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JULY 30, 1932

Western Story

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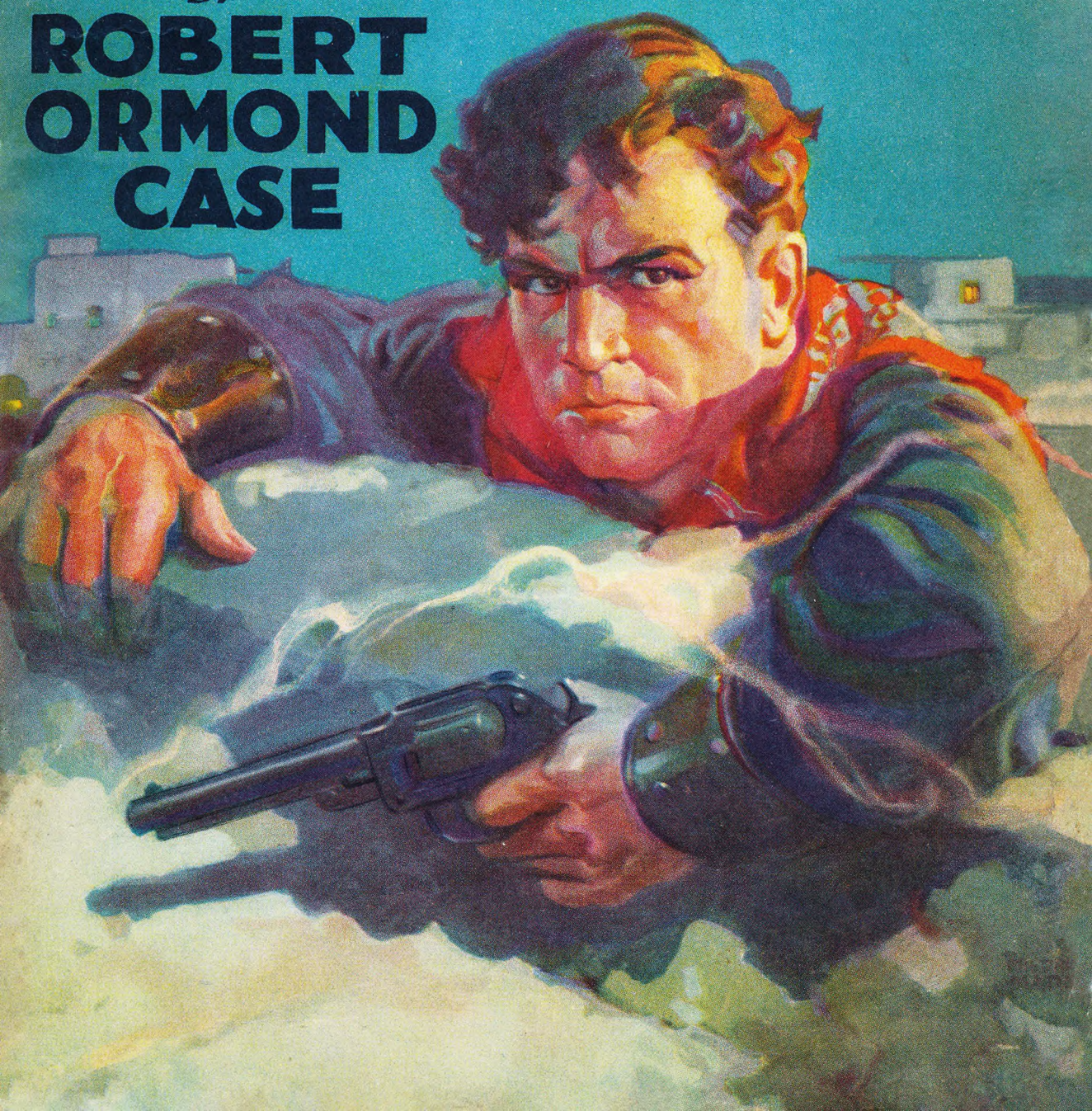

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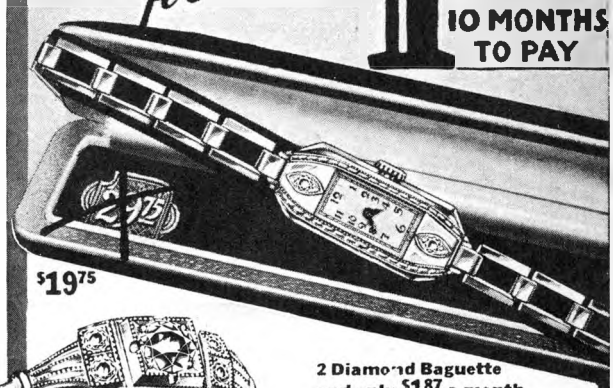

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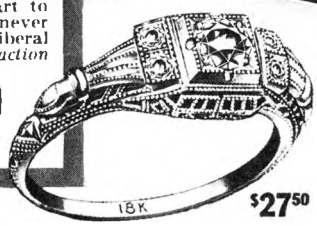

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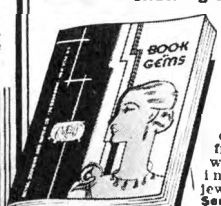

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January 10th

I HAD a bad break today. I expected to get that assistant foreman job but George Smith got it instead. George is all right but he hasn't been in the shop as long as I have and I honestly believe the men like me better. Oh well, it's life, I guess—but Dot's going to be disappointed when she hears the news. A lot depended on that job and the money it pays!

January 13th

Told Dot tonight about losing out on that new job. It made me feel mighty bad when she cried. I didn't expect that—but she said it would be foolish for us to get married on what I am making. "What are you going to do about it?" she asked. "What did the boss say?" When I told her he didn't say anything to me, she flared up and said, *"Well, I'd ask him!"* That was an idea.

January 17th

I wonder what's wrong with me! For three days I tried to get up enough nerve to ask the boss why he didn't give me that job, and every time I start towards his office I get cold feet. But I've got to do it! Dot is going to ask.

January 20th

I told Dot tonight I hadn't had a chance to talk with the boss. "Chances are scarce with you these days," she said, and there was a look in her face that made me realize I'd better do *something.*

January 22nd

Today I screwed up my courage and walked right into the boss' office. The boss sat there and looked at me until I had finished talking. There was a deadly pause. Then he leaned over his desk and said in the calmest tone: "Jack, I like you and wanted to give you that job. I thought about it a long time. But my own job depends on the men I pick—and in self-defense I promoted the best *trained* man in this shop. You've been here longer, it's true, but while you've been wasting your spare time, George Smith has been studying an I. C. S. course. He has learned the things a man on that job *must* know, and you might profit by his example. If you do, I have something in mind for you."

January 23rd

I told Dot what the boss said. "Well," she said, "there's only one thing left for you to do—enroll for an I. C. S. course right away." I nodded approval of her conclusion. (I had already mailed a coupon to Scranton!)

November 1st

This is the happiest day of my life! A new job—a new wife—a new outlook on life! Dot said she would marry me the *very* day I got my promotion—and Dot is a girl of her word, bless her heart! I owe a lot to her—and to I. C. S. *training. There is no substitute for either of them!*

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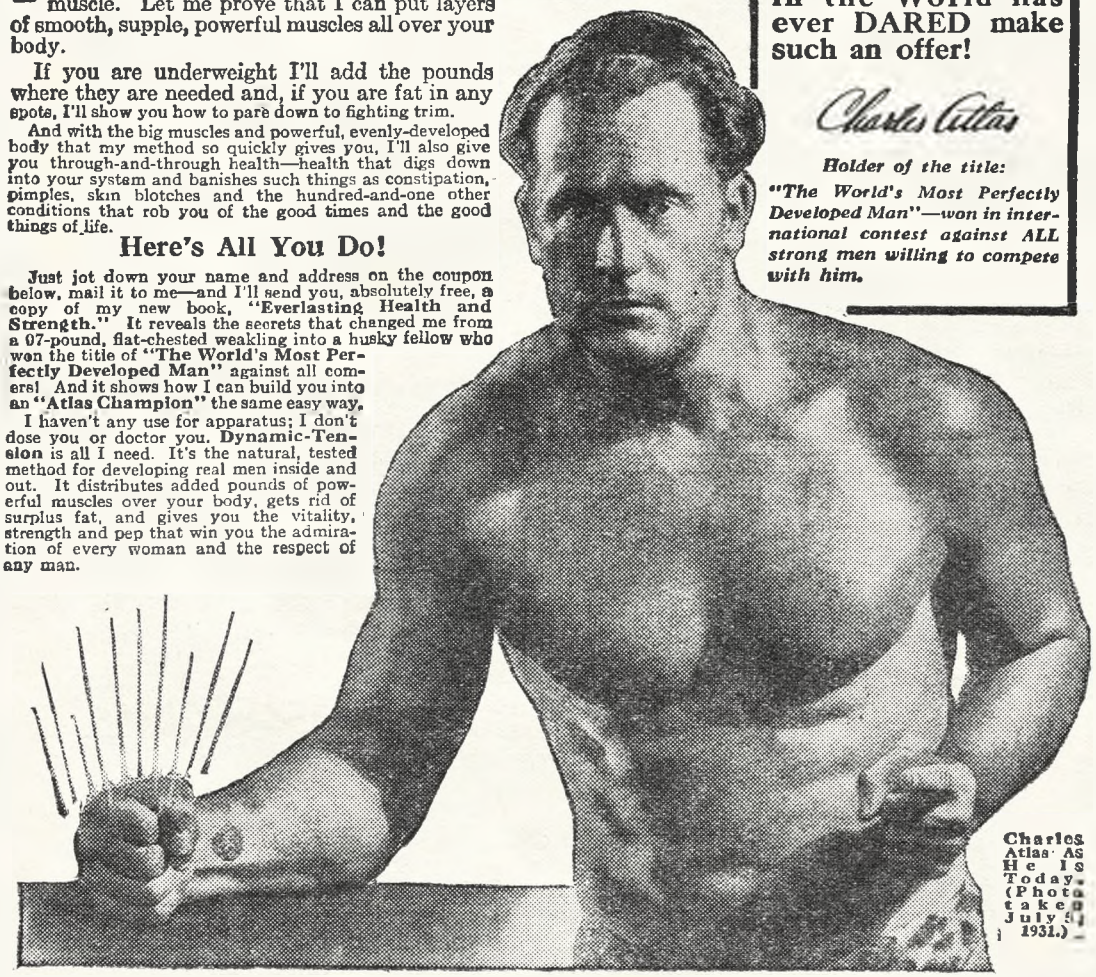

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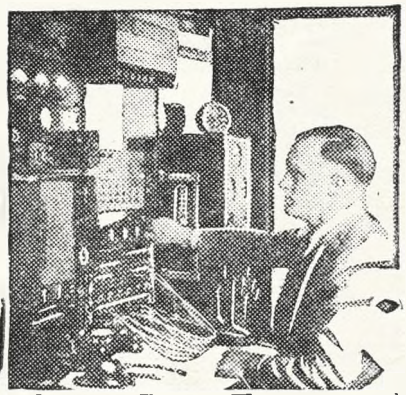

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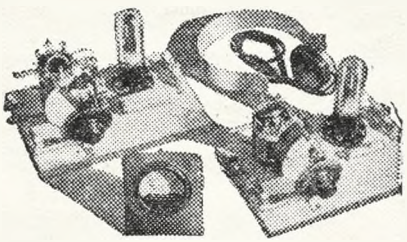

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PINTO PETE COMES BACK

By HARRY R. KELLER

OH, we used to love to go
To the Rawson Rodeo,
In the days when "Pinto Pete" had vim and verve.
Wasn't room in him for fear;
He could ride the toughest steer,
And the wildest bronc paid homage to his nerve.

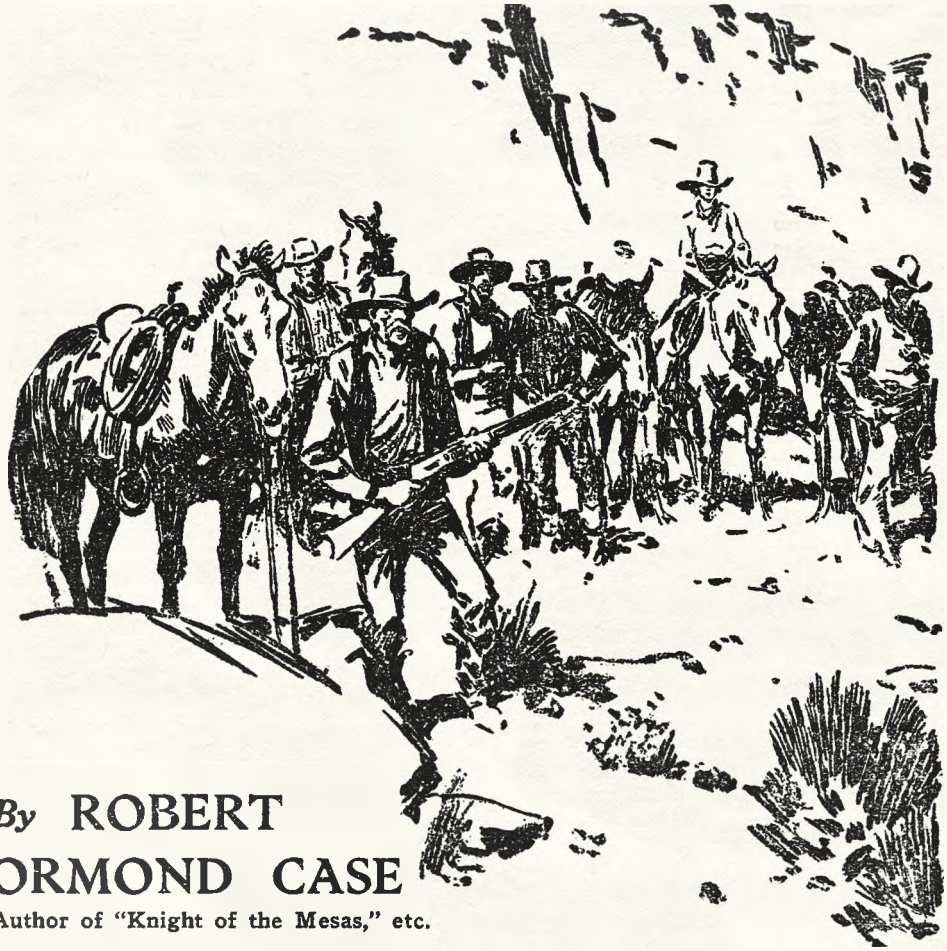
Till at last a mean cayuse
Busted cinch and saddle loose,
Tossing Pete for seven yards, or maybe ten;
Now his face was pained and drawn,
All his nerve and courage gone,
And he vowed that he would never ride again.

Like a subtle play well planned,
Fortune dealt herself a hand,
In a way that was most marvelous to see.
Pete was out to take a stroll,
For to bolster up his soul,
When a herd of longhorns chased him up a tree.

But the tree was old and brash,
And perhaps Pete's step was rash,
For beneath his feet he felt the branches crack;
With a deeply worried frown,
Pinto Pete came crashing down,
Landing square astride one locoed longhorn's back!

Well, he had no time to think,
So he didn't cringe nor shrink,
But he dug his heels into that critter's flanks;
Then and there he took a ride
Such as thrilled the countryside
In the days when Pinto topped the riders' ranks.

Once again our pard was game,
For he rode the critter tame,
While upon his features sat the old-time grin.
So again this year I'll go
To the Rawson Rodeo,
And I'll place my pay on Pinto Pete to win!



By ROBERT ORMOND CASE
Author of "Knight of the Mesas," etc.

SUICIDE TRAIL

CHAPTER I.

A WOLF FROM THE VALLEY.

AT that magic sunset hour the whole world brooded. Obsidian cliffs no longer glittered, and the harshness of lava pinnacle and sawtooth ridge was mellowed by fading gold. A violet haze enveloped the turbulent barrens that swooped downward and eastward like a crumbling into space; and beyond the gap a mighty, rough-edged shadow was advancing across the valley floor.

At a point where the canyon wall broke sharply into shadowed depths, two men sprawled, motionless as lizards on a heat-withered ledge. Their feet were to the sunset, their faces toward the gap. Rifles and canteens lay beside them. Many cigarette stubs littered the tough, wiry grass at their elbows. Invisible from below, they were studying a lone horseman approaching from the plains.

Frail and tiny this rider loomed, a fragment of life threading savage dimensions. Yet, through the crystal air, each detail about him was plain. His horse was black, clean-limbed, and muscular. He was traveling heavy—blanket roll, saddlebags, and rifle in scabbard. He sat the saddle easily, in seasoned fashion, molded to his mount. The sound of his progress reechoed between the inclosing walls.

"What do you make of him, Slim?" inquired the shorter of the two lookouts softly.

The rawboned youth with the bristling jaw did not immediately reply. His eyes were glued to powerful field glasses. Through these he continued to study the horseman for a space. Then he laid them aside and took up his rifle.

"CAN'T figure him. He ain't a peace officer," said he. "He'd know the Pass was guarded and he was signing his own death warrant. He ain't a cowhand lookin' for strays. Prob'ly a stranger rushin' in where them angels fear to tread. Either way"—he slid a cartridge gently into the breach—"we'll singe his whiskers. That's what we'll do."

"How come you hog all the excitement?" accused the other as

"Slim" laid his rifle carefully along the ledge.

" 'Tain't excitement," Slim reproved. "It's business. You're too dog-gone bloodthirsty, Yakima. We don't want this pilgrim's scalp, 'less he plumb insists. Snell's squeamish about killings lately. Things are getting too hot."

His sights were set for five hundred yards. The stranger was less than half that distance away. He therefore aimed directly at the battered sombrero below and pulled the trigger.

The crashing report reëchoed in the gorge, shuttled back from distant peaks. Slim glared through the thinning smoke.

"Son of a gun!" said he. "That slug didn't miss him eight inches, and he never batted an eyelash! Didn't even look up and say 'Bless us and save us.' "

"Prob'ly figured it was a hossfly," said "Yakima," chuckling. " 'They are bad in these parts,' says he, yawning. 'But what of it? It'll soon be sundown.' Yeah, he's a cool one, that jasper."

"Kick up some dust in front of him," Slim growled. "See if he'll laugh that off."

Both rifles belched into the depths. Puffs of dust leaped up in the narrow trail, all but beneath the horse's nose. The spirited animal reared, plunging. The rider calmed him with a muttered word and a tightening of the reins; and proceeded as before.

"He's one of them dummies," breathed Yakima in awe. "Blind, also. Or maybe he's just plain loco. Drill him, Slim. Shoot his horse, then," he suggested as Slim shook his head, scowling. "Leave him afoot and he'll take the hint, loco or not."

"No," said Slim. He eased back from the edge of space and motioned his lieutenant to follow. "We'll head him off up yonder at the bend. There's something about this jasper that'll bear looking into. He's got some joker up his sleeve. Question is, what?"

They retrieved their horses from a scrub pine thicket and descended into the upper canyon. Behind a huge shoulder of basalt that bulged above the trail, Slim loosened his gun in his holster and motioned Yakima back. The sound of the stranger's approach was close at hand.

"I'll ride out casual," Slim whispered. "If shooting starts, hold him here until Snell comes. If he parleys, come out with your hand filled and we'll take him. All set?"

"All set," said Yakima.

The stranger was slumped in the saddle, chin sunk on his chest, like one lost in thought. He looked up when Slim appeared around the corner, and pushed back his sombrero with a careless gesture. Thus was revealed boyish, lean-jawed features that were oddly bleak. His big mouth, formed for laughing, was straight-lipped and grim. In build he was slender but wiry. Upon him, backed up by horse and equipment, was the nameless, seasoned air of one who has eaten much dust in his time, and has ridden into many sundowns.

SLIM, reins held loosely in his left hand, the thumb of his right hooked in his gun belt, was obviously blocking the trail. The stranger gave him stare for stare, his blue eyes twinkling frostily. His teeth flashed in a sudden smile that held no mirth.

"Make up your mind, cowboy," he advised. "You coming or going?"

Obeying an unspoken command, Slim's horse swung a little farther around, thus approaching the proper angle for gun play.

"Stranger," said he, "this is called Suicide Trail. It's closed to travel. I sent a slug whistlin' past your ears. I kicked up dust in front of you. Those are hints in any man's language. Still you push in regardless. What's the idea?"

"Bluntly put," approved the other, nodding. "I'll call you, cowboy. I'm looking for Snell."

Slim's gaze narrowed.

"You've spoken a name, fellow," said he, "like a gent havin' authority. You claim to be a friend of his?"

"Snell's?" said the other carelessly. "No. Never met up with him."

"What you want of him?"

The other did not immediately reply. He continued to regard Slim smilingly. It became a fixed smile as the laughter wrinkles faded about his bitter eyes. From beyond the bend, at Slim's back, came the swelling thunder of many hoofbeats.

"Your interest in world affairs," said the young fellow, "is plumb wearisome. Have I got to tell my bedtime story to every curious gorilla I meet up with on this blasted trail? I'll talk to Snell."

His hands, which Slim had been watching with hawklike intentness, had been resting easily on the saddle horn. He now raised them to his breast pocket and drew forth the makings. Whereupon Slim's weapon flashed from its holster.

"Hold it," said he. "Hold that pose, hombre. Yakima!" He raised his voice.

Yakima spurred up behind him, gun in hand.

"Take this pilgrim's artillery."

"Now wait," counseled the youth. He kept his hands raised, as ordered, and continued to roll a cigarette, eying them quizzically. "Just a second, while I ponder this."

"Wait, nothin'!" growled Yakima. "What you think this is, fellah—a parlor game? Don't wiggle an eyebrow!"

"Just the same," said the youth softly, "you wait. Just hold your horses while I figure why I don't get action right here."

His coolness, his almost quizzical composure while facing the muzzles of two weapons, gave even the downright Yakima pause. Yet he did not hesitate long.

"O. K.," said he with a shrug. "I figured to pass out with my irons in my hand; but what's the odds? Come and get 'em."

Yakima reined up beside him, watchful and poised. He breathed easier when the youth's holster and rifle scabbard were empty. Slim also spurred past their prisoner, blocking the trail to the valley.

"Now then——" Slim began.

He broke off as a file of armed men rode around the bend. Something like a sigh of relief escaped him. "Here's the chief."

THERE were six or seven in the bristling column. At its head rode a short, long-armed man with a seamed face and a ragged mustache that curved down to meet a lean, outthrust jaw. His eyes, as he drew nearer, were pale-blue, unwinking, and cold as crumbs of glass.

"What's this, Slim?" His voice was dry and brittle. "What we got here?"

The briefness of Slim's reply, and the manner in which the others waited on their leader's every move, suggested a military discipline.

"A pilgrim," said he, "who says he's lookin' for Snell."

The little man turned his unwinking gaze upon the slender figure, as though to search out his innermost thoughts.

"I'm Snell," said he; and it was plain, from the stir this admission caused among the hard-bitten ranks, that a species of verdict had been pronounced upon the stranger. "Who are you?"

"A lone wolf," said the young man, "looking for a roost."

Snell pierced him with another glance, then reined away. At his gesture, each horseman pivoted, heading for the bend.

"A wolf, eh?" said Snell. "Horse him up to the bull pen, boys. We'll examine his teeth."

CHAPTER II.

OUTLAW COURT.

THERE were ten horsemen, including the prisoner, who rounded the bend. Beyond was revealed a larger group waiting. Eleven or twelve, perhaps more; it was hard to count noses as they milled and jostled, swinging around at Snell's gesture.

This cavalcade strung out in single file, mounting the trail into the higher barrens.

If the stranger was surprised at these numbers, his bearing gave no hint of it. He sat the saddle in indifferent pose, his cigarette hanging from careless lips. The trail was wider here. Snell rode beside him. Slim and Yakima brought up the rear. Heading the column was a slender youth wearing a pearl-gray sombrero. This one did not look back; nor did the others. No sound broke the stillness but the creaking of leather and the harsh clanging of steel on stone.

Beyond the hogback that ended the narrowing canyon, a small amphitheater bounded by unscalable cliffs opened up beside the trail. It was perhaps thirty yards across, a pocket, a hole in the wall. Into it the column turned, following the slender file leader. Except that youth, who withdrew into the background and remained in the saddle, chin cupped in hand, all dismounted, leaving the horses in an irregular semicircle, reins trailing.

The prisoner dismounted with the others and looked about him. Here, it was plain, was no permanent camp, but a temporary rendezvous. Ancient embers littered the sandy floor. Ancient sign told of cattle and horses having been quartered here often. It was a remote spot, sheltered from wind and storm, easily guarded.

As a lesser semicircle within the line of horses, Snell's followers grouped, shoulder to shoulder. It was revealed now that there were twenty-three in all, including the silent youth in the background. The latter's features, beneath the shadow of his sombrero, appeared to be smooth-cheeked, almost effeminate. Spiritually, as in the flesh, he held himself aloof.

Of the others, some were young, like Slim and Yakima; some like Snell were seamed of feature and grizzled of hair. A few were neat in appearance and stood erect with a swaggering semblance of pride. Mostly they were unshaved, slovenly, and yellow-fanged. Upon all, of differing types and calibers, was the stamp of reckless and lawless men.

Snell motioned the prisoner forward. In the silence that had fallen upon the cleft, his voice was like the rasping of dried leaves.

"Fellow," said he. "You may

have faced courts before. Most of us have. There'll be no lawyers here, no tomfoolery. There's no bail nor hope of appeal. You ready for straight talk?"

"Shoot," said the young man.

"You've seen me," said Snell. "You've seen these fellows. You could pick us out of a line-up. Which means you've crossed a threshold and can't turn back. You savvy that, eh?"

"Sure," said the young fellow. He added: "I've crossed worse thresholds."

UNDERSTAND, also, that I'm a judge of men," said Snell in his unemotional way. "I read brands. I haven't figured you yet. I will, when we begin to talk. On what you say, and how you say it, rests the one chance in ten you've got of leaving this hole alive. And if you leave"—he jerked a thumb toward the pinnacles—"you go west, not east. Get me?"

"Got you!" The fellow nodded.

"Slim!"

The latter stepped forward.

"Let's hear your end of it."

"He come up the canyon, ridin' easy," said Slim. "I sent a slug past his ear. He never batted an eye. Both of us fired in front of him. No result. I figured maybe he was a friend of yours. So me and Yakima——"

"Wait," said Snell. "He made no sign?"

"No sign," said Slim. "Rode like a wooden Injun. We met him at the bend. He claimed he wanted to talk to you. Named your name. So we took his guns. Then you come."

"That all?"

"Only this," said Slim. "For a minute it looked like we'd have to down him to get his guns. Then he changed his mind. Said something or other about aimin' to cash in shootin'; but what of it? That's all."

Snell waved him back. He stepped closer to the youth.

"All right, fellow. Let's have it. What's your name?"

"Enders. Pete Enders."

"Where you from?"

"The valley."

"You're riding a Bar X horse," said Snell, indicating the black. "Your hands are hands of a fellow who works. You're on the Bar X pay roll?"

"No," said Pete. "I worked my own spread. I got a quarter across the valley. On Wolf Creek. That is," he amended, "I had until this morning. Now the bank's got it."

"Ever get into any trouble?"

"Plenty."

"No wisecracks," said Snell. Irritation did not show in his voice. In some nameless manner its very dryness breathed of menace. "I mean trouble with the law."

"No," said Pete.

"Why, then," said Snell, "did you come riding with a full outfit? Why did you push on when rifle slugs told you to stop? Why did you ask for me?"

"I'll tell you why," said Pete. He cast down his cigarette and ground it beneath his heel. It was the first time he had shown emotion of any character. He spoke through lips that parted grudgingly. "Because I'm a failure down in the valley. At honest work. Because my own kind threw me out. They're not my kind —I didn't fit in. I'll never fit in. I'm branded. My father was a gunman and killer. Water seeks its own level. That's what folks say. I could go on beating my head against a stone wall. Or I could quit and head for the barrens. I done so—

to-day. Turned my back on the valley—and life—and rode to Suicide Trail. So folks would know they were right. And laugh!" He was breathing heavily. "Is that enough?"

"No," said Snell. His hard eyes did not waver in their unwinking scrutiny.

YOU'VE got to have the whole story, eh?" Pete had regained his composure. He grinned. "O. K. I'll tell it once—no more. If you've got tears to shed, shed 'em now. I had a li'le homestead over yonder. A shack, a spring, and a jag of beef. There was good foundation stock in that beef. The spring was A 1. The shack was a good shack. Home, you savvy. Climbing roses round the door."

"Never mind the trimmings," cut in Snell. "It was a good spread. What happened to it?"

"I lost it," said Pete. "I needed money. It was when I went out borrowing that I found out where I stood in that man's country. I thought folks had forgotten the strain that was in me, the wild strain. I'd worked hard all my life, you savvy. Shot square. But they hadn't forgotten. I wasn't a good risk. I'd break out some time like a rash. Sure, they had alibis for not backing my play. Hard times. Falling beef market. The baby had measles. All that plain and fancy horse-radish. But underneath was the old hand of steel.

"So I went to the banker. He was happy to oblige. Not as a banker. Oh, my, no! I wasn't a good risk. But as an individual he'd call my bluff. At ten per cent. Plus a confidential bonus. Plus a chattel mortgage listing everything but my eyeteeth."

"And you lost the works." Snell nodded. "The banker wiped you out. Then what?"

"Then," said Pete, "I went into a huddle with myself. Cold turkey. I'd worked hard ever since I'd got my growth. I'd lost my stake in a single play. I'd shot square with the world all the while, hoping in my bleary-eyed fashion that I was gaining credit therefore. That was a delusion also. I could do it all again—eat dust and sweat, make a stake, run a bluff as a stalwart citizen—and get nowhere. How buck a combination like that? What's it all about, who says so, and why? The answers to those questions is why I'm here. There's nothing mysterious about it, nothing out of the way. Pete Enders, who'd been grazing under false pretenses in them peaceful pastures, has done turned back to the wild bunch."

Snell eyed him unwinkingly for a space. Plain to those who watched, who knew Snell, was the fact that the acid test was being applied to the newcomer's story.

"You say your father was a gunman and killer. Did he, to your knowledge, ever circulate up in the Horse Heaven country? Under the name of Long Chance Carrauthers?"

"My father," said the youth, "is out of the picture. Let his bones rest. The name is Enders."

The abrupt reply did not seem to antagonize Snell.

"When you came up the trail, why did you ask for me by name? Who told you I was here?"

"It's been rumored in the valley for months," said Pete. "In the talk about impeaching the sheriff for leaving this den of reptiles flourish up in the pinnacles, it's been whispered that Snell himself was on the job. The fire-spitting desperado in person."

"Hm-m-m," said Snell, "and you had a friendly feeling for this bold, bad outlaw. You admire him and crave to throw in with him, is that it?"

PETE grinned a bitter grin. "No," he said. "I wouldn't kid you, Snell. I don't crave to throw in with you. I don't admire the color of your eyes, nor the trails you've blazed. But if I'm forced into the wild bunch, where I belong, I'll do it right. It isn't the prospect of associating with you and your uncurried wolves that fetched me here. It's this: an army is gathering in the valley, a vigilante committee of short-tempered and long-suffering citizens who'll wipe out this rattlesnakes' reunion in a hurry. Dust will mill plenty. When it's settled, there won't be anything left up here in the pinnacles but a flock of new graves. That's the action I crave and the trail I took."

"Bah!" said Snell. He shot a quick glance at his cohorts, who had stirred uneasily at the blunt picture of the retribution gathering in the plains. "We could stand off an army in a show-down. We could thumb our noses in their faces and sit tight. We'll name our own deal and see it through. When the time comes, and not before, we'll cash our chips and set out of the game. Let them prowl over cold trails. We'll be gone—plenty far—with heavy winnings."

He broke off abruptly. It was the first time he had shown anger. It was not directed so much at Pete, as to the thought he had put into words.

"And as for you, Enders, we'll pass on you pronto. Jo!" He gestured to the mounted youth in the background. "You've been listening to this pilgrim. He's hard. He doesn't give a damn whether school keeps or not. Question is, will he be useful? Let's have your hunch."

The horseman had been pushing forward during this speech. Pete saw, to his astonishment, that here was no boy, as he had supposed, but a woman—a girl, rather, cool and poised; unemotional, so it seemed, as Snell himself.

She did not dismount. She pulled up beside Snell and resumed her former pose, chin cupped in hand. She looked down at Pete through long-lashed, hazel eyes whose air of detachment was sexless and uncompromising.

Meeting her searching scrutiny, Pete was also aware of Snell's reptilian gaze, studying them both with jealous and hawklike intentness.

CHAPTER III.

THE FINAL TEST.

HER interrogation was brief but explicit. It speedily became evident that her mental processes were more keen and analytical than those of Snell himself.

"Cowboy," said she. "You're attempting to crash into a closed corporation. You're uninvited. The burden of proof is on you. We can use men who know guns, horses, and hard trails. But on the trails we ride, we've got to know each other better than most brothers are known to each other. You understand that, eh?"

"If that's an apology," said Pete, "let it pass."

"It's no apology," said the girl shortly. "We've got to know where you stand. You might be a peace officer, you know."

"I might, at that," Pete agreed.

"And if you're not a peace officer, your motives for leaving the valley,

as you've announced them, don't pass muster with me. For instance"—her long-lashed gaze swept him from head to foot—"you're young. You're healthy and strong. You're of the dominant type—reckless, fiery, and spirited. Yes"—she nodded appraisingly—"and handsome."

"Thank you," said Pete.

"I could judge the good points of a horse," she retorted, her lips curling, "with equal skill. And as impersonally. The point I was approaching is this. The loss of your homestead was a financial setback. The distrust of your neighbors, in spite of your square shooting and hard work, was a blow to your pride. But these are picayune matters, after all, to one who is young and vigorous, and before whom the world is outspread like a smiling range. Somewhere else there's plenty of room. New prospects. New friends and neighbors who know nothing of your past or your father's sins. Isn't it strange, then—unbelievable, in fact—that you should put all your chances for life and the pursuit of happiness behind you and ride up Suicide Trail?"

"No more strange," Pete retorted, "than to hear such sentiments from a girl like you." He was unsmiling now, more guarded, like a skilled poker player facing an adversary of caliber. "Unbelievable or not, lady, you're arguing with facts. I've put the past behind me. I'm here. And that's final."

"True," she agreed. "But why? Let's probe a little deeper. There's only one force that could send a man of your type deliberately into the wild bunch. It isn't the opinion of neighbors. It isn't the loss of a homestead. It's something more damaging to the egotism and self-esteem that men call pride. Tell me"—she did not appear to smile, but her firm cheeks dimpled a little—"was she beautiful? You loved her, b'gosh, and she did you dirt; is that it?"

A dark flush rose to the roots of Pete's tawny hair. His jaw set.

"This business," said he, "has gone far enough. My personal and private affairs will add no chips to this game. I've told my story. You can take it or leave it."

SHE was beautiful, then. And life, of course, wasn't worth living any more," she said, nodding. "It would be a grand gesture to ride up into the bad lands like a lone wolf. You'd probably be shot at the gap; but what of it? Perhaps, when they brought in your bullet-riddled body, folks would shake their heads and feel sorry they'd talked about you like that. She might shed a tear or two, because she'd driven you to it, and you so young! Eh, cowboy?"

Pete eyed her venomously, with the flushed and badgered air of a small boy facing a tormenter beyond his power to reach.

"All of which," she continued, "is fine as far as it goes. Some of these men have less excuse than that for being here. Some have no excuse at all. Still, they're fair to medium outlaws, mostly; and all of them will hang, some day, as all good outlaws should."

"Easy on that, girl," Snell warned. "This pilgrim doesn't know you're joking. And this is no time for wisecracks."

"The point is," she continued, addressing Pete, "you've blazed no trails. Thus far, you've been bad only in imagination. You're neither fish, flesh, nor fowl. What guarantee have we that you'll stay put?"

"You haven't any," said Pete

shortly. "I'm offering none. If my being here doesn't speak for itself, I'm through. What I crave action on is this. How long you going to keep up this tomfoolery?"

The girl looked at him steadily for a space, while the shadowed cleft grew still. Snell appeared to be awaiting her verdict. Then she straightened in the saddle.

"The tomfoolery," she said, "is over. You're not a peace officer. No peace officer rides into certain death and gives up his guns without a struggle. You're not a spy. The usefulness of a spy depends upon his returning with useful information—alive. Your story, as much as you've admitted, rings true. You've turned your back on the valley. You've got this far up Suicide Trail. But this"—her voice was cold—"is as far as you'll get. Your trail ends here."

To Snell she said briefly, turning away: "The works."

She leaned down to whisper in the outlaw's ear.

Something like a sigh escaped the intent ranks. There was a shuffling of feet and creaking of harness as they shifted position. More than one hand fumbled furtively for the makings as Snell motioned Pete forward and took his rifle.

"You'll stand over yonder, Enders." He jerked a thumb toward the opposite wall.

"What's this?" said Pete, again cool and composed. "Curtains?"

"Curtains," said Snell. "You're not wanted here. But having come this far, you can't go back to the valley alive. Wipe that grin off your face, Enders! If you've ever met up with a solemn occasion in your life, this is it!"

"Nevertheless," said Pete, taking up his stand, back to the wall, "grinning's my privilege, and I'm clinging to it regardless of what is going to happen."

"Take off your hat," said Snell, his voice brittle. "The light's none too good."

PETE removed his sombrero and cast it aside. The clicking of Snell's rifle as he slid a cartridge home reëchoed as in a vault.

"Dog-gone," said Pete plaintively, "this is a penny-ante way to pass out. I wish I'd kept my guns."

"Any last word?" questioned Snell.

"Take care of my horse," said Pete. "He's ace-high. Watch the frog on the off forefoot. It's too soft. Subject to stone bruise."

Snell nodded. "Nothing else?"

"Nothing else."

"Now wait a second, chief." A youth stepped forth from the ranks of spectators, face glistening. "This ain't right. I ain't squeamish about mowin' a gent down in a free-for-all. But somehow or another, in cold blood this a way——"

Snell, his rifle half raised to his shoulder, merely turned to look the mutinous one full in the face. The latter held his ground for a long moment. No others stepped forth to join him. He retreated, cursing, and pulled his sombrero lower over his eyes.

Methodically, Snell turned back to the business in hand. He took deliberate aim, squinting down the sights.

It was gloomy in the cleft, but not too dark for close shooting. Pete stood erect, his gaze fixed upon a lone star that twinkled high above the iron peaks.

The rifle roared. The echoes shuttled from distant crags. From the weak-kneed youth who had raised

his voice in protest came a profane cry of surprise.

The prisoner had not fallen. He still stood. He raised his hand slowly, as in a dream, and touched his face. His exploring finger tips were red; but this superficial scratch on his cheek had not been caused by the bullet. Flattening against the wall beside him, the slug had showered him with splintered rock.

"You're not running a bluff, then," said Snell dryly. "No gent with a joker up his sleeve could play it to the finish like that. Enders, you're elected!"

"Sho!" said Pete in a shaken voice. "Now there was a grandstand play!"

"Grin, cowboy," said the girl.

"And as for you, Tonto"—Snell turned himself about waspishly—"how long is it going to take you fuzz-faced yearlings to learn to back my play blind? Where's that chicken-livered young rooster who spoke out of turn?"

But the culprit, head hanging and face crimson, slunk still farther into the background.

"Let's go," said Snell. His gesture closed the incident. "You, Bull and Hondo, take the post at the gap. Turn all strays back, without exception. Slim and Yakima did O. K. to let this pilgrim in, but the trail's closed now. This army's gained its last recruit. All right, men. To the camp!"

CHAPTER IV.

SNELL'S STRONG HAND.

BELATED light still clung to the higher levels, but gorges were choked in shadow. Many matches glowed behind cupped hands as the long column rode westward into the barrens. Sparks trailed from reckless lips and steel-shod hoofs. The girl was far ahead on the undulating line. Strange faces were ahead of Pete and to the rear. The last rider was Snell.

Though he was tightening his hold on life moment by moment, Pete rode through a species of unreality. Having girded his spirit against the final and grim event, it was hard to lay his armor aside. Yet, riding as one awakening from a dream, he was conscious of his surroundings. These were unreal, fantastic, a world of savage dimensions. Mighty gorges forked to right and left. Jagged rims were outlined against the strengthening stars. The trail, as a trail, forked, thinned and was lost; but always the troop bore toward the setting sun.

"Pull up, Enders," came Snell's dry voice at his elbow. The latter had drawn abreast unnoticed, under cover of the noise in the rocky defile.

The riders behind them passed by. The head of the column, having crossed the crumbled moraine upon which the pair stood, was bearing directly upon a sheer, rugged wall. Yet, as Pete watched, the riders were swallowed up one by one. He saw then that a vertical, shadow-choked crevasse, which appeared to be of no depth, but which was in reality wide enough for the passage of a mounted man, led deep into the mighty wall.

"When you enter there," said Snell, "there's no returning. If you understand me, Enders?"

"Got you," said Pete.

"And before you enter," continued the outlaw, "there's a detail or two to be understood. You'll see action in plenty on this trail. Make no mistake about that. But we proceed according to a well-planned

campaign. I give the orders. You follow them to the letter. You ride where I say to ride, and when. You do what I say to do, and how. Got that?"

Pete nodded.

"The split," said Snell, "'is one third to me and the balance share and share alike. Until after a forthcoming deal which you'll hear referred to as 'the big job,' I hold the loot. I'm the keeper of the keys, the banker, the custodian of the jack pot. It avoids argument. It holds the group together. Any objection?"

"No objection," said Pete.

"There's one more detail," said Snell. "It concerns Jo. Three men have been buried since she joined us. They were all young. They were all careless of the hereafter. I found it necessary to eliminate them because——"

"Not interested," Pete interrupted.

"Nevertheless," said Snell, "flesh is frail. You may wake up some bright morning with a changed outlook. If so, recall what I've told you."

"And I'm telling you," said Pete with a bitter smile, "that you don't have to post any notice at the crossroads for me. There's a number of things I'm not interested in. At the end of the list is women."

THE noisy progress of the last of the column had died in the crevasse. Snell sat for a space like one lost in thought; but Pete felt his emotionless gaze upon him. All about them, as their horses stood statuesque, was the vast and imposing silence of the peaks.

"Enders," said Snell abruptly. "We're alone now. You left a girl down yonder?"

"Yes," said Pete.

"You hanker to go back to her?"

"No."

"You rode up the trail, hoping you'd be dropped at the gap?"

"Not exactly," said Pete. "I took a chance that they wouldn't drop me cold. That I could shoot it out. If I lost, what of it?"

"And you figured you still had a chance when your back was to the wall?"

"No," said Pete. "When you said curtains, I thought you meant it. It was a good bluff, Snell."

The reply seemed to please the outlaw. Some of his aloofness thawed.

"As a matter of fact," said he dryly, "it was a mighty thin margin that made it a bluff, Pete. But Jo put a thought in my head. You'll be useful on the big job."

It was the second time the mysterious forthcoming campaign had been suggested. Pete expected him to enlarge upon it. Instead, Snell turned abruptly to another subject.

"Pete, did your father ever mention an old pal named Shorty DeVore? Or another old pal named King Colton?"

Pete stiffened a little in the saddle.

"We're alone," Snell reminded him.

"He didn't discuss the past with me—much," said Pete. "I've heard those names."

"I knew you as soon as I looked into your face," said Snell. "You have Long Chance's eyes. And smile. The same cold nerve in a show-down."

"Who are you, then?" said Pete.

"I'm Snell," said the other dryly. "I was Shorty DeVore. The records say he was dead and buried up in the Cœur D'Alene. Let his record rest with him. Snell has blazed his own trails."

The hackles rose on Pete's neck. It was like facing one risen from the grave. He had assumed since childhood, as had the world for more than a decade, that with his father's death the last of the notorious trio had passed on into the limbo of frontier legend.

The legend itself was lurid and undying. Carruthers, Colton and DeVore, so old-timers affirmed, had comprised a pat hand in any game and in many a show-down—"Long Chance," the cold-eyed, smiling gunman with a notoriously big heart; "King" Colton, who carried himself like a cavalier of less swashbuckling days—genteel, polished, and aloof, even when dealing from the bottom of a deck or reaching for a ten-inch bowie; "Shorty" DeVore, the most dangerous of the trio, the least condoned, cold, calculating, fearless, with the emotionless savagery of a copperhead.

LONG CHANCE was gone. King Colton, too, in his debonair fashion, had stridden on into the shadows. Only Shorty, the reptilian, yet lived.

"Why tell me this?" demanded Pete.

"Why?" echoed the other softly. "I'll tell you why. I'm not superstitious, Pete. I don't believe in signs, omens, fate, or the hereafter. But there's a design here. Because look. Jo's name is Josephine Colton."

"King Colton's daughter?"

"The same," said Snell. "His pride. His pearl. His treasure. Which—as I suggested before—is now under my protection."

Pete permitted himself a cynical grin, but said nothing.

"Jo has already proved her caliber," continued Snell. "She and I work hand and glove now. Measure up like Long Chance and the three of us can make big medicine. We've got a good gang—as far as gun fighting and hard riding goes. Outside of that they're cattle. They'll be useful up to the big job. No further. Think it over."

He eyed Pete fixedly, significantly; then turned away.

"I'll go first. It'll give your horse confidence. It's a rough trail in the dark."

He mounted forthwith into the crevasse. Pete followed at his heels. At the edge of the engulfing blackness he twisted in the saddle to look back.

For both concealment and defense, the inner stronghold of the outlaw band, of which this was obviously the entrance, was well nigh perfect. At fifty paces distant across the moraine the crevasse would seem to be impassable to mounted men. The broken fragments of the moraine itself, shifting underfoot, left no trail. If the right crevasse—which was but one of a dozen cleaving the mighty wall—were discovered, a lone guard, with plenty of ammunition, could stand off an army.

Looking up, he glimpsed a motionless figure in silhouette against the stars. He was facing eastward toward the down-sloping barrens, like an eagle looking forth from his aerie. His sombrero shifted briefly as he peered down at the riders in the depths. His cigarette glowed. Otherwise he might have been carved from the shoulder of rock against which he leaned.

Pete had assumed, in so far as he had attempted to visualize the outlaws' retreat, that it would be a mere segment of bleak canyon, similar to the pocket where he had faced Snell's rifle. Instead, to his surprise, a considerable valley opened up be-

yond the cleft. It was a hole in the wall, but on a much larger scale than he had expected; a green and sheltered oasis hidden in the vastness of the barrens.

There was a sizable flat, dark with scattered clumps of pine, watered by a meandering creek that glittered with reflected stars. Directly across from the point where he stood was another break in the towering ramparts that hemmed in the huge pocket. It was a narrow gorge, cut through the ancient crater rim by centuries of erosion. From this came the distant murmur of a hidden waterfall.

An air of tranquillity lay upon the scene, as upon a snug mountain homestead at twilight. Horses were grazing in the open. A calf bawled and a cow muttered in reply. The grunting of hogs came from a hidden pen. Rude corrals were visible through the gloom. Flanking these corrals, at the foot of the wall, were several log cabins in an irregular row.

FROM these rude dwellings emanated certain sounds significant of a social order flourishing doggedly beyond the pale. A noisy brawl was in progress in one cabin; in another a guitar twanged mournfully. There was a murmur of voices, deep-toned, interspersed with harsh laughter. Also, from cabins far down the line, came unmistakable feminine tones, raised above the clatter of pots and pans; and the wailing of fretful children.

"Womenfolks?" questioned Pete incredulously.

"Why not?" said Snell. "Three or four of the fellows were family men. When they turned bad, their women stayed by them. I found them here when I moved in and took command. I let them stay. The children are a nuisance. The women snivel. But in the main, it's good business. Even the young bucks like to see a touch of domestic life. It makes them think we've set up something permanent. The women, such as they are, are company for Jo."

They turned their horses loose to graze. Pete unrolled his blankets in an empty bunk in a large cabin that comprised the bachelor headquarters of the crew. His rifle and sidearms had been returned to him. He hung these on adjacent pegs, disposed his equipment to his liking, stretched himself out, and rolled a cigarette.

It was like military barracks. Cigarette smoke hung from the blackened rafters overhead. Men lolled in bunks, yawning. Stud and draw-poker battles waged at tables in the center of the big room. Cribbage addicts muttered, heads together.

From the conversation about him, Pete learned much of the camp routine. It, too, was military in character, following set rules. The unmarried men ate at the cook shack, next in line to the north. The kitchen was presided over by "Gratton's widow"; Gratton himself, it appeared, having cashed in at some past imbroglio known as the Two Forks job. The girl, Jo, was quartered with the widow. They occupied a choice cabin overlooking the flats. It had a small garden with flowers in it. Snell occupied the cabin at the end of the line to the south.

Snell ruled, Pete gathered, with an iron hand. Complaints were loud among the rank and file, according to the way of active and reckless men. These concerned the food, the night guard, the way certain jobs had been handled, the mystery that

surrounded the forthcoming big job; but through it all it was plain that Snell's dominance was unquestioned, that each man of the crew was prepared to follow him blindly.

Guarded references to the girl, Jo, were significant of this dominance. There were those among the reckless ranks who would have laughed at any odds, faced death without a quiver, and for stakes less than a smile. Even in the eyes of these, it was plain, the girl was unattainable, unapproachable, beyond their horizon. She was, so their manner indicated, Snell's property, his undivided spoils.

Pete slept soundly that night. When the lights went out and the camp grew still, physical and spiritual exhaustion claimed him. He had no time to speculate through quiet hours on the events and crossroads just passed, or to appraise the future. He tried to ask himself certain questions. The answers eluded him. The past and future were vague, remote. He rode between them, in gathering darkness; so into an undreaming void.

CHAPTER V.

BIG BUSINESS.

HORSEMEN came and went in the small hours. Yawning guards stumbled in, and grumbling reliefs departed. A rooster crowed. From across the flats came a strengthening chorus of song birds. It was still early in the morning, but broad daylight, when a hand shook his shoulder.

He looked up. "Nevada," a slender, silent youth, spoke tersely.

"The chief wants you. Dress for the trail. Bring your guns. Leave your rifle."

When Pete stepped down from the threshold, Snell was waiting. The towering Slim loomed at his side. Four saddled horses stood near by, reins trailing.

Snell uttered no word of greeting. His pale-blue eyes inspected Pete's face briefly, impersonally, flicked down to his gun belt and spurs.

"Enders," said he "you're a new recruit. I've got a job for you."

"Shoot," said Pete.

"You'll breakfast at the cook shack," Snell directed. "It's ready for you. Eat hearty, because it's a long haul. You won't be back until after sundown. You'll ride with Slim. Two more will meet you at an appointed place. Slim will give you the layout later on. Three old hands will be with you, you understand. Slim's in charge. Got it?"

"Got it," said Pete. "Let's go, Slim."

He noted for the first time, as Snell turned away, that the outlaw leader walked with a slight limp.

Slim ate with prodigious appetite at the cook shack, Pete more sparingly. With the latter it was a mechanical process induced by Snell's warning that a long haul lay ahead. Save for the Widow Gratton, who ministered to their wants in silence, the two were alone in the long mess room.

"Where we heading for?" Pete questioned, midway through the meal.

"Tell you later," Slim replied.

The widow was a large, blond woman, with vestiges of former comeliness. Her plump, somewhat stolid features were deeply scored; her eyes heavy with grief. She evinced no curiosity concerning Pete, who was a stranger. They came, they went, so her bearing proclaimed; and what of it?

But once, through the open door that led into the kitchen, he found her covertly studying him. He

thought he caught a hint of pity in her gaze, a species of vague, helpless compassion.

At the rear of the kitchen was a single window. Through this, dallying over his coffee, Pete could see a small cabin higher on the slope. Only a segment of it was visible; a patch of flowers at the threshold, and the doorway itself. In this doorway the girl, Jo, stood in pensive pose, her cheek against the frame, looking forth across the flats. Her head was bare, her dark, luxuriant hair massed in shapely confusion. Upon her, as upon the cabin, was some of the reflected glory of the strengthening dawn.

Slim saw her, too. He eyed her fixedly as he ate, peering up through shaggy brows.

"A picture, eh?" said Pete. He attempted a jocularity he did not feel. "Who dealt Snell a hand like that?"

Beneath the table, Slim's knees pressed warningly against his. Pete recalled then that the cabin was the Widow Gratton's, and that the latter, from the kitchen, was doubtless listening to their every word that was being said.

THEY rode up to the cleft, Slim in the lead. As they threaded that rough-hewn corridor, Pete saw that considerable work had been done to make it passable to mounted men. Huge fragments had been moved aside, barriers blasted away. Hand holds had been cut in the vertical face of the crevasse, leading up to the lookout's perch.

"Good hunting," remarked the latter, chuckling and grinning down upon them. "Don't take any brass nickels. See you later—maybe."

"Don't forget your knitting," retorted Slim. "Save some of your strength to fight off hossflies. Keep the eggs warm."

Pete discovered later that the lookout's post was referred to by the younger members of the crew as "the cuckoo's nest." Because no armed force had ever stormed the retreat, and action at this point was nil, it was a chore irksome to restless and energetic men. Jovial interchanges were invariable between the sentry and those who rode forth; the reckless banter of those who may not again meet sundown together.

The lookouts at the gap were invisible from below. Yet Pete knew that their eyes were upon them as they passed through. They rode forth from the shadows and so into the brilliance of sunrise upon the sleeping valley.

At Slim's gesture they pulled to the left, threading the chaparral and stunted juniper of the sun-drenched slope. They did not descend to the valley floor. They mounted higher, skirting the edge of the barrens, bearing northward. Slim avoided open spaces as much as possible, selecting, with instinctive caution, dry washes and boulder-strewn arroyos that roughly followed their course.

At midday they watered their horses at a mountain spring, from which a rivulet chuckled down into a sheltered cove where the ancient buildings of a homestead nestled. Slim drew forth a roughly drawn map, studied it, scowling, and squinted at the sun. Pete, his cigarette hanging motionless, looked forth through narrow-lidded, brooding eyes upon the sun-drenched range.

"Cowboy," said Slim abruptly, "we're here." He jerked a thumb toward the homestead below. "The job's down yonder."

"Hm-m-m," said Pete. "That chin-whisker ranch looks like a

sheep outfit to me. We stealing a couple lambs?"

"No," said Slim. "It's heftier than that. But it ought to be just as easy. Three or four of the fellows that ain't known, you savvy, are circulating continuous in the valley. They keep their ears to the ground and their noses up-wind, and report world affairs to the chief. From what they tell us, down yonder's a citizen named Bodine, an uncombed sheep fancier who plays a lone hand. This Bodine person just last week sold a band of muttons to the packing trust. For them blatting half-wits he received the sum of three thousand smackers. Iron men. Simoleons. Coin of the realm. Being as distrustful of the world as a wall-eyed carp in a hoss trough, he's got it salted somewheres on the premises. That's the li'le jack pot we're after."

"Fine," said Pete, his lip curling. "Great. So that's the brand of action two salty gents, loaded to the eyeteeth with artillery, have been heading for since sunup? Calling on an unsuspecting sheep-herder. Euchering him out of a stake it's taken him years to accumulate. Now there's a trail-blazing enterprise, and no mistake."

"THERE'LL be four of us. The boss believes in playin' it safe," said Slim. "Two more came over the ridge trail and are waiting down below. Get a holt of yourself, Enders! Come down out of the clouds. It's shekels we're after, not noble, upliftin' adventure. A roll like this doesn't grow on bushes."

"Bah!" said Pete. "Let's go."

They descended the slope under the cover of a heavy stand of jack pine. Dilapidated outbuildings could be glimpsed through the trees. A windmill creaked. The stench of sheep grew plainer on the still air. A snake-rail fence barred their path. They skirted this, bearing eastward. From a clump of junipers, within sight of the rambling barn and cabin beyond, two horsemen emerged and reined up, waiting.

One of these was Nevada. The other, to Pete's astonishment, was the girl, Jo.

Some nameless signal passed between Nevada and Slim, a raised eyebrow, an all but imperceptible nod. What this communication meant, Pete neither knew nor cared. He looked the girl full in the face. She, too, was looking at him; and he caught an expression in her long-lashed eyes that amazed and troubled him. It was strained, questioning, almost desperate.

Yet, when she spoke, her mocking tones gave the lie to what he had glimpsed.

"Well, well, Jesse James," said she. "You're here, eh? Ready for the slaughter?"

"And how," cut in Slim. "Nevada, what's the dope?"

"He's been working on the hawg pen," said the still-faced Nevada. "He cut back to the shack a minute ago, prob'ly for fodder. Smoke's comin' out of the chimney. Nobody else on the premises."

"Fine," said Slim. "Made to order. We'll ride up in a bunch. Casual, like we was driftin' through. You and Jo up front, Nevada. Me and Pete'll follow. O. K.?"

"O. K.," said Nevada.

They came to a sagging gate. Nevada leaned from the saddle and swung it open. As its hinges squeaked raucously, two short-tailed shepherd dogs burst forth from the cabin with a furious barking. On their heels appeared an ancient and exceedingly shaggy person, hairy as

the dogs themselves, a rifle in his hand.

He eyed the quartet fixedly, bearded jaw outthrust. Then, seeing the girl, his rifle lowered. He turned, leaned the weapon against the door frame, and stepped down to meet them, hitching up his ragged jeans with a self-conscious gesture.

"Draw when we draw, Pete," Slim commanded from the corner of his mouth. "Shoot if we have to down him. Otherwise stay put and watch how it's done."

CHAPTER VI.

PETE TAKES A HAND.

THE dogs rushed upon them, snarling and snapping. This show of belligerence faded instantly at a curt word from the sheepman. They turned away and stood in the shade, tongues lolling.

"Howdy," said Nevada. "Nice day."

The ancient one nodded. His round eyes, like shy forest pools surrounded by thick underbrush, beamed bashfully upon the girl.

"We're from the Lazy Z," continued Nevada, jerking his thumb toward the north. "Lookin' up strays in the pinnacles, and, brother, was it hot!" He mopped his brow. "Got any drinkin' water?"

"Sure," said the other. His first suspicions allayed, he writhed with embarrassment. "Over to the pump. Wait—I'll get you the dipper."

"Never mind the dipper," said Nevada without change of tone. "Reach for the sky, Bodine! Don't move!"

Half turned toward the water bucket on an adjacent bench, the sheepman halted, transfixed. Horror succeeded astonishment as his eyes looked into the muzzles of two weapons. The girl reined a little back. Pete sat immobile, disdaining to draw his gun.

Belatedly, the ancient one grasped the grim import of the moment. His glance darted toward his rifle. But Slim's horse danced between; and Slim slid to the ground, a hackamore in his hand.

"Hold it," said he tersely.

With an expert motion he looped the rope over the upraised wrists, dragged them down, and trussed them securely. The dogs leaped suddenly from the shadow, snarling a hideous menace. Slim kicked at them, cursing. When they returned to the attack, he leveled his weapon upon them.

"Don't shoot," pleaded the ancient one. "Please, mister! They're the best dogs in the county. Down, Buster! Back, Sandy!"

The dogs obeyed, but they circled uneasily in the background, hackles erect. Slim motioned with his gun toward the cabin.

"Inside, old-timer," he ordered. "Don't stand there wheezing. Never mind them questions. You'll find out pronto what it's all about."

The interior of the cabin, by contrast to its shaggy owner and the dilapidated homestead surrounding it, was neat, well-kept, spotlessly clean. No ashes littered the hearth. The bunk was made up with military precision. Dishes shone on oilcloth-covered shelves.

Beside the window was a rawhide-meshed chair. Slim and Nevada seated their prisoner upon it, bound his arms to its back and his ankles to the legs. Then they stood back and faced him.

"Bodine," said Slim, "where you got it hid?"

Pete and the girl had entered. They stood side by side near the door. The ancient one peered at

the girl with a species of awe, more intently at Pete. Then he looked up doggedly at his inquisitors.

"Got what hid?" he countered.

"No stalling, Bodine," said Nevada. "Talk fast. This short-tempered outfit won't stand for nonsense. You sold your sheep last week. You got three thousand for 'em. You didn't put it in the bank at Lodgepole. You brought it to the ranch. A roll of big bills. Where's that roll?"

THE ancient one licked his lips. "I paid it out," he said. "It's gone. I owed over to the bank. And at the grocery store. They was a mortgage due."

"You're lyin'," said Nevada gently. "Talk to him, Slim."

"Bodine," said Slim, "unfold your ears. You brought that roll here. You ain't been off the place since. You got it hid. In the shack? In a hollow stump? Buried in the garden? We ain't looking for it. You're telling us. And pretty quick. Or there's one bewhiskered sheep fancier is sprinting pronto across the Jordan. Savvy?"

"Be danged if I do!" said the ancient one. He burst forth suddenly: "It's mine. I worked for it, sweated and starved. It's honest money; I've done right by folks. I've paid my bills. I earned it, every cent of it. Nobody's going to take it from me. It's mine, I tell you."

Slim hooked his toe under the first round of the chair, and with a ruthless motion toppled it back. Trussed like a fowl, the ancient one crashed helplessly to the floor. The force of the impact caused the breath to whistle between his teeth.

His feet were now elevated. Slim laid hold on his worn brogans and tore them off. Nevada, meanwhile, took up the iron poker and inserted it in the bed of glowing coals on the hearth.

"You'll sweat some more," said he, nodding. " 'Less you remember where that roll is, you'll sweat plenty, Bodine."

"Funny how these short-memoried fellows get action," said Slim, "when their toes begin to curl up."

The ancient one, looking up like a crushed insect, fixed horrified eyes upon Pete.

"I know you," he cried shrilly, his voice cracked and high. "You're Enders. Pete Enders. I seen you once over to Lodgepole. A likely young man. You goin' to stand by and watch these savages torture me? You ain't, are you now, Enders?"

Pete's face, masklike, grew pale. Moisture glistened on his forehead. But he said nothing.

"You, lady," cried the fallen one. "You got a sweet face. A kind, true face. You don't hold with these lads. You can't. Don't you let 'em harm me. I got a gal your age. She lives down to Humboldt Flats. She ain't so well fixed. Her man's homestead runs mostly to sand and rim rock. She's got two boys, twin boys. They'll be three years old come June. You know what I'm fixin' to do with the money I got from the sheep? Gwenny—that's my gal—wants me to come live with her. I'm old, she says, and them yearlin' lads want me, too. That there money is to help irrigate the homestead and schoolin' for the children. It'll take some of the load offn Gwenny's shoulders."

The girl stilled his outcries with a gesture.

"Well, cowboy?" She looked Pete full in the face. "You asked for it. You insisted on it. Now you're getting a glimpse of it. Does this sort of thing live up to your expectations?"

"That's enough," said Nevada. He spoke to the girl evenly, without heat. "No funny remarks. Remember what the chief said. It still goes. Slim, let's have the iron!"

"Wait," said Pete. "Never mind the iron."

SLIM straightened, scowling. Nevada shot a quick, keen look at Pete's face, and his hand dropped to his side.

"What you mean?" demanded Slim.

"I mean," said Pete, "that if you gorillas had an ounce of brains to go with your large ideas, you'd travel farther and faster. I've been watching this old rooster. You don't have to scorch his feet. His eyes have given him away. When you picked up that iron he looked toward his hole card. Old son, the game's up. It's tough, but you got to take it. Your loot's up on the shelf." He indicated a row of condiment cans and provisions on the wall above the stove. "What's it in?"

"No! No!" cried Bodine wildly. "It ain't in the shack. I buried it over on the hillside."

"Which can?" Pete stepped toward the shelf, arm upraised. "In the sugar? This alleged baking powder, maybe?"

The fallen one said nothing then. Paralyzed, motionless save for his staring eyes, he watched Pete take down the receptacles and explore their contents one by one. Three square coffee cans stood in a row. All were three fourths full. The first two, emptied upon the table, yielded nothing. When the loose coffee was emptied from the third, a package was revealed, wrapped in coarse paper.

"Ha!" said Pete. "Pay dirt!"

He unwrapped it. A roll of bills was revealed. They were of large denomination, held by a rubber band.

"Well, I'm damned!" Slim chuckled aloud, huge teeth bared. Even Nevada's frosty eye glittered. "You called the turn, at that! Enders, you're a wolf."

Pete looked at Bodine. The ancient one had sagged, as though life's springs had drained from him. His gaze was fixed on Pete hopelessly, apathetically; and two large tears welled forth upon his bearded cheeks.

"Bah!" said Pete. "Let's go. This business gripes me. You said it, Slim. We're a pack of fearless wolves. But we got our meat, so what's the odds, eh?"

He replaced the package in the can, swept the loose coffee upon it, and closed the lid. He did likewise with the other cans, scowling.

"Turn the critter loose," said he harshly. "What we waiting for?"

"Turn him loose nothin'," demurred Slim. "We'll leave him lay. If nobody calls on him for a couple of days, that's his hard luck. Who's carryin' the loot?" he demanded, indicating the can in Pete's hand.

"Jo," said Nevada. "Chief's orders."

"It's yours, lady," said Pete, extending the can to her. His eyes mocked her. "The spoils of war. No," he admonished as she would have opened the receptacle. "Best ease it in your saddlebag as is. If there's any slip-up before you get back to the roost, it's just a jag of coffee, and what of it?"

"Let's go," said Nevada.

"Listen," said Pete. "You wild cats drag along. When you're started, I'll unshackle this old rooster and follow. No use to leave him here to die by inches. There's

nothing to be gained. He can't do any harm. We're in the clear and on our way. Am I right?"

SLIM would have protested, but Nevada's careless vote carried the day. "He's soft," said he to Slim. "A couple more jobs and he won't be so finicky. Run along," he told Pete, "I'll turn him loose. I'll leave his rifle empty. We don't want him taking pot shots at us for luck."

The three spurred forth from the silent homestead. Nevada followed some moments later. He and the girl pulled away without comment, mounting into the pinnacles. Slim grinned upon Pete in the shadow of the scrub pine.

"Nevada and Jo travel together," said he. "Chief's orders. Not more than two can ride in a herd outside of the gap. Pete, you done noble. You read that ol' coot's mind like a magician. Takes a green hand like you to show me and Nevada the fine points. The chief'll be pleased. And just between the pair of us, cowboy"—he leered meaningly—"you needed it. Up till now you didn't rate with Snell no more than a busted straight. Maybe you could fill and maybe you couldn't."

Pete did not react to the obvious bid for confidential exchanges. He merely rode on in silence, his sombrero pulled low, his features dark and grim.

CHAPTER VII.

BENEATH THE WALL.

IT was after sundown when they rode through the blackness of the cleft. The lookout informed them, in answer to Slim's question, that Nevada and the girl had not yet returned. Snell was waiting in front of the bunk house. At his command, a youth lounging near by led the horses away; and the outlaw chief fixed Slim with a hard, questioning look.

"He's a curly wolf," said Slim in high praise, jerking a thumb toward Pete.

He sketched briefly the events of the day, enlarging upon the manner in which their new recruit had unerringly smelled out the hiding place of the treasure.

"Fine," approved Snell. "You did well, Enders." Complacence was in his bearing, the self-approval of a shrewd judge of men. "Where's Nevada and Jo?"

But even as he spoke, noise strengthened in the cleft above. A moment later the pair emerged, the girl in the lead. The latter's careless voice was plain. The weary horses picked their way slowly down the slope.

"You did well," Snell repeated, nodding. "Grub's waiting at the cook shack."

Again Slim and Pete ate alone and in silence. The former's prodigious appetite left no time for idle conversation. Pete sat, his back to the door. He ate without relish, despite the foodless day, listening to sounds emanating from the camp at his back.

The girl's horse and Nevada's were led away. The voices of the trio—Nevada, Jo and Snell—faded toward the latter's cabin. They would be gone three minutes, Pete judged; perhaps five. He pushed his plate away and motioned to the Widow Gratton to pour him more coffee. Having drained the cup, he reached for the makings. Half turned toward the door, he rolled a cigarette and waited.

Footsteps approached. Pete was holding his cigarette in his left hand. His right fell easily to the bench

against which his gun holster pressed. He turned himself a little further about. It was an awkward position, yet he commanded the door.

Not Snell's, but Nevada's slightly taller figure loomed on the threshold. His face was thin-lipped, his eyes piercing. He said nothing to Pete. He looked at him once, his glance flickering to his gun hand on the bench. To Slim he said tersely: "The chief wants you. Pronto."

The latter rose up, growling. His profane muttering died when he met Nevada's gaze. Wiping his mouth with the back of a hairy hand, he strode out forthwith, and the pair disappeared into the night.

Pete arose, then, and stretched himself, yawning. He hitched his gun belt a little higher and took up his sombrero. He did not go out the front door of the cook shack. Instead, he turned toward the kitchen. The Widow Gratton eyed him in silence, and in silence he passed her, pushed through the back door, and mounted in methodical fashion up the starlit slope.

There was a niche in the wall, with a flat ledge at its base. He seated himself upon this ledge, crossed his legs, and tossed his sombrero into the shadows behind him. His cigarette had gone out. He rolled another, lighted it behind cupped hands, and leaned back, his head resting on the unyielding rock.

THE girl came presently from the direction of Snell's headquarters, alone. She entered the cook shack, and from there mounted toward her cabin. She entered, closing the door. Pete did not see her emerge, his attention being fixed upon the camp; but some moments later, hearing some one approaching stealthily from his right, he peered around the abutting rock.

She was close at hand, stealing along the wall. She placed her fingers on her lips as a signal for silence. A moment later she was seated beside him in the shadow of the cleft.

She was breathing heavily. Looking at her through the gloom, his face close to hers, he saw that her eyes were wide, her lips parted.

"Pete," she said; and for the first time her voice was vibrant with human qualities, "what's it all about?"

Pete shook his head. He inhaled deeply on his cigarette, then cast it down and ground it beneath his heel.

"Run along," said he. "You've got your own life to live. Me, I'm done."

"Please believe me, Pete." She laid her hand on his arm. "I'm your friend. I must know. Snell ordered me to my cabin. The others are looking for you. The widow—bless her!—told them you had gone back to the bunk house. But they'll find us here in a moment. So talk fast."

He strove to shake off her hand, but could not. At her touch, and the sympathy in her voice, it was as though all the forlorn heartache within him rose up like a vast tide.

"Better run along," he repeated.

"Why did you give me the wrong coffee can down at Bodine's? It fooled Slim. It fooled Nevada and me. You did it deliberately. But why?"

Pete stared at her, then looked away.

"I'll tell you why. It's because I'm a total loss. I'm not even an outlaw. Holding up helpless citizens. Stealing honest money. Tears in the eye of old men. For forty years we let Bodine sweat and save and starve. Then we swoop in like

buzzards. It isn't right. To blazes with you all!" He buried his face in his hands. "Dog-gone, I don't amount to anything! I'm neither afoot nor horseback. I can't live straight. I can't play my hand as a crook. What's the answer?"

"Listen, Pete! Isn't there anything of promise left in the world for you? Anything at all? What about your girl, down in the valley?"

"That's something else again," said Pete bitterly. "I couldn't see it then. I see it now. Funny how you size up things at the finish, when it's too late! I don't love her. Never did."

"No," she agreed, "or you wouldn't have given up hope."

"She was on a kind of pedestal with me," he explained. Strangely, he felt no reticence at thus baring his innermost heart. "When she fell off I thought the whole world crashed. I can see now that the world hadn't crashed at all. Nor her, either. She hadn't even been on the pedestal. I'd fallen in love with something that wasn't there, if you get what I mean."

"I do," she nodded. "I understand. It was an ideal you held up in your heart. You thought she measured up."

HER name was Cora. Old Banker Hampton's daughter," said Pete. "She traveled with the moneyed crowd. Educated in the East, and all that. I was just a spectacular cowboy. I amused her. Get that? Amused her. A lovesick sagebrush *Romeo*. No, I don't blame her. It's me that's to blame. But it's the facts that bite. I wasn't spectacular any more when I got my own land and tried to work my own spread. It was when I lost everything and went running to her for sympathy, like a wall-eyed calf in a snowstorm, that I found out where I stood. And now——"

He broke off abruptly, checking his bitterness, and fell silent. There was a guarded commotion in the camp below. Boisterous sounds in cabins and bunk houses had ceased. Men talked in low voices. There was the creak of leather and the tramp of feet in the gloom.

"Don't know why I'm telling you all this. What's it to you? And on the other hand, why not? Best run along, lady."

But she did not run along. Looking at her closer, he saw, to his great amazement, that her eyes were luminous, as though filled with tears.

"Pete," she said, "you and I are two babes in the woods."

"That's me, all right," he agreed. "Lost in an impenetrable forest. But you're sitting pretty. You've got your place in the scheme of things, such as it is. Slide down and tell Snell he doesn't have to come looking for me with his army. Tell him if he's as good as he says he is, to come up alone. And we'll draw together."

"Why should I tell Snell anything?"

"You're Snell's property," said Pete.

"I'm no man's property." She bit her lip. "Is that who you meant —last night, when I was questioning you—when you said 'a girl like you'?"

"This is no uplift society you're a member of," said Pete. "Those fellows debating down yonder on the best means to surround me wouldn't get honorable mention in a stalwart-citizen contest. What do you claim to be?"

"I'll prove what I am," she said,

"when the time comes. The facts will speak for themselves."

"When?"

"To-morrow, perhaps."

"To-morrow," said Pete, grinning, "will be too late for me. Whatever difference that makes."

The group at the foot of the slope, having finished their consultation, now mounted toward them. They did not scatter, but came in a body. Snell was in the lead. The others walked tensely, poised. The outlaw chief himself seemed calm and unconcerned.

"Listen," said the girl swiftly. "You'll live until to-morrow. If you play your cards right. Don't antagonize Snell. Let me do the talking. I know him through and through. I saved you the first time last night. I think I can do it again."

"Why?"

"Because you and I may be able to work together, Pete"—she whispered the word, her lips close to his ear—"to find our way out of the woods."

They drew a little apart. Snell came to a halt before them, his head lowered and outthrust as he peered through the shadow. His killers spread out, forming a semicircle to left and right that hemmed them in.

PETE stood up, the girl at his side. It was to the latter that Snell spoke. His voice was dry, casual. "I told you to go to your cabin and stay there, Jo. Why are you here?"

"For several reasons," she replied.

"Name one," said Snell. "Make it good. Talk fast."

"I'm partly responsible for this poker-faced recruit of yours," she said, her voice hard and matter of fact as of old. "I vouched for him when you were giving him the third degree. I thought he would pan out. Down on the job to-day he made monkeys out of the rest of us. I wanted to know why. I'm entitled to know. So I came up here to find out."

Snell considered this, studying her.

"Hm-m-m," said he at length, nodding. "Doing a little sleuthing on your own account, eh? For the good of the cause, no doubt?"

"Certainly," said the girl. "If you gorillas had ganged up on him, he would have shot it out and never said a word. I used my own trusty methods. A little sympathy and he almost wept on my shoulder. Broke right down and confessed. It was no mystery, after all, Snell. He didn't hold out the money. Believe it or not, he felt sorry for Bodine. Couldn't bear to see him suffer. Tears in the eyes of stalwart men, and all that. So he acted on impulse and took the wrong can."

Snell continued to study her, saying nothing.

"You, Slim," said the girl. "And Nevada. You were there. Did you see him squirm when Bodine was desperate?"

"He sweated plenty," Slim admitted. "I couldn't figure what ailed him."

"What's the answer, then?" Snell demanded of the girl.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Use your own judgment," she replied. "Personally, I think he's cured. Stealing crusts from helpless citizens isn't the action he craved. When it comes to real business, he'll probably make good."

"Well," said the outlaw. "Your work's done, in any event. Run along now, Jo."

He waved her curtly toward her cabin. She did not hesitate or reveal the slightest further interest.

Without looking back, she strode in graceful fashion down the slope, and so into the cabin.

"Fellows," said Snell, addressing his cohorts, "this pilgrim has cost us heavy money. The pot's shy three thousand dollars, due to his bleary-eyed play. Give it a name."

They looked at each other uneasily. None broke the silence.

"If Jo's right," Snell ruminated, "and he's cured, it may be cheap at the price. He comes from the valley. He knows his way around. He'll be mighty useful on the big job."

"Chief," questioned one of the group hesitantly, "when's this big job coming off?"

It was obvious that none expected a direct reply to this daring query. It was not Snell's custom to reveal his plans until the hour was at hand. Yet the outlaw did not hesitate.

"To-morrow," he said.

HIS cohorts stiffened. Delighted oaths escaped them. Instantly, it seemed, the very air was charged with suppressed excitement.

"Hot dog!" breathed Slim. "And what's the layout?"

"That," said Snell, "will develop to-morrow. Meanwhile, what about Enders?"

"Speakin' for myself," said Slim, "I don't give a dog-gone. What's the odds? He ain't gun shy, that's sure. If he's over them sentimental heebie-jeebies, let him trail along. As far as that jack pot to-day is concerned, take it out of his share of the big winnings. From what you've told us, there'll be plenty."

There were restless murmurs of assent. Already the fate of their prisoner was dwarfed and lost in the prospect of the forthcoming campaign.

"O. K., then," said Snell. "Drag along, fellows. I'll fetch Enders down."

The others hurried away, with the haste of those who bear heavy tidings. Snell walked slowly, motioning Pete in step at his side. He spoke confidentially. Beneath this pose, Pete sensed that the other was in the grip of furious rage.

"That was a bad play, Pete. You're your father's son. He was always chicken-hearted like that. The men were plenty hostile when it developed that your foot had slipped. I've got to hold them in line and keep them satisfied. It's only the luck of fools that gives you another chance. Plus Jo's efforts. The fellows would never have believed that you didn't appropriate the money for yourself. But the way we framed it made it plausible."

"Hm-m-m," said Pete. "You mean you sent her up to work on me?"

"Naturally," said Snell. His voice was brittle. "You're not suggesting, Pete, old son, that you thought she came of her own accord for a confidential chat with you?"

"I'm just that dumb," said Pete guardedly. "She's a good actress. She played her part like an old trouper. Tally up one more to experience!" He shrugged his shoulders. "What of it?"

"Cowboy," said Snell, "I'll suggest this once again, finally. In the game in which I've permitted you to take a hand, let there be no more false-carding. Obey orders. Watch your step. Interest yourself in nothing but business. Savvy?"

"Raise the ante, then," Pete retorted. "Don't ask me to buck a ten-cent limit like this Bodine deal. Let's see action."

"You'll see it," Snell promised dryly, "to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SETTING OF THE TRAP.

FOUR riders entered the cleft at near midnight. Immediately thereafter the camp was astir. Lights sprang forth in the cabins down the line as Nevada, thin-lipped, moving like a shadow, told all hands to roll out and stand ready at the bunk house for orders from Snell.

It was like a military alarm, a bugle call. Married members of the crew came on the run from the north end of camp, trailed by the wails of children roused from sleep. In a matter of minutes the big room was crowded with armed men. With the exception of the two lookouts at the gap and the guard at the cleft, all were present or accounted for.

In addition were the four newcomers. These, strangers to Pete, were dusty and travel-stained. It developed that they were the "outside men," Snell's spies, who had brought information from the valley.

Snell came presently, striding like a conqueror. He was wearing two guns, hung low and strapped to his thighs. In some indefinable manner his slight limp had become a swagger. His pale-blue eyes were alive with cold flame; his drooping mustache met his outthrust jaw. His two lieutenants, Slim and Nevada, were at his side.

The outlaw chief stood before his band in the big room, thumbs hooked in his belt. As he looked from one to the other of the intent, impassive faces before him, the silence grew profound. His glance bored into Pete's in passing. It was the briefest of inspections; but in that instant, fleetingly, Pete glimpsed what he had carelessly suspected before: that the outlaw's former pretense of friendship had been the merest gesture. Not he, Pete, nor Slim and Nevada—nor the girl herself—ranked as more than pawns in a deeper design. Snell, emotionless and utterly ruthless, shrewdly molding his band to his will, stood alone.

When he spoke his words were brief and blunt. Because he was able to view proceedings—as he had grown to look upon life—as from a pinnacle apart, Pete was able to analyze the crafty manner in which Snell handled the moment to his ends. He suggested enough to add fuel to the raging fires of excitement about him, to heighten suspense, to promise rewards; but no more.

"Men," said he, "the situation I've been waiting months for is ready. The hour has struck. Before another sun has set, the valley down below will split wide open. By this time to-morrow night each of us will be miles away. Behind us, the biggest job ever pulled in the West, will be history. In our saddlebags will be heavy winnings that will make previous jack pots look penny ante.

"These fellows"—he indicated the spies from the valley—"have brought news that set my plans forward a day. I had intended to strike at sunset to-morrow. Instead, we must be there by sunup. We leave in an hour. Each man will saddle his horse, take his six-gun and rifle and bandolier of extra ammunition. He will also take light trail equipment according to his taste, bearing in mind that his horse must not be loaded too heavy for fast travel."

HE indicated a pair of youths near by. "You two saddle immediately and relieve the lookouts so that they, in turn, can make ready. You'll join the column

when the rest of us ride out through the gap."

"You mean to say, chief," a voice questioned, "that we ain't leaving no guards behind us?"

"We're leaving no guards," said Snell, "because we're not coming back. This has been a secluded and restful hangout. Its usefulness is done. The feather-bed part of the campaign is absolutely over. After to-morrow each of us will be on the dodge."

To the reckless members of the crew, upon whom the discipline of camp life had palled, this statement added zest to the adventure. Certain of the older outlaws were uneasy and troubled.

"Chief," said one of these hesitantly, "what about the womenfolks? And the kiddies?"

"For the women and children," said Snell, "there is food here in plenty. And shelter. They'll stay behind. Each of you will make your own plans with your families about where you will meet again. If you fail to meet again—if, by chance, some accident to-morrow will prevent you from seeing them for a long time—the authorities will take care of them. They'll be placed in homes, no doubt. Provided for at public expense." He spoke with chill and ruthless humor. "It's a part of the tariff we're accustomed to. Good citizens, as usual, must pay the bill."

Hard-bitten youths guffawed loudly. The man who had spoken, and the group he represented, were silent and grim. Pete saw their inner torture, and knew that they had no choice. Not Snell himself, but the rocky trail they had chosen was here claiming its toll. Women who had kept faith through pitiless odds, children whose innocent minds had not yet grasped the reality of their surroundings—these were treasures that must be left behind.

"Got it?" said Snell.

"Let's go," came the answering roar.

"All hands in the saddle by midnight," said Snell. "We'll ride out in fours, ten minutes apart. Bull, Secord, Yakima." He named the commander in charge of each platoon and instructed these leaders to forgather at his cabin. "All right, fellows. Get goin'."

At midnight the first detachment rode forth from the cleft. Ten minutes later the next group followed. Pete's quartet, including Nevada, the girl, and Snell himself, was the last to leave.

The stars were low and brilliant at that hour; the shadows black. In silence the bristling platoons mounted the slope, sparks trailing from cigarettes. Momentarily, before entering the cleft, each rider was in silhouette against the jeweled sky; and Pete, watching, saw that most of these rode on without a backward glance. One bulky giant flung an arm aloft; and far down the line, in a lighted doorway, a woman with a sleeping baby in arms returned a brief gesture of farewell.

" 'For men must work and women must weep,' " quoted the girl carelessly. "Even in this noble life. Touching, what?"

"No wisecracks, Jo." Snell's brittle voice came from the gloom at their right. "That goes for you, too, Enders."

PETE rode first through the cleft, followed by Nevada. Snell and the girl brought up the rear. There was no lookout now on the lofty perch, nor at the gap below. The rear guard, passing through, was the last of the band. Except for the women and children

who had been left behind to shift for themselves, the notorious stronghold was deserted.

At Nevada's gesture, Pete reined to the right, or south, threading the juniper-clad slopes beneath the mesa that led down to the valley floor. Snell and the girl were some ten lengths behind. While the gap was still in view, Pete twisted in the saddle to look back. Nevada, mistaking his intent, spoke tersely.

"You and I stay in front, cowboy. Snell and Jo ride alone."

But Pete—contemplatively, with gloomy awe—was looking back as at a doorway deemed forever closed. He had spurred toward the grim rendezvous two days before, never dreaming, nor hoping, to penetrate beyond the gunmen at the gap. Having entered the stronghold, he had not thought to emerge. Yet he still lived. Not thus easily, it was plain, did inscrutable Fate permit men to avoid the unsought privileges and responsibilities of life.

And what lay ahead? In what sinister drama presently to unfold would he play an unwilling part? He did not know, nor care, he told himself somberly. He was merely riding down the current of a dark tide, unresistingly, apathetically. What did it matter to him what the big job was, just so the action was lurid and the end swift?

Yet certain troubling thoughts stirred in the deeps of him, like sleepers wrestling with disordered dreams. Borne on the breath of the night wind, sweeping up from the valley, was the scent of sage, of alfalfa, and new-mown clover. From far away came the bawl of a calf lost from a slumbering herd. The lights of Lodgepole glittered like a cluster of fallen stars against the horizon line; and from near at hand, on a dusty highway, the voice of a belated horseman was raised in joyous song concerning some distant region where men were men and a river was called the Rio Grande.

That horseman, Pete knew, had once been of his own kind, of a scheme of things known and dear to him. How often had he, too, ridden with the lights of Lodgepole at his back, penniless, singing into the flaming dawn! The valley had once been his valley, with life's dusty trails beckoning fair and far.

"Nevada," said he abruptly, "where we heading for? What's it all about?"

"Not now, cowboy," said Nevada. "Snell names the play. Later."

It was the only interchange between the pair for four hours. Snell and the girl talked together as they followed at a fast lope. Only once, when soft going abruptly deadened the sound of their progress, Pete caught a fragment of their conversation. It was Snell's brittle voice: "And that's final. You know me, Jo. I'll call all bluffs."

THEY rode the stars from the sky and so into the chill splendor of dawn. Daylight was growing rapidly when they approached a sleeping homestead from the rear. Pete knew the place and the owner. It was called the Lockhart Ranch, on the Lodgepole-Placer road. The present owner was a stolid and industrious citizen named Joel Price.

"We'll wait here," Snell whispered when they had achieved the ancient orchard flanking the barn lot. "Ease up there, Nevada, and see if Slim and Hondo have done their stuff. They've had plenty of time."

All dismounted, and Nevada stole through the shadows toward the farmhouse. He was out of sight but a moment. He reappeared beside

the woodshed, gesturing them forward.

Without further attempt at caution or concealment, the outlaw strode forward, with Pete and the girl at his heels. Nevada led the way through the back door and so into the kitchen.

Here, on the floor, trussed like fowls and gagged, were Price and his wife. The man's stolid face was pale and grim. The woman's eyes were half closed, her matronly features flushed. Breathing heavily, she was all but swooning with terror. Slim and "Hondo" leaned against the wall, puffing on complacent cigarettes.

"It was a cinch, chief," said Slim. chuckling. "We nailed him out at the cow stable. Then we snared the old girl when she was building the fire. It was no chore a-tall."

"Get 'em out of the way," Snell directed after a brief inspection of their bonds and gags. He jerked a thumb toward the bedroom of the primitive establishment. "Horse them in yonder."

The pair were unceremoniously bundled away and forgotten. All moved into the meagerly furnished living room, which was still gray with early shadows.

Snell looked at his watch. He was apparently emotionless, as always; yet Pete sensed that a crisis of some sort, in his mysterious plans, was at hand. The others sensed it, too. All stood immobile, awaiting his word.

"All right, Nevada," he said at length. "Get out there and get set with your wire clippers. You, Slim, stand at the door. When I give the high sign, pass it on to Nevada. It's got to be fast"—he snapped his fingers—"like that."

Nevada instantly stepped outside. Watching him through the window, Pete saw him running up the poplar-bordered lane toward the highway. Snell and Slim, standing in the doorway, also followed his every movement.

Paralleling the road, borne on sentinel poles that merged into the horizon to north and south, was the telephone line connecting Lodgepole, the county seat, with the mining town of Placer, sixteen miles distant. Immediately in front of the homestead a rangy juniper tree had been used as a post.

Up this tree Nevada climbed nimbly, assisted by the stumps of ancient branches. He perched on the crossarm, and for a moment was busied with his pliers. Then he flung an arm aloft.

SNELL tightened his belt and approached the ancient wall telephone. He stood for a space considering, his unwinking gaze fixed on the floor. Slim stood poised at the doorway, tense, stooped a little, his hand upraised. Nevada was likewise poised on his high perch, his face turned toward them.

And now Pete was given a new glimpse of the twisted genius, the crafty resources, that had enabled Snell to survive and flourish through three decades of lawlessness in the high country. Here was play acting supreme, a difficult impersonation of differing types that might have taxed the ability of the most finished trouper. It also spoke volumes for the care with which he had prepared for the event.

For it was Snell who took down the receiver, who vigorously rang the exchange at Placer. But to the listening ear it was the voice of Joel Price, heavy, humorous, somewhat deliberate, that carried over the wire.

"Hello! Hello, Placer? . . . This is Price, at the Lockhart. I want to talk to Jim Connors, at Lodgepole. . . . Yeah, the sheriff. . . . Huh? . . . Sure, get him out of bed. It ain't important, but who's payin' that bozo's keep? Let him get up when the taxpayers get up. This is haying time."

And when the sheriff's sleepy voice croaked hollowly in the receiver, it was another personality—excitable, all but frenzied—that roared across the intervening miles. By closing his eyes, Pete could almost have taken oath that that fiery and waspish old-timer, "Hard-rock" Molloy, town marshal of Placer, was himself standing there in the room.

"Jim?" bellowed Snell. "Great Judas, Jim, come a-running. This is Hard-rock, at Placer. All Hades busted loose here this morning. Your blasted gunmen from Suicide Trail split the town wide open. Swooped in like buzzards—twenty, thirty, maybe forty of 'em—and picked us to the bone. It's a shambles. It's ruin and desolation. Main Street's littered with dead and dying! But we got the skunks cornered in a draw outside of town. What? . . . Yes, the whole kit and caboodle of 'em. All but a couple who cut out of the herd. Fetch your posse. Rout out your vigilantes. Bring every man that can sling lead. Bring the whole town. We'll hold 'em till you come. Blast the blasted polecats, we got 'em where we want 'em! We'll wipe the slate clean——"

He motioned to Slim. The latter's upraisesd arm fell. The droning of the wire ceased.

Snell turned to the girl, his pale eyes flaming with triumph.

"We got 'em," he said. "It worked. The sheriff promised two hundred men in four hours. The whole town's primed for slaughter. The skids are greased. The trap's set!"

He broke off, as though checking a weak display, and looked at Pete. The latter, through the window, saw that Nevada was descending rapidly. The telephone wire had not fallen. Nevada had secured it in such a manner that there was no visible evidence that it had been cut.

"What's the play?" Pete asked.

A MILITARY trick as old as time," said Snell. "Draw the defenders away, then take the fort. You might as well know it now, Enders! You'll soon be in the thick of it. That wire that Nevada has cut is the only trunk line up the valley. There'll be no communication between the two towns for hours. All the local, fire-spitting heroes will burn up the dust to Placer. It's a grand-stand play they wouldn't miss. All these demon desperadoes caught in a hole, ready to be shot down like coyotes. Meanwhile"—he spread his hands—"we'll take Lodgepole!"

"How do you mean—take Lodgepole?"

"Like Grant took Richmond," said Snell. "Like the barbarians took Rome."

Nevada rushed in, breathing heavily. The gaze of the outlaw chief and his right-hand man met for a brief, triumphant instant.

In that instant Pete glanced at the girl and encountered her wide eyes fixed upon him. She seemed calm, detached, aloof; but at the base of her softly molded neck, belying her disinterested pose, he could plainly see a hidden artery rapidly pulsing.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HIDDEN PATTERN.

THEY quitted the flats without ceremony, bearing north under cover of the juniper slopes. The balance of the crew, Pete learned, were already in concealment on the outskirts of Lodgepole. As speedily as a stealthy route thither would permit, Snell was hurrying toward the rendezvous.

Pete rode with Snell, according to the latter's blunt command. Behind came Slim and Hondo. It was only afterward that Pete grasped the significance of the fact that these two trailed them closely, riding wide apart. At the rear, Nevada followed with the girl.

Faster and faster now, it seemed to Pete, the dark tide was carrying him on. The roar of the breakers, in a manner of speaking, was close at hand. He was at a loss to account for the fact that now, in spirit, he was hanging back.

He thought he knew when Snell motioned them to a halt on a high ridge and pointed out across the valley. Far to the southwest, on roads paralleling the section lines that led in the general direction of Placer, were many funnels of dust. These trailed tiny horsemen, undulating, insectlike, toward the southwest. By twos and threes and larger groups they rode, an army on the march.

"Fools!" said Snell. "See them ride! Wild-eyed to get to the killing. There'll be dead horses lining their back trail when they get the news! Too late, you grand-standing scissorbills! You'll pay, and pay plenty!"

His voice was less brittle, more snarling. The iron self-control of the man was slipping from him. In that moment it was the marauding wolf, the predatory beast of prey that peered forth from his pale eyes.

And in that moment Pete knew that his heart was not in this thing to which he had put his hand. Men he knew and respected were riding yonder across the valley he loved. There, at his feet, less than twenty minutes' ride distant, was the town in which he had spent his boyhood, and whose ties held him still. What though he was unwanted, that life had cast him out? His responsibilities, in the final and ultimate showdown, were not with these men with whom he had joined in blind and savage mood, but against them to the end.

It was a staggering realization. Under its impact he rode slumped in the saddle, his chin on his chest. He peered at the horseman beside him, blinking. It was not Snell, but Nevada; and that still-faced youth was regarding him intently.

Pete roused as from a dream, becoming conscious of his surroundings. Slim and Hondo were some three lengths back. Behind came Snell and the girl. Nevada was setting pace and trail, skirting an outcropping of rim rock and scrub pine whose western extremity bordered on the city limits of the range metropolis.

"Cowboy," said he in conversational fashion, "we're almost there. The gang's waiting in the draw yonder. We'll be there in five minutes." From the corner of his mouth he added: "Grin. Roll a cigarette. Ride easy. The chief's watching us."

PETE reached for the makings. Nevada reined closer. "I'm for Snell," said he. "I'll double-cross no man. But the chief's overplayed his hand with the girl. She's entitled to a break. If she

wants to save your scalp, I'll do her the favor, and to blazes with the chief. You're only a side bet with him, anyway. Got the picture?"

Pete had not grasped the picture. But he nodded and lighted his cigarette.

"Me and Slim and Hondo," Nevada continued, "have orders from the chief to drop you on sight at the first funny move. Instead, I'll swing my horse across behind you. Slim and Hondo won't fire through me. Sink your spurs into your critter. Two jumps and you're in the scrub pine. Bust through and keep traveling."

Pete eyed him fixedly.

"I mean—now," said Nevada softly. "Before we get to the gang yonder. After that you're sunk."

Pete puffed on his cigarette, digesting what he had heard; and he knew, as he rode in brilliant sunlight, through a familiar world whose every detail was vivid and sharply etched, that his nerves had never been more cool and poised, his brain more clear, than at this moment.

"Hm-m-m," said he, "those are hefty words. But we've got five minutes yet, walking slow. A few questions, cowboy. Will you answer me straight?"

"If you'll pass your word that what I say dies with you," said Nevada.

"You've got it," said Pete.

"Shoot, then," said Nevada. Perspiration glistened on his masklike face. "Any gent who could look into Snell's rifle like you done up yonder—grinning like that—is the real beef. But talk fast."

"What did you mean, then, when you said I was sunk after we reach the gang?"

"Because," said Nevada, "the chief hates the ground you walk on. When we leave this job we leave you behind us. Toes up. So the citizens will think you led the wolves right back to the home folks' roost."

"Hm-m-m," said Pete. It was as though a cold wind breathed upon his back. "How does he get that way?"

"On two counts," said Nevada. "First, Jo's sweet on you. Secondly—and these are roots that strike deeper—he hated your father, Long Chance. Some old score he wants to pay off. Your paw, so he tells me, would have sold his soul to raise you straight."

"Sho," said Pete, chilled anew, "that's first-class hating."

"Jo's father was poison to him, also," said Nevada. "That's why she's here. Snell don't look at her like me or you. She's King Colton's daughter! And he'll make her pay plenty. What else, cowboy? Talk fast. If ever there was an unforgiven minute, it's now."

"You mean," said Pete, "that she isn't riding with this outfit of her own free will?"

SHE was teaching up in the Cœur d'Alene," said Nevada, "in some flea-bitten and windswept community. Snell wrote her a letter. It was a pippin. Claimed he was lonely and childless, that he had a housekeeper and a big ranch, that he looked on her as a daughter, the daughter of an old pal. Come, he invites, and make your home here. She came. Snell took her through the gap. That was going on two months ago. She's been there since."

"And made the best of a bad bargain?" questioned Pete. He held his breath for the reply. The answer, he knew suddenly, would point a crossroads ahead.

"You noticed that Snell limps,"

said Nevada. "Jo plugged him. It taught him respect—at least for her shootin' ability. She's a crack shot, and goes heeled all the while. So she pretended to give up hope, she tells me. She told the chief she'd marry him after the big job. Promised to hide out with him up in the Horse Heaven country and start over. But he'd have to make a big stake first. She made that final. And it sounded reasonable to the chief. The only language he understood, you savvy. The only way for her to postpone a show-down."

"Dog-gone!" Pete breathed. "But look, Nevada. There's a hole in your story. She rode on the penny-ante Bodine job with us. As one of Snell's aces."

"On that Bodine job," said Nevada, "the chief figured to kill several birds with one stone. He missed 'em all—by the width of one coffee can. It was the first time Jo had been outside the gap. It was your first job, also. He wanted to brand you both. Bodine would scatter the word in the valley, you savvy, that the two of you were in the gang."

"But what was to prevent Jo and me from making a run for it?"

"Nothing much," Nevada admitted, "except me and Slim. We both rode all day with our hands on our artillery. There was also a half dozen fellows—maybe a dozen—trailing along just for percentage."

"Son of a gun!" said Pete. "But if Jo knew Snell's plans all the while, why didn't she refuse to ride on the Bodine job? Why is she riding now?"

"Because," said Nevada with a twisted smile, "she placed her bets on you. Don't ask me how a gal figures things, but this is her slant. When she first saw you up yonder on the trail—when you rode in among our gorillas like a gent riding to a feast, grinning like that, knowing you didn't have a Chinaman's chance—she figured you were one of them answers to a maiden's prayer. What I mean, one of those knights in shining armor right out of the storybook. She needed a gent with a good right arm to back her play, and here you were. So she put in a word for you with Snell. She did it again after the Bodine job. She was hoping to get to talk to you, to break down your hard-boiled ideas and persuade you to help her make a get-away."

PETE cut in. "Listen! Last night, after the Bodine job, when I was sitting up there under the wall, waiting for the firing squad, did Snell send her up to talk to me?"

"He did not," said Nevada with emphasis. "The chief gave orders right at the start that she wasn't to talk to you. She saw her chance last night and took it. But Snell crossed her up. He took a good holt on the Widow Gratton's hair. After the third twist, when her scalp was about to come off, she told where you were. So Jo had to cut her parley short. She hoped to be able to work on you to-day. She hoped to the end. Now she's through. All she craves is that you have a chance. You're young. You're entitled to blaze your own trails. Over yonder, beyond the pinnacles, the fields are still green. Some bleary-eyed sentiment like that."

"Wow!" Pete groaned. It was as though pent-up forces within him, newly released, rose up like a hot tide. "What a noble, upstanding bonehead I turned out to be! Nevada, I'm the blindest jasper that ever had a chance to square himself with the world!"

"And the dumbest," said Nevada

bluntly. "Because look, cowboy. You've crowded your luck too far. The eleventh hour struck about a minute ago. Here comes Snell. And yonder's the gang."

Massed in the junipers at the head of the draw were many mounted men. The gleam of metal was in the shadow, and many restless hoofs milling. Snell, leaving the girl with Hondo and Slim, was drawing up abreast.

"It's too late for a break now," said Nevada. "You've talked yourself into a ticket across the river. Good hunting!"

Snell reined up beside them and shot a keen glance at each. Strange fires burned in his pale eyes. Pete glanced back, hoping to meet the girl's gaze. But she was riding between Slim and Hondo, head bowed.

"We're here," said Snell. "In fifteen minutes history will be written. Fall back, Nevada. Overlook no bets. Enders, you ride with me."

CHAPTER X.

THE TIDE OF BATTLE.

IN the sheltered draw, within rifle shot of the main street of Lodgepole, as Snell gave terse final orders for the attack, Pete learned for the first time the details of the "big job."

Its sheer daring made for its probable success. The stage had been made ready with clocklike precision. Both in attack and in preparation for retreat, Snell had employed the strategy of a master mind.

As the trading center for many hundred square miles of range, Lodgepole boasted three banks. The largest was the First National, known generally as Hampton's. The resources of the Stockman's National ran a close second. Lastly was the Merchants & Miners State Bank, a small but robust institution catering to the vast mining operations above Placer.

Because the community was remote from the great financial centers, all three were known to carry huge cash balances. The total in currency and gold in their combined vaults, Snell estimated, was in excess of a quarter million. In one fell swoop, holding the defenseless Main Street in a state of siege until the banks were being raided, they would seize upon this enormous "jack pot" and depart with haste.

The plan of attack was simple. It was now nine fifteen, when the banks' side doors, according to the easy-going custom of the range, would be open for business. The entire band, with the exception of two left in charge of the horses in the draw, would filter into Main Street as unobtrusively as possible, through back doors of saloons and pool halls, sauntering casually forth from alleys. Five picked men, with a leader in command, would gather at each bank. The balance of the crew would take up their positions at points dominating the street.

A gun shot would be the signal for the attack. The street would be cleared, and each bank raided simultaneously. The forces would converge upon Hampton's, where Snell would be in command, and retreat to the horses effected.

A sinister detail emerged in the outlaw's final instructions to his crew. Cold-bloodedly as always, Snell's reptilian nature showed its fangs. It was brought out, almost as a last word, that two cases of sixty-per-cent dynamite had been smuggled into town by one of Snell's lieutenants. This high explosive, covered by an old horse blanket, was reposing in a weed-infested vacant lot adjacent to Hampton's.

"Dynamite?" questioned one of the men. "What for, chief?"

"I'll tell you what for," said Snell. "It's a little private grudge I've nursed for the past twenty-five years. Against this stuffed shirt, Hampton. He knifed me in the back once. Never mind how. But it's a long lane that never turns. Does he think I've forgotten? No, by the eternal! Cleaning out his vault isn't enough for me. When we're through I'm going to blast his penny-ante bank into kingdom come. He laughed at me once. Let him laugh that off!"

PETE, who was standing beside him, spoke deliberately. He neither knew nor cared whether his words would precipitate a crisis. He had no plan. But his hate of the man and all that he stood for rose up within him like a red tide.

"I know what that grudge is, Snell," said he. "Hampton was a young banker then. He persuaded a couple of ace-high young fellows to quit you and go straight. He lent them the money to back their play. Their names were Carrauthers and Colton!" He looked the outlaw full in the face. "Best forget your grudges, Snell."

The outlaw whirled like a striking rattler, his hand a claw above his gun. Pete faced him—grinning, poised. Their gaze locked and held. A moment thus; then Snell, looking past him, shook his head in an all but imperceptible motion. Pete heard several weapons rasp into holsters behind him.

"What's your play, Enders?" The outlaw spoke softly; and in the same breath, as though sensing the danger of further debate: "Never mind. We'll discuss it later—after the job. Now then, men, got it straight? Take no chances. Drop any armed citizen on sight. Shoot to kill. Protect the men carrying the gold at all costs. You all know where the relay horses are waiting. You know where we meet for the split. All right, you salty gents—scatter!"

The two blocks comprising the business section of Lodgepole, at mid-forenoon, were all but deserted. A few horses hitched to buckboards dozed at hitching rails at the distant courthouse square. Shirt-sleeved proprietors stood in doorways of their respective places of business, alert for latest news from the supposed battlefield at Placer.

Those citizens still remaining after the general exodus toward the south were congregated in small groups, engaged in excited debate. Three hours had elapsed since the telephoned message had burst upon the town like a bomb. It was as though the thundering hoofbeats of departing riders and their exultant yells still reechoed down the sunlit street.

Certain strangers joined these buzzing groups. They appeared unobtrusively, sauntering from adjacent alleys. They sidled into the outskirts of the crowd, attracting no attention. In palaces of refreshment along the street, cash customers appeared as from nowhere, leaned on the bar and called carelessly for service. The ranks of pool-hall loafers gained new recruits unnoticed. The town marshal, delivering his opinion on the Placer battle from an uptilted chair at the livery-stable door, was flattered by the interest of two unrecognized persons who leaned against the post at his side, nodding in courteous agreement.

Thus, in a matter of minutes, the stage was set.

Hampton's bank, pride of Lodge-

pole, was one of the town's five brick buildings. Its massive doorway was framed by huge marble pillars. On either side of this main entrance were two lesser doors, through which, prior to the official opening for business, customers passed into a small anteroom and so through swinging doors into the ornate lobby.

NEVADA and Hondo entered first. They were followed, a moment later, by Slim. Then came the girl, and lastly, Snell and Pete. Slim pushed through the inner swinging door and held it open for the girl. At the same moment, Snell, in the anteroom, motioned Pete back.

"Outside quick, Enders." He spoke sibilantly, as through clenched teeth.

Looking past him, Pete met the girl's eyes. They were like pools of shadow against the pallor of her face. She shook her head slightly. Her breast was rising and falling to quick intakes of breath. She was standing with her hand thrust into the pocket of her leather jacket. Her pose was tense, her white teeth biting into her lip; and Pete knew then, at the desperate warning emanating from her, that he must not turn his back on Snell.

"Go on in, Jo," he said.

She shook her head again. Snell whirled upon her, turned back to glare at Pete. Women clerks beyond grilled counters were looking at them curiously. Nevada and Hondo were leaning against a high table, the former rolling a cigarette. Slim still stood, jaw set, holding the door open.

"Go in, then," muttered Snell thickly.

Turning, he strode out into the street and halted. Pete and the girl passed through into the lobby. Slim stood watching Snell, and in that moment the girl whispered in Pete's ear:

"Oh, Pete, you're through—finished! Why didn't you go? There's no escape. Don't you want to live now?"

"I do," said Pete. "I found it out too late. I found plenty out too late. But I'm doing this much for you and the world, Jo. I'm taking Snell with me."

Her face was immobile, her lips white.

"Please," she whispered, "let me help. Tell me what to do. I'll stand by you."

He shook his head. "No," he said, "it's just Snell and me. Stay in the clear."

Further parley was cut short as Snell's weapon roared deafeningly in the street outside.

Those in the bank stood motionless, frozen. The machine-gun clatter of typewriters and adding machines ceased. Banker Hampton, emerging from the vault with a tray of currency in his hand, halted in his tracks, grizzled brows raised in surprise.

Nevada's weapon leaped from its holster. His voice cut the silence like a knife.

"Stay put, mister. Right where you are. Don't move."

The banker stood statuesque, except for a lowering of his grizzled brows. A woman screamed. Simultaneously, both within and without the bank, chaos descended upon Lodgepole.

Gunfire crashed in the street outside, coming from scattered points. Loud yells reëchoed. Strident oaths, shouted warnings, the beat of hurrying feet, created a babble of sound. More distant explosions came, muffled as behind walls.

SNELL charged in through the swinging doors, guns in hand. He was a formidable and appalling figure, jaw outthrust, eyes gleaming. Slim, Hondo and Nevada, grimly shoulder to shoulder, were holding the bank employees at bay. The women were huddled together like frightened quail. Two sallow-faced bookkeepers and a youthful teller stood pale and quaking. Pete was against the wall at the right, thumbs hooked in his belt. Opposite stood the girl, Jo, her hand thrust into the pocket of her leather jacket.

Snell surveyed the scene with a lightning glance and instantly assumed command. He said nothing to Pete, gave him no orders, disregarded him utterly. He leaped across the lobby, pushed through a swinging gate that led behind the tellers' cages, and faced Banker Hampton. Slim followed, and Hondo. Nevada turned himself about slowly, his eyes were turned on Pete.

At that instant, as at a preconceived plan, seven or eight of Snell's shock troops rushed in from the street. The lobby was crowded with armed men. Three of these joined Snell and his lieutenants. Two posted themselves at the door. The others scattered to strategic points.

"You, Hampton," said Snell. "Remember me, eh?"

"Shorty DeVore !" The banker's grim face became more deeply lined.

Snell dashed the tray of currency from his hand, pressed the muzzle of a weapon against his chest, and pushed him back.

"Stand there," he directed. "Watch the parade go by. And sweat! I'm collecting heavy interest, Hampton!"

He leaped back, keeping one weapon trained on the banker. With the other, he motioned toward the vault.

"Inside," he directed the trio beside him. "Drag out the loot. You, Slim and Hondo, herd the ladies out. These white-collared heroes, also." His contemptuous gesture included the bookkeepers and the youthful teller.

A new and brazen clamor arose above the din outside. Whether the three outlaws who had entered the vault had set off some hidden alarm, or one of the apparently terrified employees had pressed a button, could not be determined. But a ringing gong burst forth in a staccato, sustained note. It added a quickened tempo to the uproar and to taut nerves, like the beating of jungle drums.

"That's Enders yonder, Hampton," Snell gloated. "You know him —Pete Enders. He showed us the way around. He's my right-hand man. He's interest, too, Hampton! It was a haywire investment you made, what?"

Plain enough was the fact that not gold alone, but the slaking of vengeful thirsts of years, made these moments climactic for Snell. And it was as though his very malignancy in his intoxication of triumph, turned invisible scales against him.

For the grizzled banker, who had seen many dawns flame on the frontier, had also faced death before. Long before, in his youth, he had pitted his resources against Snell. He did so now, though the attempt, on the face of it, was sheer suicide.

THE three outlaws were approaching from the interior of the vault, laden with currency and sacks of gold. The banker was standing some two paces distant. Notwithstanding that Snell's weapon was trained upon his breast,

that he stood alone in a room crowded with desperate men to whom human life meant nothing, he hurtled forward in a sudden, explosive effort.

Snell's gun roared. Stricken in mid-leap, the banker's bulk carried him on. The polished steel door clanged shut. Falling, Hampton's clutching hand spun a numbered dial. He slumped upon the floor, head sagging.

"Judas," breathed a voice, "the vault's closed!"

CHAPTER XI.

A BLUFF THAT FAILED.

SNELL stood, crouching. His drooping mustache curved back in an animallike leer of rage. For an instant it appeared that he would send slug after slug crashing into the banker's inert body. Then he slid his weapons back into their holsters. He whirled upon Slim and Hondo, who had just returned from escorting the bank employees into the street.

"Get the dynamite!" His voice was thin and rasping.

The pair charged forth. All about in the big room men looked at each other unwinkingly.

"Listen, chief," said Nevada, "what's the play?"

"There's two hundred thousand in there," grated Snell. "Understand? Two hundred thousand! This blasted citizen's passed out. Does he think he can checkmate me now? We'll split this vault like a sardine can. We'll blow the whole building to blazes and take the loot from the ruins. You and you—trundle that safe over here. Upset it against the door——"

In the madness of the moment, all vestige of reason had forsaken the outlaw crew. They leaped to obey Snell's command. Only Nevada's voice was raised in protest.

"Wait!" he shouted. "You're loco, chief. There's three of our fellows in there!"

"To blazes with them," snarled Snell. "We've got no time for kid gloves. They took their chances on this job. So did you. So did I. They lost. That loot in there is more than half the jack pot. Right over here, Slim. Easy, Hondo—that's dynamite. Ease them in between the safe and the door."

"Now you wait!" Nevada insisted, his voice strained to breaking. "I'm with you, Snell, but this is going too far. Two of those fellows are family men. Take a vote on it!"

"Vote nothing!" Snell was all but foaming at the mouth. "Who made a plaster saint out of you, Nevada? You'd see your best friend boiled in oil for one tenth that jack pot. We going to take chances with the noose and not get the loot? No, by the eternal!"

A roar of agreement, bestial, inhuman, drowned out Nevada. Snell tore aside the loose top of the upper box of explosive. Here was revealed a coiled fuse, already capped. He drew this forth in a long spiral, produced a match with shaking hand, and struck it upon the safe.

"Outside quick," he commanded hoarsely, waving the tiny flame aloft. "Get in the clear. It's a forty-second fuse. When she blows, rush back and dig into the ruins."

Pete, while all were intent upon the grim drama unfolding at the vault, had leaped the counter and approached from the right. He had had no plan of action a moment before. Now the way was plain. He wagered all on a single throw of the dice.

"Stop!" His voice halted the general movement toward the door.

ALL halted to look back. All stood transfixed. Pete stood opposite Snell, gun in hand. The weapon was not directed at Snell; it's muzzle was trained upon the two boxes wherein immeasureable forces awaited release; and the clicking of the hammer, as he raised it with his thumb, was plain in the momentary silence.

"Stay put, fellows. One slug in this dynamite and we're all reaching for a harp. Don't move, anybody. You know me, hombres. Even if you drilled me, I'd shorely pull the trigger."

He addressed the room, but his eyes were upon Snell. "Get in the clear, Jo. Travel, and keep going. Drop that match, Snell. If you feel lucky—draw!"

No man living save Pete himself could have thus dominated the scene. There were outlaws of caliber in the room. All these, having seen Pete face Snell's rifle without a quiver of an eyelash, stood like frozen statues. Snell himself, whose courage was as emotionless as that of a reptile, made no move. The match burned and blackened, fell away from his fingers.

"Get going, Jo," Pete urged. "Remember those green fields over yonder."

But the girl did not go. She stood, pale and poised, her hands gripping hard on the counter at her back.

New turmoil arose outside. Running feet beat a loud tattoo. Gunfire from north and south came nearer and clearer. Answering shots roared forth from the threshold of the bank.

Bursting through the doorway, their retreat covered by the shock troops converging from up and down the street, came the looters from the other banks. They were burdened with heavy bags of gold and currency. Three wounded were all but dragged inside.

"Let's go, chief!" roared one of the frenzied newcomers. "Things are getting too hot. An army of old-timers and loco kids are closing in. We have got to make a run for it!"

"Key down!" counseled a shaken voice. "See Snell and Enders? Behind that safe is enough dynamite to blow us clean acrost the Jordan. And Enders is hog wild!"

There came to Pete, at that instant, a dazzling, an incredible possibility. Because three helpless men were entombed like rats in the vault, he had leaped in to hasten the inevitable show-down between himself and Snell. He had hoped, by using the dynamite as a threat, to forestall being dropped by a dozen bullets before closing with his archenemy.

Now, with the lobby crowded with the entire outlaw band, he glimpsed a daring coup. The delay had given the citizens time to assemble. If he could control the situation a few moments longer, until the bank entrance was guarded, there would be no escape. All would be entrapped behind barred windows and walls of stone.

"You're bluffing," said Snell, licking his lips. "You couldn't do it. Jo would go, too."

The fuse slipped from his hand. His fingers remained outspread. Pete saw grim purpose gathering in his eyes.

"Never mind me, Pete." The girl's voice was trembling but resolute. "I'm with you. Play it to the end."

"Yes, Snell," said Pete, nodding. "It's just a bluff. You've seen me out on a limb before. Question is, are you going to call?"

THE plate glass of the main entrance crashed in before a vicious fusillade. The defenders at the door shrank back. All those in the lobby scattered to cover, vaulting behind marble counters, taking their stand behind soaring pillars.

Only Snell and Pete stood fast. A bullet flattened on the safe between them, its fragments spattering wall and ceiling.

"What do you want from us, Enders?" came Nevada's hoarse voice. "Name it quick."

From the tail of his eye Pete saw Banker Hampton struggle up to a sitting position, supported on his good arm. How long he had lain thus in pretended stupor could not be said. It was his voice, hard-bitten, matter of fact, that finally made reply.

"Show's over, men. Give yourselves up peaceably. You haven't a Chinaman's chance. If you thought Pete was bluffing, what about those citizens out yonder? The safe protects the dynamite now, but what's going to happen when they fire through the windows? You, Shorty—Snell—use your head. The game's up. Raise your hands. Hurry! Take his guns, one of you fellows!"

"Pete! Pete!" The girl's scream came piercingly, warningly—too late.

The slightest slackening of attention on Pete's part and Snell had struck.

It was incredible that a human hand could move so fast. Pete had only to raise the muzzle of his gun with a flick of the wrist; yet both weapons roared as one.

Under an impact which was as though a flaming sword had pierced him through, Pete fell back and down. Snell pitched forward against the safe. He clung an instant, seeking vainly to raise up his weapon again.

But even his undying hate could not give him sufficient strength. His head sagged and he slumped slowly to the floor.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SUNLIT WAY.

THE shocking power of the heavy bullet, tearing through Pete's right shoulder, had shut off light and life like the abrupt drawing of a curtain. Time and an awareness of things ceased. But deep within him, in those mysterious compartments of the human brain whose functions cease only with the last heartbeat, a species of momentum built up by his iron purpose, carried him on and on.

He had not seen Snell fall, so instant had been the halting of consciousness. He knew nothing of what followed. Thus, as he struggled up and up through a well of blackness, it was as though he still stood at the grim crossroads, calling upon all his resources of stamina and resolution to stand fast, to close his mind to all the belated promise of life, to play out his hand to the end at any cost.

Again and again in endless sequence he faced Snell eye to eye, while between them crouched giant forces capable of shattering the massive building like a house of cards, of sending all within it reeling forth like wind-blown dust. Once more—too late—he read Snell's maniac purpose. The girl's scream reëchoed. He was pierced through and through. He had failed. He was falling, falling——

He glimpsed a white-walled room and a white-jacketed figure bending over him. There was a window

through which sunlight flooded, and beside it, in a recumbent position in a wheel chair, was a bulky person whose features blurred, merged into and were lost in the engulfing darkness.

Again, æons later, he opened his eyes in time to see the white-coated doctor closing the door behind him. Immediately upon that official's departure, he at the window delved into the pocket of his bath robe, and, with an appearance of great guilt, drew forth a huge black cigar. He lighted this, blew a blast of smoke through the open window, and peered owlishly at Pete. It was Hampton, the banker.

"We've raised up a milk-fed generation," observed that hard-bitten old-timer. "Soft as putty. I get a slug through my shoulder and think nothing of it." He waved his cigar, winced, and profanely shifted his swathed torso to a more comfortable position. "At least, not much. You're drilled in the same manner—plus a rib or two, and maybe a punctured lung or some such trifle—and what happens? Two doctors for repairs and renovations. Five nurses and a barrel of ether to hold you down while they operate. Two hours for you to snap out of it. Not so good, eh?" He grinned, mouthing his cigar. "How's tricks, Pete?"

But Pete did not reflect his genial mood.

"Where's Snell gone to?" he asked weakly.

"Snell," said the banker, "has gone to his reward. That's one job you did right, son. His shot was quick, but yours was straight. Yes"—he nodded complacently—"Shorty's gone. And for his own sake, I hope he doesn't meet up with your dad or King Colton over yonder."

"Where's Jo?"

"DOWNSTAIRS. Waiting for a chance to get at you. But I spoke first. The doc says I can chin with you five minutes, no more." He snorted. "What's the world coming to when a little hefty conversation will put a pair like us down and out?"

"Where's the gang?"

"In the hoosegow. And what a round-up that was! The bull pen's crowded. With their retreat cut off, and that dynamite ready to pop under their noses, they caved in in a hurry. The fellows holding the horses in the draw were also nailed. Every man Jack of 'em are corralled, except that lad, Nevada. When they were being marched down to the jail he cut out of the herd and made a run for it. Right in front of the courthouse. Leaped on a horse and started for the tall timber. Bullets whistled all around him. They might just as well have been horseflies. Some wild-eyed fellows undertook to run him down, but it seems they had a relay string cached out yonder, ready for a quick get-away. So he thumbed his nose in their faces and faded out of the picture."

"Just as well," said Pete. "Nevada was the whitest man of the crew. Yeah, strength to his arm. Mr. Hampton——" He licked his lips and strove to speak with resolution. But iron was no longer in him, and his voice trembled. "I've got nothing to say for myself. But I want to put in a word for—for Jo. She wasn't in that crew of her own free will. She was kidnaped and forced to ride with them."

"That's enough," said the banker. "You don't have to tell me anything. I've already got the picture. The girl's told the story. To me and District Attorney Powell. Yeah, she's in the clear. As for you——"

He looked hard at Pete. "Get hold of yourself and hang on. I've got a jolt to hand you that'll shake your eyeteeth. You ready for it?"

"You can't jolt me," stated Pete apathetically. "My eyeteeth are anchored down. In the last couple of days I've been everywhere and seen everything. You don't have to tell me I'm sunk, Mr. Hampton. Without a ripple. The whole world knows I joined up with this gang, and why. They know I did it deliberately."

"Sure they do," the banker agreed, "because that little girl, Jo, told me and District Attorney Powell all about it. And Powell told the world. It's already history. Get that, Pete. There's no use trying to alibi out of it now. Because you've waked up to find yourself famous, Pete. You're a cockeyed hero!"

"What you mean?" Pete whispered.

"Listen." The other's harsh features split in a sudden, wolfish grin. This exultant leer passed. He lowered his voice and spoke in confidential vein. "You're a poker player, Pete. I've likewise been around a little. So has Powell. You may know certain things. I may suspect plenty. Powell may have a hunch. But you and I know—and Powell knows—that a good bluff is sometimes worth a royal flush. Powell's got the whole gang under lock and key. He'll send them up. That's all he's interested in. He's satisfied.

THE range is rid of the dangedest crew of cutthroats that ever cluttered up a decent community. So the valley's satisfied. Now then, if the girl explains your part in it—which immediately becomes as plain as the nose on your face as soon as she explains it—who are you to buck the deal? It's just one of those things to which a man has got to bow his head. It's the white man's burden. Got the picture?"

"No," said Pete. "What did Jo explain?"

"It's shockproof," said the banker. "The facts speak for themselves. It's a natural. Here's a young man, Pete Enders, who folks figure has a wild strain in him. This burns up the said Pete Enders. It gripes him. Here's a crew of cutthroats, roosting up in the pinnacles. The said cutthroats have thumbed their noses at the law and flourished and fattened so that the whole country's roused up.

"Now, then, this Pete Enders is desperate. He's tried to shoot square and build up a reputation for himself as a decent citizen. He's failed. He's a high-strung lad, proud as Lucifer, and he gets to brooding over it. There's several other little details, such as a banker's daughter, that aggravates the state he's in. How show the world that he's right and they're wrong? The answer hits him square between the eyes. Forthwith, without telling a soul of his intentions, while the rest of the valley is stewing and fretting and champing at the bit without getting anywhere, he saddles his horse, takes his guns, and rides up Suicide Trail.

"For what purpose? To play a lone hand, just like the cards fell, as follows. He tells the leader of this nest of polecats that he craves to be an outlaw. In a way which would have given his own dad a new slant on what a long chance meant, he makes his bluff stick. He's taken into the gang.

"But he's under suspicion, you understand. The leader of the crew

—who's as cold-blooded a snake as ever struck without rattling—has his doubts. Result is that from one to a half dozen gunmen are riding herd on Enders every second of the time, with orders to shoot to kill at the first suspicious move. Does this faze Enders? Not at all. With his life not worth a plugged nickel at any stage of the game, he lays his plans.

"He finds out that this Lodgepole raid is coming up. Fine! He rides along. He doesn't know where he's going to head off this stampede, nor how. He's just waiting his chance. He's a gambler, as everybody knows; and somewhere along the line, his hunch tells him, there'll come a break. And all this while, you understand, he doesn't know whether or not he'll reach Lodgepole alive. Riding into town, he's warned that the rattlesnake chief of those Apaches figures on leaving him on the job, toes up. Does he make a break for it while he still has a Chinaman's chance? No! He plays it to the end.

THE break comes in the bank, when a blamed fool of an old banker forgets how scared he is and slams the vault door shut. Snell goes crazy and piles dynamite against the door. He couldn't have blown in the vault that easy—any experienced safe cracker would have told him that—but he'd have wrecked it and the bank, too. That's where Enders steps in. Deliberately—outbluffing a gent who didn't know what fear is and was loco besides—he held the fort long enough for what was left of the population of this easy-going and peaceable community to close in on the polecat's nest and cut off retreat.

"And that's that. The last touch to the picture, the final star in his haywire crown, was the fact that this hero Enders played out his hand to the last card. He fell, with his gun smoking, and took Snell with him. It rounded out the deal with the kind of flourish that goes rolling down the halls of time. And if there's a buckaroo in the whole high country who wouldn't give his right arm to be in your shoes, he isn't among the herd that's milling down there on the street right now. If there's a back-biting and whispering citizen who ever speaks out in his dreams and says that Pete Enders is anything else than the squarest, whitest and most upstanding lad west of the Mississippi, the unfortunate maverick's hide will be posted at the nearest crossroads. With the scalp and ears missing.

"At least," the banker concluded, fastidiously flicking the ash from his cigar on the window sill, "that's the way those near-sighted hero-worshiping shorthorns figure it. As for me, I'll just say this—seeing that we're all alone, and I've known you since you were a foal, and your father before you—that when it comes to fellows who're positively reeking with luck, I'm backing Enders!"

Pete relaxed upon his pillow, his eyes half closed, while the room circled majestically about him. He tried to think, to grasp the incredible and undreamed possibilities opened up by the other's words, but the effort, at first, was too great.

"Don't you get het up now," advised the banker in alarm. "Get a hold of yourself, Pete. Dog-gone, my five minutes was up long ago. Where's that blasted bell? If you were to have a relapse now there's a certain young lady who'd have my scalp. And that's another——"

He hesitated, puffing furiously. Few indeed were the occasions when Banker Hampton shrank from call-

ing a spade a spade. Such an occasion was obviously upon him now. He cleared his throat in a deep-chested growl and clenched his teeth upon his cigar.

"Pete," said he, "this comes hard. Here it is, all in a bunch. I crowded you off your quarter over on Wolf Creek. On your account as much as Cora's. She's a fine girl, you understand. She's my daughter—even if her maw has weaned her away from the trails I savvy and taught her to run with a high-hat crowd. But you'd never have been happy with her. You couldn't see it. I figured, maybe, that you'd live to thank me for it. Never dreamed it would send you up Suicide Trail."

"'Sall right," said Pete. He grinned feebly. "Dog-gone, that was years and years ago!"

JUST wanted to say that the quarter's yours," said the banker hastily. "Pay for it when you like. Take as long as you like. If you need more backing, it's waiting for you. Your credit's good. Well, it sounds like the gal is coming to trundle this baby carriage away. See you later, son."

"Just a second," pleaded Pete, rousing. "Send up Jo, Mr. Hampton. Just for a couple of minutes."

"Ridiculous," scoffed the banker. "And have you swoon plumb away? It isn't in the cards. Get a hold of yourself, cowboy. Just you lay there in royal ease and count your blessings. You'll be lucky if you see her in a week!"

But his wolfish grin, as the nurse wheeled him away, all but linked his shaggy ears; and Pete relaxed, confident and content.

He turned his head to face the window. Despite his utmost efforts, a pleasant lethargy enveloped him. He was not asleep nor yet fully awake; and from that luxurious borderland of dreams the girl did not attempt to call him back. Rather, in spirit, she joined him there.

She closed the door softly and stole to his side. Her hand crept into his. No words were spoken to reaffirm the manner in which fate had linked their destinies together. No words were needed. In silence they looked forth upon the smiling range where life's sunlit trails threading green pastures, beckoned fair and far.

REDWOOD TREES IN WASHINGTON

CALIFORNIA redwood trees are being planted extensively in the parks of Washington, District of Columbia, for the first time this year. Two lusty specimens of this noble tree which stand in Lafayette Park, directly in front of the White House, and have endured the changing seasons of heat and cold, prove conclusively that they are adaptable to the variable climate of the District. There are also two beautiful redwoods in front of the National Education Building on Sixteenth Street.

Doctor J. C. Merriam, president of the Carnegie Institute in Washington, District of Columbia, and also of the "Save-the-Redwoods League," made an exhaustive study of the suitability of these trees before the planting was begun.

Storm Mountain Moonshine

By CARLOS ST. CLAIR

Author of "Rancher's Debt," etc.

SQUATTED in the middle of the kitchen floor at the Squaw Creek Station, in the Colorado National Forest, the ranger, Dave Picard, tall and spare, with lean jaws, sun-and-wind-cured to the color of beef jerky under a grizzling thatch of sandy hair, "wrastled" with a refractory coil with which he was fastening his saddle pack.

When the telephone bell jangled its raucous note, Dave swore under his breath, dropped the rope, and striding across the dusk-filled room, jerked the receiver from the hook.

"Hello, hello! Ranger Picard speaking." Dave's tone was brusque. Another second and he'd have thrown that half-hitch neat. "Who's that? Collins! Oh yes—yes!" The brusqueness was gone now. Dave's voice shook a little, tinged with respect. Collins was the big squeeze in the forest service. He hoped he hadn't sounded sour.

"What's that? . . . Why, no, I haven't, Collins. Joe Crane was in here last week after lion; got his eye on that State bounty, but I ain't seen another soul inside of two months.

"No—no sign, neither. . . . It's a whisky still, you say. . . . Shipping the stuff out? No, Collins, I ain't, not a sign nor a smell." There

was excitement in Dave's voice, now, an edge of anxiety, too. Collins was mighty cocksure and inclined to be the least bit skeptical, so Dave thought, of his repeated assurance that he had seen no sign of strange human beings in this particular neck of the woods.

"Yeah, I will, Collins," he said now. "I'll more'n keep an eye peeled. Let you know at the office there in Little Mesa? Right."

"Can you beat that?" he added heavily to himself, as he hung the receiver back on the hook.

THE black-and-white setter, who had come to stand beside Dave, nudged him twice inquiringly before he looked down.

"Why hello, Lady, old girl." He cuddled the cold nose in his big hand. "How's the new family?"

Lady waved her tail proudly, but her eyes were still anxiously fixed on Dave's furrowed brow.

"That was Collins, Lady," Dave told her. "He's down at Little Mesa. We been expecting a visit from him for a month past, and all the boys in the territory have been shaking in their boots, with the rumor on the wind that Collins was going to slash the pay roll, and give at least one ranger the ax. Been some scared, myself, me being—well, what you mightn't call young any more. A lot of talk these days about young timber and new blood."

Dave's tone was far less casual than his words, and a little involuntary shudder ran over his spare frame. He could hardly imagine himself not being at Squaw Creek. Thirty years hand-running he'd been in these woods. They were a part and fiber of his being. It'd be hard, he thought, to make a place for himself anywhere else.

Lady barked sympathetically.

"Now there's something new," Dave went on. "Collins is in Little Mesa, all right, but he says he's got wind that a moonshining outfit's operating somewhere in this territory. Sharp, he was, with his questioning, like I might be trying to keep something back, or at best wasn't covering my trails like I ought."

He grunted and stooped to his tangled rope, coiling it expertly about a brawny forearm, preparatory to another go at his interrupted task.

"There ain't another man on the San Pedros, Lady, that rides his trails as faithful as me," he complained. "Many's the ranger that's been sitting snug and dry with his heels cocked in front of his fire on a slodgy day, or with the snow flying so thick you couldn't see your hand before you, when I've been hitting trail. Day in, day out, I've followed 'em faithful—down Grizzly Creek to Jack's Spring, across on the Box Canyon trail to Horse Mountain, up Emerald Gulch to Silver Mesa, then home by way of the Forks Creek trail. The next week north on the Storm Mountain circuit. Over and over again. More nights away from the cabin, here, than in it, as you can say, Lady, minding the place alone."

Lady barked sharply, twice, and Dave, having completed an expert half-hitch, rose and patted the silky head. "Never mind my growling, Lady. I'm touchy as a nag with a saddle sore, worrying about this job of mine. After all, I reckon I just imagined Collins sounded threatening, just now. Like as not these fellows will show on some other range, and the old fellow'll give me a raise by way of apology."

He heaved the heavy pack to his

shoulder and started for the door. This was the week for the Storm Mountain route which meant four nights afield, and he was getting everything set for an early start in the morning. He was more than eager to fork the trail, now, and prove that Collins was wrong. There wasn't a Chinaman's chance that an outfit the size Collins had mentioned could be operating up here under his very nose.

HE was only halfway across the room when a staccato knock sounded on the door panels. Lady growled and laid back her ears.

"Take it easy, girl," Dave warned. "That'll be Joe Crane, I reckon, back from his lion hunt. He won't be hurting them fine babies of yours."

But is wasn't Joe Crane, grizzled old hunter, who stood on the neat gray-painted stoop as Dave flung the door wide. The squat, heavy-set man, braced on overshort stanchionlike legs, who loomed out of the dusk, was a stranger to Dave. Somehow, at first glance, Dave scented trouble. Perhaps it was the man's incongruous appearance—heavy laced boots and brown corduroys, topped by, of all things, a black, low-crowned derby. Or perhaps it was that smug, self-sufficient, heavy-jowled face with its small glinting eyes that recalled to Dave's mind a most unpleasant and nearly tragic encounter with a mountain lion, some years before.

"Howdy, Picard," said the stranger affably.

"You've got the advantage of me," Dave rejoined in a curt tone.

"Well, that's easy mended," beamed the fat man. "Name's Baronet—Pete Baronet. Got a little business to talk over." He glanced significantly over his shoulder at the open door.

Dave ignored the man's glance, wondering as he did so at his own lack of hospitality. Human contacts were rare enough here at the remote Squaw Creek Station, and as a rule he was friendly to all comers. But somehow he didn't like this rotund stranger. "All right," he said, "if you've got business, shoot."

The fat man shrugged. "Collins call you yet from Little Mesa?" he asked.

"Why, yes," said Dave, before he thought. Then he swore. "What the dickens do you mean?"

"Oh, that's all right," the stranger assured him. "The fellows up at camp will know just what the old ferret had to say to you. We got your wire tapped. We figured Collins would be calling you this afternoon."

"Got my wire tapped?" Dave bellowed, and clenched angry fists. "Who in the——"

The fat man interrupted, unabashed. "Just a little matter of business," he said in oily tones. "You'll understand when I explain."

"Then you'd better talk fast," whipped Dave, with the thrust of steel in his voice.

The stranger smiled his bland smile. "It's like this. There's a few of us fellows got a little whisky plant up here back of Storm Mountain. We been doin' a nice business, but now this here Collins has got to butt in. If he hadn't come down here and prodded you up, we could have pulled the wool over your eyes for three months longer, like as not, and by then we'd been in the velvet. But now he's sittin' in, and we gotta have help."

Dave was fairly gasping with amazement and anger at the effrontery of this suave stranger. "Reckon

you ain't comin' to me for help," he snapped. Then curiosity, or pique perhaps, got the best of him. "How by all the hinges of Halifax did you hole up in here without me knowing it?"

"Easy," beamed the rotund Pete. "You see we checked up on you 'fore we ever headed into this territory. Seen you was a methodical man. It's easy to fool a methodical man. Rain or shine, winter, spring or fall, you could be counted on to do the same thing.

ALMOST to the minute, a feller might place you at some particular spot, if he was in the know. One week you makes the southern circle. Next week the north, by way of Storm Mountain. That's soft for us. The week you're up north, we lay low. Next week things is hummin'."

"But your sign?" spluttered Dave. "I ain't seen any sign. I always been considered a good man on the trail." His voice came up a little on that last sentence, but it was husky, too, with the sudden nameless fear that gripped him.

Pete chuckled. "You seen traces of cattle up near Storm Mountain, ain't you?"

"Why, yes," said Dave. "I did see a herd up there. But that isn't noways unusual."

"Well, them cattle are what you might call onusual, Dave. One of our fellows used to be a cow nurse down Texas way. Takes to it plumb handy. He rounded himself up a bunch of critters, and the way he's hazed 'em back and forth over our wagon tracks has been right clever. Then, like I say, when you was ridin' that way, we laid low, and you wasn't suspectin' nothing, nohow.

"But now us fellows are in a jam, with Collins nosin' in and puttin' you on the lookout. We'd be out of here on the jump, but it'll take us a couple of weeks or more to move the goods we got stored up there—near a hundred barrels of bonded stuff." He winked prodigiously. "So we're in a hole, you see.

"And you'll be in a hole, too, Dave," he added suavely, "if Collins ever finds out how we've had the blinders on you for six months. Be hard to explain anything to that baby, I'm thinking, and there's talk, too, we hear, of some ranger gettin' the skids under him. For the time bein', though, Collins is all set to take your word on the situation up here." The fat man smiled. "Now maybe you know the answer."

Dave's big weather-hardened fist had bunched once more. "No," he said in a cold voice. "No, I don't."

"It's simple," urged the other softly. "You don't even have to lie. One week you ride south, the next north. Whose business is it if you choose to head south again tomorrow instead of north toward Storm Mountain, and mebbe the same again next week?"

"Whose business is it?" shouted Dave. "Why, it's my business." He took a savage stride forward. "You——"

The fat man didn't flinch as he raised a soft admonishing palm. "Yes," he purred, "you're right. It is your business, and it'll be worth just exactly a thousand dollars to you. That'd be a neat nest egg against a rainy day. And if you should lose out up here, we might have something for you somewheres else."

In spite of himself Dave's angry stride had checked midway. His raised fist fell limply to his side. He heard his own voice saying huskily: "A thousand dollars."

"Yeah," said the stranger placidly, "just for ridin' south instead of north."

And now Dave could see it all, the whole foul scheme. And it would be easy, like the fellow said. Not even a lie. Just forget that northern network of trails for a couple of weeks, then the moonshiners would be gone—a thousand dollars! Like enough he'd lose his job up here anyhow and, added to what he'd saved, that thousand would mean a little place of his own in the woods he loved. A man'd be a fool to turn it down, with only a kick in the pants for his pains if he did.

THEN suddenly Dave jumped. What was he thinking of anyhow—selling out, for a filthy thousand dollars? Treason, that's what it was—and him bragging only this morning how he'd never fallen down on his job in thirty long years. He'd told Collins that he'd keep an eye out, let him know. He'd never been a man to welsh an order or to go back on his word, and he wouldn't begin now.

"Look here, you," he said between gritted teeth, and began a slow but inexorable advance upon his unwelcome visitor, "get that rotten carcass of yours outa here, and move fast."

The fat man sighed, grunted, and started a rolling retreat across the yard. "You got until morning to decide," he called back over a bulky shoulder. "We'd ruther have you up here, riding around, same as usual and makin' your report to Collins that everythin's O. K. It's worth a thousand smackers to us, like I'm tellin' you. But should you decide not to set in with us, we got other ways and means."

"That's a threat, eh?" hissed Dave, his fingers itching for the feel of the fellow's thick throat.

The other shook his head sagely. "When the cards are runnin' against you, it don't pay to force your luck. It's best to sit pat." He climbed aboard a gray nag, which Dave had not noticed in the encroaching dusk, and it moved out groaningly beneath his great bulk.

For a long time Dave stood motionless, staring after him with glowering face and clenched fists. So that was it? If he wouldn't play with those cutthroats, he wouldn't play against them, either. They'd see to that. But the threat had exactly the opposite effect upon him from what the fat man had planned. It made him see red, turned him savage, berserk. He'd see them fry before he'd whistle their tune. They'd got the drop on him once, but they wouldn't a second time.

He went into the house, rang the bell on the telephone, took the receiver off the hook. He heard a strange clicking and whispered voices. So the fat fellow hadn't been bluffing; they'd cut his line. Oh, well, Dave thought, I'll give them the slip to-morrow. It won't be hard.

The next morning he was up long before daybreak, cooking his breakfast, tidying the house, and seeing that the shed was snug for Lady and her proud litter of puppies. There was just the off chance that things mightn't go as he planned, that it would be a long time before he'd be back.

The setter seemed to feel it, too. When the horses stood ready in front of the door, with Dave beside them, she whined with her nose against his hand. "That's all right, Lady," he assured her. "Them fellers ain't going to fool old Dave."

He picked up the lead reins on

the pack horse and swung aboard his black nag. As he headed down Grizzly Creek, he whistled a cheerful tune. Inwardly, he writhed with the thought that the moonshiners would think their plan had succeeded, that he had succumbed to the temptation of the thousand dollars, or perhaps their death threat.

But if Dave had thought to fool so easily the slick crew against whom he had pitted his wits, he soon found himself mistaken. They evidently put little trust in his apparent acceptance of their suggestion that he ride south instead of north. All that day, as he headed southward, Dave knew that he was followed. Not the sign of a man did he see, not the rustle of a branch, not the snap of a twig did he hear. But some sixth woodsman's sense told him of the inexorable footsteps which followed in his wake.

STILL Dave was not troubled. He had half expected to be followed. But it would be easy enough, he figured, to evade the man that hung on his heels. The fellow might leave of his own accord, having seen Dave well along the trail. If not, Dave planned to give him the slip about the middle of the second day, when the trail would swing along the heavily timbered slope of Horse Mountain. From there, cutting down through the timber, it would be no more than twelve miles to the KT Ranch where he could get word through to Collins at Little Mesa.

He camped that night at Jack's Spring. The next morning he did a little swaggering along the trail. It might serve, he thought, as a blind to that menacing presence at his back, might relax the vigilance with which the very air seemed vibrant. But as he took up his trek along the Box Canyon trail, he could still feel the presence of the man who followed.

He began to doubt if he would be able to give this fellow the slip, after all. Back there at the cabin he had been confident. It had looked easy. Now he realized that these men with whom he dealt were no duffers. They had a lot at stake and were prepared to guard it. Perhaps, he told himself, it would be better to go back to the cabin. Another week, even if they followed him, their confidence would have grown, vigilance would be relaxed. Or, in the meantime, some other chance might present itself.

"Might" and "if," Dave snorted the words aloud. They had never found much place in his vocabulary. Here was a job to be done. It was up to him to see it through.

It was growing dusk when Dave reached the slopes of Horse Mountain, densely covered with a growth of virgin pine, clogged with brush and down timber. It would be hard going to the KT, but it was the only route available, and he ought to make it by daybreak.

"Easy now, Cap," he whispered to the black he forked and, reining the animal to a halt, he urged the puzzled pack horse from the rear to the front of the little procession, giving him a smart blow on the hindquarters as he passed. At the same instant he pulled the black suddenly off the trail into the dense growth of the down slope.

The black's feet crackled noisily in the brittle undergrowth and Dave, looking anxiously back over his shoulder, wondered if the dimly bobbing white of his pack on the cantering animal up trail would serve to distract the attention of the man behind him from the black's noisy progress through the brush.

But presently he could hear the sound of hoofbeats on the trail, proceeding leisurely, and Dave chuckled. "Worked," he muttered with jubilant relief.

At that moment, a voice in front of him made him jump and jerk his head to a right about. "Double-crossed us, eh?" the voice rasped. "Well, up with your flippers, and make it prompt."

Not a dozen feet away, where he had circled Dave from the rear, a wizened, ratlike face appeared between the ears of a hammerhead gray, and Dave could see the muzzle of a revolver lined on him. He raised his hands, grateful for even this short reprieve. A bullet was the warning he might have expected. This barked challenge, the command to raise his hands, might mean another chance.

BUT now, with a gasp of surprise and dismay, Dave saw why the fellow held his fire. A second rider had left the trail and was foraging clumsily through the dense growth.

"I got him, Arch," the man who lined Dave shouted. "Pete sure had the jigger overrated. I could have took him in alone with one hand tied behind me. Looks like the boss got cold feet all of a sudden. Dog-gone, but I'd sure admire to ventilate the skunk—fixin' to give us the double cross."

The second rider, a big man who sat his horse clumsily, had drawn up now on Dave's right. "Why don't you?" he growled. "I'd like to see the feller eat lead my ownself. I'm sore as a bile, sleepin' on that hard ground last night. You could tell Pete the big cheese put up a scrap and you had to salivate him."

The man with the gun shook his head. "Pete figures to use him, before he pops him off. Wants the jigger should report to Collins, end of the week, that everythin's quiet up here."

He chuckled a little at the sight of Dave's dour face, or perhaps at the thought of how Pete would put the screws on this lean, dry, slab-sided woodsman to get the wanted report out of him.

For the first time, now, Dave realized the extent of his predicament, the intricacy of the web in which he was entangled. But he wouldn't give up so easy. They thought the game was up, did they? All over but the shouting? Well, he'd show them he was no cowardly, cringing, yellow-livered creature of their own kind to be stood up and shot. He'd show them that the game wasn't up, that it had only begun.

Dave had never killed a man, never so much as drawn a bead on a man in all his thirty years in the woods, but there were few who boasted notches on their gun butts who could go for their hardware any quicker than Dave. He went for it now, and it came up roaring, the orange bar lancing from its muzzle meeting and melting into the flame from the moonshiner's gun.

Dave felt a searing bullet along his ribs, but it scarcely rocked him in the saddle. Then the third gun, coughing a molten stream from the right, took Dave's already plunging black across the rump.

Instantly Dave was atop a rocket, and his lips twisted in a grim smile as he bent low in the saddle. Nothing, he knew, short of sudden death, could stop the black horse, crazed by the roar of exploding guns and stung to madness by that hot furrow across his rump.

As the animal leaped past the two yelling men, a fusillade of shots streaked the dusk, but Dave,

crouched along the black's quivering neck, sent a mocking laugh with his last shot over his shoulder. He could hear the men following, but all he could do now was to cling to the madly charging brute beneath him, leaping the fallen timber, barging through clustering brush, whipping past the cruel reaching branches of the pine trees, dodging among the crowding trunks.

Twice the black went to his knees as he ran, with only Dave's strong grip on the bridle reins to save him from complete catastrophe. Once he crashed headlong into a rearing pine, before Dave's quick hand could turn him. Dave thought then they were done, but the black recoiled, shook his head, and dashed on, though Dave's nostrils caught the scent of fresh blood in the foam which lashed back at him from the wire-spread nostrils.

IT wasn't long before the gunfire from the rear ceased, and even the scared shouts and curses of his pursuers fell into the distance as their mounts floundered helplessly over the all but impassable course. It was almost dark among the trees, and now Dave fought to quiet the black, to pull him to a slower pace. Only too well did Dave recognize the hand of Providence in the fact that they had come this far without one or both of them crashing to a hideous end. It was minutes, however, before he could force the animal to a stand, lathered, trembling, drenched with sweat.

Dave listened but there was no sound from the rear. They'd given up the chase, he thought. They'd be back-tracking now, as fast as their nags would carry them, to warn the rest of their gang at Storm Mountain. Time was the great factor now, Dave realized. He must get to the KT, get word to Collins before those two could spread the alarm and the whole outfit make their escape. They would have to leave their contraband goods behind them, at any rate, but that wasn't enough. Dave didn't want them to get away. He'd felt the iron jaws of their trap in his flesh and he was as vengefully unforgiving as a mountain lion. He wanted to see every man jack of that outfit brought to justice.

But now when Dave would have urged the black forward once more, he saw that the poor brute had gone pitifully lame. He got down and stooped to examine the quivering legs. Cap shrilled with pain.

"Why, Cap, old fellow," said Dan huskily. "You done for yourself, after all." It racked Dave's soul that he should have put the dumb brute to such torture. Then, when he thought of that long trek to the KT, he groaned again. Once out of this heavy going, he'd need a horse bad. Time was everything now, time and speed. But there was no use. Cap was done. Dave removed saddle and bridle and hung them on a tree. "So long, Cap, old boy. I'll be back," he promised.

Afoot he began to feel the effects of the bullet crease in his own side. At each deadfall of timber, each stubborn tangle of brush through which he fought his way, the pain grew worse and worse. But with hard-pressed lips and dogged stride he plunged on through the darkness. Time meant everything now. He tried to figure it out, as he forged on. With hard riding it would take those two men back there on the trail no more than ten hours to reach the Squaw Creek Station. From there, they could call the gang at Storm Mountain on

that tapped line. Then the whole kit of them would be out on the jump. But if he could reach the KT by daylight, get word to Collins at Little Mesa, there'd still be time for Collins to get the sheriff and head them off.

But Dave's pace was slow, heartbreakingly slow. More than once he plunged headlong over trailing roots, lost his footing to slide down some unseen declivity, or barged blindly into obstructions which seemed to rise with vicious witchery in a path that had been clear but the moment before.

It was past midnight, Dave thought, when he sighted the clearer going ahead. It would be second-growth stuff from here on, the trees wider spaced, the forest floor clear and grassy. He made better time, now, though his feet dragged with weariness, and the pain in his ribs seemed like all the agony in the world wrapped in one package.

"Maybe it's true," Dave muttered to himself, more than once. "Maybe it's true what the fellows have been whispering. I'm getting old—too old for the job."

IT was two o'clock when he stopped to drink from a stream which sung a merry note across his path. He was feverish and the water was grateful to his parched throat, but he was shocked at his own weakness when he tried to get up. Yet he had to make the KT by daylight, had to get word to Collins.

Each step now was a sort of special agony, but Dave kept driving on. He would have given anything for a minute's rest, another drink, but when he came to the rocky bank of a dashing stream, he wouldn't stop. He didn't dare to stop. "Right, left, right, left!" If he kept on going, he could make it. He got his watch out of his pocket, struck a match—walking, all the time walking—but he couldn't see the hands, blurring and bobbing before his eyes.

It wasn't long after that, however, when the first faint rose of dawn touched the eastern sky, and Dave groaned. "Why, I ain't going to make it," he said aloud. "That was Grizzly Creek I passed back yonder, and it's a good six mile from there to the KT. Twelve miles between dark and daylight—I had only twelve miles to go—and I couldn't make it. The fellows were right, I reckon. I'm getting old. And they've won, after all, that Storm Mountain gang."

After that the soft breeze out of the south whipped Dave's leathery cheek. He kept on walking. There wasn't a chance now that he could get word to Collins in time, but somehow he couldn't stop. "Right, left, right, left!"

So he'd failed, eh? Failed! How Collins would sneer! He'd lose his job, sure enough; wouldn't need to wonder about that any more. But it was worse, letting those skunks up at Storm Mountain pull the wool over his eyes and get away with it, after all.

"Right, left, right, left, one foot in front of the other! That was old man Puckett's cabin down yonder—old Puckett dead and gone these many years; Puckett's cabin, five miles from the KT, and daylight now, broad daylight."

Then Dave stopped. For the first time in hours he stood stock-still. A shout welled in his throat, a shout that was only a whimper on his pain-twisted lips. Then he broke into a crazy staggering run. There were horses there before old Puckett's cabin, four of them, sad-

dled. That meant men. No matter who they were they'd be glad enough to help when he told them about the gang up at Storm Mountain. One of them could ride to the KT, get word to Collins. He'd muster the rest of them and lead them to head off the moonshiners.

He tried to shout again and couldn't, but he kept going, running on a zigzag line toward the shack. He was perhaps a dozen yards from the cabin when a man's form darkened the open door. "Help!" Dave mouthed soundlessly. "Help!" And then he froze.

The short squat man in the doorway, braced on overshort stanchionlike legs, was dressed in a brown corduroy suit and high laced boots and on his head, of all things, was a black, low-crowned derby.

When he saw Dave, the fat man yelled and started to run across the yard toward one of the saddled nags. "They've got us, fellows," he shouted back over his shoulder. "Every man for himself now."

DAVE hated to do it. He'd never killed a man in all his life, never drawn a bead on a fellow human until up there in the woods last night. Nevertheless he drew his gun and fired, all in one piece. The bullet plunked sickeningly in a fat middle, and the man with the black derby squealed, dropped, and rolled over.

Dave saw him fall but, even as he saw, he fired again. This time at the cabin doorway. The muzzle of the gun, held by the man who had replaced the rotund Pete in the doorway, belched flame, its trigger already pressed, but the bullet flung upward harmlessly and the man sort of sat down as if he were suddenly very tired.

One of the cabin windows spat red fire. Another shot lanced from the rear of the building. Dave went to his knees, groaning, but he raised his gun again, fired once, twice. Then the hammer slammed on an empty chamber.

The man in the window saw what had happened and yelled like a dervish. "He's done. Get to the horses, while I finish him off."

"Done?" gritted Dave. "Done, am I?" Not ten yards distant a frightened horse lunged at the lines which held him fast to a bole of an aspen, and Dave had seen the butt of a rifle protruding from the saddle scabbard. He rose now, suddenly, missing by a fraction the bullet that should have spelled the end. He staggered a few steps and fell. But he was up again, fighting for breath, for very consciousness. Another step! Another! Another! Bullets flailed the ground all about him. One was a piercing agony in his hand. A man came running from the back of the cabin.

Dave had the rifle now and, grasping it, fired over the animal's back at the running figure. The man screamed and dived headlong. A bullet from the house plunged with a sickening grunt into the breast of the animal behind which Dave crouched and the big brute went to its knees, wrenching free, now when it was too late, from the reins which had held it fast.

Scrambling to clear himself from the animal's thrashing hoofs, Dave, too, went down. He tried to raise the rifle again toward the window, still belching red flame, but his fingers fell limply from the butt, the blue sky above him billowed and swirled, then burst into a million fragments as blackness enveloped him.

When Dave opened his eyes again, the sky had magically reconstructed

itself, but the bay horse lay just as Dave had seen him last, toppled on his side, legs stiff and stark before him. Looking along the ground, Dave could see the fat man with the black derby still on his head, lying on his back, and farther away another man sprawled headlong.

But now a hand grasped Dave's shoulder, and a bearded face bent over him. It was Collins—Collins himself—the big squeeze.

"Take it easy, old fellow," a kindly voice said. "Dog-gone, but I'm glad to see you waking up."

"I was fixing to let you know," said Dave groggily. "I figured you could head them off, but I couldn't make it. I——"

"Take it easy, Dave," Collins soothed. "From the look of things, I guess it didn't make much difference whether I was on the job or not. When we got here the party was over."

"Over? What happened?" Dave whispered.

"One of the boys has gone for the doc," Collins said. "Don't try to talk until he gets here. I'll tell you the how of things while we wait.

SEEMS like early this morning, this Joe Crane you were telling me about was coming down out of the woods with a lion cub he bagged. He hears a holy ruckus going on at your place and stopped to investigate. Found two strangers cornered in your sitting room by a black-and-white setter dog. Joe was suspicious and gave them the third degree. They were already scared to death—been there over an hour with that dog at their throats—and they spilled the works. Joe tied them up then, took one of your horses and burned trail for town. Seems the two men at Squaw Creek had already warned their gang before the dog attacked. We didn't get word from Joe until mid-afternoon and we were pretty sick, figuring them fellows had given us the slip. We were worried about you, too, not showing up. Those two scoundrels up yonder figured you'd gone for help.

"Well, we were busting along toward Storm Mountain, but sure all the time they'd get away clean, when we rode in here. We couldn't believe our eyes at first, but when we saw you lying here, we all understood. It's the sort of thing we'd expect of you, Dave, though you'd no call to risk your life."

"But you don't understand, Collins," Dave protested. "I wasn't figuring to cut these fellows off. I was headed for the KT. I wanted to let you know. Any good ranger ought to make his twelve hours between dark and daylight, even in rough going like that there. But I was slow, somehow. I couldn't make it. I just stumbled in here and that was all."

"Yes," said Collins, "that was all. Two of 'em dead, Dave, two wounded bad, and I reckon we got you to thank for that pair at Squaw Creek, too."

Dave shook his head, but now he smiled. "That'd be Lady," he said. "Good old Lady!" He was tired, very tired. If he only knew, if he only dared to ask Collins that one question which burned in his brain, then he could go to sleep.

He mustered all his courage. "There was a rumor," he began, stuttering a little. "That is, some of us fellows—you understand——"

But Collins cut in huskily. "You don't never want to believe in rumors, Dave. There isn't once in a hundred times that they'll be right."

MIGHTY LOBO

A Serial

By GEORGE OWEN BAXTER

NED WINDHAM, a man of great stature and extraordinary physical powers, can boast the added distinction of being exceptionally ugly. Doubtless, the matter of looks had probably never got within hailing distance of his brains. At any rate, at the age of nineteen, he is apparently interested only in securing a small farm ranch suitable for his needs. He finds such a piece of land in northern California, in the foothills of the Sierras.

At the end of five years he has built himself a two-room cabin, a corral, stocked the ranch with sheep and cattle, even constructed a dam, with an eye for the inevitable dry summers. He calls his place Wind Valley. He is successful, content.

Now, if this were a fairy tale, we should go on to say: "Then one night Fate appeared in the guise of a terrible monster, a wolf, that could assume the shape of a dog." For thus it happened. The beast stole in while Windham slept and killed a great bull in his corral. And after that night and day, Windham dreamed only of taming the wolf. He does succeed in capturing it, but he does not tame it. The lobo hates him. He might have conquered it in time, but before that happens a stranger appears and, in the dead watches of the night, disappears.

When morning comes, the wolf, too, is gone.

That stranger is Steve Murray, a half-breed who has made his money in Alaska, and is returning to make more—a man of evil name. Once in Alaska, far on his way to the interior, he fancies he is safe. No man, he thinks, securely tied down to a pastoral life, would venture those thousands of miles merely on a chance. And for what? A wolf, Chinook by name—no, not even a wolf! It is part dog, a mongrel.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ENCOUNTER.

THIS was in the days of Alaskan "luxury"; that is to say, the important trails had been marked out, staked, and to some extent worn in. After many packings, even when a considerable snow fell, a good leader could poke his head deep down in the snow and find the scent of the teams which had traveled that way before. There were not many leaders who possessed that faculty, of course. One who did was worth his weight in silver, at least.

In the lobo, Chinook, Murray found that he had come into the possession of a wolf dog that could do the thing. He was amazed by it. Ordinarily, it was a trait possessed only by dogs bred and raised in the cold North, that come to learn its ways, beginning with their puppy days. But Chinook had passed a considerable part of his apprenticeship among the snows of the Sierras, where the wind is as strong and the thermometer often falls almost as low as it does in the arctic.

Nature had gifted him with an ideal coat to withstand the Northern climate, except that the under fur was in a nascent state, but as soon as he stepped out on the freezing trail, he began to grow that important undergarment which lies like wool or softest feathers next to the skin.

He had his strength, of course, and his tricky wisdom. Above all, from the viewpoint of Murray, he had instinct—and a nose! He first showed that instinct one time, when they were going down the bed of a stream and Murray was urging the dogs confidently along. It was almost dark. The ice seemed perfectly strong; there was a thin incrustation of snow upon it that made the runners slide easily and smoothly, without gripping too much.

SUDDENLY, as they whooped along, without any direction from his master, Chinook began to swerve out from his course. Murray shouted, but he shouted in vain. Chinook continued to turn until he actually came straight back to the sled, and there he paused. When Murray ran shouting, club in hand, to administer reason and justice to the brute, he saw before the team, not far away, a dull dark shadow upon the ice. He stopped with a gasp. He knew very well that it was ice and that Chinook had smelled the water from afar!

It is an instinct that one leader in a thousand possesses, and it is as valuable, fully, as the instinct which enables a dog to smell the trail that lies deep beneath the snow. For when a team dashes into water, at a low temperature, there is nothing for the driver to do but to camp at once, build as large a fire as possible, and then work frantically to remove from between the toes of the dogs the pellets of ice which had formed there. Foot by foot, over

every dog of the pack he must go. Otherwise, there will be a frozen foot, and the next morning the crack of the rifle will announce the death of another Husky.

From that moment, Murray began to develop an almost blind trust in his new leader. So had the rest of the team. They had no use for the grim, silent monster, when he was out of harness. They kept carefully away from him and, if one of them blundered near, one flash of his white smile was enough to send the biggest of the Huskies scampering. When he was in harness and at their head, however, they seemed to know that he understood his work, and they followed him faithfully, with tails up and pricking ears, just as men will gladly follow a leader whom they dislike but whose brains they respect.

The trails in Alaska, since the early days, had been made comfortable, not only by staking them out, but also by the construction of way stations where a man could put up and, for a rather stiff price, get food for his dogs and himself and a blissfully warm shelter for the night. Such halts did the driver and the team much good; they put heart into man and beast.

At one of these stations Murray put up on his march toward the Yukon. He arrived rather early, ate supper with the rest, listened to the admiration bestowed upon Chinook, and then retired to his room. In this place the rooms were a special luxury. Usually such a station consisted of a single big apartment, with bunks built in around it. But here, besides the central room, there were other little cubby-holes, constructed of light logs. Into one of these, Murray went, for he wanted to write some letters to send back by the stage.

With him he took Chinook. Usually he kept the monster well muzzled, but on this night he dispensed with this precaution. After chaining him securely to a leg of the built-in-bunk, he sat down to his writing, spelling out the words painfully, the pen uncertain in his swollen hands. He had kept at it for some time, when Chinook became restless.

HE rose to his feet and slid out to the length of his chain. When Murray looked down, he saw the big fellow bristling, the hair along his back erect. In a moment the head of Chinook swung about and he gave Murray such a look as he never before had received from man or beast. The eyes of the lobo were aglow with a yellow flame, and they seemed to be saying: "Why are we anchored here? Don't you see that I have to go on?"

"You have to go where?" muttered Murray, actually out loud, as though he had heard the question.

For an answer, Chinook fell back a stride and then took up the slack of the chain with such a lurch that the leg of the bunk snapped off; Murray himself rolled upon the floor and, getting up with a curse, wiping the dripping ink from his hands, he saw that Chinook had attacked the door of the room with his teeth! He was afraid that the big fellow had gone mad, a common thing for Alaskan dogs to do.

"Chinook, you fool!" he said. "Are you going to eat wood? Didn't you get fish enough to fill your belly?"

Chinook, in the meantime, had sunk his fangs well into a projecting rim of wood and, jerking back upon it, he ripped out a whole panel from the door. The noise caused an outbreak of astonished voices in the big room, where still some of the mush-

ers were sitting about the stove, completing the thaw before they turned in.

In a far corner of the room, one big fellow, with shoulders a yard broad, looked up from the plate of beans that he was eating. He had come late. There was nothing left except the stewed beans, the dregs of the coffeepot and the heel of a loaf of bread. But he did not complain. His capacity was ten times as much provender as this, but he merely nodded and took his pittance.

The others had looked at him, when he first came in, because of his bulk, but they had quickly stopped their examination. For there was a grim and settled fierceness in the face of the stranger that did not invite questions. About his forehead, creased with three knife-cut wrinkles in the center, there was a look of brutal and animal wisdom, like the forehead of a lion. Words seemed to come uneasily to his lips, and presently no one looked toward him except with furtive glances.

Now, as he heard this rending of the wood, he raised his head, slowly, and stared at the shattered door across the room.

"What the devil is that?" asked the owner of the place. "Hey, you in there, are you drunk? You'll be paying me for a new door, you young idiot. Leave off that smashin', will you?"

"It ain't me. It's the dog. He's runnin' amuck!" Murray shouted back.

The big man in the corner softly laid his coffee cup and polished plate upon the floor. He placed the last of the heel of the bread in his mouth. He dusted his knees and rose to his feet. From the deep pocket of his coat he took a short truncheon, with a rubber padded knob at one end of it.

NOW his eyes burned! The shadows about them only made their fire more apparent, as when candles burn in the pitch dark of the night.

"Down, Chinook!" shouted Murray, inside the room. "Steady, there! Here, damn you! Chinook! Leave go of that door, you fool!" He broke into gasping, furious imprecations.

Suddenly the door was ripped again, this side and that, and through the gap which was made leaped Chinook. The hole was not large enough to let him through, but the weight of his burly shoulders smashed in a way. He came with a lurch into the room, Murray, yelling, and on his knees, crawled through the aperture behind the wolf.

He was yelling: "Don't shoot him, boys. He's just got a streak on him. He's a five-thousand-dollar dog. Don't shoot, or you'll have me to shoot afterward!"

There was a rush for the wall and the far corners of the room in the meantime. Those who were already in their bunks had been awakened by the clamor, and they sat up, wadding their blankets together, as a shield in case the dog should rush for one of them. Every man present reached for a weapon!

Only the big man, the newcomer, stood passively waiting, with his eyes fixed upon the dog.

Chinook, in the meantime, had frozen in his tracks. After jumping through the shattered door, he stood there just for an instant, glaring across the room at the stranger. In that moment, Murray looked up and saw across from him the last thing in the world which he had expected to see—the giant figure of Windham!

He could not believe it. His brain spun. He looked back, in a flash of

the mind, over the thousands of miles which he had covered and told himself that his trail could not possibly have been found so soon, or that any human could have tracked him so quickly as to overtake him upon his way to the Yukon. But there was the fact before his eyes—six feet and four inches of fact, and two hundred and fifty pounds of proof!

All thinking ended for Murray. In the place of his mind, he began to use his hands, and from under his coat he snatched out a long-barreled six-gun, his old and familiar friend, every corrugation of whose handles was a kindly blessing to his fingers.

Yet Windham was not looking toward the thief. He had eyes for the dog alone!

Afterward, so the men swore, as Windham stared at Chinook a smile came upon the face of the man, a sort of desperate smile, as when a brave man faces great odds. For a moment, the jaws of Chinook himself parted, his tongue lolled out, and he gave to Widnham the red and silent laugh of a wolf.

Then he lunged across the floor straight at his first master.

CHAPTER IX.

ONE AGAINST MANY.

NOT a breath or a word came from the others who watched that scene. There was only the scratching of the nails of the brute upon the floor, with neither growl nor snarl. He was that same, silent fiend which Windham had known before. He seemed to have forgotten all about the formidable qualities of this man. All that he remembered, in a flood of ecstatic hatred, was the scent and the form of that detested creature—man as man first had come into his life, with rope, starvation and club!

Chinook sprang. Windham did not side step, but the short, rubber-padded club smote like a thunderbolt between the eyes of the wolf and Chinook dropped to the floor, a sodden heap of unstrung nerves and loosened muscles.

Then Windham took from his pocket a long, rather light, but very strong chain, made of the finest steel forged by himself, in his own shop far off there in California. He snapped the chain into the steel rung of Chinook's collar, and then he stood by to wait for the dog's return to consciousness.

A loud, half-crying, nasal voice across the room broke in on him:

"You sneakin' thief, leave go of my dog, or I'll drill you!" Windham looked over at Murray, saw the gun leveled upon him, but merely smiled at the smaller man.

He had scarcely taken a step from the chair in which he had been sitting. Now he sat down in it again, picked up his coffee cup from the floor, and drained the last of it.

"Get hold of yourself, Murray," he said. "You're not going to do murder with so many witnesses looking on."

And he settled back comfortably into his chair. Perhaps he was foolish in doing so. Murder had been committed before crowds larger than this in Alaska, and little done about it. For there were few settled communities, and rarely have any but settled communities the sense of law. These men would all be scattered on the next day. Every one of them was accustomed to looking upon acts of the rawest violence in that wild Northern land. Only from the keeper of the place, a report might be sent back by the stage, and a marshal might journey out after

days or weeks, to look into the matter and make a probably futile search for the slayer.

Murray knew these things, if the big man did not. But now Murray held his hand, for the moment, at least. For he heard the keeper of the place saying, grimly, to Windham: "You aim to hang onto Murray's dog, stranger, without payin' him his price?"

"I've paid the only price that ever was paid for that dog or wolf, or devil. My name is Windham. I come from Wind Valley, up in northern California. I caught that lobo off the back of my own horse, on my own land, with my own rope. I tried to starve him tame in my own house. I fought it out with him and beat him with this club."

He took it from his pocket again, and showed it to them, a strange instrument.

HE went on, slowly: "I made this chain, here, with my own iron, on my own forge. I made the collar he has on. I've got the marks of his teeth all over me. That fellow, Murray, I took in for the night. He stole Chinook before morning. I've traced the two of them this far. And now I've got the dog!"

This speech, being delivered without the slightest emphasis, carried a good deal of conviction. And when Windham touched, upon his cheek, a long red scar that showed through even his dark beard, men nodded with agreement.

Murray saw that he was crowded against the wall.

"He lies," said he. "He had that dog. He was broke. He can't do nothing with the brute. I stop by and see it. I offer him a hundred bucks for Chinook, and he jumps at the price. He's never heard of a dog costing that much before! He takes the money and counts it three times. Why, partners, what would I be doing stealing a dog in northern California to take all the way up here to Alaska? I ask you that!"

There seemed to be equal logic upon the side of Murray.

The keeper of the place, a pale-eyed and pale-haired Nordic, looked from one man to the other. He liked Murray the better of the two. For no man could take easily to Windham's bulk of body and brow of iron.

"You mean to say, Windham," asked the keeper, "that you came all this way just for the sake of getting your dog back?"

"That's what I mean to say," answered Windham.

The keeper smiled and shrugged his shoulders, then he turned a little, and by his gesture he invited all of the others to contemplate the absurdity of this statement. They, in turn, nodded sharply. The case was growing dark for Windham.

Murray was quick to take advantage of this attitude. "You see how it is, fellows," he interposed. "This fellow gets the gold fever in his blood. He comes up here. He happens along to this place. The dog gets the smell of him and tears his way out to get at him. Would any man want a dog that tries to do murder every time it sees its boss? No, and that's why Windham sold me the wolf. But when he gets up here and he sees the dog, he decides that he'll take him back again. He knows that there ain't much law around here and he's a good deal bigger man than I am!"

He put out both his hands. He seemed to be appealing for justice. At the same time, his sense of an advantage gained made his voice smooth and easy. Windham

watched him closely and carefully. His blood was rising fast, and what he saw began to be tinged with red. He was holding himself hard, as he answered:

"You lie pretty well, Murray. But you don't lie well enough to get back this dog. Fellows," he added, to the crowd, "if I didn't come up here for the dog, why did I bring along this club, that I made specially for keeping him down, without cracking his skull?"

And he showed the strange weapon. Then, he pointed to the chain.

"I MADE that chain myself. Look at it, and you'll see that it's homemade. If you've got a forge handy, I'll show you how I work and you'll recognize it. Why did I make that chain so strong, except for such a wolf dog as Chinook?"

Several heads were shaken at this.

"It looks like a toss-up," said one man to the keeper of the place. "You better keep out of it, Mike. Let it slide."

"I ain't going to let it slide," said Mike. "I've made up my mind. No big ham is goin' to bully a smaller man inside of my place!"

"That's right," joined in several of the others. "We ought to have justice around here! There's been enough bullies around this trail already!"

Chinook, at this point, got slowly, sullenly to his feet. He looked at his old master and his upper lip curled and showed the white fangs. The old, undying hatred burned yellow in his eyes.

"Look!" cried Murray. "Does that look like the picture of a dog or of a four-footed murderer?"

He pointed, and those who watched, grunted in assent. They never had seen a grimmer picture than Chinook made just then.

Said Windham: "I'll tell you what, Murray, if this is your dog, call him over to you!"

Murray nodded assent. "Here, Chinook, here, old fellow!" he called. And he added a sharp whistle to reenforce the command.

Chinook, slowly, swung his massive head about and favored his second master with a long stare. Then, without moving a foot, he looked back at his owner. It was a telling stroke for Windham.

"What's the matter, Murray?" asked Mike, the proprietor. "Can't you make your own dog come when you holler to him?"

"He's got Chinook hypnotized," said Murray, sweating with eagerness and with fear. "Look at Windham, I ask you to! Is there a man of you that would want to be alone on the trail with him? Ask him why he lived ten years alone in the mountains? Because he's got the evil eye. Because folks won't have nothing to do with him. That's the main reason. Now you ask me to call my dog in, when the dog's stood there under the eye of Windham! Of course, I can't. It ain't in human nacher to beat a hypnotist except at his own game—and game as dirty as that ain't a game for me!"

It was, on the whole, a silly speech, but those who listened to it were not men of analytical minds. They merely realized, when they looked at the deep brows and the shadowed eyes of Windham, that they never before had seen a face so ugly or so powerful. A feeling of revulsion swept over them.

"I dunno," said Mike. "It sort of beats me, but I got a feeling that Murray is right."

He advanced a step toward Windham.

HEY, you, what we know is that Murray drove that dog onto his sled up to my way station," he said. "As far as the law goes, that's enough for me. This here is my house. I ain't gonna stand by and see you put it over on a smaller man than yourself. Unhook that dog, take your eye off of it, and hand it over to Murray, here, or you'll have to fight the pair of us!"

Mike came of a fighting race, and he was fighting mad. It was not for nothing that he maintained law and order among the rough gangs that gathered every night at his house. He knew his fists and he knew his guns. Upon guns he would depend, in this crisis, since mere hands seemed impotent against such a monster as this stranger from the Southland.

Moreover, the decided stand of Mike seemed to have convinced the wavering minds of the rest of the crowd. The ugly face of Windham was distinctly against him—that crag of a jaw, that beetling brow, with the triple deep-set crease between the eyes, brutal and savage and seemingly filled with animal cunning.

So Windham ran his eyes over all of the faces, and among them all he saw not one probable supporter. He was alone against a crowd, in a strange place, in a strange land with which all of the others were more or less familiar.

Murray was saying: "You've put up a good bluff, Windham. But it ain't gone through. Just unhook your homemade chain, as you call it, and turn that dog back to me. You know I paid you good money for it."

Now Windham, looking thoughtfully down before him, seemed to be studying the shadow of the stove in the center of the room. Then his glance shifted from the shadow to the lamp which hung suspended from the ceiling, swaying a little from side to side in some unperceived draft, the one point of illumination in the place.

Suddenly, without warning, he picked up the chair from under him and, half rising, hurled it fairly at the lamp. There was a tingling crash, and the room was swallowed up in darkness.

CHAPTER X.

TWO SLEDS.

NOW, the instant the chair was flung, and the uproar started, the night blackness was split through by the bark and flash of Murray's gun, but he fired too late, half blindly. At the same moment, Windham snatched the rubber-shod club from his pocket and struck into the darkness before his face.

For he knew what would happen. He had been with Chinook too many months not to know the devilish habits of the beast. The darkness through which no man could see would only be as a twilight to that cunning hunter, and this was his chance to get at the throat of his master unseen.

True enough, Chinook had sprung up from the floor, and the blow which Windham struck landed. It was, however, only a glancing blow; it did not stun Chinook. It merely told him, it appeared, that he had been wrong, and that this mysterious devil of a man was able to see, against all precedent, in the dark of the night!

The lobo did not spring again and Windham, in a stride, was at the door.

Other men were there before him.

He heard them shouting. Their wild voices guided him like a light.

"We've got the door safe!" he heard voices yelling. "Strike a light, somebody. A light! A light!"

He strode on. He reached the men before the door. Easily he brushed them away to the right and to the left.

They tumbled headlong, cursing, while he felt for the knob and found it, but the door was locked and the key gone. Somebody had had wits quick enough for that! No matter! He put his shoulder against the door and it burst wide before him. Out he sprang, into the icy night air.

He had no time to think of hitching up his own dog team to his packed sled. What difference did sled and pack and team make to him then? He had Chinook, his enemy, yet his own property, running lightly before him, giving the chain a good pull. Holding to the chain, commanding the dog with quick, sharp words, he followed swiftly on.

He heard the uproar spill outward from the way station into the open. Plainly, he could hear Murray's whining, snarling voice, like a furious beast, yelling out an offer of a thousand dollars' reward for the death of the big man or a chance to get at the dog.

Then guns cracked. Bullets sang like wasps in the air about him. He stooped a trifle lower and sprinted with all his might, and ever the pull of the wolf dog on the chain lengthened his strides. He gloried in the full expenditure of his powers of body. Now that he was once started away from them, let them take Chinook away from him again, if they dared!

He could have laughed, but the labor of the running turned his laughter into a groan, as of pain.

At that sound, Chinook turned suddenly under the brightness of the stars and looked back at his master, the chain slackening. And again Windham understood.

IF that groan had been of pain, indeed, or weakness, that monster would have been at him in a flash, to finish the work another had begun.

But he was neither wounded nor weakened. Loudly, he cursed Chinook and the lobo leaped ahead again to tighten the chain.

It was the most ironical thing in the world—the patient slave labor of the dog at the behest of the man whom he hated, whose heart's blood he wanted, the only thing that could possibly quench his deep-seated thirst!

They headed straight on. There was much running strength in Windham. As has been said, he was one of those few bulky men who are, nevertheless, in such perfect proportion that their own weight does not kill them. He could run, and he could run to a distance, like any Indian. His toiling through the mountains, over trails where even a mule could not have gone, in pursuit of game, had given him both wind and leg muscles. And never did he use them as on this night.

For, though he was green to Alaska, he knew well enough that the pause in the pursuit did not mean that it had been given up. Rather, they were rapidly harnessing their dog teams to a sled. Attached to that sled would be three or four men, and every one of them excellent rifle shots.

They would bring out a dozen of the finest dogs that happened to be at the way station on the single sled, and then they would fly down the trail. When the shooting com-

menced, it would be their rifles against his revolver!

That was his conclusion. He knew that his chances were slim, indeed. Therefore, he legged it up the trail as fast as he could go.

He might have turned into the snow on either side of the trail. But that would have made little difference. Rather, it would have been worse for him. They could follow his trail only too easily in the snow. They could not mistake it, either, for such a pair of mukluks as he wore would not readily be duplicated in the arctic, and such tracks as Chinook left behind him could be made by no other animal in the world.

He could only trust to his speed, and he knew that that speed could not be matched against the whirlwind rush of the long dog team that would follow. Moreover, he could well recall the tough look of the crowd in the station. A dozen of those men would be fit to take the trail, and surely only the best of all would be chosen to accompany Murray in pursuit of the so-called thief.

That was the most maddening part of all—that he, Windham, who never had cheated a man of a five-cent piece, who never had injured a fellow being by word or by blow, should now be placed in the wrong by the adroit lying of such a fellow as Murray, the criminal!

But there was behind Windham a life of labor, and there is this to be said of physical labor. It is the curse of Adam, but it is also the blessing. It wears upon the very soul, but it also teaches an almost divine patience. This year's bad winter may make next year's good harvest, and the day's work is not ended until the sun goes down!

So Windham said to himself, calmly, with a brave man's quietness, that the battle was not over until it was actually ended by bullets. Nothing but bullets should take Chinook from him, this time! He was sure of that.

AS he watched the magnificent animal straining ahead of him, giving of his power as gallantly as though his heart swelled with love and devotion to his master, it seemed to Windham that he was looking at the most beautiful creation of the Maker. He had seen fine horses; he had seen beautiful women; he had seen magnificent men; but it seemed to Windham that Chinook was the consummation of all that was physically perfect in the universe.

Now he pulled in a straight line, tail stretched straight out, hindquarters and withers on a level, head well forward, and shoulders and quarters driving splendidly. A worker himself, Windham recognized the patient strength of another laborer.

It hardly mattered that, instead of love, there was hatred in the soul of the wolf dog. What was important was that the animal was peerless and that he, Windham, was with it, to enjoy its might and profit by its wisdom.

It was very cold. His breath began to freeze on his beard, but he did not make the mistake of trying to break it off. It was a bitter process, while the ice was forming, but once it was made, it would form a sort of chilly protection for his skin. Old-timers had told him that. He had asked advice, on the way up from the coast, from those who seemed best qualified to give it.

He watched the thin, white mist of his own breath puffing out, to blow back and settle as frost upon his shoulders and he saw the white cloud of the constant panting of the wolf dog before him.

Small, dark evergreens stood on either side, shaped, many of them, like the flame of a candle or of a tall fountain, unblown by the wind. And these slid constantly by him, as he worked over hill and dale. He had no stream-side, easily graded trail to follow, here, but a white undulation.

That was bad for him. Over such going as this, the numbers of the pursuers' dogs would give them a vast advantage. If only it had been a dark night, all would have been well, he told himself. But it was not dark. The stars seemed, above his head, a dazzling white sheet of fiery freckles. He would have sworn that they even cast shadows!

Now, rounding a sudden turn, at the foot of two hills, he came straight upon two sleds. There were eight dogs in all. Standing alongside the first sled, there was a driver; in the second, another well-wrapped figure.

Over to the left, he could see the dull smoldering of a fire, recently put out. Apparently the team had just been harnessed, camp had been broken, and the two travelers were about to take the trail. The word to mush was on the verge of being given to the dogs, it seemed, but at the sound of the snow crunching under the feet of Windham, the stranger whirled about. The long, gleaming barrel of a rifle steadied, at his shoulder, to a single point of starlight.

"Back up, partner," said a quiet voice. "You can't have her!"

CHAPTER XI.

STRANGERS.

WINDHAM stopped. The man before him, he noted, seemed well-dressed, after the arctic fashion; that is, he was well-furred. The team of eight dogs, a big number for only two sleds, looked fit for fast and hard travel and the pack on the front sled was lashed on in the most masterly and well-balanced fashion.

These things Windham noted, as a man will at a crisis, with a single glance.

As for the man in the furs, he was of about middle height, rather broad in the shoulders, and looked well-knit and competent, a quality which the sound of his voice seemed to emphasize.

His face, partly shadowed by his hood, was totally indistinguishable in the starlight, but Windham had an impression of early middle age.

"Whatever she is," said Windham, "I don't want her, or any other she. Put down your gun and let me by."

"Go by if you will," said the stranger, "but I'll just keep this gun on you while you pass. Better wait here. I'll soon be out of your sight. Great Scott," he added, "what a dog!"

He said the last under his breath. "Can that dog run?" he asked, suddenly.

"Like a horse," said Windham, "But he's not for sale, if that's what you mean."

"I've got a little pack of fifty ounces of dust here," said the driver. "Does that talk to you?"

"Not if it were five hundred," said Windham.

"I see," said the stranger. "A fanatic, eh? Well, wait here. I'll soon be out of your sight around the curve. You're sure about your dog?"

"I'm sure," said Windham. "Watch yourself! Jump sidewise!"

For he had noticed the evergreen just above the place where the driver stood bending under its load of snow, and now, as though the fibers of the branch were weary, like muscles tired of a long strain, the branch

sagged and commenced to give way. It was heavily loaded and, even as Windham spoke, the whole burden of the snow descended with a rush. There was, also, a heavy incrustation of ice which held in the looser particles like a sack. So it was a solid shock that the driver received and he fell flat, totally lost in the snow, floundering about blindly. Windham started forward to help him to his feet, but here the seated figure on the sled stood up.

"Let him lie!" she cried. "He's done harm enough in this world. Don't give him a chance to do more. Let him lie! Start the dogs! Help me, for the sake of Heaven! I'll make you rich if you will! I swear that I'll show you a place where the gold is fairly pushing out of the ground and asking men to take it. Start the dogs—give 'em the word."

WITH this she came running back toward Windham, holding out her hand. He could not see her face, but he knew that she was young, and he felt that she was good to look on. But he shrugged. Women were nothing in his life. They never had been.

"Keep away," he ordered her, curtly. "Keep away, or this dog of mine will slash your throat."

Then, reaching through the smother of the snow, he found the arm of the man and closed his hand over it. Through the thick padding of the furs, he could feel the swell and the sliding of powerful muscles. With one lift of his hand he raised him to his feet.

There stood the stranger, gasping a little, with one hand raised to his head, where the snow had struck him. He shook himself, and the powdered snow flew off in a cloud. Then he faced the girl.

"I heard you," he said, with a ring like the clanking of iron in his voice. "Get back on the sled—you——"

He mastered himself before the word was spoken.

"Get back, and don't stand there gibbering at me!" he repeated. "I heard what you said to him. But he wasn't a fool. Mostly, you've had to do with weak wits. But this time you happened to blunder onto a man!"

The girl hesitated for a second, looking earnestly upon the face of Windham. But enough of his features could be seen even by the starlight to reveal the harsh and almost brutal cast of his countenance. With a sudden shudder, she shrank from them both and returned with bowed head to her place, slowly settled there, and pulled the robes about her.

A faint sound reached the ear of Windham. She was sobbing.

In the meantime, the driver turned back to Windham.

"If I'd taken your first word, I'd have got from under," said he, "But I thought you were trying a dodge on me. I'm glad you pulled me out. I'm gladder still that you had the good sense not to listen to that——"

He indicated the woman with a gesture.

"If it seems a strange thing to you," he said, "that I'm carting her along through the night by forced marches, I'll tell you this—that whatever happens to her, nothing can be bad enough. Of all the devils out of hell, no one is worse than she is. And that's gospel!"

His voice went hard as he spoke.

He held out his hand, but Windham did not heed it. His head was tilted. Far away, he heard the sound of voices shouting to a team of dogs.

"There they come!" said the stranger, gritting his teeth audibly. "I knew that they'd be on the trail soon, but I didn't expect 'em as soon as this."

"IT'S not you. It's myself they're after," said Windham, gloomily. "And now they have me, and be damned to them! You haven't an extra rifle on that sled that I could buy from you, partner?"

"What do they want of you?" asked the other, snapping out the words.

"That dog," said Windham. "I've followed him four thousand miles and got him back to-night from the thief who stole him. Now they're after me, with rifles. And I've a Colt, only, for talking back to 'em!"

He laughed a little, but cut his laughter short, for the quick intake of his breath threatened to freeze his lungs.

"A Colt—and the crooks want the dog, eh? Say, is it your dog, man?"

"Yes," said Windham. "A wolf dog, wild caught by me and, therefore, it's mine."

"I've a set of extra harness," said the other. "A set made for the biggest Mackenzie Husky that ever walked, and it ought to fit that brute almost. Shove him into the team."

"He'll eat the dog ahead of him," said Windham, calmly, knowing that the truth would out.

"Can he lead?"

"I don't know. I've never worked him up here. But he'll answer any right command.

"We can use those legs of his," said the stranger. "And if we can, he'll help to lift you out of range of those fellows behind. Get him up there ahead of my leader. We'll see what he can do. It's an easy trail. He doesn't have to be a number one leader for this sort of a road. He only needs a set of feet, and pulling power."

But Windham was already on his way to the head of the team. By the time he got there, the driver had joined him with the harness.

It was a big harness, strongly made, but it was not large enough for Chinook. The driver grunted with amazement when he saw the tightness of the fit.

"But it won't choke him," he said. "We'll try him. Quick, now! They're coming fast! They must be running with an empty sled!"

"They probably are or almost," said Windham. "Chinook, go on!"

And Chinook, stepping forward, made taut the whole line that hitched him to the sled and, leaning hard against the collar, scratched his way down to a solid footing.

The line creaked.

"By thunder!" said the driver. "He's trying to pull it all!"

It was a heavy pack upon the first sled. Upon the second sled, there was a smaller pack, together with the girl. But suddenly there was a groaning from the runners of the sleds. They stirred, they gradually, inch by inch, began to move.

And still Chinook had not left his tracks!

He was simply leaning and lengthening! That is the trick of pulling, for a horse or for a dog, to get the traction low, steady, driving as close to the ground as possible, so that there will be less lifting angle.

"It's not possible!" cried the driver, appearing to forget all else. "Is there a down grade?"

PERHAPS there was a slight down grade. Otherwise, truly enough, the thing appeared totally impossible—one dog, looking small indeed, in spite of his bulk, contrasted with the great load on

the sleds—one dog, and the rest of the team idle, not having received the word of command.

"He's done it!" shouted the driver. "Look there! It walks!"

And so it did! For both of the sleds were now slowly but surely under way, and the panting breath of the wolf dog shot down, and spread along the ground in rapid gusts, like the breath that shoots from the smokestack of a locomotive.

"No other dog in Alaska could have done it!" exclaimed the stranger. "I'm not believing my eyes. With that one dog, I could go to the pole and back and laugh all the way—yes, and ride on the return trip. Mush, the rest of you lazy, worthless, shriveled up, good-for-nothing curs. Mush!"

As he pronounced the last word, every one of the eight leaped forward and gave their weight to the initial pull.

But the sleds already had been broken out by Chinook alone, for the snow had not frozen hard around the runners, it appeared, and as the eight lunged, the sleds fairly leaped away, at a running pace that threatened, for a moment, to drag it straight over the wheel dog.

That slow but worthy puller, instantly began to scamper for dear life, and the whole of the eight strung out in a dead race to catch up with the flying, monstrous form of the new leader, the ninth dog from the sled.

Run they might, but catch him they never would. If it came to trotting, the long stride of the lobo brought him effortlessly over the packed snow. And when there was a question of galloping, he fairly flew, with bounds that covered distance in an amazing manner.

Both the driver and Windham had to race after the rear sled to catch up with the rapid flight of the team.

"He'll wreck the whole outfit. He's running away! Stop him!" shouted the driver.

"If I stop him, the rest of the team'll pile up on him," said Windham, truthfully.

"He'll never take the curves. This part winds like a snake. The devil!" cried the driver.

But here the girl, sitting straight up, cried in a wild, strange voice: "He will take the curves! Look, Andy! He's taking them now! Watch him go! He's a real leader! Oh, what a beauty! Go it, old fellow!"

In fact, the few lessons which Murray had given to the great wolf dog were now bearing their fruit. Murray knew his business in the Far North and Chinook could absorb teaching like a human being, well-nigh. For now he was taking the curves perfectly, swinging well out to keep the sleds from cutting against the banks on either side, some of them looming well above the packed trail; at other times, speeding straight and true down the center of the way.

"Hurrah, Julie!" cried the driver. "You're right. He's an old-timer. I never saw a better. Now we'll fly. Let them all be damned. They'll never catch you now, unless they put on wings!"

CHAPTER XII.

A SWIFT PACE.

ALONG that curving trail, dogs hardly could have set a finer pace. The two men could not have been called drivers in that violent race. Rather, they hung onto the rear sled and were jerked around corners like little boys at the

end of the line in the game of snap-the-whip.

Only when a steep ascent was reached did the runaway change to a steady trot, and Andy, the driver, could call out to his companion: "He'll make his name in Alaska, that Chinook! Look at him now!"

For Chinook was leaning hard forward, pulling with all of his great strength.

At the top of that rise they looked back, and behind them they saw, curving out from the last twist of the trail below, a team of twelve dogs and an outfit of four men, dimly outlined under the starlight. Neither was that crew so far away that the fugitives failed to hear the wild and tingling cry which they put up when they saw the leaders!

But Andy laughed, panting and choking with his running.

"They'll have the heart taken out of 'em now. Watch these devils fly down the grade!"

And fly they did. Even Windham, big, strong and sure-footed as he was, could hardly keep on his feet. With gigantic strides they rushed on, holding to the sled, helped by the speed of the dogs in front. Finally, reaching a long level, they shot through it with scarcely abated speed and then slid rapidly up a long slope beyond.

Before they gained that second crest, the dogs were not spent but the men were nearly finished. As they looked back, they had their reward for that hour of frantic mushing. Far, far behind them, almost indistinguishable, they saw that the twelve-dog team of the pursuers had halted and that three of the four men had flung themselves down for a rest.

"Winded!" said Andy, himself hardly able to speak. "Winded, the pikers! But we're not. We'll peg along. We'll peg along. It's the steady pegging that brings home the bacon!"

It seemed to Windham, his lungs burning like fire, that it was high time to make a halt, just as the distanced pursuers were doing, but he was too proud to speak of his fatigue. He pegged on, as Andy desired, swaying himself a little forward, so that the leaning of his body would compel his legs to drive ahead.

He had thoughts to fill his mind, somewhat, and lessen his care for his body. Besides, being in the most perfect training, he gradually recovered his wind, breathing was more easy; and the dogs had at last reduced their terrific pace. In a few words, he communicated to Andy the right words for guiding the big new leader of the dog string. After that, it was a simple matter to keep Chinook under control.

What Windham meditated on was the enthusiasm of the girl as she had watched the lobo running so well in the lead. It was as if she and Andy were of one mind and soul upon this trail. He could not have guessed, from her joyous outcry, that she was being compelled to accompany the man on the journey.

THE more he thought upon the problem, the more it caused him to ponder and to shake his massive head. But he knew nothing of women; he wanted to know nothing. It was only that the ringing joy in the girl's voice, her joy over the performance of Chinook, had set up a musical echo in his heart and lifted it in the strangest manner.

He remembered an old proverb: "The wiser the man, the fewer are his hours with women!"

This one was evil. There had been

a blasting rage and scorn in the voice of Andy, when he spoke of her. No one could doubt the sincerity of Andy, to be sure!

Besides, he never could doubt or question Andy so long as he lived. For he owed his life to the sudden generosity of the smaller man!

Also, with the passing of every moment he found more and more to admire in the ways of Andy. He had run evenly with Windham himself—to be sure he had been fresh at the start—and now he sent the team along in the manner of one who knows what his business is from the ground up.

Then he discovered that there was much to learn from the manner in which the other marched. Silently, Windham regarded the short, quick steps with which Andy went up slopes, the long but cautiously slouching strides with which he navigated the downward pitches, and the beautifully rhythmic swing of his trot across the level. It was his habitual gait, and it seemed to Windham that it was modeled upon the trotting of the wolf dogs of the arctic.

Without a word, he set himself to the imitation of his companion. Being in perfect physical trim, with a surplus of the needed strength, he soon was picking up the way of Andy. It was a trick which could not be thoroughly mastered in a moment, but with every hour he was more at ease. A few days of this, and he felt that the trick would be his.

Every moment or so, his glance ranged ahead and found the lofty form of the dark-coated wolf dog, and the heart of Windham leaped in him. Chinook was his!

An odd feeling came to him that this was the place for Chinook, up here in the wilderness, where his strength could be put to a useful service in behalf of man. Was not Chinook like this country, dark with the evergreens, huge, bold, overawing to the eye of man?

And he himself, Windham—why was it that such a happiness flowed through him as he measured his strength against the length of the trail and did not find himself wanting? He felt as though it were his country, his native land; yet how new he was to it!

Also, there was the golden secret here, that thing which so many men had hunted for, and so many already had become rich from it. The girl had said that she could lead him to a place where the gold thrust out from the dark ground. It well might be. For a man could tell, with a single glance, that every mystery was possible here, good and evil!

IT was a grinding march and a long one. After a time, as the pace steadied down, the girl dismounted from the sled, and she, too, began to trot along, lightening the load for the dogs.

Dressed like a man, a boyish figure she made. Though she had not a man's stride, still she seemed to make up in lightness what she lacked in size and strength. Even Andy was not the master of the graceful, easy run of the dog musher as she was. There was no wearing out to her! She seemed made all of elasticity and fire.

At the rate they had traveled, Andy declared that it was very unlikely that the pursuers would now overtake them, and that they could at last rest both themselves and the dogs. But, first, he pulled off the trail into a thick copse of trees, small and close-growing. He need not worry about the trail they left,

for from a gray, low-hanging sky a steady snow was falling, and this would soon blot out every sign of the runners as well as the tracks of man and dog.

They pulled on until they found a small opening in the trees and there the team was halted.

Instantly all three fell to work, Andy assigning the tasks. First, Windham unharnessed Chinook. The big fellow gave one sidelong, venomous glance at his master, then rolled in the snow, leaped up, and was instantly off among the dark of the trees.

"Is he gone?" shouted Andy, looking on at this with alarm.

"He'll come back," said Windham. "He won't leave me until he's had a few more chances at my throat, damn him!" He laughed a little, a faint, green gleam coming into his eyes.

In a way, he hardly wished to gain the affection of Chinook. As long as the monster was held, was it not as well to hold him by hate as by fear or by love?

Only, as time went on, he would discover the way to creep inside the mind and the spirit of the dog, and so to subdue him. Time, patience, and a firm will, these were needed, he kept telling himself.

So he had let Chinook go, then had started cutting wood. But cutting was too slow a process. He grasped shrubs, and ripped them out of the earth, the roots crackling like the explosions of rapid musketry. Then he hurriedly tore the shrubs to pieces, and flung the pieces in a heap.

Andy Johnson—he had learned the rest of the name during the trip—was putting up, with the girl's expert help, two small shelter tents and kindling the fire in the little portable stove, which held some dry kindling to start making the fires, a seasonable precaution followed by all wise Alaskan travelers.

When Windham came up, he heard the girl saying: "Does that dog really hate you, Ned?"

It was the first time, since their meeting, that she had directly addressed him. But she had heard Windham and Johnson exchanging names and in that Northland formalities do not endure long!

"Yes, he hates me, Julie," said Windham.

"Why should he hate you?" asked Julie.

THERE was sympathy in her voice, a sudden kindly warmth that startled Windham and impressed him. He looked hard at her.

The light was not good. A purple-gray mist filled up the forest like water. They were in a sense like creatures submerged. But as one looks through water and sees the wavering image, so he looked at the girl, hard and straight, for the first time and saw her.

She was as dark as the half-breed, Murray. She had the same hue of skin and eye, saving that in her a glow of color shone through. Though the eyes were somewhat almond-shaped, they were very large, and appeared even larger because of the length and the thickness of the lashes. She had a bright, keen look, as though she were very cheerful, and only waited for an occasion to smile.

At once, he felt a sense of friendly intimacy, but before he could answer her last question, Andy Johnson was snarling: "Listen to me, Julie, you hell-cat. Keep your claws off Windham. Leave him alone. He's not for you, d'you hear?"

She turned her head a little towards Johnson and smiled at him. Windham could hardly see the smile, but rather the flash of it, and suddenly he thought of the baring of a knife.

"Dear old Andy," said the gently caressing voice of the girl. "How careful you are of your friends—and your guns!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A LITTLE HISTORY.

THEY had the usual trail meal; that is to say, Andy first cooked over the little stove the bacon, while the teapot was heating at the back of the fire, and while the girl stewed the frozen fish for the dogs at another fire between the two tents.

When the bacon was fried, a sack of flour was opened, a hole made in the top of it, and the grease poured in. As it cooled, Andy worked up a great ball of soggy dough, which was seasoned with salt and baking powder. This he kneaded well, and then he made it into three huge pancakes, which were put into the frying pan to simmer until they were half done. The raging appetites of the mushers would never allow them to cook long enough.

The tea was now made. It was not the pale, insipid tea of the Southland. But a good quantity of leaves were put into the water and allowed to boil thoroughly. When the tea was poured into the drinking cups, it was almost the color of strong coffee, with more of a tawny hue to it, of course. That tea washed down the bacon and pancakes.

Then there was dessert, which showed that they were not far from civilization. A heel of rye bread was brought out, a heavy, hard and badly baked loaf, and with it, a can of blackberry jam; and the three of them devoured the jam and the bread, silently.

The dogs had already been fed. The cooking utensils were cleaned. And now the three sat together without a word. Above their heads, and near to the stove, hung their footgear drying. It would not be completely dry by morning, but at least it would be better than sopping wet. They had on their feet, now, pairs of soft, deliciously comforting slippers made of the hide of young caribou, the fur turned inward. Johnson had given an extra pair to Windham. They were oversize, but he was barely able to squeeze his great feet into them.

The men filled their pipes and lighted them. The steam of their drying garments, smoke escaping from the stove—acrid woodsmoke—and the stench and clouds of the strong tobacco filled the little tent. They began to see one another through a fog, but pleasant warmth stole through their bodies. Windham could feel his tensed muscles relaxing. He was far more tired than he cared to admit. It seemed to him that Johnson was just as erect, as jaunty as ever. And so was the girl.

Well, he had made a double march, and they had made only one. Yet he was vaguely troubled. He was accustomed to wearing other men down more than twice over! And still he usually remained fresh at the end.

But this was a new life to him. He knew, now, that he would have to study most carefully the ways of it.

"That dog, Ned," said the girl.

"What about him?" asked Windham.

"He came in for his share of the food."

I'M glad of that. When I saw him fading off into the woods," replied Johnson, "I was afraid that it might be the last of him, in spite of what Windham said."

"No," replied Windham. "He'll never leave me."

He smiled, half bitterly, as he spoke. "Not unless he's stolen,"

Johnson looked wistfully toward Windham.

"He'd be worth a lot of money to me," said Johnson. "Look here, man. I'd pay you a fancy price for him. You didn't mean what you said about never selling him. Four or five more years, and he'll be an old dog, anyway. What'll be the good of him, then? What would you do with him, away south, where there's no sledding work?"

Windham saw that the girl had leaned forward a little to wait for his answer, as well as to listen to it. And her dark eyes widened a little, holding steadily to his face.

He glanced down. There was something about her that made his heart leap. Then he put out his big hands and studied them, himself wondering a little.

"I don't know just how it is," said he. "That lobo cut a lot of throats down on my place in California. He hamstrung my prize bull. He slaughtered sheep. And I started out to get him."

His voice trailed away.

"Well, you got him," said Johnson. "What next did you want?"

"Look," said Windham, puckering his leonine brow. "If he'd been all wolf, I'd have shot him, I think. But when I saw the brown and the white in his coat—well, I changed my mind."

"Changed your mind to what?" asked Johnson, rather sharply, as though he did not relish this misty way of speaking.

"I decided that I wanted to do something with him," said Windham, stirring restlessly.

He never before had asked himself these questions. He could not exactly find the answer.

"What did you want to make of him?" snapped Johnson.

Windham made a helpless gesture.

"Look here," he said. "D'you ever see a mountain that you wanted to climb?"

"Sure," answered Johnson. "What of that?"

"Well, was there any good of climbing the mountain?"

"Yeah, you could see the other side of it, anyway," said the musher.

"You know," replied Windham, "that was the way I felt about Chinook. I wanted to see the other side of him. The dog side."

"Have you?" asked Johnson.

"No," said Windham. "But I'm still trying. I'll keep on trying. I usually keep on at a job, once I've tackled it!"

He said it without emphasis, but suddenly the girl leaned back with a sigh. It seemed to Windham like a sound of content, and when he stared across at her he saw that she was smiling down at her slender hands, which were crossed in her lap.

JOHNSON noticed the direction of Windham's look. "You're softening a little, aren't you, Ned?" said he.

"How?" asked Windham.

"The girl, eh?" said Johnson.

Windham scowled.

"Look here, Johnson," he protested. "You talk as if she were a wolf!"

"A wolf's mild," said Johnson. "A wolf's nothing, compared with her."

"If you're going to tell him about

me," said the girl, indifferently, "I'll go to my tent, Andy; that is, if it'll make you any easier."

"I've said it before your face before," said Johnson. "I'll say it again!"

"I don't mind at all," replied the girl. "I was only thinking about you. It's warm, in here, so I'll stay on, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind," said Johnson. "I'll tell you about her, Windham. You've seen her. She's pretty, ain't she? You think that, now. But you see her dolled up, slim as a colt, and as graceful—a dress with some color in it, maybe—and then she's not pretty. No, she's a beauty. She turns the head of a man. She sends 'em away dreaming, day and night. That's the kind she is."

She put her chin in her hand and nodded her head a little toward Johnson.

"You've never been so poetic about me before, Andy," said she.

"Shut up!" ordered the dog-puncher, brutally. "Shut your face, till I'm through!"

"Don't talk to her like that!" rumbled Windham.

"You shut up, too, you big freighter!" barked the excitable Johnson. "I'm trying to open your eyes. You just listen, and open up your ears. I say that this Julie Fernal is clean bad, all the way through. Comes of a bad family, too!"

The girl raised her head.

"You might leave that out, Andy," she said.

Ah, how silken smooth was her voice, and yet Windham could sense the rippling bright danger beneath the surface. He looked at her with new eyes. His heart leaped no longer. It began to ache.

"Bad family, I say," said the other. "There's her brother, Bert Fernal. Goes up North. Gets in with the Indians. Throws up his life as a white man. They say he had killed his list of decent men. So he goes out and packs in with the dirty Indians. That's what he does! Well, it's a good riddance for the rest of us, but it's hard on one person. The girl! This one. You know. You know, even the worst of 'em will stick by their own blood. I'll say that for her. She wanted to get her crooked brother back, no matter how many murders were on his hands.

"So she picks out one of the best dog-punchers that ever hung onto a gee pole in this part of the world. That's what Winslow was! And she says to him: 'Go up there and bring my brother back, and I'll show you where the gold is breaking its way out of the ground.' 'Damn the gold,' says Winslow. 'I want you.' 'Well, you can have me, then,' says the girl. 'I'll marry the man who can get Bert back to us!' "

YOU see what it meant, Windham? Twenty men had gone in among that tribe of Indians, and never a one had ever come back alive. And you knew that, Julie, didn't you?"

"I knew it was dangerous," she admitted, calmly. And she yawned!

Ice ran through the blood of Windham as he noticed the graceful care with which she covered the yawn.

No, Johnson must be right. There was a devil in her!

"She knew what it meant, but she sent poor Winslow up there and Winslow died. He's never been heard of since then. And he was worth the whole Fernal tribe, multiplied by ten!

"But that's not enough for her. What's one man's death to her? Nothing! She gets hold of the

whitest man in the North; she gets my old partner, Dean Carey, as straight as a string, as brave as a lion. A man to mush with, a man to fight with, a man to die with, I tell you. But she gives him her damned smile and her promising eyes, and sends him mad, too. And he goes out among those Indians, the devils! Finally he comes back to Fort Yukon, and there he lies, dying by inches, the sickest man that I ever saw. And he says to me: 'Andy, if only I could look on her once again, it'd feed something that's starving in me. I'd die happy, I think, if I could see her again!'

"So I slide out from Fort Yukon. I race all the way to the coast. I find this she-devil. I pretend that I want to take her out for a spin and show her my new team. When I get her loaded on, I start inland with her. And here she is. And I only hope that poor Carey's dead before she gets to him. Because if I see him smile at her pretty, damned, deceitful face before he dies, I'll kill her. I'll strangle her!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WATCHER.

HE stared at the girl as he spoke, his teeth set hard, and his jaw muscles bulging. And Windham was troubled as he watched the two, the man almost trembling with wrath, the girl calm-eyed, serene, watchful as though this scene had nothing whatever to do with her and with her affairs.

Windham pointed a finger toward Julie Fernal.

"You tell me your side of it," he said.

She looked calmly back at him. "There's no good in that," she replied, after considering him for a moment. "You don't know enough about women to tell lies apart from the truth. There's no good in listening to me, Ned. Andy Johnson would talk you around to his side of it, anyway."

"Tell me," Johnson shouted at her, "if I've said one thing that's a lie."

"You wouldn't be such a fool, Andy," she answered him. "You know too much to tell lies. You show only one face of the truth, though!"

He gritted his teeth, but did not answer and she, in turn, stood up and stretched and yawned hugely again.

"I'll be going to bed," said she.

"Hold on," said Windham. "Why should she have to sleep in the cold tent? We ought to take that tent, where the stove hasn't been burning."

"You talk like a fool," said Andy, crisply. "And you don't know her. She's a seal. She could go to sleep comfortably in ice water. Here's your bracelets to wear; anklets, I mean to say, Julie."

He took out a pair of slender steel manacles and snapped them over the ankles of the girl. There was a small, strong chain connecting them that allowed her to take a step six or seven inches long.

"Sleep tight," said Johnson, cheerfully.

"Yeah. I always sleep tight," answered the girl.

She paused at the entrance to the tent.

"About the big dog, Ned," said she.

"Yes?" said Windham. "He won't bother you at night. I'm the only one that he'll bother around here."

"No, he won't bother me," said Julie Fernal. "I want to make a bet with you. About him."

"What?"

"That I'll have him eating out of my hand inside of three days."

Windham laughed, and his laughter was like a deep thunder which was answered suddenly from the door of the tent. There stood Chinook, bristling, showing his teeth with the tight-lipped grin of a wolf ready to fight.

"Look out!" said Windham.

The girl turned her head, casually, and smiled at him.

"He'll never bother me, Ned," she insisted.

As she stood beside the big fellow at the entrance flap, she laid a hand carelessly upon his shoulder.

Chinook turned his head with teeth ready to clip that arm off at the elbow, but he seemed to change his mind at the last minute. Regardless of the hand that rested upon him, he turned his head again and confined his attention to his master, whose laughter he had just heard.

JULIE chuckled softly. "You see how it'll be, Ned," she remarked, and she walked slowly past the big lobo, nudging against him to get room to go by.

Only after she was gone, Chinook turned and disappeared into the darkness. The flap of the tent fell down again.

"You're all covered with sweat, old son," said Johnson to his companion. "I don't blame you. She's a hard case. And she's a queer one."

Windham said nothing. He was still staring at the flap of the tent.

"I'll tell you what's in your mind right now," suggested the other.

"Tell me, then," said Windham. "Only, you'll never be able to come within miles of the truth!"

"You're thinking," said Johnson, "that there must be some wolf in her blood. Am I wrong?"

Windham started violently.

"What made you guess at that?" he demanded harshly.

"Because I've had the same idea myself," answered Johnson. "I've had it almost from the first minute that I laid eyes on her. You can't help getting such notions. It's the slant eye and the way she smiles. I never knew another man or another woman to smile the way she does. Did you?"

Windham closed his eyes, to remember the picture better.

"No," he admitted. "I never did."

"And you'll never see another," said Johnson, "unless there's another devil walking around on two feet instead of four. I put everything about her short, old son. But she's a bad one. Mighty bad. She's the worst sort of poison that I ever saw in my life! She's a thousand dollars an ounce, that's what she is, and every bit of her is dangerous. You take my word for it."

Windham shrugged his massive shoulders.

"You put those cuffs on her ankles," he said. "Why did you do that? Do you think that she might harness up the dogs and run away in the night and leave us?"

"That would make too much noise. She wouldn't try to do that," said Johnson. "But she's as likely as not to strike off by herself and go straight through the snow and on her way."

"Alone?" cried Windham. "Without a single dog? Without even a pack?"

"She'd take a rifle and shoot her game," said the other.

"And freeze to death before she'd gone three days!" said Windham.

"Not that girl. She's not the freezing kind. She's got a fire inside of her, more than any Eskimo I've ever seen."

"But where would she find game? I haven't seen a head of any kind," asked Windham.

"No more would I find it," said Andy. "But she's different. She'll see a trail and follow it, when you and I would see nothing at all. And she'll melt into the woods as silently as a moose or a lynx. And before she comes out, she'll have meat of some kind or other to roast at her fire."

"That sounds like a fairy tale," replied Windham.

I KNOW it. But you'll have a chance to read her better, before we're at Fort Yukon!" answered Johnson.

Windham talked about her no more, except that, as he turned into his bed, he raised up on one elbow and said: Look here, Johnson, if she starts to get familiar with that Chinook——"

"Don't you worry," answered Johnson, yawning, as though the subject already bored him almost to sleep. "The wolf will never touch her. You were right a while ago. They're altogether too much of the same kind."

With that cheerful suggestion in mind, Windham fell asleep, to dream all the night long of a lovely lady, that turned into a grinning wolf before his eyes and then of a grinning wolf that turned into a smiling girl.

When he awoke in the morning, Andy Johnson was already sitting up, tugging on his mukluks, grunting a little, and groaning a little over the sore places on his feet. Windham dressed in silence. The flap of the tent was thrown open, the fire was kindled in the stove, and Windham, stepping outside the tent, found that Julie Fernal was already up and stirring, in fact just striking her tent.

She gave him the brightest of smiles, but Windham turned away with a shudder, for the dream of the night before was still too vividly in his mind.

Straightway they started the preparations for the morning. The breakfast was cooked, a repetition of the supper of the night before; the other tent was struck, the pack remade upon the forward sled with great rapidity, and they led out upon the trail again.

All day and every day, the same program was repeated—the endless mushing, the pause at the close, when exhaustion was tugging at the tendons of their legs, the tiresome cookery, the feeding of the dogs, the struggling fire in the little stove, and finally, sleep, the great blessing.

But Windham walked on with a growing problem in his mind and that problem was the girl. He had been told sufficiently damning facts about her, and she had not denied a single one of them. She had listened to the accusations of Andy Johnson as though the whole world already were familiar with her character and her career, as though she herself were hardened to all manner of condemnation.

But day by day she maintained the most cheerful manner. She was never sullen or sulky. Even the endless grind of the trail found her with head high, tireless as the most athletic man, ready with a constant smile. There was about her, too, a free and easy camaraderie that appealed deeply to Windham.

"How can she manage to keep up with us on the trail?" he once asked Johnson.

"She was born up here," answered the other. "That's about all I know of her. This whole country was made for her, and she was made for it. But don't you ask me to try to explain Julie Fernal. I couldn't."

EVEN more than he watched the girl for herself, Windham had an eye out for her maneuvers to win over Chinook. He knew that it could not be done; and he waited to see how she would attempt it.

He saw no efforts on her part. She seemed to pay no more heed to Chinook than to any of the other dogs in the team. Then, on the third evening, Windham learned something. Inside the tent it was hot and close and he thrust his head out through the closed flap in order to take a farewell breath of the pure outer air. The night was clear; the mists were gone.

There, at the entrance to the tent of the girl, he saw Chinook lying, with head high and the air of a watcher over a treasure.

Windham gazed in dumb amazement. It was more, in fact, than if he had seen her caress the brute and watched Chinook whining and wagging his tail with pleasure.

For the man knew, all in that instant, that Julie Fernal had made the lobo her own!

CHAPTER XV.

THE STUDY OF JULIE.

FROM that moment, so far as Windham was concerned, the march north resolved itself into two things. The first was the study of Julie. The second was the study of her increasing power over Chinook.

A week after the start the team was given into her hands to drive, and Johnson nodded at his companion, saying: "Watch her now, Windham. You think that you know dogs and I think that I can drive 'em. But she could take a lot of runty malemutes and beat the finest racing dogs in Alaska, if she really wanted to. Watch her travel, old son!"

It was true. When she spoke, a thrill seemed to run in a wave through the entire team.

"What does she do to 'em?" said Windham to Johnson.

"How can I tell?" replied Johnson. "There's hypnotism in her. That's all. Better watch yourself, and keep on watching, because she's not done with you, son!"

Windham said nothing. He began to study the girl and the dogs, and it seemed to him that he could see a special difference between the girl and Johnson and himself. He had told himself that he loved the Far North. But that was probably something which she had never even thought of. She was the Far North, as surely a part of it as the dark forests and the blizzards that whipped them. It did not occur to her to fear the wilderness, because it was in her blood, not an experience grafted onto another existence.

The moment that the team passed from her hands to his own—for Johnson was trying to teach him all the tricks of the trade—it was plain that the dogs lost heart. They seemed to grow physically smaller. Their steps were shorter. Their tails drooped. Chinook, instead of the great, gallant and gay figure which he had presented the moment before, was now a slinking devil, casting slavering looks over his shoulder, from time to time, toward the man whom he so hated. It was always the same.

When he harnessed Chinook in the morning, it was at the peril of his life. But when she called and held up the harness, Chinook came like a dark streak and stood in place eagerly. She would kneel in the snow beside him, murmuring quietly to him as she fitted the straps upon.

his great body, and once he saw the lobo turn his huge, dangerous head and actually lick the frost from the shoulder of her coat!

"There's something good about her, I tell you," he said repeatedly to his friend, Johnson. "If there wasn't, she'd never be able to handle that wolf!"

Johnson looked him full in the face.

"Why not?" he asked. "Is that because the wolf has such a good nature?"

"Why, no," said Windham. "Of course, Chinook is simply a murderer!"

THEN he saw where his own remark pointed and was still. It was impossible to persuade Johnson that there was any good about Julie Fernal. Deeply ingrained in his mind was the conviction that she was evil. He regarded her only with contempt.

As for Windham, he became more and more silent. One thing the long trail was accomplishing for him. It was burning away every scruple of extra flesh. It was consuming every bit of fat. He was turning to iron. He had learned the long and easy gait of the arctic runner, sure-footed, steady, and patient. He had learned to have eyes in his feet, to judge the snow or the ice by the look of it, like a native. It was Johnson who did the oral teaching. It was the girl from whom he learned even more, by watching her steadily.

But he felt that he was embarked upon an endless journey. To Johnson, Fort Yukon was the goal. But to Windham the goal was an understanding of Julie Fernal and mastery of Chinook. If the girl could manage that thing, then he could learn the trick, too.

One day, as they were drawing near to the end of the trip, he fell a little behind the sled, and went along at her side, up a slope which checked the speed of the dogs.

"Julie," he said to her, "why can't you tell me?"

"What?" she asked him, turning her face suddenly toward him, with a flash of smiling lips and eyes—a habit she had and a startling one.

"You know what I want to learn," said he.

"I don't," she answered.

"About you," said he.

"No, no," said the girl. "Because Andy Johnson has told you everything, already."

"No, he hasn't told me everything," said the big man. He shook his head, looking away from her, down the trail at the white undulation of the landscape.

"What do you want me to say?" she asked.

"Tell me what sort of a girl you are, will you?"

She stared at him.

"I'm what Andy said, partly," said she.

"You're something more," said Windham. "I want to know what that is."

"It's no good asking me," she said. "Why should I make some pretty lies to tell to you? Ned, I like you too much to lie about myself."

"They wouldn't have to be lies, would they?" he asked. "Besides, you can be frank with me, Julie. I know what you think about me. You don't have to flatter me at all."

"Tell me, first, what I think about you," said the girl.

YOU think that I'm pretty slow in the wits—and it's true," said he. "And you think that I'm not very much of a man, or else I wouldn't let Johnson treat you the way he does. And you think

that I'm pretty simple, take me all in all."

"Is that what I think about you?" said the girl.

"Yes," said Windham. "That's about what you think, and one thing more."

"What's the other thing, then?" she asked him.

"You think that perhaps I'd do for the northern trek."

"What northern trek?"

"Out to the Indians, to get your brother."

She stopped short in the trail. She put her mittened hands upon her slim hips and looked fixedly at him.

"Say that again, Ned," said she.

"Well, it's true, isn't it?" he demanded.

He loomed big above her, leaning forward a little, stooping his head, so that he would be a little closer.

Looking back at him, tilting her head somewhat so as to meet his glance squarely, she seemed to shift her look from one of his eyes to the other, as though she saw there a different meaning in each eye.

"Well," she said, "it's true, after all. The first moment that I laid eyes on you, I knew that you might be the man for me. The man to get my brother. That's what you mean?"

"Yes, that's what I mean."

She went on: "But I knew that Johnson would keep you from it. I knew that there was no use trying to talk you into that job."

He shook his big head at her.

"What's the good of saying that, Julie?" he asked her. "Because I know that you understand everything."

"Go on, Ned," said she. "You tell me what I understand."

He flushed, his face burning with a sudden rush of blood.

"You know," he said huskily, "that you could make me eat out of your hand, just as you've made Chinook do. I saw him—yesterday."

Her glance was still moving curiously about his face, as though she were reading every feature.

"Could I do that with you, Ned?" she asked him.

"Well, you know you could," said he.

"What makes you think that I know it?"

"Because I've seen the way you look at me," said Windham. "I've seen you look at me as though I were something that you'd just dropped, and which you hardly knew whether you wanted to stoop and pick up or not. You've looked at me like that. I understood."

"Do you mean," asked the girl, "that you'd undertake that trek to the Indians? Do you know what those Indians are? Do you know what they've done to the last twenty men who got into their territory, prospecting or just traveling?"

"They murdered them," said Windham.

"WELL, they were old-timers. And they knew the Indian lingo," replied the girl. "What chance would you have against those murderers up North?"

"I don't know," said Windham. "I only know one thing."

"What's that?"

"That you're going to ask me to go there."

"And you?" said the girl.

"If you asked me, I'd go."

It was the simplest possible avowal of love. He hardly meant it to be that, in fact. But as his glance dwelt on her, he knew that she had given the first profound significance to his life; she and Chinook who had become her dog!

She looked away down the trail.

"I meant to ask you. You're right," said she. "That was because I thought you were only a big——"

She checked herself.

"But now I've changed my mind," she said. "I see that you're a lot more. And I don't think that I'll ever ask you to lift a hand for poor Bert Fernal!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CURSE.

JOHNSON was very bitter about it. As the two came up to the sled, he gave Windham one look and then called out in irritated tones: "You've been yapping to her, have you?"

"I've talked to her a little," replied Windham.

"Then, damn you," said Johnson, "I hope that the redskins cut your throat, as they've done with the rest of 'em. You're the biggest and the blindest fool that ever lived!"

For forty-eight hours he refused to speak to Windham. They worked and traveled together in utter silence. The amazing thing was that Julie did not try to break that silence for a moment. She acted, in fact, as though she were afraid of Johnson and did not wish to risk offending him, even by an attempt to make peace between him and his traveling companion.

Then, one night, through the darkness they saw the lights of Fort Yukon, first grouped together in one little haze of radiance, then expanding, until they stretched out wide, warm arms to the trio.

"Now it's nearly done," said Johnson. That was all he spoke until they had driven into the little town.

The dogs went in on the run, whipping the light sleds behind them. The girl rode. Active as she was, she could not quite keep up with such a long-legged gait as this! So they came, smoking, into Fort Yukon. The dogs, as though the various smells of town, cookery, here and there, had maddened them, let loose wild outcries. which were answered by five hundred wide-mouthed sled dogs of the town.

They slowed, a little, as they passed a pedestrian, a man who looked like a child's image in snow, so clumsy was the fur-wrapped figure.

"Where's Dean Carey?" shouted Johnson. "Living or dead?"

"He's down yonder, in Bud Wagram's house," replied the other.

Andy Johnson yelled to Chinook and he hit the collar hard, the team surging forward behind him. At full speed they shot away and came at last to a halt, as Andy put on the brakes and yelled. They were in front of a house with a wide, low front and a big chimney standing up bluntly above the rest of the building. There was no knocking at front doors.

"Open her up and go in!" called Andy Johnson to his companion and, as Windham made the entrance, Johnson brought Julie in behind.

This part of the building, as Windham saw it, was obviously a store, with heaps of furs, perhaps waiting for the next steamer up the Yukon for shipment. Upon shelves or laid out for show on counters, there were dog harnesses, guns, ammunition, knives, clothes of all sorts to fit the Northern weather and turn the edge of its winds.

THIS display was dimly lighted by a single smoky lantern in a far corner; a brighter glow and a hum of voices came from an inner compartment. As he got to the doorway that opened upon this

room, Windham found himself entering a much smaller chamber, with a large stove that glowed red with warmth in the center, and three or four men seated about it. He gave them only a glance.

In a father corner, he saw a bedridden invalid lying with a wan, thin face, and eyes closed in weariness that seemed more than cousin to death itself. As happens from prolonged weakness, prolonged despair, the very skin of the man's face seemed to be pulling, so that the corners of his lips were drawn in a smile resembling very much that of an Egyptian mummy.

"That's Dean Carey, I guess?" asked Windham, giving no other greeting to the rest of the company.

The sick man opened his eyes wide. He looked at the ceiling instead of at Windham.

"I'm Dean Carey," answered a voice almost foolishly big and strong.

Then he raised his weak head and stared at the doorway. Windham, feeling his companions coming up, stepped aside. The removal of his bulk was like the shifting of a curtain on a stage, for in the gap which he had filled appeared instantly Andy Johnson and the girl.

The sight brought the other three loiterers in the room to their feet.

"It's her!" gasped one of them. "He's gone and got her, all right. Who'd ever've thought it!"

"I'd've thought it," said the sick man. "Andy, he never was the man to go back on his word! Andy, you're gonna let me die easy, at the end!"

"Die?" said Andy, striding rapidly up to the side of the bed. "You'll never die from this, Dean. Why, you look ready to jump out of bed and run a hundred miles."

"All right," said the sick man. "I'm glad that I look that way to you."

But he smiled a little.

"I won't be askin' you how you got her. But I'm mighty glad to see her."

He made a gesture with his thin hand. It dismissed Andy, who stepped to one side, and so the girl stood alone at the bed of Dean Carey.

The latter looked at her, but with what expression the others could only guess, so much did his long, drooping lashes veil his eyes. Only the smile was plucking still, in a ghostly way, at the edges of his mouth.

Windham made several steps toward the center of the room.

He wanted to see the girl's face as she talked to Carey, and he was amazed to see that she appeared entirely calm, almost smiling. She actually sat down on the edge of the bed and took one of the bony hands of the invalid in both of hers.

"I'm sorry to see you like this, Dean," said she.

"Are you?" he questioned.

IT was an absurdly big voice which came up out of that wasted throat, the big Adam's apple wavering up and down in it, visibly.

"Yes, Dean," she replied. "What happened?"

"Aw, nothing much," said Dean Carey. "Only, they busted my heart for me. That was all. But I saw your brat of a brother."

He opened his eyes more widely. There was visible a glare in them—a steady and baleful glare—which he fixed upon the girl.

"Why didn't you tell me about him?" he asked of Julie Fernal.

"I told you all that I could about him," said the girl.

"You lie!" said Dean Carey. "You didn't tell me what a swine he was. You said that he was a man!"

Windham began to sweat. Yet the heat of the stove had not yet pierced through the arctic chill in which he was armored.

"He is a man," said the girl, calmly and steadily. "He's the bravest sort of a man that I ever knew."

"You lie again, and you know that you lie," said Dean Carey. "He's a throat-cutter, like the beastly crowd of red men that he's living with. He lives with 'em because he likes the life. If he hadn't've liked it, he would've come away with me, when I went there. We had a chance, then. But he wouldn't come. The cur! He sold me to 'em!"

His thin lips grinned suddenly back from his teeth. It looked as though he would snap at her, like a wild beast. Windham grew sick at heart. Yet the girl did not shrink from Dean Carey.

"It's pretty hard for me to believe that, Dean," she said.

"What made you send me in?" he demanded of her, his voice turning hoarse, so that it was almost inaudible.

"To save poor Bert," she answered.

"You lie again!" said Carey. "You wanted to show that you had power over men. You wanted to put your curse on me, the same way that you've put it on other men. You wanted me to be soaked up by the snow. You wanted them to get their knives into my throat. Why, you said what you'd do for me if I brought him out!"

"I said that I'd marry you," said the girl.

"Then marry me now," said Dean Carey. "Because I'd have brought him with me, if he would have come!"

"I made a bargain with you," she answered. "You didn't do your part of it."

"Because of him, because of him!" shouted Carey, furiously. "But didn't I do my part? I'll show you what I paid!"

Suddenly he ripped open his shirt and showed his breast, hideously marked and puckered with scars.

"They did that with coals of fire!" he shouted. "They did that for two days. One coal at a time! They stood around and watched me, and they laughed. And me, I yelled for help the second day. I was a woman. I screamed. I begged! Me, I done that! Me, Dean Carey. I crawled at their feet, I hugged the knees of their chief and begged him to kill me or let me go, but to end it. That's what I done!"

HE began to sob. The tears ran freely down his face. "Here, Dean," broke in Andy Johnson, while the other men in the room crowded into a far corner of it. "Here, Dean, old partner, it's not worth while. Nothing you ever did will make the rest of us feel any different about you. You're going to be yourself again, one of these days. As for her, let her be damned!"

Carey waved him and his argument aside. He spoke again, in a broken voice.

"I got away on the third night," he said to the girl, who sat motionless, steadily gazing at the tormented face. "I got away. They took their time hunting for me, I guess. They knew that I couldn't get away far, the shape that I was in. And they were right. Somewhere out there on the tundra I died. The real part of me died. Only this damned thing

mushed through to Fort Yukon. That's all! And I've laid here living from that time to this, only waiting for Andy to bring you up, so's I could put my curse on you, before I pass in my checks!"

There was a faint gasp. Windham sucked in his breath with a deep, whistling sound. The eyes of the sick man were bulging from his head, hideously.

"Here's my curse on you," shouted Carey in a terrible voice. "May you love a man as I've loved you, till the heart in you burns night and day. May you crawl on your knees to him, as I've crawled to the feet of the chief, out yonder in that white hell. And then may he kick you away from him, as a man would kick a mangy cur! And may the devil get you at last!"

He fell back, exhausted and lay still as a stone.

CHAPTER XVII.

FIRST AID.

WINDHAM was never to forget that scene or even that moment. When Dean Carey fell back unconscious on his bed, with his breast still exposed and the scars showing, not a man in the room moved for an instant.

Then Andy Johnson stepped forward. It seemed to Windham that the man had extraordinary nerve, because he dared to stir when the atmosphere of that place was surcharged, as it appeared, by the curse of Dean Carey.

Straight to her side went Johnson. He took her by the arm and shook it. She looked up at him and Windham could have cried out with amazement, for her gaze was perfectly level and calm.

"What is it?" she asked him. "What's the matter, Andy?"

"That's all he wanted out of you," said Johnson, snarling like an angry dog. "He simply wanted to put his curse on you before he died. And I put mine on you, too. So does every other man here, Julie, because of what you are. But there's no weight in ours compared with the curse of a dead man."

She seemed totally unconcerned. The blood of Windham ran ice as he watched her.

He was badly frightened, too, to think that such a woman should have had such a hold over him. That hold was broken now, surely and forever, he told himself.

"You think that he's cursed me and died," said the girl. "But he hasn't at all. He's cursed me, and now he's going to live."

"He's a dead or a dying man right now!" insisted Johnson.

He pointed to the face of Dean Carey. It was a grim grayish green.

But the girl shook her head.

"You're sentimental, you fellows," she answered, looking at Johnson and then at the others.

Very deliberately she leaned and placed her ear to the heart of Carey, counting out the action of the man's heart, as she did so. Then she straightened.

"He's going to be all right," she said. "His ticker is running along slowly, and not very strongly, but it's steady enough. For a broken heart, it seems to be doing a pretty good job."

She stood up and yawned. Windham thought that Andy Johnson would strike her down, for the man's fist was balled in a knot, and his face was black and working.

"Look here, Bud Wagram," she said. "What have you been feeding him?"

A gray-haired, solidly built man answered: "The best things that

we could give him. Clear soup and crackers, and light things like that."

She snapped her fingers. "I thought so," she said. "Here's a dog-puncher who's been living on fried bacon, grease, and flour, most of his working days. And you give him fresh air and clear soup. There's no building power in clear soup, you idiot. You've got some good, fat, frozen quarters of caribou, haven't you?"

"Of course, I have," said Wagram. "But that sort of a diet would just about kill him."

DON'T you believe it! You cut him off a good steak, and don't cook it too much," she replied, tartly. "Leave some juice in it. I'll cook that steak for him, because I know how. You take my word for it, he could stow away a pound of steak, right now."

She added: "And coffee. And a good, soggy pancake, such as he'd have out on the march. Make it small. Put in plenty of grease. He needs something to put under his ribs, and you've given him nothing but a lot of kindness. Affection isn't what he needs. He needs chuck. He hasn't got a broken heart. He's just got an empty stomach."

She walked toward the stove.

"Here's a red-hot place where I could grill a steak for him," she said. "Now, Bud, you trot out and whack me off a good caribou steak. Pick out a piece with plenty of fat on it. A young, tender chunk of caribou will put that fellow back on his feet. Jimmy, you rustle me up some bacon. Pete, you can get hold of the coffeepot and bring it in here with some water in it.

"Andy, there's no use in standing around, glaring. Hating me won't put Dean Carey back in trim. Button up that shirt of his and tuck the bedclothes up under his chin. Don't worry about him. He'll come to when the smoke of that burning steak gets to his nose. Ned, rustle some wood and jam it into the stove. Let's have a little action around here."

Action there was, accordingly. Every man in the room jumped to obey her orders. Only Andy Johnson, as he walked reluctantly toward the bed, turned his head and scowled at her over his shoulder. She merely waved at him as, with a piece of old newspaper, she scoured the top of the stove clean.

"Keep your temper, Andy," she said. "You know what happens when you lose your head in a fight. And this is a fight to get Dean Carey fixed up. Healing a broken heart is pretty tough work. But you just watch!"

Andy said nothing. But his look, it seemed to Windham, was a little silly as he sat on the edge of the bed and obeyed the instructions of the girl.

In the meantime, the other men had brought in the meat, the coffeepot, and the bacon. Almost at once, the steak was hissing upon the red-hot surface of the stove. The meal was quickly prepared. The great heat of the stove soon had the coffeepot simmering.

Larded with pieces of bacon, fried just enough but not dry, and with crackers flanking it, the girl carried the hot, steaming platter to the bedside. There she sat while Dean Carey, his eyes open now and his color much better, looked up at her with the puzzled, blank expression of a sick child.

"Try this, Dean," she said.

"Why, hullo, Julie," said Carey, and he smiled faintly at her. "By Jiminy, but it's good to lay eyes on your pretty face again!"

HE had forgotten the scene that had gone before, at least, for the moment. "Try this," she repeated, cutting off a generous mouthful of the juicy steak, and holding it at his lips. "This is what you need, old son."

He let her feed him like a child. Between mouthfuls, his glance lifted from her hand to her face, and then dropped again.

"Seems like I'm as hollow as a cave," said he.

"Sure you are," answered Julie. "And we're going to fill up that cave, Dean. Hand me a cupful of that coffee, one of you. Take a sip of this, Dean. It's got just your amount of sugar in it. This'll fix you up, old-timer!"

He sipped the coffee. His color grew momentarily higher, until when the steak was half finished, he muttered: "I'm mighty sleepy, Julie. Wanta talk to you a lot. You'll be here when I wake up, won't you?"

"Of course, I will," said the girl. "You just drop off. When you wake up, there'll be a brand new steak for you, old son."

"Ah, Julie," said Carey. "I've been a terrible long distance away from the sound of your voice. Seems as though I've been——"

"Never you mind where you've been," said Julie. "You've had a fever. And you've had a lot of bad dreams. That's what you've had. You go to sleep, now, and I'll be right here when you wake up."

Instantly his eyes closed. He smiled, and a moment later he was breathing deeply and regularly.

"By thunder," whispered "Bud" Wagram, "you're a regular doctor, Julie. I never would've thought of feeding the poor guy that sort of chow."

"Yeah," replied the girl, nodding and speaking brightly, "there are a pile more people killed with kindness than with rough treatment, Bud. You write that down. You don't have to whisper, either. He'll sleep the clock round and never have a dream. He needs that much sleep to digest the steak that he has inside of him."

She stood up.

"What about some eats for us, Bud?" she asked. "When do we come in on the eating, I'd like to know? I could eat a whole herd of caribou myself, I'll have you know!"

But Wagram merely grinned at her.

"Julie," said he, "you've earned the best meal that I can turn out for you!"

"If she's bringing Dean around," said Andy Johnson, the words rumbling in his throat, "who was it that almost killed him? Answer me that? You're going to thank her for giving a hand to the fellow that she almost drowned, eh? That's the kind of a joke that I don't laugh at. Not on both sides of my face at once!"

"You're sour, Andy," said the girl. "But you'll feel better when you see Dean Carey sitting up in bed and talking rough again."

"Tell me this," said Johnson. "Are you even sorry about what he's gone through? Do you give a rap about what he's suffered, on account of you?"

SHE replied evenly: "Listen to me, Andy. You've had your inning, and you've had a long one. You've driven me like a dog, and I've had to take it. As for what you think about me, I don't give a rap. As for what I think about Dean Carey, and what he went through, that's my business. As for what I think about you—well, I'll let you know what that is, before

long, and it won't be with words! Put that idea in your pipe and smoke it for a while."

She turned from Johnson, and for the first time since Windham had joined the pair of them he saw Johnson stand, scowling and silent, at a loss for the proper words to speak.

At length the little man turned to Windham and murmured, as he came up to him:

"You see what she is, Ned. I hope you're cured."

"Cured?" said Windham. "I tell you, that I'm cured for life. She's not a woman at all," he went on, grasping vaguely at an idea. "She's in a class by herself—and what that class is I don't know, except that it's dangerous."

"Dangerous?" said Johnson. He laughed faintly.

"She's a snake. Where she breaks the skin, she leaves poison." He paused, and then he added: "She'll get me, too. I wonder how she'll go about it."

That question was soon to be answered!

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WALK.

AFTER dinner, that night, they rented two rooms from Bud Wagram, whose place was half store and half hotel. Windham turned in and slept like a dead man, the round of the clock and something more. He was awakened in the morning by a whining in the next room. When he opened his eyes, he saw that his roommate, Andy Johnson, was already up and dressed.

"It's her," said Johnson, slowly. "She's got your wolf dog in there with her, talking baby talk to him, and teaching him to do tricks, I suppose."

Suddenly, from the next room, Windham heard soft, joyous barking, that wound up in a whimper of excitement.

"What can she be doing to him?" muttered Windham, jumping up from his bed.

"Aw, she's teaching him to jump through a hoop, I suppose," said Andy Johnson.

He buried his face in both hands and stared at the floor.

"What's the matter with you, Andy?" asked his friend. "You look mighty bad."

"I couldn't sleep all night," answered Johnson. "I kept thinking, all the while, how it was that she would get even with me—how she would sink the knife into me! I couldn't figure it out!"

"She'll never be able to do you any harm," said Windham. "Not while I'm up and around!"

Johnson put out a hand and gripped the great arm of the other.

"You're a friend, old son," said he. "You're a friend of the right cut, and I'm going to need you. Still, she'll find a way. She'll get at me, sooner or later. I knew it when I grabbed her and took her on this trip to Fort Yukon."

He stood up, with his fists clenched high above his head, but his voice was soft as he said: "Why doesn't some one put a bullet through her cursed, clever brain, and end her forever? That's what I want to know!"

Windham shuddered as he looked into the contorted face of Johnson.

"You look here, Andy," he said with concern. "You lie down there and try to get some of the sleep you've lost. You're letting your mind work on this girl too much. She can't harm you. I'll promise you that! Now I'm going to get out and take a run and get some

fresh air into my lungs. This room is as close as a sealed barrel."

He heard the scratching of the lobo as the girl and the wolf passed down the hallway.

"Go on out and take your walk," said Johnson, gloomily. "I'd do the same thing, if I had any nerve left. But my nerve's gone. It's a funny thing how she can take the heart out of a man. Look at Dean Carey. Look at me!"

He shook his head, and the last that Windham saw of him that morning, Johnson was seated on the edge of the bed, his face buried in both hands.

FOR his own part, he ate a hearty breakfast, swallowed a quart of steaming hot coffee, while he ate half a loaf of bread heaped with vast mountains of apple jam. Then he strode forth to get his lungful of the open air.

He went down to the river bank, striding happily, his shoulders back, new vigor pouring through him with the knowledge that this day there would be no more marching than he chose. Yet he missed something. There had been a weird fascination in trekking forward, day after day, pushing along toward the goal.

He had thought it was the mere excitement of the march itself. Now he saw that he was wrong. It was not the excitement. It was the joy of conquering something from the iron white strength of this Northern kingdom.

A sharp halloo behind him made him turn, and there he saw the girl running along, pulling back on Chinook. He seemed to be charging headlong after his master, but when she spoke one word, he came to a halt and sat down, lolling his long tongue and watching Windham out of green-glimmering eyes.

"Hates me, doesn't he?" said Windham. "Look at the green in those eyes, will you?"

"You don't understand him, Ned," said she. "Some day you will, and then you'll get on with him."

"Tell me what there is to understand," said he, "and then I'll try real hard."

"You're afraid of him," she answered, with her level glance probing his.

He remembered, with shame and with inward cold, the day when he had striven vainly to master the eye of the wolf dog.

"It's true," he said. "I've been scared to death of him."

"That's why he hates you," said she.

"And not because I've beaten him to pulp?" he asked her.

"Because a thing that's afraid of him was able to beat him. That's why he hates you," said she. "That's why he'll wait for years till he has a chance to slash your throat. And if you stay with him long enough, sooner or later, he'll certainly be the death of you, Ned."

"I'm not putting a price on him, however," said he, smiling at her.

She nodded.

"I wasn't trying to cheapen him, either," said she. "Even if I wanted him, I haven't the price that Andy Johnson would bid for him."

"I thought," said he, "that you knew a place where the gold is sticking its knees and elbows right out of the ground?"

"I know that place," said she. "Bert and I know it. We went out and worked it, too. There's a couple of thousand ounces lying there, sacked, right now. Done up in homemade caribou sacks. And we only skimmed the surface of that pot of milk, I tell you. We hardly made a dent in things."

"THEN why don't you go out and haul in the ounces?" said he. "A couple of thousand ounces make over thirty thousand dollars of any man's money."

"Why is Dean Carey lying in there, about done in?" she asked.

"Why, the Indians, I suppose."

"The Indians just about did us in, too," said she. "We managed to pull out, but all that we took with us was light stuff for fast traveling. They followed us pretty hard, but we had seven good dogs, and they saw us through. We nearly starved, too, before we made it back to the Fort. They ran us within eyeshot of it, very nearly."

She snapped her mittened fingers.

"That was a run for you, Ned!"

And she laughed joyously at the terrible memory of it! She had surprised him so often, he seemed no longer able to wonder at her.

"Then what about your brother, Bert? Why doesn't he get the stuff, if he's so thick with the Indians?"

"What good would gold do him, out there?" she asked. "Gold doesn't buy you anything from those fellows. Besides, he's been afraid to come back. He thought that he was wanted for the killing of Tiny Doc Morris. That's why he ran away and joined up with the tribe. And it wasn't he who had killed Morris. It was Turk Sandersen. Turk confessed it before he died. He confessed it while the ice pack that had caught him was crushing him to death. Jock Fuller brought that story in to the Fort."

Windham listened to this grisly tale, so lightly told.

"But Dean Carey says that he found your brother, and yet your brother is still out there."

"Dean Carey," replied the girl, grimly—one of her rare dark moments—"also said that Bert double-crossed him. That shows that Dean is either a fool or a liar. If Bert hasn't come in, it's because he can't come. Nothing in the world would keep him away from me, if he could break away from the tribe, and he knew that a hangman's noose wasn't waiting at this end of the line."

Windham grinned at her.

"Are you telling me the truth, Julie?" he said.

"Yes," she answered. "It doesn't pay to lie, most of the time. I usually tell the truth, Ned."

"You told me," said Windham, "when I first met you, that if I took you away from Andy, you'd show me where the gold was pouring out of the ground."

"That's true," said she.

"Except that the Indians would have cut me up for fish bait before I got away with the stuff. Is that the way of it?"

She merely shrugged her shoulders, totally unembarrassed.

"That's one way of looking at it," said she. "There's another angle," she went on. "You've seen Dean Carey stretched out in there. You know now what those Indians are capable of doing. How does that make you feel, Ned? Just tell me that."

"FEEL? I'm mighty sorry about him. That was a bad sight, when he opened his shirt," said Windham.

"Did you give up the idea, when you saw those scars?" she asked him.

"What idea?" asked Windham, frowning down at her.

"Why, the idea that you had had before, about trying your own hand to get Bert in."

She planted her feet a little apart. There was a ring in her voice that made Chinook leap up and face his master, with a silent snarl.

"Who told you that I had that idea?" asked Windham.

She shrugged her shoulders and smiled at him.

"You know, Ned," said she. "You're not so very deceptive. I've seen you looking at me, on the march, now and then, as though you were telling yourself that the she-devil might be worth having, in spite of what Andy Johnson said!"

And she laughed a little, softly.

"Would you sell yourself, Julie?" asked Windham. "To a man?"

"For Bert?" cried the girl. "Why, I'd sell myself a thousand times over. I'd marry a Digger Indian, if he could save Bert. You don't understand. He's my brother, my kid brother. My father told me to look after him, and I promised! And there's Bert, lost to me and lost to himself!"

CHAPTER XIX.

GETTING ADVICE.

WINDHAM looked down at the girl quietly, with an odd numbness taking hold of his brain. Then he smiled at her, faintly. "I don't know about you, Julie," he said. "You may be right. Again, you may be wrong. But that doesn't seem to have much to do with it. You get what you want. Who am I to stand up against you? Only, we'll make no bargain. If I go out there to try my luck and get your brother—well, I simply try my luck. It might make us better friends and nothing more. We'll let it ride at that."

She slid her arm through his and began to walk along at his side, urging him forward, so that she was turned a little toward him, and laughed gayly up to him.

"None of the rest would ever have said that, Ned," she told him. "You're the biggest pair of shoulders; you're the biggest heart, too. I always guessed at that!"

"I'm a pretty dull fellow, Julie," he answered. "And you've guessed that, too!"

"I've guessed at that," she replied with her amazing frankness. "But I don't mind it. Cleverness you can find in a fox. But the lion leads a fatter life and so does the bear. Now tell me if you've really made up your mind?"

"I suppose I have," said Windham. "Don't crowd me about it, but I suppose that I'll do the thing if I can. I try to think that I'm not fool enough to tackle a job at which so many wiser dog-punchers have failed. Still, I'm fairly sure that in a day or so, I'll be getting ready to leave. That is, if I see your face now and then, Julie."

"I don't want to be a Delilah with you, Ned," said the girl.

He sighed.

"You can't help being what you are, Julie," he answered. "Any more than Chinook can help being what he is. You see, I'm a smaller and a weaker sort, except for mere muscles. I'm afraid of Chinook; I'm rather more afraid of you. But I'll go ahead like a fool attached to a lost cause. That's the way of it. Bad luck has found me out. A year ago, I was as secure as a gopher in a hole. Now I'm routed out and chucked up here in the North, to freeze, I suppose."

"Or to get rich, Ned," said the girl.

"Well, that's the other chance," said he. "But with me, it's like roulette. I'm putting my life on a single number, and thirty-five chances against me."

They went on in utter silence. It was more than an hour before they returned to Fort Yukon and the

hotel-store of Bud Wagram. They had not spoken a word, but every minute the slender arm of the girl had been inside the arm of Windham; he had heard her breathing at his shoulder. Once she broke into song, softly, checking herself suddenly as though she did not wish to intrude upon the privacy of his thoughts.

WHEN they came to the store, he had made his decision. He gave one long, farewell look at the girl and then marched inside, taking Chinook with him, the big brute bristling with hatred all up and down his back, his mane standing like the mane of a great black lion, multiplying his size.

In the inner room, Windham found Andy Johnson at the bedside of Dean Carey. The latter was already a changed man. His eyes were clear. The dreadful puckered look was gone from about the eyes and the mouth. In place of the gray-green color, there was an almost healthy, clear pallor.

He waved his hand feebly to Windham.

"Andy's told me how you helped him on the mush up here," said he. "I'm thanking you, big son! I've written it down where the writing won't rub out! Have you seen Julie this morning?"

"No," lied Windham, instantly.

Johnson looked at him with relief in his eyes.

"I don't understand," muttered the sick man, with irritation. "Don't understand why she's not around. Confounded strange girl, Andy, ain't she? Ain't I right?"

"Yes," replied Andy. "How's the weather outside, Ned?"

"Sharpish," said Windham. "But pretty good to breathe."

Now he went into the corner room, where he found Bud Wagram nursing a pipe, sleepily, and perusing a tattered newspaper, at least five months old.

He had spread before him a closely printed double page of want ads, and these he read with the utmost attention, one by one, here and there pausing to make a little mark with his thumb nail, like any lounger on a park bench in Manhattan. Now and then, also, he would give a small shake of his head or a nod, or raise his eyebrows with an expression of the utmost interest.

Windham watched him, unobserved, for a time with great amusement.

"Hullo, Wagram," he said at length.

Wagram marked his place with a sooty forefinger. Then he looked up.

"I want some advice," said Windham. "I want to ask you because you're an old-timer. I want to go out after Bert Fernal."

"There's only one kind of advice to give you," replied the storekeeper. "Go in and take another look at the body of poor Carey, and see just what the damned Chandalars did to him."

"Is that the name of the Indians?" asked Windham.

"That's their name," said Wagram.

"If you won't advise me," said Windham, "then I'll pick up a guide and go ahead on my own hook. Wagram, you could tell me enough to give me a start!"

"I'll tell you nothing," insisted Wagram. "I won't help you commit suicide! Get out of here."

But Windham waited, and said nothing.

"Will you get out?" asked Wagram, sullenly.

Windham shook his head.

ALL right. I guess I gotta talk to you, you fool," said the storekeeper. "Sit down there. No, it's better that you should come out with me, and I'll show you what you want. How many dogs have you got?"

"One."

"One!"

"Yes, that's all."

"You'll need eleven more, or a dozen more. And a guide. What have you got?"

"Myself, one dog, and plenty of spare cash."

"I hope you rot!" exclaimed Wagram.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CHANDALAR.

FOR two weeks, steadily, Windham accumulated his equipment. First he bought eleven dogs. It was the idle season at Fort Yukon and dogs, therefore, were not overly expensive, considering how far in the post was. He got dogs with the look of travelers, dogs that their owners were willing to vouch for.

He bought single harness, to tail them out in a line, harness made of the strong, light webbing which is far stronger per ounce than any leather. And on this trip, ounces would count. From the first, Wagram had impressed that idea upon him.

They used to sit up until late every night, working out the details. Upon Wagram's advice, he did not buy woolen underwear, but linen, which was actually woven in mesh! As Wagram pointed out, that would allow evaporation.

"You're going to be out in forty below all the time," said Wagram. "It'll be a mighty warm and balmy day, when it gets up to thirty. There'll be wind, too. Don't let them tell you that zero temperatures kill the wind. Not up there on the tundra. No, sir! And a wind at fifty below, which is what you'll have more than one day, goes straight through to the bone. That's not all.

It will hit sixty below, too, and maybe even lower. And that's death, as sure as bullets through the brain, unless you've got the right equipment.

Even the dogs can hardly stand it. Even that big ugly brute of a leader of yours will hardly be able to make the grade!

"From the minute that you leave Fort Yukon, everything about you has to be right or you're a dead man. You're a dead man anyway, most likely, as soon as the Chandalars get their hands on you! Chief Little Knife will lick his lips when he sees that much white man all wrapped up in one skin. But I want to keep you in good condition so's you'll get that far, at least!"

He grinned savagely, without humor, at Windham.

Siberian squirrel, for its weight, is as warm a fur as there is in the world. Of this his parka was made. The hood was faced with fox and wolverene. The wolverene was there because it is the only fur on which the moisture of the breath does not collect and freeze, putting an ice pack around the face! The hood was lined with silk, which enabled one to don it readily; also, it was light.

The lightest and warmest-footed animal in the wilds is the lynx, with its great, cotton-furred paws. Of those paws were the mittens made, cunning Indian work. The feet of the mukluks were moosehide, the tops were of caribou with the fur, of course, turned to the inside. Altogether, in spite of his size, the

weight of that clothing, was hardly more than six and a half pounds!

Men hesitated to go out upon a New York street without a ten-pound overcoat weighting down their shoulders. But in those light and highly efficient garments, Windham would see seventy degrees before ever, by the grace of fortune, he could come back to Fort Yukon again!

THERE are luxuries, too, such as extra light socks of caribou fur, the fur of the unborn caribou, the most delicate thing in the world. And there were other matters, too numerous to mention, worked up by the careful forethought of Wagram.

"You ought not to win," he said. "You ain't got a chance to win. Everybody knows that you ain't. If the folks around here was to guess where you aim to travel, they'd arrest you for a crazy man and send you outside in shackles. Only, you might have beginners' luck."

A hundred pounds of big brown beans were cooked and frozen. There were paraffin bags to hold the flour, sugar, rice, and other provisions. There were axes, dog feed, stove, stovepipe, guns, medicine kit and sewing kit, besides other details, small in bulk but great in importance. Hardly less important than all the rest, were the sleds; perhaps they were the most important of all!

Wagram got from his storeroom three toboggans, each a few inches over nine feet in length. The carryalls were of walrus hide, in good condition, which was an essential point for quick, secure packing. In addition, the working surfaces of the runners had to be gone over carefully with linseed oil, which was rubbed in again and again.

Now, when these preparations were completed and the pile of luggage was stacked up, it was found that Ned Windham had nearly fifteen hundred pounds to be hauled by his twelve dogs!

Well, they would pull it. Chinook was as good as two or three in one. Although the going in many places might be hard, Wagram told him that it was better to have the dogs working hard, rather than to have extra mouths to eat up the food too rapidly.

In the end, Windham had reason to think that Wagram was wrong in this respect.

When the total outfit was assembled, Wagram swore that it was as well outfitted a pack as ever had left for the Far North. Windham himself felt a great sense of security and confidence when he looked over the dogs and saw what they would pull.

There was still the guide to find. Wagram got hold of a big, rawboned, wide-shouldered half-breed.

His mother herself had been a Chandalar. His father was a Scotchman named Aintree. Gus Aintree was the half-breed's name. He had been raised with the tribe. During those years they were occupying their pleasant southern range, long before they were crowded north by the rush of the gold diggers, before they had developed that passionate hatred of all things white.

Now Gus Aintree was a professional guide and dog-puncher.

Sullen of mouth and eye—how small and piglike were those eyes—he stood before Wagram and Windham, shifting his glance from one to the other.

"You know the way out to the Chandalars?" said Wagram.

"No," said the half-breed, and shook his head violently.

YOU'RE a liar. You know damn well that you went out there on a trip, the last year or so," said the storekeeper. "You visited some of your red relatives. Don't you lie to me, Aintree."

The half-breed did not even blink.

"Well?" he said.

"This man wants to go out there," said Wagram.

Aintree failed to look at the giant.

"This man chechahco," he replied, gruffly.

"This man is fire on the trail," said Wagram. "You know Andy Johnson, run all week, never stop. This man, he run down Andy. He make Andy sick, he so tired. He nearly make Andy cry. Savvy?"

"Aintree think maybe Andy Johnson no cry," said the half-breed.

"Cut the talk short," said the trader. "You're going to go with Windham. How much you want a day?"

The breed held up both hands.

"Ten dollars a day?" said the trader. "Sure! That pretty cheap price for you and your father, his brother and young John. But this man want only you. What your price, Gus?"

Again both hands were raised, the ten fingers lifted stiffly.

Wagram grinned. "You talk like a fool, Gus," said he. "You never made that much money in your life."

Gus shrugged his shoulders.

"Chandalar very bad, now," said he.

And he whipped his forefinger across his throat, though his face retained its immobile expression.

"Too much. Ten dollars a day a lot too much," said the trader.

Gus, without farewell, turned about and strode to the door. Wagram made an angry gesture to Windham.

"He's an iron man on the trail. You've got to have him," he muttered.

As Gus reached the door, the trader called out: "Hold on, Gus!"

The half-breed turned slowly about. He showed no interest whatever.

"Look here," said Wagram. "You want lot of money, Gus."

Gus shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say that the job was worth much money.

"Well," said Wagram, "my friend want good man. He pay you money, then. He pay you a lot. One hundred dollars a month!"

The eyebrows of Gus lifted.

Windham was about to break into a laugh. One hundred dollars was offered in the place of the three hundred which the breed had demanded, but now he was amazed to hear the Chandalar reply: "All right. Gus go. Hundred dollars, eh?"

"Yeah. A whole hundred dollars a month," said the trader. "You're a lucky dog, Gus. You be ready tonight. You'll make early start. Savvy?"

NO. Not to-night. Gus want one more good drunk. Then he go," said Gus. "To-morrow night lot better. Gus go then." He did not wait to discuss the matter, but stalked on out from the store.

When he was gone, Wagram sat down with a laugh.

"I don't want to cheat that fellow," said Windham.

"He's weak on arithmetic," said Wagram. "But that's his fault. He's had chances to learn. Now he'll have to pay through the nose for never opening a book. However, he's the man for you on the trail."

"He looks like a throat-cutter," said Windham.

"Sure he is," answered the other, carelessly. "But I think it'll take a bigger man than he is, to cut your throat, old son. You'll have no trouble with him, I guess. Take things easy. The time'll come, mark my words, when that ugly map of his will look better than an angel's to you. He'll never play out, unless you work those long legs of yours too fast the first few days out. If he gets ugly and tries to come back, knock him down and rag him along for a day. That'll put the fear in him, the half-breed dog!

"Never trust him behind your back! All the same, he'll do his share of the work. He won't talk too much. And he knows every inch of the ground between Fort Yukon and the Chandalar village. He's the only man for you, so what more can you ask?"

Windham nodded. The ugly face and the uglier manner of the breed still stuck in his mind, as it were, like a bur. But he managed to nod his head.

"I'll try it with him," he said. "But it may not be a very pleasant companionship."

"What you think it'd be, anyway? A pink tea?" grunted Wagram. "You go in and sleep thirty-six hours. That's what you'd better do before you hit that trail. And don't let a soul know where you're going, or the boys are likely to lynch Julie Fernal. And I'd be the next one they'd string up!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE START.

IN spite of the fact that he knew there was sound sense in the advice which he had just received, Windham preferred to go out into the open air.

So he went out into the street, and there he almost floundered against Murray, the half-breed. The dark-faced man did not try to escape. He stood there with a smile upon his ugly face and looked steadily at Windham.

The latter struck. He would have used the ball of his fist and thereby smashed in the face of the other; but he changed his mind at the last instant and used a mere backhand. Even this had ample weight enough to knock Murray flat.

The smaller man got up again. He wiped some blood from his mouth and faced the giant once more. The wan, strange smile was still upon his lips.

Then Windham collared him and thrust him into the store, to the big room, where many men were seated around the stove.

They looked up. A murmur went around the place. For Windham still had his hand in the neck of Murray's parka. Old Wagram came in, puffing at his pipe, scowling through the smoke he raised.

Julie Fernal came in, almost unobserved. Andy Johnson was there, also, and Chinook stood at the girl's back.

"This fellow," said Windham, "is the one that swiped Chinook from me, down there in California. I had to trail him all the way north. I had to run all the way clean on to Fort Yukon to save my neck, and keep Chinook. Now, in my part of the country, there's something done to horse thieves. What happens to dog thieves in this neck of the woods?"

He flung Murray from him. The man went staggering, close to the stove, before he recovered his balance. Then he straightened up and began to rub his neck, pushing back the hood of the parka.

The smile was still on his lips. It

reminded Windham, with a sudden thrust of pain and of disgust, of the smile of Julie Fernal herself.

"Let's have a look at this snitcher," said Wagram, approaching inside the muttering circle of men who stared at Murray.

Then he nodded. "I know him. He calls himself Murray. Tell me something, Murray. Are you a breed?"

Murray lifted a hand to his bleeding mouth and wiped it. It came away streaked with red before he answered:

"You look, and be damned! That's all I answer you when you ask me if I'm a breed!"

"I'll break your head for you," said Wagram, who had a violent temper. "You dirty sneakin' thief, you!"

"Hold on," said "Blondy" Grey, a man much respected all through the North. "Hold on, there. Murray, talk up like a he-man. Let's hear what he's got to say for himself. What have you got to say, Murray? Did you really steal the dog?"

PERHAPS lies shot through the mind of Murray, but he discarded them, unused. It was too plain that these people knew and respected the great Windham. Andy Johnson, that fierce and famous dog-puncher, had worked over to the side of the giant and was glaring at the stranger.

"Yeah. I swiped Chinook," said he. "What's more, if I got a chance, I'd swipe him again. What other one of you would have the nerve even to try to swipe that brute—from that man!"

He pointed at Chinook, first, and then at Windham.

Chinook lay down at the feet of Julie and looked adoringly up at her face. Then he dropped his head upon his paws and closed his eyes, feigning sleep.

Every man in the room was looking at the wolf dog.

"You take Windham, there," said Murray, in the same matter-of-fact tone of confession, "I swiped his dog, and he oughta be glad of it. He was living like a gopher in a hole. But he followed my trail until he learned how to be a man. He's a man now, leadin' a man's life. Should I be ashamed that I led him up North? Well, I'm not. All I regret is that he got Chinook back from me."

Wagram, when he heard the end of this speech, broke out into hearty laughter.

"You look here, Windham," he said. "You go and take him and turn him over to the authorities. That's the best thing to do with him. Speakin' real personal, though, I wouldn't hold no grudge agin' a thug that was willin' to talk right out like this about his thuggery."

Windham said nothing. He saw that most of the others in the room appeared to agree with Wagram. Numbers were against him.

Murray went on: "I see that Chinook has picked up a decoration since I last seen him. Is he your dog, now, ma'am?"

"I don't talk to thieves and dog-snatchers," said Julie, looking the half-breed deliberately in the face. And she left the room, with Chinook gliding behind her.

That smutched the triumph of Murray. The rascal immediately slunk away. Wagram called after him: "Whatever you do, don't come back in here, Murray. Windham may be too dog-gone good-natured to lay a hand on you, but some of the rest of us has got tempers of our own!"

Murray went out and disappeared

in the whirl of snow which the wind was raising in the street.

This left Windham rather staggered. For he had promised himself a thousand times, during the long, wild journey he had made from California and during the flight toward Fort Yukon, that he would one day have it all out with Murray, hand to hand. He had gripped his fingers against his palms with force enough to crush bones. One day he would crush the thief in just that manner.

But now Murray had appeared and disappeared safely, like some grim, grinning spirit of Eskimo legend.

Windham went out and found Julie in the storm. It was not really a blizzard. It was simply a mild, rapid dance of the newly fallen snow, which the wind was throwing into a thousand smoky images and half-guessed-at forms.

HE found her by following the rapidly dissolving, great footprints of Chinook. She ordered the dog back from her when he came up; and Chinook obeyed, half-blotted out by the falling throngs of the snow.

"I'm going to turn in and have my last warm sleep before I hit the trail," he said to her. "I'm saying good-by and taking Chinook."

"Here's the lead," said the girl. "Only, about Chinook——"

"What about him?"

"You think that you're safe with him? I know the chances that you've taken in the past, but suppose on this trip that you're burned up. Suppose you get giddy, some day, and slip in the snow. One slip, if he's near you, and it'll be the end of Ned Windham!"

"I know that you're right. I've figured out the thing the same way," said Windham. "But there's where I'll need him more than I'm apt ever to need him again. Out there in that white hell, you know—that's the sort of a place where a devil would be useful, Julie."

"You're going to-night?" she asked him, dismissing the other question with a gesture.

"No. I'm going to sleep twenty-four hours, eat and then start."

"You've got a guide?"

"Yes."

"Well, good luck, Ned."

"Thanks. Good-by, Julie."

She stepped suddenly inside his arms and held up her face. But Windham shook his head.

"That won't help me any," he declared. "It won't even help me to remember you. I'll be thinking enough about you all the way. And besides, it wouldn't mean anything from you—now. Not from you, Julie."

He saw the pucker of a frown. For the first time since he knew her she seemed baffled by a thing he had done, but his brain turned slowly upon such matters, and he was back at the store before a possible solution presented itself to him.

Even to this he did not give much thought. Only, as he was falling asleep, he remembered that he had made no bargain whatever with the girl. He was to make this stride out into the unknown not even for gold, but to discover an unknown man and drag him back to civilization, willing or unwilling.

As he thought of this, he smiled. He was a fool; indeed, he was a madman.

But, after all, had he not achieved the impossible already, in Wind Valley? Had they not laughed at him and his "valley of rocks" when he first went up into the place? He was attempting a greater and more

dangerous thing, now, but he knew that if one patiently, bravely adds day to day, a great total will at last be achieved.

Then he slept for twelve hours, awoke, ate five pounds of caribou meat, drank a quart of scalding black coffee and returned to sleep fifteen hours more.

THEN he got up, dressed, paid his bill to Wagram—a big one it was, leaving him with little money in his wallet!—and went out to harness his team in the night. It was already harnessed!

Gus Aintree was there with eleven dogs in harness and the sleds loaded and in line. Only Chinook was not in place, and Windham quickly put him there.

He said: "You savvy that dog, Gus? Bad medicine!"

Gus Aintree grunted.

"Gus and Chinook, they understand," said he.

This enigmatic statement was all that he would make.

A lantern came blinking through the snowstorm. Wagram stood beside them.

"It's a bad night for a start," he said. "This soft snow——"

"Any time is a bad time for starting this trip," said Windham. "But this will have to do for us."

"So long, then, old son," said the trader.

"So long, Bud," said Windham with determination.

He leaned his weight on the gee pole of the leading sled. He called. Chinook took up the slack with a jerk. The others swayed forward. With a crackling sound the sled came clear of the incrustations along its runners, and they were on their way toward the distant Chandalars, and Chief Little Knife, and Bert Fernal, the vanished man.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FROZEN TRAIL.

FROM the very start, it was the bitterest sort of hard slugging. Windham, striding ahead of the dogs to make trail, told himself that a bad beginning made a good ending. Then he almost laughed aloud at himself and his childish folly.

For something spoke in his inner ear, saying that the end of this, no matter what it was, could not be entirely good. Just as one feels the coming of disaster from the raising of the curtain upon a tragedy, so he felt horror in the future.

A few hours out from Fort Yukon, there was a change in the weather and the wind. The snow stopped falling. The mists were blown presently from before the face of the stars, and the long electric flags of the aurora borealis began to stream across the sky. There seemed to be joy in the heavens; yet never did Windham feel so far removed from happiness.

Underfoot, the snow was bad. The toboggans were overloaded. They traveled for twelve hours, and at the end of that time they were not more than eighteen miles from Fort Yukon!

Then they made camp.

Gus Aintree moved about with his jaw set hard and his nostrils flaring. He was far spent, but he did not want to admit it. Sullenly, from time to time, he fixed Windham with a side glance. The latter had broken trail every inch of those terrible miles, yet he was fresher at the end of the run than was the hardened half-breed. Of course, Gus Aintree was recovering from the effects of too much alcohol. He would do better later on.

They were on the march the next

day long before daylight. Aintree plotted the way, from landmark to landmark, and Windham broke the trail as on the first day. They went on for two hours, and then Aintree came up and, silently, took his place before the white man.

Windham understood, and glad he was to discover some pride in the heart of Aintree. Most men on the march like to match themselves against other men. And Aintree, it appeared, was willing to meet the test, breaking trail all of that day. But they covered even fewer miles than on the first day.

When they were drinking tea, after supper that night, Aintree spoke, almost his first words of the day:

"Too damn much weight on those sleds!"

"I know they're heavy," explained Windham. "But we've got to keep everything. When we get out on the tundra, it will be worse going. We need every pound of supplies that we're carrying. No use whining about it, now. We've got to go on. Later on, we'll be able to start making caches, every few marches. That will lighten the sleds a good deal. Believe me, Aintree, if what Wagram tells me is true, we'll need everything that we have with us, before we see Fort Yukon again!"

"We won't see Fort Yukon again!" said Aintree.

"What d'you mean by that?" asked Windham.

THERE was no answer. Aintree looked steadily down into his cup as though he had not heard the question, and Windham forbore to press him, for a moment.

At last he asked:

"Do you mean that we're both cooked?"

"Both cooked," said Gus.

"Why don't you turn back, then?" demanded Windham. "You're free to go back to the Fort, if you want to."

Aintree looked up with a start. His face was fierce with an angry scowl.

"Gus Aintree never turn back," he said. "White devil or black devil, Gus break trail with him to the moon!"

And he straightway turned in and refused to speak again. Yet, what he had said was a great comfort to Windham. He knew that muscles will give way and tendons sag, but a great pride will sustain the failing body.

They slogged on through the broken country. The days were short, beginning at nine and ending at three, or thereabout. They were much in the black of the dusk, feeling their way, as it were, toward their distant goal.

Aintree was always shaking his head and saying that they must go faster and farther during each day's march.

"Gotta fly! Gotta fly!" he used to mutter under his breath.

"We're not birds!" exclaimed Windham once, impatiently.

The other laughed suddenly, harshly, and would speak no more; and his eyes were fastened upon Windham with an evil light.

It was plain that he felt no love for the big white man. It mattered not that Windham was always eager to do more than his share of the work, whether it were making camp or breaking trail. In the latter work, his size of foot, his weight, his tremendous endurance made him preëminent. Still there was neither praise nor gratitude forthcoming from the half-breed.

They went through a low coun-

try, cut by sloughs, marshy, with lakes here and there and a dotting of scrub spruce and brush. They had plenty of wood for their camps; that was one comfort. But the roughness of the way more than made up for any such advantage.

It took them three days to reach the locality where they could make their first cache. That was about fifty miles from Fort Yukon, and every fifty miles from there to the end of the journey they would make similar caches. Ideally, they should reach the Chandalars with empty bellies and empty sleds—empty of food, that is to say. Then on the return dash, they could pick up the caches that they had left on the way.

It was a perilous prospect. Various things might happen to break up those caches, and if two of them in a row were missing, it was probable death and destruction for the dogs and the men.

Usually such caches were safe. Well covered against wind and storm, the bundles were hitched into a tree at a height that secured them from the leaps of hungry animals. Of course, they were in full sight of all human travelers, but to break into a cache in Alaska is the last sin. It is far worse, even, than the sin of horse stealing in the West, for it may mean life or death to the man who has established the cache.

HE who violates the cache of another may plead, as an excuse, some extremest need. And his way of atoning for the crime is to rush back down the trail, where he can secure supplies and thus replace those which he has taken.

If he is too poor to buy such provisions, the community at large will never fail to make a sacrifice to replace all that has been borrowed. In Alaska, as a rule, outlawry never reaches the trail.

On this subject, Windham had no doubts whatsoever. He secured the caches and carefully hoisted them into the trees.

The weather fell colder. It hit forty below, and there was a pale, gray mist, pooled chiefly in the hollows. To descend into those foggy low places was like dipping into icy water.

But Windham steeled himself against this torment. He knew, from what Wagram had said, that they would constantly be passing through temperatures the mildest of which would be far worse than the damp, icy hollows through which they were now dipping.

They slogged on.

They came to a stretch where the snow covered the small shrubs almost to the tops of the branches, and upon the ends of the brush the feet of the dogs were cruelly wounded.

They made five miles. The dogs began to leave trails of blood, and that day's march was ended. All the rest of that day and most of the next day was spent in making footgear. As the half-breed, with expert speed, made the moccasins, he constantly shook his head and mumbled to himself.

Windham shut his ears against the noise. In spite of himself, he was growing more and more upset by the persistent gloom of his companion.

They rarely exchanged words, and the white man began to fear that they were falling into that arctic silence which first freezes up the tongue of a man, and then leads to a cruel, silent, deeply submerged hatred, never voiced, but ending in a murder by night, perhaps!

In the marshes, they found many

muskrat nests. There were rabbits, also, and these replenished the larder, for both Windham and the half-breed could clip a bullet through a rabbit's head, and the creatures were so stupid that they often offered good close shots. Then, a few days later, they found moose tracks.

They made camp. Windham did the work, fed the dogs, and cooked the supper. The half-breed, on his own insistence, went off to get the moose.

Six hours later he came back and sank down in the shelter, exhausted and silent, but with a monstrous ear in his hand which he threw down upon the snow. He carried with him, also, two vast moose steaks. He had found his game!

While Windham ate that delicious, fresh meat, it seemed to him that there was actually something angelic about the sullen half-breed! Ideals fall low on the arctic trails; belly needs are greater than the requirements of a starving soul!

THE moose meat they froze and loaded down the sleds with it. The next day, they gorged the dogs with it, when they drove to the carcass, and the half-breed showed the white man how he had hunted down the trail, continually making excursions to this side and that, so that his course was like a vast snake's, winding continually back and forth across the trail of the moose. For the habit of the moose, is to leave the trail, cut back from it, and hide its monstrous bulk with a magic skill in some patch of brush or woods.

From such a covert, Gus Aintree had startled the monster and brought it down with his second shot!

The moose meat put heart into both men and dogs, and they were glad to struggle with the additional weight. They would lighten it by eating, fast enough, to be sure!

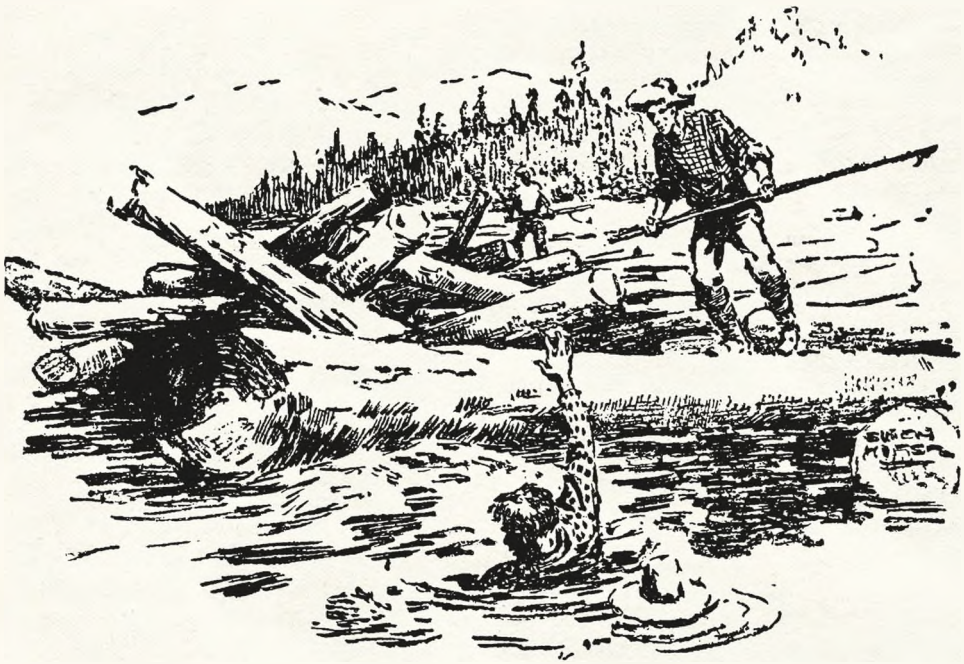
And the very next day Julie Fernal joined them on the trail!

To be continued in next week's issue.

IS "CANADA" INDIAN WORD?

THE origin of the name "Canada" has been the subject of much conjecture and dispute. No less than five different solutions have been offered. Some authorities hold that the name is derived from the Indian word "cantata," which means "welcome." It is believed that the red men used this word in greeting the great French explorer, Cartier, with whom they were on very friendly terms. Others claim that the word "canatha," which in the Indian language means "a group of dwellings," may well be the source of Canada's name.

Then there are those who believe that the Spanish word "acanada," meaning "there is nothing here," was responsible for the name. This is just as likely as that the Portuguese term "canada," or "narrow passage," which might have had reference to the St. Lawrence River, is the true origin. The fifth suggestion offered is that the word "canal" may, through the centuries, gradually have been changed to "Canada," the name by which we now know our great neighbor.



FOUR-FLUSHING LOGGER

By KENNETH GILBERT

Author of "Wood-duck Fly," etc.

OLD Dan Forsyte, foreman of the Puget Logging Company's drive crew of the Upper Ohanepecosh, strode into the two-room shack which was his office and headquarters and where his daughter, Katy, was preparing dinner. The girl was prim and neat in a fresh house dress, and her cheeks had taken on a deeper glow from the hot stove over which she was bending. She looked up smiling.

"What's wrong, dad?"

Dan grunted, and hurled his hat at a near-by peg on the wall.

"Wrong?" he echoed. "Everything's wrong! It's not bad enough to have the logs hung up by low water on Sougan Flat, but they've ordered a man sent from Camp Three to come out and sort of take charge of things!"

"But that's not serious, dad," said the girl. "At least, it relieves you of the responsibility of having the logs hung up. It's happened before, and it never seemed to worry you much. You know, you stand well with the home office!"

"But, do I?" he demanded in irritated tones. "I'm not so sure.

Anyway, it's the man they're sendin' that troubles me, Katy. It's Roarin' Bill Konsky, and I'm thinkin' he's out here to show me up and get my job!"

"Konsky?" she repeated. "I've never heard of him."

"You will!" prophesied Dan. "He's a loud-mouthed, bull-necked, swaggerin' holy terror, they tell me. He's——"

FORSYTE broke off as another man stuck his head in the door. The newcomer was not tall, nor overly broad, yet there was a trim litheness about him, and his face was cheerful.

"Hello, Katy," he said in greeting, and the girl smiled and nodded, then bent hastily over the stove again, the color in her cheeks still deeper.

"I just wish I had a picture of you—just like that," he went on admiringly. "Anybody ever tell you that before?"

"Only you," she retorted, "and I don't like flatterers!" Yet she did not seemed as displeased as her words would indicate. It was rather understood about camp that Katy Forsyte and Joe Fallon, head birler for her father, would be married before the mountain snows swelled the rivers again.

"Hy'a, Dan!" exclaimed Fallon as he caught sight of the foreman. "Got some more bad news for you. The river's dropped two inches within an hour!"

Forsyte jumped to his feet.

"If you've got any more, save it!" he cried. "There's grief enough now in camp. Anyway, I'd prefer to see you out on the job, rather than hangin' around Katy, here. No time for your pretty speeches, Joe, when there's work to be done!" As a white-water man and a birler, Fallon rated well in Forsyte's opinion, but he did not seem to take kindly to the idea of the young man becoming his son-in-law. It was Forsyte's theory that his daughter deserved a more two-fisted fighting man who could batter his way upward to success in this woods game where the greatest rewards go only to the courageous. "You'll be takin' orders from Roarin' Bill Konsky before long!"

Fallon's eyes widened, narrowed. Then he shrugged.

"I heard Konsky was coming," he replied. "Well, if he can move this jam, he's a better man than I think he is!"

Then, suddenly, the small shack seemed to vibrate to a great voice. It was like the bellow of a fighting bull moose, or the roar of an angered grizzly. A big man bulked the doorway behind Fallon.

"A better man than you think he is!" rumbled the stranger. "You squirt, he's all of that, and don't you forget it. I'll be seein' you later! Now, get out of my way!" A hairy paw was laid on Fallon's shoulder, and he was jerked backward so that he nearly fell.

His face went white, and fire flashed in his eyes. Yet the other merely stood there with legs planted well apart, hands on hips, and regarded him jeeringly.

"On your way!" rumbled the giant in a voice which suggested distant thunder.

THERE was something terrifying about that voice. It was menace in itself; it seemed to hint of dire portent. Fallon seemed actually to wince under the weight of it. He said nothing, but disappeared.

With a grin, the big man turned to Forsyte.

"I'm Konsky," he announced. "You, I take it, are the he-coon of this one-horse camp. They sent me from Camp Three to get things runnin' here!"

Dan Forsyte gulped. He had never met "Roaring Bill" Konsky before, but already he was under the spell of the big man's voice.

"Yeah," he acknowledged. "I heard you were comin'. Well, she's all yours. If there's anything I can do to help get those logs movin', I reckon you'll let me know!"

"And won't I, though!" boomed the big man with a leer. "I'll show you how to handle jobs like this. They're my meat. I can see right off that you can't handle men; you're no driver, at all. Wonder to me the company makes bosses outta men that can't stand on their hind legs and talk. You watch me, and I'll show you somethin'. We'll——"

He stopped abruptly, aware for the first time of Katy's presence. At the moment of his appearance, she had been busy before a corner cupboard, out of range of his vision. Now she turned, the pink deepened in her cheeks, her gray eyes snapping. His glance swept her from head to foot, from the short dress to her round, smooth arms, her pretty face set in a mass of dark-brown curls. If she had seemed appealing to Joe Fallon, apparently she was a breathless vision to Konsky, for his jaw sagged slightly as he contemplated her in sheer admiration.

"Well, now," he managed to exclaim, "nobody never told me about you bein' here!"

"This is my daughter," Forsyte told Konsky rather sternly, despite his apparent awe of the big man. "You're a mite fast with your introductions, I don't mind sayin'!"

"Sho'!" laughed the other. "That's me, every time. I was born fast. Me and you," he added to Katy, "ought to get better acquainted, seems to me. Not any better man in camp that I've seen!"

"A better one just left a moment ago," replied Katy hotly. "You may rate high with your own crew, Mr. Konsky, but your jurisdiction stops just at this door. See that you keep on your own side of the threshold!"

"Ho!" he cried delightedly. "Pert and chipper, eh? I like 'em that way, miss. You'll certainly see more of me!"

"I've seen and heard enough already!" was her comeback. "Come, dad, supper's ready!"

KONSKY tossed his hat in the corner and dragged a chair toward the table, as he announced: "And I'm plumb hungry. I reckon I'm invited, ain't I?" he asked of Forsyte, with a meaning look.

The drive boss hesitated. His face was reddened with anger, but he chose to be diplomatic.

"Draw up and eat," he said reluctantly. "But next time get yourself a place in the cookshack. This is what amounts to my home!" Chuckling and unabashed, Konsky settled himself in the chair and began helping himself liberally, despite the black looks the girl gave him.

That night in the bunk house, while Konsky was down at Sougan Flat, looking over the situation, "Slim" Lebeau, the Canadian birler, summed up matters.

"Me, I t'ink things goin' to bust loose around here, mabbee," he predicted. "That Konsky man ees one beeg, tough hombre. Born for trouble. He got wan w'at you call Injun sign on Joe Fallon. Me, I nevair t'ink to see Joe curl up and quit

w'en a man beller at him. But he's afraid of Konsky."

"Stinger" Brennan, another of the birlers, nodded agreement.

"Got Dan Forsyte's goat, too," he supplemented. "He said somethin' to Katy, and she heaved a rollin'-pin at him. If anybody else had done as much, old Dan would have run 'em bowlegged. But he didn't say a word.

"Anyway, what can we do about it?"

"Not'ing," declared Lebeau promptly. "Me, I lak Joe, and hope to dance at hees wedding wit' Katy. But, if he don't watch out, dat Konsky man goin' to grab Katy right away from heem! Women are fonny. If she t'ink Joe is afraid, she might get angree and marry Konsky just for spite, eh?"

"Heard of crazier things than that, too," decided Pete Steen. "Looks as if Old Man Trouble hisself has come to stay with us for a spell. Konsky is goin' to get Dan Forsyte's job, sure as shootin', if those logs move. He might even hold it as a club over Katy, and make her marry him. Can't tell what that feller will do. When that happens, I'm goin' to get me another job. If only Joe Fallon wasn't afraid, maybe this Konsky person would run out of wind. Still, I can't blame Joe. Konsky is too big and tough for him to handle. Show me a man in this camp who isn't afraid of Konsky, or says he isn't, and I'll show you a hundred per cent liar!"

They let it go at that. Roaring Bill Konsky had dominated the camp, just as he had dominated others, which was the reason why the Puget Logging Company rated him highly, and had sent him from Camp Three to move the stranded logs on Sougan Flat.

Moreover, he seemed to know his work, for as he took charge of the crew, his orders, bellowed at the men, were intelligent enough and designed to produce results. The crew responded with a new alacrity. Under the sway of old Dan Forsyte they had worked willingly and loyally, but now they gave more under the lash of fear. Sullenly, they threw themselves into the task.

IT was Konsky who picked the site of the cofferdam which would back enough of the freshet water, or what remained of it, to float the logs, and it was Konsky who supervised the building of the structure. Forsyte he ignored entirely, but he did not forget Katy. She, however, set up a state of armed siege at her father's shack. Seldom was she seen outside, and the men who called there to inquire something of Dan Forsyte, invariably found the door locked. Joe Fallon likewise fared the same. She spoke to him briefly through the closed panel and sent him hurrying back to the river with his face reddened and his ears burning. She threatened to shoot Konsky if he did not leave her alone. But he laughed at her threats and boastingly said that she'd be changing her mind before long, when she saw him solve the knotty problem of the log jam.

Work on the jam went on rapidly —yet the logs did not move! There were many reasons for this, easy to explain in themselves. For one thing the cofferdam went out before the water had risen to the desired height. Konsky, thrown into fury, swore that the dam had been deliberately cut during the night, and he threatened dire things if he caught the man responsible for it. He drove the men twenty-two hours at a stretch without rest while they

built a new dam, and saw to it that this structure was solid enough to withstand a cloud-burst.

The waters came up, but when the logs began floating, they became jammed up in a manner that promised many hours more of grueling work before they could be dislodged. The blame for this he placed upon the shoulders of Joe Fallon, whose duty it was to head the gang keeping the sticks free and clear. Moreover, he would have laid violent hands on the smaller man, or so it seemed, if he had not been called elsewhere at that moment by a threatening leak in the dam. When the leak was stopped, the jam had been partly cleared, but the key log was still deep under water.

Old Dan Forsyte said nothing while all this was going on, but seemed content to stand back and watch another man steal his job from him. If Konsky made good here, it was quite likely that the big man would land the job of drive-crew boss permanently; there were intimations to that effect from headquarters. Yet there was nothing, seemingly, that he could do to prevent it.

Nevertheless, Konsky was full of suspicion toward him, and Fallon.

"There's crooked work goin' on here," declared the big man darkly. "Somebody is playin' a game of sabotage. That dam was cut purposely, and it didn't start leakin' of its own accord, either. Also, those logs acted funnier than I've ever seen 'em before.

WHEN I get hold of the man behind all this, I'm goin' to twist his neck off, just like that!" and he wrung his hands suggestively. "That goes for all of you!" he roared at the crew. "And you, too, Forsyte. Understand?"

"I understand, Konsky," replied the other steadily, yet with a trace of uneasiness in his face.

But if plot there was, it appeared to be one in which the entire drive crew were conspirators. Outwardly, they apparently gave the best that was in them, but it may have been that when Konsky's back was turned, they lagged. They didn't want to see Dan Forsyte lose out. Toward Fallon, however, they had a different attitude. They said little to him, and he glumly went about his work without speaking, as though he understood that in their eyes he stood branded as a coward.

Yet, there were times when hatred showed in his face, and he seemed about to clash with the roaring giant who bossed them all. But the instant the big man, scenting trouble, moved invitingly toward it, Fallon weakened. So the days went on until the clouds opened for an hour one afternoon and loosed torrents back in the hills.

It seemed then that Konsky's triumph was at hand, for the river rose magically. Jubilantly he went about, hurrying the crew in preparing for the moment when the dam could be cut and the vast army of rough-barked logs released, to move downstream like an invading army. In the midst of the downpour, above the ominous mutterings of the rising waters, his full-throated bellow could be heard, blistering the men with epithets, threatening them if they faltered. It was near dark when the harassed, bully-ragged crew knew the time had come.

Jobs were scarce and this, combined with their loyalty to Dan Forsyte, was the thing which had held them to the task so far. Moreover, they had been together for a long time, some of them for a dozen seasons, and they disliked to quit under

fire, else they would not have endured the browbeating which Konsky had been giving them. Added to this was the fact that he vowed to ruin with his own hands the man who deserted; he held them through fear. His voice continued to inspire terror. Knowing that there could be no failure this time, he raced out upon the heaving, milling logs which were like a vast herd of wild horses, awaiting the word to stampede.

For, it seemed to him that Joe Fallon, out there in the center of the jam, was up to tricks, undoubtedly with the intention of blocking Konsky's triumph. Thundering vengeance, the big man ran lithely over the sticks, his steel-calked shoes finding firm foothold. Once and for all, he would show up Fallon and demonstrate for the benefit of the others what awaited them if they turned traitor. He was almost at Fallon's side, in fact had landed upon the same log on which the birler stood, when the thing happened.

THE particular log was a "buckskin," or one from which the bark has slipped. Moreover, it was a tough, timber-bound tree of twisted grain, and the wood was hard and seasoned. As Konsky leaped upon it, his foot slipped, due to the fact that the calks of his shoe were filled with bark. For an instant he teetered precariously, trying to regain his balance; then, with a sudden scream of fear, he went down between the logs.

Hearing that cry, Fallon wheeled, then ran toward the spot where Konsky's head was vanishing. The big man seemed dazed; it may have been that one of the logs had bumped him as he went down, or he may have struck his head in the fall. In any event he was drowning. Somebody yelled at Fallon, but the latter did not hesitate.

He acted mechanically. For the moment, Konsky was not his mortal enemy, but a fellow worker who was in danger of death. As Fallon lunged toward him, another log, under tremendous pressure, reared, one end upward, for a moment, then fell across the stick on which he was standing. Had not years of experience given him sure-footedness, he would have been hurled to death, but instead he managed to stay upright. Then, vaulting the log, he reached down to seize Konsky's collar just as the big man, unconscious now, was going under.

Just in time, Konsky was drawn clear; then another stick smashed over the spot where he had been.

"Give us a hand!" yelled Fallon to others of the crew. They responded, yet with seeming reluctance. Konsky had implanted hatred in them, and for a moment they would have wished to see him die. Yet, only for a moment; then reason asserted itself. Between them, they carried him ashore, and packed him to the bunk house. There, the cook came with hot water. Somebody sent word to Katy Forsyte, and she hurried over with the first-aid kit and personally took charge of treating the big welt on the man's head.

"How's he comin'?" asked Stinger Brennan of Dan Forsyte, as the latter came out of the bunk house. "Is he hurt bad? Will he come out of it?"

Forsyte nodded, and Brennan turned away with what sounded like an exclamation of disappointment. But there was no time to talk over the matter; work had to be done. It was three hours later before they

saw Konsky, his big body looming large in the glow of a lantern as he came swinging down the trail toward them. They stood there on the bank, watching the logs that still heaved uneasily out there in the rising pond. The long hours that the men had put in on the job were beginning to tell, and the crew needed a breathing spell.

UNCONSCIOUSLY, they fell back as Konsky approached, for there was menace in his attitude. Straight toward Joe Fallon he strode, and by the light of the lantern they saw his face working with anger. Any moment now his bull voice would thunder preliminary to the storm. Then happened the thing which astonished them, left their impulses uncertain. Konsky spoke, but it was not the roaring bass of old; it was the reedy tones of a stripling.

"You, Fallon!" he squeaked with difficulty. "You spun that log; you tried to drown me. Now I'm goin' to beat you within an inch of your life!" He thrust the lantern into the hands of Lebeau, who stood nearest.

"By the Rock o' Doon!" breathed Brennan to the others. "Konsky's got the pip! That ice water gave him a cold!"

It was apparently an insignificant thing, yet of amazing portent. For some reason which they could not have defined, they were no longer afraid of him! Not a man there but would have vociferously denied that it was Konsky's bull voice, rather than his huge size and strength that had awed them, yet it was a fact. Before they could ponder it, however, he had lunged suddenly at Fallon, who scarcely had time to set himself into an attitude of defense. A swinging blow, which the birler partly ducked, almost knocked the smaller man off his feet.

But that smack seemed to touch off the fireworks. Perhaps in that moment Joe Fallon found himself; perhaps, too, he had likewise discovered that he was no longer afraid of Roaring Bill Konsky, for, like an uncoiling steel spring, he snapped back into fighting position, and the thud of his right fist caught the bully full in the mouth.

They tell of that fight to-day around the camp fires of the Upper Ohanepecosh, of how the two battled it out that night beside the rumbling waters of the storm-swollen stream, the blackness lightened only by the uncertain glow of a single lantern. Fallon fought like a man twice his size, as though urged on by a fury which passed all understanding. Yet he did not launch himself blindly at his foe, which would have been the thing that Konsky desired, but rather he timed his blows accurately, coolly. Right and left, his fists smacked flesh each time; yet it was like beating against the butt of a saw log, for Konsky's jaw was a thing adamant.

Surprised at the show of spirit by Fallon, Konsky bored in with mighty swings, any one of which, had it landed, would have flattened the slighter man, if not killed him outright. To the accompaniment of his blows, he kept up that squeaking which would have been a bestial roar had it not been for the chilling he had received. Save for these sounds and the labored breathing of both men, they fought in silence.

IT was not the other birlers' way to urge Fallon on. They seemed to understand that he would have resented any such encouragement; it was his own fight, and he preferred to win or lose it in his own

way. They gave space, yet held the lantern high that all might see. For one thing, they had determined that the fight should be fair. Fallon would have scorned to take undue advantage, yet they knew that Konsky would not have hesitated an instant.

But the bigger man was given no opportunity for foul play. From the first, Fallon kept him on the jump. There was something savagely primitive about it in that weird setting, as though the pages of time might have been turned back for ten thousand years to another day when two males of a long-forgotten tribe fought for supremacy. Time after time, Fallon seemed on the verge of going down under that flailing barrage of hamlike fists, yet always he managed to come back, and try to give better than he received.

Nevertheless, it was only his courage which carried him on. for the indomitable strength of Konsky was telling now. Quick to see the tide turning in his favor, the bigger man redoubled his attack. But Fallon made a desperate and heroic rally, and his unyielding defense stopped the other momentarily. Suddenly, through the muffled tenseness, Katy's voice cut sharply:

"Joe!"

Konsky heard, and snarled over his shoulder:

"Yah! I'll cut him down, stomp him into the ground! Then you'll see who's the best man!" Abruptly, then, and with surprising agility, he leaped into the air, his heavy-footed right foot kicking out squarely for Fallon's chin. The blow was intended to kill.

Somehow it did not reach its mark. A dozen men moved in as though to leap on him, but Fallon moved more swiftly. He ducked the oncoming boot, stepped inside Konsky's guard, and his right fist caught the big man under the jaw.

Konsky staggered, weaved, but before he could straighten, Fallon's left fist smashed him. Then it was like cutting down a giant fir, for the blows rained right, left, right, left, faster than a man could count. And, like a giant fir, Konsky went down, rolled half over, tried to struggle upward, but fell on his back and lay there.

"Douse him with some water, fellows!" breathed Fallon hoarsely. "Maybe I gave him too much!"

"Not half enough!" shouted Stinger Brennan joyously. But they jumped to obey.

MORNING at last, and in the cookshack, the crew was grouped, tired but happy, swigging mugs of steaming coffee. For the jam was broken, and in the night, with the weight of a triple-sized river behind them, the logs were on their way down the Ohanepecosh, to the distant mill. The job was done, save for the clean-up of straggling sticks which would lodge here and there in eddies. Nothing much to do but ride the sticks down, and keep them from locking in another jam.

"Step on 'er, boys!" urged Dan Forsyte. "You'll get breakfast at Ten Mile Creek." He seemed curiously contented, satisfied, as he moved among them, almost happy after many days of brooding. " 'Twas a good job you did, and the credit goes to you!" They chuckled appreciation, and slapped him on the back.

Then, into the crowd moved a big man, battered of face, but leering savagely. Konsky was looking for more trouble.

"Where's Fallon?" he demanded in his old full-lunged way. "I'm not

half through with him yet! Trot him out and I'll make mincemeat out of him this time. Yes. and any of you, if you want it!" He glared around him.

But they did not fall back, as of old. Stinger Brennan took a swig of hot coffee and smiled contemptuously. Dan Forsyte stepped forward.

"You'll not find Joe Fallon here, Konsky!" he told the big man steadily. "He and Katy are on their way to town, to get married. I'd have gone with them, if I didn't have to boss the job of keeping these logs moving.

"As for who you are, and what you can do, we've forgotten. You didn't clear that jam, Konsky; it was men like Joe Fallon and the others here. They knew what to do without your telling them.

"What's more, you've played yourself out with this crew. I don't care who sent you here—you're finished. And you can go back to headquarters and tell 'em that Dan Forsyte said so. You may roar like a bull, but at heart you're a squeaking mouse.

"Hit the trail, Konsky!"

He moved closer, but Roaring Bill Konsky was already on his way.

INDIAN RECORDS FOUND IN CAVE

IN 1874, the Custer expedition discovered the Ludlow Cave, located in the central part of Harding County, South Dakota, but it is to W. H. Over, curator of the museum at the University of South Dakota, that scientific explorations of the cave were made. He first directed his research in the Ludlow Cave in the summer of 1921, and then in 1931 he again made extensive explorations.

The cave is thirty-five feet deep, fifteen feet wide and ten feet high. It is entered by a great crack in the rock formation which extends for about two hundred feet into the cave and is only large enough to permit one to crawl in on hands and knees.

When the cave was first entered, its floor was covered with camp débris. This débris was thoroughly sifted and relics which appear to be those of the Sioux Indians, who occupied the cave about one hundred years ago, were found. Among them were scalps of two white women, brass finger rings, and a gold ring. Steel arrow points, knives and beads, used by white men in trading with the Indians, were also among the finds.

Digging deeper under the cave floor, the curator found more arrow points, knives and bone tools. At a depth of approximately two and one half or three feet, arrow points were found made of precious stones. Mixed in with the precious stones were highly polished beads which showed that they had been used extensively.

Pieces of woven material made from reeds, bark and rushes seemed to be the only remains of fabric left that was used by the cave dwellers. Some bits of pottery shells and elk teeth that were used for beads were also sifted from the débris. It is believed that the presence of sea shells indicates that the indians came from the West coast.

INDIAN WEAPONS

(The Hunter's Spear)

By CHARLES L. McNICHOLS

THE spear is a very old weapon, older than the atlatl and far older than the bow and arrow. It was away back in the very beginning of time that man learned to break off a good stout sapling, scrape it smooth, and harden and sharpen one end of it by fire. That gave him a weapon that could be thrown or used for thrusting or stabbing.

Now, by the time the first of our Indians had found their way to America they had passed considerably beyond the sharpened-stick stage of spear making. They had learned the use of the atlatl (throwing stick) by which they could propel very light spears some five or six feet long for a considerable distance. With these spears or darts, they carried on their warfare and did most of their hunting.

But in order to make good missiles for the atlatl, these darts came to be made so light they were ineffective for thrusting and stabbing. So the Indian evolved another and larger spear for that purpose. It was longer, running between eight and twelve feet in all, and it carried a flint head like that of the atlatl dart, but its shaft was of good stout wood, not of the pithy, reedlike stuff used for the shafts of the lighter darts.

There was a particular reason why the atlatl-armed Indian needed this longer, heavier spear. He wasn't really a big-game hunter in the true sense of the word, but he did hunt deer and bighorn sheep and kill them in large numbers, as we know from the bones of these animals found at his camp sites. We know that the atlatl dart was a pretty feeble weapon to be used against either of these animals. Its greatest penetration was probably the length of

the foreshaft, or about six inches, and that meant the hunter had a very slender chance of inflicting a fatal wound.

WHAT he did was to cripple his game as best he could with one or more darts, and then grab his long spear and run the wounded animal down. This might take the Indian all day, but, sooner or later, he got his meat. As soon as he got close enough to get in a good thrust with his spear, or even get in range for a hand cast, the chase was over.

The practice of running down game, wounded or unwounded, persisted among the Indians of the Southwest until the introduction of firearms. Down there in the desert country the deer, particularly, used to range out in the open country where it was often impossible to stalk them within effective bow range. Hunters sometimes used a system of relays to tire the deer until one of them could get within spearing distance, but it wasn't unusual for a young brave to strip down to his breechclout, grease himself with jack-rabbit fat, to make himself swift, and start out after the deer with no other weapon than a short stabbing spear.

The deer would win the first sprint, but the desert Indian would get him in the long run. With generations of this kind of training, it is no marvel that the many descendants of these hunters are among the crack Marathon runners in this country to-day.

The Seri Indians on Tiburon Island in the Gulf of California kill deer in this same manner to this very day. They would rather waste a day running after a deer than expend a valuable rifle cartridge shooting it, especially as the cartridge might come in handy for a pot shot at visiting whites.

When the bow and arrow was introduced among our Indians, the atlatl and the dart passed out of use, but the spear was retained. The spear changed considerably, however, from the older one. The flint head was now made larger and heavier, six, seven, even ten inches long, and the shaft was made heavier and stouter. A hickory sapling became the favorite material for a spear shaft and, where hickory was not to be found, service berry or some other extra tough wood was used.

The sapling was carefully peeled, seasoned, straightened, and scraped to size. When it was finished, it often was as thick in the middle as a pick handle, with a slight taper toward the head and butt. There was a knob at the butt end, sometimes, so the shaft would not slip out of the hunter's hand, for this spear was not intended to be thrown.

The increase in size and general heftiness of the hunter's spear was due to the fact that the spear was no longer intended to kill wounded animals that the hunter was pursuing, but to kill wounded animals that were pursuing the hunter! For with the advent of the bow the Indian became a real big-game hunter.

IN these days of high-powered rifles, what is left of the big game in this country has learned to run and keep on running at the sight or scent of man. The animal knows that it hasn't a chance save in flight. Once in a while, we hear of a desperately wounded moose or bear, or even a buck deer, making a last wild charge, but it is a rare occurrence. As late as a hundred years ago, however, these same animals retained their courage. Read the

accounts of the Lewis and Clark exploration party or the journals of any of our earlier explorers and you will find a number of accounts of how the larger game animals of the West carried the fight right home to the hunter.

At the time the bowmen first encountered these animals, they were yet more savage, for they knew nothing whatever of the fear of man. According to the Indians' own accounts of the earlier times, buffalo, moose and elk would all charge when wounded.

In the bow and arrow the Indian had a weapon that would kill any of these animals, but lacked the "knock-down" power to stay its charge. This is because the arrow kills by causing hemorrhage, unlike the speedier bullet that kills principally by shock. An arrow shot through the chest or abdominal cavity of a large animal will be very likely to cause his death in ten or fifteen minutes. But the animal can stay on its feet all that time and charge regardless, and a half dozen or more arrows, similarly placed, won't stop him, barring a lucky heart shot. A bullet in the same region would probably knock him off his feet and if he got up, another would put him down again.

So the Indian hunter kept a stout and sturdy spear close at hand to meet the charge of the furious beast his arrows were unable to stop.

Even though all unmounted Indians preferred to hunt from cover, they showed no hesitation in coming out into the open and meeting a wounded animal. It was considered the manly and honorable thing to do. A hunter who valued his reputation would jump out from his blind with a yell to attract the animal. As the beast charged, he would jump to one side and thrust his spear hard into its ribs, aiming either for the heart or liver. The spear would make a huge wound that was quickly fatal.

The brave way to kill a bear was to meet its charge head-on, thrust the spear down its gaping mouth, and then jump! Most hunters preferred judiciously to shoot a couple of arrows into the bear first, and weaken him just that much, but there were certain heroes in every tribe who killed unwounded grizzlies in the manner just described.

Down in the mountains of southern Mexico, the Indians have hunted the jaguar with spears from time immemorial, and they probably still do. The spear they use for this purpose has a good, stout hard wood shaft about twelve or fourteen feet long. The head now used is of iron. It was originally of native copper.

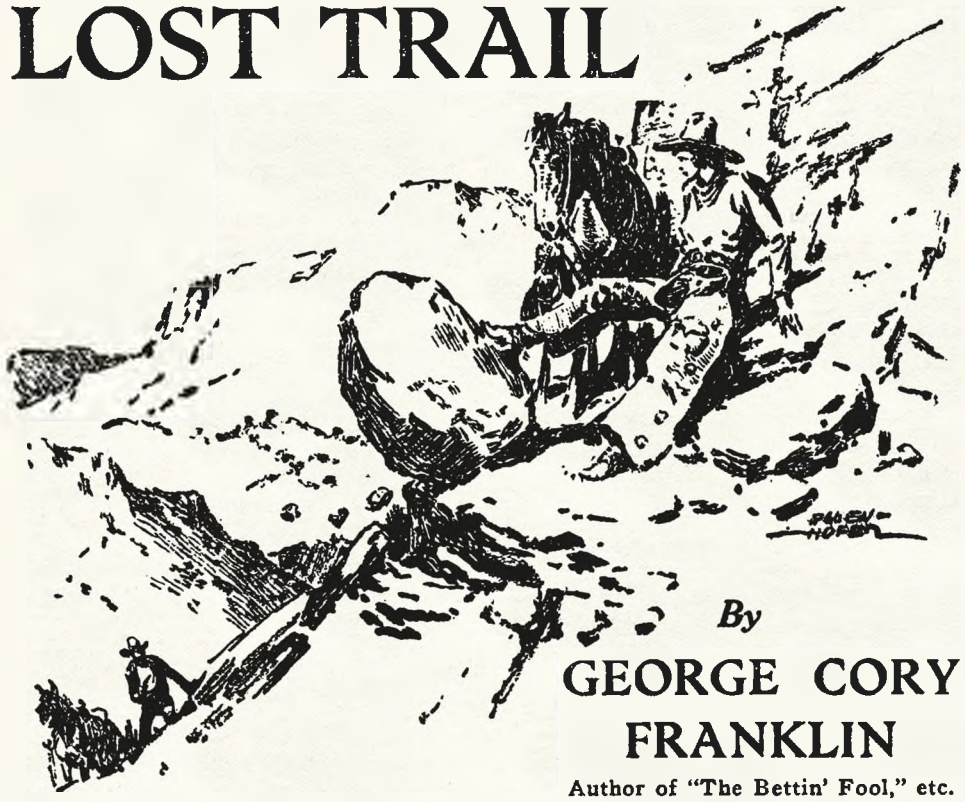
THESE Mexican Indians follow the jaguar with dogs until the big cat gets tired of the process and comes to bay. Then all hands stand around and throw rocks at him until he charges.

The jaguar, like most cat animals, ends his charge with a spring, a long leap by which he hurls his full weight through the air to crush down his victim. The Indian spear man takes advantage of this habit for the jaguar's undoing. Just as the cat springs, he crouches down, jambing the butt of his spear hard against the ground with the point thrust forward at an acute angle to meet the cat.

The jaguar simply impales himself as he comes down.

This sounds like an impossible feat, but by agility and nice timing it can be done. Many reliable travelers from the time of the Conquest to the present day report having seen jaguars killed in this manner.

LOST TRAIL



By

GEORGE CORY FRANKLIN

Author of "The Bettin' Fool," etc.

THIS being my first summer's real work at the Flying M, I was as ignorant as any other range horse would have been about what had stirred up Blaze and the other gentle horses in the little pasture and made them act so foolish. After they had charged across the grassy meadow and back, bucking and kicking like a lot of yearlings, I managed to cut Blaze off to one side.

"Now, what's happened?" I nickered.

Blaze whistled like a bull elk and trotted around in a circle, holding his nose in a silly, awkward position and clowning as he does when he's particularly tickled.

"Well," I thought, "if you want to make folks think you're a mule, keep your old secret. I'm not going to get excited until I know something about what sets you all to acting up like colts."

When Blaze found I wasn't going to follow him, he trotted up to me. "Why don't you play with us?" he whinnies.

"Why should I get up a lather just because a lot of locoed saddle stock act foolish?" I countered.

"Don't you feel anything in the air?" Blaze asked. "Don't your muscles twitch and something make you want to run and act like a wild horse again?"

I HAD sort of wanted to bust loose, but since Phyllis came to live with Thorne at the Flying M the day after there was such a jolly, happy crowd at her father's

ranch, I have been her private saddle horse and have felt more dignified than I did when Thorne or "Shorty" rode me. I hadn't dared to give one little buck of joy for fear I might forget and do something wrong when my little red-haired, blue-eyed mistress was up.

I had a notion that Thorne would be terribly severe if I made a misstep when I was carrying Phyllis. Besides, she is so nice and gentle with me that I wouldn't shake her up for the best bucket of oats I ever saw.

While we stood there, a flock of pretty, little, green-winged teal that had been hatched near a beaver pond at the north end of the pasture came sailing past us, surprising me so that I snorted. The last time I had noticed them, they were just a lot of little fuzzy balls running on top of the water, so light they didn't even have to swim.

Now I understand. "Why, it's fall," I told Blaze. "The hunting moon will soon be here, and the bucks will be stomping through the dry aspen thickets, rattling their antlers against the hard white wood."

Blaze sniffed the cool breeze from the mountains and gave a little squeal of joy.

"I don't care anything about the bucks and the wild things you are always so crazy about," he told me, "but the steer round-up will start next week. There will be exciting days on the range, starry nights, circling around a great herd of restless cattle, and"—he looked around cautiously for fear some of the younger horses might overhear—"perhaps a stampede."

A shiver shook my black coat when Blaze mentioned a stampede. "I don't think I care for that," I said under my breath.

Blaze chuckled, pranced a few steps, and kicked at an inoffensive sagebrush.

"Huh, you don't know what excitement is until you've had a run through the sand hills at night with a thousand head of crazy cattle thundering behind you."

"Sounds interesting." I coughed to make Blaze think I'd seen lots of things that were just as thrilling. "But I've had plenty of excitement already in my life, and I'm perfectly willing to settle down and carry Phyllis from now on."

"Shucks," snorted Blaze. "Once you get a taste of real cow work, you'll forget the tough times you've had on the back range and be as keen as a three-year-old." Blaze likes to pretend that I'm awfully old, but I'm only six, and Thorne says a cow horse don't ever get to be his best until he's eight or nine, so why should I worry about Blaze's insinuations?

There was no doubt about the activity around the Flying M. We could hear the music of hammers and anvils as Shorty and "Slim" turned horseshoes and reset the tires on the big chuck wagon and, if we stood with our heads over the fence by the corral, we could smell the bags of oats being loaded into another wagon and see the brown-shirted cowboys repairing saddle leather and lacing stirrups.

WHEN I saw the big remuda of a hundred head of horses brought in, I felt a bit lonely because I wasn't going along, but an hour after the outfit left, Juan, our stableboy, came out, caught me and put Phyllis's little stock saddle on me, and we went with Thorne to catch up with the rest.

The two-day trip to the head of

the Rio Grande was just lazy, happy miles of road jogging, with an occasional canter to rest Phyllis from the monotony. Then we came to a beautiful valley above where Ute Creek and Lost Trail join the main stream. Wagons were camped near pretty patches of aspen and silver-tip spruce. A big herd of horses grazed in the open, men sat around in groups, talking and smoking. Every one was happy and seemed to be anxious for the whole world to know it.

Thorne had ordered Phyllis's tent to be set up near the chuck wagon and it was there she rode me. Shorty pulled the saddle off, and I had a splendid, restful roll on the grass before I trotted away to find Blaze and hear the gossip of the remuda.

Before daylight next morning, I found myself packed in between two horses I'd never seen before, all of us squeezed so tight in a rope corral, we could hardly breathe, and when I saw Shorty, I whimpered to him.

"Why, hello, Diamond," Shorty called out. "You don't like bein' made into a sardine, do you? I'll be back in a minute."

After what seemed like an awful long time, Shorty came back and led me over to Phyllis's tent. The air was frosty, and nearly all the horses started out with kinks in their backs that morning. Some of them pitched, but the cowboys seemed to like that, and away we all went across the meadows and into the foothills with Blaze and me trotting side by side; Thorne and Phyllis laughing and waving to the other riders. It certainly was nice. I began to see why Blaze liked it so much and why it is that an old cow horse never seems happy at any other work.

About ten o'clock Thorne left us and rode up toward some blue pinnacles that seemed to touch the sky. He told Phyllis that she might ride on up that ridge and he would meet her at the next cross arroyo.

Phyllis reined me down to a walk, and we skirted along the edge of the timber, she singing a little song that she knows I love to hear, and we were both just happy over the sunshine, the tang of frosted leaves in the air and being free to go where we pleased.

For some reason Thorne didn't meet us where he said he would, and Phyllis turned me up a trail along the bank of a deep cut made a long time ago by a waterspout. Somehow I knew we shouldn't go this way and I hung back, kept turning my head and teasing to go back, but Phyllis had taken it into her head that this was the way to go in order to meet Thorne, and go I must.

A mile above where Thorne should have met us, we came to a broad trail crossing the arroyo. There were a lot of fresh cattle tracks here, and I guess Phyllis decided that some of the cowboys had gone that way. She turned me on the trail, and I thought at first that maybe we might find Thorne or some of the Flying M men, so I traveled more willingly, and we made good time for an hour or more.

HOW I did wish Phyllis would give me my head and let me take her back to the round-up camp, which I could have done very quickly, but she seemed to have become completely confused, turned me first one way and then another, and she didn't sing any more. Still she persisted in making me go farther and farther away from camp.

We were clear off the cattle range

now and following a dim trail that led back into Starvation Basin, though I didn't know that at first. If I had, I would have balked and refused to go a step farther, no matter how much Phyllis spurred me.

Blaze had told me about this place, and he shook like a weaner, too, at the time, though it had been two years since his escape from the one spot on the whole Continental Divide that is shunned by men and horses, too.

I knew Phyllis was getting tired. I could feel her body droop in the saddle, and she gripped the horn with one hand. How I wished I could talk man-talk to her. For three hours now, I had fought the bridle, teasing her in the best way I knew to trust me and not force me in the wrong direction, but I guess she was just too scared to reason or remember what Shorty and Thorne had told her to do in case she ever lost her way—let me have my head.

About mid-afternoon, the trail we were following entered a narrow place between two high rock walls. We had come down through a steep, rocky country where the roar of a waterfall made it impossible for me to hear even my own hoofbeats on the slide rock. I could understand why Blaze had felt as he had over his trip into Starvation Basin.

What little trail there was played out, and we came to a place where no grass grew and the ground was so hard that a shod horse would have made no tracks, even if one had been but a few minutes ahead of us.

Phyllis had no idea where to go or what to do. She tightened the reins until I stopped.

"Diamond, I don't know anything to do but to turn around and try to back-track our own trail," she told me.

I didn't give her a chance to change her mind. When she said that, I whirled so quickly, I swung her off her balance, but I stopped just as suddenly when I saw a strange man on a big gray gelding coming down the slope behind us. I was so glad to see another horse, that I nickered as friendly as I would have to one of my Flying M comrades. The gray answered me with a gentle whinny that showed he felt as lonely in this awful place as I did.

Phyllis gave a little cry of relief. "Oh, I'm so glad to meet some one," she rejoiced. "I'm lost and don't know how to get out of here."

The man did not look at all like a cowboy. He wore ragged clothes and his face was hidden behind a bushy growth of coarse red hair. He made no answer at first, but rode around me looking for brands. When he saw Thorne's Flying M on my left shoulder, a look came into his eyes like I've seen in a killer panther.

"You ain't lost, girlie," he told Phyllis in a beastly voice, "you're just found."

OH, then you'll put me on the right trail, won't you?" Phyllis's voice had that pretty note in it that I love so much. "My husband will pay you well if you see me safely back to where I can find my way home."

The man grunted and turned off to the right, riding at an easy jog. He didn't say any more, but rode slouched down in his saddle, acting like a horse does when he's not quite sure what to do next.

I didn't feel a bit like Phyllis seemed to over meeting the man. We horses can judge men the moment we hear voices, even though we don't understand all they say.

More than once I have left the open pasture and gone back into a little hiding place I know in the willows just because I've heard a man swear at another horse. It isn't what they say, but something behind the words that causes us to dislike them.

I felt out of sorts. If the man hadn't come just when he did, I would have been back beyond the narrow place by this time and hitting a long lope for camp. Phyllis touched me with her spur, but instead of trotting up free as I had always done before, I laid my ears back, then turned and snapped at her little foot with my bared teeth.

"Why, Diamond," Phyllis said in surprise, "what in the world makes you act so silly? We'll soon be in country we know."

I wanted to talk like Shorty does sometimes when a rope breaks or the cattle get stubborn. Smells were coming to me on the breeze that disturbed me even more than the fact that we were following a strange man into a still stranger country of big broken rocks and scrubby trees.

Above us were thousands of loose round boulders that looked like a breath of air would start them to rolling.

I didn't think that my acting cross had done any good, but perhaps it helped to arouse Phyllis's suspicions, because a little later, when we came to a dirty, smelly hut, she jerked me back quick, and I felt her hand slide down into the right-hand pocket of her chaps. That pocket, I knew, was only a pretense. It wasn't a pocket at all, but just a leather flap that covered the butt of Phyllis's pearl-handled .38 that was held in a concealed holster inside the leg of her chaps.

If she had been wearing a gun at her belt, the man would have taken it when he first found us, but, not seeing any weapons, he hadn't thought of a cute little girl like Phyllis being tough. The man turned to see why we had stopped, and Phyllis motioned with her left hand toward the hut.

"Where are we?" she asked. "I never heard of this place before."

"My name is McBride," the man said. "Does that mean anything to you?"

I could feel a shiver go through Phyllis's body, but her voice was as cold as Thorne's would have been when she spoke.

"Oh, I see," she replied, "you're Snag McBride, the man——"

"Yeah, the man your interferin' husband had sent up for three years," McBride interrupted. "Get off."

"I'll die first," snapped Phyllis.

"You'll sure die if you don't," McBride threatened, grabbing hold of the headstall of my one-ear bridle.

HE didn't go any closer, though, because Phyllis's little gun flashed from the hidden holster and pointed straight into the man's ugly face. I braced myself, expecting to hear the gun crack, but for some reason Phyllis didn't shoot, though afterward I was sorry she hadn't.

One-ear bridles were invented by some lazy man so that cowboys can slip the bridles from their horses without getting off. We can't drink with the heavy spade bits all good cowmen put in our mouths, so when we come to a stream, the fellows just push the bridles off with their hands, sometimes with the heel of a boot, and ride us into the water; then, when we have crossed to the other side, they will get off and rebridle us. Often, when I have been on a long day's trip, I have slipped my head out of the headstall myself the

instant Thorne gripped the leather, and that's just what I did now.

McBride wasn't thinking about me. He was looking at that vicious hole in the muzzle of Phyllis's gun and wondering whether she had the nerve to pull the trigger. I ducked my head low as a tired horse will, and gave it a twist. A moment later I had whirled and was running back the way we had just come, leaving a nice silver-mounted bridle in McBride's hand.

McBride did not intend to lose his chance to get ransom money from Thorne without a struggle, though, and the instant he saw I was loose, his gun came out and roared. He did not shoot at Phyllis, but at me. I felt hot lead burn my right thigh, and another bullet whizzed past my ear. Then I felt Phyllis turn in the saddle. *Crack*, went her .38. The howl of pain McBride sent up sounded sweeter than any music I had ever heard in my life.

I had been too busy getting away from McBride to think about the trail home at first, but now that I was out of danger for a moment, I slowed down to get my bearings, which was a mistake. If I had kept on running and had gradually circled back into the trail, we would soon have been out of trouble, but Phyllis had no intention of being carried helpless on the back of a loose horse if she could help it, and the instant I slowed down, she flipped the loop of her reata over my neck and jumped off.

The way that little bit of a girl snapped a half-hitch around my nose, doubled it, gave it two twists and pushed the second hitch up over my head and behind my ears would have tickled Shorty to pieces. She wasn't more than a minute fixing that hackamore on my head, and, climbing back into the saddle, but it gave McBride time enough to get onto his gray and spur back along the trail toward the outlet of Starvation Basin.

Phyllis could guide me now with the hackamore as easily as she did with a bridle. All wild horses are broken with a hackamore before a bit is put in their mouths, so I yielded to her neck-rein just as quickly as I had to the bit.

Away we went, dodging around boulders, leaping deep, narrow cuts made by the water that had come down from the melting snows, trying to outrun McBride to the narrow place below the steep slide. If he beat us there, all our work would be for nothing, because there was just this one place for the trail to pass through.

ABOVE and below, the mountain was steep and rough, with no trails except the little narrow ones made by mountain sheep. Given an even break, with the same sort of footing, I could have outdistanced the gray without difficulty, but he had a lot the advantage in knowing the lay of the ground and in not having to go around obstacles.

In half a mile I lost fifty yards, and the worst was yet ahead. It was here that Phyllis showed me how far above the horse instinct is man's way of thinking. I could see she was preparing for something by the way she was bracing herself in the saddle and turning the rope around the steel horn, but I was not expecting the sudden jerk that nearly swung me off my feet behind a huge boulder most as high as the stable at the Flying M.

I couldn't figure out what Phyllis was up to. She held me still for a moment, then slid off and reset her saddle, cinching it tight, leav-

ing me standing behind the rock while she ran up the hillside above the trail. When she came back, there were white lines about her mouth, and I knew that my little mistress was just plain scared.

I rubbed my nose against her, trying to comfort her. I could feel the throb of her heart beating fast and jumpy, and it scared me worse than anything that had happened yet. I guess no horse that ever lived loved his master any more than I loved Thorne and Phyllis. Somehow just the touch of their bodies or the sound of their voices thrills me from my ears to my hoofs, but when anything is very wrong with them, I know just as well as if I could talk man-talk.

"Come, Diamond," Phyllis said in a low voice. "There's only one chance for me, and I'm staking your life and mine, too, on your being sure-footed and brave."

She didn't get on my back again, but walked up the mountain, leading me by the hackamore rope.

By this time McBride had covered the distance to the narrow place a quarter of a mile farther on, so it certainly looked as if there was no possible way to escape past him, and I couldn't see what good our climbing up the mountain would do.

Phyllis did not hurry. She walked slowly, stopping frequently to let me get my wind. When we had climbed a hundred yards above the trail where McBride had outrun us, I looked back and saw him standing a short distance from the narrow place and, watching us scrambling up the side of the hill. He laughed a mean, nasty laugh and yelled at Phyllis, but she paid no attention to him, just kept on going and pulling at my rope.

Finally, a few yards from the foot of the cliff, we came to a shelf on the sloping side hill; this shelf led around the mountain. It had been worn into a smooth trail, by the mountain sheep and, though it was narrow, it was as solid as the rock itself. Here Phyllis walked slowly, giving me plenty of time to place my feet on the trail that had been used by the bands of bighorns long before the Indians lived in this part of Colorado.

During the years I had roamed the mountains as a range stallion, I had crossed rock slides, slippery places, and tough trails, but I have never been in such a place as this, where a single misstep or a wrong movement of the body would have sent me crashing down among the loose boulders to certain death. I walked carefully, hesitating each time I put my foot down on the sheep trail and testing the ground before I shifted my weight.

PHYLLIS was patient with my nervousness; she kept her head turned so that she could watch me and one hand held back as if she would try to catch me, if I fell. It almost made me laugh to think of her helping me in case I slipped. Once, when one of the loose boulders rolled away and went crashing into the gulch below, Phyllis swayed as if she had been struck a blow, but she steadied herself and her voice sounded strong and brave when she spoke.

"You're doing fine, Diamond," she said encouragingly. "A few yards more and there's a wider trail for your feet."

A few minutes later we were almost directly above where McBride stood, watching us from below. He was too far away for a six-gun bullet to reach us, or he would have tried again to kill me, but it was now that Phyllis showed how she in-

tended to fight to the last, no matter how tough things looked to her.

There were lots of large round boulders just above the trail. She led me past these to a place where a little grassy spot gave me a better place to stand. Then she dropped the rope and went back above one of the boulders, sat down with her feet against it and pushed with all her might.

Pretty soon the dirt gave way, and the boulder began to roll, then jump fifty feet at a leap straight toward where McBride stood. Phyllis turned to another and sent it after the first. In less than a minute, she had a string of big rocks rolling toward McBride.

"Hyar!" he yelled, and ran back into the cut where the gray horse stood out of danger.

"How do you like it?" Phyllis screamed as loud as she could. "I've got a lot more like that up here that I'll send down unless you stay back out of sight."

McBride did not answer. He knew that for the present Phyllis had the best of the argument and, if he attempted to come out of that place before she had crossed the spot where the big rocks were, that she would roll more at him.

The last rays of the sun were touching the tops of the peaks when we slid down a steep grade into the trail beyond where McBride was. Poor little Phyllis was about all in. She could hardly drag herself into the saddle and turn me up toward the trail down which we had slid before we had come through the narrow entrance to Starvation Basin. It was plain that she was now trusting her life to me. It was as if she had said: "There, Diamond, I have done all I could. The rest depends on your strength and speed."

I looked back toward the narrow cut where McBride had been held by the boulders Phyllis had kept rolling down the side of the hill. McBride was out now and on the gray. I sprang up the steep place in a series of buck jumps that must have almost jarred the life out of Phyllis, but helped me to gain a little on that gray devil McBride rode. At the top of the slope, I had good ground for my feet and I plunged ahead, though my breath came in gasps and I thought my heart would burst under the pressure I was putting upon it.

I KNEW I was running to save Phyllis's life, and my own, too, but tough as that hundred feet of slippery trail had been for me, it was just as hard on the gray. How Phyllis managed to stay in the saddle was a puzzle, but not once did she check me or interfere with my scrambling toward the safety of the forest beyond.

Perhaps no creature that lives in the wilderness has more craftiness and tricks than a wild horse. Being dependent almost entirely on flight, except when cornered, a wild horse can size up a country at a glance and figure out where the greatest dangers lie.

Even as I dashed across the first level ground above the opening, I was thinking of the chance McBride had of heading me into one of the box canyons where I might find myself trapped—this was my greatest danger now. At the edge of the timber, I did exactly what I would have done in the old days when I ran wild. I stopped close to a bushy tree and turned to look back.

Phyllis was either too played out to care, or else she knew why I was wasting these precious seconds. Anyway, she did not bother me, which was a big help. I saw the

gray stagger up the last five yards of the slope and stop at the top. McBride had not seen me yet, as I had used the old trick of rigidness. I stood as still as the picture of the horse that is painted on the barn door of the Flying M, holding my mouth open so that the air would not make that terrible whistling sound through my nostrils.

Only a few seconds did McBride stay there. I hope I never again have to look at such an awful face as his was when he thought that little girl who had kept him trapped in the cut by the rolling boulders had escaped. Then, as his eyes became accustomed to the stronger light above the pass, he pulled his hat down and leaned forward, looking toward the tree behind which I stood, and I knew he saw me.

I was as panicky as ever I had been when a mountain lion was on my trail, but my nerves did not give way. I dared not leave this place until I knew which way McBride intended to go. Probably a stable-raised horse would have lost the fight right here by going onto the trail which could be plainly seen, winding down among the little open parks, but it was that very thing that fooled the angry man who wanted so much to get close enough to me to shoot.

I wanted to go to camp, wanted it more than I ever wanted anything in my life, but I knew better than to go the way McBride supposed I would go. I stood perfectly still until I saw McBride turn the gray down the mountain and ride toward a strip of heavy spruce beyond the largest park.

A brown trail, winding through the grass, looked more tempting than a cold drink in August, but still I did not stir. McBride decided that I was not going any farther and that he could head me off in the timber, but the minute he disappeared over the hill, I turned back and trotted to a place from which I could watch him as he spurred frantically down the slope.

Phyllis must have been a little stunned by all that happened, or she would not have let me do just as I pleased. I had almost forgotten that I was under a saddle by this time, and was playing hide-and-seek just as I had time and again when I was a wild stallion and Thorne's men were trying to corral me.

THE sun was down now. It was the time of day that all wild creatures love best. Snowshoe rabbits, mottled-brown-and-gray, just beginning to put on their winter coats of white, hopped out of the forest. A doe, followed by two pretty fawns, came to see what had disturbed them, and a funny old porcupine waddled by, looking for all the world like a small bushy juniper tree.

None of these things escaped me, even though I was watching every move that McBride made. When I saw where he set his trap to waylay me, I sighed a long, deep sigh and began to eat the sweet, rich grass that grew on the hillside. Unless he turned back to look for me, I could stay where I was until it was dark, then turn to the left, keep away from the timber and go to the round-up camp which I was sure could not be more than a couple of miles farther down the valley.

If only Phyllis had used the same good sense she had shown when she first led me up the mountain to the sheep trail, we might have been out of trouble, but I guess it was lonely for her. She was tired and afraid she might have to stay out here on

the range all night. Anyway, she made me go back to where the tracks that I had made in the morning showed in the soft ground, and follow them.

We were now not over a quarter of a mile from the trail and going straight toward where McBride was hiding. I was sure that Phyllis had not seen him, or she would not ride this way. I couldn't figure out any way to tell her, though, and I felt like it was all over. The hardest day's work I had ever done in a branding corral was nothing to what I suffered as I carried Phyllis down the side hill to the main trail.

When she saw that plain trail and the fresh hoofprints of cattle, Phyllis gave a little squeal of joy and leaned over to pat my neck.

"Dear, good, old Diamond," she praised, "you did find it, didn't you?"

Yes, I had found it, but I'd have been glad to have gone without oats for a week if I hadn't, because now, of course, Phyllis would be captured by McBride, and we would both be taken back into that awful hole, Starvation Basin.

A horse will get desperate at times just like a man does. He will be cautious and foxy up to a certain point, then he'll just see red and fight against odds that he knows he can't beat, and that is what I did then.

I could smell McBride's sweaty horse plainly, and knew that he was standing in a bunch of aspen bushes just above the trail. I trotted forward a few steps, stopped, and held my head high, as I had when I was a proud range stallion. Then I sent forth that same old shriek of rage that used to strike fear to the heart of any gelding, and charged straight into the aspens.

The gray was a good horse, but he had no taste for a clash with an angry stallion weighing more than a thousand pounds, and that bugle of mine fooled him, it sounded so much like the fighting cry of a stallion. He whirled and jumped, throwing McBride off his balance and causing him to miss with the shot he fired. Before McBride could straighten up and get the horse under control, I was on the slope above him, had reared up on my hind legs and plunged toward him.

McBRIDE was struggling to hold the panicky gray with one hand and kept slinging his gun first to one side and then the other, snapping hot lead at me. The bullets burned across my neck and shoulders like hot branding irons, enraging me all the more. I forgot everything but the hatred that seemed to boil in my breast, and struck. Even if I had had a spade bit in my mouth, Phyllis couldn't have held me now, and the hackamore left me free to use my jaws.

I caught McBride's shoulder between my teeth and lifted him clear of the saddle. He clung to the bridle reins, but not firmly enough to prevent the gray from struggling away from my flashing front feet. I tightened my hold on McBride's shoulder and swung him through the air. Something gave way, and the man went sailing over the aspens to fall on the hillside below and go rolling and flopping into the canyon. The instant the gray felt that he was free, he broke for the trail and ran like a scared deer.

I was still too mad to think about Phyllis, or anything else, but as I cantered down the trail, my blood began to cool. Phyllis was dabbing at my wounds with a little white rag, crying one moment and laughing a queer little cackle the next.

The gray beat me to our camp by a good half mile. He never stopped until he was safe in the center of the horse herd.

Thorne and Shorty had just come in from their day's work and, finding Phyllis was not in the camp, were starting out to hunt for us. Thorne was on Blaze, and he rode up beside me. When he saw the rag with which Phyllis had been wiping my neck, he cried out, caught her in his arms, and lifted her from my back, making funny little crooning noises as he held her close.

Blaze muzzled me with his nose. "Where in the world have you been?" he whinnied.

"I've been in the most awful place you ever saw," I answered, "and if this is the sort of fun you were telling me we would have on a round-up, I'd rather do something else, if you please."

DOMESTIC MR. TURKEY

LIFE for a thirty-pound turkey on the ranch of George D. Williams near Burke, South Dakota, became so dull when all the hen turkeys were setting, he decided he would give up strutting about the barnyard, trying to make a hit, and bring up a family himself. He never did like the way the mother turkeys fussed and stewed over their young.

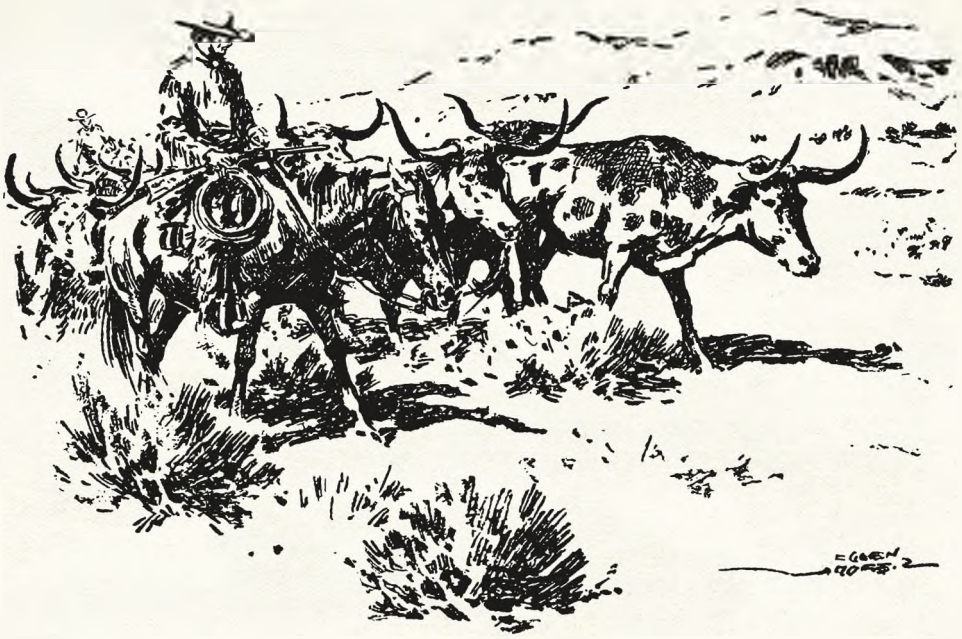
So, taking a good look about the fields, he chose the most comfortable nest and drove off the hen turkey. Then he proceeded to sit on the eggs himself and show the hen the proper way to hatch a family. Domestically, he looked the eggs over every now and then and rearranged the straw in the nest, and then back to his job he went. There he stayed until every last turklet peeped through the shell. Then, clucking to his brood, he strode down through the field into the barnyard, a proud father-mother.

GRASSHOPPER PLAGUE

GREAT swarms of grasshoppers deluged central Nebraska during the month of June, and wrought such havoc with the crops that the district was threatened with famine. The wheat, oat, and alfalfa fields were stripped bare by the intruders, and even the pasture lands were attacked and ruined.

Funds to buy and distribute poison were requested of the State department, which set aside sixteen hundred dollars for the purpose, and further effort was made to enlist the help of the Department of Argiculture at Washington.

Never, since 1870, when the whole section was ruined by an army of grasshoppers, has there been any devastation comparable to this year's. Railroad trains traveled on delayed schedules. The tracks were slippery from the masses of crushed grasshoppers. Sand was used on the tracks to keep the wheels from spinning on the slimy rails. Clothes left on the ground or hanging on lines were gnawed into tiny bits.



JESSE CHISHOLM—TRAIL BLAZER

By CLAUDE RISTER

THE blazer of the Chisholm Trail, Jesse Chisholm, was born in Tennessee about 1806, of a Scotch father and a Cherokee Indian mother. The Indian strain in the man sent him wandering on many a far-flung trail and poking into all sorts of adventures. His Scotch blood caused him to do a bit of clever trading wherever he went.

While yet but a child, Jesse Chisholm heard the silent call of the vast out-places. His half-Indian heart longed for the strange, wild country that lay beyond the broad Mississippi and toward the sunset. There were Cherokees, Indians of his mother's tribe, in Arkansas, and so one day the youngster ran away from his Tennessee home and went to join them. There he remained until he was about eighteen years old, living with the Indians, but spending much of his time among the whites of the near by settlements.

Young Chisholm was a fine specimen of physical manhood. He was of medium size, athletic of build; strong, supple, as tough as seasoned hickory. His hair was straight and black. His eyes were dark and piercing. He was known throughout the country as a fine shot with

both rifle and pistol, and as an expert at following trails.

In 1827, Captain Dutch organized a punitive expedition to punish certain marauding Tonkawa Indians of Texas. Eager to adventure still farther toward the setting sun, Jesse Chisholm went to the commander and asked to be taken along as interpreter. Dutch at first hesitated, because of Chisholm's obvious youth, but the young fellow quickly proved that if he was young in years, he was mature in experience. He beat even the seasoned veterans at shooting, and he tamed one of the wildest horses that had ever been seen at the fort. Dutch hesitated no longer. He was convinced, and so Jesse Chisholm went along with the punitive expedition.

THE recalcitrant Tonkawas were soon taught a lesson. Captain Dutch and his troopers returned to their station, but not young Jesse Chisholm. He wandered on, still farther toward the West, always in search of adventure, and an occasional clever deal in horses, cattle, furs, buffalo hides —anything.

He appeared boldly among hostile tribes, where few other white men would have ventured. His very daring caused the redskins to admire him, to make for him a place beside their camp fires. He lived among them, reasoned with them, traded among them, until he came to be fairly well versed in fourteen different Indian languages. This learning, together with his knowledge of the country, his friendship with many tribes, rendered him very valuable to the frontier military as an interpreter and guide.

He was one of the interpreters of the famous council of Colonel Henry Dodge and Governor Montfort Stokes, with the Wichitas, Kiowas, and Comanches of the Red River country. He became the mediator in many of the treaties between the United States government and the wild tribes of Texas and Indian Territory. Indeed, it was he who in many cases made possible these councils, for he succeeded in persuading chiefs to attend, who otherwise never could have been induced to do so.

It is told that on one occasion when he was powwowing with a certain chief who was dubious about entering the grand council, all his efforts at mediation were being thwarted by a renegade Mexican half-breed.

At last in a flare of temper at the renegade's persistent interference, Jesse Chisholm leaped to his feet and cried out: "Renegade, this camp ain't big enough to hold you and me both, and I'm staying!"

The Mexican half-breed, too, had jumped up. He was a noted gunman, and he now made a play for his Colt. For once, though, he had met his master at the art of the quick draw. Chisholm disarmed him with a shot. He dressed the renegade's slight wound, made him mount a cayuse and leave camp; then he returned to the camp fire.

"Now," he said calmly, "we can powwow without interference from the snake that crawls in the grass."

Eventually he succeeded in persuading the chief to attend the council.

Jesse Chisholm rambled on from adventure to adventure, and then suddenly he married and established a more or less permanent home at Camp Holmes on the Canadian River—a wild country, but he was a daring spirit that hated the narrow confines of well-settled communities.

As children came along, he turned more seriously to the lucrative business of trading, and he established trading posts near the present sites of Lexington and Oklahoma City. He still was by no means a homebody, but frequently left his family at Camp Holmes and went far into Indian countries on trading trips.

While engaged on one of these expeditions he was held up by five desperadoes one night and robbed of his complete outfit. He walked some twenty miles to a Comanche village, acquired a pony, a gun, and some provisions, and then returned and took up the dim trail.

His uncanny skill at reading sign now came in handy. For three days he followed the trail, penetrating into a forbidding country that he never before had seen. Just at dusk of the third day, from a hilltop he saw a camp fire down in a coulee. Approaching it cautiously, he found that the gang of men, all hard-looking characters, unshaven and dirty, were playing cards beside the camp fire.

THE horses were penned in a lariat-rope corral, less than twenty paces from where the men were seated, yet Chisholm managed to slip among the animals without attracting attention. He got a rope onto one of his own fine horses, but the other snorted and swerved away from him. He tried to hide behind the bulk of the animal he already had captured, but it, too, snorted and wheeled around and he was left standing in the open for just an instant. One of the outlaws saw him, yelped a warning, and then the whole five of them "came a-shootin'."

Even as the first shots crashed out, Jesse Chisholm managed to fling a loop over the head of his second horse. Now, holding both reatas in his left hand, he began shooting with his right. His hot fire sent one of the outlaws sprawling. The others desisted abruptly from their direct forward rush, and rapidly scattered to surround him.

The outburst of gun fire had thrown the small cavvy into a panic. The free animals swept away a side of the rope corral and stampeded away into the moonlight. Chisholm threw himself astride one of his own horses and, taking the other in tow, he shot his way out of the trap which the desperadoes quickly had spread for him.

With characteristic audacity and cunning, he rode a circle under cover of the darkness, returning to the camp fire. While the desperadoes were out in the cedar breaks, cursing and trying to recapture their runaway horses, he quietly recovered the merchandise and equipment which they had stolen from him. Soon he was riding the back trail, in possession once more of his own animals and outfit, as well as the pony which he had borrowed from his Indian friends.

Still another adventure awaited him, a rather strange one. Early the next morning it rained. Later in the day he came upon the trail of a barefooted boy. Jesse Chisholm stared in astonishment, for his experienced eyes told him that those tracks had not been made by an Indian youngster. What in the world was a white boy doing alone in a country that was known to be swarming with hostile redskins?

He followed the trail and it led him to a tepee village, pitched within a small valley beside a spring-fed creek. The Indians were greatly surprised when he suddenly appeared at the edge of their camp. At first their attitude was decidedly

unfriendly, but he dispelled some of their surliness with gifts, his ability to speak their language, and his winning personality.

To his further astonishment, Chisholm learned there were nine kidnaped children within the village; Mexicans, for the most part. The oldest one had gone on a short hunting expedition that morning, and it was this youth whose trail he had found and followed.

He tried in vain to learn the identities of the children; how, why, when, and where they had been taken captive. The suspicious Indians would tell him nothing about them. Nor did any of the children know anything about themselves, since they all had been kidnaped during babyhood.

And now the Scot that was in Jesse Chisholm took precedence. Shrewdly he bargained for the nine youngsters. Finally he concluded a deal for their purchase and was permitted to depart quietly with his newly acquired family.

After he had got back to Camp Holmes with the ransomed children, he tried in every way he knew, to find out whom they had been stolen from. But he never learned, and so he kept the whole nine of them and brought them up with his own young ones. This magnanimous act alone is sufficient to show how great was the heart that beat in the breast of Jesse Chisholm.

AT the outbreak of the Civil War, representatives of the Confederacy prevailed upon Chisholm to lend them his assistance in forming certain treaties with the various tribes of Indians then situated in "The Territory." This he consented to do and set about to accomplish the task.

With his family he soon drifted still farther westward, and this time he settled just north of the upper waters of the Little Arkansas, where the Wichita and affiliated tribes were living temporarily, engaged in trading activities. Since trading was one of Jesse Chisholm's chief delights, it was no wonder that he chose this locality as a new place of residence.

Although he now was getting on in age, the years had failed to dull his keen desire for adventure. Again he established trading posts. As before, he left them mainly to the management of his wife and family, and himself went out on long expeditions into countries that fairly bristled with dangers.

On one of these expeditions he bargained for a small herd of cattle, down on Red River. Hiring a few men to help him, he drove them across Indian Territory and disposed of them at a great profit, in one of the Kansas towns.

Little did Jesse Chisholm dream as he drove that small herd northward across the Territory, that he was blazing the trail for a mighty cattle empire, that millions of other longhorns and many other cow drovers would follow in his footsteps, making history, and stamping his name indelibly across its pages.

Up until that time the great State of Texas had been choked with beef. Its vast ranges were simply teeming with longhorns, many of which roamed unattended and unbranded, as wild as buffalo. There had been no local markets at which to dispose of beef, and there were no rail lines over which to ship it. It is no wonder, then, that the Texas ranchmen were poor, even while they had thousands of cattle roaming their ranges.

News of Jesse Chisholm's exploit spread like wildfire. He had shown

them the way, had blazed the trail that was to lead them out of their financial troubles and to wealth and power; he had actually crossed the forbidden Territory, with a herd, and had received a fancy price for his stock in the North! In Kansas there were rail lines, over which to transport beef to hungry Eastern markets—to all the world, for that matter! "Gold for Texas cattle in Kansas!" was the cry which rang all through the Lone Star State. Within an amazingly short time longhorn cattle were rolling across Red River in almost a constant flow, heading up the newly blazed Chisholm Trail, and toward Northern shipping points.

In the meantime, Jesse Chisholm, naïvely unconscious of the fact that he had made history, was going about other adventures. Uncle Sam was once more in need of his services, and once more he accepted an important post as mediator.

There had been further trouble with the warlike Comanches and the Kiowas. They had been invited to a council to be held at the mouth of the little Arkansas, but had rejected an invitation to attend. Jesse Chisholm went among them and, with a diplomacy worthy of a higher recognition than he ever received from the United States, won them over and persuaded them to attend the council.

THREE years later Jesse Chisholm died. His end was hastened, it is said, by the many terrific hardships which he endured on his trading trips and other adventures, after he had passed his prime.

Thus passed one of the heroes of the old West, a man who did not seek but won immortal glory.

The Round-Up

FOLKS, E. H. Sommers has come down from Lexington, New York, to be with us to-night. He is mighty glad that Geraldi is back with us again, and he wants to say so, among other things. All right, Sommer, old boy; let it go.

"BOSS AND FOLKS OF THE ROUND-UP: Just dropped in to tell you how glad I am that my old pal, Jimmy Geraldi, has at last, after all these years, come back to us. I thought it was impossible for Geraldi ever to come back, but I should have known that good old Geraldi can do startling things.

"Boss, believe it or not, I was just going to ask Max Brand to bring back Geraldi, that restless hawk of the road, when I read, with a great thrill, that he would again come a-travelin'. Geraldi has been, and always will be, my favorite character. I hope he never gets married and settles down. Tell Max Brand to get rid of that sweetheart of Jimmy's. She only interferes with the life he loves.

"My mother and I have been reading Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine for about five years, and we think it's the greatest magazine going, with the exception of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine, which we also read every week.

"By the way, Boss, ask George Owen Baxter whatever became of Thunder Moon. He can't make me believe Thunder Moon actually turned white and left the wide open spaces. No, sir; not Thunder Moon!

Allow me to compliment the publishers of Western Story Magazine for its clearer and bigger print, and let me add that anybody that complains about this magazine ought to be ashamed of themselves for their ingratitude. Just keep the old magazine as it is. Well, so long, Boss. I'll be seein' yer again some time."

Comes now Ralph Leed, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

"BOSS AND FOLKS OF THE ROUND-UP: I have read your magazines for the past three years, and find none better.

"Have just finished Cherry Wilson's 'Outcasts of Picture Rocks,' and it sure is a very wonderful story. Cherry Wilson doesn't write very often; but, when she does, it certainly is a humdinger of a story.

"By the way, I would like to hear more about Flash David. Peter Henry Morland is a great writer; but, if he doesn't soon bring out a story of Flash David, I'll rope and hog tie him till he does.

"And how about another serial by George Owen Baxter?

"Having said enough, will leave. Hope you will keep on putting more serials in your magazine."

Cherry Wilson is a particular favorite of ours, folks. We wish that she did write more stories, but she is a slow producer. There is one thing you can always gamble on finding in a Cherry Wilson story, and that is a lot of feeling. After all, that is one of the most important things to get into life—feeling and understanding.

An admirer of Raymond Berry is M. A. O'Neill of McGill, Nevada, also of Seth Ranger and Howard Perry; but it is Berry that he seems really to have a great affection for.

"Boss and Folks: I am much interested in the works of Raymond Berry. He portrays a unique style and is very adept in the handling of human-interest circumstances. His characters live on the printed page, and those bits of excellent description are typical of the West. I liked particularly his 'Cattlemen's Comeback' and 'When the Cows Come Home.' As an admirer of Raymond Berry, I say, let's have more of him.

"I am also interested in the stories of Seth Ranger and Howard Perry."

Hailing from Chocolate Bayou, Texas, Emmett Murphree will slip into the saddle just occupied by O'Neill and report on some of his favorites.

"Boss and Folks of the Round-up: Won't you please let me in on the 'Round-up'? I have been reading Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine for nearly a year now, and every week it seems better. I like Max Brand's and George Cory Franklin's stories.

"The other day I was rummaging around in the bunk house, and I found an old magazine of September 12th, of last year. I had been too busy to read it, I suppose. There was a story in there, 'The Feud of the Rocking U,' by Russell A. Bankson. It sure was a good story, too.

"I wonder if some of you pards would send me the words to the song 'Strawberry Roan.' Well, so long. Be seein' ya!"

Now, what do you think of Glenn Harper? Glenn has come all the way from Tientsin, China. He is bunking in the American Barracks, Headquarters Company, Fifteenth Infantry. We'll say that's somethin'! There's Glenn been living right underneath us, way down in China. Up he comes to report and says the best thing you can say about anything—that we are improving all the time!

"Boss and Folks of the Round-up: Your wonderful magazine is a source of many hours of pleasure away out here in the Orient, where good stories are hard to get and real American news is a luxury.

"I have been reading Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine for several years. I couldn't quit

now if I wanted to, and I'll say it is improving with every issue. Here's best wishes from across the Pacific for Street & Smith's publications."

Perhaps the thing we like best to converse about and arguefy over is horses. Just listen to what H. C. Hamilton, of 245 Dunn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, has got to say about handling man's best friend.

"BOSS AND FOLKS OF THE ROUND-UP: Another girl of the Joan Curry type has been ventilating her views upon horses. I wonder if these brutes in female form ever stop to think how they disgust all right-thinking men, and what a moral degradation they are to all who witness the more-than-beastly spectacle of feminine cruelty. No nation yet has risen higher than its women, and if all our mothers, sisters, sweethearts were brutal by nature, then God help our country! Fortunately, most women are not heartless. We speak of them as the gentler sex. We expect them to show mercy, even as we, the so-called sterner sex, shrink from meting out to a woman the drastic punishments male criminals sometimes receive. Some crimes have been penalized by imprisonment and lashes, but only for men.

"Yet lashes might do some women good—girls who callously cut their horses with blacksnake whips, with loaded or wired quirts. How would these same fair riders enjoy an application of the same? Not merely a touch, but their own bare flesh to be cut through by a loaded rawhide, wielded by hands as pitiless as their own. Perhaps, then, they would realize the unbearable agony a whip can cause.

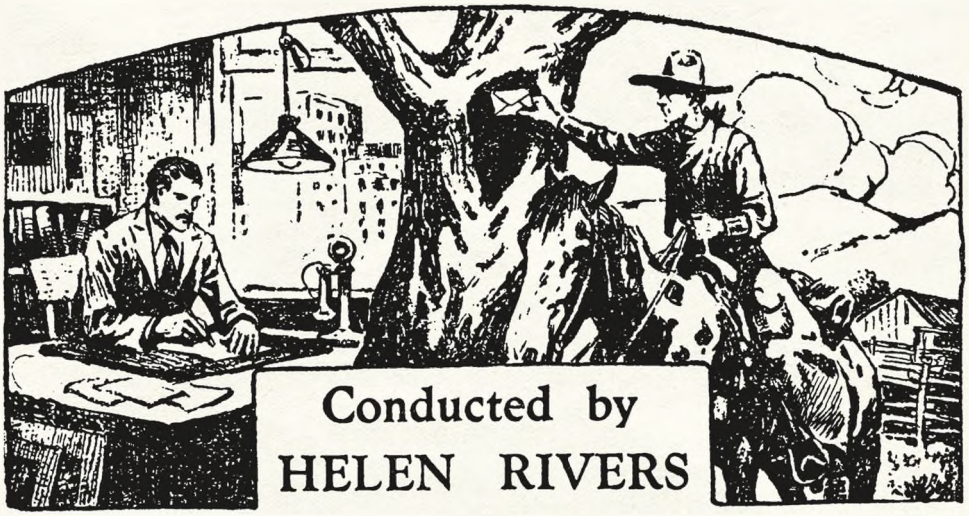
"A horse will in silence endure the most inhuman lashing. He usually falls before he will utter a complaint. And why all this hell of torment? What crime has he been guilty of? Nothing but the desire to keep his freedom. That is natural. He has been roped, tied, blindfolded, and saddled. His feelings are those of fear and anger. Of course, he will give any would-be rider a rough time. Who wouldn't? As a rule, he is eventually broken, flogged and raked till spirit and strength are spent. Reeking with foam and sweat, flanks heaving, legs trembling, lungs and heart ready to burst, crisscrossed with welts and cuts oozing blood, he bears an acclaimed 'heroine' on his back. There she proudly bestrides the exhausted animal, with reddened spurs and bit, flourishing a heavy quirt which has raised ridges and drawn blood. Gentle womanhood! What a travesty!

"We have taken a wild horse's freedom and by what right? For our own advantage. Then, for a few dollars, and the fun of it, he is turned over to some callous breaker who, despite the animal's fight for liberty, beats and rowels him into submission.

"I have had many letters from 'Round-up' readers. It is generally conceded that humane methods take a little more time—roughness gets apparent results sooner. So does cramming, forcing, or any kind of brutality, but is it the best way? All true educators will say, 'No.' Which treatment would we ourselves prefer? Which of the two ways is the better for our own children? Animals respond to kindness, once their confidence is gained, as any trainer will testify.

"I would be glad to hear from others on this matter."

The HOLLOW TREE



Conducted by HELEN RIVERS

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you.

If you would like a friend or friends in a certain section, write Miss Rivers to this effect, 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.

BETWEEN the Buck Fork country and Grants Pass is the Canyon Creek, Cow Creek, and the Wolf Creek country in that great stretch of prospecting ground in the southwest of Oregon. "Wolf Creek Al" has tried panning gold in Canyon Creek and can tell you-all what it means to cross Cow Creek when it is high and "runnin' swift."

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am an old miner and prospector who has spent many years in the hills and on the deserts of the West. My first venture in the mining game was in 1894, and made in company with a pard. Now, Billie had made a trip to the eastern part of the State and his one ambition in life was to be a prospector. He had seen the old prospectors along the streams with their rockers and pans, picks and shovels, with their Long Toms and other methods of saving the placer gold that had lodged along the streams. Some of these old-timers were making wages and better and some were barely making enough to buy grub. Yet, to all there was that one bright hope, the one dream that they dreamed not only while they slept, but when they were dozing in the daytime—they could see just a little way off the great mother lode that would bring them untold wealth. Along with the dreams were the reports that came of different strikes being made in the southeastern part of the State, where they were finding nuggets as large as a hen's egg!

When the spring came I could not think of anything else but mining, so Billie and I bought us five horses or, rather, ponies, three to be used as pack horses and two as saddle horses. We found an expert packer. He supervised the buying of the outfit, and he sure got as fine an outfit as ever struck the trail those days. So along

about the first of April there was quite a spell of fine weather and the roads began to dry up, so we decided it was time to start, and our packer traveled with us the first day and helped make camp and repack the next morning. We had fairly good roads and made twenty miles the first day. Made it to the Santiam River, which we crossed on a ferry, and made our first camp on the banks of the Santiam.

We were now on the road to shift for ourselves. For several days everything went well with us and we would travel about twenty miles each day. Soon we got to be quite expert in unpacking and repacking. We traveled south along the main highway to Drain, then undertook a detour by way of Elkton. There was where we made a mistake, as it began raining, and rained for two weeks. All the streams were at flood and we were isolated three weeks at Elkton before we could get the ferryman to take us across the Umpqua River.

However, all disagreeable things have an end, and we finally left Elkton to go to Roseburg, and it sure was a hard trip, as we had no paved roads those days, and for miles at a time we would be in mud and gumbo knee-deep on the horses. We would have to camp every ten or twelve miles to let the horses rest. We finally reached Roseburg, out on the main highway, and we thought our troubles were over. We would talk with the travelers we met, and some of them would tell us of wonderful strikes being made in different places. So we kept traveling as fast as our ponies could stand the grind. From Roseburg we started for Grants Pass, and on this stretch of the road we found our first gold. We camped at Canyon Creek, waiting for the weather to clear. Before we started over the divide to the Cow Creek Canyon we tried panning in Canyon Creek, and found quite a good prospect. We were about to locate the claims when we found that it was on deeded land, so we moved on to Cow Creek.

When we reached Cow Creek it was quite high and running swift, but our haste got the better of us and we decided to cross that evening. So we forced the pack horses into the stream and started across, but as soon as the pack horses struck the current they were carried downstream, packs and all. We had all we could do to keep the pack horses from drowning. One of the animals went down two hundred feet before we succeeded in getting her out. When we finally got across our packs were soaked, so we went into camp for three days while we dried the outfit.

While camping at Cow Creek, we met an old prospector who told us of a place up Grave Creek where he thought we would be most likely to find good ground that was not claimed. So we started for Grave Creek, but when we reached Wolf Creek, which is about halfway between Cow Creek and Grave Creek, we met a man whom Billie had met before and he advised us to go back to Coffee Creek; said he knew there was good gold there. So we turned back. We had to go clear back to Canyon Creek to get on the trail to Coffee Creek. When we got to Coffee Creek we found that it was all a hoax, and there was nothing there at all, so we had to make the trip all over again from Canyon Creek to Wolf Creek. We rested over one day at Wolf Creek and then started for Grave Creek. We killed our first deer that evening near the Grave Creek Crossing. We camped, and during the night we heard what we thought to be thunder, but it was a little different from any thunder we had ever heard. When morning came we could still hear the roar we thought to be thunder, but could see no clouds or any sign of storm, so we concluded it was some great waterfall, and with that thought in mind we started up Grave Creek, the noise growing louder all the time. At times our horses would pause and listen to it. As we came to the top of the little divide between two canyons, we looked down and there we saw some of the largest giants used in placer mining in southern Oregon. There were three of those giants throwing five-inch

streams, with a pressure of better than two hundred pounds at the giant. When one of those streams struck a rock two and three feet through it would spin like a marble, and sometimes go fifty feet before it would stop. And when the three streams would strike against the wall at the same time it would sound like distant thunder.

After spending one night at this mine, we headed for some old diggings we were told about by the men around the mining camp. So we started on what proved to be one of the hardest trips I ever made, climbing up the side of Old Baldy to the head of Slate Creek. We went over snow that was fifteen feet deep, at times breaking through and going most out of sight, but after a hard struggle we reached a place in the little creek where there has been some prospecting. And we helped ourselves, for there sure was gold in that creek. Getting down in the creek where the water had washed the snow away we dug up about a wheelbarrow full of gravel, took one pan and—fool's luck! The first pan yielded about fifty cents; one nugget of forty cents, and some fine gold! And right there I became a miner, and have never got over it yet!

If any of you young hombres are interested in an old man's hobby, let's hear from you-all. WOLF CREEK AL.

Care of The Tree.

Prospectors, here is your pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Last summer, not being able to find work to furnish me the wherewithal to exist, I took to the mountains in Idaho, via the Salmon River, to try my hand at prospecting. Now this was my first try at finding the precious metal. Of course, a person can find colors all through that country, but I believe that I know where there is some dirt that is really "pay dirt" and from which a hombre can pan enough gold to make good wages. I would like to meet up with a good partner of about forty-five, my own age, who will go fifty-fifty with me and prospect for gold during the spring and summer and fall and who would want to run a trap line, maybe, during the winter months.

If any of you hombres are interested in such a proposition, I would like to discuss the matter at length with you by letter.

ART MERKER.

Care of The Tree.

Here's an hombre who has seen a lot of country behind a string of pack burros.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

This country is about the best there is and it is sure the old West—one hundred and fifty to two hundred miles from the railroad! There is some homestead land here and also plenty of range land that can be taken up for very little.

I've been in the West for thirty years and have seen it all from Canada to Mexico. And I've seen all kinds of outfits all the way down from big cattle outfits to the little fellow with two or three hundred head. I've also seen a good lot of country behind a string of pack burros.

I've been reading the old Holla for a long time and occasionally I see where some one wants a homestead or ranch in the West. As there is some homestead land in this part of the country, I am very willing to put those folks on the trail of it if they care to write me. D. M. D.

Care of The Tree.

You-all will want to write to this young adventurer.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I was a companion of Charles Brian when he took his trip down the Mississippi River. Maybe some of the old Holla hombres know him. Now, folks, I have many interesting things to tell of that trip and a few other adventures, and I'll—yep—I'll answer every letter. I'll exchange snaps, too. So, all you waddies, don't forget me, a lonely fellow of eighteen.

ARTHUR LA ROSE.

Route 9, Box 2, Jefferson Barracks, Missouri.

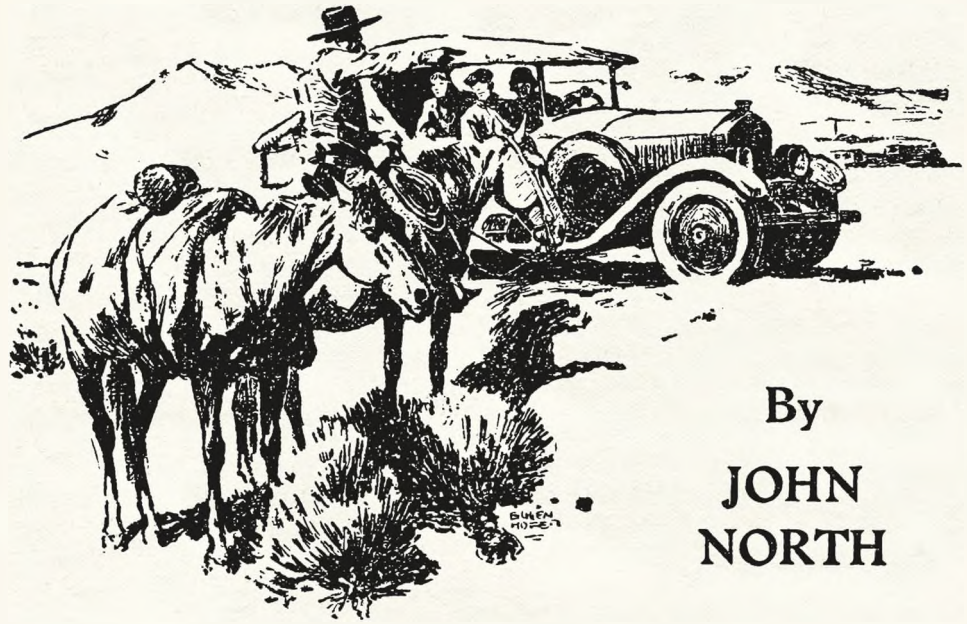
A young Canadian is looking for a homesteading pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a young Canadian who has the notion of homesteading in northern Ontario. I would like to have some advice from successful homesteaders in the vicinity of Kirkland Lake and New Liskeard as to conditions there. And I would also like to hear from some young Canadian under the age of thirty who would like to try homesteading with me. DUNDAS PAT.

Care of The Tree.

WHERE TO GO and How to GET THERE



By JOHN NORTH

We aim in this department to give practical help to readers. The service offered includes accurate information about the West, its ranches, mines, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. We will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to us, for we are always glad to assist you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THE Northwest Territories of Canada are a mighty interesting section of the world to the red-blooded, adventure-loving type of hombre and we are glad that Hugh M., of Butte, Montana, has introduced this topic for discussion.

"For some time I've been interested in the Northwest Territories, Mr. North, with the idea of trekking up there some day to look the land over. I'm considerable of a traveler and, having got the habit, I find it sort of hard to stay settled in one place for long at a time. I'm keen about the far places of the world where population is still small and where there's plenty of elbow room.

"Now, I'd like to ask you a few questions about the Northwest Territories. How large is this section and just how far does it extend? What about vegetation and climate? How does one get there? About how large is the white population? And as I'm more or less of a hunter

and fisherman, I'd like any information you can give me about the game, fish and waterfowl."

The Northwest Territories extend from the summit of the Rocky Mountains to Hudson Bay and from latitude 60 degrees to the north pole, and contain a total area of 1,309,682 square miles. With the exception of the western section it is a vast undulating plain, no part of which rises to any great height above sea level.

The western section is fairly well wooded to within a short distance of the Arctic Ocean and is drained by the great Mackenzie River which flows for a large part of its course through a series of parallel mountain ranges. East of the Mackenzie basin and extending to Hudson Bay on the east and the Arctic on the north is a vast treeless area, known as the Northern Plains, which is largely unexplored. The vegetation of this region is limited to mosses, grasses and shrubs with small trees in some of the river valleys. North of the mainland, the Arctic Ocean contains a network of treeless islands, some of which are of considerable size.

Hugh will find that the winters are long and cold, while the short summers are warm and pleasant, with three months of almost perpetual daylight.

The most-used route into the Northwest Territories is by way of the Athabaska River, or the Peace River to Lake Athabaska and thence down the Slave River to Great Slave Lake. From this lake there is uninterrupted steamer navigation down the Mackenzie River to the Arctic Ocean, a distance of about 1,000 miles. The Hudson's Bay Company's steamers make this trip twice each summer and will accommodate a limited number of passengers. The trip from Edmonton to Aklavik, in the Mackenzie delta, and return is made in 35 days.

Away from this main route, summer travel is generally by canoe and winter travel is by dog team. The recent successful introduction of aircraft as a practical means of transportation in these Northern areas has obviated to a great extent the disadvantages of long distances and slow methods of travel.

Hugh need not worry about finding the Northwest Territories too thickly settled as the whole white population is approximately only 1,000. The remaining inhabitants comprise Indians and Eskimos. Settlement is limited to fur-trading posts and missions and there are few hotels or other places offering public accommodation.

We prophesy that Hugh, if he is as much of a pioneer as he thinks, will greatly enjoy his sojourn in this little-visited region. As for the facilities for hunting and fishing they are ample. The chief game animal

is the barren-ground caribou, countless thousands of which roam over the Northern Plains in summer and migrate south to the wooded country for the winter. This animal constitutes the main food supply of the native Indians and Eskimos and its skin furnishes them with clothing..

The wooded areas are well stocked with moose and woodland caribou and the eastern section of the Arctic coast and many of the Arctic islands are inhabited by the musk ox, one of the most interesting of wild animals. The great polar bear is found along the coasts of Hudson Bay and the Arctic Ocean and throughout the numerous islands. A species of grizzly bear, known as the barren-ground grizzly, inhabits the treeless Northern Plains, but does not appear to be anywhere abundant.

Waterfowl are very plentiful as the immense lakes in the Territories are one of their chief breeding grounds. Ptarmigan are also abundant and form an important article of food for the Indians and Eskimos during the winter. The rivers and lake literally teem with fish, the most important of which are whitefish, lake trout and inconnu.

Another hombre who is interested in the Far North and asking for a little information about it is Leon T. of Boston, Massachusetts.

"The Yukon has always fascinated me, Mr. North, and I've been planning for some time to go up there during my summer vacation. This year it seems that I shall be able to carry out this pet scheme of mine and so I'm coming to you, the source of information about the West, to give me some facts about this section.

"What sort of weather can I expect up there during the summer months? I'd like to know also the best route to take to get there. Any facts which you can hand out about the Yukon will be greatly appreciated by me."

We are mighty glad to oblige Leon, and we'll start off by saying that the Yukon, which comprises an area of 207,076 square miles, is part of the Rocky Mountain system and is generally mountainous with some wide wooded flats in the river valleys. Although the winters are long and cold, Leon may expect pleasant warm weather during the summer. Three months, from the last week in May to the last week in August, are free from frost, and during this period daylight lasts for nearly the full 24 hours.

The best way to get to the Yukon is by way of Skagway, Alaska, which place is reached by steamer from Vancouver or Prince Rupert. From Skagway the White Pass and Yukon Railway runs to Whitehorse, Yukon, a distance of 110 miles. From June to October well appointed steamers ply between Whitehorse and Dawson, 460 miles northeast, by way of Lake Laberge and the Lewes and Yukon rivers. In winter this trip is made by sleigh.

We predict that Leon will revel in the scenery along the whole route from Vancouver to Dawson, for it is truly magnificent. For a thousand miles it follows the famous Inside Passage, undoubtedly one of the most imposing scenic water routes in the world.

CAMP COOKING: How would you like to vary the menu of your summer picnics or camping trips, with some genuine old-timers' dishes, such as sour-dough bread, beans-in-the-hole, and flapjacks? Free copies of these recipes may be obtained from John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine.

GUNS AND GUNNERS

By CHARLES E. CHAPEL

Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps

The foremost authorities on ballistics and the principal firearms manufacturers are coöperating to make this department a success. We shall be glad to answer your questions regarding firearms of any make or age. Address your letters to Lieutenant Charles E. Chapel, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

ALL classes of individuals can enjoyably participate in rifle and pistol marksmanship. Any one, old enough to lift a firearm and responsible enough to obey safety precaution rules, can start blazing away with a fair expectation of success; graybeards who shake with the palsy seem to be able to steady themselves when on the firing line; even high-school girls have taken to this sport as enthusiastically as their grandmothers adopted charades and spelling bees as their recreation. Rural and small-town residents have turned wasteland into rifle ranges; city shooters have erected their targets in the basements and attics of buildings. In California and Florida it's a year-round activity; in Alaska and Maine wintry blasts drive the marksmen from the open fields, but they start up soon in barns and auditoriums.

The mission of this department is to encourage readers of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine to enter the shooting game and then strive for high scores. Any one with eyesight and ordinary health has no excuse for landing hits outside of the high marking rings; even "nervous wrecks" have won national matches. If you are a beginner, we will send you free literature upon request; if you are a veteran, we'll try to settle any arguments you have entered on the subjects of hunting, gunsmithing, collecting, antique weapons, and marksmanship.

A sling steadies the shooting arm.

MR. W. E. BLAKE, Bremerton, Washington: The purpose of the sling is to steady the left arm and assist in the support of the rifle. Two kinds of sling arrangements are used—loop and grapevine, but a third method has been tried by some riflemen. Their scheme is to fasten only one end of the sling to the rifle and then stand on the other end. The only possible argument for this system is that a shooter troubled with an upward-flip tendency might obtain results, but for most people the orthodox sling adjustments are preferable.

Pads are necessary for comfort when firing a high-power rifle.

MR. C. J. KILLIAN, Topeka, Kansas: There are several dealers who sell butt pads that are designed to reduce the kick from high-power rifles; their use is purely a matter of personal choice on the part of the marksman. However, all experienced match contestants sew sheepskin pads on the shoulder and elbows of their coat or shirt. If sheepskin is not available, the next best material is toweling.

Deafness from shooting noise.

MR. F. D. SHANNON, Galena, Illinois: Very few shooters ever lose their hearing permanently as a result of ordinary shooting noises, but temporary deafness is not unusual. This can be prevented to a certain extent by plugging the ears with cotton, or by inserting patented devices in the ears. The manufacturers of these objects (which are usually made of rubber and glass) claim that they absolutely prevent deafness, but most riflemen dislike carrying any more paraphernalia than absolutely necessary. Cotton plugs may not be ideal, but they are cheap and handy.

An "O. K." firearm.

MR. T. W. IONE, Buffalo, New York: The firearm you have is the Marlin O. K. cartridge pistol, caliber .22 short, rim fire, marked "O. K." and also "J. M. Marlin, New Haven, Ct." This weapon was also made in calibers .30 and .32, both short, rim fire.

Remington rifles have seen foreign service.

MR. O. D. TAGGART, Austin, Texas: In addition to furnishing rifles for the United States government and New York State, the Remington people have made weapons for the Danes, the Cubans, the Spaniards, the Egyptians, and several other nationalities. We have mentioned the caliber .43 Egyptian before; the Spanish Civil Guard rifle was also caliber .43, C. F., and was used in Cuba; the Remingtons pleased the Spanish Army in Cuba so well that the same arm was adopted for use in Europe where it was made in both Spain and Belgium, with smaller factories in Mexico.

The famous French Lebel rifle.

MRS. CORA HARRISON, San Francisco, California: The French Lebel, model 1886, caliber .315, has a steel receiver like the 1883 Hotchkiss; a tubular magazine in the forearm contains eight cartridges. The bayonet has an "x"-shaped cross-section. The ammunition has a cupronickel ball, with 231 grains bullet, and 42 grains of powder. The overall length of the rifle is 51 inches; the barrel is 32 inches long.

MISSING

This department, conducted in duplicate in Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine and Detective Story Magazine, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

LASST, EDWARD.—Composer of the song "Memories." Last heard from in 1916. Went to War. If buddies or others know of his whereabouts, please get in touch with me at once Jimmie Birch, S. P. W., 3327 Twenty-fifth Street, Detroit, Michigan.

FINKLESTEIN or **FINK, LESTER.**—Last heard of from Newark, New Jersey, in June, 1927. May be in New York City, or in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Will greatly appreciate any information as to his whereabouts. Write William Waldeyer, 5828 California Street, San Francisco, California.

VAN WORMER, ROSCOE, or **McGREGOR, MELVIN.**—Please write to your sister, who is always longing for you. Address Pearl M. Heath, care of this magazine.

GILL, ROBERT.—Formerly a sergeant at Fort Davis, Canal Zone. Would like to hear from you. All those we knew are gone. Didn't go to Chanute, thinking you were going. Am back in the Sixty-third Squadron, at France Field. Write soon, and forgive. H. Gomez, care of this magazine.

HENDRICKS, NATHAN BURNS.—Born in Texas or Oklahoma. Lived in Arizona. Sometimes called "Aris Pete." Steel or iron worker. Riveter. About thirty-two years old. Five feet eight inches tall. Stockily built. Light hair. Blue eyes. Last heard of in June, 1931, in Chicago, Illinois. News of importance awaits him. Any one knowing his whereabouts please communicate with X. X., care of this magazine.

PARSLOW, KATIE.—Was in Kingston, Ontario, Canada, in 1930. Will any one knowing her address kindly send it to Gerry, care of this magazine?

JACK P.—Forgive me. I'm alone in the West. Write to Bessie B., care of this magazine.

REYNOLDS, L. WILLIAM.—Please write to your sister, L. P. Reynolds, care of this magazine.

BROTHER ANDREW.—Mother and father are worried about you. To ease their minds, please write to your brother, Peter Mogish, 9115 Lake Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.

CRABTREE, ROY MILTON.—Father died March 24, 1932. Communicate with mother at Pawellton, West Virginia. Bill Crabtree, 215 Truslow Street, Charleston, West Virginia.

McCABE, WILLIAM M.—Forty-four years old. Missing since September, 1903. His mother is seventy-two years old. Her health is failing, and she would be grateful for any word from or concerning her son. Please address Mrs. Margaret E. McCabe, North Uxbridge, Massachusetts.

HAUNTZ, EDWIN.—Was in Borger, Texas, in 1929, where he had gone from Wyoming. Information as to his present whereabouts highly appreciated by J. V. H., care of this magazine.

J. S. W.—Jack darling, whatever is the matter? I am sure that I can help. Please write to mother, care of this magazine.

VAN WALLRAVEN, HERBERT.—Please communicate with me. Irma Athanas, nee Parks, 762 Marcy Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

PETERSON, NORMAN.—Thought to be in Canada. Do you remember the niece you wrote to during the War? Would be so pleased to hear from you again. Please write to A., care of this magazine.

O'REILLY, MARY ROSE.—Last known address was 7208 Seventeenth Street, Brooklyn, New York. This was in 1929. She is about twenty-seven years old, with dark eyes and black curly hair. Probably still lives in Brooklyn or New York City. Information very much appreciated by Michigan Slim, care of this magazine.

McDOWELL, HARRY MILTON.—Son of Edward McDowell. Left his home in Elliot County, Kentucky, twenty-two years ago. Last heard of in Oklahoma shortly after he left. Is now thirty-eight years old. Any information concerning him will be appreciated by his brother, Rufus McDowell, R. R. 6, Hillsboro, Ohio.

LARSSON, AMELIA.—Maiden name Anderson. Formerly resided in Boston, Massachusetts. Would be about fifty-five years old. Any one having information, please communicate with Uncle, care of this magazine.

CALLAHAN, WALTER.—About twenty-seven years old. Believed to have been kidnaped by his father, in 1915, from school in Tumwater, Washington. His sisters, Irene and Loula, are very anxious to get in touch with him or any one who can give us information about him or our father, Clark Callahan. Write to Utah Kids, care of this magazine.

LARSSON, ASA.—Formerly a sailor. About fifty-four years old. Information requested by Uncle, care of this magazine.

VOLPE, FRED.—My husband, who disappeared with our sixteen-year-old son, Frank, November 16, 1930. He is a tailor by trade. Five feet six inches tall, slender, with dark-brown eyes and gray hair. Word regarding either father or son will be gratefully received by Mrs. Emily Volpe, 1115 Mariana Street, Chicago, Illinois.

BLAIN, FLOYD G.—We want you. Write to Mollie and Kathryn, care of this magazine.

GROSS, CHARLES.—Married Sophia Roberts, of Columbia Falls, Maine, in 1874, or earlier. Mrs. Gross died in Rockland, Maine, in 1917. A son would welcome information regarding father or other relatives. Address George Leonard, 61 Tilson Avenue, Rockland, Maine.

COURTNEY, CARL.—Last heard of in Fresno, California. He drove to Toledo, Ohio, in 1923 or 1924, to visit his brother. Please, Uncle Carl, write to me. I really need you. Address your niece, Thelda, care of this magazine.

JOHNSON, WILLIAM WAYNE.—Born in Raymilton, Pennsylvania, about forty-four years ago. Five feet eight inches tall. Dark-red curly hair. Gray eyes. Last heard from in 1924, in Polk, Pennsylvania, where his wife, Nettie, died that year. Any one having information, please communicate with his sister, Mrs. C. K. Brown, Route 1, Box 195, Hughson, California.

BLACK, MELISSA.—Lived with family named Farington, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, in 1925. Between fifty and sixty years of age, the widow of Elf Black, and has three stepchildren. News of any kind thankfully received by G. M. G., care of this magazine.

BARBER, ERVING S.—Formerly of Mansfield, Ohio. Thirty-one years old. Six feet tall. Weighs about one hundred and seventy-five pounds. Blue-gray eyes. Medium-brown hair. Radio repairman and mechanic. Disappeared August 18, 1930. Last heard from in San Diego, California. His wife and two small children are penniless. Any assistance in locating this party will be deeply appreciated. Please write to Mrs. Ruth Barber, 5859 North Mulligan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

NOTICE.—I was born in Jacksonville, Florida, between forty and forty-five years ago. My mother's name was Kate; my grandparents' Jack and Cherry Williams. A family named Walker brought me up. I should very much like to hear from my father or from any one knowing him. Address Bertha Eubanks, 499 East 170th Street, Bronx, New York, New York.

KEESER, GEORGE, ROY, and **MERVIN.**—Sons of George Keeser, who perished in a Kentucky mine. The children were brought to Fort Worth, Texas, by their mother and were later adopted. Word regarding them will be welcomed by their brother, Walter. Write to Walter Martin, 400 West Balknap, Fort Worth, Texas.

WHITNEY, CLARENCE WALLACE.—Over six feet tall. Hazel eyes. Auburn hair. Initials C. W. W. tattooed on one wrist, a bracelet on the other. Remember your little niece in Warren, Massachusetts, in 1914? God only knows how she has missed and needed you. Please write to Mary F., care of this magazine.

MORELAND, HARDIN and **PLEASANT.**—Born in Virginia between 1811 and 1813. Would like to hear from any one who can help me trace their ancestry. Address Mrs. O. K. Dorsett, 929 North K Street, Lake Worth, Florida.

HENDRIX, NEWTON C.—Known as Newt or Slim. Missing for seven years. He is tall and slender, with blue eyes and reddish hair. Last heard from in Kansas. His four children are anxious to locate him. Please forward any information to Mrs. Alta Crain, care of Fine's Store, R. R. 1, Seminole, Oklahoma.

DORNAIER, FRED (TEX).—Cowboy. Twenty-four years old. Five feet seven inches tall. Weight, one hundred and seventy-five pounds. Brown hair and eyes. Lived in Harrington, Washington, in 1930, but is believed to have gone to Oregon. Word from or about him will be welcomed by Miss LaVenia Patterson, Route 4, Pratt, Kansas.

NOTICE.—I was born in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, January 18, 1892. My mother's maiden name was Maud Williams. The same year I was born, I was adopted by strangers, and have never heard of my parents, my brothers or sisters. Would be grateful for any information regarding them or other relatives. My address is Mrs. Martha Russ, 1455 Stillwater Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota.

GRIDER, LESTER EDWARD.—World War veteran. Left Murrayville, Illinois, in 1929, driving a Ford car, 1921 model. Is five feet eight inches tall, bald, with dark-brown eyes and sandy beard. Fair complexion. Word of any kind regarding him or his whereabouts will be highly appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Neta Grider, Route 4, Murrayville, Illinois.

SAMSON, DON.—Brown curly hair. Brown eyes. About twenty-four years old. Any apprisal as to whereabouts greatly appreciated by Jacquie, 1244 West 101st Street, Los Angeles, California.

MUSHRALL, or MUZRALL, HARRY.—Native of New Brunswick, Canada. Last heard of in Idaho, forty years ago. About sixty-five years old. Six feet tall. Readers having information, please communicate with his brother, who is very anxious to locate him. Address Fred Mushrall, Box 17, Standish, Maine.

STORMER, EMIL.—Sergeant in Thirtieth Infantry, Company I, United States army, during 1919-1920. Will he, or friends, please write Ella Ahnberg, Spyrock, Mendocino County, California.

SCOTT, FRED (SLIM).—Was in Fort William, Ontario, Canada, in 1912. Has a sister living in Maple Creek. Would be glad to hear from him or persons having news of him. Kindly address Lillie, care of this magazine.

COATES, LeROY.—About thirty years old. Brown eyes and sandy complexion. Last heard from in 1925, in Melrose, Massachusetts, where it is believed he has an aunt. Canadian by birth. Has worked as traveling salesman. Any one knowing his present address, kindly write to E. M., care of this magazine.

MAJEWSKI, ROMAN.—Disappeared September 5, 1931. Six feet tall. Black hair, brown eyes. Twenty-four years old. Two front teeth missing. His wife inquires. Please send any information to Mrs. Josephine Majewski, R. R. 1, Cassopolis, Michigan.

STOUT, BUNNY.—Last heard of in Berlin, Maryland. Blond and blue-eyed. About five feet four inches tall, weighed around one hundred and twenty pounds. Very charming personality. Present address appreciated by Franklin E. Konetzka, Box 83, Fort Kamehameha, Hawaii.

MINERS, RAY.—Was working for a construction company at White Cloud, Alberta, Canada, four years ago. May have gone to Saskatchewan, where he had formerly been employed. Twenty-eight years old. Five feet five inches tall, weighs about one hundred and sixty-five pounds. Brown eyes. Dark complexion. Any one knowing his whereabouts, please notify his sister, Mrs. Mabel Marr, Northland, Mile 25, Ontario, Canada.

SORENSEN, MRS. BERNICE.—Thirty-seven years old. Five feet eight inches tall. Black hair. Brown eyes. Last heard from in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. Information regarding her or her whereabouts welcomed by daughter, Alice B. Sorensen, P. O. Box 827, Shelby, Montana.

NEWELL, CECIL and JOSEPH TONKINS.—Please write to Mrs. O. Roy Marsh, 1308 Brown Avenue, Yakima, Washington.

SHELDON, ROY.—A sailor, last heard of in Constantinople, Turkey. Please write to Merle Tonkins, 1308 Brown Avenue, Yakima, Washington.

THOMPSON, REUBEN.—A twin, twenty-five years old, last heard from in Los Angeles, California, six years ago. He then planned to return home to Meridian, Misaissippi, but never arrived. His mother is ill, and would be grateful for news of her son. Address Mrs. D. J. Thompson, 2675 St. John Street, Meridian, Mississippi.

HUDDLESON, F. M.—Born in Meredosia, Illinois, about fifty-seven years ago. Son of John F. and Permelia Huddleson. Last heard of in or near St. Louis, Missouri, shortly before World War. May have enlisted. Medium build. Fair. Blue eyes. Any information whatsoever regarding him will be greatly appreciated by Mrs. Ella Burnett, Haugen, Wisconsin.

CONROY, FRANK.—My father. Missing since 1911. Last seen in Hempstead, Long Island, New York. Five feet eight inches tall. Brown hair and blue eyes. Word from or concerning him gratefully received by Mrs. Edward Smith, 272 Orchard Street, Plymouth, Pennsylvania.

BROWN AGATHA.—Last heard from in Dallas, Texas. An old friend would very much like to get in touch with her. Address Pauline Simmons Jeffress, Atlas Hotel, 125 South Fremont, Los Angeles, California.

WELLS, FRED C.—Shipped as engineer on a steamer leaving New York City in October, 1923, and has not been heard from since. Born in Waupun, Wisconsin, sixty-six years ago. About six feet tall. Friendly, generous nature. Followed sea for thirty years. If not on steamer, might be located in a water-front hotel. Any news concerning him will be deeply appreciated by his nephew, Leonard R. Wells, R. D. 1, Box 96, Ulster Park, New York.

REDMAN, MRS. BEULAH.—Home town believed to be Wichita, Kansas. An old friend, who worked with her at the Tyler Hotel in Louisville, Kentucky, would like to hear from her. Please write to Pauline Simmons Jeffress, Atlas Hotel, 125 South Fremont, Los Angeles, California.

BAKER, JOHN R.—Why did you leave us as you did? Don't you ever think of us and wonder how we are getting along? Please write to Nellie, in care of Carrie, 18674 Santa Rosa Drive, Detroit, Michigan.

TERRY, W. C.—Grew up as an orphan in Indianapolis, Indiana. Parents were burned to death when he was very small. He sold papers for some years. Later became a messenger boy, and worked his way through school, getting a splendid education. Served in army during World War. Last seen in 1924 and 1925 in Cleveland, Tennessee, where he worked as automobile mechanic. Boarded with a Mrs. Clayton. He is about forty years old, five feet five inches tall, with dark eyes and very dark complexion. An old pal, who can't forget, wants to hear from him. Address Not Forgotten, care of this magazine.

SMITH, MRS. VIVIAN.—Of Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania. Formerly lived in vicinity of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Any one knowing her or her family will do me a great favor by sending me their address. A. H. Brink, R. R. 2, Box 52½, Freeport, Pennsylvania.

BRINK, JAMES.—About thirty-five years old. Five feet eleven inches tall. Dark eyes and curly black hair. Was heard from in 1925, in New Jersey. His people were last heard of in Blairsville, Pennsylvania. News of any kind requested by A. H. Brink, R. R. 2, Box 52½, Freeport, Pennsylvania.

HOSMAN, JAMES.—My brother, from whom I was parted in Buffalo, Wyoming, in 1916, following the death of our mother. I long to see him, and would be very grateful for any word from or concerning him. Write to Richard Hosman, Coldwater, Kansas.

JOHNSTON, J. T.—Last heard of as manager of Golden Tea Company, Prospect Street, Cleveland, Ohio, and National Products Company, Youngstown, Ohio, during years 1914-16. Very important that he be located. Kindly address any communications to Rose Hidinger, 2815 Shelby Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

GOODMAN.—My mother, Jennie Goodman, died in 1916. I would like to hear from her relatives or from persons having information about them. Address Harold McCammon, Box 800, Palmetto Street, Montgomery, Alabama.

McCAMMON, ROY A.—Butcher and railroad man. Thirty-eight years old. Fair hair. Blue eyes. Was in Indianapolis, Indiana, in April, 1931. His four children are anxious to find him. Please send any information to Alice McCammon, Box 800, Palmetto Street, Montgomery, Alabama.

McCAMMON, WALTER R.—Seventeen years old. Blond hair. Brown eyes. Information greatly appreciated by his only brother, Harold McCammon, Box 800, Palmetto Street, Montgomery, Alabama.

FRANKE, MAX J.—Formerly of 570 or 571 Clinton Street, Albany, New York. Present address requested by Marine, care of this magazine.

WIDENHOUSE, JOHN.—Sailor. Red hair. Blue eyes. Last heard from at navy yard, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Any one knowing his present whereabouts, please write to Miss Peggie Lou Scroggins, Island, Kentucky.

SCROGGINS, WILLIAM, JR.—Of Hope, Arkansas. Blondie, please write to me. I have important news for you. Thelma Scroggins, Island, Kentucky.

THORNBERRY, GEORGE.—Was in China when last heard from. Will he, or any one knowing his present location, please write to Miss Peggie Lou Scroggins, Island, Kentucky.

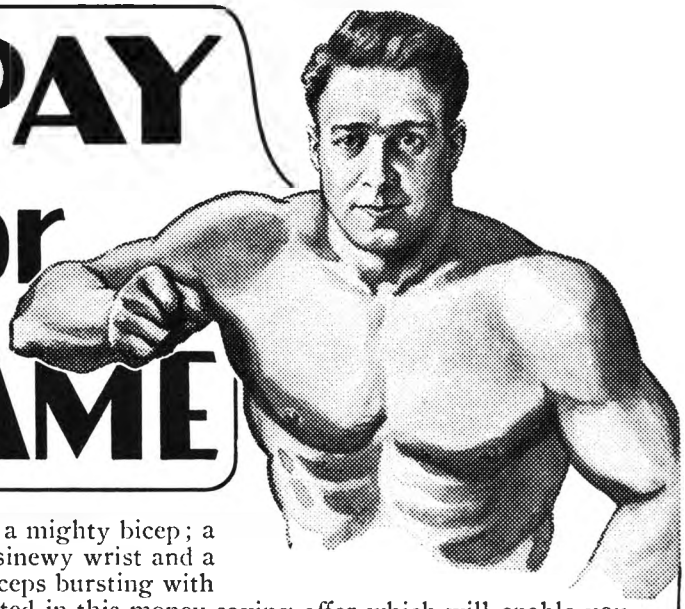
THOMAS, BUCK.—Last heard of in Indiana. Information requested by Miss Peggie Lou Scroggins, Island, Kentucky.

COYLE, ELIZABETH, and daughters, **BEULAH** and **EDITH.**—My mother and sisters. Were in Sycamore, Arkansas, in 1916, and have not been heard from since. News of them earnestly requested by Jasper Coyle, care of A. R. Ward, Route 4, Wetumka, Oklahoma.

MARCK, EMIL.—Twenty-eight years old. Five feet nine inches tall. Last heard of in 1924. Any one knowing his whereabouts, please communicate with his mother, Mrs. Emil Marck, 426 Fayette Street, Hammond, Indiana.

MARTIN, JESSIE.—Formerly of Brunswick, Georgia. About five feet nine inches tall, with brown eyes and dark curly hair. Would very much like to hear from you. Am now living in California. Address Miss Grace Nams, 3608 Ellsworth Street, Los Angeles, California.

I'LL PAY $1.00 for your NAME



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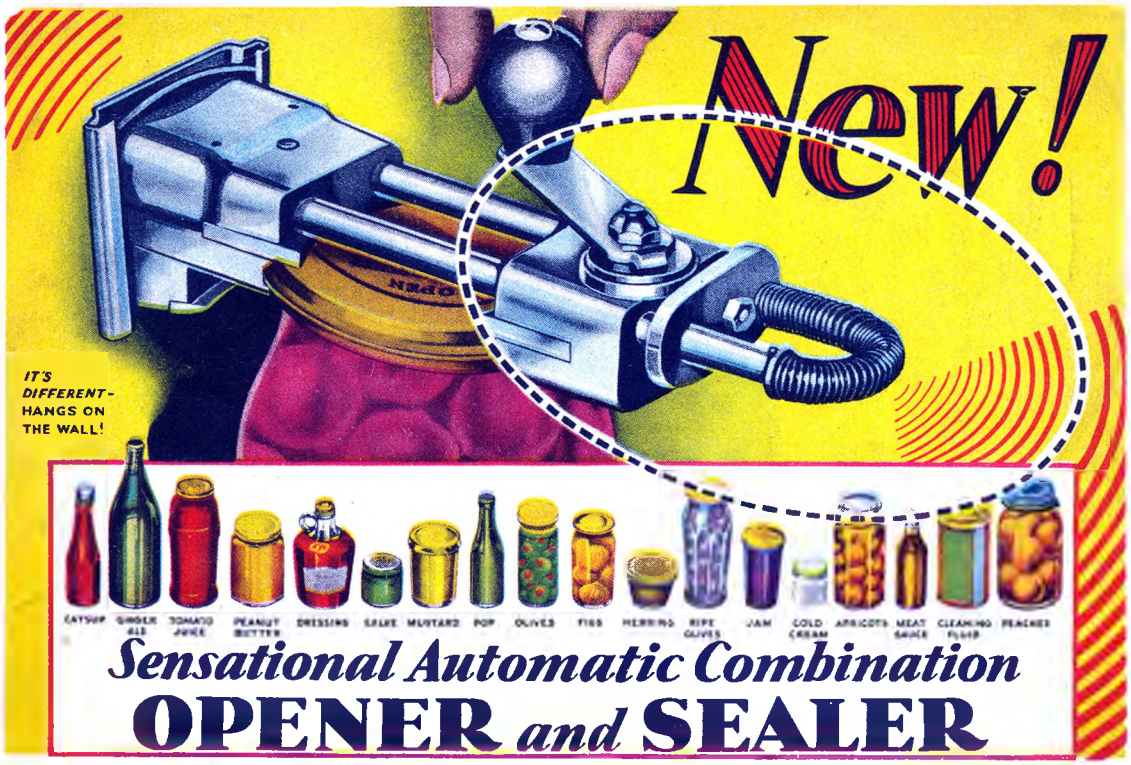

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