's been living in the old home about a mile from my house!" continued McCaig. "Well, I met her at the depot and took her home and—and when she opened her front door—she—she—"

Sheriff Cook was leaning across his desk—mouth, eyes and ears wide open.

"Yes, yes, Don; what then?"

"Well, the front room looked like five or six Brahma steers had played leapfrog or blindman's buff there!" choked the young commissioner, mopping his hot face with a red bandanna. "The place was topsy-turvy, sheriff! The other rooms were in the same condition! The house had been ransacked! Thieves had gone through it from top to bottom and left the bottom side up!"

"What did they take, Don?" snapped the astute Shorty, reaching for paper and a pencil.

"They took all the jewelry in the place," answered McCaig, "and the silverware and about \$20 in cash that was in a drawer, several guns, and some clothing. Mother recounted those items before she fainted! I carted her to my house and then came gallumping in here to get you started quick!"

Sheriff Cook grabbed up his hat and slammed it on his head. There was an angry gleam in the sheriff's eyes. He patted his twin holsters significantly.

"They had a nerve looting your mother's house, and you a county commissioner, Don!" roared Cook. "But they'll regret it! I'll have 'em by the heels before they get a chance to use that silverware or them guns! We're going up there, Don, and look for clews! There's not a moment to be lost!"

McCaig nodded soberly. He got to his feet hurriedly. Then he paused.

"I'll have to borrow a fresh horse," he said. "I used up the palomino scandalously coming in here hell-for-leather!"

"I'll get you a horse in a jiffy, Don!" cried Shorty, eagerly.

In a few minutes, the three riders breezed away, McCaig on a livery mount. It was a good three and a half miles to the Cherry Hills section where the McCaig places were located. On the way, the officers gained one additional bit of information from McCaig—the commissioner's mother's home had been entered by smashing a side window. It was evident, therefore, that the job must have been done at night, and that the thief, or thieves, were probably not noticed in the vicinity by any one. It might prove a difficult task, the scowling sheriff decided, to track down and arrest the thieves, but they would have to be traced, no matter what the cost, what the effort.

"If they had picked on any one but a relative of a county commissioner!" thought Sheriff Cook, in growing dismay. "I got to produce; I got to!"

**A**T the house, the officers soon saw that Don McCaig had not exaggerated the situation at all. The home appeared as if it had been the center of a small but destructive cyclone. Furniture was

disarranged, piled hither and thither, overturned. The rugs were scattered. The contents of drawers were heaped on the floor in various spots. And—an important point—the shades were down on all the windows. Shorty mentioned that fact.

"They worked here at night, all right," grumbled Cook. "And they worked rapidly to cause all this havoc!"

"Yes," said Shorty, grimly, "and that's what we got to do now, boss—we got to work rapidly ourselves! We've got to search this house thoroughly for clews, fingerprints, tracks, anything, everything!"

"You bet!" agreed Sheriff Cook, sadly. He did not relish the task. He figured it quite hopeless, anyway, and he begrudged the time necessary to conduct such an investigation. He would have preferred to go out and sweep through the haunts of certain suspicious characters, interview his staff of stool pigeons, lay traps among pawnshops and secondhand stores where the stolen stuff might be expected to eventually land. However, he knew that Shorty was right and that, with the county commissioner present, it behooved him to overlook no bets, however small, in the case.

So they set to work. The sheriff poked hither and thither, frowning prodigiously, but all he could see was red. He gritted his teeth savagely. It was appalling to him that any crook would have the consummate nerve to invade the sacred precincts of a county commissioner, who, by law, was a sheriff's superior officer. It made it plenty "tough" for all concerned—the sheriff's office, as well as the thoughtless robber—for there was no question that the commissioner would clamor for action with a capital "A".

Shorty, who had been nosing around one of the bedrooms, came out with something held gingerly in one palm.

"Look at this!" he said quietly, extending his hand.

Both Sheriff Cook and Commissioner McCaig hurried to look. But their interest speedily departed as they saw what Shorty held.

"Just a piece of dried mud!" snorted Sheriff Cook, disgustedly.

"Plain, everyday mud," said McCaig. "There's mud like that all over the county, I reckon! It proves what?"

"It proves nothing," said the sheriff, instantly, "even if the thief did track it in here. There hasn't been any rain in several weeks. I'd say it didn't figure in the case at all. Forget it, Shorty!"

"You boys find anything?" asked Shorty.

"No," said the sheriff.

McCaig shook his head. Shorty shrugged.

"Reckon," he remarked, "that the robber must have worn rubber gloves. He didn't leave no fingerprints as far as I can find anywhere."

Sheriff Cook bit off the end of a big black cigar.

"Even if he didn't leave clews here, commissioner," said the sheriff, with great impressiveness, "we have other ways of catching him. And we shall. We'll spread out a dragnet for that fellow—or pair of fellows—and we will sure knock him for a whole row of barrels one of these bright days. I make that statement officially, commissioner, too! When we set out to get a guy, we always get him. And this case isn't going to be any exception to the rule!"

The county commissioner looked a little skeptical.

"I hope not," he said, vaguely.



"My mother sets a heap by that silverware and the jewelry, most of which was keepsake stuff. And besides, the money isn't anything to sneeze about! She'd like it all back and——"

Sheriff Cook took a long draw on his cigar.

"And I'll see that she gets it all back," pronounced Cook solemnly. Then he turned and beckoned to Shorty. "We'll be going, Shorty. We can't do no good lingering here. We got plenty of hard work ahead!"

"That's right!" said Shorty. He moved toward the door.

"I'm relying on you boys," declared the long-faced McCaig. "I sure enough crave to see this case cleared up proper! I insist that it be solved, Sheriff Cook—and I make that statement officially, also and likewise!"

"You bet!" agreed the sheriff, but his tone was not nearly as vehement as his words. "We'll be letting you know soon, commissioner!"

ONCE back in his office Sheriff Cook motioned Shorty to a chair. The deputy sat down, dutifully, knowing full well what was coming. He was right, it seemed. Sheriff Cook was going to start things off with a little sales talk, a sort of pep meeting. Shorty assumed a solemn expression.

"Shorty, we must solve this case, above all others," began the sheriff, wagging a finger at his deputy. "It's been a long time since we had a case involving the personal interests of a county commissioner. You know that it behooves us to stand in extra well with the commissioners, seeing they O. K. our salaries, and fees, and expense accounts, and their good will is priceless. You got that picture, have you, Shorty?"

Shorty nodded his head mournfully.

"I have the picture," he answered, "but I see a sort of black frame around it, as if it was in mourning!"

The sheriff's eyes glittered ominously.

"I won't accept defeat in this case, Shorty!" he cried, angrily. "We got to work ourselves into nervous prostration, if necessary, to clear up this robbery. First thing off, I want you to start out checking up on any suspicious birds who may have been seen around; who may have offered any jewelry for sale; who may have shown sudden and unaccounted-for signs of prosperity; who may have been seen with guns that hadn't been seen before; who appear dressed in clothing apparently not designed for 'em; who——"

"You mean men dressed up like women?" asked Shorty, looking dumb. "I didn't hear you get a description of the stolen clothes, boss. But I presume they belonged to Mrs. McCaig——"

"Stop right there, Shorty!" interposed the sheriff, tartly. "I didn't overlook no bets as you may be hinting. I knew better than to ask McCaig, or any man, for that matter, to describe female clothing or jewelry. While you are nosing around generally, as I have just outlined to you, I am going personally to console the old lady as well as to get a detailed description of all the loot. When I get that, we check the pawnshops and the secondhand stores; we advertise in the Monte Vista *Clarion*, and we put out circulars, offering a reward, maybe, and send the circulars to Alamosa, La Jara, Del Norte, Wagon Wheel Gap, Pagosa Springs, and——"

"And Mesita, Conejos, and La Veta," cut in Shorty, smiling wanly. "But we've done all that before on

several other robberies, boss, and all we gained by it was a printing and postage bill!"

Again Sheriff Cook wagged a warning finger at his deputy. "Enough of that, Shorty!" declared Cook, hotly. "This time we don't know the word 'failure' and we don't stop short of Hades!"

"What's the postage there?" asked Shorty, appearing to be worried.

"Oh, tarnation!" exploded the exasperated sheriff, wearily. "Get out and get busy, as I ordered! I ain't going to waste my energy arguing with a dead pan like you! Scram! And see that you make a good check-up on everything I said, so I won't have to go all over it after you're through! Beat it!"

Shorty had no choice in the matter, after all. He left, rather reluctantly, it seemed. Sheriff Cook relaxed a little then.

"If I can get Shorty steamed up so he'll really get interested, we may get somewhere!" he sighed. "I can't carry the whole load myself! I reckon Shorty is somewhat peeved because I made light of that hunk of mud he picked up back there at the cabin! He's always making mountains out of molehills! But he'll buckle down and work on this case, or I'll fire him out of here higher than a kite, and there'll be no string attached, either, to bring him back!"

Sheriff Cook got up, slapped his hat on, and made for the door.

"Now to see old Mrs. McCaig and console her and get the descriptions!"

**T**HE task did not prove especially difficult, after all. The old lady seemed cheered by Sheriff Cook's hearty assurances that all would end happily, and that

it was but a matter of a few flickering hours before she would once more have all her jewelry, her clothing, her guns, and her currency. She was only too pleased to give him a minute description of the missing articles. Sheriff Cook took elaborate pains to make lengthy notes on the matter. Finally, after he had filled five pages of his notebook with scribbled facts, he arose politely, bowed, and laid a kindly hand on Mrs. McCaig's shoulder.

"Think no more of it," he told her, "the thief is as good as jailed now. Me and Shorty are hot on his trail! Tell your son, the commissioner, when he returns, that I said it is but a question of sifting a few clues; just that simple! You'll be delighted at the service, Mrs. McCaig!"

"Oh, thank you!" quivered the old lady, in relief.

The sheriff rode back to Monte Vista, the picture of determination. Once in his office, he sat down and carefully made out the copy for the circular he intended to have printed. He hesitated a long time over the heading, but he finally printed out, boldly, the words "\$25 REWARD" in big letters.

"I'll deduct \$12.50 from Shorty's salary to help pay that," he decided, firmly. "It should be worth that to him to please the commissioner by recovering his mother's property!"

When the sheriff completed the circular copy, he turned to writing the advertisement he meant to run in the Monte Vista *Clarion*. This time he did not hesitate to write down in big letters the alluring bait, "\$25 Reward" and he underscored it heavily. He enumerated the stolen articles; as he had done in the circular, but more briefly. He did not mention, for instance, as he had in the circular, that one of the stolen



bracelets was a wedding anniversary present from Auntie Anna Vera Loebnitz of Placerville, or that one of the lost rifles had been carried through part of the battle of San Juan Hill by Cousin Charley, "Chuck" Morris, of Topeka, Kansas, before Cousin Charley had been overtaken by a military policeman and knocked over the head for charging in the wrong direction, to wit: to the rear.

"This may help turn the trick!" exclaimed the sheriff, enthusiastically, as he looked proudly at the completed advertisement and circular copy.

"Hello," said Shorty, coming in. "I didn't get very far, boss, except that I found one guy who had a suit of clothes on that fit him like a tent. When I questioned him, I found his wife had bought him the suit by mail."

"No trace of nothing, huh?" interrupted Sheriff Cook sourly.

"No," said Shorty, "but I figure, boss, on making a suggestion, if you are in the mood to listen carefully and not get mad——"

"Shoot!" said the sheriff, grimly. "Let's have it!"

"We didn't look around that cabin up there good enough!" said Shorty. "You recall that piece of mud I picked up and made mention of——"

"Go on!" growled Cook, but his face darkened.

"Well," said Shorty, "I know you scoffed at the idea, but I been thinking there might be a creek or a mud hole, or a swamp, or a hog wallow, or an irrigation ditch with tracks in it, even if we haven't had no rain."

"You dabble around with pica-yune matters like a nitwit when we got enormous burdens weighing us down!" complained Sheriff Cook, bitterly. "I don't want to hear an-

other word about that hunk of dried mud! Not a word!"

"O. K.," agreed Shorty, sadly. "But you got to admit that we didn't look around the place good enough, outside, for clews. We rushed off in too much of a hurry. I think we should go back and take a second squint."

Sheriff Cook stroked his chin. He seemed to be pondering deeply.

"Well, there might be a grain of sense in that," he admitted. "Understand, I am not interested in mud; but we might find something of value. We can't afford to overlook nothing. Yes, we will go back up there, Shorty!"

They went. Shorty was strangely silent all the way. Sheriff Cook eyed him speculatively and suspiciously a number of times.

"He's just sulking because I take no stock in that chunk of mud!" decided Cook, finally. "Let him mope! I won't argue with him!"

Once again at the McCaig place, the pair renewed their search for evidence. The sheriff, not knowing exactly what he was looking for or just what he might expect to find, stayed fairly close to the house. He walked around and around it in ever widening circles, his eyes on the ground. He was still walking, head down, when a shout from Shorty aroused him.

"Hey, boss! Quick! This way! Hurry!"

Sheriff Cook jumped, slapped his holsters, to make sure his guns were handy, then ran excitedly toward his beckoning deputy.

"What is it, Shorty? What you got there?"

"There's a spring here and a lot of mud!" cried Shorty, pointing, "but look at that one good, clear track down there!"

Sheriff Cook stooped curiously.

He saw the imprint of an enormous bare foot. He stared at it in amazement.

"You see anything peculiar about that, boss?" cried Shorty.

"It's a powerful big foot that made that!" said the sheriff.

"But look!" insisted Shorty. "There's six toes! Six! Count 'em! A human foot with six toes! The guy probably has twelve toes all told! We got to look for a guy with twelve toes, boss! There's our clew!"

Again Sheriff Cook stroked his chin. He seemed mesmerized by the peculiar imprint. He cocked his head this way and that to size it up properly.

"Why would the thief be bare-footed?" he asked, suddenly.

"One reason might be that he could paddle around more quietly than if he had shoes," said Shorty. "I've heard of barefoot burglars before! Who else, I ask, but the thief, would blunder through this mud? He didn't know the spring was here and he stepped in here. Yes, sir! There's a hot clew!"

Sheriff Cook straightened up. He looked hard at his deputy.

"By golly, Shorty!" he exclaimed. "You may be right, at that!"

SHERIFF COOK rode back to Monte Vista with his chin up and his eyes flashing. A clew! A barefoot burglar with six toes on one foot, anyway, and the probability that he had twelve toes altogether. Shorty, who was strangely silent all the way back from the McCaig place, asked no questions until he and Cook were back in the office. Then he looked at the sheriff.

"How you figure on checking old Twelve Toes?" he asked, quietly.

Sheriff Cook had figured all the

way in. He gave Shorty a superior look.

"Son, you got to get up very early in the morning to get ahead of Sheriff Cook! I got that matter all doped out. First, I am visiting all of the local shoe emporiums and asking questions of the clerks about any twelve-toed bozo; also I am visiting the local swimming pavilion and asking Bob Geiger, the manager, the selfsame question!"

Shorty nodded soberly, but made no remark.

"You remain here while I perform that duty," continued Sheriff Cook, hastily. "I figure I can handle the matter personally. If the commissioner or his mother should telephone in, tell 'em I am hot on the trail and expect results any moment now. I'll be back directly!"

"Okey-doke!" answered Shorty, carelessly.

Sheriff Cook, lighting a fresh cigar, breezed out on the street. He felt quite confident. He decided that the case was practically solved. A man with six toes on one foot should be easily located, indeed. He made directly for Wally Reef's shoe shop. He entered and buttonholed Wally eagerly. But Wally, after listening carefully, made a brief answer.

"I don't have no twelve-toed customers, Cook; at least, not that I know about. Of course, I don't play 'this little piggy went to market and this little piggy stayed home' with my customers. You see, all my trade is high class. They all wear socks and stockings when they come in here!"

The sheriff continued on to Glenn Neville's store in a thoughtful mood. It might not be so easy, after all, he thought, to find that thief.

Mr. Neville was like a wet blanket after he heard Cook's question.



"A bird with twelve toes?" echoed Mr. Neville, amazed. "Why ask me? I'm no chiropodist, sir! I sell shoes! As a matter of fact, I don't spend no time admiring or closely inspecting feet! I fit a shoe, and that's all there is to it! I don't know how many toes my customers have, and I keep no record along that line. Has some one passed a law making twelve toes illegal?"

Sheriff Cook left Neville's considerably disheartened. He decided to try both the local chiropodists, however. It might be a good tip. He was just on the verge of entering Doctor Harry Walker's office when he heard an uproar at the corner. He turned, to see three husky youths rushing a protesting stranger along a bit roughly. The stranger was calling for assistance lustily.

Sheriff Cook forgot all about Doctor Harry Walker.

"Hey!" he yelled, dashing up the street. "What's wrong here?"

"Nothing," said one of the young men, answering his shout, "just the foot fiesta, that's all! Shorty told us to bring in any likely candidates, and we hooked this baby! He's making a fuss about nothing!"

"Foot fiesta?" cried Sheriff Cook. "What's that?"

"Go up to the courthouse square and see the fun," advised one of the youths. "Shorty is looking for a twelve-toed bozo, and we're part of the citizens' committee assisting him. We're hauling in a lot of candidates!"

SHERIFF COOK whirled as fast as any polo pony ever turned. He went up the street almost as flashily as a frightened jack rabbit.

"That idiot!" he gasped once. After that he saved his breath. It

was five long blocks to the courthouse square and the sun was high in the sky. But he arrived, eventually, panting and perspiring. He saw a crowd in the square, and he saw groups coming in from hither and thither, each group with a prisoner. His mustache bristled, and his eyes grew fiery.

"Shorty, you imbecile!"

Shorty, busy in the midst of the crowd, paid no heed to the sheriff's greeting. He was in the act of examining a kicking, squirming individual's feet. The sheriff elbowed roughly through the grinning spectators.

"What's the meaning of this, Shorty?"

"I figure this is the only smart way of taking a squint at a lot of suspicious hoofs!" answered Shorty, without looking up. "I got a big committee of citizens hauling in the victims."

"You're insulting folks this way!" cried Sheriff Cook. "We can't—"

"Strangers are just out of luck in this hoof derby," retorted Shorty. "We ain't inspecting any one we know is O. K. You'd better help out here, boss!"

Sheriff Cook flushed. He saw that he was going to have no luck trying to stop the affair. The cheers of the crowd were ringing in his ears now. Apparently Shorty's idea was going over big. And, the sheriff noticed, a lot of the gentlemen being fetched in for inspection were taking it as a joke. Only a few were indignant. The sheriff did some fast thinking.

"The twelve-toe guy will probably be found," he decided, cannily, "and I might as well be in on the victory, after all! I'll join!"

And he did. He jumped in to help Shorty. There was quite a line of waiting victims. The sheriff, push-

ing his hat back on his head, went to work with a vengeance. He was on his sixteenth man when he saw Shorty tap a man on the shoulder. The sheriff looked up to protest, loudly.

"Hey, Shorty! I just checked that bird. He's got only ten toes!"

Shorty grabbed the man by the arm.

"Well, toes or no toes, I want him!" answered Shorty, grimly. "In fact, I am arresting him for robbing Mrs. McCaig's place! Come on, buddy!"

Commissioner McCaig stepped out of the crowd.

"You get the guy, Shorty?" cried McCaig, in astonishment.

"I sure did!" said Shorty, proudly. He looked hard at his frightened prisoner. "I reckon the commissioner here will go easy with you, fellow, if you want to cough up where all that loot is, especially the jewelry and the clothing and the guns. If we can get it all back——"

"Well," drawled the stranger, "I guess I'll accept that deal!"

There was a cheer from the crowd, as Shorty rushed his prisoner jailward, where conversations could be more private. Commissioner McCaig, beaming with pleasure, hurried after the pair, completely ignoring Sheriff Cook, who stopped only long enough to order the official end of the foot fiesta. Then the sheriff rushed toward the jail, boiling with rage.

He found Shorty and Commissioner McCaig shaking hands in the office. The prisoner, back in a cell, had promised to lead them to his cache of loot at their convenience.

"That bozo," burst out Sheriff Cook, "hasn't got no twelve toes! I examined him carefully! His hoofs were perfectly normal——"

"Correct you are, boss!" laughed Shorty. "All that extra toe business was just camouflage! I had to do something, after you forbid me to mention that hunk of mud I found on the floor of the McCaig cottage. So I got that sculptor lady, whatever you call her, over in the bank block to make me a plaster-of-Paris foot with an extra toe. I rushed it up to the McCaig place and made the impression you saw. It worked. You got interested in examining feet and that was all I wanted——"

"But the guilty man's feet were O. K.!" protested the frowning sheriff.

"Sure they were," agreed Shorty. "I wasn't interested in feet. I was interested in shoes—in heels. That flat hunk of dried mud I picked up had a name impressed on it! I checked all the local shoe dealers and cobblers and found no trace of such a rubber heel. So I knew it must be a stranger. The foot fiesta turned the trick. I was looking for a pair of heels with that name on 'em and I found 'em! Of course, there was a chance the thief wouldn't still be wearing the same shoes, and there was another chance that more than one guy would have those kind of heels. However, those chances were quite slim. We won."

"By hoodwinking me!" complained Sheriff Cook, with a groan.

"No," answered Shorty, smiling, "but by knowing in the first place that Mrs. McCaig was too fine a housekeeper to go away and leave a piece of dried mud on her floor! You should have thought of that yourself, boss!"

But Sheriff Cook was smiling again. He extended a hand to McCaig.

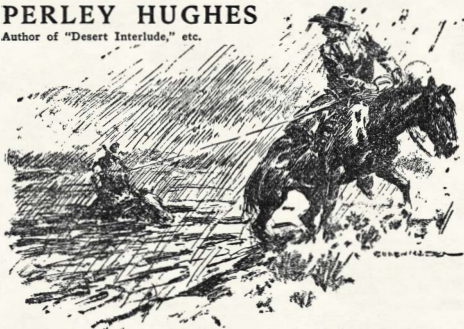
"Put her there, commissioner!" he said. "We give service, don't we?"



# THUNDER BIRD

By JAMES  
PERLEY HUGHES

Author of "Desert Interlude," etc.



**H**EAT, clinging oppressive heat, an unwelcome stranger to the little desert town of Tres Pinos, laid a burden weighing heavily on both man and beast. Instead of the high, dry air common to Arizona, this was an almost humid wave that drove the perspiration bursting into tiny nodules on every brow.

The courtroom was like a Russian bath. Men sat coatless, their shirts plastered to their backs, fanning futilely. The place seemed to grow hotter as word flashed among the spectators that the jury had reached a decision.

Tom Hamilton's eyes were fixed on Conchita Billings's face, rather than the prisoner's, when the foreman handed the verdict to the clerk.

"Guilty!" The word rolled through the courtroom.

The girl sank back, holding a handkerchief to her lips. Fred Billings, her brother, stood motionless before Judge Lee, whose circuit covered virtually the entire territory. The jurist arose and began speaking. His words were Fred Billings's doom. The prisoner would be returned to the custody of the sheriff, and on Friday next he would be taken from his cell and hanged by the neck until dead.

Conchita's horrified eyes flicked to Tom Hamilton, but he stared stonily ahead, his face devoid of color. He was the sheriff, a friend of Fred Billings, and more than friend to pretty Conchita.

The verdict had done more than doom Fred. It had been a death-blow to Tom's and Conchita's love.

The specter of Billings's lifeless body, dangling at the end of a rope Hamilton had tied, would forever be a barrier to their marriage. Worse still, Tom believed Fred innocent, although circumstantial evidence had been woven to make a perfect case. Still, no one had seen him kill "Tex" Thompson, the gambler, whose death would send him to the gallows.

"Court's adjourned," Judge Lee announced.

Tom Hamilton stepped forward and took the prisoner's arm. He dared not look at Conchita. He knew her soft eyes were filled with tears, the mouth he had kissed so often twisted with pain.

"Come on, Fred," he managed to mutter.

The prisoner's stunned gaze was turned to him. Billings was still unable to comprehend what had befallen him. Outside the courtroom, he mopped his stippled brow and looked at the sky. It was cloudless and blazing with light.

"This is sure tough on you and Conchita," Fred said, after Hamilton had given him a cigarette.

"Forget us. We've got you to think of. We got to find——"

"The jury did the finding," Fred Billings mumbled.

When they reached the jail, the sheriff turned his prisoner over to Cal Ewing, his deputy. He wanted to be alone to think. He looked out over the desert upon the edge of which the little mining town was built. In spite of the enervating heat, it was quiet out there, serene, unharried by the petty troubles of men.

HE walked down a side street passing the wretched shacks inhabited by Mexican and Indian workmen. As he reached the trail leading to Dry Mesa, he looked

back to see a woman hurrying after him. Her head and part of her face were covered by a black mantilla, but he recognized her as Maria, the wife of Piute Pete, a half-breed who had recently left Tres Pinos.

"*Que quieres*—what do you want?" he asked in Spanish, when she had reached him.

The woman looked around, as if she feared some one might be listening. Then she drew closer and spoke in a frightened whisper.

"You must not hang Señor Billings," she said in her native tongue. "He did not kill Don Tex. Of that I am sure."

"Who did?"

"My Pedro—I am certain—he killed and robbed—just before he ran away with that wench, Pepita Hernandez."

"Your Pedro—you mean Piute Pete?"

"*Seguro, señor*—surely, sir."

"How do you know?"

"My heart so tells me. My Pedro had money, a young girl, horses—all in one night. That night Don Tex was killed. Is not that enough? Besides, my heart tells me."

"That's not evidence," the sheriff retorted. "Don't you know anything?"

He paused, clawing at his memory for something that would be tangible evidence.

"How about that button they found in Don Tex's hand?" he asked. "Didn't Pete have a slicker with a black bone button?"

"*Seguro, señor*. Still, every man has a slicker. My heart tell me he killed Don Tex. That is enough."

But it was not enough for Judge Lee, who was preparing to take the stage for Bisbee, where his next court would be held. He questioned the woman and sent her home.

"The suspicions of a deserted wife



aren't evidence," he told Tom Hamilton. "I don't think the jury paid any attention to the button."

"What can I do after you're gone, in case I——"

"If you get any evidence against this Piute Pete, ride to Phoenix and see the governor. He can stay the execution."

"There's only a week left—less than that."

"I'm sorry, sheriff. I've heard how things are with you, but the case against Billings was a strong one. I can't interfere."

"But couldn't you wait a day?"

"Not an hour. The rains are coming. I heard the Hopis are already putting on their snake dance. I know there's not a cloud in the sky, but the Hopis are wise; so are my bones."

The judge climbed into the stage and the driver cracked his whip. He, too, was anxious to cross the desert before the rains came. These tempests swept down with the speed of hurricanes, and veterans of the Colorado plateau knew their fury.

Tom Hamilton stood watching the stage until it disappeared. Then he hurried to Conchita's home. He found her alone, tearless and composed. She had faced the future with unflinching eyes, and there was only a touch of wistfulness in her voice when she told him their romantic dream had ended.

"I'd always remember," she said simply. "So would you."

He nodded. Then he repeated what Maria, the Mexican woman, had said, but Conchita shook her head.

**J**UDGE LEE is right," she murmured. "That's not evidence. Now, if that button——"

"I'm paying attention to it, if the jury didn't," the young man broke

in. "I'm riding—right now."

"Riding—with the rains coming?"

"Yes."

"Then you're not going to——" She bit off her words.

"I'll be back before Friday," he answered.

Tom Hamilton left the Billings home and hurried to the jail behind which his horse was stabled. He paused to stuff his saddlebags and take the button that figured in Fred's trial from the office safe.

A crowd had collected outside, but it was not a gathering that menaced the prisoner. Tres Pinos had voted for law and order and would await the day of legal execution, but the appearance of the sheriff, booted and spurred and with bulging saddlebags, stirred curiously.

"Leaving the job for Cal?" more than one voice inquired.

The young sheriff's face darkened, and he turned in his saddle to address the crowd.

"I'll be back by Friday noon," he told them, "and then hang the murderer of Tex Thompson. I ain't dodging my duty. You can roll that in your next cigarette."

He paused in the Mexican section to talk with Maria, the deserted wife, and several others who knew Piute Pete and the girl with whom he had eloped. All agreed that the man had ridden toward the north, heading for the Painted Desert and the Utah border.

A vast district for one man to cover, but visitors were few in the Hopi country. Piute Pete would be seen, and the presence of a girl would mark him. Time alone was the great handicap. Six days remained, six days that must be filled with untiring effort.

The landscape was a brazen plate, beneath a brazen bowl, when Hamilton reached the Painted Desert.

He saw several Indians on their way to the Hopi snake ceremonial and he questioned each in turn. From one he got his first definite information about Piute Pete and his girl companion.

"Him take trail to Cañon de los Penitentes," the Hopi said in answer to a flood of inquiries. "Old pueblo there—water. Plenty water, when Thunder Bird come."

Tom nodded. He knew the canyon. Once it had been the headquarters for a notorious band of road agents. Then came the memory of a tale that Piute Pete had once ridden with that band. Hamilton turned his horse in that direction. It was a good day's ride across the Painted Desert. Two days would be done when he reached the canyon. It would take as long to get back—Tuesday and Wednesday.

The sun burned down as he crossed the magic wastelands that are celebrated around the world. The oppressive weight of heavy atmosphere pressed down continually. Perspiration cut tiny washes through the dust caked on his face, but he drove on with only a short pause at a shaded water hole.

The stars were shining when he reached the Canyon of the Penitents, whose sheer walls cut off all sight save the spangled ribbon of the night sky. Piute Pete had picked a safe retreat. With the coming of the rains, the narrow defile would be filled with a raging torrent barring all who sought to enter.

Hamilton rode on, his horse picking its way carefully over the scattered rocks. Halfway up the narrow defile, the sheriff saw a square of light, high up on a shelf rock. It came from the deserted pueblo of the cliff dwellers of centuries gone by. Piute Pete must be cooking, after waiting for night to screen his

smoke. He had not thought the light would be seen.

**T**OM reined and picketed his mount. Soon he would know if his fantastic journey had any basis more tangible than a deserted wife's suspicions. The sheriff's youthful face was as hard as the basalt cliffs that formed the canyon walls as he stole up the narrow causeway leading to the deserted pueblo. Voices reached him as he neared the shelf rock, a man's and a woman's. They were sharp with anger. Piute Pete and his Pepita were having more than a lovers' quarrel.

The sheriff paused to listen, but the hotly voiced Spanish words were sheer invective and bore no news.

Hamilton pressed on. Both guns were in his hands, thumbs on their hammers. Piute Pete would shoot on sight, if he were guilty of murder. Even the appearance of a stranger on a peaceful mission might draw his fire.

"Curb your tongue or I shall wring you neck, my little star," Tom heard Pete grate.

"And put another fresh notch in your gun?" the girl giped.

The smacking sound of an open-handed slap, and Pepita's voice rose to new heights. Then followed a stream of Spanish that called upon the saints to witness that Piute Pete was a dog of dogs.

Tom Hamilton reached the shelf rock and pushed on toward the house. As he neared it, he half stumbled over a rock. A moment later, a shot blazed and he felt the hot breath of a slug pass his ear.

"Stick 'em up. I want you, Pete," he called in Spanish.

"Ah-ha, my friend. The sheriff has come for you," Pepita shrielled, recognizing Hamilton's voice.



An oath from the half-breed and his gun blazed again, but not at Hamilton. He had spun and fired at Pepita, but her nimble feet saved her from injury.

The sheriff leaped into the room. Piute Pete shot from the hip and a bullet raked Tom's shoulder. He dared not kill Pete. A dead man in the Cañon de los Penitentes would not save Fred Billings. More than that, Tom had pledged himself to hang Thompson's murderer Friday noon.

"Stick 'em up, Pete!" he repeated. "I want you for killing Don Tex."

"I told you. I told you," shrilled Pepita, her face still burning where the man had slapped her.

The half-breed turned his gun on her and it blazed again, but once more she dodged to safety. At the same moment, Tom Hamilton holstered his guns and lunged. He had to have a live prisoner and he grappled with his man.

"Look out! He shoot—the dog," Pepita screamed. "Wait, just one minute. I slip this knife into him."

"No. Don't hurt him."

A scream of savage mirth came from the woman's lips. Piute's slap had turned the fiery Spanish girl into an enemy.

"Ah, I see you save to hang him." She laughed shrilly.

"That's right."

"Fine—fine. I help you."

But her words were spurs to Piute Pete. His gun roared, and a bullet bit into Hamilton's arm.

"Let me slide this knife into his black heart," Pepita begged.

THE sheriff shook his head. Then one of his own guns smashed down on the half-breed's close-cropped head with a force that stretched him on the hard clay floor.

"You kill. That's good." Pepita smiled with savage pleasure.

Then she saw a dark stain upon Tom's arm. She ripped off Pete's shirt and tore it into bandages. Next her tender fingers dressed the wounds. Wild cat and woman combined, Pepita was a girl of swift loves and swifter hates. Her work done, she leaned against Hamilton's uninjured arm, her dark eyes on his.

"Now what you want?" she asked.

"Where's Pete's slicker? I want to see it."

"Bueno."

She went to a corner where saddles and blankets were piled and returned with the oilskin a moment later.

The sheriff took the garment and spread it out. One button was missing. Next he compared the one he had found in the office safe. It matched the others, but Tom was not satisfied. He examined the threads that remained in the button and the broken remnants in the slicker. He felt his heartbeat quicken as he counted the threads. They matched exactly. The long and short fragments balanced. The button Tex Thompson's dead hand had clutched could have come from no other garment. This was evidence.

"Where are your horses?" he asked Pepita.

She gestured up the canyon, but her eyes held his, while her lips pursed temptingly. The sheriff frowned. Between Piute's hate and Pepita's love, there was little choice. Both were dangerous.

"Bring them down to where mine is hobbled," he told her.

The girl hesitated for a moment. Then she raced down the incline leading to the floor of the canyon. Piute Pete was mumbling when the

sheriff slipped handcuffs on his wrists. A dash of water, and his small, black eyes glared at his captor.

"Don Tex, huh?" he growled. "What of it! You have no evidence."

"No? How about this?" Tom held up the button he had taken from the safe.

"All buttons same on slickers."

"Yes? Threads all the same—twelve each—broken ends match. Maria, your wife, sewed on that button. The threads are different. She told me——"

"Did she tell you how Don Tex cheat at monte?" Piute Pete suddenly raged. "Did she tell you he refused to give back my money? No, the old wench was too jealous. Sure, I kill, but with reason. Mebbe you law——"

"Horses all ready. I go 'long, just to see my Pedro hang," Pepita announced breathlessly.

Tom Hamilton said nothing. He was counting the hours between then and the time when Fred Billings was sentenced to hang. Judge Lee was well on his way to Bisbee. It would be impossible to catch him and he back in Tres Pinos by Friday noon. Long stretches of desert lay between him and Phoenix, the capital, where the governor lived. He glanced at his watch. His horse needed rest as well as himself. He manacled Pete to a heavy stanchion and sank down for two hours' sleep, while Pepita guarded the prisoner. It was a chance he had to take.

Dawn was blazing across the desert when they left the Cañon de los Penitentes, presaging a day of burning heat and long, waterless miles. Hamilton's wounded arm and shoulder ached, but his heart was light. He had his evidence and a virtual confession from the murderer. Fred

Billings would not be hanged if he could get back to Tres Pinos by Friday noon.

CROSSING the Painted Desert, they skirted the Gibraltarlike rock upon which the Hopis were holding their snake dance. Piute Pete stared at the brightly colored throng and then at the sky. The sun was blazing pitilessly, but the half-breed knew the desert's lore. The Hopi ceremony was always followed by rain. The Thunder Bird invariably answered their prayers.

Sight of the ceremonial was a spur to Hamilton. He barked an order for Pete to increase his pace. He roweled his own weary mount. The heat increased, a dull, oppressing heat vastly different from the desert's usual dry warmth. Horses and men were wet with perspiration. The animals whitened with lather.

Night came, and with it the chill that invariably follows the desert day. Hamilton forced his prisoner onward. Early morning, and he stopped to rest the utterly exhausted horses. Piute was shackled to a giant cactus. They started again with the coming of dawn. Wednesday's sun was high in the heavens when they reached Otono. There they got fresh horses, but Pepita refused to mount.

"Too much trouble just to see my Pedro hang," she said with a shrug of her shoulders, "but if Don Tomas smiles, I'll——"

"Not a smile left in me," the sheriff answered.

Once more the girl's shoulders rose and fell. Then she turned to smile at a man whose tinkling guitar had sounded the opening strains of "La Golandrina." Piute Pete frowned darkly, but a smile came to Hamilton's grim face.



More miles of burning thirst and heat that seemed to press down until they could bear it no longer, but the sheriff was relentless. They reached Phoenix after dark, but rode to the governor's adobe mansion. A judge was summoned for a double hearing that ended with an order for Fred Billings's release and the execution of Piute Pete, who growled a plea of guilty, and signed a statement to that effect.

"Go on—hang me now," the weary man muttered.

"I'm taking you to Tres Pinos," the sheriff replied.

The prisoner looked at the sky. Clouds were scudding across the face of the moon. The Thunder Bird was on the wing.

"Never get there," Pete mumbled. "Not with me."

"I'll try, anyhow."

Hamilton paused long enough to have a doctor dress his wounds. They were slight and only needed bandaging. Then they mounted fresh horses.

Men shook their heads as the two rode down the street leading to the trail across the desert. A few spattering drops as large as pigeon eggs were beginning to fall. The Thunder Bird would soon be screaming in the heavens.

Out into the night they rode, Piute Pete's shackles jingling like Spanish spurs. Ten-mile Wash was running knee-deep when they reached it. Tom did not hesitate, but drove his prisoner into the swirling stream. Then they started to cross Long Flats that within a few hours would look like a lake. Hamilton wore no protection against the lashing storm. He had given his own slicker to Piute, keeping the half-breed's in his saddlebag as evidence.

Navajo Wash was a raging torrent when they reached it. The horses balked at entering its boiling waters. As they paused on the bank, the sheriff heard Pete's manacles jingling. The man was trying to free his hands.

"I'm throwing the key to those cuffs away, hombre," the sheriff shouted into the darkness, "and my guns go with it, so don't get any ideas."

THE half-breed growled his understanding. Then they spurred their horses into the raging current. The already weary animals were swept off their feet. Piute Pete leaned to the right, forcing his mount to turn upstream. He knew of a landing where he might reach and leave the sheriff behind. A flash of lightning showed the half-breed leaning forward in his saddle. Tom whipped out his rope and launched it as another flare lighted the sky. The loop settled over the prisoner's shoulders.

"Turn around or we'll have our hanging—right now," the sheriff shouted above the mounting clangor of the storm.

The half-breed did not answer, and Tom twisted the rope about the saddle horn as his horse reached the opposite bank. Piute Pete and his mount were towed to land and the grim march into the maw of the storm was resumed.

Thursday's rain-filled dawn broke, and Hamilton found they were off trail. The sheriff rode in circles until he picked it up again, but the time lost filled him with consternation. Masked by heavy layers of brooding clouds, the sun painted the desert a dismal gray instead of gleaming gold. Noon saw them pause to eat and rest their weary

horses. They found shelter in a deserted prospector's shack. Piute Pete's crafty gaze studied Hamilton's bleak face. The sheriff's eyes were lusterless, sleep-starved and dead. But Tom fought off the tormenting urge for slumber. Too much depended upon his return to Tres Pinos by noon. The life of Fred Billings and the love of Conchita were both at stake. But twenty-four hours remained. Under ordinary circumstances it would be an easy task, but with the mounting rage of the Thunder Bird, each mile would be more difficult. They had yet to cross the boiling waters of Zuni Wash. If they were held up there—Tom Hamilton stiffened as the thought broke through his mind. There could be no "if." The sheriff leaped to his feet.

"Get going," he yelled to the half-breed.

Piute Pete did not move. His dark, sullen eyes looked up defiantly. Although his hands were manacled, he was still a dangerous man. Tom had thrown away his guns as a matter of self-protection, but the move had weakened his defense.

"*Venga—andale—come, quickly,*" he rasped.

The half-breed did not move.

Hamilton reached down with his uninjured hand and grasped Pete by the shoulder. With a wrench, he dragged the sullen prisoner to his feet. At the same instant, Piute raised both hands and brought their steel bonds down upon Tom's head. A blinding flash, like sheet lightning from the storm outside, broke before his eyes and he went to his knees. Pete struck again, but the sheriff instinctively avoided the blow. The force spun the half-breed around and Hamilton staggered to his feet.

He saw the man raise his hands again. Another blow would end the battle. He stepped back as the chained fists came down. Then he concentrated every ounce of his depleted energy into a blow that struck Piute flush between the eyes. The man went down, falling flat on his face.

Hamilton grasped the half-breed's collar and dragged him out into the mounting rain. The pelting drops revived him some, but the sheriff was forced to lift him into the saddle.

**I**NCREASING savagery marked the waxing storm that whipped and flayed both horses and men. The beasts leaned forward, no longer able to keep up their tireless lope, but forced to strain to make any headway. Darkness was near when they reached the banks of Zuni Wash. Piute Pete looked at the boiling, yellow waters and shook his head. Then his yellow teeth flashed a hate-filled smile.

"No go," he said.

"You are—right into it."

The wind was whipping across the desert with hurricane force, leveling the squat mesquite, sage and greasewood that grew along the edge of the wash.

"No go," the half-breed repeated.

He nodded at his mount. The animal was spent, drooping with exhaustion. Hamilton's face hardened. The life of a horse against the life of a man. There could be but one answer.

Once more he took his lariat and threw it over Pete's shoulders. The man tried to shrug it off, but Tom tightened the loop.

Then he turned and spurred his horse into the swirling Zuni flood. The gallant animal plunged in, strug-



gling desperately, but the sheriff saw in a moment that the poor beast would drown unless its burden was lightened. He slid from the saddle, but hung onto the horn, paying out the rope. A flash of lightning showed Pete was trying to free himself, but Tom tightened the line. In another moment horse and man reached the opposite bank.

"Get a-going," Tom bellowed through cupped hands.

Piute heeled his horse into the flood, but, as the wild waters swept the animal's feet from under it, the half-breed dived headlong from the saddle. Instead of grasping the horn, he struck downstream. Hamilton jerked at the lariat. It came without resistance. His prisoner had worked free.

For a moment he stared incredulously. Everything for which he had strained and labored had suddenly collapsed. Piute Pete had escaped.

Then his weary mind went into action and his tired body moved. He gathered his lariat and started a loop to swinging. Racing down the side of the wash he waited until a blaze of lightning disclosed the half-breed, fighting for his life. The rope shot out, falling over the man's still manacled hands. Hamilton twisted a coil around a giant cactus until he got his horse.

Darkness had come when Pete was safe on land again, but his mount had been lost in the flood. The Thunder Bird was screaming through the spare arms of the tree cactus and tormented branches of chaparral. Thirty miles of fury-lashed desert stretched between the Zuni and Tres Pinos. More than twelve hours remained, but they would be hours of nerve-rendering, muscle-breaking struggle.

The sheriff gestured his prisoner to

mount. Instead of leading the animal, he marched behind, knowing the beast would follow the trail with eyes better trained to darkness than his own.

They plodded onward as the storm mounted to dizzy heights. The heavens blazed with sheet and forked lightning, and the cannonade of the thunder sounded like a battle being fought in the empyrean.

On, on, on! Hamilton was reeling with fatigue. The flares from the sky showed him that Piute Pete was near collapse. The harried earth boiled with rain the sandy waste could no longer swallow. Rivulets flowed in every direction. Lakes appeared where barren stretches of shrubless sand had been.

**A**NOTHER gray dawn glided over the desert, baring a dismal scene. The ghost of a man lurched behind the ghost of a horse which bore a swaying shadow. Sheets of rain, now mixed with hail, struck them unceasingly. The horse staggered, then stopped. Its spent legs trembled.

"Get down!" Hamilton ordered in a voice he scarcely recognized as his own.

Piute Pete swayed uncertainly, but made no effort to leave the saddle. The sheriff reached to grasp his arm.

"Lemme alone," the man growled.

"Get——"

The horse sank as Hamilton dragged his prisoner from the saddle.

Now both were afoot, two utterly exhausted men, one doomed to perish at the end of a rope at the hands of the other. More than five miles stretched between them and Tres Pinos, five miles of storm-lashed terrane which lifeless legs must traverse by noon. A chill had

settled over the land—a chill that cut the weary men to the bone.

“Get going!” the sheriff commanded.

“*No puedo*—I can’t,” the half-breed moaned.

Hamilton stooped and picked up a sharp-edged bit of quartz.

“Start,” his tight lips said, “or I’ll beat your brains out.”

Piute Pete staggered on, bending forward as he leaned into the flailing hail. His rough face was cut and bleeding, his hands raw from the whipping they had received.

Eleven o’clock and the storm reached its peak. Both men were near the point where spent muscles and exhausted nerves would function no longer.

Hamilton bowed his back, pushing the prisoner ahead of him. They were heading directly into the storm. Each step was agony to their overstrained muscles. Brains were numb, their motions entirely automatic.

Eleven thirty! Unutterable weariness came over Tom Hamilton as he looked at his watch. He tried to quicken his step, but his forward push sent Piute Pete upon his face. The man grasped a flintlike bit of rock and struck as the sheriff bent to pick him up. It cut a gash in Tom’s cheek. Instead of knocking him out, it stirred his numbing senses.

Another blow that bit into his leg!

Tom kicked instinctively, his booted toe striking the half-breed full on the jaw.

The man went limp. Hamilton grasped his collar and staggered on toward Tres Pinos. The storm shrieked with banshee fury, pressing against the sheriff until he leaned

far forward, dragging his heavy prisoner after him.

Slower, ever slower, but he plodded on.

The houses of the Mexican quarter were in sight. Hamilton put his last strength into the final effort. He paused, breathing heavily, and looked at his watch.

A numbness stole over him. The pelting hail no longer hurt. It was five minutes past noon. He was too late.

He fell forward, but regained his feet.

Then he saw several figures coming toward him. One was a woman. It was Maria, Piute Pete’s deserted wife. The man beside her was Cal Ewing, Tom’s deputy.

The sheriff took another step, but stopped, a puzzled expression upon his storm-lashed face. He let go his prisoner and stood upon uncertain, aching feet. Ewing was smiling.

**T**HEN you haven’t— Fred Billings— You haven’t hanged—” he stammered incoherently.

“No, not yet. Couldn’t hang a man on a day like this, and, besides, we’ve been waiting for you. Judge Lee came back after his stage broke down in the middle of Dry Mesa and he said to wait.”

“Well, I got—”

Hamilton paused as Maria, the deserted wife, raised a keening cry. She had thrown herself beside her erring husband in spite of the hail and rain.

“—got the man who killed Tex Thompson,” Hamilton finished, “and we’ll hang—”

“No, we won’t.” Cal Ewing straightened, after bending over the prisoner’s motionless body. “He’s dead already.”



And Maria added her cries to the wails of the storm, lamenting the man who had deserted her.

The Thunder Bird had flown away and the sun shot its golden arrows at the desert once more, but the sandy wastes were hidden. An unending carpet of flowers stretched as far as the eyes could reach. The magic of water had turned the seared land into a picture of paradise. Its beauty would be short-lived, but while it lasted, it was transcendental.

Three horses cantered over the colorful scene. Conchita Billings rode in the middle, her brother on one side and Tom Hamilton on the

other. They had gone out to Zuni to retrieve the sheriff's guns. Soft glances passed between the girl and the man who had fought the fury of the desert. Fred Billings saw it and spurred his mount ahead, suddenly remembering a mining claim, miles away, that demanded his inspection.

"See you later, sis," he called over his shoulder.

Tom and Conchita waited until he had disappeared into the wash ahead. Then their horses drew closer, and lips met again after an interval that had been a nightmare to both, but which, once passed, would never come again.

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*A Complete Novel,*  
*"OUTLAWS OF SHOTGUN GULCH," by H. FREDRIC YOUNG,*  
*in Next Week's Issue.*

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#### TIMES WERE HARD

**A**LL through the centuries we have read or heard about "hard times." The last period of its kind had a more elegant name to it; "depression," it was called. While we have listened to the complaints of those who experienced these various periods, it is a shock, indeed, when some one expresses the idea that it was easier to live when times were hard. Says Joe Ford, 68-year-old Montanan, a once Pony Express driver: "Life then was hard, but that's the way we expected it. We knew that there would be times when we would have only dried buffalo meat to eat. And there were strings of hard luck, but you always used to be able to weather them somehow. It was much easier to live in those days."

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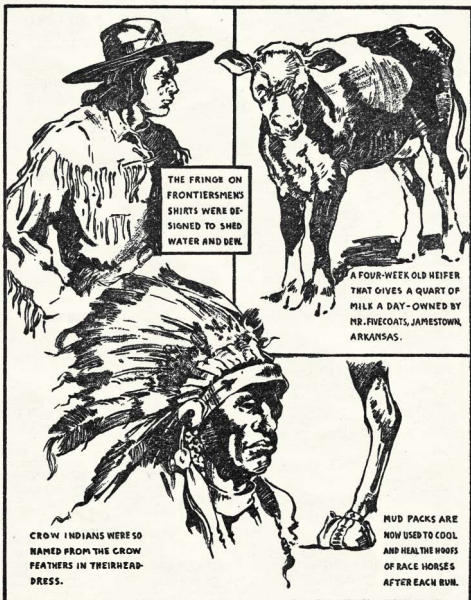
#### TATTOO BRANDS

**I**N India, where there are great cattle ranches such as there are here, the owners have many of the same problems to confront them. Among these is rustling.

To prevent this the government of India has arranged a complicated code system of branding the cattle. The branding is done by means of a tattoo needle on the left and right ears of the animals. It is said that thieves have been taking on an average of fifty thousand head a year, because of the ease with which the cattle have escaped identification. The new tattoo method is believed to be a complete foil to the rustlers.

# Interesting And True

By H. FREDRIC YOUNG



THE FRINGE ON FRONTIERSMENS SHIRTS WERE DESIGNED TO SHED WATER AND DIRT.

A FOUR-WEEK OLD HEIFER THAT GIVES A QUART OF MILK A DAY - OWNED BY MR. FIVECOATS, JAMESTOWN, ARKANSAS.

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Mr. Young will pay one dollar for any usable Western "Interesting And True" features which readers may send him in care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Return postage must be included for suggestions found unsuitable.





PART IV.

# TRAIL MATES

By NEY N. GEER

**B**EN CARSACK, owner of the Turkey Track spread, is shot down by raiders. Before he dies he tells his foreman, Tombstone Graves, that he is dying without a cent—can't even pay Tombstone the two years' back wages due him. Tombstone assures him that he doesn't care and pledges himself to deliver a letter which Ben has given him. The letter is addressed to Peter Doabb. Tombstone, whose real name is Ted Graves, starts on his errand. His destination is Rawhide. To reach there he must travel over mountains and through bad lands.

While resting, Tombstone hears shots. His glasses show him a slender rider pursued by two other riders. The first rider shakes off the pur-

suers and comes toward Tombstone. He discovers the rider is a girl. She explains that she is Fawn Hayspur and asks if he is one of the three. He assures her that he is traveling alone. She makes no further explanation. Noticing that she is wounded, Tombstone offers to help fix her up. She refuses vehemently, insists that she must hurry home. He asks to be directed to water. She advises him, and they separate. He fails to find the water and believes that she has tricked him. When his canteen is almost empty, he meets a tall, gaunt fellow on horseback, utterly spent. Tombstone gives him the last of the water.

The newcomer introduces himself as Sidewinder Simms. The two set out together. Shortly they run

into a hatless rider on a wild bronc. After some argument he persuades them that he is friendly. Cactus Smith is his name. The three decide to stick together. On the trail they find the body of a dead man. Cactus says that he thinks he recognizes him.

The three take the body into Rawhide. The sheriff, Bill Summerhayze, takes charge. He is a "hard-boiled" individual, tied up with the worst element in the county. He owns and operates the White Front Saloon, as well as large ranch holdings. The sheriff tells them the dead man is Peter Doabb. Tombstone destroys the letter, since it can never be delivered.

The three punchers put up at the Antlers Hotel. Charlie Lancaster, a man of fine character, owns it. They eat at the Silver Moon Café, which opens out of the Antlers. It is owned by Mrs. Hubbard and her daughter Sue. The Hubbards formerly owned the Webb ranch, but lost it after Mr. Hubbard and his sons had been dry-gulched. Usually Lancaster does very little business, but later that evening his place is crowded; the three newcomers are the magnet. Honey Joe, a rider and gunman for Monk Mosby, deliberately picks a fight with Cactus Smith. Cactus kills him. The news is carried to Monk by Slick Voss, another of his riders. Monk is county treasurer, coroner, big rancher, et cetera—pretty much boss of the county.

Later, in their room upstairs in the Antlers, Cactus displays a notebook containing sketches of faces. Peter Doabb's is there; also Honey Joe's. Cactus crosses out those two faces, merely saying that these pages are a record of a debt long overdue. Cactus warns his companions that his company is dangerous for them.

Nevertheless, the other two insist upon sticking to him.

Cactus's saddlebags are literally bursting with currency—money that he won in a lucky break in a gambling place. He places the bags in Lancaster's care.

Early next morning Cactus slips away to Hank Hayspur's ranch to buy a horse. Hank deliberately makes the price prohibitive, but tells Cactus that if he can ride a tough bronc he has, he will give him the horse he wants. Cactus gets the horse.

Back in Rawhide, Sue Hubbard gives Tombstone a note from Fawn Hayspur. She asks him to come to her and bring some medical supplies. He fears a trap, but goes anyway.

In the meantime, Sidewinder and Cactus pay a visit to the Webb ranch. They find it deserted except for the Chinese cook. In an attack, purposed on killing Webb, Cactus and Sidewinder get into a fight with Sheriff Summerhayze and his followers. The sheriff is mortally wounded by Cactus.

Tombstone meets Fawn. She leads him to a cave where another girl lies seriously wounded. She is Fawn's double. Fawn has never seen her until she picked her up wounded, but she tells Tombstone that she believes that her father, Hank Hayspur, has shot the girl, thinking that he was shooting at Fawn. Tombstone looks after the girl and, when he is through, insists upon dressing the old wound in Fawn's shoulder.

When the strange girl recovers consciousness, she says that she is Ruth Carsack, daughter of Ben Carsack. She has been living with an aunt in the East. That explains why Tombstone has never heard of her.

Monk Mosby asks Slick to take Honey Joe's place as his right-hand



man. Slick accepts. His first commission is to "get" the three strangers and two girls with yellow hair. Slick is not particularly happy about "getting" girls.

That same night the Antlers is held up. Lancaster is knocked out and Cactus's saddlebags carried off.

Monk Mosby finds a notebook in the dead sheriff's pockets. It is the same one that Cactus showed to his companions that night at the Antlers. It had slipped out of Cactus's pocket when he was riding the bronc at Hank's. Monk tells Slick to take it to Hank.

When Cactus and Sidewinder return to the Antlers and find Tombstone has not returned they are much worried. Next morning they set out to trail him. They meet De Boe, Monk's foreman, and have a slight run-in with him. After De Boe goes on his way Tombstone is discovered close by. Cactus announces that the two girls are twins and his sisters. Sidewinder Simms substantiates the story. The girls are June and Jane Wallace. They were all three separated in childhood when the wagon train of their father was held up and burned. The parents were murdered. Their uncle, Dave Wallace, back in Kentucky had commissioned Simms, really a U. S. marshal, to trace them, and Simms had been working on the case for some years. Cactus then explains the picture book. All the faces are of men involved in the killing of the Wallaces. As each man meets death, Cactus crosses his picture out. Doabb's picture was there; also Sheriff Summerhayze's.

When able to travel, they all go back to Rawhide. Simms insists that the Wallaces must go back to Kentucky with him. Cactus is in love with Sue Hubbard; Fawn with Tombstone. They don't want to go, but are finally persuaded that it is

the right thing. Before they go Cactus fights it out with Monk. His picture is in the book. Monk is killed. He is the last of the gang. Slick Voss asks to be taken on by Tombstone, who is going to run the Webb ranch. Cactus has bought it—the money had been placed elsewhere for safety by Lancaster, and the stolen bags were stuffed with paper—for himself, Tombstone and Sidewinder.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### PLUMB CLOSE.

**T**HE leathery-faced driver flourished the long lash of his whip, and cracked it like a pistol shot. The four restless broncs thrust out their necks; the coach boy swayed in its leather cradle straps, and, in a swirl of dust, the Colton stage rolled swiftly out of Rawhide.

Standing there in the thick dust of the street, Tombstone Graves watched with somber eyes. Then, for a moment, his rugged features lit up in a slow, boyish smile. A girl's face was looking back; a hand fluttered. Tombstone's battered hat was off. He waved it above his head in one last silent farewell. When the stage was only a moving plume of dust, all but lost in the far distance to the southward, he turned about and faced the battery of curious, unfriendly eyes that lined the narrow board walk.

More than ever, Tombstone felt the great force of utter loneliness. Here in Rawhide, with Paradise Valley sweeping far into the hazy distance on all sides, he was a stranger. Strangers in Rawhide did not take well at any time. The reek of fresh spent powder seemed still lingering in the air. The bodies of Monk Mosby, Bill Summerhayze, and

Hank Hayspur lay under mounds of fresh earth that were still damp from the digging. But here were the reckless, hard-faced riders that had used their running irons and six-guns for pay and the love of the game. They watched with narrowed, speculating eyes.

The lines in his face deepened and his smoke-gray eyes were cold and emotionless as Tombstone faced them. One by one he picked out men to be reckoned with; grim-faced De Boe, Ike Stillwell, "One-card" Wiley and others—men with the fires of full manhood burning strong in their veins. This rich, well-watered range had been shot wide open and there would be a strong bid for power. He marked them well in his mind, these men who would make that bid; they stood up under the probing of his level eyes. Then he said:

"Gents, Webb has sold his spread and is hittin' the out trail. I been picked to ramrod the layout, an' I'll be needin' some top hands to ride for me."

For a long moment, there was silence following Tombstone's words. The morning sun slanted down over the sharp fangs of the Smokies on the eastern rim of a flame-shot horizon, and began heating the silvery dust of the street. Tombstone stood there, eyes questioning.

It was Ike Stillwell who spoke into the dead silence. "Be you aimin' to pay six-gun wages, stranger?" Ike demanded stridently.

Tombstone eyed the man coldly. "I aim to pay honest wages to honest riders for honest work. When it comes to gun slingin', I'll handle that job myself. I'm packin' two plumb good ones an' they're well oiled." The words were softly spoken, yet the suggestion was bold and clear.

The tall, flat body of Ike Stillwell hunched a little forward. For years

Ike had been Bill Summerhayze's trusted right-hand man in all matters pertaining to cattle and range. He was habitually a silent, taciturn man, and that play of guns out at Webb's ranch, where Bill Summerhayze had been killed, had affected Ike strongly. Now Ike shot One-card Wiley a swift sidewise glance; One-card returned it understandingly.

DE BOE was watching closely, and a thin, brittle smile showed for an instant on his grim, bold face. Already De Boe could scent the fresh reek of gun smoke. No matter how the play ended, he would be winners, for there would be one less to reckon with. De Boe was sitting tight.

"Speakin' of gun slingin', stranger, I'm thinkin' you could tell us somethin' about that shootin' out at Webb's place," suggested Ike Stillwell harshly.

"A man can't be shot for thinkin', hombre," stated Tombstone evenly, "but there's times when talk comes high."

Ike stepped slowly into the dust of Rawhide's main street. "Stranger, I'm a man o' few words, an' I'm ready to back my talk for money, chalk, or marbles."

It was coming. Tombstone knew that. It was in the cards. Trigger itch! One gun fight calling for another! Why were men consumed with burning eagerness to match the speed and skill of their hand against that of another? Sooner or later, the end was always the same. Death! An unmarked grave! Death was here now. It was in Ike Stillwell's narrowed eyes, and Tombstone knew no backing down.

Tombstone shifted slightly, and his leg muscles tensed and hardened.



"I'm askin' you to do that very thing, hombre," he suggested softly.

There was a sudden change of expression on Stillwell's face, a flash of fire in his eyes. Tombstone's big hands dipped to his guns. Ike Stillwell's gun came out clean and fast, and Tombstone was dimly conscious of the slash of that first bullet along his left side. Then his two big guns spoke as one, close on the heels of that first report, and the impact of those shots swept Ike Stillwell to the dusty street, where he lay motionless, save for a spasmodic twitching of lifeless hands.

For an instant no one moved. Then One-card Wiley shifted, and his hand slid across his checkered vest and under his coat. Tombstone's back was partly turned, and the subtle movement escaped him. But Slick Voss was watching with those restless yellow-green eyes so like a wolf's. A shrill command hissed from his lips, and he faced the gambler with naked gun.

"Not so fast, One-card!" Slick Voss challenged. "If you ain't satisfied, step into the street an' declare yourself like a he-man. I'm backin' Tombstone's play."

One-card smiled as he rolled his dead cigar across his thin lips. Slowly, his right hand came from under his coat, and in his fingers was a match. The match burst into flame on the gambler's thumb nail, and he laughed sardonically as he held it with steady hand.

"Slick, for once I know just where you stand. That question has always troubled me. Now I'm satisfied."

"I'm ridin' for Tombstone Graves," said Slick Voss firmly. "I'll be askin' you gents to be careful movin' your hands—when his back is turned."

One-card blew a cloud of smoke

into the air and smiled as he watched it float away in the morning breeze. Slick glanced at Tombstone and saw that Tombstone's big hands were empty. There was that in Tombstone's eyes, as their glances met, which warmed Slick's heart and made him holster his own gun with confidence. Slick fell in behind, as the big puncher stepped upon the board walk and moved through the silent, watchful group of riders toward the door of the Antlers Bar.

DE BOE stepped into the street and turned Stillwell's body over on its back. He bent over it a moment, his bold eyes questing. Then he straightened. "Ike always said there wasn't a man livin' that could beat him on the draw," remarked De Boe casually, to no one in particular. "I reckon Ike was right. But when it comes to shootin' dead center—" De Boe shook his head, but there was a satisfied smile upon his lips, for a round, dark spot was in the center of Ike's forehead, and another directly over his heart.

"I aim to keep runnin' Monk's Jack-in-a-Box iron," De Boe informed them easily. "I could use a few more top hands."

One-card rolled his cigar across his lips, but did not smile. He knew that De Boe was talking straight at him. But those words of Tombstone Graves rang in his ears: "There's times when talk comes high." In silence, the gambler turned away and moved calmly toward the White Front Saloon, which he had heretofore run for Bill Summerhayze, sheriff of Rawhide, but now ran for his own profit.

As he pushed through the swinging doors, One-card Wiley smiled in his turn. Tight in the massive saloon safe reposed all the cash and papers

that the cunning, greedy sheriff had possessed. And there was no other man living besides One-card who knew the combination and had access to its contents.

"I'll buy a drink," said Tombstone. "What'll you have, Slick?"

For a moment the young rider did not answer. A new quietness seemed to rest heavily upon him; a new firmness showed about his restless eyes. Tombstone saw and understood. Some new quality was forming and growing inside the man.

"I'll take a cee-gar," replied Slick, after deep inner contemplation. The color deepened in his face as he met Tombstone's eyes. "Liquor sets fire to somethin' inside me, amigo, and there's times I can't fight it down. I'm workin' for you, Tombstone, an' I aim to give you the best I got, so it's best I don't drink no hard liquor."

That slow smile softened Tombstone's rugged features. He placed his big hand upon his companion's arm. "You got a way with you, cowboy, and danged if I don't cotton to you strong. We'll both have a cee-gar; smoke seems to be in the air."

From behind the Antlers Bar, Charlie Lancaster watched those two with shrewd eyes. "Those shots! What happened?" he asked quietly.

"Ike jumped my boss," said Slick. "Ike is dead."

Lancaster's eyes brushed over Tombstone's high, powerful body. "Looks like you got more than a new hole in your shirt, Tombstone. Come on back in the washroom and let's have a look at it."

"It don't amount to much, Lancaster. But you can clean it up. I've everything you'll need for the job in my saddle pockets."

"I'll go bring 'em in," said Slick. He pocketed his cigar and headed

out the back door toward Lancaster's corral and stable.

THE saloon man filled two glasses and slid one toward Tombstone. They drank in thoughtful silence, understanding deep between them. Presently Lancaster spoke.

"Where will this shooting end?" he asked moodily.

Tombstone shook his head. "Slick saved me from a shot in the back, I reckon. Charlie, I like that lad."

"Up till now I haven't been strong for him, Tombstone. I never liked his eyes—too shifty. I wouldn't trust him far. And I don't like the idea of Simms and Cactus leaving you alone. You make a big target; a target all the boys seem to crave a shot at. Like as not some gent will have a try at you with a rifle."

Tombstone smiled somberly. "What's in the cards will out. Why worry?"

Lancaster shook his head. His eyes were full of utter seriousness. "Yeah! But you are going up against a stacked deck, Tombstone. Remember that."

Tombstone shrugged wide shoulders resignedly and busied himself a moment replacing the spent shells in his guns. Then he turned and strode back to the washroom, where he stripped to the waist. Slick came in with Tombstone's medical supplies and laid them out carefully upon a bench. He eyed the path the bullet had plowed along Tombstone's ribs.

"That was plumb close; directly in line with your heart, boss," he said, moistening his lips.

"Close don't count in a gun fight, Slick. Lancaster, start scrubbin' yore hands. That's carbolic acid in that brown bottle. Slick, put some o' that catgut a-soakin' in some hot water with ten drops o' carbolic in

it. Put in six or seven stitches, Charlie, and it'll be healed up in a week. That's right, amigos, have at 'er high, wide, and handsome. I could make a couple o' first-class hoss doctors out o' you gents in no time a-tall."

They worked in silence as Lancaster began placing the stitches, drawing the edges of the shallow wound together. The doorway darkened, and Mrs. Hubbard and Sue stood there looking in.

"We heard there was a fight. Is —is Tombstone hit bad?" Mrs. Hubbard asked. "What can I do to help?"

"Stand out o' the light, ma'am," Tombstone suggested with a grin. "You've started Lancaster's hands to shakin'."

Sue pulled her mother from the doorway. "No need to worry, mother. He sounds too cheerful. The only time when he's happy is when he's patching up a bullet wound."

"Land sakes! And why not?" Sue's mother rejoined. "When a man'll stand patchin', he's not dead, is he?"

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A HAYWIRE OUTFIT.

IT was yet early in the day when Slick Voss checked his horse upon the low crest of a rolling, timbered ridge and pointed eastward. "That's her—the old Hubbard ranch! From there to yonder, and from somewheres about here to Tensleep Pass up on the Smokies—that's your range. And not a strand o' barbed wire on her. In the fall, beef comes off those upper slopes fat as butter."

Tombstone let his eager eyes rove here and there over the richest cattle range he had ever seen—rich in water, feed and shelter from winter

storms. He sighted the low, rambling log ranch house, and, as Cactus had stated, it looked like home, sweet home.

"Yeah? Waal, beef should come off that summer range fat as butter! But where do they go to, Slick? Lancaster said Webb never gathered a trail herd in three years' time."

Slick Voss grinned. "Webb was a stranger—a foreigner in these parts. What Webb knew about runnin' cows I could stick in my eye and see a mile. No one bothered Webb's cows. They waited till Webb's calves made beef and then gathered 'em in. It ain't no trick to work over Webb's brand. I grew up in this valley, and in these parts kids cut their teeth on a runnin' iron, Tombstone. In fact, folks hereabouts consider an exchange of beef an innocent pastime. It ain't spoken of as rustlin', nohow."

"I got to have riders," Tombstone mused aloud. "Looks like honest riders was goin' to be hard to get. Danged if I can lay eyes on anything that looks like a bunch o' saddle stock anywhere around. Didn't Webb run any hosses?"

"Shore. They're shaded up for the day, I reckon."

They continued on and came up to the ranch yard. There was no sign of life about the place, save for the shaggy hound that came to meet them, barking and rumbling in his throat. When the hound quieted down, Tombstone dismounted and made friends with it.

"You stable the hosses, an' I'll have a look around for the chink cook," said Tombstone. "I don't see a smoke. The chink may have taken to the tall timber, and I wouldn't blame him. Look at those broken windows and bullet-scarred walls."

Slick nodded and trailed off with the horses toward the log stable with



its low dirt roof. Tombstone went to the house and surveyed it room by room with a critical eye. This was to be his home. A few days back he had been only a half-broke puncher in need of a job. Now he was a part owner in this ranch and its wide-flung range. At the foot of Devil's Head Pass, Fate had sent him friends. Even before that, out of the bad lands of the Broken Bow, Fate had sent him Fawn Hayspur, who had thought of herself only as a breed girl.

Tombstone smiled somberly. Love! Was it a fading fancy? Or something to grow stronger with the passing days and years—something that would eat his heart out with aching loneliness as time slid by, as it was doing now. His boot heels thumped hollowly in the empty rooms. The musical tinkle of his spurs mocked him. His wound throbbed, the stitches pulled, and there was a dull ache in his side that spoke of a cracked rib.

The broken glass from the shattered windows had been cleaned away. The house was spotless and in order. The hound looked well fed. But where was the Chinese cook? Tombstone surveyed the kitchen. He was tired, hungry and impatient. His eyes came to rest upon the shaggy hound that was following him about. "Go find him, boy! Go find that heathen chink!" But the hound only looked up at him with sad eyes and seemed not to understand. The nickel-plated alarm clock on the kitchen shelf over the sink ticked on, and the sound grew loud in Tombstone's ears as the silence lengthened. The hour was nearing noon.

He stepped out into the yard and looked down toward the corrals and stables. Slick Voss was in the saddle far out, seemingly riding a slow circle

around the ranch. Slick was leaning forward, peering intently at the ground. There was an eager intensity about his posture in the saddle that suggested a hunting wolf. Taking his new job seriously, the young rider was losing no time about rounding up the horse cavvy.

**R**ETURNING to the kitchen, Tombstone removed a stove lid and saw that the fire within still smoldered. He stuffed the fire box with wood and opened the draft. There was a heaviness in his legs, a lightness in his head, and a sunken, washed-out feeling inside him. He moved listlessly to the living room and sank into an easy-chair.

For a time he sat there, chin sunk upon his chest. Powder smoke and ead! Trigger itch! More smoke and lead and blood and death! When and where and how would it end? He rocked his head slowly in answer to that question. But always, the cards must be played as Fate let them fall from the deck. His chin raised; his shoulders lifted; his hand brought forth the harmonica that was always with him, and he blew into it gently. The shaggy wolf-hound lifted its pointed muzzle from between its paws and raised a sad, mournful howl. Tombstone played on, and, like a kindred spirit, the dog wailed an accompaniment. Time slipped by.

From the kitchen came the sharp, metallic click of metal. Tombstone shifted his body, and his hand dipped to his gun. Through the kitchen doorway came Sing Lo, a huge meat knife in hand, slant eyes gleaming; and from his lips flowed a torrent of words that exploded like fire-crackers:

"Clowboy alle samme! Make-e fire all same hot like hell-e! Me

plenty all time black-e stove, you think?"

Tombstone grinned. Sing Lo changed to his native language, where he could find a wider range of words to express his pent-up feelings.

"Take 'er cool an' easy! Come up for air!" Tombstone commanded. "I'm your new boss. You savvy Sidewinder Simms an' Cactus Smith? Us three gents own this spread. Webb sold out."

Sing Lo waved his meat knife. He shook his pigtail violently. "Me savvy cooke-e! No savvy Slide-winder Slimms! No savvy Clactus Smith! No savvy all time bang-bang, break-e window, burn-e black-ee off Sing Lo's stove. Me velly fine cookee."

"Waal, you gotta show me!" Tombstone grinned. "Go whittle some shavin's off a hunk o' beef an' rustle up some chuck. Show your new boss how good you are."

Sing Lo eyed Tombstone's big six-guns a moment suspiciously. Then he smiled. "Boss, you like-e ample pie?"

"Now you're talkin' my lingo, hombre. Have at 'er!"

"Sing Lo catchum," declared the Oriental. He bowed with dignity and shuffled back into the kitchen.

**S**LICK VOSS came in presently, his lean face grim and hard. "Our hosses are bunched an' travelin' fast." There was the suggestion of a brittle smile upon his thin lips.

"Sit an' rest your boots a spell," said Tombstone calmly. "Which way they haided—an' how come?"

"They're swingin' north, but I've a hunch that's a blind. Three gents a-pushin' 'em cut down the mountain last night at dusk."

The smoke-gray eyes of Tomb-

stone narrowed. "Ike Stillwell was in Rawhide last night—an' I reckon Ike had more on his mind than foolin' with Webb's saddle stock. So what, Slick?"

"I've a sneakin' feelin' that I'll cut sign up under Tensleep Pass," replied Slick thoughtfully. "Soon as I've had a snack to eat I'm headin' that a way."

"I'll trail along," said Tombstone.

Slick Voss shook his head. "You stick around the ranch, boss, and give Lancaster's stitches time to do their job. You look pale under the gills, sort of. Besides, you don't know Gus Thornbeck."

"Yeah?" said Tombstone.

"Yeah! Gus Thornbeck claims near all the range on the east slope of the Smokies, an' when Gus sets his stakes he drives 'em deep. Gents on this side o' Tensleep are playful, sort of; but Gus is plenty tough. On his range the hoot owls roost with the chickens, an' folks keep a she-wolf for a watchdog."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah!" said Slick. "Thornbeck has takin' ways. He's magic! He can wave his hands over a bunch o' cattle on a bald-headed plain, an' them critters just naturally disappear in thin air. I'm near fifty pounds lighter in the saddle than you be, Tombstone, an' my hoss is a top."

"So what?" asked Tombstone somberly.

"I aim to trail them hosses fast—an' haze 'em back home," declared Slick Voss flatly.

Tombstone understood. This young, restless rider was burning with the urge to make good. He was reckless, yet that recklessness was tempered with cunning. His slender body was seasoned and toughened

to the consistency of sun-cured jerky stretched on barbed wire. This range would hold no secrets from him; he knew his way around. True, there was that about his shifty, yellow-green eyes which suggested the treachery of a half-tamed wolf, but so far—upon three occasions—Slick Voss had proved his mettle. Something deep and strong called to Tombstone; something that flowed like a hidden tide far below the surface of external things. It was like a hunch, and Tombstone played his hunches.

"Have at 'er, cowboy!" Tombstone grinned. "If long riders are behind them broomtails, you'll have to trail 'em hard an' fast. When you find 'em, then what?"

"I'll pack a snack o' grub an' borrow your glasses. Sooner or later, them hosses'll be needin' rest an' feed. Them gents'll throw 'em into some hidden meadow where there's water, an' lay back an' watch 'em for a day or two while they take turns catchin' up on their sleep. One o' them gents will, most like, drop back an' camp on their back trail. But me, I'll outfox them gents an' snitch our hosses right under their nose." There was yellow fire in Slick's eyes.

"O. K., Slick! But take 'er cool an' easy. If you need me, ride out on one o' them high, open shoulders o' the mountain an' signal with your rifle—one shot, then two more; wait a couple minutes, then two shots followed by another draggin' far behind. I'll come a-runnin'!"

Slick nodded agreement.

Sing Lo called them to dinner, and the meal proved that he was a cook. Afterward, Slick rode away and was lost to Tombstone's view among the rugged slopes and timbered canyons of the Smokies.

There was much to claim Tomb-

stone's attention as he moved about among the high pole corrals and low-roofed log sheds. There was an air of permanency about the ranch that pleased him. Yet it was clear that Webb had no ideas beyond a haywire outfit. Things in general were in sad need of repair and setting in order, and Webb had made only a shiftless, makeshift attempt to do so—a fault not uncommon in cattle country.

But Sue Hubbard's father had been of different caliber. The ranch house, the sheds, the high pole corrals with their cedar posts set deep in the earth all showed that clearly. Hubbard and his sons were no more—the earth had claimed them to the tune of throbbing six-guns. Yet here was the work of the man's hands, his brain; his home built on the ragged fringe of an uncertain frontier—something that endured still. Tombstone's mind flashed back to Rawhide and the Silver Moon Café and a front window made cheerful with potted flowers. A grim hardness deepened on his rugged features, and he retraced his steps to the house. There, among Webb's tally books and papers, he sat and pondered over Webb's loose accounts.

At six o'clock Sing Lo called him to supper, and later, in the cool of the evening, Tombstone watered and cared for his roan in the stable. He was restless and wandered about in the open, his active brain forming plans for the job in hand. Riders he must have even if it cost him a trip outside to pick them up. And horses! He studied the eastern range as the low-slanting sun bathed it in mellow glow. His narrowed, probing eyes, used to great distances, picked out the lowest saddle between those saw-toothed peaks. Tensleep Pass! Instinct in such things named it, and instinct selected the easiest trail up those steeply rising slopes.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

## ANOTHER SPRING.

AS he stood there watching the purple shadows roll slowly upward on those peaks and wash away the gold, the wire-thin sound of the first signal shot drifted down to his attentive ears. Slick Voss needed him! An appeal of dire urgency seemed to travel with those shots.

With his thoughts traveling swiftly upward along those purple slopes, he strode quickly to the stable and threw the saddle on his roan. He made sure of his long-barreled rifle and checked the contents of his saddle pockets. Then he swung into the saddle and rode to the house. Sing Lo poked his head cautiously out the kitchen door.

"Keep your ear to the ground and your fingers crossed, hombre," Tombstone told the cook somberly. "Look for me when you see me comin'."

He whistled to the hound and continued on his way, following the trail Slick Voss had taken shortly after noon. As the hammer-headed roan picked its way up over the first long, timbered slope, night closed swiftly down. The tracks of Slick's horse were no longer visible in the darkness. But Tombstone smiled grimly. For the shaggy wolfhound was trotting on ahead, leading the way, and, with slack rein, the desert-bred roan was following where the dog led.

Looking back and down from time to time, Paradise Valley widened and deepened until it was a black sea lapping at the slopes behind. Then, one by one, the stars came out and shimmered in the velvet canopy overhead. The hours dragged by, and the labored breathing of the roan grew loud in his ears. The night air sucked down through the can-

yons, thin and cold, and whispered ghostlike among the pines. A startled buck bounded away across the trail with a rending of underbrush, the hound hard on its heels, baying madly. All Tombstone's shouted commands were of no avail. He listened as the chase led away and faded into the distance behind a timbered ridge. Then he pushed on, trusting to his own sense of direction and that of his mount to guide him until the moon came up.

The dull ache in his side became a living thing that walked up into his chest and danced about with every twisting lurch of his climbing mount. The moon, as it finally slid over the bared teeth of the Smokies, glinted on the beads of cold sweat that fringed his rumpled hair. The trail grew clearly distinct in the moonlight, and Tombstone's pulse quickened. For the fresh tracks of Slick's horse were with him still, and under them lay the tracks of many more. Slick had been right in following his hunch. The horse cavvy was being pushed over Tensleep Pass and onto Gus Thornbeck's range.

ASHADOWY horseman slipped out from a clump of pines beside the trail, and Tombstone's guns were in his hands. But the rider's hat came off, and as the yellow light of the moon claimed the slender figure, Tombstone called Slick's name.

"What's the rub?" asked Tombstone, when their two horses stood nose to nose.

"I signaled you up here because you're good at patchin' folks up," Slick Voss replied huskily, as if choosing his words with care. "There's a family o' nesters tother side o' Tensleep Pass. They're in plumb bad shape."

"Nesters?" said Tombstone Graves.

"Yeah, nesters! It's askin' a heap o' a cowman to help a nester. You wouldn't understand till you see 'em. Are you a-comin'?"

"Lead on," said Tombstone shortly.

Slick Voss turned his mount, and the two pushed on over the divide in silence.

Tensleep Pass was a narrow saddle between two angular peaks that towered far above timber line. Wild flowers grew in rank profusion, and their perfume was clear and distinct on the cold night air. In the lower valleys, summer was in full vigor, but here on Tensleep spring had only started. On his right, Tombstone caught the tinkling sound of snow water trickling from a ledge above, and the footfalls of their passing were thrown back sharp and clear upon his ears. Steam rose from the sweating horses, and his own breath was visibly outlined in the silver moonlight.

They passed through and dipped down across a gentle slope that lay above a canyon's head. Presently, as dawn was breaking, they entered an open stand of timber. Thin veils of mist rose from the canyons below and draped themselves in horizontal lines along bold rock-ribbed ledges.

Even before he sighted the fire, Tombstone caught the odor of wood smoke, and his attentive ears registered the sound of a woman's low, plaintive moaning.

Slick Voss turned in his saddle and studied Tombstone's face in the half light. A smile that was not a smile lay strong upon Slick's thin lips, and yellow fires burned hot in his narrowed eyes. His voice, as it broke the long silence between them, was ragged and husky with pent-up emotion:

"Nesters, Tombstone! But, by heavens, they're human!"

Tombstone nodded. A strong nostalgia settled upon him heavy and intense; it became at once a misery and a pain.

At the fire, guarding the camp, stood a slender boy of perhaps sixteen. A light, double-bitted ax was in his hands. He wore no hat, and his rust-colored hair was tousled. One side of his face was discolored and swollen, and his left eye was completely closed; the other peered at them with cold suspicion, unafraid. Crumpled beside the fire was a woman, and hers was the sleep of utter exhaustion. Tombstone saw that her right arm was swathed crudely in soiled bandages, and it thrust out crookedly beside her. A little beyond and to one side lay the figure of a man, his rough, flat-heeled cowhide boots protruding from under a worn blanket that covered his face.

Turning in his saddle, Tombstone sought to locate the sound of that plaintive moaning. He sighted a rickety wagon with bows and canvas cover standing half hidden among the pines.

Slick Voss spoke to the boy on guard: "I fetched the nearest thing to a doctor within a hundred an' fifty miles." He stepped stiffly down from his saddle and ground-hitched his reins.

The boy appraised Tombstone intently. "We ain't askin' no help from cowmen, mister—an' you look like a cowman to me."

Tombstone smiled that slow boyish smile that showed all too seldom upon his rugged, rough-hewn features. "I ain't much of a cowman, son. Mine is only a shoe-string outfit, an' I only got one hoss to ride. I'm sort of a nester, so to speak."

"You ain't one o' Thornbeck's

hellions?" the boy probed cautiously and firmly.

"Not me, son."

"Cross your heart an' hope to die?"

"Cross my heart an' hope to die," said Tombstone softly.

"Then take a look in the wagon, mister," said the boy in a choked voice.

Tombstone swung his horse among the trees. He heard Slick Voss ask gently: "How's your pappy, youngster?" The boy's voice was flat and sad and hushed when he answered: "Pappy's dead, mister."

One rear wheel of the wagon was missing, but a limber pine pole had been lashed under the axle to take its place, and the path it had traveled pointed back, a furrow along the ground. Dismounting, Tombstone brushed aside the canvas cover at the wagon's rear. In the uncertain light, he made out vaguely the form of a girl lying on a makeshift pallet spread on the wagon's bed. Her hair was a disordered mass of burnished copper behind a clean-cut girlish face devoid of color; her eyes were wide open—eyes of clear amber flecked with gold. As Tombstone looked closer, he saw that they were glazed from prolonged suffering. She saw Tombstone then, and her voice came to him as from a far distance:

"Go away, please. There's nothing you can do."

Some subtle instinct sharpened Tombstone's interest, narrowed his eyes, and caused his pulse to quicken. "How long has this been going on?" he demanded gently.

"Days! Weeks! Years! I want to die—and it won't be long. Please go away."

Tombstone turned quickly and strode at once to the fire. "Your sister?" he asked of the boy.

The boy gulped and nodded, anger, shame, and utter misery all blended on his bruised and battered face.

"How long has she been like that?" Tombstone asked softly.

"Better'n three days, mister. Is—is sis a—ago'in' to die?"

"I don't know," Tombstone muttered huskily. "I don't know."

He stood there a moment motionless, his eyes resting upon the wreck of the woman by the fire. Her head lay upon her one good arm. She, too, suffered; but sleep was an anæsthetic that deadened her pain. Then his troubled eyes lifted to the mountain crest where the bold, jagged peaks were catching the first rose flush of day. He felt the need of courage greater than he had ever known, and he searched his retentive memory for meager scraps of knowledge which must be pieced together to form a pattern to serve his present need. For there was that inborn quality within him that made him shoulder responsibilities even as Fate hurled them in his path.

**W**ATCHING him intently, Slick Voss and the boy acquired something from him that soothed their jangled nerves.

"Put water on the fire," Tombstone told them. "When it boils, call me. I'll need to scrub my hands." He turned back to the wagon then, and climbed inside.

"You've no business here," she told him. "Go away!"

"I think I have," said Tombstone softly. "Don't you find it lonesome—dying here alone?"

Hot anger flashed into the girl's amber eyes. "Men are all the same! I hate you."

"You're wrong, girl. There's even a difference in the quality of apples picked from a single tree. You're



too young to die; this wild, hard land that has harmed you needs you bad. It'll take women to soften it an' teach it gentler ways. Women like you, girl."

"Me?" The girl laughed bitterly.

Greater understanding came to Tombstone then, and he searched her eyes in the strengthening light. "When I was a boy," he confided gently, "I found a little mountain meadow where beautiful wild flowers grew. It was the prettiest spot I ever saw. Those flowers were all sizes and colors; some grew close to the ground, like a magic carpet; some grew among the tall grass at the timber's edge and tossed their proud heads in the wind.

"I claimed that little park meadow for my own, and it became a part of me, seems like, now as I look back. I used to ride up there often, when it was hot and dusty down below. Up in my meadow, the air was always sweet and cool and clean—just like spring!

"I'd tie my pony near a tiny spring that sparkled in the sunshine, and I'd lay on my back under a low-branched pine and watch white puffs o' clouds that sailed by or hung on the windward side of mountain peaks. I'd breathe deep, an' the scent o' them flowers all about would be like wine. I remember wishin' all my days could be like that, sort o' dreamylike, you know."

The girl's eyes left his face and slowly traveled down his high, deep chest and came to rest for a moment upon the two big six-guns swung below his slender waist—guns that all but brushed the floor as he knelt there beside her.

"Yes, I do know," she murmured. "Then what happened?"

Tombstone smiled ruefully. "Waal, gal, cattle worked their way higher up the slopes—hungry cattle

in search o' better feed. When next I visited my little meadow, them critters had grazed it off slick an' clean, an' what they didn't eat they trampled into the ground. They was shaded up, makin' a bed ground around my spring. It was muddied up an' polluted until even my pony wouldn't drink. One old, ornery critter stood under my pine tree a-fightin' deer flies an' pawin' dust. That day sort of hit me low under the belt, gal."

"Life is like that!" declared the girl bitterly.

"Yeah," agreed Tombstone readily. "There's always some ornery critter a-tramplin' the flowers an' pawin' dust. But the days slide by, an' there's always another spring, gal. Me? I stayed shed o' that spot for near a full year. Winter passed with its bitter cold an' drifted snow. Then something got into my blood, an' I rode my spotted pony back to that little meadow."

She began to catch the drift of his meaning. A new light brightened in her eyes. "Go on," she prompted eagerly.

Tombstone smiled. His rugged face held the beauty of a sunrise. "Danged if my little meadow wa'n't prettier'n ever! Them ornery critters had left a richness there, seems like, an' them wild flowers were ten times thicker an' prettier than ever before."

A soft mist veiled her amber eyes, and she allowed the silence to grow for a time between them. "You are different!" she breathed, soft and gentle as the morning light.

Before Tombstone could give answer, quick, sharp suffering was upon her, and he took her clutching hands. When it had passed and left her limp and exhausted, he looked deep into the misery that clouded the amber of her eyes.

"I'll help you, girl—if you want I should," he told her calmly. "Do you, little woman?"

"If—if you think you can," she whispered.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### MADE TO ORDER.

**D**AWN comes swiftly on the eastern slope. With his back to the fire, Slick Voss waited and listened with strained intensity, his eyes fixed upon the wagon. The boy spoke to him, but Slick did not hear. Never before had he totaled the cost of human life in its beginning. Now understanding came with crushing force. His sun-tanned face had set and paled; a muscle in his cheek twitched spasmodically.

The boy touched Slick's arm. He, too, was suffering from the strain of listening. "Mister, don't you reckon I should start diggin' pappy's grave?"

Slick turned. "Got a shovel?" he asked huskily.

The boy nodded.

"I'll help you," Slick offered. He eyed the boy's mother lying huddled by the fire. She still slept on. There seemed to be no blanket to cover her. He went to his horse and stripped off the saddle, staking the animal on a picket pin. Then he placed his saddle blanket gently over the woman's shoulders, and his slicker over her hips and legs. The boy watched, then moved off among the pines, shovel in hand.

Some little distance out from camp, the boy paused and looked around. In an open glade stood a silver spruce apart from all other trees—a watchful sentinel on guard. The slope was gentle, and the sun peered in down a long avenue among the bushy pines.

"Do you reckon pappy would like

it here?" asked the boy. "He always loved to watch the sun rise."

"I reckon he would," said the young rider thoughtfully.

They took turns with the shovel for an hour or more. The job finished, the boy turned his one open eye up at Slick and said: "Mister, I reckon I gotta kill a man!"

"What man?" asked Slick.

"Gus Thornbeck!" replied the other firmly.

"What's your name, youngster?" Slick questioned kindly.

"James Minter. Sis most always calls me Jim, mister."

The rider's hand came out. "Slick Voss is my name, Jim."

The boy swallowed hard. And there beside the open grave the two shook hands. In silence they trailed back to the camp, and in silence they carried Jim Minter's father away and lowered him gently into the waiting earth. The boy worked with the shovel and, presently, formed a mound. Then he straightened and stood for a time gazing into the far distance out over the panorama of wild and broken slopes.

They were nearing the dying fire again when Slick Voss hissed sharply: "Listen!"

All sound from the wagon had ceased.

"Do you reckon we better start diggin' again?" Jim Minter asked in a choked whisper.

Slick gave no answer, but was off in long strides.

Tombstone stepped down from the wagon and came toward them, his face grim and haggard. He saw the shovel the boy carried, and understood.

"There'll be another grave to dig," he told them. "A tiny grave." Tombstone measured with his hands.

"An'—an' what o' her?" Slick de-

manded, his eyes searching Tombstone's keenly.

"She may live," he told them somberly. "That all depends."

"On what?" asked the sober-faced rider.

"On whether she feels living would be worth while. She's pretty low, Slick." Tombstone turned his eyes upon the boy. "Lad, is there any grub in camp?"

Jim Minter shook his head. "None to speak of, mister. You see, pappy staked a homestead on Gus Thornbeck's range. Gus married sis and took her to his ranch. But it wasn't long till he tired o' her, seems like, 'cause he brought sis back. Pappy and Gus had words! Gus Thornbeck gun-whipped pappy an' smashed ma an' me around. Gus hooked up our old team, and threw some of our things in the wagon. Then he burned us out. He said if we didn't get offn his range, he'd kill us all. That's why there ain't no grub, mister."

Slick Voss's spurs tinkled as his boots shifted restlessly, and the yellow fires were very close to the surface of his eyes. "I'll be driftin' down the mountain, Tombstone. Our hosses are haided that a way."

"Take 'er cool an' easy, cowboy," cautioned Tombstone softly. "Them hosses can wait a spell. First off, I need you to help me set that woman's arm. It looks like blood poison has set in. We can't move that girl down to the ranch for a couple o' weeks. We got to have blankets an' grub an' fresh meat in camp, Slick. That job is up to you. Do you see what we're up against?"

"You mean we're stoppin' right here an' takin' care o' these folks?" Slick demanded.

"We play our cards as they come from the deck. That's the way I was

taught the game, Slick," Tombstone replied somberly.

"You play 'er high, wide, and handsome, boss!" ejaculated Slick Voss proudly. "That's the way I love to see 'er played!"

THE home ranch of Gus Thornbeck lay well down the eastern slope. It cluttered the upper end of a beautiful valley that meandered off to the south. His corrals and buildings had been arranged and constructed with no apparent thought or care. They lay scattered, like bleached bones around the den of a mountain cougar, and the moonlight failed to soften the sense of danger hovering there.

Seated in a battered chair of quarter-sawed oak, Gus Thornbeck drank raw liquor from a gallon demijohn. His hickory shirt was open at the neck three buttons down, and the matted hair on his chest was like a dark Brussels carpet. His hamlike hairy hand held the heavy demijohn as if it were a wineglass, then replaced it on the plank table. He cut a thick slice from a huge rump roast in the middle and slapped it on a hunk of bread. He gazed at the man standing by, and his eyes were cold and merciless as arctic ice.

"'Ombre, you're a damn poor cook!"

"Yeah? Waal, you had a good cook not so long ago, but you wouldn't keep her. Me? I ain't no cook."

"You better learn! You ain't no good for nothin' else with that busted hip. Nothin' except shootin'—same as a crippled hoss."

"I'll try, Gus," the man said miserably. "How's the bread this time?"

Gus Thornbeck threw a piece in his cook's face. "Not enough soda—flatter'n a sheep-herder's heel."



The man sighed sadly. "Yesterday it was too much soda. Some day I'll hit 'er just right."

Steps sounded outside, and a small, weasel-eyed rider entered without knocking. The rider was not over twenty-five, but his face was old, hard and cunning.

"How'd you make out, Half-pint?" Thornbeck demanded eagerly.

The rider grinned. "Just like you said—things are made to order. Soon as Monk, and Hank, and Bill Summerhayze was gunned off, them young bucks started to rattlin' their horns agin' the brush and walkin' stiff-legged. Webb sold his haywire spread for a song and played the tune himself. He's gone. Next, two o' them three strangers up and took the Colton stage haided for old Kentucky. Soon as the stage was out o' sight, Ike Stillwell lowers his antlers an' makes a pass at this Tombstone gent. Ike's daid! Lead poisonin' quick an' sudden."

**T**HORNBECK finished wolfing down his bread and meat, and took another drink from the demijohn. "Webb's hosses? Any one trailed 'em yet?" he asked shortly.

"Half-pint's" grin widened. "Not a sign! I tell you them Rawhide gents is set to stage a family war."

Thornbeck hacked off another slice of beef. "We'll pick up Webb's cattle next," he said.

"Why not? There'n nothin' to stop us," Half-pint declared sagely. "But I ain't finished yet. I got eyes, I have, and I know my way around. Hank Hayspur was buildin' a trail herd just before he kicked off. Them cattle is still bunched, and they're bein' held by a few o' Hank's old riders up on the summer range. Looks like them gents is watchin' for a chance to slip them beef critters

out o' the country. Part o' them is brand-blotched stuff."

"We'll pick up Hank's trail herd, too," said Gus Thornbeck without hesitation.

"All this talkin' makes me powerful dry," suggested Half-pint.

Thornbeck drilled the other with arctic eyes. "Buy your own liquor, Half-pint! Don't I pay you plenty?"

Half-pint grinned; he was used to being ridden over roughshod; that was Thornbeck's way. And Thornbeck had the fists and guns to back it up. Temper, too!

"I learned other things, Gus. I was thinkin' a good drink would help me remember."

"Don't fun with me, Half-pint. I been in the saddle since before damn this mawnin'. Spit 'er out, dammit!"

The weasel-eyed rider busied his fingers fashioning a cigarette. He licked the brown paper thoughtfully. "De Boe dug up Monk Mosby's money cache; there was a heap o' change."

Thornbeck stopped chewing. His attention sharpened instantly. "Know where he cached it again, Half-pint?" he demanded sharply.

Half-pint laughed. "De Boe didn't cache it again; he gambled it away. I watched One-card Wiley take De Boe like Grant took Richmond—slow but sure."

Thornbeck's breath escaped from between his square, massive teeth with a hissing sound. He resumed eating, as if opportunity had passed him by.

Again Half-pint's laugh echoed in the room. "That old crock o' a safe in the White Front Saloon is like to split open with all the cash it's got crammed into it, Gus. Has it slipped your mind that Soup Wilson did a stretch for blowin' safes back in Iowa? I got a plan!"

Thornbeck's fist banged down upon the table with a mighty crash. "I got it now! Half-pint, it's made to order!" He swore a boisterous, happy oath. "We'll clean the White Front safe We'll pick up all them cattle! We'll leave Paradise Valley as empty as a whisky jug the morning after. And we'll do them jobs all at the same time, Half-pint!"

"That's exactly the way I figured it, Gus," Half-pint grinned happily.

Thornbeck turned his frigid eyes upon the cook, who lounged hard by. "Get out, Limpy! Go hit the hay! What you don't know won't git you shot."

The crippled rider hobbled from the room, a forlorn expression in his beaten eyes. Once he had ridden with Thornbeck's lusty crew, and the crack of pistol shots in the night had been music in his ears. "Little better'n a mangy cur," he muttered. "Gus don't trust me no more. Gus don't trust any one, an' never did. That's why he eats an' drinks an' sleeps alone."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### ONLY ONE OF HIS KIND.

**P**ERSPIRATION trickled down Slick's face and worked into his eyes. The woman in his arms went suddenly limp. "She's fainted!" Slick muttered bitterly.

Tombstone looked into the woman's ashen face and nodded. "These bones are mighty hard to place. If it was her upper arm the job would be easier. Hold her steady, an' straighten out her other arm. I gotta use it for a pattern." His big hands worked firmly in the silence for a time.

"There! Slick, does that hand look straight to you?"

Slick Voss blinked the sweat from his eyes and squinted over the

woman's shoulder. "Danged if it don't, Tombstone. I didn't reckon you'd ever make it, her arm bein' swelled up like a toy balloon. This female shore has a heap o' sand; never a whimper out o' her."

Tombstone placed his splints with care, and began wrapping bandages around them.

Presently the woman opened her eyes and straightened. "Is it over?" she asked weakly, her gentle eyes on Tombstone.

Tombstone nodded. "If nothin' happens, you'll be usin' this arm in a couple o' months, ma'am."

"I—I was thinking of my girl, stranger. Is—is she——"

"That's over, too. She's sleepin' now. I reckon she'll make the grade. Now don't fret, ma'am. We're stoppin' here a spell an' lookin' after things." Tombstone's was a friendly smile.

That smile warmed her. "God will bless you, lad. These last few days my cross has been greater than I could bear. My spirit was willing, but my flesh was weak."

"You're half starved, ma'am, no wonder. Slick, how about that venison?"

"I'm on my way, boss. That job won't take me long."

In less than an hour, Slick was back, a young buck swung behind his saddle. Thick steaks were cut, and another hunk was placed in a kettle to simmer on a slow fire. The boy worked about the fire and tended the sizzling steaks. He placed the first steak on a tin plate and handed the plate to Tombstone. Tombstone cut the steak in bits, then seated himself beside the woman.

"I'll help you, ma'am. There's nothing like venison to put new strength in a tired body." Tombstone began feeding her much as if she were a child.

When the broth in the pot had thickened and strengthened, Slick Voss ladled out a cup of it. "Tombstone, do you reckon I could take this to the girl?"

Tombstone's eyes searched the eyes of the girl's mother, and found the answer there. He turned and nodded. "Why not, Slick? Food is what she needs."

The young rider walked slowly to the wagon, the cup held steadily in his hand. He parted the canvas gingerly and thrust his head inside. The girl was sleeping. For a time he stood there motionless and watched her. It was the first time Slick had seen her, and the pallor in her face raised a sudden hard lump in his throat that stifled him and threw him into a panic, for he thought that she was dead. Then he saw that she was breathing, and Slick, too, began to breathe.

The girl's head tossed restlessly, and her shadowy eyelids opened. Her gold-flecked amber eyes slowly fixed upon Slick Voss peering in the wagon's end. Slick's hand came up and slowly removed the wide-rimmed hat from his head and let it fall unheeded to the ground.

"Be you hungry, miss?" he asked awkwardly, very ill at ease.

She studied him a moment. "Who are you?" she asked, much as if it didn't matter greatly, as if nothing mattered.

"Slick Voss. I work for Tombstone Graves. I signaled him up here with my rifle last night, soon as I found you folks."

"Thanks," she murmured. "So his name is Tombstone Graves. Is that his real name?"

Slick Voss smiled. "I never asked him, miss; but the name shore fits him.

"I don't think it does," the girl

replied. "I think he's the gentlest man I ever knew."

The young rider nodded. "He is that, miss. I never laid eyes on another like him. I reckon Tombstone busted the mold."

"My name is Fern; Fern Minter. I am hungry. And I'm glad you came."

Slick climbed inside, very careful of the cup he carried. She tried to raise her head, but sank back weak and spent. Then she looked up into Slick's inscrutable eyes and smiled wanly. He raised her up gently, and placed the cup to her lips.

"Too hot?" he asked.

"Just right, thanks. Does your hand always tremble like that?"

Color surged up into his face. "Shucks!" he muttered. "I never saw it shake like that before!"

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### PAY DAY.

**G**RIM-FACED De Boe was feeling very low, and his face was very grim indeed. De Boe was never given much to introspection, but now he called himself a fool. He called himself other names, too. "A man's a fool, nine kinds of a fool, to buck another man's game!" De Boe told himself, as his horse carried him aimlessly with slack reins upon its neck. "One-card Wiley was laughing at me from the very first. Damnation! How I hate a man that laughs!"

"Ike Stillwell was a fool to buck Tombstone Graves. Tombstone knows his shootin' irons. It sticks right out his eyes. I could see that, but Ike couldn't. Ike would never gamble with One-card, but I did. Both fools in our own way. Ike is dead. I'm alive. I reckon Ike was the bigger fool, at that.

"Now One-card is top dog here-



abouts, and me—— It's goin' to make me scratch payin' off my hands when pay day rolls around. Me—I got the toughest bunch o' riders that ever forked a hull; but them kind want their pay day when its due. Money talks! And One-card is laughing up his sleeve. Damnation!" De Boe cursed so viciously that his horse pricked up its ears, swung about, and headed back toward the ranch. De Boe neither knew or cared. But Fate had turned another card.

The man who lounged on the deep porch under the low shake roof watched De Boe draw near with interested eyes. The man's hair was no longer than the stubble of beard on his sallow face. His clothes did not fit him, which was not strange, since he had found them on a clothesline late at night. His shoes were all but cut to pieces by rocks and thorns.

De Boe rode up and gave the human scarecrow a cutting stare from under his low hat brim. He did not speak.

"Howdy," said the man, shambling stiffly to his feet.

De Boe nodded.

"Monk Mosby an' me are old friends, so I rambled this way," informed the stranger.

"Monk's daid," replied De Boe coldly.

"So I've heard, but that don't trouble me none. I reckon you're De Boe. I've heard of you."

"What's your name?" asked De Boe shortly.

The man grinned, and showed an almost total lack of teeth. "Acey, deucey, seven come eleven," he replied cheerfully.

"Now ain't you funny!" De Boe hissed, developing an ugly temper.

The man showed no sign of a gun

on his person, but De Boe laid his hand on his own gun.

"Come clean, hombre!"

The man's grin widened. "Don't you savvy? That's a number—one, two, seven, eleven. Gents go by numbers where I come from."

"Ah!" said De Boe. "So you're an ex-con! I might have known."

The man's grin became extremely wide. "Not ex-con—just con. Seven of us salted away a couple of guards and took French leave. I don't know about the other six. My legs are long, and I took to the wide open spaces. Glad to meet up with you, De Boe."

"Yeah? Don't be too sure. I might decide to send you back."

The man shook his head with confidence. "I'm handy to have around, De Boe. I open things: doors, windows, corral gates, sardines and safes."

"Yeah?" said De Boe nastily, never fast on the rebound.

The expression on the man's face changed. The look he gave De Boe chilled his blood.

"Listen, you half-baked cookie! Don't curl up your lip at me. I knew the game when you didn't know enough to wipe your nose. You don't even now! You let One-card Wiley rob you like a kid in your first crap game. Straighten up your mug! Act like a man! I heard you was lookin' for a gent who could open the old safe in the White Front Saloon."

De Boe's heavy jaw sagged; his mouth gaped open. "I never thought of that," he muttered.

"You wouldn't! You'd sulk around the ranch and wait for some one to tell you! You ain't such big onions, De Boe. Right now most of your riders are drinkin' free drinks in the White Front Saloon and One-card is sayin' as how you're busted. It don't

listen good, does it, big boy? I'll open that can for half."

"If you're so hot, why don't you do the job alone?" De Boe snarled.

The sallow-faced man grinned. "I need a lookout to stand at my back with a pair of guns, and help with a get-away."

De Boe laughed. "With a bar o' yellow soap an' a quart o' soup you'd raise enough hell in Rawhide to last twenty men the rest o' their natural lives, which same would be plumb short."

"Soup? What you talkin' about, tomato soup? I don't use soup, De Boe. I opened the prison safe in seven minutes, blindfolded, when the warden lost his combination. Soup!"

"Go wash up and I'll have the cook throw you a feed," De Boe told him. "I reckon your name spells pay day to me."

"I've had a feed and I don't need washin'—my skin's too tender. We'll talk this job over and finish it up to-night. I gotta be on my way, shovin' back into the hills."

"Come inside then," De Boe agreed. "I'm beginning to like your style."

**R**AWHIDE crouched silent and motionless in its cottonwood shadows. As the night wore on, the moon was blotted out by a curtain of clouds that thickened and promised rain. For an instant the silence was broken by a vague, muffled sound like the gentle closing of a heavy door. Then the silence settled down again, grim and intense.

One-card Wiley opened his eyes. For an instant he wondered why. Then he was conscious of a vague sense of vibration, as if the two-story building were rocking back and forth. Cautiously, he swung his feet to the floor and drew his guns from under his pillow. Listening for a moment

to the regular breathing of the woman who slept beside him, he stood up and moved silently from the bedroom to the head of the stairs and peered down into the darkness of the saloon below. A pungent odor assailed his nostrils. His jaw set. Guns thrust out before him, One-card silently went down the stairs, step by step. He gained the last step and paused to listen. To his ears came a rustling sound. Taking the last step softly, he moved silently toward the safe. He was conscious of a subtle movement behind him, and whirled. Then darkness became total and complete. One-card Wiley dropped limply to the floor—dead as a pole-axed steer.

The rustling sound continued for a time. Soft footfalls whispered across the saloon floor and died away toward the rear among the gambling rooms. There came a sound on the reeking air as of an outer door opening for a moment, then closing. For perhaps an hour the silence grew; the darkness became more intense. Outside, the clouds thickened overhead, and a light rain began to fall, soft as mist.

The man, whose name had been changed to a number, softly tried the rear door of the White Front Saloon. It opened under his hand. He paused, balanced lightly on the balls of his stocking feet, shoes hung around his neck. He whispered in De Boe's ear out of the corner of his mouth. "The door's not locked! This might be a trap."

"One-card may be on a bender an' forgot to throw the bolt," De Boe replied. "Go ahead! What's eatin' you?"

The man advanced a step or two and paused. De Boe sat down on the step and pulled off his boots. Carrying his boots in one hand, a naked six-gun in the other, he joined

his companion inside the doorway. "Acy-deucey" sniffed the stagnant air. He took a step forward and sniffed again.

"Too late!" he hissed. "Some one's beat us to the job! We gotta git out of here!"

"What's that?" De Boe whispered.

"Some one's cracked the safe. I smell soup in the air"

"You're loco! Who'd blow the safe?"

"I dunno! We gotta git out of here!"

"What a rabbit you turned out to be!" De Boe hissed. "Go ahead! I got a gun in your back!"

Acy-deucey listened intently for several minutes. He heard not a single sound. He knew what he knew, but there might be some small change lying around. Once he had overlooked a valuable diamond necklace when cleaning out a crib. He turned to De Boe in the pitch blackness: "O. K., hard guy! I'll show you what I mean. If you horn in on your own funeral, don't blame me!" He moved forward, and De Boe followed.

The escaped convict slipped through the darkness, avoiding chairs and poker tables with the stealth of a cat. They left the gambling rooms behind and entered the silent emptiness beyond. The acrid reek of nitro fumes became much stronger; they assailed De Boe's nostrils and struck him with almost physical force. He was possessed with a sense of frustration, bitter disappointment. He suffered the extreme torture of self-pity. He was just too late!

**I**N one hand Acy-deucey carried two strong gunny sacks intended for the loot; in the other a dark lantern fashioned cleverly from two tin cans. Inside burned a short stub

of a candle. The wire-thin sound, as his companion adjusted the shutter, struck De Boe's straining eardrums with the intensity of a pistol shot.

Then a pencil beam of light lanced out and wandered off across the saloon floor and around the walls. The beam wavered, pausing for an instant to probe a vague blur a few steps from the stairs. De Boe's pulse stopped completely, then took up a steady hammering, like a water pump sucking air. He moved closer, his breath a rasping sound.

One-card lay where he had fallen, a heavy wooden mallet close beside him.

"Tapped with his own bung starter!" De Boe muttered.

"Dead as a salted herring!" Acy-deucey hissed. "We gotta git out of here!"

A heavy stubbornness came to rest upon De Boe, like a buzzard with folded wings. "The safe's at the end of the bar," he whispered. "Throw your light that way!"

The heavy door no longer swung on its hinges. It lay face down upon the floor. Under it lay a thick cushion of quilts and mattresses used to deaden the explosion and ease the door as it struck the floor. As if pulled by a magnet, De Boe moved closer, and Acy-deucey traveled by his side. Their eyes followed the beam of light as it exposed the barrenness within those metal walls.

"Clean as a hound's tooth," the convict mourned sadly. "They even took all the small change. And I could have opened that door without a sound. A sweet job of blastin', I'll say that for 'em. De Boe, we gotta git out of here!"

"Damnation! I shore hate to be robbed!" De Boe muttered. Temper was growing hot within him. "I've a good mind to set fire to this joint. I been robbed here aplenty."



Acey-deucey stooped and picked something from the floor. He held it in the palm of his hand and trained the beam of light upon it. "Two bits! The price of a drink," he mourned resignedly. "Come on! We gotta git out of here!"

He moved silently back along the way they had come. De Boe followed, guided by the beam of light which traveled along the floor. De Boe's companion stooped again, blotting out the light.

"What'd you find?" De Boe hissed.

"Four bits! Want half of it?"

De Boe cursed softly.

Near the rear door, Acey-deucey paused and stooped again.

"A buck!" he whispered back.

Outside, he sat down on the step and put on his shoes. De Boe pulled on his boots. The rain was falling heavier now. Already their fresh tracks were flattening out. Sparkling with moisture, well to the right of the saloon's rear door, the beam of light disclosed another silver coin.

Then, quite suddenly, De Boe was struck by an idea, and new hope dawned strong within him. "There's a hole in the sack they're packin' the silver in!" he ejaculated strongly. "You follow their trail. I'll git the horses!" He was off in the darkness and the rain.

**A**CEY-DEUCEY smiled and hunched his thin shoulders. De Boe, he mused, was like a dog's tail—always one jump behind. He shuffled along, with his improvised lantern, and the number of coins in his pockets grew. Without difficulty, he arrived at the foot of the trail that slanted up and over the gravel bench overlooking Rawhide's main street from the west. Here he paused and listened. The footfalls of horses were muffled by the freshly dampened dust, yet he distinguished

the sound clearly. He signaled with his light, and soon De Boe came up in his saddle with a lead horse behind.

"What luck?" he demanded eagerly.

"Another hundred yards, and I'd 'a' had enough to buy a suit of clothes," Acey-deucey replied. "The pay dirt seems to end here, but the trail leads right up over this hill."

"They're haided for Devil's Head Pass and the bad lands of the Broken Bow!" De Boe ejaculated.

"I don't know about that," the other pondered.

"It's clear as mud!" De Boe insisted. "We'll trail along for a mile or two and make sure. Then I'll hit for the ranch and round up my crew o' riders. At this time o' year, it won't rain out on the Broken Bow desert. We can follow their tracks dead easy. I'll trail them skunks plumb to hell! I'll show 'em they can't rob me!"

Acey-deucey smiled into the darkness. "You trot along, De Boe. Hard riding makes me saddle sore. Besides, I don't like low altitude. I'm heading for high places, and I'm heading now and sudden."

"I knew you'd rabbit out on me," De Boe snarled. "But that's Jake with me. You sure turned out a frost!"

Acey-deucey heaved a mournful sigh. "Oh, well—I could have found use for half what was in that sack, and half would have been plenty. But such is life!" He hunched his shoulders against the chilling rain.

"Half?" De Boe laughed.

"Half would have been aplenty, De Boe."

"Give me that lantern an' be on your way," De Boe snapped.

Acey-deucey's smile widened, but De Boe could not see that smile. "Want I should stop at the ranch

and send your riders out this way? It'd save time, De Boe."

"I'd have mentioned that," De Boe muttered stridently. "Tell 'em to meet me at Devil's Head. I'll be lookin' for 'em at the head o' the trail."

De Boe swung down from his horse and took the dark lantern in his hand. He listened as his companion mounted and rode away behind. Then, leading his horse by the reins, De Boe climbed the slanting trail upward, following the pencil beam, hunting for silver coins.

**I**N the gray dawn, his eager riders found him waiting. The rain had ceased; the sky was clear. The trail of three horses lay ahead. There was that in the eyes of grim-faced De Boe which told them he would follow that trail stubbornly to the end.

With a rattle of sliding gravel, a creaking of saddle leather, and a tinkle of bit chains, De Boe, with a dozen riders behind him, careened down Devil's Head Pass. Hard riding was what these men loved. The thrill of the chase warmed their blood. Danger was a wine that sharpened their eyes, hushed their voices, and made restless gun hands tingle. With a molten-copper sun pushing higher above the Stepping Stones, and the chimney buttes and shifting sands steadily gathering heat out in the bad lands of the Broken Bow, De Boe led on. If there were any among those riders who were reluctant and lukewarm, it took only a few silver coins glinting along the fresh trail to banish all doubt from their minds and whet their eagerness to a keen intensity.

They fanned out to right and left, those riders, avoiding the choking dust that raised behind. Suddenly, a mount broke through a crust of

earth above a varmint's den; horse and rider crashed headlong in a tangle of arms and legs. The rider rolled free and came to his feet, shaken but uninjured, but the horse did not rise. A shrill, piercing scream of agony and despair issued from its straining throat. Perhaps the animal understood and sensed what was coming. For its right front leg bone was snapped off short below the knee. Its rider looked into those pleading, anguished eyes and gave it a mercy shot; then he turned his head away.

De Boe checked his headlong pace and turned back. He saw at once what had happened. He surveyed his men quickly and at the same time scrutinized their mounts. "Slim, your mustang has turned lame!" he said. "You an' Jack stick together. With one hess between you, you can make it back to the ranch, an' pack Jack's ridin' gear. Come on, boys!"

Spurring hard, he was off. The day wore on. Heat and hard riding began to tell on the horses, toughened as they were. The killing pace slowed down. Men began to lose the keen edge of their eagerness. A few turned in their saddles and looked back into the shimmering heat waves through which they had come; then turned again to peer searchingly along the trail ahead, but no drifting plume of dust caught their searching eyes. Only the tracks of three swiftly moving horses fading into the mirage beyond.

Presently, the trail led close in under a table butte whose perpendicular gray rock wall threw back the heat like a furnace blast. Hat brims were pulled down over squinting eyes. Under the merciless sun, more scattered silver coins winked and blinked at them along the trail. De Boe and his riders bunched and picked them up, swinging low in their

saddles. The coins were hot, too hot to hold, and they juggled them about from hand to hand.

A bullet struck one of De Boe's men with a sodden plunking sound. Then came the sharp, spiteful rifle crack from up above. The rider spilled slowly from his saddle and fell upon his back. He made a gurgling noise—the death rattle in his throat. One hand pointed at the crest above, then fell limply to his side.

Again that sodden sound, that spiteful rifle crack. Another of De Boe's riders spilled. De Boe cursed.

"Take cover an' pick that coyote off!" he barked, as he dragged his carbine from its boot.

But there seemed to be no cover. They scattered along that sheer wall on their right. Looking up, they saw a wisp of thin gray smoke marking a muzzle blast. A rider swore softly as a bullet broke his arm, high up, and left it dangling at his side. They bunched and, for an instant, milled. Then spurred snorting, lunging horses into speed. They fired raggedly, but the deadly marksman lay well hidden up above. He cut another rider down. There seemed no mercy in him. He shot to kill. Men's tempers boiled. None showed fear. Those who before had looked behind when the going seemed hot and dull, now brightened to the thrill of danger and death hovering in the desert air.

**C**LOSE in under the mesa's rim they raced tired horses at breakneck pace, following those horse tracks recklessly. Here there was no way up, but those tracks would lead them to a break. Their quarry was hard-run and making one last stand. De Boe smiled grimly; a fortune was within his hands.

"Watch sharp, boys," he cautioned shrilly. "There's three o' them coyotes up ahead. Watch sharp!"

The table butte turned and swung slowly around before those racing hoofs. The deadly marksman no longer had them under his gun. A ragged, broken slope appeared. Up this slope the trail led, fresh and clear as a new scar. Buck-jumping their horses, up this steep pitch De Boe and his men rode. Now they were keenly alert, rifles or six-guns ready in their hands. Horses winded and spent, they cleared the lip of the rim above and began beating back along the butte's flat table top. There was scant cover for even lizards to hide, and the butte was of no vast extent. A few shallow gullies lined with stunted brush—that was all. No tethered horses met their eyes. No skulking killer with his robber's loot. Nothing!

De Boe swore a bitter oath. "Look!" He pointed suddenly. A way down here!"

In ages past, the far side of the rim had crumbled and formed a slide of loose rock and shale. Down this slide led the trail of the three horses; and already far out upon the desert floor below was a moving streak of dust floating high. Once again, fortune had slipped through De Boe's fingers. Once again, he was one jump behind. It came to him then—when it was too late—that he should have split his men and sent half around the butte the other way. He counted the cost already paid in men. Only six remained. Those six were eying De Boe in a way he did not like. His grim stubbornness strengthened.

"Come on!" he shouted curtly. "Come on!"

"Wait!" a rider ejaculated quickly. "This whole cockeyed thing is wrong!"



De Boe paused and swung around. "What's wrong?" he demanded hotly. "Spit it out! We're wasting time."

"The numbers is wrong, that's what," the man stated strongly, counting on his fingers, and naming those who had dropped behind. "Thirteen, De Boe! That's what I make it! Thirteen!"

"Thirteen?" De Boe muttered.

"Thirteen!" the man repeated strongly. "I don't like that number!" He shaded his eyes with his hand and peered intently out at that trailing dust. "One gent with two spare horses! We'll never catch up with him, De Boe. One gent—and he whittled us down to seven. Cagy as a cat, that gent! De Boe he's laughin' at you."

De Boe cursed savagely. "I don't give a damn! I'll run that buzzard down if it takes a hundred years."

"That's what's wrong with you, De Boe; you don't give a damn. I'm beginnin' to think you're not half smart."

"Yeah?" said De Boe coldly.

"Yeah! That's what I said. Out here in these bad lands, you don't know your way around. You got two men same as afoot; three dead, an' one with a busted arm. Like as not, that boy has bled to death by now. An' you don't give a damn. To hell with you, De Boe. I'm goin' back!"

"The same goes here," another spoke thickly. "My canteen is empty. De Boe, where's the closest spring?"

Their badgered leader shook his head stubbornly. "I don't know, an' I don't give a damn! If you boys have quit, I'm goin' on alone. Damned if that buzzard can laugh at me!"

He sat his spent horse and watched his riders rein about and move off,

back along the way they had come. Bitterness was in him, strong as gall. It matched his stubbornness. He had lost the leadership of his crew. One course remained. De Boe swung down heavily and pulled his latigo strap up tight. Then, stepping up into his saddle, he pointed his horse down the treacherous slide and headed out into the shimmering heat waves of the Broken Bow, a dogged grimness in his bold, hard eyes.

Far ahead on the desert's floor, Half-pint shaded his eyes and looked back, a thin smile on his sharp, weasel face. He picked out the single rider moving along his trail. His smile widened. His left hand dipped into a strong canvas sack tied to his saddle horn. His hand came out, and along the trail he scattered a few more silver coins.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### RECOVERY.

IT was late in the evening when Slick returned from the ranch. He led Tombstone's horse, and the roan was packed heavily with blankets, grub, and such camp equipment as cowboys use in the mountains when holding cattle on the summer range. He had gathered up an old tent, a pair of Dutch ovens, a five-gallon water bag, and a long seamless sack to hold their fresh meat and keep the flies away.

Tombstone and Jim Minter were sitting by the fire in silence when Slick came trailing in. Tombstone stood up and began unpacking the roan.

"How'd you find things, amigo?" he asked.

The young rider grinned. "Plumb quiet," he replied. "There's no fresh tracks goin' through Tensleep either way. When I was breakin' out o' the timber down below, that old

wolfhound took to barkin' plenty loud. I looked sharp an' saw your chink cook a-haidin' for the smokehouse like seven Chinese devils was trailin' him plumb close. The chink ducked inside an' closed the door behind him. I had a danged good notion to smoke the critter out, but left him be in there.

"I stabled our hosses an' throwed 'em a feed o' grain. Then I began lookin' for what grub an' such I could find. That chink is like a gopher; he can't stay in his hole over long. Pretty soon I saw him pokin' his haid out the smokehouse door. He was a-squintin' them slant eyes o' his up at the chimney watchin' to see if I aimed to start a fire, I reckon, which I was. Then down he come a-chatterin' like a chipmunk, an' began bangin' his pots an' pans around. 'Where bossey man?' that chink wanted to know. I told him you was huntin' grouse, an' wouldn't be back for a week or two. 'You telle bossee man more better he huntee cow.' He seemed plumb disgusted with you, that's a fact. But, Tombstone, danged if he didn't scramble you up a cake."

Very carefully Slick removed a bulky package from his saddle and placed it in Tombstone's hands. Tombstone removed the wrappings gingerly, revealing a huge affair whose dark chocolate frosting glinted in the fire's glow.

"What do you know about that?" he demanded. "Danged if I don't begin to admire that chink. Seems like he's got the best interest o' our spread at heart." Tombstone turned about. "Jim, do you reckon this mess is fit to eat?"

The boy's battered face lit up, his one good eye agleam with interest. "It looks danged good, mister. I reckon sis could eat a piece o' that."

"You take this cake, Jim, an' cut her off a hunk. Tell her there'll be hot biscuits short off. I aim to cook us up a feed."

The two riders unpacked and removed the saddles from tired mounts. The boy returned from the wagon. "I got our team staked out not far from here," he informed Slick. "Want I should stake your hosses with 'em?"

"I dunno," Slick mused thoughtfully. "Maybe, if it ain't too far. We don't want these broomtails driftin' off. Tombstone an' I don't like walkin'."

"That's right," Tombstone agreed. "But the lad's picked a good spot o' feed for his stock, an' it'll do for ours, Slick. You go with him an' see that our ponies are staked out hard an' fast. There's the makings of a good cowhand in the boy, Slick. It's up to us to teach him right. Do you reckon we could break him in as hoss wrangler to start with, Slick?"

The young rider looked the boy up and down very carefully. There was a twinkle in his yellow eyes. "Yeah, I reckon we could, Tombstone, soon as we git him down to the ranch, an' soon as he can see out o' both eyes—an' soon as we git some hosses for him to wrangle."

THE boy watched as Tombstone raked fresh coals from the fire and placed a Dutch oven on to heat, preparatory to making a batch of bread.

"Was you thinkin' some of givin' me a job, mister?" he asked, suppressed eagerness in his voice.

Tombstone smiled. "Would you like that, Jim?"

"Better'n anything else in the world—I gotta learn how to ride an' use a gun, mister."

The two riders exchanged glances. "We'll teach you, Jim. From now

on, call me Tombstone. You're one o' my crew, hombre."

The boy swallowed hard and nodded his head. Words were beyond him. Before he met these two, bitter hatred against all cowmen and their kind filled his heart. Now that was all washed away. Now he was a cowhand himself—one of Tombstone's crew. In silence, yet with new confidence in himself, the boy grasped the hackamore rope of Tombstone's roan and led the way down through the dark timber. Slick followed.

Some distance lower down the slope, where a spring made its beginning and subirrigated a narrow swale below, the boy stopped in grass that topped his knees. Starlight filtered down through the opening among the pines, and by that light Slick Voss made out an old horse and a bony cow tethered there.

"Is that your team?" he asked.

"Yeah, that's them. One of our hosses died soon after we left our ranch. Thornbeck kicked him in the stomach when he was hookin' up the team after he set fire to our shack. The next day the critter got down, an' I couldn't git him on his feet again. Then he died, lyin' there in the canyon. The other horse couldn't pull the wagon all alone, so I sneaked back an' caught up our cow. She needed milkin' bad."

"You aim to say you fetched that wagon up the east slope with that crow-bait nag an' a milk cow?"

"It wasn't so bad at first," the boy said modestly. "But then we got into a broken canyon, an' a wheel busted. I rigged up that pole to hold the axle off the ground and worked the wagon around. I pulled back out, then zigzagged up the hills the best I could. But pullin' that wagon dried up our cow. She don't give no more milk."

"You'll do to take along, Jim," Slick said, then lapsed into thoughtful silence as they secured the horses.

TOMBSTONE was beside the fire on his knees, his attention divided between brewing coffee, broiling venison, and the Dutch oven loaded with baking-powder biscuits. Mrs. Minter had come from the wagon and now sat near by watching.

"It seems strange to watch a man cook," she told him; "but you're right handy."

"Most cow-punchers can turn their hand at cookin' well enough, once you git 'em started. How's the arm feel, ma'am?"

"Much better, Tombstone. That herb tea you've had me taking seems to be cooling off my blood. Those shooting pains have nearly stopped now, and my hand don't look so blue."

"How's the girl?"

Mrs. Minter smiled. "Fern wants another piece of cake."

Tombstone shook his head. "Nothing doing! I'll not have her turning down my grub that a way."

In the wagon, Fern Minter lay and listened to the gentle murmur of voices. The distance was too great for her to catch what was said. She had slept all through the day and felt rested and refreshed. She was hungry, too. From time to time, the scent of wood smoke drifted through the pines and entered the wagon, and with the smoke came the odor of cooking food to sharpen her appetite. It was pitch-dark in the wagon under the tree, but the darkness did not frighten her now. The low murmur of Tombstone's voice changed all that. She listened for Slick Voss to speak, and presently he did. Slick's voice was higher-pitched, yet she



found a soothing quality in its drawling tones.

She sensed that her life had changed, yet somehow she could not tell just why. She considered this for a time quite thoughtfully. Then she heard the tinkle of spurs drawing near. Tombstone! Already she could distinguish his stride. He carried a lantern, and knocked gently on the wagon bed.

"Come in, Tombstone," she said.

"Hungry, gal?" he asked, hanging the lantern from a wagon bow.

She nodded, watching the play of light upon his features. Yes, there was a hardness there, but there was great gentleness and kindness, too. He asked no questions of her. He left the past lie buried in the past. He gave her hope for the future; treated her with gentle courtesy and friendly respect. He smiled at her now, a boyish grin.

"Want I should move the wagon up close to the fire?"

"Yes, I was wishing for that. You think of everything."

"Your mother's arm is making out fine now; the swelling is going down."

"I'm so glad, Tombstone. How is dad?"

He studied her a moment in the lantern's yellow glow.

"Not so good, Fern; he was beat up pretty bad."

Something in his smoke-gray eyes told her.

"Tombstone—he is dead?"

"Dead, Fern," he told her gently.

She did not cry out or make any sign, save that a mist clouded her gold-flecked amber eyes. When the silence grew heavy she spoke: "I've always wished I had been born a boy, Tombstone."

"There's fifty-two cards in the deck, little woman; we gotta play 'em as they fall."

"Dad went up against Gus Thornbeck empty-handed, and Thornbeck clubbed him with his gun. It was Thornbeck who suggested dad stake a homestead on his range—after he saw me. Dad always used to look up at these mountains and wonder what it was like up here."

"And now he knows," Tombstone told her. "I can't think of a better place to be buried than right up here."

"What's going to happen to us, Tombstone, now that dad is gone?"

"Would you mind comin' down to the ranch and stoppin' with me a spell? I need help, and I could give Jim a job. Jim is quite a lad."

"Would I mind?" The mist thickened in her eyes.

Tombstone climbed down from the wagon then, and called Slick Voss and the boy to help move it nearer to the fire. That night, with a caution born from long familiarity with trouble, he moved their riding gear a short distance back in the timber and hid it from sight. He sent Slick to sleep near the horses, and placed his own blankets far back from the edge of the fire's glow. He reasoned that if any of Thornbeck's riders happened by and found only this broken family of nesters, they would ride on. But should they find strange riders camped with them, trouble would surely follow.

**B**UT day followed day, and none of Thornbeck's riders came. Each morning the sun rose in a blaze of glory far out upon the eastern plain. Each evening it set behind the Smoky Range and flushed the sky as with artillery blasts. A subdued quietness rested over the camp among the pines, yet time was healing, even as a wounded tree grows new bark to hide its scar. It

was a lazy life, and Tombstone grew restless and played much upon his harmonica. Soon Fern Minter was up and lounging by the fire, or putting her hand at some small task of camp work. The swelling disappeared from the boy's face, and slowly his eye opened. The broken bones in Mrs. Minter's arm knit and became stronger, so that Tombstone must caution her firmly against trying to use it too soon and ruining the job he had done.

Slick Voss, too, was restless. He spent much of his time away from camp, but not far from it. He carried Tombstone's glasses and, for hours on end, he would lie on some high shelf of rock and study the lower slopes to the eastward—a speculative, calculating gleam in his yellow eyes. He picked out trails and cross trails down below; from the sawtooth peaks at his back, where white Rocky Mountain goats made their home, to the rolling swells of grassland breaking against the first range of foothills to the eastward. He sketched a map and etched it on his memory for future use.

There were other times when Slick strode back and forth among the pines, his lean, sinewy hand dipping to his gun and whipping it from its leather. Many times each day he practiced his draw, for he had seen Cactus Smith in action and knew his own hand was slow. Slick was beginning to understand that it took something more than a fast draw to bring a man through a gun fight, and he wondered what it was. One day when he was alone with Tombstone, he said:

"What's the best thing to remember, Tombstone, when you're draggin' out your iron an' aim to kill a man?"

Tombstone's rugged features turned grim and somber.

"Slick, that's hard to tell. If your draw is slow or your aim is pore, remember you'll spend a long time daid. Offhand, I'd say to watch their eyes, and brace yourself against the shock of lead. Sooner or later, that shock is comin' to all o' us gents that pack a gun. Men don't die of old age out here in cattle land, Slick; remember that."

Slick Voss nodded, and looked away down over the broken slopes. "Tombstone, don't you reckon it's high time that I go hunt them hosses?"

Tombstone shook his head. "I'm givin' the womenfolk another day; then we'll trail out o' here. Time don't mean so much, Slick. Cast your eye up at those Smoky peaks. Time softens 'em somewhat and wears 'em slow away, but there's always plenty left to last another day."

"There's times, Tombstone, when I don't quite git you; your talk goes plumb over my haid."

Tombstone smiled. "In time you'll understand, amigo. In the meantime, don't fight your picket pin."

Slick's lean face clouded, and he turned and walked away. Tombstone watched him go.

"Trigger itch!" Tombstone muttered softly. "That lad has got it bad!"

They were all in camp next evening. Fern Minter was watching Tombstone remove the splints from her mother's arm. The next morning they would be leaving and crossing Tensleep for the other side.

Fern stood up uncertainly and found Slick's gaze upon her. "Will you take a walk with me?" she asked him.

"Waal, I reckon," Slick said, and moved beside her through the pines.

"I'd like to see my father's grave," she told him.

Slick nodded and led the way. They came to where the sentinel spruce stood watchful above two mounds. For a moment her face was puzzled, then a tender smile formed on her lips.

"Who did this?" she asked him, pointing down at the wild flowers that grew upon the mounds.

Slick's boots shifted restlessly, and he seemed at loss for words. The girl studied him carefully a moment, and read the answer in his eyes.

"I thank you, Slick," she told him softly. "I hope you understand."

"It was something Tombstone said that gave me the idea," he told her huskily.

"I'm a good girl, Slick," she told him, very close to tears.

"You don't need to tell me that, Fern. I *know* you are. Bein' a woman in this God-forsaken land is the hardest job I know."

He turned away and moved a little apart. When he looked again, she was kneeling down. She joined him, after a time, and stood silently by his side, following his far-sighted gaze down a vista that revealed the hazy distance beyond. Presently she spoke: "It don't seem right to leave them here—alone—without some funeral service over their graves."

Slick Voss turned and searched her eyes. "I reckon Tombstone could manage that, Fern. I'll ask him. He's good at anything, seems like."

"We'll both ask him," the girl said. "I'm sure he'll understand."

THE sun was just rising, and a deep rose flush was on the peaks. Through the avenue between the pines, the silver spruce caught and held the golden glow. Tombstone removed his battered

Stetson and held it tightly gripped in his two big hands. A silent hush hovered in the cold, still air. The words he spoke came soft and gentle as the first breath of morning's breeze:

"Great Spirit of the wilderness, Father of the mountains and the plains, we leave these graves in your keeping. Your sun will warm them; your clouds an' mist an' rain will make the flowers grow. Their spirits will trail along with us down yonder mountainside an' guide the feet o' our hosses along the narrow ledge-rock trails. We be only hard, rough men, Great Spirit, and ain't given much to askin' favors; but we got a job to do, an' if you want to help us, why, ease our guns out fast an' clean. Amen."

"Amen!" Slick Voss muttered.

"Amen!" Jim Minter echoed in a voice both firm and clear.

The three turned back toward camp and left the two women standing there, a spot marked only by the lonesome spruce.

"We'll have to leave the wagon, Jim; it's rough going the west side. Your hoss looks gentle. We'll cover his bones with blankets so the womenfolk can ride. We'll sling a pack on your cow, and you can lead her along behind," Tombstone said, and set about breaking camp at once.

The sun was not an hour high when the five trailed off through the open timber and slanted up the slope toward Tensleep Pass. From time to time, Slick Voss looked back as if strongly reluctant to ride away and leave a certain job for another day. Slick knew Gus Thornbeck by sight and by reputation, and now Thornbeck's face troubled him; it was constantly rising up before his eyes by night and by day. Slick wondered about his draw. Would his draw be



fast enough? Would Thornbeck spend a long time dead? Or would he, himself, experience the shock of Thornbeck's rending lead? The palms of his hands grew moist, and Slick wiped them on his Levis. Damnation! What ailed him? Was he a coward at heart? To be honest with himself, he did not know. The question worried him.

Tensleep opened up before them, a winding path between two peaks. Deer and bear and Indians had crossed here for ages past. The trail was worn deep and smooth. Lush grass and flowers flanked it on either side, slanting up the silt and rubble to the very edge of steeply inclined walls marked by narrow ledges and perilous trails used only by mountain sheep and goats.

There was a beauty here which struck them all, especially the girl. A pass! A way over high obstacles—a means of reaching something new beyond! The thought thrilled her. Tensleep! What did the name signify? Perhaps Slick Voss or Tombstone would know. She would ask them. But those two were up ahead, trotting their horses forward, drawing farther away. She sensed a new sensation in the high, thin air. Faint, but clear, on her ears came the bawling of many cattle, all but cut off by the granite walls ahead.

Tombstone and Slick checked their mounts and looked down from Tensleep's western end. Cattle, bunched and coming fast, were beginning to show just above timber line. Pointing the herd came a rider with a pack horse following close behind. Above the ceaseless bawling and the low rumble of many hoofs, other riders could be distinctly heard, their voices raised in shrill yipping cries as they worked the cattle up through the fringe of stunted timber just below.

The lips of Slick Voss grew thin; a wild fire blazed in his eyes. "Gus Thornbeck movin' beef!" he hissed. "Movin' beef off our range!"

Tombstone nodded, his rugged features emotionless as the grim rock walls behind. "Go back an' git the womenfolk in a safe place, Slick."

"What do you aim to do?" Slick demanded.

"I aim to stop that drive," said Tombstone calmly.

"An' you're sending me back?"

"I'm sending you back, amigo; we've women to think of. And there's Jim, a likely lad. If my luck runs out, Slick, Thornbeck's riders will shoot those cattle through here like buckshot through a smooth-bore. Be on your way."

"That's Thornbeck up ahead! Tombstone, do you know what you're askin' of me? Do you?"

"I know, Slick—it goes agin' your grain."

The young rider shook his head. There was anger in his eyes. "Tombstone, your medicine is mighty bitter to my taste. I'll be damned if I'll swallow it!"

Tombstone smiled. "Go back, Slick. Fate dealt this hand to me. Don't fight the bit. She may deal you in sooner than you think. Go back, amigo."

There was that about Tombstone's smile that caused the young rider to feel very much the boy, yet it softened the resentment in him and took the sting away. "So long, boss!" he muttered, and reined his horse around.

"I'll be seein' you!" Tombstone called, as he selected a spot to make his stand.

"Slick didn't know why I sent him back! Boy, if Slick was to kill Fern's husband, mean an' ornery as the critter is, that might put a damper on

their happiness. Yeah, the job is up to me."

Slowly the softness left his face and his eyes became cold and hard. Swinging the roan around, he carefully scrutinized the high rock walls, the narrow, flower-strewn saddle between. The bawling of cattle was louder now, and Tombstone walked his horse a little farther back into the narrower confines of the pass. A jutting shoulder caught his eye, and he reined the roan over and in behind. Ears pricked forward, the desert-bred roan stood motionless. Eyes narrowed, Tombstone waited. Would his luck hold? If not, then this was a pleasant spot to die.

For a fleeting moment his rugged features softened. The perfume of wild flowers was in the air. He wondered, had Fawn Hayspur ever ridden her pony to this pass and sat to dream a while? What would Kentucky do to her—a girl who knew nothing of civilization's gentler ways? He wanted Fawn unchanged. He loved her as she was. But life here was hard! Better if Fawn loved a man who wore no guns—a Kentucky gentleman.

Tombstone drew his right gun and hefted it with steady hand. This gun must clear the way for Slick and the nester's girl! He had watched those two with understanding eyes. Love would bloom like an opening flower, once the powder smoke had cleared away.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### STAMPEDE.

THE scent of flowers faded before the reek of sweating cattle on the move. The lead steer bawled just around the turn. Tombstone walked his horse out into the trail. Sight of him brought Gus Thornbeck up short. The man's

frigid eyes probed the emptiness of Tensleep Pass beyond, and his heavy, square-cut teeth parted in a wolfish smile. He did not speak; he did not nod his head in greeting. He waited, confident, while the trail herd with its pushing riders gathered pressure behind him.

Tombstone's voice carried like soft taps upon a bell: "Thornbeck, I'm not askin' to see your bill o' sale; I'm askin' to see your draw."

For a moment Thornbeck sat there, weighing Tombstone's words. Then his smile widened. "I'll show you both!" he said. His eyes flickered, and his right hand became a blur of movement.

Tombstone's roan felt the sudden lifting urge of rein and spur. It came up dancing on hind legs and shifted to one side. It snorted as Thornbeck's muzzle blast all but powder-burned its nose.

Thornbeck's wolfish smile became a sickly thing to see. The six-gun in his hairy, hamlike hand seemed strangely heavy now. He had difficulty holding it in line with his target on the dancing shifting roan. He fired again, but missed. Was he shooting blanks? There was a numbness in his side slowly changing to burning fire. Then his gun seemed to explode in his hand and fly away like a bird. He dropped his reins, and groped for his left-hand gun. But the roan came in, ears flat, teeth bared. Thornbeck felt the sickening impact upon his left leg, and his horse tipped over and crashed to the ground. Then it scrambled up and lunged away, leaving him broken, lying there. Again he groped for his left-hand gun, but found his holster empty. Then he looked up into Tombstone's watching eyes.

Tombstone's laugh was not a pretty thing to hear.

"Thornbeck, I could have plugged you between the eyes; instead, I drilled you through the kidneys. I want you should know what it means to suffer, before you die. Don't strain your eyes lookin' for your gun; I got your good one here in my hand. Now watch me spill your rustled herd—and think thinks over."

The pack horse that had been following Thornbeck stood to one side, watching. The lead steer stood uncertainly in the trail, watching. And Thornbeck lay there watching, as Tombstone pointed his roan at the lead steer. The roan was a cow horse, Thornbeck saw that. For with ears flat, teeth bared, the roan careened across the spear point of that herd. The lead steer lumbered about; the roan bit him on the rump, then nipped him on the hock. The whole lead turned, bellowing, and shouldered into the press behind. Tombstone's shrill cowboy yell was followed by crashing reports as he emptied Thornbeck's gun into the ground at their heels, then hurled it into the jam ahead.

Like a ripple traveling along water, excitement traveled back along the herd. In a moment, it became a sea of humping backs; a turbulent river flowing back down out of Tensleep Pass; a mighty flood that rolled down the rock-strewn slope and disappeared below timber line, irresistible as an avalanche. Out in the open, Tombstone checked his horse and watched them go.

NOT all of Thornbeck's riders had been swept back by that stampede. Instinct and cow cunning had prompted some of them to draw aside. Two had been riding "swing" just back of point. So Tombstone reasoned as he turned and headed back. And not too soon. A bullet fanned his face and spat-

tered against the rocks beyond. Tombstone laughed. His luck was running high.

An instant later, he turned limp in the saddle and slumped over the saddle horn. The roan balanced its rider there a moment, shifting in its stride, carrying him onward. Then Tombstone spilled slowly to the ground.

Slick Voss swore softly as he rode back to do Tombstone's bidding. Was he a coward? Why had he left Tombstone to face Thornbeck's guns alone? One man to stop a trail herd and hold back a cavalcade. Was it fear of him? Slick shook his head. "It's just his cussed smile, dang him!" Slick muttered, and let it go at that.

"What's wrong?" Fern Minter asked, as she saw the grim look on his face.

"Turn back," he told her shortly. "You women clear out of Tensleep Pass. Jim, you take 'em back an' find a place to hide."

"Turn back? Hide? Where's Tombstone? What does this all mean?" The girl's eyes were open wide.

"Gus Thornbeck is comin' through with a rustled herd! Tombstone aims to stop him! I gotta go back! Now you women clear out o' here."

Fern Minter's face turned deathly pale. "Gus Thornbeck?" Her voice was like an echo. Fern's mother began trembling as if with the cold. Jim Minter laid his hand on Slick's stirrup leather, and his eyes were pleading.

"Please loan me your rifle, mister! I'm going up with Tombstone."

"I'm going, too," Fern declared quickly.

"We'll all go!" Mrs. Minter stated firmly. "We've only got once to die."

"Damnation! What's got into you folks?" Slick demanded hotly.



It was then those first two shots rolled back upon their ears. For a brief interval no one moved. Then came another, and yet another. Slick Voss reined about, raked his horse with the spurs, and bolted back the way he had come. Jim Minter dropped the lead rope of his cow and followed fast on foot. Fern Minter slid to the ground and took after him. Mrs. Minter sat the old, bony nag alone. Mindful of Tombstone's stern words of caution regarding her broken arm, she sat there. But she thumped its tough old hide with her heels and started it forward in slow motion. With sad, thoughtful eyes, the bony cow viewed the situation, then ambled along behind.

Slick Voss knew the meaning of those six fast pistol shots: Tombstone was working on the herd. Tombstone was top dog—so far! He rounded a turn at full gallop and came upon Thornbeck lying in the trail. He reined up short, and sat for an instant looking down into the man's tortured eyes.

The gray pallor of slow death was on Thornbeck's brutal face; dust and blood matted the gorillalike hair on his chest; his right hand was shattered and useless; his thick legs were broken and twisted, limp as trampled grass.

"Water!" Thornbeck pleaded. "Gimme a drink before I die!"

Slick's yellow eyes were cold, merciless. "Go wrangle a drink in hell!" he hissed, and shook his reins.

He heard two quick rifle shots, and caught the direction from where they came. He saw Tombstone slump in his saddle and fall head-first to the ground, where he lay limp and motionless. The roan stopped short, turned, and walked back trailing its reins. A swift, hot flush of excitement surged through Slick like a tidal

wave. Tombstone lay out in the open, and Slick peered at him with speculating eyes. Thornbeck's wolf pack was gathering fast. To ride out there was suicide. One thought came to him! He must hold the pass regardless.

**S**WINGING his horse about, his eyes swept the high rock walls and found what he was looking for: a ledge he had marked before. He stuffed his pockets with rifle shells from his saddlebags and rode in close, dragging his rifle from its boot. He stood up, his boots planted in the saddle's seat. Reaching high, he laid his rifle on the narrow ledge. Then, with the wiry strength in his arms, he worked to drag his body up.

A bullet splashed against the rock wall just above his head. He felt the sting of lead splinters in his arms. He turned his head and saw a man crouching just inside the pass entrance. The man's hand was working the loading lever of his rifle; his next shot would not miss. With catlike swiftness, Slick Voss twisted his limber body, drew his six-gun and fired with cool deliberation, dangling by one hand from the ledge above. His keen eyes saw his bullet raise a tiny puff of dust on the man's shirt front. He holstered his gun and scrambled upward.

Rifle in hand, he worked his way higher up and forward, so that his view of the west slope widened. Tombstone had not moved. He spotted three saddled horses tied below the fringe of stunted trees. He marked some of Thornbeck's riders working their way upward from cover to cover as they came. On hands and knees now, Slick edged his way along. If he could reach a vantage spot he had in mind, he would show Thornbeck's men a thing or two.

A bullet kicked rock dust in his face and screamed off in ricochet. The echo of the rifle shot bounced back and forth between the towering peaks. Searching the far wall, Slick spotted a gray sombrero and caught the glint of a silver concho in the light. He swung his rifle around and carefully lined his sights. This man had gained a ledge higher than his own, and, before Slick could squeeze his trigger, he saw the muzzle blast. He felt the blow of the bullet as it ripped through his thigh. His sights wavered; the far wall flickered before his eyes; his left leg went numb. Dizziness seized him, but he shook it off and blinked his eyes. Again he lined his sights. If he missed—he thrust the thought aside. Gently he stroked the trigger. He saw the gray sombrero rise, the rifle slide, and the man kick off the ledge and follow his clattering rifle down.

He wiped the gathering sweat from his face and dragged himself along the ledge. Ah! So this was what Tombstone meant by the shock of lead! A sudden sickness that turned your blood to water—a numbness that made your hands grow cold. He steadied himself and placed a fresh shell in his magazine. A little farther now, and he'd be set to give them hell. But bullets were beginning to fly, leaving pockmarks on the granite wall. Thornbeck's men were a salty crew. They'd spotted him. Oh, well, just a little farther now.

Jim Minter was running fast. The roll of shots was in his ears. "I'm one o' Tombstone's crew! I gotta have a gun! I gotta have a gun!" He came upon Thornbeck in the trail, and paused.

Thornbeck raised his head and gasped: "Water! Water!"

"Where's your guns?" Jim Minter asked. "My boss shore did you in!"

"Water! Water!" Thornbeck's voice was a croaking sound.

THE boy raised his eyes, looked around, and ran to Thornbeck's gun. He snatched it up, then dropped it in disgust. Tombstone's bullet had ruined it. Thornbeck's mount and pack horse had crowded into a pocket to one side. His eye spotted a polished rifle stock, and he ran that way. He eased up to the frightened animal and managed to drag the rifle from its scabbard. Then began whimpering with disappointment. Its stock was broken and its lever twisted to one side. "You club-footed critter, why did you fall?" he muttered. "I gotta have a gun! I gotta git in that fight!"

He ran on and came upon Thornbeck's second six-gun trampled in the dust. His eyes brightened as he picked it up and wiped it tenderly. Then his face fell as he turned the barrel toward his eye and squinted in its cylinders. Every shell was spent! With gun in hand, he ran back to where Thornbeck lay. He was panting with eagerness as he bent over and began unbuckling the man's crossed gun belts.

"Water! Water!" Thornbeck's left hand clamped down on the boy's wrist and began pulling him down. Quick as a flash, Jim Minter swung the heavy gun against the man's wrist bones. There was a crunching, crackling sound, and his hand was free.

"That pays for maw's arm!" the boy said. "And this pays for me!" With cool deliberation, he laid the gun barrel along the side of Thornbeck's face in a slashing, stunning blow. He had watched his father gun whipped and knew just how the job was done. Tugging the two belts free, he laid them over his arm. As

he hurried on, he fumbled with the loading gate to freshen up his gun.

When he charged into the west entrance of Tensleep Pass he didn't see a thing, save Tombstone and the patient roan. A lump rose in his throat. He swallowed hard. "They've got Tombstone! Now I gotta be a man!" Bullets were in the air. One ripped the ragged hat from his head and cut off a lock of hair. "Whe-ew! That was close. I felt it bump my haid!"

He dropped to the ground, crawled to his hat, and looked all around. He couldn't see a thing to shoot at, so he began crawling out toward Tombstone. Gravel struck him in the face and he ducked his head. Eagerly he squinted down the slope. If he could just get his eye on one of them! A small boulder was just in front, and he wormed up to it cautiously. Folding his hat a couple of times, he slid it up and eased the long six-gun barrel upon it. With his head to one side, he waited.

Bullets were dusting the wall high up on his left; he could hear the lead spatter. The crackle of shots was all around him. The echoes were confusing. He made out a wisp of gray smoke following a muzzle blast. Gun in both hands, elbows on the ground, barrel cushioned on his hat, he closed his left eye and squinted. Suddenly a man raised up dead in his sights—a man crouched low and running forward. Jim Minter eased back on the hair trigger. The recoil of the gun filled him with wild exultation. He saw the man stumble forward.

"That pays for Tombstone Graves!" he muttered.

**FERN MINTER** found the going tough. She possessed only a small measure of her former strength, and it was soon spent. A ragged pain tore at her

side and slowed her down to a walk. The sight of Thornbeck sickened her, so that she turned her face aside as she passed him by. His lips were silent; he did not move, and she thought him dead. Tensleep! A means of reaching something new beyond! A way over high obstacles! Head up proudly, she walked into the rolling gun play just beyond, and saw Tombstone, lying among the trampled flowers. She went to him boldly and dropped upon her knees.

"Tombstone! Tombstone! What have they done to you, boy?" Her voice carried sympathy and tenderness enough to bring a man back from the grave, but Tombstone did not answer. She gathered his limp head into her lap and sat there looking far out over the western slope down into Paradise Valley. The view was lost, for tears made a blur of things.

Jim Minter raised his voice and called: "Sis! Oh, sis! Is Tombstone dead?"

Her throat too choked for words, Fern Minter nodded.

"Be you right sure? Put your hand over his heart!"

Stunned, for a time Thornbeck lay without movement; then little by little his body began to writhe. His cry for water was more feeble now. The nester's wife, who had suffered so much at Thornbeck's hand, heard that cry as the old horse brought her slowly along the trail. The horse stopped short some ten feet away. Its low-hung head stretched forward, and with dilated nostrils it sniffed the air.

At once bitter loathing filled her heart. Pent-up anguish filled her soul. All that she had suffered crashed into her mind, a chaotic violence of emotion. This hairy, gorillalike creature was to her the



embodiment of all the hellish brutality of ages past incarnated into human form, and spawned by the devil himself. Now it was a broken thing, squirming in the dust like a crippled worm. She thanked God that there were six-guns in the world and men like Tombstone.

Then gentleness came upon her—an inborn quality, stronger than hate, or fear, or loathing—and pity followed fast on its heels. The lines of her careworn face softened; compassion was in her eyes. For a moment she looked around uncertainly, the banging of gun shots pounding on her ears. The bony cow came up behind and began to graze. Outside the pack the cow carried, the five-gallon water bag was slung.

With utmost caution not to bump her broken arm, the woman slid to the ground. She went to the cow and removed the bag, nearly full of cold spring water. She carried it close beside the dying man and placed the mouthpiece to his lips. With her knee she forced the water upward from the bag and let it trickle down his throat.

Thornbeck heaved a deep, satisfied sigh. "It's made to order, Half-pint—we'll have another drink!"

Again the nester's wife placed the

mouthpiece to his lips, and watched him drink greedily. The nester's wife—a widow now—a refugee driven from the public domain.

"Do you know who this is?" she asked gently.

"You're a man after my own heart, Half-pint. You shore have got a brain," Thornbeck muttered thickly.

She shook him with her one good hand. "Wake up, man! You're dying! It's high time you made your peace with God!"

He laughed, his massive hairy chest heaving up and down. "It's made to order, Half-pint! We'll crack the safe and take the cattle, too! We'll shoot those riders of Rawhide plumb to hell—an' halfway back ag'in!" He clutched at her with broken, bleeding hands. Suddenly he was dead.

The woman slowly drew away, gathering up the water bag. Those gunshots seemed less frequent now, as if Hate had had its way. Crying softly, she trudged onward, bent sidewise by the heavy water bag. There would be dead and dying up ahead, but she must be very careful of her arm. Tombstone would be disappointed in her if she broke those bones anew.

To be concluded in next week's issue.

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*A New Serial, "CANYON RATTLERS," by ELI COLTER,*

*Begins in Next Week's Issue.*

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#### LOST SOIL

**A**CCORDING to a recent report by one who has studied soil conditions, enough of America's soil has been lost through erosion to supply two million farmers with one hundred acres. This has been due to incorrect farming practices. Lost soil now lies at the bottom of bays, rivers and oceans.



# Bull Creek Camp

By C. L. DOUGLAS

**I**N the genesis of many frontier towns scattered over the west and northwest of Texas, the troops of Uncle Sam's army, with their bluecoats and striped breeches, played a leading rôle.

Life for the lads in the ranks—many of them farm boys from the East and North—wasn't quite as simple as for the frontiersman born and bred to the wild, hard ways of a raw new country, but they filled a particular corner in the general scene.

For a long period during the early '70s, the Federal garrisons stood as a buffer between marauding Indians and such frontier villages as Concho, Fort Griffith, Jacksboro, Belknap and Fort Davis, and though the troopers entered into the social and

civic activities of the communities, it wasn't all a matter of dress parade and routine guard duty.

These bluecoats, on sorties out from their home bases, engaged in many sporadic skirmishes with raiding Kiowas and Comanches, and not infrequently they left on the Texas plains some sizable splotches of blood—and once they even drank it.

The story of that unusual incident has remained buried for nearly sixty years in the files of the San Marcos Free Press, where it was told in the form of a letter from a young lieutenant who took part in the affair. It is retold here for the purpose of illustrating some of the hardships endured by the garrisons of frontier towns.

Turn back the years to July of 1887.

Rumors had been circulated for days in the village of Concho that a large party of hostile Indians was abroad on the plains to the northwest, stealing stock and killing game. The commandant at the post was frankly skeptical, for the Indians had given little trouble for more than a year, but he knew that an investigation was expected.

Accordingly, he called before him Captain Nicholas Nolan and Lieutenant Charles L. Cooper, of the Tenth Cavalry.

"You will prepare for a two month's scout over the area between here and the Double Lakes," he said, his right forefinger tracing a map. "I would suggest that you establish a supply camp on Bull Creek—that's about one hundred and forty miles northeast of here—and operate with that as a base. I doubt you'll find Indians, but I want you to see."

The party, two officers and sixty men, rode out from Fort Concho on July 10th, bound for Bull Creek.

It was a hot, dry season. A broiling sun scorched the prairies, and a searing mid-summer wind soughed through the clumps of buffalo grass. During the past two months, there had been no rain, and little water was available—the canteens for the men, a few chance alkali pools for the horses—and it was a tired, thirsty group of men and beasts that arrived at Bull Creek seven days later.

Camped on the banks of that stream the detachment found a party of twenty-eight buffalo hunters who verified the story of Indian activities. The hunters, who had with them a Mexican guide named José, said they had banded together to track down raiders who had been running away stock, and

that even then, they were preparing to continue their scout.

Captain Nolan proposed that both parties cooperate. He established a base camp and then, on July 19th, started his maneuvers, taking with him his lieutenants, forty-two troopers and twenty-one hunters.

After marching for several days with the water supply almost at a minimum, the expedition reached Double Lake, but here the water was found to be so impregnated with alkali that it was fit for neither man nor animal. Obviously, something had to be done, and on July 26th, Nolan ordered his detail to rest while José and a few picked men rode seventeen miles west to Dry Lake in search of water.

**N**EXT day the party returned to report that, although no moisture was in evidence, they had sighted about forty Indians traveling northward, killing game as they went. Evidently the redskins did not suspect the troops.

Nolan's men saddled immediately and took the trail. They followed until dark, then made a "dry" camp—no water for either troops or horses. Next day they again took the trail and followed until nightfall. Again they made a "dry" camp, and to add to difficulties two men were down from sunstroke suffered during the day.

That was quite enough to worry Nolan, but there was something worse. The party, having been intent on the Indian trail, had lost its bearings.

"Nothing to do but let the Indians go," the captain told Lieutenant Cooper. "We've been two days without water, and we've got to find it. Some of the men are in bad shape."



At dawn on the 29th, the march was resumed, in quest of water now, instead of Indians, and by mid-morning three of the men were unable to sit their saddles.

Nolan tried to keep the expedition intact and at the same time continue the trek, with the result that only a few miles were covered before dusk, and another "dry" camp.

Forced marches under that blistering sun were bad enough—but three days without water! Tongues were beginning to swell, parched lips were beginning to crack. More than once during the heat-scourged day some of the men had looked ahead to see the cool sparkle of a lake on the surface of the plain, but each time it developed that their bloodshot eyes had seen only mirage—adding the torture of imagination to that of reality.

That night the strongest men, eight of them, were loaded with all the empty canteens and started on a search for a water hole, and, when they failed to reappear in the morning, the main party saddled and rode out to find them.

The quest was in vain, and during the day more of the thirst-tortured soldiers dropped from the line of march, and now no effort was made to rally them. Those who could still move forward were intent upon only one thing—water—and when camp was made that night, at the end of the fourth waterless day, only eighteen men, two officers and one hunter were left.

Although the pack mules carried plenty of food, the men now found themselves confronted with the danger of starvation. With their tongues and throats swelling more and more, and without enough saliva in their mouths to permit them to swallow, the troopers couldn't even

take food. They could only look at it—another source of torture.

"I found a few grains of brown sugar in one of my pockets," said Lieutenant Cooper, when he later wrote his description of the experience, "but when I placed them in my mouth I found that my tongue was so dry the grains wouldn't even melt."

On the morning of the fifth waterless day, Captain Nolan decided to try for Double Lake, but the expedition had not traveled a mile before one of the horses, already afflicted with "blind staggers," stumbled and fell dead. This gave Lieutenant Cooper an idea.

"Slit its throat," he ordered, more by sign than speech.

A cavalryman drew his saber, and, as it cut through the animal's neck, Cooper caught the blood in a container. Then he rationed it out to the men of the command.

The men drank heartily of the steaming blood and it helped for a while, but there hadn't been enough.

**T**HE men are grumbling—going crazy," the lieutenant told the captain. "We've got to kill another horse."

But that was no loss—now. The animals were dropping over, one by one, and, as each went down, a cavalryman was at its throat with a saber. Lieutenant Cooper and Captain Nolan could no longer control the men.

Like maniacs they fought over the dead animals. A few, less crazed than the others, tried to soak hard-tack in the blood of a pack mule but, as Cooper testified later, they almost choked when they attempted to swallow it.

As night came on Cooper made a brief talk, outlining a plan. He pro-

posed that the remaining horses be driven as far as they could go, then slaughtered for blood, as blood might be required. He ordered that all rations and equipment be abandoned—everything but rifles and revolvers.

The men, somewhat refreshed by the horse and mule blood, agreed, but before midnight something occurred to disrupt the lieutenant's plan. The horses had suffered as much as the men, and the blood must have been infected—for the men began showing the same "blind staggers" symptoms noticed in the animals.

By one a. m. two of the troopers were dead, and an hour later two more. They were buried on the spot, and shortly before dawn the expedition hopelessly broke camp and pushed forward—afoot.

There was not a man who entertained any hope of coming out alive.

Within five miles of the last camp, the party came across what ap-

peared to be an old wagon trail. A few hours later, with the aid of providence and blind chance, the detachment staggered into Double Lake!

And even the alkali water, according to some of the survivors, was as good as any champagne that ever spouted out of a bottle.

At Double Lake the main party found most of the stragglers who had dropped out during the march—all but one of the hunters, who had died of thirst before gaining back to the alkali water hole.

Captain Nolan and his lieutenant ticked off their casualties—four troopers, one hunter, twenty-three government horses, and four pack mules—no Indians accounted for.

The party rested, then headed for the frontier town of Fort Concho, and once started, it lost no time.

There would be beer in the bars of Concho.

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*Coming Next Week, "CCC COYOTES," by SETH RANGER.*

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### HENS GROWING COMPLEXES

**T**HE lowly hen, the most innocuous amongst the barnyard livestock, is rapidly becoming a creature of neurosis and complexes. No longer can a hen be depended upon to cluck, lay eggs, or mother a family of chicks. Just as the modern woman of to-day smokes, divides her skirts, and enjoys many of the recreations which a few years ago were monopolized by the male, so the hen is looking up to the rooster and imitating his mannerisms. Since imitation is said to be the sincerest form of flattery, the human male and the fowl male should be pleased. But experience has proved that the human male is disgruntled over the change in his world, and it is possible that the fowl male feels much the same. For now it has been reported, from more than one barnyard, that the hen which has been quietly laying eggs, setting, and mothering her chicks, is now beginning to crow. Wattles have grown on the pullet of one or two summers, and the family is awakened in the morning by a feminine crow, which is a very good imitation of the former cock of the walk. What it is that these unusual hens have to crow about is a mystery. But what does a rooster crow over? Superiority? Perhaps, but that day, too, is passing.

# A MAN'S JOB

By EUGENE R. DUTCHER

Author of "The Quicksand Trail," etc.



**R**OY NAYLOR sat cross-legged before the little fire, staring solemnly into the flames. The wavering light reached out into the dark forest, but failed to reveal the figure coming slowly toward the tiny tongue of flame. It was not the sort of fire a hunted man would build, yet in the hunch of Naylor's shoulders was written desperation, held under control because of steady nerves. He watched the yellow flames, unaware that eyes out in

the forest bored into his broad back. He heard nothing but the small voice of a breeze in leaves and the crackling of the fire! The setter dog at Naylor's side lay still, his snoot between forepaws. The wind was blowing in the wrong direction to carry the warning of a stranger's approach.

Naylor stroked the glossy head. "Hap, old fellow," he said, "you saw who bushwhacked your master. If you could only tell me what the killer looks like, it would help a heap. I can't bring Jay back for



you, but we've just got to get back that money. Mom Evans will sure lose everything if we don't, and she's already been hurt enough, old fellow."

Naylor spoke low, steady. There was no trembling of his firm lips as there had been six days ago when he had found Jay Ferns, "Mom" Evans's foreman, dead in West Pass and he realized the money from the beef shipment was gone. Hap had lain beside his master's body, badly beaten, and in the trail dust Jay had written two words, "Lives Hana-ville." That was the town from where Ferns had shipped Mom Evans's beef.

Naylor tossed wood into the fire. He could not forget the look of Mom Evans, sitting in the porch rocker, the stitches she dropped in her knitting the only sign to tell that her eyes were none too clear. She knew that the loss of that money meant no winter feed. Beef would starve. There would be no trail herd next year, no meeting the bank's demands. The Cross T would go under.

Perhaps it was the yellow light that made Naylor's eyes look that way. He could not remember his own mother—just Mom Evans scrubbing his ears, buying his first pair of boots. He felt he had not repaid her very well for all those years of care. He should have insisted on going with the trail herd himself. At least, he could have taken Jay Ferns's place there in West Pass. Naylor's eyes narrowed as he remembered how the foreman's body had been stripped of every valuable. His watch was gone—an old silver timepiece. Even his pockets had been turned out as the killer had looked for loose change.

"The man we're after is money mad, Hap," Naylor said thought-

fully. "Money mad, and he lives somewhere around here. Not much to go on, old fellow."

THE setter's long hairy tail thumped weakly once. This voice did not warm him inside as his master's did.

Out in the timber, the figure stood a moment longer, undecided, hearing the murmuring voice, but catching no word. Then the breeze swung abruptly, and Hap's head jerked erect. Deep inside him, ominous growls started rumbling.

"Steady," Naylor soothed. "That coyote's not bothering you."

It didn't even occur to him that the prowling thing might be human. Hap just did not greet men this way. He might wag a friendly tail, or at worst ignore them completely after warning of their approach with lifted ears, but never with hackles straight up and bared fangs as now.

Naylor was reaching a quieting hand toward Hap when a twig snapped loudly close behind him. He whirled up, twisting. Only vaguely did he glimpse the shadowy form, before the dog, snarling horribly, started his charge.

"Down, Hap. No, boy." Naylor's open palm struck hard the setter's hurtling body, deflecting the arrowlike flight, causing the clashing teeth to miss. Before Hap could charge again, Naylor had him firmly by the loose hide of his neck.

"Golly sakes!" said a very small, trembling voice, trying to sound brave. "Ain't your dog got no manners, mister?" Into the full glow of the fire stepped a small boy, barefooted, bareheaded. Under one arm, he held tightly a wild-eyed, pot bellied pup. A gunny sack was slung over his slender shoulder. Naylor said nothing. He knew how Hap loved children. Why, then, had the

dog sought to tear the boy's throat? There was only one answer. On the lad's clothing was a scent that enraged Hap; made of him the killing animal he must have been when he fought to protect Jay Fern's fallen body—fought until clubbed unconscious. Naylor moistened his dry lips. The man who had stolen Mom Evans's money had touched this boy. He was sure of it. Nothing but the smell of that man could possibly affect the usually docile Hap this way.

"Steady down, old fellow." Naylor was none too steady himself. "You don't want to chew up our visitor now, do you?"

Hap sniffed suspiciously at the boy's tattered overalls, plainly sensing that he had made some sort of mistake, yet showing fangs at the scent he detected.

"I reckon he thought you were somebody else." Naylor released Hap who backed watchfully off.

"Yeah." The boy dropped the guny sack and passed his hand across his freckled face. "I seen your fire and thought I'd warm up a bit. Don't mind, huh?"

"Nope. Wood's cheap. What brings you up here in the mountains alone, anyhow?" Naylor spoke softly as if he feared he might frighten this strange young one back into the forest.

One small hand managed to keep a hold on the pup's hind leg, while the other brought a badly squashed apple pie from the gunny sack. "Me and Pinky is on the move," he said matter-of-factly. "We're a-hunting us a new family. The dad we got now ain't so hot. My real dad's dead, and so is mom." The small throat had sudden trouble swallowing a bit of pie.

Naylor knew that feeling of being all alone, without a father or mother.

He knew how good it was to find somebody who cared, somebody like Mom Evans.

THE boy's blue eyes were carefully taking him in. "I guess," the boy decided abruptly, "you'll do for a dad. You're plenty big to look out for a fellow, all right."

Naylor did not even feel like smiling. This young one was very serious. "Maybe you had better hold off making a decision," he suggested, "until you and me talk it over with this gent you're living with." Naylor was eager to start along the lad's back trail.

The twelve-year-old boy considered gravely. "Old man Crone will sure give me an awful whaling for running off again," he said, "but I guess it'll be worth it to get you for my dad. Say, you can call me Dimp. My mom named me Dimples. Ain't that awful? But pop, he wouldn't stand for it. Dimp ain't so bad, do you think?"

"It's swell." Already Naylor was kicking dirt over the fire.

They rode down out of the tall pine country, with Dimp chattering like a young jaybird in Naylor's arms. "Gee, this is sure going to be swell." He grinned. "I got a mom all picked out for us, too. You'll like her a lot. Old Crone thinks she belongs to him, but she don't really. You and me can take her away from him easy."

Naylor should have been warned by this startling speech, but his thoughts were ahead with Hap—zig-zagging through the sage. How long would it be before the setter cut the trail of Ferns's murderer? Would it lead him to this Crone whom Dimp had mentioned or to some one else? How could he regain the stolen money without proof?

The red manzanita grew sparser now; brown grass appeared; cattle moved away at their approach. With the passing miles, Hap became more and more excited. Naylor grew tense. He knew the dog was repeatedly getting the hated scent. That meant this was the murderer's home range.

"Gee," Dimp grunted, "you're squeezing me and Pinky pretty tight. We can't breathe so good." They topped a knoll, and the boy was pointing. "Them lights is Crone's ranch," he informed. "Hey, where's your dog going!"

Hap, deep growls rumbling inside him, rushed forward. "Heel, boy! Heel!" Naylor commanded. But for the first time in his life, the setter refused to obey. Like a dissolving white cloud, the dog vanished in the night. Fiercely Naylor kicked in the spurs, but, when he pulled rein in the yard, Hap was nowhere in sight. Laughter came from the low bunk house. Light shone through cracks in the barn as some one worked inside.

A man's shadow crossed the front window of the ranch house. Naylor sat on his saddle, alert to every movement, every sound. Any one on this ranch could have left his scent on Dimp's clothing. He needed Hap badly now. Why the devil had the dog turned wolf and gone prowling to make his own kill? When the murderer recognized Hap, Naylor knew he could expect a quick slug in the back, just as Ferns had gotten.

**T**HE front door was jerked violently open, and for an instant a man stool silhouetted there, shaggy-haired, round, with powerful shoulders, thick about the middle. Naylor heard Dimp's breathing start coming hard and fast like a fright-

ened young animal. So this was Crone.

The man recognized Dimp and then reached inside the door. He came striding forward, a leather razor strop gripped in a knotty fist.

"So you found my brat, eh, stranger?" His square jaw snapped as if on tight hinges. "Well, I'll give him something to dream about. He's always running off. Hand him down here."

But Naylor lowered Dimp on the far side, and Crone found a six-foot man standing before him. "I wouldn't be too tough on the kid." Naylor's voice was deceptively mild. "Not if I was you."

"But you ain't me." Crone's big left arm rose to brush Naylor aside, only to find his arm gripped by fingers that seemed full of electricity. Crone's bluster abruptly faded. He grew deadly calm. The strop slipped to the ground, allowing his thick fingers to spread wide over his holster.

Naylor kept listening, hoping for Hap's return even as he stepped back. This was no matter for guns, yet he realized Crone meant it to be, and he started watching the red eyes for the tightening of lids that comes unconsciously in the same second with the draw. Neither man heard the approaching horse, its hoofs deadened in the deep dust, until a girl spoke.

"Good evening," she said. "Oh, there you are, Dimp. We missed you at school the last two days."

She rode into the light, coming from the open door. Slipping to the ground, she stood smiling at the men, a little tensely, Naylor thought, as if she realized fully the deadliness of the scene.

Dimp's blue eyes looked reproachfully at his teacher. "Gee, Miss Lee," he said. "I sure never thought you'd



snitch on me. Now I'll catch heck for playing hooky."

"But, Dimp, I thought you were sick." She was plainly sorry that she had given him away.

Naylor watched Crone's blunt fingers drop possessively on the girl's shoulder.

"Don't want to take Dimp too serious, Joan," he chuckled. "You know how kids are. Always feeling sorry for themselves."

Joan Lee tried to smile, but even a less keen eye than Naylor's would have seen how she quivered under the man's touch.

"The trail's awfully dusty," she suggested. "Would you mind getting me a drink, Mr. Crone, before I start back? I just wanted to make sure Dimp was all right."

"Sure thing, Joan, but there ain't no reason to hurry off." Crone's eyes turned on Naylor and went dead. "I reckon, stranger," he grunted, "you'd best be moving on. This ain't no road house." He strode off, and Dimp started tugging Naylor's sleeve.

**T**HAT'S her," he whispered excitedly. Joan must have heard every word. "She's the girl we're going to take away from Crone. Miss Lee, this here is Roy Naylor. Gosh, he's swell, and I'm going to have him for my dad if we can ditch old Crone. Gee, you and him will sure make me a swell family. Here, I'll tie your horse." Eagerly Dimp took the reins from Joan, and his bare feet padded away toward the hitch rack.

Naylor, expecting the girl to blush hotly, found, instead, her steady eyes, dark like her hair, studying him carefully.

"You would be good to him," she decided abruptly. "Oh, if you will only take Dimp away from that—

that man." Her glance went to the open door. Naylor saw fear in her every move, fear for her own safety as well as the boy's. "You mustn't refuse, not without listening to me," she whispered. "For months I've let Crone paw me for Dimp's sake. He knows Dimp tells me everything that happens to him, and it has made Crone a little easier on the child. But now he is getting out of hand." Joan's young cheeks colored. "The job's too big for me. I—I think the man's a little mad. You've just got to take Dimp away."

Naylor watched the pulse beating wildly in her throat. He felt the coldness of her small hand through his sleeve. It seemed as if they had known each other a very long while.

Naylor had an impulse to tell her he'd take both her and Dimp away. He wanted to see that haunted look leave her eyes. Then he remembered a little gray-haired old lady in a rocking-chair. Mom Evans had first claim on him. She must come first—always.

"Miss Lee," he found himself saying stiffly, "I came here hunting a man. If that man turned out to be Crone, good. If not, well, I'm sorry, mighty sorry."

Joan stepped back, surprise replaced by scorn. "Vengeance," she said. "You'd let vengeance stop you from saving that child." She waved toward Dimp, holding a bucket for her horse from which to drink.

"Not vengeance." Suddenly it seemed very important to Naylor that this girl understand his grim predicament. He talked low and fast. Joan listened. She watched the working of his strong young face.

"So you see," he finished, "the jam I'm in. Jay Ferns's killer may be anybody on the place. The dog could point him out for me, but Hap's gone hunting on his own."

Joan nodded. Her eyes were bright, and a little moist. "You love Mom Evans very much, don't you?" she said softly. "Of course, you realize that to recover that money means outlawing yourself? Just because a dog hates a man's scent isn't proof enough of guilt for the law." She was holding out her hand. "I'm glad you told me. Naturally, Dimp and I won't ask any help of you now. I suppose it's terrible for me to wish death on any man, but I—I hope Crone is the man you're looking for. The only reason he ever adopted Dimp was to secure the hundred and fifty a month Dimp's father left in a trust fund. Crone's money mad."

"Money mad!" Naylor's fingers gripped Joan's till they hurt. He recalled Ferns's turned-out pockets, the stolen watch of little value. "Joan," he asked, "has Crone been away in the last ten days?"

SHE looked up at him, suddenly frightened at what she saw. "Yes," she whispered. "He only returned four days ago. You think he—"

Naylor refused to heed the tiny voice within him insisting that he might be about to make a grave mistake, that he should wait until Hap positively identified Ferns's killer.

"It's Crone all right," Naylor said. "Everything fits. Joan, you and Dimp better stay out here." Naylor strode toward the door when the quiet was broken by a hungry whine out behind the house. Naylor leaped forward as the whine rose higher and higher to break abruptly into raging, snarling barks. Out there Hap charged Ferns's murderer! A gun thundered as Naylor reached the front corner. He raced along the side of the building, drawing as he went. He brought up short. On

the ground, halfway between the barn and the house, Hap lay very still, his glossy white coat showing an ugly stain in the starlight. No one was in sight. Then the barn door was flung open, and a man ran out through the shafts of light. Boots pounded as the bunk house emptied out excited men. Naylor, down on a knee beside Hap, waited, watchful, his mind clicking clear and fast. Those in the bunk house were eliminated. The door had been in his view constantly.

Then Crone stepped from the back door, and Naylor stood slowly up. He wished Joan wasn't standing there, holding Dimp close. Why didn't she take the boy away? Had Naylor glanced at the scar-faced man who had come from the barn, he would have noticed the furtive little eyes boring hard into him.

"Somebody," Naylor said quietly, "shot my dog." He thought he stared straight at Crone and was startled when the man with the scarred face snarled:

"What the devil you glaring at me for, fella?" His hooked nose twitched. His little eyes peeked out from under shaggy brows, and nervous hands kept twitching over double guns. "Me, I was in the barn all the time, you hear! I was minding my own business. You ain't got no call to pick on me."

Unmistakable fear and hate were plain on the scarred face. Naylor's eyes grew masked. This man had no reason to fear him save one—a guilty conscience.

Without a word Naylor turned, and, gathering Hap in his arms, strode for the bunk house. He found Joan moving close at his side.

"You—you think Teet Durst, the scar-faced man killed your friend—instead of Crone?" she murmured, half reading his thoughts.

Naylor nodded. "This Durst has no other reason to fear me like he does unless he recognized Hap and knows I'm after him. Sorry, Joan. I was hoping it would be Crone."

She tried to smile up at him. "It was asking too much to have it turn out that way," she said. "Don't worry about Dimp and me. We'll manage all right."

"There's still a chance it's Crone." Naylor tried to sound hopeful. "At least, I'm waiting till I'm sure."

**B**UT you can't wait." She spoke low for the punchers were crowding up. "If Durst is guilty, he'll shoot you in the back at the first opportunity. I——" She stopped, for Naylor's lips were smiling.

Joan had given him the answer to his problem. He'd give Durst and Crone rope, and the one who tried to shoot him would be admitting his guilt. Naylor pushed open the bunk-house door with his shoulder.

"Take Dimp and get off the ranch if you can," he muttered as Crone strode near. "At least, stay in the house." For an instant, his eyes were very near hers. "Nobody but Mom Evans," he said, "could make me leave you two this way, Joan. You know that?"

"I do, Roy." Her misty eyes followed his big stiff shoulders through the opening. Then she turned and ran swiftly toward the ranch building, with Dimp at her heels.

The men trooped silently in. Naylor noticed that Durst was not among them. Perhaps the man had returned to his unfinished work in the barn. Perhaps he was skulking outside, waiting for a chance to kill. Crone stood, his hands on broad hips, plainly angered at the way Joan had taken up with the stranger, but con-

trolling his anger to a smoldering rage.

"Patch up your dog and get the devil off my ranch," he grunted, "and see you do it right sudden. You've caused enough trouble around here."

As Crone bull-moosed out, a red-headed puncher, Buckly, entered.

"Here's some hot water and bandage," he offered. "Figured you'd want it for your pooch if he ain't dead."

"Thanks." Naylor knelt by Hap. The rest of the outfit stood silent, a little suspicious. "Sure funny how this jigger Durst flew off the handle like he done," Naylor mused. "I didn't accuse him of shooting my dog. He been with the outfit long?"

"Yeah." Buckly rolled a smoke. "Two-three years. Durst is one of them quiet jiggers, but he ain't never acted gun-hungry like he done with you. He's been away for a spell, just come back two days ago. Maybe his girl give him the air." The red-head's grin faded when a puncher said:

"Maybe, Buckly, you're talking too much. This stranger wears only one gun, but I've seen bad men what didn't pack two."

Buckly looked foolish for a moment, then his young eyes grew very hard. "Maybe," he said, "you're right."

Naylor knew he must count these men, who ignored him now, as enemies when trouble broke. They would back one of the outfit against a stranger.

He worked over the unconscious Hap, but never did his eyes quite leave the single window—waiting—waiting for a slug to come crashing through the pane. Strain showed only in squinty eyes and bunched jowls, while steady fingers applied bandages to Hap's shoulder. It wasn't a bad wound. Then came a



movement beyond the dirty glass, just a vague blur in the night; an indistinguishable face cautiously peered in. Naylor worked steadily on, his toes gripping the boot soles until they ached, every muscle drawn flat against bone. His man had come. Was it Crone or Durst crouching there in the darkness? It must be Crone. Inside him Naylor kept repeating the name as if that could make things turn out as he wanted them to. The face at the window faded, then reappeared, plainer, nearer. Stars gleamed on blue metal—gun metal.

**N**AYLOR started counting seconds. "One, two." The time it would take the killer to steady the barrel. "Three, four." Hammer back, finger squeezing. "Five!" Naylor hurled himself flat to the floor.

A flash like lightning, crashing glass—and black gun smoke billowed into the bunk house. Naylor was scrambling forward on hands and knees, coming up, drawing with the right; left reaching for the door. Glass still showered through the air when he jerked the door wide open and plunged out behind a probing .45. It was bad coming from the light into the dark. He saw a moving shadow just turning the corner of the bunk house. Naylor was fast after it when three figures rushed from the ranch building. Three! Dimp, Joan holding a lamp above her head, and Crone, his puffy face showing red!

Naylor kept going, but something was gone out of his charge, and he had to keep thinking hard of Mom Evans. He followed Durst's darting, diving form, passed the barn, and went into the willows lining the creek. Behind them the punchers were swarming over the yard, their

hoarse shouts coming from all directions.

Twice in open spots Naylor's .45 rose toward the leaping back ahead, but the hammer did not fall.

"Draw up, Durst," he called, "or I'll let you have it where you did Jay Ferns. Come around, bushwhacker. I want that money you stole."

Naylor never knew quite what happened. A root must have caught Durst's boot, for the man half turned, fell, arms flaying wildly. Momentum shot Naylor forward, and the two were down in a tangle of branches, legs and arms. Suddenly Durst stopped struggling. The scar showed white along his jaw.

"Wait," he managed as Naylor's fingers relaxed their hold on his throat. "What you mean I bushwhacked somebody? Ain't you a U. S. marshal? Ain't you after me for helping my kid brother bust out the pen? The kid never done that bank job. He was innocent."

Naylor looked long into the small eyes and knew positively that no lies were coming from the man's quivering lips.

"I reckon," he said, "you and me both made mistakes." He helped Durst to his feet. The man seemed stunned.

"Gosh," he said. "I sure figured you was the law the way you acted. Mighty sorry about taking a shot at you in the bunk house, but I didn't plug your dog, honest." He shuddered. "Jail! Gosh! It gives me the creeps. I—I lost my head."

Naylor was staring off into the willows that hid the ranch house. "You'd better get out of here," he suggested, "because the law will be coming here right soon."

"Yeah," Durst agreed eagerly. "I got me a horse staked out." Words of thanks bubbled to his lips and

died. Durst recognized the look on the stern face. Somebody was about to die. "Yeah," he repeated softly and slipped silently away.

**M**ETHODICALLY Naylor blew the dust and leaves from his still smoking gun, gathered in his fall. He worked the action once. It was too dark for him to see the twig that the moving cylinder had pulled in, wedging it between cylinder and frame. The next time a thumb fell on the hammer, it would not rise.

Steadily Naylor moved through the willows. He had his chance now to make things right for Joan and Dimp and Mom Evans, too. He must not bungle the job. It was not so easy deliberately heading oneself toward outlawry after a fellow had met a girl like Joan.

Naylor drew back into shadows as red-headed Buckley charged by him. The others were fanned out all about the ranch, looking for him. Nothing he could say would ever convince them of Crone's guilt.

Clinging to the side of the barn, Naylor moved in on the house unseen. Boards creaked as he stepped to the porch. Through a window, Naylor scanned the room: big chairs, massive table, thick rugs. Two ornamental lamps hung from beams. A huge rock fireplace with a holstered gun hanging from a deer antler—a sport rifle in a corner, trophies of the hunt and—Crone.

The man leaned in the doorway leading into the hall, thoughtfully running his blunt fingers through shaggy hair. No one else was in sight. Joan must have left, Naylor thought. He swung open the door and glided in, the harmless .45 thrust before him.

Crone grunted as if from an unexpected blow. His eyes widened,

then narrowed until the heavy pouches under them puckered.

"Well," he growled, shoulders humping forward. "Well!" It was plain that he realized what was coming. "Thought I told you to get off my ranch."

With these words, there was a stir on Naylor's right. He dared not take his eyes from Crone, but a faint gasp told him Joan stood there. Concealed in one of the massive armchairs, facing the fire, she had been unnoticed.

"Just stay right where you are, Joan," Naylor said with a drawl. "Just stand fast. We'll be careful with our lead, eh, Crone? It ought to be as easy to shoot a man in the chest as to plug him in the back—like you did Jay Ferns in West Pass. But first I want that money you stole."

"Don't know what you're talking about." But Crone did know. Guilt rushed over his face in a wave of blood.

Instinct told Naylor that Crone was waiting for something or some one. Perhaps Buckley or one of the others were due here. His thumb rested firmly on the hammer, ready to draw it back. Then out of the hall behind Crone, on silent bare feet, came Dimp.

The boy had not as yet seen Naylor when Crone's left arm scooped him up, right hand driving gunward.

Naylor's thumb slipped off the hammer as it stubbornly refused to cock.

Dimp's flying leg struck up Crone's gun, sending the first slug rushing high. Like a savage little animal, he sank his teeth into Crone's arm, fists flaying, feet kicking. Joan cried out, and Naylor, blood draining from his face, stood fighting the hammer of his jammed six-gun. Strange how his eyes seemed to see the whole

room at once, how his ears heard every sound in that endless second. Joan, one hand before her as if to hold back the inevitable, the other gripping her throat until knuckles whitened! Crone's widening eyes as he realized that his enemy was helpless before him! The bellow of triumph as he hurled Dimp from him! The sound of the little body crashing against the wall! Shouts outside, coming nearer! All the while the black bore of Crone's .45 whipped toward him.

NAYLOR hurled his useless weapon as he pulled the heavy table toward him. Slugs tore into his shield.

Firing with either hand now, Crone circled, closed in. Naylor could hear him grunting with each step. Better to take it standing up than to crouch here like an animal waiting for lead to break over the edge of the table.

"Roy! Roy!" Joan had snatched the gun from the holster hanging on the deer antlers. Even as she called his name, she sent the .45 hurtling toward him. Hungrily Naylor snatched it out of the air. He came up, right hand steady, while the palm of the left smacked back the hammer once, twice, three times. He was aiming for speed, not accuracy. Four—five!

Crone, like a bewildered boxer under a shower of blows, shuddered, sagged back, jerked half around, then fell. The back door crashed open. Boots pounded in the hall, and gravel crunched as men ran toward the front door.

Naylor's hands fastened on Joan's shoulders. "Mom Evans's money," he said. "It's here somewhere. You'll find it? You'll see she gets it?"

"I will, Roy."

There was time for no more.

Into the smoke-filled room charged Buckley. He stared down on what had been Crone.

"So you plugged the boss," he snapped as angry faces crowded in behind him.

Naylor knew it was useless, but Joan stepped quickly forward. "It was self-defense," she protested. "I saw it."

"Self-defense don't go with us." Buckley was bitter-eyed. "This here jigger come looking for trouble. Well, he's going to get it sure enough."

Dimp, still a bit groggy from being manhandled, stood close to Joan, one grimy hand holding a watch to his ear.

"I can't hear if she's still ticking," he protested, "with everybody talking."

Naylor stared hard at the watch. "Where," he asked thinly, "did you get that?"

Dimp started guiltily. "I—well—I sort of snitched it off of Crone," he admitted. "But, gosh, he'd never miss it. Old man Crone had all kinds of jewelry. Want to see some, huh? Want to?"

Eagerly Dimp bounded to the fireplace. Grunting, he heaved up a hearthstone. "I seen Crone ditch stuff here lots of times when he didn't know I was around," he informed as every one stared down into a pit filled with rings, watches, sheafs of bills and heavy leather bags.

"That watch," Naylor said, "belonged to Jay Ferns. He was murdered for that money belt laying there."

"Yeah." Buckley's voice was small. He pointed. "That silver ring with the deer head belonged to Hinkly. He got bushwhacked six months back; robbed. Gosh, the boss, huh?"

I always knowed he loved money, but I didn't guess he was that bad. Sort of crazy, I reckon. Crone got your pal, too, huh? Gee, I wonder how many others!"

Naylor led Joan from the house and did not answer. As they strolled across the yard, it did not seem at all strange to either of them that his arm should be about her waist or that her head rested lightly against his shoulder.

"We'll adopt Dimp," he said gently, as if everything that should

have been said before had already been said.

Joan nodded. "We will, Roy." Her hand found his at her waist, while Dimp watched them from the bunk-house doorway where he had gone to look for Pinky.

Dimp sat between Hap and his pot-bellied puppy.

"Gee," he said, his eyes very blue and bright. "Ain't we got us a swell family now, Pinky? Ain't we, huh? And I betcha Mom Evans will be some grandma, too!"

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### PANNING THE RUINS

**N**EAR Dillon, Colorado, a roving prospector used his powers of deduction to good advantage. He panned the ruins of a saloon that had burned to the ground several years ago. The saloon flourished during the era when liquid refreshments were paid for in newly mined gold dust and nuggets. This dust had occasionally fallen to the floor boards and sifted through the cracks, and an accumulation of it, during many years, netted the prospector a considerable sum of money. A few nuggets were found also, besides a number of articles of historic value, such as balls from cap and ball pistols.

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### AND THE BEAR CAME ON

**A** FARMER, Mr. Carl L. Addy, of Twin Falls, Idaho, chanced to fall upon a bear which had been wounded by some hunter's gun. Now, any one who has had experience with bears knows that a wounded bear is the most formidable enemy of all. When the bear charged, Mr. Addy fired his high-powered rifle point-blank, but the bear kept coming. The farmer dodged behind trees, firing his rifle at least fifteen times, every shot entering the animal's body. Finally, the bear came so close that the farmer was unable to use his rifle, and the bear lunged upon him. Mr. Addy still kept his head and a few seconds before this happened, pulled out his automatic pistol from his belt and fired six shots into the bear's ear. It was his last effort, and also his last cartridge. Fortunately, it was the last lunge the huge bear would ever make. He was dead at last. The valiant farmer, his clothing bloody and torn, was partially pinned under the animal, when friends appeared on the scene shortly after to drag him out.





## The Round-Up

**F**OLKS, you will remember that sometime ago Mr. H. P. Gassin, of New Brunswick, New Jersey, asked Mr. George Cory where he could buy some burros. Then Mr. Gassin remembered, after a while, that he hadn't inclosed his address, so he wrote to us again, and we forwarded his letter to Mr. Franklin. Because we think that there may be others interested in burros for the same reason that Mr. Gassin was, we are going to read you Mr. Franklin's letter to Mr. Gassin:

"DEAR MR. GASSIN: Regarding your question as to where you could buy some burros, I would suggest that you write to Mr. Shirley Wills, of Creede, Colorado. Mr. Wills is a reliable stockman, and, if the matter should be worth while, he could, undoubtedly, find whatever animals you wanted.

"As to price, I have not been informed recently, but they formerly ranged from ten dollars each for females, up to thirty dollars for the better types of Jacks. The expense

of shipping the burros East would perhaps constitute your chief problem, but, in that, too, Mr. Wills could probably advise you."

Now we just want to take a little time off to tell you hombres about what our Missing Department accomplishes now and then, and we want to advise you to write in any time you'd like to have us put an ad in for you. This service is entirely free of charge, in case there is any one with whom you'd like to get in touch. We really do find people, you know.

We've just had word from W. E. L. Harbour, of Ashland, Oregon, who had lost track of his son. We feel that there may be many fathers and mothers who would give anything in the world to know where some loved son or daughter is living out his or her span. Sometimes the errant traveler is longing just as much to find parents who, perhaps, moved from the old home site and left no forwarding address.

But we started out to tell you about W. E. L. Harbour. This is what he wrote us:

"DEAR BOSS: Have just received reliable information that W. Lloyd Harbour is alive, and prospecting in the mountains of California. Words cannot express my appreciation for your coöperation in the search for my missing son. I believe in the limitless power of God, and will ever pray for a special blessing on you and yours."

So boys and girls, men and women, think twice about those loved ones and send a word of cheer to them through the Missing Department of Western Story Magazine.

Perhaps all your friends and relatives are at home, and it may be that you would like to get away for a short time—you know that old saying of "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." So, if you are looking for a place to light, saddle up that broncho of yours, throw together a bundle of provisions, and start out. But, before you do any of these things, write to John North who conducts the "Where to Go and How to Get There" department. If you don't know where to go, he will tell you, and if you do know where to go, he will tell you the best way to get there.

And now we'll get to Mr. B. Bristol Green. Mr. Green, compared with the other writers, is a tenderfoot, because he's only been writing for us for a couple of years.

Mr. Green was born in Louisville, Kentucky. He speaks of Louisville as that staid old town that couldn't quite make up its mind what to do about the Civil War. He grew up where the *Courier Journal* ran second to the family Bible, and he got his first job on that paper, after graduating from high school. We have found that most all writers

have had some newspaper experience; it is a very good school to start in, if one is interested in writing.

The call of the West came not long after his newspaper job, and Green went to Denver to join the *Denver Republican*.

Then he got the mining fever and, as he expressed it, "The mining bugs didn't overlook a nice young tenderfoot and I got bit—bad." He discovered that there were a few things he didn't know about mining and decided he knew quite a bit more about newspaper work, so he trekked on to Nebraska and bought a paper. There he found a girl who beat anything Kentucky ever grew, and she fooled him into marrying her.

Then that virus of the mining fever, which was evidently still in his blood, lured him back to Colorado. He went into the mining camps up on the main range, back of the South Park country. For seven years—winter and spring, because Mr. Green says there aren't any summers due to its being up around twelve thousand feet—he learned a lot about real men, and managed to get some information on mining. It was here that he began to lay the foundation for his characters in the stories which are written for Western Story Magazine.

Mr. Green then decided, at the end of seven years, that he wasn't giving his city-bred girl a square deal, isolating her in that rugged country, so they headed west again, and settled in San Diego. There he met some writers, and became interested enough to buy a typewriter. He says that he expects to spend the rest of his life trying to keep a toe-hold in that company of top-flight yarn-spinners who meet at the corral of Western Story, and that, he believes, is a full-time job for any man.

# MINES AND MINING

By

J. A.

THOMPSON



This department is intended to be of real help to readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.

Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be answered in this department in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.

**N**EVADA, still rich in its promise of future great gold discoveries, is the scene of one of the latest spectacular bonanza gold strikes. Off in the desert country of the northwestern part of the State, in Humboldt County, lie the Slumbering Hills.

But they are not slumbering now. Not since George Austin and his two stalwart sons have begun taking \$500 a day in gold from their mine out there. A mine, by the way, which Austin is reported to have refused to sell for a quarter million dollars cash. And that's money these days. It is also present-day gold prospecting.

George Austin is no fiction character. He's a real person. A broad-shouldered and clean-shaven, sun-tanned outdoor sort of cuss with a good head on his shoulders, and an abiding faith in the mineral possibilities of the West. Officially he is, or was until just recently, the post-master at Jungo, a little town on

a dirt road halfway between Winnemucca and the Black Rock Desert—about 35 or 40 miles west of Winnemucca, say.

That is part of our answer to John K.'s recent query from Tulsa, Oklahoma. But only part of it, John.

John wrote us: "Been reading about a new gold strike in northern Nevada lately. Is there really such a person as George Austin? Did he really take out a sun anything like \$500 a day from his discovery? And where is it? I'm sure interested."

There's another story behind the rest of it. The mine itself, the Jumbo, lies about 38 miles south of Jungo—right out in the middle of plenty of wide-open space. But Austin didn't discover it. He bought it. The reported price he paid was \$10,000. And barring a \$500-down payment, he paid the \$9,500 balance out of the proceeds of the mine itself.

So he put in \$500 a few months

ago for a property he won't sell now for \$250,000 cash. Not a bad buy on Austin's part. And just another example of the kind of money to be made in gold mining when Lady Luck, good judgment, and earnest, hard work combine to give a fellow the breaks.

J. C. Stagg, a prospector and mining man, who came from Idaho to try his luck in Nevada, discovered the Jumbo, just a short while before he sold it. When Austin took it over, all the development work that had been done consisted of a five-foot hole in the ground and a few narrow trenches uncovering the surface vein. But parts of that vein are said to have assayed \$5,000 a ton at the grass roots.

Anyhow, Austin's purchase, and the subsequent rich development of Stagg's prospect have done things to the Slumbering Hills. They woke up. From being an isolated strike in the middle of nowhere, the Jumbo is now the center of a feverishly active mining area—fittingly named the Wakening district.

Prospectors are hurrying out there from near and far. And apparently it is a darn good place to hurry to, John K., if you want to taste the thrills of a boom-mining-town in the making. Even the big shots in the mining industry are either making tracks for the Slumbering Hills themselves, or sending experts, scouts, and engineers up there to look the new field over. Reporting on this angle, the *Denver Mining Record* said in a late issue:

"As tests continue to show valuable ore over a wide extent, John Fulton, director of the Mackay School of Mines at the University of Nevada, began preliminary surveys to select the best point to start operations on the five claims owned by Doctor Bart Hood, Reno, and

George and Jesse Austin, adjoining the Jumbo property on the north.

"R. M. Hanna, vice president of the Standard Oil Company of California, acquired an option on the claims after a visit to the area with former President Herbert Hoover. Mr. Hanna selected Fulton to handle the engineering work. Ed Benane, well-known mining man, with Congressman J. G. Scrugham, has optioned property adjoining the Jumbo claims on the West."

Yep, the biggies are getting interested in the Slumbering Hills. But it took a persevering, plain, practical prospector to make the initial rich discovery, and a chap like Austin to open it into a bonanza mine and start the rush.

Maybe T. P. L., of Paterson, New Jersey, is thinking of heading for the Slumbering Hills, too. He doesn't say. But he writes in to ask us, "Just who may locate lode claims in the United States? And how big is a lode claim?"

Any citizen of the United States—either male or female—or any person who has declared his intention of becoming a citizen before the proper court, may locate lode claims on the public domain under the United States Federal laws. This can be done without regard to the legal residence of the locator. An Indian can make valid lode locations.

As to size of a lode claim: The maximum size of a single claim, whether located by an individual, or jointly by several persons, "shall not exceed fifteen hundred (1500) feet in length along the vein, or lode." Nor can it be more than three hundred (300) feet on each side of the middle of the vein at the surface. In other words, maximum width is 600 feet. Another thing. The *end* lines must be parallel.



# The HOLLOW TREE

Conducted by

## HELEN RIVERS

It is a natural impulse and it is a good impulse to desire to wander and to roam. Not too much, of course. But the desire to go places and see things should be and is in all of us—in all of us who amount to anything, at least, for traveling educates us, and changing our geographic location often is of great benefit to health, mind, and economic well-being. A wise man once said, "A rolling stone gathers no moss," but a wiser man, we think, added, "but a standing pool stagnates."

If you are one who would travel, it is a mighty good thing to have man's best asset along the way, and at your destination. We mean, of course, friends.

If you would like a friend or friends in a certain section, write to Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, and she will put you in touch with readers who want to correspond with folks in your part of the world.

It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

Address: Helen Rivers, care The Hollow Tree, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.



**T**RAIL trekking through the mountain country of Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming is an experience that outdoor hmbres will not want to miss. "Salinas Boy" will pick a good pardner and hit the mountain trails.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I have been living here in Salinas on a ranch for six years. I have my own saddle ponies. I have traveled quite a bit on horseback, and I have led hunting trips back into the mountain country.

Now, in about a year I am going up through the middle of California, up through Oregon, and over to Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. I plan to make this trip last about two to three years. I plan to follow the mountain trails and work at different ranches on my way to give the

ponies a rest. I will take a rifle, my .22 special Colt pistol, my bedding, a few cooking pans, and some grub, and we will knock over a few rabbits and such on the way.

Now if I could get a pard living in California north of Salinas who has a couple of horses and would like to take such a trip, I sure would like for him to drop me a line. If he is free to take such a trip, he would only have to have around twenty-five bucks for this and that. I am easy to get along with and will do my part, so come on, drifters, and let me know. I am twenty years old and six feet tall!

SALINAS BOY (B. AUSTIN, JR.)

Route 1, Box 132-A, Salinas, California.

A marine in China has some yarns to spin with you folks.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a lonely marine out here in China, and I often yearn for news from people in

the good old United States and other spots of the world. I am prepared to write many interesting letters telling all about this country. I feel that I am qualified in this respect because I have been out here for nearly four years. So come on and write to me. I will really appreciate each and every letter, and will do my best to answer them all. I will also exchange photos with any one who cares to do so.

PRIVATE JAMES A. EVANS.  
Company A, 4th Marines, M. C. E. F.,  
Shanghai, China.

Rose is a "Sunny Alberta" lass.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a girl of seventeen years of age, and I would love to hear from cowgirls from all over the world. I love all outdoor sports, especially swimming. I play the piano and have the words of many cowboy songs. Will you please write to a lass from sunny southern Alberta?

ROSE G. PECK.  
Box 122, Coaldale, Alberta, Canada.

Boys, here's a Canadian junior member.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I would like to correspond with boys between the ages of sixteen and twenty, from all over the world. I am sixteen years old and interested in music and entertaining. So come on, all you ink slingers, and let's start up a friendship. I have lived up North for thirteen years, so I'll have some interesting things to tell you.

CECIL ALTON.  
2970 Oak Street, Vancouver,  
British Columbia, Canada.

Marianna hails from Florida.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I hail from Florida. I like to tap dance, swim, ride, read, and wisecrack. The wisecracks abound throughout my letters. I am thirteen years old. MARIANNA TRIBBLE.

416 N. W. 50th Street,  
Miami, Florida.

An English Pen Pal seeks Western correspondents.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I would so much like Pen friends from the States. We came back from California four years ago, and I am terribly

homesick for the United States, although I am English. I would welcome letters from anyone in southern California, especially Long Beach, where I lived for four years, or Jackson, Michigan, where I have lived also. I will be looking for loads of mail.

MRS. F. ANDREWS.  
112 Hertford Road, Lr Edmonton,  
London, England.

From the Magnolia State comes this new Pen Pal.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a young girl seventeen years old. I hail from the good old Magnolia State. I am looking for Pen Pals from all over the world. My hobbies are writing, basket



"Salinas Boy" will take a straight-shootin' pardner on a long mountain trek through the Northwest. Wear your friend-maker, membership badges, hombres, and put in your bid right pronto.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering be sure to state which you wish.

ball, baseball, swimming, reading, and singing. I have just begun collecting songs, so won't you-all please help me? I am collecting cowboy songs.

I have lived in Louisiana all my life, so I can tell you about anything in Louisiana.

VIOLA RUTH COOKE.  
Box 28, Iowa, Louisiana.

You hombres will all want to yarn with this adventurer.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I was sitting at my workbench one night working out some difficult details concerning a small ocean-going boat that I had been working on during the past few months when a friend dropped in. He came over to the bench in his quiet way

and began toying with a chisel. I could see that he had something on his mind, but I pretended not to notice, knowing that he would speak when he was ready.

"Don, how would you like a chance at one hundred and twenty million dollars?" he said. His question, while it sounded crazy, could not be taken lightly. I had known Lloyd for several years, and I had learned that when he acted as he was acting he really had something important on his mind. And it turned out that he had been visiting an old Dutch friend of his, and in the course of the visit, the old man had told him a story of buried treasure. A story of the wealth of ancient Peru being buried to protect it from invaders. Buried on the small island of Cocos, several hundred miles southwest of Panama.

Since I had been planning and building a boat for an extended tour of the South Seas, Lloyd thought that with a little talking I could be persuaded to go two thousand miles out of my planned route to see if the map that he had acquired with the story was right.

The next day I went to the library and studied the history and all of the comments on the invasion of Peru. In a small, out-of-date story-history book I found what I was looking for. Peru had been invaded. All the images, all the idols, the money from the banks and all precious stones had been collected and loaded on a ship which put to sea, never to return with its rich cargo.

According to this history the captain of the ship murdered the officials of the government and, with his crew, had sailed to Cocos, where he buried the bulk of the treasure. Later he added the plunder of two rich merchant ships, and shortly after that his ship was sunk. Only one man was rescued. In later years, this man sailed to the island, and came back with gems estimated at forty thousand dollars. A short time after that he was killed, and on his person was found a map showing the exact location of the treasure of Cocos. The map Lloyd had was supposed to be an exact copy of the original.

With this information my mind was made up. In a month we sailed. We arrived at the island just before dusk and decided to wait until the next morning to go ashore. While waiting we studied all sides of the rough shore line, but failed to find a place to land our boat. We later found out that there was no harbor or any sign of a landing place.

The next morning we went ashore in the

dory. After considerable difficulty with the map we started looking in earnest. Many of the marks on the map could mean six or eight different places, and the descriptive matter was little better. We soon realized that the map was useless to us and we began a scattered search of the entire island.

The next night a new shift was sent ashore to search. Bucking the underbrush was hard work, so we took turns hunting. For three days we searched, but to no avail. The barometer started dropping, as a storm arose. We returned to our boat and sailed for a safe harbor. After the storm we never went back. We loaded the little ship with shells and curious collections of marine life. Lloyd had several rare plants and flowers, so, with this cargo, we sailed for home. Lloyd's collection sold for five hundred dollars, and the shells and stones were made into novelties which, when sold, paid all our supply bills.

Since that trip I have made several voyages to all parts of the world, but never will a story stand out as that one because it was the first time I was entirely on my own. Some day in the next three years I am going back to look for the treasure. I fully believe it is there waiting for some one.

New plans for a new boat have been purchased, a workshop is ready, and after a year or so of building, a small white boat will drop anchor and unload its crew on the beach of Cocos Isle.

Any one interested, just drop a line.

DILLON FANKHAUSER.

424 Maple Avenue,  
New Martinsville, West Virginia.

### Cecil hails from the far-away Philippines.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am one of Uncle Sam's soldiers here in the far-away Philippines, and I get very lonely at times. I am fond of every sport that has any action in it. Boxing is my favorite sport. I have traveled a lot. Have been to old Mexico, Central America, Panama, Hawaii, Wake, Guam, and I will sail for China next year. So, any one who would like to hear from any of these places, just sit down and drop me a line. I will assure you of a long, interesting letter.

I am twenty-three years young.

CECIL O. HUBBARD.

Headquarters Battery,  
59th Coast Artillery, Fort Mills,  
Corregidor, Philippine Islands.



# WHERE TO GO And How To GET THERE

By JOHN NORTH

We aim in this department to give practical help to readers. The service offered includes accurate information about the West, its ranches, mines, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. We will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to us, for we are always glad to assist you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

**A**S vivid colors flame in the tall woods and the mornings dawn crisp and frosty, sportsmen everywhere turn their thoughts to the fall hunting season. Guns, rifles and ammunition are put in order, and numbers of carefree Nimrods are off to their favorite haunts of former years or else are eagerly preparing to explore new hunting grounds.

Enthusiastic about following unknown and far-off trails, Bob C. of

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is asking for information about the hunting possibilities in the Apache State.

"Although I've spent many happy hours in the woods of my native State, I've never journeyed far away on a hunting trip, Mr. North. This year, however, I'm trekking to Arizona on doctor's orders, and want to get in some first-rate hunting. Will you tell me what I can expect in the way of game out there? And kindly



suggest some good points from which the hunting grounds may be reached."

You can put your expectations quite high, Bob, and gamble on not being disappointed, for Arizona, the land of desert, cacti, pines and scenic wonders, is considered by many sportsmen a real hunters' paradise. In fact, the State Game and Fish Commission rate the wild life of the Apache State as one of its leading natural resources, ranking next to mining and agriculture. Furthermore, hunting in season is good practically all over the State.

Although there is no open season on the antelope which roam in large numbers over northern Arizona, the hunter is free to try his luck with the mountain lion, declared by game authorities to be the devil of the wild life of the State. It is estimated that one lion kills as many as fifty deer annually. Other animals which attract the attention of the hunter are deer, squirrels, rabbits, and bear.

The largest number of deer in one small area is in the Kaibab National forest, north of the Grand Canyon, which section has become a mecca for sportsmen from all over the nation. In that forest alone there are said to be more than sixteen thousand deer. Deer, however, abound in most of the mountainous areas and some desert portions of the State. The hunter will also find a number of bear, brown, black and

grizzly, roaming the White Mountains. In addition, there are muskrats, raccoons, opossums, otters, squirrels, and foxes.

For the bird hunter, Arizona presents turkeys, quail, doves, white wings, ducks, geese, brant, coot and Wilson snipe. Turkeys are native to the State, and there are large numbers of Gambel and scale quail in Arizona, believed by game-department authorities to have been in the territory when "the Indians first came." Large flights of ducks are found in northern and central Arizona areas throughout the fall and winter. The same is true of geese and other migratory water fowl.

Among the centers from which hunters radiate during the open season are: Flagstaff, Lake Mary, Mormon Lake, Verde Valley, Santa Maria, Sierra Ancha, and Camp Woods Mountains, Williamson Valley, Natural Bridge, Wickenburg, and Tonto Creek in the northern part of the State. In the south, hunting is good in the Huachukas, Chiricahuas, Dragoons, and in the Douglas and Tucson regions. Border towns provide ports of entry into the wonderful hunting in Old Mexico.

Every devotee of outdoor life has his favorite form of recreation, be it hunting, camping, hiking, or horseback riding. Deep-sea fishermen claim there's no better sport than theirs, and a tyro who'd like to try his hand at it, Bud R. of Fresno, California, writes: "I've heard so

## SPECIAL NOTICE

### A SPRING BED FOR YOUR FALL CAMP

It's mighty important, when camping out in fall or winter, to be able to make a warm, comfortable bed for that lean-to of yours. A spring bed is the best, and if you don't know how to build one, John North will gladly send along the directions. Address him in care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

much about the wonderful fishing at Guaymas, Mexico, Mr. North, that I'd like to go down there and try my luck. Where is this seaport located?

When you come back to camp after a day of hunting you can make an appetizing barbecue for your evening meal, if your bag holds a rabbit, squirrel, quail or duck. Ask John North for his recipe for real old-fashioned Western Barbecue and it will be sent to you pronto.

What is the best time of year to go? And what fish are to be caught there?"

Guaymas is on the west coast of Mexico, Bud, one and a half days from Los Angeles by train. From February to June, deep-sea anglers flock there. Non-sportsmen go at any season just for the romance of the land and beauty of the sea. The catch includes boca dulce, cabrilla, mero, bass, Spanish mackerel, and yellowtail. There is a resort hotel three miles from Guaymas where fishing outfits can be had and launches hired.

While some of our readers are going places in search of recreation, others are busily looking for desirable locations for farm homes in the West. Among this latter group is Lyman P. of Roanoke, Virginia.

"It has been my ambition for some time, Mr. North, to move out to Colorado to live on a farm, and I've been making inquiries from time to time about various sections of the Silver State. The part I am now interested in is the Arkansas River Valley. Can you give me any facts about this region, and can you tell me anything about Holly, which has been recommended to me as a model town? Any and all facts as to irrigation, land prices, and crops will be welcome.

You've picked a mighty good section, Lyman, for the Arkansas River Valley with its abundant supply of water for irrigation purposes, has long been famed for its fertile lands

Down below the Rio Grande, in Old Mexico, the sportsman will find wonderful hunting and fishing. Before trekking down that way for some first-rate sport, however, you should inform yourself about locations, game laws, open seasons, and the price of a hunting or fishing license. For the address from which this information may be obtained, write John North.

and prosperous people. The town of Holly, in Prowers County, has for years been the center of one of the most productive irrigated districts in the Valley. The district gets its water supply from the Amity Canal and reservoirs, the water being taken from the Arkansas River many miles west of the town of Holly.

Irrigated lands in the Holly district sell at from fifty dollars to a hundred and fifty dollars per acre, depending upon the soil, value of improvements and adjacent farms, and proximity to town. The lands of this district are among the most productive in the State.

Alfalfa makes an average yield of about four tons per season to the acre. Much wheat also is raised under irrigation, the yield per acre often running as high as fifty and sixty bushels. Beans and sugar beets are raised extensively, and have been most profitable crops. Dairying, poultry raising and hog raising also are extensively carried on here.

The man looking for a farm home in Colorado will find a country much to his liking in the Arkansas River Valley, with its abundant supply of water for irrigation purposes, its fertile lands and prosperous people. For an address from which detailed information about this Western Valley may be obtained write John North.



# GUNS AND GUNNERS

By  
**CHARLES E.  
CHAPEL**

First Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps



Address inquiries regarding firearms, marksmanship, and hunting, to Lieutenant Charles E. Chapel, "Guns And Gunners," Street & Smith's WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Ave., New York, N. Y., and inclose a stamped, addressed envelope.

**A** BULLET is fired from a rifle held perfectly level. At the same time, another bullet is dropped from a height equal to that of the rifle muzzle. Which bullet will hit the ground first? The answer is that both bullets hit the ground at the same time. This is a favorite subject for bets, and bobs up in our mail at least once a week.

The explanation is that the movement of the fired bullet forward does not affect the perpendicular attraction of gravity which has a constant acceleration of sixteen feet per second. The longer a bullet is in the air, the faster it drops. If both bullets started at a height of several hundred feet, an air resistance would be built up in both cases, which would neutralize the speed of fall when it reached a rate of about three hundred feet per second. Since both bullets encounter the same air resistance, they both reach earth at the same instant.

This idea appears in various disguises, such as firing from the rear of a moving train, firing in a vacuum, and so forth. The vacuum

merely cuts out air resistance; it does not repeal the law of gravity. Mathematics professors sometimes send us elaborate sets of figures to prove various theories about falling bodies, but it gets back to one thing: Who wants to drop a bullet at the same instant as they fire a rifle? Is there a market for this activity, or is it a game? It is probably classed as "Boondoggling."

Let us try to forget things that can never happen and turn to the answers to some of this week's sensible questions.

**Location of outdoor range.**

M. T. R., Kansas City, Kansas: Have your outdoor range run north and south, with the firing line facing the north. This gives the best light at any hour of the day.

**Economy note.**

Q. W. A., Springfield, Illinois: Put a fired cartridge case in your .22-caliber rifle before dry-snapping. Dropping the hammer with an empty chamber will damage the firing pin and eventually cause misfires.

### Training rifle instructors.

J. L. H., Des Moines, Iowa: If you wish to train instructors in marksmanship, include the following subjects in your course: History and development of firearms; nomenclature of the rifle and pistol; sights and sighting; use of the sling; breathing; trigger squeeze; rapid-fire operation; marking targets; safety precautions; range construction and operation; organization of firing parties; and competition methods.

### Steyr rifling.

G. B. C., Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina: The Steyr type of rifling for pistols was used in the early model automatics; it has four grooves, with lands and grooves of equal width, and has its twist to the right.

### Rimmed cartridge in automatic.

F. B. J., Fitzgerald, Georgia: To use a rimmed cartridge in an automatic, it is necessary to file down the rim. This was done extensively in the World War because revolver ammunition was more plentiful than cartridges for automatics.

### Barrel life.

R. L. B., Nanticoke, Pennsylvania: Continued firing makes the bore of a rifle or revolver larger in diameter, but it takes three hundred

rounds to enlarge the bore one ten thousandth of an inch in diameter, so it is apparent that barrels are long-lived.

### Forensic ballistics as a profession.

L. J. T., St. Joseph, Michigan: Forensic ballistics as a profession is new and uncrowded. What the layman calls "finger-printing bullets," requires an understanding of the manufacture of guns and ammunition; the repair of firearms; criminal law; chemistry, photography and microscopy. Experts receive from twenty-five to five hundred dollars per day while appearing as witnesses in criminal and civil trials.

### Boston brave.

P. W. C., Portland, Maine: Mr. George Ayoob, Boston storekeeper, always carried a revolver during working hours. Twice his store has been entered by bandits; twice Mr. Ayoob has driven them off with his quick drawing. The future of the land of the bean and the cod is safe in the hands of men like Mr. Ayoob.

### Hammerless revolvers.

T. B. N., Ottumwa, Iowa: So-called "hammerless" revolvers actually have a hammer, but it is concealed so that accidental discharge is avoided.

The supply of used U. S. Rifles, caliber .45-70, formerly sold by the U. S. government, is exhausted.

A ten-cent handbook for boy and girl marksmen will be mailed *free*, as long as the supply lasts, to those who request it. Please inclose the usual stamped, addressed envelope.



# MISSING

This department is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

**WARNING.**—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

**HALL, ROY.**—A corporal from Corning, Arkansas. Formerly a machine gunner. Discharged. Pleas'd write to your old buddy, Two Gun Burklow, Box 74, Aurora, Colorado.

**ATTENTION.**—Would like to locate any of the boys that were in the Signal Corps, 2nd Brigade, at Thür, Germany, near the town of Kottenheim, in the months of March, April, and May, 1920. I was first attached with the motor Repair Unit No. 29, Fortress Astenstein, Germany, Signal Corps Detachment, 2nd Brigade, and later was transferred to the town of Thür, Germany. Am having trouble proving my contention that my disabilities are service connected. When answering this please name commanding officer and top sergeant that were in command at Thür, Germany. Please answer as soon as possible as I have but four or five months more to get in my claim. K. B. Rediger, Box 520, Walla Walla, Washington.

**CHAIG, ELLIS AND WALTER.**—Ellis is fifty-one years old. Walter is nineteen years old. Ellis was accustomed to work in monument shops. Last heard from he was in Waterloo, Illinois. Walter you promised that you would always write to us. It is important that we hear from you and dad. Kalen and Eugene Craig, Salida, Colorado.

**MURRAY, TOM.**—A mining engineer, who has some children in a home in Sacramento, California. If any one knows his address will they please send it to me. Frank H. McKinney, 2006½ 2nd Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

**ATTENTION.**—Would like to hear from some of the boys that were with me in the General Hospital, No. 41, Fox Hills, Staten Island, New York, in 1918 and 1919. John W. Simpson, George Ware, W. Riche, V. Russel and Howard Miller were some of them. Please write to Frank H. McKinney, 2006½ 2nd Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

**GILMAN RELATIVES.**—Am trying to get in touch with relatives of R. B. Gilman, who died February 28, 1936. He was born in Fryeburg, Maine, December 16, 1895. His father's name was Randolph Gilman. His father was a monument carver at Fryeburg, Maine. His mother's maiden name was Alma Austin. She married a second time a Mr. Lord. His oldest sister's name was Bertille Gilman. She married a plumber by the name of Fred Bryant. I believe most of his relatives are living in Maine or New Hampshire. Mr. Gilman has lived in the South for the past fifteen years. Information appreciated by Mrs. R. B. Gilman, 232 Cypress Mill Road, Florence, Alabama.

**FITCH, WILL.**—My husband. Last heard from four years ago. He is believed to be in Raleigh, New Jersey, with his brother, Heakli Fitch and his sister, Fannie Day. If I could get in touch with his brother or sister I might be able to locate him. Mrs. Ethel Fitch, Glen Jean, West Virginia.

**ESMON, MORRIS.**—Any one knowing the address of this man formerly of Hartshorne, Indian Territory, now Oklahoma, please write to P. B., in care of Western Story Magazine.

**KELLSEY, GEORGE and JOHN.**—They are brothers who were raised around Fayetteville and Landcaster, Arkansas. They would be in their sixties by now. Last heard of in 1900, around Ladonia, Texas. Any information about them will be appreciated by their nephew, Robert L. Phillips, 314 North 6th Street, Frederick, Oklahoma.

**EAGON, JOHN.**—When last heard from he was in Columbia, Ohio. He would be about sixty years old. Any one knowing his present address please write to his nephew, Forrest Kile, Route 2, Box 34, Sistrerville, West Virginia.

**TUCKER, L. B.**—About eighteen years old. Has brown eyes, and dark hair. Last heard from in southern California. Please write to your cousin, Maxine Smith, Route 1, Box 5, McQueen, Oklahoma.

**SEPERHAR and VIDMAR.**—Am anxious to contact any of my mother's relations that are in America. My mother came from Semich, Yugoslavia, in 1913, to San Francisco, California. She is of Slovenian nationality. Her first name is Margaret. The Vidmars are my father's relatives who live in Cleveland, Ohio. Information about these families appreciated by Advertiser, in care of Western Story Magazine.

**HODGES, BARNEY F.**—My brother. He is about six feet tall and has blue eyes and sandy hair. He married a widow by the name of Emma. She had a daughter named Jennie. Last seen, in 1913, and last heard from in 1918. Believed to be in Tennessee. Any information of his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by Kansas Hodges Shay, Box 23, Riverdale, California.

**YOUNG, BENNY.**—My brother. Please write to me. Am anxious to hear from you. Have tried to reach you through the address you sent to me. All my letters have been returned unclaimed. Any one knowing my brother's whereabouts please write to Mrs. Lola May Redman, 714 15th Street, Sacramento, California.

**POSEY, MRS. JULIA MARY.**—Last seen August 23, 1936. Please write to me. We all love you and need you. Junior and Morgan ask about you every day and ask when you are coming home. I love you, honey, and cannot live without you. If you see this notice at a later date and think I may have moved, obtain address from navy department as we are getting a car and expect to travel. Charles I. Posey, 908 "A" Avenue, National City, California.

**POLK, WILLIAM or BARE.**—He is my brother. He is between twenty-five and thirty years old. He is fair with dark hair and is medium height. He wrote to my mother, in 1934. He was at White Horse, Colorado, then and said he was going to Denver. My mother wrote to him but never received an answer. We are worried. His home town is Nashville, Arkansas. Information about him appreciated by Mrs. Roberta James, Silver, Arkansas.

**OLSON, MARTENSON, or FLOHR, JULIA.**—My mother's name, her marriage was Olson. She married Lewis Martenson and later John Flohr. Last heard from she was at Wilmar, Minnesota. That was in 1916. I was put in an orphanage in St. Paul, Minnesota, at the age of seven together with my half sister who was three years old. Any information about my mother appreciated by Mrs. Ruben Gerlock, General Delivery, Lincoln, Nebraska.

**ANDERSON, JAMES KIER.**—My brother. He is forty-three years old. Your letter mailed from Grand Windsor Hotel, New York, was received but you left before you received our letter. Martha, your stepmother died. Edith and Bill, your stepbrother and sister and dad—"Jim," live in Pasadena. Earl and I came out here, in 1925, and are now divorced. I still have Dorothy, Marjorie, Harold and Mildred, also a little boy, Jimmie. Ann Margaret is married and lives in Washington. If you see this please get in touch with me. Mrs. Gertrude Jane MacLeod, 706 Cahuenga Boulevard, Hollywood, California.

**SCOTT, LIZZIE MAY.**—Formerly of Jackson, Michigan. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Alice Scott Hawkins, Route 2, 3325 Seymour Avenue, Jackson, Michigan.

**ALTON, ZELDA.**—She was sent to the Children's Home, Fargo, North Dakota, in November, 1923. She was born January 22, 1923. Has curly brown hair, blue eyes, and probably goes under a different name. Am broken-hearted. Your mother, Elsie Alton, 1036 17th Street, Monroe, Wisconsin.

**EDGIN, BUSTER.**—My cousin whom I have not seen since he was a baby. His father, Will Edgin, and his mother separated when he was very small. He was born in Arkansas about twenty years ago. News of him or his address will be gratefully received by his cousin, Miss Gelean Edgin, General Delivery, Campbell, California.

**MOUNT, MRS. WALTER GEORGE.**—She is my sister. Last heard from in Knoxville, Tennessee, early in March, 1936. She is five feet, one inch tall and weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds. She has brown hair, which was long, and dark brown eyes. Is about twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old. Please write to me as father is nearly paralyzed in his legs and wants so to hear from you. Any information will be appreciated by Mrs. Aaron Moyer, R. F. D. 1, New Port Richey, Florida.

**KEEN, CHARLES MARTAIN, Jr.**—He is five feet tall, and used to weigh about one hundred and forty pounds. In 1933, he was in Lakeland, Florida. He is twenty-three or twenty-four years old. Has dark brown hair and dark brown eyes. Please, brother, write to me as father's health is falling mighty fast. He is nearly paralyzed in his legs. Any one knowing his whereabouts or having any information whatsoever about him please write to Mrs. Aaron Moyer, R. F. D. 1, New Port Richey, Florida.

**WHITE, WILLIAM CHARLES.**—Should be about seventy years old. Was raised in Clinton or Crab Orchard, Nebraska. Last heard from in 1894 or 1895, when he was an engineer on a boat out of Little Rock, Arkansas. Information would be greatly appreciated by an old friend, R. L. M. B., in care of Western Story Magazine.

**WILLIAMS, HARRY, and SAL.**—They were with the Florida Exposition Shows in Florida. Important! Please write at once to R. H. Sisco, care of Billboard Publishing Co., Cincinnati, Ohio.

**MANFREDO, NELLY.**—She was adopted from an orphanage in Peoria, Illinois, and is believed to be in Chicago, Illinois, with her adopted parents. Information concerning her will be greatly appreciated by her brother, John Manfredro, 861 South State Street, Lincoln, Illinois.

**BENNETT, INEZ.**—She lived in Winona, Minnesota, in 1891. Later she was married but cannot recall her husband's name. Her stepfather was Sam Crossman, a brakeman on the C. & N. W. R. R. She would be about sixty years old by this time. Any information will be appreciated by F. P. S., in care of Western Story Magazine.

**WITHAM, JOHN EUGENE.**—Twenty-five years old. Last heard from June 16, 1936. At that time he was with Seals Brothers Circus at Brigham, Utah. His mother will greatly appreciate any news of his whereabouts. Address, Eloise Woody, 1425 Redwood, Lansing, Michigan.

**WATERMAN, MRS. R. E.**—Last heard of in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Your brother would like to hear from you. B. J. Gardner, 1028 Pottawatomit Street, Leavenworth, Kansas.

**RATLIFF, ROY ROBERT.**—He is twenty-seven years old and has light hair and blue eyes. Last heard from in April, 1931. His mother is not well and would be glad of any information. Mrs. Kitty Anderson, 1506 Pontiers Avenue, West Los Angeles, California.

**MAYOLE, THOMAS.**—He was twenty-six years old in October. When last seen he was hitch-hiking to Alabama. He left Emble Brothers Show four or five months previous to September 6th. Last seen in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, September 9, 1936. He has light wavy hair, light-blue eyes, weighs one hundred and thirty-five pounds or less, and is about five feet, six or seven inches tall. He has tattoo marks on his arms and on his chest is a snake design. Tom, if you see this won't you please come back. Mother and dad are satisfied with you and me. I am worried sick about you. Please come back. If any one knows the whereabouts of this young man will you please write or ask him to write to Francis Pluck, R. D. No. 4, Willowdale, Coatesville, Pennsylvania?

**CLARK, MRS. ELMER C.**—A schoolmate of mine. As a child she lived on a ranch on Bear Creek, near Salida, Colorado. When last heard from she was living in Tacoma, Washington, and got her mail at Fern Hill Station. Please write to your old friend, Mrs. Lulu Sampson, 81 West Archer Place, Denver, Colorado.

**YULNEK, TONY.**—He is of Bohemian descent. Has blue eyes, brown hair, and is about five feet, six inches tall. He has a blue mark on the right side of his nose caused by coal. Sad news about your sisters, Mary and Frances. Will you please write to me? Please send any information concerning him to Miss Mary Stano, Route 2, Russellville, Arkansas.

**REPPERT or GILCHRIST, MARY BROWN.**—Last heard from in Erie, Pennsylvania, in 1924. Any one having information regarding her please write to Grace S., care of Western Story Magazine.



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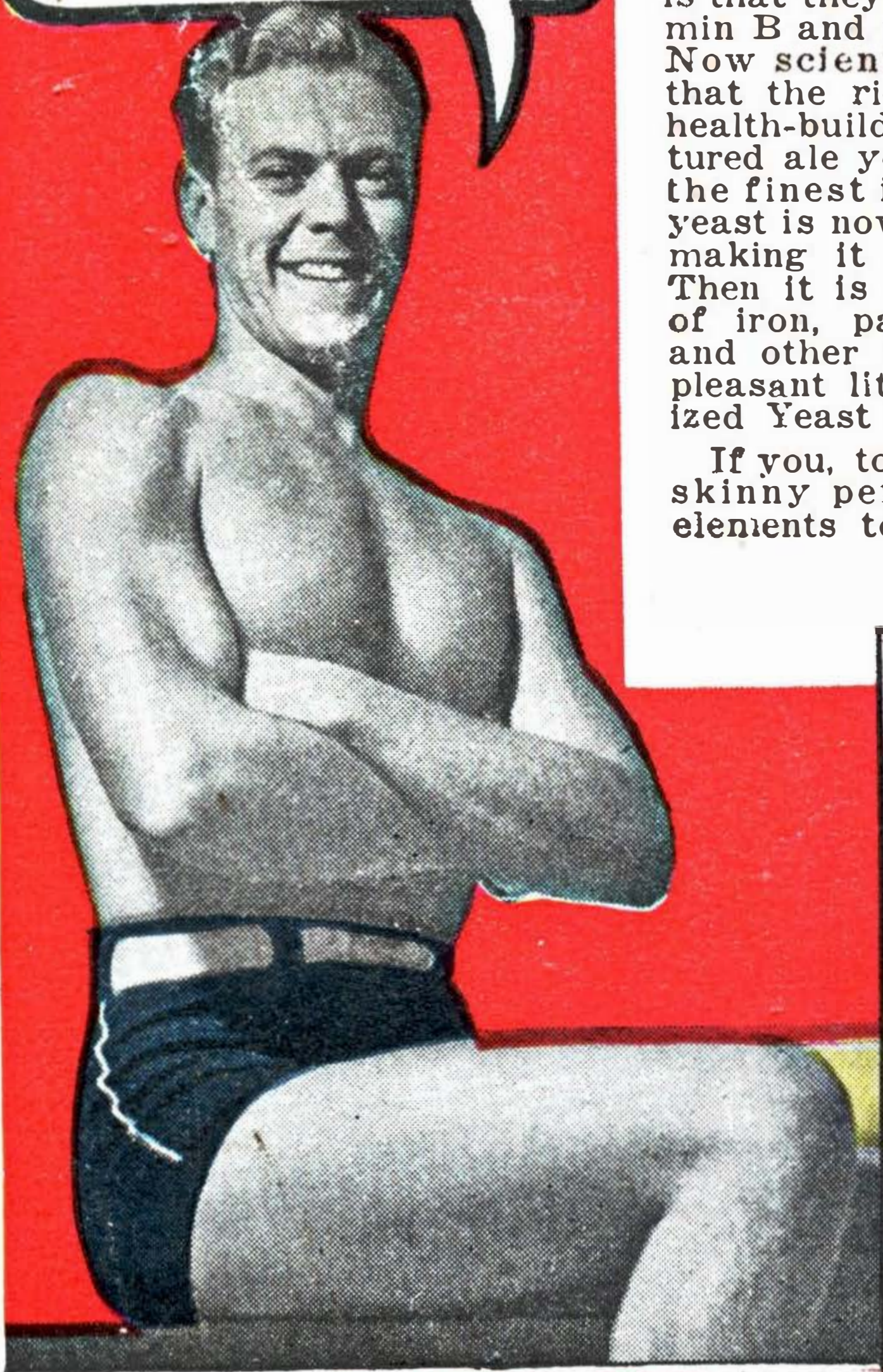
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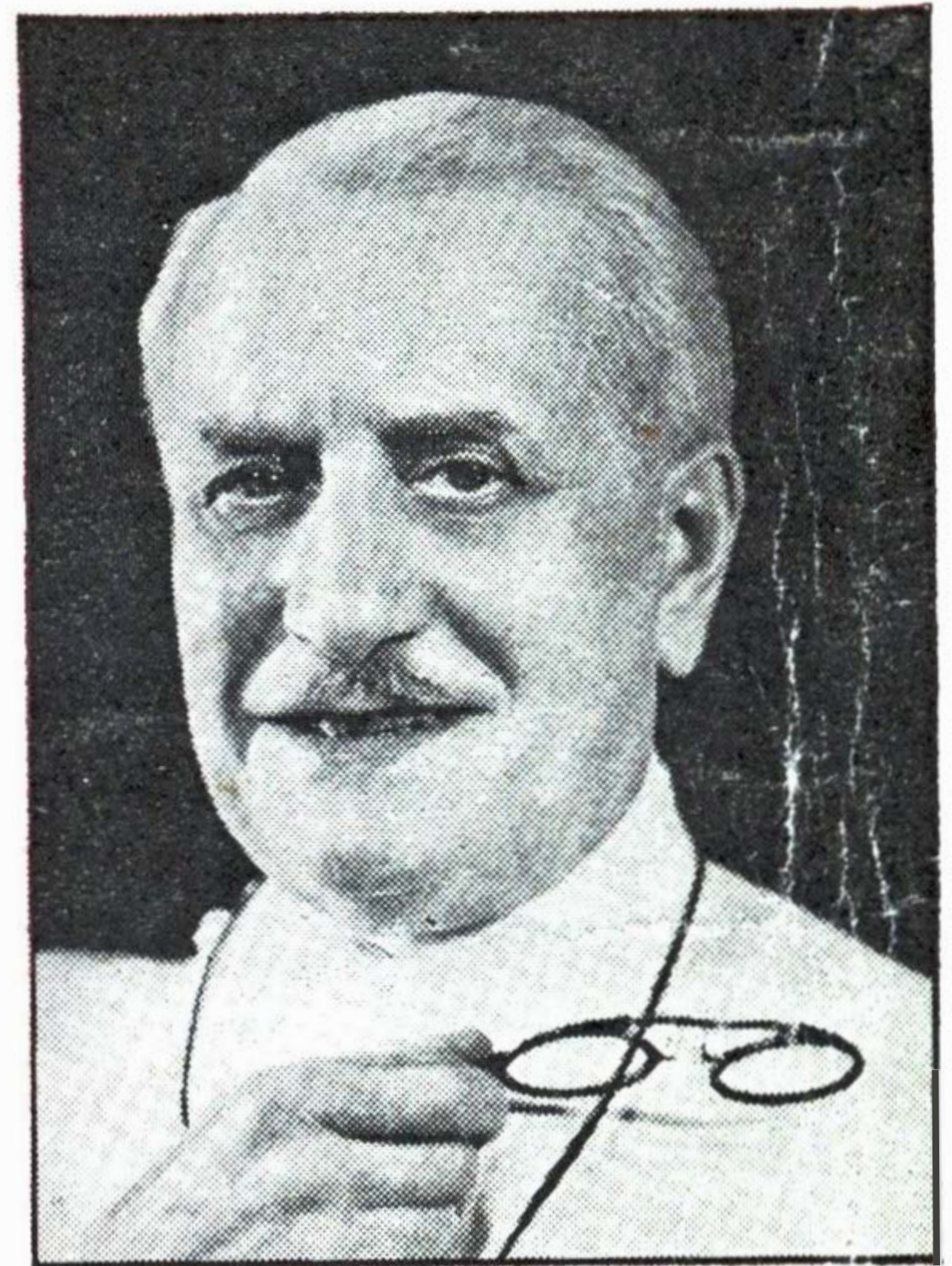
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