

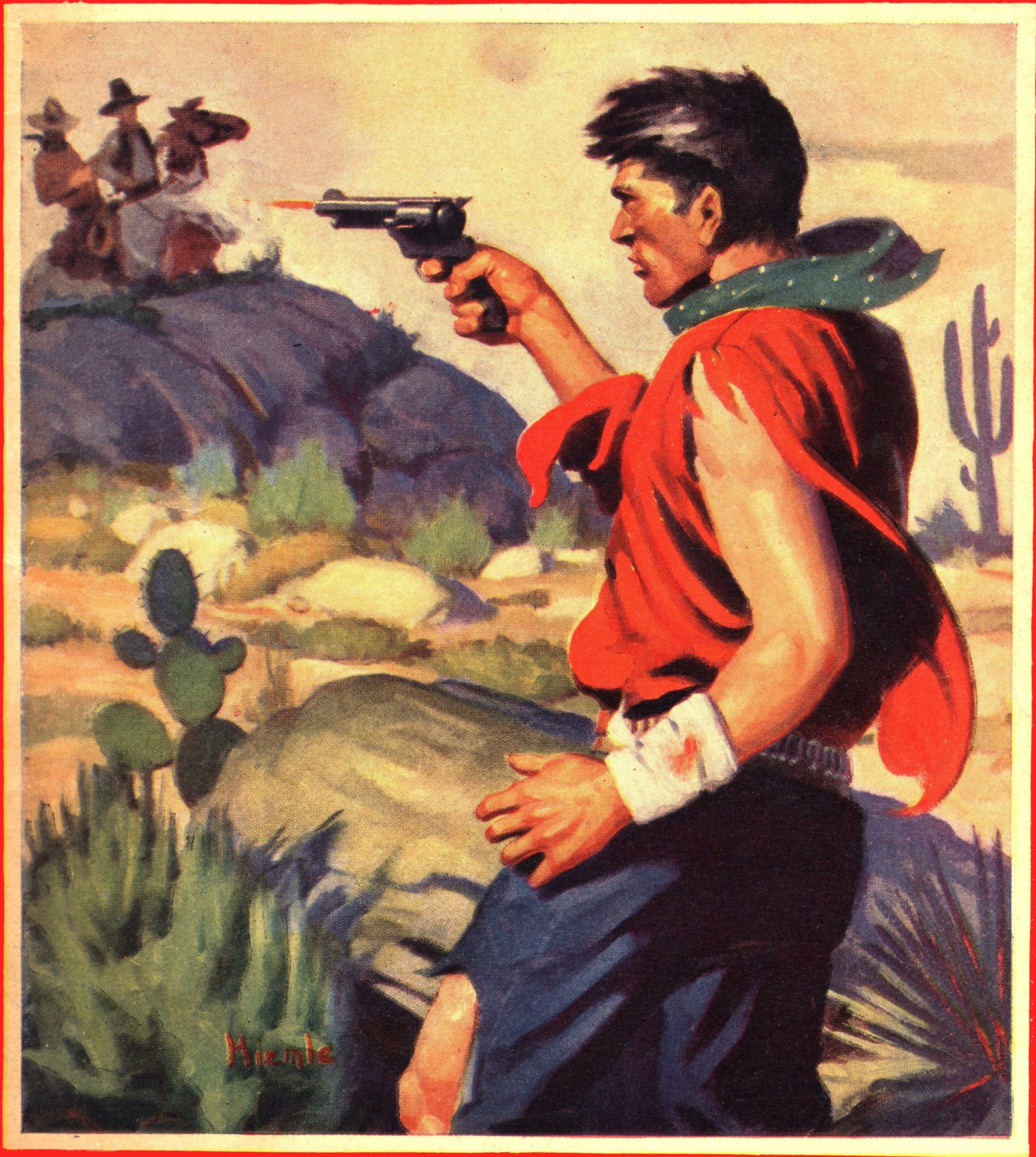
10¢ NOV. 6 *

STREET AND SMITH'S

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

10 CENTS

NOVEMBER 6, 1937



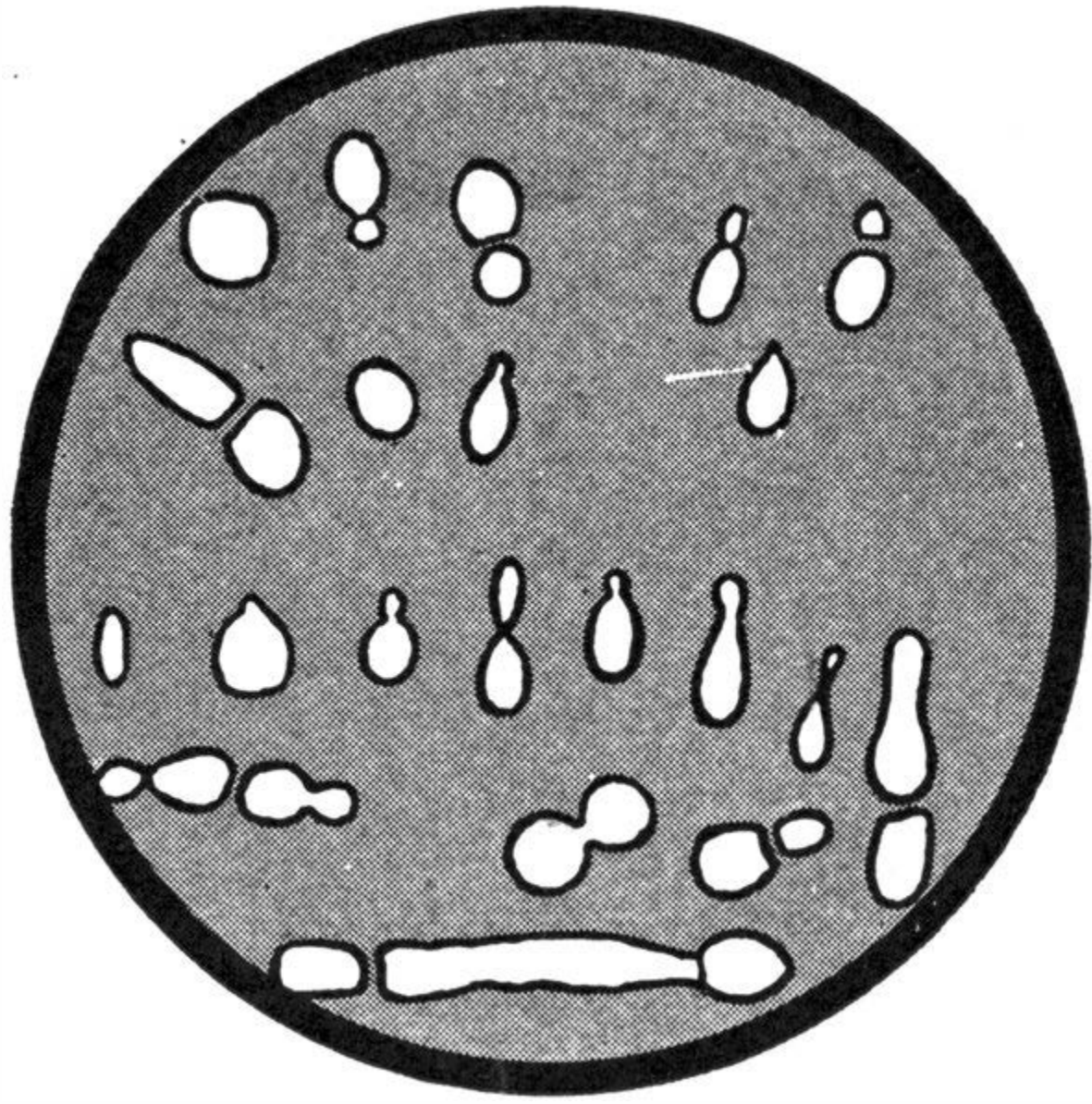
WESTERN STORY

BEST OF THE WEST

GUN FIENDS OF CRAZY CREEK By Arthur Hawthorne Carthar

This is the stubborn germ you must kill if you want

REAL RELIEF FROM DANDRUFF



Discovery that Strange Bottle-Shaped Germ Causes Dandruff Leads to New Kind of Therapy, Antiseptic in Character. Listerine Treatment Brings Quick Relief to 76% of Patients in New Jersey Dandruff Clinic. Thousands Report Remarkable Results

Pityrosporum ovale

The germ which causes dandruff, magnified many times. In cases of dandruff it is always present on the scalp and hair and in dandruff scales.

IF you have any evidence of dandruff, don't waste time on untried ointments, salves or solutions that merely strike at symptoms and relieve only temporarily.

Use the new treatment that really gets at the cause . . . the only treatment so far as we know that has proved itself repeatedly in laboratory and clinic . . . the treatment that is getting results for countless people who try it . . . Listerine Antiseptic once or twice a day, accompanied by massage.

Listerine surrounds the hair and scalp and penetrates infected hair follicles, and kills the germ *Pityrosporum ovale*, which, research now shows, causes dandruff.

See Improvement at Once

After the first few treatments you will notice how Listerine Antiseptic diminishes the number of unsightly crusts and scales. How it allays irritating itch and burning which so often accompany a dandruff condition. How it cleanses and freshens the scalp so that it feels lively and youthful. How it brings new vigor to the hair, itself.

For your own satisfaction, examine Listerine's brilliant results in the most searching clinical study of dandruff undertaken in years.

Curing Rabbits of Dandruff

Rabbits given dandruff by inocula-



WOMEN SAY THE BEST WAY TO APPLY **LISTERINE** IS BY MEDICINE DROPPER APPLIED TO THE PART IN THE HAIR

tion of *Pityrosporum ovale* were treated on one side, only, with Listerine Antiseptic once a day. The other side was untreated.

Within four days improvement was noted, and at the end of fourteen days, on the average, a complete cure was effected. No scales, no crusts. The sides not treated with Listerine showed evidence of dandruff nearly a month later.

Relief in Two Weeks

In a noted midwestern skin clinic, men and women dandruff patients were chosen for the Listerine treatment. A majority were instructed to massage the scalp *once a day* with Listerine Antiseptic. The rest of the group used a non-antiseptic solution. We ask you to carefully note the convincing results again achieved:

A substantial number of the users of Listerine Antiseptic obtained

marked relief in the first two weeks on the average. In many other cases, scalps were found to be clear and free of dandruff in from three to eight weeks—itching stopped, dandruff scales were eliminated, and in some cases falling hair was terminated. *Virtually none of the persons using a non-antiseptic solution showed any improvement.*

76% Got Relief

Meanwhile in a New Jersey clinic, other dermatologists were cross-checking the results of the midwestern clinic. Fifty men and women, all with definitely established cases of dandruff, were undergoing treatment twice a day with Listerine Antiseptic. At the end of three weeks, 76% showed either complete disappearance of, or marked improvement in, the symptoms of dandruff, i.e., itching, scaling. Only three failed to respond to the Listerine treatment, possibly due, as a research report suggests, to irregularity in applying the treatment.

Keep it Up

If you have the slightest evidence of dandruff, start now with Listerine and massage, once a day at least. Twice a day is better. Caution: Don't expect overnight miracles. Remember, dandruff is a germ disease, requiring persistent and systematic treatment, which *should be antiseptic*. Remember, also, that Listerine's results against dandruff are a matter of laboratory and clinical record.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY
St. Louis, Mo.

LISTERINE GETS RESULTS

Death Waited While He Hovered in the Sky!



**Crowd Waits
Electrocution
As Falling Balloon
Wafts toward Wires**



was going to set me none too gently down in a nest of hot, high-tension wires!

"I never did like jumping from balloons," writes C. W. de Grange, professional daredevil of Martinsburg, West Virginia, "and this time there was a mean wind to make matters worse.

"We finally got the hot air bag filled, and I took off in the dark from the fairgrounds at Emmitsburg, Md., intending to make a parachute jump into the town square.

"But the balloon was soggy. She wouldn't give me altitude. I passed about 300 feet over the treetops of the town square, and didn't dare to jump... and then the big bag began to slowly settle.

"I ripped my 'Eveready' flashlight from its straps on my chute harness and snapped it on to see what was below me. To my horror, the balloon

"I've sideslipped by these death-dealing wires with a 'chute many a time... but just imagine steering a lollypop big dying balloon by pulling on the shrouds. But I pulled with everything I had while the crowd waited for an aerial execution... and because those faithful, fresh DATED 'Eveready' batteries were on the job, and showed me the wires in time, I slid by certain death by inches! Without light the instant I needed it, that crowd would have got more than its money's worth. (Signed)

C. W. de Grange

"EVEREADY" BATTERIES ARE FRESH BATTERIES

The **DATE-LINE** guarantees FRESHNESS

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AND THAT'S WHY YOU WANT FRESH DATED 'EVEREADY' BATTERIES... A DRIED-OUT BATTERY DOESN'T LAST LONG, AND THIS DATE-LINE GUARANTEES FRESHNESS

STREET & SMITH'S WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

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EVERY WEEK

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Vol. CLX Contents for November 6, 1937 No. 4

A COMPLETE NOVEL

Gun Fiends Of Crazy Creek . . . *Arthur Hawthorne Carhart* . . . 14
Barney Rogers never hunted trouble, but he frequently found it.

TWO SERIALS

Gunfire Gold In Silver Town . . . *Eli Colter* . . . 62
Part One
Prospectors invade the Mesa Bend range, and "Buck" Dillon declares war.

Red Trail To Black Treasure . . . *Luke Short* . . . 84
Part Five
Senator Warraurode arrives at an important decision.

SHORT STORIES

Well, Well! . . . *William P. Lawson* . . . 48
There were two gushers in Hard-luck Harvey's life—one being Mrs. Harvey.

Buskin Bronchobuster . . . *Lloyd Eric Reeve* . . . 77
Give a man enough rope, and he may save himself.

Half-breed, Whole Man . . . *Seth Ranger* . . . 103
A fir country flood, and a fur country coat.

Gumshoe Gallegher . . . *Glenn H. Wichman* . . . 113
Something was due on some "Mountain Dew," and that started it.

AN ARTICLE

Great Cattle Ranches (The Hill Ranch) *Charles L. McNichols* . . . 99
The sunfisher riders—rodeos West and East.

A FEATURE

Interesting And True . . . *H. Fredric Young* . . . 61

MISCELLANEOUS

The Rattle of a Rattler . . . 47 Perfume from the Trees . . . 76
The Irvine Ranch . . . 60 Snowshoeing The Horse . . . 83

DEPARTMENTS

The Round-up . . . *The Editor* . . . 122
Mines And Mining . . . *J. A. Thompson* . . . 123
The Hollow Tree . . . *Helen Rivers* . . . 125
Where To Go And How To Get There *John North* . . . 127
Missing 129

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Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Artemas Helmes, President; Ormond V. Gould, Vice President and Treasurer; Henry W. Raiston, Vice President; Gerald H. Smith, Secretary; A. Lawrence Holmes, Assistant Secretary. Copyright, 1937, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., New York. Copyright, 1937, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions to Cuba, Doua Republic, Haiti, Spain, Central and South American Countries, except The Guianas and British Honduras, \$5.00 per year. To all other Foreign Countries, including The Guianas and British Honduras, \$7.50 per year.

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STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC., 79 7th AVE., NEW YORK, N. Y.



BILL SAID "YES" HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY IN RADIO NOW



TOM SAID "NO" HE'S STILL WAITING FOR "LUCK"



I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME *in Spare Time* FOR A GOOD RADIO JOB



J. E. SMITH, President
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Established 1914

Many Radio Experts Make \$30, \$50, \$75 a Week

Do you want to make more money? Broadcasting stations, employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays as much as \$200 to \$500 a year--full time servicing jobs pay as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts operate full time or part time Radio businesses.

Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to \$5,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay, see the world besides. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, and loud speaker systems offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises many good jobs soon. Men I trained at home have good jobs in all these branches of Radio.

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day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets showing how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and ideas that made good spare time money for hundreds. I send Special Equipment to conduct experiments, build circuits, get practical experience. I GIVE YOU A COMPLETE, MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL WAVE, ALL PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVING INSTRUMENT TO HELP SERVICE SETS QUICKER--SAVE TIME, MAKE MORE MONEY.

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Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities, also those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing, earning; shows my Money Back Agreement. MAIL THE

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National Radio Institute, Dept. 7MDS
Washington, D. C.

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COUPON in an envelope or paste it on a penny postcard--NOW!

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Washington, D. C.



"I have REDUCED MY WAIST 8 INCHES WITH THE WEIL BELT"

... writes George Bailey



"I suddenly realized that I had become a fat man. The boys kidded me about my big 'paunch'."

At parties I learned that I had become a "wall flower". Nobody wanted to dance with me.

In a halting suit... I was tongue-tied. The day I heard some children laugh at me I decided to get a Weil Belt.



What a change! I looked 3 inches slimmer at once and soon I had actually taken EIGHT INCHES off my waist... and 50 pounds off my weight!

It seemed to support the abdominal walls and keep the digestive organs in place... and best of all, I became acceptable for insurance!

I have a new enjoyment of life... I work better, eat better, sleep better... I didn't realize how much I was missing!

IF YOU DO NOT REDUCE YOUR WAIST THREE INCHES IN TEN DAYS ... it won't cost you a penny!



We have done this for thousands of others... we know we can do as much for you... that's why we make this unconditional offer!

THE MESSAGE-LIKE ACTION DOES IT
 ■ You will be completely comfortable and entirely unaware that its gentle pressure is working constantly while you walk, work or sit... its message-like action persistently eliminating fat with every move you make!

■ Many enthusiastic wearers write that the Weil Belt not only reduces fat but it also supports the abdominal walls and keeps the digestive organs in place... and with loss of fat comes increased endurance, pep and vigor!

IMPROVES YOUR APPEARANCE
 ■ The Weil Reducing Belt will make you appear many inches slimmer at once, and in 10 short days if your waistline is not actually 3 inches smaller... 3 inches of fat gone, it won't cost you one cent!

Don't Worry. Fat is Dangerous
 ■ Insurance companies know the danger of fat accumulations. The best medical authorities warn against obesity. Don't wait any longer, start today!

SEND FOR 10 DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER

THE WEIL COMPANY, Inc. 5111, Hill St., New Haven, Conn.
 Gentlemen: Send me FREE, your illustrated folder describing The Weil Belt and full details of your 10 Day FREE TRIAL Offer.

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I have thousands of satisfied customers all over the country who could not afford to pay big prices. I have been making dental plates

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DR. S. B. HEININGER, D. D. S.

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Is Uric Acid in your blood causing "Arthritis;" stiff joints; sore muscles; rheumatic pains; neuritis; neuralgia?

Bladder weakness? Kidney irritation? Up many times at night? "Worn Out"? "Acid" Stomach? "Catch cold" easily? Skin itches and burns? Nervous?

HOW MANY SYMPTOMS HAVE YOU?

For more than 45 years The Williams Treatment has been helping others to better health and comfort. You try it!

WANT A 75c BOTTLE?

Mail this advertisement with 10c in stamps or coin to The Dr. A. Williams Co., Offer M.L.F., East Hampton, Conn.

We will give uric acid sufferers who send this advertisement, home address and ten cents, one 75-cent bottle (32 doses) of The Williams Treatment and booklet with DIET and other helpful suggestions. No obligation. We pay postage. No C.O.D. Only one bottle given same person, family or address. Sold since 1892.

NO BOTTLE UNLESS THIS ADVT. IS SENT

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YOU CAN GET a Boy's or a Girl's Model Bicycle like this or big cash commission for SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE art pictures with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE, used for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to your friends at 25c a box (with art picture FREE) and remitting as per our new premium catalog and plan book. Many other premium offers in catalog. Our 42nd Year. We are fair and square!—Sell one or more boxes of CLOVERINE SALVE in most every home. Old Cloverine Agents order now. SEND NO MONEY!—We trust you, the First! Begin now. MAIL COUPON BELOW.

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Dept. SS-75, TYRONE, PA.

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New Premium! Fully equipped with electric motor. Baked crystal enamel. Accommodates 200 feet film, eight minute show—two empty reels. Tilting device for angle projection. Reverse rewind to top pool. Frame, Reflector. SPECIAL bulb, cord and a plug. Size of picture 20 x 24 inches at a distance of ten feet from the screen. A Jim Dandy! Get one now! FREE 25 feet of Film valued at the included if you remit in 10 days! You can get this Projector easily by Simply GIVING AWAY FREE art pictures with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE, used for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to your friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE) and remit as per our new premium plan catalog. Send no money. We trust you. Mail coupon. Wilson Chem. Co. Inc. Dept. SS-75, Tyrone, Pa.

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A Beauty! A REAL COASTER WAGON—with a big streamlined all metal body, size 20 x 48, with 8 1/2 in. ball-bearing wheels and 1-inch rubber tires. Yours for SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE beautiful pictures with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE used for chaps, burns, etc. easily sold to friends at 25c a box (with picture Free) and remit as per our catalog. **WILSON CHEM CO., INC.** Dept. SS-75, Tyrone, Pa.

Send No Money!

GIVEN

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Standard Size Guitar, regulated—fretted ebonyized finger-board, pearl position dots. —Tenor BANJO with 11 inch rim—18 flat top brackets—inlaid position, calf-skin head, patent pegs. See Mickey Mouse on the Dial of the watch! In colors, too! See the two charms on the bracelet. WHAT A WATCH FOR BOYS AND GIRLS! ... You can easily get a Guitar, Banjo, Watch or big cash commission by SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE beautifully colored Art Pictures with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE used for burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE) and remitting as per our new premium catalog. Many other valuable gifts. 42nd Year. We are reliable. BE FIRST!

WILSON Chem. Co. Inc.
Dept. SS-75, Tyrone, Pa.

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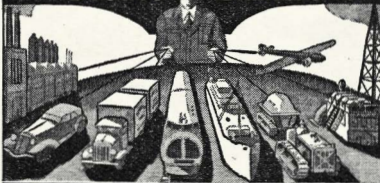
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The Diesel Engineer



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2 Diesel Lessons Free

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30x4.0-94	\$2.15	30x4.0-94	\$2.35
30x4.0-95	\$2.15	30x4.0-95	\$2.35
30x4.0-96	\$2.15	30x4.0-96	\$2.35
30x4.0-97	\$2.15	30x4.0-97	\$2.35
30x4.0-98	\$2.15	30x4.0-98	\$2.35
30x4.0-99	\$2.15	30x4.0-99	\$2.35
30x4.0-100	\$2.15	30x4.0-100	\$2.35

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The First Name You Think of May Be a Winner

Think of the many names that are now being used and suggest a new name for flour—one that you feel will appeal to the housewife. The name you send in may be of one, two or three words, separate or combined. It will cost you nothing to send in a name. You may win one of the fifteen prizes.

15 Cash Prizes Totaling \$300.00

Write your name for this flour on a penny post card or sheet of paper, sign your own name and address, and mail within three days from the time you read this announcement. It will pay you to be prompt. Your name for flour must be mailed before Dec. 18, 1937. Fifteen cash prizes will be awarded. If the name you send in is selected as First Prize winner, you will receive \$100 in cash, and as an extra prize for promptness you will receive a check for \$50 each month for the three remaining months of this year. Second Prize will be \$50; Third Prize \$25; Fourth Prize \$15; and eleven prizes of \$10 each. These fifteen prizes are in addition to the extra prize of \$50 a month which is offered to the first prize winner for promptness in sending in the winning name. Duplicate prizes will be awarded in the event of a tie.

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American School, Dept. DD-855, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

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GEPPERT STUDIOS Dept. 549 Des Moines, Iowa

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Caused by Tired Kidneys

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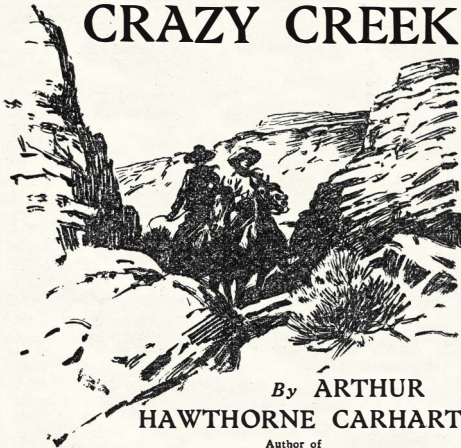
I would like a FREE TRIAL of a Royal Portable in my home, without any obligation on my part.

Also send FREE copy of your book, "Your 14% Better Chance For Success."

Name _____

Address _____

GUN FIENDS OF CRAZY CREEK



By **ARTHUR
HAWTHORNE CARHART**

Author of

"Wild Hoofs And Powder Smoke," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A WARNING.

BARNEY ROGERS rode new country, and he wasn't looking for trouble—not specifically. Primarily he sought a cattle ranch where he could take root and flourish. He'd found it.

He twisted six feet of range-tough body around in the saddle and looked up across the lower meadows of the Quarter 33 to the buildings that squatted beside Crazy Creek,

where it came out of the hills. He nodded, as though he had reached a conclusion.

"My land," he said aloud, "if my cash talks loud enough." Then added with a slight grin, "Mine, even if the first crop I grow there is war of some kind and I have to harvest it."

Barney Rogers whistled cheerfully through white teeth, but the grin on his generous mouth faded into meditation as he started his saddle horse along the wagon trail toward the little town of First Pine, where he



would find Conrad Weiber, the fellow who seemed curiously anxious to sell the Quarter 33. Weiber had appeared so eager to make the sale that it made Barney Rogers a mite suspicious; he had, accordingly, taken more than ordinary precautions before talking to Weiber.

In the wake of Barney's saddle pony was a led pack animal carrying personal belongings and a bed-rock camp outfit. Behind the pack horse tagged two ponies, carrying extra saddles. This was all he had withheld when he had sold out back on Indian River, put his cash in a money belt, and started the quest for his dream ranch.

Among several properties that had been offered in stockmen's papers,

Barney had decided to look first at the Quarter 33. This was for two reasons. In answer to the letter he had written, answering the blind advertisement, Conrad Weiber had sent a description that indicated it was just what Barney wanted. Thereafter, his curiosity had been aroused by a queer threat coming by the same mail as Weiber's letter.

The warning was scrawled with a blunt pencil on a rough sheet from a writing tablet. It was in the form of an arithmetical statement. The Quarter 33 brand was followed by the sign which indicated that this outfit was equal to a skull and crossbones, the design found on bottles of poison. Below was scrawled the name "Livy."

"Some one else wants that place and is trying to scare me off," he had concluded. "Doesn't know how easy I don't scare."

Barney Rogers never hunted a squabble. But let some hombre start shoving him around and he began to get stubborn. He wouldn't stand being intimidated, and probably that was the reason he had rejected the way he had about this scrawled warning. He was particularly determined, now that he had seen the Quarter 33, for it looked to him like an earthly paradise.

Prompted by inherent caution, Barney had secured a legal description of the place by writing Conrad Weiber. Quitting Indian River, where he had sold his land to an irrigation company because they needed it for a dam site, Barney had ridden to Edgemoor, the county seat, and there had spent a day checking the title to the Quarter 33. If he was going to make a deal, he'd know what he was getting.

Methodically he had ridden on from Edgemoor, and by the aid of a map had located a section corner on the ranch boundary. Using a pocket compass, he roughed out the boundary of the place, checking it on the map and with legal descriptions. If there was something sour about this, he'd not found it. He had found a ranch that he was willing, if need be, to fight for. He liked it that well.

"Kick along," he said to his horse as he finished this last look at the land. "Got business yonder at First Pine."

THROUGH clear Western air he saw the skeleton of the railway bridge over Crazy Creek, the water tank beside loading pens and dwarfed buildings. From this distance he could tell what sort

of a town First Pine would be. A main street that ran up from a hot red depot; false-fronted buildings facing that street; and, on byways that stuck out from the main stem like broken ribs, discouraged-looking houses dim in the shadows of cottonwoods. Anyway, he wasn't looking for a town, but a ranch, a ranch like the one on Crazy Creek. First Pine would be all right as a trading and shipping point.

The section he had sold at such an astounding price to the irrigation people was one of those arid places on which, people said, nesters could raise only the devil and kids. Barney had raised the former, but he'd not seen any big-eyed, stringy-legged nester girl he cared to invite to raising the latter. So he'd just raised a little more of the devil. He'd come to hate that Indian River place.

Truth was, he'd never been in love until right now. He'd taken a header for the Quarter 33. Probably because he had dreamed and dreamed, out there on the plains, of such a place in the mountains. Warning or no warning, he was on his way to see whether or not this Weiber fellow meant it when writing that cash, even though considerably short of what the place was really worth, likely would take it.

Riding down into a slight, rough-walled draw, Barney was mulling over what he had better say in approaching a deal with Weiber when he heard the flat slap of a rifle shot beyond the shielding shoulder of the gulch. He reined in swiftly. He thought of the sign of poison, and this "Livy" person. Some one might even now be disputing his right to own and occupy the Quarter 33.

Nothing further happened, and he rode deliberately out to the open bench beyond the cleft in the rocks. There he halted again as he saw two

riders off the trail among the tall sage and scattered boulders. One of them held a rifle. They jerked their horses around, evidently said something to each other, then rode directly forward.

Barney sized them up as they came on. The one with the rifle was scraggly in face and dress. A cowboy, and a rough hombre by all signs. The other was colorless, cold-eyed, with a little soft wad of fat around his jaw and neck. He was dressed well, but looked shifty. They reined in sharply to face Barney where he waited.

"Any luck hunting?" Barney suggested smoothly.

"Coyote," the man with the rifle answered, as though that dismissed the subject of the shot. "Just what you doing riding in this direction?"

"Easy to relieve your mind," said Barney, grinning a little at the blunt unfriendliness. "Looking at a ranch up here a piece."

"Only ranch above here is the Quarter 33," snapped the one with the rifle. "I'm Hulett Freece. That's my place. Now that you've sneaked in and had a look, maybe you'd better go on looking somewhere else."

"You don't say." Barney lifted a rather surprised eyebrow.

"I do say," broke out Freece. "Dude Stone here'll back me up in it, too."

"I'll back you," said "Dude" Stone, without emphasis.

Barney decided that perhaps he could gather some interesting information from this pair.

"I understood the Quarter 33 was up for sale," he ventured.

"I suppose you answered one of Conrad Weiber's blind ads in a stockman's paper," sniffed Freece. "Said he'd sell it for cash."

"So he did," nodded Barney. He was gibing at them a little, keeping calm, though their attitude was enough to stir up his blood.

"Suppose you go right along, then, to First Pine, and talk your talk to Weiber," said Freece, and his saw-edged voice thinned. "If that's what's in your mind, stranger, I've no objections at all."

"I wouldn't think of seeing Weiber if you objected," Barney said sarcastically. "No, sir. I'm an amiable cuss. But since you don't object, Mr. Freece, and I know Weiber's really got title to that ranch, I'll just do my dealing with him. If you don't mind."

AS he sent his horse down the trail, Barney kept a wary eye on the pair. After he had gone half a mile ahead, they started following as though to make certain he did go to First Pine. By the time he was in town, Barney had figured out that Freece, the former owner, still on the ranch, perhaps, was naturally hostile and peeved because he'd lost the ranch and knew Weiber could sell it.

But what had happened might lend real importance to that scrawled warning he had received. It was worth sober consideration, certainly.

Freece and Dude Stone rode down Main Street and tied their horses to a hitch rack in front of the Cattle-men's Rest as Barney halted just inside a door that gave entrance to a flight of dusty stairs leading up to Conrad Weiber's office. The two riders glanced his way, then went into the saloon. Going upstairs, Barney found the door with Weiber's name on it partly opened and stepped inside. A gawky stripling in dilapidated cowboy clothes slapped his boot soles on the floor

and regarded Barney from marble-round eyes. He had tousled, tow-colored hair, a hungry look, and, because he had not filled out in flesh after growing like a weed, his teeth seemed extraordinarily large.

"You're not Conrad Weiber?" suggested Barney.

"Should say not," the kid replied. "He's over at Zimmer's place, the Cattleman's Rest Saloon. I'll get him."

After the kid had been gone a few moments, another man came up the hall. Conrad Weiber entered the doorway, saying, "Livvy said you wanted to see me."

"Livvy?" Barney let that slip.

"Livvy Ricketts, that kid that was here," answered Weiber. "Saddle tramp. Drifted in here couple weeks ago, and I'm letting him sleep at my horse barn, take care of my harness stock, and keep office here when I'm out on business. He's dull-witted, but got enough sense for what he's doing. Now, what was it you had on your mind?"

Barney introduced himself and said, "Thought I might buy the Quarter 33 if you've such a mind to sell."

"Well, well," said Weiber, getting up hastily and grinning. He offered to shake hands.

He was on the spare side, and wore clothes rather better than most people who lived in a cow town. He had high cheek bones that jutted prominently, a wide forehead, and a pair of large brown eyes.

"I hope I made it plain that cash talks," said Weiber.

"Sure," nodded Barney. "But I've heard other talk. I met a fellow named Hulett Freece before I got here."

"Freece? Where?"

BARNEY told him, remarking that Freece didn't seem too neighborly. Weiber seemed suddenly jumpy. He asked several questions about the meeting, learned something from the answers that apparently satisfied him, then seemed to relax.

"Don't let that hombre bother you," he said finally. "I'm the one who holds title to the Quarter 33, and I'm selling."

"You took it away from Freece," suggested Barney.

"Had to," said Weiber shortly. "He got in very deep with me." He swung around, and Barney saw he was really younger than he had seemed, at first glance. Weiber's thin-lipped mouth perhaps made him appear older.

"If you want to buy, I can prove the title's mine," Weiber said again.

"I know it's all right," replied Barney. "I checked up at Edgemoor."

"You did?"

"Sure. And then looked at the ranch. Ran out enough of the boundary to know what I'm buying."

"You're pretty forehanded," observed Weiber.

"Just a habit," said Barney shortly. "I'm ready to talk turkey."

"With cash?" Weiber bent over the desk a little.

"If I've got enough on me." Barney eased down in the chair. The idea that he wouldn't have enough to swing this was something he had wrestled with all afternoon. The ranch was worth more than he had.

"How much you got on you?" asked Weiber huskily.

"Twelve thousand." Barney watched Weiber's eyes flicker.

"It's worth more," said Weiber. Barney knew that, too well. "Look

here," said Weiber explosively, "I'll just about be giving that place away if I sell to you for that, but it'll let me out. I want to get this closed up and get away—for certain reasons."

"Afraid of Freece, maybe?" suggested Barney.

"No." Weiber struck the desk with the palm of his hand. "Freece can't do anything. But just don't talk to any one around town so Freece will hear it. I'm telling you this much: I want to get the cash and get clear. I've my own reasons."

"Twelve thousand's my one and only bid," said Barney shortly.

"I'll take it." Weiber straightened.

"Including the stock carrying the brand?" Barney watched the flicker of Weiber's eyes. "I made a rough count while I checked boundaries. You wrote that the stock went with the place."

"All right," Weiber said suddenly. "If we can close this right up, and you've got the cash right here."

"Draw up your papers," said Barney. "I've got the money."

Weiber nodded, pulled several legal forms out of his desk, and tossed them across, saying: "They're all filled in except signatures. Fact is, there's another party who's been fooling around with an idea of buying, for more money, by the way, but he's had to ask a brother or sister or somebody."

"If there's some one ahead—" began Barney.

"No, there isn't," Weiber said emphatically. "I said cash talks. If you have to wire back to your wife or family and lose your chance—"

"I don't have to wire any one," said Barney. "I'm all here, and I'm all my family there is."

"That's good," Weiber said, so positively he seemed to check himself. His face twisted into a smile, and he added: "That makes it possible for you to act without talking around and maybe losing the chance. Now you can get title and possession right away. Look these over if you want to."

BARNEY picked up the papers Weiber shoved toward him. Back at Indian River, Barney had tangled with land law even before the irrigation people came into the picture. Distrusting lawyers, he had gathered a stack of books and, during long evenings, had read all he could about the laws of land. He had used his knowledge in personally checking records at Edgemoor, and he used it again as he thoroughly digested these documents. There was nothing out of the way that he could see. Even the cattle count in the bill of sale to cover the herd was close to his own rough estimate, and one head or twenty more or less made no difference if he was getting the whole layout for twelve thousand.

"Get your money counted out," Weiber said, as Barney handed back the papers. "I'll go over to Zimmer; he's a notary. Then I'll get Livy Rickets and Dude Stone—they're both over there—to witness my signature."

While Weiber was gone, as he counted his cash into piles so Weiber could easily check it, Barney Rogers sifted his thoughts, trying to see where there was a joker, if there really was one. It all summed up to Weiber taking over the Quarter 33 from Freece, and wanting to get out from under and leave First Pine. Barney didn't care about Freece. He'd get a deed, get it re-

corded before Freece made trouble, and then let the fellow make any play he wanted to. It would be something of a pleasure to run him down Crazy Creek just as he had ordered Barney to move on, an hour ago.

Some one came in the door at the foot of the stairs and took the steps two at a time. Then Livy Ricketts stuck a frightened face into the doorway.

"Say, you," he panted. "You Barney Rogers? Didn't you get my warnin'? That Quarter 33's pure pizen!"

"Look here," began Barney, suddenly getting up. "If you thought I'd scare——"

"It's poison, fellow," Livy insisted excitedly. "Don't you——" He caught his breath, looked toward the stairs, and said: "Weiber's coming. Oh, my gosh, he'll slaughter me if he catches me at this. He'll kill an' skin me!"

Livy Ricketts spun, ran tiptoe to an open window at the end of the hall, put one leg out, looked back in terror, and dropped out of sight as Weiber came hastily up to the second floor.

"Signed, sealed, and delivered," remarked Weiber, holding out the sheaf of papers. "All that remains to make you full owner is to record those at Edgemoor. All fixed up. Do that before Freece hears about it, you better. Where's the money?"

Weiber saw the stacks of bills, hurried to the desk, and Barney Rogers watched him riffle through the packets, counting. Then Weiber nodded and smacked his lips. Almost mechanically Barney perused the documents in his hands. Not a thing wrong with them. Something certainly was haywire about the deal or the ranch. Probably this trouble

with Freece was what Livy Ricketts was trying to tell him about. Well, he knew about Freece, and if that hombre thought a scaring of any kind would keep Barney from taking over the Quarter 33, Freece was making a considerable error. He'd let this deal go through, and then handle Freece if he had to.

Weiber was counting the bills again, and Barney was leaning against the doorframe, when some one ran into the lower hall and began running up the steps. A second, heavier tread followed. The race ended just below the top stairs. A girl with tousled hair and flushed, cameo features whirled defiantly to face her pursuer, Hulett Freece.

"Don't you touch me!" she flared, as Freece lunged. "Have you gone crazy?"

In answer, Freece leaped. They stumbled up the last step, spun, fighting. The girl was long-limbed and strong. Freece cursed. She gave a cry of mixed terror and pain as Freece lashed his arm around her, threw a forearm across her face to muffle her cries, and held her.

Barney Rogers took a half dozen swift steps. He yanked, spinning Freece away.

"Why, blast you!" burst out Freece, as he hit the wall.

Then he whipped back at Barney.

He met a blow, square in the face. It sent Freece reeling into the wall, and his hand lifted to where his lip had been cut. He stood, a little stunned, anger sweeping his features, bracing for another attack. The girl, her blue eyes wide, leaned against the wall, silently watching.

In that moment of strained silence, as Freece tensed for another leap, they heard Conrad Weiber trotting hurriedly toward the door of his office.

CHAPTER II.

DANGER TRAIL.

CONRAD WEIBER took two steps into the hallway. He came on tiptoe, like an animal stalking prey. Barney Rogers saw the killer look in Weiber's gleaming eyes.

Then, with a sudden effort, Weiber masked the expression and faced Freece. "What is this, anyway?" he demanded.

"This girl; I had her stopped before that idiot slammed me." Freece spoke jerkily.

"That girl? What about that girl?" Weiber looked toward her.

"I learned just now she's Hollis Middleton's sister."

"Judas!" Weiber took a menacing half step. He halted, his face working.

Barney stood braced. The atmosphere suddenly was charged with an unknown menace. Weiber stood swaying, a flickering light playing back and forth in his eyes.

"Middleton." Weiber let that slip out huskily.

"I'm Victoria Middleton," the girl said throatily. "Where's my brother, if you're Conrad Weiber, the man he wrote me about?"

"How should I know where he is?" said Weiber, in a sudden burst of anger.

"Because you're probably the last one he saw before he rode from First Pine," said Victoria quickly. "He left a letter at the hotel."

"He didn't say you were coming to town." Weiber's voice frayed, and he stared a little wildly.

"Maybe not," she retorted. "I expected to meet him here. But there was the letter. Written three hours ago. Said he had to move fast to be sure to close a deal before a man named Freece learned about

it; that he was coming to your office then to pay the money, and then ride on to Edgemoor to record a deed to the Quarter 33 Ranch."

"The—what?" Barney Rogers half turned.

"Keep on blabbing and I'll——" Freece started again toward the girl.

Barney shoved her behind him and faced Freece. The girl's statement hit him hard. Whatever this was, he was involved. Freece began moving a hand stealthily toward his gun.

"Not here, Freece, you fool," Weiber whipped out angrily. "You can't take care of it here!"

"Oh, no?" rasped Freece, half turning, his hand still slipping toward his gun.

"Shut up!" yelled Weiber. "You're a fool." He caught Freece by the arm and hauled him back.

"You're the fool if you let 'em get away now," Freece answered, breathing heavily.

Weiber kept his hold on Freece and stared. Back of Barney, the girl trembled. With a clean, swift sweep, he had his gun out, covering Freece and Weiber.

"Go down the stairs," he said to the girl. "Quick! Get out of this place."

"But Hollis," she protested. "My brother."

"I'm thinking of what might happen to you," said Barney, without moving. "I told you to get out."

She hesitated only a moment, then hurried down the stairs. He waited until she had reached the bottom of the flight.

"Now if you want to tear loose, Freece, do it," said Barney coldly. "Whatever crooked move you want to make, I'll meet it!"

"Not here," said Weiber hastily. "Freece, I tell you it's not possible here."

"Something smells about this land business," Barney said steadily. "Let's have it."

FREECE suddenly cursed. He lunged. Weiber slammed into him, smothering him. Barney hesitated. In that moment, Weiber threw all his weight against Freece and drove him into the open office. The door slammed, the key clicking decisively in the lock.

There was a chance of getting a bullet in him if he tried breaking through the door. And there was a still more important angle in the fact that he had no way of knowing just what forces in this town he'd have to buck if he started rough tactics. If Weiber had influence, he might have Barney thrown into jail. The local man always had the edge. Barney had to stay clear of any such trickery.

Until he knew more, plain caution dictated that he must refrain from starting a war; much as he would like to, he could not go hammer and tongs at this pair and beat whatever the truth might be out of their tricky mouths.

Victoria Middleton waited just outside the door, on the plank walk. Barney saw, for the first time, that she was dressed in a good riding outfit; not in dude riding clothes, but the sort of garb a range girl would wear. And how graceful and trim-figured she was, with beauty in her features despite the questioning and panic that also was there.

"Tell me," he said quickly, "just what happened when Freece came after you up the steps?"

"I asked him, just as I would ask anybody in a strange town, where Weiber's office was."

"That didn't start him charging, did it?"

She shook her head. "No; just

as I started into the lower hall, I turned and asked if, by any chance, he had seen my brother here; mentioned his name. Then when I started upstairs, he came. I believe he'd have killed me." She said it matter-of-factly.

Barney nodded. "We were both close to something of the kind up there," he remarked.

"Did you feel that? I did."

"When you said your brother had bought the Quarter 33, earlier this afternoon."

"Why should that——" She faced him squarely.

"Because," said Barney, "not twenty minutes ago I paid twelve thousand cash to Weiber, and he gave me a deed to that same ranch."

He saw her flush, observed her effort to keep calm.

"Strange," she said finally.

"There's more than that," he said. "I don't know how much more; but, whatever it is, it's crooked. You go over to the hotel and wait there. I'm going back to Weiber, and before I'm done, we'll thrash this thing out. Now go on; this may be rough business." He grinned, but there was no mirth in his smile.

Some one had started to shove Barney Rogers around, and he wouldn't shove. Curiously, as he watched her turn suddenly and hurry across the street, the thing that made him ready to rip the hide off that pair upstairs and get at the bottom of this was a certain conviction that, while they were trying to shove him, they were as surely shoving Victoria Middleton around. More than that, both Freece and Weiber had been contemplating murder up there in that hallway.

As he was just about ready to tip-toe up the stairs, he remembered that the patch on his boot squeaked. It would forewarn them of his com-

ing. He wanted to catch them as much by surprise as possible. He slipped off the boots. Then, ascending the stairs, he made no sound. He was beside the flimsy door when he stopped to listen. There was no sound from within the office.

Then the silence was shattered as Freece gasped: "Blast you, you're choking me! Lay off, or I'll cut you in two in the middle."

"Oh, no, you won't." Weiber's tone was cold.

"No?" Freece's voice was husky with fury. "You got that sucker that just come in here, the one that hit me out there in the hall. How much cash did you shell out of him? It's in this room. I'll do for you, confound you, and I'll take that and get out of here."

"If you can find it." Weiber had Freece jittery, but Weiber was steady and cold. "Don't be a fool, Freece," he went on. "We'll handle this."

"Kill them? The girl, too?"

"Don't be a loud-mouthed fool!"

THERE was a silence. "Now, look here," Weiber's voice went on, and Barney had to bend toward the door to hear. "You said you aren't sure you finished the job this afternoon."

"That new fellow came riding down the creek when Dude and me was searching around in the sage. This Middleton had crawled from where I knocked him over."

"Then what you doing in town?" Weiber's voice flared out.

"I told you," replied Freece hotly. "Dude and me didn't want this new man turning back to see if we'd really killed a coyote."

"You're losing your nerve! Get Dude, and get back there before any—"

"Go back, nothing! The beans

are spilled. I said this would happen. I'm getting out of here."

"If you run, I'll hang the whole business on you, Freece. You know I can. Follow my orders or I'll crucify you!"

What he was hearing changed Barney Rogers's mind about smashing into the office and fighting. He'd plunge into a pistol killing of some sort if he tried to go in there. Until he knew more about whatever crooked play they were making, and how they stood in First Pine, he must, he reasoned, be cautious. Along with that was the realization that young Middleton had been dangerously wounded by Freece, and, in desperate need of help, was out there near that pocket gulch where he had first heard the shot. Unless some one else got there first, and succeeded in getting the wounded man away, Freece and Dude Stone would find him and finish him.

Perhaps Middleton held the key to this murderous business. If Middleton could show a deed from Weiber made before Barney had procured the one that was in his pocket, Weiber at least could be forced to return the money Barney had paid him. The move was to get going, and get to Middleton before Freece and Stone found him.

Barney was at the foot of the stairs, slipping on his boots, listening for any sound of the door opening above, as he finished blocking out this move. And he would have to move swiftly to get ahead of Freece and Stone.

He held himself from running as he started across the street toward the slab-sided frame hotel, but his thoughts raced.

He saw no explanation to what had happened. There was something crooked in Weiber issuing two deeds; but, whatever it was, it could

be broken open with the help of Hollis Middleton. If, for any reason, Middleton failed him, he still could take a whack at Weiber and force the repayment of his money. He wouldn't get the Quarter 33, perhaps, and that rankled, because he wanted the ranch. But far more important, right this minute, was the fact that some one had started to shove him around. That made him see red.

IF there had been time, he might have sounded out the town to see how Weiber stood there. But there was not a minute to lose.

Victoria waited in the deserted office as Barney came hurrying into the hotel.

"Let's get where we can talk by ourselves without being seen," he said swiftly.

She nodded and, leading the way along the ground-floor hall, unlocked the door of her room and motioned for him to come in. She trusted him this far, anyway.

"I can't understand why that Freece went wild the way he did," she said, before Barney could speak.

"Think you can trust me?" he asked. He had to know.

She studied him steadily a second, then said: "Yes, after what's just happened. Did you hear——"

"I heard a lot," he said. "You won't fly to pieces?"

She seemed to brace herself and said: "I'll not. Tell me."

Barney spoke swiftly. Her lip trembled, but she kept her chin up.

"Freece tried to kill Hollis because he was getting the ranch," she said huskily.

"But Freece certainly is in cahoots, some way, with Weiber," he countered. "What they're doing is devilish. I can see that much."

"But exactly what are they up to?"

"I don't know; got just a hazy hunch. It's deadly enough, and the first thing, I've got to get that brother of yours out of the way of that pair of killers."

"Get me a horse; I'm going with you."

"There may be a fight."

"If it comes to that," she said swiftly, "I'll be in it." She stooped, opened a grip, and hauled out an old six-gun. "My father taught me how to use this before he died. Don't stop to argue. There's no time. I'm going."

"There's danger."

"And danger here, with Weiber in town," she retorted. "I'd rather take the chance of riding out there with you than what might happen here. He was thinking of murder up there in that hallway."

That was an angle he had not thought about. And he might need the help she could give if he did find Hollis Middleton desperately wounded. There was nobody else in town he could count on.

"Then let's go," he said shortly.

As they started, he glanced at the girl's determined face, and wondered where this might end. He knew that, whatever lay ahead, he had found a woman he was ready to ride with and trust; and he knew, also, that she'd go through with whatever danger they might meet.

CHAPTER III.

THUNDER AND GUN THUNDER.

INSTEAD of riding directly toward upper Crazy Creek, Barney held to a circling course, following a shallow arroyo that would give them cover. The sandy wash paralleled the direct line they had to take. If Freece and Stone

should spy them leaving town, it would be a race, and danger would be immediate. That pair might, however, take their time and stop for another drink if they saw no riders heading up the valley.

The girl beside him rode like a veteran. If Barney had not set a hot pace, he knew she would. She was tight-lipped and determined.

"Storm coming," she said, as the turn of the arroyo made them face westerly. "There may not be light enough left."

They quickened their pace. There was a race against darkness now. With all speed, there would not be more than faint searching light by the time they got out to the point where Freece said he had shot a coyote.

They had to halt after the climb out of the upper end of the long sand wash. The horses were nearly tuckered, and there was rough going ahead. They would make more speed by giving the animals a chance to rest for a moment.

"Your brother answered a blind ad in a stockman's paper," Barney suggested. "Then Weiber wrote, saying it was a sacrifice sale and that only cash would talk." He was beginning to have a hazy idea of what Weiber's scheme might be.

"He did answer that kind of an ad," she nodded. "We'd sold out in Wyoming. We didn't want to stay on there; local conditions weren't good, and we thought we'd found the answer to what we wanted here."

Her voice caught. She was thinking of the sort of answer Hollis Middleton had met as he rode toward Edgemoor.

"Look, quick," Victoria said suddenly. "Two men, riding."

"Freece," breathed Barney. "And Dude Stone. Coming from town."

In an eerie storm light they saw the pair that Weiber had sent to hunt down a man. Barney threw his horse around, and they slipped in behind some sage. Almost as they did, there was a flash of lightning and the bursting roar of thunder. The horse under Barney cringed. He reined in a moment, looking back. Freece and Stone had not paused, indicating that they had not seen Barney and the girl.

"If we can get to him before it's plumb dark," he called out as he rode up beside Victoria, "we may slip away without having a fight. The storm's coming fast."

Almost in answer to that, there was a stab of lightning and another burst of thunder.

"Careful," Barney called, as they started down behind the walls of an arroyo. For Victoria was driving her horse along at a reckless rate.

But they had to go recklessly. The storm might cover any noise they made at the speed they were riding. The darkness that was now falling like a black blanket would make it more difficult for Freece and Stone to see them as they rode through the sage and past the high blocks of stone that were strewn about everywhere on the flats. But it might thwart them at the last.

"I'm afraid," said Victoria, as they were side by side a moment in a wide gulch floor.

"Not of that pair," said Barney. "Of the darkness," she said quickly. "We'll never locate Hollis now. I'd not dare to call, nor could my brother answer. They'd hear if they were close by."

A GLIMPSE of Stone and Freece, riding somewhat below, warned that they, also, realized they had to get up the flats near that pocket gulch before

the storm hit. The horses Barney and Victoria rode floundered as they drove them along the sandy bed of another low wash. Darkness was arriving abruptly now, hastened by the scudding storm clouds. They were not going to get there in time."

However, neither would Freece and Stone, unless they knew exactly where they would have to look. In that they might hold a threatening advantage.

"There's another rider," said Victoria, who was ahead. "One man, leading a horse with an empty saddle."

Barney checked his own horse as she stopped. For only an instant the lone rider and the extra horse were outlined against the eastern sky; then they sank out of sight, as though the sage had swallowed them.

"He's heading right into that flat southeast of the little gulch," said Barney.

"Who?" she demanded.

"No idea," he said sharply. "Get going."

The twilight took on an eerie yellowish color. Off to the west the gray curtain of the rain had begun to lay a veil between them and the horizon. The storm was coming now with the speed of an express train.

Sand began to blow. It was flung off the edge of the cut banks as if blasted. The horses slowed, but they spurred them on. As they went on, Barney Rogers tried to figure out the part that was being played by the mysterious man ahead.

He and Victoria were ahead of Freece and Stone. But some one, friend or enemy, was ahead of them, almost on the spot where Barney had seen that other pair, earlier in the day. Then the wind whipped and shot sound at them; the sound of galloping hoofs. He could not

be certain whether it was the horse of the man ahead or whether it came from the hard-ridden horses of Freece and Stone. The wind was roaring now, and instead of the sand shooting along the level of the ground, swirling currents of air caught it up and threw it into eddying clouds.

They still could see, however, as they arrived at the flat below the little gulch where Barney had heard the shot fired by Freece. He pulled the rein and sent his horse lunging up the low grade toward the bench where Freece and Stone had been halted when they sighted him.

"What's that?" Victoria called from where she rode at the flank of Barney's horse.

It was the thin sound of a gun blasting through the storm. Another gun spoke, and another. Then silence, followed by two more shots.

"My brother!" Victoria threw her tired horse forward. "They've found him. They're trying to get him!"

"Don't." Barney spurred cruelly, but she was ahead.

In the midst of the charge, he heard another gunshot. The lightning darted. A first few spatters of rain descended. Then, in the dying rumble of the storm, there was another shot.

He saw Victoria catch at the saddle pommel; saw her horse swerve until she was half thrown from the saddle. He heard a bullet whine somewhere near by.

"Don't let them see you," rasped Barney. He threw himself to the ground and stood beside Victoria, who had dismounted a moment before and stood, half crouched, back of the rim of a cut-bank wash.

"My brother," she gasped. "He's back of that turn in the gully, shooting from there."

BARNEY threw her down back of some sage. Two rifles spoke from down the draw. The lightning momentarily illuminated the scene. In the draw down below, their horses dancing, Barney saw Freece and Stone. He recognized the color of the horses they rode. There could be no mistake. One of them fired.

The thought that shuttled through his mind was that Hollis Middleton was alive. He could think of no one else who might be firing from behind that sharp angle in the upper gulch.

With a sweep he had his rifle out. The blackness had hit in now thicker than ever, but he could see the white patches of a pinto Stone rode. He cut loose on them just as the rifle up the gulch blared again. There were two shots from below, a yell. Then came a scream, with Stone's voice yammering. The sound was drowned in a burst of thunder.

The time was one of madness. Fighting in moments that were blinding dark, then staggering light. Barney jumped as the old six-gun in the hands of Victoria Middleton boomed out. She was throwing in, as he knew she would, to beat back Freece and Stone. He heard more shooting down there.

"Get out!" Freece yelled, but the rest was drowned in a roar of wind that came within the first splash of heavy rain.

"They're running!" Victoria stood suddenly, and took a step toward the edge of a cut bank.

For a minute she stood there, trying to see down through the storm, and in a momentary lull they heard Freece and Stone beating a frantic retreat. She turned and started up the side of the gulch, calling her brother's name.

Barney saw their horses start to

run away. He caught his own by the bridle, and was obliged to drag the animal and then lunge past some wet sage before he could get hold of the one Victoria had ridden. The crash of the storm beat on him as he caught up the slippery reins. He heard Victoria call again, her voice lashed back in his direction by the storm.

He called to her as he dragged the horses. He saw her dimly in the midst of the storm. Then there was a searing, blinding light that seemed to throw him back. Three bolts struck near by within a split second of each other. He was blinded by the flash as he came to her. She was calling, but the great voice of the storm was smothering the sound almost as it left her lips.

He caught her.

"Hollis," she gasped. "I saw him when that lightning hit. In the saddle. Recognized his hat. It was Hollis, my brother!"

She called again.

"Which way?" he demanded.

"That way," she cried. "Coming out of the gully and riding over the ridge. The other man was leading the horse he rode!"

"Other man."

"Yes. Another man was leading the horse Hollis was on." She shouted again.

"Here," he said, "into the saddle, quick! We've got to go before we lose track of the direction they took."

He caught her, pulling her toward the horse.

In that moment the storm struck with renewed fury. Their very breath seemed beaten from their lips. He heard Victoria gasp. In the downpour, dazedly, they clung to each other, lashed by a thousand whips of furious rain.

CHAPTER IV.

MYSTERIOUS MESSENGER.

FOR a moment, Barney Rogers stood in the fury of that first assault of the storm. Victoria was holding to him as though, if she let go, the force of the wind, the sweep of the rain, would drive her away into the very vortex of the tempest. That first assault of the elements was staggering. Only in such a land, where storms come infrequently, but hit with a ferocity that is almost paralyzing, could such elemental fury be bred.

Even in this furious moment, Barney was aware of another tempest, the one that was rising within him. Instinctively the girl crept into the circle of his arm, her head bowed against the beating rain, until he felt her wet cheek against his. As though they were two lone humans, lost even to each other unless they held tightly, he put his free arm around her and was excitingly aware of her slim, strong body, held so close he could feel the shiver of fright that raced through her.

The first crazed blast of the tempest swept by. She moved slightly; a little closer, perhaps, inside of his arm.

"Listen," she commanded. "Can you hear anything?"

For another second they stood thus, Victoria with her head lifted, taut with the effort of trying to catch some sound in the midst of that frenzied rush of wind and rain. They heard only the rising roar of a fresh burst of the storm, sweeping on them from the west. The lightning began to dart in almost continuous flares.

"If we get in the saddle and ride——" he began.

"Yes," she agreed. "We've got

to ride after them, where I saw them."

She broke away from his arms, and before he could help her she was into the saddle. He handed her the reins. Before he could get his feet in the stirrups, she had started.

"Don't get away," he yelled. "Don't lose contact!"

He didn't know whether or not she heard. The blast that hit then was as fierce as the first sweep of the storm. He saw her faintly in the flickering light, thought he heard her calling frantically. He forced his horse into a reckless trot. Spurs would not drive the pony faster. When the lightning hit again he was close behind Victoria and could see her more plainly, bent low as her horse beat a way into the storm.

The moment had an unreality that was like a nightmare, the sort of dream in which one struggles to move forward but is held back by mysterious power that binds limbs and numbs nerves. Yet he knew they were plunging along in the Stygian blackness at a pace that was dangerously heedless.

"Hollis!" The cry of Victoria was thin as the wail of a banshee.

She could call now, without any chance of Freece and Stone hearing. They had started their horses running down the slope, and would be carried swiftly beyond earshot. But the same pandemonium of sound that prevented her from being heard by that pair thwarted her as she shouted for her brother.

In the midst of a long lightning flash, Barney saw the girl drop from sight and heard her scream wildly. With crazy fury he sent his own horse plunging. He heard her scream again, then the roar of water. He heard that as his own horse pitched down in the dark.

For a moment he was floundering,

the horse thrashing, then the pony caught footing. There was another jagged slash of lightning. He saw in the flash what had happened. Running headlong, Victoria's horse had not been able to stop as it came to a low cut-bank arroyo. They had gone over into hip-deep water where, but a few moments ago, there had been only dry sand. The slick, steep sides of the draw had shot the down-pour into the flat bed under the low cut bank, and now a churning flood was beginning to pour down the draw. And she was in it.

He shouted, spurring his horse ahead in the muddy water, calling her name.

"Here!" He saw her as she called, for the lightning began to set the soggy clouds ablaze with a continuous flare. The thunder was constant, like a monstrous drum beaten by a hundred invisible hands.

Then he saw something that chilled him to the marrow.

IN the fall, Victoria had lost her horse. She was standing bewildered, braced against the turbulent rush of the water. Beyond her, the pony was floundering toward the far bank, wild with the instinct of self-preservation.

"Stay there!" he yelled with all his might.

He drove his horse toward her, and wondered, as he did so, if the sweep of the water would change his course so he would miss her. He yelled again, but got no answer. He felt suddenly terror-stricken.

He couldn't see her swept away by this racing, silt-filled flood.

All the recollections he had of how these dry-land gulches became murderous torrents, in such a storm, spun through his thoughts in the span of a second.

There was frenzy in the yell he

let out, calling her. But there was something more, he realized faintly. The fear in his voice also was an indication that her life meant much to him.

Then she called out of the darkness, close by, and he pulled his horse around. He saw her, then, fighting the swirling tide that was tearing at her with vicious, overpowering lunges.

It seemed an age before he reached her. He clutched her hand as she reached up toward him, saw her in the fitful torch flare of the cloudy heavens.

"Up, quick," he cried. "Now—up!"

He was almost unseated as she clutched him and pulled herself up. The horse, thrown off balance, stumbled and almost fell. Then she was behind him, her arms wrapped tightly about him, and he felt the terror in her by the way she held to him.

"I couldn't have held out much longer," she gasped. "I was dazed."

"Hold for your life," he yelled over his shoulder. "We've got to go across."

Before him he saw the waves tossing higher. The flood was becoming a torrent between the walls of the arroyo. Some fearful magic could transform these dry gulches into mill races in the twinkling of an eye, almost. Barney saw the lapping waves, now carrying a crest of foam, churning in the middle of the channel. He drove into them and felt the horse under him stagger. Victoria was shouting something, but her words were lost in the storm.

Another sheet of lightning ripped through the sullen clouds. Upstream there was a new wall of water coming. It rolled in a frothing, angry wave above the level that already filled the stream bed. There

was a sound of boulders rumbling along the floor of the gulch. Such boulders would break the leg of a man like a twig, if they hit squarely, and might even knock a horse down.

"Sit tight!" he shouted, as they hit the main current.

IT seemed as if a veritable wall of water slammed into them at that moment. The horse lost his footing, and they were almost under, the spume of the water in their nostrils. For a few feet the horse swam, then screamed. Barney yelled at the animal. As though that sound of human command was needed to spur the pony into making a last, desperate effort, the gallant beast thrashed and struggled, downcurrent, trying for the bank ahead.

For a fleeting instant, Barney suspected they had taken the wrong course in their attempt to get across. Then he thought of the cut bank behind them. That would be a death trap—they could never get up over it. It was either go on across or die trying.

He had lost all feeling of reality; only the touch of Victoria as she clung to him, the thrashing horse under them, seemed tangible. All else was nightmare.

He yelled something, he wasn't sure what, as the horse got footing. In the flickering light he saw a patch of rising earth just beyond a brief spread of water between them and the shore. A mad lunge, and the horse was on the land. Then it stumbled and threw them.

Instinctively Barney clung to the reins. He stumbled, spun, and as he came to his feet in the darkness, called loudly for the girl. His hand touched her, and he knelt. He marveled at the strange tenderness in his voice as he spoke her name; his hand swept lightly over her face.

His arm caught her close around the shoulders, holding her. With a queer little cry, her arms reached out, and she clung to him, her breath coming in gasps.

It seemed impossible that he had only met her a couple of hours earlier. Since they had ridden swiftly from First Pine they had lived months, not minutes. He was suddenly aware of an onrush of tenderness for this brave but fragile girl, and for a moment he held her close, his voice low, murmuring soothing words.

With a sudden gesture, she got free and stood.

"Thanks," she said breathlessly. "I've got hold of myself now. But if you'd not been there——"

"I was, though," he said shakily. Her only answer was a relieved sigh.

The lost pony, bewildered and frightened, whinnied. Barney's horse answered, and they heard Victoria's mount come in a frantic run, to stop, snorting. Barney spoke in a soothing voice to the pony, which stood as though too frightened to move. Barney gathered up the reins and patted the little horse on the neck. Then the pony followed him, closely, almost shoving him ahead as he went back to where she waited.

"Able to ride?" he asked.

She nodded.

There was a lull in the storm, which was now beating eastward, on toward the hills between the flats and Edgemoor. There were still intermittent flashes of lightning, however, above the dripping sage. By this light Barney was able to check the saddles and bridles before they mounted.

"I seem to be pretty dangerous in the lead," said Victoria. "I'll follow. Which way?"

"Back to town, if I can find it," he said. "We'll see if there's any chance of getting help there."

BARNEY wasn't sure. The main sweep of the storm had passed, but it was still raining steadily. There was no use giving the horses their heads. They would not naturally seek a trail to First Pine. It was his own instinctive sense of direction that might save them, and he started off into the blackness feeling a way toward town. It was blind going in blind country, and at every step his reason questioned whether or not they were headed toward First Pine. And when they got there—if they did—there would be more blind going until he found some one he could trust.

They came out of the storm suddenly, riding into land that was fairly dry. Mountain storms often are as localized as they are fierce. To one side they saw the lights of the town. Barney halted and listened.

Off to the eastward Crazy Creek was boiling. But he heard no flood running on the westerly side of town. The fury of the storm had hit the one limited watershed.

"Circle in from the west and we can get there," he said.

"And then what?" asked Victoria.

"Not sure," he admitted. "There must be some people in that town we can trust. I've got to find 'em."

She was silent a moment, then said, "I wonder where Hollis is."

"Been thinking," he said reassuringly. "Whoever that was out there, the man we saw just before the storm came was getting him away from that killer pair for some reason. We've got to bank to some extent on whoever it was being a friend."

"It's all such blind going," she stated.

"It is just that," he agreed. "I'll get you back to the hotel, now, where you'll be reasonably safe, and then I'll start prowling."

They could ride more rapidly now, and the horses seemed to step out more willingly. They crossed the sandy draw where only a little stream now ran, and came into the side of the town in such a way that they could reach the hotel without having to ride through the streets.

At the rear of the hotel, where the door was open into the hall, they stopped. Victoria reached out and placed both her hands in Barney's palms. It was a gesture of trust.

"If you learn anything," she said, "please come and tell me. I'll wait up until I hear from you. If it's dangerous to come into the hotel, my window's on the ground floor, and I'll have the light burning just inside the shade. Rap on the window."

"I may find out——" he began.

"You'll find nothin' before you go with me."

Victoria's grip tightened. It stopped Barney's instinctive motion toward his gun. The voice that had spoken out of the heavy shadows beside the door was so low they barely heard the words. They stood for a long second.

"I've been waitin' here for you two," said the voice. "You've got to go with me."

"What's this?" Barney lifted his voice a little.

"Don't talk loud," ordered the man in the shadow. "It's dangerous to talk loud. Now turn about face, both of you. All right, step out. Easy. Take it easy. And don't yell. I'm takin' you to see some one who wants to see you, bad!"

CHAPTER V.

BLACK SHADOW.

HIS got the drop on us," Barney said to Victoria. "Do what he says." If Victoria had not been beside him, Barney would have made it a contest. But for the moment he dared not. A break might come where he could swing into action.

"Turn right here, and don't talk," said the man who walked behind them. "Over toward the railroad."

Several box cars had been set off the trucks to make quarters for track crews, although the railway through First Pine hadn't seen a maintenance crew for several seasons. The line wasn't important enough, with only one accommodation train through a day; one day, one direction; the next day, the other.

"First bunk house," directed the guide. "Don't knock. Open the door."

The hinges creaked as though they had not been moved for days. Barney braced to shove Victoria aside, throw her flat if necessary, then jump the fellow behind him. Tensed, he heard the sound of heavy breathing. It came from somewhere back in the pitch-black room. There was a chance that whoever might be in there had him covered. He hesitated.

"Go in," said the man behind them.

"Is that you, Livy?" came a voice from within.

"Hollis!" Victoria leaped past Barney into the darkness.

"You go in, too, Rogers," said the man who had brought them. "Got to get the door closed before we strike a light."

Livy Ricketts came up from be-

hind, closed the door, and struck a match. Barney turned on him.

"Why didn't you say who you were?" he demanded.

"Didn't want to argue," said Livy shortly. "Too much chance of some one hearin'. Had to get you here quicklike."

Livy touched the match to the wick of a coal-oil lamp. Barney turned to where Victoria knelt beside a shabby bunk. There was enough resemblance between her and the man propped up in the bed to confirm the fact that she had found her brother.

"I'm all right now," Hollis Middleton was saying. "Brace up, sis, and get hold of yourself. I'll be all right."

"You were the rider ahead of us at the dry gulch just before Freece and Stone rode up," Barney said to Livy.

"Yup," replied Livy. "Freece was in the Cattlemen's Rest, tellin' Stone what Weiber had ordered 'em to do, an' I heard it. They believe I'm a half-wit an' pay no attention to me. I shore rode."

"You found Middleton pretty quick."

"Freece had it figured out and told Stone. I heard. It was just where the trail to Edgemoor turns off from the road to the Quarter 33. I managed to get Middleton back to these bunk cars. Only place I knew in town to put him so Weiber's hyenas wouldn't find him. Now listen; we've got to talk fast."

"You're feverish," said Victoria, passing her hand over her brother's brow.

"Not the first time," he said quickly. "Now hush. Listen to Livy."

"Weiber's going to go crazy," said Livy shortly. "Might as well know,

he's sure to want to kill us. He knows he's got to."

"Because of the way he sold the Quarter 33 a couple of times," said Middleton.

"Yup," said Livy. "That ranch is pizen bait. Rogers, I saw a letter you wrote, an' tried to warn you."

"You did. I didn't warn. Now what's Weiber's reason for having to make war?"

THERE'S two deeds given out by Weiber," said Livy. "He knows he's got to do some killin' or he'll lose his own hide. The whole thing'll blow open. Him with it."

"Freece?" asked Barney. This black business still was cloudy.

"Scared to death," said Livy. "Crazy scared. Weiber happens to know Freece is guilty of an old murder he didn't hang for."

"And now he's forcing him to attempt more murder, is that it?"

"It is," said Livy. "The Quarter 33 was man-bait. This a way: Weiber would get people in here through his advertisements, people who had cash and wanted to buy that ranch. Then he'd sell, for cash."

"Did that twice to-day," Barney said.

"And that wasn't the first sale," Livy stated. "My brother came in here with cash, nine thousand dollars, to buy that place. Last I heard from him he was heading for Edgemoor, to register the deed."

"Never got there?"

"Guess not." Livy drew a breath. "By all the signs Freece and Stone caught up with him somewhere out on the flats. Like they tried for Middleton here. Like they was ready to try for you, Rogers, if you rode out on the Edgemoor trail."

"So that's their scheme." Barney let out a tight breath:

"It worked," said Livy. "Weiber got buyers to come who had cash. If he found out they had a family or friends who'd make trouble, he told 'em he'd already made a deal. If he thought nobody'd get wise, he'd make the sale, just like it was straight, an' then tell 'em not to mention it around because Freece might get wind of it and make trouble. Scare 'em, see? Get 'em to hit right out, quick, for Edgemoor, to get their deed in the records. There wasn't a sign of anything wrong up to that point. Then he turned Freece and Stone loose with their rifles, to make sure they never got there, an' that the deed he give was destroyed."

For a moment they all were silent, struck by the fiendish scheme Weiber had conceived. Barney appreciated how any one wanting to get a ranch, just as he had, would fall into the trap. Weiber picked the victims. Demanded cash. Then learned whether or not they had a family that would start an investigation. Put over the idea that, unless they moved secretly, Freece would make trouble. Nobody in First Pine would suspect because it all was kept under cover.

"I knowed what you were headin' into," Livy said to Barney. "Saw a letter in Weiber's office. I warned you, remember?"

"Thanks," said Barney. "But I'm glad I'm here."

"Shucks!" said Livy. "Don't you see? Weiber, an' Freece, too, an' Dude Stone, know they're good as hung if they don't just blot the whole bunch of us out."

Barney glanced at Victoria, and said, "It's clear what's got to be faced."

"I told you what," said Livy breathlessly.

"Nobody shoves me around," said Barney thickly.

"The Quarter 33——" began Middleton, then coughed.

"Weiber's give Freece a deed back," said Livy. "They knew this couldn't last. Freece already was scared witless. Weiber figured on gettin' you two, an' makin' a split in the cash to Freece and Stone. Then he'd let Freece get back his ranch so it wouldn't look queer, an' then Weiber was goin' to skin out, complete. That's the death trap they cooked up."

"I bought that ranch," said Middleton, and by his words, Barney knew how Victoria's brother had set his mind on owning the Quarter 33.

"But if Freece should get stamped into recordin' his deed before you——" began Livy.

"That's what I'm thinking," said Middleton quickly. "That's the move I want to see made. Sis, you've got to ride, to-night, to Edgemoor."

"I don't know the way," she protested. "Besides, I can't leave you."

"Listen," said Middleton, hitching up on his elbow, and Barney knew the effort cost a lot of pain. "Recording our title is the first move. Livy can go with you, and——"

"I'm goin' to get Conrad Weiber an' Freece——" began Livy.

"Get this," Middleton said emphatically. "Freece has his stake in the ranch. There's a chance if we nail the title to it he'll believe Weiber's double-crossed him and blab. If they have the ranch, they'll have something under their feet to make a fight on. If we don't get the deed on record, we haven't got so much proof as we'll have if we do. Sis," he said earnestly, turning to Victoria, "you've got to do this."

"I said I can't leave you," she insisted stubbornly.

"I'll be all right," said Middleton. "Just nicked. Glancing bullet. Rogers will stay with me. He'll block any of Weiber's moves to get me if any are made until you get back. Get that title registered, and then we're in a stronger position to go in on Weiber and take his hide."

"I don't see——" she protested again.

"Well, I'm asking it," said Middleton huskily. "Isn't that enough? I'm asking Livy to do this. Rogers, isn't it the move?"

Barney nodded. He had guessed what lay behind this argument; saw it as he watched Middleton.

"If you won't go after Weiber until I get back, so's I'll have a chance," said Livy fiercely, "I'll go."

"That's fine," declared Middleton. "Sis, I'm begging you to do this."

"If it's that important," she said.

"It is that important," he insisted.

As Livy came with horses, Barney met him outside.

"If there's law and order in this county," he said, "you'll find it at Edgemoor. Take time to talk to the sheriff there. Tell him the whole business."

"I'll handle Weiber," said Livy shortly.

"Talk to the sheriff," insisted Barney. "Law is on our side, and the sheriff should be."

Victoria came from the bunk house, laid her hands in Barney's, and said, "You'll take care of Hollis."

"Count on it," he promised. "He handed her the deed and bills of sale he had received from Weiber."

"What's this?" she asked.

He told her: "If Weiber and his bunch come after me, they'll not get what they're after; those papers are

evidence that'll hang that bunch. Hang onto 'em."

"You'll have to have these to force Weiber to pay back your money," she said, and he knew she did not know the truth of what he had seen by the light in the bunk house.

"I'll get my money," he said shortly. "Nobody can rig me up for what Weiber did and get away with it."

"Be careful," she said. "You know what they did to Hollis."

"I'll be careful," he promised. "I know what they did to your brother." She didn't, but he did.

"We ought to be sure we get over the bridge on Crazy Creek," said Livy. "Flood might take it out if we don't hurry."

Barney saw them disappear in the night before he turned back and walked heavily into the bunk house, relit the light, and carried it over to where Victoria's brother lay with his face turned toward the wall.

"Middleton," Barney said. He reached his hand.

"Yes, Rogers. Talk fast—we'll have to talk fast."

"I know it," Barney said soberly. "You got Victoria out of here because of what Livy said. Sending her to record the deed was your way of being sure she was out of First Pine to-night."

"Partly that," said Middleton and breathed heavily a moment. He had fought all through to keep an appearance of steadiness, but he knew deception was unnecessary now. "I wanted her to have that ranch, Rogers. She's my only kin. It's worth double the money I paid. I want her to have it. If that deed's recorded, she'll have it. You understand?"

"I do," Barney said quietly. "If

I live long enough, I'll see she gets it."

"Good," breathed Middleton. "The money you paid Weiber?"

"I'll tend to that," promised Barney.

"Thought so," said Middleton. "With sis and Livy out of the way, you're free to make your own war without their getting caught into it. I saw that clearly enough."

"A man sees things clearly, they say, when he's dying."

"Yes," whispered Middleton, "he does. Lucky Vic couldn't see. I knew there wasn't a chance when Livy picked me up out there, but I wanted to get back and see her, give her that deed." He smiled wanly, drew a slow breath as though it was heavy going, then said, "Rogers?"

"Yes." Barney came over closer. Middleton got hold of his hand.

"She told me about you," said Middleton. "She likes you. What you think of her?"

"Finest."

Middleton's hand gripped Barney's more tightly. "You're right," he said softly. "Finest. Queer I should say this now. But you said any one in my shape sees things clearly." He caught another breath. "Take good care of her, fellow."

Middleton's hand was still pressed to his in a stout handclasp. Barney eased a finger over to the patient's pulse.

There was no pulse there.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEATH TRAP.

BARNEY ROGERS stood thoughtfully beside the bunk where the body of Hollis Middleton lay. He would have liked to have had that fellow as a riding

partner. Weiber's villainous scheming had robbed him of some one he could have called a friend. There was this account to add to the score when he settled with the Weiber gang.

He might wait for the law, but that did not enter Barney's thoughts. He would deal direct, before the slow-moving law got into motion. And he would have to move quickly, before Weiber could get away.

His hands were free, with Livy and Victoria out of town and safe. Then he realized that their future safety would be assured only if he made certain Weiber and his men could not strike at the girl and the kid to remove them as witnesses of what had gone on. It still was positive that if Barney Rogers, Victoria Middleton, and Livy Ricketts escaped, justice would catch up with Weiber, even if Barney didn't.

The trickery, the sheer villainy of the scheme Weiber had concocted, merited condign punishment. He and those others had plotted against Barney Rogers's life; they still would seek it. He knew that. Livy Ricketts had tried to warn him. Well, he wouldn't let Livy down.

Barney moved over toward the light, and as he turned, heard a sound outside.

He froze. There were footsteps of men coming along the tracks. He could hear them leave the graveled roadbed and approach the bunk house. They halted, and there was low talk. Then one of them shouted:

"Come out of that bunk house, Livy Ricketts! We've come to get you for killin' Dude Stone."

Barney was trapped. He looked wildly around. To be found here, with Middleton dead in the bunk, would surely put him in jail, for a few hours, anyway, and right now

minutes were precious. And there seemed to be no chance to crash out.

"Livy Ricketts," the voice said again. "This is Johnson, the town marshal. You better come out with your hands up. Dude Stone died, an' we know you done it."

There was a chance, if he could hide, that they would become excited over finding Middleton, and give him an opportunity to ease out a little later. It was the only chance; he must get under the bunk where Middleton lay. He slid underneath, letting blankets fall from the bunk edge to further mask the hiding place. It was almost too narrow for a man to lie flat. He lay there breathing softly, listening.

"We're comin' in," said the voice of Marshal Johnson. "You're same as dead, Ricketts, if you resist."

THE door slammed open, and as the light wavered, at least a dozen men charged into the bunk house. They halted, as though the light partly blinded them.

"Where's Ricketts?" broke out Johnson.

"I was sure I seen him come this way, leadin' a couple of horses."

"Look—look in that bunk!"

"Who is he?"

"That stranger. One who's been hanging around town a couple of days. Ricketts again! Two killings!"

"Sure he's dead?"

"Dead as a doornail! What in thunder——"

They crowded close to the bunk. Johnson leaned down and felt Middleton's pulse.

"Pete and Billy," ordered the marshal. "Get right over to Weiber's barn, where Ricketts slept. If you find him, lay him out if he doesn't give up immediate. You others, swing out on the highway west of

town and don't let any one pass. The bridge is out on Crazy Creek, and he's blocked that way if he didn't get across before it went. We've got to move quick or he'll get away, sure."

"What will you do, marshal?" It was the voice of Conrad Weiber.

"Going for Doc Morrissy. He's deputy coroner."

"Better not leave this place alone, had we?" Freece was speaking, this time. "Couple of us oughta stay and keep watch here."

"You and Weiber," said Marshal Johnson, as he started for the doorway. "I'll get doc and be back pretty soon."

The door closed. Barney heard the scuffling of feet beside the bunk as Weiber and Freece made a dive at Middleton.

"In his pockets, quick!" Weiber said huskily. "Freece, you clumsy fool, get your hands away so I can go—"

"Pockets empty." There was panic in Freece's voice.

"Look again, confound it!" Weiber's voice was ragged.

"Rickets must've got the deed. He's got it and he'll—"

"Shut up, Freece! You're going yellow."

"Going yellow! You bet I am. Weiber, you've got our necks in the noose; you've got us—"

"I have! Blast you, Freece, you're the one who did that; you're the one who got us in this jam. Because you were nervous to-day when you shot at Middleton. Because you slammed into that girl when she came up the stairway and the whole thing was blurted out before that Rogers fellow. I got us into this!"

"You did," snarled Freece, his voice suddenly breaking. "There's two deeds out. The one Middleton

had is gone. The one you gave Rogers—"

"I did my job, didn't I? I got the money. And you smeared the whole machinery with your shaking hand when you laid sights on Middleton, and didn't finish him. You let Livy Rickets get away; and I know now he's after us. That kid's brother was in here before, and his name wasn't Rickets. Freece, you wanted the ranch, and I said you'd get it. If you don't get out and find those three, and make certain they—"

"I'm going to make certain!" Freece's voice was wild with terror. "I'm going to have my share of that money you've got hidden! I'm gonna take that and run. Stone's dead—I get his share for letting you use my ranch, and for what I was forced to do out there on the flats."

"You're going to get back to town, and you're going to make sure that Rogers and that girl and this kid don't ever get a chance to tell what—"

"I tell you, Weiber, I'm getting my money from you, and I'm running. I couldn't hold onto the ranch now. Give me that money! I'm going to have my share or—"

"So," Weiber cut in angrily. "So you've lost your nerve! Blast you, you got us into this. You lost your nerve. Go get those others!"

"I won't. *I won't!*" Freece was almost blubbering.

"Listen." Weiber's voice became deadly.

"I won't listen," broke out Freece. "There's one chance, I tell you. You give me a share of that cash, and we'll get out of here. If you don't, I'm going to tell how you got me to let you use my ranch."

A shot stabbed the silence. Freece staggered and sank slowly to the floor.

"Weiber," he groaned. "Weiber." There was surprise in his voice, surprise and utter disbelief.

YELLOW," snarled Weiber, "you went yellow, Freece. You'd get us all hung. Do you hear me, Freece? You bungled. But I don't bungle, Freece. I know all the answers. Freece, do you hear what I'm saying? Oh, you can't talk? Well, now you'll go to Hades instead of back to that ranch as you always begged me to let you do. And I'm going out of here, with the money, to the railway beyond Edgemoor. Freece, hear what I'm telling you? You and your ranch can go to Hades; I'm taking all the money, like I always planned."

Barney struggled to get from under the bunk. It must have moved Middleton's body. He heard Weiber's choked exclamation.

"Middleton!" Weiber screamed. "Blast you, you're dead! You've got to stay dead!"

The gun in the hands of Weiber spurted fire. Crazed, cracking under the strain of seeing a dead man apparently come to life, he emptied his gun at the corpse on the bunk.

A shrill yell clogged the throat of Conrad Weiber. Middleton's body had moved again. Weiber ran in terror. He could shoot it out with the living, but when a man he knew was dead began moving, as though in protest to further murder, Weiber couldn't face it.

With all his might, Barney kicked himself out of the slotlike hiding place under the bunk. He scrambled on hands and knees out into the room, where Middleton now lay in the rigidity of death, and Freece, face down, clawed and squirmed.

There was a touch of madness in the moment. Barney plunged out the door, trying to catch sight of

Weiber. He saw a figure running. He fired one shot.

He regretted it the instant he had pulled the trigger. It would bring back the men who had been with Johnson, the marshal. He heard them now, shouting over toward the edge of town. Some one not so far away was running. Johnson must have been coming with Doc Morrissey, for the marshal let out a yell for the others to come on. Then, however, he waited, as though he wanted their support before advancing any farther. There would be a moment before they would approach the bunk house. Barney whirled. If this was to be war, crazy war, he could use the gun he had seen on Freece. He stooped, unbuckled the gun belt, and rolled Freece to get it free.

"Killed—like a dog?" Freece was blubbering in semiconsciousness. Then he opened his eyes with a jerk. "You!"

Barney was half stooped. Freece had a chance of living long enough to accuse him of murder. A dying man's word would be taken, and he could not easily refute it. Weiber was heading toward Edgemoor. That was the direction in which chance might bring him face to face with Victoria and Livy, as they rode back. Regardless of that, Weiber, the center of this whole violent business, was getting clear; he would get clear unless Barney Rogers could keep free to trap him or cut him down.

As though a spring had snapped, Barney leaped toward the doorway. A gun blasted out across the tracks.

"There he is!" Johnson was shouting. "That isn't Weiber or Freece. Get him!"

"That isn't Ricketts; it's that other fellow who was in town this afternoon."

THEY had spotted him; recognized him. They would be hunting him now, perhaps blaming him for the death of Middleton, certainly for the fatal shooting of Freece. And he had to keep his freedom or Weiber would escape.

There wasn't time to stop and argue; he discarded the thought as it entered his mind.

Getting away from the door, into the shadows, Barney stooped and ran. In a moment the loading pens hid him. Behind him he heard Freece yelling that he was shot through the stomach and was dying. For a moment that demanded the attention of the men with Marshal Johnson. It was the moment he needed to get clear.

This all could be straightened out if Livy brought the law from Edgemoor, but Barney knew that he dared not wait; not if he wanted to settle with Conrad Weiber. And the town was dangerous, every foot of it.

He halted a moment to get his bearings. Weiber would be going first to his office for the money. Barney ran and stopped at the foot of the stairs. Back at the bunk house beside the tracks, there was wild shouting. Men were lifting their voices like a wolf pack that scents a kill.

Up in the hall, the light shone from the open door of Weiber's den. There was no sound there. Barney made a sound that should have drawn Weiber out if he was in there. There was still no sign that any one was in the room—just the light burning.

With a jump, Barney Rogers was into the doorway, his gun drawn. He saw no one. Then he heard a strange whistling sound, and felt a sudden, stunning blow.

He staggered, headlong, against the desk in the office. He heard

Weiber's cursing, as from a distance, and turned, groggily. Weiber had a gun, and now had it pointed firmly at his stomach.

"Well, if it isn't the man who wanted to buy a ranch," Weiber sneered. "Well, you're getting the same homestead I've given that yellow pup, Freece!"

He laughed suddenly, and the sound was demoniacal.

"Rogers, you're a fool, like Freece and Stone and Middleton," he rasped. "See that bag? It's got all the money; all of it. They thought I'd share it; you thought yours would buy a ranch! So you were fools; I trapped you just like I'd trap some rabbits."

"Weiber, you'll hang," Barney said thickly.

"Hang?" Weiber laughed again. "Why, they won't even look for me. They'll find a body in this building, after it's burned, and they'll think it was me, and they'll never even look!"

Barney made a move.

"Don't do that." Weiber's eyes glittered like a snake's. "I don't want you to do that. I'd have to put a bullet through you, and they might find that. I don't want to shoot you. But, Rogers, you're going to die!"

Weiber knew he faced a madman, a maniac imbued with the lust to kill. He thought of Livy and Victoria. What if, too anxious to wait for the formation of a party at dawn, they had decided to ride back over the trail? They might—and ride straight into the hands of Weiber.

"There's iron shutters locked outside the window," Weiber was whispering huskily. "And there's bars over the transom. I kept my money here. My money? Your money, part of it, Rogers, but mine now!" He laughed jerkily. "And they'll

think your body, when they find it, is me. These fools in First Pine will think it was me that burned."

Still gripping the gun, Weiber unscrewed the burner from the kerosene lamp. Barney crouched for a spring. But he was still shaky from the blow on the head. He knew he would get lead in the middle if he did not hold strictly taut. So long as he lived, there was a chance.

THEN Weiber knocked over the full bowl of the lamp, while he held the still flaming wick in his fingers. The kerosene spread over the litter of papers on the desk. For an instant Weiber grinned evilly above the wavering flame of the wick. Barney tensed.

Weiber saw it. He flung the lighted wick into the papers, swept up the sack of money, and ran out the door. Barney lunged for the door an instant afterward. But Weiber had banged it shut and turned the key from the outside! Weiber was running down the hallway, down the steps. Barney spun around. Flames belched all around him. Again he threw himself at the door. He felt the heat, smelled the heavy stench of the kerosene.

No use to try the window. Weiber, making this his money cache, had protected it at night by iron shutters, locked with a heavy padlock. It was the door, or death.

With feet braced against the wall, Barney made a battering-ram out of the heavy desk. The flames licked his face. He drove a corner of the desk at the lower panels of the door. There was a crash, and the door buckled.

Barney jumped directly across the desk, tearing at the splintered wood. No need to look back into the office. Weiber had sprinkled the kerosene widely, and flames were leaping

everywhere. With fresh air coming in through the splintered door, one corner of it, where there must have been a gaseous mixture, seemed to explode in dull red.

Barney crashed through the gap into the hallway. For an instant he stood there, braced, breathing heavily; then he raced down the stairs.

Weiber had failed again!

The night air was like wine, and Barney sucked it in deeply as he stood panting just outside the doorway at the foot of the stairs. He felt a momentary touch of great weariness. He knew all he had gone through had gravely sapped his strength. But a fierce feeling of elation, that would not let fatigue touch him, now ruled. Weiber had failed to stop him in that fire trap.

And he was going to get Weiber!

Running on tiptoe, a gun in his hand, Barney crossed to the hotel. He halted there, listening. A horse was trotting out toward the bridge on Crazy Creek.

Weiber!

Barney's lips tightened.

SO Weiber thought he was all-wise; that all others were fools. He'd started shoving Barney Rogers around, and this time he'd shoved the wrong man!

Barney didn't realize he was muttering that to himself, in a kind of guttural growl. And yet he was not jittery; he was thinking swiftly.

He was going to a kill!

If nobody had found them, his horses still were tied back of the hotel, where he had left them only a few hours ago. Hours? Preposterous! It must have been days.

No matter. The thing that mattered was that Conrad Weiber was going to be made to pay for his dev-

iltry. And, right now, Weiber was riding away.

Nobody had found the horses. His own high-powered rifle was still tight in the saddle boot.

He felt of the cinches, thought of the horse having to go again, on bad trail. Well, it had to be.

For the first hundred yards, until well beyond the center of First Pine, Barney rode cautiously. The noise that emanated from the bunk house, where two dead men now lay, seemed to be increasing in volume. The citizens had not, as yet, any inkling that in a moment fire would add to the confusion and excitement.

The fire, when it really started, would burst through the dry, half-rotten cedar shingles of the two-story building and make a great torch that would illuminate the entire town. Barney wanted to be well beyond it, when that happened.

He was thinking, as he rode, that he must avoid being seen, and that he must guard against stumbling upon Weiber unprepared. He had learned how dangerous that was.

But he'd take his chance and shoot it out if he could find Weiber, going at him, head-on, in gun smoke.

So, busy with these thoughts, Barney had ridden almost to the edge of Crazy Creek, where the bridge had been, before he remembered what he had heard Johnson say. The bridge was out, and the silt-filled flood shot down the channel, with boulders as big as bushel baskets tearing along the stream bed.

The sound of the flood came to him with a roar. It was a diabolical sound.

If that tumbling stream lay between Weiber and the trail to Edgemoor, the man Barney hunted had not gone that way. No horse could have made a yard in that water.

And if Weiber still were on this side of Crazy Creek, had not reckoned on that flood barrier stopping him in his flight—

Barney tensed. His horse had moved instinctively back from the cut bank. But there had been the sound of a horse shuffling on the far side of the creek. Then he heard a different sound, that of a horse, well shod, going at a gallop, over a rocky trail.

Weiber had found a way to cross!

CHAPTER VII.

THE FINAL RECKONING.

FOR a moment Barney Rogers was too stunned to move. He had been positive no horse could cross that flood. Yet, in some way, Weiber had reached the other side. It would be that scoundrel, he thought bitterly, riding toward Edgemoor and safety. All the others in town were still circling and milling around the bunk house.

Weiber, beyond the flood, riding toward Edgemoor, would be taking the trail toward Victoria and Livy!

In that moment, baffled by the barrier between him and the man who rode beyond it, Barney saw the fire burst from the frame building. A great red plume thrust into the sky with a dull roar. Sparks showered, and the black outlines of buildings leaped into view. Beyond the fire other buildings reflected the light, seeming to dance with terror at the threat of the fire spreading.

A bell began clanging; a bell that beat out a weird and frightening cadence. Mixed with that was the yelling of the men as they started running from down beside the railway. They would be held for a time, now at least, from trailing Barney. But the fury of Crazy Creek

still lay between him and the chance to go for his man.

He turned to look again and saw the red from the fire reflected on the sage beyond the creek walls. The burning building was a giant torch. Then, suddenly, Barney gasped.

He saw the one way Weiber might have crossed the flood.

Downstream from where the flimsy wagon bridge had stood, with some of the timbers from that wrecked span piled against it, was the railway bridge. Its stout trussing, the solid piles driven to bed rock, held against the assault of the flood. He could see the level of the bridge ties just above the rake of the flood.

Making no attempt to cover the noise he made, Barney spurred his horse to the end of the bridge. There the pony shied. Barney dismounted, and then found the full answer to how Weiber had crossed. There was a narrow plank walk over the ties.

"Come on, boy," he said quietly to the horse. "Good crossing, what there is of it. You've been on narrower trails."

It took a moment to get the horse started along the plank. Then, as though he were wild to get across the surge of muddy water to safe ground, he fell into a jerky little trot. The anxious snorting of the pony, the rush of the waters, the clanging of the bell, the shouting of the men running toward the fire, the crackling snap of the fire itself, mixed into a frantic medley of sound as Barney started out into the sage that lay between him and the hills, toward Edgemoor.

Before caution caught him, he sent the horse under him into a first fierce charge. He realized, then, that he had done that because the surge of feeling that carried him after Weiber

had almost robbed him of reason. That, and the thought of what might happen on the trail if Weiber came on Victoria and Livy, and caught them unawares.

At the end of a mile the pony dropped to a trot, then shied as a jack rabbit leaped from the trail.

"Hide and seek. And death." The thought kept drumming through him, holding him back from riding blindly.

He hauled in to listen. There was no sound except an owl hooting off to the right. The silver-tinted sage rustled eerily in the night breeze. Far beyond the hills now, the storm of earlier in the evening was blowing itself out, but there was still a faint grumble of thunder. The lightning was like a passionate heartbeat that pulsed irregularly beyond the rim of the hills.

HE rode on, the faint light of the stars guiding him. He began to fear he had missed his man. He reined in again. Dawn was coming. The frantic night was hurrying toward bright day. Even now there was a dimming of the stars.

Then, off to one side, he heard a horse being ridden at a trot. Weiber!

He sent his horse forward, and almost piled into a cut-bank wash. He halted there a moment and listened again. There was no sound. Then the horse he had heard started again, as though the man riding it also had stopped to listen. Weiber had heard him coming!

Barney spurred on. There was no need to cover sound now, and he rode as fast as he dared. The sage became a faint cloud, spreading over the broken plain. The mountain rim to the east hunched up into the sky, and the low-rolling hills were black, then gray. He thought he

saw Weiber over to the right, but couldn't be certain. He heard the sound of the other horse again, faintly.

The first low canyon, in the alluvial tongues running out from the mountains, opened ahead. There the shadows were darker. He strained every nerve to catch sight of Weiber. He saw the horse and man for a fleeting instant, and then Weiber disappeared into the canyon.

Jerking his horse to a halt, Barney fired. But the man he hunted was gone, out of sight.

The canyon had jigsaw sides. At the upper end, where the hills dropped low, Barney saw that there was a pass. Pausing to listen, he heard Weiber's horse going at a furious pace up the gulch. Weiber was not stopping to fight; he was running, trying to outdistance pursuit.

Fresh fury seized Barney Rogers. He sent his horse racing into the wide mouth of the canyon. Up ahead rode Weiber, at a dangerous, breakneck pace. Rocks and shadows filled the bottom of the draw, and a feeling of nightmare hit Barney as he rode the floor of the gulch. The rocks were like stony giants, impeding his way. The light was getting stronger. He knew he could see to sight his rifle, if he could see Weiber.

He came around a slight bend. A rifle blasted in front of him, and a bullet whined by. Weiber had turned.

He jerked his horse aside toward rock shelter. For an instant, the pony was broadside. In that moment, Weiber fired again.

Plunging, rolling, with legs buckling, carrying Barney down, the horse under him pitched into a mass of rocks. Barney felt pain stabbing through his leg. He was caught un-

der the horse on his left side. Up-canyon, Weiber was shouting to his horse. He had dismounted to make his aim more certain, and the horse, scared by the two shots, was shying away.

Barney wrenched half erect, and saw Weiber trying to reach his horse. "Whoa! Whoa!" Weiber's efforts to stop the horse drove it farther away.

Barney could see the horse, but not the man. While the fire of pain shot through his leg, he strained to a position from which he could draw his rifle sights on anything he could see up the gulch. Weiber's horse was in plain sight, but Weiber kept cover. There was one thing to do, and Barney threw sights on the horse. The squeeze of the trigger, followed by the kick of the rifle, threw him back against the rocks half embedded in the gravelly earth. His ribs were punished. He lay gasping. Then he twisted up a little and saw that the horse Weiber had ridden was down for good. It was more nearly even now, with both of them unhorsed.

SNAPPING of twigs in patches of brush up the canyon gave him the location of the man he hunted. He shot at the sound. His shot drew return fire. He was half in the open. Weiber might circle a little and shoot from cover. He had to get free from the dead weight of the horse.

Grinding his teeth, Barney Rogers pulled and wrenched. He had been thrown in such a way that he could get but little purchase as he tried to lift himself free of the weight of the pony. His foot moved a little. Weiber fired once more, and this time the bullet hit the dead animal.

Then, with a last, desperate effort,

Barney wrenched free and tried to stand. He couldn't. His ankle was badly twisted. He sat, sweating, under the shelter of a rock, making a hasty examination. Nothing seemed broken. But when he tried to stand again, the pain was almost unbearable.

The light was becoming brighter. Objects were becoming more clearly outlined. He looked up canyon. Beyond the brush and rock tangle there was an open space where the gulch flattened, and there was grassy ground with no covering on it. As he watched, Weiber came out of the far edge of the brush. Barney saw that he was carrying the sack of money. A rifle shot made Weiber dive back into the cover.

Holding to the rocks, and steady-ing himself with the short, stout trunks of the low growth, Barney started working up the draw. Every step he took brought agony. He couldn't move rapidly, and Weiber had that advantage. In a pause, Barney heard the other fellow working back. There was the snapping of twigs; little sinister sounds between the canyon walls.

Here was hide and seek that would end in death. He was stalking Weiber, and Weiber was stalking him. That rascal now realized that he was trapped unless he could blot out the man who would get him if he started across that open space above.

Weiber shot. The bullet clipped close, and the canyon walls threw back the sound. Barney threw himself flat, and tried to see where his man was crouching. He dared not move. For the moment, there was too much open space around him.

He wondered if he was caught. Weiber, moving more rapidly, could circle and creep, while Barney had to drag up to his feet and hobble, or worm along on his belly. He tried

that. It was slow going. A run of rocks moved under him and bounced down the slope. It gave Weiber his location, and there was another shot while Barney flattened. Then stillness.

He dared not move again. Weiber was still stalking him, waiting. The sun slowly rose and began to beat on Barney. The pain in his foot began to run up his leg like spreading fire. Magpies began to dart through the brush in the canyon floor. The low piece of rock behind which he lay afforded but scant shelter. He wondered if Weiber had gotten away. Still he dared not move, and wondered, now, if he could, for his ankle was swelling and throbbing.

The sun climbed. Time passed. The magpies suddenly began a chattering up toward the head of the draw. Then silence fell again. He heard a twig snap. Weiber still was there, waiting. Barney eased his hat out. There was no shot.

With all his will power, he got his feet braced. He had to find out if Weiber still was in the brushy hiding place. He had to go on, some way, if the man had sneaked out. He jumped and stumbled.

That injured ankle saved him. He fell again, just as a wild bullet snarled by. He slid on his face into the underbrush, and lay there, breathing heavily. Then, slowly, he started worming toward a rocky shelter, near by. It took a long time. After he had reached it, he lay there perspiring, trying to move his leg. The pain was becoming a pulsing agony that battered his senses.

WEIBER was moving again, as though he believed he had wounded Barney and now could chance a move to get clear. Barney tried to get his feet under

him. It was useless. His leg gave way as he put his weight on it. And Weiber was sneaking slowly up the gulch. The excited magpies that hovered to one side of where Weiber moved signaled the alarm.

Barney had no way of telling how much time had passed. It seemed like hours, and, indeed, it might be hours. The sun was well up now. He had to get up to where he could see that open section of trail and turn Weiber back if the latter made an attempt to cross to the upper end of the gulch. Dragging his leg, he wriggled toward a mass of rocks higher up on the side of the draw.

He stopped, fighting pain, then heard the sound of approaching horses. The sound came from the head of the draw, and it was of horses ridden at a fast trot. As he turned, he saw Livy and Victoria come into the upper end of the open space.

And Weiber was up there at the edge of the brush, unseen by them. They were riding directly into ambush!

Barney yelled with all his might. He saw them halt. Then Weiber fired.

Forgetting his injured leg, Barney lunged ahead. He had to get higher. He had to catch a glimpse of Wei-

ber, where the fellow crouched under a rock. For an instant the two riders were caught completely by surprise; plain targets, in the open.

Lurching, stumbling, yelling with all his lung power, Barney started on a slanting plunge down the side of the draw. He saw Weiber whirl. He threw up his own rifle and fired. He worked the lever, sighted again, and the hammer merely clicked. Empty! A bullet tore close. He threw the rifle away. He was half in the open now, his feet tangling with the low scrub brush on the ground. His hands swept to his belt guns; his own, and the one that had belonged to Hulett Freece.

He was going head-on, forcing Weiber to turn away from the pair upcanyon. He had to turn Weiber.

With a shrill yell, Weiber came at him, shouting aimonly. Fright threw Weiber's aim off. Barney's leg dragged, and he was dimly conscious that he was running with a flopping, pitching motion.

Upcanyon, Livy Ricketts had apparently caught the significance of the situation. He was riding down on the charge. Victoria was trailing, shouting wildly, but Barney could not make out the words. Weiber had dropped his empty rifle and was working his short guns. One of the



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slugs tore the skin in Barney's good leg. He pitched down, sliding on his stomach. The guns in his hands were still flinging lead.

His eyes pained. His legs throbbed agonizingly. Weiber was in the clear now, crazed by the sight of Barney Rogers, the man who should have been dead hours ago. Livy, riding in with his rifle up, was trying to get to a point where he could cut in on Weiber. Victoria was close behind him.

With a last, desperate effort, Barney steadied, took careful aim, fired. There were two explosions. He saw Weiber spin, stumble, then start toward him, weaving, a smoking gun still in his hand.

Then a curtain of blackness fell around Barney Rogers.

When he regained consciousness, there was the sound of men riding up the gulch, headlong. He looked over toward the spot where he last had seen Weiber. Livy Ricketts was out of the saddle, and Weiber was on the ground. Victoria was riding on to where Barney was trying to brace himself against a rock. She was calling to him, terror in her voice.

THEN the band of riders came charging into the open, approaching the point where Livy stood. Barney saw that before Victoria threw herself down by his side.

"Weiber?" he asked.

"Livy caught him in the open," she said. "And you?"

"Scratched up," he said dully. "Just scratched up. And my ankle torn loose some way."

He managed to get up on his feet and held to her.

He remembered how a posse would be riding from First Pine with orders to shoot Livy Ricketts on sight.

"Must get down there," he muttered.

"Look out!" She caught him as his leg started to buckle.

"Help me up," he said, turning toward her horse. "Got to get down there to bust up trouble for Livy."

She caught the note of urgency in his voice and ran beside him as he rode down to get between Livy and the posse from First Pine. He hauled the horse in to block them. Livy stood waiting beside the still form of Weiber.

"If you're looking for Ricketts —" Barney began.

"We are," said a big man with the voice he recognized as belonging to Marshal Johnson.

"You've got to listen to the truth of this matter."

"Guess we've got it," Johnson said shortly. "Freece lived long enough to spill the whole dirty business about how he was forced to let Weiber use the ranch the way he did. Guess Freece didn't want to go to eternity with that on his soul. Or he wanted to make sure Weiber wouldn't enjoy the pelf after he shot Freece to get away with it. We were after Weiber, and didn't think we'd catch up with him. Appears some one did, luckily."

While there still was a murmur of general talk in the little group, the sheriff from Edgemoor and three other lawmen came riding in. Victoria and Livy had talked to the sheriff almost as soon as they had reached town, and he had arranged for the earliest possible recording of the deed. He had been unable to keep up with them, however, as they rode back.

"I'll take charge of this sack," said the sheriff. "The court'll see whoever has claims on it gets their money back, right enough. It ought to be legal, so there's no question."

Barney got heavily out of the saddle. As he did, something snapped in his foot. A bone that had been dislocated had slipped back. He took a step, limping. Victoria faced him.

"The deed," she said, handing over the papers. "It's registered."

Barney looked at it. The deed was to him, not Hollis Middleton.

"Yes," she said swiftly, as he looked at her inquiringly. "Yes, it's yours. You wanted it, I know. I'll have to get Hollis to a hospital; there'll be expenses, and the money is more use to me right now than the land would be. I knew you wanted the Quarter 33."

"He wanted you to have it," said

Barney soberly. "He made me promise that I'd see you got it."

"He wants—he wanted— Made you promise!" She halted, her voice catching in a sob. Then, suddenly, with tears in her eyes, she was coming into the shelter of his arms.

There was another way she could have her title rights in Quarter 33. When the time came, he knew, he would ask her to share it. And he knew she would not refuse.

Barney Rogers hadn't ridden into the Crazy Creek Basin looking for trouble. He was looking for a ranch, where he could settle and take root. And, at the end of the trail, he had found all a man could ask for when he rides out of his old country into new.

THE RATTLE OF A RATTLER

DOES a rattler, when about to strike, always warn his prey? Most cowboys agree that they usually do, but not always. Perhaps the times that the rattler doesn't rattle, according to those who claim it sometimes doesn't, are the times that the cowboy doesn't happen to be listening, and so does not hear the warning hiss.

According to Spence D. Turner, chief forester of Los Angeles County, California, the rattler always gives warning that it is about to strike. He claims that the rattlers are timid creatures and prefer to be left alone, and that they will only strike in self-defense when they get into an exposed place where they are unable to make a quick get-away.

"Contrary to common belief," says Forester Turner, "rattlesnakes seldom have been known to leap any more than a third of their length, and they will not chase you. If you are attacked, get immediate treatment, but first be sure you have been bitten, for the snake may have missed, or its fangs may have penetrated only your clothing. One can tell if bitten by the several drops of blood that will ooze from the small wound.

"Try not to be frightened, for fear stimulates the blood action and hastens the spread of the poison. Fatalities from rattlesnake bites are very low. There is no reason to expect serious consequences if immediate medical attention is given."

Snakes like temperate weather conditions. They will die in freezing weather, and will be practically helpless at fifty degrees. Even at seventy the snake becomes sluggish. If the thermometer registers above ninety degrees, Mr. Snake will seek the protection of a damp, shaded spot.

The first warm days of spring bring the snakes out from hibernation.

WELL, WELL!

By WILLIAM P. LAWSON

HARD-LUCK" HARVEY, known to his wife as Ephraim, sat on the edge of the hillside and faced the situation squarely. Before him lay a sandy corner of the Diamond Bar range, dotted with mesquite. His saddled buckskin pony grazed contentedly near by. Overhead a buzzard soared lazily, black against the pale-blue sky. The golden Texas sun shone down, warming the fecund earth. A scene of peace—only, as Hard-luck knew, peace fails to function when man and wife work at cross purposes.

The eyes of the wizened rancher, filled with gloom, were fixed on a shallow pool below, a pool whose surface glistened iridescently.

"Plumb rotten with oil," he muttered morosely. He added, after a moment's somber thought: "Gold, you might say, laying in plain sight—waitin' to be gathered up. And Maudie Belle won't tech it."

He felt abused, frustrated, much as Tantalus must have felt with the life-giving cup held just out of reach. He had married Maudie Belle—and the ranch—six months before, to discover oil, and the fact that his bride would have none of it, at the same disappointing instant. Maudie Belle didn't hold with oil, she informed him flatly, deeming derricks and drilling a plumb messy way of earning a stake, for a cattle woman with a proper pride in the cleanness and dignity of her calling. Arguments and cajolery had availed nothing to

move her from this stand. The ill luck for which the meager cowman was notorious seemed to have reached a climax.

One less resolute might have resigned himself to the inevitable. But Hard-luck, among other worthy qualities, possessed the attribute of initiative. If a run of hard luck did not wear itself out in the natural course of things, he believed a man



should take steps. With this thought in mind he raised his eyes, sharp beneath frowning brows, to perceive a horseman riding slowly across the sandy waste toward him.

Hard-luck's eyes squinted against the sun as he gazed. "Rocky" Ford the rider was, one of the two hands—besides Hard-luck—of which the ranch boasted.

Hard-luck had already confided his problem to Rocky, and found a sympathetic listener. Money was good, the bow-legged puncher had averred, no matter how acquired—so long as it would spend. His long face, as he rode up, wore a look of commiseration, for he had no difficulty in deciding the nature of Hard-luck's present occupation.

He pulled up and dismounted slowly, jerking a shoulder toward the slough below where the sheen of oil showed.

"Tough, ain't it?" he observed.

His immediate superior in the hierarchy of the Diamond Bar grunted noncommittally.

"She give any signs of weakenin' yet?" Rocky persisted.

The little cowman scowled.

"More ways than one of skinning a cat," he observed oracularly.

"Meanin'?" the other queried.

Hard-luck pursed his lips, stared narrow-eyed before him.

"Got about three hundred head of stock right now, ain't we?"

Rocky nodded, his tanned face betraying perplexity. Hard-luck tranquilized him with a studied frown.

"Well," he said slowly, "suppose these cattle was to be stole some dark night—the range cleaned out. Miz Harvey'd have to fall back on the oil then, wouldn't she?"

Rocky stared.

"I reckon. But—good gosh, who'd rustle 'em, now Taggart's dead?"

TAGGART was a former rancher who, aware of the oil-bearing properties of the Diamond Bar, had endeavored to obtain possession of the spread by fair means or foul, chiefly the latter. In the ensuing mix-up he had fallen before a well-directed bullet from Hard-luck's gun. With the passing of this menace, the course of affairs on the ranch had run smoothly—outwardly.

"We-el," drawled Hard-luck, "some of those no-good amigos of yours hanging round Rawhide might do the job, if it was made worth their while. They could drive the bunch down across the border an' hold 'em there fer a spell, till the first well was sunk—then locate 'em accidental."

Comprehension dawned in the cow-puncher's leathery face. He slapped his overalls with a calloused hand and said admiringly:

"Well, I declare, if that ain't a humdinger of a idee! How ever do you think 'em up, Hard-luck?"

"Practice," returned the pint-sized cowman shortly. He added, "Of course, if you was to arrange the affair, I'd see you didn't lose nothing by it, when we struck oil."

They fell, absorbedly, to discussing ways and means. As a result of the conference Hard-luck was awakened a few nights thereafter by a loud knocking at the door.

"What all's that outlandish racket, Ephraim?" his wife demanded from the darkness. "Git up and see."

Hard-luck crawled out, lighted a candle, and walked stealthily to the door. It opened to admit an excited and disheveled Rocky, who promptly poured forth the details of the night raid, which, as he proceeded, assumed the proportions of a major catastrophe.

"All of them cattle!" exclaimed Hard-luck loudly, simulating horror. "Druv off like that without a by-your-leave?"

"Every last hoof," confirmed Rocky.

Maudie Belle appeared, a middle-aged woman in a long brown wrapper with her short hair rumped. Her deep-set gray eyes, however, were cool and undaunted.

"Tell it over again," she snapped, "and without usin' up so many words. Just what was it happened?"

Fall round-up was just over and the bunch had been gathered for cutting in a long valley—a mile or two east of the ranch house. Rocky and the other hand, "Slim" Bogert, had been riding night herd when the trouble started.

"First thing I knew," Rocky stated, "a crowd of fellers come ridin' in, whoopin' and yellin' an' shootin' off their guns. The herd started south with them fellers after."

"What was you doin'?"

Mrs. Harvey's voice was a whip-lash. Rocky gulped uncomfortably.

"Why, I—uh—I yelled and took a shot or two at the gang. Then my hoss stepped in a gopher hole and throwed me. And by the time I'd got him up, and was in the saddle, they was plumb out of sight. So I come on home quick's I could make it."

"Where'bouts was Slim?"

A look of faint worry appeared in Rocky's eyes.

"Dunno. Didn't see hide nor hair of him from first to last."

"Mebbe he had gumption enough to take out after the rustlers," was Mrs. Harvey's acid suggestion.

"Mebbe."

"Well," she said with abrupt decisiveness, "no use standing here gabbling all night. You two light

out on the trail of them cows quick as you can, while I phone the sheriff. Looks like the Lord might have tempered the wind a mite, seeing what we been through already, but—well, reckon He knows what He's doing, arter all."

Hard-luck, who had an abiding faith that the Lord always aided those who deserved it, said amen to this sentiment, but to himself only. Aloud he observed, "Reckon I done brought you nothin' only tough luck, Maudie Belle. But it ain't my fault hardly—jest my misfortune."

Receiving no answer, he sighed and proceeded to draw on his boots and cartridge belt, after which he saddled his horse and joined Rocky in what he knew, with a guilty certitude, would be a quite futile errand.

On the way to the scene of the disaster they met Slim, hobbling toward home afoot. He was woe-begone and wholly apologetic. He had tried to fight off the raiders, he said, but before he'd got started good his horse had been killed and himself thrown over the animal's head and stunned as he struck the ground. When his wits returned the cattle had disappeared and he was alone, save for the dead pony, on the mesa. Forthwith he had made his way back as best he might, to acquaint his employers with what had occurred.

"I shore made a plumb pore showing, Mist' Harvey," he ended. "I wouldn't blame you if you was to fire me for not puttin' my brand on them owl hooters."

"Shucks," said Hard-luck, whose relief was great that his hired rustlers in their enthusiasm had not injured the puncher more severely. "You done the best you could. You just wasn't predestined to be no hero, was all."

DIRECTING the crestfallen rider to report to Mrs. Harvey, and wait on her further orders, Hard-luck and his companion resumed their interrupted trek.

They camped out for two days, taking it easy while time drifted by. It was unnecessary for them to follow the herd for they knew already where it was, safe in a secluded hide-out below the Rio Grande. Then, thinking the moment ripe for the execution of his purpose, Hard-luck headed once more toward the Diamond Bar, bearing the bad news of their failure to his waiting help-mate.

When he had duly reported, and they were alone together, the rancher said gravely:

"Well, Maudie Belle, we done made a good fight, but looks like we're licked. We've done lost our herd and we got no money to buy cows with. What's more, the ranch is mortgaged up to the hilt, as you know. Don't look like they was any way out unless"—he paused, eying her cautiously—"unless we was to drill for oil, like I figure we'd ought."

"Who'd pay for the drillin'?"

But that was easy.

"I already been in correspondence with a feller in Oklahoma," returned Hard-luck with a trace of eagerness. "You know I worked in the oil fields myself for a couple or three years. And this feller's willin' to drill on a gamble. Share an' share alike—"

He stopped at the grim look on his wife's face, at the hostile gleam in her eyes.

"Mebbe there's oil there, like you say," she snapped, "but if it is it's going to stay there, for all of me. Because I don't hold with oil, like I've told you often enough."

She paused to resume slowly:

"I got this to say for you, Ephraim, you learned your place

right quick after the wedding, but looks like you been forgetting it of late. You was to be a silent partner, if you rec'lect—except when you was working."

The ruby tip of Hard-luck's nose turned a deeper red.

"Seems as if even a silent partner could speak up every so often and give a piece of advice," he demurred.

"When I want advice," Maudie Belle stated with finality, "I'll ask for it."

Hard-luck subsided. The gleam in his pale eyes vanished. He shrugged resignedly.

"If you know a way out of the jam we're in, Miz Harvey, I'm with you."

Silently his wife drew a folded telegraph form from a coat pocket and extended it to him.

"This come while you was chasin' round in the hills."

Hastily, Hard-luck glanced at the yellow slip. It read:

Your Uncle Robert died this morning. As one of the heirs you are requested to be present at the funeral on Thursday the fourteenth instant, and for the reading of the will.

ELBERT F. STRAIGHT.

Attorney-at-law.

"You see," said Maudie Belle, "God tempered the wind, looks like, arter all. You didn't overlook where it says I'm a heir, did you?"

"Heir to what?" inquired her husband with shocked bluntness.

"I dunno, exactly," his better half admitted, "but I've always understood Uncle Robert was right rich. It'll help us over the rough spot, I wouldn't wonder."

Hard-luck was searching for the place from which the wire came—Westerville, Iowa. A faint hopeful glint appeared in his eye. The wind-tempering hadn't, it was true, come

about in precisely the way he'd expected—but it might.

"You'll be gone a week on such a matter, I expect?" he said, his voice shaking slightly in spite of himself.

Maudie Belle nodded.

"I reckon. I was figurin' on leavin' to-night. I'd take you with me, only I believe 'twould be best to have some one here at the ranch to look after things, or what's left of them."

Hard-luck drew a deep breath. On the spur of the moment he had decided to launch the biggest gamble of his checkered career.

"Shore," he agreed with hypocritical casualness, "'twould be best, for a fact."

MRS. HARVEY left Rawhide on the evening train. Hard-luck, seeing her off, received her various parting admonitions without comment, gave her a limp hand before she got on, and absently watched the last coach till it had rounded the turn north of town. Then his mien changed. He straightened his shoulders, and a strange light shone in his pale eyes. He lifted his booted feet high as he strode off toward the telegraph station. A very few minutes later he filed for dispatch a wire to one Ben Ryan at Tulsa, Oklahoma—a message commendably brief:

READY TO DRILL STOP START
HEADING THIS WAY
EPHRAIM HARVEY

Then, feeling his good deed for the day done, he returned to the ranch and called Rocky Ford into consultation.

"You shore didn't lose no time jumpin' into action," commented the puncher admiringly when the measures taken had been explained to him.

"No," returned Hard-luck, with complacency. "I ain't totally lackin' in executive ability."

"What I'm wonderin'," Rocky went on thoughtfully, "is what Miz Harvey's goin' to say about your activities when she gits back."

Hard-luck frowned.

"Oh, she'll take it right sensible, I wouldn't wonder. All the mess'll be cleaned up by then, and the well flowin'."

"S'pose there ain't no well? S'pose that surface oil's just seepage, and you don't hit no pool underneath?"

If Hard-luck felt hurt by his satellite's eleventh-hour misgivings, he gave no sign of it. He said slowly:

"It ain't likely, but it's possible. I been considering of it. And the conclusion I come to is you'd best high-tail it south and get the herd we hid out started back—givin' them fellers the ten per cent cut of beef on the hoof we promised. Then if anything goes wrong with the oil prop'osition the stock being back will likely take the edge off Miz Harvey's disappointment."

Rocky promptly agreed that this was a wise precaution and started out on his errand without delay, taking a pack horse and grub for the trip. And Hard-luck settled down to wait, with what patience he could muster, for the coming of Ben Ryan and the drill outfit.

They showed up two days later, a small fleet of cars and trucks holding a hard-bitten crew of men and much cumbersome machinery. Hard-luck, notified of their arrival, emerged from the house to meet them. Ryan, a thick-shouldered man with a bull neck and a shaggy head that he held slightly forward, his jaw thrust out pugnaciously, climbed from the leading car and waved a hamlike hand.

"Nice spread you got here, Hard-luck," he greeted as he approached. "H'are ya?"

The slender cowman took the proffered hand gingerly, wincing as pressure was applied.

"It ain't bad," he admitted. "As for me, I'm plumb hopeful."

"Might as well be," grinned the driller, showing yellowed teeth. "It ain't charged for extra."

His thin wide lips drew together again. There were tobacco stains in the corners of his mouth, and his chin bore a two-day beard. From his face, burned brick-red by the sun, blue eyes gleamed coldly.

As they walked toward the house, his roving glance took in the trim white-painted frame structure, the well-kept fences and corrals, the big cottonwood by the porch. Curiosity shone in his eyes.

"Last time I seen you," he said bluntly, "you was hanging round the outskirts, with nary a two-bit piece to knock agin' another. How come you to land here like this—in clover, you might say?"

Hard-luck cleared his throat.

"'Twas like this," he explained.

"I read in one of them mattermonial magazines where a widow lady with a cow ranch was wantin' a husband which had stock experience. So we got to correspondin' and then I come on and met her and passed muster. So we was wed."

Ryan stopped short then, his brows meeting in a scowl.

"The devil," he burst out, "you didn't say nothin' about no woman in your letter."

Hard-luck's mobile features promptly fell into lugubrious lines. He drew a soiled bandanna from his pocket and dabbed at his eyes.

"She left me," he said mournfully, "right recent."

Ryan's face cleared.

"Oh," he muttered in an altered tone, "she's gone, eh?"

Hard-luck nodded.

"Jes' so. And," he added with entire truth, "I shore miss her. It ain't the same since she went."

"Well," said Ryan consolingly, "it's the way of the world. Makes it simpler, too, because I got the contract already made out—with you as owner. We'll just sign up if you say so and then you can show me where the field you was talking about lies."

A few minutes thereafter they affixed signatures to the papers Ryan produced. The driller thrust out his fist. Hard-luck, possibly remembering the other's prowess as a hand-shaker, wagged his head from side to side.

"Jest a minute," he demurred.

With an air of importance he walked to a sideboard against the wall and took therefrom glasses and a full quart of rye, procured in Rawhide with the present occasion in mind. Pouring two glasses of the amber fluid, he raised one solemnly.

"Here's to a gusher!" he said.

Hard-luck was not, as a rule, a drinking man. The red tip of his nose was due, not to intemperance, but to chronic sunburn. The rite under way was significant chiefly as a gesture of independence which his wife's absence facilitated. As the mellow liquor warmed him the diminutive cowman felt it a good augury of fortune to come. He was forgetting, it may be noted, the usual nature of his luck.

Led to the sandy waste beyond the breaks where the pool of oil lay, Ryan's eyes bulged when he saw the surface sheen.

"Why, you don't need to drill," he exclaimed. "All you need's buckets here."

But Hard-luck was in no mood for levity.

"Listen, Ben," he said tensely, "they's reasons why I want you to get this hole sunk just as quick as your strength'll let you. No need of going into details, but I'm offering a bonus of ten per cent for every day less than five you take putting her in."

Ryan stared.

"Five days—you crazy? I'll take a week to ten days at least, working a twenty-four hour shift. But," he added as Hard-luck's face fell, "I won't waste no time. You can gamble on that."

HE was, as it proved, as good as his words. In a surprisingly short space of time the rigging was set up, the drill mounted and sent into action. Through sand and clay the steel bit quickly. The hole deepened with spectacular celerity. By nightfall of the first day they had gone fifty feet underground, far past the surface skim of oil, deep into solid earth.

For the next several days Hard-luck fluttered in and about the derrick like an uneasy ghost, a look of strained excitement on his face. If he slept, no one knew where or when. At odd moments he would pop up, now here, now there, cracking the knuckles of his finger joints restlessly, peering over a man's shoulder or under his arm, egging a worker on with zealous tenacity or asking with monotonous persistence how the work went. He became a veritable pest, a hindrance rather than a help; but so sharp was his interest, so obvious the strain under which he labored, that even the hard-boiled oilmen tolerated him good-naturedly, as a harmless pest rather than the human barnacle he was.

Then, one morning at dawn, it happened unexpectedly. The machinery was clanking rhythmically, the men working with smooth efficiency at their allotted tasks, when, without warning, a rumble sounded deep underground. Men stood as if petrified, other men started running instantly. The next moment a terrific roar sounded and gas burst from the hole, flinging debris high in air. It shot upward with the noise of Niagara, infinitely amplified.

They gathered in a crowd at a distance from the unwelcome portent, gazing toward the source of the deafening sound awesomely.

"A gasser," muttered a grizzled tool sharpener. "Y' can't see nothin'—but, by heck, you can listen all you please."

Ryan, face set, jaw hard, glared at his wrecked equipment with murderous intensity. Hard-luck, his face working, plucked at the big man's sleeve.

"Ben," he yelled hoarsely, standing on tiptoe to reach the other's ear, "do we just set and wait?"

Ryan nodded slowly.

"We don't even set," he growled, "mebbe she'll blow off for a week, mebbe two—mebbe longer. Mebbe oil will come later, mebbe not. If she stops we can try nitro. But now, *till* she stops, nothin' to do but wait."

Hard-luck's heart sank. Maudie Belle, an avenging Nemesis, was overdue. Rocky, whom he had expected to return with the mislaid herd in a few days, had not yet put in an appearance. And now this gasser—liable to spout like an ill-omened whale for weeks!

Wildly he glanced about, as if seeking an inspired solution of the problem which confronted him. Suddenly he stiffened to attention,

hope rising from the ashes of despair in his breast. Over the brow of the wooded ridge to northward appeared a rider on a tired cow pony—Rocky Ford!

HARD-LUCK waved madly. Rocky saw, raised his arm in a half-hearted response, and made toward the group. When he was yet yards distant Hard-luck cupped his mouth in his hands and shouted at the top of his lungs:

"Hey, Rocky—did you bring them steers back?"

Rocky shook his head to indicate his inability to distinguish words against the overpowering roar of the escaping gas. When he came up, Hard-luck repeated his query.

The puncher, unshaven and dust-caked, swung a leg over the horn and sat sideways in the saddle, relaxing gratefully. Drawing the makings from his pocket he began rolling a cigarette.

"Dog-gone it," exploded Hard-luck, "you gonna give me a plain answer or not? Whereabouts is them cattle at?"

Rocky's lips curved in a mirthless grin.

"Wisht I could tell you. But I can't—though I've been rambling through the best part of north Mexico to locate 'em. That's how come I took so long gettin' back."

Hard-luck stared incredulously.

"You mean——"

Rocky nodded.

"Yep. You guessed it. Them fellers decided they was playin' for keeps, looks like. Leastways I couldn't find hide nor hair of them or the cows."

He lighted his cigarette and blew out a cloud of smoke with apparent relish.

"You havin' stock trouble?" asked Ryan, with a thoughtful look.

"Trouble? Trouble?" cried Hard-luck and paused, seeking words.

In the pause Rocky started slightly, his face sobering. As he dug in his vest pocket he said hastily:

"Reckon you ain't been into Rawhide lately. I found this waitin' there for you—been layin' around a couple or three days, I wouldn't wonder."

He extended a yellow envelope bearing the well-known insignia of the Western Union. Hard-luck grabbed it, his thin face apprehensive. This is what he read:

UNCLE ROBERT DIED INSOLVENT
STOP TOOK ME A WEEK TO FIND
OUT STOP STARTING HOME NOW
MAUDIE BELLE HARVEY

Hard-luck felt a cold chill at his vitals. He raised worried eyes to find Ryan regarding him queerly, a look of dawning suspicion in his glance.

"Bad news?" he asked curtly.

Hard-luck gulped, shoved the ill-omened missive in his pocket, and replied with fortitude:

"What? Oh—good, fur as it goes."

Ryan scowled, opened his lips for speech, then froze as the roaring sound from the well changed subtly and a sudden hot blast struck them like a blow. The driller's ruddy face paled, and his eyes bulged as he glanced toward the sound.

"Look out!" he cried. "She's afire! Friction from the rigging. Run for it!"

Amazingly the invisible column of gas had turned into a pillar of red flames, shooting hundreds of feet into the air. The heat thus suddenly engendered was terrific.

With one accord the men fled, running till they had reached a spot some two hundred yards from the blaze, where the heat was bearable.

There they stood, as if hypnotized, staring at the flare dazedly.

HARD-LUCK, panting from his exertions, sweating profusely, gazed with unseeing eyes at this crowning misfortune. The cattle on whose presence he had counted to temper his wife's wrath were gone beyond recovery, Maudie Belle herself was due on the scene at any moment, and all Hard-luck had to show for his flat disobedience of orders was a spectacular fire in her lower pasture which could be seen and heard for many miles around.

For a moment the unhappy cowman knew the dull blight of despair. He wondered at the temerity which had led him to pit feeble might against the decrees of the evil destiny that seemed always to stand athwart his path, an iron barrier blocking his puny assaults on the far-seen citadel of fortune.

But a man does not undergo constantly recurring ill luck without, in time, acquiring a compensatory ability to withstand fate's sharpest attacks and—if he has courage—to fight back to the last ditch. Hard-luck, indurated by experience, possessed in his slight frame a moral resilience which, when aroused, was literally as the strength of ten. So now, in this crisis, his fondest hopes crumbling about him, he called on the resources of his intrepid spirit for aid in a last desperate sortie against failure.

He straightened, his eyes gleaming, and turned urgently on Ryan.

"Listen, Ben," he said, "you got to do somethin' about this fire right quick. You just *got* to—savvy?"

Ryan considered, shook his head slowly.

"That's just it, I don't savvy. They's something funny about this

set-up, and I want to know what it is. Suppose you come clean, Hard-luck—give me the low-down."

There was an unspoken threat in his manner. Hard-luck hesitated. It occurred to him that his best chance lay in frankness.

"Well," he blurted, "the long and the short of it is Miz Harvey's liable to be back any minute——"

"Your wife? I thought you said she was dead?"

Ryan's interruption was curtly inimical.

"I said she was gone," corrected Hard-luck. He added hastily: "Of course I figured you might think I meant dead. Reason was Miz Harvey's agin' drilling for oil—likes cattle breedin' better. An' I figured, when she had to take this trip, 'twould be a good chance to sink a well and see could we clean up. But now—well, if we don't get that fire put out before she shows up she's liable to have us all thrown in jail for trespass, if nothing worse."

Ryan scowled blackly.

"What's to prevent my picking up and clearing out—leavin' you to face the music?"

Hard-luck sighed disconsolately.

"Nothin'—only that I'd likely go with you."

He perceived that an argument on other grounds was required.

"Listen, Ben," he said quickly. "You've known me a long time. You know how I've always fit hard luck—and always been licked, to date. But I never failed to come back for another whirl—nor I never will."

"You ain't no quitter, for a fact," conceded the big driller.

"Well," Hard-luck ran on, "here I was, not much better'n a cowhand on a cattle ranch, with all this oil lyin' in plain sight. So can you blame me for wanting to make a

stake while I had a chance—get somewhere in the world?”

“No,” returned Ryan slowly, “I dunno as I rightly blame you.”

Hard-luck was quick to take advantage of this admission.

“What I claim is, we still got a chance. If we can get this fire out before Miz Harvey comes back, oil might show—or we could blast. It’s the only chance I can see.”

Ryan grinned suddenly. A light of grudging respect showed in his eyes.

“A chance in a million, you danged li’le gambler, you! But by the eternal, I’ll back your play. Because I’ve been known to take a chance or two myself, in my time.”

HE whirled, barking gruff orders, galvanizing the group about him into prompt and furious activity. In the space of minutes a large metal shield was rigged upright on two wheels and pushed forward by men carrying crowbars, shovels, buckets, and a compass.

When they had approached to a point as close to the flaming well as they dared the man with the compass took a careful sight on the well, jotting down the angle of direction. Others, meanwhile, had started digging behind the shield, and when the hole was deep enough began to drive a tunnel toward the well on a slight downward grade.

Dirt was carried back to the mouth in baskets and dumped there. The work went on apace. The men toiled with feverish haste, in short shifts. From time to time part of the gang would trundle the shield back to their waiting fellows and a new crew took their place, pushing the shield forward again into position. Soon the tunnel had been dug

to within yards of the well shaft. The end was in sight.

Hard-luck, on tenterhooks of excitement, bustled about helping where he could, offering unsolicited advice or encouragement, getting in the way generally. The men, by now inured to his ubiquitous activity, ignored him. Yet it was observed by more than one that, however rapt in his occupation he seemed, he did not fail to keep an eye on the ridge to the north where the avenging figure of his wife, tensely awaited, might be expected to appear.

The last few yards of the tunnel, if their calculations were correct, were being carefully cut away. The shield was back by the base group, ready for its final trip to the tunnel’s mouth. This time they would take the clamps with which they hoped to squeeze the casing in the well shaft and cut off the flow of gas. So absorbed was Hard-luck in these last-minute preparations that, for the moment, attention on his major task, that of watchful waiting, was in abeyance. The first he knew of approaching doom was when Rocky Ford, gazing by chance toward the hillside, exclaimed fervently:

“Ye gods—look yonder!”

All eyes shifted promptly. Through the scrubby trees on the ridge moved a roan cow pony. On his back sat a woman whose garb of men’s knickers, flannel shirt, and cowboy boots contrasted oddly with the blue poke bonnet she wore. Across her saddle bow lay the twelve-bore pump gun whose shells, Hard-luck was unpleasantly aware, contained buckshot in lethal quantities.

“Here, where you off to?” demanded Ryan, for with one swift glance at the newcomer the little cowman had leaped forward and was

pushing the wheeled contraption of the shield frantically on its way.

"Come on, men—let's go!" he yelled.

To Ryan he shouted briefly:

"Talk up to her, Ben. You can do it easier than me—you ain't been bossed nigh so regular."

In a way it was a race between the slowly moving shield and the advancing horsewoman, a race watched fascinatedly by the group in the rear. And Hard-luck won. While yet the wife of his bosom was rods distant, the shield reached its objective and the agile fugitive darted into the refuge of the tunnel, making his way quickly to its head.

RYAN, left to face the invasion single-handed, eyed the buxom owner of the Diamond Bar dubiously. His misgivings were in no wise allayed by the set of her jaw as she rode up; by the frown on her face, or the irate glitter in her deep-set eyes.

Deeming offense the best defensive maneuver, the driller stepped out and said heartily:

"Howdy, ma'am. Miz Harvey?"

She glared.

"What in the devil is going on here?" she demanded, disdainful formalities. "You responsible for that—that bonfire yonder?"

She indicated the huge torch of flame as she spoke. Ryan nodded.

"In a way, yes ma'am. Though I got a contract to drill here for oil with Mr. Harvey, owner of the ranch."

"Owner!"

She darted a glance about the circle of solemn faces, failing to note Rocky Ford, who had discreetly hidden himself behind two of the largest of the drill crew.

"Where is that ornery li'l shrimp?" she demanded with omi-

nous calm. "I got a word to say to him when I find him."

Ryan took a chance, though a long one. Advancing a step, he waved a hand dramatically toward the well and said:

"He's where I'd be if I had his nerve, ma'am—down yonder in the bowels of the earth, as you might say, fightin' to defend his lands and hereditaments from the scourge of fire." He added, matter-of-factly: "We dug a tunnel to reach the casing underground, where there's no flame, and pinch off the gas."

Maudie Belle said nothing, but dismounted and started toward the tunnel's mouth on foot, her gun held at the ready. Ryan, seeing her purpose, interposed, raising a hand.

"Good gosh, Miz Harvey," he protested, "you can't go no closer. You'd be burned to a cinder." As an afterthought, he added: "It's work for men, fightin' that blaze—and only right brave ones at that."

Maudie Belle checked, stared at the flaming column musingly. Whether it was the cumulative effect of misfortune, or the bright picture Ryan had painted of Ephaim as an outstanding unit of the home defense, was not apparent, but it was obvious that her initial animus toward her spouse was fading.

"So Ephaim's in there fighting fire," she commented. "He always was a nery li'l critter." She turned to her companion, faint interest in her glance. "You was speaking of pinching off the gas. You mean you ain't struck oil yet?"

The big driller shook his head.

"No, ma'am. She's a gasser, so far. But we got hopes."

Tactfully, he explained the possibilities of the situation. Mrs. Harvey listened attentively, without interrupting once—which was a good sign, if one knew her ways.

Hard-luck, meanwhile, had reached the end of the tunnel with the need for speed alight in his brain. Tensely, he knelt in the dirt, urging the men working there to greater and ever greater efforts.

"You men all get a share in the bonus money, he told them. "Ryan says so. And I got a feeling we'll strike oil."

Whether it was his faith that availed, or luck which had relented at last, will never be known; but at least they hit the well casing—no mean feat when one recalls that their course was charted by a snap compass reading only.

In a trice after bringing up against the metal tube they scooped a space about it, and adjusted the clamps on the casing. Pressure was applied and the steel jaws slowly closed. The roar from above suddenly ceased. A silence that seemed deathlike prevailed.

"Got her," one of the men said in a hushed voice. "Fire's out."

They blocked up the tunnel by the shaft, recovered the clamps and tools, and retired along the passage. Hard-luck debated the wisdom of remaining there after the others had gone, but rejected this craven counsel. Nothing to do but emerge, face Maudie Belle, and take his medi-

cine. If she agreed to let them continue efforts to bring oil in, well and good; if not, it would be merely one more victory chalked up to fate's credit.

HALFWAY to the tunnel's mouth, Hard-luck stopped as, for the second time that day, a rumble sounded far beneath. The next moment the earth shook and a roar came—but not a roar such as the gas had made. It sounded somehow softer, *wetter!*

Afraid almost to trust the hope that beat like a bell in his brain, Hard-luck scrambled to the entrance and crawled out, rising upright, gazing back at the well.

He caught his breath, his eyes popped. A tide of exultation rose up and engulfed him. So young David must have felt when the giant Goliath fell. For from the well mouth rose a dark jet, towering majestically, falling to form in pools and rivulets of liquid wealth. From the watching crew rose a long, heady yell.

"Oil! Oil! She's in!"

Hard-luck straightened, his eyes blazing, and walked like a soul reborn toward where his wife awaited. He was justified of his dreams, a man of mark who had outgamed



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fate, beaten adverse destiny to its knees. He had made his own luck.

Maudie Belle, apparently unmoved by the clamor about her, gazed with qualified approval at the gusher, sniffing the tainted air critically.

"It don't smell nigh so bad as I figured it would," she vouchsafed.

Ryan paused in his jubilation long enough to glance at her curiously.

"It smells right good as a rule—to the owner," he replied dryly.

"Did you say it ought to run about three thousand barrels, Mr. Ryan?"

The driller nodded.

"I reckon. You'll be able to buy yourself a bigger ranch and more cattle, ma'am, if you want."

She said calmly:

"I aim to. 'Twas in my thoughts to tell Ephraim he could drill if he was a mind to, when I got back."

It was at that moment that Hard-luck came up—a new Hard-luck, straight-backed and virile. He looked his wife squarely in the eye.

"Well, Miz Harvey," he drawled, "we don't have to worry no more about finances for a spell. 'Twas a hard grade, but we made it—by pullin' together."

Maudie Belle's glance was quizzical. She smiled faintly and said:

"Yes, we done made a team. But we mustn't forget they's always got to be a lead horse in any work combination." She paused, eyed her husband appraisingly: "What I say is, a man's place is at the head of the table—if he is a man!"

THE IRVINE RANCH

REPUTED to be one of the most valuable ranches in the United States, the Irvine layout straddles the main highway between Santa Ana and San Diego, California. It is a strange and unique conglomeration of the old and the new. Originally it was one of the earliest of the "grant lands," its history going back to the days when California was under the Spanish flag. For a century it was entirely cow range, but the discovery and development of abundant surface water changed all that fifty or sixty years ago, and now, from what the casual traveler sees, it is a vast checkerboard of orange groves and sugar beet fields.

But back of this rather narrow belt of highly cultivated valley land the ranch contains miles of chaparral cow range, as primitive as it was when the first longhorns were turned into it. That part of the ranch is seldom seen, as strangers are not encouraged to nose around.

Trespassers and cow thieves are serious problems on all these ranches that are fairly close to large centers of population. With a bootleg market for beef so handy, rustlers have a habit of killing cattle and carting it to town at high speed. An unwatched bunch of baby beef near a line fence is an invitation to a thousand dollars' worth of grand larceny, and cowboys diligently ride fence with guns on their hips. Rustlers haven't yet learned to travel faster than a bullet.

On the Irvine ranch we have another contrast—in land values. Good orange groves, and the Irvine groves are really prime, have an estimated value of three thousand dollars an acre, and up. Chaparral cow range is worth about two dollars an acre, if you have several thousand acres of it.

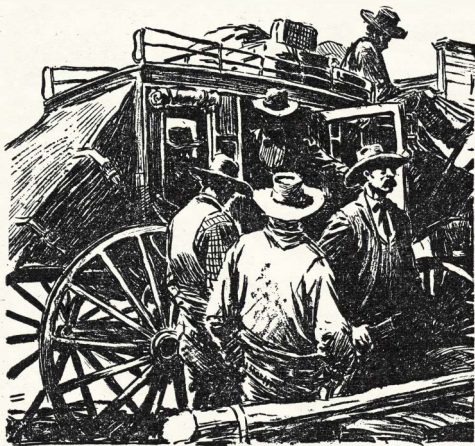
C. L. M.

Interesting And True

By H. FREDRIC YOUNG



Mr. Young will pay one dollar for any usable Western "Interesting And True" features which readers may send him in care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Return postage must be included for suggestions found unsuitable.



GUNFIRE GOLD IN SILVER TOWN

PART I

CHAPTER I.

SILVER AND GRASS.

LEANING idly against one of the posts that supported the arcade in front of the Oriental Hotel in Mesa Bend, where the twice-weekly stage always halted, "Black" Moran stood gazing down Boom

Street and out across the hills. His brooding eyes followed the winding, dusty road along which the stage would come, rounding the butte by Discovery Point to lumber, creaking and groaning, into the little center of humanity that was Mesa Bend.

This hour was between times, Black thought, in the history of Mesa Bend.



By **ELI COLTER**

Author of "Two And Two Make Five," etc.

He saw the town clearly, without favor or prejudice, for what it was; set as a dull and dubious gem in the center of an almost endless domain of rocky, dun-colored hills, semidesert, and green valleys. Mesa Bend had been founded by cattlemen and it had subsisted on the intermittent trade of cattlemen, until, a few months previously, Louie Clumm had picked up a bit of jagged, corroding brown rock with streaks of a greenish tinge between gray-white blotches.

"Silver!" the bartender at the Dark Crystal had said, and Black

Moran had known, from that minute, that the calm and peaceful existence of Mesa Bend and of the surrounding open range was doomed.

Black Moran knew that Mesa Bend country from the Dragoon Mountains to the Simon Hills, and from the canyon to the border. He could see it now in his mind's eye, stretching for monotonous miles of open range, open range on which a few hardy cattlemen with more optimism than caution ran their herds. In the valleys the stock did well, and it was possible for a limited number to survive on the desert

plains; but the ranchers often cursed the barren, rocky hills where grew only stunted bushes of tough sage, scattering scrub trees, and countless cacti with their vicious, stinging spines.

But it was in those hills, Black remembered, that Louie Clumm had picked up that bit of rock that was to prove as potentially explosive as a stick of dynamite. The rock had been assayed, and found to run thousands of dollars to the ton. Word of the find had spread like wildfire, and Black Moran scowled to himself as he recalled the feverish rush that had responded to that cry of "Silver!"

From far and near men had flocked in; from Naco, down by the border, and from the plains of Kansas; mining men, who knew ore when they saw it; men from burned-out farms who knew only hope, and gambling men who knew that, where silver was, there, also, was wealth for them.

BLACK MORAN had watched them come with a dubious frown, had watched the changing scene uneasily. On the plains and in the valleys surrounding Mesa Bend there were still cattlemen, whose tough, hard-bitten riders rode herd on unnumbered white-faces; but, in the town of Mesa Bend, and in the nearby mines nestled in the baked and barren hills, there were also miners, in whose veins burned the fever aroused by the precious white metal, and in the saloons and gambling halls were the gamblers whose hearts beat fast to the tune of easy money. All the various men and women who follow in the wake of any big discovery were there, and seemed to fill all the other available space around and in the town.

Between them they formed two separate and distinct factions, and Black Moran shook his head in grim foreboding as he turned the situation over in his mind. Two hostile factions they were, one knowing only the lure of the buried silver and the labor of wresting it from its rocky bed, the other aware only of the vast, engulfing silence of the plains, and the necessity for jealously guarding the cattle which browsed there.

As yet the two factions had not clashed openly; as yet neither had encroached too seriously upon the domain of the other; but Black Moran knew that each faction had already reached a point of being violently resentful toward the presence of the other, and he sensed the tense atmosphere of approaching conflict. He had been sensing it and getting ready for it now for months. Strange, perhaps, but in all that mad multitude, Black Moran alone realized and felt the throb and power of the storm to come.

He straightened from his post in front of the hotel, adjusted his position a little, and swerved his gaze to the board walks and the buildings along the street. Evening was supplanting the day. The day-shift men, grimy and tired, had come up out of the stopes of the Big Betty Mine, and were milling about on the short main street, each intent on wending his way to his own favorite spot of relaxation and refreshment. Under the arcade, which shaded the entire corner by the Oriental Hotel, the crowd was so packed that men jostled one another in passing. Black heard behind him numerous good-natured greetings, jovial slaps on the back, gibing and railing calls between friends, all mingled with the buzzing monotone that is the voice of a crowd.

But the hum of human voices penetrated Moran's consciousness only vaguely. His naturally dark countenance, shaded deeper by sun and wind, was impassive, his mind intent on the arrival of the stage. Above the buzzing of the voices there was a sudden sound that made him tense within and hold his breath. It was the voice of "Bull" Dillon, raised in a rasping roar that bore no least hint of good nature, no slightest trace of friendship.

Bull Dillon, burly cattleman from up by the Dragoons, stood there in the packed crowd under the arcade and loosed the first devastating bolt of the imminent storm in six hot words shouted at a slim Spaniard.

Black Moran's facial muscles tightened slightly, but he did not turn his head as Dillon's furious words cut the air like a lightning flash, and a stark hush blanketed the buzzing tongues of the crowd.

The six words Dillon shouted were fighting words. "Get out of my way, greaser!"

THE venom and the fury in his voice were clear, like the sulphurous fumes of some deadly concoction suddenly brought to the boiling point and exploding with startling abruptness. In the swift hush that fell, movement halted, breathing seemed to cease, and every eye that could find Bull Dillon widened upon him. For, in that appalling instant, every man in the crowd suddenly knew what Black Moran had known for weeks; that a wild and devastating storm was about to break over their heads. They stared at Dillon, chilled and panic-stricken. Black Moran alone did not turn his head to look at Bull Dillon.

Dillon himself seemed oblivious of every one but the man he had in-

sultingly called "greaser." He would have pushed the Spaniard roughly aside had the other man not stepped lithely out of his way, then paused, waiting for Dillon to pass. But the cattleman did not pass. He whirled and faced the Spaniard, his heavy-lusted face flushed with anger.

"Listen, Lombardi!" Dillon's harsh voice broke the tense silence. "For the last time, I'm tellin' you to keep off my range! Dig all you want to in these rock hills around Mesa Bend, but them plains and valleys out there is cattle country, and you dirty miners and prospectors are goin' to keep out of 'em!"

Moran felt his nerves go taut in the aching silence that hung in the air. For almost a full minute after Dillon ceased speaking, a man could have heard a rabbit's footsteps. It was the Spaniard's move. A hundred pairs of eyes were on Lombardi now. The Spaniard bowed stiffly, the lids half closed over his glittering black eyes. His voice was so low that only those standing very close heard clearly the reply that he made to the belligerent cattleman.

"Beeg Bull Dillon talks loud," Lombardi said; and Moran heard beneath the silken surface of the Spaniard's outward tone a slight warning rasp that reminded him of the buzz of a sidewinder's rattles. "And he forgets, perhaps," Lombardi went on evenly, "that he does not own the range. It is open range. I have seen good ore to the north. To-morrow, at sunrise, perhaps, I shall make the prospector's pile of stones on a rich claim."

Still Black Moran did not turn, but, knowing the men gathered there behind him, he could view in his mind's eye the entire scene taking place, quite as well as if he were watching it.

Dillon took a step toward the

Spaniard; his thick lips moved, his wide mouth opened to speak.

Then somebody broke the spell; a man at the upper edge of the arcade cried out excitedly:

"Hey, the stage is comin'!"

In that instant, in answer, the voice of the crowd rose again, almost in a gasp of relief, and the throng surged toward the street, sweeping around and past Black Moran, who, a head taller than the tallest around him, could still look over them and find his view of the street unobstructed.

Thus it was Moran alone who caught Dillon's threatening retort, muffled by the rising noise of the crowd: "A pile of stones, greaser, and you'll be under them!"

Then Dillon himself turned, and glanced down the street toward the oncoming stage. In another three minutes, with pounding hoofs, jangling harness, rumbling wheels, and creaking gear, the lumbering stage would pull up before the Oriental Hotel with its mail and passengers.

Black Moran, impassive, still stood by the arcade post. His head was turned sidewise toward the advancing stage, and his dark eyes, half closed, seemed, by lack of all expression, to evidence his disinterestedness in everything and every one around him. Although he appeared utterly unaware of the fact that his presence there, at that particular time, had attracted a great deal of attention, he was fully cognizant of it and of the reason for it. A thousand times the stage had arrived and departed without so much as drawing an idle glance from the silent and brooding man now standing by the arcade post; certainly never before had it impelled him to take a place at its stopping point and patiently await its arrival.

His quiet vigil there was arousing

comment, and he heard, without striving deliberately to listen to them, whispered conjectures as to the significance of his presence.

He heard the voice of Lotta Miller, wife of the Big Betty Mine engineer, directing a carelessly loud whisper to the woman beside her.

"That's Black Moran, there by that post. I wonder what he's expecting on the stage?"

"And who is Black Moran?" the other woman asked.

"My dear!" Lotta Miller's voice was almost shocked. "Wouldn't we all like to know! He's the dark horse of Mesa Bend. Though they won't admit it, practically all the men in town are afraid of him, and all the cattlemen out on the range except Bull Dillon seem to think he's some sort of god——"

LOTTA MILLER'S voice was drowned in the roar that went up from the crowd as the six-horse stage bounded up before the Oriental, and the thronging men and women swayed back only far enough for animals and vehicle to reach their stopping place. The excited milling about increased, but still Black Moran did not move.

A miner, forced backward by those shifting quickly to make way for the stage passengers, stepped heavily upon Moran's toes. The miner turned his head and looked up, intending to apologize, and then he saw upon whose toes he had trod.

"Oh! Sorry!" he stammered. Then he moved hastily aside, prodded the ribs of the men nearest him, and said something hurriedly in a sharp undertone. Moran did not catch the words, but the result they brought was almost startling.

In mere seconds the packed space between Moran and the coach was clear, and men stood lined on each

side of the suddenly formed path as if waiting the passing of a parade. Then the door of the stagecoach opened.

A thin smile barely touched Moran's lips. His eyes, grown suddenly hawklike in their intentness, were upon that open stage door as the passengers began to emerge from their cramped quarters. At sight of the first person to appear, Moran's thin smile became more pronounced. The passenger first descending from the stage was a round, fat Chinaman, with a beaming, good-natured face, and with hands and brow oily from sweat raised in the hot, close interior of the vehicle.

Moran's amused smile vanished as the second passenger appeared and stepped to the ground, a big man with a grim, unreadable face, a man whose business and identity were openly proclaimed by the United States marshal's badge pinned to the front of his leather vest. As the marshal passed Moran, his gaze rested for a moment on that dark, impassive face; then, his expression blank, the officer moved on. Two more men emerged from the stage to follow the marshal past Moran.

To the first of the two Moran accorded the merest passing glance. The other, however, he viewed a little more sharply, classifying him instantly by his appearance.

Another gambler, Moran told himself grimly; probably August Arletta. He'd heard that Arletta was on his way to Mesa Bend. He was still covertly following the newly arrived gambler with an uneasy gaze, absorbed in his thoughts, when the next passenger alighted from the stage. Moran did not see this man emerge from the open door, stare at him, grin, and then start swiftly toward him. He was unaware

of the other's presence till a hilarious greeting brought his mind abruptly back from contemplation of the gambler who was disappearing into the crowd. Moran shifted his gaze and straightened quickly at sound of the words.

"Well, if it isn't Moran! You old son of a wall-eyed alligator! Imagine you being the first person I'd run into here! Or did the little birdies tell you I was coming?"

Moran eyed him coolly, but there was no smile upon his face. The other man was tall, almost as tall as Moran himself. He was well built, but with that look of softness that easy living makes so evident in a big man, and that look was accentuated by his flashy dress, garments of pseudo-frontier type that men of Mesa Bend labeled "store clothes."

"Well?" he boomed impatiently. "What the devil's eating you, Black? Don't stand there so infernally——"

"There are ladies present," Moran cut in quietly, "so slow up before you get started. No, no one told me you were coming. I certainly wouldn't have expected to see you here, Vallance. I was waiting for somebody else."

Vallance glanced about, as if to assure himself that there really were ladies present. He saw three. He grinned, and swung his gaze back to Moran.

"Good old Galahad Moran! Or was it Chesterfield who was always looking out for the ladies? No matter. So you were waiting for somebody else, were you? Hm-m-m."

He turned his gaze quickly to the stagecoach. But Moran's eyes had already taken in the disturbing fact that there were no more passengers to emerge from that open door.

The coach was empty.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN AT HEATH.

VALLANCE chuckled, and shook his head at Moran's inscrutable inspection of the empty stage. "Couldn't have been waiting for that swell-looking girl that got off at Heath to take care of a wounded gun fighter, could you? Let's see—Nellie, I believe her name was. What a gal! I could have ridden that stage a long way with her and never noticed the heat and the confounded bounces and bumps." This evidently was only a gibe. He couldn't imagine Black Moran waiting anywhere for any woman.

Moran's gaze moved from the empty coach to come back and rest on Vallance's grinning face. "Nellie," he repeated. "Hm-m-m. Did she have brown eyes, real blond hair, and a small scar like a dimple at the left corner of her mouth?"

Vallance felt a little inner sense of start. So Moran really had been expecting her, then. He'd been certain that she was merely bluffing, trying to intimidate him and repulse his advances by the threat of the name of Black Moran. Black Moran, as he remembered, didn't go for the ladies. But—well, all things could change. A strange light gleamed in Vallance's eyes as he answered, still keeping to his bantering tone:

"That's the description, my boy! And what hair, what eyes, and——"

"You can omit the rhapsodies," Moran interrupted coldly. "How did she happen to get off at Heath?"

Vallance shrugged, and the strange light in his eyes burned calculatingly. He spread his hands in a gesture both deprecating and graceful.

"Well, it was like this. We

stopped to change horses. The passengers were going to get out and stretch their legs, but just about that time there was a ruckus started in front of the saloon where we were stopped. The shotgun guard closed the coach door and warned the passengers that they'd better stay inside, there might be shooting.

"Might be, my eye! There was! Nasty shooting, too. A young fellow standing with his back toward the coach, not twenty feet away, drew his shooting iron just as another fellow came barging out of the saloon with both guns roaring. The young fellow fired one shot, and clipped the other jasper right between the eyes. But not before the other jasper had put two shots into him.

"The young fellow half turned as he went down, and we could see his face from the coach. This Nellie gal let out a yell, and before any of us could raise a hand she was out of the stage and down on the ground, with the young fellow's head in her lap. The hostlers had been pretty fast changing horses, and by then we were ready to roll. The driver went over to the girl and told her we were pulling out. I didn't hear what she said to him, but he said she told him to go ahead, that she was staying there, though she might come on later. So what could the driver do? She stayed. We came. You waited. No gal. Sorry, but that's the way of it."

Moran's face remained a mask. "You talked to her?" he inquired. "That is, before the stage reached Heath?"

VALLANCE nodded, and his eyes narrowed a trifle. Whatever might be between Black Moran and the Nellie of the stage-coach, it wasn't his business to ask,

and he fancied he wouldn't find it too healthy to probe into things Moran didn't wish to explain. Vallance answered blandly: "Oh, yes, you know how it is on a long ride. You talk to the other passengers to keep from being bored to death."

"Did she say anything about me, or about why she was coming to Mesa Bend?" Moran asked.

"Nary a word," Vallance answered. "But to heck with the stage. Is this any way to greet an old-time pal? I ask you! I'm sorry as thunder that your girl disappointed you, but after all, it's no fault of mine. You're an old-timer here, I understand, and know all the cow trails. I picked this spot to make a stake. Suppose you loosen up, and have a drink with me, and show me around the diggings."

Moran gave him a meager smile. An old-time pal, Vallance had called him. Well, it really wasn't so long ago that he and Vallance had been pals, at that. Ten years isn't so long. It had been a kind of friendship to remember with some regret for its passing, too, Moran admitted. A stanch friendship, a good friendship, between two men who had nothing to buy and nothing to sell between them, and who would have given all or nothing with equal nonchalance at the other's need. No, ten years wasn't so long, Moran mused, as he stood there studying Vallance's face, while Vallance waited for some reply to his suggestion that they have a drink and see the diggings. But a great deal had happened in those ten years, during which neither man had seen the other, and those years had worked a subtle change in Bob Vallance.

Subtle! Moran studied the new arrival. Yes, the change was subtle, also ominous. Vallance had always

been smooth-tongued, light-hearted. He'd always been scheming, too, although he had masked the serious intent of that scheming with a continuous barrage of banter. The man had a peculiarly ingratiating surface lovability that had forced Moran's liking despite frequent misgivings as to things Bob Vallance might prove capable of doing, given the opportunity. Moran thought of an old song: "Love me, hate me, or pass me by, but take me as I am." Bob Vallance would never be anything but what he was.

"Well, well, well!" Vallance cut into his disturbed moment of musing and hesitation. "Why all the dallying? Do we drink, or dine, or do the town? Come, come, my good man. Speak up! 'Just one word,' the maiden faltered, 'just one word to slake my soul.' Make it yes or no. Or don't you slake a soul? Maybe it's thirst I'm thinking about."

Moran smiled in spite of himself. "How do you intend to make your stake, Bob?"

Vallance laughed. "Oh, is that what's troubling your conscience? Why, any way I can make it, my boy—honestly. Honestly! You figure that one out. Come on, long face. Let's see what a drink will do for your disposition." He gripped Moran's arm, and started toward the doors of the Dark Crystal Saloon, and Moran fell into step with him. The saloon adjoined the Oriental Hotel.

AS the two men made their way through the thinning crowd, Vallance glanced about and caught the curious glances that had been directed at him and Moran, and he realized, suddenly, how oblivious, how utterly unheeding of the

men grouped about them, Moran had been. But that was like Black Moran. Moran had changed in those ten years, Vallance was thinking; he was a little harder, a little grimmer, a little more silent, if that were possible. Further cogitation over any change in Moran was cut short by a lithe, dark man with a Latin face, a man who stepped close and touched Moran on the arm.

Moran paused. "Yes, Tony? This is Tony Lombardi, Vallance. Did you want something, Tony?"

"Si!" The Spaniard's swart face was intent and earnest as he lifted his gaze to Vallance's countenance. "Señor Vallance, the pleasure is mine. You will pardon me, please? I wish to speak to Señor Moran."

"Sure, sure!" Vallance waved an indulgent hand. "Go right ahead. I'll wait here."

"Can't imagine what he wants," Moran said in an undertone. "Excuse me. Be with you in a minute, Bob." He followed Lombardi a few feet to one side.

Lombardi flicked a boring glance at the men under the arcade and on the board walk. Then he moved a little closer to Moran, and his voice dropped to so low a pitch that even Moran barely heard what he said.

"You do not know me, Señor Moran? Only that I am Tony the prospector, who have come to Mesa Bend a little while ago, eh?"

Moran shook his head. "Wrong. I recognized you instantly, the first day I saw you here. But I didn't know whether you wanted to be recognized. You were once foreman of the vaqueros of Don Sonalo, in Sonora."

Lombardi nodded quickly, and relief leaped into his black eyes. "Si. I was not sure you would remember. We talked much when

you came to buy the cattle from Don Sonalo, but that was a long way from here."

"Not so far," said Moran, and his gaze searched the Spaniard's face. "And you didn't call me aside to remind me that we had met before. Out with it. What's on your mind, Tony?"

Lombardi's dark face seemed visibly to harden. "Do you know who stole those cattle, señor? Do you know who stole from Sonalo the money you paid for them, and who killed Don Sonalo, and his men, too?"

"I have a faint idea," Moran admitted dryly. "Why? Do you happen to have something more than just an idea about it?"

"Si! I know!" The Spaniard's eyes glittered like obsidian in the sun. "*Quié sabe, señor?* I know. I know who raided the rancho, and I have found him here."

"So? Hm-m-m." Moran's eyes drilled into the Spaniard's. "So you come prospecting, do you, Tony? Alone?"

Lombardi shook his head. "*Nada!* I come with Pedro and Carlos Manuelito. As soon as we had buried the others, we come, trailing the herd. And you—you have trail the herd too, *si?* And I see you here, and I say now—now everything is finish, everything is clean up queek! But, nothing happens. What has turn up that the *hombre valiente*, the so-brave Black Moran, stand idle by, while a thief and murderer drives Moran's cattle on Moran's range!"

NOT so fast, Tony!" Moran's face whitened under its depth of tan. "Once in a while these little matters of adjustment take time. So far there has

been nothing I could do but stand by, and wait. I'd only get in over my head if I started anything. There is nothing to do until I can lay my hands on some convincing proof."

"Nothing to do?" The Spaniard's voice was almost taunting. "The señor can still shoot?"

"Just a little better now than I could then, Tony." Moran smiled thinly, and laid a hand on the Spaniard's shoulder. "But I'm afraid the time has passed when we can settle our disputes that way. We have the law here now, you know."

"The law! Bah!" Lombardi spat out the word contemptuously. "A law that drinks at the bar with the strong, and laughs in its sleeve at the cries of the weak. Is that any kind of law to make the punishment for great wrongs like ours, señor?"

Moran shrugged. "You may be right, Tony. But—we'll give the law a chance. And if it fails us—well, I just told you that I can shoot a little better now than I did then. Where are Pedro and Carlos?"

Lombardi frowned darkly. "They hide in the hills. Carlos is the brother of Señora Sonalo. Pedro loved Don Sonalo like a son. They are the stepbrothers. Both are very bitter. They would kill every gringo they see, if I did not watch them. But I cannot watch them every time, señor, and they have a little trouble at a place near Apache. So—they hide in the hills."

He waved a hand in an indefinite gesture toward the frowning ramparts of the Dragoons. "And you, señor? Are you afraid that we name names? Do you not know upon whose range your cattle run?"

Moran laughed, and it was an odd sound, metallic, menacing.

"Certainly I know. As well as I can know. But my knowing is not enough. There must be proof, I tell you. Have you got it? Can you prove that the cattle on Dillon's range are the same ones that were stolen in Sonora from Don Sonalo? Can you prove that Dillon led that raid?"

"Si!" The Spaniard's eyes flashed. "*Seguro!* And that Bull Dillon pays his riders with the gold you give Don Sonalo for those cattle. So, is it enough? You will make the move, and give this law the chance?"

Moran laughed again, the same hard, menacing laugh. "Are you asking me? But this is neither the time nor the place to make preparations, Tony. My friend is waiting for me. I'll see you shortly."

"Si. Very queek, señor. Do not delay. I think Bull Dillon suspects maybe where I come from, and why I prospect for a claim on his range."

"I'll see you to-morrow," Moran promised grimly. "You can depend on that."

"I think you better not wait till to-morrow," said Lombardi ominously. "Bull Dillon, he have the bullet that carries my name, señor. I must talk to you queek. I must lay these proof in your hands. I see you after you talk with your friend."

"Well, all right," Moran agreed. "I'll get away from him as soon as I decently can. I haven't seen him for years and I'll have to chin with him for a little while. But I'll be with you as soon as I can make it. Stick around."

"Si, señor." Relief blanked the worried lines in Lombardi's face. "I steak around. Adios."

"Adios, Tony. Be seeing you." And Moran turned to join Vallance,

who stood waiting impatiently by the entrance to the Dark Crystal.

CHAPTER III.

DEATH IN THE DARK CRYSTAL.

THE two men went inside the saloon, and Vallance said lightly, as the doors swung together behind them: "I thought you were going to talk all day. What'd the greaser want?"

"Don't call him a greaser!" Moran said sharply. "He's a Spaniard, and a darned decent one. What he wanted couldn't possibly concern you. What'll you drink?" And he turned to face Vallance as they drew up before the bar.

"Sorry." Vallance's tone was still light, almost mocking. "I didn't mean to butt into your business, Black. I'll take it straight, about three fingers."

Moran nodded, gave an order to the bartender, and leaned idly against the bar. His back was to the room, but he was scrutinizing Vallance's face so that, not even in the bar mirror did he see Tony Lombardi enter the saloon and pass unobtrusively down the room to a place just beyond the dice table.

"I thought you were drinking with me," Vallance said, as the bartender came toward him and Moran with bottle and glasses.

"You can buy the next one." Moran picked up his glass, filled both his and Vallance's, and set the bottle back on the bar. "Well, here's happy days, Bob."

"Happy days, old-timer."

"Speaking of your plans, what have you in mind?" Moran set down his empty glass. "Mining, prospecting, or ranching?"

"Anything I can get into that's profitable," Vallance answered

promptly. "There ought to be a plenty of openings around here."

"Yes, I suppose," agreed Moran. "But, anything that's profitable covers a lot of territory, Bob, and there are certain procedures around here that are none too healthy."

"So? Well, go on. Isn't mining healthy?"

"I'd call it doubtful," Moran answered dryly. "It's probably healthy enough in the hills that have already been opened up. But the richest veins lie well out from Mesa Bend, and it's not likely that you or I will ever see the day that a pick digs into them."

Vallance frowned, turned his empty glass over in his hand, laid down on the bar payment for a second drink, and picked up the whisky bottle. "There's a lot you're insinuating, and I'm dumb sometimes. Can't you put it into plain words? What's to keep men from going after the richer stuff out away from the town?"

"Cattle land," Moran said tersely. "And these ranchers aren't to be fooled with. They were running cattle on this range before anybody ever dreamed of finding ore here. They're hard; they've had to be, to survive on that range west of the Dragoons. They had an almighty tough time getting a start there, and they aren't going to submit to the invasion of miners and prospectors without a battle."

"O. K. I'll stay off their blamed cattle range." Vallance shrugged. "There are still the mines that have already been opened up. One of them certainly ought to have room for another good man, and I'm good, if I do say it myself. Where's the best chance of an opening?"

"In the Big Betty Mine, I should think," Moran answered. He swallowed the drink Vallance had bought

and stood staring down at the empty glass in his hand, as if he were trying to make up his mind just how much to say. "That's the biggest mine around here, and it's really the only one that amounts to anything. You can see the mouth of the main tunnel at the edge of town. The drifts and stopes of the Betty undermine most of the hill to the south, and about half the town."

"And the other mines don't amount to much, eh?"

"They don't, Bob. Narrow veins, all of them. I wouldn't bother with any of the little fellows. You might see Roy Miller, engineer of the Big Betty. That's the only one of those holes in the ground that can continue to be profitable, and—safe."

"Safe!" Vallance looked up sharply. "Just what do you mean by that?"

MORAN shook his head and spread his hands eloquently. "Don't ask me, and forget that I said it. But you'd be smart to take my advice. Let's have another drink."

Several other men were gathered along the bar, and Moran abruptly became aware of some one crowding at his elbow for room to order a drink. He moved over closer to Vallance, and looked sidewise from the corner of his eye to see who had come up. He saw the thin, florid face of the gambler he had guessed to be August Arletta. If the fellow was Arletta, his advent boded no good for Mesa Bend. Arletta's reputation was none too savory, but he had always managed by one devious route or another to keep clear of the law and to avoid the impact of stray bullets.

Moran pushed aside his glass and said in an undertone to Vallance: "Let's get out of here."

"Have another drink first," Vallance protested. "Traveling by stage is dry business."

Moran frowned. "Well, I suppose you're old enough to know your own business, Bob, but it seems to me we've had enough. If I were in your shoes, I wouldn't take too many too close together till I'd got the lay of the land."

Vallance laughed, and the strange surface charm that was his beamed from his good-looking face. "All right, uncle. I'll stay fairly sober; that is, after to-night. But good gosh, man, can't we celebrate my arrival and our reunion with just one more drink now?"

Moran smiled, and capitulated. "Just one, and no more for me."

Vallance poured the drinks and paid for them, and was about to lift the glass to his lips, when he felt Moran stiffen against him. Looking up, he saw Moran gazing intently into the mirror back of the bar. His eyes swung to follow Moran's stare, and in the mirror he saw clearly the tableau that had suddenly plunged the room into silence.

Just inside the swing doors stood a hulking, heavy-jowled fellow, taut as a snake ready to strike. His eyes were fixed on the dice table, his hand resting on the butt of the gun in his holster.

Moran's gaze darted to the dice table, but three men stood close together between him and Tony Lombardi, so that he could not see the Spaniard there, half crouched in an attitude of defense, eyes hard on the man in the doorway. Moran's gaze, puzzled, wary, came back to the hulking man in the doorway.

"Who's the big bruiser?" whispered Vallance.

"Bull Dillon," answered Moran. "Keep still. Dillon's drunk, and

I'm afraid somebody's liable to get hurt."

"Afraid?"

"Right! Things aren't ready to break yet. There's too much at stake. Keep still, will you?"

MORAN'S dark face had become a little pale. He alone knew just how much was at stake. There weren't only his range and his cattle, the brutal massacre of Don Sonalo and most of his men, and the theft of the money he had paid into Sonalo's hands, to be considered. These things had been the only consideration when he had laboriously and doggedly trailed what he believed to be his herd, to that range west of the Dragoons. But he had found in Dillon's herds no cattle branded with Don Sonalo's Half-moon S. All of the cattle Dillon ran were unbranded, save for the brand Dillon himself had put on them, the Triangle B.

But the cattle Moran had purchased from Sonalo had been unbranded, too, save for sixty-odd head, and Dillon could easily have disposed of those few. Moran could have sworn that those were the same white-faces for which he had paid hard cash, down there in Sonora; but by the time he had reached that conclusion Bull Dillon had ensconced himself securely on the range west of the Dragoons, and he had won the favor of the other cattlemen with his apparently jovial, blustering good humor and his display of affluence. He had already become a power on that range before Black Moran had tracked him down. And what proof had Black Moran? None, save the certainty in his own mind that a hundred small details fitted together.

Being sure of his ground, he had

set himself to haunting the town and the hills till he could wrest from men or time or circumstances the proof he sought, and he had been untiring in his search for the slightest clew. It was while engaged in that search that he unearthed many other things, and learned of the dangerous situation that was swiftly moving toward a breaking point in the section around Mesa Bend.

He discovered that the whole range was in danger of spoliation, the lives and fortunes of all its inhabitants at stake; and, though he knew what he had to do, he had as yet found no way in which it could be done. Also, he had found no clew to the vital proof he sought, and how dare he move without it? There was, he knew only too well, always the chance that he could be wrong, that Bull Dillon might be exactly what he seemed to be, and that he, Moran, had somewhere missed the trail and come at last upon the wrong herd. He was too just a man to strike in haste and risk the blow falling upon some one innocent. Accordingly he had withheld his hand, and the storm had gathered until now, it seemed about ready to break.

And in that eleventh hour Tony Lombardi had come out of the silence to say that he had the proof in his hands.

Moran felt a surge of triumph, as he stood there by the bar, watching Dillon in the mirror. Dillon was in another towering rage at somebody. Somebody probably was going to get hurt, right enough, and Moran wondered swiftly whether or not that was a thing to fear, after all. If Dillon grew rash enough to precipitate some blatant atrocity, he might get himself in disfavor and clear the way for the working out of Moran's own plans.

Moran stood still, and waited, and held his breath to see what was coming.

He saw that Dillon carried a coiled lariat slung around his left arm; and he saw also, above the curve of the swing doors, the blaze face of Dillon's horse standing near the entrance to the saloon. Before he had time to wonder at that, Dillon's voice boomed through the room and echoed against the adobe walls.

"This is show-down, you miners and prospectors! I've warned a dozen of you to keep off the range. I've told you that you're ruinin' our water supply, and our cattle are sufferin' for it. I've told you it had to stop. You wouldn't listen. By gad, you'll listen now! Is this warnin' loud enough?"

DILLON took one swift step forward. His weight on the light-timbered floor shook the glassware on the back of the bar. His hand flashed up, the gun roaring as it cleared the holster. Another report almost blended with the first, coming from beyond the dice table. Dillon fired again, twice.

Only then did Moran see Tony Lombardi, as the Spaniard swayed

into his range of vision and crumpled grotesquely, easing himself to the floor like a man stiffly lying down to rest. Moran's dismayed eyes widened, and in the next instant Bull Dillon's voice filled the room, drowning out the last faint echoes of gunfire.

"I warned that greaser five times to stay off my range! You heard him defy me out there in front of the Oriental just before the stage came in. Said he'd mark his claim on my land with a pile of stones at sunup to-morrow. Well, I'll pile the stones for him—over his grave!"

As lithely as the dead Spaniard once might have moved, Dillon swung his lariat, sailing it accurately toward the motionless body on the floor. It settled around Lombardi's shoulders.

As every other man in the room stood rigid, Dillon backed through the swing doors, vaulted into his saddle, caught the end of the rope in a hitch around the saddle horn, and with a vicious jab of his rowel spurs, sent the horse plunging into the street.

The lariat jerked taut, Lombardi's body spun about in the loose sawdust, shot in a skidding slide along the floor before the bar, knocked



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over a cuspidor, then jerked from sight into the street under the swing doors.

Vallance gave a shaky, gulping sigh. "I'll—I'll have to take another on that," he said jerkily.

The tension broke. The bartender wiped the sweat from his face and reached for another bottle. The dealer at the faro table cleared his throat and announced the next play. A wizened Mexican came from the back of the saloon with his short-handled rake to smooth the sawdust and obliterate the path of Lombardi's departure. The hum of voices rose again.

Black Moran poured himself a stiff drink of whisky and muttered a savage curse. He was as white-faced as his dark skin would permit, and his eyes burned dangerously as he turned them, narrowed and hard, upon Vallance.

"And there goes something I've

worked and waited nearly a year to find. The Spaniard had it, and Bull Dillon must have discovered the fact. It's breaking, boy. Take care of yourself for the next few minutes, and let me alone, will you? I've got some thinking to do."

Vallance frowned and stepped close. "See here, what's it all about? What's comin' off here?"

"I asked you to let me alone for a few minutes, didn't I? Do you have to be knocked down to take a hint?"

"O. K. O. K.! Keep your shirt on!" Vallance moved back, one hand lifted as if to ward off a blow. "I'll hang around till you're ready to talk to me. Over by the dice table. I've got a few dollars I wouldn't mind losing. Give me the high sign when you're ready."

He turned away, toward the table, without a backward look. Moran didn't even see him go."

To be continued in next week's issue.

A Complete Novel, "THE UNHOLY OF JACKSON'S HOLE,"
by M. McCLUER BROWN, in Next Week's Issue.

PERFUME FROM THE TREES

LITTLE do we think that perfume may come from trees, but such is the case. In Graford, Texas, a single plant is capable of manufacturing from cedar logs forty gallons of juice that is used as a base for perfume that eventually sells for fifteen dollars or more an ounce.

Sticks and logs are shredded and boiled in large containers. Then the juice from these is distilled and put into fifty-gallon barrels for export. A cord of cedar wood produces from seven to eight gallons of extract that sells for one dollar and thirty cents a gallon. The Graford plant is the largest in the Southwest.

Foliage from the cedars is distilled also and sold as camphor. Boiled shavings are dried and sold for fuel and to manufacturers of floor sweeps.



Buskin Bronchobuster

By LLOYD ERIC REEVE

Author of "Broken Tracks," etc.

IN the ranch kitchen early that morning, as soon as Pete Wilkins had gone down to the corals, young Billy Mattern made his startling announcement. He blurted it out, and Hugh Mattern, listening, just stared at him in blank amazement. Hugh couldn't believe his own ears.

Billy's freckled face was flushed, his wiry body tense with a stubborn anger as though to resist physically the dumfounded protest he knew must flare from his older brother. But for another instant Hugh's rugged features remained just blankly uncomprehending, and even Billy,

staring obstinately back, looked a little confused, as though the thing he was doing sprang from some violent inner compulsion which he could not himself fully understand. Which was true, though it served only to increase his anger, the baffled need somehow to justify himself. He repeated a little wildly:

"I said I was *leaving*. Ain't it plain enough? Quitting! Going away! Pulling out!"

Hugh spoke then, flatly. "Kid," he said, "that talk's just foolish."

"Yeah?" snorted Billy. "That's what *you* think! Well, I figure different!"

Hugh shook his head in honest bewilderment. "You're sure on the prod," he admitted. "But danged if I can see why. We got a good spread here, grass, water, cattle, a chance to get somewhere. I've had the papers fixed to make you a half owner. And if there's anything else you want, kid, anything at all I can give you——"

"I don't want nothing!" Billy blazed. The reminder of Hugh's generosity, strangely enough, seemed only to inflame that secret resentment. "I don't want this ranch," he added, "or any part of it! All I want is to get out. I'm just telling you I'm leaving, and there ain't nothing more to rag about!"

"But you can't do this!" Hugh protested. "I won't let you!"

"Won't eh?" Billy gave a short laugh, staring defiantly. "How you going to stop me?"

Hugh couldn't answer that. Billy was still a kid, only seventeen, but Hugh knew that if he had made up his mind to leave there was little he could do to prevent it. He said, almost pleadingly, "But you've always done what I wanted before, Billy."

"Well, now I'm doing what I want," Billy retorted. "You don't own me, do you? I'm free, ain't I?"

"Oh, sure," Hugh soothed. "But I——"

"Then it's settled," snapped Billy. "At the end of the week I'm leaving. I'll be on my own and make my own way. You'll see!"

"But why in blazes do you want to be on your own?" Hugh exploded. "You got everything you need right here!"

Billy didn't answer. He just swung on his heel, big spurs clanking, stalked out of the kitchen, and slammed the door.

HUGH stood there, big and solid, staring at that petulantly slammed door. Billy going away, leaving him. It had come like a bolt from the blue, and Hugh still couldn't believe it. Why, for five years now he had worked his fingers to the bone, day and night, fighting blizzard and rain and heat, giving everything his big body and stubborn will had just to make a go of this spread. And what for? To make a home for that kid, see to it he had a future, make good on the job of raising him, which he had shouldered when they both had been orphaned, ten years before.

Hugh had been sixteen then, Billy only seven. It hadn't been easy, at sixteen, raising and protecting and earning enough to feed and clothe a seven-year-old brother. But somehow he had managed it, made it easy for Billy, shouldered all the responsibility, the heaviest tasks. He had guarded and fought for the youngster like a mother bear with a cub. Billy's welfare and future had come to be the biggest and most important thing in his life, a job he'd started and had to finish. Five years past he had taken up this land, ran cows on the side while riding for the Bar 20, launched himself, at last, as an independent cattleman. He had a vision of himself and Billy in the future, cattle kings, a great Mattern Brothers Ranch.

And now Billy, just when everything was shaping up so fine, was, for no reason on earth, simply walking out on him, leaving him. Announcing almost furiously he was leaving, as though some long repressed anger had at last burst uncontrollably and blindly to the surface.

Billy once had been laughing and reckless, full of boyish deviltry. Smart and quick. The two of them

had eaten and slept and ridden together, and Billy had seemed almost to worship the ground on which Hugh stood. But not any more. Hugh realized, now, that this strange restraint had been growing in Billy for months, something increasingly resentful and brooding and rebellious, almost as though Billy was coming secretly to hate him.

Billy hating him—but why, *why?*

Hugh didn't know. He couldn't seem to think; he was oddly stunned, as though Billy had amazingly struck him a sudden and savage blow on the jaw. Still bewildered, he walked forward, opened the door, and stepped out into the crisply sparkling prairie dawn. A red sun had just risen over tawny eastern hills; the air was pungent with sage and the arid fragrance of seared, straw-colored grass. Hugh walked around a corner of the house, and then stopped abruptly, a little tense, staring down at the corrals.

Pete Wilkins was still there, and so was Billy. Billy had just saddled a long-legged, red-eyed, hammer-headed roan, was swinging defiantly aboard. It was the one horse which Hugh had told Billy to leave alone, not to ride. Simply because he didn't want the kid to break his neck just to show off how good he was, because that roan was black-hearted and treacherous with a loco killing streak that could flash to the surface suddenly, when least expected.

But it was too late to stop Billy now; he had already swung up and, as he hit the saddle, the roan reared instantly with a wicked squeal. It came down, stiff-legged, with a thud, and burst into a frenzy of violent pitching and snorting, ripping up the sod as it hurtled wildly around the ranch yard. Hugh watched narrowly, tense, as always, when any danger threatened Billy, but he

couldn't keep the admiration from his eyes. For the kid was good, plenty good. Holding the reins lightly, one arm extended, he was taking everything that wild roan had to offer, riding high, wide, and handsome, with an eager control born, for the moment, of his own boyish need somehow to conquer something. He rode the horse down, and, a moment later, pulled up its head, sending it away into a smooth lope across the grassy, sun-glistening plain.

HUGH, his eyes still faintly narrowed, walked on down to the corrals. Pete Wilkins grinned up at him, a bit sardonically. Pete, a gray-haired little rider with an almost uncanny cow sense, wrinkled, wiry and bow-legged, had ridden for Hugh three years now, and had already become a sort of ranch fixture.

"Hugh, that kid can sure ride," Pete chortled now. "He just took that jug head apart and put him together again!"

"I told him to stay off that horse," Hugh growled. "He'll get his neck broken first thing we know."

"Might be better to break his neck than his heart at that," remarked Pete.

Hugh looked up a little sharply. "What's that?"

Pete sauntered into the corral, uncoiled his rope, and shook out a loop behind him. He watched the horses milling and snorting at the far side of the inclosure. "Billy tells me he's pulling out, aims to be on his own," he added, without looking back at Hugh.

"That's what he just told me," Hugh grumbled. "What's got into him, Pete? I can't figure it at all. For ten years I've been doing everything I can for him, and now he just up and says he's leaving."

"Reckon you've answered your own question," decided Pete. His loop leaped forward suddenly, like a striking snake, and neatly snared a dodging bronc. He braced back against the rope, high heels digging into the earth, then walked up along the lariat crooning soothing profanities to the snorting horse. He led it out of the corral, eased his saddle on, talking as he worked, almost as much to himself as Hugh.

"Reckon the kid feels he doesn't amount to much around here," he mused. "Got an uncommon urge to be a man all by himself. Figured he's mostly a dead weight on this spread, Hugh, that you don't need him at all. Like whenever a tough job comes up you're always making him stand back and doing it yourself. Everything he does you do just a little better. Makes him mad without his even knowing why he's mad. Folks claim as how it's a sight better to give than receive. I heard a preacher say that once. Or maybe it was a bartender. No, I don't reckon it could have been a bartender. At any rate, somebody said it, but I'm not so dang sure that it always holds. Maybe if a man's smart he'll learn that sometimes the receiving can be as important even as the giving."

Hugh was leaning against the corral, rolling a cigarette. He asked without looking up, "you telling me I've fallen down on the job, Pete?"

"Not telling you anything," said Pete. He stepped into the saddle, let his horse crow-hop for a minute, then pulled up.

"Always let your horse crow-hop a bit, Hugh," he advised. "Then he'll figure he's having his own way, and he'll work his head off for you. Horses and humans are a lot alike. Like when you stake out a horse. If the rope's uncommon short, so short a horse can lift his head and jerk

straight up, he'll yank the stake right out and run away. But if you put a nice long rope on him, all he can do is pull sideways and he never can get that stake out. Reckon that ought to prove that a long rope always holds better than a short one, such a short one as you've put on Billy, say. I'm making a long circle up past Bear Creek." And Pete wheeled his mount abruptly, loping off at a fast clip.

BILLY MATTERN, in the impetuosity of his nature, was still controlled by his own boyishly reckless moods. That same willful rashness resided in Hugh, too, but Hugh, the older, had, in the experience of his years, learned to subdue and master it. Hugh was mature and Billy wasn't; Hugh could use emotion to shape his ends, while in Billy emotion remained, as yet, only an ungovernable, dazzling flame.

Thinking of Billy all that day, Hugh rode a long southward circle across those sun-shimmering leagues of land, instinctively busy with countless range tasks, branding the occasional calf, looking to grass and water and salt licks, noting and controlling the wide grazing drift of his cattle. He thought, too, of Pete Wilkins, of the salty bits of wisdom spiced through that old cowboy's rambling musings.

Hugh had always considered the ranch chiefly in terms of what it might mean to Billy, had unconsciously found in his gruff devotion to Billy a goal, the vitalizing emotional spark essential, in one form or another, to every man's effort. To lose Billy was to have that spark somehow extinguished, to make even the ranch seem pointless and futile.

Such was the bitterness in Hugh

this day, further intensified by the ironically confusing belief that he had failed Billy only by trying so hard to help him, that he had lost him solely through a too stubborn effort to hold him. There was no anger in him, only this sense of failure and loss, the desire still to understand his brother, to bring back the companionship which had once knitted them so securely together.

But how? A long rope, Pete had said, holds better than a short one. Hugh kept thinking about that.

Having made his decision to leave, Billy Mattern in his youthful stubbornness blindly intended to carry it out. He expected that Hugh would argue with him about it again that night, and, partly in defense against a growing sense of guilt, he had hardened himself to withstand anything Hugh might say. But strangely enough, both during supper and afterward, Hugh made no mention of his leaving at all, acted, in fact, as though nothing unusual had happened.

Billy was somewhat nonplused by this development, like a man all set to resist a blow which confusingly fails to materialize. At first he was almost angered, but then, to his own amazement, felt only aggrieved, suddenly hurt because Hugh was apparently no longer at all concerned over losing him. He refused to join Pete and Hugh in a game of seven-up at the lamplit table, and presently, a little sulkily, snapped a short good night, which Hugh answered pleasantly enough, and stalked off defiantly to bed.

That next morning, however, Hugh made a point of reaching the corrals before Billy. When Billy came down, swaggering a little self-consciously over the clanking of his big spurs, Hugh had already saddled

up the hammer-head roan which Billy had so rebelliously ridden the previous morning. Pete sauntered up, rolling a cigarette and watching the two brothers with mildly speculative eyes.

"I'm riding this jug head to-day, Billy," Hugh announced, somewhat curtly. "Figure I can handle him better than you, and he's a plumb dangerous brute."

ALL Billy's anger returned; his freckled face went ruddy with instant resentment. "You saw me ride him yesterday, didn't you?" he challenged. "And you didn't see him throw me either!"

Hugh shrugged. "Anybody can be lucky once. But I wouldn't want you to chance it again."

"*Lucky?*" Billy exploded. "*Lucky?* Why, why——"

Hugh grinned at him tolerantly, infuriatingly. "You do well enough for a kid, Billy," he explained. "But it takes a grown man to ride a horse like this."

"Why, why dang it," Billy raged, "I'm as good a rider as you, and maybe a lot better! I'd just like to see——" His words trailed off into a choking, unintelligible splutter as Hugh, with another deliberately taunting grin, sprang into the saddle.

Again that big horse reared instantly, plunged down with an earth-shaking thud. Again he skyrocketed into a bewildering whirl of fiendish pitching, stem-winding, plunging, and fence-cornering all over the yard. He squealed and bawled. Leather snapped and cracked. Dust rose in a thick swirl.

Hugh sat straight up, just as Billy had yesterday, one arm extended, reins lightly held. For an instant, as usual, he seemed the brute's complete master, riding smoothly, with a

lithe loose swaying balance. But only for an instant, and then, suddenly, amazingly, the watching Billy and Pete saw something they had never seen before. They saw big Hugh Mattern, Hugh, the supposedly invincible, wobble drunkenly, saw him lose that easy balance, lash wildly about, and then grab the saddle horn, disgracefully, and hang on for dear life! Then, astonishingly, they saw him going down to certain defeat on this horse which only yesterday Billy himself had so surely and confidently ridden.

"Watch out!" Billy shouted, in quick concern. "Watch him, Hugh! He's going to throw you!"

It happened even as that startled warning left Billy's lips. The horse leaped high and came down stiff-legged, with a spine-jarring thud, head bogged between shaggy fetlocks. And Hugh, as though shot from a catapult, left the saddle suddenly, sailed straight over the horse's shoulders. He flew through the air, kicking, hit the ground, and skidded on his side for six feet in a cloud of dust. He started to sit up, slowly, looking amazed and chagrined.

In spite of himself Billy grinned. "Ride him better'n me, eh?" he chortled. But suddenly, then the look on Billy's freckled young face changed. For Hugh had sunk limply backward, a look of surprise on his rugged features, fallen prone again. Billy blinked; followed by Pete, he rushed to Hugh and abruptly dropped to one knee beside him.

"Hugh!" he demanded. "You hurt?"

Hugh nodded briefly, a little grimly. "Leg," he said. "Busted, I guess." He managed a twisted grin. "Reckon you'll have to shoot me now, Billy."

Billy's face had paled. He looked stricken. He gulped and reached out impulsively toward Hugh's leg, but Hugh cringed quickly away with a sharp cry of protest.

"Don't touch it!" he pleaded. "It—it hurts like sin! You and Pete just help me into—into the house. Then—you ride for all you're worth to town for Doc Miller. I reckon I need him bad!"

LATE that evening, after Doc Miller had left, Hugh lay on his bed with his leg stretched out in splints. Pete Wilkins lounged in a shadowed corner of the room, puffing on his pipe as he watched Hugh with a faintly sardonic amusement. Billy sat beside the bed. He was fussing over Hugh like a mother hen with a brood of chicks.

"Sure there isn't anything you want, Hugh?" he asked anxiously. "Maybe a drink of water or something?"

Hugh looked pretty sad. "It's the ranch I'm worried about," he muttered, "not myself."

"The ranch?" Billy asked, perplexed.

"Why, sure," Hugh explained. "It's bound to go to pot now."

"What d'you mean," Billy growled, "go to pot?"

"Well," Hugh pointed out, "it's a cinch that I won't be able to run it for the next few months. And Pete's getting pretty old. And with you gone away, I reckon there won't be anybody to take charge I can trust."

"Huh!" Billy said. "I'm not going anywhere."

"Why, sure you are," Hugh reminded him. "You told me only the other morning you was leaving. I wouldn't stand in your way, Billy. Don't want you hanging around here just taking care of me."

"Yeah?" snorted Billy. "I'd dang well like to see you *stop* me staying. Ain't I your partner? Think I'd walk out on you when you needed moist?" His eyes were suspiciously moist, and his young voice cracked a little as he tried to add with manly gruffness: "Reckon I can run this ranch as good as anybody! You'll see! I'll make it pay like it never paid before!"

"Gosh, Billy!" Hugh exclaimed. "That's uncommon fine of you! But I don't know. I don't want to be a burden to you. Maybe you better not stay."

"I said I was staying," Billy snapped. "I reckon *somebody's* got to take care of you, the way you're always falling off of horses and everything." He stood up suddenly. "Guess I better go outside now, and take a look around. Just to make sure everything's all right."

He swaggered out of the room, big spurs clanking, and his freckled young face looking very earnest and proud and determined. Hugh gazed musingly after him, and over in his corner Pete Wilkins snorted softly. "At that," Pete remarked, "the kid was kind of dumb this morning.

Anybody else could have seen what a tough time you had making that horse throw you. Well, horses and humans."

"And a long rope holds better than a short one," added Hugh. "The kid's got spunk. I should have seen a long time ago that the only way to take care of that young fire-eater was to make him think *he* was taking care of me!"

"Well, you needn't look so all-fired smug about it," growled Pete; "reckon it was me that put you up to it!" He sauntered out of the room.

Hugh lay back on the bed. Pete was smart, saying as how it could sometimes be better to receive than give. And Doc Miller had a sense of humor, too; he'd fallen in with the plan right off. Well, it was worth it, just to see how cocky and earnest Billy had looked when he knew he was going to run the ranch. Still, Hugh admitted to himself, it was going to be a little monotonous lying around with his leg in splints, hobbling around for months on a leg that wasn't even scratched, that had, in fact, nothing whatever the matter with it.

In Next Week's Issue, "COYOTES HANG THEMSELVES,"
by RAY HUMPHREYS.

SNOWSHOEING THE HORSE

NEAR Anchorage, Alaska, there is a horse named Klondike. And Klondike wears snowshoes. They are round boards reinforced with wire and bolted to the horse's hoofs. By means of these Klondike is able to travel twenty to thirty miles a day. He breaks trail for his two masters, owners of a mine, and takes the season's grubstake to the railroad. Klondike has been doing this for the past six years. The load he carries is packed on a double-ended sled.



RED TRAIL TO BLACK TREASURE

PART V

By LUKE SHORT

CHRISTINA MELLISH, sister of Big Ben Mellish, owner of the large Anchor Ranch, seeks refuge in the home of Doctor Benbow, a friend, when she learns Ben is hiring gunmen to intimidate other ranchers in Seven Troughs Basin. There she meets Pete Yard, former employee of Senator Matthew Warranrode, owner of the vast GW Ranch. Yard, a patient, has been brutally flogged. Christina reads in the *State Register*, edited by Steve Trueblood, that the Federal government is planning a huge

dam project at near-by Antelope Butte. Yard evinces keen interest.

Warranrode, in a talk with his foreman, Ames Manderfield, discloses that he is back of the dam, and that by bribery he has secured passage of a bill reducing the size of the Ute Reservation, near the proposed dam site. In this he has an ally in Major Linkman, agent at the reservation. When the Ute excess land is auctioned, Warranrode will have it bid in by Schumacher and Lassiter, owners of ranches adjoining. These two will

be "dummy" buyers, actually buying for Warranrode, who has learned the land is rich in coal. Warranrode has hired Ben Mellish to fight the basin ranchers, so that they, too, will sell out and leave. Warranrode has sent Pete Yard to handle Trueblood, a crusading editor, but Trueblood converted Yard to his own cause and in reprisal Warranrode had sent Manderfield to beat up Yard. The senator hopes Trueblood will be killed in the ranchers' war stirred up by Mellish.

Sylvia Warranrode, his daughter, loves Yard, but her feelings are not reciprocated, Yard being in love with Christina Mellish.

Sheriff Nance, a relative of Mellish's, denies Trueblood's accusation that the dam project is a "plain land steal," with Mellish working against the interests of the basin ranchers. Mellish, meanwhile, has gone to Warranrode's and induced the senator to offer a five-thousand-dollar reward for the arrest of Pete Yard, alleging Yard murdered his brother, Frank Mellish. Yard, knowing Mellish will make tracks to Sheriff Nance and ask him to serve a warrant for his, Yard's, arrest, goes to Seven Troughs and kidnaps the sheriff. He and Trueblood take the lawman to a hide-out in the mountains, hoping to convince Nance of Yard's innocence, as well as of Mellish's perfidy.

Meanwhile, while Christina is on a visit to Major Linkman's, where Sylvia is also stopping, the major is mysteriously murdered and a glove belonging to Ben Mellish is found at his side. Christina hides the glove, then, when Yard returns to Seven Troughs, tells him about it. Yard tells her the glove is a plant, that Mellish could not have murdered Linkman. After a meeting in the hotel with Sylvia, who

has learned of his love for Christina and given him up, Yard is captured by Mellish's men and jailed. In jail, Yard intimates to Mellish that he, Mellish, is being framed by Warranrode. Meanwhile the sheriff, who has been allowed to escape, and who now is sympathetic to Yard, releases him from jail. Mellish, continuing his war against the ranchers, burns four places, but while he is absent on a raid, the irate ranchers organize and descend upon his own place, killing several of his hands and burning the bunk house.

Playing a lone hand, Yard captures Lassiter, one of Warranrode's pawns, and by a clever ruse exacts a full confession from him, including an admission that Warranrode was responsible for the murder of Major Linkman. Yard then goes to Colonel Knight at the reservation and gets Lassiter's confession in writing. He then induces the colonel to start out for the GW and arrest the senator for murder.

CHAPTER XVII.

BEN MELLISH STRIKES.

AMES was told to take his time with the job, and to do it well, so the first three days he was in Seven Troughs, he kept to the saloons and listened. Nowadays, Seven Troughs was not a curious town, so that he was never questioned, and by keeping his own counsel he learned of the progress of the war. He heard about the raid on the Anchor, and he smiled at his drink. It seemed that these basin ranchers would relieve him of part of his job. Twice, idling in the dark in front of the Melodeon, he saw Steve Trueblood ride into town in company with Ed Briedehoff and others. After they had stabled their

horses they would go into the Exchange House for the night.

Ames turned this fact over in his mind, considering its possibilities. The chances were he could get away with it; but to find their room, he would have to ask the clerk or find it himself, and either method entailed a little risk. So he waited.

And while he did, many things happened along that main street of Seven Troughs that did not escape him. Sylvia Warranrode was in town. Ames knew that Warranrode hated having Linkman murdered when Sylvia was visiting the agency, but at that time, haste was imperative. And Sylvia had flatly disobeyed her father's orders to come home after it had happened. Instead, she had come here to Seven Troughs to watch over Mrs. Linkman. Or did she? Ames wondered. How much of all this did she link with her father? Very little, Ames guessed, despite the fact that she talked often with Christina Mellish. The only men who knew Warranrode's part in this war were not the kind who would hurt a woman.

Another thing Ames had noticed was that Christina Mellish had left her hotel room for a tiny shack in the alley behind Doctor Benbow's. He had even passed it one night, purely out of curiosity. The night the army investigator got off the stage at Seven Troughs and went immediately to Doc Benbow's, Ames had a few bad moments. This move was unexpected, signifying something that Ames did not rightly understand. But by the next night it was gossiped around the saloons that the army man was an old friend of Doc's service days. Of course, Doc Benbow would know everything Steve Trueblood and Pete Yard knew, but that would never be tied in with Linkman's murder, and

would apply only to this Seven Troughs war.

So Ames waited—in daytime inside saloons, at night in the dark shadows of the street. Word had reached town this afternoon that Ben Mellish and four of his riders had ridden into an ambush of the north basin ranchers. Ben Mellish had been wounded, but not badly, and he had escaped. And Ames, who had studied the movements of Trueblood and his men, reckoned that Trueblood would come in to Seven Troughs some time to-night.

Ames kept to himself, avoiding the saloons and the passers-by when he could. He smoked a half dozen cigarettes in the dark doorway of Pearson's Emporium, and then crossed the street to stand in the dark slit between two unlighted business buildings. During that hour and a half, two riders left town, and none entered. But Ames had patience, and he liked his place of concealment.

Presently, when most of the town's activity was concentrated at the two saloons, the feed corral, and the hotel, Ames heard some riders upstreet. There were five of them, and one was Steve Trueblood. Ames swung out of his hiding place and, turning the corner, ran for the alley that snaked behind the feed stable and corral. His rifle was where he left it after dark, against the side of the stable and inside the corral. He levered a shell in the chamber, then glided through the corral and softly swung the gate open.

A week of watching this corral, day and night, had taught him the routine of the place, and this did not include a lantern in the rear at night. As he stood in the gate opening, he heard the soft padding of the penned horses as they approached him, eager for any chance to leave

the corral. From here he could look straight through the long centerway of the stable, at the head of which the lantern hung from a nail.

EVEN as he was watching, five horsemen swung into the arch and dismounted, their forms silhouetted against the light of the street. Ames had no trouble picking out Steve, who stood beside his horse, talking to the stable boy.

It was difficult for Ames to sight his gun, and he decided to wait. But when Steve turned to unsaddle, broadside to him, Ames could not resist. He raised his gun again and fired, and saw Steve go down.

The horses behind him snorted. Casually, almost, Ames stepped away from the gate and the horses trotted through. The last one Ames kicked viciously in the belly, and it headed into the others, causing a stampede.

Ames dropped his gun and walked back across the corral, climbed the fence, and listened a minute. The ranchers' horses in the centerway were out of control, and Ames could hear the thunder of their hoofs on the plank floor, mingled with the shouting of the men.

When the first man raced out beside the corral and yelled, pointing up the alley, Ames allowed himself a meager smile. He traveled the narrow, littered way between two buildings and approached the sidewalk cautiously. He smiled again, now, for his wait had allowed the loafers on the hotel porch to leave their chairs and run for the stable. Momentarily, the sidewalks were cleared of people who had collected at the stable.

Ames sidled out and turned down toward the stable and stopped there in the growing knot of watchers. He waited until Steve had been picked

up and carried off toward Doctor Benbow's, and then he asked a neighbor, "Dead?"

"I dunno. Them Anchor hands are usually good shots."

Ames drifted across the street and into the hotel and inquired after the number of Sylvia's room. At the end of the first floor corridor he noticed the window was open, and a fresh breeze whipped out the curtains.

Sylvia opened to his knock, and her greeting was indifferent, almost hostile. Ames smiled slightly, and took off his hat.

"I know. Dad wants me to come home, doesn't he?" Sylvia asked bluntly.

"That's about it," Ames said, his lean face watchful and grave. "He's worried."

"Didn't he know I was here with Mrs. Linkman?"

"Yes, but this is no safe place for a woman now. He says to come home."

Sylvia shook her head. "Sorry, Ames, but I'm of age now. I'll be home when it pleases me."

Ames shrugged. "It's up to you. There's no one to nurse him but Mrs. Sais."

Sylvia said swiftly, "He's sick?" and Ames nodded.

Sylvia looked at him a long time, and he held her gaze. Finally, she smiled. "I've lived with you too long, Ames. You're a liar. Good night."

Ames said "Good night," and went out. Outside her door, he paused and drew out a sack of tobacco. He was sifting out the tobacco into the paper when the whole corridor exploded with sound. But before even a noise could register with Ames, something drove into his back and he fell, his blood pooling beneath him and creeping out of the corner

of his mouth in a slow, deliberate trickle.

SOFTLY, Ben Mellish closed the door of the linen closet in which he had been hiding, and sank down on the linen, cuddling his warm gun in his hand, his head hung low on his chest. Beyond that wire-taut sickness that passed wave on wave through his body, he felt something like satisfaction. If he was licked, then it was not Ames Manderfield who did it. He felt the blood on his boot cold to his foot, and every time he moved his thigh ached. It angered him that he should be so weak, and from beneath him he pulled out a cloth and wrapped it tightly around his leg. He listened, hearing the first tentative movements of some one in the corridor. Then a woman's scream, shriek after shriek, sounded, and again Ben's head sunk on his chest, and he waited.

At first dark he had ridden into town, sloping in his saddle, faint from his wound. This morning he and his four remaining men had been ambushed at Cass Ford's house when they rode up to burn it. Ben had a vague and savage memory of a fight, and of riding away, his leg a bloody, aching pulp where the blast of a shotgun had channeled it as he wheeled his horse away from the door of Ford's house.

Later, miles away from it, he had pulled up in that hot morning sunshine that was already sickening him, and read his own future. Unless he could hide, he would die. And this morning he had not a friend, not a hired gunman, not a man or woman to turn to in his need. He was beaten and sick and afraid to die. Then he thought of Chris, and with the blind and unquestioning faith of a child, he knew she

would take care of him and hide him if he could only get to her. He had left her in her room on the first floor of the Exchange House, and he returned there to find her.

By what processes of torture he could not remember, he had climbed the sheds to the roofs, and from the roofs he had got in that back hotel corridor window, which he did not even try to close. But Chris's room door was locked, and he had not the strength to crash the lock. So he had hidden himself in this linen closet, waiting for her, and bleeding slowly as he waited. The sound of Ames's closing of Sylvia's door had roused him, and when he inched open his own door to see Ames's broad back, the memory of that glove and of Pete Yard's cold and knowing advice came to him. He had killed him, thinking that if he was to be licked, it would not be Ames Manderfield who had done it.

And now he heard the gathering commotion in the hall, and he waited for this door to open. Discovery would be blessed and welcome. But it never came, and as Ben listened to the activity outside his door, he remembered the open window. They would think that the murderer had escaped.

After the commotion had died, Ben rose and stumbled out. Slowly he made his way down to Chris's old room. Again it was locked, and again he did not have the strength to open it. With that knowledge came a sudden terror of dying. He *had* to find her, he *had* to have her help. And suddenly he thought of Doctor Benbow, and he turned to look down the corridor. Doc Benbow would help him in spite of what he had done to Doc. If he could make Doc Benbow's, he would be saved.

THIS time the rope fire escape coiled on its hook by the window pointed a merciful way to him. In the dark alley below he reeled and stumbled, clinging to the sheds for support, heading up the alley toward Doc's.

The street would be the hardest to cross, but he walked out into it with indomitable strength. Three quarters of the way across it, he knew he was going to fall, and he tried to run. He made the mouth of the alley and its shadow before he pitched on his face in the cinders.

Lying there against the back of Pearson's Emporium, barely conscious, he saw three men leave Doc Benbow's. They were Ed Briedehoff and Miles Leston and Cass Ford, and if they found him, they would shoot him. He did not call, letting them go.

He lay there, waiting, terror coiling within him. If he was to shout, there was the chance that another basin rancher would come out of Doc's. While he was lying there, his mind almost made up to shout, the door opened and Chris stepped out and turned up the alley.

Ben called to her, and Chris stopped and turned, and slowly retraced her steps. And then she saw him and ran to him.

"Hide me," Ben whispered. "I'm hurt! But you've got to hide me!"

"I'll get Doctor——"

"No! No! Hide me," Ben pleaded, for, now that he had her, he did not care about Doc Benbow. All he wanted was the security she could give him.

She managed to get him to his feet, and, bringing his arm across her shoulder, she moved down the dark alley. Ben wanted to ask where she was going, but he was too tired.

Chris got the door to her shack

open and hauled Ben inside and laid him on the bed, then shut the door, pulled down the curtains and struck a light.

His whole side was matted with blood, and his face was pale and drawn. When he opened his eyes, they were tortured with fright. In that moment, Chris forgot all her hatred for him, and remembered only that this was her brother, and that he might die.

At her touch, Ben opened his eyes and took her hand and clung to it.

"I'll be all right," he murmured. "Only hide me, Chris—for old time's sake! Hide me and don't let them at me!"

Chris only nodded, mutely.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONFRONTED.

WHEN the GW was in sight across the green prairie, Colonel Knight raised a hand and reined up. Pete pulled his horse in, and the six troopers and the adjutant behind stopped, too. Colonel Knight was dressed in neat blue, and sat his horse straight as a ramrod. His carriage was strictly military, even to the cast of his face, which was less sensitive and more determined than Pete had ever seen it.

"You stay here in the timber, Pete," the Colonel said.

"I don't like to leave a thing half finished," Pete drawled. "I started this, and——"

"The army will end it. No, I'm not taking a chance. I can handle it better alone."

"But he'll see me when you bring him back."

"Well and good. That's time enough." He raised a hand and spurred his horse on, and the

troopers filed past Pete until they were abreast their colonel.

Colonel Knight approached the GW at a leisurely pace and with an understandable reluctance. The next few minutes would decide his whole future in the army. But he was also a man of convictions who understood well the spirit behind duty and discipline, and his conscience was easy. Nevertheless, he wished with bitter impotence that Warranrode had not sent his man over to the reservation that first day with a note of welcome which pledged his support and, at the same time, invited the colonel to be a guest of the GW at the earliest opportunity.

The sight of the place did not help Colonel Knight any. No one had told him how grand and imposing it was, nor of its beauty, nor of its air of incorruptible wealth and good taste. He took the main road into the place, which skirted the plaza and led straight to the giant cottonwoods and water.

With sinking heart, Knight saw that Warranrode was standing on the long porch and that he waved as Knight and his men rode into the yard.

Dismounting, Knight said to his adjutant, "Craig, come along. Sergeant, dismount and be ready for Craig's orders from the house." Then Colonel Knight stepped away from Craig and walked over to meet Warranrode, who stood at the gate.

He saluted and took Warranrode's hand, but his face was unsmiling as he listened to the senator say, "Well, I was afraid I'd have to do without you a few days more, Colonel Knight—which makes this surprise twice as welcome."

Knight bowed stiffly and said, "Senator Warranrode, I don't wish to trade on your hospitality. I have

come on a far more important errand than enjoying your dinner."

A flicker of caution crossed Warranrode's eyes, but he was too able at dealing with men to betray it any other way. He smiled. "Errand, you say? Out with it."

"I have come to place you under military arrest and to conduct you to the reservation."

NOT a sign of anything but polite disbelief showed on Warranrode's face. "Arrest? That's interesting. I dare say you can explain it as well in a chair as you can here. Come along."

He led the way to the porch and indicated a seat, and when Knight declined he sat down himself. "Let's hear it."

Colonel Knight said briefly, "It is my duty to arrest you as accessory to the murder of Major Linkman."

After a moment's pause, Warranrode observed, "That's interesting, especially in view of the fact that he was one of my oldest and dearest friends."

Knight reached inside his tunic and drew out a thick sheaf of folded paper. "Perhaps this will tell you more than I can, Senator Warranrode."

Warranrode accepted the paper and looked at it without opening it. "What is this?"

"Proof that you were in league with Major Linkman to defraud the government out of considerable property. But that is only incidental. The immediate charge is the one I've already named."

Warranrode smiled absently and nodded and laid the papers in his lap. "Would you care for a drink, Colonel Knight? A cigar?"

"Neither, thanks."

Warranrode rose. "Then, if you'll excuse me, I'll take these up to my

study and look them over. They are bound to be important, I assure you, especially"—and here his voice carried an undertone of pointed sarcasm—"to my army friends."

Again Colonel Knight bowed and Warranrode left. He did not hurry up the stairs, and once he was seated in his study, he lighted a cigar before he took up the papers, broke the seal, and read. At the top of the first page was the notation: "Copy, original filed with Commandant at Fort Kiowa." He read on. It was written in the form of an indictment, with the personal pronoun "you" introducing nearly every paragraph.

As he continued, Senator Warranrode removed the cigar from his mouth and laid it on the table without looking where he put it. The clock on the wall ticked loudly in the room, its only contender against utter silence being the occasional rustle of paper as he leafed over a page. When he was finished, he let the hand holding the paper sink gently into his lap.

Yes, that covered it all. Except for a few minor inaccuracies, it was complete. The reason for his wanting the coal, of course, was not mentioned, but then, that had always been a secret between himself and Senator Crippen of Delaware and Ames Manderfield. Immediately, his mind flicked back to the source of this information. Without a doubt, it was Jim Lassiter. Which argued that Lassiter was in the hands of the army now. Schumacher was, or soon would be. Trueblood and Yard had doubtless given Knight the information. Mellish was dead by now, but a determined congressional committee could soon ferret out Warranrode's connection with him.

HEEDLESS of the cigar burning beside him, he drew out a fresh one and lighted it and settled down in the chair. Colonel Knight had said arrest, which meant that he would be escorted back to the reservation and jailed. If Ames were here now—this minute, this second—there would be a possibility of avoiding this charge by doing away with the witnesses, but Ames was not here. And Colonel Knight was downstairs, waiting.

Carefully, Warranrode weighed his chances of fighting this charge and winning. With the best lawyers, with some luck at bribing, with more luck at getting at the witnesses, it might be done. But Knight, with full authority, could keep him incommunicado until all witnesses were safe. The bulk of the evidence was inferential, but the sum of it was great, and what was worse, correct. Even if he fought the charge and beat it, he was certain to be impeached by the Senate. Moreover, his plan to purchase the Ute lands was overboard now, destroyed by this publicity.

Supposing he was freed and later impeached, he would come out of it an old man, dishonored in life and office, cursed by a rabble he always believed he could persuade into liking him. Warranrode was an honest man with himself, and he did not even bother to try and convince himself that life would still be bearable in the face of all this. He knew it wouldn't. It would be agony until he died, and even his death would be unhonored.

Looking back with a surprising calm, he could see where he had made his mistakes. Although this document did not say so, he knew Steve Trueblood and Pete Yard were responsible for the uncovering

of its material. Therein lay his mistake. His plan—to promote this Seven Troughs war as a means of anonymously killing Steve Trueblood, and as a screen for his steal—had been admirable. But he had waited too long. A wiser man than himself would have put those two out of the way in the very beginning. He had made the serious error of not crediting them with an intelligence equal to his own—or even to Ames's. In an impersonal way he admired them.

He thought briefly of Sylvia. She was grown, she would have money—and money, he still believed, counted more than anything else. He doubted if she would miss him, certainly not if she learned everything about him. That was inescapable.

TURNING to his desk, he dipped his pen in ink and read over the document again. Occasionally, he inserted a date in his fine, neat script; less often, he made a correction. At the end, on the blank half page, he wrote neatly, "Substantially correct. Matthew Warranrode." He was about to lay his pen down when he paused and added the line: "Colonel Knight. If it is possible and compatible with your conscience, and the conscience of your superiors, I ask that judgment against me be rendered in secret."

He rose, folding the paper, and yanked the pull rope by the door on his way across the room. At the wall safe he paused and turned the combination and swung the door open. Taking out a steel box, he opened it. It was crammed to the top with fresh bank notes—seventy-five thousand dollars in all.

On his way to the desk, he answered a knock on the door, and

Mrs. Sais, the fat and comfortable Mexican housekeeper, stepped inside.

"One moment, Mrs. Sais," Warranrode said. "Be seated."

At his desk he drew out a clean sheet of note paper and hesitated a moment before he wrote:

MY DEAR COLONEL KNIGHT: If one of your couriers can overtake the mail and retrieve the original of this document, returning it to me, I will pledge myself to triple the amount contained herein.

He wrapped the note and the money in a wide sheet of paper, rose, and handed it to Mrs. Sais, saying, "There is an army officer below on the porch, Mrs. Sais. Give him this and wait for an answer."

Mrs. Sais was gone only a little more than two minutes. When she returned, she handed the package to Warranrode. "He asked me to return it to you with his regrets, sir," she said quietly.

"Thank you, Mrs. Sais. That is all."

Mrs. Sais let herself out and waddled down the corridor. Nearing the end of it, she was arrested by the sound of a gunshot. By the time she had hurried back down the corridor, Colonel Knight appeared at the top of the stairs, and behind him was Adjutant Craig. Mrs. Sais said, "In there," and Knight opened the door.

Warranrode was seated limply in his customary chair, head slumped on chest. The gun was on the floor, where it had slacked from his hand.

Colonel Knight crossed over to him and looked at him with pity in his eyes.

"That," he said, maybe to Warranrode, maybe to Craig, maybe only to himself, "was the only way left."

CHAPTER XIX.

FINAL ENCOUNTER.

CHRIS did not show her panic until Ben lapsed into unconsciousness, and then she looked at his leg. She did not know what to do. Like a trusting child, Ben assumed she could take care of him. He was bleeding profusely. She washed out the wound, and still the blood seeped out. In desperation, she applied the remedy of a pioneer people; she poured flour on the wound, trusting to its clean adhesiveness to clot the blood.

Then she considered. Ben was unconscious. He would never know if Doc Benbow looked at him or not; and, without thinking longer on it, Chris made her decision.

Doctor Benbow was alone with Steve Trueblood, who occupied the lone bedroom.

When he saw her, Doc said, "Ready to stay the night?"

"Will he live?"

"Probably. It isn't bad. I got the slug out without any trouble."

Chris announced swiftly, "Ben is in my place, Uncle Doc. He's hurt badly. Will you come look at him?"

Doc's private emotion at this news was one of satisfaction, but he only nodded and packed his black bag. On the way down the alley, Chris told him of finding Ben, and of his plea to be hidden. When she finished, Doc observed, "Ed Briedehoff tells me Ben has played out his hand. He hasn't a man left." He tried to see her face in the dark. "Ed says he knows Ben shot Trueblood. He says when they've hunted Ben out and killed him, they'll hang up their guns, and not till then."

"Ben knows that, Uncle Doc."

"Good," Doc grunted. "He knew

it before. Maybe he'll believe it now."

"You won't give him away?"

"I ought to," Doc said grimly, and added, "but I won't."

Doc's first act was to give Ben an opiate hypodermic, and then he examined and dressed the wound. Finished, he said, "He'll never know I was here unless you tell him." He put on his coat and looked up at Chris and said, "If you're going to worry, don't. He can't be killed—more's the pity."

Chris didn't look at Doc then. She was watching Ben with a dispassionate curiosity, and it was hard for Doc to guess what was running through her mind. But his lip pouted in anger and he scrubbed his clipped head in an impatient gesture.

He said gruffly, "Chris, are you going to let him do this last thing to you, make you nurse him and hide him?"

"He's my brother."

"You're not to blame for that!" stormed the Doc. "To-morrow, Ben will be awake and plotting a bull-headed revenge, and when he can walk, he'll try to carry it out. Why don't you let me talk to Nance? In a couple of days, Nance can take him away in a spring wagon."

"Where?"

"What does it matter?" Doc said angrily. "Away from you. And once he's gone, I'll put up a reward myself to keep him out of this country."

Chris only shook her head and smiled faintly, and Doc subsided.

"What am I going to do for a nurse for Trueblood?" he grumbled. "You won't leave Ben, I suppose?"

Again Chris shook her head. Then, remembering, she said:

"You remember the girl, Sylvia Warranrode, who is attending Mrs. Linkman?"

"She's a senator's daughter," Doc said wryly.

"She'd help you if you need her," Chris said. "I'll go over and ask her."

SO it came about that Sylvia, at Chris's request, spent her time at Steve Trueblood's bedside, and Chris watched after Ben. It took some reluctant scheming on Doc's part to keep Ben's hiding place a secret. When Chris did not show up the next day, Sylvia wanted to go see her, and it was then Doc told his first lie.

"You won't go near her place," he said abruptly, and when Sylvia asked why, Doc said, "She's in bed. No, she's not sick, just worn out, and she's got a cold. If you go down there and visit her, you'll catch her cold and bring it back here. And once your patient gets the cold, I'll have a warrant out for you for murder. You stay here."

"But who will look after her?" Sylvia asked.

Doc said, "I see her three times a day and I take her meals to her. The rest of the time she sleeps."

To back that statement up, Doc had to carry a tray from his kitchen to Chris's shack three times a day, and Chris had to stay penned up with Ben. Inevitably, Ben learned that Doc shared the secret of his hiding place, but he would never allow Doc to come in. And each time Doc handed the tray to Chris through the crack in the door, he saw her face more haggard, with the life and serenity of it vanished, and he would stamp down to the Melodeon for whisky. He heard talk of how Ed Briedehoff, left utterly alone

by Sheriff Nance, had his north basin ranchers out riding the country for Ben Mellish, and more than once Doc was tempted to drop a hint as to Ben's whereabouts. Only the thought of Chris kept him from it.

The third day of it, when Doc took in Chris's breakfast to her, he could not bear the look in her eyes. He elbowed past her into the room and glared belligerently around him. Ben was sitting in the only comfortable chair, pulled up against the drawn window curtains. He looked more surly than ever, and even his paleness was beginning to fade against the glow of his animal health.

Doc said passionately to Chris, "When are you going to kick him out?"

Chris only shook her head, while Ben laughed unpleasantly.

"When can I walk again, Doc?" he asked.

"The sooner the better," Doc said bluntly.

"I tried to walk to-day and couldn't," Ben said angrily. "What's the matter with me? I'm weak."

"The trouble with you," Doc said savagely, "is that you are afraid, Ben. You were never hurt bad in the first place—only scared. And well you might be. The first time one of these north basin ranchers lays eyes on you, I'll be called to attend you again—and this time in the capacity of coroner."

"Uncle Doc," Chris said gently. Doc sighed and looked at her. She was paler than Ben, and there was a look in her strained face that gave him more than a clue to what she had been going through. It was a look of patient, harried, frantic waiting, and Doc knew surely that if Ben Mellish did not leave soon,

she would break. If Doc had known the whole truth, he might have been angrier than he was, for Ben Mellish, as soon as he found that his only hurt was a loss of blood, had sunk into a brooding, sullen, bullying that Chris was finding unbearable.

THE waiting on him and attending him, she did not mind, for she was used to that; but his savage impatience, his sneers, his brutal relish of what he had done, and of what he was going to do, sickened her. There was no relief from it, for she could not leave the house. Since she had last known him in their home, he had changed from a rough, headstrong man into a homicidal monomaniac.

He related the story of all his night raids, and laughed when she asked him to stop. And all through his talk and thoughts ran the thread of revenge. He was not down yet. He had money banked, and money would buy help. In the end, he would have this basin at whatever cost. At times, Chris pitied him, at others hated and feared him, and he was slowly breaking her. The only thing holding her to him was the thought that they were the children of one mother, and that she must help him. But sometimes, as she lay awake on the cot and watched him staring at the lamp, his face secret and crafty and brutal, she wondered if she was sane.

On the fifth day, Pete and Colonel Knight rode into Seven Troughs. Pete had heard no word of the progress of the basin war, but he did not believe Ben Mellish had been wasting his time.

When Colonel Knight, who remembered Pete's account of the trouble, saw this cattle town somnolent in the hot sunshine of late

spring, peaceful and serene, he observed, "It seems quiet enough."

"It is," Pete answered. "Too quiet."

Colonel Knight glanced at his friend, puzzled, but Pete's hard and angular face was unresponsive, more sober than he had ever seen it. At daylight they had left the reservation together, and Colonel Knight had ridden the entire day with a mind free of worry. After burying Warranrode they returned to the agency, and found Lassiter's cook and Alphonse Schumacher already under guard. Brief questioning verified everything that Pete had told Colonel Knight, and he, with the memory of Warranrode's suicide fresh in mind, and the possibility that he had blindly been the cause of it, felt an unspeakable burden lifted from his shoulders. All that remained was to get Trueblood's evidence, and to threaten Ben Mellish into a confession. But if Pete felt relieved, there was no sign of it on his face, and Colonel Knight wondered in silence.

Pete entered the business section with caution for he remembered his parting with Ben Mellish. When they met again, anything might happen. But no one gave them more than a passing glance, and that only because of the sight of an army uniform. Pete sat tensely in the saddle, his eyes restless and dark against his browned face.

Reining up, Pete looked toward the Melodeon. There were no Anchor horses at the hitch rail, no Anchor riders loafing on the sidewalk. Immediately his gaze swiveled to the Legal Tender. In front of it he could see Ed Briedehoff's pony standing in the sun.

Pete murmured, "You wanted cigars, colonel. Go get them and meet me here."

HE swung off his horse and walked the few yards to the Legal Tender. Two strangers to Pete were drinking at the bar. A desultory poker game was in progress at the window table. He knew none of the players. About to go out, he spied a form on the lone pool table at the rear, and he walked back. It was Ed Briedehoff, unshaven, haggard, deep in sleep.

Pete shook him hard before he wakened.

"What's happened?" Pete wanted to know.

Ed sat up and shook his head, and then looked at Pete, and the light of a deep friendliness lighted his eyes. "I knew you'd be back. You're late, though."

"Late?"

"The fuss is over. Ben Mellish is whipped. He ain't dead yet, but every rider of his is dead or gone. Ben's hidin' out and he's hurt. The Anchor is empty." He regarded Pete, and added, "All we needed was that rawhidin' you gave Steve. It worked."

Pete grinned, and said:

"You were wrong about Steve. He's fought with us, got shot with us, ate with——"

"Shot?" Pete cut in.

Ed nodded. "In the back. But he ain't hurt bad. That was the last thing Ben Mellish done before he left. Steve's over at Doc Benbow's and Doc says——"

But Pete had already left. In his haste to get to Doc Benbow's he forgot about meeting Colonel Knight. He didn't knock on Doc's office door, and he found it deserted. Going into the kitchen, he saw Mrs. Carew and nodded to her and then turned into the bedroom.

Steve lay in bed, his tow hair rumpled and untidy. He had been sleeping, and Pete wondered if that

pallor was not close to death. Then Steve opened his eyes, and, for a moment, they stared at each other.

Then Pete grinned broadly. "You old mustang," he murmured. "So they couldn't kill you?"

He took Steve's hand and wrung it and Steve grinned with delight.

"It's done, Steve," Pete said then. "Warranrode is dead—by his own hand." And Steve listened with rapt attention while Pete told him, and at the end of it, looked thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"What about you?" Pete asked. Steve told him briefly of what had happened, and Pete saw that he did not like to speak of it. He was answering Pete's few questions when he said suddenly, "How are we going to break it to her?"

"Who?"

"Sylvia." Then, by way of cryptic explanation, he said, "She's been my nurse through this."

Pete looked at him curiously, searchingly, and a slow flush began to spread over at Steve's homely face, but he did not smile.

"I can't help it, Pete. For days now, I've been thinking what you're thinking now. You see——" He paused, to see if Pete understood.

"A man couldn't help loving her," Pete murmured. "Is that what you're trying to tell me?"

STEVE nodded. "Only it won't work, son. I—I helped to kill her father," he said bitterly, searching Pete's face for a denial.

"Let me answer that. I have known her a long time, Steve. She would rather have him dead if she knew it."

"But why did I have to do it!" Steve said savagely.

"You didn't. I did."

Steve raised his eyes to Pete. "But I helped."

"If you had known Sylvia before this happened, would you have acted any other way?"

Steve sighed. "Maybe I would. But I would have been ashamed of it all my life if I hadn't fought him."

"Don't you think she'll see that?"

Steve did not answer. Pete stepped to the window and looked out. He was waiting for something inside him to resent Steve's love for Sylvia, to be jealous. But there was nothing—and he knew that he had been right that night in the Exchange House.

He heard Steve murmur, "You're a comfort, Pete. Maybe you're right. But I'll tell her some day—before I ask her to marry me."

"Not now."

"No."

All of that part of him that had to do with Sylvia was dead now, Pete knew, and he felt a relief mingled with gladness. And as he felt this die, he felt the other thing within him that he had fought down and smothered these weeks. He said, "Where is Chris?"

Steve turned his head and looked at him. "So that's the way it is?"

Pete said simply, persistently, "Where is she?"

"The shack down the alley back of this place. She's sick, Sylvia says," and he added, "but not very. There's no one with her."

They heard the outer door close and Steve looked swiftly at Pete. "It's Sylvia."

"Let me tell her," Pete said.

In a moment, Sylvia entered the room, and at sight of Pete she stopped and there was a studied moderation in her greeting. "Hello, Pete."

Pete rose and came over to her and said, "I don't know how to tell this to you, Sylvia, except in the only truthful way."

She caught some of his gravity. "What?"

"Your father is gone. Dead."

She stood utterly still, looking at him, at his eyes.

"It was a hunting accident," Pete said gently. "He was killed instantly."

A moan caught in Sylvia's throat, and she bowed her head. Pete stood aside as she walked over to Steve and knelt by his bed and put her arms on the spread. Her hand sought Steve's as she began to cry brokenly.

Steve caught Pete's eye and motioned him out, and Pete left. Perhaps this was the way it was meant to be, he thought, as he tramped through Doc's office. Sylvia had turned to Steve in her grief, not to him.

OUTSIDE, dusk had begun to fall, and Pete looked up the alley. He saw the shack, with its single curtain pulled. Deep within him, he acknowledged simply that this was the hour, the minute that he had been waiting for, fighting for; and he turned up the alley, increasing his long stride.

At the shack door he knocked gently, and then opened the door and stepped in.

In one swift glance he saw Ben Mellish sitting in a chair, the fading light of day from the window full upon him. And by him, Christina stood, utterly motionless, her hand half raised to her parted lips.

In one brief instant, Pete knew that he was facing what he had feared most, and what he had tried and sworn to avoid.

A gun was in Ben Mellish's hand. With his free arm Ben brushed Christina back, and she cried, "Pete! Pete!"

The gun tilted up and still Pete

could not move, could not unlock his muscles. And then the gun went off, far louder than Ben's snarl. Pete felt the vicious blow on his shoulder and it threw him back and sideways against the door; the second shot blasted out, missing him.

Ben put one hand on the arm of his chair, and struggled to heave himself up. His gun hand doubled under him. There was a muffled shot. Then he sank back and his head fell to his chest and his gun clattered to the floor.

Pete raised bleak eyes to Chris, and met her horror-stricken gaze. Then she folded silently to the floor.

Slowly, Pete moved over to her and knelt down. Picking her up, he laid her gently on the bed and then left the house. Doc Benbow was running down the alley toward the sound of the shots. At sight of Pete he stopped, and a look of understanding came into his ruddy face.

"Take care of her, Doc," Pete said quietly, and he walked past Doc and into the street. When he came to the hotel he asked for a room and went up.

He sat on his bed and let the dusk stir into night around him. All the shapes and shadows of these bitter weeks moved in his thoughts, and beyond them and before them he saw the image of Chris as she had looked at him over the body of her dead brother—the brother he had killed. It made no difference to him that it had not been his own bullet. He would have killed him had not Fate stepped in and done it for him, and, in this intention, he had killed that only other thing he cared for. That last bitter scene would link him forever with tragedy in Chris's memory.

AS the night grew thick and dark about him, these thoughts became unbearable, and he rose and walked to the window which overlooked the shadowed street. His shoulder hurt, irritated him.

He must ride on, ride out of here.

He did not, at first, hear the knock. When he did, he did not answer it. Only when the door opened, he turned, a curse on his lips.

There was the figure of a woman in the door. She said, "Pete." It was Chris.

Wordlessly, he moved over to the table, and striking a match, lighted the lamp. Then, holding himself taut, he looked up at her.

She moved over to him, her face sad and beautiful, so that it was a physical hurt for him to look at her.

"I couldn't let you go," she said.

Pete said bleakly, "Why did I have to be the one who did it?"

"You didn't. It was his own gun and his own hate that caused it."

Still despair welled up in him.

"Pete, Ben had to die that way. You told me long ago that he would, and that it might be you. Even if it had been you I'd feel the same."

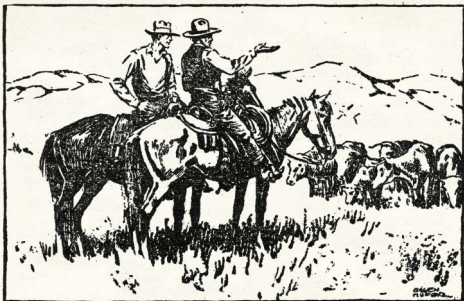
For one brief instant, Pete stood motionless, and then he took a step toward her, and she was in his arms, and he could not speak.

"Darling, I've waited," she murmured. "Can't we forget it all?"

Pete said huskily, "Before this hour, nothing has ever happened. Remember that, because we can't look back. Will you ever want to?"

"Not if you are with me, Pete."

And Pete knew then, that it was all behind them; but he could not say it, for he was kissing her.



GREAT CATTLE RANCHES

(THE HILL RANCH)

By CHARLES L. McNICHOLS

I'VE received so many inquiries lately about the so-called "Hoot" Gibson ranch that we'll have to have an article on it. Actually, the Gibson layout never was a real cattle ranch. It is just a four-hundred-acre piece of former cow range that has for years been used as headquarters for an organization that gives "rodeos"—cowboy contests—all over the West coast. Hoot Gibson, well-known cowboy picture star, operated it for some time, but for the past three years it has been the property of Paul Hill, who owns and runs

a real, sure-enough beef-producing ranch of about twenty-seven thousand acres a little farther north, up in Tehachapi, California, and is also sole owner of the Southwest Commission Co., which buys more than half a million head of beef a year at Los Angeles stockyards.

So the rodeo show is really a sideline to Hill's activities as a large beef-cattle operator, but it's an important sideline, for more people are attending these shows than ever before. There isn't an important town in the West that doesn't have one every year, and I understand they

are spreading throughout the East. Of course, the big one at Madison Square Garden in New York City has been an annual event for a long time.

The set-up at the Hill headquarters—the Gibson ranch—near Saugus, California, is probably representative, except that it is equipped to conduct a show right on its own home grounds. Out there you will find a five-eighths-mile track and a grand stand seating twenty-two thousand people. Here is where the earliest annual show dated by the American Rodeo Association is staged each year. It is always held the last Sunday in April.

In addition to the track and grand stand, there are stables for a hundred and twenty horses, and a flock of corrals for the Brahmin steers and bulls, both used in bucking contests, and the cows and calves that are used in roping events. Leonard Ward, who is the superintendent of the outfit, lives on the place. He was the world's champion cowboy back in 1934, so you probably remember him. There are also quarters for the numerous feeders and cow wrasslers who work for the layout.

Here we had better clear up a point. No authorized rodeo outfit hires any of the riders and ropers for its contests. There are some troupes touring in the East with a bunch of hired riders, but what they put on is not a contest, but an exhibition of riding and roping and other cowboy stunts. An outfit like the Bill ranch dates a contest. Plenty of publicity is put out, so all the good contest riders in the country know about it. The boys show up with nothing but their saddles and their ropes, although these days the entrants in the roping and bulldogging contests usually bring

their own specially trained mounts—almost always speedy thoroughbreds.

ALL the rest of the equipment is furnished by the company putting on the show. This includes the hide-twisting buckers, the wild horse in the bareback event, and all the bulls, steers, cows, and calves that are used. None of the contestants are paid anything except what they get in prizes for winning the various events. In fact, it is generally customary for every entrant to post a fee. This money is added to the prize money, so that the more entrants there are, the larger the prize. The competition in all events is very keen, for not only are the losers out everything, including their railroad fare and a lot of stray patches of hide, but the winners collect, in addition to their immediate prize money, those highly valued "points" which are added up at the close of the season to determine the world's champion cowboy for the year.

This is no empty honor, I can tell you. There's a swell saddle, some cash, and a lot of valuable collateral that goes with it. The "points" the rider wins vary in number according to the nature of the event he appears in, and according to the rating of that particular show. Shows rate from triple A down to C and D, according to their size and the amount of prize money they pay. I understand that the show up in Calgary, Canada, pays the most and rates the highest, with the Pendleton and Cheyenne round-ups and the shows at Madison Square Garden and the Salinas, California, rating together just below it. These ratings change from time to time, so I can't be sure of the present standing. Anyway, the bucking and roping contests rate the highest in

every show; so the man who wins one of these events at the biggest show gets himself the highest possible number of points for any one contest.

But you can see that it is possible for a consistent winner at the smaller shows to take the championship, even though he has bad luck in the big ones. However, the consistent winner usually takes the big ones, too.

That first contest at the Hill ranch is always well attended, as it is only about thirty miles from the city of Los Angeles. A big share of its audience comprises people from the motion-picture colony, who go for sporting events in a big way, especially where horses are featured. Then there are several hundred ex-cowhands who are working in the Western pictures. You'll find these boys both among the spectators and among the contestants. Of course, the big stars in the Western "horse operas" are barred by clauses in their contracts from engaging in any dangerous outside activities, even though they are top riders. But the free-lance boys sure like to take a shot at that prize money.

As soon as the "home show" is over, Leonard Ward and his helpers are confronted with the big task of shipping the whole outfit to the next stand, usually in the great central valley of California. Some towns have a regular date every year; for example, the big show at Salinas. Other places only put on the shows occasionally, to celebrate some special even. The route is never quite the same, from year to year. But, wherever they go, the cowhands have the big job of entraining a load of calves and steers, wild-eyed bucking horses, and mad Brahmin bulls for a journey of from one to five hundred miles. It's like shipping

beef for a big ranch, with a lot of additional complications.

The contestants may follow this outfit to the new stands, or some of them may head for another show being staged in some other part of the country. Each man or woman—there are always some women riders—goes wherever he thinks he can win the most money and the most of those coveted "points" that will win the silver-mounted saddle, the diamond belt buckle, and the rest of the prizes that go to the champion at the end of the year. The best and luckiest like the "long shows," those that run several days, because they can win "day" money as well as "total prizes," and can, in addition, pile up a lot of "points." Others will head for the small, one-day show, where the competition is not so keen, the winnings being slimmer.

CONTEST performers that are taking it easy like to hit a small show some place in the heart of the cow country where there will be a lot of "local talent." That is, plain working cowhands from the local ranches. And old hand knows better than to compete with the professional contest boys, unless he has some specialty in which he knows he excels, but there are always a bunch of youngsters around who think they are good and are willing to take a try. Out of this local talent, every now and then, some green youngster proves to be really good, and rides in the money. That's how contest riders are made.

He picks up his rope and saddle and starts out after big money. Maybe in two or three years he's the champion cowboy of the world, or a top rider with a circus. On the other hand, he may be back at the old ranch again, working as a cook or roustabout, too crippled to ride any

more, all his money gone to pay hospital bills. For contest riding is a hard, dangerous, and exacting job.

The ordinary run-of-the-ranch cowpoke isn't good enough to be a contest rider. Even the bronc toppers on the big ranches, specialists who are paid extra for breaking horses and riding bad ones, do not usually have a chance in a regular association contest, riding the prescribed association saddle under contest rules. The contest rider generally starts out as a ranch hand, but by the time he gets so he is winning regularly, even in the smaller shows, he is a trained athlete—an expert of experts.

He has to ride the pick of the worst buckers in the country. Paul Hill has men out all the time scouting for bad buckers. They comb the country from Canada to Mexico for the craziest-twisting sunfishers they can find. And that's the kind of stuff the contest rider is forking when he comes riding out into the arena.

Take roping. Some cowhands are handy with the rope, and some aren't. But put even a top hand on a "hot," superfast, highly trained thoroughbred, such as are now used in roping contests, and he would be a lost hombre—at least, until he had had plenty of practice under such high-speed conditions.

On the other hand, the contest roper and his race horse might have a pretty tough time on the ranch until they became reconditioned to everyday work.

Well, to get back to the Hill show.

It entrains every week or so for a new stand, so you can see the boys always have a job ahead of them. Sometimes they hop as far east as Provo, Utah, but mostly the hop is just to another town on the Pacific coast. The last stand of the season is at the Union Stockyards, in Los Angeles. This takes place sometime in the latter half of December, and is really a cowman's show.

Now, as you know, the beef round-up on most ranches is in the fall of the year, and right after it comes the shipping season. This makes it convenient for cattlemen from all over the Southwest to be on hand, for most of them do business with the Los Angeles stockyards and like to get there once a year to talk things over with the buyers at the various commission houses which are situated in the main buildings of the yard.

Ranchers are always among the most interested and critical spectators at a contest of this kind, so you can figure the boys will really put it on for them. A lot of them know they are performing for their old boss and a flock of their buddies from the home ranch, and then, knowing that home-ranch money is back of them, how they ride!

After the stockyard show the whole outfit goes into winter quarters on the Hill ranch for rest and reconditioning. Some of the stock is put out on leased pasture, but all of the better horses are held right at headquarters, where there is fine winter grazing after the fall rains have put a third growth of wild oats and clover all over the hills.

NOTICE—This magazine contains new stories only. No reprints are used.



HALF-BREED, WHOLE MAN

By SETH RANGER

Author of "Fire Bug," etc.

THE high wind sweeping across the Puget Sound country filled the air with the crash of falling trees and flying branches. Rain fell in torrents, turning the new trails built by the Civilian Conservation Corps into temporary water-courses, and testing the new CCC bridges to the limit.

"Spruce" Renfro, of the Indian River Camp, scowled dubiously at a flood-control dam the outfit had thrown across Elk Creek. In an ef-

fort to save the lower country from its annual spring floods, the CCC had enlarged a dam originally built by a beaver colony. "The beavers would have done a better job," Spruce growled, "but I guess it'll hold. Still—" He listened to the rain slapping against his slicker and shook his head again.

"It's got to hold," his companion, Joe Beaver, declared. Joe was darkly handsome, and because his swarthy complexion was similar to that of the Indians the CCC mem-

bers had seen fishing off the Washington coast, he had been nicknamed "Siwash."

"It'll be pretty tough on the ranchers in the lower valley if it lets go, Siwash," Spruce observed. "We'll keep an eye on weather reports, and if this storm shows signs of growing worse we'll warn 'em to clear out."

"A warning will save lives," Siwash admitted, "but it won't save property. It won't protect the efforts a bunch of poor devils have put into those ranches."

Spruce understood what was in the other's mind. Certain government agencies had taken a group of Northwest Indians and convinced them they were not beaten by conditions of the time. The government men had argued that no one could beat the natives but themselves. The CCC had cleared land and built cabins in the lower valley, which, under an old treaty, was Indian Reservation. The natives, catching the enthusiasm that was in the air, had pooled their resources and bought a few head of dairy stock. A government loan aided in the purchase of additional cattle and the future looked bright.

Numerous other natives, slipping into indolence and poor health, were watching the experiment. If successful, they would establish small ranches which, in time, would carry them safely through bad fishing years.

No man in government service was more enthusiastic than Spruce Renfro. Weaklings were instinctively drawn to his boundless physical strength. Spruce allowed them to lean long enough to catch their breath and then he set them about arranging things so the weakest could stand alone.

He regarded Siwash as a weak-

ling. The man was desperately in love with Marcia Lee, and doing nothing about it. "We might as well go back to Indian River," Spruce said. "There's a big dance at Kelly's Hall—a kind of a farewell party for some of the boys whose enrollment had ended—and Marcia will be there."

Spruce glanced sharply at Siwash when he mentioned the girl's name. He saw a deep hunger fill the other's face, and something about it stirred his sympathy. What Siwash should do, in Spruce's opinion, was get a job, ask the girl to marry him, and make a start in life. Marcia, he knew, had plenty of common sense. They would come through with flying colors.

HE led the way down the soggy trail while Siwash, brooding darkly on life, followed. A mile from Indian River a wretched young man dressed in a drenched CCC uniform stumbled from a swamp and sat down on a log to catch his breath. Devil's clubs had scratched his face, swamp muck dripped from his waist to his boots, and his bleeding hands were blue with cold.

"There's your social problem, Spruce," Siwash said. "I think you're licked there. He's crazier than a loon, and as timid as a deer. You remember how he ran out on us during the big fire last fall?"

"Forget it," Spruce growled. In his opinion a man who didn't have nerve enough to ask a girl to marry him was just as yellow as one who ran when a forest fire singed him. "I had hopes for that mug until the big blaze shattered his morale."

They said nothing more until opposite the obviously exhausted CCC man. "What're you doing down there, Trapper?" Spruce asked.

"You're a sight for the gods, not to mention a candidate for double pneumonia." "Trapper" was a nickname.

"Trapping," the other said, through chattering teeth.

Spruce got a good grip on Trapper's arm and helped him down the trail. Renfro now had three things on his mind—the dam, Siwash and his girl, and Trapper Gilman. A fir tree crashed in front of them, and the top of it, weighing nearly a ton, struck the ground forty feet behind. Spruce expected Trapper to quake with fear, but to his surprise the man plodded steadily along. "I'm glad it ain't a fire," Trapper said.

"You've been trapping ever since you came here," Spruce growled, "and you never caught a thing but a rabbit. You were too chicken-hearted to kill the rabbit, and now it's a camp pet. What's the idea, anyway?"

"I was born in a city tenement," Trapper answered. "We never had much. Ma always wanted a fur coat. A cheap one. It's the only thing she ever did want, bad. It seems like she was always cold and never could get her blood thickened up. I guess she needed a fur coat for winters. Well, she saved for one, and when she'd get a little ahead one of us would take sick and she'd have to use her coat money for doctors and medicine."

"Go on," Spruce urged. He was beginning to understand.

"I've seen ma try on a coat and look at herself in the store mirror, then hand the coat back to the clerk and say she'd think about it. It made the clerks mad. They could tell by her clothes she would never buy a nice coat. But it helped ma," Trapper explained, as he stumbled along.

"Things like that do help," Spruce admitted.

"When we heard about the CCC," Trapper continued. "It looked like the break we'd been hunting for. Ma never would let us loaf around, waiting for a break. She said we should hunt them, or make them. She had plenty of courage locked up in her skinny body. I wished I had some of it." An oddly wistful expression passed across his thin face.

"There are different kinds of courage," Spruce commented.

"I hopped into the CCC and asked to be sent out here," Trapper said. "It looked as if I could find courage, get some flesh on my bones, some hope in my heart and—well, a chance to trap ma that fur coat. We'd heard there were all kinds of animals in the lakes, mountains, and streams."

He was silent a long time. "I've got just three weeks left of my enrollment. I ain't any heavier. And I didn't find nerve. And I didn't get a fur coat for ma. To-day I thought I might trap a bobcat down in that bottom where the creek goes through the brush. But—no dice."

THE trail narrowed, and Trapper walked on ahead. Siwash swung in close behind him. "You've made some kind of a record, wood tick," Siwash said. "Men have joined the CCC for queer reasons, but joining it so you could trap your mother a fur coat takes the cake."

Spruce Renfro gave Siwash a lusty boot and growled, "Shut your trap, you mug, or I'll shift your front teeth. What've you done that gives you the right to sound off? You haven't nerve enough to ask a girl to marry you."

Siwash Brown whirled, fists clenched, dark features contorted

with fury. "I could kill you for that," he panted. "You've done some pretty fine things in this man's camp, but for once you don't know what you're talking about. Now if you want to shift my teeth, just hop to it."

Spruce squared off, then hesitated. "Wade in if you feel like it," he invited. "Maybe you're right. Perhaps I had no business making that crack. But can't you see Marcia Lee loves you?"

"I've tried not to see it," Siwash answered. "We'll settle this later. I think I'm going to need everything I've got in the next forty-eight hours. This storm's getting worse." He turned and followed Trapper Gilman. Spruce trailed along, his mood serious and thoughtful. There was something in Siwash's make-up he did not even remotely understand.

The trail led sharply upward and followed a ridge overlooking lower Elk Valley. Elk Creek was running full and the main run-off of rain water had not really started. Moss, ferns, thick brush, and other vegetation held it back. Each cabin had smoke trailing from its chimney and fairly radiated security. And yet the three CCC men knew it was a false security.

"I'm afraid all their hard work is done for," Spruce said. "Look, the creek is overflowing on some of the pasture land already. The cattle are working up to high ground. You can't fool cattle."

"I've a mind to go back," Siwash said, "and see if I can't figure a way to strengthen that dam, or else check the overflow upstream beyond the dam."

"A ranger will be watching the dam within an hour," Spruce answered. "He'll tell us what he wants

done. They're safe enough until tomorrow afternoon, anyway."

"Indians are made to feel their place in the scheme of things by whites," Siwash said thoughtfully. "Sooner or later they get into a rut. And yet, they want to improve their lot. When they do what those Indians down there have done—well, it takes more than average courage. It's pretty tough for them to go under before they even get a toe-hold on their ranches."

"Blasted tough," Spruce agreed. "But floods are merciless. Come on. If you keep looking at those snug cabins and happy folks moving among them you'll only start brooding. Our job now is to pour Trapper into a tub of hot water. And then, go to the dance."

SPRUCE RENFRO let out a yell when the floor manager announced that the next dance would be a Swedish polka, and made a bee line for a blonde named Hulda Nordstrum. "It goes, one, two, three—hop!" he yelled at Siwash. "Grab Marcia, and swing out on the floor."

Several minutes later Spruce, flushed and puffing, led the fair Hulda to a secluded place with the suggestion they catch their breath and cool off. "It's intermission, anyway," he said. "There's a swell spot out here on the porch, if somebody isn't there ahead of us."

He rounded a corner and stopped dead in his tracks. Marcia was gazing happily into Siwash's face. "Don't tell me you love me," she breathed. "I already know it." Then the look of happiness faded, leaving the girl white-faced and frightened. "I don't—I don't want to hear you tell me."

Spruce could see that the situation was tense. Siwash had at last

summoned sufficient courage to ask the girl he loved to marry him, and she had stopped the proposal as it came to his lips. Now the two faced each other, uneasy and confused.

"I hope I'm not talking out of turn," Spruce said, "but I came to ask you for the next dance, Marcia." It was a bald lie, and Hulda knew it. He had come to catch his breath.

"Will you dance it with me?" Siwash asked Hulda, and the blond girl, equal to the situation, nodded.

Spruce and Marcia danced in silence once around the hall. "I'm sorry it turned out that way," he said. "You see, it has taken Siwash a long time to tell you how he felt. He'll probably never ask you again."

"Would you like to know why I stopped him?" she asked.

As he looked down into her dark, troubled eyes and watched the light play on her glossy black hair, it came to him that she was one of the most beautiful girls he had ever seen. "If you'd like to tell me," he said, "go ahead."

She talked in a low, tense voice, and when she had finished he looked at her in astonishment. "What'll you do now?" he asked.

"The government people assigned me to work with the Indian women on the Elk Valley project. I like the work and—— The dance has ended, find me a chair, please. I'm suddenly all tired out."

The dance wasn't the only thing that had ended, Spruce thought, as he seated Marcia. Fate played strange pranks on young people at time—particularly, it seemed, when young people were deeply in love.

As he looked about for a partner for the next dance, a man in a dripping CCC uniform appeared at the door. "Spruce!" he panted. "The forest ranger telephoned the dam's

liable to go out any time. He wants everybody in the Indian River Camp to light out for Elk Valley and move people, cattle and furniture to high ground."

"O. K.!" Spruce answered. He passed the word along and hurried over to Siwash. "We're moving 'em out of Elk Valley."

Siwash's look was desperate. The reaction of Marcia's refusal had put him in a reckless mood. "You're moving 'em out," he said briefly, "but I'm going to fight the water. There's an ancient channel in the canyon. If we could divert part of the water through that old bed it would relieve the pressure and——"

"That's out!" Spruce barked. "If the dam let go, and you were in the canyon, you wouldn't have a chance."

"Nothing is out," Siwash said evenly. "With the help of powder, a crosscut saw, and one man, I've got a chance. We can't let that blasted water wipe out everything those poor devils own. And nobody's going to stop me!"

He disappeared before Spruce could argue further against the mad scheme. The latter started the CCC men toward camp, then searched about the deserted hall for Siwash. He heard Trapper Gilman's voice exclaim: "On the level, Siwash? Will you really do it? Can you do it?"

Spruce jumped a fence and found Siwash and Trapper standing in the shelter of a spreading cedar. "What's this 'on the level' business you're talking about, Trapper?" he demanded.

The skinny man's eyes were fever-bright with excitement. "Siwash says he'll get fur pelts enough for ma's coat if I'll help him turn the water up there in the canyon," Trapper exclaimed.

"What kind of fur pelts?" Spruce demanded.

The sullenness in Siwash's eyes was visible even in the gloom of the stormy night. "Pelts from fur seal," Siwash answered. "There are hundreds of thousands of them swimming north to the rookeries on the Pribilof Islands."

"Yes, and they're protected by Coast Guard cutters all the way from the mouth of the Columbia River to the islands," Spruce shouted. "It's a prison offense if you're caught taking them. And what's more, even if the Coast Guard didn't catch you, you'd have a swell time getting them processed. You'd be caught there, sure, because the people who clip and dye the pelts would want to know where you got them. Siwash, you're a yellow coyote to hold up such an offer to Trapper!"

"I'll stop at nothing to turn that flood water," Siwash shouted. His fist lashed out and caught Spruce flush on the jaw. As the latter's knees buckled, he drove in another punch to insure complete unconsciousness. That fur seal coat is on the level, Trapper," he said. "Are you coming with me?"

"Just a minute, Siwash," Trapper said. "If—if something should happen, and I get caught up there in the canyon and you—you get out alive, will you send ma the pelts?"

"I'll send her the coat," Siwash promised. "Come on!"

SPRUCE RENFRO opened his eyes and watched the dripping clouds above him spin around. Sometimes he was under a single cedar tree. Again under several. He got upon hands and knees and stared at Kelly's halls. There were five of them. When they merged into one and became steady he stood

up. "Man alive!" he said thickly. "What a wallop! He sure thinks his cause righteous or he wouldn't have put all that steam behind it!"

Spruce reeled through the night until he found his feet on a forest-service trail. He started for Elk Valley, then changed his mind and headed for the canyon. Day was beginning to break as he neared the canyon mouth. Trapper and Siwash were hard at work falling a big fir tree. The latter was doing most of the work because of his superior strength and desperation. He saw Siwash leap back and heard him yell, "Timber-r-r-r-r-r!" above the storm.

The tree fell across the raging creek, drifted several yards, then lodged firmly against another, already down. The first tree had piled up against a granite wall on one end, and against a five-foot fir snag on the other. The snag was thirty feet high. "You get out of here, or I'll throw this double-bitted ax into you," Siwash threatened as Spruce appeared. "You can't take us back."

"I'm here to lend a hand," Spruce answered. "You don't suppose I'd miss a fight like this?" When it was all over he resolved to tell Siwash why Marcia wouldn't marry him. Then the poor fellow, he reasoned, would love her more than ever.

Siwash set Trapper to work gathering brush while Spruce helped him fall the remaining trees. There were seven in all, and their combined bulk was impressive. "There's no time to rest," Spruce bellowed. "We've got to keep at it, the water's rising!"

He gave Trapper a long pole and directed him to turn all driftwood against the logs. Water pouring through the cracks between the logs sucked the driftwood tightly against

the cracks and helped seal them. Spruce and Siwash tossed in quantities of the brush Trapper had gathered, and worked it into place.

A forest ranger, waving frantically from the crest of the wall two hundred feet above them, caught Spruce's eye. The ranger cupped his hands and roared: "She's liable to go any time. Get out of the canyon."

"We're diverting the stream down the old channel," Spruce yelled back. "We can't leave. Besides, we're standing on a bench above the stream."

The ranger indicated that the flood would smother the bench. He disappeared somewhere beyond the canyon rim and a few minutes later his prediction came true. A wave a foot high swept along the canyon wall and licked at the base of the bench.

Spruce and Siwash exchanged glances. The roar of the creek had mounted, and the job was only half done. Spruce pointed to a small jam upstream. "If we could get that down here it might plug up the remaining holes," he bellowed.

"Come on," Siwash said. "You stay here, Trapper. And if you hear a roar, get out of here as fast as you can. The whole dam may go, or only part of it. It's a gamble."

Spruce plunged into the stream and fought his way slowly against the current, clutching at outcroppings and shoulders of rock—anything that would give a handhold. Siwash followed. Icy water spilled over their shoulders at times. The pair clutched at the jam and began working it loose. The rising waters aided them, lifting logs and root masses that had been gathering for years. They pushed and tugged, using long poles for levers until the surface was covered with debris.

"If we can get this root mass loose," Spruce panted, "it'll fill that big hole between our log dam, and we'll have the fight won."

"We need a couple more men," Siwash gasped. He jumped down into the water, planted his feet against the canyon wall, his back against the root, and pushed. Spruce joined him. The mass gave slightly, and then stopped.

"Listen!" Spruce panted. "Dam's let go! Hear that roar?"

A different sound echoed through the canyon. It was heavier, deeper in tone and threat. "Let her come!" Siwash grunted. "It's no time to play safe."

"I'll help!" a voice chattered behind them.

"Trapper!" Spruce shouted. "This is no place for you."

"I ran out on the fire," Trapper said thickly. His face was turning blue with cold. It was drawn and desperate. "If this licks me, I'm licked forever." He laid hold and pulled. Under their combined efforts the root mass broke clear. It bobbed down the river, followed by logs, drift, brush, and the debris that had accumulated behind it.

Spruce leaped to a log, reached down, and hauled Trapper into his arms. "Wrap your legs around my waist," he directed, "and your arms around my shoulders. Let my back take your weight. Don't choke me!"

THE log was wallowing dangerously, and, as it turned, Spruce drove in his caked boots and checked it. Siwash was riding another log five feet behind them. A wave smothered Spruce's log. Water boiled up around his knees, and for a moment he struggled to maintain his footing. The advance guard of the water spilling from the broken dam was on them.

"When we hit the log dam ahead," he yelled at Siwash, "it's every man for himself. Don't be sucked under, or you're liable to wedge between the cracks."

"Turn me loose," Trapper said, "and give yourself a chance."

Spruce swung the lighter man around in front of him, then lifted him above his head and held him with arms stiff and perpendicular. An instant later the log struck the log jam. Spruce heaved and sent Trapper through the air. The lighter man struck with a grunt, clawed desperately, and hauled himself to temporary safety.

Spruce's log shot downward, carrying him with it. His foot sucked into a crack, but his hands found a snag and he hauled himself, gasping, above the surface. Trapper leaned down and caught at his wrist. They pulled furiously, and suddenly Spruce's foot cleared.

He climbed to the top of the dam and sprawled across the log, gasping. "No time to loaf," he managed to say. "Gotta move. Where's Siwash?"

Trapper pointed. Siwash had just crawled out. They climbed down to the bed of Elk Creek. The logs had stopped the water, momentarily, and it was flowing at less than half its normal strength. The trio ran down the bed, dodging boulders and plunging through obstructing pools. The outcome was still in the laps of the storm gods. The impact of the water might knock the logs aside. If so, a wall would soon sweep down the valley.

Spruce saw a path that a goat might have made, leading out of the canyon. He scrambled to the crest of the canyon and dropped, exhausted. Trapper came next, with Siwash bringing up the rear, pushing the weaker man ahead of him.

They crawled to the edge near by and looked down. Their log dam had vanished. In its place the flood waters seethed and swirled.

"It's holding!" Siwash yelled hoarsely. "It's holding even under water."

A wall of water, diverted by the dam, was rushing through the old channel. Nothing could resist it. Driftwood, carried along on the crest, smashed down willows and alders growing along the bottom. Surging currents uprooted them and carried them along. Spruce got stiffly to his feet.

"This sure turned out to be a record day for you, Trapper," he said. "You measured up-man-sized, right from the ground. There are men who faced the fire last fall who never would have stood up against the water as you did to-day. And it'll go down in your record."

The sky above was darker than ever, but Trapper thought it was brighter. "And does ma get a fur coat, Siwash?" he asked.

"She sure does," Siwash answered. "But you're getting all blue and shaky again. Spruce, you'd better take Trapper back to camp and put him into a tub of hot water."

"It seems as if that's all I've been doing lately," Spruce grumbled. "And you'd better come along yourself. After all, you're no iron man. And even if you were you'd probably rust with all of that water that's in your uniform."

It was late afternoon when they gained the ridge above Elk Valley. Swarms of CCC men were pulling driftwood from the old channel and keeping the water from piling up. On the other side of the valley Elk Creek's normal channel was doing valiant service. Indians were beginning to move their belongings back to their cabins. He saw fat squaws

carrying babies in their arms, young boys driving cattle back to pasture, and men staggering under the burden of provisions and furniture. But mostly he was conscious of the smoothly working CCC machine, created by the army and the forest service. Trapper nodded toward his companions, laboring tirelessly, and said, "It's nice to call yourself one of 'em."

"That's the way I feel," Spruce answered. "Now for the bathtub and bed."

SPRUCE awakened with a start. Daylight was streaming through to his bunk. He glanced around. Everybody was sleeping in. Well, they deserved it. One bunk was empty—Siwash's. Spruce rolled out and dressed, then hurried outside. "Where's Siwash?" he asked Sergeant Finnegan.

"You mugs saved Elk Valley," Finnegan answered, "and the captain said you could have most anything you asked for. Siwash asked for a week's leave and got it."

"Where'd he go?"

"Somewhere off the coast," Finnegan informed him. "A place called Lapush, I think."

"It's at the mouth of the Quillayute River," Spruce answered. "For a man who didn't have nerve enough to ask a girl to marry him, he's found plenty of it all of a sudden. He's going after fur seal."

"That's against the laws of the United States, England, and Japan," Finnegan exclaimed.

"Yes, and China and Russia, too," Spruce added. "That takes in most of the world's population. Can I have a week off? I've got to keep that bird out of trouble."

"The back of me hand to such a mug," Finnegan growled. "Clear

out and see what you can do for him."

An hour later Spruce left Indian River. He caught an Olympic Peninsula stage and early the following morning unloaded at Lapush. Armed with binoculars, the CCC man made his way to the nearest headland and began studying the vast Pacific. The recent storm had cleared the air, and brilliant sunlight flood the water. Spruce breathed easier—there wasn't a Coast Guard cutter in sight.

Below him an Indian canoe cut the water. It was constructed of a cedar log, and carried a high prow that threw back the high seas and kept the lone paddler in the stern dry. "It's Siwash!" Spruce exclaimed. "I can paddle that good. He sure isn't covering himself with glory."

Three miles from shore the canoe changed its course abruptly. The paddler boated his paddle, caught up a harpoon, and drove it into some swimming object. After a brief struggle the object was hauled aboard.

"That's his first seal," Spruce said. "There he goes after another. Well, there're a million and a half headed for the islands, so he should find enough for Trapper's ma's coat."

Slowly Siwash drifted seaward. Spruce relaxed. Perhaps he even dozed. He opened his eyes and blinked at a white coast guard cutter steaming toward the canoe. It stopped, and the canoe drew up alongside. Ten minutes passed, then the canoe was hoisted aboard and the cutter turned northward. "Well, can you tie that?" Spruce exclaimed. In spite of his tone, Spruce wasn't particularly surprised, but it looked as if Trapper would have to remain in the Puget Sound country, trapping, if his mother was to ever

own a fur coat. He wondered if she would be contented with a bearskin coat. Black bears weren't hard to find.

He was still pondering on the problem when he returned to the Indian River Camp. "What happened?" Sergeant Finnegan asked.

"The Coast Guard caught him," Spruce answered. "That's what they're out there for."

"The scrap he had with his girl made him desperate," Finnegan suggested. "I've known men who won the Congressional medal of honor—not because they were brave, but because they had a row with their girl and temporarily went haywire and took it out on the enemy."

SHORTLY after dark that night Finnegan ordered Spruce to report immediately. "He's coming," he informed the latter the instant he appeared. "Somebody just telephoned me. Maybe the cuss has escaped from the Coast Guard and wants us to hide him."

An hour passed, slowly; then they heard the crunch of gravel under heavy CCC boots. The door opened and Siwash stood there, smiling. "How'd you get away?" Spruce asked. "I saw the Coast Guard pick you up. You must've had ten seal by that time."

"Yes, ten," Siwash admitted. "It takes six skins to make a coat that'll fit Trapper's mother. I added four more to cover the cost of making the coat. They're already on their way to Kansas City to be processed. I lined up a job for Trapper. I imagine his mother will wear the coat on the train when she joins him."

"First showing it to all the neighbors," Spruce suggested. "But why did they turn you loose?"

"When United States, Great Brit-

ain, Japan, China, and Russia made a treaty covering the fur seal to save them from extinction, it was agreed only Indians could take them. And they had to use primitive weapons. No gas boats or rifles. Well, I took advantage of the treaty because—I'm a Siwash! The fellows who nicknamed me called the turn and never dreamed of it."

"Go on," Spruce said quietly.

"Well, I decided I'd go white when I was fifteen. I cleared out, got an education, and planned to marry a white girl," Siwash concluded. "Blood is thicker than water, I guess. When the government started to establish natives on small ranches, I figured my job was to help my people. My conscience wouldn't let me be white. That's why I wouldn't ask Marcia Lee to marry me. I loved her too much to take her to—a reservation."

Spruce heaved a mighty sigh of relief. "Maybe you'd like to know why she shut you up when you started to ask her that night love got the better of good judgment."

"I sure would," Siwash answered. "She got interested in the Indian project, too," Spruce explained. "So she came here. She is pretty much in love with you, old son, but she didn't propose to let a white man marry her. She is a Siwash, too—a half-breed from the Yakima tribe."

"And I am a half-breed Quillayute," Siwash said. "It looks as if I'd have to put to sea for another fur coat. It should be easier, this time—the Coast Guard knows I'm not a white man."

He grinned broadly, and hurried into the barracks to slick up. "You'd better call Marcia Lee and tell her she's better stay home, Spruce," said Sergeant Finnegan. "There's a gent calling on her."



GUMSHOE GALLEGHER

By **GLENN H. WICHMAN**

Author of "The Six-gun Points T o Six," etc.

IT was along in the middle of the morning when the boss came riding back from town. He brought with him a copy of the weekly county seat *Gazette*, which newspaper he tossed at me and my partner, "Hep" Gallagher, as we were coming out of the corral.

"Boys," said the boss, "if you'll take a look in the classified advertising column you'll see that Muzzie Watkins is in hot water again. If you're feeling brave enough to try an' get him out of it, it'll be all right

with me. I kinda like the guy."

With that the boss went up to the ranch house and left me and Gallagher to read the news. This "Muzzie" Watkins that the boss had mentioned was an amusing sort of cuss, and quite a friend of everybody's. He lived on a neighboring ranch, and that ranch of his was the most woe-begone institution that the eyes of mortal man had ever seen. How any of the ranch buildings remained standing was a perpetual wonder. They all seemed tired and dizzy and about to collapse from their own

weight. In fact, one of them had recently fallen all in a heap. Muzzie was always tired, too; he was by all odds the laziest and most shiftless man in the world, and could sit longer in one place without moving than a marble statue.

Mr. Watkins's cow ranch was entirely beefless; the only thing it ever produced was an occasional batch of mountain dew. Muzzie's corn liquor, however, was priceless, for while it packed dynamite in large quantities, it was as smooth as bear grease. A lot of men in the valley had the habit of occasionally riding over to Watkins's spread to get a little fire water; if it hadn't been for that, Muzzie would either have had to go to work or starve to death. Most folks were of the opinion that he wouldn't have bothered to go to work.

Gallegher and I leaned up against the corral and got busy on the paper. The classified section consisted of three advertisements. Muzzie Watkins himself had inserted the astonishing ad at the top of the column. It read:

ONE DOLLAR REWARD. I will pay one dollar to any detective who will recover the letter that was stolen from my house last Tuesday night. It was addressed to me and was written by Lena Westfall and will do nobody any good but me, seeing that I am the guy Lena asked to marry her, this being leap year. Lena now says she didn't propose to me and I say she did. One dollar will be paid for the letter because I have a broken heart.

MUZZIE WATKINS.

"Well, I'll be durned!" exclaimed Gallegher. "So Lena's asked Muzzie to get married."

"Must be a mistake," I objected, "because no woman in her right mind would want to marry Muzzie. And Lena certainly has a mind." This was right, too, because Lena Westfall was as sharp as a couple of

tacks. At one time she and her brother had owned the Block F, but her brother had died and she had sold the outfit and had moved to town to live on the interest from her money. She was what was known as an old maid, but this had never seemed to bother her any because she was good-looking and had had all kind of chances to get married.

We read the second advertisement, which was equally astonishing, and which Lena herself had inserted.

TWO DOLLARS REWARD. I will pay two dollars to any one who will return to me the letter which Muzzie Watkins says I wrote to him, and which I say I didn't write. Whoever heard of the like! Isn't there any chivalry left in the West? Why, Muzzie can't even understand the English language.

LENA WESTFALL.

"Shucks!" said Hep. "Now isn't that just like a woman? In one breath she says she wants the letter back, and in the next breath she says that she didn't write it. There's a mystery here of some kind."

"Nothing for us to worry about," I told Gallegher. "These lovers' quarrels are usually rough on the party of the third part. Only lunatics would interfere."

"Nonsense!" snorted Gallegher. "Who's afraid of Lena Westfall?"

The third ad only served to further complicate the matter. It had been inserted by Mike Salaratus, the blacksmith. Mike was a fellow with large bulging muscles and a serious mind. There was no nonsense about him, and he could and did shoe more horses in a day than any three ordinary blacksmiths. He was likewise a saving gent, and had more money than any one in town, with the exception of Lena.

This advertisement read:

THREE DOLLARS REWARD. I will pay three dollars to any one who will bring

Muzzie Watkins to my blacksmith shop so I can sock him on the jaw.

MIKE SALARATUS.

"Now I know," said I, "that this is nothing for either of us to butt in on. If Mike's mixed up in it, somebody's bound to get his nose busted."

HEP GALLEGHER rubbed his jaw and tried to look wise. "This," he finally said, "is the most profound mystery that I've ever encountered, and I've encountered some good ones. It must have been especially put together for me to unravel. There's three questions to be answered: Who stole the letter from Muzzie Watkins's house? Why does Lena Westfall want a letter back which she says she didn't write? And why does Mike Salaratus want to punch Muzzie's jaw?"

"It's easy," I offered, "to see how the three ads came to be in the paper. The editor was drumming up some business for himself. He took Muzzie's ad to Lena and she wrote hers in answer. Then he took the two ads to Mike, and Mike wrote his. But what I can't understand is why Mike Salaratus should get so hot an' bothered."

"Neither can I," acknowledged Gallegher, "because Mike has never had time for either love or the ladies. He hasn't got time for anything but shoeing horses and making money. That's why he offers the reward for bringing Muzzie in to town. The sucker's too busy to spend time looking for him himself."

With that, Gallegher hurried up to the bunk house, and I trailed along behind him. A moment later he came out of the bunk house with a large star pinned on his bosom. There was but one word on it—"Detective."

WS—8D

"I always knew," Gallegher explained, "that some day I'd have use for this thing, which is why I bought it. Anybody can see that I have an analytical mind and hadn't ought to be tending cows. This is my opportunity to get started up in the world. I'll solve these mysteries or bust a fiddlestring."

When Gallegher once got an idea in his noggin it was impossible to shake it out. If the ideas had been good ones it wouldn't have been so bad, but they were always foolish ones. He was almost a specialist at thinking up queer ways to get himself into trouble, and would ride a hundred miles any old day of the week to do it.

"The reward," I told him, "will never make you rich. You're supposed to do three things and get a sum total of six dollars for doing all three of them. If that's the way detectives are paid, you'd better stay with the cows."

"This is a special case," replied Hep. "It ain't my fault if I'm workin' for a lot of cheap skates. But think what it'll do for my reputation. After I've solved these mysteries, folks won't mind puttin' out real money to hire me. Come on. I'm going to find that letter."

"Can't imagine," I objected, "you takin' Muzzie in to town to have his nose punched by the blacksmith."

"Haven't any such intention," snorted Hep. "Between you an' me, Muzzie's been put upon and ganged up on. I'm out to protect the gent as well as to earn his dollar. I'm working exclusively for Muzzie."

There wasn't any use to argue. "By the way," I suggested, "you haven't forgotten, have you, that you an' me were over at Muzzie's ranch house last Tuesday evening? That's the night he says in the ad that the letter was stolen."

"By gosh," gasped Hep, "I hadn't thought of that. But I can't see what difference it makes. It's a double-barreled cinch that neither you nor me took it. And remember, there were other men there besides us. We saw 'em ridin' into the ranch yard as we came away. Three of 'em, but it was too dark for us to tell who they were. Recollect?"

I recollected, and made one more fruitless effort to talk him out of it.

Gallegher shook his head. "It's the chance of a lifetime. Think of how hard it's going to be to find that letter. When I do find it, folks'll talk about it for the next ten years."

Seeing that the boss was willing, and that I couldn't help it, we saddled our horses and rode over the hills to Muzzie's outfit. We got there in the early afternoon. The ranch house was deserted; both doors stood open, and there was nothing inside but a hound dog that refused even to wake up.

"With a reward of three dollars on his head," said I, "Muzzie's probably run away. Or mebbe he's already been captured."

GALLEGHER scratched his head and didn't think that anybody in the valley would be so low as to capture Watkins for three dollars. Hep went out in the ranch yard and began to call for Muzzie to come back, on the theory that a gent as lazy as Watkins couldn't have gone very far. At least, not any farther than a man could holler.

Hep made the welkin ring with that voice of his. By the time Gallegher had worked himself into a sweat there came an answer from the wooded ridge which was to the east of the ranch house. Shortly Muzzie came stumbling down the slope, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

By the time he got into the ranch yard he was more or less awake.

"What an infernal racket," declared Muzzie. "I was hitting the hoot-owl trail, being that I'm a fugitive, when you woke me up." Watkins's eyes opened wide as he caught sight of the huge star on Gallegher's shirt. "Shucks!" grunted Muzzie. "I can't believe it."

"I've engaged myself to be your gumshoe and to see that you get justice," Hep told him, "and to find the letter. It'll be a cinch. Tell me who was here Tuesday night besides me an' my partner."

Watkins couldn't think of anything so complicated as that until he had sat down in the shade. He sprawled out under a tree, keeping an eye open for any one who might be coming.

"There were three gents came after you boys were here," began Muzzie. "After they'd gone I discovered that the letter was missing. It'd been on the kitchen table an' it was gone. The three fellows were Chuck Nichols, Pete Sullivan and Dan Barclay. I went to town and asked each one of 'em about the letter, an' they denied taking it. Somebody's a liar, because somebody took it."

"Obviously," nodded Hep. "Somebody took it."

It was a little hard to think very ill of these three men, because they were substantial fellows, even if they did come out to see Muzzie occasionally. "Chuck" Nichols ran the hotel, Pete Sullivan owned a trading concern, and Dan Barclay was a horse doctor.

"Are you sure, Muzzie," I asked, "that Lena Westfall proposed matrimony to you?"

"Of course," came back Watkins. "I can read, can't I?"

"Lena thinks you can't," I replied.

"And what under the sun do you want the letter for? If the lady's changed her mind, that oughta end it."

Muzzie nearly went to sleep before he answered. "George," he finally told me, "my affections have been trifled with. I'm entitled to damages, but I'll have to have the letter to prove it. I'm going to sue Lena Westfall for breach of proposal. And besides that, she's called me a liar, right to my face. Not even as well a lady as Lena is can get away with that."

"Certainly, Muzzie," declared Hep. "I'll find the scoundrel who stole your letter, put him behind the bars, an' then we'll tell Lena where to get off at. Your life's been ruined."

"It was ruined," I put in, "long before Lena Westfall showed up in these parts."

"Well, anyway," came back Muzzie, "it's more ruined now than it used to be."

"Not to change the subject," I said, "but what has Mike Salaratus got to do with this?"

"Can't rightly say," explained Muzzie, "except that Mike lives right next door to Lena. Mebbe he thinks he oughta side in with his neighbors. Lena's let it be known that I'm tryin' to stampede her into holy matrimony. It's her that's been doin' the stampedin', not me. Shucks! An' here I thought I was going to get married an' have somebody to help with the cookin'!"

Hep was tapping his own forehead. "Muzzie," he said, "a great idea has been born. Perhaps Lena sent those three gents out here purposely to retrieve the letter that she wrote you! And now they're holding it out on her, expecting a higher reward!"

"By gosh!" exclaimed Watkins.

"The buzzard who has that letter oughta be hung." With a great effort, Muzzie managed to sit up. "Friends," he announced, "I've gotta be gettin' back to my hide-out on the ridge. Somebody may be along to earn that three dollars, and I don't want to have Mike Salaratus on my neck. That guy's awful."

We watched Muzzie amble up the slope and disappear among the trees.

"A sad case," Hep sighed happily. "Poor Muzzie is entirely undone with it. But I'll do him up again. When I solve this crime of the stolen letter, the Pinkertons will have nothing on me. I'm going to town now and put the pressure on those three suspects and on Lena. When I'm through with them——"

WE got our horses and rode toward town. Just before we got there I asked Gallegher if he wouldn't, as a kindness to me, be good enough to take off his detective star and put it in his pocket.

"Do you think I'm ashamed of it?" snorted Hep.

"You oughta be," I said.

But Gallegher couldn't be talked out of it.

"We might have a drink first," I suggested, hoping that that would get his mind off the matter.

"Sure," agreed Gallegher. "Nothing like a little larynx lubrication before I start in detecting."

We went into the Uvalde Saloon. Luck was neither with us or against us, depending on how a man wanted to look at it. There at the bar, drinking beer, stood two of the suspects, Dan Barclay, the horse doctor, and Chuck Nichols, the hotel man. Hep eased up beside them and ordered him and me a drink.

Dan Barclay spotted Hep's star almost immediately. "By the eter-

nal," said Barclay, pointing to the emblem, "look what's bloomed and blossomed in our midst!"

Chuck Nichols laughed. "Detective Gallegher!" he chuckled. "Hep, the last time I saw you you'd just fallen off a horse. I hope you didn't injure your head or——"

"It's nothing to laugh at, gents," interrupted Gallegher.

"No hard feelings," hurriedly said Nichols, who was really a fine fellow.

We got along first-rate together, and I was beginning to hope that Gallegher had forgotten why he had come to town. He might have, too, if luck had been with us, but it wasn't. Right at that minute Pete Sullivan, who was the third suspect, came into the barroom.

Pete congratulated Hep on having found himself a new job, which was what started the fireworks. "I've always had an itch to be a detective," said Sullivan. "You might tell us how you got that way."

Gallegher drew himself up and tried to look important. "Gents," he announced solemnly, "I represent Muzzie Watkins in the matter of the letter which was stolen from Muzzie's house last Tuesday evening—the leap-year letter that was written to him by Lena Westfall. I'm going to find that letter and return it to Watkins, and I'm going to put the man who stole it in the calaboose."

"That'd be a good idea," agreed Dan Barclay. "A man who'd steal a love letter would rob an orphanage."

"Ditto," added Pete Sullivan. "The world's gotta be made safe for love letters."

"It seems to me," suddenly put in Chuck Nichols, "that I smell a mouse in these proceedings. Unless my memory's off, Muzzie came to

town the other day and accused the three of us of having absconded with the said letter. Not being willing to take our word for it that we haven't got it, he's now up and hired Gallegher to pester us."

"Your deductions are correct," admitted Gallegher. "Despite your denials, you three gents are under surveillance and suspicion. I'm going to interrogate you. Don't any of you go away until I'm through."

"I've got no thought of moving," replied Nichols.

"Me either," said Dan Barclay, "unless somebody pulls the bar out from under me."

"Anyway, you're an obliging bunch of buzzards," acknowledged Gallegher, "even if you are a pack of scoundrels. Answer me this: Were you or were you not out at Muzzie Watkins's house last Tuesday evening?"

"We was!" answered the three suspects in unison.

"Uh-huh!" exclaimed Hep. "Then that's settled. Now answer this: Did you or did you not remove a letter that was on the kitchen table?"

"We did not!" shouted the three men at the top of their lungs.

GALLEGHER looked worried. "Kindly don't holler that way again or you'll have the whole darn town in here wonderin' what the trouble is. That'd spoil everything——" Hep's expression changed to one of puzzlement; he turned to me. "George," he asked me, "where was I?"

"I know where you oughta be," said I.

Nichols came to the detective's assistance. "It was something about a letter——"

"Pardon me for having let my mind wander," continued Gallegher.

"Once again I have a grip on the situation. Gents, I accuse you of having entered into a conspiracy! I accuse you of having hired yourselves out to Lena Westfall to recover the letter which the lady wrote to Muzzie Watkins! And I accuse you of having stolen that letter and of now having it in your possession."

Pete Sullivan solemnly shook his head, although he was laughing to himself all the time. "Them's fighting words, Gallegher, and I ought, by rights, to shoot you. Boys," he asked the two remaining suspects, "hadn't we ought to shoot him?"

"Let's wait till to-morrow," suggested Chuck Nichols. "It's gettin' dark now, an' we oughta have daylight."

"Mebbe we oughta vote on it," proposed Dan Barclay.

They voted on it and decided not to shoot Gallegher until sunup the next day.

Hep began to get mad. "I insist," he informed the three men, "that you cut out the horseplay." He thumped the star on his bosom. "Don't this emblem mean anything to you dumb bums? Here I am, just starting up the ladder of success and——"

"It occurs to me," suddenly put in Nichols, "that we oughta all go down an' ask Lena Westfall if she hired us. That'd settle the matter."

"Fine idea," agreed Barclay. "But maybe we oughta have dinner first. We'll draw cards to see who pays for the beefsteaks for the five of us."

The bartender produced a deck of cards. We drew. Gallegher was low man with a deuce of hearts and was elected to pay the bill.

"Don't ever think of getting married, Hep," advised Pete Sullivan. "If you've got it in the back of your head to join Lena Westfall at the al-

tar you'd better forget it. A deuce of hearts. That's bad."

Gallegher looked as though somebody had hit him on the head with a mallet. "Thunderation, gents!" he exclaimed. "I'd never thought of getting married."

We went out in the street and headed for the restaurant, but hadn't got more than halfway there when along came Mike Salaratus. The blacksmith was smiling and full of chuckles before he saw us, but *after* he'd spotted the five of us he darkened up like a thundercloud.

"Gents," grated Salaratus as he stood with his legs apart and his muscles bulging, "I've heard some talk that you perambulating shepherders are horning in on what doesn't concern you. Shake the clods out of your ears and listen to this: Don't!" With that, Mike continued on down the street.

"This matter gets more and more puzzling," said Chuck Nichols, "but I can't see that it ought to interfere with our appetites."

We went over to the hash house and took our time with the beefsteaks.

"Now," said Dan Barclay after we'd finished, "it's time to call on Lena Westfall."

"You mean *I'm* going to call on Lena," objected Hep. "There's no reason for you birds to tag me around. I've bought you your suppers, an' that's enough."

But Gallegher couldn't shake the others. All five of us went down the lane that ran off the main street on which Lena lived. We passed by Mike's house and came to Lena's, which was next door to it. But when we got to the gate nobody seemed to want to be the first to enter, because everybody had suddenly got cold feet. This entailed a

large argument, carried on in loud tones.

Before the matter had been settled, Lena Westfall opened the front door of her house and came out on the veranda to see what the racket was about. Even in the dimness of the moonlight Lena made a pleasant sight, because she was dressed all in white, and, anyway, she was a good-looking woman.

"Are you gentlemen," she asked, "trying to imitate a pack of coyotes baying at the moon?"

"Far be it, ma'am," answered Chuck Nichols. "We're just accompanying a great detective by the name of Gallagher. Gallagher's got some questions to ask you, ma'am, about the letter you wrote Muzzie Watkins."

"Well," said Lena as we trooped up on the veranda, "you all appear to be sober and in possession of your minds. This is indeed a happy night. Come on in. Mr. Salaratus will be over shortly."

PERSONALLY I couldn't see as it was a happy night, or any reason why Mike Salaratus should come over either shortly or at all. We trooped on into the parlor and looked uncomfortable. Nobody could seem to think of anything to say or anything to do after we'd sat down, except look at the big star on the front of Hep's shirt. We were still gaping when Mike Salaratus rapped on the front door and came in.

"Now remember, Mike," said Lena Westfall to the blacksmith, "that you must try and be reasonable, because some of this was my fault. You let these men do their talking first and then we'll do ours."

"I'll try to," agreed Mike, "but I'm about to bust. If I ever lay my

hands on Muzzie Watkins, or the buzzard who has that letter——"

By now Gallagher had got his nerve accumulated and was rarin' to go. "Ladies an' gents," he announced, "it's *me* that demands that letter, because I'm workin' for Muzzie, who's my client." He pointed to the three men who had accompanied me an' him. "Mike, it's one of these bow-legged rascals who has the letter in question. Miss Lena connived with 'em to go out there an' swipe it an'——"

"Heavenly days!" interrupted Lena Westfall with a blush. "I did no such thing!"

"Listen, Mike!" snorted Chuck Nichols. "If either me or Dan or Pete Sullivan have that letter, I'll eat the darn thing. You can search us, turn us inside out."

Mike Salaratus was having a hard time trying to keep control of his risibilities. "Well," he roared, "you five men were the only ones who were out at Muzzie's, weren't you?"

Nobody contradicted him.

"All right," yelled Mike in that blacksmith bass of his, "it must be one of you five who's got the letter! You're putting on this play acting to cover up the fact. When the time comes, you'll try your hand at a little blackmail! Well, by thunder, you won't! Gallagher, you're heading this, so I'll start in by searching you! Lena, lock the door!"

Things happened then in no time at all. Mike Salaratus descended upon the bewildered Hep like an avalanche. Gallagher turned to run. Mike made a grab at him and caught hold of Hep's hip pocket. Cloth ripped, and the pocket came entirely off. And out of Hep's hip pocket there dropped a *letter!* It fluttered to the floor. Lena Westfall grabbed for it. Mike checked his rush to avoid running into Lena.

"My letter!" gasped the woman. "Mr. Gallegher had it in his pocket!"

EVERYBODY seemed too astonished to say anything. Hep's face was the color of a Mexican serape. By now Mike Salaratus had Gallegher covered with a gun.

"The great detective," said I.

"Boys," finally began Lena, "I have a confession to make, but I'm so happy that I don't mind making it. I've already told Mike, and he's forgiven me. And Mike, I want you to put that gun away, because nothing unpleasant is going to happen to anybody, especially seeing that tomorrow is our wedding day. I'm sure that Mr. Gallegher meant nothing malicious."

Lena was blushing something awful. Mr. Salaratus, who'd now cooled down about a hundred degrees, seeing that the letter had been recovered, went over to Lena, put his arm around her, and kissed her.

"Gents," announced Mike, "I'll do the talking, and if anybody laughs I'll kick him in the pants. The whole thing is my fault. I've loved Lena for a long time, but I've been so blamed busy shoeing horses that I've neglected to tell her and to ask her to marry me. There's a limit to any woman's patience, and Lena ought 'a' hit me on the head. Instead, she tried to make me jealous by getting Muzzie Watkins to come calling."

He unfolded the letter. "The sentence that Muzzie, who must be a dumb egg, misunderstood, was this: 'And now, my dear Mr. Watkins, for Heaven's sake, try and wake up.

Comb some of the cockleburs out of your hair, put on your best suit, and get here at exactly six o'clock, because that is when the parson will show up."

Mike Salaratus wiped his brow and looked tenderly at the lady. "The 'six o'clock' refers to the time when I always come home to supper. The 'parson,' whom Muzzie must have taken to be a minister of the gospel is *me*. That's Lena's pet name for me, probably because I ain't anything like a preacher. And now, if you lunatics will get out of here, all will be forgiven. I'll even forgive Muzzie."

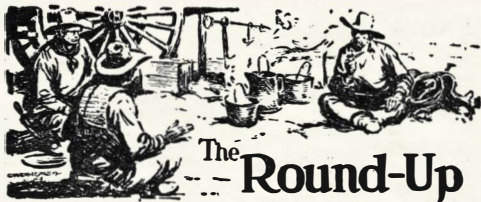
We got. In a hurry. Hep and I snuck off alone in the darkness, while Chuck Nichols and his two friends looked for us with the idea of hanging us. But they didn't look very hard.

"The great detective," said I. "Hepburn C. Gallegher, the great detective!"

But Gallegher didn't feel too badly about it. "I remember now how I come to have the envelope," he told me. "The other night I owed Muzzie two dollars and sixty cents for some mountain dew. I gave him three dollars, and we couldn't figure in our heads how much change I had coming. I figured it on the back of an envelope which was on the table, and then absent-mindedly put the envelope in my hip pocket. Nevertheless, I think I'll go down in history as a great guy. Probably I'm the only detective that ever lived who looked for the stolen papers and then found them to be in his own pocket."

No doubt Gallegher was right. He must have been.

NOTICE—*This magazine contains new stories only. No reprints are used.*



The Round-Up

THE days are getting shorter and the nights a little longer, but somehow we haven't caught up on our chores. Maybe like the bears and other hibernating animals, we need more sleep during the cold weather. It's right comfortable to-night because that fire is bigger than usual. It just pushes Jack Frost 'way to the outer rim of this circle that has gathered here. Don't forget that after the meetin' you're all invited to partake of coffee and doughnuts. Aunt Lou and Ma have been all morning making those doughnuts, and the coffee is already startin' to boil. Can't you smell it? We find it mighty hard to get down to business, but here goes.

To-night we have with us an old-timer, Mr. W. H. Potter, and friend Potter has a little peeve that he wants to get off his chest, so we'll let him spout:

BOSS AND FOLKS:

I note in the September 11th issue of the magazine that my name is not included in the Old-timers' list. Am I no longer eligible? After forty-nine years of reading Street & Smith's products, dating from November, 1888, to the present time, and having been a regular reader of Western Story Magazine since 1924, I feel sure that I should rate at least something.

Because you left me off the Old-timers' list does not mean that I shall quit the magazine. On the contrary, I shall continue with my favorite to the end of my reading life.

We are awfully glad, Mr. Potter, that you have told us about the omission of your name on our Old-timers' list. We certainly didn't mean to leave you out. Potter seems to be a popular name among those who like the best reading, because we have another Potter on our list, a youngster of eighty years, "C. W." We wonder if you happen to be any relation.

Now here's our list again with all the names received thus far:

OUR OLD-TIMERS

Name	Age
O. J. Husaboe	92
R. E. H. Gardner	91
Alice L. Gilson	90
C. E. Walter	83
Frances Hogan	80
C. W. Potter	80
G. E. Lemmon	80
L. J. Rieck	77
Celia Spencer	76
James Wm. Thornton	76
G. H. Forde	75
F. B. Chafee	75
Alice M. Wilkinson	74
Mary Taylor	72
H. L. Wick	71
W. S. Oliver	70
Wade Hampton	68
W. H. Potter	66

MINES AND MINING

By

J. A.

THOMPSON



A LARGE slice of gold-mining interest has long been centered in the arid mineral-bearing regions of desert Nevada. During the past few seasons, this interest seems to have been particularly well rewarded in many instances. Placering has opened up in many districts. Lode mining for gold, silver, lead, copper and tungsten has been on the increase.

One of the latest to have an acute yen for Nevada prospecting is James R., of New Albany, Indiana. "I am mighty interested in Nevada's gold possibilities," he writes. "Anything you can tell me about the country, particularly the best county in northern Nevada, will sure be appreciated."

James, we'll concentrate on Pershing County, Nevada, this time, and try and sketch the highlights for you, both as regards topography, and the approximate location of the likely prospecting areas and definitely proven mining districts.

In the first place, Pershing County, in the northwestern part of the State, is really a chunk taken

from southern Humboldt County in 1919 and given its own name and local government. Lovelock is the county seat and main town. It has a population somewhat under three thousand, so you won't be crowded out, James. There's plenty of open space in the hills and valleys, and the citizens are mostly stock raisers, or miners.

The local mountain ranges generally extend north and south, and are separated by troughlike valleys that form a series of long basins, into which the snow-water drainage from the hills pours in spring. There is no river outlet for the water, and the basins become sinks, alkali flats, or salt beds. With reference to sea level, the lowest valleys range from four thousand feet to forty-five hundred feet in altitude. The mountains, mostly smooth and rounded, run up to almost ten thousand feet above ocean level.

It's high country, with a mild, healthy climate, and not much rainfall, which has been a drawback to larger-scale placering operations. There is some winter snowfall, heavier up in the hills, of course. Nevertheless, mining can generally be carried on throughout the year. Prospecting, too. All right, where?

Well, as far as gold placers are concerned, the gold discovered in American Canyon, Spring Valley, and Dry Gulch, in the eastern part of the Humboldt Range, kept mining humming along at a swift pace from 1881 to about 1900. Some of the boys have been going back there lately looking for reconcentrations.

Then there is the Placeritas district in the hills on the east slope of the Kamma Mountains, some eight miles south of Scossa, and forty-seven north of Lovelock. The entire Scossa neighborhood is a good one for the serious prospector, according to recent reports, although you may be up against it for water. But originally, gravel was hauled from Placeritas over to Rabbit Hole Springs and washed in hand rockers.

The Rabbit Hole district itself, also out of Scossa, is another placer center that has been receiving considerable attention these past few seasons. Still around Scossa, and a comparatively new find, is the Saw Tooth district, discovered in 1931 by Rufus Stevens. This section is about twelve miles north of Scossa by automobile road. It is claimed that nuggets worth as much as four dollars and fifty cents have been recovered here with dry washers.

Another, older, placer section is the Sierra district at the north end of the East Range, twelve miles northeast of Mill City. Here production in its heyday has been estimated at some four million dollars' worth of placer gold, most of which came from Wright, Auburn, Barber

and Rock Hill Canyons. The patient Chinese gleaned the pickings from this section pretty thoroughly, but one never can tell when a new strike will be made in an old field.

The Spring Valley district, on the east slope of the Humboldt Range, fourteen miles east of Oreana is another Chinese-worked sector. They say ten million in gold came from it in the early days. The gold occurred right from the surface down in a series of gravel layers separated by seams of tough clay. Perhaps the lowest gold-bearing gravel layer hasn't been reached yet.

These are just a few of the placer districts in one county in Nevada. And mining in Nevada is widespread throughout the State. But it will give you an idea, James, of the abundance of "chances" a fellow still has to make his beans and buns, and possibly a strike, prospecting in the West to-day. Of course, that big bonanza that spells ultimate success can't be guaranteed now any more than it ever could. That gamble is part of the fascination of prospecting. The game will never be without it because no man can look down deep into the solid earth and tell what's there. You have to dig.

L. M. Otis, of Des Moines, Iowa, asks what is meant by a vein pinching out. When a vein gradually narrows down, or thins, it is said to be pinching out. And finally, when the vein walls meet, there is no more vein. It *has* pinched out.

We desire to be of real help to our readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.

Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be published in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.

The HOLLOW TREE

Conducted by HELEN RIVERS



AT the real headwaters of the Pelly River, three hundred miles out back of the last outpost or civilization, there is a fortune in furs awaiting the trapper who will brave a year in the northland's frozen tundra. "Tagish, of the Yukon Territory" can tell you folks about trap lines in the far North.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

To trap on a big scale is the only way you will ever make anything at this trap line game. All along the Yukon the Indians have everything pretty well trapped out so that a man can just make grub money. The best trapping country that I

know of which hasn't been "gutted" is on the headwaters of the Pelly River, three hundred miles from any white man. You will find Indians up the river for about two hundred miles. And the only way a man could get to the head of the Pelly is by airplane. But let me tell you, *hombres*, that even after you had paid all expenses you would still have a wad big enough to choke a bear! The only way would be to go to the Pelly in August and not return until June of the next year. A *hombre* would then have time to build cabins and cut trail, etc., before winter set in. A tent in the winter is mighty cold. Let me tell you, for you would freeze your fingers on an ax handle in that season!

You would bring your outfit from Vancouver, as everything costs about as much again up here. You would need a good Yukon sled for dogs, and you would need six dogs. You would require two .30-caliber high-power rifles, and two .22-caliber rifles, together with plenty of ammunition for all guns, in case of wolves. You would need two arctic sleeping robes, two or three pairs of snowshoes, besides your tents, supplies, stoves for the tents, and about four good axes in case an ax handle should break in subzero weather—say seventy below! Then there will be cooking utensils, crosscut saws, heavy mackinaw clothing, mukluks, mitts, fur caps, and dog packs in case the snow should go off on the way "outside." And after you have packed in all of this you will still have to have about two hundred traps.

I sure would like to go there myself but I haven't the grubstake to pay for an outfit and the plane charges to boot. From the head of the Pelly one can see the midnight sun. I don't know how much daylight there is there, but here daylight comes at 8:30 a. m. and it gets dark at 3:00 p. m., in the winter. On clear nights, however, one can travel by starlight and if there is a moon one can almost shoot by moonlight.

My brother and I run a trap line out from Tagish and we will be more than pleased to hear from any one interested in this far North country.

TAGISH, OF THE YUKON TERRITORY.

Care of The Tree.

Here is a Southlander from New Zealand.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Maoriland calling! I am interested in letter writing, and I would like Pen Pals from anywhere to write to me. I am eighteen, the daughter of a dairy factory manager at Drummond, a southern district of Southland, the most southerly province of New Zealand. Drummond is situated twenty-six miles north of Invercargill, the capital city of the province. Southland is renowned for its scenic beauty. I could tell all Pals about everything of interest in New Zealand. New Zealand is 103,286 square miles in area, a self-governed dominion of the British Empire, in the Pacific Ocean, and is comprised of three islands, namely: North, South, and Stewart. I have some good snaps to exchange of our scenery, and in return I would like pictures of your country.

JEAN LINKLATER.

Drummond, Southland, New Zealand.

Stamp collectors, your correspondence is invited.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

One of your Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine readers is hoping to get a very large mail from stamp collectors all over the world. I have thousands for exchange, and every letter will be faithfully answered. I would be pleased to tell any one all about New Zealand. I am a farmer here, about thirty miles from Rotorua, and I will send all who wish a post card of some of the geysers there, and believe me, they are interesting.

I am forty-four years old, and I go in for swimming, dancing, skating, and cricket.

A. W. BEALE.

Paengaroa, Te Puke, New Zealand.

This junior "Aussie" is a Queensland girl.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

May I have some pen friends, too? I am a thirteen-year-old girl living in a gold mining field in central Queensland. I would like Pen Pals from all over the world, from thirteen to fifteen years old. My hobbies are swimming, reading, writing, and sewing. I promise to answer all letters.

GWEN GOODSON.

Miclere, Via Clermont,
Queensland, Australia.

From Waihou Valley comes this New Zealander, who is especially interested in Western cowboys.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

This New Zealander has come to the old Holla for some cowboy pen friends. I hope there will be some cow waddies and broncbusters out West who are interested to know about Maori life. I would be able to tell them some Maori legends which are very interesting. I promise to answer all letters that come from all parts of the world, but especially from those cowboys out West. Come on, folks, if foreign countries are your goal. Opportunity awaits you in New Zealand. Keep your pens busy; write now.

T. NEHUA.

Waihou Valley, Okaihau, R. M. D.,
Bay of Islands, New Zealand.

It is a natural impulse and it is a good impulse to desire to wander and to roam. Not too much, of course. But the desire to go places and see things should be and is in all of us—in all of us who amount to anything, at least, for traveling educates us, and changing our geographic location often is of great benefit to health, mind, and economic well-being. A wise man once said, "A rolling stone gathers no moss," but a wiser man, we think, added, "but a standing pool stagnates."

If you are one who would travel, it is a mighty good thing to have man's best asset along the way, and at your destination. We mean, of course, friends.

If you would like a friend or friends in a certain section, write to Miss Rivers, and she will put you in touch with readers who want to correspond with folks in your part of the world.

It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

Address: Helen Rivers, care The Hollow Tree, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.



WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

By JOHN NORTH

SPECIAL NOTICE: FREE FOR THE ASKING

Directions for Building a Log Cabin
Camp Cooking Recipes
Choice Recipes from Old Mexico
How to Outfit for a Camping Trip
How to Travel With a Pack On Your Back

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FALLS and winters have a new meaning to those who enjoy them for the first time in Colorado. Bright autumn days, and smooth, hard roads invite and encourage trips into the mountains, where the glowing yellow aspens and flaming sumach, against pines and spruce, make a striking setting for the scenic beauties so easily accessible on automobile trips.

Driving into this neighboring State to enjoy some of its fine climate and scenic beauty, Ned P., of

Abilene, Kansas, has a few questions to put.

"I'm motoring over into Colorado this fall, Mr. North, to the Pikes Peak region, as I hear the climate there is ideal in autumn and winter, and there are some marvelous sights to be seen. I had thought of making Colorado Springs my headquarters. From there, would one have quick and convenient access to the other scenic sections of the State?"

Yes, Colorado Springs makes a convenient headquarters for seeing many of Colorado's wonderful sights,

Ned. There are numerous trips and drives in this Pikes Peak region, but all are so well charted and timed that much can be seen even in a few hours.

Of course, you'll want to scale Pikes Peak. If you're a good hiker you may enjoy climbing it, as so many do, but if you don't feel up to this you can make the ascent by steam cog road, burro, or by car.

There are some magnificent drives, such as that over the Corley Mountain Highway and the Broadmoor Cheyenne Mountain Highway. And there are Seven Falls and Seven Falls Canyon, famous objectives in this region, and North Canyon. Many travelers stop in the small village of Manitou, six miles from Colorado Springs, to drink of the healing waters of its health springs. You won't want to miss the Cave of the Winds, nor the famous Ute Pass, once an old Indian trail. There's also the well-known Garden of the Gods, part of the Colorado Springs park system.

As for fishing and hunting, the trout season stays open until October 31st, and with streams settling to crystal clearness, late fall becomes the time when fly fishing often is best. The season for ducks and other migratory birds lasts from October 1st to the last of that month.

Sam B., of Boulder, Colorado, is intrigued by our newest national monument.

"I hear there's a new national monument over Utah way, Mr.

North, and aim to make a trek over to that State and have a look at it. Another young fellow I know is going along and we are traveling on foot, as we're both good hikers and enjoy this way of covering country. I'd appreciate a little information about the locality we aim to explore."

Zion National Monument, our newest, is west and northwest of Zion National Park in southern Utah, Sam. It includes the famous brightly painted Kolob Canyon, which is almost as deep as Zion Canyon, and even narrower. The new monument includes also Hurricane Fault, where the earth's crust split and three-thousand-foot cliffs were thrust up. It is a lovely wilderness country you're going to explore, where you will see plenty of wild life, deer, cougars, coyotes, bobcats, and gray foxes, and, of course, gorgeous scenery.

There are no automobile roads, which won't worry you, as you are traveling on foot, which is how one's exploring must be done, if one doesn't go on horseback. But the outlooks over Kolob Terrace, over the White and Pink Cliffs, the Pine Valley Mountains, and that beautiful oasis, the lower Virgin Valley, will reward you for your efforts.

The National Park Service runs regular pack trips from Zion National Park to the new Zim National Monument, or one can make arrangements for private pack outfits at Cedar City, Utah.

We aim to give practical help to readers. Mr. North supplies accurate information about the West, its ranches, mines, homestead lands, mountains, and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. He will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to him, for he is always glad to assist you to the best of his ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

MISSING DEPARTMENT

PAYN or MCGUIRE, MYRTLE.—Formerly of Dalhart, Texas. Last seen in Kansas City. She married a salesman in Wichita, Kansas. She has a sister living in Logan, New Mexico. Would like to hear from her, or her whereabouts, in regard to army discharge. Please write to Fred Horvius, U. S. Vet's Camp, Mt. Vernon, Missouri.

DILFILL, VAN CAMP and ESTEP.—Would like to hear from my brother, C. W. Dillfill, who was last heard of in Dayton, Ohio. Also my sister, Mrs. Orlan Van Camp, who was last heard of in Kansas City, Missouri, and other relatives named Dillfill and Estep. Bertha E. Fellows, 9932½ San Antonio, South Gate, California.

SAUNDERS, FRED, and sons, WALTER, ALBERT and JACK.—At one time they lived near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Last heard from at Wellston Station, St. Louis, Missouri. That was in 1929. Fred is a small, middle-aged man of Swedish descent. He is hard of hearing. He is a carpenter by trade and often does farm work. Please write to Garrison Lee Boothe, A Battery, 13th F. A., Schofield Barracks, T. H.

WOODSON, ANNIE.—Her daughter, born in Independence, Missouri, September 6, 1912, and thereafter taken by Foster parents as per prenatal adoption agreement, would dearly love to hear from her. She might reside in Texas. Foster parents gone. Have a lovely seventeen-month-old grandson for her. Please write to Yvonne, care of Western Story Magazine.

MAHON, THOMAS J.—Last heard from when he left Hightstown, New Jersey, saying he was going to his sister's in Newark, New Jersey. He is fifty-one years old, has hazey eyes, gray-brown hair, is five feet seven and one half inches tall, and weighs one hundred and sixty-five pounds. Tom, please write to your wife, in care of Mrs. Jean Miller, 381 South 6th Street, Newark, New Jersey.

PARKER, CHARLES.—Formerly of Halifax, Nova Scotia. He is about seventy years old. In 1904 or 1905 he was a fresco painter in San Francisco, California. He is related to the Parkers of Boston, Massachusetts. The daughter of Patrick L. Dowd and Ellen Parker Dowd is anxious to hear from him. Address K. A. Dowd, 271 Washington Street, Norwich, Connecticut.

SMITH, ALICE.—Am wondering about you after all these years. You had a sister, Cecelia, and you lived on Walnut Street, Denver, Colorado. In 1914 you lived on Larimer Street. Please write to Ed, in care of Western Story Magazine.

FISH or FISHERMAN, HARRY.—He has been missing since January, 1932. Dad passed on in December, 1934. We need you and still love you. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by C. A. Jones, 338 Pine Avenue, Long Beach, California.

SMITH, MARION EMMA.—My granddaughter, who disappeared from her home near West Fork, Arkansas, March 28, 1932. Her stepfather's name is Carl M. McDonald. Marion, if you see this please write to me. Any information concerning her will be appreciated. Mrs. Sam P. Roberts, Route 1, Westville, Oklahoma.

DE DONATO, LUCIANO.—My brother, who left home over three years ago. He is over six feet tall, has dark hair and blue eyes. He has a light mark on left forehead and nose. He is twenty-two years old and is of Italian-English descent. Your sister is anxious to hear from you. Dolores De Donato, Stop 9, Lake View Beach, Lake Shore, Ontario, Canada.

CARROLL or ELLIOTT, RICHARD JOSEPH.—Aged sixty-one, five feet six and one half inches tall, dark complexion. His right hand has two fingers with reversed knuckles. Before the World War he was working in Pittsburgh. Any one knowing him or his whereabouts please write to his niece, Mrs. Jane Miller, 3237 Dorset Street, New Westminster, B. C.

ADCOCK or BELVILLE, LOUISE.—Last heard of in southern Missouri about eighteen years ago. Lester would like to hear from you. Please write to C. L. Wightman, Battery C-55, Ft. Kam, Honolulu, T. H.

BENTZ, AMELIA.—She is sixteen years old. Last heard from in 1935 when she was in Miami, Florida. Believed to have moved to Pennsylvania. She lived with her father, mother, younger brother, and older sister, Laura. Amelia, if you see this, please write to me. Any information concerning her will be greatly appreciated by Harry B. Bottom, Jr., U. S. Naval Hospital, Portsmouth, Virginia.

There is no charge for the insertion of requests for information concerning missing relatives or friends.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

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