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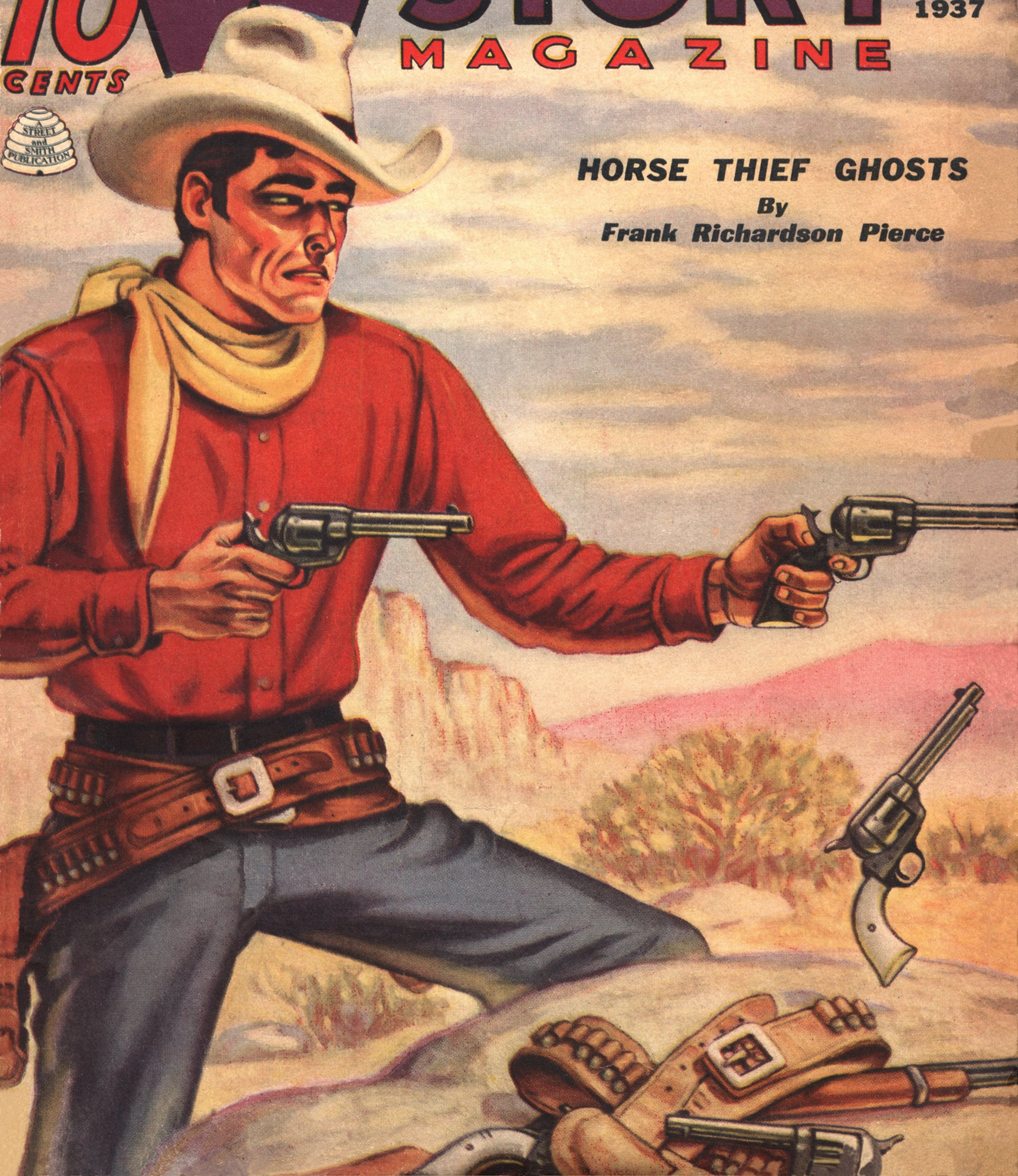
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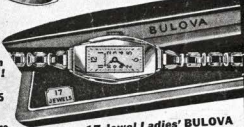
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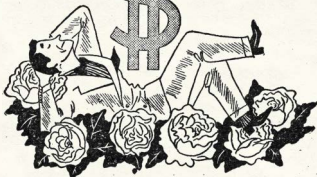
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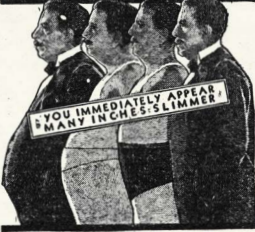
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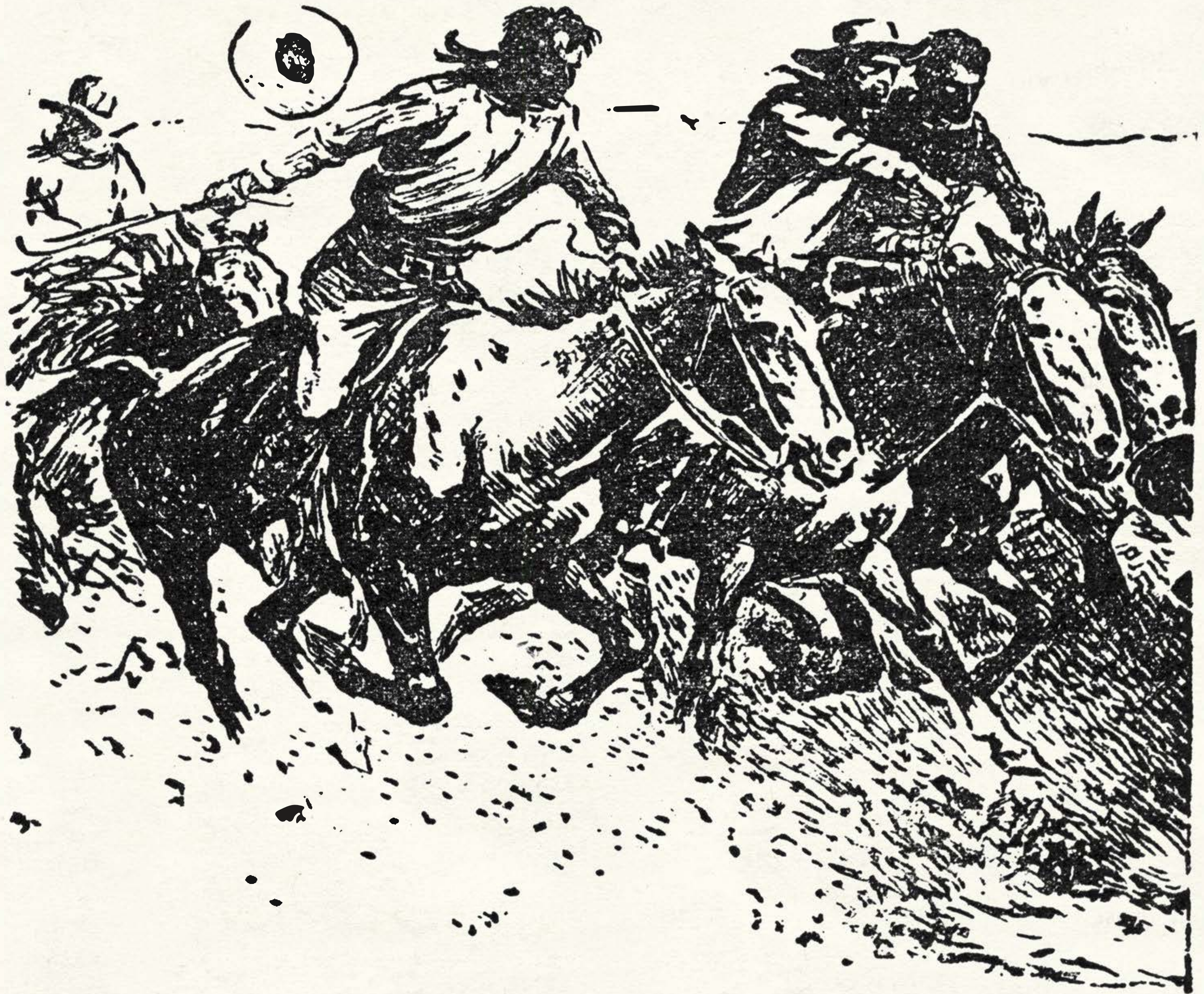
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HORSE THIEF GHOSTS

By **FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE**

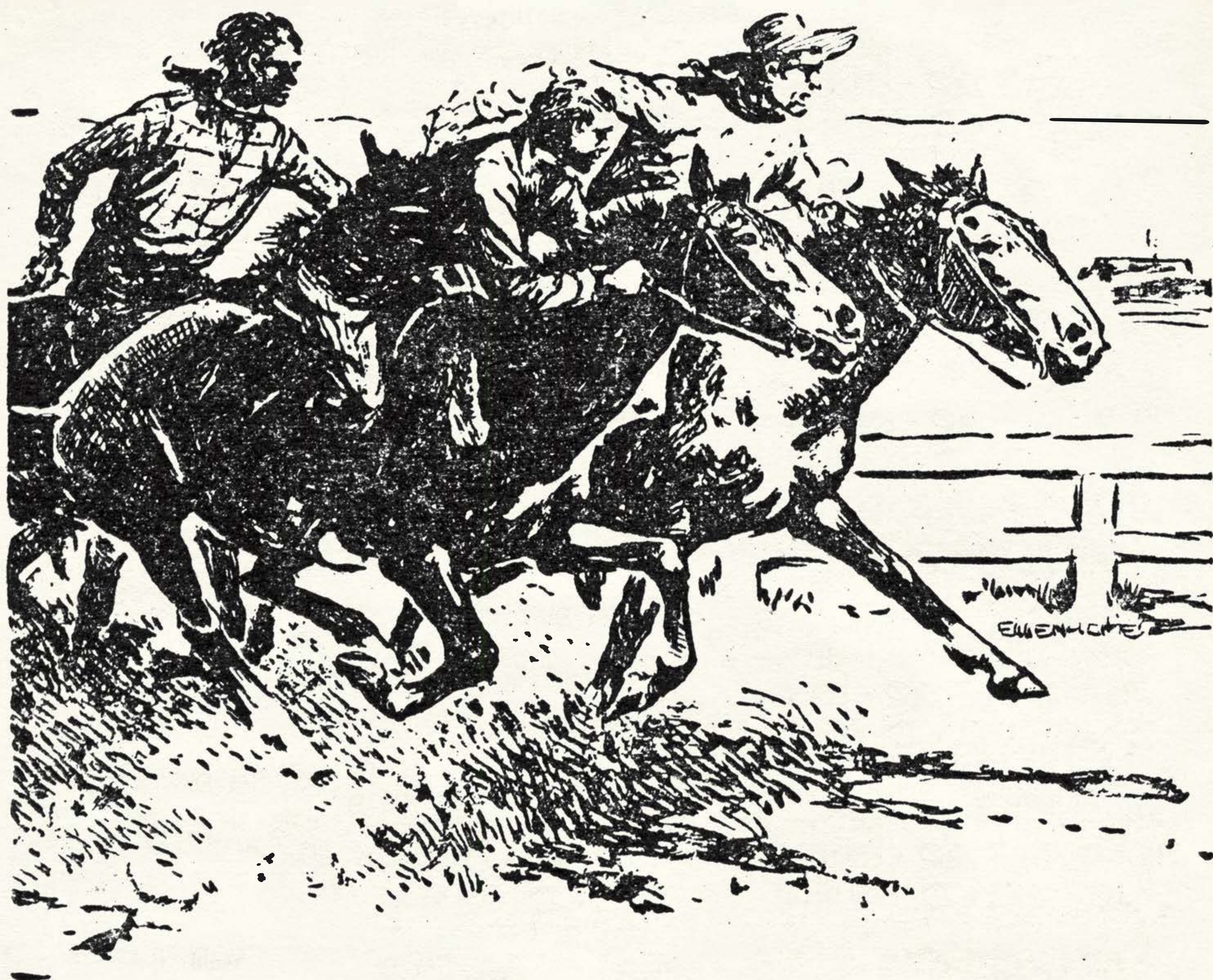
Author of "Night Rider's Last Ride," etc.

CHAPTER I.

ACE HORSE THIEVES.

AS long as "Rod" Barry could remember he had always stood close to his brother Scott. Perhaps it began in the orphanage when they stood shoulder to shoulder and fought off groups of larger boys bent on tormenting them. Pos-

sibly it was because Rod had comforted Scott when the little fellow's nightmares started him shrieking in his sleep. Rod had always comforted him. The nightmares were frequently the same—Scott saw a man hanging from a cottonwood limb. As for Rod, he dreamed of a big ranch house, with range that rolled to the horizon, range dotted with thousands of horses.



Rod and Scott Barry stood close together now as they leaned on the bar, drank slowly and talked to the American who ran the saloon on the Mexican side of the border. The bartender polished the bar with a soiled towel and unburdened his mind. "Maybe you noticed that flashy dressed dude that just bought a drink?" he said.

The pair nodded. "He's the slick-est customer that ever hit these parts. He buys horses stolen from the big ranches north of the border. They claim he got sick of dealin' with fools that was always gettin' caught, so he picked up a couple of smart, educated kids, then sent them along the border to learn all the tricks of the cattle rustlin' and horse-thief business. He paid 'em while they was learnin' and then turned 'em loose."

"Is that so?" Rod said, finishing his drink.

"Yep, I'm givin' it to you straight. The boys send a few head of Circle R stock south every once in a while. Sid Roat, owner of the Circle R, is pretty near crazy. Bein' smart, the boys get away. Folks call 'em 'The Gray Ghosts,' the bartender said. "It's claimed this dude—his name's J. Harney Knox—has even trained a mare to lead rustled horses south. She's like these here carrier pigeons—always comes home."

"That's the darnedest thing I ever heard of," Rod said. "Well, s'long. Glad to have met you. Come on, Scott."

"Drop in again some time," the bartender said.

J. Harney Knox was mounting a horse when they emerged. He rode

slowly out of town, occasionally hailing some acquaintance. And once he stopped to tell a friend a story about a whisky drummer. He left the friend doubled up with laughter.

He stopped at a thicket which surrounded a water hole on the edge of town and waited. "Hello, Rod. Hello, Scott," he said as the pair rode up. "I suppose the bartender gave you a song and dance about me?"

"Yes, and us. It seems you are the monkey and we are the cat's-paws you are using to pull your chestnuts out of the fire," Rod said.

"But he didn't peg you as the Gray Ghosts?" Knox said. "That's fine. I can use fifty head of Circle R horses next week. Get 'em. Roat won't be expecting another raid so soon. But you'll have to go deeper, and well beyond the boundary of the old Banning-Lawrence ranch."

"I'd like to see that ranch," Scott said. "You should see it, too, Rod; it might be something like the place you're always dreaming about."

Rod nodded, his eyes on the flashily dressed man. "Listen here, Knox, that bartender set me to thinking. I know you took us from the orphanage, sent me, my brothers and sisters to a good school. You paid for our horse-stealing education, too. But why should we go on stealing Circle R horses to square the account? It seems to me you're cashing in on our appreciation. The debt can be paid off in some other way."

"This is the way your father wanted it paid off. I owed him a lot, boys," Knox said. "He was a good friend. I'm carrying out his wishes."

"You haven't told us everything," Rod suggested.

"I had to hold back to determine whether you had the stuff your fa-

ther believed you would have. I was trying to help him the night Roat and his men found him with a bunch of Circle R horses," Knox said. "It was a running fight. They brought him down with a shot. Roat's shot. Then they hanged him. Before he died, Roat asked him if he had anything to say."

"What did he say?" Rod asked.

"He said, looking at me standing in the crowd under the tree: 'Roat, I've got three boys and some girls. The youngest is a baby, the others are almost babies, but I've seen enough to know they've got the stuff in them. If they were men you wouldn't do this to me. Some day they will be men. If there's a friend within sound of my voice, I hope he lives to tell my boys what happened this night. I hope he guides them, then turns them loose, Roat, to square this account.'"

Knox looked at the two pairs of bright eyes before him, and the flushed faces. He knew he had reached the spot he was seeking, and that they would never question his motives again. "What did Roat say?" Rod asked.

"He had a queer, almost-scared look in his eyes, as if he was afraid the prophecy might come true," Knox answered. "I've got a hunch it'll come true."

"He's caught many a man-stealing his horses, hasn't he?" Scott asked. "I heard he was responsible for the death of both Banning and Lawrence of the B-L Ranch. You say he hanged dad. I know of others. He must be a powerful man."

"The most dangerous man in the country," Knox said. "There's only one angle I can't figure out now. There's a girl up in that country now. She has a colt they claim she got from the Indians. A girl, with a colt—if she's pretty and the colt

has possibilities—might get your minds off your work. Leave the girl alone, but I might want you to get me the colt. That'll be the subject of later orders. Remember if you're caught, Roat will hang you. If you have to hide out, pick a good place. And never forget you're carrying out your father's orders. Good luck."

Without waiting for them to answer, he rode off. They looked at each other in silence. "Let's get those fifty head of Circle R horses," Rod said. Together they crossed the border and headed north.

THEY came over a ridge at sunset and stopped. A different world spread before them, a green, rolling world that vanished over the horizon. There was a creek, bordered with trees, and visible patches of water shimmered in the light of fading day. Horses dotted the range, and there was a likely band they could cut out and start south.

Rod's eyes included the big house among the trees, and a smaller and older structure in the distance. "The big house must be the Lawrence place," he thought, "and the smaller one, the Banning home. There's a cemetery between. A peaceful, sheltered spot, too."

"Pretty fine layout," Scott said. "But I was thinking Knox can be hard when he wants to. He's always ruled us with an iron hand."

"And I was thinking I understand now why the Bannings and Lawrences stopped here in the first place," Rod said. "And no wonder they were willing to die for it. Roat got both of them, and now this is his. I wonder whereabouts in this country our folks lived? I'm going to ask him some time."

"You're serious for once, Rod,"

Scott said. "Usually you'd be wondering about the girl with the colt." He waited until the shadows settled, then said, "Let's get those nags moving south."

They rode toward the band and started it moving, then suddenly Rod pulled up. "Those horses shied from something, first on the east side, then on the west. Men might be ambushed there. Let's find out."

He wheeled suddenly and started northeasterly on the dead run. Scott followed. Shadows emerged from boulders, mounted horse-like shadows and pounded toward them. "You were right," Scott yelled. "They were waiting for us. There goes the first rifle bullet. And there goes—" He gasped suddenly and pitched to the ground. His horse galloped fifty feet beyond and dropped.

Rod wheeled. "Hurt bad?" he asked.

"Leg. Bullet went through my leg and killed the horse," Scott answered. "Drop me somewhere and clear out."

"Like hell!" Rod retorted. "There's an old mine I know of if we can reach it." He helped Scott into his own saddle, lifted the contents from the dead animal's saddlebags, mounted and raced on. The country seemed alive with men, turning them first one way then another.

A half hour later Rod's horse was hit. He dismounted and ran beside it, heading for shale which would cover their tracks. As the horse dropped, Rod pulled his brother from the saddle. He carried him a mile with but scant rest, then pointed. "Get in there and stay. I'm going to make it to the nearest water hole. I know it'll be guarded, but—we've got to have

water. There's none fit to drink in the old mine."

Rod Barry licked his dry, alkali-dried lips, lifted his head cautiously and stared at the armed figure guarding the water hole. He picked up a rock the size of a baseball, stood up and hurled it with all his strength. The rock struck the man behind the ear, and he dropped, rolling over on his back, his deputy sheriff's badge gleaming in the sunlight.

Rod never touched him. He filled the canteens and slipped away, half amused when he pictured what would happen when the man regained consciousness. "He'll think he fell asleep, rolled off that rock and cracked his head," Rod said. "And now, to get back."

Some distance from the water hole he stopped and drank briefly. He was worried about Scott. He had promised to go into the old mine and stay there. Scott was twenty-one, and Rod a year older. From habit Scott had taken orders, but there were times when he was restless.

Except in midday when the shadows were short, Rod Barry kept to the shadows. He shifted from gulch to gulch, crossing ridges only when necessary, then crawling through sage and mesquite. Frequently he saw riders, like statues on lofty hills, studying the lower country. Rod's heart pounded with excitement as he slipped under their very eyes at times.

The shadows lengthened, purpled as the sun dropped behind a range of saw-tooth mountains, then filled the draws to the brim. Rod took to the open country and made better time. Flesh had melted off his normally thin frame during the trek to the water hole. He felt weak and tired, but drove on. The timbered entrance loomed up at last. He en-

tered and bellowed. "I'm back, Scott. Strike a match."

His voice echoed hollowly. An eerie silence followed. "Scott." He spoke sharply and listened to the word echo through the tomblike drifts. A sense of foreboding filled him. He yelled again.

Again a tomblike echo mocked him, "Scott." He gripped his six-gun tightly, ready to fire at the flash of an attacker's gun, then struck a match. He saw Scott's blankets and the package of provisions they had carried to the mine. He lighted two candles and studied the mine floor. Boot-nail scratches on the rock proved men had staggered and stumbled about. "There was a fight," he said thickly. "And here's where Scott stood on his uninjured leg with his back to the wall. The slivers on the mine timbers are full of lint torn from his shirt. Here's more slivers filled with lint. A man with a hickory shirt slid by this timber and got him from behind. That settles it. Either a sheriff's posse or some of the Circle R outfit trapped him."

Rod sat down and studied the situation from all angles. "I can't figure out how they located him," he reflected. "Shale in front of the entrance cover footprints as soon as a man lifts his boot." He sniffed and caught the odor of wood smoke. He picked up a candle and made his way deeper into the shaft. The light picked up a foul pool of mine seepage and several charred pieces of wood. It was clear enough now. Scott, desperate for water, had crawled to the pool, built a fire with the intention of boiling, then drinking the water. "And somehow the smoke betrayed him," Rod concluded. "I've an idea I know where the Circle R outfit is camped tonight," he said suddenly.

HE slung a canteen over his shoulder and struck across country, climbing a gradual slope until he gained its crest. A stiff wind swept across the desert, howling across the arroyos and setting the sands to whispering of long-forgotten tragedies.

The valley below the ridge was black velvet—black velvet on which lay a single, flaming ruby. "That'll be their camp fire," Rod said briefly. "I wonder if they'll be expecting me." The place was known as Granite Tanks, because of the granite formation and the unfailing water supply in the gravel beneath an ancient waterfall. There were several acres of coarse grass, a few cottonwood trees, clumps of mesquite and a rusty iron pump that men often primed with the remaining water in their canteens.

To avoid the blowing sand on stormy nights, travelers spread their blankets some three hundred yards from the cottonwoods, where sheer cliffs turned back the sand-burdened wind.

Rod Barry circled Granite Tanks, then crawled slowly toward the camp fire. A half moon cleared the rim rock and flooded the spot, brightening the dancing cottonwood leaves. Rod raised up slightly and saw a half dozen horses cropping the coarse grass, a man splitting wood and several others grouped about the fire. A bulky individual dominated the group. It was Roat.

"The cuss we caught up in the mine was one of the Gray Ghosts, sure," he declared. "Most horse thieves cut and run for it at the first sign of danger. But the Ghosts are different. Some claim they're brothers. I've never seen them close up. All I know is they stick together. The other one will show up if we wait long enough."

"We'll let him hang until he does, eh?" a hard-faced rider suggested.

"Yes," Roat answered briefly.

"Let him hang," Rod repeated. "Let him hang!" He turned so suddenly and with such deadly fury, he almost revealed his position. His eyes desperately searched the immediate surroundings. He saw the cottonwoods and their nervous leaves fluttering in the wind, but nothing else capable of supporting a man's weight.

The moon lifted higher, then he saw—the grotesque shadow of a hanged man. It came toward him, then retreated, a grim thing swinging pendulumlike in the wind. He covered Roat with his six-gun, then fought down the impulse to fire. "I've got to use my head," he said wretchedly. "I'd get Roat, blast him, but his men would riddle me."

Complete calmness returned slowly and with it a deadly grimness. "Roat's right," he muttered. "He knew I'd come, but he isn't expecting me so soon." He lifted his eyes to the hanged man. "And I thought you'd be safe, Scott, or I'd never have left you in that mine."

An hour passed. The wind kept up its incessant moaning and the sand its whispering. The shadow swung up to him, then retreated, with measured regularity. Some of the men rolled up in their blankets and began sleeping. Rod saw that they were as exhausted as himself.

Roat stood up and again Rod fought down the impulse to pour lead into the rancher. "It isn't likely the other Ghost will show up to-night," he said. "Chances are he's around some water hole trying to fill a canteen. But we'll stand guard just the same. He'll come up the canyon and if the moon's still up he'll see his brother on the end of the rope. He'll look. That'll give

whoever is on guard a chance to get the drop on him. And we'll decorate that limb with another horse thief. Where's Sam Moss?"

"Here," a voice answered from the shadows.

"You take the first trick, Sam," Roat directed. "Mike will relieve you at four in the morning. Take this sawed-off shotgun, and if the other cuss shows up, give him one chance to reach for air. If he don't, let him have it."

"Yes, sir," Moss answered. He picked up the shotgun and passed within twenty feet of Rod. Moss selected a thicket a hundred feet from the cottonwood and settled down for his watch.

The others prepared to turn in. Rod saw them shaking out blankets and smoking. Sid Roat appeared elated over the day's work. "Sorry my boy Joe isn't in on this," he said.

"Where's Joe?" one of them asked. "Sparkin' Eileen Logan, the new schoolmarm," Roat answered. "He sure has the girls eatin' out of his hand." He laughed loudly.

Rod waited patiently, watching the camp fire die down and the men gradually sink into deep sleep. He began crawling from the scene, his eyes set on Sam Moss's thicket. He swung behind the man and approached with increasing caution. He lifted his head like a stalking catamount, located Moss, then crouched. Less than five feet separated them. Rod Barry leaped. One arm went about Moss's throat and caught it in the crook of the elbow; the other hand threw the shotgun clear. Moss struggled desperately to escape from Rod's grasp. He partly succeeded as they went to the ground.

Rod's thumbs sank deep into Moss's throat. At the same time

he shifted his weight to the man's stomach and chest and pinned him to the ground. His face looked oddly white in the moonlight. It seemed frozen with a sort of horror and there was terror in his eyes. Rod realized Sam Moss was only a boy—perhaps seventeen. Suddenly the resistance left Moss's body and the sense of what was happening went out of his eyes.

Rod bound his hands and feet, then stuffed a gag into his mouth and bound it tightly. He looked intently at the camp and realized Scott's body was visible whenever the sleepers awakened and looked that way. "And somebody's certain to wake up during the night," he reflected. He made his way to the rope. It had been passed over a limb and the free end secured to a lower limb.

HE untied the rope and lowered the body to the ground. Tears blurred Rod's eyes as he loosened the noose. "Scott—kid, brother," he half sobbed. "It's going to be tough, riding alone." He carried the body reverently to the thicket, then picked up Sam Moss and carried him to the cottonwood.

Rod shot apprehensive glances toward the camp as he worked, substituting Sam Moss for Scott. He hauled Moss to a standing position, then lifting with his left arm, and hauling in the slack with his right, he managed to swing Moss to the approximate level Scott had occupied. He secured the free end and returned to the thicket. He mopped his brow and breathed easier. "If anybody wakes up they'll see him swinging there and think it's Scott," he panted. "But my work's only started."

Rod Barry lifted his brother's remains in his arms once more and

struck off through the brush, a man bowed with grief and the burden he carried. Pictures of other and happier days came to his mind. At first they were torture, but presently he treasured each.

There was Scott toddling around the floor of the old ranch house; Scott's first day in school; their hunting expeditions together; their mad rides on outlaw horses. There was Scott, reckless and daring. And Scott at eighteen stealing Rod's girls from him. "And Scott always ready to help me out of any jam I got into," he muttered. "A week ago you were twenty-one. And now you—"

On and on he went through the moonlight, moving steadily among ghostly valleys, hardly noticing the drifting coyotes; hardly hearing the night sounds of joy and tragedy. He left his burden in the brush, roped two horses in a pasture and borrowed a pack and riding saddle from a near-by barn. He lashed Scott to the pack saddle and rode slowly from the little ranch.

An hour after sunset Rod tied the pack horse in a thicket and galloped across country to a small settlement. He entered the saloon and found a swamper cleaning up the place and getting ready for the brisk business that would develop in the afternoon. "I want to use your telephone," he said.

"Help yourself," the swamper answered.

Rod called the undertaker at Dry Falls and spoke briefly. "Yes," he repeated, "you take the Sage Hill cut-off and drive on to Alec Land's ranch. I'll expect you by noon."

He paid for the call and left, confident that the swamper had not heard the brief, low-spoken conversation. "I hated to take a chance like this," he reflected, "but it had

to be done. The swamper was pretty well ginned up and talking to himself, so the chances are he didn't pay much attention to me." Rod picked up the pack horse and shortly before eleven o'clock pulled up on the Sage Hill cut-off.

An hour later Rod heard a buckboard coming. He masked his face, pulled on gloves to conceal his rope-scarred hands, drew his six-gun and stepped into the road. "Stick 'em up!" he ordered. The undertaker dropped the lines and raised his hands. "Nobody needs you at the Land ranch," he explained. "That was a trick to get you headed this way. The job's here."

"One of the Gray Ghosts," the undertaker gasped nervously. "Listen, mister—"

"Keep your shirt on," Rod snapped. "Nothin's going to happen to you. Drive off the road and up the canyon." He searched the man for possible weapons, then waved him on.

"I'd heard you two boys would go through hell for each other," he said, "but I never thought the man lived who'd take the risk you're taking. The idear, calling up, then meeting me!" He shook his head, as if such loyalty was beyond his comprehension.

"He's my brother," Rod said briefly. "Sid Roat hanged him." His tone spoke volumes.

The man started to say something about Sid Roat's reputation for hanging cattle rustlers and horse thieves, but thought better of it.

Rod waited patiently, his head bowed with grief, his gloved hands resting on the saddle horn, until the man returned. "I've done my best," he said. "The casket is on the buckboard. Here are some things I found in the pockets of your brother's clothes."

Rod thrust a notebook, pencil, silver watch and several coins into his pocket, then handed the undertaker a roll of bills. "Take out what's due you," he directed.

"Don't get mad because I'm shooting off my mouth," the other said, "but I've seen plenty of horse thieves in my time, but you sure do take the cake. How does it happen two fine boys like you took up so dangerous a business?" He returned Rod's money and pocketed his own share.

"Forces sometimes take charge of men's lives," Rod answered. "Your trail is blazed for you, and you take it. Some men are dealt a poor hand and they play it well. Others are dealt a good hand and play it poorly."

"I'd sooner play a poor hand well," the man observed.

"That is what I'm trying to do," Rod answered. "You take this horse and the pack horse and ride back to Dry Falls. Turn 'em loose and they'll likely go home. I'm taking your buckboard. You'll get it back. If you don't I'll pay the damage."

"All right. You've treated me square and I'll keep my mouth shut," the man promised.

"I wouldn't do that. I'd talk. If this day's business is ever found out, and you haven't mentioned it, you're liable to be accused of aiding a horse thief," Rod warned. "Take your time getting back to Dry Falls, though. I'd like a twenty-four-hour start on Sid Roat and the sheriff."

CHAPTER II.

TEACHER'S PET.

IN the shadows of late afternoon Rod Barry stopped before a small cemetery located on a high knoll. Nodding pines kept eternal vigil. Once the spot had been well

kept. There were iron posts with sagging chains to keep out marauding cattle, but some of the chains had broken. Once the tombstones were erect, but now many of them sagged and two had fallen. The formerly well-kept plots were overgrown with weeds. And the grass was thick and coarse. It had not been cut in years.

Rod selected a spot, dug a grave with care, lashed the casket with a rope snubbed around a tree, and lowered it into the grave. He read briefly from a small, worn Bible, then completed his grim task. He stared a long time at the mound, then sighed. "And that leaves me to finish a job dad started years ago," he said. "And if I don't finish it—it'll never be done."

His gaze shifted to the headstones—imperfect records of pioneers' efforts to tame a wild land. There were short graves of children unable to withstand the rigors of the new land; long graves of those who had grown to manhood. But the span of life of most was brief. Few men lived beyond thirty—cut down by an enemy's bullets. And most of the women, tired out at forty, had died soon after. "And when I place a tombstone on Scott's grave," he said, "it'll show he died at twenty-one. The West doesn't change."

He climbed thoughtfully onto the buckboard and drove to the nearest store, a crossroads establishment smelling of bacon, flour, rope and spices. He bought overalls, a hickory shirt and a new hat. A mile from town he burned his old clothing, including a gray mask, then started the team toward Dry Falls. Half an hour later he crouched on the railroad right of way as a freight train approached, then leaped onto a flat car.

Shortly before midnight he un-

loaded, stumbled through the brush to Outlaw Creek, flung his exhausted body down on the grass and slept until dawn.

Rod ate food he had carried in his pocket, made himself presentable, then made his way to the Outlaw Creek schoolhouse. Two or three barefooted boys in overalls were playing on the hard, sun-baked grounds. A slip of a girl stood in the open door regarding him curiously. Her hair was brown and wavy, her eyes blue and filled with conflicting emotions. She had a mutinous chin and the finest complexion Rod had ever seen. He guessed she stood about five feet three inches and was around twenty-one. The pioneer breed was stamped all over her, and particularly in the cool, appraising gaze she turned on him as he stopped at the bottom of the steps.

She noticed his black hair needed trimming, and the black stubble lent his cheeks a blue appearance. It was evident she sensed he hadn't been born with the slight dent in his otherwise straight nose. She glanced keenly at his hand movements and judged he was swift and sure with a six-gun. Rod sensed her swift summing up of his characteristics. "Good morning, miss," he said.

"Good morning," she answered. A man would find her voice soothing after a hard day's work. "What can I do for you?"

"Put me in the second grade," he answered.

"What?" she gasped, then froze slightly.

"Maybe you'd better start me in the first grade, and if I'm good enough you could pass me," he suggested.

She colored and her eyes flashed

dangerously. "I'm in no mood for nonsense," she warned.

"Listen, lady," he said. "I'm serious. I was raised plenty far back in them hills. Seems like the school board forgot all about us. Ma tried to teach us kids. We learned suthin' of figgers and a bit o' readin' and writin', but a man ain't got much chance unless he can read papers he has to sign, or add up what money's comin' to him. It ain't agin' the law for a man my age—I'm twenty-two—to start in school."

"No, it isn't against the law," she admitted, "but you'll be the laughingstock of the range. And so will I."

His face darkened. "They can laugh at me," he said, "but they'll only laugh at you—once."

She studied him a long time and he felt uncomfortable and guilty under the intenseness of her gaze. "What is your name?" she asked.

"Rod Barry," he answered. "You're Eileen Logan, I've heard."

"Yes—Eileen Logan," she said. "Do you know anything about horses? Racing stock, I mean."

"I guess I've picked up about what the ordinary puncher does," he answered. "Why?"

SHE led the way across the school grounds to a trail, and stopped at a clearing a hundred yards from the school-yard boundary. A blue-black colt, with tail in the air, galloped about the clearing, shying at imaginary dangers and rolling his eyes until the whites showed. "I call him Blue Streak," she said.

"Blue Streak!" he exclaimed. "That was the name of the great stallion Hank Banning developed years ago."

"And the original Blue Streak caused a range war," she said. "I

am incurably romantic about this country as it was a generation or two ago. I know how the Bannings migrated from Kentucky to this country and brought with them their finest stock with the hope of creating a superbreed of harness and running horses. This is high country and Hank Banning expected great things from his horses."

"Go on," he urged. "I like to hear it. I can't resist a good horse. I spent three months runnin' down and bustin' a stallion—a wild one. Best horse I ever had. A fellow tryin' to dry-gulch me hit the horse instead. I'd sooner taken the bullet myself."

She looked at him a long time, as if she were trying to place him. She had seen his picture somewhere with those same eyes peering at her from an album, or perhaps it was from a reward poster tacked to a tree. "I believe you would have rather taken the bullet," she said. "In time we learn to love our horses."

"That old boy had saved my life a few times," he said. "Where did you get this Blue Streak?"

"I spent my vacation here instead of returning to my home back East," she explained. "I covered a lot of country and studied Indian tribes, legends and the early history of the Banning-Lawrence ranch. Banning was wild, reckless and gambled his money and life. But he knew horses. Lawrence was a steady influence. The two started the B-L on a shoe string. Their horses pulled down some big purses and their ranch grew. They built homes on adjoining ridges, with rich bottom land between."

"I've seen both places," Rod said. "They're run down, now."

"They owned everything south of Outlaw Creek, and controlled the grazing land north of it," Eileen con-

tinued. "Sid Roat bought the leased range north of the creek from the government and started his own stock ranch. Banning and Lawrence were friendly and said there was room enough for a dozen big horse outfits. Roat and the B-L got along fine until the original Blue Streak appeared on the scene. He was a broomtail with the bearing of a king, about a year old. He looked like a stallion the B-L had imported. But Roat claimed the colt belonged to him as it was the offspring of a mare a catamount had killed. Clawmarks on the colt tended to bear out that claim. Lawrence said they weren't catamount claws, but scars made by some human being to lend color to the story. Anyway, Banning had already branded the colt B-L and that settled it according to the unwritten range law."

"You have gone into the early history," Rod observed. "I heard that one thing led to another and there were frequent fights."

"There were. Lawrence was killed and Mrs. Lawrence took her children and left the country. Then Banning was killed and that left two widows with young children as owners," the girl explained. "They hired managers, but horse raising isn't very successful unless one can personally look after their business. The managers got into trouble with Roat's men; horse thieves raided the stock again and again, and finally the two widows sold off the remaining stock and divided the proceeds."

"Who owns the old B-L now?" Rod inquired.

"Mr. Roat took it over for the unpaid taxes," she replied. "He's a shrewd business man. He bought the B-L brand, also. He branded his second-grade horses with the brand and sold them on its reputation. That practically killed the

brand, and his Circle R became the symbol of quality."

"But you haven't told me where you got Blue Streak, the second," he said.

"He was one of a band of Indian horses," she replied. "I was struck with the similarity between the colt and what I had read of Blue Streak. I bought him on a hunch and there he is, branded L for Logan. Honestly, what do you think of him?"

"I think, with training, he'll go places," Rod said with enthusiasm. "I'd like the job." He felt a sudden stab as he remembered how Scott would have enthused over this superb colt. "Yes," he said to himself, "I'd like the job. It would help me forget a lot of things."

A BREATHLESS girl hurried up. She had a freckled face and disapproving eyes. Two pigtailed trailed down her back. "Teacher!" she exclaimed in severe tones. "Ain't we going to have no school to-day?"

"Molly," Eileen said sharply, "haven't I told you not to use 'ain't'?"

"How'm I goin' to find out if we're goin' to have any school to-day if I don't ask, ain't you?" Molly argued.

"All right," Eileen said wearily, "we'll see what can be done about it."

Rod followed teacher and pupil to the schoolhouse. "Good grief!" he thought. "I've slipped. I started talking like a hill-billy, then we got onto the subject of horses and I forgot my rôle. I hope she isn't as smart as she looks. She might get to wondering about me." He managed a grin, the first in some time. "If she ever thinks a hunted man is hiding out in her classes the deputy sheriffs will be ten deep around the schoolhouse."

Eileen's face betrayed nothing as she stepped behind her desk and called for order. She motioned Rod to step to the front of the room. "You train Blue Streak," she said in a low voice, "and I'll admit you to my classes."

"It's a deal," he replied, relieved that she had not noticed his earlier lapse from mountain-country lingo. "He's a wild cuss, but I'll gentle him."

"That'll be all for now," she said in her best school-teacher tone. "Find yourself a seat." Rod squeezed into one in the rear of the room. Eileen ordered silence. "When this country was settled," she said to the class, "it often happened that schools were not available, and youngsters grew to manhood unable to read or write. Rod Barry, here, is one of those unfortunates. He plans to study hard, and I shall expect help and consideration from each member of the class. That is all." She hesitated, then decided to treat him exactly as she did the others. She could hardly call him Mr. Barry. "Rod, you will see what you can do with the first reader."

Rod opened the book awkwardly and stared a long time while a tense silence filled the room. "See—mamma and—baby," Rod read haltingly. "Mamma—loves—baby—"

"That will do," Eileen directed. "Turn to the second-grade work."

"We have a—a—lut—lut—"

"Not 'lut,' Rod, but—little—"

"We have a little red hen," Rod continued. "Our lut—little red hen has—tuh—tuh—twelve chickens."

"That will do for now, Rod," Eileen said. "Study the spelling on the blackboard. Later I will give you an arithmetic examination."

A red-headed boy with more freckles than a turkey egg snickered and hunched down in his seat.

Eileen lifted her eyebrows and looked stern. "Tim, I said there would be no laughter. Come forward and hold out your hand." She picked up a ruler and waited. She read the protest in Rod's eyes, but her own plainly said, "You keep out of this."

Tim, barefooted and thin, thrust forth his hand. A frayed sleeve slid up his bony arm. She brought the flat of the ruler sharply across the palm of his hand. His shoulders winced slightly. "That didn't hurt," he shouted defiantly. She glanced at Rod and saw distress in his eyes. She set her jaw and brought the ruler down again. The impact cracked like a pistol. Tears filled Tim's eyes. "That didn't hurt!" he said loud enough for the class to hear.

"Of course it didn't hurt," Eileen said evenly. "Tim, my thought is to discipline, not hurt you."

She caught a glint of surprise mixed with admiration in his eyes, then a gleam of appreciation. She had given him, as well as herself, a chance to retire with honor, and he accepted. He walked sturdily back to his seat and sat down. He stared at a book without seeing its pages while the last flame of resentment blazed up once more. He looked hard at Rod Barry. "Teacher's pet," he hissed.

CHAPTER III.

HORSE THIEF RIDGE.

ROD BARRY left school with the others and made his way to a cabin a half mile away. A bow-legged old fellow wearing silver-rimmed spectacles was digging in a garden behind the cabin. "I'm Rod Barry," the latter said, "gettin' myself some book l'arnin' over at the school. Can you put me up for the winter?"

"I'm Ance Babcock," the old fellow said. He peered intently through his spectacles. "You look honest enough, though sometimes a man can't tell these days. Move in."

"I'll pay board and room," Rod offered.

"Nope, I'd sooner you bought your share of grub and help me with the work," Ance said.

"It's a deal," Rod agreed. He deposited his few belongings on a shelf, borrowed Babcock's razor and shaved. Then Babcock cut his hair and Rod sheared the old man's white locks.

"Looks like we're goin' to git on fine, son," Ance observed. "What's your business?"

"Punchin' cattle and trainin' horses," Rod answered. "I saved myself a dollar or two and figger to expose myself to some l'arnin' and I hope it takes."

"Come here," Ance said suddenly, "and tell me if Sid Roat's plantin' another tree on that there ridge." He indicated a ridge on the Circle R range. A dozen or so cottonwoods of varying sizes grew on the crest. Three men were planting a cottonwood about ten feet in height.

"There's a big cuss bossin' the job," Rod said. "Looks like he's wearin' pearl-handled six-guns. And the v're plantin' a tree."

"That's Roat," Ance declared. "So he's got him another hoss thief."

"I'm afraid I don't get your drift," Rod said.

"Bein' a stranger, chances are you don't. Seems like Sid Roat has trouble with hoss thieves," Ance explained. "Whenever he catches and hangs one, he plants a tree as a warnin' to other hoss thieves. It's like carvin' a notch on your gun."

"A tree for every thief," Rod observed speculatively. "Who does the

big cottonwood stand for?" He studied the line of trees. "It's the first to the right."

"That was planted when he caught Hank Banning dead to rights," Ance explained. "Some claim Hank was shot and hung before he died. Some favor the story Hank was dry-gulched and never hung. I kinda think Hank was hung, then somebody put a bullet through his back for luck. Humans are full of cussedness at times."

"But Banning was one of the big ranchers in these parts, wasn't he?" Rod inquired.

"Son," Ance answered, "when you're as old as I am you'll know a hoss thief is a hoss thief, whenever and wherever you meet him. And the penalty's the same. They's suthin' 'bout Hoss Thief Ridge up there that gits under a man's hide. Seems as how it's kinda rubbin' the disgrace in. It's a wonder some hoss-thief's pardner don't git even with Sid for plantin' a tree."

"Maybe they've tried it," Rod suggested. He knew that new tree stood for Scott, and the very sight of this monument to his brother's disgraceful death stirred the cold fires of resentment.

"Oh, I suppose they've tried it," Ance said. "But most folks rate a hoss thief below a sidewinder and are ready to back Roat's hand. Besides, he's 'bout the biggest man in these parts. Folks out for revenge tip off their hands by showin' it. It'll take a cool customer to reach him." Ance squinted at the ridge again. "Looks like Roat's headin' down this way. I'll introduce you. You never can tell when a big man like him might help you out."

Rod fought an inward battle with himself as Roat rode slowly toward the cabin. "I could kill him," he said again and again. "I could kill

him, but that isn't enough. That's only half enough." He lit a cigarette, puffed savagely a half dozen times, found the taste unpleasant, and tossed it away. "I've got to submerge my feelings," he told himself. "I've got to—yes, I've got to look him squarely in the eyes, shake hands with him and say, 'Pleased to meet you.'" He drew in a deep breath. "I wonder if I'm the cool customer Ance said might get Roat?"

ROAT was in fine humor as he pulled up in response to Ance Babcock's hail. His green eyes glittered with satisfaction and he waved benignly. Rod noticed the man's cheeks were red and puffy and lined with tiny veins. "Meet up with Rod Barry," Ance said. "He's a friend moved in to keep me comp'ny."

A picket fence stood between them, and Rod did not have to shake hands. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Roat," he said. "I've heard of you and I always like to meet folks I've heard about."

"Heard about me?" Roat inquired, obviously pleased. "Where?"

"Oh, I heard a couple of tough-lookin' customers down in a border joint say you'd run 'em clean out of the country," Rod answered. "They looked like horse thieves to me."

"Prob'ly were," Roat said. "Well, Ance, I hung one of the Gray Ghosts, I'll get the other, too."

"It'll be a mighty relief to ranchers hereabouts," Ance predicted. "How'd he act?"

"Turned plumb yaller when we dropped the rope around his neck," Roat said.

"You lie!" Rod panted.

"What's that?" Roat sharply demanded.

"I asked, why? Why'd he turn

yaller?" he said coolly, trying to cover up the outburst.

"The nature of the breed, I guess," Roat replied. Two others pulled up and spoke to Ance. With a start Rod realized one was the deputy he had knocked in the head at the water hole. The man tilted his hat forward so it wouldn't rest on a lump behind his ear. It gave him a devil-may-care attitude.

After dropping a few more comments, Roat and his companions moved on. The undertaker had evidently said nothing of his experience with Rod. Roat had said nothing of awakening in the morning, finding Scott's body gone and Sam Moss hanging from the cottonwood limb. Rod was puzzled.

He went to his room, sat down and began checking over Scott's belongings to make certain nothing would identify him as Scott's brother. As he looked through the pages of the notebook, he suddenly stopped. A hastily scrawled page read:

Rod: Roat's going to hang me. I'm sorry, as it leaves you alone to finish what we started to do. I know you'll find some way of giving me a decent burial. We shook hands on that two years ago. And you'll find this note. And you'll read these lines and find them blurred by your tears. We've been pretty close—closer than most brothers. I know how I'd feel if it were you. Keep your chin up. A kid, Sam Moss, is guarding me now. He feels sorry for me and is letting me write this. He may read it, I don't know. But he doesn't seem to be that breed. If he gets in your way in days to come, be easy on him. Well, they are coming. Roat is going to find one horse thief will start on the final reckoning without turning yellow. It isn't so hard when a fellow remembers his forefathers were men, and that his brother is a man.

Forgive all the trouble I caused you as a kid, and later. Consider my death as an incident to a man-sized job that's got to be done. Adios, you old horse thief, and dry your eyes.

Scott.

Rod Barry cached the notebook behind a wall log—then dried his eyes. "They don't come any gamer than Scott," he said.

When he appeared at the school the following day, Eileen informed him he had been promoted to the third grade. "You're doin' fine, teacher's pet," Tim Grant whispered. "Pretty soon you'll catch up with me. It's a cinch. I was in the first grade three years, the second two, the third two, and it don't look as if I'd get out of the fourth this year."

Rod settled down to his studies and said little the remainder of the week. The country to the southwest was being thoroughly searched for the surviving Gray Ghost. The children at school discussed it, repeating the comments their parents had made. There was talk that Roat had posted a reward of three thousand dollars for the Gray Ghost, alive. "Don't bring him in dead or you don't collect," the rancher was supposed to have said. "I want the fun of hangin' the cuss."

The school proved an ideal clearing house for facts and rumors. "It's the best hide-out I ever struck," Rod reflected. "I'm sorry I didn't think of it before. I know more of what's going on in these parts than the sheriff. I know every move Roat makes; where his men are searching, and where the sheriff has sent his deputies."

Friday afternoon Rod stayed after school. "I'm havin' trouble with my figgerin'," he explained. Eileen cleared up the difficulty while he scratched his head and looked stupid. "What about this Tim Grant?" he asked. "He's a hard case."

"He's one of eleven," Eileen explained. "He's been overworked and kicked about. He's hard and bitter and hates the world. The poor little fellow doesn't believe in

giving any one the best of it. 'Give 'em a dirty deal before they give you one,' is his code. He's the most difficult pupil I have ever known. He's calmed down since you joined my classes. I think he's afraid to make trouble."

She closed the school and followed Rod down to the pasture. They leaned on the rail and watched Blue Streak's antics. "What do you want for him?" Rod suddenly asked.

"He isn't for sale," she replied. "At any price."

"I'll give you a thousand dollars—money I saved for my l'arnin'—for a half interest," Rod offered.

"Sorry," she answered. "I want to own all of him."

"What are your plans?"

TO enter him in a few local races for the experience," she said, "and then—there is no need of denying it, I hope he will some day be a Kentucky Derby winner. In running through the early-day history of the Bannings and Lawrences, their dream was to breed a Derby winner. They never did. People say I am silly to grow so romantic over early-day things. I can't help it," she concluded with spirit, "and I'm not ashamed of it."

"Then you want me to go ahead in Blue Streak's training, with the Derby in view?" he asked.

"Of course," she said quickly, regarding him curiously through her keen blue eyes. "I naturally supposed you realized training the colt would be a full-time job until we know definitely whether he is the real thing or a flash in the pan. When the purses start rolling in, you'll be paid a salary. Until then you—"

"Until then you want me to string with you and gamble," he suggested.

"I hope you will."

"I hadn't figgered hangin' 'round here more'n six months," he informed her. "Then I saw the colt and later worked with him. It's changed my plans. That's why I wanted to buy a piece of him. I'll give you a thousand dollars and the colt my best love and attention for a quarter interest."

She smiled and shook her head. "Every one confirms my own opinion of the horse," she said. "Mr. Roat kept raising his price until he reached five thousand. I refused, even though I needed the money."

"Heh! Heh!" Ance Babcock chuckled as he joined them. "Danged tootin' Roat would like that blue feller. If he don't git him, chances are the Circle R will be losin' races hereabouts, and that's suthin' Roat can't stand. He hates losin' a hoss race almost as much as he hates hoss thieves."

"Does he?" Rod's eyes narrowed, but Babcock didn't happen to notice it.

Eileen noticed the narrowed eyes and caught something of the pent-up fury behind them. "My third-grade pupil," she thought, "is a dangerous man. But he knows horses. And he'll serve my purpose for a while. I wonder how far I can trust him. I wonder. I've never seen any one who wanted a horse more than he wants Blue Streak. You can see it in his eyes."

Eileen noticed, in the weeks that followed, that Rod Barry could get more out of the colt than any one she had ever known. He was infinitely patient. He never lost his temper when in a fit of high spirits the colt got beyond control.

On a bright Thursday morning he arrived at school ahead of the others and found her at her desk. "Where were you yesterday?" she asked. "And did you bring an excuse from

your parents? If not, I'm afraid I shall have to send you back for one."

"Here, teacher," he said humbly. He pulled a big red apple out of his pocket and handed it to her.

She flushed slightly. Tim Grant poked his head through an open window at that moment. "Yah!" he jeered. "Teacher's pet."

"Get out of there, Tim, or I won't let you ride Blue Streak again," Rod yelled. He grabbed the apple and hurled it at the boy. It bounced off the red head and rolled over the hard ground. "One down, two cigars!" he droned in the voice of a county-fair carnival man.

"Have you been letting Tim ride Blue Streak?" she asked.

"The colt is about ready, Eileen," he said. "I'm too heavy to ride. I've been trying out Tim as a jockey. He's short-tempered and flies off the handle when things don't go right, but I hope to take that out of him. Nobody trusts Tim and he knows it. So I'm trusting him. And yet I—"

"What is it, Rod?"

"Blast it, he don't trust me. His folks have been double-crossed so many times he keeps looking for the ax he thinks I'm grindin', and I don't like it," Rod grumbled. "Yesterday I lined up a race over at Dry Falls. Two of Roat's colts are entered and it'll give me a chance to see how Blue Streak and Tim act under fire."

"Lovely!" Eileen exclaimed. "By the way, Rod, there was a man looking for you yesterday. He stopped at Babcock's place, then came over here."

"What kind of a man?"

"A waxed mustache, an eye for a pretty face, thick black hair, and he wore expensive clothing. I couldn't decide whether he was a frontier barber or whisky drummer,"

Eileen answered. "He said he would be back."

"I don't need either a hair cut or whisky," Rod said lightly. But she had a pretty definite idea he recognized the man from her description.

"I'll excuse you from classes today," she offered. "You can make up your work."

He thought he detected a faint note of sarcasm in her tone. "Thanks," he answered, "I think I'll go back to the cabin and hang around. It might be important." He hesitated a moment and made certain the few children about were beyond earshot. "There's a masquerade ball the twentieth. I'd like to take you."

"I'm sorry, Rod," she answered, "but I promised Joe Roat, months ago, that I would go with him. The masquerade is quite an event."

"Yes, I know, and the girls are asked a long time ahead," he said gloomily. "I was afraid of something like this. How about a dance?"

"Of course," she agreed.

"Joe is Roat's son, isn't he? They call him the crown prince because some day he'll inherit the old man's horse and cattle kingdom," Rod said.

"That is the gentleman," Eileen answered. "Run along now, like a good boy; I've work to do. And don't forget to catch up on your lessons or I'll give you a black mark."

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

ROD BARRY returned to the cabin and found a stocky, broad-shouldered man talking to Ance Babcock. The man was overdressed and sported a checkered vest and wore a large diamond ring on his left hand. A flaming red necktie carried a small gold horse-shoe pin studded with diamonds. He

sat, tilted back in Babcock's best chair, with his thumbs tucked in the armholes of his vest. "It seems the cigar drummer was fuller'n a goat," he said to Babcock. "So he says to the waitress, 'What've I got hid in my hands?' And she says, 'A dollar.' And he said, 'No; guess again.' So she said he had a bunch of keys. He took a peek and shook his head and said, 'Guess again.' That made her kinda mad, so she says, 'You've got a horse hid in your hands.' Well, the drummer takes a long, careful peek and says, 'What's the color of the hoss?' Haw! Haw! Haaaaaw!"

"Heh! Heh! Heh!" Ance Babcock doubled up with laughter. "Did you ever hear that one——" He stopped. "Hello, Rod. Meet up with J. Harney Knox. I never did set much store by fellers what part their hair or their name in the middle, but this one's a card."

"Rod Barry!" J. Harney Knox exclaimed. "I'm glad to see you. I heard you was hanging out in these parts getting yourself a little schooling. I'm glad I stopped over."

"I'll go out and hoe spuds," Ance volunteered, "and leave you two old friends to chew the rag."

The genial J. Harney Knox changed the instant the old man was gone. "You blasted coyote," he snarled, "where're the Circle R horses you were going to drive over the border for me?"

"Go easy, Knox, with that tongue of yours or I'll jam it down your throat," Rod threatened.

"You don't dare," Knox retorted defiantly. "You're a horse thief with a price on your head."

"And what're you?" Rod demanded.

Knox took a deep breath and calmed down. "It doesn't pay for thieves to fall out," he muttered. "It seems like I have bad luck whenever

I tie up with you Barrys. Your old man agreed to get me Circle R horses. They bring a big price below the border. I advanced him five thousand dollars. And what happened? He got caught and strung up still owing me three thousand. Then I stake you and Scott."

"And Roat caught Scott," Rod interrupted. "And—hanged him. They're hunting high and low for me, and I'm hiding out in the last place they'll think to look for the Gray Ghost—in a class of third-graders."

"That was a fine idea," Knox said. "You always was a fast thinker. But I want Circle R horses."

"And I'm located where I know what's going on. I learn it from the kids. When the set-up is right I'll hit fast," Rod promised, "but I've got to have time."

"I thought maybe you were stuck on the school-teacher," Knox growled, "and weren't tending to your knitting. It wouldn't be the first time a pretty face changed a man's life. A girl tried to reform me once. I liked it until I learned she was reforming a dozen others. Then I woke up. Now listen, I want that Blue Streak horse." His eyes grew hard when he saw Rod was prepared to argue the point. "No back talk. I want that Blue Streak horse."

"Who's talking back?" Rod flared.

"You looked like you were fixing to," Knox accused. "Now when can you head fifty Circle R horses for the border?"

"There's a masquerade the twentieth," Rod answered. "It'll begin eight o'clock in the evening and everybody will be there. It'll last all night. I'll need your help."

"What do you want me to do?" Knox asked.

"I'll let you know later. Don't

fail me and I won't fail you," Rod promised. "There's a horse race ahead of the masquerade and I'm going to be busy with that."

"The Blue Streak's maiden effort, eh?" Knox said, nodding wisely. "I'll be there."

THE county fair grounds at Dry Falls included a mile track, a small grand stand and bleachers. Banning and Lawrence had built it as a proving ground for their colts in the old days. The track was built right and subsequent ranchers had kept it in shape. It was fast and held one world's record which the original Blue Streak had hung up.

Sid Roat, bowing right and left to friends and those who went out of their way to recognize him, sat down in his box and watched the crowd trickle in for Sunday's race. There were no touts or hangers-on. Even the lady selling hamburgers was a rancher's wife. The crowd was made up entirely of cattle-country people.

Roat's son, Joe, with the marks of a hang-over on his weak, handsome face, joined the rancher. "I just got up," he yawned, "and my head pounds." He blinked his eyes and stared at Blue Streak. "Who's the black-haired puncher with the colt?" he asked.

"It's about time you were askin' that question," Roat suggested. "He's Rod Barry, one of Eileen's pupils."

"One of Eileen's pupils?" Joe yelled. "What're you talking about? He's a man grown."

"Yes, but he's regularly enrolled in the third grade," Roat explained. "There's nothing unusual about grown men going to school in this country. But—five days a week he's with your girl in the school-

room. On the sixth and seventh days they meet and talk about Blue Streak. She's hired Barry to train the colt."

"Maybe they talk about the colt and maybe they talk about each other," Joe stormed. "Where did he come from? What does she know about him? What does he know about training horses?"

"We'll find out what he knows about horse training this afternoon," Roat predicted.

"I'm going to end this right now," Joe threatened. His loose lower lip trembled with anger and jealousy. He recognized qualities in Rod Barry that attracted women and which he did not possess. "That red-headed Grant brat is riding Streak. The whole tribe is scum and Tim would sell his soul for two bits."

"Probably, because Tim doesn't see two bits often," Roat observed.

"I'm going to slip him a five," Joe whispered, "and get him to pull Streak. If the colt wins, Barry's job will be cinched."

"Keep your seat," Roat admonished. "I've already talked to Tim. I gave him five dollars and told him to turn the colt loose. I want to know exactly what he can do in competition. This Barry may be smart and not want to show all the colt has. Tim didn't say so, but I got the idea he had orders to pull Blue Streak if he gets too far out front."

"What did Tim say?"

"Grinned and tucked the five dollars in his pocket. It's the biggest money he's ever seen," Roat said. "Funny how cheap men and boys come—at first. Later, they learn money comes easy and the price goes up."

"The colt's nervous," Joe muttered. "You can tell he came from a wild band. He'll go to pieces in another minute."

He left the box and made his way along the rail to Blue Streak. The colt shook his head angrily, and his eyes rolled back until the whites were visible. White-faced and tight-lipped, Tim was fighting to master the young stallion.

"It ain't the colt; it's you, Tim," Rod said. "You're excited and you transmit your excitement to Blue Streak. Remember, this is just another ride. You've ridden the colt a mile scores of times in training. Here, let me get into the saddle a minute. You walk around and get hold of your nerves."

Rod leaped into the saddle and spoke a few words. He felt the tremendous store of energy in the black body, energy that seemed about to explode. "Marvelous, Rod," Eileen exclaimed as the colt calmed down. "You're a natural-born trainer, I—" She started to say more, then suddenly choked back what was on her mind.

"Perhaps he's a natural-born trainer," Joe Roat said in a low tone, joining the girl at the rail, "but what do you know about him?"

"Oh, hello, Joe," she said, brimming over with enthusiasm. "This is my first race as an owner and I don't know whether I'm afoot or horseback. What do I know of Rod Barry? Nothing, except he has nerve enough to sit with third-graders and study the same lessons. That and the fact he has worked wonders with Blue Streak. Which is enough for me. Wish me luck, Joe, even though he is going to race against your horses."

"Of course, all the luck in the world," Joe said. "But about this man Barry. You can't be too careful, Eileen. We're close to the border. Plenty of scum drifts through our region. And some of them are pretty dangerous—well-educated,

brainy men gone wrong. Dad strung up one of the Gray Ghosts, but the other is still alive. We are slowly but surely running him down, but as long as he's at large, he's dangerous."

"Joe, are you suggesting Rod Barry is the Gray Ghost? That's silly," she said.

"I'm suggesting no such thing," he said, stung by her tone. "I'm trying to point out the man has eluded the tightest of nets so far. Very well, it follows, if one man can do it, then others can, and a girl with your attractions, and possessing a colt as promising as Blue Streak, can't be too careful."

"Oh, stop your worrying," she said in an annoyed voice.

"When a man loves a girl, he has a right to worry," Joe almost whined. "My father is the biggest man in these parts. I'm his sole heir. I can give you anything. Why won't you marry me instead of playing with horses and teaching school?"

"We've been over all this before," the girl said patiently. "I like horses."

"And I can give you a whole stable filled with them," Joe argued. "We Roats are on the top of the heap in this part of the State."

"And I'm afraid that is part of the trouble," Eileen said. "When you are on the top of the heap there is no other place to go except down. Now run along until this race is finished, then I'll join you. I want to talk to my—trainer."

MUTTERING, Joe Roat walked sullenly to his father's box. "This man Barry's got to be chased out of the country," he complained. "All of a sudden she's interested in him."

"It's more than interest, Joe,"

Roat snarled. "And people are beginning to laugh at you. I won't have it."

Below them the horses slowly came to the barrier. The starter, a man as patient as Rod in dealing with horses, got them lined up and suddenly they leaped forward. "They're off!" Rod exclaimed.

"It's thrilling, Rod!" the girl exclaimed. "A thousand people shouting, 'They're off!' as one. What's the matter? Blue Streak is lagging!"

Even as she spoke the colt found his stride. Slowly he pulled even with the leaders, then dropped back. Experienced jockeys bottled up Tim Grant on the right turn. Tim found a hole a hundred yards from the finish, and the colt shot ahead in a bewildering burst of speed.

"Oh, Rod!" Eileen exclaimed. "Blue Streak got a second!"

Rod Barry did not answer for several moments. He was reviewing each phase of the race in his mind. "I'd still like a quarter interest in him," he said. "The thousand-dollar offer still goes. I'd raise it, if I could. Or—I'll give you two thousand for a quarter. One thousand cash and the balance in thirty days. I think I know where I can scrape up the other thousand if given time."

She smiled. "And the answer is still—no." She regarded him curiously. For a moment he seemed hardly aware of her existence. "What are your plans for Blue Streak now?" She waited a moment then protested. "Rod, you aren't hearing a word I say."

"Oh, yes," he blurted. "The colt—why—I think we should keep him out of the small races and throw him into the Turfmen's Mile."

"Rod! Are you mad! That's the biggest race on the West coast. It's almost next to the Kentucky Derby," she protested.

"I've had an idea from the first, Eileen, you'd like to make a lot of money on Blue Streak," he said thoughtfully. "If you do, what'll you do with it?"

She hesitated and he saw she was debating the wisdom of taking him completely into her confidence. "I believe I would buy some of the old Banning-Lawrence ranch and gradually stock it," she answered. "Now, don't breathe a word of it, Rod. I don't think Roat would like it at all."

"Oh, he might sell you a piece of the B-L," Rod answered. "He would figure you'd go broke sooner or later and he could pick it up again at his own price. No man could buy in. He would like to own the world. I've watched him. It swells him up with importance and makes him feel like a feudal baron." He tried to choke back the last remark. "What," he thought, "would a third-grade student know about a feudal baron?"

She appeared not to have noticed. They were bringing Blue Streak back to his stable for a rubdown. "I'll keep your secret," he said. "Suppose we toss that colt into the Turfmen's Mile. He'll be a dark horse and a long shot. You might as well collect the smart money as the next one."

"But has Blue Streak had enough experience?" she asked, her gaze still on the colt.

"Tim Grant needs the experience," Rod answered. "I watched him carefully. He was bottled up and lost precious yards. He tried to turn the colt loose and show what he could do, but the other jockeys were too smart. It's all right, though. Blue Streak's real speed isn't known. Second money pays a hundred dollars. Suppose we send Tim to one of the big tracks where he'll work against top-notch jockeys?"

"Just as you think best, Rod," Eileen answered. "While I won't sell an interest in the colt, nevertheless you are to have a free hand. Here come the Roats to offer congratulations."

Rod felt like leaving, but he decided to stand his ground. He nodded when Eileen introduced him to Joe, then stepped back, ready to leave when he could decently do so. "Sorry, Eileen," Joe said. "I know you expected Blue Streak to win. But he hasn't had the training. Nor can you give it to him. You haven't the facilities nor the money to do it right. Better sell him. Dad will stretch a point, in spite of that second, and give you five thousand dollars."

"That wouldn't be stretching a point," Rod said evenly. "I know a party who'll give eight thousand."

Eileen repressed a smile. Rod had offered two thousand for a quarter interest, and four times two is eight. He wasn't doing at all badly for a third-grader.

"Whoever offered her eight thousand is a fool," Roat snorted.

"But eight thousand dollars paid by a fool is just three thousand dollars more than a wise man's five thousand," Rod suggested. "But I don't think she'll sell. I've tried to buy an interest myself." Then he hurried over to the stable to care for the colt.

"I got in a couple of jams," Tim Grant said apologetically. "Or Blue Streak would've won."

"Listen, Tim," Rod said. "Opportunity knocks once at every man's door, they say. It hasn't knocked very hard on your door for a long time. But right now it's kicking the door down. String along with Eileen Logan, give her the best you've got. Go through hell and high water for her and you'll go far.

She's going to send you to the West coast for experience. Hang around the big jockeys. Learn their tricks. Listen to their talk and keep your own mouth shut. As soon as she can get the money you'll start. How about it."

"I'm with her all the way," Tim answered. "Say, Mr. J. Watchamay-call-'em Knox was in the grand stand. He yelled and said he wanted to see you."

"Thanks," Rod answered. As soon as he finished with Blue Streak he located J. Harney Knox.

"I want that colt," Knox declared.

"You said that before," Rod answered.

"I know, but I want him worse than ever. The Roats want him too. I heard them talking," Knox said. "But we've got to watch out for that boy Tim. He's a runt, but he's got the eyes of a man. Tricky too. Is there any way to get rid of him?"

"I've already fixed it," Rod explained. "He's going to the West coast for seasoning as soon as we raise the money."

Knox pressed two hundred dollars into Rod's hand. "Get him out tonight," he directed.

"This is a surprise," Rod answered as he pocketed the money. "He didn't expect to leave quite so soon. I'll see what I can do."

"I'm a man of action," Knox snapped. "And I want that colt."

CHAPTER V.

THE GRAY GHOST RIDES.

EILEEN LOGAN turned her purse money over to Rod late that night. "My first prize money," she said. "Pin money, really, but winning the Derby wouldn't give me a greater thrill."

"Don't you fool yourself," Rod said, grinning. "There's no thrill greater than that. I took some money I had and started Tim on his way, so I'll credit this against your advance."

"What's the program this evening?"

"I'm going to take Blue Streak home. I'll be at school to-morrow morning," he answered.

He saddled Buck, a tough horse Ance Babcock had loaned him, and headed for Outlaw Creek, leading Blue Streak. "I'm sure sitting on a powder keg," he reflected as he rode slowly through the night. "J. Harney Knox goes around slapping backs and giving people cigars, but he is tightening the rope on me. I've got to deliver him what he has coming to shut him up. I forget to talk like a hill-billy when I'm around Eileen. If she wasn't so interested in the colt and the early-day history of the Banning-Lawrence outfit, she'd smell a rat, pronto. Imagine a third-grader saying, 'I'll credit this against your advance!' Sufferin' coyotes! What a slip!"

He slept soundly that night and for several ensuing nights. Lack of sleep, he knew, catches more outlaws than bloodhounds. A sleepy man isn't alert. Rod had schooled himself to sleep soundly, if lightly, at night. He found ample opportunity to wrestle with his problems as he scowled at his books. He recited with the others, carefully stumbling along and frequently receiving Eileen's help.

Thursday night he turned in at the usual hour and waited until Ance was asleep. The old fellow slept like a log. He claimed his bed fitted him and for that reason he rarely disturbed it. And he never awakened until daybreak. Rod quietly left the cabin, slipped out to the barn and

saddled Buck. He rode directly to the corral and whistled sharply at Blue Streak.

The colt kicked up his heels and responded. "Not so loud, you chump," Rod growled. "Do you want to attract a lot of attention? This is the middle of the night!"

He led the colt from the corral and struck off toward the bad lands, following seldom-used trails, and frequently no trail at all. A faint moon filled the gulches and draws with a sinister silvery light and revealed slinking coyotes and an occasional night bird of prey. "I'll be glad when that cussed moon is down," he grumbled. "Moons are fine when you've nothing on your mind but a girl. But they're no friend of a horse rustler."

He pulled up suddenly as the colt snorted and reared back. The unexpected movement almost yanked Rod from the saddle. "Easy, boy!" he said soothingly. As he straightened up and began calming the colt a rope whistled through the air, dropped about his shoulders and pinned his arms to his side with a vicious *z-z-z-zip!*

Rod's fingers just touched his gun butt when a second rope hauled him from the saddle. As he struck the ground a half dozen men leaped from the boulders. One grabbed the colt; the others ringed him with drawn six-guns. "Roat!" Rod muttered. "And the precious, loose-lipped Joe. I'd like to put a bullet through him and do Eileen a good turn."

Joe Roat stepped up and yanked Rod's hat from his head. "Well, if it isn't the—teacher's pet," he sneered. "Stealing the teacher's horse, too. You should be promoted to high school for this night's work."

"I'll promote him," Roat said thickly. "He's one more tree for Horse Thief Ridge."

Some one removed his gun, and others searched his clothing for hidden weapons. Rod said nothing, knowing talk was useless. But he was determined to take advantage of even the most desperate chance to escape. "What's your real name?" Roat asked.

"Rod Barry's a good name," Rod answered. "I ain't ashamed of it." He remembered he was a third-grader, not that he expected it would do much good. "I want you to take me to Miss Logan," he said. "I'm her trainer and she'll stand by anything I do. I had good reason for takin' Blue Streak."

"I never knowed a hoss thief yet that didn't have a good reason," a man jeered.

"Women are soft-hearted," Roat informed Rod. "We don't want any scene, with her pleading for your life. Hang 'em first and tell about it afterwards is my motto. And it's a good motto. Hardly a horse thief left in this part of the State. I began with Hank Banning, but I doubt like thunder if I'll end it with you. There's still the Gray Ghost. Unless—unless you're the Ghost?"

"If I was the Ghost I wouldn't be here," Rod answered evenly.

THEY rode on in silence, Roat leading, his men flanking the prisoner and Joe Roat bringing up the rear with Blue Streak. Day came slowly as if reluctant to witness what the rancher had in mind.

The sunlight picked up a coyote or two, a covey of quail, three buzzards and J. Harney Knox, who was perched on a ridge with his eyes glued to a pair of binoculars. Knox saw a cloud of dust moving slowly toward Horse Thief Ridge. He waited until the horses crossed hard ground and the dust settled, then

he recognized Rod Barry, Roat and the colt. Nothing else mattered. "I've got a lot of money tied up in that cuss," he moaned, "and if anything happens to him, I'll lose it. He must and shall live until he completes his part of the deal."

In the stress of the moment Knox spoke with all the feeling of a Fourth of July orator speaking of the Constitution. He fairly flung himself onto his horse and headed for Eileen's home. "She can turn the trick if anybody can," he said nervously.

His horse was lathered when he arrived. Knox leaped to the ground, raced up the front steps and bellowed: "Miss Logan, they're hanging Rod Barry!"

Eileen slept with her windows open. Her face, frozen with horror, appeared immediately. "What for? Stop 'em!" she shouted.

"Hanging him for stealing Blue Streak. Roat seems to think he's got him dead to rights. You're the only person who can stop 'em," Knox answered. "I'll go up there and do what I can."

He set off as fast as his jaded horse could carry him. It was a mile and a half to the ridge, and he was just beginning the last steep climb when Eileen galloped past him. She was riding bareback and her hair was flying in the wind. There was something wild and primitive about her, something determined.

Brush screened her approach, and the movements of Roat's own horses drowned the hammering of her mount's hoofs. "I'm going to hang him on Hank Banning's tree," Roat declared. "It's got a limb, now, big enough to support a man's weight. The whole country can see him and know——"

The brush stirred violently and Eileen shot into the group. "Just

what are you doing to my trainer?" she demanded.

"Now, Eileen," Joe pleaded, "this is none of your affair. Come along with me. You can't stop the boys. You know the unwritten law, and what's going to happen won't be nice to see."

"Mr. Roat, what are you doing to my trainer?" she repeated, walking up to the rancher.

He flushed and began to bluster. Rod said nothing, and Eileen took a long look and she saw something she had not seen in a long time—fearlessness, mixed with utter contempt for his captors. He stood erect, with his chin up, heedless of the rope about his neck. "We caught the cuss——" Sid Roat said thickly.

"You caught him with Blue Streak," she said in icy tones. "Well, what of it? He owns a quarter interest in the colt. He has full power to do whatever he thinks is best."

"I don't believe it. He didn't show us any bill of sale," Roat argued.

"Since when must a man carry a bill of sale about in his pocket?" she demanded, her eyes flashing. "If you'll take the trouble to go down to the recorder's office, you'll find it duly recorded. The trouble with you, Mr. Roat, you're drunk with power and swelled up with a sense of your own importance. You've been riding high, wide, and handsome on this range for a long time. It looks to me if you don't tighten the r in you'll ride to a fall."

"Now, Eileen, please," Joe said humbly. "If we've made a mistake we're sorry. We don't know anything about him, and when we caught him in the dead of night with your colt we——"

"Of course," she interrupted. "Next time, go a little slow. Now clear out. I'll take the colt." She

watched them ride away and then made certain Knox had followed them. She turned to Rod Barry. "Oh, Rod, how could you?" she half sobbed.

"I wasn't stealing Blue Streak," he said desperately. "I—I—was afraid he would be stolen, though. The Roats are afraid of him. Others have wanted him, so I thought I'd put temptation beyond them by driving the blue boy to a box canyon I know about. Naturally I did it at night."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"You were in bed, probably asleep, when I made my decision," he answered. She looked at him a long time and shrugged her shoulders. "You don't believe me?"

I'M afraid I'm disappointed in you, Rod," she said wearily. "I don't know what to believe. I come from a family that talks straight from the shoulder and doesn't believe in beating about the bush. I'm afraid you disarmed me from the first with your reckless charm, your love of horses and, yes, your amazing knowledge of them. Rather suddenly I realized you sometimes talked like a hill-billy, and when you were off guard you spoke like a man with a good education. After my surprise over this discovery it became fun watching you at school you were perfect. You stumbled through your lessons. You were a hill boy. But when we were alone——"

"I know, and I had a hunch you'd caught some of my slips," he said. "Well, where do we go from here? You saved my life with your courage and the story of my interest in Blue Streak. I'll never forget it."

"You owe me two thousand dollars," she said. "I couldn't take a chance in playing this hand without

backing it up. I scrawled a bill of sale, gave it to Ance Babcock and told him to file it at the recorder's office. It was back-dated two days, just in case Roat took a notion to check up."

"I'll deed the interest back to you, as much as I want it," he said seriously.

"No," she replied. "I think I'll let things stand as they are. You ask where we go from here. Very well, my plans, I like to think, are bigger than either of us. I was going to ask you if you are by any chance the Gray Ghost. I've decided not to—knowledge of that nature might prove dangerous. I think you are a wanted man, very cleverly hiding out in my classes."

He said nothing and his face betrayed nothing.

"I think you are a man of honor. That is, you would live up to your word. Will you give me your word of honor to—well, throw in with me to the exclusion of all else that you may have in mind, to the end that we go from here to the Turfmen's Mile and from there to the Derby if Blue Streak is deserving?"

"I'm sorry," he answered, "I can't give you my word, because something might come up that would turn me aside."

She looked terribly disappointed, and a little bit alarmed, as if she had been suddenly deserted. The bewilderment passed and he knew she was prepared to drive the best possible bargain. "Then, Rod, go with me as far as you can. And give me warning if you must either quit me before the goal or—turn against me," she said.

"I'll give my word on that," he said quickly, "and now I'd better take the colt back to the corral. After all this uproar those who want

him are likely to leave him strictly alone."

"When you see J. Harney Knox again," she said, "don't forget to thank him. He learned what was going on and told me. He was around here a minute ago."

"And probably still is," Rod thought as the girl rode off. She had to freshen up, eat breakfast and then hurry to school.

J. Harney Knox popped up as soon as Eileen disappeared. He tucked his thumbs in the armholes of his vest. "Well, I saved your life, Rod," he cheerfully announced. "I know you had swiped the colt for me when I found his corral empty and your horse Buck gone from his stall. So I squatted on a ridge, and when the sun came up there you was—in Roat's hands."

"I think Roat was either watching the colt or else preparing to steal it when I appeared," Rod replied.

"That girl's a smart one," Knox said with admiration. "She deeds you a quarter interest in Blue Streak and makes an honest man out of you with a stroke of the pen as you might say. It took the wind out of Roat's sails. Now here's what I want you to do—drive off fifty head of horses the night of the masquerade. You can turn the colt over to me later. I'll have to buy your quarter interest, I suppose," he added gloomily. "You can't expect a man to steal his own horse."

"We'll hurdle each ditch as we come to it," Rod suggested. "I'm all set for the masquerade. You meet me in Babcock's barn. I'll give you a clown's outfit to wear. Make yourself conspicuous, but don't talk. Dumb clown. They unmask at one o'clock. At twelve thirty you return to the barn and I'll get into the clown's outfit and high-tail it back

to the masquerade in time for the unmasking."

"I savvy the idea," Knox said. "The Gray Ghost rides again. But a hundred people will swear you were at the dance all the evening as a dumb clown and that'll stop anybody from ever accusing you of being the Gray Ghost. You'll be free to get in your work later on." He thought a moment, then continued with mounting enthusiasm "You can even turn the colt over to me, and the girl, Roat and the others will figure the Gray Ghost took him."

"And they'll be right, won't they?" Rod suggested. "What will you do with him?"

"They have horse races in Mexico, you know," Knox answered. "Well, so long. I'll see you the night of the masquerade."

ROD BARRY left the clown outfit in the barn where Knox could find it, then he struck off through the shadows, drifting steadily toward the Circle R. He kept to the draws and thickets, often within sight and sound of the ranchers riding and driving to the masquerade. This was an annual event held at the Outlaw Creek Hall, a rambling structure built on natural picnic grounds a mile below the schoolhouse. It contained the biggest dance floor in the country.

Rod roped a Circle R horse, changed his saddle from Buck and left him in a thicket. He wanted no lathered horse at the dance-hall hitch rails to betray him. A half mile from the Circle R fence, Rod dismounted and pushed through a thicket. A gray mare nickered eagerly. "Bess, old girl," he whispered, "it's months since I've seen you." He rubbed her nose and fed

her sugar. "The world's only horse-thief mare. Come on."

He led the mare into the open, mounted his own horse and rode slowly toward Circle R range. Bess was a stupid-appearing, unbranded animal, shaggy and scarred. Her tail was filled with burs, but she had an amazing homing instinct. And her home was on Knox's ranch, south of the border.

Rod paused a long time before he advanced on Circle R barbed wire. He watched Bess, knowing she invariably detected signs of others in a given vicinity. And he listened for unusual sounds. "Nobody within miles," he said softly. "Everybody's at the masquerade."

He cut the wire at several points, leaving wide gaps so that stampeding horses would not cut themselves. Then he waited. Vague shadows came out of the darkness—other horses interested in the intruder. A stallion pounded up, determined to include Bess in his band.

Rod waited, as he had waited on other nights when raiding Circle R stock. The area was filled with horses. Suddenly he released Bess and gave her a sharp cut with the rope. She wheeled suddenly and headed down a draw in a southerly direction. The stallion, determined to maintain discipline, thundered through the brush in an effort to overtake her. Rod cut in sharply, blocking all possible retreat and stirring up the stragglers. His rope whipped them into a frenzy. The herd instinct, strong in moments of excitement, sent them after the remainder of the band.

The buttes and canyon walls echoed with the thunder of pounding hoofs. Rod followed, riding on the edge of the choking dust, giving no animal a chance to turn back. He looked at his watch. It was ten

o'clock. "And they unmask at one," he said speculatively. "I can stick with this bunch another hour. After that, they'll follow Bess to the border."

The canyon narrowed, the neck of the bottle. But the bottle itself was behind—the Circle R range. Beyond the canyon lay open country. But it was dry country and there would be little temptation for the band to scatter.

Rod felt reasonably safe. If any one ahead tried to stop the drive, he would be amply warned by the action of the leaders. The Circle R horse under him was tough and tireless. He had an idea it could outrun the average saddle horse. Nevertheless, from instinct, his eyes watched the rim rock and boulders on either side of the canyon.

Suddenly a head and shoulder's lifted a hundred and fifty feet above him. He caught the shadowy bluntness of a shotgun. The man flung the weapon to his shoulder with the gesture of a wing shot. There was to be no warning, Rod sensed. The hunter was gunning for the surviving Gray Ghost and was taking no chances. Rod's six-gun flashed and cracked. The man pitched over the boulder and the charge from the shotgun plowed up the ground ahead and sprinkled Rod with gravel.

Rod pulled his mount back on its haunches, swung it about and sent it up the canyon on the dead run. Vicious stabs of flame leaped from surrounding boulders. Lead droned past his head. "Good gosh!" he exclaimed. "I rode into a whole nest of man hunters."

He turned in behind a heap of boulders, dismounted and waited until the nearest man was within gun range. He fired high to turn him back. The man winced as the bullet whistled past his ear and shot

between two boulders. A searing pain raced through Rod's left shoulder and his arm dropped numbly. He tensed, crouched lower and blazed away. The rider tumbled from his saddle and rolled into a thicket. His horse, bearing the Circle R brand, galloped by, the flopping stirrups whipping it into a frenzy.

As the leading rider fell, a half dozen others leaped from their mounts and scattered for cover. "It's the Gray Ghost all right," one of them yelled hoarsely. "I saw his mask. I think Ed winged him, but ain't sure."

Rod knew they would wait several minutes before working toward the boulders. Silence they would regard as a trap. He led his horse to a turn in the canyon, mounted and rode slowly for nearly a half mile, then galloped at top speed until he reached the thicket where Buck was tied. A sense of feeling had returned to his left arm, but it hurt to use it. He saddled Buck with his right arm and hand, released the Circle R horse, then rode to the barn, keeping to the brush whenever possible.

Knox's voice came from the darkness. "It's twelve o'clock," he whispered. "What kept you? They unmask at one."

"Light a candle," Rod answered. "Help me get off my clothes. Grab a wet towel. I want to get rid of some of the dust."

"Great heavens, man, you're shot!" Knox exclaimed.

"Sure. But I think Bess will take the horses to the border. Circle R riders jumped me. They let the horses go, figuring they could round 'em up later," Rod explained. "The bullet's still in there. Don't touch it; there isn't time. Bandage it up."

"You shouldn't be going around wounded——" Knox argued.

"I've got to be at the unmasking to clear myself," Rod snapped. "It don't make any difference how I feel. Eileen cleared me once, but no bill of sale is going to explain this wound if I'm examined to-morrow or later."

"You're pale as a ghost," Knox warned.

"I suppose so," Rod admitted. "But white powder will cover it. And clowns are well powdered."

With Knox's help, Rod got into the clown suit, pulled down the cap and drew on the mask that covered hastily daubed cheeks. Knox helped him into the saddle and watched him ride downstream toward the festivities. He shook his head with misgivings. "He'll probably faint, but he's got to go through with it," he said.

CHAPTER VI.

FIRED.

THINGS blurred before Rod's eyes as he tied Buck to the hitch rail and walked grimly toward the hall. Heads moved past open windows as the orchestra played a waltz. "Where's that dumb clown?" somebody asked. "I ain't seen him cuttin' up for a half hour."

"Outside coolin' off," another answered. "I saw him smokin'."

Rod lighted a cigarette and leaned in a window. Some one saw him, pointed and laughed. Several children rushed up. "Better git in fer the unmaskin', son," an old-timer said.

Rod tossed the cigarette away with studied carelessness, then went around to the door and entered. The room was stuffy. He felt dizzy again. He supposed he should tumble or something to get a laugh, but he was afraid to chance it. He re-

mained silent, as Knox had done, and looked about, hoping to locate Eileen. There were a number of pretty girls dancing and a half dozen cow-punchers masked as the Gray Ghost.

The waltz ended abruptly and the floor manager yelled, "Masks off!"

Rod removed his mask and looked around. Half those in the room were staring at him. "Knox must have put on a good show," he muttered. "Everybody seems interested."

"It's Rod Barry," some one said. "Golly, the teacher's pet," a boy whispered.

"Clever work, Barry," a man said, coming up. "But you did a better job training Blue Streak. That colt is a world beater with proper handling."

"Thanks," Rod answered. His only thought was to be seen generally, then hide out somewhere until the wound healed.

Eileen hurried up and congratulated him. Joe nodded coldly. He was dressed as a knight, and he clanked a lot as he moved about. Eileen was *Little Bo-peep*, and a rancher warned her not to bring her sheep into the cattle country.

"Funny," Rod muttered. "I'd like to flop down somewhere and put my head in her lap and let time pass. A kind of a kid-wanting-his-mother feeling. I must be pretty badly wounded. I've got to get out of here."

A dust-coated man burst into the room. "The Gray Ghost struck again," he bellowed. "Started fifty head o' Circle R cattle for the border. Some of us jumped him. He killed Shotgun Palmer deader'n a smelt and wounded Alf Preston. We cornered him, but he got away."

"Because you didn't have the nerve to move fast," Rod thought.

The ranchers were stunned and looked oddly out of place in their masquerade costumes.

"Where is he now?" Sid Roat asked sharply.

"We lost him," the man explained. "We've strung men along between the Circle R and the border. Now we need more to blanket the country. He can't have gone far. He's wounded. We're sure of that. We found bloodstains where he crouched behind the boulders."

"Sorry to break up the dance," Roat shouted. "Every man's needed. Three thousand cash to the man who brings him in—alive!"

Men milled about, hastily collecting their six-guns; arranging for their families to drive home or wait until the following day; exchanging orders and ideas. Joe Roat hurried over to Eileen. "I hate to leave you this way, but—you understand. Somebody will drive you home."

"Never mind me," Eileen answered.

Sid Roat's roving eyes fell on Rod. "You're in this, Barry," he said loudly.

"Oh, no!" Rod retorted. "It's a row between you and the Gray Ghost. You almost hanged me the other day and I'm taking no chances on trouble. You're in no position to ask my help."

"He's right," a cow-puncher said. "It ain't his funeral."

Joe Roat had a picture of Rod taking Eileen home and he scowled, but he could not with good grace refuse to go along with the man hunters. The men vanished and long afterward the beat of hoofs floated back. Women began talking excitedly while small boys speculated on the outcome.

Rod felt his knees shake with weakness. "I'd like to take you

home, Eileen," he said. "I'll be—outside. This clown outfit is—hot."

His face revealed nothing because of the coating of white powder, but she saw his eyes grow dull and his lips pale. "You *had* better get some air," she advised. "I'll go with you." She hurried him into the cool night. His lungs sucked deeply for air, but there didn't seem to be enough.

EILEEN helped him to a buckboard. The owners, she knew, had borrowed a saddle horse and joined the chase. "Do you feel better?" she anxiously inquired.

"Yes," he answered. "Imagine a cow-puncher growing faint."

"I'm relieved, Rod. I was worried." She listened a moment. "This is the biggest man hunt yet. It happened most of the men were at the masquerade and no time was lost organizing a posse. I'm glad you're here, not out there. You know, I said you were a wanted man. I rather hoped you were the Gray Ghost."

"Why?"

"There's something about him that's different from—from——"

"Different from the mine-run of horse thief?" he suggested.

"Oh, I know he's a killer, but he gives the other fellow an even chance. You'll notice he must have given Shotgun Palmer a chance to kill him. He must have seen Palmer's gun on him. Behind it all I've sensed a noble purpose. It's my fool romantic nature again, of course. I've even thought he might be one of old Hank Banning's sons avenging his father's death. That's why I've followed his swift raids with so much interest," she said.

"Maybe he's one of Lawrence's sons," Rod suggested.

"He couldn't be," she replied. "Lawrence had three daughters. It

was Banning who had the sons, three of them, and five daughters. I've gone into the family history rather thoroughly."

"And you're disappointed because I'm not the Gray Ghost?" he suggested. "Well—well——" He fought desperately to remain erect and overcome this new fainting spell. The buckboard seemed to swing from under him. He vaguely realized Eileen's arm was about him and she was pulling him back onto the seat. Then—blackness.

He opened his eyes and blinked at blurring stars. The moon had gone down, but he recognized the girl's anxious face. "So I fainted?" he said heavily.

"From loss of blood," Eileen said quietly. "Why didn't you tell me, Rod, you were seriously wounded? Don't you know you can trust me?" He sensed his apparent lack of faith hurt her. And he saw something in her eyes—something beautiful and tender—something he wanted to see, yet did not want to see.

"Trust you?" he said. "To the limit, but—aiding a wanted man is a criminal offense. A man doesn't drag a girl into his troubles when—well—ever. And when a man loves a girl, he's doubly careful. I've loved you since the day I saw you framed in the schoolhouse door. It's selfish to tell you, but it'll explain why I came back to-night. I could have made it to the border and been safe. But my absence would have been proof of guilt. You had already gone to bat for me and the world knew it. So I had to return and let the world—your world—see me and believe I'm Rod Barry and that the Gray Ghost was some elusive cuss the posse was hunting. But I had to spoil it all by fainting. Now, give me a canteen, drop me into a thicket and I'll watch my

chance and get through to the border. You can tell them I've gone to the coast to enter Blue Streak in the Turfmen's Mile."

The effort to speak left him exhausted and gasping. She gave him a drink of water and smiled down at him. "Now I'm going to talk, Rod," she said, and he saw her jaw set with resolution. "You spoke of what a man does when he loves a girl. Very well, Rod, I'm going to tell you what a girl does when she loves a man. And then—I'm going to do it."

"Listen," he protested.

"You listen," she said gently, then kissed him. He felt resolution draining as his physical strength had drained. The feeling of being utterly alone which he had known since Scott's death left him. "Once, only once, in a girl's life, the right man comes along," she said. "And she's a fool if she doesn't 'string with him' as they say in the West. Because another like him will never appear. And *never*, Rod, is a long time."

"I'm a horse thief," he argued weakly, "trying to square an account that's overdue. I'm fighting one of the most ruthless and powerful men in the West. The West is full of long-odds gamblers, but mighty few would risk a hundred dollars on my chances of winning out and taking my place among respectable ranchers."

"You'll win out, Rod. I know that," she said with feeling. "Something within me, some instinct that has never failed me, assures me. You don't have to teach school long to know that blood tells in humans as it does in horses. Blue Streak was only a broomtail colt owned by a wandering Indian band. But he had the original Blue Streak's blood in him. And that blood was apparent in the fire, determination and

courage he revealed in his first race. You come from thoroughbred stock, Rod, and—I'm stringing with you. If it's life south of the border you want, with faint trails, danger and hardship, then that's my life."

HE lay with his eyes closed, relaxed, but she knew he was listening and that every fiber in his body hungered for her words. "Go on," he said faintly.

"But I think we'll beat this." The Gray Ghost will vanish and become a legend," she continued, "and in his place there'll be a turfman named Rod Barry who'll own a racing string and a ranch that will become known wherever men follow horses."

"I'm weak now," he said. "I'm babying myself. It's selfish. But when I'm strong, I won't let you do it. Where are we?"

"When you fainted I drove the buckboard two miles to a small creek. I gave you water and fixed up your wound," she answered. "Then I drove on to the old Lawrence house on the B-L Ranch."

"Roat owns it," Rod argued. "It isn't safe."

"I know Roat owns it, so does every one else," she replied. "Next to a schoolroom it is the last place any one would think of looking for the Gray Ghost." She drove on a few yards and he saw a ghost house standing amid lofty trees. The limbs were outstretched like protecting arms, as if to hold back the decay everywhere visible.

Shutters hung drunkenly, broken windowpanes were stuffed with paper, paint was peeling from the walls, and the walks were overgrown with weeds. The house with the stained-glass borders about the larger windows had once been a landmark and a social center in the region. The women who had once lent grace,

and the men who had given dignity to the home, were long since dead. Yet it was not difficult to imagine the carriages rolling up the broad winding drive, the house ablaze with lights, and the scraping of fiddles when the B-L Ranch held one of its frequent balls.

There was a mellowness and permanence about the place existing nowhere else in the country. The massive pile Roat had built as a monument to his triumph in creating the largest ranch in the region was a monument—not a home. Even in its present state it was easy to understand this was a sanctuary to which the Lawrences had returned when it was time to die.

"I'm going in and find a place to leave you," she said.

"I'll go along," he informed her. "I've got strength enough to walk, with your help. The rest, a few drinks of water and the shot of whisky I suspect you gave me have brought results."

"Well——" she agreed doubtfully. "You have to go in sooner or later, anyway."

He threw his arm across her shoulders and they entered the back door to avoid climbing steps. He sat down on a dusty chair while she struck a match. The air was old and musty, and dust her movements stirred up stung the nostrils. She disappeared and then reappeared, smiling. "I've found just the place—on the second floor. It's on the west wing and was once used by the hired girls."

"Was once used by the hired girls?" he repeated.

"You know, the sort of room assigned to the hired girls," she explained.

"Yes, I know," he observed. "I know that you were familiar with the turns as you drove up the road

to the house, and that you knew the layout of the rooms as soon as you were inside. You didn't blunder around, stumbling into rooms that wouldn't serve your purpose. You went directly to the west wing and found the very room you wanted. You knew exactly where you were going when you started out. Do you know what I think?"

"What?"

"I think your real name isn't Eileen Logan, but Eileen Lawrence," Rod bluntly informed her. "And I'm pretty certain you returned with the hope of bringing the old B-L brand back to its former glory."

"Yes, Rod," she admitted, "I'm Eileen Lawrence—eldest of the three girls. When mother died we were sent East to an aunt, who raised us. A peaceful New England town couldn't kill my love and interest for the West. I remembered vaguely of mother and dad discussing the B-L; of mother's tears when he was shot. I began delving into the history of the ranch. I learned a lot through reading old letters my aunt had received from mother. I knew that the original Blue Streak escaped and became leader of a wild band. And my excited mind pictured a colt that would be a throw-back to the great stallion."

"There were probably several," Rod observed, "and they ended their days ridden by some Indian brave."

"When I learned Roat had framed Hank Banning and hanged him, and later his men drove every one out of the country and ruined the ranchers, including my own people, I blazed with resentment. I wished every night I were a man. Then I thought, why not try to win back what was mine, anyway? I hoped to make up in intelligence what I lacked in physical force," she explained. "I could teach school, and

by pretending to have a romantic interest in the West I could ask questions and make investigations that would never arouse suspicion."

"Clever," Rod observed.

"It wasn't pleasant associating with the Roats, though," she admitted. "I had to do it, though, to learn certain things needed to bolster up my case against them. Besides, Roat is president of the school board and he hires and fires."

"It was tough going around with Joe," he suggested.

SHE shuddered. "At first, I refused," she replied, "and that aroused his interest. Girls had thrown themselves at him from time to time—girls who had an eye on the Roat fortune. He thinks highly of himself. Well, in time I managed to even endure Joe. Rod, you've rested some. Do you think you are equal to climbing the stairs?"

"Let's find out," he replied.

She helped him up a flight of creaky stairs and to a room containing a walnut bed and springs. She returned to the buckboard and got a blanket which she spread on the springs. "It won't be very comfortable," she explained, "but it will have to do. I'll be back to-morrow night with bedding, food and bandages. Here's a canteen of water. And—my dear, do take care of yourself."

"I'm feeling better already," he answered. Back in his mind was the thought: "I'll get in shape to travel, then pull my freight. She's not going to be caught aiding a horse thief."

Eileen arrived back at the picnic grounds shortly before daybreak. The buckboard owner was still hunting the Gray Ghost, but some of the other man hunters were drifting in.

"Disappeared into thin air as usual," a rancher grumbled. "Can't say I'm sorry. Roat never done me any favors, but I could sure have used that reward money."

"A lot of us can use it," another agreed. "It sure beats the deuce how that cuss works it. Roat's frothin' at the mouth. Fifty-odd head of horses got clean across the border. He'll never see 'em again."

"He can afford it," another said. "Hello, there's the teacher. Howdy, Miss Logan. Where's Rod Barry? I want to tell him what a fine clown he made. I liked to busted my sides out laughin' at him."

"Rod washed up, got into some respectable clothes and I drove him down to Carney's Crossing. Trains stop there on signal. He's off for the West coast to enter Blue Streak in the Turfmen's Mile," Eileen calmly informed them. "Now if I can get a ride I think I'll go home. It has been quite an exciting night."

Eileen went to bed with the hope of sleeping until late that afternoon. At twelve o'clock her landlady awakened her. "Mr. Joe Roat is down on the front porch," she said. "He seems all put out over somethin' or other."

Eileen hurriedly dressed and joined Joe. He sat in the porch hammock, scowling. His loose lower lip was shaking with fury, and his eyes were angry. "What're you trying to do?" he snarled. "Make a fool out of me? Did you or didn't you set in a buckboard this morning with your arms around Rod Barry, hugging and kissing him?"

"I did not hug or kiss Rod Barry in a buckboard this morning," she answered coldly. "And if I had chosen to do so, it would have been none of your business."

"But you sat in a buckboard with him?"

"Yes—talking," she replied.

"You were mooning with him while I was out risking my life hunting the Gray Ghost," he shouted. "And another thing, you lied about it, because some of the kids saw you hugging him."

It was evident passing children had seen her arms pull him to safety when he fainted and was about to tumble from the buckboard seat. They had doubtless mentioned the incident, with much snickering, to their elders. And the usual trouble maker had passed it on to the Roats.

"Will you marry me right now and end this nonsense?" Joe demanded. "I'm getting tired of it, and so is my father. A woman's place is in the home and not raising racing stock and lallygagging around with horse trainers that come from no one knows where."

"Joe, marriage is conditioned on love, or should be. I don't love you," she answered quietly.

He looked at her a long time, his loose lip shaking with fury and stung pride. Ranchers were laughing and saying Rod Barry had swiped his girl. It wasn't healthy to laugh at the Roats. Suddenly he thrust an envelope into her hands. "Put that in your pipe and smoke it," he snapped. He stalked down the walk, banged the gate, leaped into the saddle and was off.

Eileen opened the envelope and read:

MISS LOGAN:

Because of your open and scandalous actions last night with your horse trainer, the school board of this county hereby declares you unfit to teach our children. You will consider your services as teacher of the school in the Outlaw Creek district ended.

Yours truly,
SID ROAT,
Chairman.

"I won't stand for it!" she exclaimed furiously. "I won't! I won't! I'll—yes, I'll have to stand for it. I can't explain to my pupils' parents that I was holding the Gray Ghost because he had fainted."

She put on her hat, walked over to the schoolhouse and got her personal belongings, then she made up a pack of the things Rod would need and waited for darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

KNOX MAKES A DEAL.

EILEEN picketed her horse a short distance from the old Lawrence house and stealthily approached. Her heart was in her mouth from worry over Rod. There was no telling what the Roats might do. Sid Roat had an uncanny way of guessing a man's hide-out and swooping down without warning. Rod's wound might have developed complications. She stood several minutes a few feet from the door, listening for any one who might be lurking near by, and hearing only her pounding heart. Suddenly she ran across the driveway, skipped through the back door and closed it. "Rod!" she called.

There was no answer. She fairly raced upstairs. "Rod!" She opened the door, lighted a candle and stared. "Rod!"

"Oh, hello," he said, waking from a heavy sleep, "it's you!" He blinked and stared. "What's happened? Your color is gone."

She kissed him. "I was afraid something had happened to you," she explained.

"I didn't sleep for hours," he said. "But once I dropped off I didn't wake up. What's happened?"

"The Gray Ghost has escaped again, and I've been fired," she informed him.

He listened while she explained what had happened. "Joe's a rat," he growled. "Some of these days—shhh. What's that?"

"I tell yuh I saw a light," a man said. "And I ain't had a drink t'-day. It might be the Ghost, and I can sure use three thousand dollars."

"Won't they ever let up on you, Rod?" the girl whispered wretchedly.

"One of the fine old Western customs is to never let up on a horse thief," Rod answered. "They waited nearly a half hour and nothing happened. The chances are they've gone for help."

The crunch of gravel under a heavy boot broke the silence. "Hey—Rod!"

"That's J. Harney Knox," Rod answered. "Go down and bring him here. He may not be a friend, but I'm worth something to him, so he's not an enemy."

Knox was breathless when he arrived. "I had an idea you might be here," he said. "A couple of Circle R punchers saw a light, but they didn't see me. You've got to move. In fact, you've got to get out of the country, pronto. I hear they fired you, too, Miss Logan."

"Yes," she answered.

"That upsets your racing plans, what with Rod's wound. What're you going to do for money?"

"The colt isn't for sale," Rod cut in, "if that's what you're thinking. No matter what happens, she's hanging onto Blue Streak," he added pointedly.

"Exactly," Knox agreed to Rod's amazement. "Now I'll give you five thousand dollars for your quarter interest, Rod. That will finance shipping the colt and yourselves to the West coast."

"And give you a legal hold on the colt," Rod thought. Their position,

however, was desperate, and beggars couldn't be choosers, he remembered.

"What do you think about it, Eileen?" Rod asked.

"The most important thing in the world is your safety," Eileen answered. Knox lifted his brows at this significant statement. He wasn't exactly surprised, but the situation had developed sooner than he expected it would.

"There's nothing like a bullet wound to hurry up a love affair," he reflected. "Well, what do you say to my offer?" he asked.

"Take it," Eileen said decisively. "That is, providing you will help Rod to the coast."

"That is my idea," Knox answered. It was apparent he had prepared for everything, including a bill of sale for Rod's interest in Blue Streak. He spread out the bill of sale for Rod to sign, then asked Eileen to witness the signature. Next he handed Rod a roll of bills. "There's five thousand dollars there," he said. "I'll loan you my money belt until you can buy one of your own."

Rod handed most of the money to Eileen. "You'll need it," he said. "Ship the colt out in a private car, well padded. We can't take chances with him. Hire some trustworthy man to go along with him."

"But isn't that expensive?" she argued.

"Sure. But all of our eggs are in one basket and we've got to guard the basket," Rod answered. He waited until Knox was out of the room. "Another thing, this man Knox isn't helping me for my health. He's in this because there's money in it for him. Another thing, I'll have Knox send a telegram saying I've shot myself while cleaning a gun, but am not in danger. That'll explain my sickly, pale look should

anybody from Dry Falls bump into me on the coast. I'm expecting the Roats out there."

KNOX returned and announced he was ready to carry Rod downstairs. It was obvious, now that the deal was completed, he was losing no time. He carried Rod to a buckboard, wrapped him in a blanket and gave him a stiff drink of whisky. "Now, don't you worry, my dear," he said, patting Eileen's shoulder. "I'll sneak this man of yours out of the country safely. Just you see that Blue Streak arrives on the West coast in as good condition."

She watched them drive away, then returned home and began packing her own things. The following day Eileen called on Ance Babcock. He was known, locally, as "Uncle Ance." "Uncle Ance," she said, "Rod telegraphed me to send his things. Can I get them?"

"Heh! Heh!" Ance chuckled. "The cuss didn't bring enough clothes here to dust a fiddle. But I'll get 'em together for you. I'd sure give a pretty to see Blue Streak run. I saw the original Blue Streak run. I sat in a box with Hank Banning and Lawrence, the time he won." He sighed heavily. "If they'd have carried out their plans, things would've been different with me. In my time I was some pun'kins as a trainer." His faded eyes suddenly brightened with hope. "It's kinda crazy, I suppose, but do you figger I could start where I left off, and go along with you as trainer? I could give Rod some pointers."

"I know you could, Uncle Ance," she agreed. "But there isn't any pay roll. We are doing all this on a shoe string."

The old fellow sighed heavily. "I'd sure admire to see one more

B-L winner come in," he said. "Folks may claim different, but any colt that comes from this here part of the country is a B-L nag to me. Wait," he said as she started to go.

He pulled up a board under the wood box, lifted out an empty milk tin crammed with money. "I saved it," he explained, "for the day when I might need doctorin' or couldn't lay me in a winter's grub. Take it and pay me back when that colt wins some money."

"Oh, Uncle Ance, I can't do it," she protested. "The colt might not win and—"

He shook a gnarled finger under her nose. "Tut! Tut! Tut!" he said severely. "Don't even think that colt ain't goin' to win. It's same as puttin' a curse on him."

"Oh, dear," she sighed. "I really don't know how to handle you."

"You're danged tootin' you don't know how to handle me," he snapped in a shrill, triumphant voice. "I'd been married years ago if ary a female knowed how to handle me. Take this money and shut up." His eyes twinkled merrily. "Take it before I get riled up and have one of my spells."

"Oh, all right," she agreed. Then she went home to wait and worry until she heard Rod had safely arrived on the West coast.

Rod Barry, weak and pale, but on his feet, anxiously watched the train pull in. Knox was with him. The man held a fourth interest in Blue Streak and there was no way of getting rid of him. Nevertheless, Rod was on guard against eleventh-hour trickery that might give Knox entire control of Blue Streak.

As he looked back, Knox had always been generous in his offers. But he invariably demanded a full accounting and took his profit. And

that profit was often tremendous. Again, Knox knew he was the Gray Ghost, and that was an effective club in itself. There seemed nothing to do but make the best of the fellow.

"Blue Streak's in that car," Knox shouted, checking up on the car number. "They're opening the door now."

"I wonder who Eileen hired to watch the colt," Rod said. "She didn't say in her letter—just said the paper published a story about my shooting myself while cleaning a gun, and that they would start soon."

The door slid back and Eileen stepped into the frame, looking as bright and happy as the first day he had seen her framed in the schoolhouse door. "I was afraid to trust any one so came along myself, with an assistant."

"Who's the assistant?" Rod asked.

"Heh! Heh!" The familiar chuckle floated from the car, then Uncle Ance's cheerful face appeared. "I run a whizzer on her, son," he explained. "Loaned her money, then made her put me on the pay roll. I'm gittin' a dollar a week and found."

ROD started to climb into the car, but Knox pulled him back. "Easy, Rod; you can't afford to climb around yet. Your wound isn't healed," he warned.

"I wanted a look at Blue Streak," he said. "I suppose I might just as well be patient. I can't even help Eileen down. I'm sure a poor excuse of a man."

Eileen jumped to the ground and ran into his arms. While he held her, she pressed her cheek against his, and quickly brushed the tears from her eyes. She was worried and shocked. He looked terribly sick and underweight. He should never have been moved. She hated Roat

and his remorseless pursuit more than ever. He lived, smug and respected, while better men were hunted down, shot and hanged.

He pushed her gently back and noticed her glistening eyes. "Don't worry, Eileen," he said; "I'm doing fine. Am much better."

"Much better?" she asked. "What must you have been like when you arrived?"

"Hardly worth lugging to a room," Rod answered. "But Knox has a lot invested in me. So he carried me to a room and put me to bed. He's treated me fine. I suppose I shouldn't kick, but it seems as if I'm getting deeper and deeper into debt with him."

"Where's Tim Grant?" Eileen asked.

"I wrote for Tim to join me two weeks ago, but didn't get an answer," Rod answered. "What do you think? I hope he hasn't gone to the deuce."

"If Tim has suddenly vanished," Eileen said, "that'll make two Dry Falls boys who have disappeared without a trace."

"Who was the other?" he asked.

"Sam Moss, Rod," she answered. "I talked to his father the day I left. He asked me to keep an eye open for him on the coast. He disappeared about the time Roat's riders hanged your brother, Scott. He was with Roat and——"

"Out with it," Rod said grimly as she hesitated.

"Roat spread the report the Gray Ghost had probably killed him," she said.

"The Gray Ghost didn't kill him," Rod snapped. "I had to cut down Scott's body and leave some one swinging in his place. I was in a killing mood because of Scott. Sam Moss was on guard and I jumped him. I was about to finish him when

I realized he was only a scared kid—a kid like Scott, only younger. I didn't do it. I bound and gagged him, then hung him to the limb, but the rope wasn't about his neck. It was tied to rope bindings around his arms and shoulders. I thought the impudence of the act would ridicule Roat, and I've wondered why I'd never heard anything. Roat, to silence Moss and save himself from becoming range laughingstock, must have finished Sam."

"And his men wouldn't ask questions," Eileen said. "Because you had made them look ridiculous also." She sighed. "Another crime charged to the Gray Ghost he never committed."

A group of men, carrying cameras, approached. They explained they represented the various newspapers and wanted photographs. "We want the colt, with its owners standing by it," one of them said.

"Knox and you had better take your places," Rod whispered.

"But—oh, yes," Eileen said in a disappointed tone, "I had forgotten, Knox made you sell your interest to him."

Rod stood back and watched the photographers take pictures from various angles, then the reporters asked the girl questions. "I want you boys to meet my trainer, Rod Barry," she said when they had finished asking questions. "He knows horses."

The men were pleasant, but they were interested in the colt and his chief owner. "Now let's move out to the track," Eileen suggested when the newspapermen were gone. "Rod, you need rest."

"I'm doing fine," he answered. "Everything is fixed at the track, with reservations for us at a near-by boarding house."

"Did you make reservations on

the cuff?" she asked, smiling. "We haven't much money. The transportation costs were terrible."

"The landlady was hard and practical. She has dealt with track folks before—or some kinds of track followers—and she demanded cash in advance," Rod explained. "Come on, let's start. You, too, Ance. You're in on this."

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM AN OLD ALBUM.

MRS. O'LEARY, the landlady, called Rod into the parlor. "You folks are the limit," she sighed. "You're all different. First there's this J. Harney Knox. His talk would charm a bird off a bush. He," she added significantly, "seems to have money. Then there's you, on your last legs physically and financially. Uncle Ance Babcock is cheating the undertaker and boasts of it. Then we come to Eileen—God love her—she's a darling. And all of you wrapped up in a colt. All of you practically broke. And now here's a rat-faced jockey, down at the heel, who claims he belongs to your party."

"Is he red-headed?" Rod asked.

"Yes, and with a face like a turkey egg," she added. "I can see by the look of your eye I must let him in." She opened the door. "Come in, you mick!"

Tim Grant, eyes bright with eagerness, bounced into the room. He looked as if he had ben riding the rods. He was dirty and dusty. And Rod noticed something more—Tim's eyes were hard and worldly. There were glints of suspicion in their depths. The trust in mankind had not been any too evident back at the Outlaw Creek school. But now the last glimmer had vanished. There was a newborn confidence

that did not escape Rod. Whether the world had made a wolf or fox of Tim, it was certain he knew how to survive. He had learned how to force the world to feed and transport him without cost.

Tim shook hands. "Where's the colt?" he asked. "Where's Miss Logan? And what's happened to the teacher's pet? You look like you'd been sick."

"It's a long story, Tim," Rod answered. "What's happened to you? I gave you enough money to last until we got out here. You look down at the heel."

"That another long story," Tim answered. He was fresh, impudent. "I got trimmed out of that money, first thing. Where's Miss Logan—if she is Miss Logan?"

"Why do you ask that?" Rod sharply demanded. He devoutly wished he were physically strong enough to give the boy a thorough shaking up. "Why did you ask that?" he repeated.

"I spent my last money for this paper," he said, thrusting a late edition at Rod.

Rod sat down on a sofa, and it was well he did so, in his weakened condition. On the sports page, a headline greeted him.

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM AN OLD ALBUM

The *News* takes pleasure in publishing photographs from an old album. On the left is the likeness of the original Blue Streak, and on the right, his reputed descendant, the present Blue Streak. On the left, immediately below is a photograph of Abbie Lawrence, wife of the junior partner of the famed Banning-Lawrence ranch. On the right, immediately below, is a photograph of Eileen Logan, who owns a majority interest in the present Blue Streak.

The *News* admires the courage of Eileen Logan, J. Harney Knox, Rod Barry and their reputed jockey, Tim Grant, but all, with the exception of Knox, are too young

and too inexperienced to hope to win the Turfmen's Mile. And this goes for the colt, too. Sometime, but not now.

Rod stared at the pictures of Eileen and Abbie Lawrence. Except in clothing styles, they were alike. It was obvious they were mother and daughter. Some one had found Abbie Lawrence's picture in searching out items of interest in the earlier race. Struck by the similarity, the *News* had published them instantly and effectively. The reader would read and wonder, then leap to his own conclusions.

Rod groaned. "The cat's out of the bag now," he said. "The Roats will know a Lawrence has come back to challenge them. Out of decency, I hope no paper digs out the fact that Sid Roat was responsible for Lawrence's death. Or, worse yet, prints a picture of the trees on Horse Thief Ridge."

Eileen came in a few minutes later. "Read this!" she exclaimed, thrusting a newspaper at Rod.

"I've already read it," he said. "It'll give Roat the shock of his life. He'll begin to check back and wonder just how much you have learned. He'll remember your interest in the early history of the country and he'll know you're here for one purpose—to beat him."

"I know, Rod," she said wearily, "and I'm just sick over the whole business."

"There's this in our favor: The battle had shifted from the Outlaw Creek country to the West coast," he said.

"But he'll throw the weight of his wealth against us now," she argued. "So far he has regarded us with contempt. Now he'll bring the fight to us. You know how ruthless he was with the Gray Ghosts. He'll be equally as ruthless."

"We'll beat him. We've got to," he said. "Did you see Tim Grant?"

"Yes." She groaned. "I always had faith in Tim. But—he's as furtive, shrewd and hard-eyed as some little red-headed animal. He learned fast. He knows the Book of Survival. And to think we thought we were giving him a real chance by taking him away from Outlaw Creek. He'll have to ride Blue Streak, of course. The colt has confidence in him, even if ours is shaken. And you know the old saying about swapping horses in the middle of the river."

"Do you know what I'm going to do after we win this race?" Rod asked her suddenly. "I'm going to marry you, first. Then we are going to the high mountain country and forget everything but each other. We'll whip some trout streams I know about. And all this is going to happen after we *win this race*."

"You are sweet to buck me up. I should be ashamed of myself, talking like a quitter," she said.

"It'll be your turn next, Eileen. When I'm down, give me some backbone. Our only danger is, we'll both feel low at the same time," he said. "But if we both feel high at the same time, nothing can stop us." He eyed her curiously. "Where have you been all the morning?"

"There's ten days' racing before the Turfmen's Mile," she answered. "I went out and lined up the hamburger concession. I'm going to make some money and put it right down on Blue Streak's nose." She got up and put on her hat. "Roat arrives in a half hour with his black stallion, Cultus Chief. I want to see how he acts when he buys the *News* with the photographs from an old album." She regarded him anxiously for a moment. "I wish you

would take several days off and rest."

"I can't," he answered. "Blue Streak has certain faults that must be corrected. But I'm not going to work him too hard. Many a good horse lost his race during the training period."

EILEEN had arrived in the car with the horse. Now she watched the Roats step from their private car, which was attached to the train which brought their racing string. With luck, they expected to take thousands of dollars in purses during the race meet and climax the season by winning the fifteen thousand dollars offered to the winner of the Turfmen's Mile.

Sid Roat greeted acquaintances loudly as he stepped from his car. He enjoyed the fawning his wealth and position invariably brought. And for that reason he enjoyed arriving at places.

"Here's something you'll want to see, Mr. Roat," a man said, extending a copy of the *News*.

"Very interesting," Roat said importantly as he glanced at the headlines. He duly observed the similarity between the horses, then he froze as he realized Eileen was Abbie Lawrence's daughter.

"He's frightened," Eileen whispered excitedly. "He's so frightened he's forgotten to mask his feelings. There—he has control of himself."

"Interesting," Roat said for the second time, and thrust the paper into his pocket. He slowly entered his car, closed the door, then roared as he aroused Joe out of a sound sleep. "Eileen's Lawrence's daughter!" he bellowed. "How much have you told her, you blithering idiot?"

"Nothing," Joe blurted.

"She pumped you dry about early-day history. Do you realize that

she might— No, you can't realize it. You haven't got the brains. From now on, keep to the car and keep sober," he ordered. "I don't want you doing more damage. This is a fight. They can't do anything without money. And by thunder I'll break 'em here and now."

He stalked out and put in the remainder of the day watching the track. In the days that followed he watched Blue Streak's workouts through binoculars. "The Grant brat can handle him," he concluded. "And Rod Barry's a trainer, or I never saw one. I thought they were crazy—everybody else thinks so, too—to enter Blue Streak in the big race. But Barry isn't crazy. He knows horses. Where'd he learn? Where'd he come from? Shot himself, they say. He looks bad. I wished he'd blown his infernal head off. But there's an answer to it all—Tim Grant. I've got to get to him."

Three days before the big race, Roat sent word for Tim to meet him in his room. Roat was pacing nervously up and down when the jockey arrived. Roat stared a long time at the freckled face. "You've learned a few things since you left Outlaw Creek, haven't you?" he said.

"Plenty," Tim answered shortly.

"Maybe you've learned the wise man in this world looks out for himself," Roat suggested.

"That's the first thing I learned. And I learned everybody's out to knife a kid like me. And that goes for you, too. So why'd you send for me?"

"We speak the same language, Tim," Roat said. "Others might argue about this, but we know Blue Streak's going to win the race, unless he breaks a leg. And that my Cultus Chief will place. Good! They are quoting ten-to-one odds on Cultus Chief. A thousand dollars

on his nose will get you ten thousand. That's more money than your family ever saw."

"It sure is," Tim agreed. "The folks could buy a small ranch with good soil for that much."

Roat counted out ten one-hundred-dollar bills. "I'd like to see your folks get onto some good soil," he said. His eyes narrowed. "And just to make sure you don't double-cross me and bet on Blue Streak, my own betting commissioner is outside." He stepped to the door and called a man with a florid face. "Elmer, here's a lad who wants to turn an honest dollar to get his folks onto god soil. He's betting a thousand on Cultus Chief's nose."

"A lad of sound judgment," Elmer said. "Here's your ticket. But don't let anybody catch you with it. Come to me, after the race, and I'll arrange to cash it. And I'd leave the hotel the back way if I were you."

Tim slipped out the back way, and a half hour later went to his room in Mrs. O'Leary's boarding house. Rod came in and asked him how he was feeling. "Fine and dandy," he answered. "Things are looking better all the time. I'd say Blue Streak had as good as won right now, only you can never tell what'll happen in a horse race."

Mrs. O'Leary's voice interrupted. "I thought the jockey was bad enough," she said, "but the critter that's at the door asking for you now looks like something from a shady past. Shall I let him in, or call the police? Maybe it's the Gray Ghost that we used to read about in the papers."

Rod peered intently from behind lace curtains. "Good grief," he groaned. "What next?" He called Ance Babcock. "See that fellow? Get him into your room and keep

him there until after the race. Keep his mouth shut, if you have to gag him. Later on, when I've taken a drink and braced up, I'll talk to him."

"Leave it to me," Ance chuckled. "I told Eileen I'd be needed before this race was over."

CHAPTER IX.

A LONG-SHOT BET.

EILEEN picked up the morning's mail, speculated briefly over an envelope bearing Roat's handwriting, and then glanced at the brief note within. It read:

MISS LAWRENCE:

Now that the *News* has smoked you out, and we both know it's a finish fight, why not settle the whole business by a few side bets on the race. I'll bet you cash, land or horses against your Blue Streak.

Yours truly,

SID ROAT.

She walked into the living room, where Rod was sprawled out on a sofa. He looked so sick and tired she was inclined not to bother him. But in the end she decided he should know. "What do you think of this?" she asked, handing him the note.

"Roat's pretty sure he's going to win the race," Rod answered. "Otherwise he wouldn't be risking cash, land or horses."

"Do you think he's fixed the race?"

"He would if he could. The officials are on the level, though," he answered. "That narrows it down to Tim Grant."

She went out and called the jockey. His face was hard and suspicious when he appeared. He acted as if he felt they no longer trusted him. "I want your advice on this, Tim," Eileen said.

The boy read the note through slowly. "I guess we're the only folks that figure Blue Streak will win," he said. "We may be fooled, but it's a good bet. You should make a lot of money on a long-shot bet."

"All right," she answered, "I'm going to call on Mr. Roat."

Eileen, accompanied by J. Harney Knox, met Roat in his hotel lobby that evening. "Mr. Knox holds a quarter interest in the colt," the girl explained.

"I'll buy that quarter interest if I win," Roat said. He was uneasy before Eileen's cool, contemptuous gaze.

"I'll bet my interest," Knox said. "Figure it at two thousand; that's what Rod paid. I paid him a little more, but the odds are long and I don't want to scare you out. Say, my interest against twelve thousand? The odds are twenty-to-one so you're getting a bargain."

Roat repressed his elation. "That's a deal. What's your proposition, Miss Lawrence?"

"I'll bet my interest against a clear title to the old Lawrence home on the B-L ranch," she answered. "That will include the original one hundred and sixty acres around it. You see, I am still sentimental."

"That's a big bet," Roat argued.

"You've let the house, orchards and everything around it run down," she said. "That's my offer. Take it or leave it." He hesitated, and she got up. "All offers off, then." She got up and started for the door.

"Mine's off, too," Knox added.

"All right," Roat growled. "I'll take it. Let's make out the papers right now and put them in the hands of a stakeholder."

An hour later Eileen returned to

the lodging house. Rod was sleeping heavily on the sofa. She noticed the lines of worry had deepened. The wound and the responsibility of putting Blue Streak in shape for the race were taking a terrible toll from his system. He woke up with a nervous jerk. "What happened?"

"I went all the way, Rod," she replied. "When the race is finished either we own Blue Streak, the old homestead, free and clear or—nothing."

"If it's nothing, we'll start all over again," he said. "I think I'll hit the hay. I don't seem to have much ambition these days."

Eileen looked in on Rod the day of the race. "Let him sleep until noon," she told Ance Babcock. "I'm really worried over him, but he'll never forgive us if we let him sleep through the race."

She hurried down to the track and got the hamburger stand in operation. "We have to have some money to get out of town on," she thought, "in case things go against us. Still, why should we leave town? Where'll we go?"

Business came in waves. After each race there was a flood of customers in front of the counter. With a hired helper she fairly threw hamburgers at them. The cash register rang merrily.

Then she was alone in the stand. She mopped her perspiring face as the crowd yelled, "They're off!" The next race was the Turfmen's Mile. A genial individual, who listed heavily to port, beamed at her over the counter. "Howdy, sister," he gulped. "Whatcha worryin' about? Folks don't come to a horse race to worry; they come to get drunk."

"I'm not drunk," Eileen answered, "so I'm worrying."

"Have a snort," he invited, extending a quart bottle.

"No, thanks," Eileen answered.

"There's somethin' queer about the big race. Odds are forty-to-one against Blue Streak," he said. "The smart money's goin' on Cultus Chief's nose."

"Forty-to-one?" she asked. "How'd you like to run this stand for a few minutes?" She dragged him behind the counter and put an apron on him. In his present mood he sought adventure and this was something unusual.

"If mother could only see me now," he gulped. "Get 'em while they're hot—Monty Morgan's double-barreled, center-fire hamburgers! Get 'em while they're hot!"

EILEEN emptied the cash register and hurried to the nearest bookmaker. "All of this on Blue Streak to win!" she said. She ran back to the stand. "How would you like to buy me out? You can have the whole works for fifty dollars."

"Sister, you've made a deal," Monty Morgan informed her. He laid the money on the counter. "For once in my life I'm goin' to turn an hones' dollar. Monty Morgan's double-barreled—"

Eileen ran back to the bookmaker. "Fifty dollars more," she said breathlessly. "And that cleans me." Then she searched for Rod and Tim Grant.

She found them in the paddock. Rod was whispering final instructions, and Tim, with his face set and impassive, was nodding. "That's all," Rod concluded.

Roat gave a last word to his jockey, then looked up as Tim rode past. "Don't forget what you're riding for," he warned.

"I won't," Tim answered.

When the crowd had drifted to the rail, Rod sat down on a bale of hay and took a stiff drink. He smiled grimly. "I'll stay here, Eileen, until they're off. I never could stand the uncertainty of a start. Sorry I'm folding up on you like this." He sighed. "How's the hamburger business?"

"It's all on Blue Streak's nose," she answered. "Here comes Ance Babcock. I wonder what he's done with the prisoner you gave him?"

"They're off!" the crowd roared.

Rod got to his feet and Eileen caught his arm and hurried him to the rail. The horses thundered past with Cultus Chief out in front. Blue Streak was bunched well behind. "Grant's pullin' Blue Streak," a railbird exclaimed. "Now maybe you'll believe me when I said Roat had given him a thousand to bet on Cultus Chief."

"Rod, did you hear that?" Eileen gasped. "I can't believe he'd throw us down for all his hardness."

"You never can tell," Rod growled.

"I smelled a rat," the railbird said, "when I saw him sneak into Roat's room. I peeked over the transom and saw Roat's bettin' commissioner give Grant a ticket. Then I ducked out before I got caught. Roat's a bad one to fool with."

The bunch trailing the leaders separated, and Blue Streak, shaking his head and with ears laid back, pushed up to fourth place. "Grant's makin' it look like an on-the-level race," the railbird said. "Wants to stay in the business and make more crooked money, I suppose."

"Now take that third nag!" Rod suddenly yelled. He got onto the fence—a ghost of a man with two

splashes of red on his hollow cheeks. "Move in like I told you or I'll wring your neck, Tim. Give him the whip. Stir him up."

"He never can catch him now," the railbird yelled. "Come on, Chief."

"Blue Streak!" Eileen screamed. "Come on!" She was pushing her body with each stride, as if to help the colt along. Lengths ahead sped Cultus Chief. The second and third riders closed in, checking Blue Streak, then Tim swung wide, lost ground, and regained it.

"Clever rider," Rod muttered. "He's learned plenty. You couldn't prove in a thousand years he's throwing that race. Look at the blue boy go!"

A roar of approval thundered from the stands. Even the Cultus Chief's backers were stirred by Blue Streak's courage. His legs were a blur, his tail floated like a defiant flag and the jockey seemed to melt into his back and reduce wind resistance.

"He's cutting down the lead," Rod yelled. "Come on, boy. By golly, I think you can do it." Lurid adjectives flowed from Rod's mouth. He forgot everything but the colt.

"Rod! Rod!" Eileen pleaded. "Calm yourself! You've got to. Oh, my darling. Come on, Blue Streak. Rod, calm down. Blue Streak! Come on! Rod, you simply must relax! Come on, Blue Streak!"

"What's the matter?" Roat roared suddenly. "Has that fool colt taken the bit in his teeth? Tim, you fool, pull him."

But Tim wasn't pulling him. He was giving everything he had to get the last ounce of strength out of the colt. Rod could see the jockey's lips going as he talked to Blue Streak. He told himself no horse could cut

down that lead, and yet a mighty lunge put Blue Streak's head even with Cultus Chief's saddle. Another and he was even. His nose fell back, then shot ahead. The judges' narrowed eyes saw the blue nose leap ahead six inches beyond Cultus Chief's nose.

"Rod!" Eileen sobbed. "He won! We won!"

"Sure," Rod said thickly. "Sure, we—"

"The pale guy fainted," a railbird yelled. "He must 'a' bet on the wrong horse."

"He bet on the right horse," Eileen retorted. "Somebody, get a stretcher." She glanced toward the Roat box and saw the angry rancher pushing toward the finish line. J. Harney Knox was not far behind him.

KNOX and a square-jawed individual paused as Roat jerked Tim Grant into a secluded spot. "You rat!" the rancher panted. "You double-crossed me."

"I didn't double-cross anybody," Tim snarled. "You just made a mistake when you figured because the Grants had had a lot of hard luck at Outlaw Creek that we were a crooked lot. Sure, I bet the thousand just as you told me to, then tore up the ticket. Do you suppose I was going to throw down the first pair of folks that ever gave me a chance? Another thing, Rod Barry shipped me west to learn a few things. And I learned that if I didn't let you think I had thrown my backers down that you'd probably throw in a couple of crooked jockeys to box me up."

"You double-crossing rat," Roat panted, "I'll—"

"You'll face a charge of murdering Rod's brother Scott by hanging

him," J. Harney Knox cut in. "Rod cut him down that night and strung Sam Moss up in his place. That trick would have laughed you off the range, and so you paid Moss to get out of the country, then dry-gulched him. You wanted to hang his murder on the Gray Ghost. He fell into the river and floated to safety. Since then he's been trying to get over your bullet wound. He read that story in the news, figured things out, and showed up. Rod's had him under cover ever since. But he's thrown a scare into your men, Roat. And rather than face a murder charge themselves, they've agreed to talk."

"Who are you, Knox, and what business have you got mixing into my affairs?" Roat demanded as a square-jawed man placed him under arrest.

"I'm just a man who has been working on this case nearly twenty years," Knox answered. "More will come out at the trial."

"Rod is Scott's brother, eh?" Roat said. "Then Rod's the other Gray Ghost. Officer—"

"Keep your shirt on," Knox admonished. "Don't think for a minute you're going to arrest Rod for running off your horses, or shooting up the Circle R riders you had appointed deputies. That angle is all taken care of. S'long. I'll see you in court."

J. Harney Knox walked on his tiptoes as he entered the room under the stands which served as a temporary hospital. "I've collected all bets, folks," he announced. "It looks like you'll soon be moving back to the old B-L Ranch—well, after the honeymoon." He beamed. "Roat's been arrested."

"Does he know I'm the Gray Ghost?" Rod asked.

"Sure, but what good will it do him? He doesn't know yet, nor do you, that Rod Barry is really Rod Banning, Hank Banning's son," Knox explained. "So when you ran off Circle R horses you were only taking what belonged to you; and when you shot up Circle R men you were defending yourself against the biggest horse-thieving ring that ever operated in the Southwest."

"Go back, Knox, to the time Roat hanged my father," Rod asked.

"I was a youngster, mixed up with the mob, and trying to do something," Knox explained. "But your father shook his head and said: 'You can't help me now, Knox. But see that my boys are taken out of his reach. He'll stop at nothing to wipe out all of the Bannings. Train them against the day when they can come back and square this account, and finish the job Lawrence and I started—developing a Kentucky Derby winner.'"

"We've got the winner," Rod said. "And the B-L is the ranch I used to dream about, when Scott had his nightmares."

"You were pretty young when I took you away, and named you Barry to throw Roat off the trail," Knox explained. "But this country was impressed on your mind. The dream was really recalling scenes of your babyhood."

"And Scott's nightmares?" Rod asked.

"He must have seen his father hanging to that cottonwood limb," Knox answered. "Young as he was, the impression was left in his mind. I'll leave you here until I can get a carriage. There's lots to be done fixing up the ranch. Gradually you'll control the whole country. Joe Roat will never keep Circle R's head above water after his father is gone."

"Feeling better?" Eileen asked Rod.

"Plenty," he answered. "The old Banning-Lawrence partnership now starts all over again. Come here, Tim; we haven't congratulated you yet on the great ride."

Tim shook hands bashfully. "I felt pretty sick for a while," he confessed. "I had a hunch maybe you'd heard things about me and didn't trust me."

"We couldn't distrust you," Eileen explained. "And it's true you could have cleaned up ten thousand dol-

lars just by simply throwing that race?"

"I suppose so, but my mind don't work that way. Besides, think of what I'll clean up at the Kentucky Derby, riding a dark horse. I'll see you later. You'll be wanting to plan your honeymoon now." At the door he paused and looked over his shoulder.

Eileen was smiling down at Rod. She leaned down and kissed him impulsively.

"Y-a-a-a-aaah!" Tim jeered. "Teacher's pet!"

SOWS MUST HAVE THEIR VITAMINS

AFTER calories swept the country and filled every heart with misgivings of one kind or another, the spotlight went to vitamins. And now that the public is pretty well informed on what vitamins should and should not be in their diet, attention is turned to the pork family. Apparently vitamin "B" should be the sow's greatest asset in its diet, for that is the vitamin found in most protein food.

Swine specialist C. P. Thompson, of Oklahoma, says: "Pigs born to sows with an adequate supply of protein during pregnancy will weigh more and be more vigorous than those from sows whose rations are deficient in protein. Proper balancing of rations is more important than feeding large amounts."

The best protein pasture for sows is green-colored, leafy, leguminous hay. Among commercial protein food, milk, meat meal, meat scraps, fish meal, cottonseed meal, linseed oil meal and wheat shorts, are suitable.

So much more
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HANGMAN'S KNOT

By DON ALVISO

BRETT HALE stood on the deep porch of the Circle C ranch house, the shadows of the night almost concealing his tall figure, the scrape of the fiddle and the shuffle of the dancers' feet in the big living room behind him only half heard. The sounds were loud enough; they were only half heard because Brett's eyes were brooding over the wide expanse of Blue Grass Valley, his mind on the vague, disquieting rumors he had heard of Cappo Yahcanne since he had come

home. He realized that his thoughts should have been on the birthday party going on inside the house, the birthday party of Bonnie Carlin, the daughter of "Tomp" Carlin, who owned the Circle C. But he couldn't get his mind off Cappo Yahcanne.

He heard a step behind him, but he did not turn. He had recognized the step. He stood motionless, waiting for the other man to discover him there. In the next instant Tomp Carlin had seen him, and paused beside him.

"So this is where you've got to,

Brett. What's bothering you, son? You haven't been yourself since you came back."

"It's Cappo Yahcane," answered Brett bluntly. "He seems to have perpetrated some pretty ugly outrages for himself in the two years I've been away to school."

"Yes, he has." Carlin nodded his head in the darkness. "The Sourdough Hills are as beautiful a stretch of mountain foothill country as you'll ever see, Brett, and in Blue Grass Valley lies the finest cattle land west of the Rockies. But they never should have been included in the same county."

"Right," agreed Brett grimly. "It's wonderful country, hills above and valley below. But it's a potential powder keg right now, if what I hear of Cappo is true."

"Well, it's true." Carlin's voice was harsh, and his gaze went with Brett's out over the valley.

In the Blue Grass Valley was the town of Union, county seat, and the only town of any size in the whole county. There were several ranches in the valley, none of them huge in size, but all of them large enough to be prosperous. Blue Grass Valley was cow country, with cow country ideas and ideals. It was peopled by hard-working and serious-minded ranchers, who employed hard-riding and straight-shooting cowboys. In the recesses of the Sourdough Hills lived the mountain folk, nesters, doing some farming, a bit of trapping, and a little scratching in the creek beds for gold.

The mountaineers seldom came to town, save for a trip a year to buy necessary supplies; but the valley people were aware of their presence, the twenty or thirty families of them, of their crude log cabins, their scrub stock, and their sinister bad man, Cappo Yahcane.

"Just where did he come from in the first place?" Brett asked, cutting into Carlin's uneasy thoughts.

"I don't know, Brett. I guess his ancestry's pretty uncertain. From his looks, you'd judge that he's of such mixed breed that any name you might apply to him would fit. He simply lives in the hills, anywhere and everywhere, and until the last year he didn't seem much of a threat. He did his plundering and bullying among his own people up there, sort of descending on any of them any time, demanding food and a night's lodging, and taking it by force if they seemed at all unwilling. He got them all afraid of him, and I suppose that puffed him up, and he thought he was too big for his breeches and branched out."

"So he started the branching out by raiding the Rocking R, scared the daylights out of Mrs. Roland, and shot up one of the cowhands, and then kept going, eh? When did Sheriff Lynn go after him, Tom?"

"The very next day after he shot Old Morgan's boy, Brett. Been gone three days now. Lulu and I have been getting anxious about him. He's her only brother, and he's been more like a brother to me than a brother-in-law." Carlin shifted from one foot to the other. "I'm sorry your father died, Brett, and that you had to come home from agricultural college, but I'm glad you're here. This situation's frightening, it's so bad. We've been trying to get Cappo now for well over a year, but the posse men have been helpless in those hills."

"Oh, yes. Of course." Brett frowned impatiently. "They can only wear themselves out in that thick mountain brush, or be sniped off by mountaineers who could never be identified. Lynn was right to go alone. But I wish I'd known he was

going. I wish I could have gone, too. I've got a personal score to settle with Cappo Yahcannie, Tomp, though he doesn't know it."

"You, Brett?" Carlin started. "What did Cappo ever do to you? When did he ever do anything to you?"

"He killed my father, Tomp. Three years ago."

"Why—why, Brett! Your father only died last month."

"Yes. But three years ago he caught Cappo stealing that big black-and-white pinto he valued so much. He and Cappo traded bullets. Cappo hit him low in the body. He didn't want any one to know it. Even I never knew it till I came home last week. He left a letter for me. He died of that bullet wound, Tomp, after waiting three years to get well enough to go after Cappo himself. And I—if I could ever get a chance at Cappo Yahcannie—"

HE cut himself short as a man came riding down the road at a furious gallop, straight into the ranch-house yard. Both Brett and Tomp Carline stepped forward to the edge of the porch, as the man came rushing up the steps, and the dim light from the house window revealed him to be "Cass" Newman, one of the Diamond A men. Brett had been working on the Diamond A when he went away, and he had returned to the same job when he came home. Newman halted in front of him.

"Sheriff Lynn," he said swiftly, "is dead. He tried to down Cappo, on the edge of the valley east of Union. Cappo was staging another raid. He shot Lynn. The boys are bringing him in."

Carlin stood aghast. How could he tell his wife what had happened

to her only brother, whom she had loved so much? He half turned to Brett, in a kind of stunned helplessness, and several men came hurrying out of the house to see what was happening, having heard the approach of the horse, and the sound of Newman's excited voice. In another moment the news had burst among them, they flocked into the house all together, gesticulating and loudly calling down curses of vengeance on the head of Cappo Yahcannie.

Brett stood among the excited and furious men, so intent in silent and harried thought that he scarcely realized where he was, that he had come into the house with them, that they were grouped crowded around him. He was thinking bitterly, wildly, "Cappo Yahcannie! How I'd like the chance of stringing him up!" Then he started and stared around him, realizing suddenly that he had said the words aloud.

"What's that?" demanded Amos Ayers, at his elbow. Ayers was owner of the Diamond A. "What did you say, Brett? Did you say you'd like the chance of stringing him up?"

"I did. But I didn't mean to say it aloud." Brett's grim gaze turned to Ayers. "I wish I could lay hands on a rope stout enough and hard enough to break his neck, and light out right now and do the job myself."

"You wouldn't stand no more chance than a celluloid dog in hell," protested Carlin quickly. "He'd get you just like he did Lynn, like he's already got several of the valley men."

"I ain't so sure about that!" Amos Ayers stroked his lean chin and eyed Brett thoughtfully. "Lynn was a good man; the others who have gone after Cappo were good men; but

they didn't have the cunning it's going to take to git ahead of Cappel Yabcanne. Brett, now, he's got brains of a superior type. Yeah, you have, Brett. You've always been well liked in the valley, too; and you can shoot and you can ride, and if anybody can think one tick faster than Cappel can it ought to be you. I got a suggestion to make, fellows. Long's we need a new sheriff, I don't see why Brett shouldn't be it. What say?"

There could have been only one answer. The idea met with emphatic approval from the Blue Grass Valley men immediately. Union County had never possessed a young sheriff; not for any particular reason that any one knew, but simply because they never had. And Brett had been away to college in the city, Brett had studied and learned a thing or two beyond their ken. Without a breath of hesitation another of the ranchers answered Ayers with vehement enthusiasm.

"That's the smartest suggestion you ever made, Amos. Nearly everybody in the valley is here tonight. Let's hold the election right here and now and make Brett Hale sheriff of Union County. I think Amos is right. I think Brett is the boy who can bring Cappel in."

That swiftly the matter was out of Brett's hands. With the simplicity and dispatch possible in an area of limited population, the election was held and Brett Hale was elected sheriff without one dissenting vote. The mountaineers weren't there to vote, but nobody thought about that. They never came down to the county seat to vote anyway, and they never admitted the least allegiance to the county government created and maintained by the elections.

Though the Sourdough Hills and

Blue Grass Valley touched boundaries, they were as far apart as two worlds. And Brett stood there in the big living room and gazed about curiously at the men who had imposed duty and trust upon him, and the election was over, and "Shorty" McClure, foreman of the Diamond A, approached Brett ceremoniously with a new heavy lasso rope coiled neatly on the palms of his outstretched hands.

"Were you sayin' you wanted a rope stout enough and hard enough to break his neck, sheriff? Here she be. I bought it for myself, over to Union, but I ain't had a chance to use it yet, and I'm makin' you a present of it." He flung the coil across Brett's arm.

Brett glanced down at the heavy rope. It was certainly a strong rope. One of those factory-made ropes with an oiled hemp center of twisted strands, with a hard, close-woven cotton covering on the outside. It was not stiff, as straight twisted hemp is, and as soon as it was worked and used a bit the oil from the hemp center would soften the entire thickness, leaving it still as strong as ever, but easy to coil; pliable, but tough and waterproof.

"It's a swell rope," said Shorty as he turned away. "Just the thing for Cappel. It won't stretch."

BRETT carried the rope home to the Diamond A that night. Two days later, when he went out to saddle his horse, he looked at the strong new rope again, hanging where he had fastened it with a leather thong to the left side of the saddle horn. Before he had finished saddling, Amos Ayers rode up with a committee of ranchers. They had brought the star of law to pin on Brett's shirt, and they swore him in in proper order, and when they left

him he stood still for a long moment, his hand lying idly on the coils of the new rope.

Then he vaulted into the saddle and turned his horse toward Union. As he rode, he took the rope from its fastening and slid the coils thoughtfully through his fingers. He allowed his horse to proceed at a walk, and he built a loop and sent it sailing at small clumps of passing mesquite, swinging the loop off before it could tighten. By the time he reached town, the new rope had begun to limber. As he rode down the one main street of Union, he found himself the object of curious and speculative glances. The election of such a young man to the office of sheriff was causing a mild sensation in Blue Grass Valley. And Brett set his jaw grimly, as he realized that the swiftly the news would seep into the hills, too. All news from the valley seemed to get into the hills some way, with miraculous speed.

Cappo Yahcanne would hear of the young man from agricultural college, little more than a boy, who had been made sheriff for the express purpose of catching and hanging him. Brett wondered what Cappo's reaction would be; that of ridicule, doubtless. Cappo had never held anything but disdain for the valley men and their sheriffs, and Brett's youth would double that disdain and bring ribald laughter to the lips of the strange and bestial being who was Cappo Yahcanne.

Cappo had already heard; and his amusement had been so great that he had deemed expression of his attitude necessary. On that very morning, as Brett rode into Union with the new rope on his saddle, the men of the town found, pinned to the door of the sheriff's office with a long thorn from a mountain bush,

a jeering challenge written on a scrap of paper:

Keap yure boy sherriff out of the Sourdough Hills, or I'll hang him with his own rope.
CAPPO YAHCANNE.

As Brett neared the office he had come to lock up, he saw a group of men before the door, talking in excited murmurs, and from the way they backed to make room for him, and looked at him, he knew something strange was there. Then he saw the note from Cappo. He left it hanging where it was. He went into the office and secured another gun to aid the one strung at his belt. He came out of the office wearing crossed belts, holsters tied down. And he rode out of town, looking neither to the right nor the left, but staring ahead with brooding eyes that held an ugly light, his hand toying with the new rope.

By evening he had entered the first sloping region of the Sourdough Hills. He had quite forgotten that the men of the valley had sent him on this errand and made him the new sheriff of Union County because they believed he had the cunning to outwit Cappo Yahcanne. He remembered only that his father had lingered three years, slowly dying from Cappo's bullet; that Cappo had killed his father for a black-and-white pinto; and for that deed Cappo had to die.

His brooding eyes searched the landscape ahead, and he left the ravine he had been following and took to the ridges. They were less thickly overgrown. He stood less chance of running into an ambush there.

He scrutinized the territory, wondering what he was going to find in this country he had never before entered. It stretched for miles in every direction ahead of him, a mass of hills and ravines, with scarcely a

mile of clear open space anywhere. Combing such a territory for a man who knew the region, and who demanded the allegiance of its inhabitants, and got it, was an enormous task.

"And just how would you find a man like that up here?" Brett asked himself. "You wouldn't. There's only one way to do this."

Late the next morning he came to a mountain cabin. In the cluttered space in front of the cabin several small children were playing. They ran scattering as he approached. He rode up to the door and called. A lean and whiskered man came to the door and peered out.

"I'm Hale, the new sheriff from the valley," Brett announced bluntly. "I'm looking for Cappel Yaheanne. Seen him around lately?"

The man shook his head. "Don't know nothin' about him. Never seen him nowhere no time." And he turned and went back into the cabin.

Brett swung his horse and rode on. At the next cabin he was confronted by a squirrel-faced young man who came hurrying from a scrubby cornfield to intercept him. Brett repeated in almost the same words what he had said to the man farther down the hills. The squirrel-faced fellow scratched his head, staring up into Brett's face.

"Well, le's see naow, sheriff. Seems I did hear of Cappel bein' aroun' som'ers, but I kain't remember where. Looks like ye got a pow'ful dubby job ahead of ye tryin' to ketch up on his trail."

"Perhaps," Brett agreed without emotion. "But I'll keep riding till I get him. Every man in these hills can't have as poor a memory as you have, my friend."

The man stared. "Huh. You'll fin' out!"

BRETT'S face wore a thin hard smile as he rode on. Find out, would he? He hoped so. He rode straight on. He found seven more cabins that day, and he took particular pains to stop at every one, to make clear his identity and his mission in the Sourdough Hills. And no man or woman in any of the cabins could remember where Cappel Yaheanne might be, or where they had seen him, or were even sure they had ever heard of him. And he wondered, as evening came, and he wearily sought a place of rest and concealment, how much of that sort of thing it was going to take before the word would be carried to Cappel Yaheanne, and Cappel would come wrathfully blundering out of hiding.

He was up with the sun and pushing on into the hills, seeking cabins, leaving that message which must sooner or later reach Yaheanne, and send him with its insolence, and send him belligerently looking for the man who had come to hang him. "I'd never find him any other way in this forsaken country," Brett muttered to himself, as he topped a rise, and saw ahead of him a pair of hill men lounging at the edge of the trail just beyond.

"Howdy," Brett greeted them as he rode up to them.

"Haowdy," one of them answered, more less civilly. "Goin' some place or jist ridin'?"

"Both," answered Brett. "I'm Sheriff Hale, and I'm looking for Cappel Yaheanne. I suppose you never heard of him, or never saw him, or if you ever heard of him you aren't sure when, and if you ever saw him you can't remember where."

The other of the two grunted sourly. "Smart, ain't ye? Yeah, we know Cappel Yaheanne, and we

seen him less than an hour ago, camped daown that draw a piece."

Instant suspicion leaped into Brett's eyes. "Oh, you did? Seems to me you're uncommonly informative, brother. Something smells funny around here. What are you two doing along the trail? Where are you bound?"

He received no answer to that question. A harsh voice burst loudly and suddenly on his ears from behind, and he stiffened at the sound and the words.

"Grab for the treetops, sheriff. If you're lookin' for Cappel Yahcanne, chances are you can quit lookin'—or look this way. Up with 'em!"

Brett quietly raised his arms, and the harsh voice of Cappel Yahcanne commanded the two lean men by the trail. "Take his guns, and bring me that there rope. Then git. This is my tie party. Hurry up."

The two men by the trail sidled toward Brett's horse, one on either side of the gelding, reached up and took his guns. One of them removed the rope, passed him with it, and gave it to Yahcanne. Then they both went scurrying up the trail, still carrying his guns.

"You kin keep the guns!" Cappel shouted after them. "He ain't gonna need 'em no more, nohow! Well, I guess you kin look around now, sheriff."

As Brett turned his head, Cappel rode into sight a few feet away, on a black-and-white pinto, swinging the new rope in one hand, his brutish scowling face leering his triumph and satisfaction. "So, this is the rope for hangin', eh?" He shook the coiled rope at Brett. "So! I going to hang with your own rope, like I say. This is it, no?"

"That's it." Brett surveyed Yahcanne's squat figure, his thick

neck, his heavy jowls and dark visage, with expressionless eyes.

Yes, cunning was there in the rough features; cunning, and a kind of devouring curiosity about other men and other ways. The black hard eyes were surveying Brett in avid eagerness, as if he were some strange animal to Cappel Yahcanne, which in reality he was. Yahcanne was not a man upon whose vanity any one could play; too many must have tried that. His cunning would instantly perceive the ruse and thwart the intent. But if that curiosity of his could be aroused, to utter absorption, only for an instant—and Brett felt himself tighten to almost painful watchfulness at the thought.

"You kin come yander this a way." Cappel jerked a thumb over his shoulder, gesturing toward a spreading live oak only a few yards away, a live oak that showed a great stout limb growing almost horizontally from the trunk, fifteen feet in the air. "You go ahead, and stop under that limb."

Brett prodded his mount into movement, passed Yahcanne, and came to a halt under the limb, ignoring the gun that was pointed at his back. With one deft throw of his left hand, Cappel hurled the rope over the limb, and the lasso end of it came dangling down in front of Brett's face.

"You help now." Cappel waved his gun threateningly. "You got a nice loop all ready. You put that loop on your neck."

Brett turned cool eyes on the outlaw. "Hell, you wouldn't try to hang a man with a knot like that, would you? How many men have you hanged, anyhow?"

"I no hang 'em. I shoot 'em. What's the matter with that knot?"

You be just as dead with it as any kind of knot."

Brett laughed shortly. "I thought you couldn't know much about it, Cappo. You'd get the surprise of your life if you tried to hang anybody with a knot like that in a rope like that. That's a special kind of rope. Take a look at it."

Cappo glanced skeptically at the rope, but the gun in his hand did not waver. It wasn't quite like any rope he had ever held. "Good rope," he grunted. "Strong."

"Not very," contradicted Brett lightly. "With a knot like that it would simply break and you wouldn't hang a fellow at all. He'd only drop to the ground and probably break his leg."

The ridiculous statement meant nothing to Cappo Yahcenne. He, in his abysmal ignorance, accepted it for gospel truth. He scowled, but the curiosity was growing in his black eyes. "What you doing, then? You joking at me?"

Brett shrugged. "Not at all. There's a right way and a wrong way to do everything. You might as well learn to do it right. You might want to hang somebody else some day. Why, man, didn't you ever see anybody hanged? Don't you know what a hangman's knot is?"

Yahcenne's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Don't know much about hanging. Put that loop on your neck, or I shoot quick!"

Brett's gaze watched the hammer rise, and he coolly lifted the noose and slipped it around his throat. "Oh, well, this is your party, as you said. But you're going to be a surprised man when you try to hang a man with this rope and this knot in it."

"You ever see 'em hang?" de-

manded Cappo, as if he were forced to the question in spite of himself.

"Sure. Lots of them. Now, you take a lean man, like me, for instance. You know, Cappo, no matter what kind of knot you use, you seldom break a man's neck. Did you know that? It's considered a fine neat job when you break the neck. But it isn't so easy to do. Lean men like me are too light, they usually strangle. And heavy fellows like you—well, you're heavy enough, but hanging you would be a particular job. Very particular, in fact. Your neck's thick and soft. There's a lot of meat on it, but not much muscle. No chance for a quick snap. If the rope didn't break, it would only draw tight and cut in, and before you were dead your neck would be almost cut in two."

"But if the rope break—"

"Ah, yes, if the rope broke," Brett interrupted. "Under some circumstances, that would be a slightly different matter."

"What you say about hangman's knot?"

"Oh, yes—the hangman's knot. Too bad you never saw a real hangman's knot close, Cappo. But if you had, you wouldn't be here. A hangman's knot will break a man's neck, quick and sure, if you place it correctly. A lariat noose can only strangle him. It's too slow. The rope would be sure to break before the job was done if the fellow kicked too hard. But a hangman's knot. Ah, that's a different thing! A sure thing. Easy on the rope, too."

"You talk too much," said Cappo, his black eyes glinting resentfully. "You show me knot, quick."

"With pleasure!" The words had a grim relish, as Brett's gaze clung to the black-and-white pinto and his father's brand on its shoulder. "Give

me the other end of the rope for a minute."

"Yeah. Sure. No tricks, or I shoot quick." He tossed the end of the rope into Brett's hand, and there young Sheriff Hale sat, with a noose about his neck, and the other end of the rope in his own hands. He seemed not to see the ghastly jest of the situation. He was very much interested in showing Cappelto how to fashion a hangman's knot. He formed a loop with the rope end, and his speech ran on, clear and unhurried.

"Now, you do it like this, Cappelto. You wind the rope around, in this manner. See? You should take about thirteen turns. Which takes a bit of rope, but it makes a big hard knot. And it's sure to break the neck before your victim's kicking can break your rope. You must wind it very tight, like this. Watch closely, now. After you have it wound, you must take the knot in your hands and roll it, to make the noose slip better. Now this, Cappelto, when we get it done—ah! Man, that's a knot."

Cappelto was gazing intently at the knot. There was something of admiration in his eyes. Truly, that was an excellent knot, the like of which he had never seen before. The gun he held was still pointed unwaveringly at Brett's chest, but—his eyes were intent on the knot, so that he did not see Brett working at the same time to gain slack in the rope. He did not see that a good foot of the slack had somehow got slipped down to the saddle horn, caught in a half hitch around that horn. He only saw that the rope depending from around Brett's neck had drooped down till it seemed to lie on Brett's saddle before it rose to the limb above.

"Then you roll it again to make

sure it will slip, and slip easily," Brett finished, lifting the knot and loop in his hands. "Like this."

Three things happened with the speed of light. The loop sailed straight over Cappelto's head: the rope jerked taut; and Brett Hale drove sharp rowels to the flanks of a horse that did not know spurs. The gun in Cappelto's hand roared. A bullet whined like an angry wasp past Brett's ear. Brett's goaded horse grunted and made a wild clean lunge ahead. The black-and-white pinto reared and backed. And Brett prayed that the half hitch on his saddle horn would hold.

It did not. It tightened, and strained, as the startled horse made another wild leap ahead. The half hitch slipped from the saddle horn. There was a sound of something falling behind Brett Hale as the rope tautened viciously about his own throat—and broke. Brett was jerked backward in the saddle so violently that he was all but dragged from the lunging horse, and he gripped both hands around the saddle horn blindly, conscious of a stinging pain in his throat.

He fought to clear his senses and bring the plunging gelding to a halt; then he lifted an exploring hand to his neck, and it came away wet with blood, from the raw wound where the rope had torn his skin before it parted on the rough limb of the tree overhead.

"Gosh!" he muttered. "That was too close!" His face was rather white, and the cold perspiration stood out on his forehead as well as on his upper lip.

He removed the lariat from about his neck, and turned to look back at Cappelto. Cappelto lay on the ground, at the pinto's feet, flat

on his back, his face turned almost to the ground. The neck had broken clean.

Brett Hale laid Cappo Yahcenne's body in the Union jail before he turned his horse's head toward the Diamond A. He did it late at night, quietly, and no one in Union knew that night that he had come and gone. He walked into the Diamond A bunk house where the boys were all up, talking to Amos Ayers, trying to argue him out of sending somebody after Brett. The boys looked at him, slightly startled, as he halted in the doorway, a coil of

rope over his arm, and they wondered why he looked so white, and why he had his neckerchief so high about his neck. Ayers whirled and stared at him.

"You—did you give it up?"

"Cappo Yahcenne has paid his debts, Amos." Brett slipped the coil of rope from his arm. Each end of it still bore a loop. One loop was decorated with a hangman's knot. The other was stained with blood. He tossed the rope to Shorty McClure, and a faint smile lifted his sober mouth. "Your danged rope is no good. It broke."

THE MOUNTAIN HORSE

SOME people call the mountain horse "the Oregon bronc," because he has made himself famous, or infamous, as a rodeo buckler for many years. "Mountain horses" is what the natives usually call them to distinguish them from the smaller cayuse that is common to the plains country farther east.

The mountain horse is quite sizable, fifteen hands high, and weighs better than a thousand pounds. Naturally, he stands up better when working cattle in the hill country than the ordinary cayuse, which is the name for mustang in the Northwest. But he had his origin at least two generations before the establishment of cattle ranches in that country. He was a direct result of the slave trade carried on by Indians.

The Klamath and the Modocs who lived in the mountains of southern Oregon and northern California used to raid the weak tribes around them and carry their captives to The Dalles on the Columbia River where they were sold to slave traders from the rich aristocratic tribes from the Puget Sound district. These raiders first acquired a few ordinary mustangs from the Piutes, possibly a hundred and fifty years ago. But when American and Hudson Bay traders appeared along the Columbia with big, English-type horses, the Klamath-Modoc raiders decided that their mustangs were very puny, sorry animals. They very much wanted the big horses the white men had and offered them slaves, which the white men did not want.

However, the white men wanted furs. The Puget Sound Indians had furs, particularly those of the very valuable sea-otter, and so a three-cornered trade was arranged, slaves for furs, furs for a few of the white men's big horses.

This trade lasted up until the 1840s or '50s. The raiders practically decimated several Indian tribes in western Oregon and northern California in their greed for "big horses."

The mountain horse is the result of haphazard cross-breeding of these English type animals and the native mustang.

C. L. M.



NO PARTNER WANTED

By H. FREDRIC YOUNG

Author of "The Sheriff Was A Softie," etc.

NO one in Prospect Valley would hesitate in throwing a lusty "hooraw" at the man who claimed "Hank" Jensen, as long as there was breath in his body, would sell any part of his Spur outfit for money, marbles, or chalk. But Hank was dead; a month ago his horse had tripped on something at the lip of Granite Gorge, throwing Hank bodily down into the merciless jaws of that place, where his battered body was found two days later.

WS-5D

And now came "Povy" Silver to make his claim, showing his proof in black and white. He had a type-written sheet which read that the undersigned, Hank Jensen, had bargained to sell, for a stipulated sum, half interest in the Spur outfit, and forthwith acknowledging receipt of one thousand dollars as a guarantee of faith. Furthermore, Povy exhibited his cancelled check as evidence.

Hope Jensen was facing Povy across a desk in the Spur house. Her cheeks were hollowed out a bit as

if the wear and tear of ill fortune were too much for her. A vague premonition was having its way with her mind, yet she was not certain from what quarter it came.

"But," said Hope in a strained voice. "I can't understand it, Povy. It just doesn't seem reasonable that dad would have bargained to sell half of Spur. Especially—" Her voice faltered.

"Especially to me?" asked Povy with a hurt expression.

She shook her head slowly, uncertainly, as she watched Povy's face take on a tenseness as he waited her reply.

There was something in Povy that Hope always thought had been strange, a little obscure. He had a compound of suavity and quick temper that would not let her answer in the affirmative to a question such as he had just asked. So she kept shaking her head slowly, until he heard her say:

"No. No, it isn't that, Povy. It's just that—I don't think dad would have sold a share of Spur to any one man or a dozen, for that matter. Spur was part of him. As he'd always said, he raised Spur from a weak suckling, and no man was entitled to share its harvest."

"But," argued Povy, as he had done for a solid hour. "We've had a dry spring and summer. A lot of calves died off up in the timber. Your father lost a lot of them like every other rancher in the valley. He simply saw that he wasn't going to make it financially through the winter. He'd have to feed, and that takes money—big money when you have better than ten thousand head—more than Spur had on hand. It was a case of necessity. I'd asked him about a year ago if he'd sell part of Spur, and he refused. About a month before he died—uh—got

killed, he came to me with a proposition. I took him up on it and we made the papers out right there at my place. I was to complete paying in sixty days, taking over half of Spur at that time. Before the sixty days were up he was—dead."

Hope shrugged resignedly, remembering that her father had mentioned along about that time of riding up into the Yellows to see Povy about a deal; he had never mentioned what the deal involved, however. And this angle struck Hope as odd, too, for Hank rarely missed the opportunity to discuss his deals with Hope. She mumbled:

"Well, if dad agreed to that, I'll not go back on his word. Let's go to town and complete the deal."

Povy let a slow smile cross his lips. He stared at Hope, and his steady breathing broke for just an instant. Here was a girl he admired in his stingy, gloating way. He nodded, and couldn't keep from saying:

"That's good sense, Hope. No use in you an' me being enemies, now that we're gonna be pards. Besides—well, you might learn to like me a lot. I ain't so bad. Why—we might even decide to get married some day."

These words brought a polite smile to Hope's mouth. Povy tilted his head to one side as if listening intently to something. He straightened his head, and seeing the girl's smile, he couldn't decide whether she had warmed to his words, or just couldn't frame an answer.

Povy rose from his chair. His eyes darted to one side and fixed his gaze on the door of the office an instant, then he stepped lightly across the room. Springing catlike, he snatched the knob, twisted it, and jerked back the door. "Tad" Cruce, a Spur cowboy, came stag-

gering, half crouched, through the opening.

Hope came to her feet, face aflame. Povy Silver gave a snarling chuckle. Tad Cruze caught his balance and stood there with a hot blush flooding his cheeks.

"Well," snapped Povy caustically. "What's the idea, Cruze?"

TAD CRUZE groped for words, his eyes looking lamely at the girl. There was a deep flame of chagrin in her eyes, and it cut Tad like keen-edged disdain.

"You better go, Tad," she said hollowly.

"Yeah," sneered Povy. "You better get your horse and ride the south river. Take a look at the bog holes down that way and see if there ain't some beef in 'em. We can't afford to lose any more beef this year."

"Seems to me, Povy," said Tad hotly, "you're a little early with your orders."

"You'll put salt on those words and eat 'em after to-day," snarled Povy. "I'm——"

"Sure," snapped Tad. "You're buying half of Spur. Sure. If I was Hope I'd look into that deal plenty before I took your money."

Anger had a quick and deadly way with Povy. His fingers closed against his palm, rolling his whole right fist into a hard ball. His left foot slid along the floor toward Tad with an unmistakable menace. Tad stood his ground, half a head shorter than Povy, a statue of defiance. He was wishing that Povy would take a swing at him. He would console himself to a severe beating just to smash that leering mouth once.

"Don't!" said Hope shakily. "Tad. You'd better go."

"I'll go," snapped Tad. "But let

me tell you this, Povy. Don't ever decide to take a punch at me again unless you aim to carry it out. An' keep off my toes here at Spur."

Tad Cruze wheeled and strode through the doorway, slamming the door at his back. His footsteps thumped along the hallway and out of the house, and then the sharp clap of hoofs rose and fell in the cool morning air.

"You'll have to excuse Tad," said Hope. "He's——"

"Young and hot-headed," said Povy. "A kid bubbling over with puppy love. What'll he ever bring you, Hope. He never will be able to boss this outfit."

Hope's tall and lovely figure stiffened a trifle. Her eyes turned cool against this man Povy Silver.

"That's one angle of Spur you'll have no share of," she told Povy. "I'll meet you in town at three this afternoon."

Povy fought the sullen flash from his face with a smile.

"All right," he said. "Let's say three o'clock at the bank."

The sound of Povy's horse had scarcely died in the down breeze of Prospect Valley when a horse shot from the thickets along the Little Hellion River, a quarter of a mile south of the house. It was Tad Cruze, his young face sour.

Tad dismounted at the house and stormed inside. He found Hope still in the office.

"Look here, Hope," Tad blurted. "You can't go through with this unless you investigate it thoroughly. Povy Silver is crooked. There's something fishy about this deal."

"You're jumping at conclusions, Tad," Hope said in a tired voice. "Povy has an agreement signed by dad. He gave dad a thousand dollars to clinch the deal until he could

raise all the money. I've looked over the papers. The signature is genuine all right."

Tad paced around the room. He wondered why Hank Jensen had decided to sell the Spur when he had sworn more than once that the fertile graze lands, reaching their carpeted way over hill, into valley, up into high, rugged areas, would always have a Jensen or the blood kin of a Jensen in command. Now Povy Silver had his loop around the shank of Spur. That Hank had needed money was a poor excuse to Tad—he found it hard to swallow. He said:

"Povy'll be running this spread inside thirty days without a word from you, Hope. He's that kind. Whole hog or none, that's the word for Povy Silver."

Hope waved a hand despairingly.

"I can't go back on dad's word," she said. "Besides—well, Povy is a cattleman, you'll have to admit. He took that old McGinnis spread up in the Yellows about five years ago and he's built it until it's worth a fortune."

"I'll bet he stole ninety per cent of his profits," Tad grumbled.

"You've no right to say that," Hope said angrily. "You're just mad. Remember, Tad, when Povy becomes half owner of Spur, he has as much to say about things as I do."

"You won't have any of the old hands inside a month," Tad snapped. "They'll all quit. They won't stand for Povy dealing out orders."

"That's not true," said Hope spiritedly. "I don't have a man on Spur who wouldn't stick here as long as I have a thing to do with Spur."

Tad slapped his hard palms against the desk top.

"Here's one that won't stay," he

shouted. "The minute Povy takes over the reins, I'm through."

"All right," she said defiantly. "Then you're through at three o'clock this afternoon. And just to make it definite, you're fired right now."

If she had slapped him, Tad Cruze couldn't have been hurt more. He swallowed dryly, his lips fell open, moving without sound issuing forth. Then suddenly he gave a quick tug at his Stetson, pulling it down to shade his misty eyes. He turned and strode to the door. Pausing there just an instant, he looked at Hope as if there was a sarcastic word he wanted to say. Then he had slammed the door to his back, stomped down the hall, and hurried to the bunk house where he began jamming his belongings into his war bag.

THIRTY minutes later, Tad was spurring his horse out over Prospect Valley, his war bag lashed behind the cante, his heart heavy with rage and remorse. And he couldn't figure out which took precedence over the other, the rage or remorse.

An increasing wave of wind tumbled down off High Rock Range, flattening his clothes against his body, chilling him a little because of the hot blood that throbbed in his veins. Far beyond the splintered spine of High Rock he could see the mightier body of the Yellows, a range of broken grasslands where there were a thousand lonesome trails and crooked draws.

Tad wondered, as the dim crest of the Yellows hung in his vision, why he had always told himself that a man couldn't get rich honestly in that high area called the Yellows. McGinnis, there before Povy, had been wiped out for his rustling. Be-

fore Povy took over the land, Hank Jensen had discussed buying it. And, Tad recalled, Hank had decided against it. It was too broken, too high, laid wide open to the destructive blizzards that Prospect Valley and Spur were sheltered from.

He kept associating the Yellows with his present plight, curbing the anger that beat at him, suffering the pangs of woe that came to fill him as memories beset him. And from all this mental turbulence there evolved an idea.

Slowly this idea began to take form, filling his thoughts as it drove to cover his anguish and anger. His departure from Spur had cut him with the keen edge of tragedy. Spur had been his life, his hope, his home. Never had he realized this so acutely as now. Never had he taken into account his feelings about Hope, and it stirred him as he realized how utterly full-fledged were these feelings. It seemed as if something solid had been yanked from beneath him as he was in full stride toward a coveted goal. He felt that he had been crushed, or nearly so, and that salvation lay in but one direction; the quarter to which his present idea goaded him. With cold instinct, he swung his mustang up a trail that pointed its twisted finger at the Yellows.

The day wore away like soft shale in a swift stream, and the sun began to sag lower and lower until at last it wallowed with fiery helplessness in the tawny-red waves that distorted the ugly crown of the Yellows.

Tad Cruze was following a trail that was strange to him. Deep in timber, he let his horse have a drink at a noisy creek, then swung back to the trail. Once, drawing quickly into the brush, he heard another rider clipping along on the up trail.

He saw the man passing; some strange rider he didn't know.

Tad raked his horse to a fast trot. There was a little light left in the sky, with the wind lifting its pitch shrilly into the trees and whipping around grotesque formations of rock.

He trotted his horse up over a rise and descended upon a high mesa, the flatness of which was upset by shaggy hillocks here and there. And as he crossed over the first of these hillocks, a rider came from the trees bordering this mesa, and slowly followed Tad along.

After a couple of miles, the terrain again changed, dipping down into an area that looked as if it had been spooned out by some primordial giant. Grass lay in scattered clumps along this region. And dead ahead Tad saw the dull bloom of a lamp breaking the full darkness.

Seeing the light filled Tad with the determination to carry out his idea. He remembered Hank Jensen, and Hank's sober vow, and was spurred on by these memories. And to goad him further, was the hurt that he suffered because he had suddenly weighed and judged his feelings regarding Hope.

Of one thing he felt certain. A prowler in this area was taking his life in light fashion. He thought of Povy Silver, and of this man's slow and deliberate way of going about things.

Tad couldn't remember a time when he would have tossed his faith to Povy with hopes of its safe return. And he recalled now, too, the tactful tolerance Hank Jensen had always used when dealing with Povy. "What was it," Tad asked of himself, "that made men deal with Povy with their tongues in their cheeks?" And he thought the

answer centered on Povy's methodical habits.

Thus thinking, Tad Cruze became filled with extreme caution. He dismounted and walked on afoot, leading his mount. He made a wide circle toward this gleam of light, and came presently to a corral and barns. Beyond this he could see the black framework of a large, log house.

Running away from the corral was a large pasture with a single strand of barb wire encompassing it. Cattle were in this pasture, and Tad had the urge to see some of their brands. But it was the house that incited his curiosity. He walked his horse around the corrals.

As he came into the open, he saw that the light remained unchanged. Wind was howling bitterly down off a rugged peak, battering noisily against the house, swinging an unlatched door of the barn open and shut, lending a startling punctuation to the whine and grate of the unbroken gale.

And then another voice pitched its warning note into the night. A dog came bouncing along stiff-kneed, uttering its sharp signal.

Tad stopped dead-still. A door at the house came open, and a figure yelled out somebody's name questioningly. Tad didn't catch the name, nor did he answer. He just stood there immobile until he saw the figure come on out and stride toward him.

Tad stepped into the saddle, spurring his horse back around the corral. He thundered toward the trail that had led him there, and as he broke away from the pole fence of the corral something happened that bereft him of clear thought. In full stride his horse had snared its forehoofs into some invisible object that sent it tumbling to the ground.

Tad left the saddle clean, hitting the ground on one shoulder. The impact was terrific, and he felt that his muscles had been torn from their moorings. He clambered to his feet. The fall had left him stunned and he groped for something that wasn't there.

Then he saw the dark figure of his horse getting up, hobbling around on three legs, one of its forelegs lifted. Instinctively, Tad reached for his gun, and then a voice snarled:

"Stand fast, hombre. You're covered."

TAD lifted his hand away from his gun, looking around at the voice to see some one coming toward him.

"Turn around," came the second order.

Tad about-faced, careful to keep his hands well away from his body. Then he felt the gun leave its holster, and a large hand frisked his clothes for another piece.

"What's the idea?" asked Tad gruffly.

"I wouldn't know," came the reply. "Wasn't my idea. Jest carrying out my orders."

"Orders?" queried Tad. "Whose orders?"

He waited expectantly, disappointed when the voice said:

"I ain't surprised you'd like to know. Now git along toward the house."

"What about my horse?"

"He'll be taken care of," said the man. "I think it's jest a sprain. Git along. Don't want particular to kill you."

Tad stepped on toward the house. He couldn't figure out this fellow's semipleasant mein. And, because he couldn't reason this out, he was

filled with a strange, uncertain feeling.

Tad was ushered into the living room of the house, an unadorned section merely partitioned off with thin plank walls. There was another man here, a large one with a heavy, black beard and a pair of saturnine eyes.

"You got him, huh, Luke?" this man observed coolly.

"Yeah," said the one called Luke. "Never missed throwin' a hoss yet with this stretched lariat."

At this, Tad's eyes dropped to the rawhide lariat in Luke's gun-free hand. He studied that rope intently, as if he had seen or heard of it before.

Tad looked around the room then, seeing a pot-bellied stove that was throwing out its heat against the chill, a trio of chairs around this stove, and a desk opposite it pushed back against one wall.

"Jest as well take it easy, fella," said the one called Luke. "Boss, he'll be back 'fore long. He was kinda expectin' you, it seems."

Tad looked around, but found no answer. His eyes shifted back to the desk, taking in the scattering of papers, a bottle half full of ink, and a typewriter, glistening with newness against the flare of a lamp which sat on a small table before a rattling window.

Tad said: "Yeah. Just as well take life easy."

Luke hung his prisoner's gun on a nail protruding from the wall across the room. Tad stepped over and sat on the edge of the desk. The bearded one sat in a chair and propped his feet against the guard rail of the stove, watching Tad through drooping eyes. Presently this one said:

"Don't git any wild ideas, fella.

Jest take things easy. Boss'll be along right smart now."

Tad Cruze let his eyes wander along the papers on the desk. Several papers showed where cattle tallies had been made. There was a check book under the bottle of ink, and a stack of invoices were held down by a large piece of granite on their corner. Tad's hand crossed over and riffled through the invoices. Something seemed to catch his eye, for he did this several times. His gaze became more intent as he peeled back several and studied the one thus revealed. It showed the sale of one typewriter to Povy Silver from a mail-order house back East. Tad's eyes strayed from the two-week-old date on this paper to a calendar tacked to the wall over the desk. His eyes narrowed in deep thought, then a shrewd kind of twist took hold of his lips.

"What's a matter with you?" growled the bearded one.

"Nothin'," said Tad, turning back.

"I said not to get any wild ideas," snarled this man. "If you think you can do any good with that piece of granite, try it."

"Not getting wild ideas," said Tad. His eyes wheeled on across the room, clinging to his gun that was hooked over a nail by the trigger guard, measuring the distance as if he were calculating his chances to leap for it. Then Luke said:

"I'm turning in, Tant," and turned and walked toward a narrow stairway that led to the attic.

The bearded one turned to Luke, grunted something as his head was turning, and in that instant Tad saw his chance to make a dive for the gun across the room. It was a long chance, four swift steps at least, with the odds against him tremendously. He waited another instant,

and saw his chance wither into uncertainty, for hoofbeats came rocketing out of the howling wind to stop at the outside door. Then a man's footsteps could be heard mounting the steps.

Tant and Luke turned that way as the door came back, and Tad settled back as Povy Silver came through the door.

Povy slammed the door at his back, made a couple of steps away from it, stopped and looked at Tad.

"So he came snoopin' around, did he?" said Povy, walking toward the stove and spreading his cold hands against it.

"Tripped him up," laughed Luke. "Just like——"

Luke chopped his words short, and Tad saw the dark flash that crossed Povy's wind-raw face. Luke shrugged, then became sullen.

Povy swung his attention to Tad. "Couldn't keep your nose clean, huh?"

"Could you keep your boots clean walking through a cow lot?" retorted Tad.

Povy threw a baleful gaze at Tad. He stood there rocking on his heels.

"You know too much," said Povy.

"Mebbe I do," replied Tad. "I know enough to tell you to keep your dirty fingers out of Spur."

"Too late for that," sneered Povy. "Done got my hooks in Spur. I'll own the whole damn works in two years. The best graze land this side of Canada."

"Sure. You'll steal it, just like you've stole this place," snapped Tad heatedly. "And murderin', too."

POVY'S face went stony, his eyes turning first to Tant and then Luke. Both shook their heads, and Povy turned back to Tad.

"You'd like to hit on the right guess," snarled Povy.

"I don't have to guess," said Tad. "I've done got proof that that agreement for Hank Jensen to sell you half of Spur is a phony. And, being able to prove that, it wouldn't be hard to add that you killed Hank, too."

"I figured I'd be able to run you outta the country," said Povy. "But you know too damn much now. I'd always be thinking of that."

Povy's hand dropped an inch toward his thigh. Tad knew in that brief instant that the game he had been playing with Povy was close to its climax. The narrow flame that was mounting Povy's eyes was nothing short of plain venom.

Tad's eyes darted around the room, bringing to Povy's lips a rasping chuckle. The house trembled as the wind caught a new gust, flailing mercilessly against the house's exterior, filling the room with the hollow creaks of ill-fitting sashes straining at their moorings. A draft coming around one of these sashes caused the lamp flare to dance wildly. Then the gust had swept on past the house, and there was just the steady howl outside.

Tad, pursing his lips, threw one foot across his other knee and began tugging slowly at his boot in an abstract way. He seemed to be thinking, and Povy was standing there waiting for Tad to voice his thoughts. But what Povy didn't know was that Tad had no intention of expressing his thoughts verbally.

Tad just kept tugging at his boot absently, pulling it half off his foot, jamming it back on. And then the boot was off, and Tad's hand flashed out to send it whirling awkwardly across the room. There was a swift crash of glass as Tad's boot blasted its way through a window, and the

wind howled through this new opening with screaming gusto. A swirling current swept over the lamp, devouring the jittery flame as it passed.

In the sudden blackness, Tad toppled sidewise from the desk top, conscious that a slug had torn past his head and thudded into the wall at his back.

The room was shaken by a choppy roar as Tad hopped across the room, bearing down unerringly on that six-gun pegged to the wall. He felt his fingers close about it, and then he threw himself on the floor and rolled a few feet away from the wall.

There was a moment of absolute quiet, then the shifting of some one's feet. Tad steadied his gun at the grating sound of boot soles and flung two shots that way. He heard the sound of a slug ripping its deadly way through flesh and bone, and he heard Tant's weary sigh, his faltering lurch, and the thump of his body against the floor. Then some one else had fired into the core of muzzle flame from Tad's gun, leaving a stinging trail along his forearm.

Tad felt the heat of that slug tear painfully through him. He rose slowly to his knees, blood pounding through his head. One of his spur rowels jingled as he moved, bringing the furious roar of another shot, and blazing a target for his own trigger finger. Tad wheeled his gun, flung a shot at the dying flare, and another. Upon his gun echo fell the agonized scream of a voice that he recognized as that of Luke. Then he knew there was only Povy Silver left.

Silver's harsh breathing came out of the darkness like wind off a barren land. Excited now to a tingling pitch, Tad fired recklessly after that sound. He thumbed back the ham-

mer twice, the second time hearing the dead sound of a pin striking at a spent shell. Then came Povy's quick sound of relief and anticipated victory.

Tad raised at that sound, feeling his body pounding with the rhythm of his heart. And then he shot forward, aiming his shoulders at the tall shadow that moved swiftly toward him.

They struck, and Tad threw what strength he had in the long muscles of his legs, lifting Povy from the floor and charging back with him.

Povy was cursing and wrenching his body around. Then his gun barrel came against Tad's head, with Tad feeling the throb of it as the hammer shot back. Tad centered his quick strength in his arms then, throwing the man away from him in a mighty effort as the rocking report of a gun tore at the drums of his ears.

After that came a loud crashing sound, and Tad knew that Povy had collided with the stove. There was a half scream from Povy, and the entire room was swept by the stench of burned flesh. Then an odor of soot as sections of the stovepipe fell away and bounced along the floor, leaving a way open for smoke to pour from the glowing belly of the stove.

TAD took a swift step toward Povy, then the room echoed with a second crash. The room was filled with an unearthly glow. Povy, in his struggles, had upset the stove, throwing a wild spray of live coals out upon the floor. Instantly, the coals ate their way into the floor planking, while the wind, roaring through the smashed window, brought a draft that lifted a quick blast of fire in their midst.

Smoke was thickening in the room, and Tad heard Povy give a strangling cough. He panted: "Get me outta here," and Tad knew that the man's craven nature was asserting itself and that he was no longer a menace.

"I'm leaving," said Tad. "Burn up for all I care."

The light was striking against Povy's face, bringing out the man's terror.

"I'm down," groaned Povy, "for good. You twisted that shot into my leg."

"I'm leaving you, Povy," said Tad heartlessly. "You'll learn how it feels to be scorched by some of the hell you've handed other people."

"Don't leave me!" gasped Povy. "I'll confess to the whole deal."

Tad laughed at that, and as he sucked in breath the smoke stung his throat and nostrils.

"Don't need your confession," snapped Tad. He watched the flames creep over to run up the tinder-dry walls.

"This is the end of the Yellows stronghold," said Tad. "There won't be any more of Spur's beef coming this way. As long as there is life in you, you'd be doing that. And now you can fry in a fire of your own making."

"Take me out of here," groaned Povy pleadingly. "I'd rather take a whirl at prison than this."

Tad waited a while longer, thinking ahead carefully. He saw the flames cutting off escape for Povy. Then he ducked his head a little and moved to the desk. Grabbing up the invoices, he stuffed them down in a pocket. He picked up the typewriter and carried it across the room, kicking open the door and going through while Povy screamed behind him. Fifty feet away, he set down the typewriter and sped back

toward the house. He rounded the corner and retrieved his boot, slipped into it and came back in the house.

Povy was crawling along with a leg stretching out behind him, trying to beat the flames that were cutting off his path to freedom. Tad stepped over and dropped to one knee beside the injured man, hoisting him to his shoulder and staggering toward the door, swaying there momentarily as the wind thrust its power at him, then lowering his burden a little and plunging out against it.

Well away from the house, he let Povy drop. He looked down at the man and said: "I hate to see a man ride with a broken leg."

Povy looked up at Tad, an expression of absolute surrender on his face.

"I'd rather do that than fry," said Povy.

It was mid-morning of the following day when Tad turned through the Spur gate, saying a clipped "Howdy" to the first Spur man that rushed from the bunk house.

"What the heck!" sang out this man. "A typewriter in yore lap, an' Povy Silver tied to his saddle. What's up, Cruze? Hope had us all scouring the country for you."

"Take care of Povy," was all Tad said in reply. "Get him to the bunk house an' call a sawbones. He's due to see the sheriff, too."

Dog-tired, Tad slid to the ground and walked toward the house, the typewriter clutched in his arms. As he wobbled through the door, he was met by Hope. Her sensitive mouth framed a question, then she put a hand against Tad's shoulder to lend aid to his trembling legs.

Tad wobbled along the hall and into the office. He sat the type-

writer on the desk, then let his body slide into a chair.

Hope stood in the doorway, lover perhaps because of her anxiety. And at last she said:

"Tad, where in the world did you go?"

He said quietly: "I'm all right, Hope. And there'll be no partner in Spur."

"You know something, then?"

"I've got something," said Tad. "I've got proof that the agreement Povy had was forged. He said he made that agreement a month or more before Hank died. He said it was made up at his house. It was written on a typewriter that Povy never had until two weeks before Hank was killed. I got a invoice that'll prove that. I——" He started to tell her that he was certain that Hank had been murdered, but stopped, deciding that this

could come later. "It was just a plain case of a forged signature. I can't figure out the thousand-dollar check unless it was for some beef Povy bought from Hank. Likely that's it. Povy wanted that canceled check, so he bought some beef outright from Spur."

Hope turned her face away for an instant, and Tad could see the wetness of her eyes.

"But that's over," said Tad. "There'll be no partners in Spur. Just like Hank would have wanted it."

"And," said the girl impulsively, "it'll be just you and me."

Tad's face lifted a little.

"You mean——"

"No," she said. "I'm not hiring you back. You stay fired as a Spur hand. But I am marrying you. Just like Hank would have wanted it."

A Complete Novel,

"POTLUCK RIDES WITH THE LAW," by NEY N. GEER,

in Next Week's Issue.

THE SAN LUIS SCOURGE

A LION, extraordinarily gifted in cunning, was for three years the terror of the San Luis valley in Colorado. Many attempts to capture him proved fruitless until Charles Calar, a veteran government hunter and trapper, was put on the case. Calar studied the lion's habits, exploring the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo range and then set a trap near the freshest kill.

This lion was a killer for the love of killing and an epicurean, sampling only the choicest steaks. At night he would attack a herd of sheep and leave dead bodies strewing the pasture. He also destroyed many deer. Dogs put on his trail invariably lost the scent when he led the chase over foothill crags.

When the marauding lion approached his latest kill for a second meal, he walked into the trap laid for him. Soon after, Calar shot and killed him. The lion weighed 115 pounds and measured seven feet.



BOUNTY FOR TWO

By **SETH RANGER**

Author of "Gold In The Tundra," etc.

BILL RYAN stepped from his barracks in the Indian River CCC camp and started toward the cabin occupied by Spruce Renfro. Thirty feet from the barracks door Bill halted as a spike buck leaped from a thicket and joined him.

"Listen, Mike," Bill pleaded, "go back into the woods and be wild. You don't want to grow up and be a sissy deer, do you? You've

caused me enough grief already. First, I had to act as nursemaid from the day the boys found you. Now you follow me around and the whole camp is making up Mary-had-a-little-lamb poems about us."

Bill glanced cautiously around, decided no one was watching, then gave the buck a cigarette. The deer chewed on the tobacco with evident relish. Bill squeezed in between two buildings, narrow enough to prevent the buck from following,

and walked briskly down the main street.

"Hello, Wildcat," a CCC man said cheerfully. "Have you got you a girl yet for the big dance down to Mill City?"

"Hello," Bill answered. He detested the nickname. It was given in derision because he stood five feet three inches and weighed a little over a hundred and ten pounds. He had mild blue eyes, an eager, intelligent face and a friendly smile. He believed in avoiding trouble. A week after his enrollment a free-for-all loggers' fight had broken out in a Mill City pool hall. Instead of getting into the brawl, or standing around and watching it, Bill Ryan had legged it to a safe place.

As a result some one had nicknamed him "Wildcat." It followed naturally enough, so the camp thought, that Bill should be detailed to act as nursemaid to Mike. A slashing party had found the deer, motherless and half starved, and brought him to camp. Bill Ryan raised the buck on a bottle.

Bill knocked on Spruce Renfro's door and was admitted. The best dressed and handsomest CCC man in the Northwest was engaged in applying a piece of raw beefsteak to his left eye, which was badly discolored.

"Golly, Spruce, what happened to you?" Bill inquired.

"I haven't quite figured it all out," Spruce admitted. "You know Elsie Morgan, don't you?"

"Sure," Bill answered. A sentimental gleam filled his eyes and he smiled softly. Elsie was slim, blond and full of the joy of living. She stood exactly five feet one inch and weighed ninety-eight pounds. Bill had met her at one of the Mill City dances and since then he wondered if he hadn't better line up a perma-

nent job somewhere and begin saving his money. He was confident he could look the world over and not find a girl as sweet and stirring as Elsie Morgan. He experienced a twinge of jealousy when Spruce mentioned her name. "What about Elsie?" he asked.

"Elsie has five brothers," Spruce answered.

"Five?" Bill exclaimed. "I didn't know that. Five! That's a lot of brothers."

"Any one of them is a lot of brothers," Spruce said gloomily. "The runt of the bunch is six feet two inches and weighs two hundred pounds. The full-grown brothers stand over six feet three and scale better than two hundred and twenty-five pounds. Their muscles are so hard they don't know fat. In fact, Jud, the largest, almost looks lean."

"Gosh!" Bill said weakly.

Spruce went on: "Jud is the prize fighter of the outfit. Ebb is a logger. Terry is a deep-sea fisherman, while Tim and Lafe are cougar hunters. They're all hot-tempered. Each believes no man is good enough for their sister."

"I agree with them there," Bill said promptly. "The man was never born who is good enough."

"Enough," Spruce interrupted. "I know the lady. The Morgan boys have threatened to beat up anybody caught taking their sister to a dance or show. That sounded unreasonable to me and I decided to do something about it. Elsie warned me there might be trouble and gave me a chance to back down, but I'd have been a heel to lay down before a threat."

"And so you took her?" Bill asked nervously.

"Sure. And on the way back from the Morgan cabin," Spruce con-

tinued, "there was Tim standing in the trail. Being a cougar hunter he's used to moving around without a sound. He wears rubber-soled shoes and wool pants. Tin pants make a noise when a man walks. Wool don't. I hadn't heard a thing, Wildcat, not a thing. Yet there he was. He had been after old Scarface, the man-killing cougar; had failed to get him and he was out of sorts."

"Then what happened?"

"That's what I'm trying to figure out," Spruce said in a depressed voice. "I've licked a lot of fellows in camp boxing matches and held my own with a flock of others. I saw a fist as big as a barn door. Then something like a bomb exploded in front of my eye. I saw fire shoot in every direction. The next thing I knew I was on the ground. And I'd been there so long the grass under me was warm."

BILL RYAN peered intently at the eye. It was completely closed and the flesh about it looked as if it had stopped a pile-driver hammer. "I feel kind of sick," Bill said. "Just seeing the result of a hard blow makes me weak all over. I wish I didn't like Elsie so much. It'd be easier to break the date. I wouldn't have a chance against those cougar hunters."

"Yeah, that reminds me," Spruce said, "Scarface has been prowling pretty close to camp. He explains why so many fawns and yearlings have disappeared among the deer. You'd better keep Mike in camp. Your plan to force him to live a wild life and prepare for the future will have to be postponed. Scarface will make short work of him."

"Yes, I'll keep Mike in camp," Bill promised.

The long silence that followed

ended when Spruce had fixed a bandage over his eye. "Say, what did you come over here for in the fire place?" he asked suddenly.

"I came over to ask you where a man finds courage," Bill explained in a halting voice. "What is it inside of him that makes him face danger, and go through with it? Where does he find it when needed? And how does he call it to him?"

Spruce, who knew something of Bill Ryan's history, realized the other was serious. He had joined the CCC partly because his family needed the money badly, but mostly because he hoped association with rough men in a rugged country would overcome a timid complex.

It wasn't men questioning his courage that disturbed Bill Ryan—it was their amazing attitude toward him. They acted as if they didn't expect a man of his stature to have courage. When risks were taken, some husky CCC man shoved him aside and did the job.

Again and again incidents had transpired that would have caused the average man to fight, but the force which sent men into battle never manifested itself in Bill.

"You've worried about this—er —" Spruce hesitated.

"Yellow streak," Bill said brutally.

"I wouldn't call it that," Spruce said. "Your type isn't yellow."

"Then why don't I want to tear things apart when I see injustice?" Bill hotly demanded. "Why do I look for some peaceful way to straighten out a misunderstanding?"

"Maybe it is because you have more horse sense than the rest of us," Spruce said.

"No, that isn't it," Bill argued in a wretched voice, "the *something* needed isn't there."

"It's there, but it takes something to arouse it," Spruce insisted.

"What?" Bill roared. "An earthquake?"

"No," Spruce answered thoughtfully. He had been in the Civilian Conservation Corps a long time now, and more and more younger men came to him for advice. He deeply regretted the occasions he was unable to help them. "But the *something* will come, then you'll have another problem—to control it. It's liable to generate so much momentum it will run away with you."

"You mean I'm liable to get crazy mad, pick up a club and pop somebody over the head with it?" Bill anxiously inquired.

"It might take some such form," Spruce admitted. "It's a valuable element to have, but it must be handled, or it'll handle you."

"You're dog-goned tootin' it is a valuable thing to have," Bill growled. "Without it a man won't get far in the business world. I'm a little guy. There's only one way for a little guy to get along in the world. And that's to make big ones work for him. But he's got to have some fight. I've worried about it since I was fifteen. I'm twenty-one now, and, brother, I've sure lost sleep over it since I met Elsie Morgan. As man to man, do you think I have a chance there?"

Spruce scratched his head. "Search me," he replied. "I can't speak for the lady. But I always go on the theory I've got just as much chance as the other fellow. Once in a while a man gets the conceit taken out of him. But he wins often enough to make it worth trying. Some of these days you're going to have your toes stepped on. And you'll find that *something*. I

only hope I'm around to see the fun. But, listen, don't take on Elsie Morgan's brothers."

Bill Ryan departed in a depressed mood. Spruce stared at the ceiling with his good eye. The more he thought of it, the more hopeless Bill Ryan's problem grew. "One of the Morgans will toss him onto the brush when he calls for Elsie. And that'll be the most humiliating thing that could happen to him. If they'd treat him like the others and black his eye, I think he would appreciate it. He would have something to talk about. But they'll toss him out, like so much trash."

Spruce pondered a long time, then a slow smile spread over his face. He threw back his head and laughed. He laughed again and picked up the telephone. "I want to talk to either Tim or Lafe Morgan," he said to the operator.

Ten minutes later the telephone rang. A heavy voice growled, "Who wants Tim or Lafe?"

"Never mind who wants them," Spruce retorted, "which one is speaking?"

"Neither," the surly voice said shortly. "They're after that Scarface cat. What with the special rewards, the bounty runs close to a hundred dollars. Besides the pelt will bring suthin' or other. They aim to collect. They're right busy these days. This is Jud speakin'!"

"You'll do," Spruce said. "Next Saturday night a CCC man named Wildecat Ryan is going to take Elsie to the dance down at Mill City. He'll call about seven o'clock, and —" Spruce's voice grew low and dripped with confidence. From time to time Jud Morgan said, "Yes! Sure thing!" When Spruce hung up the receiver, he leaned back in his chair and laughed again.

SIX o'clock, Saturday evening Bill Ryan knocked on Spruce's door. "We who are about to die, salute you," he said. "But no fooling, I'm scared stiff. I could hardly eat just now. My stomach is tied up in knots. Say, aren't you going to the dance?"

"What with this mouse under my eye?" Spruce asked in horror. "Not me! Well, good luck. Say, keep an eye out for Scarface. Be careful as you pass cliffs and overhanging limbs. Cougars drop down and the impact stuns or knocks the victim sprawling. That's when they get in their work. I don't think there's much danger of him attacking a man. He's had too many fawns to work on. Do you want to take my six-gun along?"

"No," Bill answered, then abruptly changed his mind. "Thanks, I believe I will."

Bill Ryan had never known the forest to be so eerie and silent. There was light overhead, but the branches formed a covering and the somber trunks absorbed most of the light that trickled through the leaves.

Bill whistled and hurried over the narrow trail. The rot on the forest floor muffled the fall of his feet. The crack of a twig startled him, and each vague shadow speeded up his heart. Suddenly something thumped behind him. He whirled, gun in hand, then swore. "Mike, blast you. I thought I tied you up!"

The spike buck sniffed around for tobacco. Bill gave him a cigarette. "You might as well come along," he said, "it isn't safe to drive you back. That big cat would make short work of you. Besides, you wouldn't go, anyway. All you bring me is trouble."

Bill swung along at a brisk pace

and Mike contentedly followed. Bill stopped before the gate leading into the Morgan ranch, and drew a deep breath. "I sure hope the Morgan boys aren't home," he said with feeling. "Tim and Lafe should be away cougar hunting. Jud should be in Seattle boxing, and——"

He opened the gate, admitted Mike, then followed. As he neared the vine-covered porch five brawny figures emerged from the shadows. "Who in tarnation are you?" one of them demanded, "and what's that follerin' behind?"

"That's Mike, a pet spike buck," Bill answered, "and I'm Bill Ryan?"

"Ryan?" Jud demanded. "Not Wildcat Ryan?"

"That's my nickname," Bill admitted, uncomfortably.

The men looked at each other in astonishment, then shook their massive heads. Jud laughed and the others joined in. Bill could feel the blood rush to his head, but still he wasn't mad enough to pick up a club and knock one of them down. "What's funny about a man calling to take a girl to a dance?" he growled.

"It seems that some cuss called Jud on the telephone," one of them explained, "and said a man named Wildcat Ryan was coming to take sis to a dance. This cuss claimed it would take all of us boys to lick him. So we waited for this here wild cat to show up and start clawin' us. And you come. Haw! Haw! Haw! Why you ain't no bigger'n a cake of soap after a week's wash."

"It's men like you who work for men like me," Bill snapped. "And why do you object to your sister going to dances with the boys? She's entitled to some fun."

"Dang it," Jud snorted, "we want sis to have a good time; to marry and be happy. But it's got to be

the right man. He's got to be a better man than any of us. But the joke is on us to-night, sonny boy. We'll go along and guard her. It'll give folks a big laugh."

The four other giants joined in the laughter. Bill walked up the steps. He didn't hate the Morgans for jeering at him, but he hated himself because their ridicule left him untouched. "I'm yellow clean through," he said viciously, "and it's pretty terrible any way you look at it. Me dreaming of asking Elsie to marry me. Blast it all, I won't even go with her again. She deserves a *man!*"

He knocked and the girl admitted him. "She's as cute as a bug's ear," Bill thought. "This seems to be my night for heartbeats. First, thinking about the cougar started it pounding, then the Morgan brothers. And now—Elsie."

"Well, what have you been doing, Bill?" she asked. "You act like a boy stealing apples."

"I was thinking you looked swell," he blurted. "I suppose we might as well get started. The boys are going with us."

"Yes, I can't understand why all of them stayed at home," she said. "They are dears, all of them—always up to something. And for some reason they love to torment the boys who come to see me. Some of these days one of my friends will become annoyed. *Then*, watch the fur fly."

Bill gulped. "I'd like to be around and see the fun," he said. The boys appeared a few minutes later, put on neckties and coats and started for the speeder.

"Where's Mike?" Bill asked.

"I put him in a pen," Tim answered. "He'll be safe enough!" He hurried up and joined Lafe. "That spike buck gives me an idear,

Lafe. Why not use the little cuss as a decoy and bag old Scarface? We've tried calves and colts, but the old cat is too wary. But a spike buck—"

"There is an idear for fair," Lafe answered. "We'll talk it over at the dance. The little feller ain't goin' to think much of the proposition, though. He's a kinda soft-hearted cuss. You can see it stickin' out all over him."

"We don't care what he thinks," Tim argued. "What can *he* do? Any way, he might listen to reason. We risk the life of a spike, bag the slickest cougar that ever hit these parts, get a big bounty and save the lives of scores of deer. Hardly a week goes by that he don't get one. You know that, Lafe."

"Yeah, I suppose that's true," Lafe agreed doubtfully. "But what about sis? She acts different about this one. We can't beat him up like the others. We'd be a laughing-stock."

"Sis gets over her mads," Tim said. "If the buck is killed she'll blow up, then cool off. As for her marryin' Ryan—huh! Don't be a fool, Lafe. She knows we won't stand for the likes of him in the family."

THEY boarded the speeder and rode to the dance. Bill Ryan, escorting Elsie, and flanked by her five brothers, created something of a sensation at the dance. The five danced some, but Tim and Lafe met another cougar hunter and talked shop.

"You ain't got Old Scarface yet," the hunter said, "and what's more you won't get him. He's got a den nobody never found but old man Sellers. Sellers, the best cat hunter ever in these parts, tried smokin' Scarface out. But the smoke came

out of a half dozen vents in the mountain. The cat just stayed in his den and laughed at him. Sellers tried all the tricks he could think of to get the cat out, but none of 'em worked. Sellers figured he couldn't afford to waste any more time, so he gave up."

Bill Ryan counted his money carefully when no one was around, then decided he could take Elsie over to the Merchant's Hotel for a bite to eat after the dance. Just as they were sitting down, the five Morgans trooped in. "Hope we ain't buttin' in and spoilin' the party, folks," Lafe said.

"Oh, not at all," Elsie said with sarcasm her brother missed.

"Sure, sit down," Bill urged.

The bill was ten dollars, and the host had but five in his pocket. "Put the five I can't pay down on the books," he whispered to the cashier. "I'll be in next pay day. I hadn't planned on feeding those big hulks."

"They always do that," the cashier said. "It don't take them long to discourage Elsie's friends."

Bill said little as they rode home on the speeder. He escorted Elsie to the door and talked, while the five Morgans sat on the steps below them and smoked. "It's been a fine evening," Bill said. "Thanks, Elsie. I'd like to come over again some time."

"Any time," the girl answered, glaring at her brothers.

Bill went out to the barn and looked into the pen. Mike was gone! He ran back to the cabin. "My deer's gone!" he shouted.

Tim nudged Lafe. "Now ain't that too bad," he said. "We'll keep a sharp look-out and let you know if we see him. Like as not he got out and headed for camp when he couldn't find you."

"You'd better take this flashlight along," Elsie urged. "The trail's pretty dark in spots."

"Thanks," Bill answered. He hurried away at a fast pace, hoping to overtake the buck. From time to time he stopped, turned the light on the ground directly under foot and searched for the buck's hoofprints. "Mike didn't go this way," he said gloomily.

Half way to camp Bill stopped suddenly and his blood congealed in his veins. The footprint of a huge cougar stood sharply outlined on his own. The cat had tracked him on his way to the Morgan cabin.

"Sights like this sure scare a man stiff," he said thickly. He touched his pocket to assure himself the six-gun was still there, then hurried on with quickening pace. "Blasted man-killer! Holy K. Smoke, what was that? Sounded like a baby bawling."

He held his breath and listened. The wind was blowing toward him, carrying any sound on the trail behind, and also preventing his scent from being carried back.

He heard the click of hoofs on rock, then another bawl. "It's Mike!" he exclaimed.

Bill raced back and rounded a shoulder of rock that obscured a stretch of trail. He saw the spike buck suddenly go down. It went down and the cougar was on it, though Bill did not see the big cat drop. One paw held the terrified buck to the ground, as gleaming fangs slashed at the animal's throat.

Bill's scream of fury matched the cougar's defiant snarl. He suddenly found himself utterly devoid of fear and caution, carried on by cold anger. In that instant he had found the thing that made men fight, and yet he was not aware he had called and it had responded.

The cat bounded back, crouched, its tail lashing, its eyes shifting alternately from the bleeding buck to the advancing man. Bill's six-gun roared and the cougar twisted, leaped and vanished into the nearest thicket.

Bill Ryan followed and caught sight of the cat climbing a rocky trail. The man thrust his flashlight into his pocket, clamped his teeth on the six-gun and climbed over the rocks. The trail skirted a sheer bluff a hundred yards, then ended apparently in the heavy brush. Bill, panting from his efforts, flattened down and squinted through the brush.

"Blasted catamount," he half sobbed. "Ripping that buck to ribbons. I'll kill you if it's the last thing I do. You'll kill no more spike bucks. You——" He broke off, squirmed along on his stomach and emerged on a broad ledge. Two cougars crouched on the ledge, snarling and defiant.

BILL turned the flashlight on with one hand, gripped his six-gun with the other and fired straight at the twin pools of flame leering at him. The cat leaped convulsively, struck the wall, rebounded and fell back onto the ledge.

The second one vanished into a crack in the cliff. Bill climbed over the dead cougar and squatted down before the crack. The rocks were blackened, as if some one had built a hot fire there within recent years.

Bill turned the light into the cave beyond and saw nothing, but he heard a menacing snarl. Behind him, and below, he heard the brush crash, then Tim Morgan's mighty voice. "Them cats are around here somewhere. Hey, Elsie, what're you doin' up on that ledge?"

"Come quick! Come quick!" the girl sobbed. "Scarface has got Bill and is dragging him inside the den. I just saw his feet disappear."

"I'm all right," Bill yelled, not realizing his body filled the entrance and prevented his voice from carrying. He wormed his way ahead ten feet and the cave widened. A cougar's snarl rasped his ear drums. Vaguely he remembered Dave Logg, the ranger, had said cougars were cowards until cornered. He turned the light into the cat's eyes, then shifted his gun about so he could sight along the barrel.

He held his breath and pulled the trigger. The roar almost deafened him. Some mighty force whipped the flashlight from his head. He fired at the snarling sound in the darkness ahead; fired until he realized the hammer was falling on exploded caps. Silence fell on the cave at last. He struck a match and noticed his arm was bleeding and his sleeve was torn off.

The cat had slashed him in its dying struggles, but he was not conscious of pain. Bill located the flashlight, grasped the cat's tail and began to back out. It was slow work, but presently he felt his feet in the clear and he heard Elsie's voice. "Bill, are you hurt?"

He pulled the cat clear without answering and dragged it abreast of the first one. "Bill!" Elsie exclaimed, "you *are* hurt."

"Just a scratch," he said, looking around, bewildered. It was slowly dawning on him what had happened. "How's Mike?" he asked. "And how'd you happen to be here?"

"Mike is badly clawed," she answered, "but Lafe is fixing him up. I think he'll live. I happened to hear Lafe and Tim say they had hidden Mike and had turned him loose, knowing he would follow you.

They trailed behind, hoping to get Old Scarface. But I imagine the cougar had scented the buck as he passed earlier in the evening and was waiting."

"Scented him?" Bill exclaimed. "He stalked me!" He blinked at the lights the five Morgan brothers carried as they came onto the ledge. "I was just thinking," he said more to himself than to them, "Spruce Renfro knew what he was talking about. The thing that makes a fellow fighting mad comes when you need it. But I hope I don't lose my temper often. It makes a man feel too mean afterwards. I hurt all over."

The five Morgans continued to stare at the little man who held a pair of "badly wanted" cougars by their tails. The weight of them was more than he could drag.

He dropped the tails and advanced a step, his eyes blazing. "But before I cool off," he roared, "we're going to have an understanding. I'm going to call on Elsie any time I feel like it, and you're not going to clutter up the front steps with your big hulks. Understand?"

The five giants found themselves nodding. "And what's more," he continued, "when I invite her to have a bite to eat at the Merchant's Hotel, you birds aren't going to horn in and eat like wolves, then make me pay the bill. If you sit at my table it's going to be dutch treat."

Again they nodded.

"And that isn't all," he added, "the bounty money will give me a nice little stake. There's a game-warden's job open and I'm going to ask for it. Tim and Lafe, I want your indorsement. Do I get it?"

"It looks like we might get hell beat out of us if we didn't give it," Lafe muttered. "Is that all?"

"No." He turned to Elsie. "When that game-warden job is cinched, what do you say we take the bounty money and go on a honeymoon?"

"Yes, anything, if you'll just let me fix up that scratch on your arm," the girl answered.

"All right," Bill said. "Now let's shake hands all around and be friends. I don't like to get riled up. Oh, yes, there's one more thing. I'll claw the first cuss who calls me Wildcat."

"What shall we call you?" a deep voice inquired. It was Dave Logg, attracted to the scene by the first shot.

"Dave," said Tim solemnly, "meet up with our brother-in-law-to-be—Cougar Bill Ryan. The toughest cuss in the Morgan family."

"No it isn't the Morgan family," Bill shouted with his remaining defiance. "From now on, it's the Ryan family."

And the five big Morgans solemnly nodded.

GOLD RUSH HOMESICKNESS

IT is said that homesickness killed many a miner during the gold rush days of 1879 and 1880. Writers claimed that "many of the most rugged passed over the last divide," with a strange malady sometimes labeled "mountain fever," and more often, "homesickness." A few months after the gold camps were established the disease disappeared and never returned.

Interesting And True

By H. FREDRIC YOUNG



Mr. Young will pay one dollar for any usable Western "Interesting And True" features which readers may send him in care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Return postage must be included for suggestions found unsuitable.



BOSS OF THE RAFTER C

PART VI.

By JAY LUCAS

GREG LAWSON, of Montana, went to Arizona to visit his friend, Slim Hammond, and on the very night of his arrival, Slim was murdered in his bed. A smoking gold-tipped cigarette left brazenly in the room pointed to the notorious English Dick. Slim dead, Greg took charge of the big Rafter C for Mrs. Hammond and her daughter, Rose, Slim's sister, to whom Greg became practically engaged.

Greg found the outfit deep in trouble: The country for miles around was a nest of rustlers who specialized in running cattle across the border into Mexico. It was a big and profitable business, and two men were fighting for the leadership: English Dick, the bandit, and a wealthy cattleman, Floyd Mackay of the Triangle Box. The Rafter C was strictly on the square, even going so far as to report stolen herds

to the Cattlemen's Association—it was the only fly in the ointment of a perfect rustling set-up. Therefore, it seemed obvious that whichever of the two could smash the Rafter C would become leader of the rustlers. And Greg also made personal enemies of both; he had a row with Dick over a Mexican dancing girl, Faquita, and he shot Floyd's brother, the notorious Dell Mackay, gunman.

Red-haired Clem Glasscock had looked for the good job as boss of the Rafter C, but he was too much a man to hold a grudge when Greg got it. Indeed, they promptly became close partners, although Clem, unknown to Greg, was also in love with Rose Hammond. Clem even saved his rival's life, when Greg was arrested by a drunken posse that tried to kill him.

To complicate matters, came Nan Browne, Six-shooter Nan, a flaming-haired gun woman whose father had been murdered at his little ranch near the Rafter C. Greg got her to stay with them for safety. She bravely helped him out in a scrape, then went over to English Dick, to lead Greg into a trap. But though she thought herself tough, she found the gang still tougher; Greg had to rescue her.

Next, Faquita sent for Greg, and told him that a large herd of stolen cattle was to pass near the Rafter C. Greg secretly wired the Cattlemen's Association to send him help so that he could arrest the rustlers; it would be a blow to them.

Still that blow would not be decisive; it would hardly get the leaders. This Greg mentions to his partner, Clem, remarking that what he would like to do was to catch the leaders in a Federal offense, so that the crooked local law could not save them. He even had thought of a

way to do it; get word to the gang that a wealthy Mexican was coming up to buy the Rafter C, bringing the full price in gold. That was a bait that could hardly be resisted. And the gang would not know until too late the supposed gold would be coming as registered mail. A fine plan, but it could not be worked; there was no convincing person to take the message.

An hour later, Clem came back with hanging head and white face, to offer to take the message himself. Badly upset, he confessed that he was an outlaw hiding out, English born, and an old pal of English Dick's. By revealing who he was, he could keep the gang from suspecting him, but it would mean his being arrested, jailed for life, perhaps hanged. Greg refused the generous offer—Clem was still his partner, outlaw or not. But Clem overrode the refusal and started out to save the Rafter C—for Greg and Rose, for his partner and the girl both loved.

CHAPTER XV.

LOPEZ'S BLUNDER.

GREG stood up and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. He had just got through shoeing Red Boy, and it had been a task indeed; the big sorrel seemed to regard it as an unwarranted indignity inflicted upon him. Of course Greg had not taken the easy way and thrown him while he worked—a horse thrown to shoe once must generally be thrown to shoe for life. No; Greg, with Shorty to hold the horse's head, had spent the whole afternoon in perspiring patience, and had managed to get the shoes on without unduly exciting the sorrel. Next time, it would be fairly easy; so agreed the dozen

or so Association men watching casually.

He led the horse around, often stopping to pat its head—he would not turn it loose while still jumpy and nervous; he wanted it to get over all nervousness in his presence. He was at last about to pull the bridle off when a man came trotting toward him casually—a man at sight of whom Greg straightened with a jerk; a big, bulky man who looked "tough" if anybody ever did, in spite of a kind of surly good nature on his heavy face. It was the man who had gone through the stage passengers and taken Greg's watch, the man whom he had left perched up there on the side of the butte. He rode up with a grin.

"Mornin', Greg. My name's Bat Cassidy."

"So I've heard," answered Greg shortly and coolly. He wondered what this new trick might be.

"Can I talk to you alone a minute?"

"Could if I'd let you."

The man guffawed; he seemed to think that a very clever come-back. He swung from his horse, jerked his shaggy, graying head, and walked toward the corrals. Greg hesitated, but followed him. Off by themselves, Bat stopped and turned.

"Well," asked Greg stiffly, "what do you want?"

The man lowered his voice.

"Clem sent me."

"Huh!"

"Uh-huh."

"But—but why——"

Bat Cassidy grinned a broad grin as though very pleased with himself. He took a soiled plug of black tobacco from his chaps pocket and, like a dog tearing flesh from a bone, twisted off a great chunk with his

teeth. He began to masticate contentedly.

"Uh-huh. Me and him's old pals—I sorter thought his face looked sorter familier them couple times I seen him, but dog-goned if I could place him, with that red hair and them freckles. Say, Greg—do you know as how that thar's about the finest hombre I ever stuck up a stage with?"

"Uh-huh—finest. In fact, I allus reckoned he was too good for the stick-up game—not sayin' as it ain't all right for fellers like me; jest another way of makin' a livin', and honest as most."

There was a sinking feeling in Greg's chest. So the crowd had caught Clem—might even have killed him by this time. What sort of trick were they trying, sending this man over? Anger surged over Greg. He burst out suddenly:

"Get off the ranch! If I knew Clem was hurt——"

Bat stared at him, looked pained. He spoke rebukingly:

"Huh! Me let 'em hurt—uh-uh—I mean Clem!" He dug a smudged envelope from a pocket and thrust it forward aggressively: "Here!"

Greg snatched the thing with a sudden return of hope. He tore out the quickly-written note and read:

DEAR GREG:

This is to introduce Mr. Bat Cassidy, better known as "Big Bat," a good friend of mine from other days. In the way of business, he'd crack your head and rob you in a split jiffy, and I regard him as one of North America's true experts in the ancient arts of robbing stages and stealing horses. However, but for little things like that, and a few minor interfections made necessary by the exigencies of his profession, he's as honest as a judge, and if he's your friend he's just that and nothing else. I've hammered into his head the fact that you and I are bosom friends, so anything he tells you is the gospel truth. Hope you become pals; he's worth cultivating. CLEM.

There was a look of relief on Greg's face as he finished—that last sentence was one of Clem's little jokes. Yes, Clem had written this all right, and it did sound as though he fully trusted this man.

Greg thought suddenly of that letter he and Clem had helped Faquita write, of Clem's pretense to bad education. He thought also of a time or two when Clem's tongue had slipped for an instant and permitted signs of better schooling than most cowboys had. Greg glanced up.

"Know what's in this?" he asked.

Bat gave him a disgusted look—he had not thought the famous Greg Lawson would be so simple as to ask.

"Sure I know. Think I'd carry it over here without readin' it? That's why the envelope is so dirtied up; I couldn't git it stuck back right."

GREG hid a grin; at least this big, genial ruffian pretended to be nothing but what he was. A massive wrinkle had drawn down between Bat's eyes.

"Greg, what the blue blazes does in—inner-feckshuns mean—and that word beginnin' with 'ex'?"

Greg had to shake his head. Big Bat shook his, too—there was a respect amounting to awe in his voice when he remarked:

"Uh-huh—he's powerful eddicated; he can write langwidge so good that nobody but himself can understand it. Uh-huh—he was jest throwin' himself away on the stick-up game; if I was that smart, I'd be a preacher and take life easy."

Greg had to conceal another grin. He was beginning to like this burly ruffian.

"What," he asked, "did Clem send you over for?"

"Oh—that! I shoulda told you instead o' wastin' time jabberin': So

many new men comin' to the Rafter C got the crowd suspicious; they rushed that herd—they been keepin' driftin' 'em slow all day. They're goin' to be at Dobbs Water Hole, within fifteen miles o' here, to-night."

"What! I wasn't figurin' on that. Good lord—I got to get the men together; it's five o'clock now!"

He was turning hurriedly when a sudden thought struck him and he whirled back.

"See here: Clem was going to the Triangle Box—Floyd's place. How come he found you there; you're in with English Dick?"

Big Bat gave an immense grin. He winked, but Greg noticed that he hesitated, thought hard, before answering:

"Reckon you'd better ask Clem about that."

"But Floyd's back of all the rustlin'?"

Bat nodded gravely.

"Oh, sure! Floyd's crookeder than I am—he's done things that made me sick to my stummick, and that ain't easy done. Like that Browne business. Shootin' the ol' man was kinda raw, but a feller could stretch a p'int and call it business. But how he been doin' that poor gal, Nan—"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, stealin' her cattle—breakin' her up. All he wants is to get her busted flat, with her mother on her hands to support, so's he can— Well, what would the skunk want?"

Big Bat was glaring indignantly from under bushy brows; his thick lips were curled in contempt of Floyd.

"Good grief!" gasped Greg. "So that's why that poor girl— But jest what's the cause of all the row between Dick an' Floyd?"

"I wouldn't know. You gotta ask Clem next time you see him."

Bat stood staring up at the sky in a manner of determined innocence; of course he knew; his manner told that. Greg tried a last question:

"Was Clem—uh—mixed up with 'em while he was here? Does he and English Dick—"

"I wouldn't know—you gotta ask Clem."

The man was not a good actor; his voice gave Greg a sick, sinking feeling. Clem— But no!—danged if he'd let himself think anything bad of Clem. And if Clem had had some communications with English Dick while he was on the Rafter C, they surely had not been very damaging to the outfit. It came to Greg that no matter what Clem had done, nor how recently he had done it, he trusted him completely, and nothing could shake that trust.

Again Greg was turning off. Big Bat seized his arm:

"Hold on! I'm hungry as a she-wolf with sixteen cubs—take me up to the cook shack and interdooce me formerly. Somebody might take a shot at me 'less you tell 'em I'm a pal o' yours."

Greg called to Shorty, who was not far off. When he came up, he spoke:

"Shorty, meet a good pal o' mine, Big Bat Cassidy—take him around and tell the boys he's all right."

"Huh!"

Shorty stared, gulped; everybody knew Bat's reputation. But Shorty trusted Greg as much as Greg trusted Clem. With a dazed look on his face, Shorty started off, Big Bat looming behind him head and shoulders taller.

Although this thing had come sooner than was looked for, Greg

had been preparing for it; matters went off more smoothly than he had expected. He had been gathering saddle horses off the range since the first of the newcomers arrived, so it was easy to give first-class, fresh mounts to the Association men—there were seventeen of them altogether. A pretty hard-bitten crowd; only that sort had wanted to get into this row. Those, with the Rafter C cowboys—now to the last man members of the Cattlemen's Association—made a formidable-looking little army. Probably they would outnumber the rustlers greatly, which was what Greg wanted; he had vague hopes that the weight of numbers would overawe the rustlers into submitting without a fight. But that was not likely; hardly a man of them but was wanted elsewhere on other charges—they had not collected so near the Mexican border because they liked the climate.

SKILLET COX, the cook, outdid himself; he even had two pieces of pie for each man—Skillet was all excited about this matter. The meal was eaten in a casual manner, with quiet jokes—that showed the temper of the men better than any boasting or brave talk. The horses had already been wrangled, and some of them, including Red Boy, saddled. Greg hurried up to the house for a last word with Mrs. Hammond before leaving. As he was going back to the corrals, Rose stopped him. She looked very pale and a trifle frightened—what girl would not under the circumstances?

"Greg," she asked, "I want you to tell me the truth about Clem—where is he?"

"Why, I told you—"

"That he was off looking after

some things for you. Greg, tell me, honestly, one thing: Has—has Clem been in trouble? Was he hiding out here?"

"Huh?" Greg looked hard at her, and perhaps something in his face answered.

"I've always suspected it, Greg—something about how he acted; he always avoided strangers and seldom went to town if he could get out of it."

"Well," demanded Greg, "what of it? There's plenty of men down here that have got into some little trouble or other in their lives. Clem's all right—I know all about him, and I'm stickin' with him."

"He's educated."

"How do you know?" countered Greg; he did not like this questioning.

"I began to suspect it soon after he came here, so I tricked him: I made an excuse to have him read something out of a newspaper to me once, something about the death of Lincoln. He read like any cowboy, until he came to what Booth said when he fired that shot—you know—*Sic semper tyrannis!*

Greg's forehead wrinkled.

"I—don't get it."

"One must have studied Latin to read it as easily as he did."

Greg shook his head; he still did not quite understand, but it came to him that Rose herself was a good deal better educated, and also a good deal more clever, than he had suspected.

"Well," he demanded, "what of it? If he's gone to college, and wants to keep it a secret, ain't that Clem's own business?"

"And," she went on broodingly, "when he came here first, he used to come up to the house every evening after work and sit with mother and Slim and me. All at once he

stopped coming up—I don't think he was in the house once again until you came. Why?"

"Rose, I don't know a thing about it—in fact, I didn't know he ever did visit at the house much. Excuse me for hurryin' off, but I see the men all waitin' for me."

He turned and walked rapidly toward the corrals; he did not like that questioning about Clem. Of course, Rose had a right to know the character of men working on the outfit, but if Clem ever wanted to come back for his old job—well, if Rose tried to keep him away, her mother could get another range boss; Clem was good enough to work anywhere that Greg worked.

Greg swung into the saddle and turned Red Boy away from the ranch—he did it as coolly as though starting for a day's ride among the cattle. The men followed, Big Bat and two or three of the older cattlemen catching up with Greg for a final council of war. Rose stood on the porch and watched them go—her mother was badly upset and not in sight—and Skillet Cox waved a dish towel from the cook-shack door.

They rode leisurely—Greg wanted to save their mounts. They stopped once at a spring to water the horses, and went on again. It was after midnight when they came to their destination, Dobbs Water Hole, named from a trapper who had camped there off and on for many years.

Greg was cautious; he did not permit anybody to ride down to the water—a lonesome little rock pool in a narrow draw, with high ridges on both sides. He gave instructions to the men, and they rode away in ones and twos; they were to form a very wide circle around the water hole. Greg kept half a dozen men with him. He found a dense clump of cedars about a quarter of a mile

below the water where they could hide; after the herd had passed they could fall in behind to complete the circle.

Then began a long wait, all the longer because Greg had given strict orders that there was to be no smoking, that nobody must strike a match under any circumstances. This wait was so long that he began to grow uneasy—what if the herd was being taken past by another route?

It was approaching dawn when he heard a faint, vague sound off to the north. Nobody could say what it was. It faded, and suddenly it swelled on the still air—a herd swinging over a ridge. Greg wondered if he should send a last word around from man to man, but he decided not to risk it—there was a possibility of a silent rider down there in the darkness.

Very, very slowly the sound increased; they had heard the bawling a long way off at first. The east had grown light; now one could distinctly see individual cedars on the opposite ridge.

"Look!"

SOMEbody nudged Greg, but he already had his eyes fixed across. Two men, grayish in the weak light, were riding lazily back toward him from the water hole; everything had looked peaceful to them. They started slowly up the ridge on the far side. They were almost to the top when they jerked their horses to a sudden stop. The hands of one went into the air; the other whirled to run.

A gun cracked; the fleeing man went plunging from his saddle and the horse raced off in panic; he was crossing the little draw.

"Get him, boys—he might run back to the herd!"

Greg flung himself into the sad-

dle; others, too. He cast one glimpse across to see three men rushing back into the cedars with the one who had fallen. Two more were tying his companion.

The loose horse saw the men dashing toward him with whirling loops; he turned and started full speed down the draw. Yard by yard Red Boy drew up with him—the speed of the sorrel amazed Greg. A rope shot out; the runaway horse saw the loop drop over his head and slide to a quick stop before the pull came—he was well broken.

Then the little lonesome draw looked peaceful as before, after that quick flurry of action. A man whispered:

"Think they heard that shot?"

Greg answered:

"No—herd makin' too much noise."

A half hour more of waiting. By this time the approaching sound was loud and, with the sun almost rising, they could see the cloud of dust above it. Now they could distinguish the quick, yelping shouts of the drivers. Presently the point came into sight, and before long the swing and then the drag—behind the latter rode most of the men, whipping the slower of the cattle with their ropes to urge them on.

Nineteen men with the herd, as Greg counted—that, with the two already disposed of, made twenty-one. This was more than would be needed for a herd of the size under ordinary circumstances, but probably there were many who insisted on helping so as to share in the profits. Greg's eyes were sweeping eagerly. He recognized the man who appeared to be bossing things as Sam Crump; he could see nobody else who seemed important. The drag was swinging past. A few minutes more of waiting.

"Now!" whispered Greg.

All mounted. Suddenly, with a wild yell, they burst from the cedars, charged down the ridge to close in behind. It was the signal; carbines began to bark up on the ridges, bullets to kick up dust around the herd—it was Greg's orders that the rustlers were not to be shot at except as a last resort.

There was wild consternation down in the draw. Men whirled their horses toward the ridges, whirled them back again, stopped, started in other directions. A man from the point was racing back toward the drag, shouting something; others fell in with him. Hardly a minute after the alarm had come all were collected in a close knot, horses rearing from the excitement—it was a foolish thing to do; had the men on the ridges really been firing at them they would have had a solid mass of men to shoot into.

Not one of the Association men was in sight now, but for a hat here and there showing over a boulder or beside a tree trunk. Greg had thrown himself from his saddle and taken refuge behind a large tree squarely in the middle of the draw. He was one of the closest to the rustlers; he peeped around the tree, raised his voice, and shouted at the top of his lungs:

"Give up! Might as well give up!"

He doubted that they heard, above the bawling of the herd—the cattle, of their own accord, were moving rapidly toward the water; they had probably had none for hours. Sam Crump seemed to be giving quick orders. Greg hesitated; he was reluctant to pass word around to shoot at those men in the comparatively open draw. But it came to him that there would be no need; those cattlemen wanted venge-

ance for their rustled stock, and the Rafter C cowboys had hardly more love for such a crew.

And then came a shout from Sam. Greg, in the din of the herd and the barking of carbines, could not make out the words. The surrounded men were turning their horses toward him, coming in a hasty trot. Each had his right hand in the air, and those whose horses knee-reined or could be depended upon to travel steadily with the others had both hands up. Greg leaped from behind the cedar, shouting:

"Hold on! Stop where you are!"

He wanted them to stop until all the Association men could close in on them. They did not seem to hear; they came on steadily. Men were now running down the ridges on both sides, yelling in their exultation—this thing had been so simple as almost to be a joke.

"Stop!" shouted Greg to Sam.

Still they came on—and Sam was careful not to be in the lead.

SUDDENLY came a shout from Sam; Greg could not catch the single word. The hands in the air fell; the men leaned low over their horses' necks. Here they came! Riding in a dead run to burst through! Their guns were coming out, beginning to bark!

They had got close in the excitement; Greg had to leap to the cedar not to be run over in the mad stampede. But one leap and he was there. His carbine whipped up; he was shouting frantically:

"The lead horses! Get the lead horses!"

Somebody had heard; the cry went on: "Lead horses!"

Greg's hat flew from his head, but he was too excited to notice it. For some reason, his left foot gave way and he went staggering to his knees.

He did not try to rise; from one knee, he was pumping bullets. He did not know that one spur shank was twisted.

Horses were down, more falling. Those horses behind, now wild with panic, shied off in spite of their riders—probably several of them were made frantic by wounds. Greg saw one of the cattlemen drop his carbine and sink slowly beside it, his hand to his left side. Another man, a Rafter C cowboy, was plunging head-first down the ridge, sliding on his face.

But the charge had been partly stopped. Now, before it could be organized again, some of those on the ridges had mounted. They were coming flying down, not seeking cover—they were a grim-looking crowd closing in. One left his saddle to slide to the ground; the rest came on as though nothing had happened. They were closing in on the rustlers. Among those balked men in the middle of it, hands began to rise again, guns to slip to the ground.

"You—and you—after 'em!"

Greg yelled this as he raced toward his horse; he did not want a single man to get away, and he could see the backs of four going down the draw—all that had broken through. Even as he watched, one of these threw both arms in the air, careened wildly a full fifty yards on his racing horse, and crashed on his face to the ground. The man behind him stopped suddenly, raising his left hand; that thing had frightened him. The two ahead did not know, or perhaps were too desperate to care—on they dashed.

And Greg thought he recognized the back of one of them, and the horse he rode—Sam Crump. What rotten luck it would be if the leader of this band got away!

Two men beside Greg were follow-

ing; the rest were surrounding the main band. Greg was too much in the lead to shout back any orders—for that matter, any one who did not know what to do would be stupid indeed. The two escaping men were now out of sight, but the crashing of their horses through the trees, the swish of their chaps, came back clearly—they had to ride madly wherever they could, with no regard for the noise they made.

They seemed to have separated—they naturally would. Greg got a brief glimpse of a hat disappearing over a ridge—looked like Sam's. Red Boy was taking the steep grade in enormous strides, running easily as though a heavy man were not on his back; he was a wonder of a horse. Greg had to slow his pace an instant on top, to look, to listen.

There he went! A flash of somebody darting across a little opening. After him! The speed of the big sorrel downhill was truly terrific; Greg felt quite sure that the horse must overreach and come crashing down in an ugly tangle of horse, man, and flying saddle fenders. But he did not try to check that wild run.

There—just ahead!

"Stop! Throw 'em up!"

Greg's gun flashed; the bullet must have come close, for the man ducked his head.

"Stop! I got you!"

The man was sliding to a stop, beginning to raise one arm. Then, from the ridge behind, came the bark of a carbine. The man reeled, toppled out onto the horse's neck, and slid to the ground. Greg raced up, and leaped from his saddle to turn the man over. Before he did it, he knew the truth. It was not Sam Crump; the thin, ratty face of Skeeter Coe looked up at him, twisted with pain, eyes glazing.

Skeeter tried to speak, but his lips stiffened, his mouth fell open. He was dead.

Two horses came tearing up from behind, a cattleman from up north and Shorty Jackson. They had leaped from their horses at the top of the ridge and used their carbines. Perhaps they had not realized that Sketter was about to surrender; perhaps one of them, at least, did not care—the cattleman looked very grim and quite pleased with himself.

"Bring him back!" snapped Greg.

He mounted quickly and struck back toward the water hole; he did not go beyond a very fast lope; he did not want to risk straining his mount's wind. And there seemed to be little need for haste now; there was no shooting back there.

He rode back to the ridge to find his men already busy tying the hands of the captives to their saddle horns—the last trace of fight had gone out of the rustlers. He trotted down to where a circle of his men surrounded those who were doing the tying; they stood with cocked carbines in their hands, to prevent a last attempt at breaking away. Old Burke turned to Greg; his face fairly beaming.

"Well, we got 'em."

"Uh-huh—but Sam Crump got away; two darned fools took out after me following one man, instead of chasin' the other. How—how many of our men—"

"Three shot up bad—we gotta git 'em to a doctor right away. Five or six more scratched more or less but not real serious."

"Them fellers?"

"Four dead, two more likely to be that way. Save a hangin'. Did you git one of them that ran?"

"Uh-huh—I mean, I think it was Jerry Clark got him."

Burke nodded contentedly.

"He would—he knows how to treat rustlers; they've pestered him enough lately. Well, what next?"

ALL the captured men were tied by this time—they were surely a gloomy-looking crowd as they sat their horses, all in the same position, wrists against saddle horns. A quick consultation was held. One of the cowboys knew of a nester's place two or three miles away and was sent flying for a wagon to haul the badly wounded men to town to the doctor. Probably the nester would be sympathetic to the rustling crowd, but he would not dare show it. Those who had been wounded had already received rough first aid. Greg made the rounds of them; not one of his men but should recover with reasonable luck—they were a tough, healthy lot and could stand a great deal. Three or four of the older cattlemen were riding up to him.

"Well, Greg, what do we do with 'em? String 'em up?"

"Nothin' doin'!"

"Well, we don't like it either, but it sure is what they got comin'. Reckon we got to take 'em to jail."

Greg had thought of that already.

"No use—not to the Zalagarda jail; it would be fixed for 'em to break out. How's the sheriff up in your county—square?"

"Bet your boots! Mike Adams is a prince—and he's sure got it in for rustlers and horse thieves."

"Well, I figure you'd better take that gang and cut across country with 'em and turn 'em over to Adams."

Burke hesitated.

"But—it's out o' this county. It won't be legal, and Adams won't want 'em."

"I know it. It'll likely get us a

good bawlin' out from some judge, and a lecture about our own lawlessness. But the point is that Adams won't turn 'em loose—can't, them bein' rustlers caught red-handed."

Burke grinned.

"Say—that's clever. Well, me, I can take a bawlin' out—let's get 'em started."

Greg turned to him:

"Say, friend; could you take charge here—wait till the wagon comes and see that it gits off all right; I'm havin' all my men start them cattle to Rafter C range till you send after 'em. Mrs. Hammond and Rose—I know they're worried sick about this thing, and I'd like to hurry back and tell 'em."

"Sure—sure! Fine woman, Mrs. Hammond is. Greg, I heard stories about you and Rose——" A knowing grin.

Greg reddened, and a sheepish look came to his face. Burke nodded.

"Well, she's about the finest gal you could find, son. I see why you want to git back—she'll be worryin'. Well, thanks a million times for all this; any time the Rafter C fires you, there'll be a few of us up north a ways howlin' for you for range manager. Adios, Greg."

Greg rode away—there was nothing more for him to do. He felt fairly well satisfied with his day's work. Of course, he had not caught any of the main ones, and even Sam Crump, who seemed to be a sort of "straw boss," had gotten away. Still, an even twenty rustlers was a good haul indeed; the loss of so many men would weaken his enemies.

There was one thing that kept him puzzling most of the way to the Rafter C: Of the twenty he had captured, about a third were men he knew to belong to English Dick's

gang, not Floyd's. Still, that was not hard to explain—toughs of that sort would be only too glad to rob a bank with English Dick one day and help drive a stolen herd for Floyd the next, so long as they could get away with it. The only thing really strange was that Sam Crump, who seemed to be a sort of lieutenant for English Dick, was with that herd.

A likely explanation of this came to Greg: English Dick had trusted men of his "planted" on the Triangle Box—which made it look very much as though Floyd might be skating on ice that was thin indeed and might let him crash through at any moment. That English Dick was the more clever of the two went without saying—not only more clever but more unscrupulous, bad as Floyd was. Yes, as Greg saw it, it looked pretty tough for Floyd; something might happen to him at any moment, which did not worry Greg at all.

Queer business—two rival gangs fighting each other, and the Rafter C fighting both to the death. But this day's haul would cut down the membership of both gangs and weaken them. Yes, on the whole Greg felt satisfied.

And so did his employer, Mr. Hammond—particularly since Greg took the liberty of minimizing the wounds of his worst-injured men; she looked pale and shaky enough without scaring her any further. Greg tried to reassure her while they ate lunch—Rose, too; she looked far from happy with such things going on, and she was strangely silent.

THE meal over, Rose waited until she could catch Greg's eye without her mother's noticing; then she gave a meaning little jerk of her head and presently

left the room. Greg followed her outside, and down to the end of the porch. From somewhere she produced a yellow envelope.

"Greg, is there a mistake somewhere? A man brought this out a couple of hours ago."

He took the telegram and read with sinking heart:

ESTEEMED MADAM I LEAVE FOR YOUR RANCHO BY TRAIN THAT GO FROM HERE AT THREE AND A HALF O'CLOCK FRIDAY STOP IN MY OWN PERSONAL CARE IS THAT OF WHICH YOU KNOW STOP OBEDIENTLY YOURS

RODOLFO NUNEZ DE GUZMAN Y GUTIERREZ

Greg sank limply down to sit on the edge of the porch. He half heard Rose's voice:

"I—was pretty sure it was a mistake; I kept it from mother."

Mistake was right! Either Burke had not written his instructions clearly or the Mexican had misunderstood the English—the word-saving messages of telegrams are often confusing enough for one to whom English is a native tongue. Here he was, coming up without waiting for his cue, before any arrangements had been made. It looked very much as though the whole carefully-laid scheme of Greg's might be ruined—of course it could not be worked a second time. Greg felt Rose's sympathetic hand on his shoulder.

"Poor Greg—you've been working so hard, and everything seems to go wrong."

He was too cast down, too thunderstruck with this blunder, to answer. She spoke again, gently:

"Can't—can't you fix it to have things ready in time? I was looking at some old time-tables, and as well as I can understand them, he won't be here until to-morrow night. Isn't that time enough?"

WS—7D

Greg shook his head hopelessly.

"How could we get the U. S. marshals here by that time?—that's what we want, to cinch 'em."

"If you wired for them right away you—"

"Yes—if I ride all the way to Sandias with a wire, I'll be too late to do anything else. And not another man on the place to send. Well," he stood up quickly but hopelessly, "I got to do it. You write out a wire while I wrangle a fresh horse."

Luckily, he found some of the horses down at the water troughs near the corrals, and among them Bearcat, a good, strong brown—good horse for a long ride, though not much of a cow horse. He drove him in and saddled him, and quickly though he worked, Rose was coming running toward him with a slip of paper before he had time to mount. He took the paper, swung dejectedly into the saddle.

"By, Rose. When the boys come home, have 'em all stay here till I come back, or send word for 'em."

"By, Greg."

He was off in a slow, swinging lope; he dared go no faster at the beginning of a long ride. He would cut straight across country, and it would be luck if he chanced onto any ranches where he could change mounts—the last time he rode to Sandias, he had followed the main road from Zalagarda, so fresh mounts had been easy to obtain.

Of course the worst of it was that he had no means of getting in touch with Clem, to find out where the holdup would be—unless Clem managed to get word to him, which would be difficult on such short notice. The whole thing had turned out to be an awful mess—and he had hoped so strongly that it would be the final blow to save the Rafter C. Final blow! Why, he'd have to be-

gin the fight all over again, just where he had started. If it wasn't the very devil!

Two miles from the ranch, as he was thudding steadily along, he got a glimpse of a rider half a mile ahead and off to the left of where he was going. Six-shooter Nan—that was her little pet roan. She had, of course, moved back to her Pitchfork. Darn her, the little fool! If she—

And suddenly a wild thought came to Greg—a wild hope, rather. Could it be possible that, after her ill treatment in English Dick's gang, she would hate Dick and his crowd worse than she hated him, Greg? With a wry grin, Greg thought that that would be a big job of hating for a girl of her size—but she seemed pretty good at that sort of thing.

Dang it, this business was hopeless—why not risk it? He swung his horse to the left, raising his voice in a long yell. He saw the roan stop; he waved his hat. Here she came, loping to meet him. They slid their horses.

"Howdy, Nan."

"How." Short as the grunt of an Indian.

"Nan, want to get even with that crowd for how they treated you—want to see 'em sent up?"

"Sure—pretty near as bad as I want to get even with you."

"Even with me—for what?"

She reddened furiously, and glared at him. He took the paper from his pocket and handed it to her.

"Here's what I want—"

He quickly told her the whole plan—even if she did go straight to English Dick, it could do little damage; he could not work it in time without her. He ended:

"So, will you ride with this to Sandias, fast as you can?"

Without the courtesy of a word,

she turned and struck a lope away from him. He dashed up beside her.

"Nan, tell me—will you do it? That where you're startin'?"

"I'll get it there. I promise. Or—would you take my promise? Do you think I'm a liar as well as everything else you think me?"

She was staring straight ahead as she rode. The look on her freckled face was almost pathetic! She did not look like the Six-shooter Nan he had known—perhaps the misadventure with the gang at Sam Crump's place had taken some of the spunk out of her. Suddenly Greg spoke:

"Your word is good with me, Nan. It'll git there. Thanks."

He was slowing up; she was drawing away rapidly, never once looking back. He noticed how she had shifted her weight in the saddle, to "ride light"—that girl knew horses; she was getting set for a long, hard ride. The big Stetson with the flaming red hair beneath it rose and fell gently, drawing away from him. Spunk—she had it! To Greg's surprise a feeling came to him that he respected Six-shooter Nan, had always had a strange respect for her down in his heart—goodness only knew why; she did not deserve it. The little fool—she was a great kid, anyway.

She was out of sight now, and Greg was changing his course again, once more in a lope. Where was he going? Why, he was heading straight oward the Triangle Box.

And then he realized something that had been in the back of his worried mind all the time: He had to go to the Triangle Box—sneak up to it in darkness or something—and get in touch with Clem. It was the only possible hope; Big Bat could not be sent, for Sam Crump had got away after seeing him with the Rafter C

men. Yes, it was more than risky, but there was absolutely nothing else for it. Greg pulled his horse down to a trot; he had plenty of time to get there before dark, and he did not want to be close to the place any sooner, perhaps to be seen by one of Floyd's cowboys riding the range.

CHAPTER XVI.

FAST SHOOTING.

THE sun set; the light began to fail. Greg, who had been watching the Triangle Box from the top of a knoll for nearly an hour, ventured to roll a cigarette and carefully light it—they could not see the pale little curl of smoke now. A few feet off, his horse stood hunched, reins tied loosely to a bough; the saddle and blankets lay near him—Greg, always careful of horses, wanted his back to dry and cool. Now Greg went to him and slowly saddled, but without untying him.

He went back to the summit, to watch. During that hour, he had fixed the location of the houses clearly in his mind. Floyd's residence was easy to place; it was of two stories, large and pretentious for the country. He saw a small glow spring up, as the first lamp was lighted down there.

There was one thing that worried Greg: He had seen half a dozen hounds—lion hounds, of course, they would be—wandering aimlessly around. It was easy to guess what they would do if a stranger came sneaking up to the place at night—and half a dozen locomotives could hardly make more noise than they would when they broke out baying.

But Greg knew hounds; he had a plan that he felt pretty sure would work. It was nearly dark now, so

he mounted and started away from the ranch. He had seen a little knot of cattle down at the foot of the knoll; he went toward them casually with a loop dangling beside him unobtrusively. There, near headquarters where they saw many riders, the cattle were gentle for range stock; they did not run until he had got very close, and then only half-heartedly.

Greg dug his spurs in and darted after them. Bearcat was not a good rope horse, but he served to put Greg up to the cattle. The rope shot out; a big, fat calf thudded to the earth without a sound. Now the others were running faster, and Greg was out of his saddle and racing to the calf before it could get up. He was drawing—not the pegging string looped over the belt of his chaps—but his pocket knife. He opened the small, thin blade and bent over the calf. Dexterously, he slipped the blade into the joint between the calf's spine and its skull. The spinal cord severed, the calf died instantly and painlessly.

Getting the dead calf up before him on Bearcat was not too difficult. Greg thanked his stars that he was not riding Red Boy; if he had been, by no possible chance could he have got it up at all—Red Boy would have been driven frantic. Stolid Bearcat did not like it, but finally permitted it.

The calf before him, Greg rode around the knoll; he kept on around the ranch until he was directly on the windward side. He let the dead calf drop, and dismounted. Again he drew his knife—this time the big blade. He cut the jugular vein, and then made several deep slashes in the thighs and back. The odor of warm blood and flesh came strongly. Now, he'd have to wait—there might be air currents between him and the

ranch that would keep the scent from getting down there immediately.

It was a brief wait—hardly five minutes. Through the darkness came a low, cautious shape. Greg spoke soothingly:

“Hello, Boone!” It was a good guess that there would be a hound of that name in any pack; if there was none in this, his friendly tone would serve to reassure them. “Come on, boy—meat!”

The hound came forward cautiously. Hounds, even lion hounds, are notoriously good-natured and friendly; this one came up timidly, and even permitted Greg to pull a long, silk ear. Here came more—sniffing, cautious. Five—six—there were nine of them altogether, more than he had thought. Some stood; some sat down on their haunches; all looked longingly at the dead calf.

“Come on, boys—here you are.”

Greg cut a strip of the veal and tossed it to one. They had seen dozens of beeves butchered for the ranch table, and often had waited thus for scraps thrown to them; Greg had difficulty in coaxing them to approach. But a big black and white at last tore out his first tentative bite, and presently Greg was entirely forgotten in the feast.

He was about to leave when a little fox terrier came trotting up, following the hounds. This little dog was far more suspicious and unfriendly than the others, and Greg thanked his lucky stars that he had come—a fox terrier is a good deal more intelligent than a hound, and a much better watchdog. But the feast proved too tempting; the terrier fell to with his friends.

“Fine as silk!” thought Greg joyfully, as he walked back to his horse and mounted; there had not been the least sound. It was now about as dark as it would get, so he rode as

close to the ranch as he dared, and hid his horse in some tall scrub oaks.

He kicked off his chaps, unbuckled his spurs; he even left his big hat—it might loom against the sky, and besides, if anybody ran onto him, a bareheaded man would more than likely be taken for a Triangle Box cowboy strolling around.

The best thing, of course, would be to walk up casually but silently, and not appear to be skulking. It was easy; Greg got within fifty yards of the house without any difficulty. Then, out of the darkness, came a shadowy figure.

“Who’s that?” a voice asked.

Greg had been thinking of just what he would do if such a thing happened. He spoke in a low, casual drawl.

“It’s me. Gimme a match.”

HE walked straight to the man, whom he could vaguely see fumbling in his pockets. The man had stopped; it even seemed that he was tentatively backing off. There came the sound of a match being struck on the hammer of a gun. But Greg was prepared; his own gun swung; there was a thud of iron against a hat. Instantly Greg’s left hand shot out to close on the match, barely beginning to flare as the man went down. The sulphur burned his palm, sent a pain shooting up his arm, but the flame was out.

He hastily picked the limp man up, threw him over his shoulder. He hurried off a hundred yards and laid him behind a corral; here he tied and gagged him, using the man’s own belt, his neckerchief, strips torn from his shirt.

Then Greg was going back toward the house. He wondered if the man had been a guard, or if his presence there had been merely accidental—

not that it would make any difference now. He stopped to survey things—and saw a big man walk to a lighted window and pull down the shade. Floyd! That was the room he should peep into first—but it was on the second floor.

Greg stole closer, up to the wall of the house. The porch was a roomy affair, and screened—how could he get to the roof of it? At last a plan came. To carry it out, he had to go directly to the porch door, opposite the main door of the house.

He felt in the darkness; as is usual, the lower half of the door was boards and the upper wire screening. He pulled the door half open, placed a foot on the top board, next to the screen, and swung himself up. His other boot found the top of the door frame, and in an instant he had thrown himself flat on the shingle roof of the porch—with the leg still hanging down, he permitted the screen door to close softly.

And not an instant too soon—there came the clank of spurs in the darkness, and a moment later a man had opened the screen door, crossed the porch, and entered the house. Had he seen Greg? Not likely—his footsteps had never faltered once. Besides, if he had he undoubtedly would have shouted an alarm from outside and stood there to see that Greg did not escape.

Greg, on hands and knees, climbed the gentle slope of the roof to the lighted window. The shade was askew; an inch-wide streak of light came out beside it. Now, here came the difficulty: Greg's head, if he looked in, would be outlined plainly against that cream-colored shade; anybody outside could not help seeing it.

Greg could think of but one possible way out of this. He took the big silk kerchief from his neck and

draped it over his head, extending out to his left shoulder. That would render his outline against the light shapeless—nobody could recognize it for what it was. It might be taken for the shadow of some piece of furniture in the room; at least it was not likely to attract attention so long as he kept perfectly still. With one quick movement, Greg brought his eye to the opening beside the shade—the sash was raised, so that there was no glass to interfere.

In spite of his resolution, Greg started. Directly opposite him a wiry man of medium size was standing with his back to a cold stove, standing with feet outspread, hands behind his back. It was a man with wavy blond hair—only by looking closely could Greg see faint traces of what had once passed for freckles.

Clem! But what a different Clem it was! He looked cool, almost sneering in his calmness—contemptuous of whoever else might be in the room. Except for the two guns he now wore, he had on the same cowboy clothes in which Greg had seen him last, but otherwise he seemed an entirely different man, a strange young man whom Greg had never before seen. He was smoking a white, "tailor-made" cigarette. Floyd was seated so that Greg could see his face. His deep voice came:

"Well, what do we do about it?"

Clem shrugged indifferently:

"That's rather for you to decide, old chap. The point is, y'know, that I find it annoying to have some silly ass pawned off under my name."

Floyd looked more than disconcerted; there was a dull flush on his heavy face.

"But—how do I know that you're the real English Dick?"

Another careless shrug.

"Well, for instance— Oh, well;

English Dick is rather known for his facility with six-guns, y'know. Care to make that test—or to have your fastest man make it?"

"N-no!" Hastily. "I jest want to get this thing straight. No reason why we should row, whoever you are."

"And excellent reasons why we shouldn't." There was not much of politeness in Clem's drawl—it was a smiling threat.

Greg was staring, listening in amazement. Why, this sounded no more like the Clem he knew than the man in the moon! The voice was higher, with that sort of musical ring in it that he had sometimes heard in Englishmen's voices in Canada—and it swept up and down, instead of holding to the level drawl of a cowboy. Why—why—Greg could only stare harder.

And the nerve of Clem!—actually trying to pass himself off as English Dick and make the real one out to be a fake! He couldn't get by with that!

"Well"—Floyd was speaking—"this is a turn. I jest git back from a business trip to Mexico, and—here you are. I—I dunno—" He seemed badly puzzled.

Suddenly Floyd sat straight up.

"Say! It—it was you that night at the saloon— That night I was goin' to git Greg Lawson; you saved him."

"Quite. Slipped outside and did it—Lawson himself doesn't know. Fact is, I was working on the Rafter C under the name of Glasscock. I had learned about a certain little deal—very remunerative—and had to keep Lawson alive so that I could find out just when things were to be—er—er—ripe."

"Deal?" Floyd looked at him slyly.

"Yes. Ranch being sold for a

hundred thousand—cold cash. Had to find out just when the money was coming."

"A—a hun—" Floyd's tone suddenly become friendly, oily. "Say pardner—you don't need any—I mean, goin' to pull it alone?"

"Thought of it—but rather difficult. Y'see, my old crew's split up— But you specialize on rustling; this wouldn't interest you."

A PAUSE. Floyd looked sly—and not a little pleased with the turn things were taking.

"We-ell, I've had a part in— We-ell, let's talk it over."

"Assuredly—no harm in that; especially since I suspect a great deal more about you than you think I do. There's your deadly feud with that synthetic English Dick, for instance. Amusing. Really. Won't you give me the inside info', old bean?"

Floyd chuckled. He sat staring at the floor, chuckled again, and at last looked up.

"Sure—seein' as it looks like us two might get along fine. Well, nacherally, I wanted to keep my name outa things all I could. I jest stuck that feller up for a figurehead; he could act brazen as he liked, because there was always a couple good men stickin' close to him to do the shootin' in case anything come up. An' most of the crowd thinks it really is English Dick—it helped draw 'em, helped a pile. My row with him—jest to keep my name out of certain things."

"I thought so—felt sure of it, in fact. What is the chap—an' actor? He does the English gentleman so well that he'd deceive anybody who'd ever seen an Englishman—on the American vaudeville stage." Clem laughed amusedly.

Floyd laughed, too; he seemed to be getting into good spirits. This

thing, upsetting at first, seemed to be turning out for the best.

"Uh-huh—ham actor. Pretty good, though—I seen him play *Lord Halfontaine* in "Murder at Normandsby Towers" at the Birdcage Theater in Tombstone. Say, but he sure was good—the lord turned out to be the murderer."

Clem nodded—something like a trace of his old grin crossed his face.

"Of course! His lordship always is, poor beggar! Well?"

"Well, I got a little influence around here, like you know. I found out that there was warrants out for him back East for gettin' money on false pretenses—he played the real lord with some suckers that wanted to be society people, and took 'em to a cleanin' right. They might not have said anything, only he was foolish enough to use the mails in writin' to 'em—that made it Federal."

"So you whisked him out to the ranch before he could be arrested?"

"Uh-huh. He's gittin' a good cut—he has no kick comin'. Only"—Floyd chuckled again—"the big kick he gets out o' lordin' it around and runnin' it over people, knowin' that there's men backin' him so's he's safe. He's pretty much of a fool about that sort of thing; pretty near come to believe it himself."

Clem had gracefully thrown himself into a chair and sat with crossed boots stuck out.

"So—that means that it's really you who was behind certain bank robberies and things lately?"

Floyd hesitated and looked keenly at the other. Clem tittered.

"Careful what you say to such a law-abiding chap as English Dick! You were in Mexico to sell that herd being run down. That actor ass came back with you to-night, didn't he?"

"Uh-huh—wonder he's not up here by now; he sure took a likin' to my cigars. Say—that reminds me; I must git some out. Back in a minute."

Floyd got up casually and went into an adjoining room. Was it some trick? Greg had no time to guess; he whispered quickly, softly:

"Clem! The window!"

A startled look flashed toward him. But instantly the surprise left Clem's face; he slipped silently across the carpet and stood close to the window—not looking at it, in case Floyd came back unexpectedly. A whisper came to him from outside:

"Clem, when you can git away, walk straight from the house toward the North Star till you meet me. Whistle kindalow, in case you're not quite—"

"Here we are." Floyd was coming back into the room. "Have one, pardner?"

Clem was strolling casually back to his old place.

"Thanks—I prefer cigarettes." He took a fresh one out, tapped it on the back of his hand, lighted it. "As we were saying—"

He stopped and glanced questioningly at Floyd; footsteps were coming up the stairs. Floyd nodded.

"Uh-huh—that's him."

The door opened. A handsome, elegant young man in riding breeches stood there; he glanced indifferently at the stranger in cowboy dress, and entered, closing the door. There came an amused laugh from Clem:

"So that's your version of English Dick—hardly complimentary to the original!"

The newcomer stopped dead in the middle of the floor, turned stiffly, raising a monocle to affix it in his eye. Clem laughed again:

"Oh, can it—I suppose you'd say 'tin it,' to sound English."

"My deah chap——"

The handsome one was lighting a gold-tipped cigarette with a lordly, supercilious air; he paused with the cigarette in his mouth and the burning match in his fingers; he was turning away, as from one not worth noticing.

Crash! Greg had hardly seen a movement. Floyd leaped wildly to his feet; "English Dick" stood gasping. Clem was still seated in his chair, legs sprawled out, but two smoking guns were in his hands. He laughed coolly.

"Old thing, if you haven't happened to notice it, your cigarette is shot squarely in two, and so is the match. Not bad, eh?"

FLOYD'S mouth was opening and closing like a fish's; the almost supernatural ease and speed of that draw left him speechless—he had seen, and hired, many a fast gunman in his life, but never had he even imagined anything like that streaking draw.

Greg, forgetting that he was to keep his shadow still, sank back on his haunches, staring blankly at the window shade. That draw—*The man was English Dick himself!*

The window shade was whipping up—Greg had barely time to throw himself flat on the roof under the window and hope for the best. He could hear the bunk-house door opening swiftly, could hear voices there. Then, directly over his head, came Floyd's shout:

"It's all right, fellers—nobody hurt!"

The shade was rippling down again—fortunately, Floyd had been in such a hurry to get back to his conversation that he had not glanced down at the long, dark shadow hardly three feet from him—and besides, his eyes were accustomed to

the light in the room; he could not well have seen Greg, anyway.

The men remained outside the bunk house a moment, then began to straggle back in—all but one, who was walking to the house, probably to find out more about the reason for that double shot. Greg lay there; he did not dare bring his shadow before the light with that man approaching. Also, as well as he could see by craning his neck up, the shade had come straight down this time; there was no opening beside it. He listened intently. That very English voice was coming:

"Think I'll trot down to my room—I've taken the liberty of using the best one on the ground floor. Don't mind, do you?"

"No, no! Not at all, Dick—make yourself right at home. I'll call some of my main men to the livin' room later on, and we'll talk it over with you." Floyd's voice changed, became sarcastic: "You can git out, too!"

A shuffle of feet; a moment of silence in there but for the scratch of a match—probably Floyd lighting a cigar. Then the door burst open; that would be the man who had hurried from the bunk house.

"What's up? What was the shootin'?"

Floyd's deep draw:

"Jest a little exhibition. English Dick number two."

"Say, we didn't know what to do with him till you come back—he jest walked in and took the best room in the house. Is—is he——"

"He sure is—that's jest what he was demonstratin'."

A silence, then the newcomer's voice:

"Well, what do we do? How do we explain things to the boys—that we been foolin' 'em?"

Another silence—a long one. Floyd cleared his throat slowly.

"Easy enough. This real English Dick would want too big a cut to suit us—he knows of a haul of a hundred thousand dollars that can be picked up easy."

"A—a hun——"

"Hundred—thousand. That's money!"

"Well, if he's that useful——"

"Bunk! We don't want any strangers—leastwise no damned Englishmen—cuttin' in on us. We'll find out where to pull it, and all about it. And I do hope that none of you fellers git careless in your shootin' when we're doin' it, and plug one of our men that's with us."

Another pause—the man seemed dull-witted. Then a throaty laugh.

"Me sabe! I'll warn some of the boys to be careful. Where's the thing to come off? Goin' yourself? But 'course you ain't; you never do."

A chuckle, dry, harsh.

"I'll be there this time; some of you might lose your way comin' back here with all that weight. And you'll find out where it is when we git there."

"Aw, Floyd, ain't I——"

Floyd's dry chuckle.

"Oh, sure! But, in plain English, I ain't takin' no chances with nobody. Drop out to the bunk house and bring back three or four o' the best men—you know who's to be in it. I'll be down in the livin' room. Wish Sam was here—wouldn't have sent him with that herd if I'd knowed this was comin' up."

Both were leaving the room. Greg could hear no more at that window, and it might be difficult to escape later. He crawled quickly to the eave, swung down from his hands, dropped, and then he was running quietly. He went into the little patch of scrub oaks, untied his

horse, and mounted. He circled until he was, as well as he could judge, in a line between the house and the North Star; then he rode directly north about a quarter of a mile, dismounted again, and found a comfortable spot under a cedar—he might have a very long wait, while things were being discussed.

He had been lying there about half an hour when he sat up suddenly—what was that? He listened. It was undoubtedly the sound of rapid hoofbeats approaching the ranch.

Now, who was that coming in such a hurry? It sounded, from the uneven beat of the hoofs, as though the horse might be about exhausted. Well, he'd find out from Clem—or whatever he should call him now—when he got there.

IT was a very long wait indeed. Greg was tired, and had lost a good deal of sleep lately. To his chagrin, he woke up with the rising moon—it was well on toward its last quarter—shining in his face. He pulled out his watch. Why, it was nearly one o'clock! Had Clem come out and failed to find him? That would be the crowning calamity—and his own fault.

Still, he was dozing again when he heard a click of a boot on stones. He sat up quickly. Somebody was coming toward him, whistling a tune softly.

"Here I am! This way—left!"

Clem came up and sat down beside him. They talked.

"Greg, what the blazes have you been doin'? You sure pulled a bone-head!"

Strangely, this familiar drawl surprised Greg.

"Huh?"

"Gosh, but you've made a mess o' things—wirin' that man to come up so soon!"

"I didn't!" Greg quickly explained, and told of his having sent for the U. S. marshal.

"Think he'll git here in time?"

"I dunno—but what else could I do? If Six-shooter Nan——"

Clem interrupted; there was a curious note in his voice that Greg could not understand at all:

"She'll git it out for you; wish we had nothin' but that to worry about."

Greg hesitated:

"Say, Clem—uh—want me to call you that?"

"It's my name."

"But—ain't you English Dick?"

"We'll talk about that later on; there's more important things now. Greg, I got bad news for you; you got blowed up on that rustler business. Sam Crump came in to-night on a dead-beat horse and told us about it. He sent the sheriff and a posse to stop your men before they got out o' this county; they're to take the prisoners away from 'em and bring 'em to Zalagarda to jail. You know what that means?"

"Huh! Reckon they——"

Greg did not finish the question; those men were, on the whole, peaceful, law-abiding cattlemen—they would not dare fight a sheriff in his own county. The whole crowd of rustlers would be taken to the Zalagarda jail—from which they would promptly "escape." All that work, those wounded men—one or two of whom might die—for nothing! The blow left him dazed. Dully, he heard Clem's voice:

"Sam brought a copy of the telegram, too; he didn't know what it was about, but Floyd's been getting copies of every one that sounded like it might be about money or cattle—there's some telegraph operator ought to be behind the bars for life."

"What," asked Greg dully, "did

Floyd decide?" He was in a frame of mind to feel sure that this business would go wrong, too.

"It's to be pulled at a place on the railroad they call the Summit—the top of a long divide. The train slows up badly climbin' it, so the engineer will be able to stop when he sees the track tore up and a pile o' ties lit to show the break. They're goin' to have a man rush in and blow out a section of rails behind with dynamite, to make sure o' things."

"Who'll be there? I know Floyd will."

"That's somethin' I don't know; they was holdin' some things back on me, quietlike, but I caught on. Can you be ready?"

"To-morrow night? I can—but I don't know about the marshal. Might look funny for a crowd of us to stop the thing without any authority. Got to risk it, though. Oh, say, Clem!" Greg turned to him anxiously. "I heard something after you left the room. Floyd don't want to split with you—and likely he himself wants to be the whole big boss. You're to be shot in that holdup—likely in the back."

Clem nodded; he did not seem ruffled.

"Half expected they'd pull that; they're crookeder than snake tracks. Well, I think I can take care of myself—we'll see."

From his casual tone, it again came to Greg that this man did not care whether he got killed or not; he felt that he had made too bad a mess of his life for that to matter. Clem was getting up. Greg stood up, too; he was stiff all over from sleeping on the hard ground in the cold; he could hardly rise.

"Well, Clem, I got to go get the boys ready, and go to Zalagarda to see if any marshal gits in—gosh, but

I hope he does! I—I reckon I'll see you to-morrow night, when it comes off."

A chuckle from Clem; the man surely had nerve!

"I'll be round there, somewhere—don't know just what I'll be doin' till I see how things come out. Well, so long, pardner."

He reached out his hand—Greg noticed that he seemed hesitant about it, as though not quite sure that it would be accepted.

"Dang you, Clem!" Greg shook it warmly. "Well, pardner, there's a good chance anyway o' cleanin' up my mess for good to-morrow night; let's hope things turn out right for you, too—heck, there's a way out of everything!"

"Except Federal prison, Greg. Oh, well!" Clem grinned—and there seemed real humor in his grin. "One consolation is that American prisons are better than English ones—no turkey dinners and baseball over there; they have a queer notion that convicts shouldn't be made pets of. Well, adios, pardner."

Clem was walking off, whistling softly, as though he had not a single care in the world. Greg stood staring after him until he was out of sight, the whistle out of hearing or stopped. Then, with a sigh, he swung into his saddle and rode away silently. To-morrow night. Darned queer, but he somehow seemed to be worrying more about good old Clem than about the other things. If Clem got killed—

GREG got back to the Rafter C before any one was up. He liberated his horse and went quietly to his room—no reason to disturb everybody. He lit his lamp and considered. He could take a short nap, of course, before the others arose, but he had had several

hours sleep out under that tree—he was glad of this now, seeing that it had done no harm.

He happened to glance at himself in the mirror. What he saw was hardly attractive—a dusty, unwashed face with a long stubble of reddish-brown beard. He decided to shave; he had to do it with cold water, but this was nothing new for him. Having plenty of time, he stopped to hone his razor, touch it up on the canvas, and strop it carefully. Then, largely to pass the time, he shaved with unusual care. To finish, he rubbed talcum powder on his face and wiped off the surplus—he certainly looked a very different man for those few minutes' work.

He dug out fresh clothes, and changed. By this time, he heard sounds of others beginning to stir in the house. He had just got through changing clothes when a soft tap came at his door. It was Rose. Her anxious face told him what she wanted to know before she spoke; he hastened to reassure her:

"It's all right—I think. I've found out where the holdup is to be. Now if the marshal only gets here! I met Nan out on the range and sent her with the message; question is if she'll get it there."

Rose gave him an odd look—it reminded him of how Clem had looked at him when he told of sending Six-shooter Nan. Rose's manner seemed to stiffen a trifle as she answered.

"Oh, she'll get it there for you!"

She had begun to inspect him and his clothes; she spoke again, a trace of wonder in her voice:

"Why, Greg, you look fresh as a daisy—anybody would think you'd just slept twelve hours and didn't have a trouble in the world."

Mrs. Hammond was coming to-

ward them. A few words with her, and Greg went out. He wanted to tell the wranglers to be sure to get every man's top horse, including his own Red Boy. He had a few further instructions to give, so by the time he went back to the house breakfast was ready. He sat down, and he had barely begun to eat when he heard the sound of wheels outside. Who on earth could have arrived at that hour of the morning?

He went out to find a buckboard just drawing up to the porch. A glance showed that it had come from the livery stable, and that the passenger was very obviously an Easterner—even an indoor worker could not long have that smooth white skin in the dry climate of Arizona. He was a young man, of about medium size and a trifle overweight. He had somewhat the appearance of an athlete pretty badly out of training but not quite to be called fat.

"Good morning," greeted the arrival pleasantly.

"Howdy, stranger," answered Greg. "Light an' come in."

The man climbed down. He was quite well dressed, but not overdressed; there was a touch of carelessness about his clothes. Genial looking young man; looked good-natured and quiet. He followed Greg into the house—Mrs. Hammond was coming to ask him to breakfast. He introduced himself as Marlow only, and accepted the invitation to breakfast with an undisguised readiness that showed Greg what the crisp night air of Arizona could do to an Easterner's appetite.

Greg was puzzled: what on earth could that soft-looking young man be here for? His conversation told nothing—indeed, he did not say much beyond making a few com-

monplace remarks; he was too busy eating. Breakfast over, he took out a cigarette and nodded to Greg:

"You're Mr. Lawson, aren't you? Could I speak to you in private?"

Still more puzzled with the man, Greg led him to his room. Marlow sat down in the one chair, while Greg took the edge of the bed, rolling a brown cigarette.

"Well, what can I do for you, Mr. Marlow?" he asked.

Marlow looked up with his genial, almost innocent air.

"You sent for the U. S. marshal for this district. He's in bed with influenza, so he wired me to drop out and see about things while he gets in touch with some of his men—I was down near here, anyway, seeing about rumors we'd got about a certain man we want."

"Oh—you're one of his deppities?"

"No—I'm what you'd call secret service. This really wasn't my affair, but Larimer has often gone out of his way to help me, so I couldn't refuse."

Something had been working around in the back of Greg's mind, trying to come out—something that seemed half forgotten. Suddenly he looked up.

"What did you say your first name was, Mr. Marlow?" He hadn't said, as Greg knew.

"Jason," he answered carelessly.

GREG sat up, staring at him. Jason Marlow! Little as Greg read the newspapers, he knew this name well—everybody did. So this was that famous man who had cleaned up some of the toughest crooks in the country in practically "nothing, flat." About half of them had chosen to shoot it out with him; they were promptly buried. It was no wonder Greg stared; he could hardly imagine any-

body who looked less like a government gunman—Marlow's real job was to shoot those who couldn't be arrested.

There had been quite a pause. Marlow laughed—a chuckling, low laugh.

"Oh, come out of it! The papers just like to make a big story out of nothing—I didn't do any more than dozens of the other fellows."

And only then, in a sudden flash, the truth came to Greg: With Jason Marlow in charge, anybody around here who was implicated even in the slightest in a Federal offense would do well to give up and take his term in prison—Marlow didn't argue. His coming was the greatest piece of luck Greg could have had.

"Say," Greg looked up suddenly, panic clutching at him, "did the marshal wire you to come here? You couldn't have been far off, to get here so soon."

Marlow grinned—he had a pleasant, reassuring grin.

"Don't worry, Mr.—oh, damn it, let's make it Greg and Jason! He had one of my men wire me in code; even the name of this ranch was coded."

Greg relaxed with a sigh of relief; he had heard before that the secret service men always used code—they'd have to, of course. He stole another glance at the detective sitting opposite him; he could hardly imagine anybody who looked less like a famous Federal man hunter. Then, hesitantly, he asked a question that had been on his mind for some time:

"You wouldn't want to say who you was lookin' for down here, would you?"

Marlow grinned slightly and shook his head. Greg spoke again, watching him closely:

"Not English Dick, by any chance?"

Another grin that told nothing whatever. Marlow whistled a bar or two softly.

"Why?" he asked. "Know anything about him?"

"I—might. Danged if I know."

That lightning draw of Clem's—But Clem had assured him that his name was really Clem—and Clem absolutely could not have done some of the brutal things attributed to English Dick.

Suddenly Greg remembered something: English Dick's riding was a famous joke, especially up North where there were so many really good riders—it was known that he could barely stay on a running horse. And he could not rope at all; one of his men always had to catch his horse for him; everybody knew that. Indeed, once, with a sheriff hot after him, he had fallen off when his horse jumped a gully—all that had saved him was one of his miraculous long shots that brought the sheriff's horse down too and gave him time to catch his own own and lope away clumsily.

Well, that definitely let Clem out; as a rider, Clem was little inferior to Greg himself, and he was possibly a shade more deft with a rope—there would be little choice between the two of them at either. Greg nodded in relief.

"No, I don't know a thing about him. There's two different fellers down here usin' that name—one of 'em ain't even English. Funny—all I been hearin' since I come down here is English Dick."

Now, just what did Marlow mean by that quiet little smile? Greg knew then that he was dealing with one of the deepest and cleverest men he had ever run across—and probably one of the least nervous. Marlow yawned, stretched—he had been

up most of the night, coming out here in a bone-shaking buckboard.

"Two! Well, let's hope no more English Dicks turn up!"

They spent most of the morning sitting there planning. Greg told Marlow everything, with one exception; he held back the fact that he himself was the real instigator of this robbery of the mails, that it was his trump card to rid the Rafter C of a crowd that the rotten local law would not touch. Whether Marlow suspected, he could not tell—as well try to read a stone as this man's smiling, good-natured face.

At Greg's request, lunch was being prepared an hour or more early. Marlow, knowing little of the cattle country, seemed surprised that the noon meal was called lunch and not dinner; Greg explained that a cowboy, making long rides, generally ate nothing at all at midday, that the main meal of the day always came in the evening. Marlow spent a good deal of his time, as would any "greenhorn," in covertly inspecting the cowboys—to him, they must have appeared a wild-looking, lawless crew indeed, with their lean, tanned faces, their swinging guns, their swishing chaps, and the air of recklessness that is the stamp of their profession. The man's interest in them amused Greg—it was only accident that he himself was freshly shaved and presentable that morning.

LUNCH eaten, there was the bustle of roping horses and saddling—the secret service man was down at the corrals, not to miss any of the show. He was too "green" in the ways of the West to have brought a saddle for himself, but Greg found a spare one to lend him; he put it on what he judged to be the gentlest horse that

would have life enough for the ride they had to make.

"Here you are, pardner."

Greg handed the reins to Marlow and stood watching. At least, the man knew which side to mount. He climbed on with fair grace, although he held the saddle with both hands in doing it. It was better than Greg had looked for—what a cowboy expects of an Easterner in the way of riding is very little, indeed. Greg, in the saddle, turned:

"All set? Let's go! Look out!"

Greg whirled Red Boy—and just in time. Marlow's horse, striking out after the others, had taken the shortest course—which happened to be by leaping a low pile of fence rails that lay beside him. The rider had lost one stirrup and was clawing wildly at the horse's mane. The cowboys—mannerly about such things toward a stranger, were going on, practically strangling with mirth and not daring to look back, afraid the man would see their faces.

Greg had Marlow's arm; he was fighting himself to keep from grinning. He helped him to a straight seat. Marlow was gulping with embarrassment; his face was red.

"He—he just whirled sideways and jumped it!"

Greg spoke gravely—it cost him an effort.

"You gotta look out for that—it would surprise anybody not lookin' for it. Here, rein him this way."

Watching out of the corner of his eye, he made a fresh start. Marlow's horse had an exceptionally easy lope—Greg had picked him partly for that. Fine! Marlow was keeping down in his saddle most of the time, and fairly well balanced all the time so long as the horse went straight. He obviously had ridden before; Greg had feared that he had not. When Marlow tried to speak,

the effort was somewhat ludicrous to Greg:

"Gug-Greg! I—ugh—ugh—not used to riding lately. If-fuf—there's fast riding—ride—to be done—you take chu-charge. I—uth-outh—author-ize it."

"Sure!" Greg spoke with relief—he had hoped for just that, but had not wanted to make the request. "I'll take charge of everything; I'll try to do it like I think you would."

They had caught up with the cowboys. Shorty Jackson dropped back beside the two. He gave Marlow an innocent grin as they loped along, and reached out his tobacco sack and papers.

"Smoke, pardner? No!"

He dropped his reins, hooked a knee over the horn of his saddle, and placidly rolled and lit a cigarette as he loped along. Marlow stared at him with envy.

"Ugh—I'd gug-give a thousand dollars—be able—to do—thud—that!"

"Nothin' to it!"

Shorty yawned, stretched, unhooked his knee and picked up his reins; then he was catching up with the others. Marlow gave Greg a sheepish grin, a good-natured grin, and loped along. Greg glanced angrily at Shorty's back—Shorty had no business "devilin'" the man that way; there were millions of men in the world who could not ride even

as well as Marlow, but were still pretty good men.

A mile or so farther on, Greg and the man beside him were gradually loping up toward the lead. Suddenly a jack rabbit bounded from a patch of brush beside their trail and went leaping wildly off. There came an unexpected crack of a gun; in the middle of a leap, the jack rabbit collapsed as though a cannon ball had struck him. Dazed eyes turned on Marlow; a gun had appeared from nowhere and was balanced negligently in his hand.

The cowboys, with one accord, slid their horses and rode up to the dead jack rabbit—his head was practically blown off. With his horse stopped now, Marlow could speak calmly. He threw a sly, friendly grin at Shorty:

"Just to show you," he drawled with a chuckle, "that I can do *some-thing*."

Shorty stared at him; he had always thought that, somehow, good riding and good shooting went together. He nodded, gravely, respectfully.

"Pardner, you sure got me showed! You sure can!"

But Greg, as they started on again, was strangely silent; there was a line drawn down between his eyes. In all his life, he had heard of only one man who was a completely rotten rider but a dead shot—English Dick.

To be concluded in next week's issue.

THAT OTHERS MIGHT LIVE

IN order to save the remaining herd of 10,000 elk in Yellowstone Park, Montana, two thousand others were lured to corrals baited with hay. It was believed by the park rangers that there was enough forage for 10,000 to survive. When the corrals were filled with the required number, they were shot and most of the meat given to Indian agencies.



THE GIANT OF LAVENDER HILLS

By **ELI COLTER**

Author of "Baked-beans Trail," etc.

IT is said that the West is a perfect crucible in which to try a man's soul. The great reaches of the merciless desert lands, the changeless frowning majesty of the mountains and high hills, the beauty and loneliness of the forests, valleys and canyons, all conspire to set him in his place, to swelter the littleness out of him, to bake him hard with sun and buffet him tough with wind and storm, so that if there is any soul in him it must come clean to its Maker's face at last.

"Mell" Painter did not know this when he came to the West.

Mell Painter came to the town of Lavender Hills, nestled at the foot of mountains misty purple with sage, looked once at the resources and the inhabitants, and said that what the country needed was brains.

"Brains," said Mell, "and I've got them." That's what he thought. He did have brains, at that, but not of an admirable kind.

Lavender Hills, named for the tint of the sage-blanketed mountains, was a quiet cow town in a peaceful

and exquisite country. Its few inhabitants were easy-going, simple-hearted people, who knew little of the intricacies of life in the city centers where "brains" abounded, and cared less concerning it. But Mell Painter had lived long in the cities, he was what he called a man of parts, and he admitted modestly that he knew how things were done. He knew what could be done in Lavender Hills, there was no mistake about that.

"This country is a bonanza for us!" he told his sister Juno. "So here we camp; and we'll take plenty with us when we move on. In the range land surrounding this town there are thousands of cattle ready for market. These dumb ranchers sell every year very little of what they have to sell, they make no effort to crowd their profits; they want only enough to buy supplies for the next year. Up in the Lavender Hills themselves, there are a lot of jug-headed oafs with all kinds of valuable furs lying around going to waste. We're going to change all that, my dear."

"With your usual system, I suppose?" said Juno wearily. She was appropriately named. She was tall and beautifully fashioned. She had a face like a goddess, framed by a mass of curling red-gold hair. Her eyes were clear clean brown, and they could look through a man mercilessly, probably because there was a real brain but no evil behind them. They looked through Mell now, cleaving his shabbiness like a clean sword, and her deep husky voice was edged with scorn. "I can't think why I stay with you, Mell, how I continue to abide your slippery ways and your low cunning. Perhaps it's because you're all I have on earth, and there's a fool pride in me that won't surrender to your go-

ing quite down to the gutter, to seeing my only brother become a complete rotter. I suppose it doesn't matter. I'm going to leave you some day."

"I've heard that before," grunted Mell. "You might as well forget it. It doesn't sink in. Besides, my mind is on business right now. They've got one saloon here in Lavender Hills, only one; all the gambling they do is in friendly games of poker between themselves. The young folks, and the old ones, too, do their dancing at the hick affairs held at the ranch houses. You wait till I get the White Palace fixed up and running. The money's going to roll in. I'm taking that old deserted store down the street; already made a dicker for it, and I'm going to move fast."

"No doubt," agreed Juno bitterly, straightening her magnificent shoulders. "It seems that the lure of chance is irresistible to a lot of men, and weasels like you fatten on the fact."

"Don't be so danged insulting!" flared Mell.

Juno turned wearily away. She knew the whole story so well, she knew perfectly exactly what would happen. Mell would erect his White Palace, his gilded gambling hall, in the deserted store. Ranchers who otherwise would have been forever content with their mild and friendly poker games, would succumb to the lure of chance winnings—and Mell Painter's system would go to work. He would allow them to win at first, sometimes much, sometimes not so much; according to each man and his nature. Mell's shrewd brains could read other men. He would allow them to win enough to fire their blood, and instigate in their minds dreams of great winnings to be made. Then they wouldn't win so much.

Then they wouldn't win at all. Then they would lose. Then they would be swamped with debt to Mell. Oh, yes. It worked. It always worked. It would work here. And she would grimly hang on to Mell, and argue and watch, and try to keep him from going clear bad. And he would send for big "Battler" Foley to come and take the place of bouncer, and she and Battler would go on hating each other, and fighting each other for Mell's soul.

She was entirely correct. It all happened within a year: and by that time Mell held the I O U papers of half the riders on the range, and mortgages on a good share of the ranchers' fall beef herds. But here Juno's fierce arguing, her desperate attempts to save Mell from the lowest degradation, seemed of less potency than ever before. Her mental and verbal conflict with Battler Foley seemed to fail of victory more frequently than ever in the past. Every time some cheated and indebted rider unexpectedly got a faint glimmering of Mell's "system," and raised objections, and was beaten and thrown out by Battler Foley, her furious and passionate attempts at interception were of less avail each time.

She knew a growing fear that sooner or later one of these straight shooting cowboys was going to draw a gun, and Mell or Battler, or both, for the first time would shoot another man, and shoot to kill.

SHE liked the thronging crowd of cowboys from the ranches. She liked their lean, tanned faces, their big hats and flannel shirts, their cowboy boots and jingling spurs. She didn't want any of them ever to fall victim to Mell's gun.

She didn't want Mell ever to be

strung up as a murderer, either, but she lived in mortal fear that in this country it might happen. She was nervous and upset already over an argument with Mell, the evening that "Limpy" Fry came lurching into the White Palace, half drunk. He stopped at the bar and downed another drink before he approached the gaming tables, and Juno watched him with wide, apprehensive eyes. Limpy Fry was a man with a grim and dogged temper. He had come there and lost money before. She had begged him not to come back, and he had laughed in her face. He paid no attention to her now, though she was certain he must know she was watching him.

She was afraid of what was going to happen if Limpy lost again tonight. She knew she was about at the end of her tether. She would have to give up her unequal battle and leave Mell sooner or later. She wasn't winning an inch of the way. She was ready to admit that at last. She walked along the wall, watching Limpy with an uneasy gaze.

He lost heavily, and suddenly he turned from the table with a wild oath, and started to draw his gun. But he was very drunk by now. Battler Foley was right behind him, Battler was six feet and three inches tall, built like an ox, and Limpy was small and lean and lame. Limpy had no chance. Battler snatched the gun from him, struck him several battering blows, and started to drag him toward the door, still raining blows upon his face and head, while Limpy struggled futilely and cried out in fury and pain.

Then in the door of the gambling hall from somewhere outside, "he" suddenly stood. No one knew where he came from. No one there had ever seen him before. He loomed, startling, unbelievable, almost filling

the space of the open double doors. He was six feet and nine inches tall, and he was as broad as two men. He stood as straight as the sash of the door framing his gigantic figure. His thick black hair curled to his neck. His gleaming black eyes looked sternly out of his mighty face, and instantly comprehended the shameful scene taking place before him. His thunderous bass voice boomed two words.

"Stop that."

Battler held hand upraised, ready to descend on Limpy in another merciless blow, and glared at the giant in the doorway, and almost gasped. But he refused to be intimidated. "Get out of my way!" he roared.

The man in the doorway lifted one huge hand. He picked Battler Foley up by one arm, swung him in an arc, and threw him in a heap ten feet away. With speed all but unbelievable in a man of his enormous size, he picked Limpy up, set him on his feet, shoved him out the door, and again turned to face the room. Then Mell Painter came to life behind the bar, and Battler Foley, murderous with rage, struggled to his feet. Neither of those two had any defense against the giant in the doorway—save one. Juno, watching, holding her breath, feeling her heart stop with fear, saw both Mell and Battler draw their guns.

"Get out of this place!" Mell shouted at the man in the doorway. "Get out, or I'll let you have it."

The giant ignored him utterly, and started to advance into the room. Battler Foley and Mell Painter fired in the same breath, and they were too close to miss. Before either of them could fire again, something moved like a white gleaming flame from beside the wall and spread itself before the bewildered giant of a

man: Juno Painter, with her golden head flung back against his chest, her arms flung out to stop his advance, her brown eyes blazing in scorn from her white face upon her brother and Battler Foley.

"Mell! Battler! Put up those guns, you fools."

They glared at her, and at each other, and slowly holstered their guns. Juno whirled to look up at the giant stranger, whose black eyes were resting upon her in almost childlike delight.

"Oh, go!" Her voice rose in passionate entreaty. "Go quickly, before they have a chance to shoot you again. You have been hit, man! You're wounded."

"Oh, hit! No. No hit me. No man hit me. I too big."

"A bullet hit you!" said Juno sharply. "Two of them. In your chest. Don't you know you may die if something isn't done for you right away?"

The man raised one great hand to his chest, drew it away and looked at it. His eyes widened at sight of the blood on his fingers, then he laughed, a great rumbling sound that filled the stilled room. "No. I no die—now!"

"Will you please go!" said Juno, her voice sharp with desperation. "Please—go!"

"No. I no go. I stay. Nice place. I like much. I stay."

"You will like——" Mell began, and Juno cut him short.

"Shut your mouth, Mell. I'll get him out of here." She laid a hand on one of the giant's thick-thewed arms. "Then will you come with me? Will you come with me and let me look at your wounds?"

"Oh, sure. I come—with you. I no go. Where I come with you? When? Now?"

"Right out this door." Juno

turned him toward the door through which he had entered, and he went with her into the night outside, as docilely as a child.

THE room was still as death behind them, for a long-drawn moment, then Mell Painter expended a hard breath, and drew out a handkerchief and wiped his face.

"Whew! Where did that mountain come from? Anybody here know who he is?"

No one did. Mell shrugged.

"Well, get things moving again, Foley. Juno will get rid of him. She's probably ditched him down the street somewhere by now."

He erred a long way in that guess. Juno had taken the giant, without explanation or preamble, to the one doctor in Lavender Hills, young Doc Hawley. Hawley found both bullets embedded in the big man's breast bone, and he wanted to administer an anæsthetic before removing them, but he could not make the huge fellow understand what it was all about. The man would only shake his great head and say no.

"No. I no hurt. You take out bullets, or I go with bullets in."

So Hawley removed the bullets, perspiring, but the huge man made no murmur. He simply lay and took it, his black eyes rapt on Juno's goddess face. When it was over, he buttoned back his shirt, and put his hand in his pocket and stood to his full height. "You do good job, I pay good." He laid two twenty-dollar gold pieces on the operating table that had groaned with his weight.

"Gosh, man, that's too much!" protested Hawley. "That's——"

"That's all. I go now." The giant turned pleading eyes on Juno. "You come with me. I go home."

She gave Hawley one indescribable look, and followed the huge man out in the night, onto the street. There he paused and looked down at her face, white in the sharp light of the full moon.

"You must do what you promised," she said swiftly. "You must go home. Where did you come from?"

"Way up in hills. I live there long time. Since I am so high."

"What's your name?"

"I am name Dom Pole. I no speak good in English. My people Polish."

Juno's breath caught in a little gasp—Polish—Dom Pole. "Who called you a damn' Pole?" she asked sharply.

"One trapper up in hills. I ask him what my name in English. He say Dom Pole. I am name Dom Pole."

"Why did you come here?" demanded Juno.

"I come see you. I live away far. I never see many people. I hear say down here is beautiful lady with gold hair. I never see any so beautiful lady with gold hair. I come see you. I see you. I go home now. Maybe some day you come see Dom Pole."

"Yes, I think I shall," said Juno, surprisingly. "I think I shall take my horse and go riding in Lavender Hills to-morrow. Watch for me, on the hill beyond Square Cross Ranch. I am sure I want to see you again. I shall want to keep on seeing you till I know that my brother did you no permanent harm. Good night, Dom Pole."

When she returned to the White Palace, Mell was waiting for her in the room on the second floor, Battler Foley informed her, and she went up to face him. He was pale and agitated, pacing the floor, and he stopped short, to stare at her with burning eyes as she entered the room.

"What did you do with him?"

"I took him to Doctor Hawley. Hawley extracted the bullets, and I sent him home. Hawley says he'll be all right. You can thank your lucky stars you and Battler haven't committed murder."

Mell drew a breath of relief. "Who is he? Where did he come from?"

"He came from Lavender Hills, and he says his name is Dom Pole. That's enough for you. Maybe when it sinks in how close you came to fitting yourself for a rope to-night, you may pull up a little. Get out of my room."

Juno had been in the habit of riding in the hills, but not with any great regularity. Now the habit became so noticeable, she was gone so frequently and so long, that Mell grew uneasy and curious. He set Battler Foley to watching her. He suspected that she went to see the great dumb Pole. Battler confirmed that, and reported that Juno and Dom Pole seemed to have no interest save in a couple of old books and some pencils and scraps of paper on which they were always scribbling. Battle Foley did not report that he had discovered what rich furs the giant Pole trapped there in the hills, the frugal habits that had saved the money accruing from the sale of the furs, and the golden cache that was somewhere about the Pole's cabin.

He did not report that he had lost all interest in what Juno could find of moment in the great trapper. He was spying only to learn the location of that cache of gold pieces.

Mell endured the incomprehensible situation for three months, then he faced Juno with it.

"Juno, this idiocy has gone far enough. Why will you go up there to see that dumb ox of a trapper?"

"He is not dumb." Juno's clear eyes looked through him. "His peo-

ple died when he was only a child. He has literally come up by himself there in the mountains. He has never known anybody but the few trappers who live there. The little he remembers of his own language is scarcely more than a gibberish. There are no other Poles up there. The few words of English he knows he has picked up from the trappers. He seldom talks to any one but when he does he talks in his scant English—that's why he has no foreign accent. The trappers all like him. They are honest and trustworthy. They have brought him supplies from time to time, have sold his furs for him. He is not stupid, he is only ignorant because he has had no opportunity to learn. And if I want to spend a few hours with him when you don't need me here, I can't see that it is any of your business."

Mell thought that he would make it his business, but he didn't say so. That night while Juno was watching the tables, Mell drew Battler Foley aside behind the bar. "Battler," he announced grimly, "we're getting out of here before we are caught in some kind of mess. We've no kick coming. We have a pile of jack laid away. We've made a damned good stake here. It's time to go. We close this place next week. Don't say anything about it, not even to Juno. Don't let the word get around! But we're through in Lavender Hills."

"The big Pole?" inquired Battler Foley.

"Yes." Mell cursed savagely. "The damned dumb Pole. I don't like the way things look. If Juno had to get interested in somebody, why couldn't she pick on some of these cowboys that hang around? They're harmless. But that brute of a trapper!"

"Well, what do you care?" Battler shrugged his indifference. "She's

got to fall for somebody sometimes, I suppose. What does it matter?"

"She's my sister, you fool!" snapped Mell, which was more of an index to what was really inside of him than even he himself could dream.

Battler Foley wheeled and passed behind the bar, his brain crawling with sudden dogged resolve.

The next day Juno went riding in Lavender Hills. And Battler Foley followed her. And that night, with the first heavy snow, Dom Pole came again to the White Palace.

The air was freezing cold, and the White Palace was filled with men lured by the warmth and the festivity of the White Palace. They all noticed that Mell was taciturn and worried. They wondered where Battler and Juno were. Mell was wondering the same thing. They had not come back. For a long time fear of the huge Pole had harried his mind, and it rose to-night with devastating force. He was certain the Pole was planning vengeance on all of them. If the Pole dared to harm Juno, he would kill him for it if it took a cannon.

Maybe that was why Battler had been keeping such close watch on Juno. Maybe Battler was really worried about her under his scoffing exterior. Maybe the Pole had run amok, and Battler had tried to protect Juno, and they both had been killed. By the time the clock over the bar banged out a noisy midnight, Mell was beside himself with fear.

As the last raucous stroke died away, the swing doors were flung open. Dom Pole stood there. His black head was hatless. His arms and chest were bare, his shirt, ripped and torn, powdered with snow. His hair was crowned with snow. Around his mouth there was a crust of bright red, snow and blood frozen together.

His face was wild, his eyes half mad. He started straight for the bar.

Mell, stricken with certainty that his worst fears had come true, that the giant had come to finish his grim vengeance by getting him, cried out a wild command.

"Stop right there. "Stop!" He whipped up his gun. "Stop, or I'll stop you."

Dom Pole did not stop. His eyes widened, and the light in them glared like an insane flame. He increased his pace toward the bar. Again that room had gone still as death, every man staring. Mell sobbed in his throat, thinking of Juno, and the gun in his hand belched twice in quick succession. Both bullets struck, but Dom Pole kept coming.

"Stop!" Mell's voice was a rasp of terror, and the gun barked again. And again, and again, till it was empty.

But Dom Pole still came on. And Mell crouched behind the bar in frozen terror, as the report of the gun died to the deathly stillness that held the room, and the useless weapon dropped from his hand. And Dom Pole crashed against the bar, his great arms swinging at his sides. It was a terrible thing to watch that advance, and the end of it. To see the giant of a man mechanically putting one foot before the other, to see the red splotches spring up on his chest, to see him blunder to a halt before the terror-frozen Mell, the melted snow running down his arms and face, the melting blood beginning to drip from his mouth. He stared for an unspeakable minute at Mell, with his half insane eyes, and his left hand clutched the bar tightly.

Then he raised his right hand, and looked about uncertainly, and his gaze focused on the sheet of butcher's paper under the stack of glasses

on the bar. He lifted his right hand a little farther, straightened his forefinger, moved it to his bared chest, swabbed the finger in his own blood, and laboriously wrote on the paper.

Mell's dilated eyes, fascinated, followed the slowly moving finger, spelled out five stark words: "Juno—Foley—doctor—cabin—come."

Then Dom Pole collapsed upon the bar, and it groaned and shivered with his weight. Mell sent up a wild despairing cry. "Men—help! He—he came for help, and I shot him! But why didn't he say something? I thought he was after me. Move, you fools! He may be dying. Help me get him to Doc Hawley."

It took eight of them to carry him, but somehow they got him there through the snow, and Hawley stared at them all, and shook his head.

"What, again? Is that all the man does every time he come to town, get himself shot up? Lay him down here, quickly, while I look him over."

"Yes, look him over, and see if you can't bring him back to consciousness for a few moments, anyhow," Mell commanded harshly. "He has to tell us where Juno is. He knows. He wouldn't talk."

"He couldn't talk!" snapped Hawley. "He's been shot through the mouth. The wound was hidden by frozen blood. Do you see it now?"

"Lord—oh, Lord!" gasped Mell. "Doc, don't let him die. Juno and Battler are up there somewhere in the hills, needing you. He knows where—"

"Keep still!" Hawley turned commanding eyes on Mell. "He has lost a lot of blood, and he must have suffered hell, and he's taken several bullets. But this time none of them lodged. He has only flesh wounds. He's not going to die. I'll have him around and so he can talk in thirty

minutes if you'll keep out of my way and let me work."

That shocked Mell Painter to sober thought and sane action. He swept the other men back out of the way, and became an aid instead of a hindrance. But forty minutes had passed before Dom Pole's wounds were dressed, and he was conscious again, and his bullet slashed mouth was eased and cleaned. The bullet had pierced one cheek near the corner of the mouth, torn out two lower teeth, and emerged between the lips in front. Dom Pole lifted his wild black eyes to Hawley's face, and his numbed lips and aching jaw tried to move.

"Doc—you come now. You—come. Lavender Hills."

"We'll come," said Hawley crisply. "Who's hurt? Juno? Battler?"

"Juno." The stiff lips managed the word difficulty. "Battler dead."

"You keep still," Hawley ordered. "Mell, get to Hank's livery stable, get his black team and the big sleigh. Bring them here as fast as you can move. We've got to take Pole with us, to show us the way, or we'll never get there. He'll stand it all right. Hurry, man. For the love of Mike, hurry! It will be daylight before we get there."

He missed correct calculation. The daylight was barely breaking when he stopped the black team before Dom Pole's cabin, and Mell leaped from the sleigh and ran staggering through the snow to fling open the door. One glance into the room told the grim story. The room's habitual neatness had been ravaged to wild disorder. The body of Battler Foley lay on the floor, the life battered from it by the two great hands of Dom Pole. Before and around the body glittering gold coins were strewn on the floor. On Dom Pole's bed Juno lay beneath the cov-

ers, her goddess face bright with fever, her voice muttering incoherent whispers.

Mell whirled as Hawley came up, Dom Pole walking stiffly behind him, and the doctor plunged past Mell with a sharp ejaculation of anger. He stepped over the body of Battler Foley, and went down on one knee beside Juno, ripping down the covers. A swift moment of examination, and he turned to look up at Mell and Dom Pole.

"Don't worry. We're in time. A slight wound in the shoulder. A blow on the head, causing the fever. Neither very bad. You can thank Dom Pole for her life, though."

"And I shot him. What—what will she say to me?" Mell buried his face in his hands. "What will she say?"

She said, two days later, sitting up in Dom Pole's bed, and gazing at all of them with clear eyes:

"Foley came here to rob him. Dom had gone to the spring for water. I saw Foley sneak into the cabin, and by the time I got here he'd found the money. I tried to stop Battler, and screamed for Dom. He came charging in just as Battler struck me and shot me. Dom leaped on him, and he shot Dom through the mouth, and Dom—killed him. I made Dom go for you. All this summer I've been teaching him to

write in English. And if I hadn't—he couldn't have written those words on the bar, and——"

"Hush!" Mell's voice was sharp with agony. "I can't take it."

"You'll have to take it," said Juno steadily. "I told you I'd leave you some time, Mell. I'm never going back to the White Palace."

"Don't—don't leave me!" In Mell's white face there was a look she had never seen there before. "You win. There isn't going to be any White Palace any more. I'll give back everything I've taken from the ranch men. I'll humble myself to the dust. But I can't do without you. You're everything I've got. Don't leave me!"

Juno's eyes widened in swift, incredulous delight, and raised beyond him, beyond the averted face of Doctor Hawley, to the great silent bulk of Dom Pole. Beyond him she seemed to see the dim figure of Battler Foley, with whom she had fought for Mell's soul. And she had won. Her low laugh shimmered through the still cabin.

"Leave you? Don't you leave me, my brother. We're going to stay up here, and watch the years go by in Lavender Hills. With that mountain of a man behind you. I don't know what his name is. I can't pronounce it. I shall be content to be known as Mrs. Dom Pole."

Coming Next Week, "GHOSTS OF BLUE GULCH,"

by HUGH F. GRINSTEAD.

OUT OF ITS ELEMENT

A RABBIT, shot near Shawnee, Oklahoma, showed unmistakable signs of having "gone to the devil." In fact, it seemed to be the devil incarnate. The rabbit bore five horns which were hard and peaked, protruding well out of the fur on the animal's head. Three of these horns grew in front of the left ear, and two in front of the right. His own mother wouldn't have known him.



PARSON PICKS A PAIR

By RAY HUMPHREYS

Author of "Grand Opening," etc.

PARSON DUNKEL rode down the dusty side road in his buggy, looking for a good span of mules, preferably gray mules. Now the "Parson" was not a man of the cloth, although he had a cherublike face and a soft, soothing voice. The closest the Parson had ever been to a church was the hitch rail in front where he had wandered, once, to look over the horses there with a professional eye. The Parson was a horse trader and a good one—in one sense of the word. He was a shrewd

one. Despite his guileless face and pleasant tone he was notoriously crafty, cunning as a coyote, and as treacherous as the meanest broncho that ever looked through a halter.

"Some of the dumb farmers should have the mules I want," he remarked, aloud, to himself, as the buggy jolted along behind his big sorrel mare. "If I can find a real dumb farmer on this back road with mules—I'll make him think he's doing himself a big favor by selling me those mules for practically nothing! A silver dollar rolling along this road

should set the whole section ablaze! Give me the back roads for real bargains!"

The Parson chuckled as he remembered another back road.

"It was on just such a road as this that I found that old widow with the blaze-faced bay colt!" The recollection caused the Parson to shake with laughter. "She took me for a preacher and I told her I wanted the colt for a little orphan girl. I got it for seven dollars and a half—and that Denver horse company paid me a hundred and fifteen smack off the bat! Gosh, there was a deal!"

The Parson touched the sorrel mare with his whip.

"Get along, Nellie—this may be a big day again!"

The Parson scanned the green pastures on both sides of the winding road. There were lots of cattle and a few horses. But so far he had seen no mules. He had an order, in the pocket of his rusty black coat, for a hitch of six gray mules, young, sound, matched, for a big city contractor. He had acquired two of the animals, was dealing in another section for two more, but still needed a span to complete the layout.

"Farmers are getting dumber every day!" he remarked to Nellie, indignantly. "There's money in raising mules. Big money. A span of real mules will bring a good price any day, except—except when I happen to buy 'em!"

Again the Parson laughed immoderately. He was proud of his far-flung reputation in the horse-buying trade as an unscrupulous, tricky and perfidious dealer. He gloried in his false colors, his fake nickname.

But suddenly the Parson hauled back on the reins.

"Whoa, Nellie! There's mules—gray mules—big, gray mules!"

Immediately the Parson hopped from his buggy and opened the gate that led into the farm on his right. He got back in the buggy and drove in, sedately, assuming a benign expression as he traveled the shady lane that led to the white house. He waved graciously to a dog that came yipping out to herald his approach. He pulled up, finally, with a pompous flourish and a bland smile as the farmer came out on the porch.

"Good day, brother! Good day to you, sir!"

"Howdy," answered the farmer, eying the Parson skeptically. "If it's medicine for man and beast you're selling I reckon we don't—"

"A moment, my good man!" interposed Parson Dunkel, with the merest trace of annoyance in his voice. "I am Parson Dunkel, sir."

"Oh," said the farmer, abashed, it seemed, "excuse me, reverend!"

"Assuredly, assuredly!" beamed the Parson, feeling that he was making an auspicious start and that he had impressed one of the dumber of the dumb farmers. "I dropped in to see if you wished to dispose of one of those gray mules. We have need of one—an elderly one—at our camp for convalescent elders over in Seewanee County. A worthy charity, my good man, a very noble charity. If you have a mule you could spare, cheap—"

"Those are fine mules in that pasture!" said the farmer, slowly.

"They look docile," admitted the Parson, with a dignified bow. "The board of trustees would not want any other. Of course, our funds are very limited. We assure a good home, though, and the gentlest of loving care. Deacon Madden is in charge of the live stock at our camp. A very splendid man, Deacon Madden. Shall we look at the mules, brother?"

"I reckon," drawled the farmer, a peculiar light kindling in his eyes, "that my mules would be entirely too frisky for an elders' home—and, besides, the price would be too high."

"I should like to look at them, however!"

"Sure," said the farmer, "always proud to show 'em, reverend!"

They strolled toward the pasture, Parson Dunkel pretending to be quite calm and serene. Actually, however, he was feverish with excitement. Here, indeed, were seven or eight gray mules that would bring top prices in any man's market. He saw a golden harvest ahead, provided—

"We are farming a bit at our convalescent camp," spoke the Parson, with impressive solemnity, "in an effort to supply food for our free kitchens and extensive welfare work in the large cities where poverty reigns. If we could locate several elderly mules—why—I am convinced—that I could persuade the board of trustees and the deacons to acquire that number. It is a shame, after all, to separate and break up a large and happy family of mules. At our camp they would be tenderly named after flowers, perhaps, or famous figures in history. And no one would ever permit them to hear a bad word, brother! 'Darn' is permitted by Deacon Madden, but nothing more serious. Kindness, sympathy, a keen understanding are—"

"You don't know much about mules, reverend," exclaimed the farmer, and the remark was music to the Parson's ears, indeed. "No, sir, not much!"

"I am acquainted with Balaam's ass," answered Parson Dunkel, modestly, "but only as I have met him in the Good Book, brother. I really know little of modern mules. These

mules look very respectable, however!"

"Best in the county," said the farmer, smiling. "You can have your pick, reverend, at one hundred and thirty-five dollars each. There's one there I'll let you have for one hundred and twenty-five."

PARSON DUNKEL flinched visibly. He began to shake his head dolefully and was framing the pious speech he was about to make when his wandering eyes fell on a coal-black horse grazing just beyond the group of mules. The horse looked like an Arabian! It was tall and lean and clean-cut, with a wonderful head and magnificent legs. And it was young. Probably a two-year-old. The Parson forgot all about his mournful dirge anent the mules.

"What kind of a horse is that?" he gasped, pointing. He was out of character and he knew it, but he was too excited to care just then.

"That colt's mother was the best mare I ever owned," said the farmer, earnestly. "I got her at an auction down country. She looked like a thoroughbred. Her first colt was a dandy, but I didn't realize it in time. I sold him. The mare's dead now. This was her second colt. Ain't he a beauty?"

The Parson almost admitted he was the finest colt he had seen in years. But he caught himself in time. Instead he bowed gravely and rubbed his hands together and wondered just how far he could lead the farmer down the road of deceit. He licked his lips, determined to make a stab at a real deal.

"We—at the elders' convalescent camp—we have a reformed cowboy from Wyoming—Elder Tom Clennan—and he—he asked me if I

could get him a horse sometime!" Parson Dunkel was ashamed to look the farmer in the eye. He was afraid to try it. He realized how absurd his story sounded. "What would this pony cost, brother? What is the price tag on him?"

"He isn't for sale," said the farmer. "I figure he'll make a good running horse. I'm keeping him. No elder in the world could ride him!"

Again Parson Dunkel licked hot lips. Beads of perspiration were on his face.

"Elder Peabody—I mean Elder Clennan—can ride like nobody's business!" insisted the Parson, devoutly. "He always rides for the doctor when any of the elders become seriously ill. Often he has ridden all day long. This pony now—even if he was a bit expensive—you see, Elder Clennan, is—well, he has saved his money religiously for many years. He feels that he would like to plunk it all down on a horse."

"The horse isn't for sale," said the farmer, quietly. "I told you I am to see if he can run first. If he can't—why, maybe—"

"When do you anticipate knowing?" asked the Parson, innocently enough, it seemed. He was sorry, for once, that he was masquerading now. He felt that he could make this particular deal easier as a worldly horse trader!

"Oh, almost any day," said the farmer, whimsically eying the Parson. "I'll match him against a good horse some morning and see."

Parson Dunkel's heart leaped within him!

"I have a friend—Currihan—who has a fair-to-middling bangtail we might get over here for a matched race!" he exclaimed. "I—that is, brother—Deacon Currihan is in the

city. He—the horse was donated to him by a repentant race track gentleman who said he was a bangtail, whatever that is! I thought maybe—just for a lark, you know—we could arrange the—er—contest—and if your horse wasn't a good runner I—I might offer a reasonable sum in the name of Elder McSwiggan—no, I mean Elder Clennan—who desires a horse, as I informed you, brother!"

The farmer was staring hard at the Parson. The Parson fidgeted a mite under the intense scrutiny, but he managed to spread a beatific smile across his perspiring face.

"If you really mean that about the race, reverend," said the farmer, slowly and thoughtfully, "I might take you up on it. There's no good running horses handy here. But I'm surprised that you clergymen would be so all-fired interested in running horses! Sarah, my wife, would faint!"

The Parson became excited.

"My dear brother!" he exclaimed, grasping the farmer by the arm. "I beseech you not to disillusion your charming wife. And do not yourself get the wrong and sinful slant on my interest. You see, I am but thinking of the stricken elders who must have the doctor speedily—and the doctor lives five—yes, seven—nearer eight miles from the convalescent camp. When Elder—Elder—"

"Elder Clennan?" asked the farmer, naively.

"Thank you," nodded the Parson. "I was thinking of a text for my next sermon and not mindful of what I was saying. What I meant to remark was that Elder Clennan needs a fast horse to ride for the doctor, see? Now if I can prevail upon Deacon Currihan to bring his horse down—"

"Sure," agreed the farmer. "No harm in that as I can see!"

"No, not a bit of harm in that," hurried on the Parson. "I shall get in touch with Deacon Currihan shortly. Meantime, we'll sort of consider that I have first call on that colt. Don't sell him to any one else until I see you again. I'll be back in—in three days. Good-by!"

"How about the mules?" called the awed farmer, but the Parson was gone!

OLD NELLIE, the Parson's sorrel buggy mare, worked up a real sweat for the first time in years. Perhaps she wondered, in her equine way, what ailed her excited master, whether the law was after him, finally, or whether a mob of infuriated farmers was in close pursuit. The Parson, strangely, did not take the mare into his confidence. He was unusually mute. All he said was, "Giddap," repeatedly each time that he laid on the whip.

When they reached the telegraph office in Junction City, the Parson leaped from the buggy without bothering to wait to wrap the lines carefully around the whip socket, as was his custom.

"Give me a blank, quick!" the Parson shouted, as he rushed into the telegraph office. "Clear the wires for a fast, extra-special message!"

The girl behind the counter slapped a pad of telegram blanks down in front of the Parson. He was waiting, his fountain pen poised.

He scribbled hurriedly for a minute or so.

"How much?" demanded the Parson, "with the fastest service you got?"

The girl picked up the message he had written. She read:

MIKE ALOYSIUS CURRIGAN
BOULEVARD STABLES
DENVER

HAVE LOCATED GREATEST RACE
PROSPECT COLT IN YEARS STOP
BELIEVE CAN BUY FROM DUMB
FARMER FOR SONG STOP MUST
PROVE COLT CANNOT RUN SO
DUMB FARMER WILL SELL STOP
SHIP DOWN IMMEDIATELY THAT
BROWN BANGTAIL YOU THINK SO
GOOD STOP EXPRESS WITH
TRAINER STOP FIFTY FIFTY WITH
YOU AND IT IS SURE KILLING STOP
DON'T FAIL ACT FAST

DUNKEL
JUNCTION CITY

When he had learned the cost and paid for the telegram, the Parson looked around the office. He gave the girl a smile.

"I'm looking for a chair. I'm going to wait right here for the answer!"

He waited three hours, chafing and fretting, and growing more panicky as the minutes passed. What if Currihan was out of the city? What if he didn't still have the brown bangtail? What if Currihan wasn't interested? What if something happened that he couldn't get the black "wonder" colt, after all? Fifty times the suffering Parson lifted his ears hopefully as messages ticked in on the wire. A number of times, despite the open frowns of the operator, the Parson ambled over to see what the operator was writing on the typewriter—but it was always such things as "Your Aunt Mary arrived here safe to-day, love," or "Please send me fifty dollars more for fare home, love," or "Johnny has the measles and the cat has died, love," or something else that served only to infuriate the fuming Parson.

But at last the operator, who seemed greatly relieved himself, beckoned to the waiting Dunkel. The Parson jumped over and read

the message as it dribbled in over the wire from Denver:

DUNKEL
JUNCTION CITY

SOLD BROWN BANGTAIL SORRY
STOP AM SENDING YOUNGSTER I
PICKED UP CHEAP RECENTLY STOP
HAS NOT BEEN CLOCKED BUT
PROBABLY FAST ENOUGH TO HELP
YOU SKIN DUMB FARMER STOP
SHIPPING TO-NIGHT ARRIVE TO-
MORROW CURRIGAN
COLLECT

The Parson ordinarily would have raised a rumpus right then and there about paying for any collect message. But he didn't. He was too excited. Sticking the telegram in his pocket he hurried out, leaped in his buggy, drove Nellie to a feed stable and sought a hotel room for himself. He warned the clerk twice to get him up in time to meet the first fast train out of Denver in the morning.

Finally he went to bed, and to sleep—to dream of a satiny black colt, racing under the flaming colors of Dunkel and Currigan, winning the Preakness, the Kentucky Derby, and everything else worth while. Later he dreamed that he and the colt and Currigan were on a beautiful yacht, sailing away for a vacation, with the colt paying all expenses. He smiled in his sleep, thrice he muttered "dumb farmer," and chuckled so loudly that he risked awakening himself. The Parson, it would seem, was in Heaven!

THEY got the Currigan horse out of the express car with some difficulty—several railroad men, the Parson, and the little black boy who had accompanied the animal from Denver. The Currigan horse was a pretty good looker himself, the Parson decided. He was black, but he wasn't as velvety black

as the colt up the back road. The Currigan horse also had a peculiar triangle white mark on his forehead where the farmer's colt had no mark at all.

"This here horse," said the boy, "is a crazy horse, sir. Mister Currigan ain't had him but a few weeks and he ain't been worked much. But Mister Currigan said any cheap horse should beat any farm colt."

The Parson scowled at that remark. He grumbled something under his breath that sounded like anything but a religious remark.

"Mister Currigan is so worldly, so avaricious, so intent on making money, that he doesn't appreciate the finer things in life," said the Parson.

"Yes, suh!" The colored boy rolled his eyes.

"Now you set in the back of my buggy and lead this horse," directed the Parson, as they got the black away from the train. "And mind you that nothing happens. We're going out to see a dumb farmer, Sambo, and have a little race, as Mister Currigan may have told you. And remember this, Sambo, whenever you speak to me call me Parson—get that? Parson!"

"Yes, suh!" agreed the boy, respectfully.

"Then we are ready to go! Mind you hold that black well!"

They went. The Currigan horse led readily enough. He was a little dusty, however, when they reached the farm out on the back road. Again the Parson jumped out nimbly and opened the gate and drove in with a grand flourish. The farmer, working along an irrigation ditch at the edge of the lane, hailed him familiarly. He stuck his shovel in the bank and ambled over.

"You're back early, reverend!"

"Yes, my dear brother, I am back

early," nodded the Parson, with a sanctimonious smile. "Elder Clennan is rather impatient. I told him all about the black colt here and he is all steamed up. But, of course, I explained that he wasn't for sale if he could run well. I brought along the horse belonging to Deacon Curri-rigan that I told you about. He's just a cheap runner, but if he should beat your colt, brother, it would prove——"

The farmer wasn't listening. He was looking hard at the Curri-rigan horse.

"Funny mark he's got in his forehead," said the farmer.

"Peculiar mark," agreed the Parson, softly. "He'd be easily identified, wouldn't he? Deacon Curri-rigan calls him 'Triangle,' standing for Faith, Hope and Charity, as I believe I have heard the deacon remark—boy!"

"Yes, suh, mister parson?"

"You can saddle up!" The Parson was eager to close the deal. "And you, my dear brother, can you get your colt ready?"

"Sure, reverend," said the farmer, smiling broadly. "I have him in the barn. He's ready. But who is going to ride the deacon's horse?"

"The little son of Africa there," answered the Parson. "He knows nothing about riding, but he shall have to ride. Personally I am ignorant on all matters pertaining to horses, you know. Who is going to ride your colt?"

"I'll get my boy," said the farmer. "He doesn't know how to ride, either."

"Good!" The Parson beamed all over. "Then let us proceed with the match. Where shall we stage it? I notice that the road is straight and level and soft in both directions from your place. Maybe we could——"

"It's just one mile from my gate

post yonder to them two oak trees you see down the road," explained the farmer. "That should be a fair distance."

"Splendid!" conceded the Parson, enthusiastically. "Let us prepare!"

The farmer departed and the Parson waited until he was out of ear-shot before he turned to the black boy.

"Sambo, dog-gone your black hide, you ride like the devil himself was after you!" ordered the Parson, his face flushing. "A lot depends on you beating this colt all to smash! Get off fast and stay ahead! You been riding for Curri-rigan long enough to know how to win a race! This is one of the biggest races you ever rode in, whether you think so or not, and if you don't win I'll kick you all the way back to Denver. If you do win—I shouldn't wonder but what there is five bucks in it for you, as a gift!"

"Yes, suh, I understands. I'll sure win, mister parson!"

The farmer appeared to be delayed. The Parson walked back and forth, back and forth, in the lane, wondering how much longer he must suffer in anguish before the race could be won and the colt bought for a song. At last a buckboard turned into the lane and two whiskered gentlemen alighted. About that time the farmer appeared, leading the colt, which was followed by a boy of fourteen or so, a gawky hired man, and two dogs.

"Reverend," said the farmer, "these gents are two of my friends I asked to watch the race. They like horses. I telephoned them."

"You're both welcome, brothers," said the Parson insincerely. "But I fear it will not be much of a match. My horse is a cheap one. The colt is green——"

"Hank," said the farmer, "will you start 'em off? I reckon the reverend and me will be down at the finish line, at the oaks, with Jim."

"Sure," said one of the newcomers, "I'll start 'em, Jerry. I started a trotting race once at the county fair some years back."

The Parson coughed discreetly. He looked hard at Hank.

"This is merely a little friendly match," said the Parson. "I, personally am opposed to such things as horse racing. But our little convalescent home for elders is sadly in need of a handy horse for errands of mercy—hence my interest in this colt. Just see, Brother Hank, that the horses get off fairly even. It is all in fun and—"

"Sure," said Hank, "I'll get 'em off right, reverend!"

"Thank you, Brother Hank!"

Then, with a last, meaning look at the black boy, the Parson followed the farmer, the hired man, and Brother Jim down the road. The Parson's heart was pounding again. He wished that Brother Hank and Brother Jim had not arrived. But they were harmless-looking codgers, he decided. After all, he could get the dumb farmer aside after the race and make his deal in private. He decided, too, that the black colt looked even better than it had the day before and that, with a little training, it could be made into a real horse that would bring a very fancy figure in any ring.

Finally they reached the trees. The Parson took the farmer aside, leaving the hired man and Brother Jim to themselves. The Parson was again telling about some of the woes of the convalescent home for elders when there was a shout from the hired hand.

"They're off!"

THE Parson held his breath. Yes, they were off! And they were neck and neck, two blacks glistening in the sun. The black boy atop the Currigan horse was bending low, jockeylike, but the farmer's kid wasn't. The Parson put a large hand over his mouth to hide his grin of satisfaction. Currigan's horse should come in at least six lengths ahead of the colt, he decided. He glanced at the farmer and was surprised to see that individual smiling!

"What ho?" exclaimed the Parson, as he craned his neck. What he saw caused him to gulp. Despite the fact that the colt had an amateur rider, the colt was half a length in front of the Currigan black and appeared to be coming extra well. The Parson trembled. What if the colt won? But, of course, that was foolish to consider! He would tire. He would play out. The black boy was probably holding the Currigan bang-tail. Everything would be all "hunky-dory" in the end, after all!

"Would that the elders were here to see this!" cried the Parson, trying to appear indifferent. "The poor fellows would enjoy the sportive event!"

But the Parson was getting scant enjoyment. As he stared he saw the black colt coming on like a dark cyclone, leaving the Currigan horse in the dust. The colt was three lengths ahead now. No, four lengths! Brother Jim let out frenzied whoop of joy. The hired man cupped his hands and shouted encouragement. The farmer himself smiled broader.

"Good heavens!" groaned the Parson, under his breath. The colt was five lengths ahead. The Parson's practiced eyes measured the remaining distance. The Currigan black could not overtake that lead, if it had wings. The next second, before

the astonished Parson could adjust his expression, the colt tore past the oaks. Later, in the colt's dust, came the Currigan horse, with his amazed, apprehensive rider on his neck. The farmer's colt had waltzed in almost seven lengths ahead.

"Well, well, my word!" faltered the flabbergasted Parson, retaining enough of his wits not to burst out in a fevered fit of profanity. "Well, well—my good brother—why—Deacon Currigan's horse can't run at all—a mule could beat him—several of the elders at the convalescent home could beat him, running backward."

Brother Jim beckoned to the farmer, who walked over that way. The hired hand and the farmer and Brother Jim went into a huddle.

"Pull yourself together quick, Parson!" the dazed Parson told himself, wretchedly. "There is still hope for a hasty charge! You may yet outwit the dumb farmer by a fast flank movement. Hey, brother farmer!"

The farmer came back at the call. He smiled kindly at the flustered Parson.

"Deacon Currigan's horse generally works on an ice wagon," explained the Parson. "You mustn't take this match too seriously, dear brother. I—I am still in a position—to offer you a fair price for the colt, although I am afraid it is a bit too spirited for Elder Clennan. I really hesitate to offer you anything for it—but, in the interests of humanity, and charity, and brotherly love—if you think thirty-five dollars would—"

The farmer laughed loudly.

"Reverend, you are just wasting your time talking about that colt of mine!" he declared. "He isn't for sale for ten times that amount, although I admit that the deacon's horse isn't as fast as I expected—or

as you expected, I reckon. No, no—no sale on the colt!"

The Parson sighed and rushed his hands together.

"Ah, well, as the Good Book so truly says," began the Parson, attempting to conceal his great disappointment. "Oh, me! Oh, my! I dread to return to the convalescent camp, to meet the elders, to tell Elder Clennan that—"

"How about that mule you first mentioned, reverend?" asked the farmer, earnestly. "Do you still wish to dicker on him? If you do—"

"No, brother farmer," began the Parson. Then he thought of something. "Excuse me a moment, please!" The Parson turned away and covertly took Currigan's telegram from his pocket. He read it again to make doubly sure. Yes, there it was, in type: "Am sending youngster I picked up cheap recently." Yes, the horse with the triangle on his forehead *was* a cheap animal! The Parson's native cunning bubbled up again.

"Brother," said the Parson, turning back to the farmer, "would you be interested in a trade, perhaps? Heaven knows I am no match for one who knows animals. But I fear that Deacon Currigan will die of shame when he hears that a green farm colt outran his ice-wagon horse! I wonder—"

The Parson hesitated to be impressive—also to do a little mental arithmetic hurriedly.

"I wonder if I could swap the deacon's horse for—say—three mules?"

The mules, the Parson had figured, were easily worth two hundred and twenty-five dollars apiece. The farmer had asked one hundred and thirty-five for one. Three mules at two hundred and twenty-five each was six hundred and seventy-five dollars, probably five hundred dol-

lars or more above what Currigan had paid for the so-called ice-wagon horse!

"No," said the farmer. "I wouldn't want to do that, Parson—but I'll tell you what I will do! You give me a bill of sale for the deacon's horse, if you are authorized to do so, and I'll give you bills of sale on two mules! They're fine mules."

The Parson hardly hesitated.

"Sold!" he exclaimed. "That is, yes, I will trade that way, brother! I shall write you out the bill of sale on the horse now!" The Parson took out his fountain pen and a pad. He scribbled hastily. Then he handed the writing material to the farmer. "Give me a bill of sale for a span of those mules. I shall pick the two I want, brother! Is that O. K.?"

"Sure, I guess so," said the farmer.

Ten minutes later the Parson had picked his mules. He chose the two best, naturally, and he averted the farmer's gaze until he knew the deal was concluded and that there could be no backing out. The farmer's hired hand now held the reins of the Currigan horse despite the reluctance of the black boy.

"Well," said the Parson, with a return of his old spirits, "I trust the elders will be satisfied with the mules. I trust I didn't pick the culls. I trust our little deal will be mutually satisfactory."

"I think so," agreed the farmer, and for the first time the Parson noticed the broad smiles on all the other faces. "You see, reverend, I know this horse you brought down here! As a matter of fact, I owned him once, two years ago, and foolishly let him go for a song to a blasted slick horse trader. He's a full brother to the colt you wanted."

"What?" asked the Parson, recoiling.

"Yes," grinned the farmer, "and he isn't so danged slow, either. I told you the colt's mother looked like a thoroughbred. Well, the sire of both these colts was a thoroughbred, to! I figure they're real racers."

The farmer looked at Brother Jim.

"Yep," said Brother Jim, quietly, "I held a stop watch on that race to-day and those colts traveled faster than any one thought! You see I always time the runners at the fairs around here! The horse that came in second ran the mile fast enough to beat nine out of every ten ordinary horses! With some real training—both of those colts will outrun anything the big tracks can offer to-day! I wouldn't put a price on either one!"

Later, as the Parson and his black boy rode down the road, the boy holding the halter ropes on the span of gray mules, the Parson recovered sufficiently to say a few humble words.

"Sambo, I owe you five dollars—if you'll keep your mouth shut about all this to Currigan. Let him think his horse was a phony! He said in his telegram he was a cheap horse, anyway. When I get paid for these mules I will have sufficient funds to pay Currigan for the horse—you understand?"

Sambo rolled his eyes in wonder.

"These must be all-powerful expensive mules, Mister Parson!" murmured the boy, impressed. "Mister Currigan paid one thousand dollars for that horse—but, of course, that was cheap for him, seeing he generally pays around twenty-five hundred or more for his racing horses! Yes, suh, I expect these are wonderful mules!"

But the Parson was busy spitting out the stub of his cigar. He had bitten it in two, something he had never done in his life before!



The Round-Up

FOLKS, to-night we have somebody else who claims to know something about snakes, so we are going to let her take the saddle first. Now we'll listen to Mrs. Arthur Opitz, of 303 South Fifth Street, Easton, Pennsylvania:

"**BOSS AND FOLKS:** I want to answer the three men who claim to have seen a garter snake swallow her young. Mr. A. D. Hathaway claims to have seen this happen while he was within four feet of the snake.

"I have been a collector of snakes for several years and have studied their habits and raised them myself. I have two pet garter snakes that I have had for three years, and I wish to disagree very much with any one who claims to have seen any snake swallow her own young. Knowing something of the structure of the snake's mouth and stomach, it seems to be an impossibility. A garter snake could have young snakes in her "stomach" when killed, but these snakes would be her unborn young.

"If a snake should swallow her own young, they would be immediately enveloped in the process of digestion. A garter snake is not a cannibal snake, and therefore they do not eat other snakes. No snake eats young or smaller snakes of their own breed. A black snake is one of the cannibal breeds that eat smaller snakes of another breed. I have had one of my black snakes eat two green snakes and later disgorge them partly digested.

"I have had a personal letter from one of the greatest authorities on snakes in the world, Mr. Raymond L. Ditmars, and in his opinion it is impossible for a snake to swallow its young and have it disgorge them alive again.

"I would like to discuss this with any one who cares to write to me. And to Mr. Cyril McEvoy, of Canada, I want to say that I am also a Canadian, so he and I ought to be able to have rather an interesting debate."

To-night we are honored by the presence of one of the CCC boys,

Reese Campbell, Camp 3450, Abberville, South Carolina. Reese wrote to George Cory Franklin asking where he could buy spinning rope with instructions. Now Mr. Franklin is with us this evening and I think he will be only too glad to tell Mr. Campbell and the rest of you folks what he knows about spinning ropes.

"BOSS AND FOLKS: It is always a pleasure to hear from readers of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine and to give them helpful information about Western activities.

"A spinning rope can be made at very small expense. A nice little rope to start practicing with would be a piece of $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch window sash cord, 20 to 35 feet long. You can make a honda in one end by merely doubling it back a couple of inches, then wrapping it with broom wire, as close as you can. If the loop seems too tight for the rope to 'render freely,' this can be overcome by whittling a round peg, soaking the rope for a little while, then pushing the peg into the honda and leaving it until it is perfectly dry.

"This little outfit will do just as well as a more expensive one. And, like most things of this sort, the whole secret is practice. No one can make you a good roper, any more than one can make you a good swimmer. You have to do the work yourself. Just run out a little loop, 18 inches to 2 feet in diameter, and teach yourself to spin it. As you are able to keep the loop open, enlarge it and keep on practicing until you can let out the entire length, and, keep it circling around your head. That's all there is to it—just a question of work."

Here comes our old-timer, Mrs. Celia Spencer, who has a mean twinkle in her eye. Let's have it.

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP: I enjoy the biographies of the different writers. It gives us a chance of getting acquainted with them. You asked the old-timers to write you and to each other, also for their pictures, and they have responded. Now I have a request for you. Will you put your picture in the rope frame, with the horeshoe for good luck in the round-up, so we can get acquainted with you, also? Thanks. I think the old-timers and the readers of Western Story Magazine will say, 'Aye, aye,' to this proposition. I hope so, anyway.

"I wish you the best of luck. I have been reading Western Story Magazine for eleven years without missing a copy."

Well, now, we just thought that Celia had a trick up her sleeve, but we didn't know the joke was going to be on us. We appreciate your feeling the way you do, Mrs. Spencer, and we thank you for your kind thought.

And now we want to introduce O. A. Husaboe, of Trent, South Dakota. Mr. Husaboe was ninety-two years old May 1st, 1937. He has read Western Story Magazine for many years, which only goes to show that it is our old-timers who are really keeping up the good work and showing excellent taste. Next week we are going to put Mr. Husaboe's name on our list, which is still growing. We hope that we shall soon be hearing from some more of you. So don't be bashful.

MINES AND MINING

By

J. A.

THOMPSON



This department is intended to be of real help to readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.

Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be answered in this department in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.

WITH the great Climax Molybdenum Co. at Climax, Lake County, Colorado, producing around ten million pounds of the metal annually and paying dividends the total of which runs well into seven figures, it is small wonder that increasing numbers of wide-awake prospectors are asking about the possibilities of a "strike" in this "new" metal. The latest to inquire is B. J. R., of St. Louis, Missouri.

"How about molybdenum as a bet for the modern prospector?" he writes. "While I don't mean to slight gold as the main attraction to the metal hunter, wouldn't it be worth while to keep an eye out for molybdenum ores, too? Is it true that this is a comparatively new metal? Where has it been found in the United States? In other words, the low-down on molybdenum, Mr. Thompson."

Of course, the efficiency organized and well-managed Climax Molybdenum Co. in Colorado is the country's outstanding producer of molybdenum. Ores of the metal have been discovered and production also made in Pinal County, Arizona, east of Mammoth and at Goodsprings, Clark County, Nevada, another "molybdenum" locality. And some high-grade molybdenum ore has been reported mined in Sulphur Gulch, east of Questa, New Mexico.

Idaho, rich in minerals of many metals besides its wealth in gold and silver, is another State in which intelligent prospecting for molybdenum ores might prove the path to a profitable mine. Outcrops of molybdenum sulphides have been discovered in Boundary, Custer, Lemhi, Idaho and Elmore Counties.

There's sufficient widespread territory in which to search for, or be on the lookout for molybdenum. While the metal itself isn't "new", it is only within fairly recent years

that a big and growing commercial demand for it has sprung up—chiefly in the ferro-metal and special steel industries. Back before 1914, molybdenum was known, of course, although the manufacturers of steel used very little annually, and lacking large scale uses, the metal was up against a small and difficult market. But the steel metallurgists are always busy. They began some intensive experimenting and research. They found that the metal in minute quantities gave very desirable characteristics to special types of steel. Demand grew, a market developed, and the Climax Molybdenum Co. made millions of dollars.

That company's outstanding success, as well as the increasing uses to which molybdenum steels are being put, quite naturally caused future-seeking prospectors to study the ores of the metal, and keep on the lookout for them in the field. After all, in the final analysis, it is the actual pick and shovel prospector who makes the first discovery of valuable mineral in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand. And that goes even if the prospector has to send a sample of his find to the city, or some State bureau to have it identified. A prospector knows instinctively that almost any ore, noticeably heavier than quartz, is likely to prove valuable.

Only two ores of molybdenum are common, of commercial importance and therefore, of practical interest to the prospector. Molybdeite, a sulphide of the metal is one. This is a soft, shiny, metallic gray mineral usually occurring in flakes that can be separated into thin leaves like mica, and quite apt to be confused with graphite, as it often resembles the latter closely. Both will make a mark on paper. So as a differentiating test that simple trick is out.

There is, however, another easy little gag that works better. All you need is an ordinary, glazed porcelain dish around the camp. Graphite rubbed on the dish leaves a black mark, as it does on paper. But if the mineral is molybdenite the smear on the porcelain will have a decidedly greenish tint.

The other prominent ore of molybdenum is wulfenite, which also has considerable lead in it. This mineral is usually bright yellow, or reddish orange in color and is frequently found lining small cavities, cracks and holes in rocks. There are other minerals it resembles, but the pay-off to initial, tentative identification of wulfenite lies in the fact that it is generally discovered as thin, definite crystals. The minerals for which it might be mistaken are seldom found in this form.

Like other open-market metals, the value of molybdenum fluctuates considerably, depending on supply and demand. It has been quoted lately around 42 cents a pound for 90-per-cent concentrates, meaning that each 100 pounds of concentrates must contain 90 pounds of molybdenum sulphide which would be paid for at the quoted rate. In other words at 42 cents, a 100-pound sack of 90-per-cent concentrates would bring in \$37.80 for its ore content. Yes, indeed, B. J. R., there's good money in an accessible, workable, molybdenum discovery.

Bill Clark, of Dallas, Texas, asks us to list the chief metallic mineral resources of Owyhee County, down in the southwestern corner of Idaho.

They're plenty, Bill—gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, antimony. Opals and agates are found in some of the desert sections.

The HOLLOW TREE

Conducted by

HELEN RIVERS

It is a natural impulse and it is a good impulse to desire to wander and to roam. Not too much, of course. But the desire to go places and see things should be and is in all of us—in all of us who amount to anything, at least, for traveling educates us, and changing our geographic location often is of great benefit to health, mind, and economic well-being. A wise man once said, "A rolling stone gathers no moss," but a wiser man, we think, added, "but a standing pool stagnates."

If you are one who would travel, it is a mighty good thing to have man's best asset along the way, and at your destination. We mean, of course, friends.

If you would like a friend or friends in a certain section, write to Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, and she will put you in touch with readers who want to correspond with folks in your part of the world.

It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

Address: Helen Rivers, care The Hollow Tree, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

HORSE SPRINGS, in western New Mexico, offers a stomping ground to the rancher who would choose the great Southwest for his range. "Horse Springs Rancher" owns a small outfit in this country, and he is looking for a grubstake pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

There are many people, I am sure, who are interested in the West and who would like to become a part of it. I am a cowboy, thirty-three years old, have a family, and have lived and worked on Southwestern cow ranches all my life. For the past ten years I have owned a small cow outfit of my own and in that time have learned some of the things that make the wheels go around in the cow business.



Upon the passing of the Taylor Bill by Congress, regulating the use of the open range, I proceeded to acquire all the controlling land and water I could get near my ranch, and I now control approximately twenty thousand acres of excellent grass land, together with adequate water, et cetera. This ranch is located in ideal cow country and is sixty-five miles from the nearest town and railroad. And now to get right down to the bottom of this letter, folks. I wonder if there are not many people who would like to acquire an interest in such a place by grubstaking the purchase of stock to put on it. What I have in mind is to lease the property to any one wishing to stock it, or what is probably better, the organization of a small partnership among some of you folks. If I lease my ranch there could be a percentage of the calf crop arrangement, or the party could run the cattle on a share of the profits.

Any of you hombres who are interested in this proposition may feel free to write me for information. And, incidentally, let's hear all your ideas.

HORSE SPRINGS RANCHER.

Care of The Tree.

Russell is in the United States Marine Corps.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Will the old Holla get me in touch with people living in Alaska? I was with the fleet on the last Alaskan cruise and I liked the country well enough to want to go back. I am in the United States Marine Corps, and at the present time I am stationed on San Clemente Island.

RUSSELL E. HEATH.

Marine Detachment,
San Clemente Island,
Care of 11th Naval District,
San Diego, California.

This Wyoming rancher can tell you much that you want to know about the West and Northwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Well, folks, I have worked at a lot of different trades, although I was master of none, and I have traveled around quite a lot in Canada and the United States. I found that you can't save much by working for the other fellow, so I decided I would have a home of my own and be my own boss. I found a fair blue-grass country in Wyoming and I took up a little ranch. Now I have a home of my own all clear from debt and I feel better toward the world.

There is open prairie here, but I am in sight of the Black Forest Reserve. It is never lonesome here, for the paved State highway passes close to the house. There are some minerals here—a ten-foot vein of bentonite, a seventy-percent-soda deposit, and a small vein of pitch blend. Speak up, you mineralogists, these minerals are being used for a lot of different purposes. This place is also just a short distance to forty-five producing oil wells.

Well, folks, it is grand to have your own home and be independent. I will tell you about any State in the United States or any province of Canada, as I have seen them all. So, folks, tell me about your troubles. I have lots of time to write, and I will try to help you get straightened out.

A cowboy shot two coyotes and a wild

cat at the creek on my ranch last week. There are quite a lot of antelope here, too.

C. HILL.

Star Route, Spencer, Wyoming.



You folks who are interested in a small outfit in western New Mexico will do well to contact Horse Springs Rancher, who is looking for a pard or two. Wear your friend-maker, membership badges, boys, and drop this cowboy a line.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering be sure to state which you wish.

Dorothy is especially interested in aviation.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Although I am only a young girl, I am interested in aviation; also stamp collecting and traveling, and I would like very much to hear from some one from Mexico, South America, China, or any other foreign country. I am sixteen years old, fond of sports, and movies, and, best of all, I expect to attend a flying school some day. I keep scrapbooks of aviation news, and I will exchange snaps. I promise to answer all letters, and I will be glad to hear from any one, anywhere, who is interested in anything!

DOROTHY GRUBB.

34 South High Street,
West Chester, Pennsylvania.

Here is an hombre that you West-erners will want to yarn with.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

The months of July, August, and September I am devoting to a trip through the States of North and South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. I have spent several summers in the better-known resorts out there and this summer I want to get away from the main highways and drive to the more remote spots. I'll appreciate letters from any one

in these States, telling me of local points of interest and especially spots reminiscent of the old West, such as old mining camps, Indian landmarks, et cetera. I've traveled over the entire country so if you have any questions to ask, I'll be glad to answer them if I can do so. In fact, I'll reply to all letters. I am one young man who is intensely interested in the Western part of the country. And may I give a hand to Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine for the fine Westerns and the very interesting and informative departments?

JIM WRAY, JR.

614 University Avenue,
Ithaca, New York.

Folks, is there a home somewhere for these people?

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Is there some one who is in need of a motherly woman—some one who will give me and my two little girls a home in exchange for companionship and service? Is there not some one who needs a mother's helper, or some motherless home that needs a woman's help? I would give the best of care to such a home in exchange for a living for us. I am a widow, fifty years of age, and need a home badly. Please, any one who needs my services, let me hear from you.

MRS. KERKUS.

Osceola, Florida.

Laura hails from Quebec.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Hello, everybody! I live in a small manufacturing town in northern Quebec. I am nineteen years young, and my favorite pastimes are dancing, swimming, and skating. I am also very much interested in art, and I would especially like to correspond with artists or those interested in art, also Pals from foreign countries and Alaska. I will exchange snaps and views of Quebec and other parts of Canada. I will appreciate and answer all replies.

LAURA A. STEWART.

Brownburg, Quebec, Canada.

This young miss hails from Manitoba.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I would like to exchange information concerning the North with people in any part of the world outside of Canada and the United States. I am an ardent stamp collector and I would like to trade stamps or anything in exchange for stamps. I would

especially like to hear from some one in Central or South America, but I promise to answer all letters. I am seventeen years old, dance, play the violin, go in for sports, and am especially interested in hockey.

HELEN YORKE.

Box 34, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada.

This West Virginian is planning to go to Canada.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

May I have a corner in the old Holla? I am half Indian, and I was born in northern Michigan. I would especially like to hear from Pals around Toronto, Canada, as I plan on buying a home there. Of course, I will answer all who write.

BERNEDETTE MARKS HALLER.

Care of Pete Haller, Route 3,
Moatsville, West Virginia.

A Nebraskan would like to have you Pennsylvanians speak up.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Folks, I am living alone on a farm in western Nebraska and I would like to have Pals from everywhere, old and young. I would like especially to hear from people in Pennsylvania as that is where I was born—around Shamokin, Pennsylvania.

FRANK SWIFT.

R. R. 1, Brady, Nebraska.

Nora hails from Indiana.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

May a young girl of sixteen summers who is seeking Pen Pals join the old Holla? I'd rather ride horseback than anything else I can think of. I would like to hear from some one who lives in the Western States, but I promise to answer any other letters from anywhere.

NORA HUTCHISON.

R. R. 4, Box 77, Valparaiso, Indiana.

A Saskatchewan miss is here to yarn with you-all.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Yes, I'm just a happy-go-lucky girl from Canada. I'm fifteen years old and I enjoy all sports, especially skating and hand ball. I would like to hear from people all over the United States, and I will gladly answer all letters. Come on to my rescue, all you young cowgirls, and be a Pen Pal! I would like to exchange snapshots and songs.

RETA ROSS.

Pathlow, Saskatchewan, Canada.



WHERE TO GO And How To GET THERE

By JOHN NORTH

We aim in this department to give practical help to readers. The service offered includes accurate information about the West, its ranches, mines, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. We will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to us, for we are always glad to assist you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

ALL set for a carefree vacation as far away from civilization as possible, in the outdoor West, Charlie H., of Kansas City, Missouri, is asking for information about the Beaver State.

"As an ardent lover of mountains, forests and streams, Mr. North, vacations with me mean getting away from civilization as completely as possible. This year I'm planning

a jaunt West and have picked Oregon as the ideal location. Can you tell me something about the mountainous regions of the Beaver State and also outline a couple of camping trips out there which you would recommend?"

To the man who seeks active life in the open, the mountains of Oregon offer some of the finest playgrounds in America, Charlie. Within the borders of this Western State are the

great Cascade Range, the Coast Range, the Siskiyou, the Blue and the Wallowa Mountains. In the highest elevations of the Cascades occur glaciers, vast snowfields, and stretches of gaunt crags, where the true mountaineer finds his joy. Below is the flowery mountain-meadow region, dotted with thousands of lakes, and vast forests of fir, spruce, cedar and pine.

Nowhere will the lover of outdoor life find more abundant and delightful opportunities for indulging in his favorite sports. The mountain streams and lakes of Oregon are alive with gamy trout of every known species, replenished by State enterprise, while the wilderness roundabout is the haunt of all kinds of game.

From Crater Lake northward, the rugged Cascade Range becomes, at least superficially, the continuance of the Sierra Nevada and unites in a colossal chain the conspicuous peaks of Mount McLoughlin, Mount Thielsen, Diamond Peak, the Three Sisters, Mount Washington, Three-Fingered Jack, and Mount Jefferson, culminating in Mount Hood, north of whose glistening cone the Columbia breaks through the barrier.

At the head of Hood River Valley and dominating everything in the vicinity, looms the splendid white peak of Mount Hood, the most noted and most beautiful of the galaxy of Oregon's crowned pinnacles, 11,925 feet in altitude. Al-

though it is sheathed by nine glaciers and has all the icy grandeur of any Alpine summit, it may be ascended with comparative ease. Guides and equipment for the thrilling four-mile climb over snowfields and glaciers to the summit may be had during the season at Cloud Cap Inn, at the snowline on the north side of the mountain, or at Government Camp on the south side.

There is no more fascinating camping trip than that south-

ward from Mount Hood to Mount Jefferson, Diamond Lake, Crater Lake and Klamath Lake, over the Sky Line Trail, at an average elevation of 4,000 feet. This is a horseback outing that practically crosses Oregon on the summit ridges of the Cascades and traverses for some 260 miles a region of num-

berless lakes, peaks, glaciers, forests and volcanic areas where exceptional fishing may be had. To the eastward, winds the deep spectacular gorge of the Deschutes and beyond lie the vast uplands of central Oregon.

Another charming mountain recreation area which we can heartily recommend for a camping trip is the Wallowa Mountains of northeastern Oregon. The rugged snowy peaks that surround lovely Wallowa Lake have been likened to those of Switzerland! they are part of the Blue Mountains and have a general elevation of 8,000 feet, though many individual summits,

SPECIAL NOTICE

A GUIDE BOOK FOR CAMP AND TRAIL

As an aid to the inexperienced woodsman the editor of this department has collected some useful information relative to life in the outdoor West. This practical manual includes suggestions for camping outfits, grub lists, instructions for making an outdoor fireplace, well-trying recipes for camp cooking and directions for carrying a pack on your back. A free copy may be obtained by writing John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

such as Eagle Cap, are much loftier. The fishing through this region is also exceptionally good.

Much of these mountain areas lies in the National Forests, which are in fact, great playgrounds where trails, free camp sites, and other facilities for wholesome recreation are maintained by the rangers.

The hombre who is planning to try his luck this season in the famous fishing streams of Oregon should obtain a copy of the pamphlet, "Trout Fishing in Oregon," together with an up-to-date road map of the Beaver State. For the addresses from which this free literature may be procured write John North. And in case yo. are back-packing into the wilderness, ask him also for a copy of his grub list for one man for one month.

Well, it's wholesome outdoor recreation that Wallace Y., of Brooklyn, New York, is in search of.

"My partner and I plan to spend our vacation this summer out in the wilds, Mr. North, and have Minnesota in mind as a good State for this purpose. Can you tell us about some large forest areas where we could camp, canoe and fish. We'd also like to visit an Indian reservation or two if you can tell us where they are located."

You and your pal will find many wilderness regions in Minnesota, Wallace, for this State possesses twenty-four State parks, as well as two national forests. Of the State parks we'd suggest Itasca, a tract of 34,854 acres embracing the headwaters of the Mississippi. This is an untamed area with large lakes, and primeval forests, where you would find excellent camping.

The larger of Minnesota's national forests is Superior, one of the true remaining wilderness tracts of the Central West, which contains

1,250,000 acres of virgin pine, studded with hundreds of lakes and slashed by a maze of waterways. The region, which is the natural haunt of large and small game, is traversed chiefly by canoe. The second and smaller national forest is the Chippewa, which contains 312,000 acres.

Several reservations now provide for the Indian population of Minnesota, which is between five and ten thousand. In early days, the Chippewas possessed the greater part of Northern Minnesota, and the rest of the State was roamed by bands of Sioux. To-day, the red man lives primitively at Nett Lake, on the Bois Fort Reservation. Another reserve is the Chippewa Reservation, on the west shore of Lake Mille, a picturesque spot with a trading post, wigwams and huts of birch bark. Other reservations are White Earth, Red Lake, and Pigeon River.

Vacation-minded also is Mike T., of Chicago, Illinois.

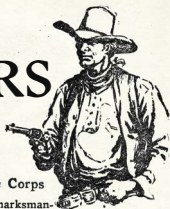
"Like most of your readers, Mr. North, I'm trekking out West for my vacation, with California my goal. Sometime ago I read about a new Joshua Tree Monument having been created in the Golden State, and as I'm especially interested in desert plants I'd like to visit this site. Can you tell me where it is?"

You'll find the new Joshua Tree Monument in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, Mike. This monument embraces 900,000 acres of desert land near Twenty Palms, Mecca and Garnet. The area contains thousands of Joshua trees, the oldest living desert plants, as well as extensive tracts of juniper and other growths found nowhere else in the world.



GUNS AND GUNNERS

By
**CHARLES E.
CHAPEL**



First Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps

Address inquiries regarding firearms, marksmanship, and hunting, to Lieutenant Charles E. Chapel, "Guns And Gunners," Street & Smith's WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Ave., New York, N. Y., and inclose a stamped, addressed envelope.

MEMBERS of rifle, pistol, and trapshooting clubs will be interested in a survey we recently conducted to determine what factors have contributed to loss of club membership. Over one hundred gun club officers answered our letters; most of them reported a splendid increase of members within the past few months, but all agreed that there are certain definite conditions which drive away members. Here they are:

1. Insufficient encouragement of beginners.
2. Lack of interest by club officers.
3. Lack of proper handicapping, thus permitting a few shooters to win all the prizes.
4. No publicity, resulting in the absence of community support.
5. Grounds inconveniently located.
6. Lack of organization of the matches by the officials.
7. Permitting betting, and "sweepstakes," on match results.
8. Allowing "cliques" and factions to dominate the club.
9. Too many matches, resulting in small attendance at each shoot.

Presidents and secretaries of organized rifle, pistol, and trapshooting clubs can secure from this department, free, valuable literature on this subject. We even have a pamphlet for boys and girls small-bore rifle clubs. It costs us ten cents for each copy, but it is yours with our compliments if you are a reader of Guns And Gunners.

Here are the answers to some of your questions.

Forensic ballistics.

W. A. L., Chicago, Illinois: "Forensic ballistics" means fingerprinting bullets, or, to be more accurate, the examination of arms and ammunition used in homicide cases.

Liquor and marksmanship.

H. E. T., East Alton, Illinois: Doctors say that the reason some men shoot better under the influence of liquor is that they are normally a bundle of jumpy nerves and that the alcohol slows down their "reaction time." In other words, their nerves are so nearly paralyzed by liquor they can't flinch if they try. On the other hand, a stolid, phleg-

matic shooter may have too slow reaction time already; liquor would do him serious injury in shooting.

Gun fighters era.

M. H. J., San Pedro, California: The Western gun fighters were most active between the years 1860 and 1900, about forty years to be exact. They ranged from the Mississippi to the Pacific, from the Milk River in the north, to the Rio Grande on the south.

Most unique gun stunts.

T. F. R., Houston, Texas: The most unique stunts of the gun fighter were the "Road Agent Spin," "The Swiveling Holster," and the "Pin-wheel." Some day we shall describe these in detail in this magazine.

Fast shooting with scope sight.

S. F. C., San Antonio, Texas: By using a wide-field telescope sight, the hunter is really using only a front sight, as represented by the cross-hairs; there are no sights to line up, and hence, shooting with a scope sight is almost as fast as shotgun hunting.

Trick questions.

H. S. C., Pekin, Illinois: Questions about the results of firing a bullet from the rear end of a train,

with the bullet and the train having the same rate of speed are not answered in this column. Likewise, we do not care to enter into arguments about shooting bullets straight up into the air. To begin with, trains and bullets do not have the same rate of speed, nor do people with good sense fire bullets into the air merely to test mathematical theories not based on practical ballistics.

Sportsmanlike shooting.

M. P. F., Suffolk, Virginia: A rifle and cartridge which does not give a large proportion of death wounds when a single shot is placed well into the shoulder, or just behind the shoulder of big game, is branded as unsportsmanlike. It is admitted, however, that game will run several hundred yards even when shot through the heart, but this is exceptional.

Cleaning patches.

G. T. H., Woburn, Mass.: Cleaning patches should be cut from a medium weight of cotton flannel, which has been thoroughly wet with water and wrung out several times to make it highly absorbent. The size of the patch depends on the caliber of the gun and the type of ramrod. Usually the patch is from $\frac{3}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches square.

The U. S. Rifle, (Enfield), Model 1917, Caliber .30, in excellent condition, is sold to citizens of the United States, by the government, for \$8.87, under certain conditions which will be explained to readers sending a stamped, addressed envelope.

A ten-cent handbook for boy and girl marksmen will be mailed *free*, as long as the supply lasts, to those who request it. Please inclose the usual stamped, addressed envelope.

MISSING

This department is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

HOLMES, WILLIAMS.—An Englishman, who is about forty-five years of age, five feet eleven inches tall, and weighs about one hundred and forty-five pounds. He has a dark complexion and hazel eyes. He is a welder by trade. Left Oakland, California, March 26, 1936. Bill, I realize my mistake. Please let me hear from you. Address M., care of Western Story Magazine.

VAN DEVER, HARLIN.—He is my brother who has been missing for thirteen years or more. He was born and raised in Tiffin, Ohio. Any information leading to his whereabouts will be most gratefully received. Please address Edith Craig Dowd, 68 West Ettruria Street, Seattle, Washington.

JACOBY, GEORGE M.—Regardless of what you have done in the past, please write to me immediately. I love you and need you so very much. Your wife Florence.

SORDEN, REBECCA, WILLIAM, JOHN, and OLIVER.—At one time they lived near Nevada, Missouri, where they owned a home. Any information concerning my friends will be greatly appreciated by Nora Edwards, 2265 Buena Vista Avenue, Alameda, California.

SIEMER, CHARLES.—My brother who is forty-eight years of age. When last seen, just before the World War, he weighed one hundred and forty pounds and had golden hair. He was five feet six inches tall. He used to work on farms. Am anxious to find him. Information appreciated by Richard Siemer, St. James Hotel, 1017 19th Street, Bakersfield, California.

McKENNA, JAMES.—My uncle who was with the Canadian forces during the World War. He was wounded twice, discharged in Ottawa, Canada, and left for Boston, Massachusetts. Has not been heard from since. His sister died in England and we would like to get in touch with him. Please communicate with his nephew, James P. Carty, 85 Mt. Vernon Street, Somerville, Massachusetts.

SCRUGGS, WILLIAM.—My father, who is seventy-one years of age, six feet four inches tall, with gray hair and mustache. He is a bit stooped. Last seen when he was in Wirt, Oklahoma. Information appreciated by W. E., care of Western Story Magazine.

YATES, DORIS.—My granddaughter who is about thirty years of age. Her mother's name was Eudalia. They lived near Blackwell, Oklahoma, at one time. Last heard from they were in California. I would be very grateful if I could learn their address. J. M. Yates, Center, Colorado.

WALKER, MILLS.—Last heard from December 27, 1934. He was then in Pasadena, California, living at the Y. M. C. A., and was studying law at night school. He also went to the Y. M. C. A. night school in Glendale, California, in 1933. He has a fair complexion, blue eyes, and light auburn hair. At one time he worked for the Lewis Construction Co. at Las Vegas, Nevada. Any information would be appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Effie Walker, Goldthwaite, Texas.

GANGNON, RAYMOND.—Last seen in Chicago, Illinois, in 1922, when he was working for the Nickle Place R. R. Can't we be friends again after all these years? Chet is dead. Please write to Dorothy, care of Western Story Magazine.

O'BRIEN, MARY ELIZABETH.—Daughter of John O'Brien. She was adopted and I do not know her name by adoption. Please write to Jennie Ferguson, Box 146 Rawlins, Wyoming.

ELLIOTT, KENNETH ROY.—He was seventeen years of age, February 22nd. Last seen in Lundbreck, Alberta, Canada, September, 1936. Any one knowing his whereabouts please notify his parents, Mr. and Mrs. A. A. Elliott, Kaling, P. O., London, Ontario, Canada.

HASHA, A. L.—Would like to locate my old pal. He has but one arm. The last time I saw him he was in Calexico, California. That was in 1925. Information appreciated by C. W. Price, Route 1, Box 118, Corpus Christi, Texas.

CONLEY, CHARLIE.—Last heard from when he was working for a canning company in California about forty years ago. He is about seventy years of age. He was born in Johnston County, Texas. His parents are buried in Hopkins County, Texas. His "big sis," Margerite Ellen Mills, would like to know where he is or what has become of him. Please address Mrs. George Davison, Route 2, Box 83A, Henryetta, Oklahoma.

DYSON, CLAUDE.—Last heard of in Little Rock, Arkansas. Please contact your brother George R. Dyson, 1936 49th Street, South, St. Petersburg, Florida.

LOUT, PETE and ALEC.—Last heard of in Oklahoma, in 1904. Information appreciated by Samuel Larkin Smith, Narcoossee, Florida.

SMITH, JOHN HENRY.—My brother. Last heard of in Robinville, North Carolina, in 1917. Ed, Jack, or Roy, if you see this please notify your uncle, Samuel Larkin Smith, Narcoossee, Florida.

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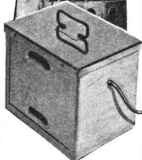
ADDRESS ALL ORDERS FOREPAYS ON THIS PAGE TO JOHNSON SMITH & CO. DETROIT, MICHIGAN



New 6-Volt TRINDL Electric ARC WELDER

PATENTS PENDING

Works on Storage Battery or 110 Volt Light Circuit
A REAL WELDER



Men, here is the hottest specialty item that has come along in years. A real honest to goodness electric arc welder that does a man size job. Built sturdily of the finest materials. Requires no mechanical knowledge—any one can use it. Every demonstration should make a sale. This new Trindl Electric Arc Welder is made possible by the invention of a low voltage carbon which gets white hot from the current of an ordinary 6 volt storage battery such as in your automobile. It only uses about 20 to 25 amperes of current which is about the same current drain as 4 head-light bulbs, yet develops about 7000 degrees of heat.

MELTS IRON AND STEEL INSTANTLY

The Trindl Welder is simple to use. Expert welding can be done by anyone. The

Trindl Arc Welder is the only battery welder that, after a rigid test, has been approved by the Automotive Test Laboratories of America. It is ideal for making permanent fender repairs—also for broken castings, radiators, cylinders, water jackets, holes in auto bodies, hog troughs, boilers, tanks, milk cans, radios, batteries, etc. Iron, Steel, Brass, Copper and Tin can be worked on for a quick and permanent repair. The repaired part will be as strong as before.

NEW 110 VOLT CONVERTER MAKES FULL SIZE PROFESSIONAL UNIT

This new converter is used on any 110 volt 60 cycle electric light socket in place of a storage battery. It is especially designed to be used with the Trindl Electric Arc Welder—COSTS LESS THAN A GOOD BATTERY—The combination makes a full size professional electric arc welder that everybody can use. Ideal for fender and repair shop needs. This is a sensation, not only in price but also in actual results. The converter represents the same fine construction and engineering skill as the arc welder. The complete outfit, including the transformer, is easily portable so that it can be brought right to the job.

USERS SWEAR BY IT—The price is so low that now anyone can afford to have a real welding outfit. Think of the profit you can make introducing this Trindl Welder and Converter—a simple five minute demonstration should make a sale to every interested prospect, especially when they hear the amazingly low price. Garages, radio and battery men, tinner, sheet metal workers, janitors, farmers and home-owners—all need the Trindl Welder and Converter.

ACT NOW! There are big profits and a steady business waiting for you taking care of your coupon today.

TRINDL PRODUCTS
2229-MU Calumet Ave., Chicago, Ill.



FACTS

Here are just a few excerpts from the many letters of praise we have received from Trindl Electric Arc boosters.

"Please find enclosed for 12 welders by return mail for I am about sold out now. They are selling fine."—W. C. Anderson, Nehr.

"Received my Trindl Arc Welder and am both pleased and surprised."—Louis F. Giler, Ohio.

"Results are very gratifying with your welder. I am enclosing an order for 12 more Electric Arc Welders."—Nelson O. Lyster, Florida.

"I received my welder, and it is a regular repair shop in itself."—J. R. Harper, La.

"I sold 4 of your Trindl Electric Arc Welders in three minutes."—C. Gillies, Canada.

"I sold 9 welders in my first ten calls."—F. W. Stico, Iowa.

\$10.50 a day profit for you for only selling 6 Trindl Arc Welders. No matter where you turn, you will find people who will want to buy arc welders from you. Garages, shop men, radio repair men, farmers, home-owners, mechanics, janitors, all of them need Trindl Electric Arc Welders. Be the man in your territory to clean up with Trindl.

MAIL COUPON NOW!

TRINDL PRODUCTS
2229-MU Calumet Ave., Chicago, Illinois

Yes! Rush me free particulars of how I can make big money with Trindl Electric Arc Welders and Converters. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name

Local Address.....

City

State

**11,000
VOLTS**

AL TAFFT works in a maze of high-voltage wires. Around him—11,000 volts lurk. A tense job that will test digestion if anything will! Here's Al's comment: "Sure! Working among high-voltage cables isn't calculated to help digestion. But mine doesn't give me trouble. I smoke Camels with my meals and after. Camels set me right!" Smoking Camels speeds up the flow of digestive fluids—*alkaline* fluids. Being mild, Camels are gentle to your throat.

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WELCOMES A "LIFT." "I have my hands full," remarks Mrs. Richard Hemingway. "When I'm tired, I smoke a Camel and get a grand 'lift' in energy."

COSTLIER TOBACCOS

Camels are made from finer, **MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS**—Turkish and Domestic—than any other popular brand.



**FOR
DIGESTION'S
SAKE...
SMOKE
CAMELS**

**HEAR
JACK OAKIE'S
COLLEGE**



A gala show with "President" Jack Oakie in person. Fun and music by Hollywood comedians and singing stars! Tuesdays—8:30 pm E. S. T. (9:30 pm E. D. S. T.), 7:30 pm C. S. T., 6:30 pm M. S. T., 5:30 pm P. S. T., over WABC-Columbia Network.