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# WESTERN STORY

MAR. 2, '40

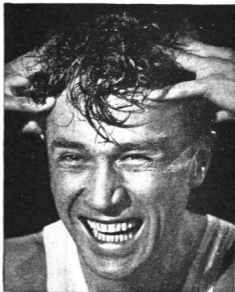
MAGAZINE • MAR. 2, 1940

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CENTS



**GUNS OF THE BUCKSKIN EMPIRE**  
A Book Length Action Novel by Harry F. Oimsted

# *Good News!* for **DANDRUFF SUFFERERS**



## **Listerine Antiseptic Treatment Fights Infectious Dandruff Clinical Tests Showed Marked Improvement in 76% of Cases**

If you are troubled with infectious dandruff, give Listerine Antiseptic a chance to prove how helpful it can be...how quickly it attacks the infection and those humiliating scales...how fresh, clean, and invigorated it makes your scalp feel. Users everywhere acclaim its benefits.

The treatment is as easy as it is delightful. Just douse the scalp, morning and night, with full strength Listerine Antiseptic - the same Listerine Antiseptic that has been famous for 25 years as a mouth wash and gargle. Massage hair and scalp vigorously and persistently. In clinical tests, dandruff sufferers were delighted to find that this treatment brought rapid improvement in most cases.

### *Kills Bottle Bacillus*

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Rabbits inoculated with *Pityrosporum Ovale* developed definite dandruff symptoms which disappeared shortly after being treated with Listerine Antiseptic daily.

And in a dandruff clinic, 76% of the men and women who used Listerine Antiseptic and massage twice a day showed complete disappearance of or marked improvement in the symptoms of dandruff within 30 days.

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If you are troubled with dandruff, don't neglect what may be a real infection. Start with Listerine Antiseptic and massage right now - delay may aggravate the trouble. It's the method that has demonstrated its usefulness in a substantial majority of test cases.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO., St. Louis, Mo.

### **THE TREATMENT**

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

Always follow with vigorous and persistent massage with fingers or a good hair brush. Continue the treatment so long as dandruff is in evidence. And even though you're free from dandruff, enjoy a Listerine massage once a week to guard against infection.

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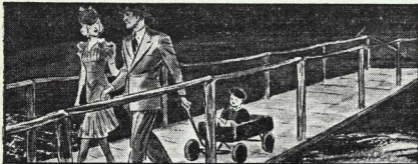
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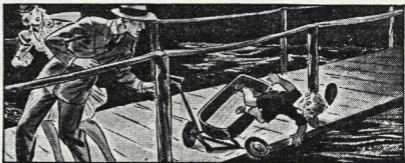
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# WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

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VOL. CLXXX NO. 5

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COVER BY PAUL STRAYER

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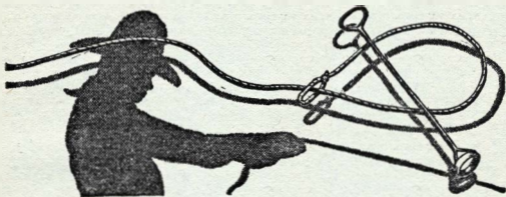


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## The Roundup

AFTER what, in the opinion of many of our readers, has been too long a time, we are glad to present another of Charles L. McNichols' articles on the cow horse. We hope you all like *THE THOROUGHbred IN THE WEST*, which will be found on Page 82 of this issue, and we have some more of these fascinating cow-country fact stories planned for future issues.

Among Malcolm Horlick's favorite writers he lists Cherry Wilson, Frank Richardson Pierce and Bennett Foster. "I'm looking forward to some serials by these authors in the near future," writes Mr. Horlick, who lives in Youngstown, Ohio.

Not only Mr. Horlick, but all you members of The Roundup will be pleased to know that we've just bought a new serial by Bennett Foster, which we consider one of his finest. Frank Pierce is about to take a *pasear* to Southern California, where, he says, "I can prowl around the desert and other old haunts—and write." We're glad Frank mentioned

that, for he's working on a long yarn right now, and much as we want him to enjoy his vacation we know all you readers are impatient for his next story. And, we might add, we're busy corralling Cherry Wilson, for her last novel, *BRAND OF THE THUNDER GOD*, which we published in our December 2nd issue, sure made a hit, judging from the many appreciative letters we received.

In your next Western Story—

Ever since Kenneth Gilbert wrote *TAMANAWOS GOLD* for us, folks have been asking when we're going to come through with another of his fine stories of the Far North. The answer is "next week!" and the yarn is a dramatic five-part serial entitled *WHITEWATER MEN*, which we're sure you'll like every bit as well as you did Brother Gilbert's last.

Stuart Hardy, whose appearance always seems to rate cheers, will be represented by *A NECK WORTH \$40,000*, an unusual and gripping novel; *GHOSTS OF THE RIMROCK*, by Harry Sinclair Drago, winds up to a smashing conclusion, and there'll be a top string of other stories and features.



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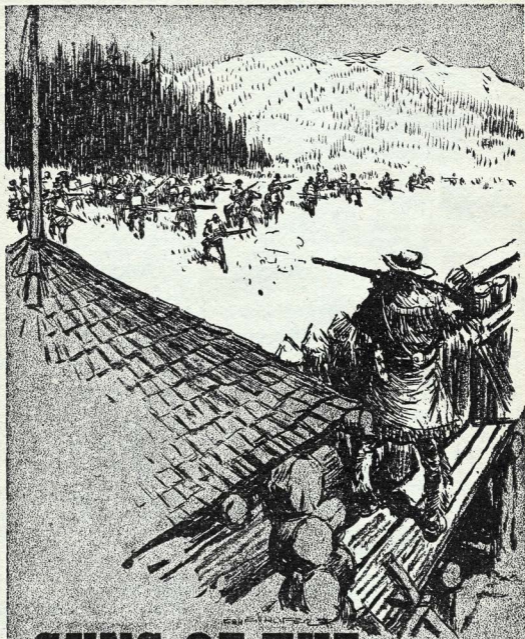
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# **GUNS OF THE BUCKSKIN EMPIRE**

by **HARRY F. OLMSTED**

## CHAPTER I

## DEATH FROM THE WILDERNESS

THE spruce fire crackled merrily, repelling the thrusting blades of the frosty spring night. It cast a red glow across the troubled breast of the Mad River and seemed to intensify the blackness of the moonless night beyond the limits of its beams. Yankee Dawson hunkered with his back to the flames, grateful for the warmth striking through his soiled buckskins and for the lift of the great tin cup of black tea he sipped.

From somewhere afar off drifted the echoes of two challenging, ram-paging elk bulls and closer, much closer, the shuddery, spine-tickling quaver of a timber wolf. That hunting cry, long drawn out, seemed to bring a silence to the forests. It hardened the eyes of this young emissary of the Great Western Fur Co., drew down the corners of his wide mouth.

The Gros Ventres had a saying that when the great wolf vents his cry thus on a moonless night, some man thing was marked for death. Yankee had little patience with Indian fears and superstitions, but tonight it was easy for him to give this one credence. For men had died, and would die. The bones of free trappers had been found in the trails, picked clean, by questing Carnivora. Their bodies had been taken from sprung beaver sets. *Engagés* of the Great Western and of the powerful Anglo-American Fur Co. had been found murdered, their caches rifled and their scalps taken. There was war along the fur trails and for more than a year Yankee had fought against it, pleading for peace in the Indian villages, in the far-flung outposts of the big companies and in

the lonely, fortlike stockades of the Independents.

Yankee Dawson didn't see the leaping flames, the dancing shadows, the sprawled figure of Weasel Greer, his trail mate, across the fire. His eyes were blank as he looked back over that wasted year. In the great Northwest Territories there was fur enough for all. But unless there was peace, there was death for many and profit for none. Yankee had pleaded for amity among the trapping fraternity, without encouragement, without result. The Indians had received him with dignity, and a noncommittal attitude. The Independents had promised to keep the peace only so long as they were let alone, adding they had no hope of that. The factors of the Anglo-American Co. simply stated the creed written into their charter—that face must be maintained, even at the cost of war.

Out of his whole campaign of peace-making, Yankee had garnered only bewilderment. Who was responsible for the violence, the thievery, the spirit of antagonism between the fur companies? The Independents blamed the Indians. The Indians blamed the Anglo-American Co. Anglo-American blamed Great Western. And Cooper Dawson, Yankee's uncle and managing head of Great Western, was sure the Independents were at fault. It was a vicious circle, winding itself into a bloody knot. And now, returning to Great Western's main post at Fort Danger, hardly two short days to the west, Yankee wrested with a disheartening sense of failure. His uncle had been right. There could be only war along the beaver trails until Great Western had driven out all opposition—with guns.

YANKEE wasn't aware that Weasel Greer had reared up to one elbow, that he had then bounced up on his bandy legs, that he had spoken twice—sharply. A third repetition of his name caused Yankee to turn to his companion. The little snaggle-toothed trapper was standing stiffly, his nostrils flaring as he keened the night breeze.

"You hear what I heard, Yank?"

"What was it?"

"A shot! Down the river."

Yankee heard it then, the faint echoes of gunfire, knifing through the endless murmurings of the water. Instinctively, he stooped, caught up his primed long gun, powder horn and bullet pouch. As he straightened, Weasel kicked out the fire and the night bore in upon them with the ominous rustling of a chill wind.

"Mought only be hunters shinin' an elk," Weasel's voice came speculatively and in the tone of one who makes excuses for his fears. "But I'm—"

"Can't be far down stream," murmured Yankee. "Mebbe we ought to look into it."

"Keep yore fingers out o' the fire, younker," the little old trapper said sagely, "an' you won't get burnt. We'll be headin' down the river at daybreak with our eyes peeled for whatever's there fer us to see. If Great Western men got rubbed out down yonder, yore uncle will be fit to tie up."

"Fit to tie," agreed Yankee morosely, "but unwilling to lift a hand to bring peace to these woods."

Weasel snorted. "Peace—humph. Ol' Cooper Dawson's run Great Western posts too long to believe he can have peace while them thievin', back-shootin' Canucks foller the orders of Anglo-American in these parts. I'm givin' you gospel, younker, we gotta fight back—an' soon.

Best thing to do right now is to hang that Cecil Ravenhill gent high an' run his hirelin's out o' these waters."

The movement of Yankee's shoulders caused a whisper of impatience to run along the fringed seams of his buckskins. "A man like Ravenhill wouldn't be fool enough to start trouble like we've been having. Nothing breeds ill feeling and makes war so fast as loose talk like you've just made and can't prove. War means ruin to all of us. If it becomes general, in five years there won't be a trapper in Oregon with the hope that Uncle Sam will jump in and claim these woods."

"To hell with Uncle Sam," growled the little trapper. "I've served my hiteh for him. Right now I'm workin' for Great Western—an' itchin' to lay my sights across the human wolverines that are piratin' our trap lines. Let's sleep!"

They slept on their guns, those two, each in a covert that commanded the beached canoe. A sense of danger made their sleep light and they were up and stirring before the first lightening of the eastern sky. Breakfastless, they launched their canoe and took to the Mad River, Weasel in the bow, his long rifle ready to his right hand, his paddle flashing in the starlight as he met the thrusts of the swift and treacherous water. Yankee wielded the stern paddle, steering, savoring the release of nerve tension in the battle against the surging waters. Day was at hand, and the fears and forebodings of the night were dissolving like mists in the sun.

The buoyancy of youth, the joy of living, the challenge of a man's world, all these were reacting on Yankee as the rods fell behind and the dawn rose like a flame in the east. He sang, and Weasel joined in, with his cracked, tuneless falsetto.

Yet, even as they gave vent to this new-born lift of spirit, their eyes were questing the banks for the answer to those shots of last night.

YANKEE'S paddle was poised in mid-stroke when it was almost torn from his grasp. Puzzled, he flashed a swift glance at the blade, saw the jagged splinters in its edge and the dark streak where the lead had marked it. He was reaching for his gun when Weasel fired. Through the echoes came the faint cry of pain from the brush lining the bank. Then the little trapper was barking his strident "wagh," flashing his paddle like mad as he drove the light dugout ashore. And Yankee was giving all he had to help him.

They drove the craft high on the gravelly shingle, leaped out and ducked into the thickets, their primed guns held before them. Shoulder to shoulder, they pushed into a small clearing. The coals of a small fire smoldered there. A coffee-pot bubbled musically beside it and a piping hot bannock fumed in a frying pan. Of humans, there was none to be seen. Nor was there any other sign, save the unloaded rifle lying where the assassin had dropped it when hit by Weasel's bullet. The little trapper pounced upon it, bit off a string of trap-line oaths and held the stock out for Yankee's inspection.

"Eyeball that crown on the butt, younker," he barked. "That's the mark of the Anglo American. An' now that you know it's also the mark of murderin' wolves that shoot from the brush, I hope you'll give over yore crazy notions about peace with 'em. By gopher, I've drawn blood on one of the varmints an' I crave war—my whole neck full of it. I'm goin' after that skunk."

"Wait!" Yankee sized up the

camp. "This is a canoe outfit and he's probably hitting the river right now. Come on!"

They wheeled and raced back to the bank, staring downstream. There was only a short stretch visible, the current sweeping around a point an eighth of a mile down and vanishing from sight. No craft rode the surface there and they were never to know whether the wounded man had escaped in that direction. They had spent enough time in the camp to permit the man to cover so short a distance on the swift current. And it took them added time to run down the bank two hundred yards or more to the canoe tied up to a pile of drift.

At first they were certain it was the craft of the man Weasel had wounded. But, as they neared it, both knew different. As if halted by the same rein, both men drew to a sudden stop, staring. Having passed a jutting point of alders, they were looking at a camp. The wind toyed with the dead ashes of a cold fire. Blankets were spread nearby, unslept in. Beside the fire, stiff in death, lay the body of a man. They knew him at once. He was Baptiste Fontaine, one of the trappers of Great Western, bound for Fort Danger with his winter catch of fur. And his fur was gone!

## CHAPTER II

### FORT DANGER

GLUM and silent, Yankee and Weasel drove on toward the home post. Seething with rage at the skulking killer preying upon the beaver lanes, dreading to face Cooper Dawson when they reached Fort Danger. For he must be told. And the damning evidence of that crown-marked gun butt would rouse in him a righteous fury that might

change the course of an empire in the Northwest fur country, make or break the Great Western Fur Co. and cost the lives of hundreds of good men.

Cooper Dawson must be given the evil news carefully, and in such a way that he would not act hastily, Yankee reflected. On his uncle's shoulders now hung the peace of the northland.

Yankee's heart was heavy with worry as they approached Fort Danger, at the mouth of Henry's Fork. They swept into the rock-studded mill race of *Le Rapide Diable*, the last tortured water before reaching the post. Their blades bent and the muscles stood out beneath their close-fitting buckskins as they swerved their light craft around dangerously jutting rocks and into swift, deep channels. A single miscue here would bring disaster, and had to many an ill-fated river man. But this was home to both of them and they knew every mood and hazard of this torrent, making the passage seem easy.

They swept about a rocky scarp that jutted out to turn the stream, pulling hard to the right bank to avoid the suction of *Tourbillon Nois*, the deep, black whirlpool that according to legend pulled men down, sucked them dry and spewed out their lifeless husks.

Reflecting the awe all men felt for this sinister place, both men turned their eyes to the swirling, foam-flecked surface of the whirlpool. Then Weasel's clipped curse was drifting back and his paddle was backing water. Yankee felt the blood drain from his face as he twisted his paddle in a turning effort. The batteau shuddered, swerved across the current, shipped water, then shot into the spinning tide. Ahead of them a light skin canoe

bobbed and circled as if propelled by some invisible paddler. But there was no paddler and the high prow bore the red cross in the black circle, the mark of Great Western Fur.

The unoccupied craft was straight across the pool from them now and, rather than labor to overtake it, the two men backed water until it came around. Yankee reached out and caught the gunwale. Weasel craned his neck and gasped.

"It's Ben's canoe," said Yankee, as if to himself, "and Ben!"

AS the whirlpool swept them in endless circling, they stared at the thing lying in the bottom of the canoe. It was the body of a beardless boy no more than eighteen. His sightless eyes were open, staring at the sky. His throat was cut, from ear to ear. And jutting from his chest was the beaded haft of a trapper's Green River skinning knife, ornately decorated after the manner of the Gros Ventres. In the bow were the indubitable marks of a load of furs, missing now.

"The lad likely went up to fetch in part of Ba'tise's peltry," the old trapper said somberly. "They killed him for the fur. What will ol' Cooper say?"

Yankee only shook his head. That's what he was thinking of. What would Cooper Dawson say? And, more important, what would he do? Years before, a half-breed *engagé* of Great Western had fetched an eight-year-old white boy to the post, a boy he had taken from a traveling band of Horse Indians. The boy couldn't tell who he was or from whence he had been captured by the red men. But he did fall at once into the routine of Fort Danger, making himself a fixture, beloved by all. Indeed, lonely Cooper Dawson came to think so much of the lad

that he officially adopted him, having the papers and proceedings put on record in court proceedings in St. Louis. So the waif had become Ben Dawson, son of the Rocky Mountain head of the company. And now he was dead, victim of the terror stalking the beaver trails.

As he transferred the stiffened body to their own canoe, wrapping it in a blanket and laying it out amidships, Yankee experienced all the pangs the loss of a brother would have engendered. For Ben had been like a brother, gentle, eager to learn, spreading an unflinching cheeriness and optimism even when things looked darkest at the post. Now that bright spirit was stilled, and Yankee's faith was shaken.

This wasn't trouble; it was war. Even as he preached peace for the good of all, those who had listened were sending out their mercenaries to kill and rob and destroy. As the first stunning impact of grief gave way to rage, Yankee told himself that he must have been wrong. Maybe war was all their ruthless competitors could understand, war that would end this trouble in one deadly stroke.

As he matched Weasel's savage effort to escape the clutches of the whirlpool, his eyes remained fixed on the blood-clotted beads of the murder knife. It was a good one, too good for an Indian killer to have carelessly left planted on his victim. It added up to an unnatural sum that screamed of a plant. Who could have done this thing, hoping to make it appear that the Gros Ventres were guilty? His eyes shifted to the metal crown on the rifle dropped by the skulker who had shot at them. And therein, seemed to lie the answer. Had Cecil Ravenhill instructed his mercenaries to launch a campaign of extermination?

Yankee Dawson was reaching out for calmness when Fort Danger loomed ahead. His little companion, unusually silent, was puffing furiously on his pipe, sending back clouds of the smoke of mixed tobacco and kinnikinnick as they drew into the post landing. The sun was setting and the smoke of the supper fires swirled about the skin tepees outside the fort. Indians and breeds stared at them impassively as they drew the dugout high on the bank and covered it with a canvas sheet. A white trapper hailed them from the gate.

Yankee tossed his hand in greeting, then his eyes sought those of Weasel Greer, to find there a reflection of the same things he, himself, felt.

"Peace!" snorted the little trapper. "I hope you've got a bellyful of it. See you when I git my skinful, my knife whetted an' a new supply of powder an' ball."

"Take it easy, Weasel," cautioned Yankee. "I'd be right with you if I didn't have to take this word to the Old Man. An' I may need you to help me hold him."

As he marched away, Weasel flung a grim look over his shoulder. "To hell with holdin' him," he rapped. "Let him go wild. Turn him loose, with all the power of the company. An' me, I wanta be with the force that moves against Ravenhill an' his killers at Fort Coffin. Wagh!"

Yankee stood watching the little bandy-legged man stalk away. And he knew a vast regret. He and Weasel had always thought alike. Between them had been a trust so profound that either would bet his life on the stanchness of the other. They had supplemented each other perfectly. Now, suddenly, Yankee knew they were as far apart as the poles.

SWINGING through the gate, Yankee didn't see the familiar things that had become a part of his life. The piles of furs fetched in from far caches. Bearded trappers, long starved for the pleasures and social contacts of the post, sitting around spinning windies and sipping trade whiskey from horn dippers. A dancing *voyageur* surrounded by roistering men shouting a river song, seen through the doorway of the grog room. But Yankee was in no mood to appreciate these evidences of the coming spring rendezvous. His eyes were on the lighted window, through which he could see the slight form of the factor, his father's brother, bent over his desk.

Cooper Dawson looked up quickly as Yankee came in. His face lighted up and his hand shot out. "Yankee! Good boy! I was just sayin' today that I hoped you'd check in before the fur sorting begins. You've been gone too long."

Yankee shook his hand. "Yes," he conceded soberly. "I've been gone too long."

He sank into an elkhide chair and his uncle's pleased expression faded as he searched the younger man's dark scowl. "What's eatin' at you, son," he said quietly. "This fool errand of peace backfire on you? How'd you find things in the camps an' at the posts?"

"I found hell," confessed Yankee. "They heard me out, admitted the idea was good and agreed to think about it—while they cook up more devilment. Everybody blames everybody else for the trouble."

"And trouble there's been, son," said Cooper Dawson, with a wry twist of the lips. "Men vanishing, fur caches rifled, terror loose on the trails. Our Crees gave up and went back through the Kootenai Pass, claiming the Windigo was loose

amongst us. By the way," a look of concern crept into his pale eyes, "Ba'tise sent down word from the Tetons that he needed help to get his furs out. Ben went up to help him. Didn't see anything of them, did you?"

Yankee dropped his eyes. "Looks like you'd have sent a man grown," he chided. "Knowing the risk—"

The factor's shoulders straightened and his voice was proud. "The boy's grown and filled out since you went away, Yankee. A great youngster, one of the best. As good a man as Fort Danger can boast. Better look out, son, or he'll prove a better man than you. See any sign of him as you came down?"

"He's in," murmured Yankee miserably. "Asleep. He had a—"

"Crawled into bed without reportin' to me?" roared the factor. "That ain't like him, Yankee. Go rout him!"

"But, uncle—"

"No arguments, Yankee. Go get the boy."

Yankee knew better than to argue with his uncle when his mind was made up. The man was as stubborn as he was just. The young trouble shooter of Fort Danger turned outside, his mouth ash-dry with distaste of his job. Back to the dugout he went in the failing light, calling two Indians to help him as he passed the village outside the gate. Unemotionally, they obeyed his order to lift Ben's body. With Yankee leading the way, they carried it back to the factor's office.

A whispering ran along the roofed arcade as they crossed the compound with their burden, and the roistering in the grog room stilled. Men moved through the twilight, knotting up as they swung in behind. Yankee held the door open while the Indians carried the body in and laid

it on the floor. Then, at his nod, they filed out. Yankee and his uncle were alone, and the older man looked at his nephew with angry eyes.

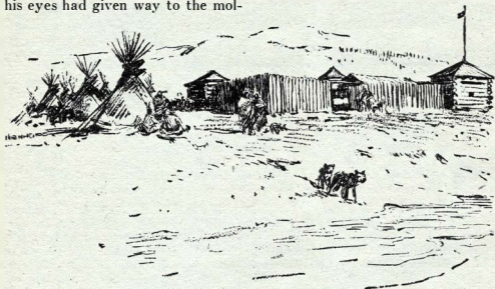
"I see," he said. "Why didn't you tell me he was drunk? Who gave him the liquor?"

**Y**ANKEE said nothing. But his action of laying the knife with the bloody, beaded haft before the factor was answer enough. Cooper Dawson went white. Words tore at his throat, but no sound came. His eyes were pleading for a denial of the thing he feared. Then he ceased struggling, although a sob shook him. He moved to the side of the dead youth, knelt and pulled aside the folds of the blanket. For a long time he stared into the gray expressionless face. Yankee watched him, his heart pounding thunderously.

When Cooper Dawson rose, he was a changed man. The chill of fear in his eyes had given way to the mol-

Yankee, his nerves held in check, pointed to the knife. "That blade says it was a Gros Ventre. But Ba'tise, too, is dead, killed at his own fire, his fur stolen. Whoever did that job left a man who tried for me and Weasel. When Weasel pinked him, he dropped a long gun marked with the crown of Anglo-American. If the two were killed by the same outfit—"

Cooper Dawson went wearily to his chair and slumped into it. "The two were together," he muttered. "An' it goes without sayin' that the same killers got them both. Murder and robbery. Ravenhill has gone bad and, like a killer wolf, must be laid low. Such boldness simply means he's lined up the Indians and Independents to attack us. With us out of the way, he'll destroy his allies in no time at all." His eyes suddenly blazed fury at Yankee. "I listened too long to your drivel about



ten heat of anger. His voice, normally thin and gentle, was a flat, toneless rasp.

"Who? Who did this?"

peace," he raged, "when I should have been answering the threat of war with steel. This settles it. We fight!"



He rose, seeming to have grown to greater girth and stature. He flung open the door and his voice struck out into the gathering darkness:

"Jules! Jules Scarlatine! Somebody tell that big Frenchman to come here."

A strident: "*Ho! Oui, mon ami!*" came from the compound. Heavy boots pounded the corduroy floor of the arcade. A great body filled the doorway, flexing at the knees to permit the coonskin cap of the giant to clear the lintel. He seemed to fill the room, this buckskin-clad *coureur de bois* with the commanding height, the outflung barrel chest, bolelike thighs and confident, patronizing grin. At sight of the body, his smile faded for the briefest of moments. His lips formed the word: "*Mort!*" Then he was looking at Yankee with puzzled interest.

"Jules," said the factor. "Meet my nephew, Yankee Dawson. He's been making the rounds of the posts, like I told you. He's failed, of course, to arrive at any basis of peace. Now that he's back, with the

body of my son, he will listen favorably to some other plan. And that's why I called you in. I've reconsidered my refusal to let you work out a peace."

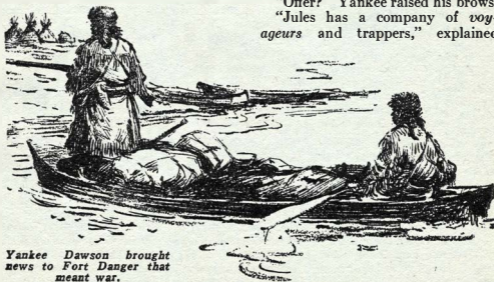
"*Bien!*" The big Frenchman's voice shook the room. His hand came out to grip Yankee's and the young trouble shooter winced. The giant chuckled, slackened the grip, eased his great form into a chair and whipped off his cap to release long, raven hair. Never once did his eyes leave the younger man. "You bring me good fortune, my frien'," he cried. "Dees oncle of yours, she's de stubborn one. She wants de peace but she's not willing to fight for it. Mebby she's thinking you get de peace by begging for it, *hein?*" He threw back his head and the windows shook with his laughter.

Yankee looked at Cooper Dawson, puzzled. And the factor was quick with the answer.

"Jules," he explained, "comes from St. Louis with an offer that I've turned down at least a dozen times in the last six weeks. But he wouldn't take no for an answer. I'm glad now, he didn't."

"Offer?" Yankee raised his brows.

"Jules has a company of *voyageurs* and trappers," explained



Yankee Dawson brought news to Fort Danger that meant war.

Cooper Dawson. "Some are here now, others map the trails and learn the country. He agrees to rid the beaver country of raiders and killers, trouble makers of all kinds. He says he can bring law and peace, which is about the idea you have had—"

"How?" The question was wrung from Yankee.

"I tell you how, *mon ami*," answered Jules, leaning forward and stabbing with a thick forefinger. "Dese raiders dat keel de trappaire, dat steal de fur from de cache, she's understand only two things—de gon an' de knife. But Jules she understand them, too. We meet dese killers and we fight! *Eh bien*, what a good fight we have! Den—*pouf*—we have no more trouble!"

His lips curled back from yellowed teeth as he talked; his eyes shone with the heat of unholy fires. And Yankee, watching him, saw through his words and into the red welter beyond. Big Jules Scarlatine was bringing war to the fur lands, marching at the head of a skeleton army that would gain strength as he moved. In the cruel brutality that characterized the man, Yankee read a lack of qualm. He would clean up as he went. All men would be fair game, friend and foe alike. The man was the personification of greed and power. He would drive back Ravenhill's Anglo-American mercenaries, or kill them. The Independents, Mink Fulton at Blackfoot Post on the Flathead, Jock Lanark at Fort Beaver on the Yellowstone, Reni du Chien at Poste Carcajou, 'on Pend d'Oreille, all these and others, would be rubbed out.

"At what price?" Yankee demanded coldly of his uncle. "What does he ask to sign such a peace in blood?"

Again the Frenchman answered: "Half of de beaver water in de

Northwest Territories." He smiled as if it were but a new Treasury note he were asking. "We trap heem together—de Great Western for de United States, Jules Scarlatine for La Belle France—"

"France!" Yankee almost shouted it, for that country had ceased to be a factor in the West since the Louisiana Purchase.

The big Frenchman stood up, a far-away look in his dark eyes. He shrugged eloquently, spreading his hands. "Ah-h-h," he sighed. "France is very far away. So I, Jules Scarlatine, will be France—in America."

### CHAPTER III

#### UNBIDDEN DELEGATE

SEVERAL days had passed. Indian runners had been dispatched to call in the men who looked to Jules Scarlatine for leadership. And they came straggling in, grim, hairy men in soiled buckskins and moccasins, carrying long rifles and bearing the indubitable stamp of trained and capable rangers of the woods. There was a depth of purpose in every line of them, an innate cruelty that made Yankee Dawson shudder. For the dozenth time he faced his uncle with the same plaint.

"It won't do, Uncle Cooper," he stated flatly. "These men are killers and they'll sooner or later, turn on you. Listen to Scarlatine out there. Hear him roar. One would think he was the factor and you only one of his hirlings. You have the reputation of being the best man in all the woods country. Before this man is done, he'll brand Great Western as an outfit of destruction, and you a murderer. Do you think that's the way Ben would have wanted it? You think he'd ask you to avenge him like that?"

The factor shook his head, troubled. "You're jumping at conclusions," he muttered. "Scarlatine promises to bring peace. Aside from those rogues raiding the trap lines, he makes no boast of killing."

"He don't need to," growled the younger man. "It's written all over him. If he's thinking of making the Northwest safe for trappers, he's not thinking of Great Western. Do you think he'll consider you when he's won half the rights to this fur company?"

Cooper Dawson blinked. "That's a bridge we must cross when we come to it, Yankee," he said miserably. "Right now I'm between the devil and the sea. I'm desperate and in no position to split hairs. You don't like it; what have you to offer in its stead?"

"Forget this man's crazy plan," pleaded Yankee. "Let me send runners to the different posts, calling for a meeting where we can talk over our troubles and try for new agreements. Not here, nor at any other post, but up in the Teton Basin, in the land of the Gros Ventres. It will take six weeks. If we fail to work anything out, I'll quit arguing and lend myself to whatever action you want to take."

"It won't work," grumbled Cooper Dawson. "We'll lose six weeks and then—"

The door opened and Jules Scarlatine filled the portal. His smile was tolerant, pitying, as if he was forcing himself to bear with the quarrels of children.

"*Mon factor*," he said courteously. "You make Big Jules capitaine of fighting men for Great Western. We have much work and great danger in war. *Bien!* De plan of de *petit enfant*, she is maybe good. It is worth a try to call this meeting that so much blood she does not flow.

So let us call the parley *hein?*"

Cooper Dawson was patently pleased with the Frenchman's concurrence and readily agreed. Yankee, too, was surprised—and suspicious. But Jules was apparently so sincere in his desire to make one last try for a peaceful solution to the problem that scourged the beaver country, that the young trouble shooter began to chide himself for his doubts.

No time was lost. Runners were sent out to the camps and posts, calling the meeting. Time passed. Furs piled up in the compound at Fort Danger. Trappers came in with their furs, some with a full winter's catch, others to report losses to mysterious raiders who shot from the dark. Some, among the first who should have checked in, had not showed. Wagers were being made that they never would.

One by one, the runners returned with word that the companies would each send a delegate to the meeting in the Teton Basin, with authority to give guarantees and make agreements. The tribes had been purposely left out, a reflection of Yankee's belief that if they were involved in the long series of depredations they were only being exploited, misled by one or more of the fur companies.

And so, as the fur sorting was due to commence, the day came for Yankee to depart. He packed his canoe and, with the moment at hand, the whole post came down to see him off. Word of his intent had spread, how, Yankee didn't know. Weasel Greer was one of the first to take his hand.

"I'm hurt most mortal, Yank," he complained, "that yo're haulin' up river without yore ol' side pardner. You an' me, we've allus traveled together."

"An' thought together, Weasel," added Yankee, "until you turned toward war. No, I'm going alone. If I fail, I'll know it was because I wasn't strong enough to succeed, not because I listened to a partner who held notions contrary to mine."

Weasel nodded glumly, gripped the youngster's hand and gave way to Cooper Dawson, who impressed upon his nephew the need of urgency in getting back word of how the parley went. Delay, he pointed out, could be costly to Great Western if agreements were not consummated. Yankee promised, then Jules Scarlatine was before him, smiling in his humorous, almost taunting way, folding the younger man's hand again in that constrictor grip.

"*Bonne chance, mon enfant,*" he boomed. "Be strong and have courage, *mon ami*, for what you cannot do at the Tetons, Big Jules will do when you return. *Au revoir.* Goo' luck, my frien', and goo'-by."

**Y**ANKEE DAWSON was later than he had hoped to be at the abandoned post of the old Henry Co., on Mad River, above the gorge. Melting snow had swollen the river and there had been many portages. Then, too, he had detoured to visit the summer village of the Gros Ventres, on the Bondurant, to smoke the pipe with the headmen, to plead for peace among the neighbors of the beaver country and adherence to old agreements.

So, after traveling without rest all one night and most of the next day, he came into the lush basin of the Tetons, beaching his canoe where the tepees and cooking fires of Indians and a hundred free trappers marked the site of the rendezvous. The sun was setting behind the jagged crests of the Grand Tetons and the air swirled with the re-

dolence of burning pine wood and the aroma of cooking meat.

At the tepee of a Gros Ventre trapper, down from Buffalo Fork with prime otter and beaver, he sat to rest and to eat while hearing the news. The emissaries of the fur companies had arrived several days before, had waited impatiently for him to arrive and were even now convinced he was not coming, that their long trip had been in vain.

Ravenhill had sent a dour Cornishman, Gordon FitzBugh, who for long had been trap-line trouble shooter for Anglo-American. From Mink Fulton, at Blackfoot Post on the Flathead, had come a towering breed with pistol and knife in his belt and a silence of tongue to match the evil of his repute. Jock Lanark, had chosen his son, Douglas, to represent him, a headstrong, arrogant man of thirty, with the reputation of shooting first and talking afterward. From Reni du Chien's Post Carcajou, on Pend d'Oreille, had come Raoul Gasc, a little Frenchman with an unimposing front but the deadliest blade in the Northwest Territories.

Yankee considered the list with distaste. That they were all fighters was only a reflection of the doubt the companies held regarding the honesty of this call. He'd have to break down that suspicion, show them clearly that prosperity and the good of all, lay only in orderly adherence to the original agreements and a mutual desire for peace. He sent one of the Indians with word of his arrival and with the word that he would meet with the delegates in the old Henry log fort soon after dark. Then he stretched out on buffalo robes and went to sleep.

A big red moon was rising in the east when the Gros Ventre woke him. Yankee stretched sleep from

his weary frame and took out for the old post, a scant quarter mile upstream. He had covered less than half that distance when the wolf howl boomed down from higher ground to the west. And a gust of chill, rustly wind seemed to shake the basin. The Indian dogs broke into a chorus of yelping, barking and howling. Yankee halted in his tracks, stricken suddenly with a premonition of danger. He knew it for a trick of his nerves, yet it was so real as to wring a gasp from him.

It was as if some presence, invisible and ghastly, stood there beside him. As if a cracked whisper rode that tumultuous little breeze. "Death comes also to the parley! What you think or say or do, will have little weight in this meeting. Death will have the last and clinching word."

Yankee shuddered, shook himself. Was he still sleeping, dreaming? Cold sweat broke out on his forehead and he knew he was awake as a lightning flash struck downward, changing the night into a white, unreal landscape. And thunder rolled down the canyon, rumbling, crashing, running out into innumerable growling echoes. The rain came down then and black clouds, scudding eastward across the peaks, obscured the moon and brought a Stygian blackness.

YANKEE cast off the spell, pulled his gun in under his coat to protect the priming. And slowly, reaching out for a return of his shaken confidence, he moved toward the old fort, the only object looming black in the intermittent lightning bursts. A faint light showed in one of the oiled-skin panes and toward that beacon Yankee bent his steps. He saw it blacked out momentarily, as some opaque form passed be-

tween. Again he halted, his gun gripped hard. The wind whipped rain into his face and drove it through his clothes. But it was not that which chilled him. It was the low curse that came down the gale:

"Parbleu, she's de *maudit* night, this one!"

"Jules!" The name was wrung from Yankee's parted lips.

"Hoi!" Steps slogged through the wet grass. A giant form loomed black against the curtain of night. A heavy hand fell upon Yankee's shoulder. "Hell fire, *mon enfant*, where you been, eh?" rumbled Jules Scarlatine. "I leave Fort Danger one day after you. I get here one day before you. I think for sure, you not come. But, *bien*, you are here. And de *deputiés* are here. Come!"

Jules started to draw him toward the door of the old fort, but Yankee tore loose.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded. "If you're planning some of your strong-arm business—"

"*Non, non!*" The Frenchman's protest was fervent. "I come but to protect you from danger, *mon ami*. To see that thees men do not hurt you. Your uncle, she worry and fret, so I come along to ease his mind."

Yankee could understand that, after what had happened to Ben, but the patronizing air of the big *voyageur* irked him. "Listen," he said, his voice rough-edged. "I called this party an' I intend to run it my way. You keep out of it, you understand? Go on back to the rendezvous and wait for me."

"I am your bodyguard, *mon ami*," said Jules, gently but firmly. "I go where you go."

Secretly, Yankee was glad enough for the comforting strength of the giant at his elbow. "All right," he

said grudgingly. "But you keep in the background and keep your mouth shut."

He led the way, Jules following. As they neared the portal, the rumble of voices struck out at them. And they seemed to grate against the young trouble shooter's nerves. Everything—their identity, their tones, the night, this giant at his heels—seemed to challenge all that part of Yankee Dawson that he tried to suppress. He felt slow rage warm him. And, instead of knocking as he might have normally, he jerked the weathered latch string and shouldered inside.

Four men, playing at cards, on a blanket before a leaping hearth fire, lost interest in their gaming and came to their feet, staring at the two dripping intruders. Yankee knew them all, and they knew him. Yet there were no greetings passed. Yankee's interest was on their patent readiness for war. Theirs was for the towering, darkly smiling man who stood just inside the doorway.

"Dawson"—it was lithe, slit-eyed Douglas Lanark who broke the spell—"you sent word we would meet, one delegate from each company. Who's your little friend?"

Yankee was embarrassed, between two fires. Jules, acting for Cooper Dawson, would not be easily dismissed. Yet his very presence in this gathering created an immediate antagonism and menaced the peace of the meeting. Using caution, Yankee colored his introduction.

"Jules Scarlatine, gentlemen, is an independent trapper from St. Louis. He has decided to compete in this Northwest country and demands a seat at our council."

"Anudder company, eh?" The wicked little eyes of Raoul Gasc burned at Jules. "Where is your post, my grinning horse?"

There was an instant tensing as the Poste Carcajou man flung the insult. Only Jules didn't seem to notice. His great shoulders rolled and he chuckled good-naturedly as he stepped before Yankee. "*Hoi!*" His voice rivaled the thunder. "Jules Scarlatine, *mes amis. Le Fievre Scarlatine!*"

"Scarlet Fever?" Blocky Gordon FitzBugh looked puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"You will hear it often, *m'sieu's*. And you will learn much that you would not believe if I boasted now. *Oui*, I am de king of de Nort', *m'sieu's*, and my post she will be de envy of you all. Until I build it, I stay at Fort Danger."

Douglas Lanark's voice was vibrant with passion. "Is this the peace you bring, Dawson?"

"*Non!*" Big Jules answered for him. "I have de peace, here." And he whipped from his belt a crooked, deadly blade.

## CHAPTER IV

### PEACE WITH THE KNIFE

IT was all like a dream to Yankee, so quickly did it happen. Jules bellowed: "*Guerre a mort!*" and leaped at Tonkin, the silent emissary from Blackfoot Post on the Flathead. The breed made a swift stab for his knife, but Jules ripped out his throat with a lightning stroke of his blade.

"You bleedin' butcher!" cried FitzBugh, drawing his Green River knife. He closed with Jules, whose poniard ripped across and through his buckskins, in a death stroke. FitzBugh sank to the floor with a moan.

Douglas Lanark, nearest to Yankee, whipped the flintlock pistol from the fringed sheath at his thigh.

"You treacherous dog!" he rasped, and leveled the weapon.

With his own life hanging in the balance, Yankee launched himself at the man. His left hand caught the wrist that lifted the gun, bore it aside. A blast rocked the air of the room, the bullet snarling past Yankee's ear. The Great Western trouble shooter whipped out his knife and stabbed with it. Lanark knocked it aside, laying hold of Yankee's wrist. And then they stood there, the firelight playing upon their straining bodies. Each was intent upon the deadly game they played, neither daring to venture a look at the battle being waged between Jules Scarlatine and Gasc, deadliest blade in all the fur country.

For a full minute, Yankee duelled with Lanark, in a test of strength, without result. He was trying to turn his blade in and down, while the son of the Fort Beaver factor strove to turn it out and up. For a while they were equal. Yankee gritted his teeth against the pain of the effort. His body ached. Soon, he knew, his arm would numb and then—

Desperately, he called upon strength in hidden wells, deep inside him. He felt Lanark give. The blade pointed down, inching in, inching in. Breath gusted from the lungs of the Fort Beaver man and he took a backward step. But Yankee followed in to consolidate his leverage. It was then that Lanark remembered his right hand, his grip upon the useless gun that had been fired. He suddenly loosed that hold and shot his hand to his knife hilt. Yankee didn't counter or try to protect himself against that menace. His answer was in his own right hand and in his adversary's weakening left.

As Lanark swerved, Yankee put all he had into the down sweep. And, though in that moment, he knew he had won, there was no triumph lifting him. Instead, he knew a vast regret. This battle, these killings, were none of his doing, no part of his plan. He consoled himself as he drove his blade to the hilt in Lanark's neck, that he was defending his life, making possible completion of the bitter task necessitated by this night's work.

Then Yankee was planted above his fallen foe, gasping for breath and watching the play of steel between two great fighters across the room. Gasc, a pygmy beside Scarlatine, was all finesse, but Jules matched him with an unguessable skill grounded on sheer power. Though both were bathed with sweat, neither was marked. Their blades flashed, rang, caught and hung. Then they broke and Gasc lunged. Jules swerved aside, the point of the knife slitting his sleeve. It must have scratched him, too, for a yell burst from his lungs.

"Peeg," he roared. "For that I—"

His right leg shot out to kick the smaller man's feet out from under him. As Gasc fell, Jules pounced upon him. Yankee turned his head away. He heard the sickening strokes and when he turned, Jules was looking at him questioningly.

**T**HERE, *mon enfant*," he said, his voice still thick with rage. "There is your peace." He cocked his head, listening to the distant beat of feet and the cries of men rushing from the rendezvous. "*Sacré bleu!*" he murmured. "The wolf pack would pull down the grizzly who kills the snake. Come, it is best that we make for the rivair, my friend."

He caught Yankee's sleeve, pulled him outside. The horror of the

merciless execution of the emissaries was on Yankee, sickening him. But the sound of raging men rushing through the storm, roused him. He matched Jules' swift run across the flat. The darkness swallowed them.

Jules seemed to be rushing blindly through the night, that he knew where he was going, was evident, as the murmur of the river lifted ahead. Forms were suddenly before them. The big Frenchman's orders crackled. Yankee found himself handed into a long batteau, felt it shoved into the current. His head bobbed to the thrust of eight strong paddles. They shot downstream, with the clamor of pursuit lifting behind.

At the lower end of a swampy island, less than a mile downstream, the dugout swerved abruptly to the left, the paddlers turning it up a sluggish arm of the river. They rested on their paddles now, listening to their pursuers flash down the main channel of Mad River. Then, when the sounds had been lost, the *voyageurs* of Jules Scarlatine drove on up the stream, swiftly.

Slowly the shock, the rage, the disappointment seeped out of Yankee, until he could think clearly. And out of his thought came a startling truth. This Scarlatine, supposedly a newcomer from St. Louis, was no stranger to these parts. He had come with surprising speed to the rendezvous, from Fort Danger. His men were now navigating a treacherous river in pit blackness. Who was this man? What lay in his mind after the coup he had counted this night? Jules' voice came from behind.

"You would like to kill big Jules, *mon ami*," he chuckled. "But do not be hasty. Those men would

have killed you there tonight, if I do not act first. Some day you see it—and understand."

"I understand now," said Yankee, a canker of bitterness sweeping him. "You've made an outlaw post of Fort Danger. You've made a two-tongued snake of Cooper Dawson. From now on, men will trap with one hand and fight with the other. You've planted the seeds of war and the fur lands will run red with human blood."

Jules seemed to think that over. After a while he said: "De game is bigger than you think, *mon enfant*. De rustling leaves speak it and de river says it over and over again. But you do not hear. Dere is no peace like you dream. De Oregon country is big and de nations will fight for it. America and France will share it, if you play with Jules. *Le Fievre Scarlatine* will sweep de Anglo-American far to de nord. It will dump de bearded men of La Russe into de sea to de west. We will all have de fight. When it is over, I will take this land for France; you will take it for your country. Frien's, allies, we shall hold it together. It is a great gift I offer. Few men live who can offer so much to their flag. Remember this when you hate Jules. Remember what you saw tonight when you think of fighting *Le Scarlatine*."

Yankee had no answer, but he had food for new thought. The man had spoken like a patriot, impassioned. How far apart were the two facets of his character. One moment a raging killer, terrible in his savagery; the next a calculating statesman of wide vision. And though his dream of re-establishing France in the New World seemed insane to Yankee, the man had made him see how he and his reckless *voyageurs*, allied with the mercen-



aries of Great Western, might make it happen.

"Where are you taking me?" he flung over his shoulder.

"Taking you, *mon ami*?" Jules' voice reflected surprise. "But, *non*, I am not taking you, my friend. Like two generals, we go to talk terms with a third."

"Who?"

"Running Bear, chief of the Black-foots."

"Running Bear?" Yankee gasped. "He hates us all, preferring to fight us rather than treat. They'll hang our scalps, along with those of many another white man, in their tepees."

"I am very jealous of my black hair, *m'sieu*."

"And more than that," Yankee went on bitterly, "there is nowhere else for us to go now, except back to Fort Danger to stand a siege. They will be hunting us like mad wolves."

"Safer they come to us, *mon enfant*, than that we go to them. It is plain you do not yet know Jules Scarlatine. But you will learn, *mon brave*, just as *de rest* will learn."

## CHAPTER V

### THE RED DEATH

THAT night was a never-to-be forgotten one for Yankee Dawson. The dugout was driven some twenty miles up the Mad River, abandoned at the foot of thunderous rapids and allowed to drift away with the current. To the Great Western trouble shooter, it was like burning their bridges behind them. Here they were in trackless wilderness, hundreds of miles from their base, with only their legs and their guns to help them escape from those who must soon be hunting them avidly.

The surprising Jules wasted no

time. "*En marche!*" he snapped, and led the way along a trail that Yankee could not even see, let alone predict what lay ahead. Single file they moved—Jules, Yankee, then the other eight, moccasins padding, buckskins swishing as they climbed.

They marched till the dawn, occasionally resting as the trail grew steeper. As the sun came up, Yankee spotted that slight movement on the crest above, saw the dark head uplifted, with the eagle feather whipping in the breeze. He caught Jules' great bicep.

"Wait!" he commanded, and pointed.

Jules smiled patiently. "And die," he added meaningly. "Is it only the loser who waits, *mon ami*. *En marche!*"

The lurking figure vanished and the morning seemed filled with peace as they topped the ridge and dropped into the water meadow beyond. The storm had passed and the new sun shone warm from a cloudless sky. Grouse drummed in the thickets. Marmots barked from the rocks. A wren regaled them cheerily.

It was so for an hour. Then, electrically, a figure was in the trail before them, a tall Indian, his yellow buckskins beaded, porcupine-quilled, his full war bonnet rippling in the breeze. Jules' hand went back and the company halted. And then, as if by magic, forms moved from the bushes lining the trail, and they were surrounded by Blackfoot braves, painted, feather-bedecked, their leveled lances, tipped with blades secured from Russian traders some years before, glistening in the sun.

Yankee felt a chill move along his spine, but he never shifted his eyes from that darkly scowling figure in the trail. That it was Chief Run-



*On the banks of  
Mad River,  
Indians attacked  
the boats.*

ning Bear, he knew. He knew, also, that word from that grim red man would precipitate an orgy of blood that must surely see ten white men slain.

"Where would the white man go?" The query came in the guttural dialect of the Blackfoot. "What do you want in the land of Running Bear?"

Yankee, with his facility for native tongues, waited for Jules to demand the interpretation. His surprise

was great when Scarletine's voice boomed out in the Blackfoot tongue, fluently.

"I go where I will, Running Bear," he thundered. "And I demand the welcome that the unfriendly red man denies me. My men are hungry and tired. We would go to your village for meat and the comfort of your robes. Hurry! Do not keep us waiting."

The chief's eyes glittered. "You

howl," he said, "like the little prairie wolf at the heels of the great four-footed hunters. Your noise is only annoying." He lifted his face, voicing the weird, long-drawn ululation that always struck terror into the hearts of the invaders of the red man's country. And, as if by magic, the hemming heights and ridges teemed with mounted braves, their feathers whipping bravely, their lances giving back the sunlight. "This is your answer, white man."

Jules Scarlatine's laughter woke taunting echoes. He caught at a thong looped about his great neck, jerked a brilliantly red vial from his shirt front and held it high for all to see. "Fool!" he roared. "You call your braves forth to their destruction. Have you not guessed that I am *Le Fievre Scarlatine*? Do you dare me to loose the death I hold here in my hand? Do you invite the fate earned by the sullen Crows at Absaroka? Do you wish the death wails to lift from your lodges as they did from the tepees of the Shoshones, in the Wapitis? Do you call the black clouds of vultures to your village, as they came to the lodges of your kinsmen, the Piegans, at Kay-i-you. Answer quickly, Running Bear?"

**S**AVAGERY fled the face of the Indian chief, leaving it ashen, blank, stupid with fear. Lances dipped as those nearest Jules fell back, prey to an awe that diluted their courage. A vague restlessness swept the mounted legions on the ridges, as they half-turned their ponies as if for flight. The chief, his eyes fixed with an awful fascination upon the writhing liquid inside the red vial, seemed stricken dumb. And as he hesitated, he was joined by a Blackfoot who towered above him by a full head, whose spindly

limbs seemed quite unequal to the task of supporting and balancing so tall a figure. This Indian's head was crowned with buffalo horns. His buckskins were heavily worked with beads and quills and the long fringes were fixed to hundreds of tiny trade bells that tinkled musically as he moved. Nor did he cease to move, even as he placed himself before his chief. The tasseled rattle in his left hand swished rhythmically to the drone of his words and his long legs, flexed at the knees, beat a chiming time to his harangue.

"Great chief," he droned, "who asks only that the grass grow green and lush upon the trails of war, and hatred cease, the Great Spirit has been good to us of late. He has brought the rain to strengthen grass and browse that our ponies be strong and fast against our enemies, that meat be fat and plentiful, that our seed be strong, our increase satisfying, our people happy. But somewhere we have failed in our gratitude. For He has brought us, too, the White Man, whom he also made, to share our meat and to kill our little beaver friends. We have found his heart bad and have held him back from what our fathers handed down to us. Great Spirit, who pitched the same blue tepee above us both, is now displeased. He gives the White Man stronger medicine than ours. It is well that we turn down our lance points and bid him welcome. I, Touch-the-cloud, have spoken."

An eager "*How, how, how!*" swept down from the ridges as the fearful tribesmen strove against the horror of the red death that had mysteriously decimated certain remote villages of the fur country. And Yankee Dawson, like all the rest, was prey to foreboding as Running Bear motioned the tall medicine man

aside and continued to stare at that crimson vial. A jay flapped close, shrieking insistently, as if to drive home baleful warnings to the chief. A swirling wind swooped in to shake the trees, fleeing with a mournful moan. And Running Bear found his voice. The opening meadowland grew ululant again and the mounted braves were no longer a menace on the ridges. The chief's hand rose and fell, in a signal half in pride, half despair.

"Come!" he said. He led the way. With a thin smile on his broad face, Jules let the vial slide once again down his neck as he followed. The braves fell in behind the little group of whites. And so they came to the village of the skin lodges set in a protected cove in the hills, where the river swung close.

Word had gone ahead. There was no taunting of shrill child voices, no anathema from the silent, staring squaws. Even the horde of skulking dogs seemed to sense the terror and were mute. Running Bear snapped orders. Robes were fetched and spread beneath the pine before the chief's own lodge. Meat was brought. Ravenous, Yankee gorged with the rest. And when appetites were sated, when all had stretched out to smoke and rest, Running Bear came to squat upon the robe with Jules, to smoke in silence for a while and then to speak.

"Your medicine is too strong for my people, Bearer of the Red Death," he said humbly. "They are afraid and I will not be the one to feed their fears, even though it were the life of my son you demanded. What do you want of us?"

"First"—Jules seemed to expand with a sense of his power—"horses for all of us."

Running Bear tossed his head "They graze there, upon the mea-

dow. They are fat and strong and swift. I will have the best ones caught and you can leave at once with whatever gifts—"

"And second," Jules interrupted coldly, "I want the English girl that your hunters captured near Fort Coffin."

The chief's eyes blinked. "Our enemies spread false reports about us—"

"The half-breeds say your word is but the crooked word," broke in Jules, smiling cruelly. "That your heart is bad, your words false and your tongue split like a snake's. Fetch the girl!"

**R**UNNING BEAR started. His eyes seemed to be fascinated by those twin thongs on either side of Scarlatine's neck. He rose, dark eyes flashing. Then the touch of prideful anger had passed and his shoulders slumped. He lifted a cry and braves darted into a tepee, emerging almost immediately, with a white girl who struggled and fought them. They released her before the chief, but her eyes were not for him. Her contemptuous glance swept Big Jules, then his men, coming to rest at last upon Yankee Dawson. She straightened her disarranged riding habit and her lip curled.

"You dogs!" she flayed them. "You despicable renegades. If . . . if I were only a man—"

"*Sacré bleu!*" breathed Jules. "What a beautiful man you would be, *mon cherie.*"

Yankee stood up, staring at her. She was beautiful, for all that the marks of her stay in the Blackfoot village were upon her. Tall, lithe, with the pink and white skin of the English, she was patently a girl of breeding.

"Who is she?" he demanded of Jules.

"Who is she?" echoed Jules, and his great laugh rolled through the silent village. "*Mon petit enfant* asks who she is. She is the little wild cat sired by our frien' Cecil Ravenhill."

"Ravenhill!" Yankee's eyes widened. "Then what are we waiting for? Let's get those horses and take her to Coffin. Her father must be half crazy—"

"Take her to Coffin?" Jules gasped at him. "It is you dat is crazy, *mon ami*. Why do you t'ink Jules comes here? Why, but to take dis girl as a hostage."

"Hostage?"

"*Securité* that her papa leave Fort Coffin and take his mercenaries nort' of de Kamloops, de Milk and de Missouri rivers. Dere is no place for de British in de fur lands of France—and de *Etats Unis*. You understand?"

Yankee understood many things. Once again Jules had betrayed, in his outlining of new fur boundaries, that he had long planned this coup, that he was far from a stranger to Oregon. Moreover, he was showing plainly now, as he had showed at Old Fort Henry, that his aim was paramount, that sentiment, mercy, humanity had no place in his scheme. And, as plainly as if Jules had just voiced it, Yankee knew that if the man made good his dream, his agreement to share the territory with Great Western was worthless. Having used the strong American company as an ally to triumph, he would turn on them. In that moment, Yankee knew that some day he would be fighting this giant, as surely as the rise of tomorrow's sun. And the fight would be bitter.

"You fool," he flared. "Do you think Ravenhill is the kind that

cringes? Do you think he will trade away his trust, even to save his kin?"

Jules shrugged. "Who know?" he grinned. "But if he will not trade, my frien'; then Jules will still be ahead. I will then have to drive the Anglo-American nort'. And what comfort, what joy to have dis beautiful lady in my camp—"

His fingers fixed on the girl's arm and he drew her close, beaming. She flushed under his amorous glance and struggled against his strength. Yankee started forward.

"Take your dirty hands off the girl, Scarlatine," he commanded, suddenly reckless. "She's not for your kind; she's a lady."

"*Oui, oui!*" The giant took no offense, neither did he take warning. "A beautiful lady, *mon ami*. Dere is none like her, even in La Belle St. Louis." His thick arm went about the girl. "She will be de queen of de squaws in our fighting camps, cooking my food, binding my wounds and gladdening my eye."

The girl struggled in his embrace. Yankee surged in, caught the huge man by the shoulder, tore him loose from his victim. Then, when Jules had spun to face him, his face crimson with rage, Yankee's balled right fist crashed against his jaw, felling him.

FOR an instant, there was absolute silence in the village, save for the swift breathing of the girl. Jules sat there, shaking his head like a dazed bear, bracing himself on his hands. Yankee stood above him, holding no delusions as to what must surely follow, his hand on the haft of his Green River knife. The effect of the concussion passed and light came into Jules' eyes. He lifted them, grinning coldly at the Great Western trouble shooter.

"So-o-o," he murmured venomously. "It comes too soon between us, *mon ami*. But none can handle Jules so." He came up explosively, falling back cautiously and driving his hand to his sheathed blade. Yankee whipped out his piece, following in. Then both were freezing. Touch-the-cloud, the medicine man, had suddenly materialized in the lane between lodges. His voice lashed the braves:

"To your lances, men of the Black-foot! Their medicine cannot be so strong, for they fight among themselves. Look, the younger one is not afraid of the Red Death, for he attacks *Le Fievre Scarlatine*. Strike now, while—"

Yankee read the truce in the big man's dark eyes, shot home his blade and lunged for his rifle. Again Jules was snatching out the red vial and his fingers toyed with the stopper. His voice thundered at the in-pushing braves.

"Back, dogs! Get back or I'll loose the Red Death among you! To the white man it is harmless; to the Indian it is awful death. Who wants to taste it?"

It stopped the jabbering of Touch-the-cloud. It stopped the advance of all but one of the warriors, one in the lead. Maybe he was deaf. Or maybe it was only that he was an unbeliever, fatalistic or resigned. He came rushing, his lance leveled. Jules, having loosed the vial, stood with only his knife in his hand. He raged at one of his men who threw a long gun level.

"Don't, fools! Don't shoot!"

The brave came charging in, his keen Russian blade gleaming. It was miraculous how Jules turned it with a quick flick of his wrist, the two blades clanging. Then the lance had flashed past the giant and the brave was sinking, Jules' knife in his

throat. And once again the red vial was uplifted, casting its further spell of awe over the cowering red men.

THAT night, after a heavy feast had been prepared for the appeasement of the white man with big medicine, Yankee lay on deep robes in Running Bear's lodge. Close by, the chief and big Jules lay, breathing in the heavy rhythm of profound sleep. In an adjoining tepee sounded the snores of Scarlatine's eight *voyageurs*. The village was very quiet, but Yankee's mind was too busy for sleep.

He had already decided what he had to do. He must get the Ravenhill girl back to her father, at Fort Coffin. And, of that whole hazardous project, getting her out of this village loomed as the most difficult step. By all the rules he knew, there would be no chance to take out the girl and get horses, too. That meant a hundred miles through the wilderness—afoot.

Having accepted that judgment as inevitable, Yankee came out of his robes to crouch in the darkness, his knife in his hand. He tiptoed to the tepee flap, where starlight showed him the guard sitting, with his back against the skin side of the lodge—asleep. Yankee struck from inside. A moment later he had dragged the dead Blackfoot to the robes, still warm from his own body, and had wrapped himself in the man's blanket.

Swaddled to the eyes, assuming the flat-footed shuffle of the Indian, Yankee let himself outside, threading his way among the lodges to the tepee from which they had dragged Elsie Ravenhill at Jules' order. A low, gruff challenge came from the shadows and the guard stepped toward him. Too late, he saw the flash of Yankee's knife. His mouth

opened, but his yell of warning died in a rattling croak as the white man ripped his throat. He fell, thrashing, and Yankee darted to the door of the tepee, his nerves on fire. Faint as it had been, that warning had been enough. The village was stirring.

He ripped open the flap, calling the girl's name. And she was there, fully awake, alert and ready for anything.

"What is it?" she demanded.

"It's a slim chance," he told her, "but we've got to take it. Come!"

In the desperation that must have been hers, she didn't question. Her hand went into his and they were running, dodging between the lodges, over a low bank, across a brawling stream that muted their movements and then into the deep timber beyond. And behind them lifted an ululate cry, followed by the bull voice of Jules Scarlatine. The chase was on.

## CHAPTER VI

### HARD TO HOLD

THOSE first hours were a torment, the details of which Yankee was never to recall with any clarity. Through scratchy thickets, over mazes of down timber, down the rocky beds of cold, tumbling streams, up rocky hillsides where boots and moccasins left no mark, he dragged the failing girl, sometimes even carrying her. Striking northwestward through untracked wilderness, praying for a delayed dawn, that they might put miles enough behind them so that some hound-nosed Blackfoot might not quickly pick up the faint trace they were leaving.

Breaking daylight caught them on a timbered ridge where a rocky up-thrust provided a sort of fort. Elsie

Ravenhill was a brave girl, but her labored breath and grayness of face hinted at utter exhaustion; so here Yankee elected to spend a few hours.

The girl slumped to the ground and fell at once into a profound sleep. But Yankee was too keyed up to sleep. His mind raced out ahead, covering the days that lay before them. And he found them hell. They were burning up a lot of energy and would need food. Meat roamed the forests, but for a long way, Yankee wouldn't dare to fire his rifle. Even now, marmots chattered at them from the rocks, so close, indeed, that Yankee tried to bag one by hurling rocks. He had no luck.

At midday, he reluctantly woke the girl and they struck out again, holding to the deeper timber lest keen Indian eyes might be watching from the heights. The pace was slower now, but none the less cautious. As the hours fled, Elsie found it more and more difficult to keep up, and they rested oftener. By sunset, Yankee was ravenous and the girl's deep-sunk eyes told plainly of her need of food. Leaving her in a thick fir grove, beside a playful little creek, he ranged afield, returning in an hour with a fool hen he had knocked off a limb with a stick. It bulked small against their consuming hunger; but it was food and they were grateful for the comfort of it, after he had roasted it over the small blaze he dared to light.

When they had picked the bird clean, Yankee studied the weariness in every line of the girl's relaxed figure. "I've covered our trail as well as I know," he told her, "and I think we can chance making this our camp for the night."

"And tomorrow?" she asked softly. "And the days after that?"

He sensed no fear in her questioning. She was knife steel sheathed in the velvet of civilization. It was more that she ached to know what to brace herself against. Yankee grinned at her.

"If we do as well tomorrow and the next day, as we have so far, two sunsets more will see you on the height, looking down upon your father's post, at the foot of Mount Coffin."

Strange lights glittered in her eyes. "An hour before I left Fort Coffin on my daily ride and was picked up by the ruffians from whom the Blackfeet took me, word came to my father's post."

"Word?"

"Of what the men of Great Western, led by you, did at the Teton rendezvous. I have never seen hate flare as it did at Fort Coffin. The men who own loyalty to the Company of the Woods, will not forget that, even though you return the daughter of the factor from the hands of his enemies. You must not venture within a day of Coffin."

Yankee shrugged. "After the terror of Running Bear's village, do you think to scare me with the threat of Anglo-American's men?"

She looked at him with hopelessness in her eyes, yet deep down, he saw a glint of admiration. She, too, shrugged, turned away. Soon she was asleep and Yankee covered her with his coat against the quickening chill of night.

Next morning, at first dawn, Yankee crouched beside a beaver pond. And now his luck was better. He caught a kitten behind the ear with a well-aimed stone, carried his prize back to show the awakening girl. Again they dared a small fire and ate heartily of the juicy, tender tail meat. What they did not eat, Yan-

kee carried along for future nourishment.

HER youth, reacting to strong food and encouragement, carried Elsie far that day. And, from the peaks that hazed the northern sky, Yankee knew they were within a modest day's reach of Fort Coffin. It made him carefree, and he hummed as he broiled the meat he carried over the blaze that evening. But the girl was silent, moody, plainly worried.

"I owe you much," she confessed, when she had finished her supper. "Too much, to let you throw your life away. Tomorrow morning I will go on alone. You turn where judgment tells you there is some measure of safety."

"Tomorrow," he said resolutely, "I take you on to Fort Coffin. Do you think I would throw away this chance of telling Cecil Ravenhill my side of what happened at Old Fort Henry?"

"Tell me," she begged.

And so, with the tiny bed of coals lighting their faces, Yankee told her of his dream of peace in the fur lands and of how he had worked to make it come true. He spoke to her of the reign of terror, of trappers slain, caches looted, canoes of furs intercepted and stolen. He recounted the experience Weasel Greer and he had had on Mad River, of the attempted assassination and the dropped Anglo-American rifle, then of his murdered foster brother and the rage of his uncle. Lastly, he told of his final attempt to mold a peace, of the call for a meeting of representatives of all the posts, of Scarlatine's appearance at the rendezvous and his merciless action.

"Your father wouldn't listen to me when I was last at Fort Coffin," he finished, "and he may not now.



So I'm glad that a Ravenhill knows now that the mercenaries of Anglo-American are—"

"No!" she broke in upon him. "You are wrong to think the Company of the Woods has broken its solemn agreement! I know father would never permit that. Years ago, the boundaries were fixed between Anglo-American and Great Western. We have not violated that. But, listen, Yankee Dawson, nine men of our company have been murdered already this year, their furs stolen. And each has been killed, according to our trackers, by invaders of Great Western. Last winter, men from Fort Danger stole the horses of our Nez Perces Indians. Those horses would have been a food supply when they were starving in last winter's blizzard. It turned them against us, against all whites.

She fell silent, staring into the coals. And Yankee ached to answer her, but she had not finished, he knew, so he waited.

"Father's a proud man," she went on at last. "In these woods, he is England. He fought hard to build the company prestige here. He'll fight just as hard to maintain it. He refused to listen to you, Yankee Dawson, because he felt you were not sincere: and who can blame him, after what went on? He hates your uncle, you and the Great Western, because he feels you broke your agreement. Somehow, I know that is not so. But . . . but I do not know who killed your men and robbed your caches."

She fell silent and the night bore in upon them like some menacing thing. She fell asleep sitting there and Yankee laid her down, covering her as he had the night before. And in the few minutes granted him before he fell asleep, he pondered on the things she had told him, the

things that had scourged both of the big fur companies of Oregon Territory. He went to sleep, convinced that some sinister force was at work to put the fur companies at each other's throats.

Yankee slept hard, awaking with a beam of fretted sunlight in his face. He saw his jacket lying upon the ground beside him, but Elsie Ravenhill was gone.

## CHAPTER VII

### DOWN THE MAD RIVER

**G**AUNT, bearded, plainly showing the physical and mental strain he had been under, Yankee came home to Fort Danger with none of his usual buoyancy. He went at once to Cooper Dawson's office, where he found the factor and Big Jules Scarlatine awaiting him. The Frenchman lolled in his chair, favoring the trouble shooter with a wry grin.

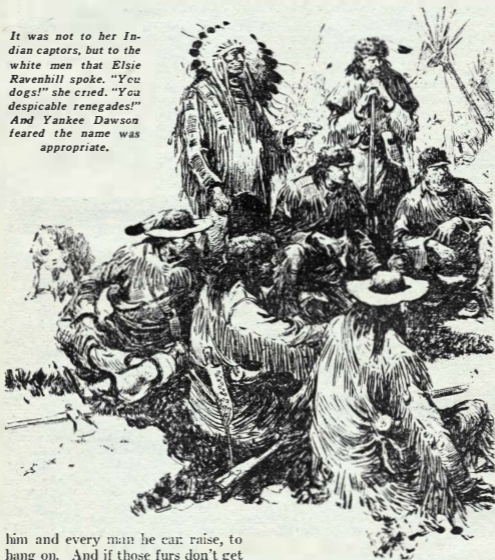
Cooper Dawson sat straight behind the desk, his eyes full of questions and his manner that of one who holds hard to the tag ends of a shattered temper. It came to Yankee before he had spoken a word, that what passed here between the three of them might well change the history of the vast Northwest fur country.

"I take it; uncle," said Yankee, dropping into a chair, "that Jules has told you of our peace meeting in Teton Basin."

"Jules didn't have to tell me," retorted the factor. "It was on the wind, days before his return. The leaves whispered it. You saw that our Indians had pulled their tepees? They lifted their furs and more, vanishing overnight. Free trappers went past in their batteaux, without stopping in for whiskey and talk. It's bad, Yankee, so bad, I sent

Weasel out with the fur at once. Jules knows now, it was a fool's work, but he stays on. We'll need do not love Scarlatine. Men who fight together must lay aside their little differences."

*It was not to her Indian captors, but to the white men that Elsie Ravenhill spoke. "You dogs!" she cried. "You despicable renegades!" And Yankee Dawson feared the name was appropriate.*



him and every man he can raise, to hang on. And if those furs don't get through to St. Louis—"

"They won't," predicted Yankee. "How can they? Every hand in the woods will be against Weasel and his men. We'll never see them again. And you can thank this," he indicated the grinning Jules.

The man chuckled amiably. "You will soon forget *mon ami*, that you

"Little?" Yankee raged at him. "You intolerable fool, this is not—"

"Yankee!" Cooper Dawson halted the tirade. "Stop it! What's this Scarlatine has been telling me about a girl?"

"The girl kidnaped from Fort Coffin by two buckskin men who, in turn, lost her to the Blackfeet," Yan-



kee explained swiftly. "Who were the first two acting for? And, how come Jules alone, was aware of the whole deal? The daughter of Cecil Ravenhill, whom Jules boasted would cook his meals and tend his lodge while he made war on the Anglo-American! Have you not told my uncle the whole truth about this, Scarlatine? And if not, why?"

The huge Frenchman scowled darkly, came to his feet. "A squaw's tale," he growled. "Am I an old beard who hangs a skirt before his lodge? Am I a Samson who seeks

a gentle hand to leech him of his strength. This does not make sense. I am *Le Fievre Scarlatine*, strongest bully of de woods. Let us have no more of this foolery!"

But Cooper Dawson wasn't satisfied by the giant's defense. "This is bad business, Jules. You have not denied abducting the girl. Why?"

"To hold her as hostage, to force Anglo-American out of Oregon and back into Canada," answered Yankee. "He boasted of it."

"Bah!" Jules roared. "You put words in my mouth, little one. Run-

ning Bear brought the girl as bait, hoping to weaken my medicine wid de offering of beauty. Did he, *hein?* No, but for my medicine, we all must have died. Now they fear us, even as they hunt us, because you killed two braves when you stole the girl. What have you done with her?"

Yankee flushed. "I . . . I lost her."

Jules' laughter shook the room. Then he was savage, stabbing a finger at the trouble shooter. "You lost her, *hein?* She escaped you, and why, *mon ami?* You were alone with her much. You talked, told her all you know. She runs now to her father; he is warned and de fight comes to us. Fool! *Imbecile!*"

Yankee's silence was tacit admission of the charge. Cooper Dawson twisted his fist in disgust. "As if we didn't have enough else to worry us," he exclaimed. "Well, it comes to this: We must put out scouts and be ready to make a stand, night or day, hoping Weasel Greer gets back soon with trade goods and supplies. It's Fort Danger against the whole North. We haven't got a friend."

IT seemed that Cooper Dawson had spoken the truth when, less than a week later, dugouts swept to the landing and Weasel came back to Fort Danger, battered, bloody, short-handed, but triumphant. They had been jumped on the Yellowstone and had been forced to fight their way through three days of hell. Cut off downstream, counting losses that would seriously cripple them, the bandy-legged little trapper had turned back, portaged unmolested over the divide and had returned along the Mad River to the post. The eighty bales of furs had been saved—for what?

Yankee, with Jules and as many

others as could crowd into the factor's office, listened to Weasel's profane recital. It was a body blow to Cooper Dawson, and he showed it.

"Cut off from the market," he mourned, "with our enemies bearing in. What in the world can we do?"

"Don't ask me," protested Yankee. "Ask Jules. He got you into this."

Every eye in the room fixed on the big Frenchman. Suavely, smilingly, he answered the unspoken query. "*Oui, mon factor*, you have but to ask Jules Scarlatine. I will sell de fur, for more money dan dey pay in St. Louis. It will not be too difficult."

"Where?" Cooper Dawson clutched at his words. "How?"

Jules beamed. "Down de Mad Rivair, m'sieu's. Astoria. De fur catch has been short to de west. Dutch ships, French ships, English ships and Russian ships wait off de mouth of de Columbia, crying for beaver pelts to sell in China."

There was silence as they stared at him. And Yankee felt as if he had been struck a blow. So this was the stranger from St. Louis. And he was talking of running fur down the Mad River and the Columbia, waters of reputed terrors, which few men had ever navigated. But Jules Scarlatine knew all about them, as his ready answers proved. His legends of reckless daring made a quick disciple of Cooper Dawson. It was soon arranged. And Yankee fell in with it, only because he had nothing better to offer. Somewhere in the three thousand miles they must travel before returning to Fort Danger, he would peg Big Jules, his lies, his plans and his villainy. And more important, he and Weasel, the only two Great Western men Cooper Dawson felt he could spare to go with Jules and his *voyageurs*, would

wear constant caution, even in their sleep.

THE season of green grass was already six weeks gone when the expedition embarked on the perilous journey. Here again, Jules had proved himself a true man of the north country. He was hard to satisfy. He would have none of the dugouts at the post, fashioning three stout batteaux of spruce, each to hold six paddlers and a steersman, food and blankets for seven men, and a thousand pounds of prime pelts.

At last the boats were ready and the morning had dawned. Cooper Dawson came down to wish them Godspeed, his face long, his eyes full of fears. For here was the pick of the fighting force he had banked upon to turn back the thrusts of their enemies. He was left with only a slightly greater force of his regular *engagés*.

"Jules," he said, thus recognizing the Frenchman as the expedition's head, "the fate of Great Western is in your hands. I'm depending on you to dispose of the fur and get back here with powder, ball and supplies—quick."

"And how can I fail, *mon factor*?" smiled the Frenchman. "Good boats, your own kinsman to help me and the best damn paddlers on dese rivers to work de batteaux for us. *Bien!* And a good fight to come back to. *Au revoir, mon ami*, and do not worry."

The boats shot down Mad River, miles falling behind swiftly. Vast plains rolled away from the river and the banks become high and rocky. The warlike Bannocks claimed this bleak land and Jules warned his men to be ever on the alert. If their enemies had sent the word on ahead, attempts would be made to halt them.

One evening they rounded a point,

to find an Indian fishing from a half submerged rock. At sight of them, he dropped his line and fish, darting up the bank. His hurry seemed inspired by more than fear of the boatmen. From the stern of the lead boat, Jules lashed an order.

"Put a bullet in him! Kill him before he warns the others!"

Answering his cry, Weasel Greer, at the steering sweep of the second boat, took up his rifle, threw it level. But he couldn't shoot the racing red man in the back. Cursing savagely, Jules caught up his own long weapon and broke the Bannock's spine with his first shot.

A yell came from the cliff on their right, a flight of arrows. They bent to the oars and pulled away from the half-naked warriors racing along the rim when a deep tributary gorge cut them off. But, somehow, they all knew that word would speed ahead of them, as if on the wind, and that there would be other tests.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BADGE OF COURAGE

THEY traveled now by day, pulling the canoes high and resting at nights. Jules Scarletine dominated those firesides, boasting of his strength, his willingness, his prowess, until even his own men sought their blankets in boredom. Weasel Greer, an experienced mountain man who had reason enough to boast of his own exploits, came to hate Big Jules with all the venom of his little carcass.

"That big bellyful o' wind," he complained to Yankee once, "makes me sick. He talks big, but some day I'm testin' him out. I'm curious to see his tune change when he's facin' cold steel."

"Steady, Weasel," cautioned Yankee. "Let him boast. That can't

hurt Great Western. Your test may come when we turn this fur into gold and supplies. Just watch him, that's all."

The sun lost its sting as the days shortened, as high, snow-capped mountains reared to the west. Desert scrub gave way to pines on the banks and one evening, as they drew the dugouts high on the shingle, they found the fresh marks of a great bear along the margin of the stream.

"It is de grizzly bear," shouted Big Jules excitedly. "To a Scarlatine he is like de kitten. I break his kind wid de hands."

"Hog wash!" snorted Weasel.

The Frenchman glared at him and sulked while they made camp. One of the men killed a deer in the nearby timber and they feasted. Afterward, over their pipes, Jules broke an hour's silence with an incredible narrative.

"It is on de Purgatoire," he began, "where I meet de grizzly. Dis feller kill everything he meet, de wolf, de deer, de buffalo, de man. But"—he swelled—"he never meet Jules Scarlatine before. I warn him as he stand before me in de trail. I tell him to stan' aside or fight. *Oui*, I talk to him like I talk to you. He say he want fight. Eh, *bien*, so we make de fight. We rip up de bushes. We tear down de trees. He have ten knives in his claws. Jules have but de one knife. We got cover with blood and after an hour, de bear, he grow weak and Jules grow strong. I stab him one hundred time until he fall dead at my feet. What you think of dat, little one?"

He glared at Weasel venomously. The little trapper threw back his head and laughed. "I think it's the damnedest lie I ever heard."

Silence fell, and Yankee gathered himself for a stand against the

giant's rage. But for a moment Jules didn't move, although he trembled with anger. Then he rose, turned abruptly and stalked noiselessly into the thickets. Weasel looked at Yankee.

"What the hell's he up to now?" he demanded.

"He's going after that bear," said Yankee, nor did anyone dispute him.

They waited a long time for Jules to return. Then, as weariness gripped them, one by one, they sought their blankets. Yankee awoke to a dark camp, and the shock of some terrific racket in his ears. Curses, roars, the smashing down of brush! The whole camp came alive at once, men reaching for their guns. Someone threw fuel on the coals and a blaze hurled back gloom. Yankee and Weasel led the way into the woods, cautiously. But before they reached the source of the discordance, it had ceased. It was silent again except for stentorous, bubbly breathing.

They found Jules and the grizzly lying side by side. The bear was dead. The big Frenchman was covered with bloody wounds and close to his end. They carried him to the fire and for hours worked on him. Broken arm, broken leg, smashed ribs, face clawed mercilessly, scalp almost ripped from his skull. The list of wounds was long. He was alive but unconscious, when dawn broke. And, because they were river men and time a thing they could not reclaim, they loaded him into one of the boats and answered Yankee's order to continue downriver. Weasel was very quiet and studious. But, as he took a last look at the giant form sprawled in the bottom of the dugout, his eyes held a spark of admiration he could not conceal.

IT was a bleak outlook for Yankee, as he took the lead. Ahead lay a river filled with uncharted dangers. Jules had spoken of them with scorn, just as he did of all opposition. In particular, he had stressed their worst hazard, the long rapids. According to him, it was not so much that it was the worst water they would encounter, but rather whether word had come from Anglo-American to their allies who haunted the fierce rapids. Would the Molallas, or Oregons as they were commonly known, have instructions to seize the furs of Great Western?

Yankee knew nothing of those people, their tempers or habits of fighting. Jules, no doubt, knew, but Jules was out of it, maybe dying. For the first time, the young trouble shooter's antipathy toward the Frenchman waned. If only the man's great strength permitted him to survive the price of his overbearing pride!

As if Yankee's wish had been heard by the gods who look after boastful fools and river bullies, a yell came from the dugout behind. Jules, they said, was conscious and demanding to be placed where he could direct the passage. An hour later, he was propped up, and his great voice, undiminished by his weakness, rolled out across the water.

The days passed, with Jules mending but still quite helpless, due to his fractured limbs. Then, one day, he turned his great voice back, grinning.

"Hear de thunder of de *Danse des Morts*?" he roared, and they did—a low muttering that swelled and died and came again. "If Jules was whole, we would run it, *mes enfants*. But now, when you round dat points, we beach de canoes and portage."

A cripple, three dugouts and three

thousand pounds of furs. Twelve miles of carry. That would be a tremendous task and would take valuable time, but perhaps it was safest and best, Yankee reflected.

The muttering of the rapids grew in volume. They swept about the point, where they were to land. And there a dozen canoes were pulled up in a line, and fifty long-haired, painted Molallas stood watching them. A few had guns, but mostly they carried long bows, with quivers of arrows slung across their shoulders.

Yankee's mind raced. He knew, at first glance, that they had received the word and were waiting for these three dugouts. Ordinarily, it would be a case for powwow, harangue and treaty. But Yankee knew that if they landed, they would never leave alive. If they didn't land, the Dance of the Dead lay ahead. And from the gnashing roar of those rapids, the choice seemed slight.

Yankee would have ordered a right-about face, a quick retreat to some fighting point of vantage. But Big Jules caught up a rifle, lifted it with his good hand and sent a ball winging into the body of one of the stirring Molallas.

"Drive on!" he roared.

"No, *mon chef!*" screamed the man who had replaced him at the sweep. "It is better that we land than to run that hell water. Threaten them with the Red Death."

"*Imbecile!*" Jules' fury lashed at the man. "These are not Blackfeet, or Gros Ventres, or Absorakas. These are Oregons, well schooled by Ravenhill. Push on!"

The Indians were leaping to their light craft, shoving into the stream. And Yankee and Weasel, echoing the Frenchman's order, were bending their men to the paddle, steering

away from the bank and into the first pull of the *Danse des Morts*. A flight of arrows whipped out at them, but the range was long. Guns sounded faintly through the roar of the torrent and bullets kicked up little geysers alongside them. But every man was busy; there was no chance to shoot back.

The current caught the dugouts, whirled them down into the maelstrom. The lighter craft of the Indians fell back, held by back strokes, as their crews stared in wonderment at the foolhardy whites who would shoot these rapids. After that, they were blotted from sight by flying spume, as great waves lashed the dugouts and swept down on great jagged rocks with the speed of a racing horse.

Propped against his fur cargo, standing on his one good leg, clinging with his strong right arm, Jules bellowed orders at his steerman as he peered ahead. Snatches of those orders came back to Yankee and he, in turn, bellowed them back to Weasel, bringing up the rear.

**T**O Yankee, beaten by the haft of his sweep, jolted, bounced, gasping for air in the sheets of solid spray, time became endless, without beginning, without end, without reason. The scenes were dream scenes, too bewildering for the eye to grasp. One thing saved him, and one thing alone. The giant form of Jules Scarlatine in the boat ahead. Every muscle of the man screamed the orders that the bellow of the rapids tore from his furled lips. Yankee leaned upon those vague movements, obeying them without question, knowing fear only when flying spume threatened to obscure the boat ahead.

Chill water drenched him. His fingers became part of his hickory

paddle, numb to the agony of an endless strain. His muscles cramped for a while, then they, too, were deadened to the punishment. Spray blinded him, but he shook it off desperately. He wondered how Weasel was coming with the third craft, but dared not look. Even the slight digression of thought sent the prow of his dugout spinning upward along the slimy face of a towering rock that Jules had missed by inches. The boat shuddered, took off like a bird and came back to the water, bottom down, in a series of bumping bounces.

Once Yankee lost control of his paddle and the canoe spun in dizzy circles. Hopelessness gripped him, passing only as a faint echo of Jules' booming voice struck back to him. It drove him to an effort far beyond his spent strength. He fairly lifted the craft out of that whorl and back into the current.

On and on. Mile after mile. Until it seemed that æons had passed since they had swept past the menace of the Molallas. He was failing, and his paddlers, as stout men as the northland knew, were failing. He cursed Big Jules for having led them into this, his words torn away by the deafening turmoil. His vision clouded. His arms were dead clubs in their sockets. A vast emptiness shook him and the roar of the Mad River dimmed. He was passing out, he knew, and nothing he could bring to bear could stop it. He was done.

Then, when the roar of the rapids was only a murmur in his consciousness, he felt something shake the boat and a husky voice woke him.

"We have win, m'sieu's, from de Molalla and de angry river. Jules Scarlatine, Yankee Dawson and de little one who doubts me—"

"Dry up, you big moose," came the weary voice of Weasel Greer.



"I'll never doubt the biggest of your lies, not after what I just seen you do!"

Yankee opened his eyes. The three dugouts were floating down the placid breast of the Mad River, the paddlers hanging limp over their gunwales. The warm sun drew vapor from their sodden buckskins. The growing silence was unbearable. Peace had come miraculously, out of the Dance of the Dead. They had won!

## CHAPTER IX

### DAINGEROUS BUSINESS

IT was a battered, weary crew that beached the three dugouts of fur at Astoria, that sturdy post built at the mouth of the Columbia. But they had fur and they were given a king's welcome. Not at the post itself, for that was in the hands of allies of Anglo-American, who called the place Fort George. But in the settlement mushrooming about the post, it was an occasion for rejoicing. Fur, normally sent down the far Missouri, had come west. It was an omen, a signal for jubilee. Colors were hoisted, great guns and little guns were fired. Clean, fresh buckskins were provided the ragged men and they were feasted.

Astoria was filled with fur buyers and there were ships anchored off shore waiting to transport the peltry to avid markets in the Orient. Bidding was sharp and Big Jules, fully recovered now, save for a limp and scars he would carry to his grave, was a hard trader. True to his promise, he demanded and received a far higher price than the best that could have been hoped for in St. Louis. He sold to a French freighter captain, demanded payment in gold and, surprisingly, obtained it. It was to Weasel Greer, the man he

knew despised him, that the big *voyagur* intrusted the gold.

"You do not trust me, *mon ami*," he said sorrowfully. "But look how Jules trusts you. Guard it with your life. For it can win Oregon for de one who gets it to de mountains."

Weasel swelled. "I'd like to see the size of the gent who can git it away from me, mister. If this is what it takes, Great Western wins Oregon."

"And France," whispered the giant, winking slyly, and shaking a finger in the little trapper's face. "Don't forget dat."

Yankee watched the horseplay between them uneasily. He was eager for the return trip. But first the men must have time to recoup, and there were supplies to purchase. He gave each of the men money and that night there was heavy drinking. Jules absented himself, boarding the French freighter where he could fraternize with his own countrymen. Yankee busied himself with the outfitting, leaving Weasel and an armed guard always at the camp.

Thus, severals days sped past pleasantly, and the time neared for the return start. The night before the departure, Jules showed up at the camp. With him came a score of men in spotless new buckskins and carrying new French rifles. Not even the frontier get-up could disguise the fact that they were mariners.

"I recruit new men, m'sieu'," Jules beamed. "New *engagés* for Fort Danger."

"More boats, eh?" asked Yankee, but he was thinking of the gold.

"In good time, my rooster. But first there is something Jules must do. You start back. We will overtake you at the portage around le *Danse des Morts*."

"What are you going to do?"

Jules blinked. "That," he said between locked teeth, "is between me—and France. I tell you, maybe, when I see you again."

Nor would he say more. Stubbornly, he put a stop to the questioning by leading his new force from the camp. But not before taking six of the best paddlers and ordering the rest to give Yankee their best and to guard the gold with their lives.

More than ever, Yankee was troubled, but no evil had befallen them yet under the big *voyageur's* guidance. And none would, if he and Weasel could prevent it. The start was made next morning and Yankee held down the pace, lest they make such time Jules could not catch up. Curiosity plagued him, and a down-bearing sense of impending trouble. They were in camp one night, within a day's run of the great rapids, when the canoe grated on the bank and one of the six paddlers Jules had taken came reeling into the firelight.

"M'sieu!" he gasped, and Yankee noted the grayness of his face. "Come swiftly if you would save Jules Scarlatine. *Voila*, I live only by the grace of *Le Bon Dieu* to reach you and bring you back to the sea." He bared his chest, where an angry, festered wound extended along his ribs. "I am spend. But Jules, he is rotting in the prison of de bearded men of Russia—"

"At the Russian post below Astoria?" demanded Yankee.

The *voyageur* sank down, sighing. "On behalf of France, he led us against the Russe. We were beaten, most of us killed."

Yankee tried to tell himself that Cooper Dawson and Great Western was well rid of Big Jules Scarlatine; that the man had reaped only what he had sowed. But as he stared at

the twelve who looked to Jules for leadership, he saw the plea echoed in their eyes. He had come to look upon them as his and Weasel's captors. He had come to feel that when the order was passed, they would take the gold that had been paid for the furs and use it to further Jules' mad dreams of empire. Yet he could not deny them, now that their boastful, roaring and swashbuckling captain was in distress.

"That's the best news we've had yet, Yank," Weasel was exclaiming. "Let the big wolf rot in the Russian jail. We got him where the hair is short, an' I say let's keep him there!"

"And sacrifice the best fighting man in Oregon?" demanded Yankee. "The man who may mean the difference between Great Western going on or being forced out of the Northwest? No. To your paddles, men! We're heading back."

WITH a great deal of grumbling, Weasel gave in. The boats were launched. All night they bent to the paddles. Shortly after sunrise, they beached at a fish camp of the sullen, but the grudgingly friendly, Calapooiahs. There, for ten blankets, five pieces of gold and three sacks of flour, they were given four scrubby ponies, one of which was packed with the gold, another with blankets and supplies. By mid-afternoon, Weasel and the stoutest of the *voyageurs* had ridden eastward along the river, heading for far Fort Danger.

"I risk my hair gettin' this gold back to yore uncle," the little man had growled as he rode away, "an' you risk yores tryin' to free the gent who's sure to try to take it from us. Bah, you've gone crazy!"

Two miles downstream from the Calapooiah camp, two loaded dug-outs were beached and cached in the



"Now you die!" Jules roared and kicked Yankee over the cliff toward the rock-studded river.

dense underbrush of the bank. Then, traveling light in the third, Yankee and the remaining men sped back toward Astoria, twelve paddles flashing.

IT was night at Fort Kropatkin, the post with which the Russians bid for the American fur business, on Shoal Water Bay. The gates of the great log compound were wide and a leaping fire blazed in the courtyard. For this was an occasion calling for lavish hospitality. Everyone was welcome, for the Indians, men of the woods and nationals of three nations must be shown that no one dare strike at the might of the Czar, in Oregon.

Impassive, blanketed Indians; drunken, buckskin-clad woodsmen; bearded *engagés* of the Russian post clustered about the pine gallows tree reared within the inclosure. And

ringing them all, leaning upon their long rifles, were the scowling warriors of the fort, who had turned back Jule Scarlatine's mad attempt to take the post some nights earlier. Yankee Dawson came striding

into the compound, just another man of the woods come in to see the hanging. And following him, one by one, were the eleven fighting men who had accompanied him. Each knew his job, and each was pledged to carry it out.

Yankee came edging through the crowd, pausing only when he stood beside the platform of the gallows. The buzz of talk ceased and silence fell. And then, through the crush came the giant Jules, two Russians holding each trussed arm. The big Frenchmen's eyes stabbed right and left, touching Yankee's face with a momentary flash of surprise, then with an unasked question.

Jules climbed the scaffold, a scornful smile on his broad face. And Yankee felt again, that admiration for this magnificent figure, and regret that his reckless game should stand between them. The swinging noose was placed about his great neck, and he started as the strident hooting of an owl came from the gloom beyond the packed assemblage. It happened then.

A spiraling pillar of flame shot up from one of the log buildings across the compound. A shrill cry of "Fire!" sheered through the sudden hush. To a man, the gathering whirled. There was a rush of men through the leaping blaze that furnished light, men who kicked the burning logs away from the bed of coals, who trampled those coals into the earth. A semigloom settled and smoke swirled thickly across the compound. Somewhere, a man's death scream rang out, as a knife found his throat. The Russian guards were bellowing warnings, and in that pandemonium, their course of action was anything but clear.

A shot, muted by the bawling of excited men, dropped one of those who held Big Jules. A thrown knife

put another one down. Two shadowy and buck-skinned figures leaped upon the gallows platform, to engage the bewildered pair who still held Jules. Under cover of boiling smoke from the extinguished fire, Yankee leaped to the scaffold, his knife palmed. Two swift strokes freed the giant.

"Viva la France!" he bellowed, caught up pistol and knife of a fallen guard and sailed out into the crowd. The air was suddenly rent with a vast explosion, as the Russian powder house went up. And a towering stream of white flame went toward the heavens.

The blast knocked half the crowd off its feet, planted the seeds of full panic. Roaring and milling, they stampeded out the gate and into the night. And the men from Fort Danger raced with them, not a one bearing a scratch to attest their exploit. Behind them leaped the flames that were destroying Fort Kropatkin, the last post ever to be built by the Russians in Oregon.

JULES was in great good humor as he timed the beat of paddles to the bellow of his chant. But, as the night wore away and the miles fell behind, he made no mention of Yankee's saving strategy, expressed no thanks. Indeed, it wasn't until afternoon of the next day, when they hauled out the cached dugouts, divided the paddlers and prepared a quick repast, that he even noticed the trouble shooter. Then, suddenly, he was before Yankee, his hands on his shoulders, his facial muscles jerking with an emotion that made his voice husky.

"*Mon ami,*" he said fervently, "you save me from *de Russe*, so how can Jules scold you for the things you do dat I do not like, such as sending *de little one* to Fort Dan-

ger alone? He lose dat gold an' den where we be?"

"You don't know Weasel," said Yankee quietly.

"I know Ravenhill, *mon enfant*. The gold is as good as his, right now. But what of that? We will go on, you and I, without it. You run de *Danse des Morts* when Jules is helpless. You return for me at de post of de Russe, mak' children of dem. *Voila*, I swear you are as good a man as Jules, and well fit to be his partner. By now, you know that it is war for Oregon. Ravenhill fights for de English. De men at Kropatkin for de Russe. Your uncle fights for de United States and Scarlatine fights for France. France will win when de fighting is done. If you are with Jules, your country will win, too. What you say?"

It had come, the thing Yankee had feared. Jules, not content now with a tacit alliance with Fort Danger, was seeking to draw Yankee into the web of his mad scheme.

"No," he said, firmly. "That is not to be, Jules. I work for Great Western alone."

Jules grimaced but seemed to accept it. He ordered the boats upriver and they resumed the journey. They were portaging the Dance of the Dead some days later, when he brought the matter up again. They were resting on the trail, atop a cliff that gave sheerly to the tortured waters, a hundred feet below.

"What you say, now, M'sieu' Yankee," Jules suddenly said. "About you and me being de partners, eh?"

"I told you no, Jules."

"Then you die!"

He was fairly on top of Yankee before the latter could rise, let alone arm himself against the blade that flashed in the big *voyageur's* hand. Defensively, Yankee hurled himself backward to avoid the sweeping

knife, felt the edge of the brink crumble under his heel. Desperately, he struck Jules' knife hand aside, clutched at the man to save himself. His fingers caught the thong looped about the Frenchman's neck. Jules was laughing as he lifted his foot to Yankee's belly, shoving violently. The thong broke and the trouble shooter shot out into space, spinning downward like a plummet. As he fell, he heard Jules' mad, triumphant cry, heard the gnashing roar of the river as it cried for him. But his eyes were fixed, not upon that crushing death below, but upon the writhing liquid in the red vial he held in his hand—the Red Death of *La Fievre Scarlatine*, held like a club over the awe-stricken red men of a fur empire.

## CHAPTER X

### RED DEATH TO TRADE

IT was many weeks later that Yankee Dawson came limping down through the timber overlooking the village of Running Bear and the Blackfeet. He was gaunt, battered, foot sore. His buckskins were in tatters, his moccasins worn out. But in the straight, hard line of his mouth and the fierce light in his sunken eyes was mirrored a deathless determination. That he had been spared in the Dance of the Dead, had ceased to cause him wonder. For that bitter battle with killing waters had been as play, compared with his struggle to make his way back to Fort Danger.

He had traveled many hundreds of miles, all on foot. His only attempt to steal a pony from a hunting band of Indians, had ended in failure and a close call from death. He had eaten what the trail provided, and it hadn't been more than enough to keep him going. Roots, berries,

bird's eggs and spawning fish. Once he found a deer carcass, freshly slain by a questing cougar. He had gorged himself on the raw meat and hung around until long cut strips of the flesh had dried. That break had been salvation to him.

Now, with the smoke from the Blackfoot tepees in his nostrils, he fought back the cold stream that threatened to numb his nerves. By all the rules, his life must be forfeit here. Yet it was as important that he talk with Running Bear as it was to live.

He hobbled into the open and a wild yell greeted his appearance. There was a rush of braves, with arrows fitted to their bow strings. He gave the sign of peace and they seized him, rushed him into the village. And, for all his trail-worn appearance, he knew that they recognized him. Children ran alongside, screaming taunts, pointing their fingers. Squaws hurled epithets. Dogs barked. It was pandemonium.

They halted him where the tall, decorated lodge marked the center of the village. The flap parted and Running Bear stood before him, a fine figure of a man who held his emotions in perfect check. His eye was stern, his mien condemning as he folded his arms across his breast. His words sheered through the sudden hush.

"So," he intoned, "the dog that walked in the tracks of the great buffalo wolf, seeking what he left of his kill, has fallen into the hands of the Blackfoot. You, who killed two of my braves in the blackness of the night; you who stole the white squaw who belonged at Fort Coffin, what did you expect to find here but death?"

Yankee fought back fear of what he read in their eyes. "I came to parley," he said quietly.

Running Bear's breath hissed from his lungs. "Parley? The Blackfoot does not treat with one who has the split tongue of a snake. No!"

Reacting to his rage, the others pressed in, their eyes blazing. Yankee braced himself. Death would strike quickly, with the twang of a bow string. He could not reason with them, he knew. There was only one course left.

"Look!" he said, and held up Scarletine's red vial. "If you will not hear me, then I must—"

"The Red Death!" The murmur ran through the gathering and there was an instant recoiling, Running Bear with the rest. The chief's face was gray with fear of the doom that had swept the lodges of his northern kinsmen, the Piegans.

Yankee pulled the glass stopper, held the open vial aloft, as if ready to throw it. He had not known what manner of magic the little container had contained, nor had he taken any chances. Long ago, he had drained out the pungent red liquid, carefully washing the vial and refilling it with pure water, stained with the crimson juice of the sour berry. That was what he held now as a club over these Indians, a thing that might gain his point without harming them.

"Here," he told the chief, "is the medicine of *Le Fievre Scarlatine*. I took it from him, how, does not matter. I can use it against you, unless you listen well to me. Or I can give it into your hands—a great medicine that will make you the master of your enemies."

The eyes of Touch-the-cloud, who towered behind the chieftain, glittered covetously. His murmur came: "Great chief, he speaks wisdom. With such strong medicine, you could keep our enemies, the Gros Ventres, the Nez Percés and the

Absorakas, away from our hunting grounds. You could even extend your power to the fierce Sioux and Cheyennes."

Visibly impressed, Running Bear said, "What is it you want of us?"

"I want the agreement that you have always refused," answered Yankee. "That Great Western Fur can trap unmolested, in your country, that you will keep the peace—"

"Peace!" the chief said scornfully. "The White Man wants no peace. Look at the fighting that goes on among you. *Le Fievre Scarlatine* and his men have attacked Black-foot Post, killed the headman and driven the rest from the woods. He routed the men of Poste Carcajou, running them into Fort Coffin. And the same with those at Fort Beaver. Next he will attack Fort Coffin, where he already has his own men in positions of trust."

IT was all news to Yankee, startling news. He pressed the chief for details and when he had heard them, he held a doubt. Running Bear had said *Scarlatine* would attack Fort Coffin next. Maybe so, but why not Fort Danger? His men were planted there, also.

"The medicine of *Le Fievre Scarlatine* is yours," he said earnestly, "if you will take picked warriors to Fort Danger and help Cooper Dawson turn back that man." And when he saw Running Bear's look of fear: "Scarlatine no longer has his medicine. He has only guns, and there are many guns at Fort Danger. You will defeat him."

Touch-the-cloud, his eyes avidly upon the red vial, spoke with passion, urging the chief to accept the deal, promising that he would bring the power of his own medicine to bear upon the fighting. And, after a while, it was arranged. Yankee

scratched a note on a piece of buckskin with a sharpened bullet, advising Cooper Dawson of his peril. This he gave to Running Bear and then lit out for Fort Coffin. There was grave risk in his appearing there, he knew, but Ravenhill must be warned that Jules' men were undermining him from inside. Their common enemy now was *Scarlatine*. He must be broken!

MORE weary and gaunt than ever, Yankee had been severely manhandled when they led him into the presence of Cecil Ravenhill. The man was a typical Englishman, sober-faced, calm and chill of manner. He toyed with his graying mustache as he heard Yankee out.

"You say," he murmured, when the Fort Danger man had finished, "that *Scarlatine* has packed my force with his own men. Who are they? Name them!"

"I . . . I don't know," said Yankee miserably, knowing he had lost. "It was told to me by the Black-feet."

"Those trouble makers," the British factor said scornfully. "Enough of this flub-dub. It is plain to me that Great Western and the Dawsons are the ones trying to undermine Anglo-American, working with this renegade *Scarlatine*. Take him away, men. Lock him up until we can consider his case."

And that is how Yankee came to be behind bars in the lock-up provided for transgressors of fur-land law. He didn't give way to the hopelessness that gnawed inside him. There was too much excitement for that. The compound outside buzzed with activity. Fighting men were being told off, equipped with shoulder packs and being issued powder and ball. Old Jock Lanark, Independent from Fort Beaver on the

Yellowstone, was in the forefront of this activity. And so was Rein du Chien, from Pend d'Oreille. And Yankee saw the men of the dead Mink Fulton, from Blackfoot Post.

At last, all was ready. More than fifty trail-hardened fighting men stood ready, waiting for the last word of Cecil Ravenhill.

"Men," he addressed them. "A wolf is loose among us. If we do not destroy him, he'll drive us out and take what is ours. He holes up in the den of one with whom we have a sacred agreement, Cooper Dawson, at Fort Danger. We have been patient and long-suffering, but that is no longer a virtue. Go to Fort Danger and clean it out. If you can capture Jules and Dawson, so much the better. We will give them a fair trial and hang them for their crimes. Burn the post and return here. I will be with you, but only as a fighting man. You will take orders from Mr. Lanark, a man better fitted for war than I am, a man who lost a son to the murderous Jules Scarlatine. That is all, and may God bless you all."

Yankee groaned and stared through the barred window of his cell. He saw the slim, lithe figure of the girl who had escaped from him. She came running to her father, kissed him and then watched him march from the compound with the rest, her shoulders slumped dejectedly. She passed from his sight then and Yankee was left with the desperation of one who must escape, but cannot.

Carefully, he looked over the storeroom that had been fitted with bars for holding desperate men. He found no weakness here and knew the bitterness of despair. For only a skeleton force had been left behind to guard the post. He sank down on the bunk.

HE must have dozed there, for suddenly he had awakened and was on his feet at the barred window. He thought he must have dreamed. But no, there was that strident pounding on the gate of the stockade. And that familiar, robust voice bawling for admittance. Jules!

Yankee saw the confusion among the men left to guard the post, the argument. Then the gate was being swung wide to admit Scarlatine and three of his men.

"*Sacre é bleu!*" he roared gleefully. "How good of *mon ami*, Ravenhill, to leave Fort Coffin for Jules, without de fight. *Bien!* And to leave my trusted men behind. You men of M'sieu' Ravenhill, do you swear loyalty to Jules and France, or must I kill you?" And when the answer was all it should have been: "Lock them up, *mes enfants*, until I have eaten and delighted my eye wid de beautiful daughter of M'iseu' Ravenhill."

"There is already one behind the bars, *mon chef*," one of his planted men told him. "One you will be surprised and very glad to see."

"Who?"

"M'sieu' Yankee from Fort Danger!"

"What? Jules' voice held vast amazement. "You mean dat *maudit* escape from de *Danse des Morts*? You mean he is back here to lay more crossed sticks in de trail for me to pass? *C'est impossible!* Tak' de guns from dese men and lock dem in a room. Jules has business wid dat Yankee Dawson—business wid de knife!"

Chilled with that lethal threat, Yankee saw guns turned against the loyal men of Fort Coffin, saw them disarmed and marched toward a log building for imprisonment. Big Jules, smiling ferociously, strode to-



ward the lock-up where Yankee was held. The young trouble shooter looked around for some object with which to make a fight. There was nothing. Utter hopelessness gripped him. There would be no more offers from Jules, he knew that. His only hope of reprieve lay in the thought that maybe the man would spare him in hope of recovering the red vial. He was braced on stiff legs, staring at the door, when a sound behind him made him whirl. A key grated in the outer lock of a small rear door of his jail. The panel creaked open and Elsie Ravenhill stood there, pale with the terror of the moment, but none the less brave. She held a knife in one hand, a rifle in the other.

"Quick!" she breathed. "Out here! There is yet a chance!"

Scarcely believing that he wasn't dreaming, Yankee darted to her, took the weapons from her hand as she relocked the door. They were behind the building, in a narrow lane beneath the sharpened log stockade.

"You will not lose by this," he promised softly. "Your father and his men are going to certain death in attacking Fort Danger. I believe I can head them off, but whether I can halt them, I seriously doubt."

"Try," she begged him. "Tell father what has happened here, that I am in danger from this Jules. Tell him I sent you, to bring him back. But go—quickly. Out over the wall. There's a ladder lying behind the factory and—"

She fell silent. Jules had lifted the bar and was storming into the jail.

"Now, my brave rooster who will not die— *Voilà*, he is not here! He is gone! *Parbleu*, de man is not human." His voice shook the building. "Fools! He has escaped you,

tricked you. Outside the walls and watch for him. I will search for him in de fort, to slit his throat. Go! Hurry! If he escapes, I will skin you alive."

"Come, you must not delay!" Elsie was plucking at Yankee's sleeve. "Now!"

But Yankee didn't move. He was listening to the pound of boots and moccasins as they roared to the gate and through. The loyal Ravenhill men were locked up and quiet. Jules was emerging from the jail room. And Yankee was feeling the first sting of a mad resolve. Even if he got over the wall and escaped those even now circling it, there still remained the inevitable clash with Jules. The man, himself, had admitted that Oregon was not big enough for them both, that sometime they must fight. When, and where could there be a better setting, with the odds more even than now? The girl seemed to sense his thoughts.

"No!" she whispered. "You mustn't. If you die, father—"

She halted her flow of words, ending them in a faint little scream. A giant figure had suddenly glided around the corner of the building, stood there regarding them with lustful, delighted eyes. Those eyes, Yankee decided, were changed, more feverish, more mad. Yankee could have shot him, but he dared not make the try. He hadn't looked at the priming. If the gun didn't fire, his last chance was gone.

"Ah!" Jules' voice was poisonous with venom. "I find you wid de lady, *mon ami*. But this is business for me. Come!" His hand dropped to his knife and he slid forward.

"Get away from us, girl," Yankee cried. He cast the long gun aside and braced himself for conflict.

## CHAPTER XI

## DEATH TO THE LOSER

SCARLATINE'S eyes blazed fury. "Hoi, imbécile, where is de Red Death?"

"Poured out, Jules," Yankee taunted him. "Wasted. Your magic is gone, replaced by colored water. Would you fight me for that?"

"Colored water!" Jules shook with mirth. "It was never anything else, *mon enfant*. Juice of the cochineal bug, trade dye. But the fancy glass bottle dat mak' de red liquid dance—dat is hard to replace. Dat is a devil bottle to de Indians who fear de scourge that killed dere kinsman. For dat bottle, I kill you."

"Kill me!" Yankee scoffed. "Try it, you big ox. Come on."

Jules' eyes glittered. "Who are you, little one, to stand before Le Comte Durande de Ruchette Caudray, of Dommartin-sur-yevre? Do you think I escape the English pigs at Waterloo, an' come to dis nort' country to let a boy like you tear me down? You think I let you stop my plan to rescue Napoleon, *le empereur*, from St. Helena and bring him here to start his new empire? *Hein* No, you die."

Helunged swiftly—a madman, obsessed with his dream. And, at first contact, Yankee learned he was out-matched. Speed was his hope. He swerved aside, saw his opening and struck. Laughing, Jules flicked his wrist and Yankee's knife lay a rod away.

Only a slim chance he had of recovering the blade, but his life hung on it and he tried. Recoiling from Jules' thrust at his throat, Yankee spun, darted for his fallen weapon. Jules roared after him, giving him no chance to stoop for it. He tried

to kick it away, but Jules, with no knife to fear, launched himself at the blade. Yankee whirled again, kicking his foe in the face, rolling him over.

Roaring with pain, flattened there, Jules tried to hook the knife to him with his moccasin. Yankee leaped, came down on the outstretched leg. Jules gave over the idea, surged up and back to the fight. After that, both were too busy to try again.

Jules rushed savagely and Yankee countered as he could. His left hand knocked the giant's knife arm aside; his swinging right thudded into Jules' belly. The big man grunted, gave ground. Watching the knife, Yankee forced him, sledging blows to the ribs. He parried a heart stroke with his left arm, felt the limb sag and knew blood seeped from his numbed finger ends. After that he took no chances, leaping around like a flea, pummeling the big *voyageur* with his one good fist.

Jules had no defense for the beating, as he slashed viciously at his tormentor. The blows stunned and weakened him, slowed him up, until Yankee found it surprisingly easy to avoid the knife strokes. The giant lost his confidence. His breath began to come gaspingly as he fought against a goading he couldn't fathom. His thick legs lost their spring and he went down from a solid smash in the face. He got up, went down and rose again. His eyes were turning black. His bruised lips swelled and blood trickled from his flattened nostrils.

A dozen times he hit the earth, each time rising with the unconquerable will to rend and destroy. Now he dallied as he came up, glaring. And Yankee knew the time had come to make another try for his weapon. He put all he had into the blow, crashing Jules to the earth, and

then darted to scoop up the lost blade.

Jules rose, roared to meet him. Their blades clashed, and this time it was not Yankee who gave. Worn by weeks of near-starvation, weakened by loss of blood from his arm, he was none too stout. Yet he forced Jules' arm back and down.

Jules broke, gave ground, then attacked desperately with all the tricks he knew. Yankee parried, but one stroke slipped under his guard, raking his ribs under his left arm. Twisting from the agony, he saw his chance and took it. The last of his strength drove his blade upward from his side, the point driving to the hilt between Jules' ribs. Loosing the grip, he hurled himself against Jules, rasping six words as he reached and caught the man's knife: "Up to the Green River, you devil!"

For a long moment, they clung together, breath rasping from them, their bodies straining. Then all strength seemed to leave Jules. His eyes closed slowly and an awful agony twisted his broad face.

"*Oui, mon ami,*" he whispered. "Up to de Green Rivair in Jules. A great fighting man has killed *Le Fievre Scarletine*. Now I die! *Vive la France!* Napoleon . . . adieu!"

His breath whistled out; he fell and lay still. And Yankee stood braced, his brain fighting back the blackness that swirled about him.

TIME stood still as Yankee fought back that vertigo. Then, strangely, he was sitting with his back to the log wall and his vision was clear again. His arm was tightly bandaged, and Elsie was tying the last knot in the sheeting she had whipped about his chest. Noting that he was conscious, she smiled, uncorked a bottle of brandy and pressed it to his lips.

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"Drink," she commanded. "I don't know how you accomplished it, but what you have just done, frees us all from a reign of terror."

"Then you didn't see it?" he asked, reacting at once to the potent liquor. "I'm glad."

"No," she confessed. "I was busy barring the gate against *Scarlatine's* men and freeing my father's loyal men. Listen—they fight to keep them out now."

And for the first time, Yankee became aware of the steady beat of gunfire from the parapet of the stockade. The odds, as he visualized them, were about even. The real fortunes of the Oregon Territory were being fixed in the south, before the stout walls of Fort Danger. It was too late to hope now to head *Ravenhill* off, and Yankee said so. The girl's answer heartened him.

"I sent one of the imprisoned men with the word," she told him. "And my prayers went with him. I fear my father has been very wrong."

"And the fur country," added Yankee, "has a way of taking toll from the man who is wrong. I hope your runner catches *Cecil Ravenhill*."

Two days and two nights that fight swirled around the stockade of Fort Coffin, with the issue all in favor of those who defended it. Four times the renegades charged the gate; four times they were hurled back, with losses. Then, on the third night, the remnant of *Jules Scarletine's* force came in from three angles, carrying brush. They were lighting it, scurrying back into the friendly darkness when they were caught by a large force of men moving in behind them. Guns crashed a swift salvo and the few survivors of the *Scarlatine* conspiracy faded away into the forest. Then *Cecil Ravenhill* was being admitted at the

gate, along with his beaten, battered followers. Elsie came to throw her arms about her father and sob against his breast. Yankee, standing close by, heard the man mutter:

"They defeated us, pet; they were too many. That rascal, Cooper Dawson, had enlisted the Blackfeet—how, I do not know."

"I enlisted them, Ravenhill," said Yankee. "Just as I would have enlisted you, and Lanark, Fulton and Du Chien, if you had listened to me. Together, we could easily have ended the reign of the renegades."

Ravenhill threw up his head, his weary, bloodshot eyes burning into the Great Western trouble shooter. "You," he croaked. "I . . . I thought I left you locked up."

"I let him out," confessed the girl. "You were hardly gone when Jules Scarlatine walked in and took over the post—"

"Scarlatine?" The name burst from the British factor's lungs. "That rascally lieutenant of Cooper Dawson's?" Again he was glaring at Yankee. "I should have known you wouldn't come here alone. When you entered with that Judas warning, he lurked outside with his men and—"

"His men were inside the stockade, just as Mr. Dawson told you," the girl said spiritedly. "Most of them crippled and ailing. They recovered miraculously when you had gone. It was easy for Jules to take over the post and imprison our loyal men—"

"And release Dawson," added the factor bitterly.

"I released him," his daughter said. "Don't you understand, father? Jules was coming to kill him. I gave Mr. Dawson a knife. He fought Jules—and killed him."

"Killed Scarlatine?" Ravenhill stared. "Then I—"

"You have been very wrong, Mr.

Ravenhill," said Yankee. "And were when you went against Fort Danger. Jules fooled my uncle, just as he fooled you. He tried hard, through me, to make Great Western his ally in securing Oregon for France. Once in control, he would have destroyed us, just as he planned to have us help destroy you. But that is done, ended. Jules is dead and France is out of the picture. There remains now only new and binding agreements, peace—"

"Peace!" Ravenhill's lips curled as he cast his tired eyes over his battered warriors who, even now, were attending their wounded and taking toll of the missing. Slowly, disconsolately, he moved toward his office, under the arcade. Yankee and Elsie Ravenhill looked at one another inquiringly. It was plain to them both that the factor was not convinced.

THE sun was rising over the vast expanse of timber to the east of Fort Coffin, when the large, armed force appeared at the edge of the forest, entirely surrounding Fort Coffin. A shot screamed from the parapet, answered by many from below. A bugle blared in the compound. There was a rush of weary men to guard the walls. From the cover of the pines, a voice was calling for Ravenhill. The factor showed himself, and, with bristling rifles covering him, Cooper Dawson moved into the open.

"Ravenhill," he shouted. "You broke the covenant, sent your trappers into Great Western preserves, looted my trap lines, killed my men from ambush and threw the whole fur country into confusion. I bore with your meanness. I was long-suffering. But when you led your men against my post in open warfare, you went too far. We hurled you

back, but that didn't end it, as far as I'm concerned. I'm giving you five minutes to open your gates and surrender."

"Dawson!" The British factor stood straight and proud, fair target for Great Western guns. "The lie you have just spoken is no more dastardly than your conduct this past year. You are the one who broke the agreement. Great Western came into Anglo-American territory, murdered our trappers and stole their catch. You took to your bosom this one called *Le Fievre Scarlatine* who, with your own nephew, murdered our agent, Gordon FitzBugh, and the agents of three Independent companies, at Old Fort Henry. I would die a hundred deaths before I'd surrender one inch to you."

He had called out certain truths that Cooper Dawson could not refute with the righteous and angry denial of the Englishman. He stood there, glaring and thoughtful; his force hanging upon his withheld word. And that silent pause gave Yankee time to climb to the parapet. His appearance was the signal for a buzz of excited comment from the timber.

"You are both wrong," he shouted. "And the rift between you is exactly what Jules Scarlatine worked for. Even in death, he is laughing at you. And well he may, now that you snarl like dogs over the bone he tossed between you. The murdered trappers and the looted caches were his work. And the sign he left was to hurl you at each other's throats. No man could have foreseen nor forestalled his treachery at Old Fort Henry. And only his scorn of lesser men has made these woods safe from the menace of France—forever. Uncle Cooper, bring your men into the fort, with the solemn promise

that there will be no violence. Ravenhill, let them in. We will sit around a table and draft a new peace—for Oregon."

Several moments of silent deliberation passed, before guarantees were given and accepted. The gates swung wide and the mercenaries of Great Western came into the compound of Fort Coffin. Ravenhill, the two Dawsons, Jock Lanark and Reni du Chien repaired to the factor's office, where the articles of new agreements were drawn. Nor was it strange that Yankee's voice carried more weight than all the rest.

As arguments were made, countered or agreed to, Yankee had the weird sense of some unseen force hovering at his elbow, of some impulse from the outer air that all this had been done for La Belle France and the United States. And at times it seemed that words were being put into his mouth, as he held out for new boundaries in the fur country. From the lips of Jules, the thought had been repugnant to him. But now, strangely, he fought for it as though the idea had been his from the beginning.

And so, because Anglo-American had led armed forces against Fort Danger, because Ravenhill had been defeated, the weight of the argument was against him. Lanark and Du Chien were offered alliance and profit interest in Great Western, and they accepted. When the agreement was drafted and signed, it fixed the southernmost line of the Anglo-American trapping, a boundary that many years later was to be approximated by the boundary commissions of England and the United States, making Oregon a part of the Union of States.

"From the junction of the Milk and Missouri Rivers, on the east, thence up the Milk River to the

crest of the Rocky Mountains; then down Flathead River to Selish Lake; thence along Kootenai River, Clark's Fork and Columbia River to the sea."

That was the way they wrote it, those five, Ravenhill on behalf of Anglo-American, ceding Fort Coffin for a price to be paid in fur over a quarter century, and agreeing to move his trappers three hundred miles to the north and west. It was a congenial and orderly conference, with Ravenhill and Cooper Dawson emerging after some hours, with their arms linked fraternally.

Outside, Yankee found Running Bear and Touch-the-cloud, painted and regaled for war, each holding a long coup stick adorned with scalps. One long raven mane made Yankee frown.

"We asked for *Le Fievre Scarlatine*," explained the chief. "They took us to him. I took his hair."

"That was not part of the bargain," protested Yankee.

Touch-the-cloud snorted. "That man was evil. It is not right that he enter the happy hunting ground with brave warriors and

good men. Are you like the rest who treat with the Blackfoot? Do you seize upon this to deny us payment, or do you keep your word?"

"Great Western always keeps its word," said Yankee, and placed the little red vial in the hands of the medicine man. "May it bring you strength!"

Grimacing like children with new toys, the two Indians bent over the flask and moved away to display it before their tribesmen.

Staring after them with a vast feeling of letdown, now that it was all over, Yankee heard his name called. Elsie Ravenhill and Weasel Greer were watching him from the arcade. The little trapper carried a gory bandage around his head, but he wore a grin that told Yankee that he, too, had cheated Big Jules' try for the gold.

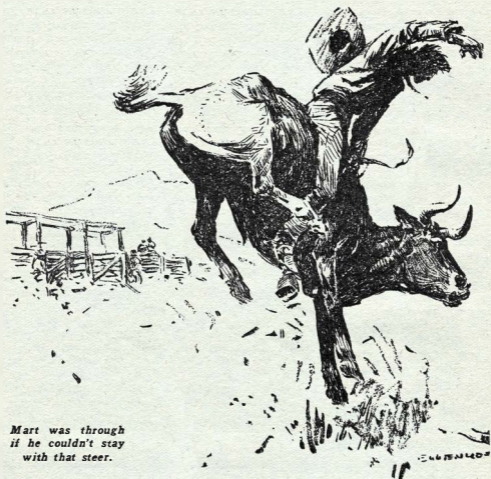
Weasel gave a side glance at Elsie and spoke down the stem of his fuming pipe. Whatever he said, sent a delicate wave of color over the girl's face, but when Yankee Dawson went to meet her, she put her hands in his and met his glance with clear, trusting eyes.

THE END.

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## HOOF BRANDING

SOME stockmen brand the hoofs of their fancy horses that are to be turned on the open range for a short period. The letters used are similar to printer's type, and are set in a brass form. When heated, the initials can be burned into the hoof, and they look as though they had been put on with a rubber stamp. Some people object to ordinary branding and prefer to have the horses they buy for polo ponies or park saddlers unbranded. For such as these the method of hoof branding was figured out. It has the advantage of being painless to the animal and is legal identification. Of course, such a means of branding could never come into general use, since each animal would have to be caught and subjected to close scrutiny before the brand can be read.



*Mart was through  
if he couldn't stay  
with that steer.*

## HARD-LUCK HANDICAP

BY SETH RANGER

I SAW the saddle first. It was lashed to the back of a battered coupé. It was a saddle that might have come out of a junk shop, or perhaps from some storeroom where it had been kept for sentimental reasons. It was pretty well coated with desert dust because the road was dry and unpaved.

The coupé was having some trouble climbing the grade. Blue smoke

boiled out of the exhaust. I could hear the motor missing fire and finally it quit cold.

The dust settled and I saw a pair of amazingly long legs shoot forth from the driver's side of the coupé. Well-worn cowpuncher's boots were on the lower end of them. The rest was covered with worn overalls. The boots settled in the dust and the remainder of the man squirmed clear

of the door. I guessed the fellow was six feet three and weighed about a hundred and ninety pounds. His shoulders were wide, but his hips were narrow and his stomach flat. He had a pair of strong-looking hands hanging from sleeves that fell a long way from reaching the wrist.

"I'm right sorry to hold you up this way, pardner," he called to me. "The old teakettle damned near made the grade at that."

"I'll push you the rest of the way," I offered. "Then you can coast down to the ferry."

"Nope, that won't work," he said. "Ain't got no rear bumper. I'll tell you what, though. You can tow me if you feel like it."

"But I can't get by you," I said.

"Oh, we'll fix that in a hurry," he said cheerfully. "Kitty, guess you'll have to pile out. Come on, Jerry, hit the dirt."

A youngster of about seven jumped out, and a moment later, a slim, blond woman followed. She looked a lot like the boy, I thought. She was dressed in a cheap print affair, and I noticed she wore neat high-heeled boots, and a high-crowned Stetson hat. She was mighty pretty, but her blue eyes were full of trouble.

The thing that caught my eye about these folks was their clothes. Though cheap and worn, they were spotlessly clean. The big fellow's overalls had been washed until they had faded to a whitish blue. He went around to the front of the car, squatted down, rested his forearms on his knees, caught the axle and lifted the car half off the road. Then he went around to the rear and repeated the performance.

"I guess you can make it now, pardner," he said.

I made it with three inches to

spare and my left wheels bouncing on the edge of the ditch. I stopped and got out. What I saw almost knocked my eye out. There was another cowpuncher in the car. It reminded me of the story of the packer who carried an iron stove over a pass, then confessed he had a sack of flour inside the stove.

"That's Bill," the puncher said. "He's all stove up. Hurts him to get in and out of the coupé, so we don't disturb him none. I'll get some ropes for towin' and if you can haul us to the top of the hill, it'll help plenty."

**W**HILE he was attaching the ropes I heard the boy call the girl "Mom." She didn't look old enough to be married, let alone have a boy that size. I took a quick look at the big puncher and the sick one. They were both around twenty. I couldn't figure it out—three grown-ups and a boy crammed into one seat and driving over rough roads. And two of the grown-ups big men, at that.

I hauled them to the top of the hill and got out while the big fellow untied the tow rope. He coiled it up, the easy, sure way a puncher usually does and thanked me.

"I'm going to the ferry, too," I said. "If one of you want to ride with me I'll be glad to have you. It's pretty crowded in your car."

"Yeah. Still it could be worse," he drawled. "We could be sardines."

"You'd better ride, Mart," the girl said. "That'll leave room for Bill. I'll drive. Jerry can sit between us." She turned to me. "Mister, you'll never know how much we'll appreciate this. If we hadn't been towed to the summit we'd have missed the ferry, and that'd been bad. Our lights quit on us and we can't drive after dark."



Seems like you've been having a chain of bad luck," I remarked.

"Yeah," Mark said a little bitterly. "A chain—and I'm the weak link, seems like." Curiously enough, the girl didn't deny it.

"I'll go ahead down and if you don't show up I'll ask the ferryman to wait," I said.

There was nothing about that to make tears come to a girl's eyes, but they did. Just as I was turning away I noticed something I hadn't seen before. A part of the windshield on Bill's side was missing. Wind whipped around the ragged edge of the glass and blew dust and bugs into Bill's face.

"Say, Bill," I said, "why don't you ride with me, too? It's ten miles and the road's plenty rough."

"Hurts too blasted much to get out of the car," he answered. "Kitty's got me pretty well padded with pieces of an old comforter she cut up. I can hold my breath when the dust comes in, and I can shut my eyes agin' the bugs."

Mart got into my car. He extended his hand and said, "Guess it's time we got acquainted. My name's Suddreth."

I told him my name—Jack Carney. "You fellows are a nervy lot," I said. "You can sure take it."

Mart was thoughtful a moment. "I guess we've been taking it ever since we can remember. After awhile it gets to be a habit. When we get a break the average man would figger is only what he's got comin' to him, we feel like somebody gave us a surprise party."

"What's wrong with Bill?" I asked.

"It's a long story, mister, but it can be told short," Mart answered. He laughed and put his hand to his left side. "Got a stitch in my side," he explained. "Grandma used to

get 'em. I guess I'm gettin' old before my time."

"You look healthy enough," I said.

"I am. To get back to the story: I was the little kid of our crowd. The feller the big ones let tag alone. I was always gettin' lost, always fallin' offn a horse or gettin' into trouble, and they were always helpin' me out. I was quite a trial to 'em. Again and again they'd say they was through with me, but I'd beg hard and they'd weaken." His eyes had a funny, soft light in them. "That bunch is kind o' soft-hearted, I guess. They've been right good to me ever since I can remember. Hank, especially."

"Who's Hank?"

**H**ANK DAYTON was the oldest of us kids," he replied. "Then came Kitty and Bill, brother and sister. Then me, no relation to any of 'em. When Kitty was fifteen their ma died. There wasn't any place for her and Bill to go. She'd been keepin' company with Hank since she was thirteen, and as he was nineteen, and a man grown, they got married. They tried to make a go of ranchin', but had a tough time. After they'd been married a couple of years Jerry arrived."

"A new baby must have complicated things," I remarked.

"It did. Though it tickled 'em plumb to death," Mart answered. "But then things got bad. They lost cattle in a blizzard, and several summers of hot wind burned up their crops. On top of that the top soil blowed away. Then as the years followed, things went from bad to worse."

"Tough," I said.

"Tough's no name for it. Early this spring Kitty says, 'I'm sick and tired of going 'round in circles and getting nowhere. We've been mar-

ried nine years now and it's time we done something."

"What?" Hank asks.

"I've been watching these rodeo pictures off and on," she says. "I can do trick riding and roping. I know it. I could do relay riding, too. Hank, you and Bill are all-around cowpunchers. Last year, working steady, Bill only made two hundred and forty and found. You know what we made, Hank. We can do better on the rodeo circuit."

"And so you tried it?" I asked.

"Yeah," Mart answered. "I asked them to let me go along. At first they wouldn't hear of it. They said I'd only get hurt and be on their hands. They said I'd always been a cry baby and they couldn't take a chance on me. It's funny how things that happen when a man's a kid will stay with him. Home town folks never forget, it seems like."

"I take it they didn't change, either," I said. "You seem to be along with 'em."

"Yeah." He grinned. "They weakened, but they said the first time I got hurt I could cry and be damned, that they'd go on and leave me. We made an agreement that we'd all stick together, and when the season was over we'd split the pot four ways, whether a man lasted through or not."

"How's it been working out?"

"Well, Hank had some hard luck at the Little Coulee show. A horse rolled on him. He was pretty sick, but he didn't let on. We had to get in the money, you see, and we needed his points. So he finished the show, then went to the hospital. We left him all the money except enough for us to reach the next show. We couldn't afford railroad fare, so we bought that teakettle for fifty dollars."

I looked back. A cloud of dust

marked the teakettle's progress. We were in high country, and the road descended in a series of switchbacks and straight stretches off from a quarter to a half mile in length. Some of them were slightly upgrade, but if they came down fast enough they could coast to the next descent.

"What happened to Bill?" I asked after several minutes of silence.

"Got bucked off," Mart replied. "His foot caught in the stirrup and he bounced against the fence before they could stop the horse. He ain't in good shape, but we didn't have money enough to leave him in the hospital."

"And that leaves you to carry on?" I suggested.

"It leaves Kitty and me," Mart amended. "Golly, I hope nothin' happens to me."

"You've been lucky so far?"

"Plenty lucky," Mart answered. "I kind o' messed up a bulldoggin' event and lost second money once. You ain't supposed to bust the steer—that is, come down on their horns so hard their heads dig into the ground and they go head over heels. I was too anxious, I guess, and busted him. Busted myself, too. His head swung around and knocked the wind out of me. I still couldn't get my breath, and was slow on my second steer. That's the way it goes." -

I saw the ferry coming across the river as we came down the last draw. I parked clear of the road and told the ferryman a car without power was coming. He had everything ready, and the teakettle coasted to a stop on the other end of the boat.

**T**HERE were only the two cars, and as soon as the ferryman had collected fares and got under way he lifted the cowl of the teakettle to see what was wrong. Few fine cars used

his boat, he told us, and as a result he had had plenty of experience with sick ones.

"Points," he said presently, "I can fix them up for a while, I guess. But you should have new ones."

"It seems as if this car needs a little of everything," Kitty said ruefully.

I went over to Bill. "Since you're going to Arroyo Grande, why not join me? It's a long ride, and my car rides easy."

"Why don't you, Bill?" Kitty urged. "I know you hate to move, but it'll pay in the long run."

Have you ever seen a man try to move a few days after he's been dragged by a stirrup and battered against a fence? I flinched every time Bill made a move, and I marveled at his courage in taking the beating he must have taken in the teakettle.

We got him into my car at last. And for a long time he just lay back against the cushions, white-faced, gasping, and with his big hands clenched. But he didn't utter one word of complaint.

I drove fast for the first two miles to make sure the teakettle wouldn't eat my dust, then I slowed down. Bill and I got to talking about the thing that was most on his mind.

"This sure hurts my pride," he confessed. "And it must hurt Hank's pride, too. We get banged up, and the Cry Baby—that's Mart—misses the grief. He has to carry the load."

"How about the stitch Mart's got in his side?" I asked.

"Didn't know he had one," Bill said. "But I ain't surprised. 'He's always gettin' something. I guess some folks just don't have what it takes. As long as I can remember, Mart has been a weak sister."

As we drove along I learned something of their plans. They hoped to

catch the eye of Otto Brennan. Brennan had a string of riders and horses moving over the rodeo circuit. He paid his men good wages and they were allowed to take a fair share of the prize money they won. Rodeo outfits paid Otto to bring his men to their shows. They knew he only employed the top-notchers.

I waited on the outskirts of Arroyo Grande until the other car arrived and asked where they were going to put up for the night. They got out to talk things over, and the boy walked over to a restaurant window and looked at a display of food. I saw Kitty glance his way, start to speak. Then her face took on a look of hopeless defeat. She knew what that kid was thinking, and she knew the answer. I felt like stocking them up with grub, but I knew proud people when I saw them. I had an idea how to handle them, though.

"I'd like to make you people a business proposition," I said. "I dabble in the rodeo business myself now and then. Enter a horse once in a while in the races. I don't see why I shouldn't enter men now and then, the way Otto Brennan does." It was a lie, but I could see they were interested. "Suppose we go in here and talk things over."

They hesitated, wondering who would pay the bill, but I settled that with a terse, "The meal's on me, of course."

When we got Bill settled as comfortably as possible, I took over the job of ordering—soup for a starter and man-sized steaks all around. It did my heart good to see that little boy go to work on his.

**T**HEY'D been so hungry that their guard was down. When they got to the pie-and-coffee stage they began to get suspicious. I could see

it particularly in the girl's eyes. These folks just didn't believe they could get something for nothing in this man's world.

"What's your proposition?" Kitty said at last. They were all on guard now, except the boy. He was looking at me as if I were a god.

"Why stop at a small show like Arroyo Grande?" I asked. "Why not go in for the big shows, like Pendleton, Ellensburg, Salinas City, and the others?"

"We thought of that, but the entry fee is too high," the girl explained. "When Hank and Bill ran into hard luck we lowered our sights. But we'll get there sometime."

"What kind of a showing could you make at one of the big round-ups?" I asked.

"If we had Hank and Bill in shape," Mart said, "we'd do fine. I'd pick up my share of the second and third money. Kitty would take some of the girl's relay money. We'd get along."

"I'll put up the expense money," I offered, "for a percentage of your winnings. I'll make a little money if you land in big time. You'll be that much ahead. How about it?"

"Take it!" Mart urged.

She looked at him doubtfully. Mart caught the expression on her face, and I saw something come into his eyes, a longing to live down his nose-blowing, cry-baby days. Being the youngest in a large family myself, I sort of knew how Mart felt.

"How much of a percentage would you want?" Kitty asked.

"You go over to the rodeo headquarters of the Arroyo Grande association," I said, "and ask them what's fair. They may have a blank contract around. If so, we'll fill it in and sign it."

"I'll go," Mart said. He started to get up, then grabbed his side. I

heard him growl something about a stitch and being an old grandmother.

He was back in a half hour with a blank contract. We filled it out then and there. I called myself several kinds of a damned fool for getting into this, but somehow I wanted to see those folks get a break.

Twenty-four hours later Bill took a turn for the worse and had to be sent to a hospital. I dug into the old sock and paid the bill. I telephoned one of the big shows and found a three-day meet scheduled two weeks away. I telegraphed entry fees for Kitty and Mart. Then I got busy organizing things. I sold the teakettle for twenty-five dollars and gave Kitty the money to buy a few things for herself and the boy. I bought Mart a store suit and a new hat. Kitty saw to it that I put everything down in black and white.

**W**E arrived at the show in plenty of time and I took Jerry down to watch the horses and punchers arrive. A string of several brightly painted cars caught the kid's eye. Each was lettered "OTTO BRENNAN'S SHOWS."

Jerry was obviously impressed when he saw the elegantly dressed punchers and girls come down the car steps. "Gee, ain't they pretty ladies?" he said. "Golly, they look like movie stars." Then he added loyally, "But mom would be prettier if she had clothes like them."

"Yep," I said.

"And pop and Bill could ride just as well as them punchers if they weren't stove up," he continued. "Even Mart might be as good as some of 'em."

Kitty and Mart had joined us and we saw Brennan himself come out of one of the cars.

"I think I'll go over right now

and ask about the chances of getting into his outfit," Kitty said. "I believe in striking while the iron is hot."

"Don't," Mart advised. "The time ain't ripe. Wait until we've done somethin'."

"You're always afraid to take a chance," she said impatiently. Then she apologized. "I'm sorry, Mart. You mean well, but don't you see—"

"I'll bet somebody tackles him for a job a dozen times a day," Mart persisted. "The thing to do is to make him notice us, then he'll come to us."

"Mart is right, Kitty," I said. "When a man comes to you you can get better terms than when you go to him."

"And besides," Mart added, "we're tied up with Jack Carney."

"Oh," she said, "I'd forgotten that. I guess that settles it. I guess we'll never ride in those swell cars and have the finest outfits in rodeo."

She was right. She didn't know it then, but not one of the four would ever ride with Otto Brennan's shows.

The association loaned Kitty and Mart horses for the big parade the first day. And Mart figured out the day money for riding and roping a dozen times at least. An hour before he went into the arena I heard him cough and saw him grab his side. I went over. "How about that stitch, Mart?" I asked.

"It's all right," he insisted. "I'll shake it off."

"Will you let me press my fingers against it?" I asked.

He looked at me curiously, and a certain stubbornness showed in his blue eyes. "Sure," he said, "go ahead. Punch me if you want to. I know you're thinkin' maybe I've got busted ribs or somethin'. Well, forget it. If there was anything

wrong with me, I'd be in the hospital with Hank and Bill. I ain't made of the stuff they are."

He looked at me challengingly, then walked away.

We rode to the gate for those who were taking part in the rodeo, showed our passes and were allowed to go inside. Kitty was waiting for us. She was dressed in the best clothes she had, her arena outfit. It didn't seem right that a girl with a seven-year-old boy should be out there risking her neck.

They got by the first two days in fair shape, and Mart got second-day money in riding and roping. Kitty came in second in fancy riding and drew third money in a relay. She used a local rancher's string in her relay. With faster horses she'd have done better.

I collected the winnings and turned them back to Kitty. When the last day of the show came around I thought Mart looked pretty tired, but he didn't say a word. He had made the finals in the bucking and roping. He would be in the relay, but not in the bull-dogging. He hadn't done much the first two days in that.

Of course that knocked him out of a place in the all-around champion cowpuncher money. If he won both the roping and the bucking, plus the relay, which wasn't likely, he might build up points enough to get in the all-around champion money. But he wouldn't win the silver-mounted saddle in the harness-store window downtown.

"How's the stitch in your side, Mart?" I asked before the finals started.

"They say a stitch in time saves nine, so I should be hunky-dory," he answered. "Say, ain't Otto Brennan's riders somethin'?"

"They're pretty good," I admitted. Then I took my place near the chutes.

Twenty minutes later Mart came out on a steer's back. There was a rope tied around the middle, with the ends crossing in his hands. He had to hang on tight, because the instant he relaxed the ends would part and he'd be dumped. There were a couple of dollars in it if he stayed on until the steer passed a white line. Mart stayed on. That's how badly they needed money.

I saw him do a neat piece of roping later. He didn't act like he was part of a show. Rather, he was a cowpuncher doing a job. Then he went over in front of the grandstand to hold Kitty's horses while she rode in the relay.

**M**AYBE you've seen money players on the golf course, lads who had to win because they couldn't afford to lose. Kitty was like that as she came down the track for the first change. She flung herself from her horse, hit the ground with both feet, bounced and was in the saddle. The horse was already on the run.

She made the second change fast and had a good lead. The third change went wrong. Just as she was reaching for the horse, it reared and almost got away from Mart.

"Hold him!" she panted. "You never do anything right. Don't start crying about it, either."

Mart's face was a brick-red. "She's excited," he muttered to another puncher. "She don't mean nothin'."

Kitty finished third, but even though she didn't win she made the fancy Brennan riders show something. Mart wasn't around at the finish. He didn't want to face her.

But she was around when he

started to ride the buckers. "You'd better not pull leather or buck off," she warned. "Or we'll be right out of the picture. Darn it, Mart, don't you know you're the only whole man we've got left?"

The Brennan boys had made two rides that would knock your eye out. Then the announcer said, "Mart Suddreth coming out on Pick-me-up! Watch out."

A pick-me-up is supposed to ease a hang-over, but this pick-me-up was plain dynamite. I saw Mart's knees go up again and again as his spurs raked the outlaw nag. The grandstands cheered, stood up, and then roared. I'll never forget the sight of those faded-blue overalled legs and battered high-heeled boots swingin' back and forth like an alarm-clock striker.

The gun cracked, ending the ride, and two seconds later the horse tossed Mart into the air. He hit the ground, rolled over, stayed there, then got to his feet just as the stretcher men were galloping across the field. He swayed like a drunken man half the way, and I heard somebody remark, "The boy's legs are so long it takes time to get 'em stiff after a fall like that."

He sat down on the fence where the Indian spectators were lined up and collected his wits. He was still collecting them when Kitty came over.

"How're you feeling, Mart?" she asked anxiously.

"I ain't started to blubber yet," he said shortly, "and my nose don't need wipin'."

"I was afraid something might be wrong," she said. "The relay race is coming up." She consulted figures. "I've been checking up points. If you win it you'll get second money and our team will make the

best showing in the arena for total points scored. I'm trying to make Brennan notice us."

She didn't remind him he'd cost her first place in the girl's relay by letting her horse bolt. She didn't need to. He knew what she was thinking.

They lined up for the relay some time later. There was an Indian in the race. His father owned a big wheat ranch and spent his money breeding tough, fast horses. There was another white rider who was developing a string of his own. Mart was riding a string for a young rancher who hadn't much money but knew a lot about horses. The string looked good. The rancher was helping during the change, and had his horses keyed up for the race, but fairly well under control.

Mart was off with the gun and had a lead at the end of the first quarter. He was three lengths ahead of the Indian when they made the first change. He shoved this up to five lengths before he came in for the last change. It's a nice lead in a running race, but it can vanish in a relay if something goes wrong.

Mart jumped down and the crowd roared—tribute to the man who was showing the way. Mart's next horse, startled by the roar, whirled and struck out with both feet just as he was coming in. The heels caught him in the stomach, knocked him back six feet. He hit the ground flat on his back, tried to get up and fell. He got up again and, by sheer nerve, climbed onto the horse's back. The Indian flashed by, then the white man came abreast.

Mart's whole body must have cried out for rest. He swayed, then gathered his nerve. He lashed the horse furiously. The horse beside him fell behind. He was swaying

now, threatening to fall, yet staying in the saddle by sheer instinct.

The hoofbeats ahead were louder. Then they were abreast, then ahead, then abreast. The roar of the crowd was deafening as his horse took him in first. Then another roar went up as Mart fell heavily from the saddle.

**T**HEY hurried Mart to the hospital, and it seemed hours before Kitty and I were allowed to go into his room. He gave us a kind of shamefaced grin.

"Kitty," he said, "don't let Bill and Hank know about this. I'm always playin' out on 'em. This was the one time I had to come through, and now I'm playin' the cry-baby act as usual, and there're two more rodeo shows to ride in—"

"Mart," the doctor interrupted, "I want you to tell me the truth. When did you break your ribs?"

"You mean when did that stitch in my side start botherin' me?" Mart asked. "That was the time I got tangled up with the steer, busted him, and lost second money. I felt kinda sick for a while afterward, but with the other two boys out I couldn't take any time off."

"That's when you broke your ribs," the doctor said. He turned to me. "This boy's been taking his regular turn in the arena with ribs broken and his side cinched up in a wide leather belt."

"Don't let Hank and Bill know I got busted up," Mart pleaded.

"You bet your bottom dollar they're going to know it," Kitty said. "They're going to know the little boy has grown up."

I was just getting ready to clear out when Otto Brennan came in. "Just dropped in to see how Sudreth was getting along," he said, "and to ask some questions."

"He's out for the rest of the year," the doctor declared, "but he'll be as good as ever in time. You can ask him questions if they aren't too long."

"Suddreth, have you been riding the rodeo circuit?" Brennan asked. "The small shows?"

"Yes, we have," Kitty answered, to save Mart talking. "But I guess we aren't in your class yet, Mr. Brennan. We keep dropping men along the way."

"That's just it," Brennan said, "and you've been running the Brennan people ragged. All along the line I get fine reports. They want to know who's building a fire under my people. Well, I've been building a fire under them all season long, but it didn't burn. Yours did. You're as good as my best."

"Then you'll sign us on?" Kitty asked quickly.

"Nope," Brennan answered. "It wouldn't work. I got all the prima donnas I need. But I do need someone to follow my prima donnas around and make 'em sing their best. That'll be your job next year. You won't go around in expensive cars and swell clothes; you'll go in battered automobiles and old duds. But you'll get paid what they do, and you'll save more money in the end. And that's the idea, isn't it, to make a stake for a new start?"

"That's the idea," Mart said. "But you've overlooked one thing. We have a contract with Mr. Carney."

Otto Brennan took a good long look at me. "I know you now. Jack Carney, agent for motion picture and theatrical stars. I never expected to find you in the rodeo business. Well, Carney, let's have it

straight. What do you want for your contract?"

"Expenses to date and a thousand-dollar bonus," I answered.

He thought a minute. "It's almost highway robbery," he said finally, "but I'll do it. I'll have the papers fixed up right now."

I dropped in that night to see how Mart was getting along. Kitty and the boy were visiting with him.

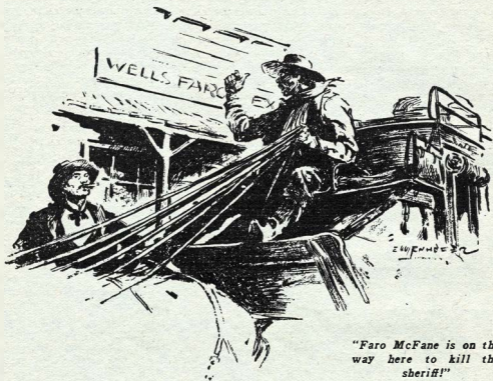
"Well, I sold you down the river, Kitty," I said. Then I dropped Brennan's thousand-dollar check into her lap. "That's the bonus," I told her. "See that Bill and Hank are treated right. The sooner you all get together, the better."

"But I can't take this," she protested. "The thousand dollars is yours. You've already done too much for us."

"Listen, Kitty. Do you know what I was doing knocking around the West? I'll tell you. A couple of months ago I was working too hard. My doctor told me if I didn't want to crack up I'd better forget business for six months and go so far into the cattle country I wouldn't see a motion-picture actor even on the screen. He said if I even talked business with anybody he'd soak me a fifty-thousand-dollar fee and collect it. So you see, Kitty, I'm on the spot."

She believed my lie and took the check. And maybe all this makes me look like a sucker. But I'm not. Like Otto Brennan said, I'm a tough guy when I'm not on a vacation. Some of these days Hollywood's going to need Kitty, Mart, Hank and Bill for some special kind of Western picture. Then I'll sign them up at a thousand a week apiece and get my ten percent. There's nothing soft about Jack Carney.





*"Faro McFane is on the way here to kill the sheriff!"*

## TOUGH CHORE

BY VICTOR KAUFMAN

It shocked almost everyone in Smoky Hill; everyone, that is, who knew about it.

Not that Faro McFane's return was surprising, because the country figured he'd come back sooner or later. And it was natural enough for him to come gunning for Sheriff Johnny Booth, because Johnny had been forced to shoot Bill McFane, Faro's younger brother.

Even the fact that Faro McFane was returning on the day Johnny was to marry Susan Hollison didn't

particularly upset Smoky Hills' men-folks. It was too bad, of course. But that was how things turned out sometimes. The thing that hurt was the sudden realization that Sheriff Johnny Booth was scared.

They heard about Faro McFane from Tim Lafferty. Tim brought his stage wheeling into town about noon; he almost fell off the high seat in his excitement, and when he got the six horses to a stop he began to yell at Hudd Longmire, the town's best liked gambling man, who happened to be standing in front of the Wells Fargo office.

"You know what?" Lafferty shouted. "You know what I know?"

"Well, what do you know?" Longmire asked obligingly.

Tim Lafferty told it in quick, breathless phrases. Faro McFane

was in Spring Valley, just down the road a piece. Lafferty himself had seen Faro. He'd even talked to him. Faro was heading for Smoky Hill. And he aimed to shoot Sheriff Johnny Booth on sight.

"Lord," Hudd Longmire said. "And Johnny's getting hitched today."

"Faro knows that," Tim Lafferty declared. "That's why he didn't come on to Smoky Hill last night. He heard about the wedding." He swore. "Faro's just the kind who'd get a lot of pleasure out of killing a man on the day he got married."

**T**HE news traveled, and within fifteen minutes practically the whole male population of Smoky Hill had gathered in Thompson's Saloon. They talked it over and decided that no one should tell Susan or her folks or any of the women or the preacher. No use making things worse than they were. But someone had to tell Johnny Booth.

About a dozen of them finally walked over to Johnny's office, next to the courthouse. Tim Lafferty was the one who told him.

"Johnny," Lafferty said, "Faro McFane's coming back."

Sheriff Johnny didn't say a word. He just sat there. And it dawned on everyone, finally, that Johnny was scared. His lips were too tight, and his cheeks were pale under their healthy tan. Johnny was tall and young and he always had a grin on his face. But he looked old now, and he wasn't smiling. He seemed kind of dazed.

Not that anyone blamed him much, but it hurt their pride. Johnny Booth was their sheriff. They'd voted for him and they liked him, and they hated to think of him as a coward.

Yet here he was—scared of Faro McFane.

For that matter, McFane was enough to scare anyone. Since he left Smoky Hill, a couple of years back, Faro McFane had made quite a name for himself. Some of the old-timers swore that he was better than Wild Bill, that he could have out-drawn and outshot Wild Bill any day of the week, whether that was so or not, no one denied that Faro McFane was pretty fast with an iron.

Sheriff Johnny Booth wasn't so slow, himself. But he'd never gone up against anyone like Faro McFane. Young Bill McFane didn't count. Bill had only been a wild, good-for-nothing kid, trying to be tough like his brother. He'd stolen a horse, and when Johnny went after him, Bill tried to down him from behind a tree. Only it had turned out the other way around.

Faro was different—very different.

The silence in Johnny's office got to be embarrassing. Tim Lafferty shuffled his feet and looked at the floor.

"It's tough, coming like it does, Johnny. But we figured you ought to know."

Sheriff Johnny swallowed hard. His voice was shaky. "Sure," he said, and he didn't seem to see them at all. "Sure. Thanks."

They went out and crossed back to the saloon and lined the bar, not even wanting to drink.

"I can't believe it," Tim Lafferty kept saying. "I just can't believe it."

"When do you figure McFane'll show up?" Hudd Longmire asked.

Tim Lafferty shrugged. "There ain't no way to tell. Maybe before the wedding. Maybe after."

The rest of the day was glum and sober, not at all like Sheriff Johnny's wedding day should have been. Smoky Hill hated Faro McFane for this, especially, because they'd fig-

ured on staging quite a celebration, and of course they couldn't do it now.

Johnny came into the saloon only once, along toward evening. He had a drink and his hand shook when he lifted the glass. He didn't speak to anyone; he just had his drink and walked out and went up to the hotel where he'd been living since he quit punching cows to take over the sheriff's job.

"Acts like he's plumb petrified," someone whispered.

"I wish there was something we could do," Tim Lafferty said.

But there wasn't. Everyone knew that. This was Johnny Booth's chore. Faro was gunning for him and he had to stand and shoot it out, live or die. That was the code. Things like wedding and brides made no difference at all.

**A**T five minutes to eight Sheriff Johnny came out of the hotel and marched up the street, dressed in his finest broadcloth suit. He moved slowly, his teeth set. Tim Lafferty and the others swung in behind him and they all headed for the church, up on the hill. There was one thing to be thankful for, anyway. Susan and her mother and the rest of the women had been too busy all day to notice anything queer.

When they got to the church, Johnny hesitated. Tim Lafferty knew what was on his mind.

"You can't wear your gun inside," he said. "I'll hold it for you."

"Sure," Johnny said. He unbuckled his belt and handed the whole rig to Tim Lafferty.

"We're keeping an eye peeled for Faro," Hudd Longmire told him. "When he hits town we'll let you know."

"All right," Johnny said listlessly. Then he swallowed and walked into the church to get himself married.

The ceremony was over and the party was well under way when one of the boys ran up from Main Street to say that Faro had arrived. Tim Lafferty managed to sneak Johnny out the side door. No one paid much attention because they were all talking and laughing and eating, and a lot of them were clustered around Susan, who made the prettiest bride Smoky Hill had ever seen.

Tim Lafferty buckled the gun belt around Johnny's waist; he didn't trust Johnny's hands to do the job.

"Well," he said, "McFane's waiting down there. Good luck, Johnny."

They waited in the darkness, tense and silent. Inside the church hall the wedding party was singing, and pretty soon there were two shots. You could barely hear them above the singing. There was an instant's pause.

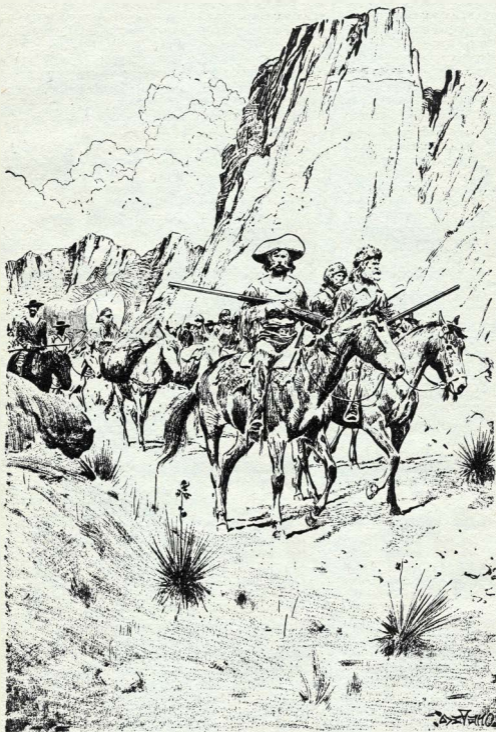
"We might as well go down," Hudd Longmire said woodenly.

They had almost reached the street before they met Johnny, coming slowly back up the hill. Tim Lafferty let out a whoop. He grabbed Johnny and shook him and began to laugh. Hudd Longmire took a bottle out of his coat pocket and they watched Johnny take a drink.

"It was a tough chore," Lafferty said. "But it's over, Johnny. It's over! You got nothing more to worry about."

"Oh, I don't know," Johnny said. He looked at them sheepishly. "It wasn't so tough after I got inside the church. As a matter of fact, boys," he grinned, "gettin' married ain't bad at all. It was just thinking about it that had me scared."

THE END



*Captain John Charles Fremont, one of the most intrepid explorers in the history of the West, also had a hand in the winning of California for this country.*

# THE STORY OF THE WEST

told in pictures and text by

**GERARD DELANO**

During the period between 1841 and 1848 four important explorative expeditions were headed by Captain John Charles Fremont.

In 1842 there was considerable immigration to Oregon and Fremont's expedition of that year was to describe the best line of travel, find the best location for military posts and fix in position the South Pass in the Rocky Mountains in order to facilitate travel in that region.

With the intrepid and trailwise Kit Carson as guide and a force of some twenty-three other men, Fremont followed the Kansas, Big Blue and Platte Valleys through South Pass and on to Fremont's Peak in the Wind River Mountains.

Fremont's second journey was begun in May of 1843. This expedition was for the purpose of securing for the people of the United States more information regarding the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the Pacific Northwest.

Thomas Fitzpatrick, a veteran mountain man, was employed as guide and the party was later joined by Kit Carson. Fremont this time explored the South Platte to its source and also one of the two principal branches of the Arkansas. From there the party swung over to the Great Salt Lake region and, uniting the various divisions of his force, Fremont descended the Snake and Columbia Rivers to Fort Vancouver.

Winter was now approaching, but snow and blizzards did not halt these men. Returning to the Dalles on the Columbia, the party turned south for the California settlements, an objective which had not been authorized by the war department. They proceeded by way of Klamath Lake and, by superhuman efforts in the deep snows and dangerous ravines, managed to make their way across the Sierras north of Tahoe and entered Sacramento Valley. They arrived at Sutter's Fort on March 8, 1844.

Fremont now veered to the southeast through the San Joaquin Valley, passed

near Los Angeles and, reaching the trail cut by Santa Fe caravans, followed it on his return trip to Utah Lake, crossing the Wasatch Range. After further explorations in Colorado, his force was disbanded at Bents' Fort on the Arkansas.

The purpose of Fremont's third trip in 1845 was to explore further in the West and particularly to observe the course of events in California. His force entered that province in two divisions. These united near San Jose. Shortly thereafter the Spanish officials ordered the expedition to leave the country. At first Fremont fortified himself and defied them, but later withdrew to the north, away from the settlements.

It was during Fremont's third expedition that the war with Mexico broke out. Commodore J. D. Sloat was in command of a small American naval force at Mazatlan when the news of hostilities reached him on May 17, 1846. In July he occupied Monterey, the capital, and proclaimed California annexed to the United States.

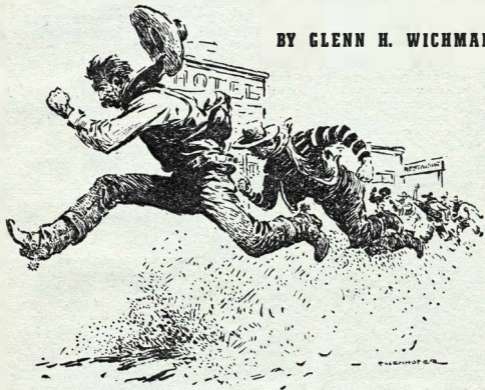
At this time Sloat was supplanted by Commodore Robert F. Stockton. Aided by Fremont and his men, Stockton occupied the other California settlements and on August 17th proclaimed California a territory of the United States. A short time later he made Fremont military commander.

Fremont's fourth exploring expedition was made in 1848. This had as the main objective the finding of a practical route through New Mexico to the Pacific. He was trapped in the mountains by heavy snows and after terrific suffering, the loss of a third of his men and all his animals, managed to return to Santa Fe where he recruited a fresh party and eventually reached the Sacramento Valley. As an explorer, John Charles Fremont was second to none in the history of this country.

**NEXT WEEK: REVOLT IN NEW MEXICO.**

# GONE WITH THE WINDY

BY GLENN H. WICHMAN



HEP GALLEGHER, who always had to be worrying over something, had taken to worrying over Bill Kindig. Bill worked with us on the Rafter A and lately appeared to have something the matter with him. He was a youngish sort of a guy, and all of us noticed that he was gettin' thin and harassed-lookin' and as cranky as the devil. Every evening for the past week he'd rode in to Murphyville and come back after midnight. This all by itself was enough to wear down even a youngish gent.

"Bill must be goin' to the devil," Hep said. "It ain't the demon rum, because he never has any trouble finding his bunk nights. Mebbe it's his gamblin' or some other form of foolish nonsense."

"Bill's old enough to find his way around," I said. "If he ain't, it's too late for him to learn. Anyhow, it's none of your affair."

But everybody's business is Gallegher's business, so he asked Bill Kindig what ailed him.

"Shut up!" Bill hollered. "Get away before I carve you up!"

"Now listen, Bill," Hep said, "you hadn't oughta get so excited. You'll bust a blood vessel. A man in your condition hadn't oughta get mad."

"What condition?" demanded Bill.

"Take a squint at yourself in the mirror," Hep advised him. "That'll tell you."

Bill calmed down and looked. "Well, now," he admitted, "I do look kind of frayed around the edges. It's

liar trouble," he said sadly. "That's what's the matter with me. Liar trouble."

"Been tellin' some stories that have backfired on you?" I asked him.

"Hell, no!" Bill said disgustedly. "That's what the trouble is! I can't think of big enough lies to tell. All my lies don't amount to nothin'."

This appeared to be a singular sort of complaint for a guy to have the matter with him. It was a little hard to pry it out of Bill, but finally he unbosomed himself.

IT appeared that the week before a gal named Martha McGuire had come to Murphyville. She was about Bill's age and had opened a hash house there. Martha, it appeared, was full of smiles and dimples and good cookin' and nice light biscuits, and her coming to Murphyville had the unmarried gents who'd seen her all in a lather.

"I'm surprised that you ain't heard of it," Bill said.

"So'm I," Hep admitted, "because I generally hear of everything. Shucks! It must be because I ain't been to town. That's what I get for workin' too hard."

"Well," Bill continued, "there're a lot of worthless guys always hangin' around Murphyville. The damn bunch of bums! They all think they wanta marry Martha so's they'll have somethin' to eat and won't have to work no more. That hash house of hers is crowded all the time with gents tryin' to impress her with what great guys they are. They lie to her somethin' awful."

"Is that so?" Hep inquired with interest.

"To hear that bunch of highbinders talk," Bill continued, "you'd think they'd all been personally acquainted with Billy the Kid an' Jesse James and the Dalton boys and the

Younger boys and Wild Bill Hickok. It's enough to make a man sick. I'm thinkin' of startin' a general slaughter in Murphyville. I think I'll kill me some of those birds!"

"Better not go in for miscellaneous manslaughter," I advised him. "It'll only get you hung. Even a hot biscuit ain't worth gettin' hung about."

"It ain't the hot biscuits an' other victuals that's botherin' Bill," Hep said solemnly. "It's love that's devourin' him."

Bill Kindig got red around the ears. "Well," he said defiantly, "I ain't ashamed of it. But I ain't makin' no impression on Martha. Those other guys are too windy for me. I ain't a liar by nature. I was brought up to be an honest man, but an honest man don't stand no chance in Murphyville. I think I'll burn the town up."

"Better not," I advised him. "Most gals have a prejudice against folks who set fire to towns."

"You're right," Hep agreed. "This matter's got to be handled more subtler. Bill, it's a good thing you spoke to me, because I've already got an idea. It's a good thing for you that I'm a guy with a lot of imagination. Bill, what we want to do is fight wind with wind. If those guys in Murphyville blow at twenty miles an hour, why, we'll blow at fifty."

This didn't seem to make much sense to Bill or to me either.

"We'll outlie 'em," Gallegher explained. "We'll give 'em cards, spades and big casino and still outlie 'em."

"Naw," Bill objected. "I'm still in favor of shootin'."

Gallegher's mind had wandered off somewhere; he looked as blank as a dried-up waterhole.

"It'll be a cinch," he said finally. "Besides, I've got another idea. I'll

dig a deadfall for these guys to fall into. Shucks! I'll trap 'em."

"Now listen," I objected. "If you're plannin' any rough stuff—don't! Those gents in Murphyville are very ungentle. They're always lookin' for trouble. Better let Bill attend to his own affairs."

"Yeah," said Bill. "I wouldn't wanta get you shot full of holes on my account. Besides, it's me that's thinkin' of gettin' married and not you. At least, it'd better not be you that wants to."

"Matrimony," Hep assured him, "ain't in my mind. But I'm a great friend of the common man. If a gent is goin' to live in the world, he oughta do somethin' about it."

"About what?" I demanded.

Hep ignored me. "Tomorrow," he announced, "we'll all go into Murphyville and grab this matter by the horns. Bill's a good, honest common citizen and it ain't right that he should be blowed out of the chance to get married. It's all a matter of knowin' how to go about it."

"Shucks!" Bill Kindig said. "I don't know as I like the idea of my courtin' being carried on by a committee. I ain't ever heard of anything like that before."

"There're lots of things you ain't heard of before," Hep told him. "That's one of the things that's the matter with you. You want to learn to adapt yourself. When you get married you'll have to learn to adapt yourself to a lot of things, such as carryin' in the wood and not forgettin' to take your shoes off before you go to bed, like you did the other night."

**T**HE next day we all laid off and rode to Murphyville. We got there along in the middle of the morning. Bill Kindig turned a couple of shades of red at sight of Mar-

tha McGuire's eatin' emporium, which was next door to the general store.

"The devil!" Bill grumbled. "I got a mind to abandon the whole works and go back to beefsteak farmin'. Mebbe I wouldn't make a good husband nohow."

"Which is a sign," Hep assured him, "that you'd make a good one. That's one of the surest indications that there is, Bill."

"Well, then," said Bill, "you guys go on home and let me suffer in solitude. I'm thinking less of the idea of having brought you all the time."

This was all right with me, but not with Hep, so we left our horses at the tie rack and went into the restaurant. There was a counter with about a dozen stools and half of 'em were occupied. We knew some of the guys. One was Case Highfield, a gambler. Case was rigged up slicker'n a whistle. He even had on a derby. Another was Luke Albright. Luke was a ramrod up the valley. He was something to look at, with a new Stetson that was about as big as a tent. Then there was Art Snodgrass. Snodgrass traded in cattle or anything else that he could skin people out of. Another guy was Willie Trigg, who had never had an occupation that anybody could remember about, except that he had once been in jail.

All these fellows were drinking coffee and eating pie and doing neither with relish because they seemed about to explode from too much of both.

Behind the counter was Martha McGuire. Bill Kindig hadn't exaggerated about her being something to look at. She was small, pretty and full of pleasantness. Her eyes were blue and her hair about the color of ripe barley and she had a dimple in her chin. Besides all that,



she was dressed in white with a white cap, and any guy would have enjoyed dying with her holding his head.

When we went in everybody looked at us.

"Well," Case Highfield remarked, "if some saddle tramps ain't come to town."

"Sheepherders," Luke Albright put in.

Bill Kindig flared up and it looked like a fight. "Listen, you warts," he told 'em, "I've had about enough of your chins. The next guy who—"

Martha came to the rescue. "Why, hello, Bill!" she exclaimed. "I'm glad to see you."

"She doesn't mean that," Highfield said. "She's just tryin' to be polite. Bill is of no more entertainment to anybody than a dead Indian'd be."

"Why, I think he's awfully interesting," Martha put in.

Bill blushed and said: "Ma'am, I want you to meet the committee—I mean I want you to meet my friends, Hep an' George. Hep Gallegher and George Armstrong."

We reached over and shook hands with the lady. Her hands were real soft, considering that she did such a lot of cookin'.

"Give us all a slice of pie an' a mug of java," Bill ordered. "I'm settin' 'em up."

"Havin' got that settled," Case Highfield said, "I can now continue with the story I was tellin'. Ma'am, I want you to listen particularly to this."

"Go right ahead, Case," Martha urged, while she cut the pie.

Highfield went ahead: "It was the fall of the year an' I was chasin' the Blackjack Kid. He was the toughest hombre in Montana. He was a hard-boiled baby. There

wasn't a harder guy than he was, nowhere. He—"

"All right!" Bill Kindig interrupted. "He was a tough guy. What happened next? Get it over with."

Highfield looked hard at Bill. "In them days," he said, "I was known as the Lone Wolf. Why did they call me that? Because I always hunted alone. I couldn't be bothered with a posse. A posse was always gettin' under my feet. And I always got my man. There was never any argument about that, either."

"Well," he continued, "I was about to overtake the Blackjack Kid when I came to the Powder River. At this point it was neither a mile wide nor a foot deep. It was two miles wide and a hundred feet deep. Blackjack was already halfway across it, swimmin' his horse. Then I made a bad discovery. My own horse didn't know how to swim a lick. But I didn't give up. I plunged into the river with the horse on my shoulder. I carried that horse across the river, remounted, captured the Blackjack Kid single-handed and hung him to a cottonwood tree. Ma'am," he asked, "did you ever swim across a river carrying a horse?"

"No," said Martha, "I can't say that I have. But that was certainly a very fine thing for you to do, Case. They must be real proud of you up in Montana."

"But not here," Bill put in. "Mr. Highfield ain't doing nothin' here except shuffle cards with the aces always on the botton."

"Now look here!" Case hollered. "I've—"

"Come! Come!" Martha interposed. "Let's all be quiet and dignified. Who else has a story to tell?"

"Let Bill tell one," Luke Albright, the ramrod, suggested sarcastically.

"That'll be fine," Martha agreed.

SO Bill took on a heavy jolt of coffee and got started: "It was in the fall of the year," he said. "In them days I was known as Bill Kindig. I worked on the Box A. I was always fallin' off of horses. Me and the horses were always finding ourselves in different parts of the country. The boss didn't like this and so he fired me. I found another job where the cow horses were all crippled and weren't so hard to fall off of. This was how I learned to be a reasonably good cowhand."

The five guys clapped their hands politely together. It was very insulting. They were an ornery bunch of buzzards and I could see why Bill had had thoughts of shootin' 'em. In spite of the fact that only one of them could marry the beautiful hash-house lady, they'd all ganged up on poor Bill.

"Now that was certainly a rip-snorter," Art Snodgrass, the cattle buyer, said, and laughed hollowly into the palm of his hand. "It was about as interestin' as a busted crutch. But it reminds me of the time when I had my brush with the Dalton boys. In them days—"

"Ah, shut up!" Hep interrupted. "Bill still has the floor. The only trouble with Bill Kindig is that he's too durn modest. Why, if Bill was to really open up once and tell you some of the things he'd done, it'd make you all lose your hair. You'd never be the same again after listenin' to 'em."

"Horse collar!" the gambler grumbled. "Bill's never done anything more exciting than change his shirt or fall off a horse."

"Tell us about it, Mr. Gallegher," Martha put in. "And have another piece of pie."

"Go easy on this, Hep," Bill urged. "Remember that you're doin' this on your own responsibility."

"Listen to the guy!" Gallegher chuckled. "Bill's the most modest man in the world. He could tell you about things he did up in Colorado that—"

"Shucks!" Bill interrupted, but Gallegher poked him in the ribs with his elbow and continued:

"I was up in Colorado a few years ago and I heard all about Bill. Folks up there think he's a magnificent fellow. Bill's a great humanitarian. He doesn't get any fun out of shootin' folks or knockin' their heads off or gun-whippin' 'em. He's always lookin' for ways to make life easier for sufferin' humanity. Why, he—"

"If he was to get out of here altogether," Luke Albright broke in, "it'd make life less sufferin' for me."

"Now, now, Luke," Martha pleaded, "please be nice and let Mr. Gallegher keep on with his story."

"Bill was up on Pikes Peak above the timberline," Hep continued. "It was in the summertime and there wasn't much snow around. There was an old prospector there named James Nugget. Mr. Nugget was washin' gold out of a pretty good-sized stream that tumbled down through a canyon and was doing right well by himself. He had several pokes of flake gold that were big enough to choke several calves. But James Nugget was short of something. You'll never guess what he was short of in a hundred million years."

"Grub, mebbe," I guessed, just so as to keep things flowing.

"Not at all," Gallegher said. "James Nugget was short of breath. He hardly had enough breath to get along on. The reason for this was that the altitude had affected the valves in his heart. They were leaking. The only thing that would cure them up was to get down a few thou-

sand feet. But the poor old gent didn't want to desert his fine placer claim. He was in a quandary. Well, Bill Kindig took one look at the old man and knew what the trouble was.

"Mr. Nugget," Bill says, "think nothin' of it. You amble down to Colorado Springs, which is only about four or five thousand feet up in the air, and wait there for me."

"What!" James Nugget exclaims. "An' give up my minin'! Why, this is the finest placer claim I've ever found!"

"You'll not be givin' it up, Mr. Nugget," Bill Kindig replies kindly. "You amble down to Colorado Springs and wait there for me. I'll bring this river down there into the lower altitude so you can work it down there. There's no use of you ruinin' your heart by workin' it up here."

"Well, I'll be goldarned!" James Nugget exclaimed. "You don't say!"

Bill Kindig groaned and turned white. There was a flush on Martha's lovely cheeks, and the five guys at the counter were kind of flabbergasted.

"I don't believe it," the gambler said. "Nobody could move a river down from Pikes Peak to Colorado Springs."

"It's all hot air!" Luke Albright snorted.

The other guys agreed with him.

"To such mangy-brained gents as you are," Hep said condescendingly, "it would, of course, be impossible. But fortunately Bill's head was built for something other than to hang his hat on. To a man of his intelligence the solution was simple. After sending James Nugget down to Colorado Springs, he waited by the river until winter came. By January 1st that river was frozen stiffer than a pitchfork handle. Then Bill picked the river up and carried it down to Colo-

rado Springs. He put it out in the suburbs where it wouldn't be in the way. When spring came and the river thawed out, James Nugget continued with his minin'. His heart didn't trouble him any more, because now he could work in the lower altitude."

**E**VERYBODY was floored by this. There was complete silence for a whole minute. Even the flies stopped buzzin' in the window.

"Jiminy!" Bill Kindig groaned. He made a dive for the door, but Gallagher caught him by the shirt collar and dragged him back.

"See!" Gallagher said triumphantly. "Did you ever see a more modest gent than Bill? Or a nobler feller? He could have told you this story himself, but he's just too all-fired modest for his own good. Instead, he tells about fallin' off a horse."

"Gracious!" Martha murmured and refilled Hep's coffee cup.

"Hell and high water!" yelled Case Highfield. "Nobody could go packin' a frozen river around on his shoulder."

"I'd much rather carry a frozen river on my shoulder," Hep reminded him, "than I would a horse. Horses naturally object to bein' picked up that way. It makes 'em spooky. They're likely to wiggle around and kick. Now, it's different with Hereford steers. Why, I remember once when me an' Bill were ridin' along a railroad track up in Wyomin'."

"He's off again," I said. "Hold everything."

"Kindly shut up," Gallagher told me. "Even you don't appreciate what a fine feller Bill is at heart, even if you do sleep in the same bunkhouse with him. Well, anyway, me an' Bill were ridin' along this railroad track when we came to a cat-

tle chute. There was an old guy there all by himself, tryin' to load some steers into a cattle car. Those were the balkiest steers you ever saw. And the most obstinate. He hollered at 'em and kicked at 'em and pleaded with 'em, but not a darn steer would get into the car. The old guy, whose name was Smith, was all in a sweat.

"'Hep,' Bill says to me, 'we must help this guy.'

"'All right, Bill,' I replies. 'It'd have taken you to have thought of it. You're just that kind-hearted and accommodatin'.'

"'So me an' Bill Kindig,' Hep continued, 'got down off our hayburners to help Mr. Smith get the beef critters into the car. But those dumb beasts just didn't have any itch to go to the Kansas City stockyards. Mebbe they was have a presentiment. We shouted and hollered and slapped our chaps and punctured the air with bullets, but it wasn't no use. Those ornery critters were so firmly planted to the ground that you'd have thought they were a grove of trees.

"'Hep,' Bill says to me, 'the time's come to take extreme measures. If you'll please stand aside and give me elbow room, I'll see what I can do about it.'

"'So I stepped to one side. Bill took a deep breath, spat on his hands, rolled up his sleeves, picked up one of the steers, walked with it into the cattle car and put it down in one end of the car. Gents, you never saw a more astonished Hereford steer than that one was. Working swiftly, Bill picked up each steer in turn and put it down in the cattle car. When the last one was in he shut the door.

"'Gents,' Gallegher asked us, 'do you think that Bill Kindig lingered there for Mr. Smith to thank him?

Not at all. When the door was shut he forked his horse and rode like the devil. That, my friends, is the kind of a feller that Bill Kindig is."

This was pretty astonishing, even for as windy guys as were courtin' Martha McGuire. Bill, himself, couldn't stand it. He made another dive for the door and this time he made it. He got away. The last I saw of him he was hightailin' it for the saloon across the street.

The collection of suitors looked kind of disconsolate.

"Gallegher," Luke Albright said, "you oughta be strung up. The idea of you corruptin' Martha's ears with such nonsense."

"You'll give her a bad impression of the West," Case Highfield added. "She'll wish she'd stayed in Kansas."

"I don't see a's you guys have anything to kick about," Hep objected. "What I told about Bill was the gospel truth, so help me."

Case began to get mad. "You aren't insinuat'in', are you," he yelled, "that what I was tellin' about myself wasn't true?"

"Shucks, no!" Gallegher declared. "We're all tellin' the unvarnished truth. But I just wanted Martha to know that Bill is much more of a hero than you birds are. Bill's a very noble gent, ain't he, ma'am?"

"I'm sure he must be," Martha said. She glanced at an alarm clock up on a shelf and frowned. "Boys," she announced, "I don't want to be disagreeable, but I'm going to have to forbid you to loaf around here so much. Please go away and let me do some work. It's nearly noon and people will want to eat. And I wish you'd all stay away for a week or so."

Hep could hardly believe his ears and neither could anybody else.

"You're just talkin' to Gallegher,

aren't you, ma'am?" Case Highfield asked.

Martha McGuire looked even more severe. "Indeed not," she said. "I'm talking to all of you. If you really want to eat, come back, but this isn't any camp meeting. Come on now, move! Or I'll complain to the sheriff!"

"Well, I'll be darned!" Hep gasped.

So Martha McGuire chased us out into the street. If we hadn't gone, I reckon she'd have got busy with a broom handle. Beautiful, she was; also, she seemed to have a lot of will power.

**W**HEN we were out in the street a riot nearly got going. Highfield and Luke Albright and Art Snodgrass and Willie Trigg and another guy wanted to drown Hep in a horse trough.

"Drownin's the only solution," Case said. "Until Gallegher showed up everythin' was goin' swell."

Hep started to get out his shootin' iron.

"Listen," said I, "let's have some stomach bitters first. Then we'll feel more like it. It ain't right to drown a guy on an empty stomach. Not even a crazy guy."

The sheriff had come out of his office and was watching us, which helped to decide the matter. We all went into the Eagle Eye Bar and joined Bill Kindig, who had already wrapped himself around a bucket of beer.

The bartender was glad to see us. He set out a bottle.

"Bill Kindig," Case Highfield asked, "when was it you moved that river?"

"The day after you caught the Blackjack Kid," Kindig said.

"The only difference is," Case insisted, "that I really caught the Kid."

"And I'm regularly in the habit of movin' rivers," Bill assured him.

The air was full of hostility and cuss words. When Bill learned that we'd all been kicked out of the hash house he was pretty mad at Hep.

"Think nothin' of it," Gallegher said airily. "I've still got some good ideas left in my noggin. I'll have things straightened out in no time."

A little while later Hep disappeared out the back door. He was back in less than an hour.

"Gents," he announced, "I've healed everything up. Martha ain't mad with us any more. She would even like us to come back an' do some more sittin' an' coffee drinkin'."

"You've saved your life," Case Highfield said.

So we gathered ourselves together, shook our heads a few times and went back to the hash house. We draped ourselves along the counter and went to work on some more coffee and pie.

"Ma'am," Gallegher began, "you've heard now what a kind, accommodatin' an' helpful guy Bill Kindig is. But you ain't heard yet how brave he is. Of course, he's too infernally modest to mention such a thing himself—"

"Now looka here!" Luke Albright interrupted. "It's my turn. Why, when I was livin' out in California I rounded up forty-seven escaped convicts single—"

"Handed," Hep cut in, "with your hands tied behind your back. I've heard all about it, Luke. That was a very nice thing you did, Luke, but it don't compare with the time that Bill here was in the stage holdup. There were fourteen desperate bandits armed to their teeth—"

But it seemed that Martha McGuire was gettin' tired of these stories. "Please," she interrupted. "Can't you boys talk about the

weather or something else for a change?"

"All right," Hep agreed. "I'll tell you about Bill and the winter of the big snow. It was—"

"Leave me out of it," Bill cut in. "Just confine yourself to the snow."

Personally, I was gettin' sleepy and wished I was home. Martha wasn't dim-witted enough to believe any of these yarns that these boys were tellin' her. It was worse'n a waste of time because it was wearin' the poor gal out.

**H**EP had got to the point where the snow was thirty feet deep on the level, when the screen door of the restaurant opened and in came Jake Crawford. Jake, who was a tremendously big stiff, was the Murphville blacksmith. Martha smiled politely at him as he sat down.

"What'll it be, Jake?" she asked.

"Nothin', ma'am," Crawford replied. "Thank you kindly. I just finished gnawin' up an anvil and a keg of horseshoes. I won't be hungry again for a couple more hours. The only trouble with me now is that I'm scared to death. I'm spooked somethin' awful."

This was at least something different. Up to date nobody had admitted that he was afraid of anything.

"Ha! Ha!" Case Highfield laughed. "What is it you are afraid of, Jake?"

"A big guy like you are, Jake," Hep said reprovingly, "hadn't oughta be scared of nothin'. I'm surprised at you."

"Last night," Jake Crawford explained, "I had a dream. A funny thing about my dreams is that they always come true. I don't have one very often, but when I do it's like havin' money in the bank. It can

be counted on just like death an' taxes."

"Well, now, that's real interesting," Martha agreed. "I believe in dreams, too." She rested her dimpled elbows on the counter and looked at the blacksmith just as though he was Christopher Columbus or some other great guy. The other gents immediately began to be jealous of him.

"Hog wash!" Luke Albright grumbled. "Why, I had a dream—"

"Now, listen here, you hop toad," Gallegher interrupted, "it was Jake that got started off on this first. Let's be fair an' give him his turn. Mebbe we can get him over bein' so scared. We ought a do what we can to help him."

Martha likewise said she wanted to hear about Jake's dream first.

"Ma'am," Jake began, "the dream was about you. It was a runnin' dream. There was a Mexican bandit came across the border and in the dead of night broke into this hash house and ran off with all your cash so that you was broke as flat as a pancake. All your work had gone for nothin' unless you could get the cash back.

"A lot of guys, includin' me, set out in pursuit of the bandit. We rode like the devil, but pretty soon we couldn't use our horses no more because the Mex had took to the hills and they were so rough that a guy couldn't use a horse. The only way to catch the bandit was to use our feet. The bandit could run like an antelope, but none of us could because we were all out of practice. None of us had run a mile on foot in years and so pretty soon we were all tuckered out. But the bandit was in practice and without half tryin' could keep ahead of us. He would keep just out of gunshot distance

and every so often he'd give us the horse laugh.

"Ma'am," Jake continued sorrowfully, "it made me so mad that I could have sat down and bawled. There we were, me an' Bill Kindig an' Case an' Luke Albright an' Willie Trigg an' a lot of other guys, an' not a darn one of us could catch the Mexican bandit. An' what made me so mad was that all your loose cash was bein' run off with because we were just a bunch of sissies when it came to leg work. We'd used horses' legs so long that we might as well not have had any of our own. Every time I think of it, ma'am, it scares me. I'm spooked. It'll happen just that way unless we do a lot of practicin' at runnin'."

"My gracious!" Martha exclaimed. "I'd certainly hate to lose my cash after I've worked so hard for it."

"I don't believe in dreams," Case Highfield declared.

"But I do," Martha insisted. Which settled it. From then on everybody believed in dreams.

"It's a cinch," Hep said, "that if you guys don't get up on your leg work you'll all be ashamed of yourselves some day. That is, all of you will except Bill Kindig. Bill can run like a jackrabbit. He can outrun any of you or all of you put together."

"He can't, either!" Case shouted.

All the rest of the guys agreed with him.

"Shucks!" Bill said deprecatingly. "I can run pretty good, but it's a lot of work."

"I've thought of something," said Hep. "A round trip up an' down the street out in front is about a quarter of a mile. Twelve round trips'd be three miles. That'd be good practice for you guys. All get out in front and start even and run the three miles to see who can do it the fastest."

There was a large silence in the restaurant.

Martha put in the deciding word. "I'm sure it'd be good for you," she said. "I'd help shake down the pie and coffee."

"Come on, you guys," Hep urged. "What are you afraid of?"

"I'm sure all of you can do great things," Martha said. "You've been tellin' me all about it for the past week."

**T**HAT settled the argument. The gents all trooped out into the street. They were pretty mad about it, too, but they didn't want to argue with Martha.

Gallegher got a couple of saw-horses out of the saddle shop and put one at one end of the street and the other at the other end. By now

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quite a crowd had gathered to see what the commotion was about. Martha came and stood in the doorway of the restaurant.

"I'll feel very undignified," the gambler complained. "Runnin' up an' down here like a goat. Gallegher, this is your fault. Till you came to town everything was goin' fine."

Hep got up on the plank walk and made a speech. He explained what the runnin' was about. This didn't make the suitors feel any better because folks were inclined to laugh at 'em. But owing to the way the thing had come up they couldn't very well back out of it.

After a while the five guys got themselves lined up and away they went. Hep and me and about fifty other people watched 'em.

"George," Hep said to me on the quiet, "did you know that Bill Kindig lived on an Indian reservation when he was a kid. Those bucks sure taught him how to run. I saw him run once when his horse threw him. He ran the horse down."

This was news to me.

"I paid the blacksmith five dollars for tellin' that dream of hisn," Hep continued. "I made it up for him. I've thought up a lot of other ways, too, for Bill to show up these other birds. He'll make 'em look like monkeys. I'll have him married in no time."

During the first round trip between the sawhorses, the foot racers ran more or less together. Then they began to lengthen out. Bill Kindig was running easily and as smooth as goose grease and was out ahead. The rest of the guys were plodding along like plow horses.

"Bill'll look good," Gallegher chuckled, "an' the other gents foolish."

"Which," I told him, "is probably

nothing to what you'll look like when these other birds get through with you."

Jake Crawford, the blacksmith, was the first to drop out. He sat down on the ground in front of the restaurant, breathing like one of his own bellows.

"You made a good try, Jake," Martha soothed. "But look at Bill go."

Willie Trigg was the next to call it a day. He blamed it on his corns. Then another fellow dropped out and also Luke Albright. Luke's face was the color of a beet.

"You're no bandit chaser," Hep said.

"Ah . . . shut . . . up!" Luke gasped.

Case Highfield was all through after five round trips. He looked as though he was going to die of apoplexy. Pretty soon Bill Kindig, still going strong, was running all by himself.

"Now, there's a man for you, ma'am," Gallegher said to the restaurant lady.

But Martha wasn't listening. She was looking down the street at a couple of covered wagons that were just entering town.

"Heavenly days!" she exclaimed. "It looks like Hiram and the folks!"

This was the first I'd heard of Hiram and the folks. But it wasn't the last by a whole lot. Bill, looking foolish, had quit running. We all stood around and watched the wagons. Martha was out in the street waving her arms. The prairie schooners stopped in front of the restaurant.

A big guy jumped down from the high seat of one of them.

"Hiram!" Martha yelled at him. Then Hiram grabbed her up and kissed her.



"Probably her long-lost brother or somethin'," Hep whispered.

Then three tow-headed kids hopped out of the wagon and ran to Martha. "Ma! Ma!" they hollered.

"Well, I'll be gosh-darned!" Hep mumbled.

Following that a dozen or fifteen other people climbed out of the covered wagons. They were of assorted sizes, ages and sexes. And they were all very glad to see Martha. And Martha was very happy, too. When they finished kissing her she turned to where the inhabitants of Murphyville stood and explained the situation.

"Folks," she said, "I want you to meet my husband, Hiram, and our three children. These other people are my aunts, uncles and cousins who live with us. I came on ahead on the train so's to get the business going."

The citizens of Murphyville looked at me and Hep and Bill Kindig and Case Highfield and Luke Albright and Art Snodgrass and Willie Trigg and then they burst out laughing. They had a right to laugh, I reckon.

The suitors looked either pretty dismal or mad, or both.

"I'm sorry," Martha continued, "if there's been a misunderstanding. Nobody asked me if I was married. I thought you boys were just enjoying eating and talking and drinking coffee."

Of course, Hep got the blame for it, because he'd stuck his neck out the farthest.

"You better run," I advised him.

He did. I followed. He went tearin' down the street with Bill and Case and Luke and Willie hot after him. By now they were so mad that they could really do some runnin' and so they caught him.

But Bill saved Hep from havin' very much happen to him.

"I was raised among the Indians," Bill said sorrowfully, "an' they're right about it bein' bad luck to hurt a crazy guy. Anyway, we're as crazy as Hep is, so mebbe we'd better all drown ourselves in a barrel of beer."

So that was how the gents got even with themselves. Which was the first and only sensible thing they'd done since Martha McGuire had opened up her hash house.

THE END.

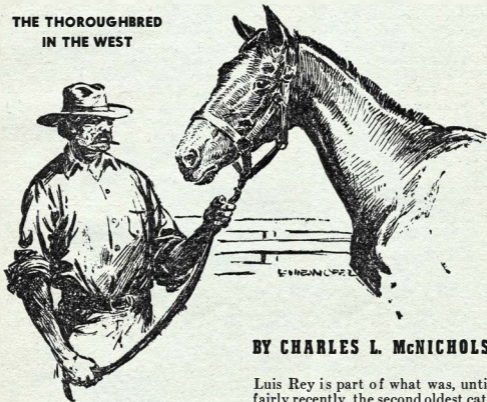
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## NATIVE TANNERS

THE Plains Indians were expert in the dressing of hides. Each tribe had its own method of removing the hair. Some squaws simply put the green hide in the water until natural decay loosened the hair. Others made a lye of wood ashes, in which the hide was washed and rinsed each day. The real work came in peeling the pieces of muscle and tendons left on the pelt by none-too-careful dressing of the carcass. Flint knives were used to scrape the meat off, and some of these served the purpose better than the cheap, poorly tempered steel sold by the early traders. Often a single garment worn by an Indian chieftain cost a year's labor on the part of his patient squaws, and just as frequently such a garment was lost on a horse race that lasted for less than a minute.

# COW HORSES

THE THOROUGHBRED  
IN THE WEST



BY CHARLES L. McNICHOLS

THE breeding of thoroughbreds for racing is rapidly becoming a leading industry on Western ranches. Some experts say, in fact, that Western horses have better bone and better bottom.

Today the biggest individual breeder of running horses in these United States is Charles Cooper of Rancho San Luis Rey in upper San Diego County, California. Not only that, but he turns out more consistent winners than does any other big breeder. He just got through telling me how he does it, and this is being written on the ranch under a big cottonwood tree that is all covered up with the biggest, most luxurious wild-grape vine you can imagine.

To begin with, this Rancho San

Luis Rey is part of what was, until fairly recently, the second oldest cattle ranch in the United States. It was established by the Franciscans of Mission San Luis Rey about 1798 under the rule of Spain. The mission had a cattle station here and another about six miles up the river at Pala, where there was a village of Indian vaqueros around a mission chapel. Well, the chapel is still there, and around it is an Indian village. Some of these Indians are the descendants of those same mission vaqueros.

Just about a hundred years ago, after Spanish rule had given way to Mexican, the missions were disestablished and the mission land was divided up among individual owners. A part of the old San Luis Rey spread went to a local land owner named Ysidro Alvada, who called

his place "El Rancho Monserate."

Ysidro was a big cowman, but he went in strong for race horses of the old Spanish "native" breed. He bet heavily and won many cattle. But some years after the American occupation, he made the mistake of betting a lot of cattle that his star horse could outrun a nag owned by a smart Yankee in a four-mile race.

The Yankee's horse was a Kentucky thoroughbred, one of the first brought to California. The result of the race was very sad for Ysidro.

Ironically, practically all of Ysidro's old cow ranch is now devoted to the raising of thoroughbreds, for within its former boundaries is not only the million-dollar Cooper layout, but another important stud farm owned by Louis Lighton, who uses the old name for his place—"The Monserate."

**C**HARLES COOPER has owned the San Luis Rey since 1931. The present layout consists of several houses, at least a dozen big barns and stables, about the finest arrangement of paddocks and pastures I have ever seen, all set off with white fences. Two complete race-tracks equipped with a starting gate and everything necessary to train colts and horses for a campaign of racing are part of the set-up.

This extensive plant, together with the fields that grow the feed and fodder necessary for the thoroughbreds, occupies a valley of its own that runs back almost at a right angle to the San Luis Rey River. The valley is walled in by big hills (they would be considered mountains in the East) where odd and picturesque rock formations struggle up out of the gray-green chaparral—with here and there a big live oak to furnish further contrast.

The output of the ranch, from the

Cooper mares, is about twenty-five colts a year. The breeding and training of these colts only represents a part of the activities carried on. There are six or seven Cooper stallions standing in stud there permanently, and various other stallions stand there at various times. Many mares are bred and stay on the ranch until their colts are schooled and ready for the track. Many racing horses are sent there for training, or just to rest up. Such "boarders" come and go, so it is hard to establish the number of horses on the ranch at any one time.

One mare was sent there from England. She never leaves the place, but each year she produces a colt. When that colt is a two-year-old and trained and conditioned for racing, he is shipped to his mother's owners.

To give you an idea how successful this San Luis Rey outfit is in race-horse production, its twenty-five or twenty-six colts make up about five percent of the yearly crop of thoroughbred colts in all California, which is around four hundred. Yet this last year San Luis Rey horses took more than half the purse money won by all the California-breds in all races on all tracks.

These colts were not competing against California breeds alone, but with the cream of our nation's thoroughbred crop, which runs up around five or six thousand annually.

What makes this record of victories more remarkable is that there isn't a single really high-priced horse on the San Luis Rey ranch. That is, there are none that command anything like the fee charged for such sires as Man o' War, for instance, or a score of "big name" horses. The colts don't cost so much, in comparison, and go for comparatively modest prices at the auctions. A Cooper colt that's sold to a racing

stable for around fifteen hundred dollars when he's a yearling is frequently called upon to race against animals that were bought at one of the big auctions back East for fifteen or twenty thousand dollars.

There is a little San Luis Rey filly called *Carmenita* that illustrates this point. She won races at Hollywood Park last summer from Eastern colts that cost something like ten times what she did. They were good colts, too. She has to beat the track record a couple of times to keep in front. She's got a promising young brother here, a yearling, that just sold for five thousand dollars.

**A**SKED why his comparatively cheap colts get out and beat the big-price babies, Mr. Cooper said, "Given sound and reasonably good thoroughbred stock to start with, breeding is only one quarter in the making of a race horse. The other three quarters is in the care and feeding." He went on to explain that ninety-five percent of the owners fall down in the feeding of their animals because too many of them try to run their establishments from behind a mahogany desk in the city.

A race horse gets its start, good or bad, from the feed its mother gets before it is foaled. Its needs vary from that time on till the day it follows the lead pony up to the starting gate. Its diet has to be watched continually and frequently changed. The man behind the desk in the city has to depend too much on what he hears over the telephone to tend to the job effectively.

Mr. Cooper says, too, that many Western breeders think that their range is as rich as a Kentucky bluegrass pasture. A range diet is too likely to be lacking in one or more of the essential elements to build a

high-speed animal like a thoroughbred colt.

A colt must be *fed*, not grazed. Grazing is all right for exercise and entertainment, but if the feed he gets is grown on land that is deficient in certain important minerals, the deficiency has to be made up or the colt will suffer. So it takes a knowledge of chemistry to raise race horses.

And from the foregoing you can guess that the Rancho San Luis Rey isn't range land any more. Well, maybe a couple thousand acres of it are, but there are about three thousand acres under irrigation that works twelve months of the year growing thousands of tons of alfalfa, oats, and assorted hay, and various kinds of grain, all for thoroughbred consumption.

When asked why he didn't pick out a location in the East where the clouds deliver water free, Mr. Cooper said that the semiarid Southwest has two big advantages for the horse breeder that outweighs the disadvantage of having to install an expensive irrigation system. One is the lack of any real cold weather, which makes it possible for the training program for the colts to go on the year around. The other is that the everlasting sunshine—that gets tiring to humans sometimes—gives the colts plenty of vitamin D, and that's what helps build big, strong bones, and gives the stamina needed for that last drive to win races.

This ranch is certainly a busy place. Fifty men and their families work on it—enough hands for a cow ranch twenty times its size. There are mechanics and farmers and stablemen and grooms, and a raft of jockeys that are kept busy teaching the colts their business. It's a fine place to go see if you happen to be tripping down toward San Diego.



## HEMP FOOD

BY W. C. TUTTLE

THE adjoining cell door clicked shut, and the Brazos Kid lifted his head from where he sprawled on his cot. Joe Rizzo was back from the courtroom. The odor from his expensive cigar floated into the Kid's cell. The jailer spoke kindly to Joe as he went back down the short hallway to the sheriff's office.

Joe said to the Kid: "Hyah, worm. Had a nice crowd today."

The Brazos Kid did not reply to Joe Rizzo. Joe was always ribbing him about things, and the Brazos Kid was not too bright. The inequality of things bothered the Brazos Kid. Joe Rizzo had killed two officers. The Brazos Kid had killed two

gamblers. Joe was the brother of the notorious Pete Rizzo, vice lord, gangster, with the blood of many men on his slim hands, who had escaped the law back East and was now somewhere in Mexico—along with several of his infamous gang. But the law had landed Joe Rizzo. He was accused of killing two officers in a dive in El Cholo, and the best criminal brains in Arizona had been hired to prove that he didn't do any such thing.

The Brazos Kid had no money to hire lawyers to prove that he didn't kill two gamblers. No one seemed to care about the Brazos Kid. They just took it for granted that he would hang. Newspaper reporters, sent to El Cholo to cover the Rizzo case, wrote reams of messages back about Joe Rizzo—but never a word about the Brazos Kid. Even a sob-sister reporter came often to Joe Rizzo and wrote heart-throb stories about the sleek-haired, cold-blooded killer who laughed at the Brazos Kid because the Brazos Kid could not hire brains to prove his innocence.

Everyone knew that the money for Joe's defense was coming from Pete Rizzo. Pete had at least half a million salted away. The Brazos Kid had no idea how much money that would be, when Joe spoke of a half-million. The Brazos Kid had never possessed over sixty dollars at any one time. As far back as he could remember he had been a cow-puncher, working at forty a month. A too-active trigger finger had caused him to move swiftly at times.

He'd got in with a couple of gamblers at Agua Frio and they initiated him in the art of smuggling drugs in small quantities, but at good profit, until the Kid's percentage amounted to over a hundred dollars. Then they got him between them in a game of

draw, then slipped him a marijuana cigarette, separated him from his money, but failed to consider that marijuana causes some folks to break out in a homicidal rash.

But the mere fact that Joe Rizzo got all the publicity irked the Brazos Kid. Joe showed him pictures in the paper, pictures of the crowd in-the courtroom, pictures of Joe and his battery of attorneys, banner heads of publicity. But there was never so much as a mention of the Brazos Kid—and the Kid resented it.

"The court will even have to hire a mouthpiece for you," jeered Joe Rizzo. "You haven't a chance in the world, Kid. The papers will merely say that you walked out on the scaffold with a dumb, oxlike expression on your pan—but you won't read it. That's the worst of being poor. With lawyers like I've got, you can beat any rap on earth. You're just a poor, dumb sap—hemp-fool."

"I shore need money," said the Kid.

The jailer told the Kid that there was a reward of twenty-five hundred dollars for Pete Rizzo. The Kid tried to figure out how much that would be in saddles, figuring sixty dollars a saddle. No good. Anyway, Pete Rizzo was hiding out in Mexico, cooking up some profitable deal. Joe had told the Kid that Pete had a great brain.

**B**UT things were not going so good at the Joe Rizzo trial, as it continued day after day. An honest judge, an honest prosecutor and one or two unfrightened witnesses were making it tough on that army of criminal experts. Joe Rizzo lost his smile, and he snarled at the Brazos Kid instead of ribbing him about his coming trial and sure conviction.

There were only a few days left before the case would go to a cow-town jury, and Joe Rizzo was in the courtroom, when the Brazos Kid overheard a whispered conversation between the jailer and the deputy.

Jean Morley, eighteen-year-old daughter of the prosecutor, had gone down to Agua Frio, on the American side, to a dance. Pete Rizzo's gang had kidnaped her. No one knew whether she was in Mexico or hidden away somewhere in Arizona. Morley had received a note, unsigned, but warning Morley that if Joe was convicted he would never see his daughter again. The reward for Pete Rizzo had been boosted to five thousand dollars.

Joe was in better spirits after that day's session, and even joked with the Brazos Kid, who asked him about the kidnaping.

"Blood is thicker than water, Kid," quoted Joe. "Pete don't overlook any bets—and I don't know a damn thing about it except what I heard."

The Brazos Kid heard more about it when the reporters came to talk with Joe, but Joe admitted nothing. He didn't know, nor care, where Pete might be. The Kid tried to talk with them about *his* case, but they ignored him. There was a lot of excitement around the jail and sheriff's office, and Joe seemed to enjoy it.

The Brazos Kid had seen Jean Morley once, and he remembered that she was pretty. Joe asked the Brazos Kid about her. The Brazos Kid said he didn't see how a kidnaping would help him any, and Joe said: "You wouldn't, you dumb cluck. Every member of the jury knows that girl, and if they don't turn me loose—"

The Brazos Kid could understand that angle.

"Five thousand reward for Pete," Joe said. "Why don't they ask what he's worth?"

"It's dead or alive," said the Brazos Kid.

"Sure. But what the hell! Pete's too smart. He stymied the officers in a dozen big cities for years, so what can these hicks expect to do about him?"

"They got me and you," reminded the Kid.

"You don't count. Hell, your hanging won't get an inch of space on the back page. And I'm just as good as out of jail right now."

About midnight that night Tom Heffron, the jailer, heard the groans of a man in agony. It developed that they came from the Brazos Kid, blanket-wrapped on his cot. Heffron peered through the bars and asked what was wrong.

"My God, I'm sick," whispered the agonized prisoner. "My stummick."

"He's been keeping me awake for an hour," complained Joe Rizzo. "Why don't yuh do something about him?"

Tom Heffron was a sympathetic soul, not too cautious; he opened the cell door, walked over to the cot and placed a hand on the shoulder of the sick man. As he leaned forward a brawny bunch of knuckles caught him under the chin, knocking him upright and backward. And as he pawed around trying to regain his balance and his senses, the Brazos Kid got to his feet like a cat and drove a straight right to Heffron's chin. The deputy lost all interest in things after that.

"Take his keys and let me out," begged Joe Rizzo, but the lock had clicked shut on the deputy, and the Brazos Kid was fading down the corridor to the sheriff's office, where he helped himself to a belt, gun and

ammunition. After which he slipped outside into the night, and went away from the El Cholo jail.

At the far end of the street he selected a saddle horse from a hitch-rack, climbed aboard and galloped swiftly toward Agua Frio, six miles away. There he left the borrowed horse and went on to the border, where he had no difficulty in crossing into Mexico. He knew that Tom Heffron was all alone on duty that night, and it might be morning before he could attract attention to his predicament. Agua Frio, on the Mexican side, was not at all particular about its population as far as morals were concerned, so the Brazos Kid felt perfectly safe. But he was there on a mission, and he was not interested in strong drink, gambling or anything of that sort. He had disposed of his belt, put the ammunition in his pockets, and shoved the heavy Colt .45 inside the waistband of his pants, where his bloused shirt concealed the butt. Mexican police do not encourage American cowboys to carry arms in Mexico.

The Brazos Kid sauntered unnoticed into a big cantina. After a while he saw a hombre whose clothes and general appearance indicated a city man. The Kid noticed that this man's raiment was very much like that affected by Joe Rizzo. The man sat down at a vacant table, waved two girls away, and seemed to be merely killing time and watching the crowd. The Brazos Kid sat down against the wall only a few feet away from him.

After a while another man came in, had a drink at the long bar, finally sauntering over and sitting down at the table with the man near the Kid. Without appearing to do so, the Brazos Kid's ears were tuned to their low-voiced conversa-

tion. The Kid heard El Blanco Lobo mentioned, and something about making a move tonight. In a few minutes the two men went away together.

A well-dressed Mexican stopped near the Kid, reading a gaudy bull-fight poster on the wall, and the Kid asked him: "Where is El Blanco Lobo?"

The Mexican smiled. "That ees the old White Wolf rancho, I theenk. Eth ees on the road south 'bout two mile, and to the right one mile."

"Thank yuh," said the Brazos Kid, and sauntered out.

He borrowed another horse from the hitch rack, mounted and rode through the town. The old road was crooked and dusty, but it was a warm, moonlit night, and the Kid sang unmusically as he rode along. He found where the road branched off to the right, and headed for the El Blanco Lobo. Not sure of what he might find there, he drew up and tied his horse off the road as soon as he saw a light at the old adobe ranchhouse.

**P**ROCEEDING on foot, he came in close. Only the lighted windows proclaimed that there was life about the old rancho. After a while a phonograph began playing, and he could hear the sound of voices in the house. The Brazos Kid made his way carefully out to the stables. There were six horses in the stable.

He heard a rider coming from town and quickly concealed himself. The man drew up at the front of the house and went in. The Brazos Kid was too far away now to hear the voices, so he merely stood in the deep shadow of the adobe stable and waited for something to happen. He was not sure that Pete Rizzo and the kidnaped girl were in there, but it was worth investigating.



After a while a man came from the rear of the house and hurried out to the stable. He led out three horses, tied them to the corral fence and proceeded to saddle them in the moonlight. He spoke in Spanish to the horses and his silhouette proclaimed him a Mexican.

When he carried the third saddle out to the horses, the Brazos Kid stepped inside the stable. Then the man came back to get the bridles, stepped through the doorway, and the Brazos Kid expertly slammed him over the head with the barrel of his gun. He went down without a sound, and the Kid drew him aside. He found the bridles and fitted them to the horses, after taking the Mexican's gun and sombrero. He was adjusting it to his head when a voice called: "Ready, Tony?"

"Si! Si!" called the Brazos Kid. He had two guns inside the waistband of his pants now, and there was no fear in him.

Two men came hurrying, a muffled figure between them. It was Jean Morley. Her legs were not bound, but her hands were tied and she had a strip of plaster across her mouth. Neither of the men noticed that it was not Tony at the horses. They were talking excitedly about the Mexican government helping in

the search and the need for evacuation of El Blanco Lobo.

"Too damn many people know where we are," said Pete Rizzo. "I'll send Tony right back, and you can use him to carry messages. It might be wise for you to stay in Agua Frio, where you can keep in touch with developments."

"All right, Pete," said the other man. "Tony knows the shortcut to that place, and we can trust him. I'll send some stuff in tomorrow."

"That's right. Well, we'll get started. All right, Tony, lead the girl's horse and get us there as quick as you can."


The Brazos Kid picked up the lead rope and mounted his horse. He had no idea on earth where Rizzo wanted to go. Evidently it was a place familiar to Tony, and possibly unknown to Pete Rizzo. In that event, Rizzo would not know whether they went wrong or right, so the Kid headed due east. They followed the road to the turn and then went across country.

The terrain was rough and brushy. Joshua palms, cactus, mesquite and catclaw were in abundance. Pete Rizzo cursed the country, but the Brazos Kid said nothing. Slowly the Kid swung north. Pete Rizzo didn't notice anything unusual. All his life

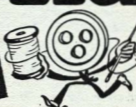
**CURTISS**

# Baby Ruth

**WHEN WERE  
BUTTONS  
FIRST USED?**



**IS RICH  
IN PURE  
DEXTROSE**  
THE SUGAR  
YOUR BODY USES  
DIRECTLY  
FOR ENERGY



**13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY  
IN EUROPE**

**CANDY IS DELICIOUS FOOD . . . . ENJOY SOME EVERY DAY**

had been spent in the city, where neither the points of the compass nor the stars in the sky had any meaning to him. Finally they were traveling due north and were almost to the barbedwire fence which shows where the Land of Mañana ends and the U. S. A. begins. Still Pete Rizzo did not realize where the Brazos Kid was leading him.

"Nearly there, Tony?" he called.

"Si, si," replied the Kid.

Then they were at the fence. Pete Rizzo rode in close to the Brazos Kid. "Where is the gate?" he asked.

"No gate," mumbled the Brazos Kid. "We cut fence."

But at that moment Pete Rizzo caught a full glimpse of the Brazos Kid's face in the moonlight.

"That fence—" he began. "You—Who in hell are you? You're not Tony!"

**P**ETE RIZZO was a sudden sort of person. He ended his sentence with a blast of flame from his automatic. The Brazos Kid was turning as the shot was fired, and the bullet seared across his chest. The next one thudded into his body, but he was in action himself, then, blasting those heavy .45's at Pete Rizzo, fairly lifting him off his horse.

Gasping and staggering, the Brazos Kid went over to Rizzo, who was just as dead as hot lead can make a man. It was a job to lift Rizzo to the saddle and rope him on, but the Brazos Kid was a persistent sort of a person. And then, in spite of the fact that he was bleeding badly and having quite a job to stay on his feet, he got two large rocks and proceeded to cut the barbed-wire fence. He could see the girl's white face in the moonlight, her eyes wide as she watched him.

He had nothing to use to cut her

loose and, anyway, he was awful tired. He tied the lead rope of Rizzo's horse to the tail of Jean's mount, fought his way into the saddle and crossed the mutilated fence.

"I'll have the laugh on Joe, y' betcha," he declared drunkenly. "I'll show 'em, y' betcha."

They came into El Cholo after daylight, a queer cavalcade, and drew up at the sheriff's office, where it seemed that everyone in town gathered in one minute. Tom Morley was there, helping Jean off her horse, while men and women cheered. They unroped the body of Pete Rizzo, shot into ribbons by the Brazos Kid, who had been slowly dying ever since Pete Rizzo had shot him at the fence.

Men lifted the Brazos Kid off his horse, arguing, questioning, trying to find out what he had done. Not over an hour ago they had discovered the incarcerated jailer—now here was the Brazos Kid back again, bringing the missing girl and the much-wanted Pete Rizzo, on whose head was a five-thousand-dollar reward. Why had the Brazos Kid, practically a convicted murderer, voluntarily come back?

The doctor came and made his examination on the shaded sidewalk. Nothing could be done for the Brazos Kid. He was conscious, but dazed. The doctor told him the truth. The Kid tried to smile.

"Hard luck," he whispered. "No trial now."

"Don't talk about trials," said Tom Morley, the hard-boiled prosecutor. "You're a hero in El Cholo, Kid. But why did you come back?"

"Wanted . . . a . . . big . . . trial," whispered the Brazos Kid. "That . . . reward . . . could . . . hire . . . good . . . lawyers—"

After all, what is a hero?



# Guns and Gunners

By PHIL SHARPE

PERHAPS you have been hearing about a new automatic rifle known as the Johnson, and have wondered whether you will be able to get one and whether the government will adopt it.

The Johnson automatic rifle is a reality. I've seen it; played around with it; have known its designer since he began to make his first experimental models, and have had him in my home as a guest.

Melvin M. Johnson, Jr., is a gun bug. He plays around with firearms all the time, and has long had the idea that a high-power automatic rifle would be suitable for both hunting and military purposes. True, our army has just adopted an automatic rifle, but as yet this has not proved itself to be entirely satisfactory. Moreover, that gun was designed before the Johnson original hand-made pilot model came into being; I know, because I saw it being born.

To discuss properly the high-power automatic rifle, it is well to review a little bit of history.

At the time of the World War, an automatic rifle handling military-type cartridges was not available. Then John M. Browning came forth with the famous Browning Light Machine rifle. This was a heavy

gun. I haven't handled one for many years—as a matter of fact, not since the close of the War—but my recollection is that this gun handling the standard .30-06 army rifle cartridge was a seventeen-pound arm, heavy as well as bulky. It served its purpose during the World War, but is much too heavy to fire from the shoulder. It is still a standard piece of equipment with the army, but is intended purely as an auxiliary weapon.

The World War showed various governments that an automatic rifle is more or less of a necessity. They wanted one which would be thoroughly reliable and capable of rapid-fire shooting, something which would stand up under the rough service given military guns in the field and still capable of being shot extensively without hammering the senses out of the shooter.

Following the War, Uncle Sam asked inventors to design a military automatic rifle. The armory at Springfield, Massachusetts, where all government rifles are made, has a museum with some of the crudest-

looking atrocities I have ever inspected. These are automatic rifles designed and submitted by inventors for government tests. All in all, they were much too heavy, few of them weighing less than twelve pounds, some of them more. Why?

Many of the boys will point out that we have automatic rifles in the Remington and Winchester lines for hunting purposes. They overlook the fact that these are essentially low or medium-power guns. To handle a cartridge as large as our regular service cartridge requires a tremendously bulky and long receiver, since automatic rifles function at their best with a totally inclosed mechanism.

For twenty years Uncle Sam played with various automatic rifles, trying to get something satisfactory. Then they adopted the Garand, which has been previously described in these departments. Now along comes Mel Johnson with a much simpler design which appears to be pretty nearly fool-proof. This gun can be loaded and fired at the rate of forty shots per minute, and tests have been conducted to show that with the standard 30-06 rifle cartridge, ten aimed shots can be fired in ten seconds, which is fast enough. Soldiers rarely use this speed; they'd run out of ammunition too quickly.

The hunter also demands an automatic rifle. Some day he may get

one. The Johnson was offered on the open market for a short time last summer as a sporting gun, but quickly withdrawn when its military possibilities appeared to overshadow its sporting features.

An interesting feature of this Johnson rifle is the fact that one can change barrels very quickly and use different calibers of barrels—within reason—on the same action.

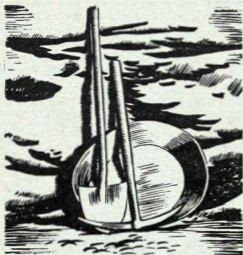
Within the next few years you are going to hear a lot about this Johnson rifle. Watch for it. Mel Johnson had several rifles in my office to show me, and to change over from .30-06 caliber to a barrel chambered for the .270 Winchester cartridge was a matter of about twelve seconds. Such flexibility has never been noticed in any other form of firearms, whether it be a standard rifle or an automatic.

This may possibly be adopted by one of the foreign governments. Who knows? If Uncle Sam doesn't take it, someone else will. It is an excellent rifle and is worthy of more than passing consideration.

At the request of Johnson, detailed information on this rifle cannot be given out. You can appreciate its military importance and understand the desire for secrecy and at present private individuals cannot obtain them. If it is ever returned to the retail market, we will notify you.

If you are interested in making a cartridge collection and would like to hear from other collectors, write to this department, inclosing a three-cent stamp for a list of names which will be sent to you as soon as it is compiled. In this way you may be able to trade some of your duplicates with others for something you really need for your collection.

This department has been designed to be of practical service to those who are interested in guns. Mr. Sharpe will gladly answer any question you may have concerning firearms. Just address your inquiries to Phil Sharpe, Guns and Gunners Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. *Be sure you inclose a three-cent stamp for your reply. Do not send a return envelope.*



## Mines and Mining

By J. A. THOMPSON

SISKIYOU COUNTY in northern California is, and has been, justly celebrated for its placer-gold mines. Fortune-making, rich bonanza gravels were mined there in the past. Today the county still offers the placer prospector a fertile field for his efforts. Judging from the letters we have been receiving lately, reader interest in Siskiyou County is definitely on the upbeat.

"What about the gold country in Siskiyou County?" writes J. M. B., of Shreveport, Louisiana. "Have been told that part of northern California is a good bet for placer-gold prospecting. What sort of country is it? Has it been active lately?"

Considerably active, J. M. B. In fact, one of the busiest placer-mining counties in the State. The mineral-bearing sections are rough and rugged, consisting pretty much of one set of high, pine-wooded mountains after another. Deep canyons cut the mountains.

As to the different gold regions, virtually all of which lie in the western half of the county or at least west of a north-south line drawn to cut the county a little east of its center, there is the Scott River Valley where early-day camps waxed rich on the bonanza gold found at Scott Bar, and around Callahan. Callahan is up near the headwaters of the river; Scott Bar, down near the river's confluence with the Klamath, not far from Hamburg. Callahan seems to be coming back with a boom lately from general reports. It should, as there is probably some good unworked gravel left in that region. The tributary creeks that form the headwaters of the Scott ought also to provide good additional prospecting.

Down around Hamburg, the short tributary creeks emptying into the Klamath River might pay intensive investigation. Farther down the Klamath River, the settlement at Seiad Valley affords another center from which to prospect for placers. Incidentally, much of the country tributary to both sides of the Klamath is steep and difficult to get around in.

Here is another point in connection with that last. Naturally, it is true that most of the smaller and easily worked placers discovered along the river itself have been mined out by this time, but climbing into the back country adjacent to the river itself might disclose not only some profitable placer patches, but also gold-lode leads of real value. Good showings from gold-quartz veins discovered in that hard-to-reach mountain area have already been demonstrated, although the gold-quartz-vein possibilities there have hardly been explored sufficiently as yet to determine their ulti-

mate richness. No telling what the boys who penetrate and intelligently prospect this back section may run into.

Still farther on down the winding course of the Klamath is the old Happy Camp. There, too, and on south toward Buzzard and Wingate Creek, gold mineralization is and has been heavy. The tip to search for gold-lode showings back from the river applies here also. In fact, about fifteen miles south of Happy Camp some phenomenally rich "picture" ore was uncovered some time ago at the Independence Mine on the creek of the same name.

In the southwestern corner of the county the famous Salmon River and Salmon River district has been and remains today a tremendously important gold-mining area, perhaps the most productive individual area as far as Siskiyou County is concerned. That speaks plenty for a region in a county whose total gold production has been close to the thirty-million-dollar mark.

The main gold sections in the Salmon River region are Sawyer's Bar on the north fork of the river about fifty miles south and west of Yreka. There is more gold country down at Forks of Salmon, which can be reached by a road seventeen miles west of Sawyer's Bar. In the early days millions in placer gold came from the placer gravels along this seventeen-mile stretch between Sawyer's Bar and Forks of Salmon.

From the latter mining camp a road continues on down the Salmon to another rich placer-gold district—Some's Bar, where the Salmon and the Klamath Rivers join.

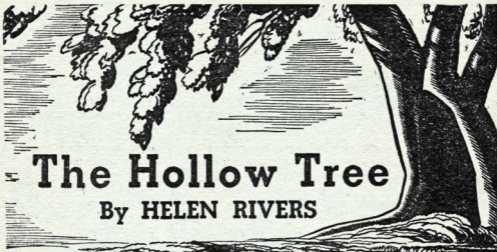
However, for today's small-scale placer-gold prospector, perhaps his most likely bet in the Salmon River country lies up toward the headwaters of the north fork of the stream and the smaller, less thoroughly explored creeks which form them. The gulches in this part of the country, too, should be searched diligently for bench placers and ancient channel courses of the prevailing streams.

K. T., of Flint, Michigan, another reader who has inquired concerning Siskiyou County, California, brought up in his letter the subject of placer platinum along with the gold found in the Klamath and Salmon Rivers. The answer, K. T., is some. But not much, and platinum occurs in only a very small proportion to the gold content of the gravels. Even the slim quantities that are found are not distributed throughout the gold placers, but only in certain localities. For instance, virtually no platinum is found in the placers along the North Fork of the Salmon; but it does occur, sometimes in quite considerable amounts, in the gravels of the South Fork below Mathews Creek.

The placer platinum, when it is found, appears as a rule as thin, smooth flakes with a steel-gray color, somewhat similar in size to fine placer gold.

● We desire to be of real help to our readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.

Letter unaccompanied by a return envelope will be published in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.



# The Hollow Tree

By HELEN RIVERS

We have had a lot of complaints lately from irate readers who have been good enough to answer pleas published here and have had no replies. One reader states that "out of a total of eighteen letters written, I managed to receive one reply, though I considered myself lucky as several of my friends had even poorer results." I know that the answer lies in the fact that you do not realize when you write for Pen Pals that upon publication of your letter, you're going to be swamped with hundreds of answers. Now, it's practically impossible for anyone to take care of all that correspondence, so you naturally answer only those which appeal to you most. The best solution, we think, to this problem is to state in the letters you send to The Hollow Tree for publication *exactly* what your interests are and the type of friends you want. Make your letters as brief as possible and dispense with descriptions of yourself, outside of your age, which is important. Let's try this system and see if it doesn't work out better, shall we? And now here's the first letter this week:

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a twenty-one-year-old English lad and think it would be nice to make two friends in the United States. I want one, twenty to twenty-two years old, living in New York, and another, between the same ages, living in any small town in California. I am fond of sports and good fun and will write about anything my friends wish to, provided it isn't beyond me. You Americans are noted for speed, so let's hear from you, New York and California. I will answer within three days.—Donald Macfarlane, 59 Main Street, Cleator, Cumberland, England

## Ruth wants pals all over the world—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am sixteen years old and would like to correspond with boys and girls from all over the

world. My favorite sports are baseball and volley-ball, and my favorite pastime, reading. I promise to answer all letters, so come on, Pals, and write to me.—Ruth Horton, Rt. 1, Box 37A, Corpus Christi, Texas

## Calling those living in British colonies—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am twenty-eight years old and have been a reader of *Western Story* for a long time. I would like to hear from Pen Pals living in any of the British colonies and Africa who are interested in stamp collecting. I will trade stamps with them. My favorite sports are baseball and football and hunting large and small game. I have also traveled in the good old United States quite a lot since leaving high school. I promise to answer all letters.—Robert Hetrick, 904 W. Washington Street, New Castle, Pennsylvania

## Don't ignore Verda's plea this time—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I would like to join your interesting Hollow Tree gang. I am fifteen years old and I've written to quite a few members of the Tree, but have never received any answers. I promise to answer all letters faithfully, so come on, boys and girls, and sling some ink my way.—Verda Merchant, Box 93, Browning, Montana

## Betty has lots of hobbies—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Here is a seventeen-year-old lassie putting in her plea for Pen Pals from all over the world. My favorite sports are ice skating, cycling and horseback riding. I have several hobbies, but writing letters and collecting picture post cards are my favorite ones. So come on, you lads and lassies, keep my postman busy. I promise to answer all letters.—Betty Ribar, 48 Kossuth Street, New Brunswick, New Jersey

## James is lonesome—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a soldier twenty-one years old stationed in the Hawaiian Islands and I would like to have Pen Pals from anywhere write to me. It's lonely here and I'd like to have some new friends. I enjoy all sports and dancing, and I'll exchange snapshots and answer all letters. I have some interesting things to write about, so here's hoping I hear from someone soon.—James Morris, Company H, 21st Infantry, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, T. H.

**Write to this CCC boy—**

Dear Miss Rivers:

I have been a constant reader of your column, but this is the first time I have attempted to write and try to get some Pen Pals. I am a lonesome Illinois boy, eighteen years old, enrolled in a CCC camp in Idaho. I promise to write to all who will give me a chance.—Ted Czapak, Company 4606, CCC, Rupert, Idaho

**Bethel says, start the year "write"—**

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am seventeen years old and would like to have Pen Pals of both sexes between the ages of fifteen to twenty-five. I will send everyone pictures of Wyoming and one of myself. I promise prompt replies, so come on, exchange, and start the year 1940 out "write."—Bethel Garretson, 630 East Sixth Street, Sheridan, Wyoming

**This Aussie has some interesting things to tell—**

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a young man twenty-two years old and I would like some Pen Pals. I have a lot of interesting things to tell you about Australia and some wonderful snapshots to exchange. I guarantee to answer all letters and will send a picture of myself in exchange for one of yours, so come on and give me a letter shower.—Robert Johnson, Kombli Heights, Via Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia

**Mrs. Gray has the right idea—**

Dear Miss Rivers:

About six years ago I wrote to you for some Pen Pals and made some wonderful friends through that letter. Letter writing is a hobby of mine and it certainly has done a lot for me. No one who has someone to correspond with can be bored and lonely. And hearing what the other fellow thinks and does is interesting and makes one's own life take on color. Now I wonder if someone hasn't room for one more pal. I'm thirty-six years old, married and have a couple of youngsters. I would like to have friends around my age or older.—Mrs. Garnet Gray, 43 Concord Place, Fort Thomas, Kentucky

**Zeke gets around—**

Dear Miss Rivers:

Do you reckon you could find room in the Hollow Tree for a sixteen-year-old feller from Massachusetts? I've been living here for two years and before that I did quite a bit of traveling. I like most sports, but swimming is my favorite, and I get around quite a bit in my old Model T Ford. So come on, all you guys and gals from North, South, East and West, and drop me a line. I'll be glad to exchange snaps, post cards, papers or anything else anyone might want to swap. I like writing letters and will answer all I receive, and I mean it.—Zeke Batson, 107 Central Street, Auburnville, Massachusetts

**Grace has a corner on poetry—**

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a graduate registered nurse doing private duty and would like so much to correspond with other nurses and stamp collectors, also lovers of poetry. I collect both United States and foreign stamps and have quite a few I would like to exchange for stamps I do

not have. I also have about twenty thousand poems that I have been collecting since childhood. I will be glad to hear from one and all.—Grace McCarth, R. N., Rt. 1, Highland Park, Chattanooga, Tennessee

**From the pampas comes this note—**

Dear Miss Rivers:

Will you please help this lonely Argentine make as many pen friends in the United States as possible? Anyone desirous of writing me in Spanish can do so. I will gladly exchange post cards or snapshots. I am very much interested in everything American, so, Pen Pals, write to this son of the pampas and tell him all about your country. I will answer all letters promptly.—Roberto Santiago Kearney, Tacuari 131, 60 Piso K, Buenos Aires, Republica Argentina

**Marie's mail box holds a lot—**

Dear Miss Rivers:

Please publish my plea for Pen Pals. I like dancing, fishing, and my work—which is stenography. I am twenty-five years old and want Pen Pals from everywhere to write to me. My mail box is large—fill it up, Pen Pals.—Marie Bryant, 4626 Marcus Street, Dallas, Texas

**Buddy needs friends—**

Dear Miss Rivers:

I have read the Hollow Tree for many years and it has helped me to pass many enjoyable hours. I've always wanted to go out West, but have never been able to do so. After reading Western Story so long, I am satisfied, as it has brought the West to me. Some time ago I lost the greatest friend and pal I had, my mother, and since then I've been lost. Letters from other readers would help so very much. I am thirty-three and like sports, reading and music—I play the piano. I can tell you about life in the city and the country. I would enjoy hearing from farmers. I'll be looking for your letters.—Buddy Pritchard, 360 1/2 North Thirteenth Street, Terre Haute, Indiana

**This plea is for fifteen-year-olds—**

Dear Miss Rivers:

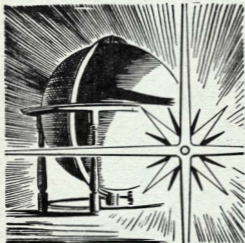
I would like to join your Hollow Tree and correspond with everyone, especially boys and girls around my age, fifteen. I am interested in all sports and my hobby is collecting match folders. I will answer all letters and exchange snapshots.—Leona Van Landingham, 306 Harriet, La Junta, Colorado

**Readers throughout the world write to Edward—**

Dear Miss Rivers:

May I request that you publish my plea for letters from your many readers throughout the world? I am twenty-seven years old and am interested in cultivating correspondence with Pen Pals of both sexes between the ages of twenty and thirty. My hobbies are letter writing and photography. I promise to answer all letters promptly.—Edward Durner, 39 Oak Street, East Lansdowne, Pennsylvania





## Where to go and how to get there

By JOHN NORTH

SOME people who read these articles about different parts of the country which offer opportunities for settlement write to me asking how a man with a very limited amount of money can get a start. Most of these folks want the same thing, a little piece of ground with a house on it and enough land to produce a modest living.

But, a lot of them say, they have lived in town all their lives and do not know anything about farming. How is such a man, even though he is energetic and willing to work, going to succeed in farming when lots of experienced farmers fail?

The answer is one that I often have to make in writing to readers.

I can only point out that there are people who have failed in every line of endeavor, and the chances are that they will fail in whatever they undertake. But there are others who succeed, no matter what the odds.

Take the case of H. G., a Missourian. H. G. was a barber, having learned the business from his father. He knew no other trade, but he wanted to get out of the barbering business. He wanted, specifically, to go up to the Pacific Northwest.

So, carrying his razors and scissors with him to support him while he felt his way about in a new business, Harry went up to Washington. And he cut hair while he looked around. His spare time he spent in studying.

Now, H. G.'s favorite breakfast was peaches and cream, so he decided to start a peaches-and-cream farm, for pleasure and profit. He found a farm, too small to support him, but large enough to keep him busy in his spare time. On that he planted peach trees according to directions and guidance of the county agricultural agent. He bought a couple of cows and learned how to milk them.

To leave out the details, H. G. moved to a larger farm five years later. It was one of those partially cleared, cut-over timberland places which can be bought on time. H. G. knew something about peaches now, so he set out three or four acres of peaches and increased his herd of cows to twenty-four, a number one man can handle without trouble.

Jumping ahead three more years, we find the peach orchard producing

For the address from which you can secure free books on opportunities in the Pacific Northwest, write John North, inclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope, for his reply. The information is free.

two thousand crates of peaches a year, selling for a dollar a crate. And we find the twenty-four cows, feeding off the land at no cash outlay, bringing in more than two hundred dollars a month. A comfortable income every month plus security and a diet of peaches and cream, all earned with a razor, a little study and a lot of hard work.

Which actual case proves that if a man is willing to use his head and his hands, and goes where opportunity lies, he has a chance to carve out a home of his own choosing and make a go of it.

While we're up in Washington, let's take a look at a neighborhood inquired about by B. R., of Delaware. "I hear," says this reader, "that they're going in for wine-making in one of the sections of Washington, and that it's getting to be quite a wine-grape section. I've had my eyes on the Northwest for some time, and, having had experience with wine grapes, I'd like to know more about it. Can you tell me where this section is, and what it's all about?"

Yes, B. R., it's quite an interesting spot, and it will come more and more into prominence as the industry up there expands.

I believe the section you have reference to is the Yakima Valley in the neighborhood of Sunnyside, Washington. There is a winery there which at the present time is turning out nearly a hundred thousand gallons of wine a year.

There are now over five hundred acres of wine grapes around the winery, operated by private growers who sell to the winery. Most of these vineyards are comparatively new, and others are being planted from cuttings brought here from the famous vineyards of Europe.

Grapes in that section make their first good crop the third year, and reach full bearing in five to six years, after which they will continue to produce as long as they are properly cultivated. There are grape vines in that section still producing which were planted more than fifty-five years ago.

As to the types of grapes grown, the vats at the Upland Winery are used for Reising, Burgundy, Sauterne, White Port, Port, and Muscatel. In selecting the types of wine to concentrate on, it is necessary, of course, to be guided by the type of weather, and select types made from grapes which come from a similar climate.

With that fact as the guide, it was found that the vines from southern Europe would not be satisfactory because they were not accustomed to a dormant period in winter. So the root stock came from northern Europe, where winters are mild but sufficiently cold to insure a dormant period in the vines.

Thus it is that now you can get wines made in the Northwest from grapes of the same stock that famous old German, Austrian and other northern European wines are made from.

● We aim to give practical help to readers. Mr. North will be glad to answer specific questions about the West, its ranches, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. He will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to him, for he is always glad to assist you to the best of his ability. Be sure to inclose a stamped envelope for your reply.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.



## Missing Department

**McCOY, MRS. ROSE**—She is my mother, and I would like any information concerning her whereabouts. I was adopted in 1920 by a couple living in Columbus, Ohio. I am twenty-two years old now and am in the army, stationed in California. My mother's maiden name was Stratton, and she lived in Reeceville, Ohio, in 1916.—Private Virgil J. Lee, D. E. M. L. Det., Fort McDowell, Angel Island, California.

**BIGGE, CANDICE**—He is my father, whom I have never seen. He and my mother separated twenty-eight years ago. When last heard of he was somewhere in Kentucky. I am married now and have one child. If anyone knows his whereabouts, I would appreciate it if they would get in touch with me. I would love to hear from him.—Mrs. Cecil Burgess, Glasgow, West Virginia.

**BARKE, BARNEY**—He is my father and was last seen when I was eight years old. The last time I heard from him was in 1926. "Daddy, I am twenty-five years old now and miss you more every day. Please write to me or Aunt Hattie."—Kathleen Bark or Mrs. Hattie Boggaw, 710 Verion Avenue, Room No. 21, Lansing, Michigan.

**HULL, MRS. RUSSIA and ETHEL**—It is important that I locate my sister and her daughter. They were last heard from in 1933, at which time they were in Alton, Illinois, and were planning to go to Buffalo, New York. If they should see this urgent plea, I wish they would get in touch with me, or if anyone knows their whereabouts, please write.—Earl Anderson, c/o Baker Dry Cleaning Company, 1610 Spray Street, Burlington, Iowa.

**BILBRO, BEN**—He is my uncle, and has been missing about twenty years. When last heard from he was somewhere in Montana. He is about eighty years old. If anyone knows his whereabouts, please write to me at once.—Andrew Cissna, Hanson, Kentucky.

**KING, RAYMOND and JOHN**—John is about forty-six years old and lives somewhere in the United States or Canada. "Your baby sister, Ruth King, has searched for twenty-six years to find you. We were separated in Minnesota in 1896 and were placed in different institutions. Our parents' names were supposed to be Mary and Raymond King. If you see this, please write to me. If anyone knows Raymond King, I would appreciate hearing from him. He is about sixty-five years old and was once a railroad man and later became interested in oil in Oklahoma and Texas. I heard that he had died in 1937 or 1938, and was buried somewhere in New York State, but don't know if it was true. If anyone can enlighten me, I would like to hear from them. Write to Ruth King Taylor, care of the Missing Department, Western Story Magazine.

● There is no charge for the insertion of requests for information concerning missing relatives or friends.

While it will be better to use your name in the notices, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" postoffice address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

**WARNING**.—Do not forward money to anyone who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.



Part Four

# Ghosts OF THE RIMROCK

BY HARRY SINCLAIR DRAGO

*The Story So Far:*

The Flagler Expedition, a party of archaeologists, heads for Pueblo Grande, Nevada, to make a study of Indian ruins. Their work is secretly opposed by the Wu-tai-shan Company, a Chinese firm whose af-

fairs are managed by Carlotta Soong, a beautiful half-caste.

Slade Salters, Carlotta's attorney, who has learned something of the secret activities of the company, is convinced that the Chinese are working a gold mine somewhere near the Pueblo Grande ruins. He hires men to follow the expedition and investigate.

Jim Morningstar, the expedition's guide, runs into trouble from the very start—trouble which comes to a head when Jennifer Orme, the only woman in the group, disappears. The party makes for Piute, the nearest town, to get aid in searching for the girl. There Jim is surprised to find Carlotta Soong who promises to take him to Jennifer if he will agree not to enlist the aid of the sheriff. He agrees, reluctantly, but next morning when they are to start, Carlotta too has disappeared.

Jim goes to Sheriff Mulhall, who assembles a posse and starts a search for both girls. Little headway is made, however, and lack of water compels the party to split. Jim's group runs into a party of Chinese who are searching for Carlotta. She is found in an old Mormon fort to which some of Slade Salters' men have taken her, and is rescued after a fight.

The Chinese, to escape Salters' gang, lead Jim and his men blindfolded, through Pueblo Grande to a mysterious destination known as "Ping-an-shanku."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE DESERT'S QUESTION

STANDING there, gazing at what was nothing less than a hidden paradise, Jim Morningstar's amazement was such that he found it difficult to credit his eyes. He discovered himself on the edge of a valley perhaps ten square miles in extent, ringed in by ragged desert peaks, with a lofty, compact mountain rising in its center. Sui Chen saw him staring at it.

"That is Wu-tai-shan," he explained. "To us it means Sacred or Revered Mountain."

Against the grateful green of the valley, Wu-tai-shan glowed red under the rays of the afternoon sun. It dwarfed the objects near at hand.

There was something strange and ethereal about it.

Jim's glance dropped to the cluster of buildings below. The houses were not jammed together after the manner of Western civilization; made of adobe, each was set apart, small and Oriental in design. Flowers grew about them. A silver thread of running water flashed here and there through the pleasing pattern made by a winding, tree-bordered lane. Beyond the tiny stream a temple tower reached skyward. It might have been a mountain village in faraway Shansi Province, in northern China, miraculously dropped down here in the barren wastes of southern Nevada.

"Perhaps you would care to look about," Sui Chen invited courteously. "The gods have smiled on us here. We are proud of what we have accomplished."

They descended into the valley by a winding path. Morningstar's guide led the way through a broad, cultivated area of garden produce, containing vegetables of many varieties, where straw-hatted Chinese worked with primitive hoes, irrigating with a flow of water that seemed inexhaustible. From somewhere up the valley sounded the lowing of cattle. Morningstar saw that he and Sui Chen were approaching the great, red Sacred Mountain.

Seen near at hand, it was even more impressive. High in the air it rose, its upper ramparts unscalable. Out of a riven gorge in its flank poured a steady flow of pure, sweet water. It came from springs hidden deep in the mountain, Sui Chen explained. But for it, this valley would have been an unlivable inferno.

They went on. Something leaped in Morningstar when, a moment later, he beheld the mouth of a mine

tunnel in the face of the mountain. It was high up, the apron formed by the mine tailings presenting a scene of busy activity just now. Jim's brows shot up at sight of the huge, crude arrastra, the primitive milling machine of the ancients: a broad, circular stone trough, round and round which heavy weights were dragged by a pair of oxen, crushing the ore thrown in by the bronzed, half-naked Chinese who poured from the mine tunnel in a barefooted, tireless stream.

Later Sui Chen took Jim to a small adobe on the outskirts of the village. Opening the split-reed screen, he motioned the white man to enter.

"Consider this your home, my friend."

At Sui Chen's handclap there appeared instantly a gnarled, elderly Chinese whose seamed face was wrinkled into a smile.

"This man will care for your wants," Sui Chen told Jim. "His name is Boo Chung. He speaks some English and understands more."

Jim was impressed by these marks of consideration, but there were some questions he wanted answered. When the servant withdrew, he turned to face Sui Chen.

"The peace and seeming security of your valley have not escaped me, Sui Chen. But I haven't forgotten what happened down at Pueblo Grande. Just how safe are we?"

Something like regret touched the bland Oriental features of the other momentarily. "Who knows?" he countered frankly. "Our secret is known now, Morningstar. You were right; we could not hope to conceal it always. All I can say is that a number of men have tried to find a way into the valley through the years. No one has succeeded."

"Where are you keeping Miss Orme?" Jim changed the subject

with a question he had been asking himself ever since his arrival.

"When I came, three days ago, she was confined to her house," was Sui Chen's response. "That was a mistake. She has since had the freedom of the valley."

Jim would have been surprised could he have known how his face lighted up with the words. Sui Chen did not miss it. He went on smoothly: "Your other friends are being detained now, but I will see that they are given their liberty. You understand that they must make no attempt to leave the valley. They will be quickly and effectively prevented if they do," he concluded.

"I will answer for them," Jim assured him.

**S**UI CHEN left a few minutes later. Jim's first concern was to remove the dust and grime of the fight at the pueblo. He found himself reveling in the luxury of a bath. Boo Chung brought him clean linen and then served him with tea and deliciously prepared food. Finished eating, he flung himself in a wicker chair, intending only to enjoy a smoke. Wearier than he knew, he was soon asleep. When he opened his eyes the lengthening afternoon shadows shocked him into awareness of the fact that several hours had passed.

Making his way to the garden, he threaded a cool, winding path. Even as he paused to breathe deep of the fragrance of the flowers, a laughing voice fell on his ear that sent him whirling around on his heel.

"Jim! You've come!"

It was Jennifer. She advanced with a glad smile, plainly delighted at finding him. She was none the worse for her experience; if anything, she appeared to have been enjoying it. Jim gazed at her, finding words

difficult, though there was something written in his eyes that she could not fail to understand.

"I'd almost despaired of finding you," he told her simply. If the statement brought the color to her cheeks, he didn't appreciate why.

"What do you think of Ping-an-shanku?" she inquired.

"Ping what?"

"'Peaceful Valley,'" she translated. "It's the name the Chinese have given this garden spot."

Morningstar laughed. "I hardly know what to make of it," he answered her question. "If it was any pleasanter, I'd think I'd awakened in heaven."

She laughed with him, then sobered. "You're not alone, Jim? What of Bill Merriam and the others?" To Morningstar's ear, it sounded like an afterthought.

"No, my boys are with me." He went on to explain events since the day she had disappeared from the expedition's base camp at Pueblo Grande, concluding: "When I told them they'd only be in the way, Dr. Birdsall and the others returned to Reno—all except Merriam, that is. He couldn't see things my way."

It was dropped negligently. He would have gone on, but she stopped him.

"Do you mean Dr. Merriam came with you; that he's here in the valley now?"

Jim nodded. "We're not very friendly." Jennifer met his look gravely. "Merriam and I look at things differently."

"Bill always was impulsive," she murmured. "Too bad."

Jim asked himself if she meant more than the words implied. But

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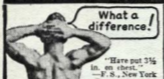
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that was absurd. He had no reason to believe she was questioning her interest in the man. He told her that while Merriam and the punchers had entered the valley as prisoners, Sui Chen had promised to release them at once. "Merriam will be looking for you."

He felt on safer ground when the conversation turned to the wonders the Wu-tai-shan Company had worked in this desert valley. He mentioned the mine. She had been there, Jennifer said, adding: "The mine and the valley were both discovered at the same time, so I am told."

"How was that?"

"One of the secret entrances leads through a fissure in Wu-tai-shan Mountain," she explained, "and the mine lies in an offshoot. Crossing the desert from Union City, years ago, the Chinese entered a cave, hopping only to hide. They crawled on and on until they found this. Many were near death. The water saved them. So they conceived the idea of developing and conserving the water and making a home here."

"It was their only chance," he agreed.

"Gardens were planted, homes built, trees brought in. The birds came." She turned to him impulsively. "Jim, the world was well lost for this! These people have been living in peace. They want no trouble. *Must* it come to them?"

He took his time over his answer. "It will if things go on as they are," he said then. "Sui Chen knows it as well as I."

"Sui Chen is our best friend, Jim, yours especially. He has great respect for your intelligence. Sometimes I think that if we are to escape from the valley at all, it will be through him. Oh, I saw your glance roaming these peaks as I talked," she hastened on, when he would have





interrupted. "I know what's in your mind. You won't rest until you have found a way out; you can't bear the thought of this captivity. We all want to get away, of course."

He nodded, impressed by her acute grasp of Sui Chen's character. "I wouldn't give much for our chances, if anything should happen to Sui Chen—"

"What could happen to him?" she caught him up.

Jim shrugged, but his tone was uneasy. "There are two opposing factions at work here. Quan Goon doesn't always approve of our stout friend's ideas. The knowledge that we are in possession of their secret might drive Quan to any length."

**B**EFORE he could say more, a voice broke in on them that swung both around.

"I see you managed to find Miss Orme, Morningstar!"

It was Bill Merriam. Clearly he was incensed at finding them together before he fairly had time to turn around. In other circumstances Jim would have taken exception to his words, but before he could open his lips, Jennifer exclaimed:

"Bill! Then you did get your freedom! We were looking for you—and here you are."

Somewhat mollified, Merriam grumbled: "Damned small freedom, I'd say! We're here, and what are we going to do about it?" He waved his hand in a gesture which included most of the valley. "I don't intend to waste any time hunting a way out of this. There ought to be a pass somewhere up there amongst the peaks that we can get through. If there is, I'll find it!"

Morningstar shook his head. "I wouldn't try it, if I were you," he advised. "In fact, I've given my

word that none of us would attempt to leave the valley."

Merriam stared at him, arrested. "Let me get this straight!" he exclaimed harshly. "Do you mean to say you actually were fool enough to promise such a thing as that?" Something had warned him against challenging Jim on Jennifer's account, but any other excuse would serve as well. In the matter of Jim's unauthorized pledge to their captors, he believed he had found it.

"Bill—what are you saying?" Jennifer cried. Indignation whitened her cheeks. "From what Jim has told me, it's due solely to him that you got here at all."

"Well, I wish we hadn't!" Merriam cried, beside himself. "Even he can't disguise the fact that we're worse off than ever! He got us into this! Why don't he get us out?"

"Hold on, Merriam," Morningstar burst out, taking a step forward. He kept a grip on himself with difficulty. "Your temper's running away with you! I might remind you that that happened before, and it didn't get us anywhere. I don't enjoy this any more than you do, but things can't be done all in a minute!"

Merriam met his flashing eyes for a moment, and his own dropped. The menace in Jim's tone had not escaped him. He began to perceive that he had overstepped himself.

"Maybe they can't," he muttered. "but I like to know something is going forward. It isn't fair to Miss Orme to leave things up in the air as they are," was his defense of his outburst. "I'm not thinking of myself."

"It's like you to lay it all at Jennifer's door," Morningstar thought contemptuously, but he said no more.

Merriam's display of temper had one result, however, which none of

them could ignore. Any pretense of friendliness while they were held here was swept away. Even Jennifer's frank enjoyment of the desert paradise had been dampened. Morningstar would have condemned Merriam for that if for nothing else. It seemed criminal to make things harder for her, since she had no choice but to remain here, for the present in any event.

"I suppose Riley and the others were turned loose at the same time you were?" Jim queried, as they paused before the house which had been turned over for his use.

Merriam assented grudgingly. "They're wandering about the valley, I expect."

It was enough to satisfy Jim that Sui Chen had been as good as his word. Jennifer and Merriam left him a moment later. He stood there, looking after them until they disappeared under the trees, a frown creasing his brow.

"Merriam is going to make trouble for us," he thought. While Jennifer had indicated by neither word nor sign that she would do all in her power to keep Merriam in line, Morningstar's common sense told him that was her intention. Yet he frankly doubted her ability to get anywhere with the man. Merriam had demonstrated more than once that he was the kind that cracked under strain. And something told Jim that what had gone before was nothing to the test they would all be called on to meet before they saw the outside of this prison valley again.

DUSK fell swiftly behind these towering peaks. Morningstar watched the lamps wink on in the village, then turned to enter his house. Lights awaited him here. It was as though Boo Chung had an-

anticipated his arrival by a matter of seconds, and then silently disappeared. Morningstar was reminded of the strange mystery of this valley and the people who lived here; he sensed how impossible it would be to make a move that was not watched by hidden eyes. Little as he had to hide, the thought was far from reassuring.

He had scarcely shut his eyes, it seemed, before dawn whitened the window. And yet, during the night his clothing had been pressed and its various rents patched. There was a new silk neckerchief to replace the torn, bloodstained one he had worn in the fight at the pueblo. It came to Jim that all these marks of service could hardly be gratuitous. Obviously some return was expected, but what it could be escaped him.

He was making ready to leave the house when a knock sounded at the door. Boo Chung materialized from one of the back rooms to answer it. Morningstar heard a murmured exchange, and then the servant was bowing before him.

"Sui Chen come see," he announced in his slurred pidgin. "You likee?"

Jim instructed him to show the visitor in. Sui Chen greeted him with a suave smile.

"Boo Chung has done his work well?" he inquired solicitously. "There is nothing you desire, my friend?"

"I'm very comfortable, Sui Chen," Morningstar assured him, wondering what all this might be leading up to. "Thanks to you."

The Oriental touched politely on several unimportant topics, after the manner of his race, and then paused, his slant, opaque eyes fastened on Jim's face. "I have something to say to you," he began smoothly, "if it will please you to listen?"

Jim nodded, concealing his keen interest with difficulty.

"Quan Goon, Mòy Quai and I have had a conference," Sui Chen announced. "During it we came to this conclusion in regard to you: we have decided to ask you to join us, to be one of our company. We need you, Morningstar. You are strong, wise. You understand things about your own people which we do not. You will help us greatly, and perhaps—who knows?—we may even be able to repay you."

No flicker of eyelash or change of tone revealed the greatness of the honor he believed he was offering. Amazement and dismay filled Jim while he talked on. This, then, was the price attached to the friendliness shown him!

"You were right from the beginning," Sui Chen told him. "There is only one course open to us. We must gain possession of this land, locate and file on the mine, establish ourselves in the eyes of your law. Your help will be invaluable. In return you will have a home here in the valley, gold, honor, perhaps even love."

He was gazing past the window as he spoke. Morningstar followed his glance. It came as something of a shock to see Carlotta passing down the broad palm and cottonwood-bordered road. Again Jim shot a look at Sui Chen, a sharper one this time. The broad ivory features were an impenetrable mask, but Jim was not deceived. In a flash he guessed the truth. When Sui Chen promised love, if he accepted, it was Carlotta's love that was meant!

"I—" he began.

"Do not speak at once," Sui Chen cut him off smoothly. "There is plenty of time, my friend. Think over what I have told you, even as we have thought it over. You will be treated fairly here. Happiness

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awaits you. Do not toss it aside until you are very sure."

"What about my friends?" Jim queried, after a long pause. "They will not want to remain here."

"They mean nothing to us," Sui Chen assured him. "We will consider your wishes in the matter."

Quietly as it was said, Jim knew how much depended on his answer. He nodded slowly.

"I'll think it over," he said.

Sui Chen left a moment later. Jim stood in the door after he was gone, stunned by the offer that had been made him. He seemed hardly able to think. The proposition seemed too fantastic to consider even for a moment.

He had found a way to get Jennifer and his friends out of the valley—but at what a cost! Not only must he give up his own life, dedicating it to these Chinese, it meant giving up Jennifer forever, for he knew he would never see her again.

"How can I do it?" he groaned. "How can I go through with it?"

## CHAPTER XV

### GAMBLER'S CHOICE

JIM was still standing where Sui Chen had left him when a harsh whoop of exultation fell on his ears. He recognized Sulphur's voice. Stepping through the door, he found Riley, Hap and Johnnie approaching.

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"Some diggin's, Jim!" the lanky Irishman greeted him. "Dang me if I ever laid eyes on anythin' like it! Why, we been tended an' fussed over an' all but fed with a spoon!" His tone revealed the pleasure he found in the novel situation.

"I know," Jim nodded, thinking of the price of those favors.

"Thought we was in a jackpot till they turned us loose," Hap thrust in. "Anyvay, there's one advantage in bein' together. It'll give us a chance to git straightened out on what we aim to do—"

He was cut off by Sulphur's boisterous and satirical guffaw.

"Are yuh in yore right mind?" the latter queried. "I know what I'm doin', fer one. I ain't thinkin' of gittin' away. Why, I been lookin' fer somethin' like this fer years! Gimme a nice little Chinese gal an' I'd be willin' to settle down here fer the rest of my life!"

Jim smiled at his exaggeration. Far from being dampened by it, however, Sulphur exclaimed: "Did yuh see that mine they've got, Jim? We jest had a look at it." His voice dropped, telling of his awe. "There's a fortune there fer the gent who grabs it!"

"Them springs are somethin', too," Johnnie seconded with enthusiasm. "That water's a gold mine in itself. No wonder Salters is interested."

They were still discussing the wonders of the valley ten minutes later, when the sound of footsteps whirled Morningstar around. Bill Merriam stood there, his face angrier than ever.

"Here you are," he grunted, as if including them all in his disapproval. "Have you learned anything?"

"No, Merriam, we haven't," was Jim's calm reply.

Bill nodded contemptuously. "I thought not!" He had more to say,

his tone so offensive that the punchers stared at him in surprise.

"Jest what're you doin' about it, Merriam, if yuh don't mind my askin'?" Sulphur demanded, before Jim could speak.

Merriam had his answer ready. "At least, I had a look at these peaks last night and this morning," he told them. "That's more than the rest of you've bothered to do."

"An' did yuh find a pass to crawl over?"

Merriam answered in the negative. "But that won't stop me. The rest of you can stay here as long as you like. I'm getting out, and I'm taking Miss Orme with me! These yellow devils have a number of exits that can be used."

"An' they got 'em guarded!" Sulphur warned flatly. "Yuh won't git far in that direction—"

"Perhaps not, if I were as helpless as the rest of you," was the cool retort. "Fortunately, I had the good sense to use a little foresight."

To Jim's amazement, he guardedly drew a gun from his pocket. How he had come by it was a mystery, for their arms had been taken when they were led into the valley. Jim wondered if he had stolen it.

"Where did you get that, Merriam?" he demanded sharply. Bill met his look with defiance and put the gun back in his pocket.

"I picked it up down at the pueblo. It was dropped by the Chinese who was killed. I shoved it inside my shirt while no one was looking." It was plain that he thought he had been clever.

Jim thrust out his hand. "If you've got a lick of sense, Merriam, you'll give me that gun!"

Bill drew back a step. "I'll never give it up!" he cried.

Jim was rapidly growing angry. "If you want to get yourself killed,

all right!" he said angrily. "But don't harbor the idea that you're going to endanger Miss Orme with your crazy attempts to get out of here—"

"I'm sick of your interest in Jennifer Orme, Morningstar!" Merriam flung at him with sudden fury. "It's about time you were put in your place!"

**W**ITHOUT warning, his fist lashed out. Jim jerked his head aside, narrowly avoiding the blow. His own fist caught Merriam alongside the jaw, every ounce of his hundred and eighty pounds behind it. Merriam went down as if struck by a battering-ram.

Morningstar waited until he rose to his feet, and then he drove in, pumping long, looping blows at Merriam's face. Bill blocked them and came back, his big arms flailing heavily. For a moment they fought toe to toe, neither able to gain the advantage. Merriam's fist connected with Jim's chin and the blow sent him staggering back. He caught his balance just as Merriam rushed. The latter had not expected so prompt a recovery and, as a result, was wide open. Again Jim struck him on the jaw, and again he fell.

Jim stepped in close, determined to finish this as speedily as possible and take the gun from Merriam. But he was already too late. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a number of Chinese who had gathered to watch the fight, Quan Goon among them. The big Oriental was crowding forward, anxious to miss nothing.

Jim's pounding had slowed Merriam up. Before he got to his knees, Happy Failes burst out: "Hold on, you two—unless yuh want Miss Orme to see yuh! She's comin' now!"

It was true. Morningstar had a glimpse of Jennifer's approach. But

it was Sulphur who jerked Merriam to his feet and gave him a powerful thrust.

"Clear out of here, Merriam, before she sees the condition you're in," he ordered.

Merriam didn't need to be told twice. He slipped away, his departure covered by the others. Quan Goon took a slow look at Jim and followed. When Jennifer approached, Jim and the punchers were discussing an accident which had occurred that morning in the mine. She was not fooled by the ruse. Clearly she caught an undercurrent of strife here.

Finding difficulty in keeping the talk away from Merriam, Jim was relieved when she left them. "Keep an eye on Merriam," he warned the boys. "No telling what that fool will try." He had plenty to think about as he wandered off by himself, scarcely aware of where his steps were taking him. Sui Chen's amazing offer was a dead weight on his mind. He knew that if he hesitated over his answer, pressure would be put on him. And if Merriam kicked over the traces before he decided, there was no telling what would happen.

It was all an unsolvable tangle, but from it there emerged one clear and uninvolved fact. He had promised himself that he would win Jennifer's freedom, and the only way he could do it was by agreeing to Sui Chen's proposals. Nothing less than his acceptance of this offer of a membership in the Wu-tai-shan Company would insure Jennifer's being returned to Piute, together with the others. Were he to say no, none of them would ever see outside the grim mountain walls of this desert stronghold again. They would be imprisoned, and this time he would be included.

But if he threw in with the Chinese as they wanted, then what? That they needed him was plain. "The day will never come when these people will be safe from attack and persecution," he reflected. "I'll have to be their buffer, do their fighting!" The situation had a grim irony that was not lost on him. Was this to be fate's sardonic way of righting the injustice his father had done these people? The thought was not easily dismissed.

HE glanced up to find himself near a high-roofed joss house, its flaring eaves cutting a sharp silhouette against the sky. Passing the door, he glanced inside. His eyes fell on a large joss against the wall. A woman knelt in prayer before the image. Even as Morningstar saw that it was Carlotta, she rose slowly and reverently. He would have passed-on, but she reached the door before he could get away. Her face lit up at sight of him.

"I have been thinking of you, Jim," she told him. "I meant to see you, if for no other reason than because I owe you an explanation."

"There's no explanation due me," he assured her. "Sui Chen has told me everything."

Her dark eyes searched his face as if she would read there the answer to her own question. "You would be happy here," she said simply.

Morningstar was in no mood to evade the issue. "Carlotta," he said abruptly, "do you realize that Sui Chen's offer to me includes yourself?"

If he had hoped to catch her off guard, he quickly saw his mistake. An inscrutable smile played about her lips as she met his gaze.

"Do you find me so undesirable, Jim?"

It was a question he had no hesitation in answering, to himself at

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least. For the right man, Carlotta was unquestionably a pearl of great price. But she was not for him.

"It seems strange that your own wishes have not been consulted in the matter," he said, pretending to misunderstand her.

"I have never hesitated where the good of all was concerned. I couldn't begin now, Jim."

There was a simple dignity, and even greatness, in the words that kindled his admiration. "If I had your courage, Carlotta," he said soberly, "my answer would be easy."

"Then you find it hard?" she caught him up. And before he could speak: "Has your difference with Dr. Merriam anything to do with this?"

"No." For some reason he found it impossible to discuss Merriam. "Doesn't it seem strange that nothing has been heard of Salters and his crowd?" he asked, partly to change the subject. "Not a gun has popped. I should think you would find this peace nerve-racking."

"Slade Salters is nothing," she answered. "We've little to fear from him. The situation will solve itself if he persists."

He had no difficulty in guessing what she meant. Not all the members of the Wu-tai-shan Company were here in the valley. There were dozens, scores, of ranch cooks, merchants and others, spread over Nevada; each ready at a moment's notice to carry out orders. Were Salters to prove too troublesome, some of their number would not be long in eliminating him, quietly and efficiently.

The girl turned as she spoke and, following her glance, Jim saw Sui Chen approaching. The Chinaman beamed on them approvingly.

"I have been looking for you," he greeted Jim.

"Yes?"

"Moy Quai has no doubt told you



that tonight is the Feast of the Moon Cake. You and your friends are invited." The Oriental went on to explain the festival in honor of the moon, which, controlling the tides along the coastal provinces of his native country, thus played an important rôle in the lives of common men. The Moon Cake, he added, had to be made after the moon's rising and eaten before it set.

Listening to the details of this ancient custom, Jim wondered how he could ever reconcile himself to the strange beliefs of these people. He did not hesitate over his answer, however.

"We'll be glad to come, Sui Chen."

The latter nodded. "The feast begins when the moon appears on the horizon. Someone will come for you at the proper time."

**T**HAT evening Jim was escorted to a large adobe obviously set aside for use on gala occasions. He found Jennifer, Merriam, Sulphur and the others waiting. More than fifty Chinese—nearly all there were in the valley—were gathered in the courtyard, and it was plain that on this night they regarded the moon, which presently thrust its silver edge above the eastern peaks, with especial reverence.

A number of tables had been set up inside the inclosure. Jim and the others were grouped together, but if they had expected to be left to themselves they were mistaken. Sui Chen, Carlotta, and the Chinese who had shown themselves to be friendly sat with them, while Quan Goon and his stern-faced followers drew apart. As for the Moon Cake, Jennifer was enthusiastic in her appreciation, and Sulphur loudly vowed it to be the best cake he had ever eaten.

Under any other circumstances the evening would have been enjoy-

able. As the feast drew to a close, Morningstar admitted that to himself, even while taking note of the disappearance of Bill Merriam. "Still sulking, probably," was his thought. Merriam had worn a long face all evening. Carlotta, who sat beside him, had had difficulty in extracting a dozen words from him.

Catching Jim's eye, Jennifer smiled. "Now you've a new experience to add to memory," she told him.

Marveling that she could entertain such a thought, he leaned forward, grasping every precious minute of what might prove to be his last evening with her. "You're not worried?" he asked curiously.

"Of course not. I've every confidence in you, Jim."

Word by word, she unconsciously added to the weight bearing down on his spirit. He opened his lips to say something—and froze as the clear crack of a gunshot rang across the peaceful silence of the valley. The others heard it, too. Sui Chen suddenly seemed to have been turned to stone. Hap Failes started half out of his chair.

"What was that?" he exclaimed.

But Jim knew. Merriam! The thought flashed across his mind in a twinkling. There was no time to speak, however. As if impelled from behind, the Chinese sprang to their feet and boiled into the open. For a moment the scene was one of wildest confusion, in which even Sui Chen and Carlotta forgot their guests.

Jim whirled. "Come with me and stay close," he told Jennifer swiftly. "The rest of you do the same! Hell will break loose if this is what I think it is! We're going to my place!"

They reached the street. Most of the Chinese had disappeared. No one attempted to stop them as they

made for Jim's adobe. They were there in a few minutes.

An uproar broke out not far away as they arrived. Morningstar listened intently, then told the others to get inside his house.

They were just entering the door when the sound of scattered firing broke on their ears. "They got him!" Sulphur exclaimed, his tone harsh. "He can't get away from that mob!"

"Who does he mean?" Jennifer asked in perplexity. "What is it, Jim?" A thought struck her then. "Not—Bill?" she gasped. "He isn't here! Surely he hasn't been doing something foolish?"

She had her answer the next moment. There was a swift crunch of heels on the path and Bill Merriam dashed in, breathless, a look of haunting fear in his eyes. He was waving his gun.

"You've got to help me, Morningstar!" he gasped. "I tried to make a break and I was seen! I had to shoot one of those yellow devils! They turned me back! They'll tear me to pieces if they get hold of me!"

**B**EFORE he could say more his pursuers approached with a rush. Jim sprang forward. "Give me that gun!" He tore it from Merriam's grasp, flung it. The gun sailed through the window. Jim whirled as the Chinese appeared in the door, Quan Goon at their head. Glaring murderously at Merriam, he started forward.

"We want that man!" he cried.

Merriam burst into a protest of innocence, stark fear riding his voice. Pushing to the fore, Morningstar thrust him back. "Get hold of yourself," he ordered curtly. "I'll take care of this!"

It was plain to him that the men with Quan Goon were deeply

aroused. Unbridled fury showed in their flat faces, and their cries were fierce. In that tense moment Jim knew to the last iota what he was up against. These men were in a killing mood and would stop at nothing. Merriam was not the only one in danger. All of them, even Jennifer, might have to pay for his folly.

Whatever the outcome, bloodshed was certain to result. If Merriam were to be slain in an explosion of mob violence, and the matter ended there, it might still make Jennifer's release impossible. The thought spurred Jim into doing everything in his power to save the man.

"Get back!" He flung the words at Jennifer, deep anxiety in his tone. "Get in the corner and stay there!"

Already the maddened Orientals were pressing forward. Jim flashed a look at Sulphur and the others. That they understood the situation was demonstrated by the fact that they had grouped themselves about Merriam. Jim moved forward to intercept the Chinese. But he was powerless to stem their furious rush. Thrusting him aside, they closed in on the others.

Sulphur was hurled back as Quan Goon crashed into him. A second later Johnnie went down when a fist exploded in his face. Hap felt himself picked up by a dozen hands and flung this way and that, helpless. A knife gashed his ribs.

Merriam had gone down in the first rush. He groveled, cowering, too terrified to lift a hand for his own salvation. The only thing that prevented him from being torn to pieces on the spot was the number of men who crowded about him. Shoved from behind, they went down in a struggling, frenzied heap.

Jim reached Merriam a moment

later, tossing the Chinese out of his way like sacks of bran. Yanking Merriam to his feet, he attempted to haul him clear, at the same time calling to his punchers to back his play. It came with so complete a surprise to the Chinese that it almost succeeded. But there were nearly a score of the attackers. The hope of holding out against them was useless.

Quan Goon closed with Jim, and his steel-wire arms wrapped about him. Others tore Merriam out of his grasp. Sulphur, Hap, and Johnnie were dealt with as briefly. Morningstar saw a hard-faced Oriental advance on Jennifer. He choked back the cry that rose to his lips, for he realized that a protest would only make things worse for the girl.

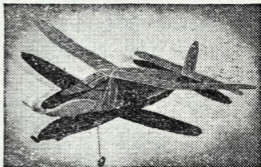
Swiftly the Chinese produced ropes and bound their prisoners. If Jim had been comforting himself with the fact that while many guns were in evidence, not a shot had been fired, the thought was of slight consolation now. These Orientals knew how to finish a man in other ways more to their liking.

**A**T a word from Quan, his men started to lead their captives out of the adobe. At that moment, however, a hitch occurred. Sui Chen appeared in the door, flanked by several more of his countrymen. He was no longer smiling and friendly. A stern dignity touched his face. Carlotta, too, had entered. Had he needed an indication of the seriousness of the situation, one look at the girl's face would have been enough for Jim.

"One moment, Quan Goon," Sui Chen said in their own tongue. Quan turned on him fiercely. There were hot words between them. Though he listened closely to the exchange, Jim was unable to catch a word of it. But keenly aware of how much depended on the outcome, he stud-

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ied anxiously each change of expression in the grim faces of the pair.

Quan Goon's stand was definite. He poured all his fanatical hatred of the Americans into his voice as he stated it: "These dogs of whites have broken trust! They must pay!"

"Be careful of your course," Sui Chen warned him. "We desire Morningstar to join our company none the less because this man has shot one of us. Nor has our need of him changed. Morningstar is worth half a dozen Merriams, but one mistake now, Quan Goon, and we will never have him."

Quan still demanded summary vengeance for Merriam's folly. Carlotta was drawn into the argument. Morningstar strove to reassure Jennifer with his eyes, only to find to his amazement and admiration that she was bearing up as well as any of them.

"Morningstar had nothing to do with this shooting," Sui Chen pointed out calmly. "He was at the feast with us when it occurred. You yourself saw his fight with Merriam this morning. There is nothing in common between them."

If Quan Goon remained unmoved, sentiment nevertheless swung to Sui Chen, their followers discussing the matter at length, then nodding approval of the latter's words. Sui Chen was quick to grasp his advantage. He indicated Merriam.

"Take that man away and imprison him."

Merriam was led off. At Sui Chen's sign, Morningstar and the others were freed. Quan stalked out of the door without a backward look. Jim turned to Sui Chen.

"I'm glad you've seen this sensibly, Sui Chen. But what will be done with Merriam?"

"I wouldn't worry too much about him," was the answer. Sui Chen

gave him time to digest it, and added, "I think you understand now. We have been patient, Morningstar, but here there is iron under the velvet. Let this be a warning!"

With that he turned away. But if his words sounded cryptic to Jennifer and the others, they were clear enough to Jim. He knew Sui Chen was telling him that in his acceptance of the offer that had been made to him lay their last hope.

## CHAPTER XVI

### BEDROCK

**D**ESPITE Jim's knowledge that disaster threatened in the face of his delayed decision, a day passed without his having given Sui Chen an answer. It was a day of anxiety and suspense for the whites. They still possessed the freedom of the valley, unmolested; but the very fact that the Chinese ignored them completely was in itself ominous.

That evening Sulphur, Johnnie and Hap came to Jim's house. They sat down, sober of visage. Clearly they had much on their minds. Jim looked them over and drew his own conclusions.

"Well?" he said, when they waited without speaking.

"Jim," Sulphur began, "what's our next move?" There was driving intent in the query, and all three waited for the answer. But Jim merely gazed at them speculatively.

"What's on your mind?" he demanded bluntly.

Sulphur grew restless. "Ain't I said?" he jerked out. "Jim, look at it this way. Bill Merriam's been beefed! You know it, well's we do. An' yuh know what it means. We can't let it drag along any longer. We got to git Miss Orme out o' here!"

"Wait a minute," Jim countered

quietly. "Let's take this a point at a time. You boys are pretty sure Merriam is dead, I know. But I'm not."

He sounded so confident that they stared at him in surprise. "Why do yuh feel that way?" Johnnie asked.

Jim hesitated.

"Yo're holdin' back somethin'," Sulphur accused. "That business the other night looked mighty queer; Sui Chen turnin' us loose an' all. This is queerer. If yuh know of a reason why they won't finish Merriam, what is it?"

They all waited for the answer. But Morningstar couldn't tell them. He felt sure the Chinese would not risk influencing his decision unfavorably by putting Bill Merriam to death. If there was no other reason for them to hold off, that would be enough. But he had said nothing of Sui Chen's offer to anyone save Carlotta, and had no intention of airing his troubles now.

"I've got reason to believe they'll spare Merriam," he said slowly, "but I can't tell you what it is." Nothing they could find to say served to move him from that stand.

"Yuh always was a deep one," Sulphur grumbled. "Reckon there's no use expectin' yuh to change now."

Jim spent a sleepless night attempting to find a way out of the maze presented by his problem, and by the time dawn grayed the sky he believed he had hit on a course which would at least offer a bare possibility of success. But before he had finished his breakfast a piece of news reached him which threw all his calculations awry.

It was as he was drinking his tea that he caught the swift stamp of running boots on the path outside. Starting up, ready as he was for the first alarm, he was not more than half out of his chair before the door burst open and Johnnie ran in. That he was a prey to deep excitement

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could be read in his face.

"Jim!" he cried. "Here's hell to pay! The chink that Merriam plugged died durin' the night!"

The gravity with which Jim received the news attested the seriousness he saw in it. "Are the Chinese stirred up about it?" he queried swiftly.

"Waal, there's been a lot of wailin' goin' on," was the answer. "It woke me an' Sulphur up. We was about ready to do somethin' about it when Quan Goon come along. He told us what it was all about. Shot it into us pretty stiff!"

Jim digested that.

"There's no question but what it changes things considerably," he admitted.

"I reckon it won't be long before Merriam thinks so, anyway," Johnnie said grimly. "What'll yuh do about it?"

"Just sit tight," Jim answered. "We've got to be ready for whatever happens."

"Mebbe yuh know best," Johnnie agreed grudgingly. "But it ain't like yuh to stall this way. I can't figger it."

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LATER in the morning, Sulphur and Happy showed up. They also wanted to know what Jim was planning to do. He could tell them no more than he had told Johnnie. Neither Sui Chen nor any of the other Chinese had come near him or tried to influence him. He was not sure just what this signified, but he reiterated his advice to stand pat.

"If nothing happens by this afternoon, I'll make a move myself," he added. "You can depend on that."

The punchers were still at his adobe when, toward noon, strange sounds drew their attention down the broad, tree-lined road. A procession was approaching. There were upwards of twoscore Chinese in all, and they moved with solemn slowness.

"It's the funeral for the poor devil Merriam killed," Jim declared.

There were several Orientals in the lead, bearing banners inscribed with Chinese characters. Next came the relatives of the deceased, and it was at these that Jim and his friends gazed with astonishment. Their heads enclosed in bags whose bottoms were drawn snug about the neck, they had perforce to be led by friends. Their muffled wailing could be heard faintly.

Behind the dead man's kin came the rude pine casket, borne on the shoulders of six Sphinx-faced pallbearers. Bringing up the rear were the musicians, playing weird strains on their reed instruments. The dirge sent a shudder up the spines of the whites.

The procession advanced and passed the watchers without a single slanted glance turning in their direction. Somehow the whole proceeding struck Jim as ominous, forbidding. He watched till the last musician disappeared inside the door of the temple, and then turned to the others.

"If there's any question of how seriously they take this, that settles it," he said. "It looks bad for Merriam. As soon as the funeral is over, I'm going to demand proof that he is still alive."

He had some difficulty in locating Sui Chen. He succeeded only when he located Boo Chung and demanded to be taken to the man at once. The servant could easily have refused and retreated into his shell of stolidity, but he did not. Morningstar was conducted to Sui Chen's office and told to wait. The head of the Wu-tai-shan Company stepped into the room in a few minutes.

"Well?" he questioned. "Have you reached a decision?"

Sui Chen's usual affability had fled. He met Jim's gaze with level expectancy.

Jim shook his head. "I have come for another purpose, Sui Chen."

The latter bowed. Jim interpreted this to mean that he would be listened to, at least.

"My friends and myself are worried about Merriam," he said bluntly. "They believe he is dead and—"

"He is not," Sui Chen assured him promptly.

"I don't believe so myself," Jim admitted. "But I must demand some proof."

The Oriental mind read his drift without difficulty. "I can take you to him, if that is your wish."

Jim could be as blunt himself. "Suppose we get started, then," he said.

**S**UI CHEN led the way across the village and approached a small adobe situated in a grove of cottonwoods. Jim knew it was no accident that several Chinese were in evidence about the place. They started forward, but fell back at a sign from Sui Chen. The latter produced a key and unlocked the door. With Jim at his heels, he stepped in.

Bill Merriam, looking disheveled and almost wild, started up from his bed to stare at them.

"Morningstar!" he burst out. "I was wondering when you would come! Get me out of here! I can't stand it. Get me out!"

Jim could only shake his head regretfully. "I'm afraid that's impossible," he said. "But keep your chin up. Things may work out all right."

Merriam had a lot to say, seeming to be obsessed with the idea that he was at the mercy of madmen. He had a message for Jennifer, pitiful in its abject despair. Jim tried to

reassure him, without conspicuous success. The imprisoned man had not been allowed to step beyond this one small room since being captured; he was like a caged animal in his restlessness and his gnawing fears.

Jim was secretly relieved when he stepped back out of the place. But he showed nothing of this in his face, turning to Sui Chen as they walked away.

"What will you do with him?" he asked. Sui Chen spread his fat, well-cared-for hands.

"That is for you to say," he suggested with a suaveness that told Jim he held Merriam's fate in his hands. It hinted likewise that an early answer would be welcome. "I thought you understood that thoroughly."

It was with a disturbed mind that Morningstar took leave of the Oriental a few minutes later. Their meeting had changed nothing. Bill Merriam was still alive; but he had been reasonably sure of that. He had known as well that his answer to Sui Chen spelled death or freedom for the man. If Sui Chen had any thought of leniency in his mind, his Chinese inscrutability successfully concealed it. Jim felt the pinch of his dilemma gradually tightening.

Passing along a shady path on the way to his house, he glanced up to see Jennifer waiting for him.

"Jim, what has come up?" she asked, studying his grave face. "Has the death of this man killed all hope of saving Bill?"

"I wouldn't say so," he answered. "I have just come from seeing him." He gave her Merriam's message.

"I've been dreadfully worried about him," Jennifer said. "I know his foolishness has made matters infinitely harder for you."

Jim read in the words that her

confidence in him was still unshaken. He said quietly:

"I believe I can get you all out of here in a day's time, Merriam included." It was hard to say, but there was little point in delaying longer, he reflected, studying the curving line of her chin and throat. There was only one answer to give Sui Chen.

"My faith in you is such that I believe you can, however impossible it seems," she said softly, coloring under his scrutiny. "But how, Jim?"

That was the last thing in the world he wanted her to know. "Sui Chen has some confidence in me," he said evasively. "I may be able to persuade him."

But Jennifer refused to be content with so vague an answer. "You mean you'd rather not tell me?"

She saw in his dark eyes that it was so. But he said. "I've had a . . . a business proposition put to me. If I accept, I may be of some service to you and the others."

Jennifer's face was suddenly white.

"Jim, what sort of proposition are you referring to?" she demanded breathlessly.

**B**IT by bit, Jennifer forced the truth out of him until she was in full possession of it. "You mean that you would consider purchasing our liberty at such a price?" she cried, appalled. "Jim, you must be mad!" None of his protestations that it was the sensible course made any difference.

"I forbid you to do this monstrous thing!" she cried. "I . . . I'd refuse to leave!" Her tone changed. "At least wait," she pleaded. "You say yourself that playing for time has been no mistake up to the present. In fairness to yourself, won't you hold off a little longer? If you



won't do it for your own sake, Jim, do it for me! Please—"

What he saw in her eyes warned him that every hour of delay now only made his decision more certain and harder to face. "I can wait a little longer," he got out with an effort. "And remember, Sulphur and the others are not to know a word of this!"

When they parted, Jennifer did not return to her adobe. Instead, she hurried across the village, her thoughts racing. And they were strange thoughts that filled her mind to overflowing. She had never dreamed that what Jim Morningstar might choose to do could concern her so closely. And yet, she knew she loved him. Nothing else mattered.

Though occupied as she was with her thoughts, she was not wandering aimlessly. A glimpse of Carlotta, feeding Sui Chen's pheasants, turned her that way.

"Might I have a word with you?" Jennifer asked.

"Of course," Carlotta answered readily, but with little cordiality.

"It's about Jim." Unconsciously Jennifer stabbed the other girl by her easy use of that name. "He has unwillingly told me of this terrible bargain that has been offered him. He is to buy our release!" She paused, then said bluntly: "Carlotta, I believe that you engineered this affair from the beginning."

Carlotta's smile was coldly inscrutable.

"How can it concern you?" she countered flatly. "Jim Morningstar means nothing to you."

Jennifer's cheeks flamed. "Don't try to evade me," she said. "You want this man. This is your way of getting him!"

The smoldering defiance in Carlotta's dark eyes suddenly came to the surface. "And why not? I will take him any way I can get him. Who are you," she demanded, "to

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raise the question? I thought you were concerned only about Dr. Merriam."

**JENNIFER** rose to the occasion, determined to fight Carlotta on her own terms. "You are quite right," she said with surprising calm. "Dr. Merriam and I are interested only in leaving here as quickly as possible. But I resent being indebted to Jim Morningstar in this fashion. There is no reason why he should make any sacrifice for us."

"To call his acceptance of what we are offering him a sacrifice is a rather strange point of view," Carlotta observed coolly, completely taken in by Jennifer's speech. "As our business agent with the outside world, he will be free to come and go as he pleases, and he will have wealth beyond his dreams. Such faith as we shall repose in him might better be called an honor. If there is any sacrifice entailed, it lies in the rather amusing fact that he hesitates over his acceptance because he feels he will be cutting himself off from you, Miss Orme. It seems he imagines himself in love with you."

Jennifer felt her throat tighten, and she strove to dissemble the excitement the words produced in her.

"That is absurd," she said evenly. "He . . . he could hardly mean anything to me."

"I should tell him that," Carlotta suggested. "It will make his decision very easy, I assure you."

"I shall tell him," Jennifer answered.

She turned away, her pulses pounding. "I shall tell him," she thought, "but it will be to say that I love him, that I would rather spend my life here than have him barter himself away like this!"

She went to Jim's place at once, only to find he was not there. Boo Chung, Jim's servant, finally appeared. From him she learned that Jim had gone to Sui Chen's office.

Fearful of what it meant, she hastened there. Jim stepped out as she neared the door. The gravity of his expression did not reassure her.

"Jim, what have you done?" she asked anxiously.

"I have accepted Sui Chen's offer," he said soberly. "I have given my word and oath before witnesses."

"Oh, Jim . . . Jim, why did you do it?" she entreated, her eyes filling with tears. "You told me you would wait."

"I couldn't wait, Jennifer. It had to be this way. It will be best for us all."

"No, Jim, that isn't why you gave in," Jennifer said quietly. "You agreed because you love me, because you thought it was the only way I could be returned to my people." Her hands caught his. "Oh, my darling," she whispered. "I can't go—not this way!"

Morningstar could only gaze at her in his surprise, words beyond him for the moment. Before he could speak, the door opened behind them. Sui Chen stepped out.

"Miss Orme," he said, "you will be prepared to leave tomorrow for Piute. Dr. Merriam and the other men will accompany you."

## CHAPTER XVII

### SALTERS STRIKES

**Y**UH say we're goin' out o' here, an' soon?" Sulphur Riley exclaimed. "Waal! I been waitin' to hear that, Jim! There's been more'n enough desert in my dish to do me fer a while."

Johnnie and Hap agreed. "Reckon it's about time we got back to punchin' cows," said Hap. "I suppose we'll all be driftin' back to Humboldt County, eh, Jim?"

Jim shook his head. "I won't be going with you this time, boys."

"Huh?" They stared at him, arrested.

"What yuh mean, yuh won't be goin' with us?" Sulphur demanded suspiciously. "What is there to keep yuh here?"

"Sui Chen has made me a business proposition," Jim told them. "One that's so attractive I've decided to accept it." It was said easily enough and without any hint of what his decision was costing him. But Sulphur continued to study him shrewdly, his long face even more serious than usual.

"There's somethin' funny here," he declared. "Yuh save Merriam's neck an' git us turned loose—an' then yuh ain't tellin' us nothin'! What's the answer?"

But Jim refused to satisfy his curiosity. "The success of the proposition depends on its secrecy," he lied. "All I can say is that what I'm doing is of my own free will. Does that satisfy you?"

Plainly it did not. Sulphur did not take kindly to the idea of leaving him behind when they went out of the valley. They were still arguing the matter when the ear-filling blast of a conch horn coming from somewhere across the valley smote their ears.

The next moment Morningstar whirled in time to see a dozen horsemen burst from the edge of the town; Quan Goon at their head. They made for Wu-tai-shan Mountain at a slashing pace.

"Somethin's wrong!" Johnnie exclaimed. "An' there wouldn't be all this hullabaloo unless it was pretty serious!" Jim nodded curtly.

Quan Goon and his followers could be seen approaching the mountain. They were taking the trail to the mine. Even as Jim and the others watched, they flicked out of sight behind a rocky shoulder.

"Somethin' doin' up there, that's shore!" Hap declared.

A moment later Sulphur held up his hand warningly. "Listen!" he cried. "Hear that? That's shoot-in!"

He was right. The popping of gunfire came clearly to their ears on the still air. Morningstar was asking himself what it could mean when, without warning, Quan Goon and his men reappeared. This time they were racing away from the mine.

"Now what?" Johnnie grunted.

HE had his answer at once. Scarcely had the Chinese cleared the flank of the mountain, in full flight now, before their pursuers appeared. Jim saw better than a score of men in that loosely strung-out band, dwarfed by distance, yet clearly discernible for what they were. His jaw dropped.

"White men!" he cried. "Salters! It couldn't be anyone else!"

The sound of firing grew sharper. As if conscious that nothing less than disaster lay in retreat, Quan Goon was making a desperate stand. Even Jim could tell that it was hopeless. Steadily the Chinese were being driven back, despite the fact that others hurried to their support. Suddenly Quan Goon dashed toward the village.

Sulphur and the punchers followed it all alertly. Jim was brought to himself by the sound of running feet near at hand. He turned to see Jennifer approaching.

"What is it, Jim?" she exclaimed breathlessly. "What's happening?"

He was explaining as much as he knew, when he espied Sui Chen and Quan Goon making for him. Carlotta appeared a moment later, but it was to the men that Jim turned his attention.

"Morningstar, you are one of us now! You must help!" Quan Goon said roughly. Sui Chen was more temperate, grave as his mien showed the situation to be.

"Can we count on you?" he asked.

Jim's nod was brief. "Provided I'm given a free hand."

"Of course," Sui Chen said without hesitation. He looked at Quan Goon for agreement. But whatever the latter might think of Jim Morningstar, he had a real respect for his fighting ability. He assented curtly.

"It is in your hands," he said.

Jim turned to the punchers. "I'll expect you to look after Miss Orme, boys," he said briskly. "This is my fight—"

"Yeah?" Sulphur tossed back, grinning. "Waal, if it's yores, it's ours, too. Jest give us our guns!"

Jim turned to Jennifer. Carlotta stepped forward and spoke before he could open his lips. "I'll see that Miss Orme is safe," she told him.

It was all Jim wanted. He turned away, accompanied by Sui Chen, Quan Goon and the cowboys. Jennifer stood rooted for a moment, gazing after them. When she turned, it was to speak to the other girl accusingly.

"You won, Carlotta—and now it has come to this!" she said bitterly, anxiety tearing at her. "Jim Morningstar may be killed as a result of this terrible mistake!"

But Carlotta was undisturbed, almost serene. "I think you underestimate Mr. Morningstar's abilities," she answered. "I have every confidence that he will be able to take care of himself. Come." She added in a voice so low Jennifer did not hear: "He carries the green dragon!"

Morningstar's first concern was to find out exactly how matters stood. Salters' outfit was being held at bay momentarily by virtue of a natural

advantage in the throw of the ground a quarter mile from the village. The Chinese were fighting desperately, but it did not take Jim long to learn that their defense must crumble eventually. Even as he arrived he saw a man start up from behind a ledge, drop his rifle, and then pitch down. He had been shot through the head. Another was binding up a shoulder wound.

Sui Chen turned to Jim with a hopeless gesture. "They are demons, those men! We can never drive them back!" he cried.

Jim didn't bother to answer, but swung to Quan Goon. A plan had already taken shape in his mind. "Order your men to fall back slowly," he directed above the crack of rifle fire. "I'll take a bunch and drop back to the village at once." Quan looked his question.

"Sui Chen is right," Jim told him. "We can't hope to deal with Salters in the open. If we climb the roofs on the edge of town it'll be a different story!"

The four white men had been given their guns. Jim picked a number of Chinese who were instructed to follow his bidding. They made for town quickly.

On the edge of the village two flat-topped adobes stood opposite



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"Get up on one of those roofs with half of these men," Jim told Sulphur. "Johnnie and Hap and the rest will take the other one!"

His words came with a force and drive that told the Chinese he knew what he was about. At once his instructions were carried out. "Salters' crowd will be along," he called to his friends. "Wait till they come close. Then let 'em have it!"

Sulphur nodded, his head thrust over the edge of the roof. "Jest leav' it to us!"

JIM hurried back to where the fight was raging. The invaders were, advancing steadily, Quan Goon's men falling back as they fired. Jim got a glimpse of Salters. Bronc Yeager was with him. Jim knew the owl-hooter was responsible for whatever success the renegades were having. Throwing his rifle to his shoulder, he flung a shot at Yeager. Smoke drifted out there and the brush obscured his vision, so he couldn't tell whether he had made a hit or not. But a moment later he heard Bronc's bull voice urging his men on to fresh efforts.

The invaders rallied to such effect that suddenly the Chinese broke. Morningstar didn't try to hold them. "Get back to the buildings!" he cried.

Quan Goon was still fighting fiercely. He was using a Spencer .56, one of the old-time buffalo guns, a blunderbuss that had found its way into the valley from nobody knew where. He and Jim covered the rear, checking the renegades' advance, but retreating steadily in the direction of the adobes.

Jim had lost his hat minutes ago. One slug clipped the hair at the side of his head, another droned off his rifle stock. Oblivious of the danger, he stopped in his tracks to answer

hotly. Quan Goon remained at his side, refusing to leave.

Suddenly the stamp of iron-shod hoofs fell on their ears. Jim knew what that meant. Salters' men were taking to the horses again, ready to follow the retreating Chinese into the village with a rush.

"Get up on the nearest roof!" Jim flung at Quan. "Hustle!" Seeing the Oriental run for one of the adobes, he headed toward the other. He didn't know whether he had time to make it or not. Salters' crowd was coming fast; he could hear their cries and the scattered firing.

Leaping to a window sill, he made a grab for the roof's edge. It was too high to reach. Jim's heart sank. If the renegades swept close to find him here in the open, alone, they would mow him down like a condemned man being shot against a wall. Already their lead was clipping the leaves near at hand.

Suddenly a voice came to him from above. It was Sulphur's. The lanky cowboy was sprawled on the roof's edge. "Ketch hold of my hands!" he cried. "I'll haul yuh up!"

Reaching up, Jim felt a strong grasp close on his wrists. Sulphur heaved. Morningstar got his elbows over the edge. "O. K.," he panted. "You were just in time, Sulphur!" Even as he got to his knees he heard a guarded exclamation from the men crouched near at hand.

"Here they come!" someone called warningly.

Jim whirled as Salters and his men swept forward, dogging the Chinese who were retreating into the village. Morningstar read in their driving determination that they had seen all there was to see of the mine and knew what they were fighting for. No bloodthirsty pirates of the Yellow Sea had ever found richer

booty than these reckless renegades confidently expected to grab.

"Push 'em hard!" Jim heard Yeager's harsh yell. "We'll smoke 'em out like rats!"

Not yet had they sensed the trap into which they were riding. Jim's one fear was lest some overanxious defender should tip his hand by firing too soon. "Wait!" he commanded the men with him on the roof. "Let them get right up close! We'll make short work of this!"

The warning came too late, however, for the attackers were not yet fairly caught between the adobes when an excited Oriental fired. Coming from above, it was more than enough to warn Bronc Yeager what was afoot. Hauling in with a jerk, he bellowed: "Hold on! This is a trap!" The others followed his example, reining up uncertainly. Jim got a glimpse of Slade Salters, darting alert glances about.

To delay any longer would be fatal, so Jim raised his voice in a sharp command: "Let 'em have it, boys!"

**T**HE men on both roofs fired almost together, a ragged volley that came as a complete surprise to the invaders. The broncs dropped out from under two of their number as if pole-axed. Another man screamed with the pain of a bullet through his thigh. All were thrown into confusion, consternation written in their faces. The terrified horses got out of control, adding to the bedlam.

If the blast did not create even greater havoc, it was only because of the poor marksmanship of the Chinese. It had done its work, however. At a cry from Yeager, the renegades wheeled back. Jim saw the outlaw delay long enough to haul one of the dismounted men up behind him. He could have drilled

Bronc in that moment, but withheld the shot. Sulphur had passed up the same chance, but it was because he was having trouble with the bolt of his rifle.

A second, scattered volley was fired into the invaders as they started to draw off. It hastened their retreat. Jim sprang to his feet.

"We've got 'em on the run!" he exclaimed. "After them!" He waved to the men across the road.

They dropped from the roofs hurriedly, falling over one another. Quan Goon looked to Jim for instructions, all his doubts of whether the other was equipped to cope with the situation swept away.

"Horses," Jim ordered. "And spread your men out, Quan! We mustn't let Salters flank us!"

The horses were not long in coming. Swinging into the saddle, Jim saw to it that Quan mounted his own personal followers. Then he outlined what it was he wanted to do. The plan, briefly, was to draw a net about the invaders and drive them back the way they had come. It would work if it was carried out boldly.

Turning to his men, Quan spoke to them briefly in crisp Chinese. They nodded woodenly.

"You all savvy?" Morningstar demanded. More nods answered him. "Then let's go!"

His bronc leaped to the touch of his heels. Sulphur, Hap and Johnnie followed close behind him. They soon found, however, that they would be hard put to it to keep ahead of these fierce Orientals. If they were savage in attack, they were terrible in defense of their homes.

At a distance of several hundred yards, Morningstar saw Slade. The attorney and his men had hauled up, shielded by the brush and young

trees. A second later, sighting the oncoming riders, they blazed away with their rifles. Jim and his men poured forth an answering blast. Jim heard Yeager's aroused cry: "Git back! Keep a-goin', I tell yuh! They're too many for us!" The next moment the renegades turned their ponies' heads and raced back up the road leading toward the mine.

"Good work!" Jim exclaimed. "Don't let up on them for a second!"

He waved a number of men to one side, directing them to work around the enemy's flank across the fields. Sulphur swung off to see that the order was carried out. But Jim could not have asked for more willing co-operation than he was getting from the Chinese.

Riding hard, Jim attempted to overhaul Salters, slim as the hope appeared to be. Slade saw him coming. He whipped his gun over his shoulder and fired. The bullet screamed past Jim's face. Salters fired again. Each moment Jim expected his pony to fold up under him.

Thoughtlessly he had drawn ahead of the others in his anxiety to call Salters to account. He was recalled to himself sharply when Yeager and his men began to slow up deliberately.

"Jim!" Hap Failes cried. "Come back!"

**J**UST in time, Jim saw his danger and hauled up. A moment later his men reached him. The renegades were driving on toward the mountain again.

Along the flank of Wu-tai-shan Mountain huge piles of weathered and riven rock lay heaped where the elements had flung them down from the high crags during the years. It was toward this cover that Salters' men were making their way. Once



there, Jim knew it would be a different story.

The invaders reached the rocks just as Morningstar's force burst into the open a hundred yards away. Jim heard Bronc Yeager calling harsh instructions. A second later a storm of lead droned out of the rocks.

"Stop!" Jim cried out to his followers. "We won't throw any lives away here!"

He motioned them toward the gullies paralleling the mountain. Two horses were hit before they reached cover; a third screamed, rearing, and pitched down, almost pinning its rider. In the gully, Morningstar said: "Close in! We'll come at them from the side!"

He led the way, Sulphur, Hap and Johnnie at his heels. The Orientals followed. They reached the rocks. Sliding out of their saddles, they began to scramble upward. Soon they would be above the raiders.

But Yeager saw the danger before they could get in position. At his command, the renegades again fell back. They were working toward the mine. Once there they would be in a strong position.

Crawling from rock to rock, firing whenever he caught sight of a target, Morningstar advanced cautiously. Salters' crowd was fighting stubbornly, contesting every foot of the way. Reaching a point in the trail like a bottle neck, Jim saw that the enemy intended to hold them there if it was possible. Slugs whined off the rocks, making a death trap of the opening. But the attackers were not to be delayed. Suddenly a yelling Chinese sprang through and ran for a rock some yards beyond. He made it.

In ten minutes the advance was again in full swing. Dislodged time after time, the renegades retreated slowly up the trail. The mine stood on a shelf several hundred yards up

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the slope. Boulders surrounded the spot, affording excellent cover. Here Salters clearly intended to make his stand.

Jim was trying to figure a way of forcing Slade and his men back into the mine, where they could be pinned effectively, when a calm voice from behind him said:

"I knew I was making no mistake when I told myself what to expect from you." He turned to see Carlotta standing there, self-possessed and cool.

Morningstar frowned. He was about to order her back sharply when Sulphur Riley gave vent to a harsh cry of surprise.

"By gopher, what do you think of that?" he demanded, striding toward Jim.

"What is it?"

"With Salters there! Who do yuh think they got with 'em? Huck Mulhall!" Sulphur answered his own question. "I jest seen him up there! Darned if that curly wolf ain't got the law behind him!"

A moment later Jim got a glimpse of Mulhall standing on the mine apron. Jim stared, arrested. For the moment he couldn't find a thing to say. Sui Chen, Quan Goon and Carlotta had also recognized the sheriff. What could this mean?

Jim didn't know. But of one thing there was no slightest doubt whatever. This, he reflected grimly, was precisely the kind of situation for which he had been made a member of the Wu-tai-shan Company. Could he meet it?

Catching Carlotta's gaze on him, he saw a look on her face which said the problem was squarely up to him.

*Why is Sheriff Mulhall siding Slade Salters' renegades? Will the Chinese continue their struggle now that the law has entered Ping-an-shanku? The concluding installment of "GHOSTS OF THE RIMROCK," which tells the exciting adventures still in store for Jim Morningstar and his friends, appears in next week's issue.*

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ACTUAL COLOR PHOTOGRAPH—Bennett Partin, North Carolina tobacco farmer, shows flowering tobacco plant—from which seeds are obtained. U. S. Gov't methods of raising tobacco are used on Mr. Partin's farm. Below: Mr. M. J. Moye in action.



# "UNCLE SAM LENT A HAND

making tobacco better-than-ever

and Luckies have bought the cream of these better-than-ever crops," says M. J. Moye, warehouseman for 18 years

**SMOKER:** "How did Uncle Sam lend a hand?"

**MR. MOYE:** "The U. S. Government Experiment Stations showed farmers new methods of growing tobacco."

**SMOKER:** "And that's why you say crops have improved in recent years?"

**MR. MOYE:** "Yes. Even though crops do vary with weather—tobacco today is better than ever."

**SMOKER:** "Does the tobacco that goes into Luckies come from these improved crops?"

**MR. MOYE:** "Yes, sir. Luckies always *have* bought the finer tobacco sold on my warehouse floor. That's the reason I've smoked them myself for years. And it's also the reason why Luckies are the 2-to-1 favorite of independent tobacco men—buyers, auctioneers and warehousemen."

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