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WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

10 CENTS

OCTOBER 23, 1937



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28x32-19	\$2.45	28x32-19	\$3.55
28x32-20	\$2.55	28x32-20	\$3.65
28x32-21	\$2.65	28x32-21	\$3.75
28x32-22	\$2.75	28x32-22	\$3.85
28x32-23	\$2.85	28x32-23	\$3.95
28x32-24	\$2.95	28x32-24	\$4.05
28x32-25	\$3.05	28x32-25	\$4.15
28x32-26	\$3.15	28x32-26	\$4.25
28x32-27	\$3.25	28x32-27	\$4.35
28x32-28	\$3.35	28x32-28	\$4.45
28x32-29	\$3.45	28x32-29	\$4.55
28x32-30	\$3.55	28x32-30	\$4.65
28x32-31	\$3.65	28x32-31	\$4.75
28x32-32	\$3.75	28x32-32	\$4.85
28x32-33	\$3.85	28x32-33	\$4.95
28x32-34	\$3.95	28x32-34	\$5.05
28x32-35	\$4.05	28x32-35	\$5.15
28x32-36	\$4.15	28x32-36	\$5.25
28x32-37	\$4.25	28x32-37	\$5.35
28x32-38	\$4.35	28x32-38	\$5.45
28x32-39	\$4.45	28x32-39	\$5.55
28x32-40	\$4.55	28x32-40	\$5.65
28x32-41	\$4.65	28x32-41	\$5.75
28x32-42	\$4.75	28x32-42	\$5.85
28x32-43	\$4.85	28x32-43	\$5.95
28x32-44	\$4.95	28x32-44	\$6.05
28x32-45	\$5.05	28x32-45	\$6.15
28x32-46	\$5.15	28x32-46	\$6.25
28x32-47	\$5.25	28x32-47	\$6.35
28x32-48	\$5.35	28x32-48	\$6.45
28x32-49	\$5.45	28x32-49	\$6.55
28x32-50	\$5.55	28x32-50	\$6.65
28x32-51	\$5.65	28x32-51	\$6.75
28x32-52	\$5.75	28x32-52	\$6.85
28x32-53	\$5.85	28x32-53	\$6.95
28x32-54	\$5.95	28x32-54	\$7.05
28x32-55	\$6.05	28x32-55	\$7.15
28x32-56	\$6.15	28x32-56	\$7.25
28x32-57	\$6.25	28x32-57	\$7.35
28x32-58	\$6.35	28x32-58	\$7.45
28x32-59	\$6.45	28x32-59	\$7.55
28x32-60	\$6.55	28x32-60	\$7.65
28x32-61	\$6.65	28x32-61	\$7.75
28x32-62	\$6.75	28x32-62	\$7.85
28x32-63	\$6.85	28x32-63	\$7.95
28x32-64	\$6.95	28x32-64	\$8.05
28x32-65	\$7.05	28x32-65	\$8.15
28x32-66	\$7.15	28x32-66	\$8.25
28x32-67	\$7.25	28x32-67	\$8.35
28x32-68	\$7.35	28x32-68	\$8.45
28x32-69	\$7.45	28x32-69	\$8.55
28x32-70	\$7.55	28x32-70	\$8.65
28x32-71	\$7.65	28x32-71	\$8.75
28x32-72	\$7.75	28x32-72	\$8.85
28x32-73	\$7.85	28x32-73	\$8.95
28x32-74	\$7.95	28x32-74	\$9.05
28x32-75	\$8.05	28x32-75	\$9.15
28x32-76	\$8.15	28x32-76	\$9.25
28x32-77	\$8.25	28x32-77	\$9.35
28x32-78	\$8.35	28x32-78	\$9.45
28x32-79	\$8.45	28x32-79	\$9.55
28x32-80	\$8.55	28x32-80	\$9.65
28x32-81	\$8.65	28x32-81	\$9.75
28x32-82	\$8.75	28x32-82	\$9.85
28x32-83	\$8.85	28x32-83	\$9.95
28x32-84	\$8.95	28x32-84	\$10.05
28x32-85	\$9.05	28x32-85	\$10.15
28x32-86	\$9.15	28x32-86	\$10.25
28x32-87	\$9.25	28x32-87	\$10.35
28x32-88	\$9.35	28x32-88	\$10.45
28x32-89	\$9.45	28x32-89	\$10.55
28x32-90	\$9.55	28x32-90	\$10.65
28x32-91	\$9.65	28x32-91	\$10.75
28x32-92	\$9.75	28x32-92	\$10.85
28x32-93	\$9.85	28x32-93	\$10.95
28x32-94	\$9.95	28x32-94	\$11.05
28x32-95	\$10.05	28x32-95	\$11.15
28x32-96	\$10.15	28x32-96	\$11.25
28x32-97	\$10.25	28x32-97	\$11.35
28x32-98	\$10.35	28x32-98	\$11.45
28x32-99	\$10.45	28x32-99	\$11.55
28x32-100	\$10.55	28x32-100	\$11.65

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES
 (High Pressure)

Size	Price	Size	Price
28x32-18	\$10.00	30x32-18	\$12.00
28x32-19	\$10.50	30x32-19	\$12.50
28x32-20	\$11.00	30x32-20	\$13.00
28x32-21	\$11.50	30x32-21	\$13.50
28x32-22	\$12.00	30x32-22	\$14.00
28x32-23	\$12.50	30x32-23	\$14.50
28x32-24	\$13.00	30x32-24	\$15.00
28x32-25	\$13.50	30x32-25	\$15.50
28x32-26	\$14.00	30x32-26	\$16.00
28x32-27	\$14.50	30x32-27	\$16.50
28x32-28	\$15.00	30x32-28	\$17.00
28x32-29	\$15.50	30x32-29	\$17.50
28x32-30	\$16.00	30x32-30	\$18.00
28x32-31	\$16.50	30x32-31	\$18.50
28x32-32	\$17.00	30x32-32	\$19.00
28x32-33	\$17.50	30x32-33	\$19.50
28x32-34	\$18.00	30x32-34	\$20.00
28x32-35	\$18.50	30x32-35	\$20.50
28x32-36	\$19.00	30x32-36	\$21.00
28x32-37	\$19.50	30x32-37	\$21.50
28x32-38	\$20.00	30x32-38	\$22.00
28x32-39	\$20.50	30x32-39	\$22.50
28x32-40	\$21.00	30x32-40	\$23.00
28x32-41	\$21.50	30x32-41	\$23.50
28x32-42	\$22.00	30x32-42	\$24.00
28x32-43	\$22.50	30x32-43	\$24.50
28x32-44	\$23.00	30x32-44	\$25.00
28x32-45	\$23.50	30x32-45	\$25.50
28x32-46	\$24.00	30x32-46	\$26.00
28x32-47	\$24.50	30x32-47	\$26.50
28x32-48	\$25.00	30x32-48	\$27.00
28x32-49	\$25.50	30x32-49	\$27.50
28x32-50	\$26.00	30x32-50	\$28.00
28x32-51	\$26.50	30x32-51	\$28.50
28x32-52	\$27.00	30x32-52	\$29.00
28x32-53	\$27.50	30x32-53	\$29.50
28x32-54	\$28.00	30x32-54	\$30.00
28x32-55	\$28.50	30x32-55	\$30.50
28x32-56	\$29.00	30x32-56	\$31.00
28x32-57	\$29.50	30x32-57	\$31.50
28x32-58	\$30.00	30x32-58	\$32.00
28x32-59	\$30.50	30x32-59	\$32.50
28x32-60	\$31.00	30x32-60	\$33.00
28x32-61	\$31.50	30x32-61	\$33.50
28x32-62	\$32.00	30x32-62	\$34.00
28x32-63	\$32.50	30x32-63	\$34.50
28x32-64	\$33.00	30x32-64	\$35.00
28x32-65	\$33.50	30x32-65	\$35.50
28x32-66	\$34.00	30x32-66	\$36.00
28x32-67	\$34.50	30x32-67	\$36.50
28x32-68	\$35.00	30x32-68	\$37.00
28x32-69	\$35.50	30x32-69	\$37.50
28x32-70	\$36.00	30x32-70	\$38.00
28x32-71	\$36.50	30x32-71	\$38.50
28x32-72	\$37.00	30x32-72	\$39.00
28x32-73	\$37.50	30x32-73	\$39.50
28x32-74	\$38.00	30x32-74	\$40.00
28x32-75	\$38.50	30x32-75	\$40.50
28x32-76	\$39.00	30x32-76	\$41.00
28x32-77	\$39.50	30x32-77	\$41.50
28x32-78	\$40.00	30x32-78	\$42.00
28x32-79	\$40.50	30x32-79	\$42.50
28x32-80	\$41.00	30x32-80	\$43.00
28x32-81	\$41.50	30x32-81	\$43.50
28x32-82	\$42.00	30x32-82	\$44.00
28x32-83	\$42.50	30x32-83	\$44.50
28x32-84	\$43.00	30x32-84	\$45.00
28x32-85	\$43.50	30x32-85	\$45.50
28x32-86	\$44.00	30x32-86	\$46.00
28x32-87	\$44.50	30x32-87	\$46.50
28x32-88	\$45.00	30x32-88	\$47.00
28x32-89	\$45.50	30x32-89	\$47.50
28x32-90	\$46.00	30x32-90	\$48.00
28x32-91	\$46.50	30x32-91	\$48.50
28x32-92	\$47.00	30x32-92	\$49.00
28x32-93	\$47.50	30x32-93	\$49.50
28x32-94	\$48.00	30x32-94	\$50.00
28x32-95	\$48.50	30x32-95	\$50.50
28x32-96	\$49.00	30x32-96	\$51.00
28x32-97	\$49.50	30x32-97	\$51.50
28x32-98	\$50.00	30x32-98	\$52.00
28x32-99	\$50.50	30x32-99	\$52.50
28x32-100	\$51.00	30x32-100	\$53.00

TRAUCK BALLOON TIRES
 (High Pressure)

Size	Price	Size	Price
28x32-18	\$10.00	30x32-18	\$12.00
28x32-19	\$10.50	30x32-19	\$12.50
28x32-20	\$11.00	30x32-20	\$13.00
28x32-21	\$11.50	30x32-21	\$13.50
28x32-22	\$12.00	30x32-22	\$14.00
28x32-23	\$12.50	30x32-23	\$14.50
28x32-24	\$13.00	30x32-24	\$15.00
28x32-25	\$13.50	30x32-25	\$15.50
28x32-26	\$14.00	30x32-26	\$16.00
28x32-27	\$14.50	30x32-27	\$16.50
28x32-28	\$15.00	30x32-28	\$17.00
28x32-29	\$15.50	30x32-29	\$17.50
28x32-30	\$16.00	30x32-30	\$18.00
28x32-31	\$16.50	30x32-31	\$18.50
28x32-32	\$17.00	30x32-32	\$19.00
28x32-33	\$17.50	30x32-33	\$19.50
28x32-34	\$18.00	30x32-34	\$20.00
28x32-35	\$18.50	30x32-35	\$20.50
28x32-36	\$19.00	30x32-36	\$21.00
28x32-37	\$19.50	30x32-37	\$21.50
28x32-38	\$20.00	30x32-38	\$22.00
28x32-39	\$20.50	30x32-39	\$22.50
28x32-40	\$21.00	30x32-40	\$23.00
28x32-41	\$21.50	30x32-41	\$23.50
28x32-42	\$22.00	30x32-42	\$24.00
28x32-43	\$22.50	30x32-43	\$24.50
28x32-44	\$23.00	30x32-44	\$25.00
28x32-45	\$23.50	30x32-45	\$25.50
28x32-46	\$24.00	30x32-46	\$26.00
28x32-47	\$24.50	30x32-47	\$26.50
28x32-48	\$25.00	30x32-48	\$27.00
28x32-49	\$25.50	30x32-49	\$27.50
28x32-50	\$26.00	30x32-50	\$28.00
28x32-51	\$26.50	30x32-51	\$28.50
28x32-52	\$27.00	30x32-52	\$29.00
28x32-53	\$27.50	30x32-53	\$29.50
28x32-54	\$28.00	30x32-54	\$30.00
28x32-55	\$28.50	30	

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THE SIX-GUN POINTS TO SIX

By **GLENN H. WICHMAN**

Author of "Gunpowder Road," etc.

CHAPTER I.

TERRIFYING NEWS.

THERE was dancing that night in the town hall at Gila Springs when news, which might well mean death to him as well as to others on the Bar 13, came to "Rio" Anderson. All hands from the little ranch were among the throng of dancers, all five of them: Rio, the foreman; Jason Ballard, the owner,

still weak and trembly from a bullet wound that had nearly taken his life; Phœbie Ballard, Jason's diminutive daughter; and the two cowhands, young Johnny McTish and the elderly "Pueblo" Jim. But there was another person present who meant more to Rio Anderson than did any of these, and she, likewise, was involved—Agnes Hornsby, the school-teacher. Rio was dancing with her when the news came.

Philo Smithers, who had been call-



ing the square dances, stepped out into the center of the hall and waved the two-piece orchestra to silence. Philo held in his hand a wrinkled copy of the *County Seat Gazette*, which had just come in on the evening stage.

"Ladies an' gents," announced Smithers, "I got some information that I think you ought to know! I won't read it because it's kind of a long piece but the gist of the matter is this: Tex Stewart's escaped the penitentiary! The prison posse's missed him, an' he's on the loose! The idea seems to be that he's headin' this way! There's those of you who ought to know!"

There was a moment of silence, punctured only by a gasp or two. Then Philo Smithers motioned for the orchestra to continue and the two musicians took up the strains of the waltz where they had left off. But somehow the dancing was not quite as lively and carefree as it had been. People were looking at Rio Anderson and Agnes Hornsby; and at young Johnny McTish and Phoebe Ballard; and at the two older men, Jason and Pueblo Jim. It was these six people who had been instrumental in sending "Tex" Stewart to the penitentiary, and it would be these six upon whom his wrath would surely fall.

Rio looked down at the woman who was in his arms, and, while she smiled up at him with confidence,

there was a trace of apprehension in her hazel eyes. He had felt her body contract as the impact of the news struck her, and now he drew her closely to him.

"Trouble," said Rio. "It was bound to come."

They danced automatically, absorbed in thought, oblivious to those around them.

"He can't come back here openly," murmured Agnes, "and assume operation of the Box A, even if he does own it. Every sheriff in the State will be after him."

A few more measures of the waltz, and Rio answered her. "There are ways that Tex can manage it. I've known Stewart for a long time, ten years, ever since I sat down across the card table from him and lost the Box A. He has connections, high trail connections. He'll use those now. Gather up four or five men of his own stripe and it will be those four or five who will run the Box A while Stewart hovers in the background. Tex knows this country, and with the help of his men the law'll have a time of it even to lay a finger on him."

"He'll come and go like a shadow," whispered Agnes Hornsby.

"The shadow of death," answered Rio. "He and his men."

Anderson glanced around the room. Young Johnny McTish danced with Phoebe Ballard. The cowboy held her protectingly, with his right arm around her waist. A glistening tear ran down Phoebe's right cheek.

PUEBLO JIM danced with an elderly widow, but he did it perfunctorily, for his mind was elsewhere. Jason Ballard, sitting out the dance, rubbed his white forehead with the palm of his hand as he glanced furtively about him.

"Tough," said Rio. "We could have been happy. The five of us out on the Bar 13 and you, Agnes, here in Gila Springs, with me coming in now and then to see you. A little daylight was seeping through the clouds and now comes this. The Bar 13 was in a fair way to make some money, too. Given time, I might have accumulated enough so that I could have decently asked you to marry me. Jason is paying me good wages, with a percentage of the profits. But Tex'll ruin the Bar 13 if it's within his power. He'll need the water we have."

"Some day," answered the woman, "we'll find what it is we seek. Happiness, contentment." She stirred restlessly. "You have a lot to think of, Rio. And oh, my dear, I'll admit that I'm afraid."

"We've known fear, you and I," soberly said Anderson, "and we'll know it again. There are two courses we can pursue, either to go or to stay—"

"To which there's only one possible answer," interrupted Agnes Hornsby. "You and I would both make the same answer. We'll stay, and take it as it comes."

"Of course."

He could feel her drawing to him, and he gloried in the look that was upon her face. They were not children, he and Agnes Hornsby. The school-teacher's thirty-five years became her mightily; she looked to be no more than twenty-five. Rio had just turned forty, and was in his prime. A trace of gray showed around his temples, but his eyes were as bright as those of a youth of twenty-one.

"Your plans?" asked Agnes. "It'll be you we'll all depend on."

"Tex Stewart," answered Anderson, "will be after me, so I'll turn the tables and be after him. Good

strategy. When a man seeks you, seek him."

The woman gasped. "The danger in it, Rio—"

"No more than having him seek me. But I have you, and Phœbie, and old Jason Ballard to think of. While Johnny McTish and Pueblo Jim and I are on the hunt we must have the three of you cached away. You'll have to abandon teaching for the time being and let the youngsters get along as best they can. It'll never do for you to remain here in Gila Springs."

"I know. The Bar 13?"

"That's out, too," Rio told her. "We'll have to desert the ranch. Too exposed to attack from the Box A. Even if the law's on our side it would be taking a needless chance. I'm thinking of the desert. There are water holes that are hard to find. And the way I figure it, that would be the last place Tex Stewart would think of looking. Naturally he would conclude that we'd all taken to the hills. We'll fool him, and go the other way."

"Good," breathed Agnes. "There's sound sense in that. There's time to arrange things. It may be a week or more before Tex works his way down here from up north."

"Not so sure of that," replied Rio. "In the old days the skunk could travel."

The music ceased, and the teacher slipped from the foreman's arms. Sheriff Jerome Allenby, who'd stopped with his partner near by, touched Anderson on the shoulder.

"Rio," offered Allenby, "you know, of course, you'll have the law's protection. I'll be looking for Tex like everybody else. I'll deputize some men. Mebbe you'd like a star."

Rio shrugged. "Better not give me one, Jerome. Then the law won't

have to make excuses for what I do. You never can tell—"

"You'll stay on the ranch, of course?" interrupted the sheriff.

"Sure," answered Rio. "Why not?" He was looking now at Agnes, and the expression in his eyes indicated that she was to say nothing to any one about the things that he had told her.

"Well," concluded Jerome Allenby, "I'll be getting along and keeping my eyes open. No fit time now to dance." With that the sheriff got his hat from a peg on the wall and hurried out into the street.

JOHNNY MCTISH and Phœbie Ballard came up to where Anderson and Agnes stood, as did Pueblo Jim and Jason. Worry and uncertainty were on the faces of all of them, with the exception of McTish's. But the cowboy, having in mind the young girl who stood beside him, was largely bluffing about the way he felt.

"By thunder!" exclaimed old Jason. "They oughta make their jails better."

Other couples joined the group around the foreman. Rio was about to speak when a cowboy, powdered with dust and bearing the signs of hard riding, elbowed his way through the crowd and stood before him.

"Hunk Prather—" began Anderson.

"Lookin' for you, Rio," hurriedly said the lanky Prather. "An' mebbe you think I ain't got some news. This afternoon I saw an' talked to Tex Stewart!"

Silence came to the people who were within hearing. Most of them gaped in astonishment and crowded closer.

"Hope you shot an' killed the guy!" grunted Jason Ballard.

"Don't be foolish," laughed young

Prather. "The first thing I saw of Tex was his gun barrel. With me lookin' down the muzzle there wasn't much chance to argue. I was roundin' up some strays an' followin' a cow path when on the other side of a bush I came on Tex Stewart's gun, and Tex was right behind it."

"Accommodating of you to come an' tell me," said Rio. "And nobody can blame you for not putting up a fight. That is, nobody who knows Tex would blame you."

"Rode to the Bar 13 first," explained the cowboy. "Nobody was home, so I got my head to workin' an' took a chance that you'd be in here to the dance."

"Don't mind a few questions, do you?" asked Anderson.

"Go right ahead," replied Prather. "You're welcome to anything I know."

"Was Tex Stewart alone when he stopped you?"

"No. He had two gents with him. Tough-lookin' birds. I didn't know either one of 'em. They stood in the background while Tex handled things."

"What'd Stewart stop you for?"

"Lookin' for information. He wanted to know how things stood in the valley. Said that if what I told him had the ring of truth to it that he'd let me go. Couldn't see any reason why I shouldn't tell him the truth, Rio, even if you are a friend of mine. If I'd have lied, he'd have trapped me."

Anderson nodded. "Sure, Hunk; you did the smart thing. What'd you tell him?"

"That his foreman, Luther James, was dead. That James had tried to kill you, but you had beaten him to it. That the men he had put on the Box A were either dead or out of the country, and that the ranch was deserted and had been ever since

James died. Never saw any man so mad as Tex Stewart when I told him that."

"Of course he wanted to know what was happening to his beef?" prompted Rio.

"Sure. I told him you'd cut the fences and that his stock was drinking Bar 13 water from the springs. Told him that if you hadn't done that most of his critters would have died. That made him madder'n ever. He was fit to be tied. The idea of his beef accepting a favor from you burned him up."

"Yeah," murmured Rio. "I expect it would. But I was thinkin' of the cows. A cow comes pretty near being a cow, no matter who it belongs to. Where was it that you met Stewart?"

"Way up at the head of Hazlett's Creek. Long ways from here."

"Not too far at that," said Rio. "Of course Stewart told you to keep your mouth closed when he turned you loose?"

"Nope." "Hunk" Prather laughed. "He didn't. Reckon he overlooked it. But whether he had or hadn't I'd have looked you up anyway."

RIO squirmed restlessly and his eyes shifted to the open door of the dance hall and the dark street beyond. "A mighty decent thing for you to do, Hunk, an' I'll never forget it. I suppose Stewart was full of threats?"

"I'll say he was. Aims to get you the first chance he has. He couldn't seem to understand why you hadn't squatted down on the Box A. I told him you were an honest man and didn't take what no longer belonged to you. When I told him that I thought he was goin' to shoot."

"Six months in the penitentiary ain't improved his disposition?"

"Not so you can notice it," replied

young Hunk. "That guy's a devil. An' those two gents who were with him looked to be the same."

"Didn't drop any hints, did he, as to his plans?" queried Anderson.

"Revenge was the only thing he seemed to have on his mind." Prather looked at the school-teacher. "Ma'am, I don't reckon you oughta be living alone here in your house at Gila Springs. Not while Tex Stewart is runnin' free. He asked about you particularly. I told him. I told him the truth about everything. I was afraid not to. But of course I knew that Rio would look for——"

"He spoke of the Bar 13?" interrupted the foreman.

"You bet. Wanted to know all about it. Wanted to know who was there an' where everybody slept. Whether some of them slept in the bunk house or all in the ranch house. I told him I couldn't be sure about that but I reckoned you all used the ranch house."

Rio shook his head in puzzled doubt. "Still can't understand why Stewart would turn you loose. It isn't like him."

The cowboy chuckled, and held out his wrists for all to see. Red welts were upon them, and in half a dozen places the skin had been torn and the wounds had bled. But the bleeding had stopped and the blood had dried.

"Tex didn't exactly turn me free," explained Hunk. "Did just the opposite. Bound me up tighter'n an Indian squaw's papoose, or that's what he thought he done. Laid me in the bushes an' tied my horse to a tree. Didn't want the nag to go back to the ranch house with an empty saddle. Told me that I'd be all right there for a day or so, and that when I turned up missing the Flyin' S hands

would be out lookin' for me. I fooled him. I got free."

For the first time young Prather showed signs of bitterness. "Tex Stewart made a mistake when he didn't tie those knots as tight as he might 'a' tied 'em. Rio, I'm putting in with you. Things are going to be popping here in this valley."

"Fine," said Anderson. "I was going to suggest something of the sort. Through no fault of your own you've become involved in my affairs. Stewart's never going to forgive you for what you've done tonight. Me an' Agnes an' the Bar 13 owe you——"

There was the stamp of running feet on the board walk outside. The sounds came nearer. A man dashed in through the open door. Nearly every one in the room had turned to look. It was Silas Lathrop, the storekeeper. Lathrop's face was ashen.

"Scatter, you people!" he shouted hoarsely. "Scatter! Tex Stewart's down the street! Three men are with him! He's lookin' for Rio! He's comin' this way! He'll be here any second!"

CHAPTER II.

THE RAID.

RIO ANDERSON'S foremost thought was of the women and of the innocent bystanders in the dance hall. If Tex Stewart and his men should come storming in that front door, guns blazing——

It would not be beyond Stewart to do such a thing. Rio made a dive for his gun belt, which hung from a hook against the wall. Already the room was in the wildest confusion. Women screamed, men ran. The crowd surged toward the narrow rear entrance.

"Agnes! Johnny!" yelled Ander-

son. "Hunk! Jason! All of you! Stay near me!"

Somewhere down the street, and not far away, came the drum of gunfire. Tex Stewart was coming! Rio clapped the belt around his waist. The six-gun came out of the holster. Overhead, and in a straight line, hung the three coal-oil lamps which illuminated the dance hall.

"Darkness!" grated the foreman. "It's got to be! Even Tex Stewart wouldn't let fly in the dark."

Rio's gun went up and the hammer fell back. Three times, in quick succession, slugs cleared the muzzle; three well-placed shots that found their marks. The lamps either came crashing to the floor or were shattered in mid-air. As the roar of his six-gun echoed, the dance hall was in darkness. No fire followed the breaking of the lamps; the wick of each had been extinguished in its fall.

Anderson felt hands clutching at him, and he knew that they were the hands of his friends. "The back door!" he shouted. "Stay together! I'll lead! Grab a hold of one another an' follow."

Dust, and the reek of splattered coal oil, filled the air. Men shouted, cursed, and shoved each other in the darkness. People stumbled, fell, were trampled in the mad stampede.

"Steady! Steady!" yelled Rio, and his voice carried even above the tumult.

Again there came the crash of gunfire from the street, followed by hoarse, unintelligible cries and angry shouts. The foreman's groping fingers found the rear door. He stood to one side, and began shoving people through the door and out into the night. The sounds out in the street had begun to fade, as though the men who had done the firing were falling back from the door and were in re-

treat. Likewise the sounds in the dance hall were diminishing, and in a moment Anderson realized that he was the only man remaining in the room. Then he followed the others, out into the unfenced back yard of the building.

"Rio," came the whispered voice of Agnes Hornsby. The school-teacher had him by the arm.

"Time we counted noses," said Anderson. "Speak up, everybody."

Johnny McTish, and Phoebe and Jason Ballard answered him, but that was all. Pueblo Jim and Hunk Prather were missing. Comparative silence came as people sought to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the dance hall. Most of the lamps in the town had long since been extinguished, their owners seeking safety in the darkness. The night was black; there was no source of illumination but the stars.

A moment, and Pueblo Jim put in his appearance, feeling his way along in the darkness and speaking the foreman's name. But there was still no sign of Hunk.

"There's a shed in the rear of Lathrop's store," said Rio. "Meet me on the far side of it, all of you. I'll see if I can find the boy."

They hurried off under Pueblo Jim's direction. The foreman was alone. Firing in the street had ceased, and a hush had settled over Gila Springs. Rio could hear people slinking about, no doubt looking for their horses, eager to be out of town. There would be no more dancing. Anderson had repeatedly strained his ears for some indication that Tex Stewart and his men had ridden away, but nothing had happened from which he could draw a definite conclusion.

"No doubt," reasoned Rio, "they're still sneakin' around, lookin' for me and for the others. Revenge

always was Stewart's long suit." With that the foreman began his search for Hunk Prather, but at the end of five minutes he knew that the task was hopeless. The business houses were all in darkness, even the two saloons had closed.

"Oughta have stayed with us," muttered Anderson, "but then, mebbe he couldn't. Anyhow, by now he ought to be out of harm's way, for the present at least."

RIO, his eyes now thoroughly accustomed to the darkness, had no difficulty in finding the shed behind Lathrop's store. To his vast relief he found his friends huddled together there, waiting for him.

"We ought to get home as soon as possible," whispered Jason Ballard. Anderson drew the five people around him. "Can't agree with you, Jason. We'd be wide open then to a raid by Tex Stewart, any time he felt like making it."

"If we stay here in town," suggested Phœbie, "we'd be safe."

"Again I've got to disagree," whispered Rio. "Look at what just happened to-night. And from now on you'll find that many folks will shun us as though we had the smallpox. Stewart's feared, and there will be those who will seek to curry favor with him. Not many, but a few. Enough traitors to law an' order, perhaps, to be our undoing. A sad commentary on human nature, but it's the truth."

"Sure it is," spoke up Pueblo Jim. "I've seen the same thing happen before. Some gent hits the high trail and he finds sentimental friends in surprising spots."

"Sheriff Allenby," said Jason Ballard, "ought to be some help."

"One man against Stewart and the gang," objected Rio. "No matter

how well he means I wouldn't bet too much money on him. I still think we'll be our own best protection." Then the foreman repeated something of what he had said to Agnes Hornsby in the dance hall.

"There's a water hole not more than three miles from the edge of the desert," concluded Anderson. "It's in a lava flow. Nobody in his right mind would think of looking for it there, but I found it once by accident. Surprising spot. Surrounded by folded lava on all sides that's forty or more feet high. There was some grass in the center of an oblong basin and a trickle of water. Enough to keep us and the horses alive."

"Couldn't stay there forever," muttered Jason.

"Tex Stewart won't be riding forever, either," explained Rio. "The hide-out will merely be a base of operation and a safe place to leave the women. Johnny and Pueblo and I will do no hiding."

"An' neither'll I," growled Jason. "We'll see," soothed Rio.

"Sounds good to me," put in Johnny McTish.

"Ditto," grunted Pueblo. "If we don't get out of here somethin's likely to fall on us."

Instinctively they all looked around them. They could hear men walking, and the sound of hoofs, but whether friend or foe there was no way to be certain. Even in the darkness Gila Springs was as tense as a fiddle string.

Anderson issued his orders: "Pueblo, you an' Johnny see to the horses. If you can't find those that belong to the Bar 13, take some one else's. Mine's in Agnes's corral. We'll all meet in the brush a hundred yards south of that corral. Agnes, you outfit Phœbie and yourself so you can ride in some kind of comfort. I'll raid your cupboards. There ought to be

enough canned goods there to keep us alive for a few days."

Pueblo Jim and young McTish disappeared in the darkness, bound for the street and the hitch racks. Rio led the two women and the aged rancher to the school-teacher's cottage, which was on the outskirts of the town.

"We'll have to do everything without benefit of a light," cautioned Rio. "Chances are about forty to one that Tex Stewart or his men may be watchin'."

Cautiously they entered the vine-covered cottage, leaving Jason outside to give the alarm in case he should hear any one coming. The two women worked swiftly, and in a moment were dressed for riding. Rio filled a gunny sack with such provisions as he could lay his hands on. The weather was such that there would be no absolute need for bedding, and so they did not burden themselves with it.

They hurriedly quit the school-teacher's dwelling and rejoined Jason on the outside.

"No sound of any one," reported the rancher, "but I seem to see shadows moving. Mebbe I'm going crazy."

ANDERSON went to the corral and saddled his and Miss Hornsby's horses. With the nags in tow, he joined the others and they all walked to the clump of brush, which had been selected as a rendezvous. Rio stepped some distance away from the horses, so as to hear better, but he could pick up nothing that alarmed him.

A quarter of an hour passed, and there was a sound of hoofbeats coming from the direction of the town. The sounds came faintly at first, then speedily increased in volume. A shout pierced the darkness, but what

it meant, Rio couldn't tell. The foreman's gun was in his hand. It would not be like Johnny McTish and Pueblo Jim to ride as incautiously as these men were riding.

When the horses were nearly upon him, Anderson heard rational speech. An oath came first, and then the voice of Johnny McTish: "If they ain't waitin' we'll all be sunk——"

It was clear, now, what was happening. Pueblo and Johnny were being pursued.

"A nice note," growled Rio. "This is goin' to be hard to handle." Then he raised his voice: "Johnny! Jim! This way; we're waitin'!" Even as he spoke a gun roared in the distance. There was a flash of fire.

"We got the horses!" called McTish.

"Mount up!" rasped Rio. "Take the road north! I'll wait behind. I'll follow! Don't leave the road!"

Anderson sprang to his own horse. In the dim light he could see Phœbe and Agnes and old man Ballard mounting. There were more flashes of gunfire as men, coming from the direction of the town, closed in. If those men were mounted—— A half-spent slug struck theommel of Rio's saddle and ricocheted into the brush.

"Jim!" hoarsely grated Rio. "You take the lead! I'll cover the retreat! Don't shoot unless you have to."

Anderson sat his horse while the two women and the three men got their mounts in motion and headed for the valley road, which ran at no great distance from the school-teacher's house. When they had gone a hundred feet he thumbed the hammer of his Colt and sent a slug screaming at the men who were coming from the town. Two seconds, and he followed it with another. His fire was returned in fivefold measure.

Then Rio turned his horse and

headed it in exactly the opposite direction to the one his friends had taken. Every few yards, and he sent a slug toward the town, firing at the flashes, which were now not as numerous as they had been. When the six-gun was empty, he reloaded and drew his mount to a standstill.

Distinctly he could hear Pueblo Jim and the others riding through the brush toward the road. Then he made the satisfactory discovery that the men who had pursued Jim and Johnny were not mounted, but were on foot. He could hear them cursing. Above the talk came the booming voice of Tex Stewart: "No chance, boys! They've divided! Get your horses!"

Rio's fists clenched, and he actually turned his bay toward the town with the intention of riding Stewart down, but in a second reason came, and he knew that that would never do. His first duty was to the women; when they had been made safe he would ride Tex Stewart's trail.

"From the sounds of the shootin'," concluded Anderson, "there were Tex an' four others. The gent's gang's growing. When Hunk Prather saw him he only had two. When Lathrop saw him there were three. An' now there's five."

Rio promptly headed for the road. When he came to it he increased the pace, following the dusty ribbon of highway that stood out distinctly in the starlight. He rode a mile before he knew that there were people ahead of him. Shortly they drew off the road and, when he was sure of their identity, he joined them.

Agnes drew her horse up beside his, and laid her hand on his forearm. "The firing?"

"So far as I know," answered Rio, "no harm was done. It was Stewart and his men. Now for the desert. We've got to get there before day-

light." He gave instructions for the march; they were to follow in single file behind him, with Pueblo Jim bringing up the rear.

ANDERSON got his bearing from the north star and headed due south. It was hard going, the ground rough, broken and covered with brush and boulders. An hour, and they came upon a road which ran due east and west. The road originated in Gila Springs and terminated at the edge of the desert. Fifty miles across the desert was the town of Larchmont, but there was no road across the desert for even a trail was obliterated by the shifting sands, often no more than a few hours after it had been made. Hardy men, and men in a hurry, rode that way at times, but such men were few and far between.

Rio and his party followed the uncertain road toward the west. When a mile from where the road disappeared into the sands, Rio left it and headed due north. They rode along the low hills that fringed the circular waste lands on the east. Three or four miles of this and Anderson was straining his eyes for the sight of certain landmarks which he must find and recognize if he was to reach his destination. It was a jagged cut in the hills, silhouetted against the stars, which gave him the clew he sought. Shortly he headed directly out into the desert, rode down a wide wash where the sand was so loose and deep that the horses were up to their hocks in it. The wash broadened and disappeared. Within an hour they were in among the lava flows, jagged and rough, yet in places as smooth as glass.

Deftly, and with a skill born of experience, Anderson retraced a route that he had only been over twice before. But he had a memory

for such things, and a patience that was infinite. They passed down a long crooked defile and out into a tiny basin.

"Ah," said Rio to Agnes, who rode beside him. "We're here. Smell the water?"

"Not me," laughed Agnes Hornsby. "My dear—you're wonderful."

They came to a pool, three feet in diameter, that shone dully in the starlight. Rio dismounted, and with his cupped hands tasted the tepid water. "Warm, but good."

Thirty minutes, and the two women had been made comfortable.

"We've a gun apiece," said Agnes, "an' there's an overhanging lava hummock that'll give us shade in the daytime. Don't worry. What more could any one want?"

"Right on the minute," said Rio, "I'm mightily worried over Hunk Prather. I'd feel better if the boy hadn't missed us, an' had come along."

Presently good-bys were said and Rio, Johnny McTish and Pueblo Jim rode out of the basin and retraced the trail that they had made in getting there. They did not stop until they were within a mile of Gila Springs. Here in the brush they tethered their horses and lay down for a few hours of rest.

The morning was an hour old when they awakened. They divided a can of beans between them, saddled, and were ready for the hazardous undertaking of looking for Tex Stewart.

"Gila Springs first," said Rio. "We'll find out what happened there last night. Ride around the outskirts of the place until we see somebody that we can talk to."

They moved cautiously on toward the valley road. When they came

within sight of it they were less than a quarter of a mile from the town.

"By heavens!" gasped Johnny McTish. "Look at that! A man's body!"

Rio had already seen, and the sight had filled him with horror. They moved closer. From the limb of a tree fifty feet off the road, and in plain view from it, hung the lifeless form of Hunk Prather. A piece of paper had been pinned to the cowboy's trousers leg, and on the paper had been scrawled the eight-word warning:

What Happens To Men Who Talk Too Much!

CHAPTER III.

THE CHALLENGE

RIO dismounted, as did his companions. After a look around they approached the gently swaying body of the unfortunate cowboy and examined it more closely.

"Being hung didn't cause his death," announced Anderson. "He'd passed on long before that happened. Look at that bullet wound."

"Pretty obvious who did it," muttered McTish. "Stewart as much as admits the crime in that warning. Nobody could read it any other way."

The lines in Rio's face were deep. "I kind of feel responsible for this. If Hunk hadn't been a friend of mine it wouldn't have happened. He tried to help me, and paid for it with his life."

"It'd have been better for him," suggested Pueblo Jim, "if he'd come to you in private instead of in the middle of a dance."

"There's a little of vanity in every one," replied Anderson. "The thing to do now is to find the man who killed him, and to balance the ac-

count. He must have been shot last night in Gila Springs, after the affair at the dance hall."

Rio's eyes dropped to the ground beneath the swinging man, and for the first time he saw that there was an envelope there, wedged securely between two stones.

The foreman picked up the envelope and was astonished to see that it was addressed: "For Rio Anderson. Will whoever finds this give it to him?"

Anderson tore open the envelope, pulled out a sheet of paper, and saw that the letter was in Tex Stewart's handwriting.

With a mixture of feelings, the foreman hurriedly read:

Rio:

This country isn't big enough for the two of us, so it's time we made a deal. Otherwise we will both lose, and that will do neither of us any good. I propose that we meet together on Wednesday noon, just you and I alone, in the deserted nester's cabin that is at the base of Bald Butte. You know where it is. I'll be there Wednesday noon waiting for you because I reckon that you will get this letter some time Tuesday. Some one will give it to you.

Your life is pretty much of an open book for anybody to read who wants to take the trouble. The one thing you want above all others is to marry Agnes Hornsby, but you're a proud man and won't do it until you again have a ranch. What would you think if I was to give you back the Box A? I paid nothing for it. It cost me no more than the time it took to deal a few hands of cards. Of course I wouldn't think of parting with the spread if it wasn't that the law was looking for me, but a fellow on the dodge finds it difficult to run a cow outfit. Not that it can't be done, but possibly it isn't worth my while to do it. If you were to get your old ranch back it would mean a lot to you and then you could marry.

Don't think I'm going to confess having cheated you at that game of cards, because I'm not. But I have a scheme on foot whereby we can both profit. I'll be wait-

ing alone at the nester's cabin Wednesday noon. Come up the wash that lies to the west, and then I'll know that you're alone. If you're alone I'll walk out of the cabin and meet you in the cleared ground where the nester tried to raise his corn. If you aren't alone, then the whole thing's off an' you'd better watch yourself.

Don't go jumping at the conclusion that you haven't anything to gain by this, because you have. Be seeing you Wednesday.
TEX STEWART.

P. S. Have in mind that if you and I were to make peace it would mean a lot to Gila Springs and everybody who lives within a hundred miles of it.

Rio finished reading the letter, shook his head, and handed it to Pueblo. "What do you make of it, Jim?"

"The man's a liar," said Pueblo, after he had finished reading. "It's just a trap."

Young McTish likewise read the letter and his opinion was the same as Jim's.

"Nevertheless," continued Rio, "I'm going there to the cabin tomorrow noon. But that doesn't mean that I won't be busy between now and then. If it's a trap, as it undoubtedly is, I'll spring it. We're riding now into Gila Springs to notify the undertaker and the sheriff."

"Stewart," objected Johnny, "may be waiting there, hoping that we'll do just that. Wouldn't be much of a trick for him an' his men to shoot us down from ambush."

"I doubt that they'll be waiting there," replied Rio. "From now on Stewart won't be the lingering kind. Not after this murder. He wouldn't mind going to Gila Springs, but when he does he'll go in with a rush and leave the same way. Allow no time for the citizens to gang up on him. If he lingers too long in one spot that's bound to happen, and nobody knows it better than he does."

THEY mounted and rode on into the town. The main street was nearly deserted, the air tense. They halted in front of the undertaker's establishment and were not unmindful that people were watching them from doors and windows. Vance Peterson, who had a variety of jobs besides that of caring for the deceased, put in his appearance after Anderson had pounded lustily on the door.

Rio told him what had happened to Hunk Prather. Peterson didn't seem too astonished. "Tell me, Vance," continued Rio, "something of what happened here last night. You weren't at the dance, so perhaps you saw Tex Stewart come down the street."

The undertaker shook his head. "Of course I'll go out an' cut Hunk down an' fix him up for burial but that's the extent of my official duties."

"Cautious, aren't you?" grunted Anderson.

"Pays to be. Go down an' talk to the sheriff. He's in his room at the rooming house with a bullet in him."

Rio and his friends moved a few doors down the street to the one-story Gila Springs Hotel. Sheriff Jerome Allenby, a bachelor, had a room in the rear of it. Anderson led the way around to the rear of the hostelry and they were just approaching the back door when Doctor Winfield Watkins came out.

The doctor's face was troubled. "I suppose, Rio, you're looking for the sheriff?"

"Had some such notion," admitted the foreman.

"Wouldn't do you any good," the doctor informed him. "Hovering between life and death, with the odds slightly in his favor. Delirious right now. His only chance is quiet."

"Got any of the particulars, doc,

as to how it happened and who did it?"

"Haven't," answered Doctor Watkins, and with that he hurried away.

"Fear," thought Rio. "Can't blame anybody overly much. Tex Stewart isn't exactly a safe gent for any man to fool with."

Anderson led his horse down to the rear of the general store, his companions following in his footsteps. It was Johnny McTish who went inside and summoned the proprietor, Silas Lathrop. For a wonder, Lathrop came out willingly and talked just as willingly.

"I first saw Tex Stewart," explained the storekeeper, "when he sneaked up beside the saloon and peeked into it through a window. Three men were with him, and that's what attracted my attention. I recognized two of them. Old-time badmen. Windy Wattles and Rattler Burroughs. They've been away from here for a long time."

"Windy and Rattler," repeated Rio. "Tex couldn't have picked out two better gents for his purpose than those. You didn't get any line on the other?"

"No. But they're all of the same stripe. I heard 'em mention your name, an' then I high-tailed it for the dance hall. As you were shooting out the lights I got outside. Tex an' the others were coming up the street. Sheriff Allenby was in their way an' they shot him down. That's how the fight started. If I was any good with a gun I'd have got in it myself."

Rio told him what had happened to young Hunk Prather.

"Bad," groaned Lathrop. "He was a good boy. After folks had scattered from the dance hall I slunk around in the darkness trying to get a chance to sandbag Tex, but the chance never came. Once or twice I got pretty close to him. He was

sore as a boil because somebody had given you warning. Some yellow-livered gent must have told him it was Hunk. A couple of times during the night there was firing going on here. I reckon one of those times Prather must have been on the receiving end of it."

"Not a doubt of that," said Rio. Then the foreman questioned the storekeeper about raising a posse.

CAN'T be done," answered Silas. "At least, not at present. The ranchers'll be for watchin' their own spreads until they see which way the wind's goin' to blow. The folks in town are in the same fix. Nobody will want to be the first to stick his neck out. Can't blame 'em too much, either. Not with a man like Stewart riding around; he hasn't any more conscience than a cougar."

The storekeeper laid his hand on Rio's forearm. "I hope you take good care of Agnes. Stewart figures that if he can lay his hand on her it'll be almost as good as laying it on you. With her for bait—"

A sharp crack of a high-powered rifle had cut the storekeeper's sentence in half! Coincident with the sound, Rio felt something snip at his unbuttoned vest and shirt front. A bullet had passed through the stout cloth. Instantly the four men, who had been standing quite close together, scattered. Rio's gun was in his hand as he spun around, although reason told him that the man who had done the firing would be well beyond revolver range.

A wisp of smoke curled up around the side of a shed which was in the rear of the undertaker's establishment. The bushwhacker took one more shot. This time his slug hit the back of Lathrop's store. McTish returned the fire, three quick shots.

"Mount up!" yelled Rio. "We'll ride him down!"

"It's Rattler Burroughs!" shouted Silas Lathrop. "Look! He's going for his horse!"

Rio gave a glance as he mounted. Burroughs was in plain view now. He was running for some brush that was beside the shed in which a roan horse stood. The man slipped his rifle in a saddle scabbard and, leaping up, shoved in the spurs. By now McTish and Pueblo Jim were on their horses' backs.

Anderson and his companions promptly took up the chase, riding through the back yards of the buildings that fronted on the street. But their progress was momentarily impeded, for they had to ride around the ends of two stub fences; and by the time they were in the clear "Rattler" Burroughs had all but disappeared. The outlaw was riding north and parallel to the road, where the terrain was cut up and fairly well wooded, which added greatly to his chances of escape.

When Rio reached the outskirts of Gila Springs he glanced over his shoulder and had a partial view of the main street. A man was riding down it, and in the same direction he was riding, a big, bearded man on a sorrel.

"Windy Wattles!" grated Anderson. "Five years since I've seen the skunk, but it's him. He an' Burroughs were staked out in Gila Springs on the off chance that I'd come to town. Hardly figured that Tex would divide his men at this stage of the game."

He glanced ahead. Rattler Burroughs had just dropped down into a slight depression, and was out of view. "Easy!" yelled Rio to Johnny and Jim. "We got the enemy behind an' before us. No use being caught between 'em."

HE slowed the pace and cut off to his right, heading for the low, wooded hills that flanked Gila Springs on the north. A word of explanation to his friends, and they willingly enough followed behind him. "Windy" Wattles had changed direction with them, but the fellow showed no overwhelming desire to close the gap that separated them.

"He'll hang on like a leech," said Rio, "but this is a game that two can play at. If I handle it right, Mr. Wattles oughta end up with a hole in him."

When Anderson was out of sight in the low hills he paused in a draw to listen, and to explain his plan. "Jim, you an' Johnny get yourselves cached up among those rocks in the head of the draw, where you can make a stand. I want you to give your position away so these two gents'll know where you are. They're not riding together now, but they soon will be. I'll sneak away an' when they attack you then I'll attack them from the rear. Understand?"

"Cuttin' it pretty fine," said Johnny. "But the idea's good."

Rio watched McTish and Pueblo ride up toward the cluster of rocks that were at the head of the draw. The distance was no more than two hundred yards. When they had disappeared from sight he himself rode up over a low ridge to his left and down into an adjacent draw. Here Rio dismounted, and tied his horse to a sapling which was in the center of a thick stand of undergrowth. Promptly he began to retrace on foot the route that he had just ridden, having in mind to be on Windy's flank when the man rode up the draw and toward the clump of boulders in which his friends were hidden. Like-

wise, he would have the advantage of being above Windy.

Before Anderson reached the top of the ridge he became aware that some one was walking not far from him. A twig snapped, followed by a rustle of dried leaves. There was a boulder on either side of him and one ahead, high boulders over which he could not see. Moving quietly, he peered around the side of the huge rock to his right, for that had seemed to be the direction from which the sound had come. He could see nothing, and now he could hear nothing. Rio tensed and waited. Again he heard a sound, this time from behind him. He turned and began backing down between the two boulders. The passageway was narrow and steep. His fingers slipped down and rested on the butt of his Colt, and all the time he was conscious that the sounds he was hearing were coming nearer.

"Somebody musta seen me tie my horse," he concluded, "and they're trying to close in on me. Two gents. Stealthy devils."

Rio moved out from between the two boulders and sought shelter in some adjoining ones. They were not as high as the ones he had just left. He squatted down, straining his ears, his gun in his hand. Suddenly the earth seemed illuminated with a strange and terrifying brilliance. A terrific pain shot through Anderson's head. Then the unearthly brilliance faded, and the sky was dark.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DOUBLE CROSS.

ANDERSON'S first impression, when he returned to consciousness, was of floating through the air with a decidedly jerky motion. He opened his eyes

and saw the reason for it. He was being carried. A man had hold of his legs and a second man had him by the shoulders. The two were carrying him down a slope. The pain in Rio's head made him sick and giddy. He closed his eyes, then opened them.

The man who had hold of his legs was the bearded Windy Wattles. He glanced up, and was looking into the bloated, red face of Rattler Burroughs.

"Hold it, Windy," suddenly whispered Rattler. "The gent's come to. We'll make him walk."

Rio found himself standing on his feet, but he felt decidedly shaky. Rattler had a gun muzzle pressed against his ribs.

"At the first peep outta you, Rio," warned Burroughs, "I'll blow your insides out. All it'll take is the pull of a trigger."

"I'm not arguing, am I?" weakly muttered Rio. "What do you want?"

Rattler pointed down into the bottom of the draw where the foreman's bay was tethered. "Pick up your feet an' do it quiet. If you make a sound I'll have another try at bendin' a gun barrel over your dome."

As Rio moved down the slope, with the two outlaws following, his head cleared. Reason told him that he had been unconscious for only a few seconds, and that Johnny McTish and Pueblo Jim must still be waiting among the boulders in the adjoining draw. He appraised the situation and decided that, at the moment, resistance would be useless; that it would be the part of wisdom to go along peaceably and play for a break. He could see but one faint ray of hope; the two men had not beaten him to death when they had had the opportunity. There must be a reason for this, some reason why

they wanted to keep him alive. Perhaps it was only that he might be delivered to Tex Stewart, so that Tex could have the pleasure of dusting him off in person. Rio shuddered.

When Anderson came to where his horse was tied he feigned difficulty in climbing into the saddle, but an impatient shove from Windy Wattles got him quickly astride the horse. Surreptitiously he felt of his holster; it was empty. Wattles grabbed the bay's reins and led the animal down the draw; Rattler Burroughs came along a few paces behind. Three minutes, and the outlaws were where their own mounts had been cached. Rio's arms were tied together in front of him and his feet were bound to the stirrups.

"Ride between us," hoarsely chuckled Rattler. "Mister, we're goin' places."

First they headed back in the direction of Gila Springs but before they came in sight of the town they had changed direction and were riding west. Rio was interested to see that they were not going straight to the Box A. Apparently Tex Stewart was somewhere else.

They rode five miles and came to a halt in a rocky gorge that was in the hills south of the valley in which the Box A lay, and not far from the edge of the desert. The outlaws left Rio sitting his horse and moved to one side, out of earshot, where they held a whispered and animated conversation, all the while keeping an eye on him. Finally the two men shook hands in agreement and rode back to the foreman.

“O DD sort of a situation,” thought Anderson. “When two men are working for a third man they usually don’t act that way. I’m almost ready to believe

that Tex Stewart may be in for a dose of the well-known double cross." He chuckled inwardly, and resolved that, if such were the case, he would do his best to make some use of it.

"Rio," began Rattler Burroughs, who'd evidently been elected to do the talking, "you may not know it, but when me an' Windy picked you up we got ourselves something."

The foreman's lips parted in an easy smile. "Pleasure to hear that I'm of some value to somebody. How much——"

Burroughs interrupted with a wave of his fat hand. "Of course, you know what happened to Hunk Prather?"

"Found his body," admitted Rio, "with the warning on it."

"You found the envelope addressed to you?"

"Uh-huh. If you're curious, you might read it. It's in my inside vest pocket."

"I gotta say you're an obliging buzzard," grunted Rattler, and reached in for the envelope.

"Anything to be accommodating," replied Rio.

Again the two outlaws retired a few yards, and, putting their heads together, read the letter.

"Are you going to meet him," asked Rattler, as he shoved the envelope back into the foreman's pocket, "the way he says for you to?"

Anderson shrugged. "You birds make me laugh. You talk as though I was free to come an' go as I pleased. If I went it'd only be with your permission and assistance."

"Right as two pins!" snorted Burroughs. "I keep forgettin' that me an' Windy hold all the cards. Suddenly we find ourselves with a fistful."

"You were hired to kill me," Rio informed them, "and now you find

that mebbe you can make more by not doing it. Well, that's lucky for me."

The pair of eyes that bored into Anderson were as hard as steel.

"Mister," rasped Burroughs, "your right to live depends on you doing as we tell you."

"Any numskull would know that," countered Rio. "I can even tell you what it is you expect me to do. You've got your dirty paws on me, but that isn't enough to satisfy you. There are others who'll be of value. Miss Hornsby, Jason Ballard, Phœbie Ballard, Johnny McTish and Pueblo Jim. They're the interested people in this mess, the people Tex Stewart must wipe out. Ballard and his daughter because they own the Bar 13. Miss Hornsby and Johnny and Pueblo Jim because they're friends of mine and friends of the Ballards. If all those people were to disappear, then Tex Stewart would not only have revenge but would have reasonably easy sailing in the future. Gents—what you expect of me is my help in trapping these five people."

Burroughs and Windy Wattles looked slightly bewildered.

"You oughta be a fortune teller," muttered Windy.

Rio spoke with an assurance that he didn't feel. "It isn't that I'm so bright," he told them, "as much as it is that you're so pathetically dumb."

Rattler swore and made a move for his holster. "Why, you——"

"Easy," cautioned Rio. "If you did that, then you'd only draw your pay from Tex Stewart for having killed me. Why rob yourself when there's real money to be made?"

Again the two men looked at him with puzzled doubt, and even with a faint trace of admiration.

YOU work for Stewart," quickly continued Anderson, "but you mean to double-cross him, for a price. Having gathered me in, you now mean to do your own scheming and to make him pay, perhaps ten times as much as he originally offered to pay you. With the six people that Tex is looking for in your hand, you'll have the advantage. Perhaps you even plan to supersede Stewart altogether, to rub him out and to become the master outlaws of the county. I wouldn't advise you to do that, for the simple reason that you haven't got the brains for it. Make Stewart pay, and be satisfied."

Rattler growled a half-spoken oath. "Rio, you're the most insultin' gent I've ever run across."

"An' the smartest," added Anderson. Inwardly he had no such thought, for Rio was not a boastful man; failure had dogged his footsteps too persistently and too long for him ever to have entertained such notions. The soul of honor and truthfulness, he found the rôle that he was now playing to be anything but to his liking. Yet, with death staring him in the face, he would have clutched at anything offered, not so much that he himself might live, but that those who were dependent upon him might have a chance for life. It would take the finest kind of scheming, and the most persuasive talk, and all the time he would be burdened with the handicap that what he said was not the truth.

"Well," snorted Burroughs, "will you fix it so that we can find Ballard and his daughter, and Agnes and the two men?"

"And in return for that," queried Rio, "what'll I get? Virtue may usually be its own reward, but I want my pay in something more substantial."

"Why, your life," answered Rat-

tlar. "If you do what we want, we'll let you drift. You can go to Canada or Mexico, or any place that suits you."

"Generous," murmured Anderson. "Real generous. But at the moment I'm more concerned with you and your welfare than with my own. Stewart's been in the penitentiary. It isn't likely that he has any considerable amount of cash about. Hard cash will be what you want to get. When it comes to the wind-up, it'll do you no good if all Tex has to pay you off with is buttons. Have you thought of that?"

"Sure we've thought of it!" exclaimed Burroughs. "Tex has money cached away. Plenty of it. Gold. It was findin' that out that gave us the idea of shakin' him down."

"How much?" asked Rio, just as though it was a matter of much concern to him.

"Ten thousand or so," said Rattler. "If we had the proper leverage we could pry him loose from part of it. These people that we're talkin' about would be the thing."

"Certainly," agreed the foreman. "And in exchange for my life I'll see to it that you get them. When it comes to dying, a fellow will agree to the most surprising things."

The two outlaws smiled with satisfaction, yet with their smiles was just a suggestion of incredulity.

"I've overdone the thing," thought Rio with dismay. "Agreed too readily to betray my friends. They don't believe me."

"You've got the two women and the rancher put away somewhere, haven't you?" asked Burroughs.

"Sure. I can take you to them, but if you were to look for them yourselves you wouldn't find them in a month of Sundays."

"McTish and Pueblo?" continued the outlaw. "We left them back

there near Gila Springs. How'll you handle them?"

Anderson forced something that resembled a laugh from his dry lips. "That's easy. After they spend some time looking for me they'll naturally return to where the women and the rancher are. They can be gathered in at the same spot, and at the same time."

"Sounds reasonable," acknowledged Burroughs.

Then Rio decided it was time he played his trump card. "Gents," he calmly announced, "I'm surprised at your complete lack of astuteness. Money is what you want. You've said so yourself. Why not get it by a direct and easy route? Why go around a dozen barns to get it?"

Again there was that look of doubt on the outlaws' faces.

"What'd you mean?" asked Windy Wattles.

"Why bother with Jason Ballard and his daughter and the others? Why increase the risk you'll take?"

"Don't know what you're talkin' about," grumbled Rattler.

Then Rio Anderson explained. "In the letter that Tex Stewart wrote me, he said that he would meet me alone in the deserted nester's shack below Bald Butte. What more do you want! He'll be alone, and there'll be three of us. And he's got money hidden away. Stewart could be persuaded to exchange that money for his life."

THERE was no sound in the gorge but the restless stomping of the horses. That the men had been impressed was evident, that they were considering it was equally obvious.

Rio pressed on. "Why bother with these other people? There'll be danger in it. Bound to be danger in it. They won't submit tamely. And

even after you have them, there'll still be Stewart to deal with. Tex isn't any angel. If you think he'll submit to a double cross without raising a rumpus, you've got another think coming."

Rattler Burroughs and Windy Wattles looked rather blank.

"What the guy says kinda appeals to me," presently admitted Windy.

"There must be a catch in it," suggested Rattler. "Sounds too easy."

"No catch," corrected Rio. "How many men's Tex got with him now?"

"Two," answered Burroughs. "A couple young punks that he got to know through friends in the penitentiary. Miles Hardcastle and a fellow called Blondy."

"Now here's something," continued Anderson. "Will Tex keep his word with me, and meet me all alone at the nester's shack, or will he have these two guys with him?"

"Quién sabe?" muttered Rattler. "But it wouldn't be like Tex to keep his word about anything."

"There could be the three of us," Rio reminded him, "and the three of them. Even."

Suddenly Windy touched his partner on the shoulder, and motioned for him to withdraw. Again the two men moved out of earshot and held a whispered consultation. Rio squirmed restlessly in the saddle, and looked up and down the gorge. There was one chance in a thousand that Johnny McTish and Pueblo Jim, having grown tired of waiting at the head of the draw, had sallied forth and been able to pick up the trail. If they had succeeded in following it— Rio turned as the two outlaws once more moved their horses up to his.

"Well, Rio," announced Rattler, "me an' Windy have decided to do our own thinkin' an' to come to our own conclusions. We're much

obliged for your suggestion about Tex, an' we're following it. Not only following it, but our original idea as well. Shoot with both barrels." He glanced up at the sky. "It's now about twelve o'clock. You're to meet Tex to-morrow at noon. That gives us about twenty-four hours to get ready for the meetin'. Plenty of time for you to take us to where you've got the folks from the Bar 13 staked out.

"To-morrow, when we go to the meetin', we'll have them with us. Then we can't lose. If the chance offers, we'll shake Tex down. If it doesn't offer, then we'll be in the clear an' accept the hundred dollars each that he offered us for doin' the job. Of course, when we've laid hands on Ballard, an' the rest of 'em, we'll turn you loose as per agreement."

"I've lost," thought Rio, yet his expression did not change. Already other desperate schemes were surging through his mind. "Fine!" he exclaimed. "But I still think you'd be doing the smart thing to leave the Bar 13 folks alone."

"Mebbe," suggested Windy with a cunning smile, "we're thinkin' of becomin' ranchers. Me an' Rattler could use the Bar 13 and the Box A ourselves."

"You'd have no more use for a cow ranch," cut in Anderson, "than you would for a horse with forty legs. What you fellows want is money."

"Might be," snickered Wattles, "that Jason Ballard's got some that he could be talked out of."

"Let's have done with the chatter," stormed Rattler, "an' get movin'! Rio, you left Gila Springs last night and got back there this morning. If you were travelin' all that time, it took you five or six hours to go to wherever it is that you've got these people hidden. All right, it

won't take you any longer now. If by sundown you ain't led us to that spot, then we'll begin takin' you apart, one joint at a time."

"Won't take until sundown," lied Rio. "Jason Ballard an' Phœbie an' Agnes Hornsby are in Gila Springs."

CHAPTER V.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

HEARING Rio Anderson say that three of the people they sought were in Gila Springs, Rattler Burroughs and Windy Wattles looked completely incredulous. "You're crazy!" snorted Rattler. "That was the one place they wanted to get out of."

Rio shrugged. "Smart people, when they're on the dodge, do the unexpected. Nobody would have thought of looking for them there. That's why I brought them back to town."

"Where are they?" demanded Burroughs.

"At the school-teacher's house," casually answered Anderson. "If we back trail the way we've just come, we can be there in no time. The cotage is on the outskirts of Gila Springs. We can go into it without being seen from the town."

Two things Rio had in mind. If they back-trailed, they might run into Johnny McTish and Pueblo Jim. Failing at that, he hoped against hope that he could make use of Agnes Hornsby's cotage in a mad dash for freedom. He was clutching at straws, any straw that offered the slightest hope. When Windy and Burroughs made the discovery that they had been tricked there was no telling what might happen, certainly nothing good.

"Won't do any harm to have a look," finally agreed Rattler. "But we'll do no back trailing."

They continued down the gorge to its end, then turned south, and, by a circuitous route, approached Gila Springs from the west. During the ride they saw nothing of McTish or Jim. The afternoon was wearing on as the school-teacher's cottage came in sight.

Rio, who was riding between the outlaws, drew his horse to a stop in the head-high brush. "Time now," he said, "that you two gents untied me."

"Nothing doing!" spat Burroughs. "When we've got something we hold onto it."

"Use your heads," advised Anderson. "If the three of us walk up there with me bound, the folks inside will naturally be suspicious. They'll likely greet us with a volley of lead. On the other hand, if I was to walk up there with my arms free, an' a gun in my holster——"

"Go on!" grunted Rattler. "What do you take us for!"

"Doesn't have to be loaded," Rio reminded him. "If I was to walk up there with my arms swinging, and you two buzzards walking right behind me, the folks inside would take it that everything was O. K. I've got a key to the front door. All three of us could walk right in through that door before anybody was the wiser."

"Rattler," put in Windy Wattles, "there's a mite of sense in what the guy says."

Anderson's feet were promptly freed from the stirrups. He climbed down off his horse and the buckskin thongs were removed from his wrists. His empty six-gun was returned to its holster.

"Relax, you gents," chuckled Rio. "If we're going to get away with this, we'll have to walk up there an' not look as though we were going to our own hanging."

Rio hitched up his belt, flexed his stiff arms and legs, and promptly started walking through the brush toward the school-teacher's cottage. A moment, and they had stepped out into the little clearing which surrounded the dwelling.

"Don't try any funny business," grated Rattler from the corner of his mouth.

"Wouldn't think of it," answered Anderson. "I know when I've had enough." He slipped from his trousers pocket the key that Agnes Hornsby had given him and held it out before him.

Then, trying not to show the nervousness he felt, he moved swiftly across the veranda. The two outlaws were at his heels. He put the key in the lock, gave it a quick turn, and flung the door open. His plans was that, during the search of the empty house, he would contrive, in some way, to go plunging through a window. Anderson stepped inside. Every drop of blood in his body froze. In the center of the living room—smiling at him, stood Agnes Hornsby!

"Agnes——" involuntarily gasped the foreman.

"Rio——"

Rattler and Windy Wattles had, by now, crowded in through the door and closed it behind them.

THE school-teacher didn't seem at all astonished at sight of the two men. "She takes them to be my friends," desperately thought Rio, "never having seen them before." And then he came to a painfully momentous decision. He would pretend that he had kept his word with the outlaws, and that he had deliberately delivered the school-teacher into their hands.

"Greeter's, ma'am," said Rattler Burroughs. "Don't move an inch. Put your hands up, an' keep 'em

there. Rio, stand o'ver beside her with the table between you, where you can keep an eye on you. Windy, you keep 'em covered while I look up Jason Ballard an' his pal." Burroughs's hand was on his gun.

Nothing that Rio had ever done had been quite so hard for him as it was now to look at Agnes Hornsby. The color had drained from her face. Her eyes were as dull and lusterless as those of a dying animal. Her lips parted, and one word came out: "Judas——"

Anderson could feel the color mounting into his temples, and his knees felt as if they would give way beneath him. Disappointment came to him, that she would so easily and quickly doubt him. Then he realized that she must know that he had had no intention of leading these men to her, for the last place that he could reasonably have expected to find her was here, in this house. She had promised to remain in the desert hide-out. Could it be that, in those few seconds, she had already divined what was taking place, and was doing her best to play her part?

At the outlaw's command the school-teacher raised her hands level with her shoulders. Rio crossed over and stood near her, with the length of the center table between them. Windy, still standing by the door, drew his gun, and, holding it at his hip, covered them. Rattler Burroughs, likewise with a six-gun in his hand, had quit the living room and was searching the cottage.

They could hear Rattler stomping around, cursing beneath his breath and opening doors. In a few moments he returned to the living room. He drew the .38 from the school-teacher's holster, and shoved it into his own belt.

"Well, Rio," snorted Burroughs,

"where's Jason an' his gal? They're nowhere around."

"Tain't my fault if they ain't here," answered Anderson. "I lived up to part of my bargain, anyway. You've got Miss Hornsby. I told you she'd be here, an' I was right."

Rattler thoughtfully stroked his chin, and his thick lips puckered in a smile of pleasure. "By thunder, I never thought we'd find anybody here. Rio, mebbe you're a man of your word, after all. I took you for a lyin' skunk."

"Yeah?" mumbled the foreman.

Burroughs turned to the woman. "Ma'am, what's become of Jason Ballard an' his daughter? No use of you not tellin' the truth, because we'll find 'em anyway. It'll make it easier for them if we find them right away."

Agnes Hornsby spoke quickly, and with assurance. "They rode away from here a little while ago. Went home to their ranch, the Bar 13."

"Huh," grunted Rattler. "It wouldn't be unreasonable. Most anybody'll go home when they get a chance."

Windy Wattles, who had relaxed his vigilance when his partner had returned to the room, suddenly uttered an exclamation of surprise. He stood by a window. "Here comes Tex Stewart, Rattler! Walkin' straight for the house!"

Both outlaws were considerably disturbed at this.

"Looks like our little double-crossin' game was up," said Wattles.

"Nothin' of the kind," growled the more enterprising Rattler. "Windy, you stay in here and watch these people, an' I'll go out alone an' handle Tex. While I'm gone don't anybody speak a word, or, by thunder, you'll never speak another!"

Burroughs promptly went out the front door and noiselessly closed it

behind him. Rio, from where he was standing, could see out the window. Tex Stewart was approaching the cottage cautiously, and coming, not from the direction of the town, but from the opposite direction. He was slinking along from bush to bush, from one point of cover to another, and not doing a very good job of it. Presumably, he had left his horse some distance away.

Cold sweat ran down the small of Rio's back. If Stewart should come in the house, and find him there, it would be the end. For the first time, Anderson was wishing Rattler Burroughs the best of luck. If the outlaw did not succeed in turning Tex aside—

Suddenly Stewart stopped moving, and his gun came out. Undoubtedly he had seen the man on the veranda, and had not been sure of his identity.

"Oh, Tex!" Burroughs called in a subdued voice. "Come here."

Rio strained his ears to hear. Stewart, who had now reholstered his gun, passed out of Rio's line of vision. He could hear the man walk up to the veranda of the cottage.

"What are you doin' here?" Tex demanded.

"Got myself staked out inside," calmly answered Rattler. "Been there for an hour or so. Figger that sooner or later some one of these people'll be driftin' back here. They left in a hurry; there'll be things here the women'll need."

"Had somethin' of the same idea myself," admitted Stewart. "That's why I come."

"No need for it now," hurriedly cut in Burroughs. "I reckon that one of us'll be enough."

Stewart swore with vexation. "That was a bum shot you took at Rio this mornin'," Rattler. Thought

you could hit somethin', or I wouldn't have let you try it."

"Shucks!" muttered Rattler. "The range was longer'n I thought. First time I've missed a shot like that in ten years. Probably it'll never happen again."

"Better not," said Tex. "Where's Windy?"

"Watchin' the road just outta town," lied Burroughs. "You here alone?"

"Nope. Blondy and Harcastle are waitin' for me in the brush."

STRIKES me," cut in Rattler, "that sooner or later Rio'll head for the Box A. He'll look for you, an' that's where he'll likely look first. Don't let me tell you what to do, but, if I was you, I'd go there an' wait for him."

"Uh-huh," grunted Tex. "So far I've made a lotta mistakes. Can't afford to make any more. Us ridin' into town last night, like we done, was a bad one."

"Grandstandin' ain't the smartest thing in the world," said Burroughs. "But if we watch ourselves things'll come out all right. Might not be a bad idea for me to get back out of sight before somebody spots me standin' here. I'll wait inside until after dark. Tex, why don't you high-tail it for the Box A? I got a hunch. Me an' Windy can look after things here in town. The more scattered out we are, the more likely we are to catch somethin'."

Tex Stewart agreed to this, and in a moment Rio saw him hurriedly disappearing in the brush. Rattler came back inside the house, a smirk of satisfaction on his thick lips.

"Pretty smart, the way I handled it," chuckled the outlaw.

"Was at that," acknowledged Windy. "Rattler, mebbe you an' I

are goin' places. Between your brains an' mine——"

"Shut up!" snorted Burroughs. "We're gotta be driftin' out of here."

Rio had resolved to raise no objection to anything the outlaws proposed unless insult or injury was offered to the school-teacher. His play, now, was to gain the confidence of these men. His empty gun was still in its holster, and there were plenty of cartridges in his belt. In some way he must contrive to load the Colt. If he could keep his hands free until darkness came, the thing might be accomplished.

"Hunger's gnawing at me," suddenly said Rio. "Reckon you gents could stand a little nourishment, too. There's plenty of fodder in the Bar 13 kitchen. After we've given Ballard an' his gal a little surprise, we could cook it."

"With the woman to fix it," muttered Windy. He licked his lips. "Not bad."

"Your horse, ma'am?" asked Burroughs of the school-teacher. "Where is it?"

"In the brush," answered Agnes Hornsby. "Saddled and waiting."

Anderson moved around the table, passed behind the school-teacher and walked to the front door, but when he got there he hesitated, and did not open it. "Mebbe we'd better wait a few minutes an' be sure that Stewart's really gone."

"Not a bad idea," agreed Rattler. "Won't do for us to run into him until we've got all the cards in our own hands."

Rio hurriedly passed from one window of the living room to another, having in mind that he might be able to get out into the kitchen, but Burroughs followed him around and there was no chance to slip away. Anderson did nothing to irritate the man, and he gave the

school-teacher, who still stood by the table, no attention whatever.

Twenty minutes passed, and Rattler announced that it was time to go. They slipped out of the house, closed and locked the door behind them, and walked to where the three horses were tethered. Agnes's mount was not far away. Less than five minutes, and they were all mounted.

Rio took command of the situation before there was time for other arrangements to be made. "The woman an' I'll ride ahead an' you two gents can follow right behind. I know the shortest way to the Bar 13 without following the road. If we hurry, we can get there while there's still some light."

"O. K.," said Burroughs. "Shake a leg."

Agnes and Rio Anderson rode stirrup to stirrup. The foreman looked straight ahead. He knew that the movement of the horses' hoofs through the tall grass would probably prevent anything he said from carrying to the men who rode behind: "Don't look at me, Agnes, or give any indication that you hear. I had no intention of delivering you into these men's hands when I brought them to Gila Springs."

"My dear——" gasped the woman. "Of course. Oh, Rio—— Rio——"

CHAPTER VI.

FURTHER SURPRISES.

THE three men and the woman passed out of the little basin in which Gila Springs lay and into the rolling hills that were between the town and the Bar 13.

"Jason and Phœbie," asked Rio, when the opportunity offered. "What's become of them?"

"Still in the desert," answered Agnes. "Jason isn't well. I came in

to get a heart stimulant. That's why I was at Gila Springs. I was just getting ready to go back to them, when you came."

They passed up a little draw. The horses were close together, there being barely room for them to walk abreast.

"Your gun?" began the school-teacher.

"Empty," Rio told her. "I'll make no move to find it till we get to the Bar 13."

"Your plan?" was Agnes Hornsby's next question.

"Can't say."

"Johnny McTish and Pueblo Jim?"

"Reckon they're lookin' for me," replied Rio. "It would be like——"

"Hey, there!" interrupted Rattler Burroughs, from behind. "You folks cut out the chinnin'."

"If I should shout," desperately continued Rio, still looking straight ahead, "it'll mean that the time has come for us to make a break. Shove in the spurs, an' try an' get back to the desert."

"Enough of that!" snorted Rattler. "Gal—you come back here an' ride with us."

The woman dropped back as she'd been told to do, and Rio rode alone. He increased the pace and, just as the sun was sinking, they were on the high ground which lay above the Bar 13. Through a stand of scrub oak the ranch house was in sight below them. Anderson reined in just as they came to the edge of the woods and when they were not far from the ranch yard.

"No smoke from the kitchen chimney," said Rattler. "This would be the time when they oughta be cookin' supper."

"Perhaps we're too late an' they're gone," suggested Rio. "Or maybe

they rode slow, an' haven't got here yet."

Burroughs snorted in disgust. "We'll never find out anything by standin' here."

Anderson disagreed with him. "Better wait till it's dark. Then we can ease down there without the chance of collectin' a slug. I know my way around here."

If those outlaws would only give him another fifteen minutes of freedom it would be dark enough so that he and the school-teacher would stand some chance of escape. Eagerly, his roving eyes searched the ranch yard, but his mind was on something else. In the palm of his hand he held the crumpled note that Tex Stewart had written him. Casually, he moved his horse up beside the school-teacher's and indicated that he wanted to pass her something. In the gathering gloom their hands met. A warm clasp, and the paper had been transferred.

"I'll be there——" said Rio, as though speaking to himself. Then he hurriedly raised his voice: "Rattler, it looks to me as though there was somebody in the barn. Just saw a wisp of smoke come out the door. Looked to me like cigarette smoke."

Burroughs leaned forward in his saddle. "Didn't notice it."

Neither had Rio, for that matter, but he continued to stare at the barn. "Got an idea," he presently said. "Why not have Windy make a little half circle an' come in behind the barn. There's a small door there. If whoever's inside would hear him they'd probably come out the front door. If it should happen to be one of Stewart's men—well, we aren't too far to take a shot at him. There's still enough light."

"Huh," growled Rattler. "It might be that Tex'd put a man here for the same reason that we're here."

"In that case," quickly added Rio, as he pressed his advantage, "it would mean that Jason Ballard and his daughter haven't showed up here yet. Better send Windy down there, before it's too dark to see."

Burroughs hesitated no longer than a dozen seconds. "All right, Windy, leave your horse here an' ease yourself down there."

WATTLES didn't think too much of the idea, but he did as the man of stronger will told him. He dismounted, tied his horse, and disappeared in the fringe of brush and scrub oak. Three or four minutes passed before he was again in sight. Indistinctly they could see him approaching the barn from the rear, gun in hand.

Rio had impatiently waiting for just this moment, and planning for it. A foot at a time he had been moving his horse up toward Rattler's, and now they were nearly together. Less than three feet separated them. No better opportunity might ever come. At least it would afford a desperate chance for Agnes to get away.

Things happened, then, with the speed of thunderbolts. When Windy Wattles was within a few yards of the back of the barn a man rode out through the wide front door. No one there was more astonished than Rio himself. And, to add to his astonishment, the man on the horse was young Johnny McTish!

Rattler cursed. His hand went to his gun butt. Rio followed suit. Anderson's fingers darted to his holster and out came the empty .45. The instant he drew, he yelled at the woman. "Ride!"

He swung the long barrel of the gun in a vicious arc, thinking to bring it crashing down upon the outlaw's head. But Rattler had had a

split-second warning of what was to happen. With remarkable speed the man drew. As he did his horse lunged forward.

Rio's gun barrel missed Rattler's head by an inch. Before he could draw back for another blow, there came the crash of the outlaw's Colt. The explosion was so close that Rio could feel the powder burn his cheek. However, with rare presence of mind he had turned his head. The slug missed him. He raised himself in the stirrups, his arms shot out, and before Burroughs could fire again he had already grappled with him. Nevertheless the outlaw got in a second shot. A futile shot, that struck the ground.

Anderson's long arms closed around Rattler's midsection, and, for a moment, pinioned the fellow's arms to his sides. The horses, now thoroughly frightened, broke away. They went in opposite directions. The two men, clinging to each other, were dragged from their saddles. With arms still locked, they fell to the ground. Vividly Rio was aware of some of the things that were going on around him. He knew that Agnes had followed his instructions. At his spoken word she had kicked her mount in the flanks, wheeled the animal around, and headed back up the slope. From the ranch yard came the staccato bark of guns. Johnny McTish had undoubtedly tangled with Windy Wattles.

No more had Rio and the outlaw struck the ground that the foreman realized that Burroughs was stronger than he. They rolled over and over, each fighting for a hold. In the matter of weight the outlaw had the advantage by sixty pounds, and he knew how to use it. No rough-and-tumble fighter, Anderson sought only to keep Rattler from bringing his gun to bear, and to get away. But

before he could do either there was a blinding flash. For the second time that day Rio felt the world slipping away. Unconsciousness swept over him.

IT was the play of flames against a wall that attracted Rio Anderson's attention. His first thought was that he was in a building, and that the building was on fire. He tried to move, and succeeded in turning from his back to his side. As his mind cleared, things began to take shape and form. The flames were coming from a stove, and not from the walls of a room. He could detect the odor of frying bacon and hear the sizzling of hot grease. The room was in darkness except for such light as came from the stove.

"I'm in the Bar 13 kitchen," thought Rio. "Now how in the world——" For a moment, hope rode high within him. Perhaps his own friends had brought him there. But hope speedily gave way to black despair. Beside the stove was the leering face of Rattler Burroughs. Rattler had turned, and was looking down at him.

"Huh!" grated the outlaw. "So you've decided to come around again. Thick head you've got, my friend. That's twice to-day you've taken it on the skull."

Anderson made no reply. He turned his head, puzzled as to why the kitchen should be in darkness. The door which led into the hallway, which in turn led to the living room, was ajar. Light came through the crack, light which originated in the living room. Yet Rattler Burroughs was doing his cooking in the dark. The thing didn't make much sense.

Rio could move his hands, but not his feet: the latter had been tied. He felt of his face, found the right side to be caked with dried blood. Weak

and giddy, he stretched out upon the floor.

"This must be the beginning of the end," thought Anderson. But in a moment his indomitable spirit was building up within him; he raised himself on one elbow. Rattler was stirring the bacon in the skillet. "Where's Agnes Hornsby?" asked Rio.

"Got away," answered Burroughs. "But when she learns what we're going to do with you, she'll be back. Rio, you're the biggest liar that ever lived, but we're wise to you now. Don't worry about the woman. You'll be bait enough to fetch her. I reckon she loves you."

Rio shivered and changed the subject. "The gent who came out of the barn——"

"Rode away with a slug in him. He won't bother anybody any more."

"What's the idea of havin' the light in the front room, an' none out here?"

"Little trap for Jason Ballard an' his gal," boastfully explained the outlaw. "They ain't come yet, but they'll be along. When they see the light in their house they'll come sneakin' up to investigate. Windy's outside waitin' for 'em. One or the other of us'll always be outside waitin'."

The back door opened, and Windy Wattles thrust his head in. "Better come on out, Rattler. There's somebody sneakin' around the yard. I can hear 'em, but can't see 'em. If it should be Tex Stewart——"

"What difference if it is?" grumbled Burroughs. "We've got Rio, ain't we? That'll please him. No matter what happens, we'll be in the clear."

Nevertheless, Burroughs went outside with his partner. Anderson, gathering his strength, found that if

the occasion should necessitate it he could drag himself along the floor a foot at a time. He felt of the stout rope that had, with many turns, been tied around his ankles. The knot was too tight to be loosened with his fingers. He felt in his pocket for his knife and, with dismay, found that it had been taken from him.

Rattler came back to the kitchen. He said nothing as he stood over the table, wolfing the food that he had prepared.

"Could stand a little of that myself," suggested Rio.

"Sure you could," countered Burroughs, "but you're not going to get it. The weaker you are the better me an' my partner'll like it."

Finished with the meal, Rattler went outside and Windy came in and ate. After ten minutes, Rio was once more alone in the kitchen. He could hear the two men, close by the wall of the lean-to kitchen, talking in monotonous.

"There's somebody around here somewhere," said Windy. "I can feel it. Jason an' his gal wouldn't be so all-fired cautious. They'd come up to the living-room windows to see who's inside. That's what they'd do."

"Rio's horse oughta be comin' back," observed Rattler. "This was its home spread. The darn plug'll naturally come back here. Mebbe that's what we've been hearin'."

But Rio was hearing something else. On the far side of the house he could hear a window being cautiously raised. The sound seemed to be coming from one of the bedrooms. The window squeaked dismally, then there was a period of silence. Rio stiffened. As surely as he was alive he could hear footsteps, footsteps *inside* the house. They were coming nearer. Rattler and Windy were still

outside talking. But they were speaking now in guarded tones, and what they were saying didn't carry, even through the thin walls of the house.

Whoever was in the ranch house was now in the hall. Rio raised himself until he was in sitting position. "Tex Stewart," he thought. "The skunk's finally found——"

The hall door opened. There, with the light behind her and clearly outlining her figure, stood Agnes Hornsby!

CHAPTER VII.

INFERNO.

AGNES!" gasped the foreman. In the dim light Anderson saw that the woman's face was white and troubled, but there was high courage there, and resolution. Despite the tenseness of the situation, he had time to marvel at it. She had come back unarmed, with the odds a hundred to one against her. For a few seconds Agnes stood in the doorway, wisely allowing her eyes to become accustomed to the meager light in the kitchen. A butcher knife lay on the table. She had taken three steps toward it when there was a sound outside.

"Get back," whispered Rio.

Swiftly and noiselessly, the teacher retreated into the hall. Wisely and unhurriedly she closed the door exactly as much as it had been closed when she had opened it. A few seconds, and Rattler Burroughs was back in the kitchen.

Rio beat his heels on the floor and cursed the luck that had dogged him, having in mind that this display of temper would effectively cover the school-teacher's movements.

Rattler crossed the room and kicked him viciously in the ribs. "Wouldn't do too much of that,

fella. The next time I'll give you another taste of gun barrel."

Anderson lay down while the outlaw glowered at him, his boot poised for another blow. But Rio scarcely felt the pain in his side, for he was listening for some sound of Agnes. There was none, so he spoke hurriedly, wildly: "That was a scurvy trick, Rattler, to kick a man when he's down."

"Ah, shut up!" grunted the outlaw. "Don't let me hear another peep outta yuh."

On the opposite side of the ranch house the building creaked.

Burroughs started, and his fingers went to his holster. "What was that?" he muttered.

Rio laughed, feigning amusement. "You're scared of your own shadow, Rattler! Any house as old as this one——"

"Thought I told you to shut up," growled the outlaw.

Anderson lapsed into silence. Enough time had elapsed for Agnes to have slipped out of the house by the same way that she had entered it. Ten minutes passed, and Windy Wattles thrust his bearded face in through the kitchen door. He spoke from that position:

"I'm gettin' tired of this, Rattler. It makes me nervous. More'n likely Ballard ain't goin' to show up. We oughta be hittin' the high spots. Stewart can see that light in the livin' room from his ranch house. It ain't too far across the valley."

Burroughs glanced furtively about him. Much of the confidence he had previously exhibited had now left him. "Huh-huh," he solemnly admitted, "if we wait here long enough we can expect Tex to come. An' there's one chance in ten he may have found out that we lied to him in Gila Springs."

"What I was thinkin'," grunted

Wattles. "Might have been that somebody saw us leave the school-teacher's house. News has a way of travelin'——"

"Wait another half hour," interrupted Rattler, "an' then we'll go."

"What'll we do with Anderson? Ain't nothin' around here for him to ride."

"If his horse don't come back," calmly announced Burroughs, "I'm going to shoot him an' cache his body in the bushes. That's what Tex said to do."

AND so it was Rio heard his death sentence pronounced. If his horse was coming back to the ranch it would have come drifting in long before this. He had thirty minutes to live. Windy closed the kitchen door and again took up his post on the outside. The ranch house was as quiet as a tomb, but in a moment Rattler had taken to striding back and forth within the narrow confines of the kitchen, rolling a cigarette as he walked.

With painful slowness, the minutes dragged. Anderson lay still, tried not to think. If Agnes had gone for help, it would arrive much too late.

Suddenly there was a roar of a Colt from just outside the kitchen door. This was followed by hurried footsteps. The door flew open.

Windy thrust his head in. "The barn's on fire!" he yelled.

"The devil!" grumbled Rattler. "What'd you shoot at?"

"Somebody who was runnin' in the yard. Couldn't see 'em. I shot——"

Rio could make out the crackle of flames and could detect the pungent odor of smoke. He raised himself on his elbow.

"The barn's on fire!" repeated Windy. "Come on!"

Instinctively Rattler Burroughs followed his partner out the door.

Anderson sat up and began to jerk himself across the floor and toward the rear door of the kitchen. The hitch rack was close to the barn, and there was a chance that the outlaws had tied their horses to it. If they had, they would, of course, have to move them. Anderson realized that, in the resulting confusion, he might be left to his own devices for a minute or more. Frantically he struggled. If he could once get outside and roll himself away in the darkness— Then he realized that the ranch yard would be illuminated by the burning barn.

Two more hitches across the floor and the kitchen was flooded with light. The hall door had opened. Agnes Hornsby came running in. She carried guns in both hands. Rio reached out. She handed him one of them. With her free hand she grabbed the butcher knife from the table and began cutting at the rope that bound his ankles.

Anderson sat facing the door. He drew back the hammer of the Colt. An instant, and the last rope had been severed. He staggered to his feet, then fell over from sheer weakness and exhaustion.

"Steady," breathed Agnes. "You can make it."

And Rio did. Gritting his teeth, he was once more on his feet and, this time, he stayed there. He started toward the kitchen door but the school-teacher stopped him.

"The other way, Rio. The bedroom window. The way I——"

Just as they turned they heard running footsteps on the outside. Anderson gently shoved the school-teacher ahead of him. She entered the hallway first, Rio a step behind. He swung the door to, was just closing it when Rattler came storming into the kitchen. Instantly, there came the bark of his six-gun. A slug

tore a jagged hole in the wood not an inch from Anderson's hand. Slivers stung his fingers. Nevertheless, he took time to turn the key in the lock. Then, sending a slug crashing through the thin door panel as he sprang away from it, he passed on down the hall.

Agnes Hornsby disappeared through the open door of a bedroom, the foreman at her heels. Rio slammed the door shut behind him, and, as he did, noticed that flickering light was coming through the window, light reflected from the burning barn. They crossed the room and were conscious of the repeated blasting of the outlaw's gun in the kitchen.

With a light spring the school-teacher was out through the open window and on the ground. Rio more nearly fell than jumped. He sprawled out on the loose gravel; rose to his feet largely as a result of the woman's assistance.

"Run, Rio, run!" she gasped. "Follow me!"

AGNES headed directly away from the ranch house and toward the fringe of brush and young poplars that surrounded the yard. The house was between them and the blazing barn, and, in a measure covered their flight. Twenty faltering steps and Rio knew that their manner of escape had been discovered. A glance over his shoulder told him that Rattler had come from the kitchen and that Windy Wattles was running up from the barn. Rattler began reloading. With every passing second the scene was becoming brighter as the licking flames mounted higher and higher.

"Faster. Faster," urged the woman. "Oh, my dear——"

As they reached the brush, slugs

beat around them. Both outlaws were firing now, and running toward the fugitives as they fired. Desperately, Rio began looking for some obstruction behind which they could make a stand. Then astonishment smote him, for directly ahead were two saddled horses, their reins loosely tied to the low branches of a mesquite. His own mount, and Agnes Hornsby's.

Anderson clutched at that horse of his like a drowning man clutching at a plank. With a Herculean effort, he pulled himself into the saddle. Confidence came with the feel of the bay between his legs, and a measure of strength surged through him. Agnes was already in the saddle.

Even above the crackle of the flames came howls of rage from the outlaws. As Rio turned his horse he took one last shot at them. Then he gave his attention entirely to escape. He allowed the school-teacher to lead, so that he might ride between her and the revolver fire that continued to come from the ranch yard. They headed directly up toward the low hills that flanked the Bar 13 headquarters on the east. Ten rods and they were among the stand of poplars, and out of sight. The bark of six-guns behind them ceased. Anderson reloaded and shoved his gun in its holster.

They passed from the screen of the trees and topped a slight rise which was just ahead. Rio turned in the saddle and saw that Rattler and Windy had abandoned the chase on foot, and were now streaking for their horses. The weather-beaten barn was a roaring inferno, with a great column of flames mounting high above it, eerily illuminating the countryside for miles around.

"The bitter with the sweet," thought Anderson. "It it hadn't been for the fire, I'd never have

gotten out of the house. As a result of the fire, we may get caught."

As they passed over the rise Rio rode up beside the school-teacher and relieved her of the leadership. His own intimate knowledge of those hills would stand them in good stead; might well be the difference between success and failure. He increased the pace, turned to his right, followed a shallow draw that would keep them out of sight from the ranch yard. They left the draw between two low hills and again headed east.

Steadily they climbed to the higher ground. Constantly Rio watched the trail behind for some sign of the outlaws, but not once did he catch a glimpse of them. The hills ahead were still bathed in the light of the fire.

"Those two rat-faced gents seem to have missed out," concluded Anderson. "Too many ways for us to have gone; they must have picked the wrong one."

Rio and the school-teacher rode in behind a hill that overlooked the valley. They reversed direction, rode up the hills, and, when nearly to the top, dismounted and left their horses. They walked on to the crest, peered cautiously over the top.

"I've been worried sick over the ranch house," murmured Agnes. "If it was to catch fire—"

"The breeze is carrying the sparks the other way," said Rio. He slipped his arm through hers, looked into her face, faintly illuminated by the distant glow. "Agnes, I can't find the words that fit in with my gratitude and admiration—"

IT was nothing that you wouldn't have done for me," she interrupted gently. "When you grappled with Rattler I rode, as you told me to do. When I found you weren't with me, I went back. I

watched and saw them take you into the house. Then I waited for an opportunity. Luckily I caught up your horse. When I got into the house I realized that I must get both those men out of the house at the same time. The only thing I could think of was to set fire to the barn."

"Wonderful," whispered Rio. "That priceless head of yours. I'm wondering about the six-guns that we have."

"They belonged to Jason Ballard's brother, who died a year ago, and were among his effects. I saw them one day when I was visiting Phœbie. They were in a bureau drawer in her father's room. Luckily, they were still there to-night."

"Miraculous," breathed Anderson. Then he stiffened. "Rattler said that Johnny McTish rode away with a slug in him. That he didn't get very far, and would never be of any use to any one again. I wish I knew."

"I saw nothing of him," answered Agnes. "When I came back to the ranch yard he was gone."

Sorrowfully, the foreman shook his head. "Good boy, Johnny. He did the best he could. When I turned up missing he went there in the hope that I would come. It was the logical thing for him to do."

Suddenly the school-teacher started, and pointed toward the west. "Look, Rio."

Anderson looked. On a hill below them a horseman rode, silhouetted against the dull glow of the fire.

"Windy Wattles," murmured Rio. "He an' his partner are persistent gents. They're on the prowl. Still lookin' for us, with almost no chance at all." Rio led the school-teacher back to the horses. "If Jason Ballard needed your help to-day, he needs it more to-night. We're riding to the desert as quickly as we can."

"You need stimulant as badly as

he ever will," objected the school-teacher. She took a small flask of whisky from her saddlebag and made Rio down three generous swallows.

Shortly they remounted and continued riding the draws that ran parallel through the hills. The light from the fire steadily diminished; presently they rode through darkness, with little more than the stars above to guide them. Rio gave Gila Springs wide berth to his left and headed directly for the desert. When he reached the edge of it he turned north and retraced the route that they had taken twenty-four hours before.

Midnight and Anderson was picking his way among the lava flows, cautiously approaching the water hole where he had left Jason Ballard and Jason's daughter. He and the school-teacher passed down a narrow defile and were on the border of the little basin in which the water hole lay. They dismounted, stood there listening, could hear nothing. They walked on.

Three minutes and Rio and the school-teacher knew the ghastly truth. Neither Jason Ballard nor Phœbie Ballard was there!

CHAPTER VIII.

SHOW-DOWN.

WEARY in body and soul, Rio Anderson unsaddled his and Agnes Hornsby's mounts and turned them loose near the water hole. Then he and the woman again searched the basin for some indication as to what had become of the rancher and the young girl. Rio struck numerous matches, but the missing people had left nothing behind them.

Anderson and Agnes sat down on the fringe of grass that grew beside

the pool and ate sparingly of the scant supply of food that still remained in their saddlebags. Finished with that, the woman dressed the foreman's wounds, working as best she could in the darkness.

"One thing's sure," said Anderson, as they again sat down. "Ballard and his daughter didn't leave here on foot. Their horses are gone."

"Perhaps they grew impatient," suggested Agnes, but her tone carried no conviction. "They were here alone and may have become frightened."

"Nope," sighed Rio. "Ballard wasn't the kind to be frightened, not even when he was sick and desperate. He knew that his only chance was to remain right here. The most likely thing is that some one connected with Tex Stewart tracked them down."

Silence for a long minute. Anderson sat with his chin resting in his hands. "There remains but one thing for me to do. If Ballard and his daughter have fallen into Tex Stewart's hands, I must find Tex Stewart. There's more reason for it now than ever, and there's need for haste. In the ordinary course of events Jason and his girl should survive a few days, at least until Tex has got some kind of a legal strangle hold on the Bar 13. He'll work through a dummy. His name will never appear at all."

Agnes Hornsby's hand rested on the foreman's shoulder. "You'll seek him on the Box A?"

"No. There's a better way than that. A surer way. You read the note I gave you? The one that Stewart pinned to Hunk Prather's trousers leg?"

"Yes," she answered, "I read it with the aid of matches. He wants to meet you in the nester's shack beneath Bald Butte. It's nothing

but a trap, Rio. The man hasn't an honest bone in his body, never has had. He holds out the bait to you that you may get the Box A back."

"At the moment," countered Anderson, "I'm not concerned with the Box A. Life is at stake, the lives of my friends. Of course, the meeting is a trap. I'll spring that trap."

"Stewart will not be alone," she reminded him. "It wouldn't be like him to be alone. McTish is gone, and goodness knows what's happened to Pueblo Jim. Rio, you can't do it."

Anderson stretched himself out upon the grass. "Some sleep now. I'll be off by sunrise. That'll give me enough time to be at Bald Butte an hour before noon. Good-night, my dear."

He went to sleep with the touch of Agnes Hornsby's fingers on his forehead.

WHEN Rio awakened, the pink of dawn was in the eastern sky. He got up and washed himself in the tepid water of the pool. "The crisis of my life," thought Anderson. "I'll be riding down upon it." He looked down at the woman, who still lay peacefully sleeping in the grass. "All I've ever brought her is trouble. But one way or the other, it'll soon be over."

Premonition, thoughts as dark as thunderheads, tormented him. He brushed the foreboding aside and busied himself by using the last of the provisions to prepare a meager breakfast.

Shortly the woman aroused herself and joined him by the water. "A new day," said Agnes. "A new day—and hope. Look, Rio—the sun."

They finished the meal; saddled the horses, and rode from the water hole. Rio had rigged an extra holster for himself and now carried both

the .45s which Agnes had obtained in the Bar 13 ranch house. The woman had no means of defense other than a hunting knife which she carried in a scabbard fastened to her belt.

Side by side they rode across the shifting sands, heading straight for the hills that lay beyond.

"Seem to have the desert to ourselves," said Rio. His eyes swept the horizon. The few hours of sleep had done wonders for him; his battered head no longer ached; he sat his saddle with renewed ease and confidence. The woman, too, was bright and cheerful, but underneath and very near the surface was stark dread and terror. The way of death lay right ahead, and well both of them knew and understood it. Yet they talked gayly enough; planned for the future; spoke lightly of pleasant happenings of the past.

As they moved from the desert into the hills their mood changed. All seriousness now, Rio took the lead and gave attention to the path that they must follow. Several times he left it altogether and detoured skillfully around scenes of potential ambush. The way was long, rough and rugged. At eleven o'clock Rio and Agnes sat their horses and looked over the crest of a low ridge.

Below them was the wash that they had been seeking, and at the head of the wash, and at no great distance, was Bald Butte. It was not really a butte at all but a great, square rock that stood there half buried in the head of the wash. The outer face was slick and perpendicular and as high as a six-story building.

On either side of the butte lay masses of boulders which had tumbled from it in bygone ages; at the base of the huge rock, and some two hundred feet from it, was the tum-

ble-down shack that the nester had deserted some three years before. Immediately below the shack was the rectangular field that the would-be farmer had cleared for his corn. The wash extended for a good mile, the sides sparsely covered with brush, and the bottom likewise covered except for those places where freshets had washed the undergrowth away.

"Not a soul in sight," mumbled Rio, as he swung down off his horse. "As I expected."

The school-teacher dismounted, and stood beside him as he looked through the brush at the scene below. Anderson glanced up at the sun and made sure that it had not yet crossed the meridian. Eagerly their eyes darted from one end of the wash to the other, but they could detect no movement of any kind, or, an indication that there was any one within a mile of them.

Thirty minutes passed, and Rio pointed across at the opposite bank of the wash, which was nearly a quarter of a mile away. "Look, a man on horseback. He's coming cautiously, avoiding the brush and staying in the open. Tex Stewart—if I ever saw the gent."

"Tex Stewart——" repeated Agnes Hornsby.

They stood back and watched the man. Stewart rode down the gentle slope to the bottom of the wash, where he turned his horse to the left and headed for the nester's cabin. Constantly Tex looked around and behind him, with his right hand resting on his gun.

"He's alone," said Agnes.

"Rides alone," corrected Rio. "He may have made previous arrangements."

"If Rattler and Windy Wattles have fallen out with him——"

"No use whistling up the wind,"

said Anderson. "When Rattler and Windy failed with me, they went back and joined Tex. He has the services of four men to count on, these two and in addition a bird named Blondy and a long-legged fellow going by the name of Hardcastle. Stewart isn't riding with these men, but they're around here somewhere. All he's trying to do is to make it appear that he's alone."

WHEN Stewart reached the abandoned corn field he crossed it at a brisk trot, rode up beside the shack, dismounted, and then stood in the doorway of the tumble-down building. He leaned against the door jamb, and looked down the wash. Presently smoke came from his lips; he had rolled and lighted a cigarette.

"Stage is set," muttered Rio. He's waiting for me. It's time that I was going. Agnes you wait here for me. I'll be back."

The foreman looked hastily at the woman who stood beside him. Tears were in her Agnes Hornsby's hazel eyes, but she bravely brushed them away. Then she smiled.

"Good luck, Rio."

Their hands met; then Anderson walked through the brush, over the top of the ridge, and down into the wash. If Tex Stuart had been fearful of an ambush, Rio Anderson had twice the reason to fear one. He moved cautiously, yet swiftly. Five minutes, and he stepped out of the brush and was in the abandoned corn field. He walked on for an additional two hundred feet, then he stopped and stood there facing the nester's deserted cotage.

Tex Stewart had straightened up at the sight of him. Stewart tossed away his cigarette, stepped out of the doorway, and advanced fifty feet. Here he stopped. Three hundred

and fifty feet now separated the two men.

Rio's shifting eyes took in the situation, although he never moved his head. Brush and boulders were both to his right and left, on either side of the cleared ground, but at a considerable distance away. There were plenty of places for concealment. There was also the shack. Men might have entered it during the night; they might still be there.

No sooner had Stewart stopped moving than he raised his hand in greeting. He spoke then, and his voice carried almost as distinctly as though he had been on the opposite side of a room, instead of three hundred and fifty feet away.

"I come in peace," said Tex, "to right a wrong that I once did! Rio, you've got nothin' to fear from me! You an' I can make a deal that'll do both of us some good!"

"Never expected to hear words like those," thought Anderson. "What's got into the guy?" Aloud he yelled: "Well! What is it? What is it you've got in mind?"

"Come closer!" called Stewart. "We'll each advance another fifty feet!"

"O. K. by me!" growled Rio.

Each of them covered the stipulated distance; again they halted.

"Rio," began Tex, "it oughta be pretty evident to you that I can't personally operate the Box A while the law's after me. What I propose to do is this: I'll deed it back to you, an' you'll own it lock, stock an' steer. In exchange for that, I'll want one fifth of the profits."

Rio could feel his heart thumping beneath his ribs. For ten years he had dreamed that something like this would one day happen. Nevertheless, he shook his head. "Got something else on my mind right now,

Tex. What's happened to Ballard and Ballard's daughter?"

Stewart did not immediately answer; apparently he was groping for words. "Can't say, Rio. But when you own the Box A they'll be friends of mine. They're already friends of yours, which means that there'll be no trouble over the water on the Bar 13."

Anderson could feel his anger mounting. Despite the distance that separated them it was all he could do to keep from drawing. Here stood the man who was responsible for all his trouble. To shoot it out, that seemed the only way.

Reason came. That distance between them must be shortened. "How do I know you'll deed me the ranch?" he asked.

Stewart laughed. "Easy enough. I got two pieces of paper in my pocket. One's a deed to the Box A. The other's a signed statement that ten years ago I cheated you in that game of cards. It was a phony deck I slipped into the game. You didn't stand a chance." He laughed again. "You were easy in those days, Rio!"

"I'm not interested in what you've got in your pocket," countered Anderson. "It would have to be in *mine* to mean a thing."

"Just what I was comin' to!" advised Tex. "I'm gettin' out those two pieces of paper. You stay where you are, an' I'm bringin' 'em half the distance to you. I'll put the papers on the ground, an' then back up to where I'm now standin'. After I've done that, you walk up and get them. We can't trust each other too far, not right yet. But when you've read what's written there in my own handwritin'—"

"Come ahead!" interrupted Rio. His thumbs were notched in his belt, above his guns.

STEWART promptly started moving. He did exactly as he had said he would. He advanced the hundred feet, laid the papers on the ground, weighted them down with a stone. Then he backed to the point where he had previously been standing.

"Elaborate plans for my undoing," thought Anderson. "There's a meaning in everything he does. But when I get to where those papers are, I'll do no backing up."

Glancing anxiously around him, he walked slowly toward Stewart. When he came to the papers, he hurriedly stooped and picked them up. Now came the problem of doing two things at once, of reading and watching Stewart all at the same time. The thing was nearly impossible, yet he did his best to accomplish it. By shaking the documents with one hand he unfolded them. Then he held them up, nearly level with his eyes and straight ahead of him. His glance shifted constantly, like the movement of a swiftly swinging pendulum.

Rio had expected to find nothing whatever on the pieces of paper. In this he was mistaken. There was writing there, Stewart's writing. The first document was a statement addressed to all whom it might concern, attesting the fact that Stewart had once cheated Rio Anderson out of his ranch at a game of cards. As the foreman read that startling statement he knew that his attention was wandering, that he was giving more attention to the document than he was to Stewart.

Anderson looked at the second paper. To his even greater astonishment, it actually was a deed to the Box A. "For valuable considerations," read the document, "certain ranch property known as the Box A is hereby deeded—"

In the split second that followed the reading of that last word, Rio realized that Tex Stewart had accomplished his purpose. He had completely distracted his attention. Dimly Anderson was aware of two things simultaneously. That Stewart had gone for his gun! And that, off in the distance, a woman was screaming! Agnes Hornsby—

Rio Anderson took Stewart's slug in the leg. But already the foreman was in action. The papers fluttered from his fingers. Simultaneously he drew both guns. As they came from leather he dropped. Before he'd hit the ground the twin Colts roared.

Over and over Rio rolled. He found concealment between two, foot-high ridges where the nester's corn had grown. Again he thumbed the hammers of his six-guns. A slug threw dirt into his face. The tiny pebbles stung as though they had been bumblebees.

Tex Stewart, raging because his first shot had failed to find a fatal spot, was likewise on the ground, partially hidden by a corn row. Vainly the two men tried to bring their guns to bear upon each other.

Anderson jerked up and fired. Then he saw something that filled him first with horror, then with hope. He and Stewart were not alone! Men were running from all sides of the clearing, and from the shack which was at the head of it. Rattler Burroughs, Windy Wattles, a tall blond fellow, and a man whom he knew as Harcastle. Tex Stewart's men, all four of them. But Rio was not without help. He saw young Johnny McTish, wild-eyed, gun blazing, his left arm hanging limp, come bounding from the brush. Pueblo Jim was beside him. Not far away was the aged Jason Ballard, tottering like a drunken man yet with his gun up

and flaming. And there were the two women, Phœbie Ballard and Agnes. One of the women had a knife held high above her, the other a cudgel.

Something that nearly choked him swelled in Rio's throat. He sprang up and raced with long strides toward where Tex Stewart lay. Tex saw him coming and bounded up. They met there, fired together. Two slugs left the muzzles of two guns. One of them found its mark. Stewart straightened as though a ramrod had been shoved down his spine. He teetered, fell. A red spot formed between his eyes.

RIO turned on Rattler Burroughs, who was the nearest to him. The scene became one of the wildest confusion. It was a battle of extermination. No quarter was asked or expected, and none was given. Guns were emptied, reloaded. Certain scenes were to stand out in Anderson's mind forever. One was the picture of Jason Ballard heroically standing his ground while Windy Wattles rushed upon him. But Wattles never lived to cover even that short distance. Then there was Pueblo Jim, in hand-to-hand conflict with the young man called "Blondy." The older man won the final round. Agnes Hornsby and the seemingly fragile Phœbie Ballard, fighting like demons, finishing off Harcastle between them. Rio himself accounted for Rattler Burroughs. One well-placed slug—

Something like silence had come to the clearing. Rio found himself holding the two pieces of soiled paper that Stewart had given him, and looked wonderingly at them. Hurriedly, he thrust the now dusty and crumpled papers into his pocket and thought only of his friends. Not a one of them was without his or her

hurt. There was work to do, wounds to be cared for.

"Thought you'd be here," gasped Johnny McTish, clutching his blood-soaked arm. "I was afraid to leave Phœbie an' her paw in the desert any longer for fear that they'd be found. I brought them away last night. We were waiting here for you to show."

Pueblo Jim, desperately wounded, grated his teeth. "That was my idea, too——" He dropped to the ground from sheer exhaustion, finding a place beside the weak and trembling Jason Ballard.

The two women clung together, crying upon one another's shoulders.

Rio's eyes were dim. "Words are weak sort of things," he began, "an' they never did come easy for me. But somehow I want to thank you——"

"No need, my friend," said Jason Ballard. "We understand."

Four days later Rio and Agnes stood alone on the veranda of the Bar 13. Through the starlit night they looked across the valley toward the Box A.

"To-morrow," said Rio, "I'm going home. For the first time in ten years, I'm going home."

The woman moved closer to him. "It's been a long trail and a hard one."

"And the day after I go home," continued Anderson, "there's going to be a double wedding. Johnny McTish and Phœbie Ballard. And Rio Anderson and Agnes Hornsby. A long time we've waited, Agnes. Ten long years——"

"My dear—dear——" breathed Agnes. She raised her lips.

And never was Rio Anderson to forget the look of ecstasy that was upon her face that night.

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FISHERMEN OBJECT

SIXTEEN thousand hunters bagged but three thousand bucks in Colorado during the 1936 fall hunting season. The rest of the hunters spent the time fishing. Now the fish and game commission want to curtail a month of the fishing season in order to preserve the German brown trout which spawn at that time. But the fishermen do not agree. They say the German browns are well able to take care of themselves. For proof of this, they say, notice how the rainbow trout disappear as soon as a few German browns show up in a stream. German browns are all right, say the intrepid fishermen, when there are no rainbow to angle for, but it is the latter which should be protected. They are willing to shorten the fishing season of rainbow-trout fishing, if necessary, for the good of all. Since each fisherman pays five dollars for a license, it is important to the State that things are arranged to keep everybody happy. The game commission find it a delicate job to protect the fish and the State pocketbook at the same time.

Only two fishermen out of one hundred and fifty were amenable to closing the fishing season a month in advance of the usual time allotted.



CLEAN=UP

By GUTHRIE BROWN

Author of "Wild Oats For Two," etc.

SHERIFF AINSLEY of Lead County pulled up his horse and sat a moment, scowling at the reward poster on the telephone pole. It was the last one he would see for some time, probably, for he was on the edge of the Caranoga Hills, an eighty-mile stretch of canyon and ridge and rim that averaged less than one ranch house to every hundred square miles—as wild and rough a country as he had ever seen.

The sheriff's sandy brows were in strong contrast to his mahogany complexion and dark hazel eyes. The reward poster which was claiming his attention pictured a strik-

ingly handsome head. It was an unusually good likeness of a face which Ainsley well remembered. He had seen it only once, five years ago, before its owner became a known and hunted outlaw. The sheriff spoke aloud, his tone grim.

"Why did you go to killing? Five years you been raising the devil all over the place, giving the law a headache and lifting everybody's taxes. And not once was there blood on your hands. No, and not once did you tackle a dinky little country store. You went out for the tough jobs, with plenty of risk and lots of dough. And how you put 'em over!

"Well, I'm out to clean up, this

trip, Copperhead. I think I had that Horse Creek gang of rustlers just about ready to corral, but when I was handed this tip, I figured that they could wait until I got you. Why *did* you go to killing?"

The sheriff rode on into the hills, pondering that question. "Copperhead" couldn't have needed money. Why had he robbed and killed a defenseless old storekeeper? There was no doubt about the culprit. He'd left that inevitable calling card of his which was always to be found at the scene of his robberies—a bright new dime, covered with wax and bearing the imprint of a tiny swastika. This time it had been laid on the breast of the dead storekeeper.

"You needn't've done that," Ainsley muttered to himself. "That was—cheap."

For two days the officer bored into the hills, following the directions of the man who had tipped him off as to the whereabouts of Copperhead's hide-out. Ainsley's mouth twisted with distaste as he thought of his informant, a rat if ever there was one. But Quirk's information tallied more or less with a few other things Ainsley knew, so he had acted upon it.

The second night found him in the upper line of the Caranoga Hills. There was good grass here. The sheriff hobbled his horse and turned it loose to graze while he ate frugally from his food pack. So far, everything had worked smoothly. The trail was just as it had been described to him by the informer, Quirk. Above him, on the side of the gorge where he was camped, rose a great line of rim rock. Farther along, somewhere under its base, was the well-guarded cave which, according to Quirk, had long been the retreat of Copperhead.

The next morning the climb up to the base of the rim, even at the angle from which the sheriff approached, was an arduous one. The canyon side was overgrown with heavy brush, higher than a man on a horse; and the lawman discovered that the best way to make progress was to get off and lead his animal.

Presently the brush thinned, and huge boulders took its place, massed among the great slides of detritus that skirted the rim's base. The sheriff tied his horse and went forward afoot, keeping to cover as much as possible and moving with the silence of a panther on the prowl. He thought it likely that Copperhead would not be on guard at this time in the morning, but he was taking no chances.

Then, between two shafts of granite, he came upon a well-beaten trail. This, too, was as Quirk had said it would be. The trail, Ainsley satisfied himself, led to a spring, a tiny trickle well hidden among the rocks. A neat little well two feet deep had been walled with stones and was full of cold, crystal water.

During this investigation, the sheriff had not set foot on the trail. Still keeping to the rocks, he began tracing the path in the other direction. The canyon was utterly still under the hot morning light. A rolling pebble would have had the effect of a pistol shot.

The last rod of the climb was steep. And steeper still must be the trail beyond, by which, if Quirk's story was true, Copperhead visited and left his retreat. The informer had told Ainsley that there was a break in the rim, a mile or so farther up the canyon, which could not be seen either from above or below. By that route the outlaw gained access to his cave.

THE sheriff had now reached a point where he could make out the low roof of the narrow-mouthed cave. A few more steps and he could see a slightly hollowed bit of ground in front of it. Across this, opposite the cave mouth, rose a little ridge of dirt and stones, forming a natural breastwork for the protection of the cave. It looked, thought Ainsley, as if nature herself had tried to form a perfect criminal hide-out. The ridge made an ideal sentinel post and a protection for retreat to the cave.

Ainsley had been moving at a crouch, gun cocked. As he heard and saw no sign of life, he straightened slowly, his intent gaze sweeping from the cave to the opposite side of the hollow. Over there he could see the beginning of the trail he had been thinking about. Still not a sound or movement anywhere.

He stepped forward, lightly, noiselessly, watching the cave mouth, but darting glances about in other directions for some sign. Suddenly the sheriff stiffened in sheer surprise.

At his extreme right, close to the top of the little ridge and at right angles to it, was stretched the figure of a tall and powerful man. He was lying on his face, motionless as the stones themselves. At first the startled sheriff, sure that those broad shoulders could belong to but one man, thought he was dead. But the next moment the man moved, pressing closer to his side a rifle stock. His attention appeared to be riveted upon a narrow cleft in the rocks before him, and the morning sun glistened on the coppery sheen of his thick, close-cropped hair. His hat lay on the ground beside him.

"This," thought the sheriff of Lead County, "is too blamed easy." He spoke.

"Drop that gun and turn around."

The figure of Copperhead jerked slightly, then lay rigid a moment. Slowly he looked over his shoulder, not moving the rest of his body. That wild face, thought Ainsley, was more handsome than ever.

Across it came a look of blank astonishment. "You!" said Copperhead, between his teeth. His glance flashed back to the crack in the rocks. "Get down!" he ordered. "Get down, you crazy fool, or they'll blow your head off!"

So fiercely sincere was the command that the sheriff involuntarily ducked. And not a second too soon. A bullet spread itself over the stone face behind him. He dropped to his heels in astonishment.

The gaze of Copperhead was once more glued to the crack. He asked in a low voice, "You got a rifle?"

"No."

"Look in the cave, right side, high shelf," were the next words of the outlaw. "Shells in a box. For Pete's sake, don't waste any!"

Ainsley had recovered from his bewilderment. "What's up?"

Copperhead wriggled to one side. "Take a look," he invited. "Oh, I'm not planning to get you!" he added, as Ainsley hesitated. "We're in the same boat."

Ainsley crawled across to lie beside the other and look through the crack. As he settled himself he saw a heavy gold ring on the hand of the outlaw. For signet, it bore a clearly marked swastika.

The sheriff turned his attention to the crack. Among the gigantic rocks and scrub trees that littered the mountainside below, he glimpsed several men. They were keeping to cover as much as possible, but they were working their way steadily upward. Their purpose was apparent.

They were closing in on the cave. Rifles were in their hands and revolvers swung at their hips.

The sheriff watched them intently for several seconds, then started and smothered an oath.

There was grim amusement in the handsome face of Copperhead. "The Horse Creek gang, with Snipe Hurst leading the procession."

A moment longer Ainsley saw the black hat and heavy shoulders of the chief of the cattle thieves. He turned to Copperhead.

"They're after you?"

The face of the outlaw still wore its hard little smile. "Sheriff, I've a powerful hunch that they're after both of us."

"But, how would they know that I——" The sheriff paused. "Why, last I heard of that outfit, three days ago, they were heading north."

"That"—Copperhead was once more at the crack—"is what you were likely led to believe. But I'll bet my neck that this crowd has been stalking you. The thing's too pat for any other guess. They saw a chance to get us together, and they're playing it."

"What've they got against you?" Ainsley asked.

"I queered their game once, when they were all set to lift some pure-bred cows from a poor devil of a nester."

"Shipton!" said Ainsley. "So it was you saved his stock! He claimed that there were at least four men. Why did you do it?" Ainsley asked curiously.

"Oh, he'd slaved and starved to build up that herd. Sa-ay, what the devil! We got a job to do. Get that rifle!"

The sheriff got it, from a well-stocked and very neatly arranged cave. When he was back once more beside the outlaw, he asked:

"How come you're so shy on ammunition?"

"Careless," was the short answer. "Had to take a dive when I wasn't expecting it."

FOR ten minutes there had not been a man in sight below them. The sheriff was lying a few feet from the other, behind a bush at the top of the ridge. This did not give so good a view as the cleft in the rocks, but it covered one line of the enemy's approach.

"How many do you make them?" Ainsley asked.

"Eight," was the answer, "is all I saw. There's another one. Maybe he's not in on the party."

There was a pause, then Copperhead asked a question. He spoke without relaxing his watch.

"How come you to be here?"

Ainsley answered, "I sorta put two and two together, eliminated a few guesses, and added on some facts I had."

"And aimed for this place, straight as a homing pigeon." The outlaw's tone was mildly sarcastic. "Don't lie. You and I've been playing hide and seek for five years, a game of life and death that didn't leave any room for pussyfooting. Who turned me in?"

Ainsley didn't answer, and the other went on: "I've always played a lone hand. I'm danged if I know who——" He stopped suddenly, and swore under his breath. "That track I found in the gorge a week ago!" His glance shot to Ainsley. "A dried-up little weasel that walks lame!" His gaze bored into the sheriff's half-averted face. "Did you know he was a member of the Horse Creek gang?"

Ainsley's head jerked around.

Copperhead grinned. "Man, oh man, did you swallow the bait!"

That rat of a Hichens hates me because I put a bullet in his hip the night at Shipton's. He's the best tracker Snipe Hurst has got. Fairly plain, isn't it? Snipe wants you, and Hichens wants me. Also, you want me. So Snipe has Hichens track me down— Now, how the devil," Copperhead broke off to wonder, "did he manage that?"

"And," Sheriff Ainsley completed thoughtfully, "Hichens, or Quirk as he called himself to me, finds your hide-out and comes to me with the information. I lay off the Horse Creek gang, which I've just about got cornered, long enough to gather you in, and—well, I'll put in with you. I've been a sucker."

"Quirk is Hichens's first name," the outlaw explained. "I only hope," he added between his teeth, "that the little varmint is with the outfit to-day!"

Ainsley wanted to ask a question, but he couldn't think just how to word it. Why had the man who'd protected Shipton murdered a helpless old storekeeper?

The answer to that inquiry had to wait.

The sheriff caught movement off to his left. He glued his gaze to the spot and was finally rewarded with a glimpse of a shoulder. He took careful aim, and heard his companion's sharp command:

"Don't shoot! Let them get on top of us, so we can use our six-shooters for most of it. We'll need our rifle shells to pick 'em off when they run. Keep your eye on that trail from the spring. I've got the other blocked off." The sheriff followed this suggestion as he said, "You're sure they're going to run?"

Copperhead snorted. "That crew!"

But the outlaw hadn't made allowance for the driving power of

hate, hatred of Quirk Hichens for himself, and of "Snipe" Hurst for the sheriff.

Presently the sheriff asked, "How did you know when I first stepped in here that I wasn't using this outfit to help get you?"

Copperhead answered simply, "Never thought of it. You couldn't play the game that way."

Ainsley was silenced, but the other question still nagged at his mind. How could this be the same man who had murdered—

The tense stillness of the mountain morning was broken by the voice of Copperhead, clear as a bell.

"One inch more, and I'll blow your head off!"

There was an instant fusillade from below. The outlaw did not respond, waiting for a sure shot.

AINSLEY, startled at the voice, had turned his head for an instant. Then his glance leaped back to the trail that led from the spring. He saw Quirk Hichens limp into sight. Instantly the rustler's gun was spitting. The man's hatred had driven him past caution. Copperhead jerked as a bullet struck him in the leg, but his eyes never moved from his rifle sights. The sheriff dropped Hichens as a shriek split the air. From the corner of his eye he saw a head and upflung arms waver on top of the ridge, then fall from sight on the other side. The empty shells of the two defenders were ejected from their guns simultaneously, and Copperhead muttered:

"Not enough play for my rifle. I thought we could hold 'em here. We got to get into the cave. They won't attack there in daylight, unless they're plumb idiots. I'll cover you while you make a run for it."

Realizing the wisdom of this deci-

sion, Ainsley dashed for the cave mouth, then whirled to cover Copperhead's retreat. To his astonishment, the outlaw ran toward the trail to the spring. He caught up the inert body of Hichens in his powerful arms and sprinted for the cave.

A bullet from the ridge winged him. He staggered inside as Ainsley drilled the shooter through the head. The sheriff said sharply: "What the devil——" and left the question unfinished.

He saw that Copperhead had not dragged Hichens inside for sentimental reasons. He wanted the dead man's gun and ammunition. Ainsley, covering the ridge with his rifle sights, thought: "That red-headed devil can think circles around me. No wonder we've never been able to nail him."

Copperhead had tipped up Hichens's holster in jerking the belt from the body. Something that had been in the tip of the leather case spilled to the ground. Two small objects rolled on the floor of the cave.

Ainsley heard his puzzled exclamation, and backed farther in to see what he was looking at. In Copperhead's hand was a lump of wax and a little square piece of iron. On one face of it was the stamp of a small swastika.

The outlaw studied it a moment, bright head bent, a perplexed frown on his brow. He seemed unaware of the blood flowing from his wounded arm and leg. Suddenly his face became contorted.

"So that's the reason I've been hunted for the murder of that storekeeper! This rat did it, and left my sign behind him, then trailed me when I lit out. He must've known where I was——"

The glance of the outlaw flung around to the sheriff, but what he

saw there stopped him. The eyes of Ainsley had lighted. He laughed softly.

"I should've known you didn't do it! You wouldn't——"

A shadow fell across the narrow entrance. The two were caught off guard. Men were pouring in upon them.

A bullet tore at Ainsley's arm. He and Copperhead had revolvers in each hand, and all four guns were spouting flame. The uproar in the confined space was deafening. Snipe Hurst went down with two of Ainsley's bullets in him, and the outlaw's gun sent another rustler sprawling over the prostrate body of the leader. A third man was trying to crawl away, and a fourth fell under the lead of both defenders. One rustler rammed into the sheriff in the gloom. Both guns spoke and found a mark.

Ainsley plunged forward on his face, with just sense enough left to roll over on his side against the wall. The last shell in Copperhead's guns finished the sheriff's assailant, and the outlaw ran to kneel beside the officer and demand:

"How bad are you hit?"

Ainsley heard the voice and forced his heavy lids apart. He saw the face above him, saw something else. The rustler who had been crawling away had stopped. He had twisted around and was raising his hand to aim his gun at the back of the outlaw.

Ainsley tried to tell this to the dim face bent above him, but his tongue was thick, and the words wouldn't come. With a last surge of strength, the sheriff lifted his hand.

The shots were as one. The rustler fell on his face, kicked, and lay still. Copperhead had staggered to his feet on the impact of the bullet,

and had then fallen headlong across the body of the sheriff. Ainsley's final effort had cost him consciousness.

IT was close to sundown when he opened his eyes. At first he felt no pain. He looked about him with slowly returning comprehension. From where he lay he could see four dead men, Quirk Hichens, Snipe Hurst, and two more. Where were the others, and where was Copperhead?

The sheriff tried to move, and bit down on a cry of pain. The pain was in his side, and his clothes seemed very snug around him there. He wondered about that, but other concerns were more pressing at the moment. By working his muscles gingerly, he concluded that he had not been seriously wounded anywhere else, thought he had been well skinned up. It was a miracle that he hadn't been killed outright, with all the promiscuous shooting which had been going on.

From the return of consciousness, he had been aware of an intense and painful thirst. Mouth and nose and eyes burned. His side burned, as if hot irons were being drawn through it. He remembered that it was a long way down to that spring.

Summoning all his strength, he tried to sit up. He couldn't make it, and the fever in him mounted like a leaping flame with the effort. But he discovered that he could wriggle about a little on his uninjured side. At least, when he moved in that position, the pain could be endured.

He worked his way to the door of the cave and saw the remainder of the dead rustlers scattered over the hollow. They had got the whole gang, then. But where was Copperhead? Ainsley thought, "What a

fool question! Of course, it was his chance to get away. He'd've been an idiot not to—"

The sheriff had been resting, his head on his arm, trying to control his mounting thirst, trying to gather strength for that harrowing journey he must make to the spring. A sound behind him interrupted his thoughts. He turned to look.

Something was moving across the ground toward him in the sunset light. At first glance it appeared like something out of a nightmare, a quite incredible vision.

It was Copperhead coming toward him, on hands and knees, across the sand of the hollow. The clothing of the outlaw was torn and dirty. At each forward move, one hip dropped in peculiar fashion. Hung about his neck by its strap was a canteen. Behind the canteen was a blood-soaked shirt, and above it a face smeared with blood from a bullet slash over the ear. In the dying light, the matted hair was the color of molten gold.

He crawled up to the sheriff, paused to look at him, and grinned with white lips.

"Good!" he told the blinking Ainsley. "Have a drink. Take her easy. It may have to last you a while."

The outlaw held the canteen while the sheriff drank, carefully. Carefully the can was corked, carefully set behind a rock near the wall. Then Copperhead quietly slumped forward on his face.

Ainsley raised himself on an elbow—the water had poured strength into his racked body—and turned the other man over. Again the outlaw smiled.

"Nice little job—we did—sheriff," he said, fighting for breath.

Ainsley forced back something in his throat. "Huh!" was all he could

think to say, and then: "Where are you hit?"

"All over, about," was the answer, with a crooked grin. Copperhead was resting more easily on his back, and the color returned a little to his face. "That last slug got me in the spine. Gonna paralyze me, I guess. I wouldn't let it, before." His teeth clamped down suddenly on his pain, but his eyes still laughed.

Ainsley could not speak. Presently the other went on:

"I looked you over. Your side was laid wide open, but there's no bullet in it. I've got a flour sack around you—neat job, if I do say it as shouldn't."

Gone were the grim years. Copperhead was a boy, who had played a good joke on fate.

"Plenty of grub in the cave," he said. "You lay up a while, and you'll make it out all right."

The sheriff said, his finger nails deep in his palm, "You ought never to have made that trip for water."

"No trick," was the reply. "And what a nice big drink I got!"

Ainsley looked at him. "Why did you do it?"

"Well, you were out of your head and kept hollering for water. I had to do something to shut you up. Besides, I was thirsty as the devil myself."

But Ainsley was not to be sidetracked by levity. "You owed me nothing."

The dying man dropped his jocular manner. He met the eyes of the other as he answered:

"But I did. You see—well, the look on your face when—when you knew I wasn't a murderer. You and I—we've played a game. My last move, sheriff. Night."

The final beam of sunset, striking between two distant peaks, once more turned the head on the ground to bronze and gold. The sheriff laid a careful hand across the unseeing eyes.

This was the clean-up he had promised himself, but he wasn't very happy about it.

Coming Next Week, "THE CHANCE OF A YELLOW DOG,"
by KENNETH GILBERT.

SHELTER BELT TREES

WHEN twenty million trees were set out in the shelter belt section, there were many who predicted that they would not live, that it was impossible for trees to grow under existing conditions. The scheme was carried out by the government in an effort to prevent further soil erosion and eliminate dust and drought hazards.

A venture of this kind takes several years for fruition, for trees grow slowly. But it is equally true that they die quickly, usually showing signs of ultimate death in a few months or less. Thus far, reports say, ninety per cent of the trees set out are alive, which is a percentage far exceeding the most sanguine expectations.

The sections running through Texas and Oklahoma is considered the most perilous part of the tree belt, and if even forty per cent survive here there will be cause for great rejoicing.



RAPIDS TRANSIT

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "The Ghost Of Golden Glacier," etc.

JAKE FINK'S shifty eyes grew crafty as he watched the trader at Big Eddy open the letter. He edged toward his partner. "Listen, Raft," he whispered, "I'm bettin' Moose Gorman's just got a letter from Old Man Ely."

"How could he?" asked "Raft" Tucker. "Old Man Ely's at the headwaters of Jump Off River, and there ain't nobody to bring out a letter." He looked at the big trader, who stood with his elbows leaning on the counter as he read a penciled scrawl. The trader's grin widened as he deciphered each line. "It must be from Old Man Ely," Raft Tucker

conceded, "he's tickled to death over what he's readin'."

Jake's eyes narrowed and the craft in them deepened. "We've got to get a look at that letter," he said, maybe the old man struck it. And if he has——" The expression on his face was significant.

"Still," Raft Tucker mused, "how could Old Man Ely send a letter out from Jump Off River, where he's the only man in the country?"

"Some trapper passed through and brought it along," Jake Fink answered. "He'd naturally come straight to Moose's tradin' post because Moose'll pay the highest price for furs."

"Yeah, that's so, but we ain't seen no strange faces hereabout," Raft insisted. "The first thing a man does when he comes in from the back country is buy hisself a drink, order a square meal, an' then get acquainted and find out the news."

"Quiet," Jake Fink warned, "watch what Moose does with that letter."

"I'll go outside and watch," Raft Tucker said. "Moose is givin' us the eye. He's no friend of ours, and would jump at the chance to send us over the road."

"Nobody's ever sent us over the road yet," Jake Fink retorted. "We're too blasted smart for men like Moose, Old Man Ely, and the marshal."

The pair sauntered from the trading post, acting as if nothing interested them. Jake Fink closed the door, moved along the log walls, then listened. There was a scraping sound, followed by a bang, then the scraping sound was repeated. "Just as I figgered," Fink said. "He put Old Man Ely's letter in the trunk under the counter."

They returned to the trading post that afternoon and sat around the stove swapping gossip until well into the evening, when Jake yawned. "I guess I'll hit the hay," Fink said.

"It might be a good idear if you two buzzards washed your clothes and let 'em dry while you're in the hay," suggested "Moose" Gorman. "You pack in mountain sheep you've shot, the tallow gets into your clothes, and then you've got the nerve to stand beside a hot stove. I'm sick of it."

"That's a heck of a way to talk to a customer," Fink snarled.

"I was in business before you buzzards showed up, and I'll be here after you've gone," Moose predicted.

"You ain't got no business callin'

us buzzards," Fink shouted. "We're honest trappers, and we don't owe nobody nothin'."

"You're buzzards," Moose then charged. "Always pickin' somethin's bones, or waitin' for 'em to weaken so you can move in on 'em. Why you ain't roostin' in the gov'ment pen at McNeil Island is more'n I can figger."

"They're a law agin' talkin' that way about folks," Fink stormed. "We'll have that law on you."

"Listen, buzzards," Moose belted, "you ain't goin' to have no law on anybody. You're keepin' just as far away from law as you can. Now get out and don't come back."

"You shouldn't have let Moose rile you up," Raft Tucker said as they walked toward their cabin. "When you shoot off your face you say too much."

"He told us not to come back, eh?" Fink sneered. "Huh! We're goin' back to-night."

"What time?"

"They claim a man sleeps hardest the first half hour," Fink replied, "we'll go back a half hour after Moose turns in."

RAFT TUCKER planted his huge feet under a window in the trading post, then lifted Fink's snakelike figure through the window. "Here's the letter," Fink said a few minutes later.

Raft placed the letter in his pocket, assisted his partner to the ground, and the pair then hurried to the Miners' Rest, which stayed open most of the night.

In a secluded corner they spread out the letter and read:

DEAR MOOSE:

I think I'll spend the winter on Jump-off Creek. I've enough store grub to last until spring and there's no end of sheep, caribou

and rabbits to be had up here. I've got a big dump ready to run through the sluice box, and it'll take me until the freeze-up. I'll take out twenty-five thousand dollars sure.

Please send my daughter in Seattle a couple of thousand and charge it to me. She's got seven kids; her husband's dead and she'll need the money. And by golly, the way things look, this is the last time she'll need money. And the last time, too, a man of my age will have to go prospecting.

Your friend,
DALT ELY.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars," Fink said softly. "No wonder Moose Gorman grinned when he read the letter. He's always had a soft spot for the old man."

"Why shouldn't he?" Raft asked. "Ely give Moose his start. I suppose we'd better get this letter back. If it's missed, folks will smell a rat."

"It had a hard time gettin' here," Fink said, pointing to the envelope and single sheet of paper. "It's water-stained and looks as if somebody had dropped it in the mud."

"Jump Off Creek's bad water. Whoever brought it out prob'ly got wet," Raft suggested. "Well, let's go. I don't like foolin' round Moose's place. He's liable to take a shot at you."

The pair approached the trading post with considerable caution. Nothing, they knew, would please the marshal and Moose Gorman more than to find an excuse to arrest them. Again Fink squirmed through the window, and again Raft Tucker stood in the shadows, ready to vanish at the slightest sound. Fink emerged and breathed a sigh of relief.

Early the following morning they appeared with their packs. "We want trail grub," Fink explained, "and we'll pay cash money for it. You was foolin' last night when you

said them dirty remarks, weren't you, Moose?" He almost whined.

"No, I wasn't foolin' one bit," Moose answered. "What do you want? I suppose I've got to sell a man grub when he asks for it, and I have it. It's a kind of unwritten law."

They explained their needs, and Gorman tossed the supplies on the counter. "We're goin' trappin' again," Fink said. "There ain't no money in hangin' round town. We figger to give Beaver Creek a try."

Gorman made no comment, but figured up their bill.

They started for Beaver Creek that afternoon, when most of the camp was on hand to see them go. Twenty-four hours later they left the creek and followed a series of ridges for two days. The third day they dropped into the Jump Off Creek Basin.

"I'd hate to think what'd happen if Mose Gorman heard we was in this country," Raft Tucker said. "He's a bad one to rile up, and the marshal's even worse." He got down on his hands and knees and began to examine the sand and sod along the bank of the stream.

"What you doin'?" Fink asked.

"Lookin' for tracks," Raft answered, "I can't figger how that letter come out of this country."

"Quit tryin'," Fink admonished. "Like as not, whoever it was come down the creek on a raft."

"The creek's a short cut," Raft admitted, "but there ain't many trappers that will take a chance on it. I'd think twice, and I'm one of the best raft men in the North."

THE two men walked slowly upstream, studying the stretches of white water, the deep canyons and whirlpools, and the sections where boulders lifted

their granite fangs above the surface. It was fast water, even for Alaska, where streams drop thousands of feet in a few miles.

"Fast water," Raft said, "but deep water. There ain't a shallow bar, a log jam or a sweeper along the way."

Raft took particular care to watch for sweepers—fallen trees that were either awash, or below the surface of the stream. Many a stout boat and raft has gone to pieces against sweepers while their unfortunate crews drowned in the turbulent waters below.

As the miles dropped slowly behind them, Fink and Raft realized why so few prospectors ventured into the country—it was impossible to pole a boat against the current, and the surrounding land was so badly broken up into deep canyons, cliffs, and rock slides, that progress was necessarily slow.

The creek—which would have been called a river in most places—was indeed a short cut if it could have been used by pole boats.

"No wonder Old Man Ely didn't want to come out," Raft said on the fourth day of their struggle upstream. "It would be too blasted hard to get back."

On the seventh day the stream narrowed and boiled through a deep canyon. Mists hung heavily in the dark shadows, and it was almost impossible to see the surface. "What do you make of it, Raft?" Fink asked. "You're the white water man of this partnership."

Raft listened a long time. "Rapids down there, but no waterfalls," he answered. "A good raft could go through."

"That's the best news I've heard since we started on this blasted trip," Fink said.

Late that night Fink parted the

blueberry brush growing on a ridge and looked down on a cabin built on a low bench that formed the south bank of the creek. Logs wedged in between boulders, more boulders, bags of sand, and piles of brush had diverted the stream from the north to the south bank. Here it skirted the cabin and hurried on a hundred yards before returning to its natural bed.

Every square inch of creek bed that lay exposed as a result of the diversion had been moved. The boulders had been rolled along the bed rock and the gravel piled in convenient heaps, while the gold-bearing sand stood in a big dump near a sluice box. The sluice box had been constructed of whip-sawed lumber and was substantially built.

"There it is," Fink said, "and I'm hanged if I see how one old man has moved so much rock and dirt alone."

"He had a helper," Raft insisted, "and it was the helper that brought out that letter." He shook his head. "But how?" he asked for the hundredth time. "We never saw one human footprint all the way in."

"Can't you get that out of your mind?" Fink snarled.

"You've had it on your mind, too," Raft argued. "Besides, Old Man Ely was a smooth customer in his younger days. Plenty of men tried their luck agin' him and come out the little end of the horn."

"He's old now," Fink retorted. "Come on, let's get the jump on him while we've got the chance."

DALT ELY came out of the cabin as they looked down on the scene. He was a slim, alert old fellow with bright blue eyes, snow-white whiskers and large, toil-scarred hands. He probably would have walked briskly but for a

hip that evidently gave him trouble. He pressed his right hand hard against it as he walked. His right leg swung forward as he swayed his body to the left.

The two waited until he reached the sluice box, then Fink ran down the ridge. He carried a worn six-gun in his hand, though he did not expect to use it. It was hardly likely Ely would burden himself with the weight of a gun. He no doubt felt that the isolation was sufficient protection against men. At seeing Fink, his head jerked up in surprise and he lifted his hands without waiting for Fink's order.

Raft followed his partner, approached the old man from behind, and searched him. "Ain't even got so much as a pocket knife on him," he said.

"Well, gents," Old Man Ely said mildly, "this sure catches me by surprise."

"We figured you'd been in here long enough to make a clean-up," Fink said. "And we're a couple of tax collectors." He laughed loudly at his own humor. "Where's your gold?" He prodded the old man in the ribs with his gun.

Old Man Ely's eyes narrowed. Behind them lay a brain that had been matching wits with tough customers for nearly sixty years. "It looks like somebody's been readin' my mail," he observed.

"How'd you send that letter out," Raft said sharply.

Old Man Ely's eyes became slits. "So you did see my letter?" he said softly.

It was a slip, and Raft realized it. "Everybody at Big Eddy heard you'd writ to Moose Gorman," he blurted, "and we just put two and two together. How'd you send that letter out?"

"I trained a eagle to pack mail

for me," the old man answered sarcastically. "All right, you buzzards, play out your hand and get it over with."

"Where's your gold cached?" Fink demanded.

"If you read the letter careful," the old man answered, "you'd know the gold's in the dump."

They tied Ely up, carried him to the cabin and lashed him to his bunk. Then they began searching the cabin. "It won't be hard to find the cache," Fink predicted, "because he wasn't expectin' tax collectors to drop in on him."

They went through the canned goods stacked on a rough shelf, then began searching through Ely's old clothes. "Heck, boys," he said softly, "you seem to be havin' a lot of trouble. My gold's in that old syrup can in the corner."

Fink clutched greedily at the can and it slipped from his fingers. "It's heavy!" he exclaimed. "Must weigh twenty-five pounds."

They poured the contents into a gold pan and stared. "Coarse gold," exclaimed Fink hoarsely.

"Yeah, and it come pretty hard," Ely said. "If it wasn't for my grandchildren needin' schoolin' and clothes, I'd never've tackled this country. I'd have got me a job as watchman at some mine and made out all right. I packed in five hundred pounds of black powder in cans, besides plenty of grub. I blasted out a dike so the water would wash out the gold behind it. Then I moved the cussed river so I could get at the gold. And now you two buzzards show up and skim the cream."

Fink grinned. "That's the way it goes in life; the suckers do the work and the smart men skim the cream."

"The rest of the cream is out in

that dump," Old Man Ely said. "Help yourselves, gents."

THE two kept the old miner lashed down the first three days, while they ate his grub and shoveled a part of his dump into the sluice box. "We'll make a dicker with you," Fink said the fourth day. "We'll turn you loose if you'll rustle wood and do the cookin' for us."

"I'm better off as I am," Ely answered. "Do your own work."

Fink's smile was mirthless. "In that case," he said softly, "we'll have to tie you a little tighter. Couldn't risk havin' you get loose and makin' trouble for us."

He untied the buckskin thongs securing the prisoner to his bunk, then pulled them up tight. Old Man Ely's teeth set and he fought back the urge to yell with pain. His eyes narrowed again.

"Better watch the old fool," Raft advised. "He's tryin' to figger somethin' out."

"Let him figger," Fink retorted.

They began preparing breakfast. From time to time Fink glanced at the old man's hands. Circulation was almost shut off, and his fingers were turning blue. "All right," Ely said at last, "you buzzards win. Turn me loose and I'll be a good dog."

"Now get this straight," Fink warned, "if you even so much as look cross-eyed we'll give you a dose of lead poisonin' that'll end *all* your troubles. If you get a fool hunch you can get the drop on us, just think of them grandchildren."

"I'm thinkin' of them grandchildren," Old Man Ely retorted. "I ain't thought of nothin' else since you showed up." A trace of weariness crept into his voice. "It looks as if I'd have to start all over again."

They removed everything he might use as a weapon except the ax needed for splitting wood and a butcher knife necessary for preparing food. Each night these two weapons were taken from Ely and cached in a safe place.

Day after day the two men worked on the dump. The heap of tailings at the end of the sluice box reached such proportions that they had to move it several times. "Old Man Ely's sure feedin' us well," Fink said at the end of the second week. "You'd think he was hirin' us to work for him."

"He always has fed his hired men well," Raft observed. "Everybody knows that. It gives me a kinda funny feelin'."

Sometimes there was roast mountain lamb, stripped with bacon; sometimes ptarmigan. Often Ely gave them caribou steaks which had been hung in an ice cave until they were prime. There was plenty of sourdough bread and blueberry pies. Three times a week they had fried trout, fresh from the creek.

Gold poured into empty cans after each clean-up. Snow began to fly as they shifted the sluice box for the last time. There was a thin crust of ice on the dump each morning, but the gravel thawed before noon and did not freeze again until several hours after sunset.

"There goes the last," Fink said late one night. "The old man sure figgered this out right. All the gold on Jump Off was concentrated behind that dike he blowed out. Now we've got it."

"He figgered twenty-five thousand dollars' worth," Raft answered. "The clean-up will run forty thousand. That's twenty thousand apiece. I'm goin' Outside on a splurge."

"We ought to knock the old coot

in the head before we pull out," Fink said, leaning on his shovel. "We ain't used names, but he might know us if he'd see us some time."

"Suppose we bumped him off," Raft argued, "and somethin' happened and we got caught? Murder would be worse'n robbery. Besides, I can't figger him out. He's takin' this too easy. Maybe he has got a trained eagle takin' word down to Big Eddy for him."

"Naw," Fink sneered. "We'd seen it hangin' round. We ain't seen nothin' in the way of pets since we've been here. His dog died six months ago, so there's no trained hound to worry about. Well, let's turn in."

OLD MAN ELY was sitting in a chair near the sheet-iron stove when they returned to the cabin. "All finished, gents?" he asked. "Well, that's fine. You'll be pullin' out in the mornin' like as not. I wonder if you'd take out a letter and mail it to my daughter? You can read it over."

Fink read it with obvious suspicious. "It's some kind of a code," he said.

"No, it isn't," Ely answered, "it's just tellin' my daughter I'm goin' on up the creek and try my luck again. I want her to know I didn't strike it this year."

"Take it along," Raft urged. "Then if anybody should ask us questions about Ely we'll have it down in his own handwritin' that he ain't struck it and is movin' on."

Fink put the letter into his pocket, lashed the old man down for the night, then turned in.

While Old Man Ely got breakfast, the following morning, the two transferred the gold to moose-hide pokes, then set about building a raft.

At noon it was completed. "Now comes the fond farewell," Fink sneered. He gathered up the old man's rubber boots and shoes, cut them to ribbons with the ax, and tossed the shreds into the creek.

"You'll have to wait until snow flies before you can use moccasins and snowshoes," he said. "By that time we'll be outside." The ax and saw followed. "Can't have you makin' rafts and floatin' down to Big Eddy," he added. "We'll take your rifle and six-gun with us."

"I need the rifle for game," Ely mildly protested, but his eyes remained narrowed. "And you know a man of my years couldn't take a raft through the rapids."

"S'long," Fink answered. He jumped on the raft, and Raft followed. The latter had rigged up a steering oar. He swung the raft into the center of the stream and the old man, the tailing dumps, and the cabin faded from view. Forty thousand dollars in gold rode in the center of the raft.

Within a half hour a stretch of white water looked up. "Get flat down, Fink," Raft yelled, "and hang on! This is the worst I ever did see." He heaved mightily on the steering oar and cleared a rock by a close margin. He was one of the best men on a raft the North had ever known, but this canyon taxed his skill to the utmost.

The raft pitched and wallowed through the stretch and floated in smoother water. The walls towered a good five hundred feet above them. In places the canyon was less than a hundred feet across. Delicate ferns that never saw sunshine clung to the mossy walls, their leaves glistening like diamonds with gathered spray. Here and there a log had wedged in between boulders, but

there was no place to land, nor even a place at which to tie up.

The raft wallowed on until the stars came out and ice began to form on the steering-oar handle. "Get hold of a pole," Raft ordered, "and see if you can find bottom. On our way up here I saw a bar where a creek came in. We should be pretty near there."

Fink found bottom, forced the raft toward the bank, and presently they saw the stream, tumbling like molten silver out of a split in the canyon wall. The raft grounded, and the two leaped ashore. A stranded log had caught soft driftwood and debris from upriver. "Here's some half-dry wood," Raft said, "and one of Old Man Ely's powder cans. It's rusted. He must've been upriver several years ago."

They dried out by a roaring fire, prepared a meal, and then crawled into their sleeping bags. Raft awakened his partner early the following morning. "I figger we can make it to Big Eddy before dark," he said. "This stream's faster'n I thought."

IT proved faster and rougher before the day was over. Pale, exhausted, and shaken from a score of encounters in which death missed them by a narrow margin, the pair grounded the raft at a point two miles above Big Eddy. Here the waters from Jump Off Creek entered the main river.

"It's a short cut, all right," Raft said heavily, "but no wonder trappers and miners don't use it. I wouldn't tackle that stream again for all the gold in the North."

"You don't have to," Fink answered. "We've got a share of that gold already. We'd better cache it here, break up the raft so people

won't find it and ask questions, then drift into Big Eddy and tell Moose Gorman we've come in for more supplies."

"Good idear," Raft answered. "Say, what was that? I heard a noise."

"Yeah," Moose Gorman said, lifting his big figure from the brush, "you heard a couple of noises. And you're goin' to hear more. How'd you find trappin'?" He didn't wait for an answer. "Ah, that's too bad. The boys had hard luck; they didn't take a pelt."

"They got somethin', though," the marshal said. "Take a look and see what's piled up in the middle of the raft."

"It's gold!" Fink snarled. "We heard about a pocket upriver and we went up and took a look at it. We figgered Raft could get us downstream again, him bein' one of the best—"

"Interestin'," the old marshal drawled. "Did you happen to hear anything about Old Man Ely?"

"Yeah," Fink answered quietly, "and he sent a letter out to his daughter. Here it is."

The marshal read the letter and nodded. "Mighty slick letter," he drawled. "The old man always was pretty smooth when it come to dealin' with buzzards. You read it, naturally, and figgered he was makin' the best of it and everything was fine and dandy. That was just what he wanted you to figger, because you'd let down and get a little careless. Here's one he sent to Moose Gorman. Read it!"

Fink read:

"DEAR MOOSE:

"I'm havin' a run of good luck. Just when it looked as if I was too badly stove up to shovel the dump through the sluice boxes a couple of buzzards showed up. They're doin' it for me while I do the

cookin'. One of 'em said somethin' about suckers doin' the work and smart cusses skimmin' the cream. So I suppose they're figgerin' on leavin' me stranded here and takin' my gold.

"I don't think they'll bump me off, but if they do, it can't be helped. I'm writin' this so you can lay on the river bank and grab 'em as they come out. Send the gold to my daughter, and you might also send a deputy up here to see what's happened to me.

"Yours truly,
"DALT ELY."

"We'll keep you two buzzards until spring," the marshal said, "and when the judge comes through there'll be a trial. By that time Old Man Ely—if he ain't dead—should be here to testify against you."

"He ain't dead," Raft said quickly. He saw the handwriting on the wall, and was quick to give up. "He ain't dead; we just left him without guns and shoes. We didn't hurt him, did we, Fink?"

"Naw," Fink snarled. "But I don't savvy how he got word out. Has he got a trained eagle or somethin' that'll carry a letter?"

Moose Gorman favored the prisoners with a wolfish grin. "He sent it out the way he's sent letters right along—down the short cut in an empty powder can. All we have to do is fish the can out of the big eddy. Gents, we've been expectin' you for several days."

THE COWMAN

THE title "cowman" is usually given to the managing owner of a sizable spread, or the superintendent of a big ranch. However, the size of the outfit the man runs hasn't so much to do with the title as the man's knowledge and sagacity as applied to the cattle business. For instance, the absentee owner of a great ranch, such as William Randolph Hearst, is never called a cowman, but many a bow-legged veteran of the old trail drives who owns about eighty head of breeders, one willow pole corral, and an adobe shack that has the courtesy tile of "ranch house," will rate the honor. "He's shore a cowman from away back," his neighbors will tell you with reverence and pride.

Down in south Texas they don't usually call Bob Kleberg a cowman, although he is the real head of one million two hundred and fifty thousand acres of land that comprises the four great ranches of the King Land & Cattle Company. Kleberg lives at the Santa Gertrudis headquarters, and directly manages that section of the estate. He has invented more gadgets and devices that have to do with ranching than any man in the world, and he has evolved an important breed of cattle and an equally important breed of stock horses. He is a good rider and a fine shot with both rifle and six-shooter, and can get out and do a day's work in the saddle with the best hand in the layout. Still, they don't call him a cowman. Not yet, anyway. Maybe when he's older he will inherit the title from his cousin Cæsar Kleberg. Bob is still a young feller.

The man they call the cowman in the Kleberg domain is old Augustine Quintenilla, the *mayor de ganado*. When it comes to cow-ology, old Quintenilla, they say, knows more by instinct than most men can learn in a lifetime of hard study. He is as full of superstition as he is of cow-savvy. He stays in bed all of January because his brother died in that month!

C. L. M.

Interesting And True

By H. FREDRIC YOUNG



IN WESTERN TEXAS, ONE PRAIRIE
DOG TOWN MEASURED 250 MILES
LONG + A HUNDRED MILES WIDE.



A HOLSTEIN COW
THAT DIDN'T GO
DRY FOR OVER 4
YEARS, OWNED BY
F. E. KILMED,
CRYSTAL, N. D.



THE BANNING STAGECOACH LINE, WALNUT,
CALIFORNIA, HAS NOT HAD A PAYING CUSTOMER
IN 40 YRS. THOUGH IT MAKES REGULAR 25 MI. RUNS.

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.



Famous Western Prospectors

(ED SCHIEFFELIN—TOMBSTONE'S FOUNDER)

By JOHN A. THOMPSON

TWENTY years after Ed Schieffelin discovered ore in the San Pedro Valley, in southern Arizona, the mines in Tombstone had produced some three million dollars in gold and forty million dollars in silver. Leasers are still working the mines, taking pay from the Tough Nut, the Lucky Cuss, and other rich mineral veins that Schieffelin discovered and recorded back in the late summer of 1877.

Few prospectors have ever made a find surpassing Schieffelin's in richness or importance. Few ever fought harder for success, or came so close to losing the fortune that was within their grasp. For a long time Ed's hardest job was to convince some one that he really was a potential millionaire, and that he really made a million-dollar bonanza discovery in the desolate, Apache-haunted wilderness of the San Pedro Valley. Even his own brother, Al,

doubted him. Ed's story was too unbelievably fantastic. As for Ed's treasured samples of blackish-looking rock, Al Schieffelin took a look at them, hefted them critically, and tossed them out the door.

"F'orget it, kid," he said, and he meant well. "You've been out alone in the desert too long. They're payin' four bucks a day in the mines here. The foreman's a friend. I'll get you a steady job in the mornin'. Settle down with me and make yourself some real money. Not just dream stuff."

That's what Al told his younger brother. And all the time Ed, just thirty years old then, had a million dollars' worth of mining property represented in the samples that Al had thrown away.

If Ed hadn't been so convinced himself that he was right, he might never have gone back to the valley of the San Pedro, and no one knows when Tombstone would have been founded, or whether it would have been founded at all. Tombstone, the richest, most colorful, gun-fightingest section of the whole Southwest! The town that became Wyatt Earp's stamping ground, scene of the bloody Earp-Clanton gun battles. Tombstone, for years the biggest town in all Arizona, where Johnny Behan was sheriff, where "Buckskin" Frank Leslie tended bar at the Oriental, and the polished "Doc" Holliday dealt faro.

Ed Schieffelin started it all when he left the small military party that was marching from Wickenburg down to Fort Huachuca under the direction of Al Sieber, one of the most famous government scouts and Indian fighters the Southwest ever knew. Ed intended to prospect when he started out. As the soldiers reached the San Pedro Valley, Schieffelin decided that here was as

good a place as any to begin. He packed his burros and headed toward the hills.

"Where yuh goin', feller?" demanded Sieber.

"Prospecting," returned Ed. "I've found some likely-looking stones around here."

The army scout shrugged his shoulders. "It's your funeral, boy. All you'll find in them hills'll be your tombstone, once them Apaches get wind of your presence."

"I'll chance it," said Ed. And he did. Prospecting by day with his rifle within ready reach, camping at night on some lonely hilltop with his burros hobbled in a gully far below him, just in case. Anyhow, Ed knew that those desert canaries had voices that carried long distances when they burst into sudden song. And he didn't want to be too near them if they chanced to advertise their presence to any hostile redskins lurking in the vicinity.

ED had one or two close shaves, but he managed to avoid actual contact with the warring Apaches. He kept on prospecting. Finding float, he attempted to trace it to its source, until finally he had worked up to the head of a narrow gully hidden deep in the mountains. Above the draw he spied a ledge, an outcrop of exposed ore that sliced between the surrounding country rock like the filling in a layer cake. He scrambled up to it, knocked off chunks of the heavy material with his pick, and stood up to study them with eager, excited eyes. The stuff was veined with solid silver.

Sweat moistened the palms of Ed's trembling hands, stood out in wet beads on his forehead. His heart thumped. He knew, as surely as if some Divine Intelligence had

told him, that he stood at last at the foot of his long-sought rainbow. His dreams had come true. He had made his great discovery. He was alone, a millionaire in the desolate, unfriendly desert. Such moments of supreme glory are allotted to few men in any walk of life. But Ed Schieffelin, the ragged, poverty-stricken, stout-hearted prospector, was among the chosen minority. He sensed that as he staked his discovery claim on the barren hill bursting with its burden of countless tons of incredibly rich silver ore.

With a quiet smile, as he recalled Al Sieber's lugubrious prediction, he staked his discovery claim and called his mine the Tombstone. It was as good a name as any.

Then he left the Tombstone Hills and hurried up to Tucson, where his find was duly recorded, on September 3, 1877. He wanted to get in touch with his brother, Al. Al would help him work the new mine. Ed thought Al was working in the mines at Globe. He went down there only to discover that the man he sought had gone to Signal, up in the country north of the Williams River, three hundred miles away across trackless desert, studded with little-known mountain ranges. Patiently Ed went to work in Globe to get himself the necessary stake for his trip to Signal.

Finally Ed found his brother and told his story. He showed his samples. "Mostly lead," said Al, and pitched them through the open cabin door. That was tough, heart-breaking, after Ed had gone to all that trouble to find Al. But it didn't dampen Ed's ardor. Retrieving some of the specimens, he showed them to a score of other mining men in Signal. They all said the same thing: "Forget it." As close to despair as he ever was in his life, Ed

accepted his brother's offer of an introduction to the foreman, and went to work, mining for four dollars a day. He stood it just one month. He couldn't get the thoughts of his bonanza out of his mind.

There was still one man who hadn't seen his rock—Richard Gird. To the miners Gird was a big shot, hard-bitten, hard to approach. He was a mining engineer who had recently come to take charge of the mines at Signal. He knew ores, and how to assay them. He had plenty of book learning, backed up by good common sense, and a whale of a lot of experience. Ed Schieffelin decided to see him. He found a few more of the discarded samples and took them to Gird's office. Gird looked up and saw the bronzed, curly headed, broad-shouldered miner standing in front of him.

"What is it?" Gird rasped. Perhaps he thought the embarrassed miner had some complaint to make about wages, or working conditions. But Ed explained, as he laid the samples on Gird's desk, that it was about the rocks. Everybody had told him they were no good, but he just didn't believe it. If Mr. Gird would just look them over and tell him definitely—well, maybe then he could forget the whole thing. As it was, it was on his mind all the time.

"I'm busy now," snapped Gird, glancing idly at the samples. "But I'll examine these rocks for you later, when I have time."

"Thank you, sir." Ed backed out of the office, feeling pretty brazen in having gone there at all.

TWO days later Ed had barely reached his cabin after his eight-hour shift underground when Al came running up to him. "Ed," he shouted, "Mr. Gird wants to see you in his office right away."

Gird had assayed the samples. One specimen ran two thousand dollars to the ton. Ed told him where the claim was located. The engineer whistled. The San Pedro Valley was a long way off. But Gird was game. He provided the grubstake, and the three of them, Ed, the still dubious Al, and Gird, the mining expert, trekked back to the Tombstone Mountains as partners. They staked additional claims, richer than the Tombstone, claims that developed into bonanza mines like the Tough Nut, Good Enough, Grand Central, and Lucky Cuss. Ore samples from the Lucky Cuss—that's what Al called Ed—assayed fifteen thousand dollars to the ton.

The trio had been on the ground only a short time when two other prospectors, Edward Williams and his partner, happened along. They were looking for their mules which had broken loose, tracing them by the marks of a stake chain that one of the animals was dragging. They spotted a place where the chain scratched over a rocky surface, disclosing the gleam of mineral. They stopped and dug. The ground was close to territory already staked by

Schieffelin. The two prospecting parties held a heated powwow. In the end, instead of drawing guns, the five men sensibly agreed to divide the ground. The part Williams kept was the Grand Central. That which fell to Schieffelin he called the Contention because of the near argument over it. The Contention afterward became the richest of all the million-dollar bonanza mines developed in the Tombstone district. Ed and his partners sold it for ten thousand dollars; its new owners made millions.

A short while later Ed and Al and Gird sold a half interest in the Lucky Cuss. They kept the other half for years, and it poured a perennial river of riches into their pockets. Gird stayed on in Tombstone. But the Schieffelin brothers sold their share of the Tough Nut for a million dollars, cold cash. And then they left.

Ed said he had plenty. He had come to the San Pedro Valley broke, a lone prospector in the desert wilderness. He left it a millionaire. He was still a very young man. A full life lay yet before him—beckoning. And he obeyed the call.

COLORADO'S MARIJUANA

IN Colorado, recently, a sheriff had a tip that marijuana was being grown in several places, cleverly hidden in cornfields so that the casual observer would not see it. Marijuana is considered a weed, but a very dangerous one, and valuable to those who would use it for dope.

This particular raid on the marijuana was considered the largest ever made in the history of the country. The sheriff and his deputies confiscated five thousand dollars' worth of the weed, which weighed nearly six hundred pounds. One bush, several feet tall, was said to contain three hundred dollars' worth of the drug. Out of five fields, the largest field contained three quarters of an acre of the stuff.

Information and evidence was turned over to Federal officials.



WISE OLD OWL

By M. McCLUER BROWN

Author of "Buffalo Cure," etc.

BLACKJACK, Treat Fisher's sulphur-eyed specimen of the great gray owl family, dug his strong talons into the ridgepole of the tent, blinked slowly, and teetered on his perch. He was a large, fluffy fellow, covered with a deep cushion of black and gray feathers. His eyes were round, phosphorescent, and slightly baleful; his beak, short, hooked, and black.

That wicked beak, Blackjack knew, was further aggravating the cat-and-dog life of the two men in the tent below him; it was an instrument of warfare that always brought him off the victor in his frequent battles with Nosey, "Clipper" Holme's yellow dog. And Blackjack

also guessed, by the men's actions, that these victories somehow balanced a long uneven score between Treat and the dog's master, Clipper Holme, for Treat always smiled quietly over them, while Clipper railed with blood in his eyes.

Blackjack stretched his neck and eyed the two men and the dog below him. Treat was the quiet-mannered young man who was sitting on a cot directly under Blackjack. Blackjack himself, being a thorny old rascal with a villainous love for battle, admired Treat for his good nature and kindness, and for the man's obliging habit of discovering for him such juicy titbits as an occasional fat mouse or a large frog.

On the other hand, Blackjack

grew huffish whenever he saw Clipper. For Clipper, who now sat on a box near the entrance of the tent, was a dark, moody man who wanted to dominate everything within reach of his glance. Moreover, this sullen man owned Nosey, the slinking, sharp-faced, cowardly dog, and Blackjack could never forgive him for that.

Blackjack ruffled his feathers, teetered, and blinked. It was growing dark outside, and when it became black enough to suit him, he intended to fly out of the tent, for he was very hungry. The men, however, had blocked his exit by tying the tent flaps down. Blackjack glared haughtily. This was an outrage! When he wanted to get out he'd have to fly to the ground and try to slip under the tent flap, and there on his belly, in front of the doorway, lay Nosey, pretending to doze.

Blackjack clicked his beak in indignation. He had wanted to get away without a squabble to-night and fly to the cave in the canyon. Two evenings ago he had found that cave, a deep hole back in the rocks where a multitude of mice lived and a great litter of baby garter snakes slithered over the ledges. Thought of such delicacies made Blackjack's eyes glitter hungrily. What was the matter with Treat that he didn't hear his vexed noises? He turned his head on one side, speculating.

Never had he seen the men quite as they were to-night, sitting with their backs to one another, silent, glaring scornfully at nothing. Treat was pretending to look at the crackling, flat thing that he called a map and that he had spread out on his knees, but his eyes were unmoving, and his young face grim. Clipper's arms were folded on his chest, and his dark face looked red and fierce.

Blackjack, who could not always understand men's motives by their expressions, but saw through animals well enough, crept along the ridgepole and turned his shrewish eyes on the dog. Nosey's pretense at slumber was wasted, because he knew very well that Nosey dared not sleep when he was around.

Moreover, he knew that Nosey was venomous, sullen, and tricky. The dog had a cowardly personality, cringing when Blackjack was on his guard, but attacking when he could do so behind his enemy's back. He also had a vicious habit of snapping at the men, and an ignoble urge to run with the coyotes at night. Often he would come in of a morning, slinking and skittish, his bloodshot eyes furtive.

BLACKJACK blinked dourly. It looked like he'd have to give Nosey a licking in order to get out to-night. Well, if he had to, he was the bird who could do it. He eyed the dog and tested his wings with vicious delight, preparing for the attack.

Treat got up suddenly, stalked to the camp stove at the end of the tent, and threw some wood on the blaze. The red light from the fire blinded the owl temporarily, and he settled back on his perch, blinking.

As if Treat's move had kindled a flame under the other man, Clipper whirled with an angry shout.

"Hey!" he snorted. "Tryin' to burn that map, huh? I thought so!"

Treat spun around, his hands clenched at his sides. Nosey jerked awake, and, cringing, watched the men furtively. Blackjack stared from one man to the other, his fiery interest diverted from the dog by Clipper's shouting. He could see the thing called a map lying on Treat's cot, and he thought Clipper must

be pretending not to see it to make trouble, just as Nosey had feigned to doze.

"What's it to you?" Treat's words were contentious for the first time. "You just got through saying it was no good—that my dad had lied about finding gold here and starting a mine!"

Clipper got up quickly, his chin thrust forward. "Huh!" he flared. "Mighty pompous since you got that banjo-eyed bird, ain't you? I can remember when you was tickled to death to have me hash in with you. If you want to get rid of somethin', why ain't it that devilish bird? Nothin' more useless than him around here!"

Treat's head was high. "So that's it!" he snorted. "Wish you was man enough to come out and admit what's gallin' your hide instead of blamin' it on somethin' else. I knew you didn't question my dad's map. You're just sore because my owl can lick that skulkin' hound of yours. If I had my way, Blackjack wouldn't even associate with your mutt. I ain't never complained about your dog before, but I ain't never liked him because I couldn't trust him. One minute he'll be lickin' your hands, and the next, slashin' at your heels. That's just plain cowardice and low breedin', Clipper. His father must have been a coyote and his mother a jackal, because he's the first brute I ever saw that didn't have at least one savin' quality."

Clipper began walking toward Treat, his expression forbidding.

Blackjack flapped his wings with delight and shifted back and forth. This was worth hearing. He liked the harsh words the men were saying, and the angry look on their faces.

"Make fun of my dog, will you?" bellowed Clipper. "Well, he obeys

me, that's enough! That's more than your gray-feather does. An owl ain't got sense, and that one'll never be anything but a lot of trouble to us. I'm fed up with things around here—your lies about the mine, that dad-blasted bird!"

Treat was looking him squarely in the eyes. "My bird's more good to me than you dog ever will be to you," he said coolly. "Some day he'll prove it."

Clipper regarded him mockingly. "Like heck he will!" He stooped suddenly at Treat's cot, picked up the map, and lurched to the stove. "And this'll show you what I think of your dad's map!" he cried, and threw it on the fire.

Treat gasped. Blackjack closed his eyes a second against the yellow light the map made as it burst into flames. Clipper walked back to the box and threw himself upon it.

"Guess you'll know who's head man around here, now!" he grated over his shoulder.

Treat sat down slowly. His face was white.

"You fool!" he gritted. "I ought to beat your head in, but what good would it do now? For once, you've overplayed yourself, Clipper! Those were the only directions I had of the mine. Get ready to hit the back trail in the mornin' because the mine's lost—for good!"

Clipper glanced over his shoulder. "Don't hand me that!" he growled. "You know every mark on it by heart!"

"There's where you're wrong!" Treat's chill words reminded Blackjack of the ice-edged Snake River on a winter night. "You've seen the map as much as I have. How much do you remember?"

This time Clipper gasped. "Great Jupiter!"

BLACKJACK hopped along the ridgepole, wantonly pleased to see Clipper so aghast. He liked to hear the gurgly sounds in the man's throat. It reminded him of the death gasps of the terrified mice that he stalked for food. Thought of the mice reminded him of the cave and his hunger—and Nosey. Quickly he poised, flapped his wings, and swooped down upon the yellow dog.

Nosey leaped to his feet with a howl of terror, but Blackjack was too swift for him. As the dog made a frightened bound for safety, Blackjack pounced upon his back and sank sharp talons deep into the flesh.

Nosey's howl of terror changed to a yelp of pain, his raucous cries growing in volume as he rolled over and over and then bounded wildly around the tent.

Blackjack ruffled his feathers, blinked his round eyes, and fastened his beak on one of Nosey's pointed ears, knowing that this painful hold always ended his skirmishes with the dog and infuriated Clipper beyond control.

Nosey yowled with the agony, and his eyes flared with fear as he leaped crazily about, running into the men and knocking over things in his terrified eagerness to rid himself of the feathered demon on his back.

Blackjack went on nipping the ear, his enthusiasm for the combat increasing with each bite.

Nosey whined and rolled his bloodshot eyes. It was then that Clipper loomed over Blackjack, his dark face fierce, and a long stick of firewood in his hands.

"I'll fix that bird, if you won't!" he cracked.

Treat's voice came frostily from behind Clipper. "Touch my bird, and I'll crack your thick skull!"

Clipper drew back, looking a lit-

tle uncertain, then his face became livid and he lifted his club. Nosey yelped with terror, slashed suddenly at his master with long teeth, and then, springing away, scuttled under the tent, carrying Blackjack with him out into the night.

Behind them, Clipper gave vent to a hoarse growl. "Wait till I get another chance at that bird!" he threatened.

"And I'm warnin' you," came Treat's cold voice. "Touch my bird and——"

Nosey lay down and began to whine again. Blackjack extricated his claws from the dog's anatomy and flapped away, leaving his defeated victim to snarl after him and slink back into the tent.

The night was windy but humid, the sky being misty with clouds which hid the stars and masked the hills in blackness. But to Blackjack's phosphorescent eyes there were no shadows, and he saw clearly as he winged his way across the hills toward the cave in the river canyon.

Later, when he reached his destination and swooped down to alight in the entrance of the cave, he had forgotten the men and dog back in the tent in his eager expectation of an immediate lunch. Noiselessly he halted for a moment at the entrance, craned his neck to see back into the hole, and then, as his hungry eyes caught the movements of a small army of mice scampering over the floor and the bright eyes of young snakes on the ledges along the walls, he moved inside and blinked at them slowly.

For a moment he watched, then darted forward, and before the nearest mouse could run away, caught it in his beak. Almost at once its frightened cries were silenced by another quick thrust of that terrible beak, and, as the other mice scur-

ried away, he stepped to the nearest shelf and gobbled several four-inch snakes easily and without haste. Well pleased, he then picked the mouse up in his claws and flew outside to finish his meal in the branches of a fir tree above the cave.

When he had gorged himself, he again descended into the cavern, and now, ignoring the mice that peeked at him from the rocks, waddled to a dry ledge where he had discovered a mound of yellow dust the night before. Here he flopped into the dust and kicked it through his feathers until he wearied of the pastime and was ready to return to the tent.

WHEN Treat rolled off of his cot at the first chorus of birds in the gray dawn, Blackjack was again on his ridgepole perch, glaring downward and blinking against the growing light of day. Treat glanced up, grinned at Blackjack, and then sobered, his gaze shifting toward Clipper, rolled in a blanket on the cot across the tent. Swiftly, Treat picked up the water bucket, darted another look at Clipper, and whirled out of the doorway.

Clipper came to life instantly, throwing off his blanket too quickly for a drowsy man who had just awakened. His first glance, also, was at Blackjack, but his smile was one-sided and his eyes narrowed as he jerked on his shoes and stood up. At once, he strode to the stove, grabbed up a chunk of wood, and brandished the weapon at Blackjack.

"I'll fix you this time!" he growled, and let fly at Blackjack with all his might. The stick of wood struck the top of the tent, just missing the owl, and dropped back. Clipper snorted, picked it up, and prepared to throw again. Blackjack shifted along the ridgepole, flicking his beak angrily and glaring down at the man.

Suddenly the tent flap was jerked aside and Treat bounded in.

"Didn't I warn you to leave my bird alone?" he cried, leaping toward the other man.

Clipper turned a little gray, but sent the stovewood hurtling upward. Treat sprang forward and caught Clipper's upturned chin with a hard fist. The wood struck the ridgepole and knocked Blackjack backward. The owl beat his wings frantically and ruffled his plumage in indignant protest. Instantly, something small and bright, like a round yellow pebble, fell out of his feathers and dropped to the ground near Treat. Blackjack fussed about and settled himself crustily again on his perch as Treat stooped and picked up the object. For a moment the man stared at the tiny thing in his hand; then he gave an excited cry that had Blackjack blinking in wonder.

"My gosh!" cried Treat. He looked down at the still horizontal Clipper. "Look what I've got, Clipper!" he said slowly.

Clipper got up with one hand caressing his jaw, and a mingled look of anger and bewilderment on his face. Warily he looked into Treat's palm, and then grabbed suddenly at the object, his dark eyes gleaming and his face tense.

"Gold!" he muttered. "A gold nugget the size of a pea! How'd it get in Blackjack's feathers?"

Treat smiled up at the owl. "He's found my dad's mine," he said exultantly. "There was nuggets in it, my dad said so! Bet Blackjack was lookin' for food. There'd be mice in a hole like that and——"

"Gold!" Clipper's greedy words broke into Treat's soliloquy. "Great Jupiter!" he exclaimed, as he quickly pocketed the nugget. "Where'd he find the mine? We gotta find out! We——"

Treat's tone was sardonic. "We?" he said. "When you burned the map, Clipper, you burned your right to a share in the mine. Remember, you insisted on havin' our contract of partnership written on the other side. You ain't got a leg to stand on, Clipper. If I don't feel like I owe you nothin', you can't prove that I do."

He suddenly smiled, his eyes still on Blackjack. "What'd I tell you about my owl?" he asked cheerfully. "Said he'd prove his worth, didn't I? Well, he's found the mine that you deliberately threw away. Can your dog do that good, Clipper?"

Blackjack teetered and preened his feathers. Treat, he decided, was pleased over something he had done, and Clipper was completely crushed. For Clipper was again on his favorite box, his face red, staring sullenly at the ground. Blackjack eyed him haughtily, his round-eyed gaze going beyond Clipper, searching the tent for the cowardly Nosey. Treat's singular approval made him long for more. This was the propitious moment to have the yellow cur yelping for his life.

Clipper abruptly glared up at Treat.

"You ain't got the mine yet," he grated.

Treat sobered and shrugged. "That's right!" he said at last.

CLIPPER grinned maliciously. "Yeah, and you ain't got wings nor eyes you can see with in the dark, either!" he taunted. "How you goin' to follow that banjoyed bird to the mine at night?"

Treat pursed his lips and frowned. "Never thought of that," he admitted.

Clipper leaped to his feet, a smug look on his dark face.

"Well, I have!" he blared. "My

dog could trail him; that is, Nosey could for half of the mine, like our first bargain!"

Treat scratched his nose. "I guess he could," he admitted.

Clipper scowled. "You know danged well he could!" he flared. "What if your bird has found the mine, that ain't done us no good. It's my dog that's—"

Treat chuckled suddenly. "I've always liked animals, Clipper," he said. "But that one's got me stumped, because he's so danged much like you. He puts up a big front, but he's a coward and he's tricky. I don't trust him any more than I do you, now, Clipper; but I'll give you both more than a sportin' chance. If you fail me this time, though, I'm through. A man can't just go on forever being a sucker. I've done it because I felt that some day you'd prove yourself a worthy partner. Now's your chance, Clipper, for both you and the dog."

Clipper looked morose and pouty. "I intend to have my share," he growled. "And Nosey'll obey me or I'll beat his slinkin' hide to a pulp. It's your brass-faced owl that's worryin' me. He's apt to fail us."

Treat grinned. "Blackjack won't let me down," he predicted.

Blackjack dozed all day because there was too much going on in the tent to permit much sleep. Treat went about as calmly as ever, but Clipper seemed under a high tension, for he bellowed, stomped around, kicked the dog, and spent much of his time glaring up at Blackjack. Twice he dragged the cringing Nosey out of the tent, and Blackjack heard him cursing the dog. The last time he came in with a look of satisfaction on his face, carrying a bloody stick.

Treat's expression was grim, and

he said, "I suppose he'll follow my owl now, Clipper!"

Clipper snorted. "He'll do whatever I tell him to!"

Later Nosey slunk into the tent to lick his wounds and snarl at the men when they came near him.

As night came, Clipper grew fidgety. Finally he got up, tied the tent flaps back, and ordered the dog to come to him. When Nosey crawled forward with fierce eyes and bared fangs, Treat shrugged and shook his head guardedly at Clipper.

"He's goin' to turn on you some day," he warned. "And much as he galls me, I wouldn't blame him."

Clipper sniffed. "He knows who's boss," he retorted. "Smarter than some men, that way. It's gettin' dark. Get your peepers on that bird of yours; he'll fly any time now."

Treat complied good-naturedly, seating himself on his cot and grinning up at Blackjack. Clipper took a place near the doorway, his rough hands gripping the scruff of Nosey's neck, his glittering eyes on the owl.

Blackjack edged along the ridge-pole and returned their stares with interest. Clipper was right; it was time to go in search of nourishment. But Blackjack resented Clipper's curiosity. He didn't trust either the man or his cringing dog. Maybe they were planning to keep him from visiting the cave where an easy meal awaited him. With a defiant snap of his beak he spread his wings, leaped into the air, and soared through the tent opening.

Behind him a great commotion arose with Clipper's harsh voice sounding loudest of all. "Go after him, you cur!" he bellowed. "After him, or I'll——"

Nosey dashed wildly out of the tent, his fangs showing and his eyes gleaming. Behind him rushed the shouting Clipper and the half-smil-

ing Treat. Blackjack halted in the branches of a tree and waited to see what it was all about. Nosey bounded to the tree and stood beneath it, snarling, his glittering eyes on Blackjack. Eagerly the two men followed, and when they were below the owl, Treat called up to him.

"Go on, Blackjack," he urged. "Take us to the mine!"

Clipper sneered. "As if that dumb bird could understand," he taunted. "You sure are a fool, Treat!"

BLACKJACK flapped on a ways and again lighted in a tree. Nosey bounded after him and the two men followed. The owl eyed Nosey intently, cocking his head to one side. The dog's attitude was no longer shrinking. His eyes were gleaming with the viciousness of a cowardly animal that seeks revenge, and thinks it has its tormentor guessing. He thought Blackjack was afraid of him—running away.

Blackjack stared at the dog unconcernedly. This was amusing, a funny game that the men had started. He could send Nosey yelping any time he grew weary of the game; therefore, it would be fun to continue with it.

Again he flew on and waited for Nosey and the men to find him. Again and again he did it, always halting and making fierce noises at the dog to keep him interested until the men caught up. After several miles of this, he was obliged to take shorter flights in order to keep the dog on his trail; but he was getting a malicious enjoyment out of drawing the dog on, because Nosey was showing the strain of his long race. The dog's eyes were more bloodshot than ever now; his gaunt body heaving, and his snarling lips were flecked with foam.

The men, too, were showing signs of fatigue. They ran more slowly, and their breath came in gasps. Treat's hat was gone, and Clipper's face was flushed and puffed. Both had their heads and arms scratched, and their clothing was torn.

Blackjack lured them on until at last he alighted in the tree over the cave and sat there watching the lagging Nosey climb the ledge after him. At once the owl's eyes became intense and yellowish in the dark. His interest in the game had made him forget the reason he had come to the cave. Nosey's hungrily malicious eyes reminded him that he, too, was hungry, and that in the cave were delicacies to his liking—rare eatables that Nosey would relish also. Blackjack's fiery temper flared. Nosey had followed him for the purpose of taking his easy meals from him. Nosey wanted his mice and baby snakes!

Resentful, and very angry, Blackjack bounced from the limb and plumped to the ground at the mouth of the cave to face Nosey with clicking beak and fierce eyes as the dog slid around a boulder and lunged forward. At sight of Blackjack's snapping fury, the dog stopped and drew back, snarling, his attitude changing instantly to one of skulking fear. It was then that the two men came up, their way lighted by a blazing stick that Treat carried over his head. Blackjack blinked and shuffled back into the mouth of the cave. Nosey tucked his tail between his legs and cowered down in the long grass.

Treat was jubilant as he looked at the black outline of the cave and saw Blackjack standing haughtily in the entrance.

"This is the mine!" he cried. "Looks exactly like the sketch dad drew of it! I take back what I said

about your dog, Clipper. He's won half the mine for you fairly enough."

"Half?" Clipper's sneering query was neither pleased nor amiable. As he spoke, he whirled, something black and shining in one hand which he pointed at Treat. "Did you think I'd be fool enough only to want half the mine when I could get it all?" he snarled. "Why, I've been plan'n' this for months, tryin' to figure a way to get it. I——"

Blackjack broke in on his triumphant speech with a savage and enraged snapping of his beak. Clipper was backing up on him, backing into the cave. Blackjack understood, now, exactly what the two men had long been fighting over. They, too, wanted his choice morsels of food. Clipper was trying to get them all; he had just said so. A relentless and formidable rage against Clipper seized Blackjack. With a whirl of wings, and an angry hissing in his throat, he leaped to the attack, pouncing upon the back of Clipper's neck, his deadly beak clamping down hard on one of the man's red ears.

CLIPPER let out an astonished yell of pain and began flaying about his head with his free arm. Then Treat's laugh came, strangely harsh, as Blackjack heard the impact of his master's fist against Clipper's face. Clipper's head snapped back. He reeled drunkenly, and Blackjack let go of him and swooped back into the mouth of the cave as the man fell.

The next instant Blackjack was glaring at Treat, who stood over Clipper with the burning stick in one hand and Clipper's black, shining object in the other.

"I gave you your last chance to be square with me," gritted Treat. "I wanted you to prove worthy of my friendship and confidence, but

it just ain't in you, is it, Clipper? Well, you're through now! You——" He halted and looked aside. Blackjack had heard a noise, also, that made his glare follow Treat's.

Nosey was raising up out of the grass, his bloodshot eyes on the form of his prostrate master. There was an ugly, almost fiendish look in his eyes as he ogled Clipper, a look which indicated that he knew his moment for revenge had come, inasmuch as the man who had kicked him and beaten him was now powerless to defend himself.

Clipper made a queer, strangled sound, and covered his face with his arms. "Treat!" he screamed in terror. "He'll kill me! He'll——"

The black thing in Treat's hand suddenly came alive, making a sharp, cracking sound and spitting fire at Nosey. Nosey snarled, showing dripping fangs and foam on his lips. He sprang into the air toward Clipper and then crumpled into a heap, lying inert on the ground. Blackjack craned his neck and stared at Nosey, wondering what had happened.

"I told you, you and your dog were alike!" Treat was standing over a now horrified and cowering Clipper. "Tricky—try to take advantage of anybody weaker than you are—at least, you'd take advantage of anybody who couldn't help himself. Well, the dog won't never do it again, and neither will you, Clipper! Not of me, anyway. Now you can either get up here and fight this thing out with your fists, or you can clear out right now! Which'll you do, Clipper?"

Clipper uncovered his face and sat up trembling. "I—I'll get out!" he

quavered hoarsely. "I don't never want to see you again, anyway. Not you, nor that fool mine, nor that dad-blasted bird!"

Treat made a motion with his hand. "All right, get!" he said.

Blackjack turned and stalked proudly into the cave. If he and Treat were to share his victuals, he would be the first to take stock of their treasure. Slowly he eyed the interior. The fat mice had been frightened away by the noise outside, but the little snakes were as bold as ever. Unblinkingly, they eyed him from the ledges and stuck out their tiny tongues.

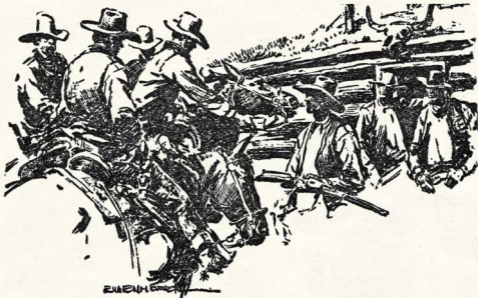
"Blackjack!" Treat had come into the cave with the burning stick still in his hands. Now he looked up from the ledge with the yellow dust on it, letting the dust sift through his fingers. "Look here, Blackjack, I brought you something," he said, and pulled a big frog out of his pocket. "That's the first installment on what I owe you for the mine—there'll be plenty of others."

He leaned back against the wall and, with friendly, boyish eyes, watched Blackjack eat his first payment. "I knew you'd prove yourself!" he chuckled. "But even I didn't guess that you'd save my life. Why, I owe you more'n all the frogs and mice you can eat for the rest of your life."

Blackjack turned his head on one side and blinked at Treat slowly. Treat didn't want his titbits; instead, Treat was offering him more than he would ever eat.

Treat laughed. "Winkin' at me! You old rascal!" he cried. "Why, darned if you didn't know what I said!"

NOTICE—This magazine contains new stories only. No reprints are used.



RED TRAIL TO BLACK TREASURE

PART III.

By LUKE SHORT

CHRISTINA MELLISH, sister of Big Ben Mellish, the owner of the large Anchor Ranch near Seven Troughs, decides to leave the ranch, contending that Ben is hiring gunmen instead of cowmen, and is engaged in some nefarious activity. In town, Christina goes to the home of Doctor Benbow, an old friend, where she gets a job nursing a mysterious patient of the doctor's—a patient who has been brutally flogged. The patient turns out to be Pete Yard, formerly an employee at the vast GW Ranch of Senator Matthew Warranrode, near Seven Troughs. Christina reads in

the *Toole State Register*, edited by Steve Trueblood, that the Federal government is planning construction of a huge dam at Antelope Butte, near by. Yard evinces a sudden keen interest in the news.

Warranrode, in a talk with his foreman, Ames Manderfield, reveals that he is back of the Antelope Dam project, and that by bribery and other means he has secured passage of a Federal bill which will greatly reduce the size of the Ute Reservation, near the projected dam site. In this, he has an ally in Major Linkman, government agent at the reservation. When the Ute excess land

is put up for auction, Warranrode will have it bid in by Schumacher and Lassiter, owners of ranches adjoining the property. These two will be "dummy" buyers, actually acquiring the property for the senator, who has secret information that the land is rich in deposits of coal. Warranrode has hired Ben Mellish to make trouble among the ranchers in the basin, so that they, too, will sell out and leave the section. Also, he had sent Pete Yard to handle Trueblood, a crusading editor who is attempting to expose Warranrode. Trueblood, however, converted Yard to his own cause, and in reprisal, Warranrode had sent Manderfield to beat up Yard and get him to leave the country.

Warranrode hopes that Trueblood, who suspects land deal frauds in connection with the dam project, will be killed by "parties unknown" in the Seven Troughs war, thus ridding him of his most powerful and dangerous enemy. He does not greatly fear Yard, who, he claims, has only a "cow-puncher's brains."

While the senator is talking with Manderfield, his daughter, Sylvia Warranrode, comes into the room and inquires about Yard, whom she secretly loves. Warranrode warns Sylvia to see nothing more of Yard, then instructs Manderfield to see to it absolutely that Yard is made to quit the country. Manderfield and Ben Mellish call at Doctor Benbow's, and Mellish prepares to give Yard another beating. Yard, however, with Christina's aid, bests him, and Mellish and Manderfield leave, after warning Yard to get out of Seven Troughs.

Meanwhile, the ranchers call a meeting to take concerted action, if possible, against the dam project, but the men can't seem to get together, although Trueblood warns

them that the dam scheme is "plain land steal," and that Ben Mellish is behind the war that has been started against ranchers opposing the plan. Sheriff Ross Nance, a relative of Mellish's, denies this, although Trueblood insists it is so and that, furthermore, the newly formed Seven Troughs Development Co. is a corporation holding all the land Ben Mellish has "stolen, claimed and bought." He urges the ranchers to organize and fight, but they are unable to get unanimity of opinion.

Later, after a talk with Stumbling Bear, a Ute, Trueblood and Yard becomes suspicious that Warranrode is angling for a slice of Ute range, and that there may be more behind the dam scheme than meets the naked eye. They begin to wonder why Warranrode, a millionaire, would risk this basin scandal for a mere one hundred thousand dollars or so.

Ben Mellish goes to Warranrode's, and asks Warranrode to offer a five thousand dollars reward for Pete Yard, dead or alive, on the theory—entirely false—that Yard murdered his brother, Frank. Warranrode agrees and the reward offer is posted by the sheriff after a warrant has been issued.

CHAPTER IX.

CHECKMATE.

ED BRIEDEHOFF was an observant man, already versed in the lessons those around him were having to learn. So when the rider emerged suddenly from the fringe of pines that ringed the knoll on which Ed's place was built, it was only a matter of seconds before Ed saw him. He dropped the stiff hide he was cutting thongs from and

walked leisurely to the house, snapping his knife shut and ramming it in his pocket.

At the doorway, he paused and leaned against the jamb, first glancing inside to make sure the carbine stood within reach. Then he regarded the approaching rider. While packing his pipe with stubby, grimed fingers, Ed played his usual game and lost, for there was nothing about the set of this man in the saddle, about his horse, about his rig, that told him anything. Ed's grimness lightened a little as he flicked match to pipe, settled his burly shoulders, and waited.

The rider walked his horse into the hard-packed circle of dirt before the porch, and in that brief instant which Westerners take to size up a stranger before speaking, Ed saw that the horse had been recently run.

"Mornin'," Pete said.

"Mornin'," Ed replied noncommittally. He did not append an invitation to alight, and Pete did not seem to expect it.

Pete said in a voice almost as casual as Ed's, "I saw Ben Mellish and five of his riders take the road over to Swan Ullman's."

Ed removed the pipe from his mouth with a deliberate gesture. "That so?" he said amiably. "How long ago was that?"

"Ten or fifteen minutes."

Ed was noticing several things about this stranger which gave him pause to reflect. First, the man had been in a fight recently, and still wore the marks of it. Second, he had a gun rammed in his belt, which argued either that he had only recently acquired it, or that he wore it holsterless because it could be unlimbered faster. "And I'll bet he's knocked the sight off it," Ed thought, as he looked at the man's

face again. Certainly, it was a face primed for trouble, lean, expressionless, a trifle hard, with a sleepy alertness in the eyes.

Ed said slowly, "What's that to me? Or to you?"

The stranger took a deep breath and shook his head. But he changed his reins from his left hand to his right, a concession to caution, and ran his left hand, palm down, along the slope of his leg, wiping it dry of perspiration. "Depends," the man said. "Trueblood said to let you know."

Ed's eyes narrowed and he shuffled his boots a little so that the sound of them was loud on the boards, and then quiet settled.

"Trueblood," Ed repeated, and Pete nodded.

"I don't recollect he mentioned you," Ed continued. "Fact is, I don't recollect your name."

"You never heard it," the man said. He gathered up his reins. "I'd guess there'd be a short cut to Ullman's up this way. Is there?"

Ed didn't answer immediately, and when he did, it wasn't properly an answer. "Swan wasn't here that night. It wouldn't 'a' made much difference. Nothin' come of the meeting."

"That's a pity," Pete mused.

"It just didn't work."

"A pity," Pete repeated. "If that place of his ever got into strange hands, it might make trouble for the folks down the creek from it. Prior water rights and such." He straightened up. "About this short cut."

Ed's face betrayed a little of the surprise he felt at this statement coming from a stranger. Pete waited courteously.

Presently, Ed said, "I'm down the creek from him. I guess it sort of puts it up to me, don't it?"

PETE said nothing. Ed went into the house and came out with a shard of mirror. Stepping out into the sun and holding it chest high, pointed down valley, he murmured, "Miles is down creek, too."

"I wouldn't bother," Pete said. "We won't have the time."

Ed looked across the long sweep of valley. Below him, in a tiny clearing among the pines, he could make out Miles Leston's place. This crude heliograph might summon Miles, but it would take time for him to get his sons and ride up. "The devil," Ed said mildly.

"We better hurry," Pete urged.

Ed knocked the ashes from his pipe, and put it in his pocket. "You might be one of Mellish's riders for all I know," he said, still looking down into the valley.

"I might," Pete conceded. "Maybe you can find out."

"How?"

"By seeing what Mellish says to me."

"It would be too late then," Ed said.

"That's right."

Ed looked up at him to see if the face held the same matter-of-fact daring the voice did. It did, and anger stirred in Ed, but he said with patience:

"If what you say is true, Mellish would have passed Miles's place."

"He didn't. He did travel trails this time."

"And how do you know that?"

"Because I've been watchin' the Anchor for three days." And then he said gently, "About this short cut."

Ed didn't answer. He went to the door and lifted out the carbine and went over to the corral. In a moment, his horse was saddled and they cut in between the house and

the corral and took to the trees on the up slope.

Presently, Ed said, "It'll sound funny for me to make a threat."

"Go ahead."

"If you've lured me up here to get me off my place, or to give Ben Mellish a crack at me, I'll shoot you!"

"All right," Pete said.

Ed picked the way up the slope and slacked off the line of the ridge into a narrow valley where the bottom was surprisingly free of brush. Then he and his companion took a feeder canyon, a mile above it to the right, and made their slow way up the face of a hogback, and reined up at the top. They could see a log shack off to the far side of the valley beyond. Ed watched it for several seconds. A woman came out into the brush, and went in again.

Ed grunted and put his horse down the slope. In another five minutes, they walked their horses into Swan Ullman's clean and hard-packed yard. Swan greeted them from the door, and it was much the same greeting that Ed had given Yard.

"Better get your woman out of there, Swan," Ed said, looking around him. Before Swan could answer, Ed said, "She can take our horses over in that wagon shed."

HE dismounted then, Pete following suit. Swan Ullman walked over to them, his rifle in his hand. He was a spare, faded man, with straw-colored hair and a kind of determined truculence in his manner. He began, "What kind of danged nonsense—"

"Ben Mellish," Ed said curtly. "Get your wife."

For a moment, Swan only stared at him and then he turned and called over his shoulder, "Emma!"

His wife must have been listening, for she was already out of the door before Swan had called her.

"What is it, Swan?" she asked wearily. A fretted, work-worn, and unlovely woman, she stood among them in a brightly clean dress, looking from one to the other. Finally her gaze settled on her man. "Melish," Swan said. "Take them ponies over and put them in the wagon shed. You stay there, too."

She took the reins from Ed and Pete and walked the horses across the bare corral lot. Swan led the way into the house. Inside, it reflected a proud, neat poverty; a tin can holding a pathetic little bouquet of fresh columbines sat on the sill of the open window.

Swan's hard, suspicious glance shuttled from Ed to Pete. "How many of them?"

"Five," Pete said.

Crossing to a wall shelf, Swan reached both hands up into a wooden box and ladled down cartridge shells to the table. Pete stood in the doorway, looking down the valley, and he could almost feel Ed Briedehoff's eyes at his back.

Pete half turned and said to Ed, "Here they come. Five, besides Ben."

"Ah," Ed said, looking at Swan, who picked up his rifle and stepped past Pete out in front of the door.

Ed said, "Maybe you better go out with him."

"I want to hear Melish," Pete murmured, not looking at him. "I want to hear how he says it. Likely, it won't be the last time we'll hear it."

"Not from behind my back, you won't."

"No. You stay there. I'll stay here."

Ed didn't say anything, but he

didn't move, either; then the sound of the approaching horses came to them. Presently, it was close and then it ceased, amid a jingle of bridle chains. Swan was standing with feet spread a little, holding his gun in both hands.

Then Ben Mellish's deep and wrathful voice came to them. "Swan, I told you to be out of here by to-day."

"So you did," Swan said mildly. And then his voice lost all its mildness. "First one of you gets off his horse will have to be helped back on."

Ben Mellish's voice said, "Blake, drive off those ponies in the corral and fire that shed."

Pete stepped swiftly out the door. The six riders were ringed in a loose semicircle confronting Swan, perhaps twenty yards away.

PETE said quietly in that sudden silence, "Go ahead, Blake. Only when you do it, hit the ground with a gun in your hand."

Blake, closest to the sheds, had his foot free of the stirrup, his weight forward. Now he settled back in the saddle again, and shifted his baleful gaze to Mellish.

Ben didn't say anything, nor did he move. A meager smile started on his weathered face. "Well, well," he said softly.

Ed Briedehoff stepped out of the shack then, and stood just a little behind Pete. Ben noticed him and then looked at the house, as if expecting more.

"Just like a cuckoo clock, Ben," Ed drawled. "Start it off. Maybe there's some more inside."

Ben ignored this, and swiveled his gaze down to Pete. "This is better than I thought," he said mildly. "Lot's better." To Swan he said, "I've got a paper in my pocket

you'd like to see," and he reached up to his shirt pocket and drew out a sheet of new paper, with two gold seals on it. He held it out to Swan, but Swan made no move to take it, nor did he show any curiosity.

"I'll read it, then," Ben said, still amiably.

He unfolded the paper and read:

"Wanted, for murder of Frank Mellish on May the twenty-third, Pete Yard. Age, about twenty-eight; height, even six feet; weight—"

He paused, and looked at Swan. "You likely recognize him, Swan, since he's standin' right beside you." He turned the paper face toward them. "Maybe those figures in heavy black at the top will interest you, Swan. It says five thousand dollars reward." He dropped the paper and folded his arms and leaned on the saddle horn, smiling expectantly.

"You said somethin' a while back," Swan said stubbornly. "Kindly get the devil off this place."

Ben nodded and straightened up. "Sure. I'll be back to-night, though, Swan."

"I doubt that."

"Don't. I'll be back with Sheriff Nance. You better saddle up and ride, Swan, if you don't aim to be taken back to Seven Troughs."

Swan allowed himself a dour smile. "Even Nance can't jail a man for mindin' his own business."

Ben leaned forward and said, "But he can jail a man for hidin' an outlaw, Swan." He settled back in his saddle. "Tell your wife to pack up, too, Swan. Because I'll have my men in here by the time Nance is through with you." To Pete he said, "And you, Yard—we'll meet again."

He saluted lazily, and wheeled his horse. Swan's gun was halfway to his shoulder when Ed reached out and shoved the barrel down, per-

mitting Swan to curse in bitter impotence while the Anchor riders took the road and disappeared.

Ed was the first to move then. He walked over to the paper Mellish dropped and picked it up and read it, then raised his eyes to Pete Yard.

"Did you know about this?"

Pete shook his head. Ed dropped the note, saying gently, "It occurs to me, Yard, that this is an easier way for Ben Mellish to get Swan than taking the place with his men."

Pete made a quick movement, and when it was completed, Ed was looking into the cocked Colt held in Pete's hand.

"You're a good man, Ed," Pete murmured. "A little too suspicious, but that never hurt a man." He circled a little to get Swan within range, but his eyes held no animosity, only a kind of pity. "Things come a little too fast for me here, but I'll get onto it," he said.

"If you live," Ed said. "There'll be a lot of us hunting you."

Pete nodded, and said to Swan, "I didn't look for this, Swan. This is my fault."

Swan looked over at Ed. "Who is he?"

"Pete Yard, one of Mellish's understrappers. Ben sent him over to me, and I brought him to you, and now Ben has got you dead to rights, Swan. He'll claim to Nance that he tried to take Yard away from us, and that we wouldn't give him up. Nance will come out and take you into custody, and then Ben moves in."

PETE said, "Swan, you can't dodge it, now. You throw in with Ed and Miles and whoever else you can get and hold this place to-night. Don't let Nance take you. If you do, your place is gone."

Ed said with bitter anger, "Swan is likely to call on me and Miles for help, ain't he, after I brought you up to him."

"Swan, drop that gun!" Pete said swiftly, and there was nothing in his voice now but business. Swan knew it, too, and he let the rifle slack from his hands, his face dark with anger. Pete said, "Now you, Ed."

When both rifles were on the ground, Pete kicked them out of reach.

"Now call your wife, Swan. Tell her to bring the horses."

Swan did. Mrs. Ullman did not even see Pete's gun until she handed him the reins, and then she backed away from him, eyes wide.

Pete swung into the saddle, and then regarded the two men. "Everything I do won't be this sorry," he murmured. "You fight, that's all."

"And you run," Ed suggested curtly.

Pete expected a shot when he was out of pistol range, but neither Swan nor Ed made a move to pick up their rifles until he was out of sight. Pete took the same trail he had used coming over, but at Ed's place he struck off into the timber, riding hard. For an hour then, keeping to ridges free of brush, he cut down the slope into the open, and then reined up and looked back over the basin. The road ribboned into sight at a dozen places, and through one of these, far to the north, he saw a band of riders, the dust funneling up behind, following them. That would be Ben Mellish, bound for town.

Pete put his horse down on the road and traveled at a fast walk, and some times a trot, through the long hours.

There was an expression of disgust on his face as he rode into the afternoon, feeling the wash of heat on his

shoulders and the brooding loneliness of this country. The bright green of the new grass lay all about him, a solid, almost monotonous color against the depth of the bare sky.

His first effort to help these ranchers had been turned against them, and in such a way that they thought he was a Mellish man. He didn't blame Ed, for his reasoning was inescapable. Restlessly, Pete turned his mind to Nance, and tried to recall what Steve had said to him. Perhaps not dishonest, but certainly prejudiced in favor of his nephew, Ben Mellish. That meant Nance, on hearing Ben's story of Swan refusing to turn over a wanted man, would come out and take Swan off his place. After a day and night of questioning, during which Swan would insist that he had not known Yard was outlawed, he would be freed, but the harm would have been done. Ben would have Swan's place, just as he had promised.

Pete swore quietly. Wherever he turned, he seemed to bring misfortune with him. First it was to Christina Mellish, then to Ed, whom Swan would suspect, and now to Swan.

At dusk, not far from Seven Troughs, Pete decided that disaster could not happen to Swan, and he felt better. But it was only at the sight of Seven Troughs lights shining into the deep dust of the main street, that he remembered he was a wanted man. It served to make him check his pony's pace for a moment, and then he went on.

Like a thousand of its sister towns, Seven Troughs had no graduations between town and country. Houses squatted in the cross street behind the main street, leaving the ragged line of stores to face the road, the last store being the town limits.

PETE pulled off the road and turned down the alley which ran behind the block of business houses and their sheds. In its friendly darkness, he dismounted. The muted noises of the town drifted over to him from the street, making more deep and vast the solitude he had just left. This was a friendless town now, he was thinking, but it would not be hostile to him until later. He could walk its streets and not be recognized, save for two or three persons, and they would not be likely to give him away.

He smiled faintly in that dark, remembering Doctor Benbow, and then his face grew secretly troubled as he recalled Christina Mellish's face. But he put this thought aside as he stepped to the board walk and made his slow way toward the center of town. Sheriff Ross Nance, he thought with pleasure, has put five thousand dollars on the head of a man he will not recognize.

Nevertheless, instinct warned him to be wary, even though Ben Mellish was a good half hour behind him. Crossing each island of light from the store windows he moved toward the center of town. At Pearson's Emporium he cut across the street to the far side. Only a few people were on the streets, for this was the Seven Troughs supper hour.

At the arch of the feed stable, he paused and considered the light in the office to the far side of it, then walked toward it and opened the door and entered. A young boy was looking over a saddle catalogue, his feet on a barrel.

"Sheriff Nance have a horse here, bud?" he asked, and the boy nodded. Pete said, "Saddle him up, will you?" and left.

Across the street, the high, wide porch of the hotel relieved the solid stretch of store fronts. Beyond it,

two doors down, was the office of the sheriff, which was not housed in the tiny courthouse up the cross street.

Pete went up the street to the corner, crossed, and walked down past the sheriff's office, glancing in at the uncurtained window as he passed. Nance was in conversation with another man, who was leaning against the desk and listening with careful attention. Pete tramped on, and at the corner of the hotel porch, where the shadow was the deepest, he drew aside and leaned against the wood of its high frame. Two men came out of the hotel and down the steps and glanced at him, and Pete nodded and got an acknowledgment. A wagon jolted up from a side street and crossed to the other one, the slack knocking of its ungreased hubs waning with distance.

Pete drew out a sack of tobacco and began to roll a smoke. Some one came down the steps and turned his way, but he did not look up until the footfalls ceased. When he did, he saw Chris Mellish before him. The startled expression was still on her face.

"Pete!" she whispered, and then looked about her. From the saddle shop next the hotel, a lone cow-puncher came out and turned their way.

Pete said quietly, "Talk up. Nobody knows me," and lighted his cigarette as the puncher passed.

"Why are you here?" Chris said swiftly. "Don't you know?"

Pete looked searchingly at her and let the match die. "I heard," he told her, unsmiling. "It was your brother I am supposed to have killed."

"But you didn't! I know that. But you must think other people know it!"

PETE laid a hand on her arm and said, "Easy. You and Doc are the only two people who know me here. There was no picture on that reward dodger."

Only then did the tension in Chris's face loosen, and the serene beauty of it was without trouble or fear. She smiled, and Pete could see the color begin to creep into her face.

"Didn't Doc Benbow tell you what I said the morning I left?" Pete asked quietly.

"About my leaving?"

Pete nodded, and Chris said, "Yes. He told me. He—he even offered to send me South."

"It would save you a lot of heart-ache," Pete murmured. "I mean that. I meant it then, and I reckon I mean it even more now."

Chris said quickly, "Then you've seen Ben?"

"Yes."

"Have you—is he—"

"We haven't yet," Pete said. "I hope we never do. But somebody is going to nail up his hide, Chris, and it won't be nice to see."

Chris looked away for a moment. "I can face that. I think I already knew it before you ever told me."

"And you don't care?"

Chris's gaze met his. "He's my blood. You know I do," she said faintly. "But not enough to stop it. We pay for what we take or get, I think. We should, anyway."

"Do we?" Pete murmured, a little angry because of her stubbornness. How could he tell her that Ben Melish was not still a big and stubborn boy, that he was playing the deadliest of games, and one which, by any reckoning, he was bound to lose? It wasn't that she was innocent, and would be hurt by it, for she was a woman who had known trouble. Her face was tempered by it, shadowed

and a little grave as he looked down into it now. But there was a high, clean pride there, too, that would bow and break under the news that Ben was a cheap hired bully with nothing to excuse him save an unnatural greed. She was watching Pete's face now, asking silently for a strength he could not give her.

His eyes narrowed a little and he repeated, "Do we? I'm not sure. You held a gun on a man once, and because you did, I'm still alive. By my reckoning, that's a debt. But I'm in this trouble up to my neck, and so is Ben. One of us will go down. If it's Been that goes instead of me, and because of me, that will be a strange way to pay off my debt to you."

"Because of you?" Chris repeated.

Pete shifted impatiently. "When a man frames another, it's because he wants him out of the way. And I won't leave."

"And that's what I'm supposed to run from?" Chris asked, her voice a little angry too. "Just because it has to be done and it might be you who does it?"

"He's your brother, Chris, whether he's right or wrong. You just said so."

"I know," she said quietly, suddenly humble.

Pete glanced down at the sheriff's office now. No one had come out. While he was looking, Chris said quietly. "There's a woman looking for you, Pete."

Pete's gaze whipped around to her face. "A woman? Who?"

"She won't tell her name." She was watching Pete's face, and the surprise in it was genuine, and Chris, strangely relieved, continued, making her voice as impersonal as she could: "She came to Sheriff Nance and asked about you. He sent her

to Doctor Benbow, who wasn't in, and Mrs. Carew sent her to me."

She raised her eyes now to the porch and nodded her head slightly. "There she is on the steps." Chris turned to go, but Pete laid a hand on her arm and looked over his shoulder. There, at the head of the porch steps, was Sylvia Warranrode; and Chris, her eyes steady on Pete's face, saw his lips pull tight and then form a soundless curse.

Sylvia came hurriedly down the steps, the rich cloth of her divided skirt swishing in her haste.

She said swiftly to Pete, "It's true, Pete! They are after you! You've got to come with me!"

"I know," Pete said. He inclined his head toward Chris, whose arm he was squeezing hard. "Sylvia, this is my fiancée, Miss Mellish," he said quietly.

BEFORE, Sylvia's darkly beautiful face had held a concern that Chris instinctively feared and understood, but now the expression changed slowly, and she saw the pride in this woman rally to hide something that Chris did not need to have named. And Chris felt a sudden hatred for Pete and his lie. She turned to him, mouth open to speak, trying to wrench free her arm, but he held it in an iron grip and in his eyes, for one moment, was a cool desperation, so that the words died on her lips.

"Oh," Sylvia said faintly. She gave one look at Chris and inclined her head. Then she said graciously, "She's very kind to me, Pete." Sylvia looked down at her hands and then again at Pete, and she contrived a weak smile. "I didn't know, Pete," she said huskily. "So—so much has happened since you left." She even laughed now. "I rather imagine my concern was for nothing, then."

Pete inclined his head slightly, keeping a tight hold on Chris's arm.

"Even the reward poster?" Sylvia asked slowly. "They are after you?"

"That's true," Pete said.

"Then——" Sylvia looked from Pete to Chris, and Chris could almost imagine that Sylvia was thinking Pete had dared to come into this town to keep a tryst with her.

"You go back to the hotel, Sylvia," Pete put in gently. "I'll have a man take you over to the reservation to-morrow."

Without a word, Sylvia turned and ran up the steps and into the hotel, and Pete watched her with impassive eyes.

Chris said hotly, passionately, "That was cruel, terribly cruel!"

Pete didn't speak for a moment, and then he said grimly, "I'm sorry about that lie. But if you see something in the path of a train, it doesn't matter whether you lead it away or kick it away, does it?" He added less irritably, "She won't repeat it. I'm sorry I had to pull you in it, but you were closest."

"But it's not that!" Chris said swiftly. "She loves you! Are you so blind you don't see it?"

Pete did not hear this. He was looking down the street and he saw a man leaving the sheriff's office. He said to Chris, "If you'll tell Doc Benbow to send a man along with her——" And then his voice trailed off, for Sheriff Nance stepped out of the door and was locking it. Pete said quietly, "You'll have to go," and he left her, walking toward the sheriff's office.

When he came abreast of the sheriff, he stopped. "Ben Mellish is outside town, Nance," he said. "He wants you." Gesturing toward the feed stable, he added, "I already told them to have your horse saddled."

Nance peered up at him. "Where's the trouble now?"

"Swan Ullman's."

"What is it?"

"Maybe you better let Ben tell you," Pete murmured. "I'll be waitin' at the end of the street. And if no one sees you, Ben said it would be better."

Before Nance could question him further, Pete wheeled and started back toward his horse. He saw the sheriff cross to the feed stable.

It was a long minute Pete spent at the head of the street, listening for Mellish and his riders, watching for Nance. When Nance approached Pete swung in beside him and pointed off to the right.

"This is mighty mysterious," Nance said. "Where is he?"

"Off toward the Ute."

They rode for fifteen or twenty minutes across country, saying nothing. Finally, Nance said, "Are you sure about this?"

Pete said quietly, "If you look behind you and to your right, Nance, you'll see you're bein' followed."

Nance twisted around in his saddle to look, and Pete reached over and noiselessly drew Nance's single gun from its sheath at his hip.

"Followed?" Nance murmured. "Who by?"

Pete gently laid the nose of the gun in the small of Nance's back and drawled, "Your conscience."

CHAPTER X.

AN IMPORTANT PRISONER.

STEVE was standing in the door of the line shack when Nance and Pete rode across the park to it next afternoon. He waved lazily at Pete, but he was looking at Nance, and a slow smile began to spread over his homely face.

"Ah, sheriff," he gravely greeted Nance when they reined up before him. "So you've come way up here to serve your inciting-to-riot warrant? How does it read?"

Nance's grin was faint, unpleasant. None of this was to his liking, but he was a man who fully understood the situation without understanding his men, and he wanted to go carefully. He nodded his head toward Pete. "Friend of yours?"

"The best."

"Then you're both in for it."

Steve looked over at Pete. "In for what, Pete?" he asked. He had already noticed that Nance was without his gun, while Pete had two of them rammed in his waistband. Pete swung off his horse and stretched.

"Nance claimed on a reward dodger that he wanted to see me about five thousand dollars' worth. I'm givin' him a look."

"You won't get away with it," Nance said.

Pete said idly, "I did, didn't I? You better light."

While they unsaddled, Pete told Steve of Ben Mellish's attempt to take over Swan Ullman's place. He talked as if Nance were not there, and the sheriff did not miss a word. Steve listened to it all and did not stop grinning.

Inside, the sheriff took one of the bunks while Steve built up the fire and Pete sliced steaks from a saddle of elk. Steve pointed to the elk and said, "That wasn't here when I left."

"Stumbling Bear came back."

Steve motioned with his head toward Nance, his glance questioning, and Pete said, "Why not? He'll know when we bust it."

"All right."

Pete laid his knife gently on the table and talked quietly. "The meeting of the chiefs was called to

make talk about the dam, farming—and the sale of reservation lands.”

“Did it pass?”

“It did,” Pete said. “The chiefs didn’t like it. Demarest—he’s the agent from Washington—promised them plows and harness and houses and made them take it.”

“What lands are up for sale?” Steve asked.

Pete smiled narrowly. “Before I tell you that, tell me where you went and what you learned.”

Steve slapped the steaks in the frying pan and then squatted against the wall. Wherever he had been, he had picked up the clothes of the cow country—Levis, worn boots, even a gun, which he wore self-consciously strapped to a hip.

“First I went over to that little jerk-line teamsters’ stop of Bend,” Steve said. “You know it? A general store and a feed corral and a house and five sheds. It’s the county seat of Warranrode County.”

“I know it. Why did you go there?”

“To try and find out exactly where Warranrode’s range was. I thought maybe a piece of it would border on the Ute Reservation.”

“It doesn’t.”

“That’s what the storekeeper told me,” Steve said. “I pretended I wanted to lease range, so he blocked out for me on the map all the outfits bordering the Ute Reservation. I began to work on the ones on the north line.”

“How?”

“I’d ride in to each spread and tell them I wanted to run cattle in this country and since all the land was taken, I wanted to lease some of theirs.” He grinned up at Pete. “Isn’t that the way it’s done?”

Pete nodded and asked, “What did you find out?”

THAT they’d all lease me land except one outfit, the Schumacher brothers’. They wouldn’t lease for any price. They wouldn’t sell for three times what the place was worth. They wouldn’t talk, either. You know them?”

Pete nodded, attentive.

“Then I accused them of not even owning the place. I got run off, then. I don’t think they do own it, but I can’t prove it because all the county records are with Warranrode.” He smiled again. “So, being suspicious, I figured that Warranrode owned the Schumachers.”

“That’s a guess,” Pete said quickly.

“Wait till I finish. Schumachers’ range is on the north boundary of the reservation. The east boundary is the Walking River bad lands. I didn’t know anything about the south boundary—the spreads on it—but I wanted to do a thorough job. I rode south and inquired from the few spreads on the south boundary about leased land. They were willing to lease—all except one.”

“Whose?” Pete said slowly.

“Jim Lassiter, who owns the Chevron on the edge of the Lowenweep breaks. He’s a leathery old boy with a big sandy mustache that covers half his face, so I couldn’t see how he took it. He was almost polite. He wouldn’t sell or lease. I went into Wheeler, the county seat of Humboldt County, and looked up his place. It belongs to him, all right.”

Pete’s face lost some of its tension, settling into its usual, hard indolence. Nance, who had been listening attentively all this while, shifted in his seat and said nothing.

Steve was smiling, watching Pete. “But I asked questions,” Steve murmured. “I found out things. Things like this: That Lassiter doesn’t ship

fifty head of stock a year; that he pays his bills yearly and in a lump sum; that he hasn't any friends there, and doesn't drink or talk. What does that prove to you?"

Pete didn't answer. He was watching Steve closely.

Steve answered his own question. "It proves that Lassiter has that place registered in his own name, but that he's running it for somebody else. Like the Schumacher brothers, only more so. So Warranrode could own the Schumachers' place and the Chevron."

"And if he did?" Pete murmured.

"It would prove that he aims to own that slice of reservation between the two. And that slice, accordin' to the storekeeper's map, would stretch from the river to the Ute lakes on the north, from a straight line south where you come to the edge of Lassiter's range. It runs on into the Lowenweep breaks and Walking River." He paused, watching Pete. "What land did Stumbling Bear say was going up for sale?"

Pete said quietly, "The slice you just named."

Slowly, Steve came to his feet. "Well, now, he drawled in a voice almost trembling, "Who's suspicious now?"

Nance said, "Them steaks are burning."

Steve turned to rescue the steaks. Pete shuffled the plates out on the table and without a word the meal was served up. Steve sat down now, offered the plate of steaks to Nance, then settled back in his chair, watching Pete. Nance was watching Pete, too. He didn't understand all of this, but it was beginning to make sense.

Pete said quietly, frowning at his plate, "The Schumachers and Lassiter would be the only logical bidders for that range at public sale. And

Warranrode could buy it through them."

"Which is what he's planning to do," Steve said flatly.

PETE'S gaze shuttled up to meet Steve's. "How would Warranrode be so sure this slice was goin' to be sold that he could buy both those places before the meeting of the chiefs? He was sure. And only one man could tell him. That's Linkman, the agent."

"You believe it then, that this is what Warranrode is workin' for?"

Pete only nodded and began to eat. Presently, Steve said, "The reason he started that basin war was for a blind, then?"

"To get you in it," Pete said grimly. "And once in it, it'll be easy to kill you and shove the blame on a range war."

Nance looked swiftly at Pete, but he did not immediately say anything. Finally he asked Pete, "What's Warranrode got to do with this Seven Troughs war?"

Steve said casually, "Why, Nance, he's the man behind Big Ben Mellish. He's payin' him to grab that land." He pointed a fork at Steve. "For five years, Steve Trueblood's newspaper has been the only one in the State that has fought Warranrode. Warranrode knew that, sooner or later, Steve would turn up this reservation fraud. So he paid Ben Mellish to start this fight in Seven Troughs, knowin' Steve would wonder how Ben Mellish got the information from Washington that a dam would be built. He knew Steve would get in the fight, just like he's done. And once in it, Steve would be killed. And once Steve was out of the way, nobody in this State has the guts to stand on their hind legs and call Warranrode a crook." Pete's eyes were scornful now. "Paste that

in your hat Nance, whether you believe it or not, and see who's right in the end."

Nance, his seamed face flushed an angry red, said nothing. He settled back to his eating and finished, then packed his pipe. Pete was already finished and had rolled his smoke. He was looking out the window, face somber. Nance glanced covertly at him and suddenly it came to him that he had listened to this recital with a rapt interest almost implying belief, whereupon he was immediately angry with himself for showing this attention. To his stubborn and close way of thinking, it showed a weakness in him, a lack of fight. So, after he lighted his pipe, he said to Pete, "Why did you kill Frank Mellish, Yard?"

Pete lazily removed his gaze from the window, and in shifting it to Nance, he rested it for one brief second on Steve, who saw the light of warning.

Pete now regarded Nance with frowning attention. "Would it help you to know? I wouldn't tell this to a man I thought would turn it against me."

Nance flushed. "I'll turn it against you, Yard. That's my promise."

Pete shook his head gravely. "I'll have to see you don't."

"Why did you?" Nance insisted.

"Maybe you didn't understand," Pete murmured, quiet menace in his voice. "To put it simply, dead men don't talk." He paused meaningly. "You still want to hear it?"

NANCE glared at him. If he backed down now, it would seem to these two that he was afraid of them, which was, in all truth, contrary to fact. He said stubbornly, "I don't think you'd shoot a man in the back. And I want to know."

"All right, you asked for it," Pete said gravely. He looked out the window, as if assembling the facts of his story. He began with caution. "You remember when it was Frank Mellish was away from the Anchor for several months?"

"The last time?" Nance asked.

"No. Next to last."

Nance frowned. "Yes. Last year, he was gone for three months. Went over into Wyoming lookin' for breedin' stuff."

That was all Pete needed. He turned to face Nance now. "That's what he said. But he never saw Wyoming, Nance. He sent a man on into Wyoming, but he never got farther himself than a little way station on the transcontinental."

"No?" Nance said curiously.

"No. And I'll tell you how I know it. I was workin' for Warranrode when I got a bad fall from a horse. Broke my hip. As soon as it started to mend, I could walk around, but I couldn't ride. I wasn't any use to an outfit. I hadn't been home close on to ten years, and when Warranrode heard my folks lived just down in Tootle County, he sent me home on a buckboard for a visit."

"That was pretty white for him," Steve murmured dryly.

Pete inclined his head. "We're a large family, us Yards—six girls and no other boys except me. It kept my dad hustling to provide for us, but he did. But only two of the girls are married, and it meant that some of them had to work to help out."

Steve was watching Pete now with alert skepticism. Pete was talking to him, more than to Nance, who was listening closely.

"One sister, Sue, worked at a restaurant in this little way station of Warms. Ever hear of it?" Both Steve and Nance shook their heads.

"Well, Frank Mellish got off the train there for a bite to eat. He saw Sue, and she's a beauty. I reckon Frank thought he could catch a later train. He wanted to sit there and look at her. Frank wasn't hard to look at either, was he, Nance?"

Nance said, "A nice-lookin' boy."

"Sue thought so, too," Pete said quietly. "She took a likin' to him and brought him home to meet dad and the family. We all liked him, right enough. He just stayed on at Warms to be around Sue until she quit her job, ready to marry him. They come back to the spread."

Pete looked gravely at Steve. "This next ain't very nice," he said soberly. To Nance he said: "He was your nephew, Nance. You want to hear it?"

"I do."

And then Pete went on with the wildest story Steve had ever heard. As if Steve himself believed it, he put in casual questions now and then. Nance said nothing during the recital. The point of the story was that sometimes a sheriff puts his nose into places where he had no business to. But it was not until the very finish that the yarn, which ended with a gruesome killing, proved to be an elaborate build-up to the point that Nance was butting into something that he had better keep out of.

Nance's face, for a moment, did not change, and then Steve let out a whoop of joy; and Nance sank back into his seat, his face an angry brick-red, and marked with an agony of embarrassment. Pete laughed silently, his body shook with mirth.

STEVE, too, bawled with delight, until he had to lean against the wall and wipe tears from his eyes. Nance, face averted, was slowly rubbing the bowl of his pipe,

and now he reached up, laid it on the table, and looked up at Pete. Across his seamed, usually grim face, a broad smile slowly appeared.

He said gently, "Gentlemen, we'll call that killing solved. Only, I'm danged if I'm not the one that is dead."

When Steve had enough control of himself to sit down and smoke, he said to Pete, "What will we do with him? He should be in a crib, but we haven't one."

The sheriff grinned again.

"We can't leave him here," Steve said.

"If you got a rattle or some mud pies, I reckon I'd make out all right," Sheriff Nance said humbly.

"You'd run," Steve said, a little sadly.

Nance nodded. "I would that."

"We could take your horse," Steve told him.

"I'd walk."

"We could take your boots."

"I'd tear up my coat for boots and still walk."

Pete grinned. Behind the officious stubbornness of Nance was a humanness that Pete's riding and Steve's gibes were bringing out. Another time, and in another situation, Nance might not have acted as he had done, Pete was thinking, when Steve said, "You want a jail, like you give your own prisoners. Is that it?"

Nance said, "If you can find it."

"I think I can," Steve murmured, looking over at Pete. "Bring the blankets and some grub and we'll saddle up."

The three of them, Nance in the middle, cut off back of the shack down the slope and to the south. They traveled for a half hour before Steve reined up and pointed. Below them, just off the floor of a canyon on a small bench hewn of the rock of

the canyon wall, was a scattering of weathered, tumble-down sheds around a shack.

Nance looked over at Steve. "I was afraid of that. I hoped you hadn't run into it."

Pete eyed Steve questioningly, but Steve pushed his horse down the slope and reined up before one of the sheds. He said to Nance, "Does the shaft go ~~into~~ the side of the hill or down?"

"It goes down."

Steve grinned, swung off his horse, and walked around to the rear of the shack. A wide hole, fringed raggedly with weeds and overlaid with slabs was visible. Steve yanked the boards away and peered into it.

"Go down and try it," he said to Nance. "After all, you're the one to be satisfied."

The ladder was missing. Pete tied their three ropes together and Nance, his foot in the loop of one, was lowered down the shaft. Only a little more than one lariat was played out before it slacked off. Steve leaned over and called to Nance, "Like it?"

"It's dry," Nance answered.

"Drafty?"

"No. They quit down here at about thirty or forty feet."

Steve said, "I forgot to tell you, Nance. If you give your word not to make a break for it, you're welcome to the shack."

"I'll stay here," Nance said quietly.

STEVE pulled up the rope and lowered the blankets and food and a canteen of water to Nance while Pete hobbled the sheriff's horse and turned him loose to graze.

Steve joined Pete, who was mounted and waiting. Steve swung

into his saddle and said, "How long a ride is it to the reservation?"

"Fifteen miles." Pete glanced obliquely at Steve and then looked away, saying, "Reckon you could do this job?"

"Make Linkman talk?"

"Yes. Or whatever it is we've got to make him do."

"And we've got to," Steve murmured grimly. "He will talk, I think. How can he explain away the fact that Warranrode bought those two outfits before the Utes even decided on what piece of land to dispose of? No, he'll talk. If not to us, then to an army committee." He was quiet a moment. "If he doesn't, we're licked, Pete. Because, in a court, we'll never prove Mellish's connection with Warranrode. Linkman is the key. We'll make him talk some way."

"Reckon you could do it—alone?"

Pete murmured.

Steve looked swiftly at him. "Alone? While you do what?"

"There's still men in the Seven Troughs Basin," Pete said. "I'm not convinced, yet, they won't fight."

"That basin isn't important," Steve said casually. "When we crush Warranrode, as we will when Linkman gives it away, we'll crush Mellish too."

"But too late," Pete said mildly. "I'd hate that. You go over to the reservation. I'll head for Seven Troughs."

"You're wanted there."

"I know. What of it?"

Steve shifted slightly in his saddle and said gently, "You're a stubborn man, Pete. At the beginning, I felt the way you do about those basin ranchers. But they won't help themselves. We have to help them, and the real way is to strike at the roots of it—Warranrode—through Linkman."

"They'll fight," Pete said quietly.

Steve laughed now, and turned his homely face to Pete. "Linkman can wait, eh?"

"Why not?"

"All right. Let's head for Seven Troughs." When Pete looked at him, a question in his eyes, Steve said quietly, "Two of us can work any game better than one. I'll stick with you."

CHAPTER XI.

MURDER.

IT took Ben Mellish the better part of twenty minutes to become suspicious. Not finding Nance in his office and seeing the door was locked, Ben sent one of his men up to Nance's house, while he and his men went in to the Melodeon for a drink. The rider returned with the news that Nance hadn't been home for supper. Ben sent him out to find Jim Bonal, the part-time deputy. In ten minutes the rider was back at the Melodeon.

"Jim said he left Nance at the office. He saw Nance come out and lock up and start off to supper."

"But he didn't!" Ben said impatiently.

The rider shrugged.

"Go over to the Exchange House dining room and see if he's in there."

The rider returned to say he wasn't. Ben angrily pushed aside the bottle of whisky at his elbow. He looked around at all the games in progress, and then said to the bartender, "Any one in the back rooms, Harge?"

The bartender said no. Ben tramped out to the street and glared up and down it. The only time he really wanted and needed Nance, he couldn't be found. And then Ben remembered the feed stable, and turned down the street to it.

He found the boy in the office. "Seen Sheriff Nance, son?"

"Sure. I give him his horse."

"When was that?"

The boy told him, adding, "A puncher come in and asked me was this the place Nance kept his horse. I said sure, and he said to saddle Nance's horse. I did it and then stood out in the stable for close to fifteen minutes watchin' him across the street, and then——"

"Watchin' who?"

"The puncher. He was waitin' for Nance."

"Didn't he go in the office?"

"No. He just waited by the hotel talkin' to people."

Ben, who had had his hand on the doorknob, now closed the door gently and said, "What did this puncher look like?"

"Tall, not so big as you, with a rather——"

"Was his face marked like he'd been in a fight?"

"That's him. Sure."

Ben said ominously, "You say he was talkin' to people. Who?"

The boy grinned. "That's what I was comin' to. He talked to your sister a long time, and then another woman come down and he talked to them both for a minute. Then this other woman left and come over here and got her horse and rode off."

Ben wheeled and wrenched the door open, and then he paused and said, "Did you see the brand of the horse this woman was ridin'?"

"Sure. A new brand to me—GW."

Ben crossed to the hotel and from the clerk found that Chris was in her room. He mounted the stairs two at a time. He found the door to Chris's room open, and walked inside. Doc Benbow sat in the lone armchair and Chris, pillows at her back, was sitting on the bed. There

was a faint, sweetish smell of whisky in the room.

Ben, breathing hard, glared at Chris and said bluntly, "Get out of here, Doc."

Chris looked at Doc Benbow. "Stay, please."

BEN shut the door behind him and came over to the foot of the bed and placed both fisted hands on its footboard. "I just learned Pete Yard was in town," he said thickly.

"Did you?"

"I heard you talked to him."

"I did," Chris said quietly.

Ben, for once, was almost speechless with anger. Doc was smiling a little, watching Chris.

"The man who killed your brother," Ben said angrily. "The man——"

"What is it you want, Ben?" Chris cut in coldly.

Ben leaned forward a little. "Why, your friend, Pete Yard, has just kidnaped the sheriff, is all," he said sardonically. "Since you seem to be the single friend that tramp has got in this town, I thought he might 'a' told you where he took him."

"He didn't," Chris said, "but I'm glad he took him."

Ben straightened a little and unfisted his hands to clasp the footboard, his big, burly body throwing a huge shadow against the far wall.

"You are?" he said softly.

"Yes. You've bullied Uncle Ross into a place where that's probably the only thing that will keep him from getting killed!"

Ben unleashed a stream of profanity.

Doc Benbow's low-pitched voice cut in, suddenly, ominously. "Ben," Doc said, "you're a foul-mouthed scoundrel! Get out of here before I let this thing off at your back!"

Ben turned slowly to confront Doc, who had not risen from his chair. In Doc's hand was a new, shining six-gun.

Ben looked over at Chris, whose face was taut and pale. There was withering scorn in his face as he said, "Drunks and murderers. That's prime company for the likes of you, sis."

Doc let the gun off then, and its blast filled the room. As the echo died, there was a faint sifting of plaster to the floor from a hole in the far wall.

Ben only laughed and turned his back to Doc and walked out the door, closing it after him.

Doc was on his feet, cocking the stiff-sprunged gun with both hands, and over his face was a fury that made Chris leap to her feet and run to him.

"Uncle Doc, don't! Don't!" She laid a hand on his arm.

Doc looked up then, his eyes fogged over, and then let his gun hand drop. He sighed gustily and looked at the floor.

"He had a good mother," Doc said huskily, "but he's a traitor to every decent thing she taught him. I meant to kill him."

Chris led him to his chair and gently forced him to sit down. He sat there a long moment, letting the color wash out of his face; then he passed a hand over his eyes and looked up at Chris. "It's not the drunk part. I don't mind that." His face relaxed a little now. "It's what he said about you."

Chris smiled wanly and sat down on the bed.

"You've got to get out of here," Doc said, and Chris nodded absently. Doc rose and came over to stand in front of her. "I know you don't want to leave. You think that would be running away; and, for you,

maybe that's right. I reckon it is. But you've got to get away from Ben until this thing is settled one way or the other." He waited a moment. "Do you know a place you can go?"

"I'll visit some one to-morrow, Uncle Doc," Chris said. "Now, would you mind leaving?"

Doc walked over and picked up his hat from the washstand. "It strikes me," he said, without looking at Chris, "that our friend Pete is a man who knows how to crowd his luck."

CHRIS only looked at him, and Doc put on his hat. He was his old self now, his eyes humorous and skeptical and his voice dry, gentle. He walked past her, patted her shoulder, and paused. "It also strikes me that you should reserve your verdict until all the facts are in."

Chris looked up at him swiftly. "What do you mean, Uncle Doc?"

"Something happened before I came up."

Chris flushed a little. "What?"

"Danged if I know," Doc murmured. "You do. Good-night, honey."

Doc let himself out and headed with the instinct of a homing pigeon for the bar of the Melodeon.

Chris sat just as Doc had left her, thinking over his last words. Without being told the whole story, he knew something had happened, and, in his wise and gentle way, was trying to advise her without violating her privacy. And thinking this, Chris blushed, and was immediately angry with herself. She had told Doc of Pete's coming into town, as if there were no price on his head, as if he didn't care, even if there was.

When she came to the part about Sylvia, she had told it to Doc without a change of voice, but she did

not mention Pete's claiming her as his fiancée, nor did she mention Sylvia's beautiful face. Doc had watched her keenly, smiling a little, so that she remembered evading his eyes. And now, she wondered why she had had to make an effort to be casual with Doc. What was there about Pete Yard's knowing a woman who loved him that should upset her? For Chris knew this Sylvia loved Pete, and she was a woman of breeding and beauty and intelligence and loyalty, all those things that a man looks for in a woman. And Pete had been brutal to her, had lied to her, but in a way that made Chris think he had done it to save her from something.

She tried to remember Pete's face when he first saw Sylvia. There was surprise and a quick stirring of anger before his face settled into that rather hard, indolent indifference that was his usual expression; nothing about it indicated that he loved this woman.

Chris sprang up with sudden anger and furiously started to undress. Why had she let herself think of these things, as if any of it mattered or could influence her empty way of life?

Next morning, she got her horse and rode out south. It had been many months since she had visited or seen Mrs. Wells, and she knew she would be welcome. The Wells family lived on the western edge of the reservation, and Chris rode up to their place in midafternoon, and was welcomed with a kiss and a giant hug by Mrs. Wells, who had followed Dave Mellish and his bride into this country.

Mrs. Wells was a robust, open-hearted woman, whose two sons and husband were riding that afternoon. Normally, she was a cheerful soul who loved the gossip she so sorely

missed; but this afternoon, as Chris helped her in the kitchen of the two-story log house that looked out beneath a tangle of trees to the sun-baked reservation lands, Mrs. Wells carefully avoided any mention of Ben or Frank, except to say that they had not heard of Frank's death until too late to attend the funeral. Chris murmured something in embarrassment, but there was nothing more to say, and she understood, as well as Mrs. Wells, that the loyalty of Anchor neighbors was a thing of the past; that it was a thing of which no one would gladly talk.

That evening, around the huge supper table, spare, lean Hod Wells was the same way. They talked of town, of cattle, of the dam, of fall market prospects, of the Indians, of the weather, of a thousand things, but never of Ben Mellish and the fortunes of the Anchor. Afterward, toward bedtime, when the brooding star-lighted lands about them seemed to hush them all to silence as they sat clustered on the long dark porch, Chris was grateful. If this acting had continued another hour, she could not have stood it.

AND in the clean, simply furnished bedroom, she lay sleepless, letting all this recent history march in ordered bitterness through her tired memory. And, inevitably, her thoughts settled on Pete Yard, this obscure and lonely man who was fighting no battle of his own. To-night, with nothing that was familiar around her, Chris let herself think of him. But she also thought of another, for the image of Sylvia, whose last name she never had heard and never wanted to hear, rose up to stand beside Pete. Chris made up a romance about them, and hated herself for doing it. She thought of those hard and brutal

words Pete had said to Sylvia, and again she pitied this woman. It seemed needlessly cruel of Pete to take the arm of a strange woman and say to Sylvia, "This is the woman I am going to marry." And why? Because he wanted to get her away from Seven Troughs—and for a reason Chris did not understand.

With startling abruptness, it occurred to Chris that Sylvia no longer needed to believe that lie, for she had left Seven Troughs. And with a measure of peace of mind, Chris slept, then.

Next morning, she saddled her horse alongside Hod Wells. She had given the excuse that she had to return to town. But, once free of the place, she swung in a wide circle to the south, and by noon was deep in the reservation lands.

A little before dark, she rode into the post. It sprawled on a grassy shoulder of land free of trees and bare as a table top except for the slim willows which hid the shallow banks of narrow Ute River below it.

A rough wagon road formed the only street, and in ragged disarray on either side of it were the skin-and-canvas tepees of the Utes. A hundred dogs skulked about the camp, and only a few of them bothered to come up and harry her pony with their barking. Wide-eyed children dressed in a laughable mixture of ill-fitting store clothes and buckskin watched her and did not speak. Camp fires burned in front of many of the tepees, the smoke hanging in a gray blanket in the evening air. Dotting this army of tepees were a few log cabins, ill-constructed, roofed with brush, doorless, yards littered with refuse. Pole corrals stood beside the tepees and shacks, and through it all moved a straight, spiritless people who seemed never to have a word for each other.

At the far end of the post, a long stone building comprised the quarters of a white trader. Behind it were the stone foundations of the old army barracks, long since burned. And set back from the road, past the trading post, were the neat grounds of the agent. The house was a two-story frame affair with a corner porch higher than the new trees and shrubs planted within the white-painted picket fence. Behind it, a barn and corral were placed in neat regularity.

Chris dismounted at the gate with some misgivings. She had only heard Pete tell Sylvia to go to the reservation; and now that she was here, she was beginning to wonder if her trip had been for nothing.

Chris noticed in the dusk that the fence swung in to meet one corner of the house, and that in front of the fence were tie rails. A bright light shone from the two windows of this corner, and she guessed this must be the office of the Indian agent.

At the door, her knock was answered by a fat Ute servant.

"Is—is Sylvia in?" Chris asked.

The Indian only gazed at her blankly. Chris could see into the house, and its large living room was glowing with dim lamps.

"Is Sylvia in?" Chris asked. "A dark girl—"

Suddenly, Sylvia Warranrode appeared at the side of the servant, who vanished noiselessly.

Sylvia looked at Chris and immediately recognized her and smiled.

"Oh, Miss Mellish. Come in." Sylvia held the door wide.

Chris stepped into the room. "I didn't know who to ask for," she said a little shyly. "You see, I never heard your last name."

SYLVIA was dressed in the same dark-green riding suit she had been wearing in Seven Troughs. She closed the door, just as an older woman entered the room from another doorway. She was a heavy woman, with a stupidly amiable face, and Sylvia said to her, "Mrs. Linkman, this is Christina Mellish, the girl whom I was to meet here."

Chris looked swiftly at Sylvia and then shook hands with Mrs. Linkman, the wife of the agent. "You're welcome, my dear. You're riding late and must be hungry. Sylvia, show her to your room to tidy up. Supper's only a minute away. You'll stay the night, of course, Miss Mellish."

Sylvia took Chris's arm and led her into a bedroom, escaping the torrential stream of Mrs. Linkman's aimless chatter. Sylvia shut the door behind her and leaned on it, smiling a little.

"I'm getting quite expert at lying," she said, "as you've probably noticed. But you must stay somewhere to-night."

Chris took off her gloves and sat down on the bed.

"I—I shouldn't have come here," she said, with hesitation, looking at Sylvia. "But there was something I had to tell you."

Sylvia said softly, her voice toneless, "About Pete?"

"Yes. You see, he lied to you that night about me—about us. We are not engaged. We scarcely know each other."

Sylvia felt something stir deep within her, something close to hope. She said evenly, "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"I was afraid you wouldn't," Chris said gently. "You see, I was earning money at Doctor Benbow's in Seven Troughs as a nurse for Pete. He was there five days. We didn't

speak a hundred words, perhaps, and I didn't know his name until later—much later."

Sylvia crossed the room to stand in front of Chris. She looked down at this woman, whom she had been hating for two days now, and looked searchingly at her clean, troubled face.

"Then why did Pete do it?" Sylvia asked.

"I don't know. I asked him—after you left, for I was shamed by him, and by you. He only apologized and said, 'If you see some one in the path of a train, it doesn't matter much whether you lead them away or kick them away.' Then he left."

Sylvia didn't answer for a moment. She said next, "What did he mean?"

"I don't even know that. I thought perhaps you might understand it."

"And you came clear over here to tell me that—just that?" Sylvia asked gently.

"Yes, I thought you should know."

"Why?"

Chris looked deep into her eyes. "Because he hurt you."

"Nothing else?" Sylvia murmured.

"Yes. Because you love him."

Without hesitation, Sylvia nodded. Turning, she walked over to the dresser, and faced it, her back to Chris.

"I'm sorry," Chris said. "It was cruel of him—and I don't think he meant it when he said it."

Slowly, Sylvia turned around to face Chris. For a moment, she didn't comment, and then she smiled faintly. "My dear, that was kind of you. But it is unfeminine."

"I—I don't understand."

"I think you do. It is unfeminine—because you love him, too."

Chris came to her feet, her hands

clenched tightly, her face pale, eyes staring at Sylvia. "Why do you say that?" she asked swiftly.

"How did you know I loved him?" Sylvia countered.

"It's—it's something you can't hide. I could see it in your face."

"And I can see it in yours." She came across the room and took Chris's hands, then tilted Chris's chin up so that she could see into her eyes. "Are you ashamed of it? I am proud of it."

CHRIS held herself tensely for a second, then a deep sob racked her, and Sylvia gathered her into her arms. Chris cried brokenly while Sylvia said nothing, and then, as suddenly, she tried to stifle her tears.

"It's true," Chris murmured. "I'm not ashamed of it. Only I didn't want to. I wouldn't let myself think it."

Sylvia moved her over to the bed, and sat down beside her, and while Chris smothered her sobbing, Sylvia talked in a low voice.

"If she is lucky, once in a lifetime a woman will love a man like him. He's not a saint. He's been drunk and he loves to fight and he has known other women and he has stolen when he was hungry, and if he had done none of these things, I don't think I would love him so much. But he is kind and gentle and strong, and he can walk alone. But he is too proud to do that. Men respect him, and take some of his fairness and gentleness and strength for their own, when they have been with him. If I were a man, and he was my friend, I would die for him. And if I were a woman—any woman—I could not help loving him."

Chris listened. "I do not know him well, but I know all that is true."

"I do know him well," Sylvia mur-

mured. "For three years he has taken me a hundred miles to put me on a train for school in the East. And for three years, I have thought I would die if I couldn't see him. And each time he met me again, he was the same. He was wise and tolerant, but he was hard with me, too. And he never loved me."

Chris said, "Are you sure?"

Sylvia laughed bitterly. "Can a woman ever mistake that? Yes, I am sure." She looked at Chris. "But it will make no difference. I want him, and I will fight for him."

Chris said quietly, "So will I."

"I know. And I think you are better armed than I am," Sylvia murmured.

"Armed?"

"Yes. You have his gentleness, and no one can fight that."

"But so have——"

The sharp, flat roar of a gunshot hammered through the house, bringing Chris and Sylvia to their feet. They looked at each other, then Sylvia ran for the door.

Mrs. Linkman was standing in the corridor, her mouth sagging, eyes round.

"What is it?" Sylvia demanded.

"The office," Mrs. Linkman answered hysterically.

Sylvia ran down the corridor, Chris behind her, Mrs. Linkman behind Chris.

Sylvia swung the door open, and immediately stopped, a sharp, horrified cry escaping her lips. Then she walked in, and Chris saw it, too.

SPRAWLED across the floor of the tiny lamplit office, face down, was the figure of a sandy-haired man in the uniform of army blue. His arms were flung out over his head, and his cheek rested in a tiny pool of blood.

"It is Major Linkman!" Sylvia

breathed and then turned to Mrs. Linkman, who had just entered the room. Her shriek echoed through the house, and then Sylvia was by her side.

"Get help!" Sylvia commanded Chris. "I'll see to her."

Sylvia put her arms around Mrs. Linkman and led her out of the office, leaving Chris alone with the dead man. Chris's eye traveled from the body to an object lying in the middle of the floor. It was a glove, large in size. Chris skirted the body and knelt by it, and she felt a sudden nausea rise within her. It was Ben Mellish's glove. She had noticed the new pair he wore that night in her hotel room, and it, like this, had had the palm cut from it, to ease his blistered hand.

Blindly, she picked it up and thrust it into the bosom of her dress and then ran through the outside door into the night.

She heard the pounding of approaching feet, and then a voice asked her, "Was that a shot?"

"Yes. Inside." Chris followed the man in. Evidently, it was the trader, the only other white man besides the doctor on the reservation, and he, like Chris, stopped short when he saw the figure of Major Linkman on the floor. Then he approached and knelt and turned Linkman over. There was a small hole in the temple which was oozing blood. The face was peaceful, stronger in death than it must have been in life. There was even a smear of red over the sandy mustache, and the man's eyes were closed.

The trader rose, and over his bony face was a grim expression as he looked at Chris. "How did it happen?"

"We three were in the other part of the house," Chris said swiftly. "We heard the shot and ran to the

office. He—he was lying just like that.”

“Nothing been disturbed?”

“Nothing,” Chris said faintly, and turned away from the sight.

Hours later, when Mrs. Linkman's grief had worn itself out in sleep, Sylvia and Chris returned to their room, exhausted but wakeful, and undressed for bed.

Once the lamp was out, they lay side by side, sleepless, and Chris's mind was a torment of fear. Why had she ever taken the glove? Would it not be better to turn it over to the authorities and let justice take its course against Ben, as it inevitably would? But she shrank from the thought of doing this. Yet, if she didn't, she would be shielding the worst kind of murderer. And if she did, she would betray her own flesh and blood. Besides, couldn't some one who had Ben's glove have left it here? She didn't know, but she wished desperately that she had some one to whom she could turn now for advice. Not Sylvia, for she understood none of this. Not Doctor Benbow, for he admitted being prejudiced against Ben. And then she thought of Pete Yard. He would tell her, and tell her truly. Moreover, he might know if Ben was guilty.

Suddenly, Sylvia's voice said in the dark, “Are you asleep?”

“No.”

“Who could have done this awful thing to Major Linkman?”

“I don't know,” Chris murmured. “The Indians?”

“But they liked him—as well as Indians ever like a white man.” She was silent a while, and then said abruptly, “Pete would know.”

Chris turned to look at her, but Sylvia's face was indistinct. “That's queer,” Sylvia said gently. “I was thinking the same thing.”

Sylvia felt for Chris's hand and took it in hers, then laughed a little. “We should hate each other, Christina. But I don't hate you. I like you.” She hesitated. “Do you want to hear more about Pete—about what I know of him?”

And till long into the night, Sylvia talked about herself and Pete. It was only then that Chris learned Sylvia's last name. Senator Warranrode, then, must be that “little tin god I worked for over yonder” that Pete mentioned the night at Doctor Benbow's. And Warranrode must, in some way that Chris did not understand, be connected with this trouble, else why would Pete want Sylvia away? But Chris listened quietly until Sylvia paused in her talking and asked gently, “Are you awake, Chris?”

There was no answer. Chris's breathing was smooth and deep.

Slowly, Sylvia raised up on her elbow to look at this woman beside her, and then she sighed faintly in the dark and turned over and went to sleep.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE ENEMY'S HANDS.

SEVEN TROUGHS, inevitably, was waiting for something. Since Sheriff Nance had disappeared, Ben Mellish, dark fury driving him, had directed the hunt. Townsmen were conscripted, as well as the Anchor and other riders. Weary horsemen came and went at all hours, but there were fewer people on the streets. Jim Bonal, the part-time deputy, like Ben Mellish, rode with them until weariness halted him, and then he slept in a chair on the porch of the Exchange House. But Ben Mellish sat awake beside him, cursing and impotent and domineering.

The quietest place in the town was the Legal Tender Saloon, four doors down from the feed corral. It was a small place, catering mostly to the small ranchers at the north end of the basin. Men rode its back alley furtively by night, and there was little heavy drinking done in its narrow, long room. Grim men watched the street from its wide front window and smiled and said little. To-night, Ed Briedehoff was one of them. He was content to wait, for Swan Ullman still held his place. Ben Mellish, wise enough to know that a part-time deputy is a poor substitute for a sheriff, had not made his brag good, and Ed, for a solid day now, had watched this activity with increasing amusement.

He stood behind the window of the Legal Tender now, just beyond reach of the batwing doors, and watched a band of riders come in from the south and dismount wearily in front of the Exchange House.

Miles Leston, beside him, said, "They oughta be tired of that, soon."

"Not as long as Ben is still on his feet."

They smoked in comfortable silence a moment, and then Ed said, "Where you reckon he took him?"

"If I know this Yard, I'd say Nance was in a shack right here in town."

Ed allowed himself a rare smile. "If he knew any one here, that'd likely be true."

Doc Benbow passed in front of the window and stepped through the swing doors.

"Evenin', Doc," Ed said, and Leston also greeted him, for in Doc Benbow they recognized a friend and the godfather of half the babies in their end of the basin.

Doc slacked against the bar, hat pushed back off his forehead, and chatted quietly with the bartender

while he had his drink. Then he approached Ed and Miles, and watched the men scattered along the railing of the Exchange House listening to Ben Mellish.

"They don't seem to have much luck," Doc observed mildly.

"Good luck, for us," Ed said.

Doc nodded. He said without raising his voice, "I've got something up at my place I think you'd like to see, both of you."

Ed shot a hard, questioning glance at him, but Doc, his face morose and a little flushed, was on his way out.

Ed and Miles gave him five minutes and then went out the back way and got their horses. They rode down the alley to the cross street, turned up it and crossed the main street, and then went on back to Doc's place. Dismounting in the alley, they tied their horses and went to the back door.

ED knocked on the door, and Doc opened it immediately, and Ed and Miles stepped into the kitchen, squinting against the sudden light.

Steve Trueblood and Pete Yard were seated on the other side of the big table.

Ed remembered how he had left Pete, and he nodded to Steve and said to Pete, "A man hadn't ought to be as suspicious as I am, Yard."

"Forget it," Pete said, and indicated chairs, which Ed and Miles took.

Doc said musingly from the middle of the room, "If I don't hear anything, I can't tell anything, can I?"

"You, too, Doc," Pete said. "You've earned a hand in this."

"That's a promise?" Doc asked, sitting down, and Pete nodded.

"Then where is Nance?" Doc said. "That's been worryin' me. A hun-

dred men in two days can pretty well look over this country."

Pete told them, adding: "Tonight, he's loose—but without a horse. If he has any luck, he'll be in town to-morrow. And that may be too late."

Ed watched him closely. "Too late?" he said mildly.

Steve interrupted gently, "Ed, who's been on the run now for a month?"

"We have."

"Who's on the run now?"

Ed smiled narrowly. "Ben is."

"You want to keep him that way?"

Ed looked sharply at him. "Maybe that ain't just right," he said in qualification. "Maybe he ain't on the run. Maybe he's just waitin' before he puts us on the run again."

"He is waiting," Steve conceded. "You aim to let him start in again as soon as Nance gets back?"

"Short of us takin' Nance again, I don't see how we can stop him," Leston said.

Pete settled his chair on all four legs and leaned across the table and tapped it with blunt forefinger. "The trouble with you," he said slowly, "is that you don't think Ben Mellish will scare."

"He won't," Ed said.

"What if Nance comes down here to-morrow and tells Ben Mellish to take his fight away from the sheriff's office? What if Nance does that?"

Ed turned this over in his mind, then said carefully, "You know somethin', Yard?"

Pete smiled briefly. "Nance did a lot of thinkin' down there in that pit. He even got to askin' questions."

"Like what?"

"Like askin' me if there was any reason why I should have a five-

thousand-dollar reward on my head. I said no. Like askin' if I didn't think a prejudiced lawman was worse than no law at all. I said yes to that."

Presently, Ed said, "It don't sound like Nance."

Pete leaned back and waited. He remembered that Ed had told him Steve's meeting had come to nothing, which meant each of these men was on his own. Collectively, they might have applauded the kidnaping of Sheriff Nance, but they would never act collectively to take advantage of it. He could see the caution on Ed's face. And Pete did not blame him, although he did not intend to show it. He was waiting to see how Ed would accept this news of Nance's possible neutrality.

"If what you say about Nance is true," Ed said carefully, "then Ben Mellish may scare."

Pete said quickly, flatly, "But not from sheep."

Ed laid his hard, curious gaze on Pete. "Now you say what we come to listen to."

PETE grinned faintly. "You've got Mellish stopped now. When Nance comes back and tells him he's got to carry this fight on his own shoulders, Ben Mellish may be mad—but he'll do it, if you let him."

"And how will we stop him?"

Pete laid a hand gently on the table and said, "By carryin' the fight to him."

Ed sucked on his pipe. "We ain't organized, Pete."

"This'll take four men—no more."

"What will?" Leston asked.

Pete said: "Mellish hasn't even a skeleton crew at the Anchor. His whole outfit, outside the cook and a few others, are out huntin' Nance. He——"

"I'm rustlin' no beef," Ed said flatly. "He stole none of mine."

"He's got three sheds of hay up there—two hundred tons," Pete said quietly, ignoring Ed's interruption.

Ed's face was impassive. Leston shifted faintly in his seat.

"Burn it," Pete said.

And before either of them could object, Pete leaned forward and said savagely, "Look, you two! You sit there lettin' the sky be pulled down on your heads because Ben Mellish hasn't moved against you yet! Don't you know what he'll do when Nance casts him off? He'll raid and burn and bushwhack and forget he ever knew Nance or the law, because he's the only man who knows how little Nance counts for. You're sittin' on dynamite now! The only way to do anything is get there first!"

Steve said quietly: "Two hundred tons of hay for the Utes at ten dollars a ton will bring two thousand dollars to hire more gunmen. And he's got fifteen now. You basin ranchers are twenty men, with twenty places to guard. If you don't make the fight, you're gone."

Doc, listening, turned his head, then rose, saying, "Hold it down," and went into his office. They heard him open the door and a woman greet him.

Ed Briedehoff glared at both Pete and Steve. He said, "It strikes me, you've got nothin' at stake, like we have."

Pete said contemptuously, "You haven't got anything at stake if you won't fight for it."

Doc appeared in the door. "Step in a moment, Pete."

Pete rose and turned his hard stare down on Ed and Miles, whose faces were flushed with anger. "You can't bushwhack a law court. Remember that when you're run off your places

and then try to win them back in court."

He stepped past Doc into the office and was face to face with Chris. Doc closed the door behind them.

"Why—what's the matter, Pete? Are you angry with me?" Chris asked.

The light in Pete's eyes faded and he shook his head. "You know I'm not. I'm—I'm tired of buttin' my head against a wall." He gestured to the sofa. "Sit down, Chris."

Chris reached inside her blouse and pulled out the glove and handed it to Pete. "I wanted to ask your advice, Pete. I don't know where to turn."

Pete accepted the glove and looked at it and said, "Ben's?"

"You've seen it?"

"No. But a man who has a palm burn would likely cut that place. Besides, I never saw a bigger one."

Chris met his curious gaze and said, "Major Linkman was murdered in his office last night at the reservation."

MMURDERED?" Pete said huskily. His lips were drawn tight over his teeth, and in his eyes was that same look that Chris had noticed the first night she saw him, a look of hot and savage anger. He turned away from her and walked over to Doc's window; then, suddenly, he paused and looked blankly at the glove she had given him.

"What is this?" he asked, coming back to her.

"I picked that glove up by the body."

Pete looked at the glove and then said quietly, "Ben didn't do it."

"Are you sure?"

Pete only shook his head and said: "No. Not sure. But there

are men here who could swear he didn't."

"Truthfully?"

"He's been hunting me for two days."

Chris sat down on the sofa, and Pete, towering above her, watched the top of her head. "I want you to have it," Chris said.

Pete's somber face took on a cruel and ruthless cast then, but it was only fleeting. Slowly, he scrubbed his chin with the flat of his hand, eyes speculative. Then he handed the glove back. "No, I won't frame him, Chris. Not even if he deserves it, as Ben does."

"But he didn't do it, you told me," Chris said swiftly, making no move to take the glove.

"He couldn't have."

"Then somebody wanted the authorities to believe he did."

Pete regarded her with close and watchful attentiveness as he said, "What of that?" In Chris's face he could see the struggle that was in her mind, behind the shame and hesitancy she showed. She rose now and stood before him.

"This isn't honest, Pete, but maybe it will work. Take the glove and give it to Ben, nobody else. Maybe he'll believe, then, that his men are betraying him. For it must have been his men! And if he believes it, then maybe he will stop this quarrel. He will see he can't win it!"

"Ben will?" Pete murmured dryly. "You really think that, Chris—knowing Ben?"

Her glance fell and she shrugged. "No, I don't. But there's a chance. A slim one. And—and it's *got* to stop him, Pete!" she said vehemently.

"Maybe."

"Will you do it? Can you do it? Because if you and nobody else does

it, he will see that you know and understand this treachery that will destroy him. If I did it, he would threaten to kill me if I told you. But you can give it to him as if you could afford to be magnanimous, as if you didn't need to give it to Nance or the army authorities because you know he is doomed already. Can you do it?"

"Some way," Pete said. He laid a hand on her arm and said: "Why did you give this to me, Chris? How do you know I won't turn it over to the army investigator. I could. I hate Ben enough to do it."

"You are fair," Chris said.

Pete's hand withdrew and he rammed the glove into his hip pocket as he turned to the door. Then he paused and asked, "Does any one else here know about Linkman's death?"

"I don't think so. Sylvia and I rode from daylight right straight through."

"Sylvia?" Pete asked, after a moment's hesitation. He started back toward her. "Is she here?"

"Yes."

"I told her to stay at the reservation. Why didn't she?" Pete asked harshly.

"We brought Mrs. Linkman with us. They are both at the hotel."

"Why did she come?" Pete asked angrily.

"To be near you." When Pete only stared at her, Chris added simply, "She loves you, Pete."

HIS gaze fell. Slowly, with the toe of his boot, he described a half circle on the floor, and then he looked up at her. "It was never of my making," he said. Then he added, "Will you keep this quiet about Linkman as long as you can?"

Chris nodded and Pete stepped back into the kitchen, closing the

door behind him, and Chris stood motionless, remembering what he had said, "It was not of my making." Then he did not love Sylvia. Chris stepped out the door into the night, feeling her heart suddenly light, and she was smiling at something she could not have named.

Pete closed the door on a grim and waiting silence, and settled his gaze on Ed Briedehoff, for he did not want to look at Steve. Bitterly he remembered that if he had not stubbornly insisted on coming back to Seven Troughs to carry this war to Ben Mellish, Steve and he would have gone to Major Linkman. A threat to disclose to Major Linkman his obvious connection with Waranrode might have brought the whole story tumbling from the major's lips. And now the chance was gone, simply because he had been stubborn; and forever after, Steve would blame him.

He said to Ed, with that anger and disgust bred from his thoughts, "You still here?"

Ed's jaw clamped a little more tightly on his pipe. "You're a hard man, Pete, and I don't know who you're hardest on—your friends or your enemies."

Steve said with quiet exultation: "It's settled, Pete. We're all going."

Pete smiled thinly and picked up his hat. "I'll be gone a few minutes. I'll meet you on the south road outside of town."

Letting himself out the back way, Pete turned into the alley and at the mouth of it, paused and looked up and down the street, then hurried across to the mouth of the opposite alley.

The glove was in his hip pocket, a precious wedge that he would use to drive in between Ben Mellish and his arrogance. But that could wait. He thought of Chris giving it to him,

and pity for her stirred deep within him. But she was a woman who needed no pity, he knew—a woman with a quiet and sturdy courage who would be cherished by a man some day in spite of this blight her brothers had spread over this land.

And it seemed strange to hear from her lips what he had always known about Sylvia. Proud and fine as she was, she was not for him, nor were her ways. He had watched Sylvia grow from a girl into a woman, and he had seen that her life could never be his. He had tried to save her from this, and to-night he must, at whatever cost.

At the rear of the hotel, he paused. There were steps there leading up to a door, which he guessed would open into the through corridor into the lobby.

He tried it, and found it open. He let himself in and waited there, peering through its length into the dimly lit lobby beyond. Out on the porch, he knew, Ben Mellish might be sitting yet, cursing his men and his own failure. Also, as when he had looked earlier in the evening from across the street, his riders might be ringed around him, so that they had only to look up and through the window to see him. Only five men out of those fifteen Anchor riders would know him, and perhaps only three would recognize him as he walked through the circle of overhead light and to the desk to inquire from the clerk of Sylvia's room.

IT was a chance he had to take. He tramped down the long corridor, making no pretense of stealth, swung into the lobby, and cutting across the circle of light and out of it, he turned his face toward the stairs and looked up.

And then he was out of the line of vision of a man on the porch,

against a corner of the counter, talking to the middle-aged clerk.

"A dark girl," he said, "dressed in green, maybe. Did she register here to-night?"

The clerk looked at his register and said, "Sylvia Warranrode."

"That's the one. What number is her room?"

"Ten. Say, she ain't the senator's daughter, is she?"

"Senator?" Pete asked, and the clerk made a gesture of dismissal and Pete went up the stairs. At the top, he paused and waited, watching the desk below. In the three minutes he stood there, nobody came in to confer with the clerk, and Pete traveled the corridor, examining the doors.

He knocked at No. 10, and it was immediately opened to him, and he stepped through, taking off his hat, as Sylvia shut the door.

Looking at her, it came to him that she was beautiful, and then, thinking behind thought, he wondered that he had not noticed this about Chris, for she was even more beautiful than Sylvia.

Sylvia said: "She found you, I see. How?"

Pete said brusquely, "Why did you come back?"

Long ago, Pete had shamed Sylvia from gracious evasion into the bluntness and honesty he practiced himself, and she had learned this lesson well. So she said, hand still on the door, "Didn't she tell you?"

"Yes. Sit down."

But Sylvia only walked over to him, a faint smile on her face. "I've grown up, Pete. I'm not a girl any longer."

She came close and stood before him, smiling up at him.

He sat quietly, "Sit down."

Sylvia sat on the bed, and Pete

sat beside her and rolled a smoke and lighted it. Then he tendered her his sack of tobacco, which she took. While she expertly rolled a cigarette and while he lighted it for her, he regarded her with a kind of aloof fondness.

"That's something I never taught you," he said gruffly, "or I would never have drawn time on GW for three years."

"You taught me to relish my vices like a man, anyway," Sylvia said, laughing a little.

Pete felt easier now, and the two of them smoked in silence for a minute. Pete finally said, "This is going to be hard."

"Not if I can help it, Pete," Sylvia murmured, her voice purposely flat and matter-of-fact. "I love you. I've loved you ever since the day you rode into the place and took your own time looking it over before you asked for the job." She looked at him now. "I guess you've known that all along, only you were a little afraid of the maid in the castle. Or was that it?"

"You know it wasn't," Pete said.

"I guess not. Well, I love you. I've wanted you so long and so much that I can't ever remember when I didn't. I love you so much that I'm humble before you and—"

Gently, Pete's hand closed over her mouth, and he left it there several seconds, his eyes bleak and strange. Then he rose and stood before her, pale, firm-lipped.

He rested a hand on the bedpost and said sharply: "I must tell you this way because you think like me, Sylvia. It wouldn't work. And if you can talk and think like a man, you can take this like a man. You're not for me. I want sweat and wood smoke and rain and rope burns and raw whisky. I want ten kids. I

want to fight and swear at a horse and——”

“You always will,” Sylvia said.

PETE straightened up and glared at her, and then he said with surprising mildness: “Yes. I always will want that. And you won’t, will you?”

“No,” Sylvia admitted reluctantly. “But——”

“Good,” Pete said. “And now for the last time, you listen to me. You get out of here. Get your horse and ride back to the reservation and then——”

“Pete, is it Chris?”

“Is it——” Pete paused, gazing blankly at her. “Chris?” he murmured.

“She loves you. Do you love her?” And before Pete had a chance to answer, Sylvia sprang up and faced him. “No! Don’t tell me! I don’t even want to know.”

She stood looking at him a full moment, looking at his face and eyes and hair as if she had hungered for them always. Then she said: “Pete, will you kiss me? I know. But let me be a woman just once. Will you kiss me?”

Pete folded her into his arms, and, for one brief moment, he felt the spell of her beauty. And then he reached up, pulled her arms from around him, picked up his hat, and let himself out into the corridor. For a moment, he stood there blindly, then tramped down the corridor to the stairs.

He was at the foot of them, walking almost drunkenly, and had turned into the corridor again, when he heard a yell from the porch, and then on the echo of it there came a shot and a crash of glass.

He half whirled, hearing Ben Mellish’s wild roar: “Yard! Get him!”

Pete ran down the corridor, and then, in its welcome darkness, he wheeled through a door and ran for the black slot of a window, across the room. He crashed into something and cursed, and above the noise he could hear the tramp of feet in the lobby.

Quickly, he threw the window open and looked out. Between the buildings, he could see men running toward the rear of the hotel.

The first man approached and pounded past, and several others followed. Crouching to the side of the window, Pete heard one say, “Watch those windows.”

Men were in the corridor now, and he could hear them out in back calling to each other. Standing utterly still in that dark room, he knew that unless he could make his way back through the corridor, he was caught. Carefully, he stepped across to the door, and inched it open. Just outside the door, looking up toward three punchers close to the lobby, was a townsman with a gun in his hand. Over this man’s shoulder, Pete saw two of these men go into the dining room, and he could hear them tramp its length, working toward him. On the back steps, Ben Mellish’s voice bellowed, “Work those sheds over and kick up that fire, Blake!”

The murmur of voices below the side window did not let up. He could see the pencil of light under the door to the dining room shrink as the lamp came nearer, and he knew that in a moment that door would open and only a gun would win him freedom. He did not want that.

He swung the door to the corridor open and tapped the townsman on the shoulder, saying: “Easy. Here is my gun.”

THE townsman lunged away from this voice at his back and swiveled his gun around, firing it into the wall, and still Pete did not move, so that the man looked sheepish, then yelled: "Mellish! Mellish!"

"Take my gun," Pete said. "In my belt."

Cautiously, the man reached out and took his gun, and Pete stepped into the corridor, as Ben Mellish bulked through the door and then walked slowly toward him. From all sides, Anchor men gathered.

"Get up front," Ben commanded crisply.

Under the lobby light, Ben paused, and Pete stopped and faced him. Ben's eyes were swollen and blood-shot from sleeplessness, and his voice was hoarse. He said to the townsman, "That's five thousand, George," but he wasn't looking at the townsman; he was scowling at Pete.

"That was cuttin' it a little too fine, even for you, Yard," Ben said.

"Looks that way, doesn't it?" Pete murmured.

"Come along."

There was an escort of some twenty men as far as the sheriff's office. Jim Bonal, who had slept through the shooting in his chair on the porch, was dragged to his feet and carried along until he was sufficiently awake to walk by himself. At the sheriff's office, Pete was prodded in behind Bonal, and Ben shut the others—except Blake, his foreman—out into the night.

He did not waste time now. "Where is Nance?" he demanded, and Pete told him. Obliging, he even related the kidnaping, and he cruelly observed Ben Mellish's face flush with new anger.

"So he'll be down here to-morrow?" Ben asked, suspicion in his voice.

"If he has luck. If you want him, send a man up with a horse."

"Why did you turn him loose?"

"You haven't moved in on Swan Ullman, have you?"

Ben said thickly, "No, but I will."

"I doubt it. You lost your chance to make that stick, Ben. It won't work again."

Blake cleared his throat, swung down from the desk, and walked over and hit Pete in the face. It was poor judgment, besides being a poor blow, for Pete rolled with it enough to catch it glancing on his cheek bone, and answered by driving his fist squarely into Blake's face. Blake caromed off the desk and against the wall, and Ben Mellish regarded him with a kind of savage scorn.

Pete murmured, "I didn't know you bought that kind of loyalty for fightin' wages."

Jim Bonal said irritably: "That's enough of this! What you want done with him, Ben?"

"Lock him up," Ben said.

THE jail was a stone affair of four small cells, and its entrance was through a door in the back wall of the tiny office. Jim Bonal went ahead with the keys and the lantern and opened a cell for Pete, who went in.

"Leave that lantern," Pete said quietly. "I want a word with Mellish."

Bonal looked at Ben, who nodded curtly, and Bonal left.

Pete drew the glove from his pocket and handed it to Ben, saying, "Remember where you left that, Ben?"

Ben took the glove and turned it over, then looked darkly at Pete. "You haven't been over there."

"Warranrode's?"

"Yes."

Pete shook his head, watching Ben Mellish closely as he said, "Have you heard Major Linkman, the Ute agent, was killed last night?"

"No," Ben said carefully.

Pete gestured to the glove. "That was found beside his body."

Ben's frown washed out a little, and he looked sharply at Pete and took a step toward him. "That's a lie," he said flatly.

"From what I've heard," Pete said gently, "you've called your sister a lot of things, Mellish, but you've never called her a liar. She was at Linkman's last night when he was shot. She found that glove beside him, and she hid it. If she hadn't, it would have gone with you just the way somebody hoped it would."

Ben said nothing, but his eyes were wary, puzzled.

"Keep it," Pete said idly. "In your place, I'd tie it around my neck, so that every time I touched it, it would tell me that I'd gone out on the limb just a little too far—and that the man who put me out there never even aimed to let me get back."

Ben said harshly, quickly, "This is your frame-up!"

"Frame-up?" Pete echoed. "Talk sense. You've got the glove. I could have turned it over to the army men who'll be here in a few days, and they could have questioned Chris to find out the truth." He shook his head. "It's no frame-up, Ben—not mine, anyway. You figure out whose it is. You know where you left the glove. You know where it was found."

Then Ben Mellish cursed with complete abandon, and Pete watched him idly, reminded of a stupid bear who is cornered and will not admit it. When Ben was finished, Pete drawled: "This basin will be a

tough outfit to buck alone, Ben. Warranrode knew that, counted on it."

Mellish glared at him and then swung on his heel and went out. Pete lay down on the cot, and listened idly to the talk out in the office, which was only an indistinct blur to him. Thinking back over his capture, he had a feeling of unaccountable anger at his clumsiness and lack of caution. And for that, he had to thank his interview with Sylvia. He had left her tormented in mind, and had stumbled into this trap. A man in his senses would have left by the back stairs or a window.

He rolled a smoke in the dark, trying to put these thoughts behind him.

IN a very short time, he heard Steve's voice out in the office, raised in violent protest—probably because he was not allowed to see Pete. And Pete hoped desperately that the guard would not tell Steve of Linkman's murder, in case Ben had not kept it a secret. Once Steve and Leston and Ed had struck at the Anchor, Ben Mellish would see to it that there would be no backing out, not even for Steve. For Pete was sure that, when Steve heard of Linkman's death, he would name their fight as a useless thing, doomed to failure. Perhaps he would not quit, for Steve was a stubborn man; but he would leave this basin war for Washington, where he would demand an investigation on the little evidence they had assembled, and probably in vain.

To Pete, who knew that in Steve lay the ability to kindle this war, a withdrawal now would mean defeat. It would leave Warranrode the time he needed to get rid of Mellish, just as he had rid himself of Linkman.

No, this fight had to flare up, had to be brought into the open, had to breed a violence that would crack it open clear down to Warranrode. But how it was to be done, Pete didn't know.

And soon, Pete even stopped thinking of that, for he was remembering what Sylvia said about Chris. "She loves you, Pete. Do you love her?" Many long minutes, he lay utterly still, feeling for the cause of Sylvia's saying that. It was not true, he was sure; it was the hysteria of the moment and the circumstances. For Chris did not love him. When she had held the gun on Ames, that was only the hatred of seeing a man murdered. That night, when he had lied to Sylvia, holding Chris's arm, she had hated him. To-night, she came to him in desperation, with

only the courageous hope that he might be able to save Ben. Never, in anything Chris had ever said or done, was there any justification for Sylvia's saying that. And wearily, Pete hated this because it was so. And he knew now, for the first time, that it was partly Chris who had brought him back to this basin fight. It was because behind this madness of Ben Mellish's, bred by Warranrode, Pete could see that Chris was doomed as certainly as Ben. Deep within her, she was too loyal to quit Ben, so that, when vengeance was visited on him, she would share it.

And again, Pete had no answer for this, knowing that if he were to save her, it would only be by destroying Ben before he could pull her with him. And that, he feared, Chris would never forgive.

To be continued in next week's issue.

In Next Week's Issue, "SHORTY'S BILLET-DOUX,"
by RAY HUMPHREYS.

BURIED LOGS GOOD AS NEW

IT was almost a hundred years ago that "cedar log mining" was a thriving trade in New Jersey. Near Mauricetown, in Cumberland County, the industry has been revived, and cedar logs are again being "mined."

Five to ten feet below the surface in the extensive marshlands lie large white cedar logs which, in spite of muck and water, are still sound. Some of these trees are fifty feet long, and are said to be five hundred years old. Shingles made from the cedar are practically indestructible. In addition to using the logs, a vast quantity of peat is being hauled out of the swamp, the peat extending thirty feet below the surface.

A cedar miner takes a six-foot iron bar and taps a hidden log until he determines its position, length and width. Then chains are placed under the log and it is pulled out by a cable and winch. The cable, which is tested to stand the strain of ten tons, occasionally breaks, due to the log becoming enmeshed in ooze and the roots of other trees.

After all the years of submersion the bark is still on the trees and the odor of white cedar is as pungent as in a live tree. After the logs are pulled out they are taken to a near-by sawmill and made into shingles.

SANDSTORM STAMPEDE

By C. WILES HALLOCK

*'Tis most entrancin' for to kill
A hour or two with Braggin' Bill.*

Braggin' Bill, when he was twenty,
Met with wild adventures plenty,
Back in 1860, when

Westerners was supermen.
Once in them excitin' days,
Bill was roundin' up some strays—
'Bout six hundred forty head—
From a Arizony spread.

"Jest a small herd," Bill explained,
"For a puncher proper trained!"

Waal, Bill got them cattle humpin'
To'rd's the ranch and kept 'em jumpin'.

Made good headway, and prevented
Each from gittin' discontented,
Singin' sprightly songs he knowed,
'Till one day a sandstorm blowed
'Crost the desert so severe,
All them beasts went wild with fear.

"'Twas the turriblest stampede,"
Murmured Bill, "I ever seed!"
But he pulled them critters through,
'Cause he knowed jest what to do!

First he busted into song,
Singin' tenor clear and strong;
Stopped the beasts from millin' 'round;
Charmed 'em with the soothin' sound!

With them cattle in control,
Bill kneeed down and dug a hole,
Which he stuck his head into
Jest like ostrich critters do—
So them cattle, every one,
Watched and done jest like he done!
And with buried heads they waited
Till the sandstorm had abated!

*"Since then my singin' voice is still,
From too much sand!" said Braggin' Bill.*





EDIBLE DUCK FOR THE HUNTER

By MORTON A. HOWARD

THERE are many game birds that hunters are fond of shooting for their edible qualities. Each year there are more sportsmen who agree that hunting should be confined to birds that are fit for the table. The day is almost past when game birds will be shot for plumage or mere sport alone.

As a general thing, the highly colored ducks are never fit to eat. The beautiful and strangely marked Harlequin duck is a case in point. With his blue plumage, red under-

part, red top, and white markings on the face like those of a clown, he is a very conspicuous object, but if you try to eat him you will have one of the toughest and most tasteless meals that ever fell to your lot.

The handsome wood duck, with a buff breast, green back, variegated tail, pink waistcoat and a green, blue and white-crested head, is another bird lacking in gustatory attraction.

In the South the quail is known as bobwhite. This bird is never over twelve inches in length, is very

plump, and is the most highly estimated morsel of bird flesh on this continent. The male is a mottled reddish-brown, and has a well-defined white line over the eye and a pure white throat. The female has the same coloring, though more on the dun side, and the line over her eye and throat are pale yellow. The bills of this species are short, and the outline of the body is short and round.

Mountain quail are by far the largest of the quail, and are found rather abundantly all along the Pacific coast. The mountain quail is a handsome bird, with a plume, and with a brown throat and brown lower breast. It does not gather in flocks in the insistent way that the Eastern quail does, and if flushed, will scatter and be very hard to find. In the desert parts of the Southwest there is a quail, not quite so large, and somewhat browner, but to all intents the same bird. The plume of the female is shorter than the male, but the coloring is the same.

The scaled quail is found in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas, and as they are blue-gray, with a small tuft on the head, they are often called blue quail. The quail found in Florida is a very dark-colored bird, less mottled, and with a black throat and the characteristic white line over the eye. A handsome fellow, he stands a little more erect than his Northern brother, and does not seem quite so round.

The Gambel quail is found in dry river bottoms, in mesquite and cactus patches, and similar places in the Southwest. He wears three handsome plumes on his red head, and has a white line over the eye, a black throat and beak, a blue-gray body, and a mottled, reddish wing.

Along the humid watercourses of

California a quail is found that bears the same head markings as the Gambel, but lacks the Gambel's red wing and has, instead, a touch of brown mottling and red on the lower parts.

Mallards are splendid eating, and are, besides, birds of good size. The French in Quebec call them French duck. A great many know them only as Greenheads. They eat only vegetable matter and get it, as the domesticated ducks do, by "tipping up," not by diving. The head is green, the back light brown, the under parts lighter, and the wing has a band of blue. The female is brown, head and all, but has the characteristic banded wing.

TEAL are small ducks, usually measuring about fifteen inches, but they are much sought for, as their flesh is very fine, since they live on grain and delicate clean plants. The green winged migrates later in the fall and earlier in the spring than the blue winged, and is a trifle the smaller of the two. The male has a brownish back, a blue head with a white stripe over the eye, and a blue wing that is tipped with pale buff. The female is more of a uniform gray, head and all, but has the blue or green wing. The cinnamon teal is found in States west of the Mississippi, and is common in South America. These birds are the color their name suggests, but with the teal wing. The female is very much like the other female teals, but with even less of brilliance of coloring.

Occasionally canvasback ducks take to a fish diet, which temporarily impairs their flesh for food, but as a rule they will hold to wild rice, wild celery and other delicate plants, and are much esteemed for the table. They have a long bill, which

is black and high at the base, a red head, and partly red throat, and a breast that is sharply marked but is in the main whitish. The female is a drab-looking creature without any of these markings, except that her head is yellowish and that her underparts are white. The female, however, is better eating than the male in this species. There is a delicate bar effect on the back of both sexes.

Black duck are called black mallard. They are a big bird, not really black, but very dark, and without any sign of bar markings. They have a blue band on the wing, and the female is almost the same as the male, save that she is a bit rusty-looking.

They are very plentiful in the North and, while wary, travel in such numbers that it is not difficult to get some. Their flesh is not quite as fine as that of the regular mallard, but is good eating, all the same. In Florida there is found a black

duck with a little different pattern made by the way the feathers lie, and with a less glistening wing and with lighter color on the throat. The black duck with very mottled underparts is found in Texas and Arizona.

Shovelers are also called broadbills and spoonbills. They are one of the few highly colored ducks that are good eating. They have a very large and long flat bill, as they feed in comparatively deep streams by "tipping up." They fly very swiftly in a crazy, disjointed sort of way that will provide plenty of sport for any one unless he is a rare expert with a gun. The male has a green head, white on the back and part of the breast, with a patch of red beginning with a sharply cut line at the middle and continuing to the tail. There is a band of light blue on the wing. The female has a lighter band of blue, but is otherwise of the mottled gray-brown color characteristic of the duck female.

MORE COWS IN DEMAND

MORE meat demanded by the consumer means more cows, and more cows mean more cowboys. Everything is on the increase apparently. June, 1937, showed a greater demand for beefsteaks than in June, 1936.

Forage crops are predicted to be unusually heavy this year. According to recent government figures, the corn crop of 1937 totaled 2.7 billion bushels as compared to 1.2 billion bushels in 1936. The outlet for the bulk of this feed will be live stock.

With feed abundant and a demand for beef, even though prices are higher than a year ago, ranchers will carry through the winter a good supply of feeders.

Grass cattle which brought four dollars or less during the depression sold recently for nine dollars. Cattle receipts in Colorado for the year approximated two hundred and ninety thousand head, which was thirty thousand head more than the same time the previous year.



The Round-Up

GATHER 'round the fire, boys and girls. We have an hombre here who wants to give us the necessary qualifications for a cowboy. His name is J. W. Warner, and he lives at 6162 Hollywood, Los Angeles, California. He thinks that people speak of cowboys being dumb, and, being one himself, is sure that that's all wrong. So take the saddle, Mr. Warner:

BOSS AND FOLKS:

You often hear people say "Oh, he's just a dumb cowboy." These people do not know of what stuff a cowboy is really made, and the things he has to know. In the first place, a cowboy has to have a constitution of iron to withstand the hardships that he encounters. He is asked to face the elements at their worst and to endanger himself almost constantly in the line of duty. His duties require nerve and daring, and that is why most cowboys appear older than they really are. The wind, rain, and snow are hard on their skins. The average cowboy is sentimental, kind-hearted, generous, and he loves and is kind to all dumb animals. And never have cowboys received wages equivalent to the amount of work they do. Few people realize how long it takes to make a good cowboy. He has to be a jack-of-all-trades and a little bit more. Here are a few of the things he needs to be in order to qualify as a first-rate cowboy:

blacksmith
butcher
calf brander
cook
carpenter
engineer
entertainer
guide
packer
hunter

baker
trapper
housekeeper
leather worker
roper
rider
horse breaker
stock raiser
teamster
veterinarian

Of course, he does not profess to be expert in all of these things, but any good cowboy can do every one of them well enough, and he does not have to have help from any source.

We know that all of you here to-night are glad to hear these things because we all know they are only too true and that sometimes a cowboy doesn't get as much credit for his versatility as he deserves.

Now, maybe you'd all like to stand up and give three rousing cheers for the return of our old friend and prospector, John A. Thompson, who has come back to us to run the Mines and Mining Department. We're hoping as hard as we can, for the sake of you gun lovers out there, that we may soon corral our Guns and Gunners Department, and then every last one of us will be completely satisfied and happy.

MINES AND MINING

By

J. A.

THOMPSON



NEW gold strikes continue to be made in the rich and widespread mining areas of the West. Nor is it always the younger generation that uncovers the new bonanzas. In mining the oldsters come into their own.

To-day when the hale and hearty, still active but middle-aged man's chances are so apt to be restricted in many fields of industrial endeavor, gold prospecting often offers a worth-while outdoor occupation with opportunity for considerable ultimate profit. Gold never asks the man who finds it how old he is.

All of which is in answer to B. Kelly, of Chicago, Illinois, and the many others who may find themselves more or less in Kelly's predicament.

"Time was," writes Kelly, "when a man who was a good worker, sober, and knew his trade, was not discriminated against merely because his hair might be graying around the temples and his years were past the middle span of life. Now it seems in many lines of business—I am a mechanic—that if you aren't just out of kindergarten, you don't fit in. How about prospect-

ing? I have always wanted to go West and to be on my own."

Kelly, there are just about as many old-timers prospecting out West as there are youngsters. Sometimes an older man's thoroughness, his patience and ability to stay with an arduous task once he has started it, operate very much in his favor. Extreme youth is apt to be impetuous, hungry for instant success, and too anxious to uncover that bonanza within twenty minutes, at least, after reaching the scene of prospecting operations and setting up camp.

As a matter of fact, exuberant reports have been coming in regarding a rich mining strike made a short time ago in Lemhi County, Idaho—a region, incidentally, frequently boosted in this department in the past as likely mining territory. And the strike was made by two old-timers, both considerably past what is generally known as middle age. Both the boys were over seventy.

Joe Denton and Ben Evans are the prospectors. The ore they found was not, in this case, gold, but a rich chloride of silver deposit. The ore is said to run some ten thousand dollars to the car load. Of course, it has to be shipped to a

smelter in Salt Lake for ultimate extraction of the metal. But there is still plenty of profit in that sort of rock.

These seventy-year-old lads made their strike some two miles east of Gilmore, and the little town has been practically depopulated since the discovery. Everybody has been moving over to Texas, the name given the new boom camp because the find was made in the so-called Texas mining district.

Denton and Evans, according to reports, have shipped already four car loads of ore from the vein, a fifteen-foot ore body between hanging wall and foot wall. Miners have estimated that some twenty more car loads of the bonanza silver ore are "in sight." Small wonder prospectors of all ages are crowding into this new camp opened up by a brace of seventy-year-olds.

And now here's T. K. L., of Spokane, Washington, with a query on gold minerals. "I know," he writes, "that gold almost always occurs free in nature. That is, the element itself, and not compounded with other chemicals, like copper, for instance, which is sometimes found as a copper sulphide, or a copper carbonate. But I have heard of 'gold telluride.' Is that a true chemical compound of gold?"

Answering mining questions, T. K. L., is our business. You ask them, and we'll answer them to the

best of our ability, gladly. Gold telluride is a true compound of gold, and the two telluride ores, sylvanite and calaverite, are the *only* known such compounds found in nature. Their occurrence is fairly rare, and apparently localized. Colorado, notably Cripple Creek, and the gold fields of western Australia, appear to be the chief sources of this type of gold ore.

Of course, there is no telling where they may pop up next, and as both the telluride ores are readily identifiable by physical characteristics and easy tests, description of them is something every gold prospector ought to have along with him.

Sylvanite is, in reality, a telluride of gold and silver. It is a noticeably heavy mineral, usually with a silver-white color and a bright, metallic luster. It is soft, so soft that it can be scratched with a finger nail, and when scratched the streak mark is gray. It is easily fusible, and if melted on a charcoal block, with a little soda, it will show a tiny globule of gold and silver metal.

Calaverite is harder than sylvanite, but it can be readily scratched by a copper coin. It runs about forty per cent gold. It is heavy, has a metallic shine to it, and its color is usually a pale, bronze-colored yellow, due to tarnish. Freshly broken surfaces are often silver-white. It is the more common of the two tellurides, although often both sylvanite and calaverite, when found, are found together.

We desire to be of real help to our readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.

Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be published in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.

The HOLLOW TREE

Conducted by HELEN RIVERS



TO trek the out-back mountain trails in summer and to take a *pasear* over the desert country in winter is the dream of many a chechahco. "R. W., of the San Bernardino Country" is looking for the right pard to join him in his ramblings.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Yep, I'm an out-back trail vagabond, fifty-four years old, and with an income of about eight hundred dollars a year. I have been prospecting for several years, going from the Western States to Brazil. I had a grand time and met any number of fine people—teachers, retired health seekers,

small-business men, et cetera. We went to lectures, trips on the desert to study rock formation, and also took in such things as astronomical lectures at Los Angeles.

I know and concede that it is the real life, but the catch is that these people all have their families and their financial worries. They are under a strain to get ahead. I would like to find some one who can finance himself; forty or fifty dollars a month is plenty if one doesn't worry about non-essentials. I would like a pard who would like really to live and travel looking for minerals, caves, or just fishing or looking at such things as desert sunsets.

I have a light delivery truck and an outfit enough for two, and I will pay more than half of the expenses, if necessary. I will furnish and will expect reasonable references.

R. W. OF THE SAN BERNARDINO COUNTRY.
Care of The Tree.

Westerners, these girls are depending on your advice to help them have a glorious vacation.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Another girl and I are planning a trip into the Northwest next spring. We are as yet undecided just where to go, but we want to camp on the banks of some river and fish, hike, and have a general good time. We have been told that there is a lot of gold dust in the Snake River region in Idaho, and as we would like to make our trip profitable, as well as for pleasure, we wish to pan for gold where placer mining is carried on.

A mining engineer once told me that the Snake River country was the best gold-producing area in the West. Now I am sure there are quite a few of you who, at some time or other, have tried your hand at prospecting. We would appreciate it very much if you folks would write us of your experiences.

I am really from the Northwest, hailing from Wyoming, but I came East four years ago to school. I finished this summer, and I expect to work until next spring, and

then—Westward, ho! I am twenty-six years of age, and of French and English descent.

ANTOINETTE.

Care of The Tree.

A young sea-going sailor is here to yarn with you-all.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Here is a letter from a young sea-going sailor whose rating is boatswain's mate, first class, and my job has carried me to the many corners of the world. I would be only too glad to tell my Pen Pals of my experiences—from the muddy rivers of China, to the sunny Riviera in France. I have just returned from evacuation duty in Spain, so first-hand information of the Spanish revolution will be given to my Pen Pals. I am twenty-five years of age, folks.

W. A. BIBER, B. M.

Fourth Division, U. S. S. Quincy,
Care of Postmaster,
San Pedro, California.

Stamp collectors will be interested in these folks.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

My husband and I are both stamp collectors, and we would like very much to exchange stamps with any one who wants mint stamps of the United States for mint stamps of the country in which they live. We are particularly interested in contacting some one in Canada and Mexico, although we would be just as glad to hear from any one else, anywhere in the world. And any one from the Canal Zone or the Philippines will be heartily welcomed, indeed! In fact, any one who wants to trade the new issues of their country for the new issues of ours. The more the merrier!

I have lived in Texas, Kansas, and in California. Right now I am studying Spanish at night school, so I would be able to write a little bit in that language, and I think I could read it fairly well.

DOROTHY AND NELSON BOTER.

8178 $\frac{3}{4}$ Commercial Place,
South Gate, California.

Ruth, from West Virginia, is speaking up.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Folks, I am out to corral some Pen Pals who will be willing to exchange snapshots and cowboy songs with me. My favorite

hobby is playing the guitar and singing. Come on, all you Pen Pals, and write to me, for I have a lot to tell you about this Hacker Valley country. I'll answer all letters.

RUTH PUGR.

Box 34, Hacker Valley, West Virginia.

From Hawaii comes this Pen Pal seeker.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Will the old Hollow Tree consider my plea for Pen Pals? I am nineteen years old, and just a lonely soldier in the United States army. I play a guitar, sing, and yodel.

PRIVATE VERNELL E. HOFFER.

11th Ordnance Company,
Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

An "Aussie" would like you folks from the States to speak up.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Would any of you folks like a correspondent in Australia? I am interested in all wild things and get out into the open as often as I can. I would like to hear all I can about your country, and maybe some one over there would like to hear about Australia. I'm by no means young, but quite young enough to take pleasure in getting out into the back country. If any of you folks care to write, I will be sure to answer.

MRS. ALICE OSBORNE.

272 Barker Road, Glenferrie,
Melbourne, Australia.

Ontario is this Pen Pal's homeland.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Pen Pals anywhere in North America or from the Hawaiian Islands will be very welcome. I play a guitar and sing and am interested in Western life. My age is sixteen.

MAUDE BALL.

30 Tecumseh Street,
Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

This American soldier in the Philippines is lonesome for some letter friends.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

May I edge my way into The Hollow Tree? I wish to contact some worthwhile Pen Pals while watching boats leave from the Philippines! To any correspondent I can impart experiences involving Ha-

waii, Guam, and of the Philippine archipelago.

Concerning myself: I am twenty-two years of age, an American soldier, and my home is in New York State. Of course I would appreciate it very much if folks of my age would write me, for I will not be back in the States until 1938. And it gets lonesome here, at times, in these jungles.

E. L. REILS.

U. S. Army Hospital, Fort Mills,
Corregidor Cavite, Philippine Islands.

A city girl looks for a ranch-girl correspondent.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

It would delight me very much to hear from some young lady about twenty-seven years of age who lives on a cattle ranch. I live in the city, but I love the outdoors. I am a recreational instructor with loads of experience in the woods, on camping trips, canoe trips, hikes, and all outdoor sports. I hope to hear from some one who enjoys a good chat.

MISS J. A. PARKER.
516½ South Hill Street,
Los Angeles, California.

An Oregon hombre is looking for a ranch pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Howdy, folks! Now I am looking for a pardner and I prefer one of those honest, ambitious, good-natured, imaginative, dyed-in-the-wool kind! I am a single fellow who has a small business in Portland, Oregon, but the city life cramps my style. My idea

is a small ranch, perhaps somewhere in eastern Oregon. I am thirty-four years old, and my one ambition is to be a rancher, even though ever so small for a start. So speak up you would-be pardners. What are your suggestions? Perhaps there is some one on a ranch or farm who finds he has undertaken a two-man proposition, or finds his isolated home a bit too monotonous. I will answer any and all who may write.

ROBERT VERNON.

431 N. E. Simpson St.,
Portland, Oregon.

Frank has trekked over most of the United States and Canada.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Here is a young man, thirty-two, single, who has seen most of the United States and Canada. I have been in acrobatic and musical acts, and I am also interested in amateur radio. I will be glad to correspond with any one, anywhere.

FRANK RIVERS.

General Delivery,
San Francisco, California.

A Michigan miss is here to yarn with you girls.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am looking for Pen Pals from the Southern and Western States, and I will answer all letters promptly, especially those with photos. I am a girl of thirteen, living on a large farm in southwestern Michigan.

ILENE KLEIN.

R. R. 1, Mendon, Michigan.

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 Rivers, 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.



WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

By JOHN NORTH

MANY hombres in search of homes in the West head for the Evergreen State, and this is the destination that Rex P. of Topeka, Kansas, has in mind.

"I'm going to move out to the Pacific Northwest in the near future, Mr. North, and in looking the possibilities over have decided to settle in Washington. The particular section I'm considering is Whatcom County, and I'm wondering if you can give me any facts about it as to farming, industries, towns, and so forth."

We can surely gratify that wish of yours for information about Whatcom County, Rex. This county in northwestern Washington has a highly developed and diversified type of agriculture, dairying and poultry raising being the two most important rural industries. Out of a total of 4,662 farmers, 3,300 are

poultry raisers. A large proportion of these keep poultry as the major activity, or as one of the major activities, along with either cows, berries, or vegetables.

The farmers out there say the climate is well suited to heavy laying and healthy flocks. Although there is considerable winter, fall, and early spring rain, this is not a bar to egg production. The mild climate is a decided advantage. There is an average of two hundred and fifteen days between the last frost in spring and the first in fall, and usually there is breeze which further moderates the temperature.

Dairying has also reached a high state of development in this section of the Evergreen State. Another important industry is canning, and for this purpose hundreds of acres of strawberries, peas, corn, beets, carrots, gooseberries, and sour cherries are being raised.

You'll find, Rex, that of the many new settlers coming into Whatcom

County, some are renting or working for six months to a year before definitely deciding on the particular piece of land on which they want to settle permanently, and in our opinion this is an excellent program to follow. This also gives you a chance to discover your niche in the life of the community.

Coming, as you do, from a mid-Western State, you'll have to go through a certain process of adjusting yourself to the conditions in the Far West. You'll find that farming here is different from what it was in Kansas. On the whole the farms are smaller, more intensive agriculture is followed, and the returns per acre must be multiplied in comparison with the type of farming you did back home. Less machinery and power are required.

The towns in Whatcom County are connected by concrete highways. Nearly all the farmers have telephones and radios. Electric power is used on many of the farms, and almost all have been equipped with water systems. Eighty-three per cent of the farmers are landowners, and only seventeen per cent tenants.

Lumber was once the foundation of the only large industry in the county, but this is not true to-day. There

is still activity in that line, however, with mills on Puget Sound, at Bellingham. Other industries have grown up for the servicing of the agriculture that the territory has developed, and which, in most of the cases, is on farms that were cut over and cleared.

Bellingham, the largest city in the county, has a population of 30,823. It is served by railroads and by ocean boats, being one of the important ports sending out supplies to Alaska, and other distant points, by water.

"Can you give me any information about the desert town of Barstow, California, Mr. North?" asks Tom R., of Cleveland, Ohio.

We're mighty glad to oblige you, Tom. Barstow is located on the Mojave River, and is a junction for the Santa Fe lines to Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco. The famous Casa del Deserto, or House of the Desert, is located here. This desert town has an altitude of 2,105 feet, and a population of approximately 2,500 people.

Activities in the Barstow region include mining, stock raising, fruit raising, dairying and agriculture.

SPECIAL NOTICE

THE WATERPROOF CUT-TREE SHELTER

If you are caught in the woods overnight you can make yourself cozy and comfortable with a waterproof cut-tree shelter which can be rigged up in a jiffy by even the inexperienced outdoorsman. Specific directions for making this shelter may be obtained by writing John North, care Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

We aim to give practical help to readers. Mr. North supplies accurate information about the West, its ranches, mines, homestead lands, mountains, and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. He will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to him, for he is always glad to assist you to the best of his ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

MISSING DEPARTMENT

MORTON, ROLAND KIETH.—He is about five feet eleven inches tall with brown hair and blue eyes. Last heard from he was in Parkersburg, West Virginia. He sent me a card from there. I am alone and would like to see you. If you cannot come to see me perhaps I could come to you. Your mother, Mrs. Myrtle Morton, Grafton, West Virginia.

SCHNEIDER or SNYDER, BARBARA, CLARA and EVERETT.—Barbara is of German descent. She is the mother of Clara and Everett. In 1915, they lived at 308 E. 8th Street, Topeka, Kansas. Mrs. Schneider kept a rooming house. Clara was sixteen years of age, and Everett three or four years younger. Clara married a man by the name of Watkins or some similar name, and it is possible that Everett is employed as a druggist. Any one having any information regarding any of these people kindly write to Frank C. Cannady, Boyd, Kansas.

EDWARDS, JAMES.—My father, who left my mother, Sarah A. Killey, in 1893. I would like to know if he still lives. My mother is dead. Would appreciate some word from my father. Please write to your daughter, Ida Nunn, Route 1, McCurtain, Oklahoma.

GAINES, WILLIAM D.—Your baby and I would appreciate a letter from you. We love you. We live at 216 S. E. 14th, Portland, Oregon. Ether.

THOMAS, EARL LESTER.—When last heard from, in 1927, he was in Milton, Oregon. He is an auto mechanic and a horse trainer. He may be working on a ranch. Any one knowing his whereabouts please correspond with Nick C. Koruynch, Somerville Home, Lewiston, Idaho.

CLARK, MRS. JUAINITIA, née TOSSAIC.—She lived in Paducah, Kentucky, at one time. Have valuable information for her. Information appreciated by Pvt. Alvin McW. Jolley, Co. E, 5th Engineers, Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

BENNIE and EBBIE MELTON.—Last seen in Conroe, Texas, in October, 1935. I am married again. Please write to your sister, Elsie Hooser, General Delivery, Central Park Station, Houston, Texas.

WESTOVER, DUNCAN A., or RELATIVES.—My mother passed away in 1929. I would like to hear from my father or some of his folks. George L. Westover, Star Route, No. 6, Council Grove, Kansas.

VAUGHN, JESSE.—My uncle who was last heard from about nine or ten years ago from some place in Florida. He is about sixty-five years old. Remember Pannie and Ola, your brother Add's girls? We are both married. I married O. R. Burns at Alapaha, Georgia, where Uncle Ed Vaughn died. I remember you, Uncle Jessie, and think of you so often. You were so much like my daddy it would be almost like meeting him to find you. Any one who has information regarding this man's whereabouts please communicate with Mrs. O. R. Burns, Route 1, Palm Harbor, Florida.

MOXLEY, W. B.—He was born in Moxley, Kentucky, or North Carolina. Any information concerning this man or his family will be greatly appreciated by Mrs. D. Moxley, 1607 Dolores Street, San Francisco, California.

COLLINS, JAMES ELBERT.—My husband who was last seen in Douglas, Arizona, in 1911. Also heard from him when he was in Amarillo, Texas, in 1911. He has brown hair, blue eyes, and is about five feet ten inches tall, and weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds. He is a cook by profession. Have tried many times to locate him. Should be see this and write I will be very happy. Maude E. Collins, 3466 20th Street, San Francisco, California.

CAMPBELL, WILL.—Last heard of in London, Kentucky. Any information will be greatly appreciated by Mrs. Zalem Champenois, 713 West Oak, Eldorado, Arkansas.

F. H. B.—Everything is O. K. I am at mother's. Please write to me there or in care of Western Story Magazine. V. L. W.

ANDERSON, SADIE and NORMAN.—Last seen about sixteen or seventeen years ago at Chelan, Washington. Believed to have gone to the northeastern States. Came to this country from Ireland with their father, David Anderson. Any one having any information as to their whereabouts please get in touch with their half-brother, Raymond Anderson, 320 Dodge Street, Lebanon, Oregon.

ROMANSKY, JOHN.—He is twenty-nine years old. In October, 1935, he was on the U. S. S. *Arkansas*. In 1936, he was on the tug U. S. S. *Koosanguia*, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. I have tried in vain to find you. Have kept my promise to you. I still care. Am sorry for having been so foolish. Please forgive me and write as I miss your wonderful friendship. Jewell Alexander, 941 West 7th Place, Los Angeles, California.

There is no charge for the insertion of requests for information concerning missing relatives or friends.

While it will be better to use your name in the 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.

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.

YOURS & BOYS! • GIRLS!

BIKE GIVEN



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