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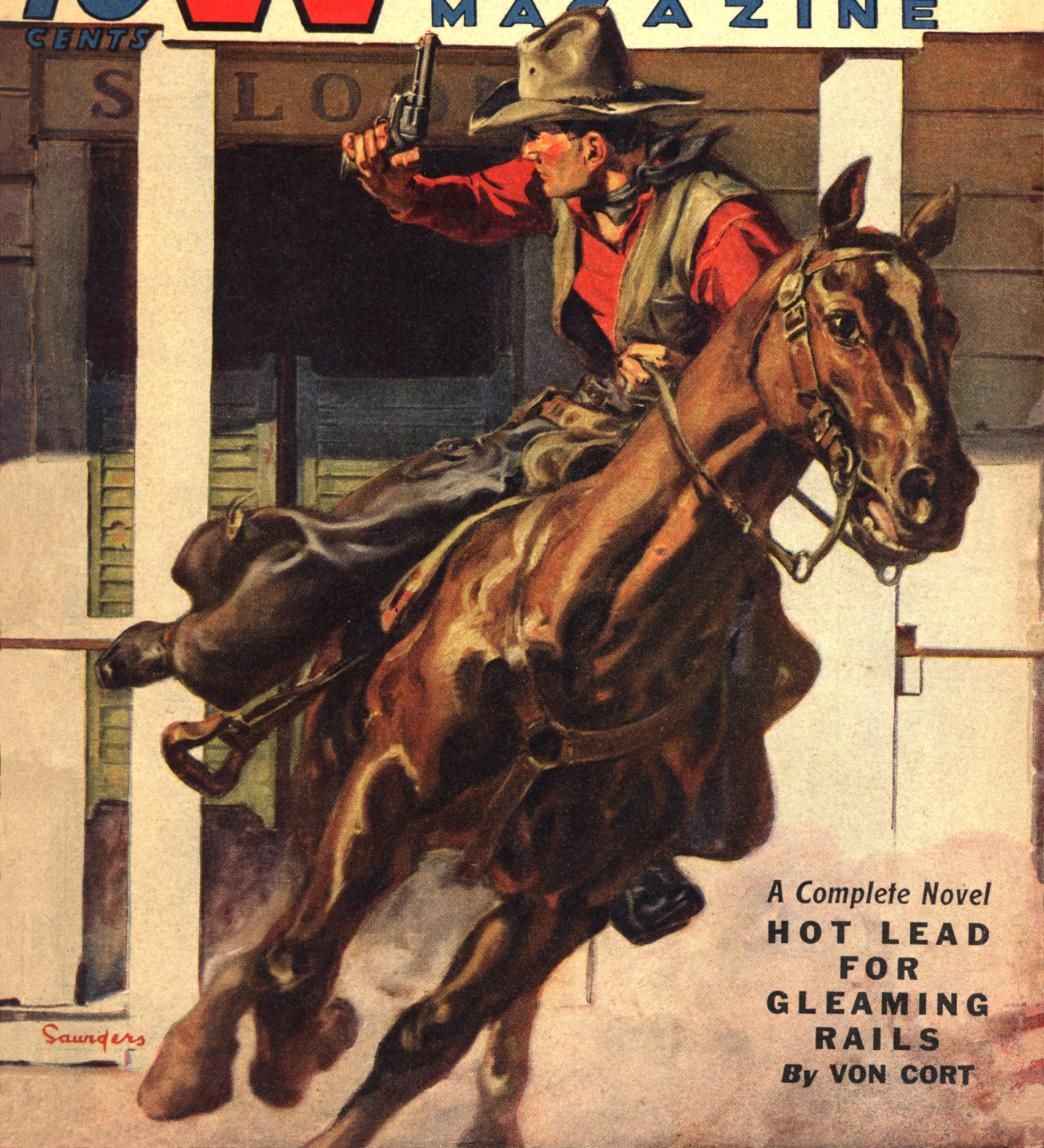
WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

AUG. 7 1937



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By **VON CORT**

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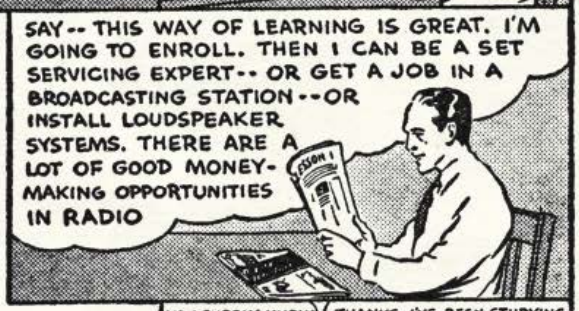

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Author of "His Father's Son," etc.

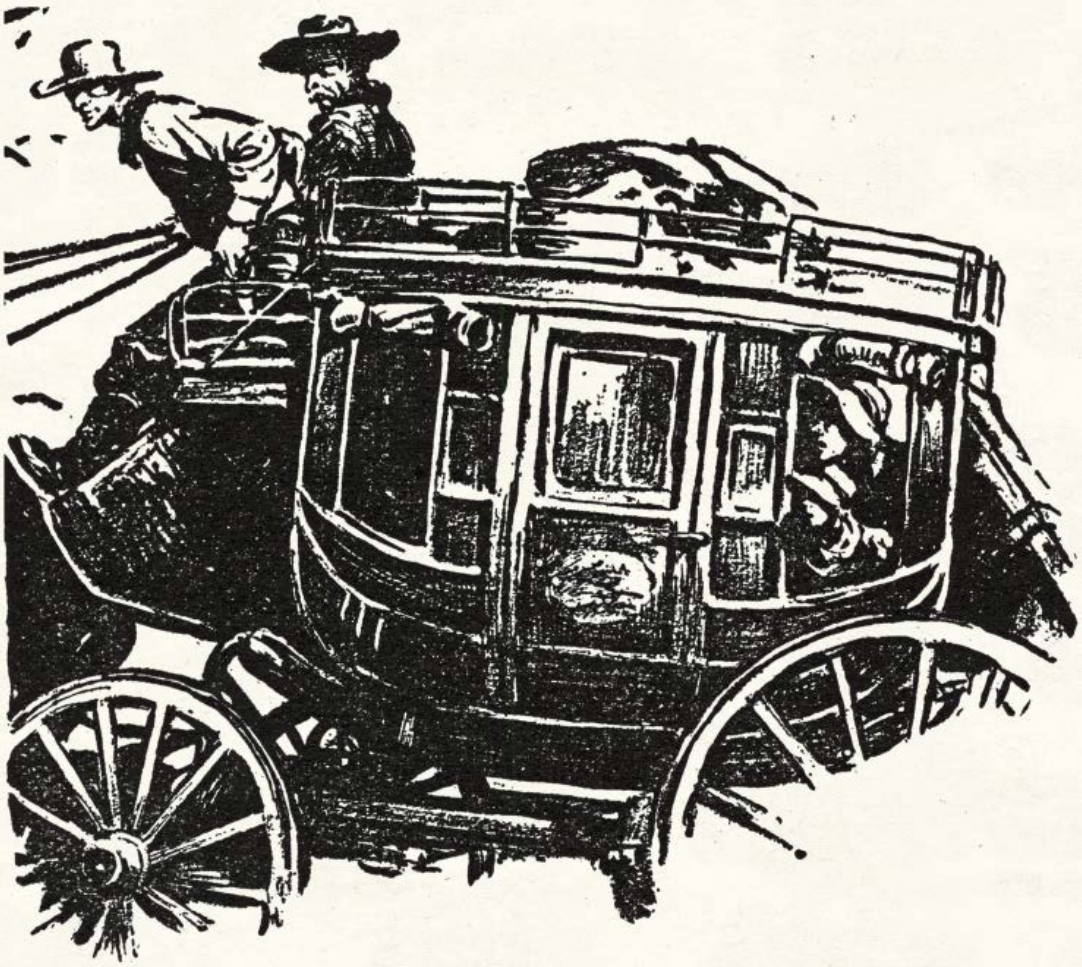
CHAPTER I.

BULLETS ACROSS THE BAR.

GRADUALLY the clanking of the rail joints under the wheels occurred with greater and greater intervals; there was a slight vibration of metal against metal which steadily increased till the scraping of the brakes rose to a resentful whine and the train stopped with impatient hissings of steam from the locomotive.

Lee Carey looked up, startled from his half slumber, and saw the sign, "Jackson Valley Junction," come to a halt outside the car window. There was a slamming of couplings as the rear car finally made up its mind to stand still. The conductor came walking down along the right of way swinging a lantern in the dusk.

"Jackson Valley Junction. Pas-



GLEAMING RAILS

sengers change to the stage for Jackson City!"

Jackson City. To Lee a world of defeat and disappointment, yet also of determination and hope, lay in those two words. Resolutely he got up and stretched his six feet, reaching for the war bag in the net overhead. There was snugness and security in looking upon the world from behind a Topeka Southwestern Railroad window, reclining in a comfortable seat. That was over now and he had to get out. The rails turned to the southwest. His way went toward the northwest, into Jackson Valley. Months, perhaps years, of fighting lay ahead of him.

Yet he had the agile, sure-footed walk of a carefree man as he went down the aisle balancing his baggage on one shoulder. There was even self-sureness bordering on cockiness about his bearing. In the firm, lightly bronzed face under the Stetson were a pair of cool blue eyes over a somewhat tight-lipped mouth. The nose was strong, aquiline.

The only disagreement with this almost stern aspect was a profusion of tiny smile-wrinkles near the corners of the eyes and mouth, trying

to make excuses for the apparent severity.

As he put one foot on the step and swung to the sandy roadbed after having thrown his bag ahead of him, he heard again the road manager's voice in his ear:

"You can't do it, Lee. Better men than you have tried to bring the railroad to Jackson Valley and have failed. Personally I don't think the place is ready for it yet. Some day, when the country has become more civilized, we'll get through. When men like Ferris Johnson and what he stands for have gone. Right now we can't even buy right of way as far as Tyndall Pass. You ought to know what you are up against when you tackle Ferris and his crowd. I tell you, they don't want the railroad. You go ahead and try, but I'm warning you, you can't do it."

"Can't," Lee had answered, "lies in the graveyard."

CAREY was barely thirty. To him the word "Can't" still meant what a red cape means to a bull. He was coming back. When he last saw Jackson Valley he had been penniless, ruined by Ferris and his crowd. He had been forced to go elsewhere even to make a living. All of Jackson Valley had not been big enough for the two of them, and never would be.

Not that the Topeka Southwestern was overanxious to put a railroad line through the valley; but they would not be averse to it, if land could be obtained cheaply and if some one could show that there were profits in cattle shipments or in lumber. As it was, all cattle had to be driven several hundred miles to the junction through rough and dangerous country. Cattle thieves flourish and only cattle sold to Ferris Johnson, at his price, came through. The man that could crush him, and Lee had failed once, would build himself a fortune from commissions and priority rights in cattle freight. Lee was an empire dreamer.

He had to come back. The railroad was not uppermost in his mind. He himself was more important. There were people who had once believed in him. They should believe in him again. He had run away in defeat. Nothing but victory would do now.

"All aboard!"

The lantern swung in the conductor's hand, evoking a frenzied spurt of steam up ahead. A rattle as the couplings "took" was answered by an agonized puff from the smokestack. Another spurt of steam and the clangor of heavy drive wheels gripping the rails. A blast from the stack, one more and another. The ground began vibrating under Lee's thin boot soles as the heavy cars moved away past him like giant animals being herded into the encroaching darkness.

Pale yellow stripes of light from the train windows raced over the ground, hitting here and there at single pines and junipers and lighting up momentarily the tiny shack that served as station house, before they slithered out into the murk of the plain. A moment later the train was but a hoot and a blurry red light in the distance, and Lee turned to survey the other passengers who had disembarked.

A young woman stood facing the other side of the tracks, where the departing train, like a curtain drawn aside, had revealed a dimly lighted building that staggered under the assignation "Hotel" painted in rambling letters on its front, a provision store, and farther down the

line, a maze of shipping corrals, along a spur, losing themselves in the fast-dwindling light. She had left the car ahead of Lee's and, as the track cleared, bent down, reaching for a valise and a hatbox standing on either side of her.

Lee swiftly reached her side. "Let me," he said. "They never heard of a porter at the hotel, and I'll be glad to carry them over for you."

She straightened up abruptly and their heads nearly bumped together. A pair of dark eyes examined him frankly, questioning his right to address her. A mass of mahogany hair fringed the edge of her hat, accentuating her softly molded, yet strong, oval face. She was all of five feet five and stood with erect and graceful bearing.

The smile wrinkles in Lee's face came suddenly, involuntarily, into play. There was a short silence; then her mouth curved into a smile that showed a glint of finely set white teeth.

"All right," she consented, without too much reserve. "I'd be thankful."

HER voice was deep for a woman, and steady. He sensed a decided personality behind it, and at once put his mind to work wondering about her and what she was doing in the region. She was obviously city bred, though he judged that it would not take her long to feel at home on horseback.

Gathering both her bags in his left hand, he caught a glimpse of three other travelers seated on the bench in the station shed and apparently making no preparation to cross the tracks. The uncertain light from the oil lantern overhead showed him a tall young man whose narrow-brimmed felt hat shadowed a rather pale face in which a pair of mustaches did their best to assert themselves. Next to him sat a young woman, obviously his wife, leaning back on the bench and holding her hands folded in her lap. A little girl of about five played with their scant baggage on the floor.

Even in that short glimpse, before he turned his back to them, Lee Carey felt instinctively that something was amiss. Their silence, for one thing; the tenseness of the woman's face for another. He had lived too long on the plains and in the cattle country, where one had to study every stranger of pure necessity, not to sense that everything was not as it should be.

"Wonder why they don't come along," he remarked to the girl, who walked with long, easy strides beside him. "There's only one hotel."

She glanced up at him quickly and turned to look at the three; an expression of sympathy crossed her face. "Poor thing, she looks tired. I should almost be tempted to say hungry. Wonder what they're doing out here."

They walked along, picking their way among wagon ruts and rocks. "I wonder what anybody's doing out here," he ventured.

She caught the implication but declined to make any comment.

"It isn't a bad hotel," he went on imperturbably. "Not much for looks, but Seavers keeps it fairly clean. He's got the best chink cook for miles around. I guess you'll be pretty comfortable."

He could see her smile at his attempt to make conversation.

"I'm not staying overnight. I merely want to wait for the stage to Jackson City."

It was his turn to smile. "Then you *are* staying to-night; the stage doesn't leave till morning."

She gave a slight exclamation and her apprehension included the dingy hotel, the corrals and the general desolation of the place. Inside the bar somebody swore and they heard a sudden, loud crash of glass, and a shout. A moment later a sickening thud resounded, and they stood still and saw a husky bartender drag a man out under the swinging doors. Propping him against the wall, the barman quickly reëntered the establishment.

"Not till morning?" said the girl.

In a moment the man was back, throwing a pail of water over the unconscious form. Having done this, he set the pail down and wiped his hands on his apron, his glance falling upon Lee and the girl.

"Lee Carey!" he exclaimed, coming a few steps forward, his bald pate shining in the light from the building. "It's good to see you in these parts again! Come in and have a drink on the house!"

"Howdy, Slats," said Lee. "I'll take you up on that drink in a minute, but the lady here wants a room for to-night. She's traveling to Jackson in the mornin'."

The man came forward, his bullet head cocked as he studied the girl with the hungry eyes of one who hasn't seen a good-looking white woman for months. "Sure enough." He pointed to a side door. "Come right this way through the dining room."

INSIDE the door Lee stopped and faced the two.

"Excuse me," he said, pointing to the bartender, "this is Slats Seavers, the proprietor of this noble establishment, and this is—er——"

"Anne Bennett," she said, and walked into the room. "Have you a nice clean room, Mr. Seavers? I don't mind the price."

Her voice had now a trace of haughtiness, which spread to her demeanor and was rather becoming. The two men stood in silence and watched her under the full light of the large oil lamp. "Slats" was nodding and smiling; Carey was just standing there, his war bag in one hand and her baggage in the other.

Anne Bennett was beautiful. Her face, her eyes and bearing, as she faced them querulously, were striking. She seemed tall in her long traveling coat, which did not completely conceal her figure. In a moment she understood their silence and two rosy clouds brightened her cheeks. A sudden quiet from the barroom told that all eyes were upon her. Those who couldn't see came out to the door and craned their necks.

"Well?" There was now a note of embarrassment; she turned impatiently toward the stairs in the rear.

"Sure, certain!" Seavers hurriedly closed the door to the barroom. "Glad to know you, Miss Bennett. Take her things up to No. 7, Lee, will you, an' I'll be seein' about some gru—dinner. I reckon you'll be wanting to eat, miss."

She nodded, and Slats disappeared in the rear of the house.

Lee Carey ascended the steps ahead of her and started down the creaky corridor on the second floor. At a door, on which some one had scratched "7" with a lumber pencil, he stopped. "Seven for luck," he said, and kicked it open.

Looking at the dingy cubicle containing only the bare necessities of a bedroom, she said: "I'll probably need it."

He grinned, put the bags on the bed, and walked to the door. "I hope you'll be comfortable."

Her glance wandered to his

strong, seasoned hand resting on the doorknob. "Where's the key?"

His brow knitted slightly as he slowly and definitely shook his head. "There isn't any, and you won't need one here." Then he added, forming every word carefully: "But you might in Jackson City."

He could see her catch her breath and the look of assurance left her eyes. He had almost closed the door when she remembered to call after him:

"Thanks for carrying my bags, Mr. Carey!"

"Didn't mind it at all," he said and went downstairs.

In the dining room he met Slats, who was on his way back to the bar.

"What you reckon she wants in Jackson City?"

Lee shrugged, "You never can tell what any woman wants anywhere."

A dreamy look, that did not seem to belong in so ugly a face, entered Slats's eyes. "Jackson City is no place for her."

THEY walked through the door to the barroom and Lee said, "Tell her that and you'll be sure she'll go there."

They were now each on their side of the bar and Slats Seavers put up bottle and glass for his guest. "Are *you* going there?"

Lee nodded.

"Well," went on the man behind the bar, looking wistfully into space, "I figure, then, you'll be sure to tell her *not* to go."

Carey downed his drink and turned, leaning on his elbows to survey the crowd. Over his shoulder he said: "What's on your mind, Slats, might not be on mine."

Lee was well aware of the notice his appearance had attracted. From several men he received a hand wave in greetings. Greetings that were, if not friendly, at least indicative of a certain respect. Despite his deadening defeat by Ferris, Lee Carey was always a man to be reckoned with; he was perhaps defeated, but never licked. It showed in men's eyes when they regarded him. It was written in his face and expressed in the way he carried himself.

A middle-aged rancher, Frank Williams, whom Lee had known quite well, came to the bar and offered his hand and a drink. Lee accepted both.

"It's good to see your pan again," he said in his peculiar low voice. "I sure thought that you'd had enough of Jackson Valley."

Lee clinked his glass against the other's. "I'll never have enough of Jackson Valley," he said grimly, "till it has had enough of me. How's business?"

Williams made an eloquent gesture with his hands. "Ferris is doing all right," he said curtly, and grew silent as a man by name of Bert Hatchell, who had been eying Lee for some time, made his way to the bar.

Hatchell was one of the men Lee Carey had once accused of rustling his stock, but who had gained protection behind Ferris Johnson.

As he put his foot on the rail, the bar was automatically cleared between the two men. There was no mistaking that Hatchell was looking for trouble. He was a heavy man with a round face above which a shock of jet black hair grew halfway down his forehead.

"Nice girl you picked yourself," offered Hatchell, as Lee made a point of ignoring him. "What's her name?"

Lee continued to ignore the man

and was about to address a question to Williams when Hatchell approached and touched him sharply on the arm with the back of his hand.

"I asked you a civil question," he declared with a cool belligerence that was peculiar to him. "I said, what's her name?"

Lee suddenly turned and locked his eyes with Hatchell's. "Did you?" he said icily.

Slats Seavers reached across the bar and poked the rustler in the ribs. "Listen, Bert, you're drunk. Go on outside an' cool off. Go on with you! Pay no mind to him, Lee."

But nothing could take the man's attention from Carey. "A lot of people don't want to see you in Jackson Valley," he went on. "If you got any sense left in that head of yourn, you'll pack yourself out of here on the next rattler."

"You wouldn't care to mention those people?"

Hatchell did not answer, but anger flushed his countenance. Slowly he backed away from the bar, his hands hanging nervously by his sides. The bar was clear now and the crowd was quietly but quickly moving toward the doors.

"You must have an awful bad conscience about that beef-stealin' two years ago," said Lee quickly, "you're so anxious to get rid of me. Maybe you could even tell me who killed Jeffries, my foreman. How long have you been on the lookout for me?"

"Shut up," exclaimed Hatchell, "you're a liar."

"Bert," Lee went on, controlling himself, "I don't want any trouble with you, except in a courthouse. Take those hands off your guns."

"Lee," put in Slats, from beneath the heavy mahogany of the bar, "I have to keep out o' this, you know why, but I sure do hope it's *your* face I look at when I come up for air again."

"Thanks, Slats," said Lee, not taking his eyes from Hatchell. "All right, Bert, make up your mind. I haven't got all night. Either get out of here, or draw."

HATCHELL drew.

Throwing himself behind the end of the bar, Lee felt the breath of the bullet as it whistled past his cheek. Another splintered the wood at the corner of the bar before the rustler abruptly dropped his gun and sank to his knees, clutching his abdomen. Coughing, he slumped against the bar, his suddenly feeble hand trying to retrieve the weapon. By the time Lee had risen and had blown the smoke from the empty chamber of his gun, the man was dead.

In the short silence that ensued, Slats's bald head poked above the bar, illuminated by a broad grin of satisfaction at seeing Lee.

Lee whirled at a loud knock on the door to the adjoining room, the gun jumping into readiness in his hand.

"Mr. Seavers," said an unmistakable feminine voice, "I should like to have my dinner now."

Turning on his heel, Lee stalked past the returning patrons into the night.

CHAPTER II.

CAREY FINDS AN EDITOR.

LEE CAREY needed the cool night outside the hotel. Things were happening fast and not exactly as he had planned them. The landscape was dripping with moonlight. Silver splashed from trees and rocks and made two shining white bands of the tracks

as they stretched away and met at the horizon. To the northwest the craggy range of mountains, beyond the heavy growth of pine and fir, showed him the barrier beyond which lay Jackson Valley. As he gazed upon it, it became the personification of all the hindrances that he would have to overcome; even the yawning cut at Tyndall Pass, through which the stage had to travel, gaped at him in gigantic mockery.

Obstacles, nothing but obstacles. Perhaps this was not the time to start his campaign. Perhaps it would be better to bide his time and form a definite plan first. Then he thought of Anne Bennett and began wondering again what she could possibly want in Jackson. Reluctantly he admitted to himself that he was more than uncommonly interested in the girl.

He was still jittery from killing Hatchell. Whether it was from taking a chance and letting the man fire two shots before he himself fired, or whether it was merely from the fact that he had killed him, he did not quite know.

Deftly he rolled a cigarette and drew in the soothing smoke. Life was full of puzzles. First the girl, then the sudden death of Hatchell.

He was suddenly aware of some one stirring in the shed on the other side of the tracks. The young couple and the child! He had clean forgotten about them. Could it be possible that they were still there? Something was obviously very wrong.

Glad to get something immediate to put his mind on, he crossed the tracks. The lantern was still hanging in the shed, but its light had gone low and barely showed him the huddled forms of the two on the bench, with the little girl between them under a heavy traveling plaid.

They looked up uneasily as the crunching gravel announced him. Leisurely he stopped and leaned against a post, touched his hat and said: "Evenin'."

The man mumbled a greeting. The woman nodded. He judged from their appearance that they were Easterners. They were good-looking, well-bred people. Trouble, or even near tragedy, seemed to hover in the air about them. Something was very wrong. There could be but one reason why they should sit out in the cold.

"Pretty chilly out here," Lee suggested.

They stirred embarrassedly and the man mumbled that they were "all right."

"Come, have a drink on me," said Lee with sudden intuition, to the man.

"I—er-r——"

"I'm not accustomed to being refused." Lee's tone was stern, but his face was in the shadow, and his smile invisible.

"I heard shots before," said the man, trying to change the subject. "Did any one get hurt?"

"A man was killed," said Lee. "He refused a drink."

The woman gave a startled exclamation. "How horrible!"

"How about that drink?" persisted Lee.

The man arose, his wife putting a hand on his arm. "We must humor him," he whispered and faced Lee. "All right, if you insist, I'll have a glass of beer with you."

They crossed the tracks. When they were out of earshot, Lee stopped abruptly and faced the other. "My name is Carey," he said

in his normal tone and put out his hand.

Pleasantly surprised, the man took it. "Henry Lawson, lately of New York."

"I apologize for threatening you to drink with me. I did that in order not to embarrass your wife. You're in trouble; I want to help you, if I can."

THE man drew himself up. "I'm not asking for any one's help," he said, clinging to his pride. "We're not beggars."

"I know that," parried Lee and grasped Lawson's arm as he turned to go. "But think of your wife and child. You're stranded, broke. It took more money to cross the country than you thought. Am I right?"

Lawson looked at the ground; his shoulders sagged. "You hit the nail on the head," he admitted bitterly. "My wife took sick in Kansas City. We were delayed. This is as far as my money would take us. If I only could get some kind of work—anything—I'd work my fingers to the bone for *them*." He jerked his head toward the shed, and added, the words biting his tongue, "They haven't had anything to eat since last night."

"We can fix that," declared Lee and fished in his pocket. "Here's twenty dollars. Go and get them something to eat."

"But I couldn't——"

"Go on! Take it! It's a loan. You can pay me back when you get work. By the way, what work do you do?"

"I'm a journalist. I suppose you're going to tell me they don't need an editor in Jackson City."

"Man alive! A newspaperman!" Lee grasped Lawson's arm so hard that he winced. A hidden chord was struck within him. He visioned a dusty, cobwebby printer's shop in Jackson City. Closed long ago. The Jackson *Eagle*. Here was a weapon with which to fight Ferris Johnson.

"I've got work for you, but it'll take nerve and guts. Running a paper. Are you interested?"

He gave Lawson a brief outline of the situation. Lawson squared his shoulders and his jaw tightened. "It takes nerve to run any newspaper right," he said.

They went back to the shed and Lee was introduced to Mrs. Lawson. She was a handsome woman with keen eyes. Lee felt that her tone denoted that she suspected him of handing them charity. Fortunately her husband's enthusiasm overrode her doubts and she rose and gathered up the sleeping child.

For the third time that night Lee crossed the tracks. Anne Bennett was eating dinner alone in the dining room, with the Chinese cook waiting on her, as they entered. From the look she tendered him, he could see that she had heard about the killing of Hatchell. Her glance went to the Lawsons behind him and she understood with a woman's instinct that he was helping them. Her eyes widened in compassion; wonderment as to what to think of him grew in them.

With a significant glance and quickly touching his finger to his lips, appealing to her sense of diplomacy, he led them toward her table.

"I think it would be nice for you ladies to know each other," he said, taking off his hat, "if you'll pardon my liberty. This is Mrs. Lawson, Miss Bennett, Mr. Lawson. You are all going to Jackson City and I think you might as well get acquainted."

He watched the two women take stock of each other for a second before they spoke. Helen Lawson was older than Anne Bennett, but straight and slim, with clear gray eyes and a friendly mouth. A mass of golden curls blossomed forth when she removed her hat and let her husband help her with her coat. Sympathy grew rapidly between the two and soon they were seated by the table in eager conversation.

CAREY went to the door as Slats appeared. "Some more dinner guests for you, Slats," he announced in a low tone, "and don't ask them why they didn't come in before. They'll want a room, too. They're going to Jackson in the morning. The kid will need some milk—pretty hungry."

Seavers went into the room and said "Howdy" to the Lawsons; then he proceeded to the kitchen and shouted some orders to the cook. Returning to the barroom door, he gazed at the golden-haired, blue-eyed Lawson child whose chubby, round face could just be seen above the edge of the table. "Three beautiful women going to Jackson City," he mused for Lee's benefit. "Two of them ought to be old enough to know what they get into, but I have a suspicion nary a one of them does."

"How do they feel about the killing?" Lee asked.

Slats Seavers winked. "They know *you;* most of them anyway, and they know Ferris, too. It's very few hombres that care to lay their cards on the table nowadays. Most of them don't know which side to favor. Hatchell, though, never was very popular. Personally, I think Ferris planned to get rid of him this way and at the same time figured on stopping you. He knew that Hatchell hated your insides. It's a swell chance for him to make it hot for you."

"That's what I figured," Lee nodded. "Say, Slats, that old newspaper and print shop in Jackson that Ferris had shut down. Who owns it now?"

"Sam Tollson, I think, bought it for taxes. Why?"

"I want to buy it."

Seavers's round face became long with incredulity. "You're not going to Jackson now—after what happened?"

"Nowhere else," said Lee curtly, and indicated Lawson with a nod of his head. "That's the new editor of the Jackson *Eagle*."

The hotel man sighed. "Yep, I might have known it. Nothing could stop you from going to Jackson now, you darned fool. Well, at least I can wish you luck, you'll need it. Let's have a drink on that. I've got to go back and help Dan at the bar anyhow."

Carey was about to follow him when Lawson rose from the table and called him. "Mr. Carey, we'd feel very put out if you didn't have dinner with us."

He thanked them and sought Anne Bennett's eyes. Would she, too, feel "put out" if he declined? It bothered him that he cared so much what she thought. He had other and more important things to think of. She regarded him with eyes he could not fathom. At last she smiled.

"By all means," she said. "I've never before had the pleasure of dining with a killer."

This decided him. With almost aggressive abruptness he came forward and took the chair next to her. "I accept the invitation. Thank you," he said.

An oppressive silence spread around the table. The cook brought in soup for him and the Lawsons. For a while they ate without conversation. Finally Helen Lawson looked up.

"Mr. Carey," she said evenly, "then you *did* kill a man a little while ago."

"Yes," he admitted, meeting her eyes unwaveringly, "about twenty minutes ago to be exact, in self-defense."

In the midst of the quiet that followed his statement, the little girl, Mildred, sitting opposite Lee, raised her spoon from the soup and pointed it at him.

"Nice man," she smiled.

CHAPTER III.

NEWS OF THE LAREDO KID.

THE more Lee talked with Henry Lawson, the better he liked the man, and he rated himself lucky to have run across him. They were sitting in the dining room after dinner, the ladies and the child having retired early to rest for the arduous stage journey ahead of them. Lee was explaining the situation in the valley to the young editor, and he saw in the other's eyes, as he listened, his own dreams of a small empire reflected. On the table between them in the heavy cigar smoke, castles grew. Suddenly Lee leaned over and touched the other's coat.

"Where's your gun?"

"Do I need a gun to run a newspaper?"

Lee nodded. "This one, you do."

Lawson's mouth tightened, and his glance took on a look of cold reality. "All right," he said determinedly, "have you one to spare?"

Lee went to his war bag in the corner and brought a .38 six-gun out. He handed it to Lawson, who took it, looked at it for a moment; then, with a quick throw of his hand, broke the weapon and saw that the chambers were loaded. His other hand came forth. "Thanks, and you better give me some extra shells."

"You talk my language," smiled Lee. He supplied the shells.

"It'll take more than guns to run a newspaper," said Lawson. "It takes money, too. How much can we lay hands on?"

"About three hundred dollars of my own cash," said Lee without smiling, holding Lawson's glance.

Ambition shone in the young editor's eyes. "Three hundred dollars to found an empire," he said, fascinated by the thought. "What have we to lose? Nothing! And everything to gain."

Lee's eyes probed into Lawson's and found what they searched for. The dreams were there, waiting to be made true. "And of course the railroad is behind us if we make good," he added.

"What about the newspaper?" asked Lawson.

"It's owned by a friend of mine, in Jackson City. We can buy it very cheaply—likely on credit."

As though moved by one impulse, the hands of the two men suddenly joined in a hard clasp as Lawson said, enthusiastically:

"Nothing shall stop us."

"Amen," enjoined Lee. Then his face lighted up in a wide smile and he indicated the barroom. "If you ask me, this calls for a drink."

"For two," replied Lawson.

Together they went into the barroom and called for whisky. Slats Seavers waited on them himself. They clinked glasses and downed their drinks.

"Here's luck," said Lee; then, startled, he looked at the hotel man. Seavers was looking past his shoulder at the door leading to the outside. At the same time a strange hush had fallen upon the room and every one's attention seemed drawn like a magnet to the entrance. Slowly the two new friends turned and followed the direction of Slats's glance.

Inside the door stood Ferris Johnson and his right-hand man, Louis Pardee. Despite the fact that Ferris was past forty and smaller than Lee Carey by several inches, he unquestionably cut the more striking figure of the two. He stood straight, and seemed light on his feet in his long black riding coat. His sinewy brown hands gripped a silver-inlaid quirt. His willful face was not unhandsome and the insolence in his jet-black eyes were backed up by more than just that. The man believed in himself and in what he did with a cynical contempt for the world at large. The stain of silver under the gray, straight-brimmed hat added a touch of distinction. Pardee, behind him, was broader and taller, with hard-bitten arrogance in his sallow mask of a face, yet, withall, he was obviously a lesser shadow of his master. Whereas Ferris regarded Lee with suspicion and interest, yet without revealing what he felt, Pardee looked as though he would as soon reach for his gun and have it over with.

FERRIS spoke first: "How are you, Lee?"

Lee answered: "How are you, Ferris?"

Only the two could feel what lay behind those meaningless phrases, though their voices indicated nothing. To Ferris Johnson, it meant that the man he thought licked for good—or had he thought so?—was still on his hind legs and asking for more. Forever trying to storm that hill which meant revenge and justice. "I'll have to kill him this time," he said to himself, and at the same time knew what it would mean to kill Lee Carey—Lee, of the Careys on Sage Creek Ranch. He tried for the hundredth time to estimate how many friends the man before him had in the valley, how many allies hidden behind cow-country poker faces.

To Lee it meant that Ferris was still the formidable enemy he'd always been; that he hadn't changed a bit; that he would be as hard as ever to crush, maybe harder; and that this time he *must* be beaten.

And yet, all they said was, "How are you, Lee? How are you, Ferris?"

"I want to see you a minute, Seavers," Ferris said, waving refusal to the whisky which Slats had just put up for him, and walking through the door to the dining room, knowing that Slats would follow.

Louis Pardee, standing next to Lee at the bar, downed his whisky and paid demonstratively for his own drink. From a traveling gambler, Ferris Johnson had promoted him to be manager of the three hotels and saloons that he owned in Jackson City. Pardee had the admirable quality of being able to do as he was told, no matter what, without argument. If Ferris had instructed him to draw and kill Lee on sight, he'd have done it without hesitation; that is, he would have drawn—most likely Lee would have done the killing. He knew that, and Lee's nonchalance irritated him till his usually sallow face had the hue of a boiled lobster.

"I see you're not traveling for

your health," he said at length, shoving the bottle away.

Lee put on his kindest smile. "No," he agreed, "I'm not. Don't need to, my health is perfect."

Ferris came back through the saloon and went straight to the door. Following him, Pardee turned and threw at Lee: "Take good care of it, mind you. Take good care of it."

Through the open door they could see several riders waiting with Ferris's and Pardee's horses. The door slammed shut and the clatter of hoofs faded away in the night.

Slats beckoned to Lee from the dining-room door.

"Well?" demanded Lee as the door closed behind them.

"Thought you might like to know," began the hotel owner, "that the Laredo Kid is back in these parts again. Held up the train from the south this morning, he and a band of five."

"Laredo Kid?" said Lee in surprise, "I thought they hung him outside Dallas last spring. That fool kid!"

"Mebbe their rope wasn't no good," suggested Slats.

Memories came back to Lee Carey. He saw before him a young stray cowhand whom he'd given a job years back and who had loyally fought at his side against Ferris. When he thought Lee was licked, he'd taken the wrong road to riches. His idol had fallen, or so he'd thought. He had drifted south across the border and taken to rustling and holdups. That had hurt Lee more than many other things that had happened to him, and when he heard rumors that the Kid had been hanged, he had spent many heavy hours condemning himself for not having kept in closer contact with the youngster.

"Are you sure?" he asked Slats again and again. "Sure it isn't some one else who's taken his name?"

"Ferris seems to think it's the same, and he's satisfied that you and him are here for one and the same purpose."

LEE chuckled, then grew serious again. "Would be kind o' fun to see that Kid again," he mused. "Mebbe it isn't too late to get him on the right train again. He's young. There's a lot of good in him."

"He's changed since you saw him," declared Slats darkly. "He's a pretty hard hombre now. Pretty bad."

Lee shrugged. "Maybe you're right." Then suddenly: "But what's all this talk? Don't tell me that Ferris stopped in here merely to tell you that!"

Seavers pulled an envelope from his pocket. "You're right smart. Guess who he gave me this for. He comes in here and asks me if a lady by name of Miss Anne Bennett had come by the train to-day."

"Anne Bennett?" Lee's heart beat a little faster, much as he hated to admit it to himself.

"So I tells him," went on Slats, "that she's upstairs sleeping, and he says that he thought she might be and didn't want to disturb her. Then he gave me this note for her and told me to see that she had the best of everything and that she got a good seat on the coach."

Lee's mouth was a bit tight and his eyes half closed; other than that, there was nothing which indicated that Seavers's words had any effect on him.

"Thought you might like to know," declared Slats.

"Thanks," answered Lee curtly, "but I don't see how it concerns me much."

CHAPTER IV.

"STICK 'EM UP!"

THERE were only five passengers on the coach: Anne Bennett, the three Lawsons, and Lee. The stage had arrived at four in the morning from the first station just beyond Tyndall Pass, and at six the driver and the guard had rested enough to start the journey back. The coach was standing unhitched in the corral behind the hotel as the passengers climbed aboard. Once the span of fresh Mexican mules had been hitched, there was no holding them till they had run a good stretch.

As Lee helped Anne aboard, he couldn't help thinking of the letter she had received from Ferris Johnson. Somehow he looked upon her with different eyes and to his annoyance the mystery about her and the interest in her, that he so carefully tried to keep from his mind, was steadily growing. Also her demeanor seemed to have changed. Her attitude toward him was decidedly cooler than the night before, and she confined herself to addressing him, when there was no way around it, in monosyllables. The guard, the driver and Dan, the bartender, were busy harnessing and hitching the mules when Slats Seavers came out of the kitchen door carrying a heavy strong box. Looking about him for help to carry it, he put it down, seeing that every one was busy.

Noticing his predicament, Lee stepped over and gave him a hand, hoisting it to the driver's boot. A combined F and J, Ferris Johnson's brand, was printed on the box.

"Here's your chance to get rich quick," said the hotel man as they slammed the box aloft. "It came on the road from Kansas yesterday. Believe me, I'm glad to get rid of it."

"Cattle money?" asked Lee.

The other nodded, and Lee thought of how much of that money might have been his if things had been different.

"That's why they've got the guard on the boot to-day," continued Slats. "Even if that there brand on the box is usually more'n enough protection. You better get aboard, Lee, they's almost hitched."

As Lee Carey made ready to gain his seat, Frank Williams, the rancher who had spoken to him just before the killing of Hatchell, climbed over the corral fence and came up to him.

"I'll be seeing you, Lee," he said in a low tone, "and so will a lot of others. They's a lot of folks that'll be right perked by the sight of you and don't you think they won't. Keep your eyes open."

Having said this, he gave Carey a tug of the arm and turned calmly toward his horse that waited on the other side of the fence.

Slats jerked his head after him and took Lee's hand. "He's dern tootin'. Goes for me, too! Hey! Here they go!"

Lee swung inside as Dan opened the corral gate and the impatient mules sprang forward, setting the heavy vehicle back on its slings like a ship struck by a sudden sea. For a moment the contents of the coach were somewhat scrambled.

When the passengers got resettled, they were a good way down the rutted road toward Tyndall Pass, and, losing sight of the railroad, they seemed to be rolling from the future back into a wilder and more rugged past.

There was not much opportunity for conversation when the stage was under way. Bouncing and jarring on the rocky road, rising gradually through the increasing timber, there wasn't, either, much chance for rest in the stiff seats. All were sitting awkwardly erect, swaying along hour after hour.

THEIR only diversion was little Mildred Lawson, who insisted on riding on Lee's lap, changing position every minute until finally, induced by the motion of the coach, she fell asleep.

Helen Lawson at once made gestures to take her back, but Lee, smiling, put up his hand in refusal. There were no longer any misgivings in her eyes when she regarded him. It was easy to see that she and her husband must have had a long talk during the night; some of the hopes for the future that still shone in the young editor's eyes, were reflected, though more soberly, in hers. Lee smiled inwardly when his glance fell on Lawson. Enthusiasm, courage and a good deal of impulsiveness were printed in his handsome features. Lee accounted himself lucky to have met him. Yet his face darkened when he thought of the dangers into which he had invited the little family. Truly, Jackson City was no place to bring a young wife and child. However, it was obvious that they had both weighed the question thoroughly, and for a woman of Helen Lawson's timber, there was only one place in life—by her husband's side.

Presently Anne Bennett, opposite him, was also lulled to sleep and he could spend the hours regarding her face at leisure. Long, auburn eyelashes were a silken fringe above her rose-petal cheeks, and her lips were barely open as she breathed with the ease of a sleeping child. He could picture the stir her arrival at Jackson City would create and a sudden wave of jealousy rose burning within him. Incredible as it was, hardly knowing the girl, he realized that if he hadn't already, he was rapidly falling in love with her.

And she had received a letter from Ferris Johnson. From Ferris Johnson! Somehow he could not believe, could not conceive, any connection between them. If he could only get a chance to talk to her, to give her a true picture of the situation in the valley. But then again, that would at once bias her against him. She would have to find out for herself.

He closed his eyes and tried to think of his own problems and begin to lay his plans. But the picture of her followed him and stood in the way of his thoughts. He wondered where she would be staying when they arrived, for none of the so-called hotels or rooming houses would be any place for her. He thought of offering the hospitality of his own ranch on Sage Creek, five miles north of town, where, it was decided, the Lawsons were to make their home until they were ready to settle in the town itself, but he could think of no way to approach the question without creating an awkward situation.

The matter, however, was touched upon sooner than he expected. Reaching a stretch of smooth, sandy road on the other side of the Pass, the sudden cessation of the usual jostle awakened the girl. Mrs. Lawson, hungry for conversation touched her arm.

"Miss Bennett!"

"Yes, Mrs. Lawson?" answered the girl, and sat up fully awake.

"I was just wondering if you have in mind a place to stay when we get to Jackson," said Helen Lawson

in a conversational tone. "I was thinking—I mean there might not be any very suitable place for a young single woman."

Considering the circumstances, it was a kind and natural question to ask, yet the girl seemed at once slightly ill at ease as she cleared her throat and offered Lee an odd side glance.

"It's awfully thoughtful of you to worry about me," she answered, "but I shall be well taken care of, I'm sure." Here she glanced at Lee. "Mr. and Mrs. Ferris Johnson have kindly invited me to stay at their ranch. He's quite an important man in the valley."

"Well, I certainly do hope you find your father," declared Lawson. "And if there's anything our paper can do when we get it going—I mean in the way of advertising, we shall certainly be glad to help you. Am I right, Carey?"

Absent-mindedly Lee nodded. "Of course, of course, that goes without saying," while inside his head he still heard her words: "Mr. and Mrs. Ferris Johnson have kindly invited me——" Mr. and Mrs. Ferris Johnson—since when had Ferris changed his views on marriage? Since when had he become married? It seemed incredible, and he refused to believe it. Perhaps he'd have to kill him in cold blood after all. Anger rolled up within him and he was about to give vent to his suspicions when he managed to control himself and say acidly: Mr. and *Mrs.* Johnson? How very nice."

HE was given little chance to speculate upon these new phenomena, as the coach, which had been following the road down through a dry wash and was laboring up on the other side, was suddenly halted by a barrage of gun shots, accompanied by a scouring of brakes and the excited braying of the mules. At the very moment that Lee reached for his gun, a bearded face, behind a Spencer carbine, thrust itself into the coach.

"Don't, mister, if you want to keep your health!"

Lee at once raised his hands and let the sleeping child roll down his legs to the floor. He nodded to Lawson to raise his hands, too.

Up in front, some one called to the driver. "All right, throw it down, and pronto, pronto!"

"See that brand on the box?" they heard the guard say. "Well, do you still want it?"

Some one laughed shrilly and Lee thought he should know that laugh. "You heard me the first time. Sure I want it, that makes it right nice."

Shortly afterward there was a scraping sound from the boot and finally a thud as a heavy object fell to the ground.

"Ferris'll get you for this," called the driver doggedly. His words were instantly followed by a shot.

"Keep your mouth shut or I'll have to part your hair the next time."

There was now ominous silence from the seat. Little Mildred Lawson had awakened and, momentarily bewildered, was staring up at her fellow passengers from the bottom of the vehicle; then, thinking that Lee was playing some game with her, she began to chuckle and laugh with noisy abandon.

"Sshh!"

Her mother suddenly bent down to quiet her as the bandit by the window called out to his companions: "Do you want to see what we got inside?"

Lee, with the carbine against his chest, saw the man's eyes shift as

his attention was distracted by the sound of the child and the sudden movement of Helen Lawson. That was all he needed. In the next split second he'd knocked the rifle into the ceiling as he dodged, pulling his own gun and firing with lightning rapidity into the bearded face.

As the bullet from the carbine scorched his cheek and embedded itself in the wood, they saw the raider slump down between the carriage and his well-trained horse, which did not stir from the spot.

"Duck!" Lee shouted, and kicked the door open.

Running away from the coach to draw the others' fire, he shot as he darted down the wash, dropping the man who was holding the front mules. Two more men were on the other side of the coach, one training his gun on the driver and guard, who were nervously watching their chance for a move, the other diving from his horse and scooting in under the coach from where he opened fire on Lee.

With Lee behind a boulder, they exchanged a couple of shots. Hesitating and waiting for proper aim, Lee prayed that Lawson, inside the stage, would keep his head.

The dead bandit's hand was still clutching the rein, the now bewildered animal dragging him back and forth in front of the coach as the bullets whined between the wheels, adding to the confusion.

The front man had quickly jumped out of Lee's firing line on the other side of the coach.

THERE were tense, pulse-throbbing seconds in which Lee held his hat over the boulder and tried to edge forth to the underside of it, getting a bead on the man behind the moving horse, the dead man and the wheels. Luckily Lawson kept still.

"Lee!"

There was that voice again! Just as he was about to fire, he saw the other tear the kerchief from his face and wave his left hand. "Lee! You old son of a gun! You goldanged, dirty-hided coyotee!"

The Laredo Kid!

Breaking his gun and reloading the empty chambers, Lee saw his former employee crawl out from under the stage, throwing a "Keep them up, boys," to the two on the boot, and come toward him grinning from ear to ear.

"Yippee! You old desert rat. Yeah man! but I'm sure glad to see you!"

Somewhat befuddled, Lee Carey watched the man stop and throw back his head in rip-roaring laughter. "And to think I pretty near slugged you. Man, but that's a good one!"

Lee said dazedly, "Hello, Kid," as the other came up and slapped him on the chest, knocked off his hat and mussed up his hair, still rocking with laughter, showing his strong white teeth.

That Kid never grew up. He still had the same unkempt, hemp-colored hair, the narrow, immature shoulders and the light blue eyes that forever refused to take anything seriously. His shirt was as dirty as when Lee had seen him, and his downy cheeks had never made the acquaintance of a razor.

"So it's you?" Lee grabbed the other by the shirt and held him still for a moment. The blue eyes stopped laughing and something sheer and brittle settled in them as the laughter died. The Kid *had* changed.

"Say you're glad to see me!"

The fellow who had been trying

to kill him a moment ago was dead earnest now. "Say you are."

Lee Carey had to laugh, to chuckle mirthlessly with pity as something snared his throat. Here stood, in a fleeting second, still the eager-eyed boy who had once idolized him. "Sure I am," he said, his shoulders shaking oddly, "you fool kid."

"What're you doing back in Jackson Valley?" asked the Kid. "If I'd ever known you were coming back —I thought——"

Lee's face was stern. "I told you, you were a fool kid," he said. "If you'd had a little more faith——" He jerked his head toward the two men he'd just killed and indicated the strong box on the ground. "You've got in bad ways. You know where you'll end."

The Laredo Kid again threw his head back and laughed uproariously. "Same old Lee! Preachin' as ever. Dern your hide, haven't seen you for near two years and you start right off preachin'."

His eyes suddenly went cold again and a contemptuous scowl creased his youthful face as he glanced at his two dead partners. "Don't feel bad about them. If they warn't pert enough, they were no good to me anyhow. Might's well git it now as later."

His utterly juvenile callousness made Lee, who was strongly affected by the killings, shudder. Watched with astonishment by the people in the coach, the two walked around to the strong box. "Give me a hand with it," said Lee, indicating the boot where the two men still sat with raised hands.

The Kid glanced at him in quick disbelief. "Hold on a second, Lee. A joke's a joke. I robbed that box fair and square."

His snapping, abrupt manner of speaking was new to Lee. There was a swift resentment in the voice, like that of a child being deprived of its pet toy, only a thousandfold stronger. "You killed two of my men," he went on. "I'm willing to let that pass; but that box is mine."

LEE shook his head. "No dice."

"What you doin' defending Ferris's property? Don't tell me——" The Kid laughed again. "No, no, I wouldn't believe that nohow. You and I can chase that skunk out of his hole and it's time we do it. Hang it, I'm glad you're back!"

Lee's voice was sad. "You and I are on different trails, Kid. It's no go. I'm for law and order."

"You ought to know that don't work with Ferris." The Kid's voice was fraught with contempt and disbelief. "This is the only kind of talk that he savvies." He twirled his gun around a horny index finger. "If you think you can fight him your way, you're loco."

"Kid," said Lee heavily, his eyes steely and his mouth tight, "the blood of those two men and many more, are on your hands. I don't ever want to see you again. Get on that horse and ride."

"You ain't gonna let him go, are yeh?" called the driver indignantly. "If you're so good, why don't you get the drop on him!"

"Shut up!" said Lee without looking at the man.

The Kid had backed away, his chest laboring, and something—was it moisture?—stirred in those brittle eyes. "You don't mean that, Lee. You don't mean it. We're gonna fight together again."

"Get on that horse and ride," repeated Lee. "And don't come to me till you got clean hands, till you learn the difference between right

and wrong. You still got time. Go on."

It was hard to look the Kid in the eye. The youngster could not believe his ears. "Gee, Lee," he finally murmured. "Why didn't I slug you when I had the chance."

But his glance strayed.

The bandit holding the driver and guard in check suddenly spoke: "Mebbe I got to say something about this. Let's get that box busted an' get out o' here!"

"Shut up!" said the Laredo Kid without looking back.

"You're not helping me any, doing this," Lee said, indicating the box. "I know what kind of money's in it, but I'm not collecting my debts from Ferris the way he collects his. You ought to know that. If you want to help me, get on that horse and ride." He paused for a moment and swallowed hard. "I don't want to see you again."

At this the Kid started, his glance again sought Lee's and his voice cracked. "You don't mean it, Lee. You can't. I'll be seein' you sure."

Suddenly Lee's gun flicked into his hand. "Get going," he said tonelessly. The Kid backed away, speechless, shaking his head, staring incredulously at Lee.

"No, sir," he said at last, "I'll be seein' you. You'll need me." He turned to his horse. "Come on, Joe!" he called to his partner, swinging himself into the saddle. Wheeling, he caught Lee's eyes for a last time. A moment later the timber had swallowed the two riders.

For a while Lee stood as if rooted to the spot; then, as the men stirred on the seat, he bent down and with a single prodigious heave, flung the strong box to the boot. The two men ventured to the ground and commenced unsaddling the dead bandits' horses and taking possession of their money and weapons.

At last Lee resumed his seat in the coach, four pairs of questioning eyes upon him. Anne was pale and he detected a different light in her eyes as she regarded him.

"Gosh," said Lawson, a trifle pale, as Lee praised him for not trying to use his gun, "you sure are handy with a six-shooter. Yes, I thought the best I could do would be to sit still."

Helen Lawson's glance went to the timber where the desperadoes had disappeared. "So young," she said as the stage got under way again. "So young!"

"Used to be a nice kid," said Lee heavily, "never came any better, no sir!" Then he added slowly, a sense of guilt and responsibility resting burdensomely upon his mind, "Guess he didn't have the proper watching over."

Mildred stepped on his toes and stretched her chubby pink arms toward him. "Up!" she begged. "Me up!"

CHAPTER V.

THE SHERIFF ENCOUNTERS TROUBLE.

WHEN the coach stopped for fresh mules at the next relay station, Lee and Lawson took a stroll along the road while the animals were being exchanged. Although it was against Lee's nature to disclose his feelings to others, Anne Bennett was so much on his mind that he interrupted a question which the journalist put to him about the newspaper.

"You heard her say that Mr. and Mrs. Ferris Johnson had invited her to stay with them. I mean Miss Bennett."

Lawson nodded thoughtfully as he tendered Lee a side glance. "And

it seemed to bother you a good deal."

Lee gave vent to a short, bitter laugh. "Ferris is no more married than I am," he said. "But for another reason: He's not the marrying kind. Ferris married! That's a laugh! He's got a red-haired creature, one of his gambling-hall queens by the name of Goldie Blake, living in his home, running his house for him. If that's what he calls being married."

He stopped abruptly, wheeled and looked back to the coach where Anne and Mrs. Lawson were walking up and down with little Mildred between them. "The cheek of the rat, to ask a girl like Miss Bennett into his home under such conditions."

Lawson followed his glance and then turned to study Lee's face. "You love her," he said quietly. "That's it, isn't it?"

Lee nodded, and before he realized it, the words were out of his mouth. "I love her. I don't know who, or what she is. I don't know what she wants in the valley——" He stopped suddenly, regretting having spoken.

"I can tell you that," said Lawson. "It's quite simple. She told Helen about it. She's come out here to look for her father. Her mother's been dead six months. It seems that her mother left her father years ago. Let him down, I guess you would call it, when he needed her most. She took the baby, Miss Bennett, with her, and he went West. That's all they ever knew. Later, when the mother realized that she had been too harsh with her husband, finding that we must make allowances for human frailty, it was too late. They tried to find him, even advertised in many papers, but no one had ever seen or heard of him. However, when her mother died, she made Miss Bennett promise to go on searching, and in some small way try to make up for what she had done."

"But where does Ferris come in?" demanded Lee.

"A while ago she received a letter from Ferris Johnson saying that he had seen her 'ad' in a San Francisco paper, and that he suspected that he knew where her father was, though the man was using another name."

Lee's face was creased with thought and premonitions. Anne's eyes—of whom did they remind him? "I'll have to tell Miss Bennett that Ferris isn't married," he said, as they went back to the coach. "Great Scott, I never thought he would try anything as crude as that!"

"Take my advice," said Lawson, "and don't tell her anything. Perhaps I know women a little better than you; it would only antagonize her. There are women, you know, who hate good advice. The more you tell them, the more they want to do the opposite thing."

Lee glanced quickly at the journalist. "Perhaps you're right," he admitted, "but hadn't we ought to warn her in some way."

"She'll find out for herself," insisted Lawson. "You're in love. If you weren't, you wouldn't underestimate her so. She's quite capable of taking care of herself."

AT last the stage rolled down the sloping hills and traveled over a rutted road, winding itself over seemingly endless plains, punctuated at great intervals by lonely ranch houses and relay stations, where they halted briefly to stretch their legs and eat a scant meal while the mules or horses were

changed. Eventually the flats began to billow and tree-clad hills beckoned them now and then. When the landscape had become definitely less monotonous, Jackson City suddenly loomed as the weary road curved about a large, sandy hill, crested by junipers.

When the hills behind them in the east had sunk below the horizon, and faint, bluish touches announced the coming of mountains in the west; when, in fact, they appeared to be in the middle of nowhere, they rode briskly down the main street of the town, over the life of which the power of Ferris Johnson hung like a dark shadow, even though the day was scorching hot and the dust sailed from the animals' hoofs and the stage's wheels in gay, sun-smitten clouds.

It was with a queer pang of homesickness that Lee saw them again, the rickety, square houses, most of which had never known paint, the three hotels and gambling saloons which, significantly, were painted and in good repair. The little crestfallen wooden church still presented its miserable excuse for a steeple at the end of the street, and directly across from it the courthouse dominated the scene with its large windows and broad, squat porch.

It was early afternoon and the town was alive with cattlemen and traders, stamping horses at the hitch rails and people just going to and fro enjoying the feeling of a town after having spent days in the lonesome surrounding country.

Down by the stage depot a fair crowd of people were awaiting the arrival of the coach.

"Miss Bennett," said Lee, "I do hope that you'll find time to come out and visit on the Sage Creek ranch. It isn't much of a place. Only my home. You'll always be welcome, and if you should ever need a friend, please remember me."

"Yes, do try to come and see us," put in Mrs. Lawson. "It may prove a little lonesome for us Easterners, and you might, as Mr. Carey says, need friends."

The girl thanked them and her eyes rested momentarily on Lee's. "It's good to know that I have so many friends," she said, and he could see that she was apprehensive and somewhat puzzled, as though she still did not know what to make of him. He must have put more into his glance than he had intended, for she quickly began looking for her immediate things and pulling on her gloves.

As Lee's heart beat a little faster, from what he so shortly had glimpsed under those lowering eyelashes, the brakes began to scrape and the heavy vehicle came to a stop.

The two women kissed each other quickly, and Anne bent down and kissed little Mildred as Lee opened the door to help Anne out.

There was quite a crowd gathered, and the stir that Lee had expected from it was not wanting. That part of it was due to his own appearance did not occur to him at the moment. As he handed her down and turned to receive her bags from the driver, several half-audible remarks as to her beauty rose from the crowd. Lee turned to the door to help Mrs. Lawson down and noticed out of the corner of his eye that a swath had suddenly been cut through the crowd and a hush had fallen over it.

BUSYING himself with the baggage, he saw Ferris Johnson approach Anne, hat in hand. Beyond the crowd, he caught a glimpse of Goldie Blake, for once

dressed with comparatively good taste, twirling a parasol on the seat of a buckboard. She was less painted than when Lee had last seen her, and her eyes were definitely trying to avoid the scene at the coach.

"Miss Bennett," said Ferris with a smile that made one forget the stain of gray at his temples, "I am Ferris Johnson. I hope you have had a pleasant journey."

It could not be denied that Ferris was handsome, that in his black coat, shiny black boots and immaculate linen he enhanced a personality which was evident in his dark eyes, his sharply chiseled and well-formed features and in his resonant voice. Women were attracted by him and he knew it. Lee saw that Anne and even Mrs. Lawson were impressed. He had all he could do to check a hasty, acid remark, but thought better of it.

Ferris offered Anne his arm and led her toward the buckboard and introduced the two women to each other.

When they had climbed aboard, Ferris took the reins and they sat waiting for a couple of his men who were taking the heavy strong box from the boot to the wagon.

As Lawson touched his arm, Lee stepped through the crowd and followed the two men, biting his lip as he went. He doffed his hat to the women and spoke to Ferris Johnson.

"My congratulations, Ferris," he said, clipping the words, "I didn't know till to-day that you had become a family man." He nodded at Goldie. "Best wishes, Goldie," he offered her, then added in a sudden fury of bitterness and suspicion, "I suppose we won't hear you sing any more in the Golden Horn Saloon."

Goldie went pale and glanced at Ferris for a cue.

Ferris merely said: "Thank you," with a blandness that only he could muster.

Lee turned to Anne. "Good-by, Miss Bennett, and good luck to you." He emphasized the word "Luck."

The box was loaded on now, and Ferris eased on the reins.

"Luck," he threw smilingly at Lee. "You better hang on to all you've got. You might need it."

The town seemed changed the moment Ferris had rounded the last house in the street followed by half a dozen of his men on horseback.

As Lee was busy arranging for a rig next door at the livery stable to take him and the Lawsons out to Sage Creek, several men accosted him and offered him their hands.

"Good to see you, Lee."

"Thought we'd never see your face again."

"What are you up to now?"

"Think you can buck Ferris?"

"We been waitin' for you."

He shook their hands, answering them noncommittally, knowing which ones were true and sensing the ones that were just feeling him out for Ferris. In a way it made him feel better that Ferris was wary of him; that he was to be reckoned with. Frank Williams was among the group, and offered him a horse to ride out on.

"You can return it any time you like, Lee," he said, lifting some of the baggage onto the rig, "or you can keep it till you get better fixed."

"Thanks, Frank, I might have to accept that last offer," Lee answered gratefully. "How does the ranch look, or haven't you been over lately?"

"Rode over last week after I paid the taxes. Gad, how they hate to take them offn you. Ferris was fig-

urin' to sell you out for nonpayment."

"Fooled him, didn't we," grinned Lee. "When I couldn't make any money in the valley on account of him, I just went somewhere else and did it. Now I've got the railroad behind me."

Williams blinked an eye and grew serious. "You got more'n just that, boy!" Then, as some one approached, he went on: "The place looks as fine as ever. Course, overgrown with weeds and the like, so you have to cut your way through, and there's very little of your garden left, but it's still the same old place. If only I'd 'a' known you were coming to town so soon, Hetty and the girls would have gone over to clean it up a bit."

LEE was ready to mount. "Don't forget to have them come over to visit anyhow."

Williams nodded and mounted, then leaned over and spoke in a low tone into Lee's ear. "I don't figger it would be a good scheme for you to linger too long in town. Everybody knows already about the killing of Hatchell. Ferris might try to sick Sheriff Byers on you for it."

"Let him try," said Lee belligerently, then laughed bitterly. "So that old horse thief, Byers, is sheriff now. Next thing you know he'll even have Pardee running for mayor. Wouldn't that be something?"

Williams wheeled his horse and turned down the street. "Next thing you know, he *will*," he remarked, and there was no smile on his face. "I'll be over an' see you to-morrow night."

Lee motioned to Lawson to drive on and the journalist started the rig and followed him down the street to the general store, owned by Sam Tollson, to stop for provisions.

The Lawsons took in the town with wide-open eyes. Gambling and drinking were in full swing, and the sound of raucous singing and the din of pianos emanated from most of the saloons. Down the street near the church a new saloon was in the process of being built, and hammering and sawing mingled with the rest of the noises.

As the little procession stopped and made ready to hitch at the store, a flock of cowboys tore down the street on their horses, firing their guns as they went, shooting at the false fronts of the houses. Helen Lawson choked an exclamation and clutched Mildred, while her husband reached for his gun. Lee smiled at them.

"Jackson is a wide-open town. You'll just have to get used to it till we can do something about it."

They hitched and entered the store, Helen Lawson making quite a stir among the idling men, every one taking notice of the fact that she and her husband were Easterners.

As they made their way to the counter, Lee whispered in Lawson's ear: "Don't tell them yet what you are in town for. Evade the question."

Lawson nodded.

Sam Tollson dropped what he was doing and stared at Lee through half-closed eyes. His was one of the very few enterprises in Jackson City that Ferris Johnson did not control, and the expression in the storekeeper's calm face was one of political slyness, ready to please both sides, but keeping his thoughts to himself. He was a heavy man with huge shoulders and long, gray, tobacco-stained mustaches. His eyes had opened wide at the first sight of Lee

and a momentary expression of pleasure filled them; but his voice had its usual impersonal tone as he said: "Well, how are you, Lee?"

As though in silent agreement, the two men did not bother to shake hands. Lee made a few everyday remarks and then introduced the Lawsons as friends that were visiting him. Leaving Helen Lawson to make the purchases, he went out of the store to take a better look at the town he had not seen for so long. There was a lively traffic in the street, and he was aware that people took considerable notice of him wherever he went. Many faces he did not know, but to him it was comparatively easy to separate the rams from the sheep. Men were either openly satisfied with conditions as they were under Johnson's régime, or they were disappointed. Some looked subdued, but many an eye flashed with new hope at the sight of Lee. Pointedly, he had stopped in the middle of the store porch and broken both his guns for a quick check-up before sauntering down the steps and promenading up past the Golden Horn.

Opposite the old print shop, covered with dust and cobwebs, he almost stopped, then went on his way. A quick glance had shown him that the ancient press was still intact under years of dirt and waste. The letters The Jackson *Eagle*, were hardly legible on the window, wind and rain and sun having faded them to a grayish stain.

So far he had avoided falling into conversation with any one, and decided to continue this policy. Stopping outside Henderson's grain and feed store, he contemplated entering the Golden Horn and having a look around. He had almost made up his mind to go in when he was conscious of a stir at the sheriff's office next to the courthouse on the other side of the street. Instinct told him that it had to do with him when he saw Hank Byers and three deputies suddenly pour out of the open door and come directly toward him. He leaned against the wall and busied himself with making a cigarette. Pretending to assume that they would go right past him, he merely watched them out of the corner of his eye. Two of the deputies had their hands resting on their guns. Greenhorns, Lee judged.

There was an empty hitch rail between him and the four men as they approached, and two of the deputies went around one end of it while the third one went the other way. Byers stood in the middle. There was no doubt about their intentions now. They were definitely closing in on him.

Lee suddenly dropped the cigarette and poised his hands lightly in front of his belt, noticing how the deputies jumped at the move.

"If you're wanting to talk with me," he said, "you're close enough."

They stopped with a side glance at Byers, who stepped up to the rail. "I want you to hand over your guns, Lee. Better do it peaceful."

Byers was a spare man with a belligerently grouchy voice. His stock in trade was an aggressiveness that covered up a bad conscience and always aimed to carry the fight into the enemy's camp. When people became aggressive, Lee always grew calm. He smiled at the sheriff.

"Just like that, eh?"

"You're under arrest for the killing of Bert Hatchell in Seavers's Hotel at the junction. Hand me them guns before we have to use ours."

Lee kept smiling. "Seems to me

the junction is out of your jurisdiction, Hank. Besides, I killed him in self-defense."

"I'll do the talking," snapped Byers. "Put up your hands! Men, get his guns!"

Before the two men, who had their hands on their guns, could draw, Lee's own weapons had sprung into his hands with a rapidity that seemed to take the breath away from the lawmen.

"If you want to take my guns, Hank Byers," Lee spoke evenly, "you better come and get them."

"You're bearing arms against the law," argued Byers, paling at the fact that Lee had beaten him to the draw. "You know what that means."

"The law in this part of the country begins with an 'F,'" retorted Lee, "and it isn't quite good enough for me."

"If you don't like it, you shouldn't have come here."

Lee chuckled grimly. "It isn't as easy as that, Hank."

A crowd was cautiously gathering. Out of the tail of his eye Lee saw the Lawsons leave the store, while a man was loading their provisions onto the rig. They were looking around for him.

"If I was you," Lee told Byers, as he motioned with his gun for one of the deputies to join the others at the end of the hitch rail, "I'd pass peacefully on down the street and just forget about arresting people for shooting in self-defense. Yes, that's about your best bet right now."

As he spoke he backed along the board walk, keeping his eyes on the four men. Byers had turned from pale white to fiery red. The attitude of the crowd irked him. For a moment Lee could see that he considered reaching for his gun, but gave it up. He jerked his head at his men and motioned for them to follow him.

"This ain't the last of this, Lee Carey," he managed before he spun on his heel and headed for the Golden Horn, followed by the three now somewhat sheepish deputies.

LEE knew that Byers was right, this wasn't the last of it. They had never liked each other. Now the sheriff would stop at nothing to get vengeance for this scorching humiliation.

Keeping an alert eye on the crowd, he sidled over to the store and unhitched the horse that Williams had lent him. A roar of laughter rose from the people when the last deputy had disappeared into the hotel; but not before.

"Seems to me," said Lawson half jokingly, from the seat of the rig, "that you're getting to be more dangerous company every day."

Lee laughed and swung into the saddle. "And I'm going to get more so as time goes on. Well, we've got to be getting along. It'll be dark soon."

As they started out, Sam Tollson came out on the porch. "Still kind of fast on the draw, ain'tcha, Lee?" Lee kneed his horse over to the porch so that he was close to the store owner. "Still own that old newspaper you bought for taxes?"

Tollson nodded.

"I want to buy it," said Lee. "How much are you asking?"

Sam Tollson's glance left Lee and rested for several seconds on Henry Lawson. When his eyes again met Lee's there was a growing light of understanding in them; a faint simle curved his mouth. "It's no good to me, Lee," he answered slowly. "I reckon you can have it for the ask-

ing. Come up and get the key whenever you like."

Without waiting for comment he turned his heavy bulk on his heel and went back into the store.

CHAPTER VI.

LEE CAREY PREPARES.

FROM the house on the hills south of Jackson City, Anne Bennett looked pensively down toward the roaring town. She was standing by the window, her mind in a turmoil. Behind her in the room sat Ferris Johnson, leaning back in his chair after the dinner and regarding, through half-closed eyes, the smoke twirling into the air from a long, black cigar. In every move or word that man made, she felt his intense personality and power. It seemed that he never said or did the least thing unless it was well planned. Although the conversation during the meal had been only light, she was uneasy. Whenever she asked him about her father, he had answered her with evasions.

The woman whom Lee had addressed as Goldie was sitting at the other end of the table, smoking a cigarette. She was supposed to be Mrs. Johnson; yet, somehow, Anne felt that she did not fit in the well-furnished and, for that section of the country, well-appointed house, though the cook was Chinese and the servants half-breed Indian women. Mrs. Johnson's conversation was careless and in poor grammar, while Ferris Johnson spoke well and gave every indication of being an educated man.

Anne had not missed the acid sarcasm in Lee Carey's tone as he had referred to Goldie's no longer singing in the hotel. Also, she saw in the woman's eyes an ill-concealed fury of jealousy. Goldie was pretty in a blond, flashy way, but her beauty was on the surface, and the surface beginning to show the stains of life. A certain tough arrogance served her as poise. Though Anne had never had close acquaintance with the other's type, she could instinctively place her.

"Do you like the view?" remarked her host eventually in his deep, resonant voice, purposely breaking the silence.

She turned and smiled a little awkwardly. There was something about the man that attracted her strangely. Not because he was handsome, for she did not forget the fact that he was more than twenty years older than she. Perhaps it was his sureness and poise. In that respect he was so different from Lee Carey. Carey had poise, was even more handsome than this man, but his poise continually exploded in violent actions and words. Oddly, she felt calmer and safer with Ferris Johnson.

"Yes," she acceded, "it is a nice view. A little barren and rough, perhaps, but there's wild beauty in it."

Ferris showed his teeth in a hard smile. "And wild men, too."

As the girl turned again to the window, he motioned for the other woman to leave. Getting up from his chair, he clasped his hands behind his back and walked over and stood next to Anne, while out of the corner of his eye he waited for Goldie to close the door behind her. She closed it slowly, worry and fear in her look.

"I like that view," he said evenly, when they were alone, "because all I see when I look from these windows, is mine. All of it." There was no braggadocio in his voice, merely matter-of-factness.

"Also the wild men?" she asked suddenly.

He smiled. "They don't get much wilder than I let them. The world was always like this. One man must tell the others what to do, and be strong enough to back up his orders. Too many voices giving orders, and you have nothing but noise."

Again that odd mixture of fear and security at the same time. She kept wondering at the man as he stood there beside her, springy on his feet, his dark eyes shining, his well-molded jaw outthrust; every inch a master, a savage master.

"You belong back in the middle ages," she said lightly, but with great intensity under the words, "in a feudal castle."

HE glanced quickly about, his eyes sweeping the wall of the large room covered with a profusion of firearms of every description. "This will do," he said.

They walked into what might be called a library. There was a huge stone fireplace and the furniture was covered with buffalo robes and deerskin. Large bearskins were scattered about on the floor. When they were seated on a large sofa, Anne said:

"About my father——"

"We return to him again."

"I came all this way to return to him. You haven't really told me anything definite about him yet."

A shadow crossed Ferris Johnson's face and his voice lost its flippancy. "As I have already said, I can't tell you anything definite about him. I'm not absolutely certain that he is your father. He comes to town every so often. As a matter of fact," he added quickly, "once you got to know him, you might regret having sought him. But your letter was so intense, so powerful, that I had to answer it. Perhaps I shouldn't have."

She wondered if he was deliberately stalling her, wondered again if Goldie really was his wife. "Don't you know even where he lives? I thought you knew all your land and all your men." This last was somewhat challenging.

Ferris Johnson slowly shook his head. "We'll have to bide our time and wait for him. I shall do my best to show him to you. Know him? Yes and no. He's the type of man it is hard to know. I repeat, you might be sorry."

"My father is my father," she said simply.

"That's admirable," he commented. "Have patience and you'll find him. Meanwhile, make yourself comfortable and please regard this as your home. The servants will obey any orders you may wish to give them, and Goldie will do her best to keep you company when I'm not about. We have some very gentle saddle ponies if you'd like to ride."

The feeling of safety and snugness possessed her again, fostered by the sincerity of his tone. "You are very generous," she said. "I hope I won't be imposing on your hospitality. I—I like it here, though I've just come."

"I'm glad," he said. "I'm very glad. There aren't many women like you in this part of the country." His eyes rested momentarily on hers with a strange, almost soft look. "As a matter of fact, there aren't any."

She hurriedly changed the subject, remembering the tone in which he had said: "Goldie will do her best to keep you company." It had not indicated a high regard for a wife.

"I would love to ride," she told

him. "I could go to town and I have some friends, Mr. Carey and the Lawsons at Sage Creek Ranch. I met them on the coach."

Steel came back into Ferris Johnson's glance.

"Oh, yes," he said, casually, "that's nice."

Anne smiled at the thought of seeing little Mildred again. "The Lawsons have a little girl, the sweetest little thing I ever saw. She's just five."

Ferris got up suddenly and paced the floor, his face a taut mask. He spun on his heel and regarded Anne, sitting on the sofa, with an absent far-away look. He seemed long distances away when he spoke.

"A little girl?" he said the words slowly. "Yes, yes, a little girl—just five years old."

A tiny, puzzled sigh escaped Anne. There was no understanding that man.

LEE and Lawson were standing in the door of the ranch house watching an approaching dust cloud in the distance. The sun was hanging low and the coolness of evening ran up to them from the surrounding plain, while the sage clumps in the distance gained vague, hazy-blue outlines and long shadows crept toward them from the west. Behind them sounded the clatter of chinaware as Helen Lawson was washing the supper dishes, Mildred standing on a chair busy with a huge towel.

"That business of Ferris trying to have Byers arrest me," began Lee, "means that he's constantly looking for trouble. He'll probably try a hundred ways of annoying me."

Lawson sat down on the doorstep and rested his chin in his hands. "If he ever got you into jail, you'd rot waiting for a trial. He knows that Jackson Valley Junction is out of this county's jurisdiction; on the other hand, your having refused arrest means that you can't show yourself in the town without being an open target. What are we going to do about that? We'll have to get in and get that paper going somehow."

Lee smiled grimly. "We'll just have to be very fast on the trigger, that's all. As far as you're concerned, you seem to be a natural-born shot, judging by the amount of bottles and tomato air-tights you punctured to-day."

Lawson fastened his gray eyes on Lee, who was steadily watching the dust cloud. "We'll be a pair of human targets whenever we go to town." He jerked his head toward the kitchen, "I don't care much for my own sake—but—how about them?"

Lee kept his eyes on the distance, the weight of the other's words tightening his mouth. "I've been thinking about that," he said. "Don't think I haven't. But then again, every time the pioneer went to put the plow to the soil, he was a constant target for the Indians. His women and children were targets, too, often worse than targets. Progress always carries risks—and then, we're not alone. We have more friends on our side than we can see right off. They'll know when we are in town. Of course you *could* go to Jackson and remain neutral, and perhaps make a living some way——"

"You needn't say any more," said Lawson.

"Think of what the railroad will do for the valley—for us, for law, and order."

"What's the first story you want me to print?" asked Lawson. "It wouldn't do to mention the railroad

till we get some options on right-of-way land."

"I don't know," said Lee as he walked toward Williams and a dozen riders that were coming up the lane between the orchard and the corrals, "but I bet we'll find plenty of news when we get to town in the morning. We *could* print about my attempted arrest."

They reached the men and opened the gate bars for the horses.

"Anybody see you ride over?" Lee asked Williams as the rancher slid from the saddle and shook hands with him and Lawson.

The other shook his head. "Don't think so."

Lee turned to greet the other men. He knew all but a couple of them. Their serious faces lighted up as he spoke to them and shook their hands. He invited them into the front room of the house and they were soon seated about the large table. They were all cattlemen, anxious for the coming of the railroad to prevent Ferris from controlling the shipping of cattle.

Lee studied their faces before he gave them his proposition. Hard, windburned faces met. Horny hands lay folded on the table. The mien of these men was not too optimistic. Conditions had been bad for a long time. Ferris was a strong power to buck and they wanted to see what Lee had on the ball. Talk was cheap.

"The proposition is this," began Lee, "that the railroad has given me authority to buy up options for right-of-way land as far as Jackson City. If I can only get sixty per cent of the stretch optioned, the railroad can get legislation to force the rest. Ferris owns thirty per cent of the range land and controls most of the rest by mortgages and false land-office registrations."

"We'll have to prove that," broke in a squat, iron-gray man by the name of Randall. "We've registered that land and we've been ranging on it for three years. The only way Ferris controls some of us is through loans and provision debts, but you'll have to prove the false registrations."

Momentarily Lee felt a dislike for the man; not so much for his words, as for his voice. Something did not ring true. He passed it off, however, remembering that Williams had picked the men.

"We might get on the right side of the county clerk," he said.

Williams smiled bitterly. "I'm afraid there ain't no right side to that hombre."

"There's a State law," said Lee, "which requires the county authorities to publish all land registrations and liens on them as far as three years back, if a sufficient number of citizens demand it. They might straighten the records in that case, since a false statement to the press in such a case is a Federal offense, the land being originally government property."

"By golly, Lee," exclaimed Lawson, "I've got to hand it to you."

A MURMUR of interest and approval went through the group. Randall said: "That's all very well; but how can we put a thing like that in the paper if the town ain't got a paper?"

"But it has," said Lawson before Lee could stop him. "It has," he pointed to Lee. "There's the owner. I'm the editor."

Lee held his breath and kept judging Randall, who said: "The old Jackson *Eagle?* Good, good!"

"That being the case," continued Lee, "you can feel free enough to sell options."

"Does the railroad pay cash?" demanded Randall.

The man was talking too much. Lee shook his head and a hum of disappointment ran through the men.

"But here's the point: When I've bought enough options to cover sixty per cent of the ground, you can begin turning in your checks against your liens and debts to Ferris. His hands will be tied then. Get the drift?"

Lee let silence rule while the men chewed on the information. He took a crude map from a drawer and began outlining the land in question. From the ranchers present, he could option about thirty-five per cent.

"How many of you are ready to deal? Five thousand dollars down in checks, the rest in cash, when the land is surveyed and the purchase registered."

Lawson brought forth blank contracts and pen and ink. The men pored over the map, pointing out their respective lands. Lawson put several of their names on the papers and began notating the approximate length and locations of the stretches.

One of them said: "Suppose Ferris finds this out? I got Harriet and three kids to think of."

"Yeah, yeah," came thoughtful exclamations from several others.

Lee faced them. "We're more'n just the handful you see here," he said.

Several of the men began to sign and Lee made out their checks.

"Suppose," suggested Randall, "that the deal don't go through. What then? Will them checks still be good?"

"Those checks are good the moment sixty per cent of the right of way has been optioned. They'll be good then, whether the rest of the deal goes through or not, but it will. Either way, you run no risk."

"Except having Ferris find out," said Randall, and pointed his finger at his head while he clicked his tongue.

Lee had handed out nine checks so far. He waved them at the rancher. "There's no reason why he should find out, is there? How about you, Randall? Want a check?"

Williams, standing near the door, suddenly made a hissing sound and caught instantly every one's attention. "Thought I heard somebody outside the window." He glanced at Lawson. "Who's in the kitchen?"

The men stood quietly about the table, the oil lamp drawing deep shadowy furrows on their grave faces. Lawson went to the kitchen door. "Helen and Mildred are both there," he announced. Lee blew out the lamp as Williams opened the outer door and sneaked outside with drawn gun.

They stood in the dark and waited, while a clock on the fireplace ticked the seconds away. Presently Williams came back and Lee struck a match and relighted the lamp.

"Must have been mistaken," said Williams. "Thought sure I heard somebody. Must have been a rat or something."

Lee shoved a contract toward Randall. "All right then?"

The man shook his head. "Got to think this over."

Two others demurred as Williams signed his. One of them was the one who had first mentioned his wife and children. No comments were made. Men had a right to be cautious and take their time.

Lee brought out a bottle of whisky and a glass and passed them around the table. Most of the men

took one pony and downed it quickly. Randall took two. The man, Harris, with wife and children, took none. Then they all went out quietly. Williams lingered after the others.

"Frank," said Lee, "I am sure the others are all right, but how about Randall?"

Williams nodded. "He had a pretty raw deal from Ferris a good while ago. Yes, I'm almost ready to swear by him."

They watched Randall mount and ride into the darkness.

"Almost!" said Lee as he closed the door.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAREDO KID AGAIN.

JACKSON CITY was drowsy with early-morning sleepiness. Lee was standing in the door of the print shop, Lawson working away at the type case, when the heavy figure of Sam Tollson detached itself from the general store and came down along the creaking board walk. He nodded in the direction of Lee's glance.

"Surprise you, Lee?"

They were both taking in the sight of a large banner spread across the street from the Golden Horn to the livery stable.

"Louis Pardee For Mayor," it announced in bold letters.

Lee guffawed. "Didn't know Jackson City rated a mayor. Maybe Ferris thinks it does—seems like a lot of foolishness to me. However it gives us something to put in the paper."

"How is it coming?" asked Tollson, and nodded at Lawson, who just then looked up from his work.

"We should have an edition out by to-morrow noon," he informed the storekeeper, then added significantly, "if there are no interruptions."

Tollson nodded darkly. "What puzzles me is that they should bother with a mayor, let alone go to the trouble of electing him. Usually we just find out that a sheriff or a county clerk has been appointed."

"My guess is," said Lee, "that he's wanting us to make trouble about it. It's a test for us. We come to town and vote, and he's got us numbered and told. Well, let him. I guess we'll be ready for him by that time."

"Here's more power to you," declared the storekeeper gravely. "When the time comes you can count on me to pass the word to those I can trust. But who are we gonna put up for mayor as the opposing candidate? We've got to have a candidate; we can't just vote in a protest."

Lee sought the older man's eye. Sam Tollson had been the friend of his father. Before him, Sam's father had been the friend of Lee's grandfather. Always the name of Tollson had stood solidly and honestly engraved in the name of the town. Sly, shrewd, the Tollsons had always been, driving hard bargains; but always honest as the day was long, never afraid to take chances when a friend needed credit.

"How about you?" asked Lee evenly.

The shadow of a startled expression flitted across the large, heavy-jowled face of Tollson. This he had never thought about. His was usually the rôle of the fox; playing his game in the background; rarely putting his cards on the table unless he had to. He had the trade of his livelihood to think of. Still, it was natural that Lee Carey should have asked him. Who else was there, who was really big enough for the job?

The startled expression gave way for one of thoughtfulness, then a new and firm light came to his glance.

"Why not?" he said quietly. "If you can fight to bring in the railroad, I guess I can do my bit and run for mayor."

The two men faced each other silently for several seconds, feeling the importance of what they were about, heavy on their shoulders. It was up to them, and men like them, to build the future of Jackson Valley. They had been called and they had answered.

Lee said, "I'll put that in the paper."

And Tollson said: "Do."

LEE turned into the shop and told the beaming Lawson the news. The young editor came out and shook Tollson's hand.

"Looks like I've got a busy day ahead of me," he declared. "What with politics, the land-office records —Lee, you've still got to get them from the clerk—and Lee's attempted arrest by Byers for killing Hatchell in self-defense——"

"One thing more," broke in the storekeeper. "I plumb forgot. There was a killin' last night out near Ferris's place."

"A killing?"

"A man by name of Randall. Don't know if you remember him."

"Randall!"

Lee and Lawson looked at each other. Then there had been somebody on the gallery last night.

"Somebody laid for him up by Ferris's ranch," went on Tollson. "His gun was fired, but whoever it was beat him to the draw. Hank Byers calls it murder—at least that's what Abe Jackson told me. He was with the sheriff when they found him."

"Why should Byers trouble to call it murder?" mused Lee aloud. "Randall was no friend of Ferris's."

Tollson turned and winked gravely at the two men.

"Mebbe old Hank forgot that in the excitement," he said slowly.

"The railroad," asked Lee suddenly of the storekeeper, "you mentioned it before. Who told you I was trying to bring it in?"

Sam's face grew suddenly noncommittal and he turned his huge hulk on his heel, preparatory to walking back to his store.

"Friend of yours," he informed tacitly, and went up the walk.

Puzzled, Lee shrugged his shoulders and returned to Lawson, who was busy scribbling copy.

"Seems that Mr. Randall didn't quite get to his destination after he left us last night," Lawson remarked as he wrote. "Wherever he was going."

Lee grunted. "Probably just as well he didn't." Then he snapped his fingers in impatience. "But what I would like to know is: Who stopped him?"

"Williams?" suggested Lawson. "He became worried after you doubted Randall."

Lee shook his head. "Frank would have told us, I'm sure of that."

"Well," said Lawson, "one thing is certain: Whoever killed Randall is a friend of ours——"

"Good morning, gentlemen!"

Lee wheeled and saw Anne Bennett in the door. His pulse quickened as he wondered whether she had heard his last remark. He went toward her, pleased that she had come, yet sensing the shadow of Ferris as a sinister background for her beauty. Quickly he dusted off a chair and bade her sit down. She declined.

"I'm only staying a minute. I'm really on my way to Sage Creek to visit Mrs. Lawson and Mildred." There was a short pause, then she said, "I've missed them."

"They've been asking for you, too," the editor assured her.

Lee stood watching her as the light chatter of everyday conversation passed between them. Her presence filled the room and tingled his senses. Her riding costume was becoming and the large hat framed her delicate face well. He found himself wondering if the clothes had been given to her by Ferris Johnson.

Biting his lips, trying to sound casual, he remarked: "You *would* visit Sage Creek when I'm not home."

His disappointment must have shown in his voice, for she smiled. "I'm sorry."

"I hope you'll come some other time when I'm there," he said, almost against his will. He kept thinking of Ferris. What did he mean to her? What did she mean to him? How much easier everything would be if she were not in Jackson City. Why must he be bothered with the riddle of her? A riddle too fascinating and beautiful to ignore. She turned to leave after a few more remarks and he could not stop himself from saying:

"I'm sorry you have to go so soon."

"I left my horse at the store," she countered. "You might walk me up the street if you care to."

THEY walked in silence past the first two houses. It was a clear, cool forenoon with the sun painting the bleak houses almost gay. Their footfalls on the board walk sounded awkward in the quiet. At length Lee said:

"Too bad you're a friend of Ferris Johnson."

Looking straight ahead, she answered: "Is it?"

Lee pointed to the banner across the street. "He's trying to put a crook into the mayor's office. I'm here to see that he doesn't. I aim to see that he's run out of the country. He's a scoundrel himself. I don't usually talk behind people's backs, but somebody has got to tell you, since you can't see it for yourself. He knows what I think of him."

She stopped directly and faced him, her eyes angry, color rushing to her cheeks. "Mr. Johnson has been very kind to me."

"Why shouldn't he be?" demanded Lee savagely, and regretted it the same instant.

Anne Bennett's tone was icy now. "You malign another man in his absence, which is unfair. You call him a scoundrel, and present yourself as favoring law and order, yet you killed a man in cold blood the first night I met you. Next day you killed two. Last night another man was killed near our—near Mr. Johnson's ranch. It seems that a lot of people die when you come to a place."

Lee was calm now. "There'll always be men who need killing. I warned you. I *thought* the climate would be too strong for you. I killed those men because I had to, or they would have killed me. Is that so hard to believe?"

His calmness and composure disturbed her. Always he was calm, though the driving force in the man was apparent beneath the surface. His tone, in spite of him, gave her to understand that what she thought of him made very little difference to him; though the exact opposite was the case.

She looked up at his hard features, wonder, almost bewilderment, stirring in her eyes and mouth. "I don't know quite what to think—of you; or any one else, for that matter."

"Believe in me," he said. "Why must we always be like this? Can't we be friends?"

"I don't know," she told him uncertainly. "We seem to be on either side of a barrier."

He answered quickly. "There's no reason why you couldn't be on my side of it."

She was asking herself rather than him when she answered.

"Isn't there?"

Against his will he kept on. "Why do you insist on staying with Ferris? Accept my invitation and move to Sage Creek. At least there you'd have the company of another lady." He paused and saw her redden slightly at the insinuation, then he went on. "Has it occurred to you that Ferris and Goldie are not married, that she's only his housekeeper? You're being made a fool of."

She surveyed him thoughtfully before she said: "You hate that man, don't you?"

"I hate what he stands for."

"I wonder what you stand for. A newspaper, the truth, law and order—perhaps. I wonder if your desires and goals in the end are not as personal as his. I think you mean mostly trouble. Trouble that always comes when men fight about power. Why not leave well enough alone—why always spill blood?"

"You can't leave well enough alone when things aren't well," he stated firmly. "Certainly I mean trouble. The world will need trouble of the kind I bring, for a long time to come. Only a blind person could defend a man like Ferris—or," he added suddenly, "a woman."

HER soft face grew hard, like a small, white mask.

"You needn't say any more, Mr. Carey," she said, her tone brittle as an icy wind. They had reached the store now and she turned to ascend the steps.

A sudden impulse, that he was beyond controlling, made him catch her hand. "Does it mean nothing to you that you are living in the house of a man who only pretends to be married? I don't understand you——"

"I don't expect you to." She refused to look at him, and made an attempt to free her hand. "You shouldn't be so concerned about my affairs. Now, if you don't mind, I have some business in the store."

"Why shouldn't I be concerned about you?" he said jerkily, still clutching her hand. "I love you! I've loved you ever since I heard your voice and saw you standing under the lamp in Seavers's Hotel——"

"Please, please," she ejaculated, her breath coming laboriously as she freed her hand, "it's no use for you to say anything further. I'm afraid you'll be sorry you said that!"

He was calm again, now that the words were said. He'd probably never have a chance to say them again. "I'm inclined to think you're right," he said to her as she quickly went up the steps and across the porch to the door, "but I had no choice in the matter. Good-by."

The door clanged shut behind her and he wheeled slowly, trying to force back the turmoil that kept seething deep within him. He had business to attend to. Those land records. Suddenly he stiffened.

From a saloon porch across the street a man was watching him,

leaning against the post, smoking a cigarette as he lazily let the smoke drift from his mouth and up around the cross beams. His face was in shadow, but Lee recognized the shape of his head, the narrow shoulders, and the manner in which the battered felt hat was shoved back on the head. It was the Laredo Kid! Just as Lee had caught sight of him, he threw the half-smoked stub to the floor and stepped carefully on it; then, pretending not to notice his former employer, he turned on his heel and slouched out of sight, past the swinging doors.

Randall! was Lee's instant thought. So it was the Laredo Kid who——

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE BLOOD IS SPILLED.

HENRY LAWSON looked up from his type case and contemplated the man who was darkening the doorway. He was middle-aged, just under six feet, and of a compact, supple build. His steady, gray hawk-eyes held nothing but friendliness as he met the editor's eyes; but there was something oddly catlike about him as he came forward into the office and stood poised in his faded Prince Albert coat and high, dusty boots. He reminded Lawson of a hunter, stalking.

The voice was gentle. "I'm looking for a man named Harry Rosswell," he said, after the greetings had been exchanged, "or Louis Rosswell. You're the editor—figured you might know him."

He threw a "wanted" circular on the desk before Lawson.

"That's his description. Reckon you know him?"

There was no picture. Lawson studied the paper perfunctorily, then looked up at the man. "I'm afraid I won't be of much help to you. I've been here only a few days—haven't had the first edition out yet."

He shoved the circular toward the stranger, who left it on the desk and went to the door.

"Keep it, I might want you to print a few of them later on. I'll take a look around town. See you've got an election coming on. There ought to be plenty of people around by that time."

"Tell you what," suggested Lawson, "the candidate for mayor might help you out. He usually sits in a poker game just around noon over at the Golden Horn; he runs the place. He's sure to know most everybody around here."

"Good idea," declared the man. "Mebbe I oughter take a look at that gambling would-be mayor of yourn. Thankee. The trail's getting hot, so I don't want to miss nothing."

Lawson watched him leave and cross the empty street with his catlike walk. As the man had leaned against the desk there had been a flash of shiny metal as his coat had slid aside. Murder and mail robbery—wanted in three States. If Lawson was not much mistaken he had just been talking with a United States marshal. Guided by a sudden scent of news he quickly put on his coat and hat and followed the gentle-voiced man. As he waded across the deep dust he saw the man turn into the door of the Golden Horn several houses away.

It happened as suddenly as that. To Lawson it seemed that only seconds passed between the moment the stranger entered the saloon and the time he heard the shot which sundered the dead silence of the hot noonday. With the explosion still

echoing in his mind, he hurried along the board walk and brushed through the doors till he stood momentarily half blinded by the semidarkness within.

There were few people in the place at this hour, but what few there were looked with intense interest upon the inert figure of a man, slumped face down on the floor near the bar, his legs drawn queerly up under him as though he had made a last desperate effort to rise before he died; for about his being dead there could be no doubt. All the young editor's senses drank in the chill atmosphere which death had breathed upon this room.

WITH a dizzying leap of his heart he recognized the faded coat, the long black boots and the hair of the man with whom he had spoken not four minutes ago. He also noted that the stranger had been given no chance to reach for a weapon.

In stark contrast stood Louis Pardee, candidate for mayor and Ferris Johnson's right-hand man, leaning against the bar a few feet away, his left hand resting on the mahogany, his right hand still inserted in the flap of his checkered vest, as though he had just replaced a small firearm in its hidden pocket. Before his brazen, case-hardened countenance, from which a certain startled expression had not quite faded, drifted a tiny wisp of thin, grayish smoke.

As the editor came forward hesitantly, Pardee jerked his head toward a couple of men who were lounging near the rear door and uttered an order in a low tone. The men came forward, matter-of-factly, as though they were required to oust a drunk, and reached for the dead man.

"Just a second!" exclaimed Lawson, staggered by this callousness. "Not so fast!"

He was at once the center of attention as, rather pale, he stepped up to the bar.

"Who killed this man?"

Before any one could stop him he knelt down and drew the stranger's coat aside. It revealed a silver badge. He had been right in his surmise; the man had been a United States marshal.

"This looks like murder if you ask me."

"But nobody asks you."

Pardee's answer came on top of the question like a hurried echo. Lawson looked about him and saw nothing but enmity in the faces surrounding him. With a sudden intuition he inserted his hand in the inner pocket of the dead marshal's coat and drew forth a folded document.

"What are you doing there?" snapped the candidate for mayor. "Gimme that and mind your own business!"

Lawson was suddenly looking into the venomous twin muzzles of a derringer, resting in Pardee's hand. He rose quickly and backed away, as the others at the same time began closing in on him.

"It may happen to be my business," he retorted, fighting to keep calm. "Very likely this paper is a warrant for the arrest of Harry Rosswell. I'm editor of the Jackson *Eagle*. I think the people of this country are entitled to know what their candidate for mayor has to say about the murder of a United States officer."

"Let him have it!" suggested a voice at once seconded by others. "Slug him! Don't let him get away!"

Lawson's heart stood still and his

legs threatened to become wabbly. What a fool he had been! He should have sneaked out and kept this information to himself. He bit his lip as he saw Helen and little Mildred before him. Now what was to become of them? Pardee reached out and snatched the paper from his hand, then his eyes reached the man nearest him and his head moved in a significant gesture. Lawson tensed his fingers for a reach at his gun—die fighting anyhow. Now! Then his hand froze.

"Mr. Lawson!" shouted a harsh, youthful voice behind and above him. "If you kind of think that the air is better outside this here place, just feel free to take a stroll any time you like!"

The men's attention was suddenly diverted from the editor. Lawson knew that voice: out of the corner of his eye he saw the Laredo Kid standing on a table inside the door, a heavy six-gun in each hand trained on Pardee and his men.

"An' drop that pea-shooter of yourn before I kill you with a man's gun," the Kid addressed Pardee, who immediately followed this advice.

"This way, Mr. Lawson, and take your sweet time about it. There ain't nobody a-hurryin' you—is there, Mr. Mayor?"

The Laredo Kid's raucous laughter filled the room. Pardee had turned white with rage and looked as though he were ready to explode. Lawson drew his own gun and stepped toward the speechless adversary. "I'll take that warrant," he snapped and retrieved the document. "If you want to read it, look in to-morrow's paper!"

"Ah, man!" bellowed the Kid. "That's showing them!"

Pardee's looks spoke more eloquently than any amount of words might have, and as Lawson eventually backed out of the door followed by the youthful desperado, he knew with dire certainty that he had made a relentless enemy. But how good the sunshine felt. How beautiful the dusty street and mangy houses looked. It was good to be alive.

THEY kept backing up the street, keeping their guns on the Golden Horn.

"Thanks, Kid," breathed Lawson, wiping the cold sweat off his forehead. "Im certainly glad to make your acquaintance, but I'm afraid it'll be war from now on."

"Pleased to meet you," returned the Kid. "Either you're a fool or you've got a head full of courage; maybe both. Whiskers, but things is gonna pop now!"

Lee had gone to the county clerk's office in quest of the land and tax records. As expected he found the office closed, the courthouse being significantly devoid of humans. There were spider webs across the doors and windows and barn swallows were the only forms of life coming and going from the ill-kept building. Lee chuckled mirthlessly as he turned his back to the place.

There was only one kind of law in Jackson Valley. Records? He wondered if they had been kept intact and if so, why. Of a storekeeper he inquired about the domicile of the county clerk and was directed to the outskirts of town. There he was told that the clerk was out hunting and would not be home until the evening of the next day. For a moment he considered breaking into the courthouse and taking the records, but thought better of it. That would be asking too urgently for trouble—better bide the time a little and let Ferris give

cause. If the clerk refused access to the records, that would be a signal to take issue. Trouble would come soon enough without asking for it.

The next thing to do would be to confront the Laredo Kid with the killing of Randall. The significance of this was obvious enough; it was also clear that he could not afford to be openly allied with the young desperado. Those ranchers that now were neutral and undecided would certainly look askance at this.

The knowledge that Anne Bennett was on the way to Sage Creek kept pestering Lee's mind as a hornet annoys a prowling bear. There was little else he could do at present than follow her; perhaps he might take back some of those hasty words he had said in parting —in fact, there were a thousand things he might say to her. Still, he had better things to do than to chase after a headstrong girl of whom he knew nothing. That was just it; of whom he knew nothing!

Before he half realized his actions he had left town and was on his way to Sage Creek. He had just caught sight of the girl trotting over a distant sage-crested hillock, when a cloud of dust approaching him from the direction of Williams's ranch demanded his attention. A large group of horsemen quickly loomed up, headed by Frank Williams himself. At least forty men were following him. They all greeted Lee with stern faces.

"What's up?" he demanded of Frank Williams.

"Plenty," said the rancher. "Yes, I know that Randall was killed, but in spite of that the news about the railroad leaked out. Every one of the hombres that sold you options have been served with notice of foreclosure of the mortgages that Ferris holds. The rest of these men have had their debts called in. It's a fine mess. They are all for having it out, once and for all, with Ferris and his crowd. They want you to lead them."

The men had circled about Lee and Williams as they talked. There was fight in their eyes; plenty of fight. Several of them shouted his name in greeting.

"You say the word, Lee!"

HE surveyed them calmly. It was important that he keep control of them and that no hasty action be taken. He stood up in the stirrups and raised a hand for silence.

"We want to do this right," he said. "We want to fight on the side of the law. If we're careful about what we do, we'll be better off in the end."

"Law!" shouted one of the men, "There ain't no law this side of Tyndall Pass. So what's the use of asking for it. Let's make our own law!"

The man brandished his six-shooter. Several men joined him.

"Listen!" demanded Lee. "Right now we're working away to put out a newspaper to swing the sentiment of the election over to our side. If you men and your friends and families will come to town and vote Louis Pardee down and vote Byers out of office as sheriff, we can straighten things out without too much bloodshed. Don't you see that this election is mostly Pardee's own idea? Ferris himself would never care whether we had a mayor or not. It's Pardee's game and we can lick him at it, and Ferris too, by means of the newspaper."

"You started this," called one of the men. "You came into the val-

ley and stirred Ferris up so that he foreclosed on us. Don't back out on us now. Let's fight before it's too late!"

Lee surveyed the men and tried to think fast. Things were coming right on top of one another and he was a bit stunned. Still, pride swelled within him at the sight of so many followers. In a way this was more than he had dared hope for; it was rather overwhelming to see such results from the mere fact of his coming to town. Greatly moved, he realized what the name of Carey had meant to the valley and what it still meant to decent men.

"They're right," asserted Frank Williams now. "Our way must be to move as quickly as Ferris—rather a little faster. It didn't take *him* long to send out notice of foreclosure to nearly a hundred ranches. It won't take him long to call out all the extra armed men he's got idling on his own places, besides the crowd he's got in town. If we don't lick him now we never will, and he'll keep on buying cattle from us at his own prices and driving us poor."

Again Lee raised his hand and silence fell upon the assembly.

"All right," he shouted as the men circled into a close ring about him. "I'll fight! That's what I came here for in the first place. Your fight is mine and my battle is yours." He raised his hand again as an approving murmur rose from the crowd. "But!" he continued, "if you want me to lead you, you'll have to fight my way. Nothing was ever accomplished in thoughtless haste. Ferris thinks before he acts —so will we. We'll have the law behind us and we'll stand behind the law a hundred per cent, fight for it if necessary."

"It will be!" shouted several of the men.

"First of all," Lee went on, "we'll put our own man up for office. Sam Tollson has agreed to run for mayor against Pardee. Any objections?"

He needn't have asked, for after a moment of hushed amazement and admiration of foxy old Sam coming into the firing line, a shout of approval broke out.

"And Frank here," said Lee, pointing to Williams, "will make as good a sheriff as any town and county ever had."

"Sure enough! You bet!"

"But most important of all," announced Lee. "We have a newspaper on our side. The Jackson *Eagle* has come to life again and the first edition will be out to-morrow. We will promote our candidates through that, and it's our job to see that it is distributed to every ranch and home in the county in order to call in the voters. There are only about twoscore of us here. We'll need more than that to lick Ferris. My immediate plan for us is to ride peacefully into town and keep an eye on the Ferris and Pardee crowds. And no one is to start trouble unless in emergency or by orders from either myself or Frank here. Without discipline and planned action we can do nothing. Agreed?"

There was only a few seconds silence, then the word "Agreed!" rolled back at him from two-score throats. The men swung their hats and stood up in the stirrups and whooped their approval. Napoleon reviewing his troops could not have been more uplifted than was Carey at that moment. Then he made the sign to move on, and in drawn-out formation the riders headed for town, himself and Williams riding in the lead.

"Pass the word among them," he told the rancher, "to hitch their horses either at Tollson's store or at the back of the print shop. Feed we'll get from Sam."

IT was of no use to consider whether it was wise for them to make this move. It had been inevitable. Unless they moved fast and in unison, Ferris would beat them. Being united they had everything to gain, whereas, if they hesitated now, Ferris would merely search them out one by one, crushing them by legal and brutal force. Thus Lee's arrival in Jackson Valley and his purpose with the railroad had precipitated a natural course of action to follow. It was as plain as that. Having resolved this in his mind, any doubts or fears that might have lurked in its recesses were evaporated as dew in the sunlight. There was only one trail ahead: Forward to success!

They had almost reached the west end of Jackson City and were rounding a small butte preparatory to taking the road leading into town, when Frank Williams, riding a few horse lengths ahead of Lee, suddenly raised his hand to command a halt. He turned his head toward the slight wind and cupped a hand behind his ear.

"I hear shots," he said, and looked to Lee. "Plenty of shooting going on down there."

They sat still in their saddles and listened. With a few seconds interval spasmodic bursts of gunfire reached them, the spaces between filled with little nervous pings of angry rifle shots. This was no gang of wild cowhands on a spree, but definite, hard-bitten controversy. Lee's mind went to the Laredo Kid and wondered whether the hard-faced youngster had started a mess of trouble on his own hook. Then his thoughts instinctively went to the Jackson *Eagle*.

He turned to the men who had matter-of-factly drawn their guns: "Come on!" he shouted and waved them on. "Let's take a gallop down and see what's up."

With grunts from the horses, squeaking of leather and whooping from the men, the cavalcade got under way, surging around the butte and down the slope toward the end of the street kicking up a dust cloud like a cyclone.

It took Lee only a second to ascertain that the front of the old print shop was a bullet-ridden wreck. Not a whole windowpane was left and the door and walls were in splinters. A steady fire from the opposite side of the street raked the building, being answered with occasional spurts of flame and drifting powder smoke from the battered windows. As Lee and his men swung down past Tollson's store, the firing from the newspaper office ceased and there was a sudden rush of men across the street, pouring forth from the Golden Horn, the livery stable and Rawlin's saloon.

In the middle of the street they stopped and faced in shocked amazement the roaring brigade which thundered down on them, led by Lee and Frank Williams.

The avalanche of horsemen spread fanwise across the street as it went, to give more riders a chance to fire. Two of the now wildly scattering attackers fell inertly to the street. Frank Williams, galloping down the board walk opposite the print shop, rode three men down as they tried to dodge into the stable. For a few breath-taking seconds Jackson City's main street was a roaring pandemonium of men fleeing before the riders, trying futilely to ex-

change shots with their pursuers. When the street again was clear, as though it had been swept by the broom of a giant, six men lay still in the heavy dust, two of them fatally wounded and three more scampering frantically for the shelter of the stable door, dragging broken legs and bruised arms.

As Lee dismounted by the newspaper office, Williams and the men deployed over the little square farther down the street, wheeled their horses and came back, half of them rounding into the yard of Tollson's, the other half gathering behind the building that housed the Jackson *Eagle*.

Half blinded by the smoke and semidarkness, Lee searched with beating heart for the sight of the editor and breathed a deep sigh of relief as Lawson emerged from behind a packing case shielding the precious printing press. He had a smoking six-gun in each hand.

"Are you all right?" demanded Lee.

Lawson smiled a little palely and nodded. "But only because the cavalry arrived in nick of time. We were down to our last six rounds. I don't know who were most surprised; we or Pardee's crowd."

"We?" demanded Lee.

"Sure, who do you think?" came a voice from the floor under one of the windows and he now saw the heavy figure of Tollson, his arm in a sling and a rifle between his knees. "You ain't forgettin' I have an interest in this here paper too, kind of."

IT felt good to laugh and joke now that the danger was over. The close call they'd had was plainly written on their faces. Then Lee caught sight of the Laredo Kid, slinking modestly toward the back door. "What the devil are you doing here?"

The young bandit stepped squarely forward and met Lee's glance. "Just upholdin' the freedom of the press, that's all. Ain't that what you said, Mr. Lawson?"

As the small shop filled with ranchers Lee was told by Lawson about the incident of the killing of the United States marshal. Shortly after Lawson and the Laredo Kid had retreated to the print shop, Pardee had appeared and promised to have the press smashed if they printed anything about the killing in the paper. Naturally Lawson had ardently refused to compromise, and the Kid, at the point of a gun, had urged the erstwhile candidate to absent himself from the premises, as "they liked to keep the air in the place as clean as possible." While Lawson had kept watch after Pardee's departure the Kid had quickly summoned Sam Tollson. No sooner had he arrived, rifle in hand, than bullets had begun to pop from the other side of the street.

"We were just holding our last shells, waiting for them to storm so that we could let them have it at close range," finished Lawson, "when you and your men saved the day, and incidentally, the press."

He patted the printing machine caressingly. "What a pity if they should have succeeded, if the Jackson *Eagle* should have gotten its wings shorn before its only real flight."

"Pity?" exclaimed Lee. "Disaster you mean." Then he smiled grimly, "Ferris certainly put his foot in it when he allowed Pardee to run for mayor. I'll wager he had no idea of how dark the man's past is; and in turn Pardee put *his* foot in it when he killed the marshal."

"And man!" joined in the Kid to the ranchers' amusement, "did we do some steppin' on them corns of his. Yippeee!"

Lee turned and gazed darkly at this strange ally of his. Right or wrong with the Laredo Kid was a matter of being on the side of his friends. If those friends were on the side of the law, then he was for the law—if they were on the other side of the fence—well, then that would be good enough for him too. Loyalty was his chief virtue. Here he could laugh and joke; kill men in the next breath. Never grown up—just a blade of steel that had become a little twisted and hardened before it was fully shaped.

Lee could not ignore the fact that the Kid had saved Lawson's life when he himself was riding after a girl. From Tollson, who had the desperado's confidence, he learned that it was the Kid who had been on the gallery when the men had met, and had followed Randall and killed him when he saw where he was going. Still, it had been in vain and Ferris had obtained his information just the same. From where, it was useless to ponder now.

Lawson went back to work on the forthcoming edition, and Lee busied himself with issuing orders to the men as to keeping a lookout on the street and being generally prepared, having as their main object the preservation of the newspaper office. Sam Tollson, after having been properly bandaged, set about organizing the food supply for men and animals.

"We're in the midst of it now," he declared, as he and Lee, from the store, watched Pardee's men gather up their dead and wounded. "We'll have to go right through with it and no stopping. I suppose Hank Byers will come barging down the street after all the shooting is over and try to arrest the whole bunch of us."

He laughed mirthlessly. "I'd sure like to see Ferris's face right now. If we can have that paper with what we know about Pardee—that arrest warrant in it, distributed by to-morrow afternoon, we'll have him licked."

"We *will* have it," said Lee, tight-lipped. "We *will!*"

CHAPTER IX.

A DREAM COME TRUE.

IT was late afternoon when Anne Bennett returned from her visit at Sage Creek. The memory of the bitter scene with Lee Carey in the morning had nearly been obliterated by a pleasant day in the company of Helen Lawson and little Mildred. The impending controversy in the valley had not been discussed, and Lee's name had purposely not been mentioned. Somehow, Helen Lawson had sensed that he was a subject better let alone as far as Anne was concerned. Only lightly did they touch upon the matter of Henry Lawson's progress with the newspaper, on which the hopes for the future of the little family hinged.

There was fire and pride in Helen's eyes when she spoke of her husband, and Anne caught herself wishing that she knew some man about whom she could have the same strong feelings. The men that affected her life most at present were terrific problems, all of them. Lee and Ferris and her lost father. At times she was inclined to think that her father was the least problem of the three. Both for Lee Carey and Ferris Johnson she nurtured feelings, feelings that bewildered her in that she was unable to analyze them. A strange unrest seemed to

have come over her host since she had been staying in his house, and a soft, far-away look stole into his eyes sometimes when he glanced at her; yet not the kind of look that would make her fear his company.

She felt the intense power of this iron will that ruled the land about him. At first it seemed to comprise the entire man, but as days went on and their acquaintance became knit more closely, she felt that a hitherto closed door in his personality had been opened, and that she was the only one allowed to peer through it. The fear of the man, which she had felt acutely when she had first arrived, had entirely left her, and still —a strange man; a greater riddle than Lee, than even the father whom she was trying to find; and to whose discovery Ferris Johnson seemed the only key in the world.

She was tired from the ride and had gone to rest a while before supper, in the huge room which Ferris used as a library. Lying on the buffalo-robe-covered sofa she watched the flames in the stone fireplace compete more and more successfully with the remnants of a blood-red sunset which still flashed through windows, painting the whitewashed walls with fiery hues. A comfortable state of sleepy semiconsciousness had overtaken her when footsteps sounded across the large hall outside and the door abruptly opened.

"——and then they broke into the courthouse," said a voice that Anne knew belonged to Louis Pardee, "cracked open the safe and took the records out. I figure they're aiming to print them in the paper—I tell you we've got to act fast!"

Ferris's calm voice contrasted with the excitement of the underling. "You're a fool, Pardee," he said. "You should have smashed that press when you had the chance. You and Byers make a fine pair. Hank fails to arrest Lee for the killing of Hatchell, and you bungle this. We could have had Lee Carey hanged by now and the Jackson *Eagle* would never have had a chance."

Anne had intended to rise from the sofa where she was hidden from view, when the remark about Lee made her pulse throb wildly, with an intensity she had never suspected his name could provoke. Staggered, she decided that there might be other things she ought to hear, regardless of consequences. The men were standing by one of the windows gazing down over the distant town just now bathed in the last streak of red sunlight.

Pardee swore. "I could have had that whippersnapper of an editor when I had the drop on him in the Golden Horn; I'd have killed him then and there if that Laredo Kid hadn't horned in and saved him."

"On what pretext would you have killed him?" demanded Ferris now, a sharp sting of query in his tone. "Why did you have the drop on him? I thought he was a rather peaceful fellow."

PARDEE was at once guardedly casual: "Oh, nothing—only he came in and tried to tell me how to run my business; got pretty fresh talking about my candidacy for mayor and what he was going to print in the paper. I should have nailed him then and there."

"You should have kept your head and made him print what you wanted him to print," retorted Ferris acidly. "We could have turned that newspaper to good use. Now we'll have to wreck it. How many men did you say they had?"

"I figure between forty and fifty. They'll have more when that paper with the land and tax records comes out. We got to be fast."

"And old Sam Tollson running for mayor against you," Ferris chuckled contemptuously. "I always thought foxy Sam knew on which side his bread was buttered. Getting old, I guess. It takes more than a handful of men to break me. Keep them busy in the town. Pester them to death—set fire to their buildings if necessary. And you better call out the men from Orcutt and Willows Bend. Let Lee get all his men to town and we'll burn those idiots' ranches behind their backs. Lee Carey and his railroad! I'll railroad them!"

"That newspaper's gonna be hard to take," said Pardee now. "There's no guessing about that. They guard it like a diamond; but I can get it if you'll give me a free hand. I have an idea."

There was a frosty sound of ill-boding satisfaction in the man's last four words, which instinctively made the girl shudder as antagonism grew in her. Pardee must have something especially vile in mind.

After a slight hesitation, Ferris Johnson said: "All right, do whatever you like; see to it that you make up for your blunders. You have my other plans: follow them. Byers and the rest know what to do."

Pardee's footsteps approached the door and Anne heard the handle turn.

"One thing," declared Ferris suddenly. "Before you take the next step, give those fools, for the sake of peace, their last chance to pull in their horns, understand? They must know they can't lick us. Give them a chance."

"Doesn't sound like you, Ferris," said Pardee from the threshold. "I can do that, but they wouldn't take it. You know Lee."

A second later the door closed abruptly after him. Ferris walked over to the fireplace and Anne Bennett sat up straight and faced him.

For almost a full minute neither of them spoke, the girl's face bearing a mixed expression of shamefulness over having eavesdropped and at the same time of bewildered disgust at what she had heard. Ferris, on the other hand, after he had quickly recovered from the surprise, composed himself behind his usual stern mask of a face and eventually shrugged his shoulders in an eloquent, perhaps slightful regretful gesture.

"Oh, well," he said. "It is perhaps better so. At least we know each other more thoroughly now. I can only say that I hope you never will have to fight as ruthlessly for what is yours as I."

"And you *must,*" she responded gravely, "and it *is* yours?"

He nodded and sat down at the end of the sofa, a painful shadow crossing his face as she involuntarily shrank back from him. "You don't understand this Western country yet. Out here what a man takes is his, and stays his as long as he can hold on to it. I made this valley rich. I've been fairly just, as lenient as I could without showing weakness. The valley is mine and I aim to keep it. The railroad won't get in here while I'm alive."

"And what when you die? What then?"

His eyes caught hers momentarily, and he smiled. "Dead men don't matter. It's what and *how* much you are when you're alive that counts. I've fought too hard and too long for what I have to let

a pup like Carey take it from me. It's either him and his life, or me."

"In other words," she said, "your life or his life and woe to the vanquished."

He straightened up to his full height and strode over and stood looking into the night. Standing there tall and straight, a picture of willful power, he made a commanding appearance and the girl felt a strange understanding of him, almost a kinship. He was what he was, and *that* with every fiber of his nature.

"Yes," he said slowly, "woe to the vanquished."

"I pity you," she said.

AT that he turned upon her and she saw that she, surprisingly, had struck a vital spot. "You would hang Lee Carey for killing in self-defense," she went on. "You would destroy people's homes and property to bend them to your will. I have no doubt that you can do all these things, but what will you have when you have accomplished it? Nothing; nothing but the hate of your enemies and the jealousy of your underlings. You're an intelligent man. If you were a stupid, vicious brute I could understand you better."

He smiled bitterly and shook his head. "It isn't as easy as all that. I learned long ago to depend only on myself; to have faith in no one but myself. I was a fool once and learned my lesson."

"A woman?" she asked.

He said nothing but his silence spoke loudly. "Women are only human," she said, rising and starting toward the door. He followed her with his eyes, a strange light in them, a distant softness behind the bitterness. With her hand on the door handle she turned and faced him. "Good-by, Mr. Johnson," she said unemotionally.

"You're leavin?"

He came forward, genuine concern in his voice. She nodded slowly, "I don't belong here——"

"But you do," he insisted. Then command grew in his tone. "You're not leaving. You're staying."

"I came here to find my father," she answered calmly. "I haven't found him and I don't believe that you know him or you would have told me. I'll have to search somewhere else—unless you mean to keep me by force."

He shook his head emphatically. "No," he said, almost to himself. "Some things you can't keep by force. Your father—no, I guess you didn't find your father—probably won't find him."

He met her eyes suddenly. "You can't stay here after what you heard to-night—that's it, isn't it? I suppose you hate and detest me."

Slowly she shook her head. "Somehow I can't," she said. "I—feel sorry for you. Good-by and thanks for your hospitality."

He held her hand for a moment tightly clutched in his; then, as though with a great effort, he let it go. In the next moment the door had opened and closed after her.

The first rays of morning sun found Henry Lawson back at work at the type case, after having had but a few hours' rest during the night. The new Jackson *Eagle* was gradually taking shape under his eager hands like the phœnix rising from its own ashes. During the night a dozen or so additional ranchers had ridden into town and joined the little force which aimed at the overthrow of Ferris Johnson's power. The news of the killing of

the marshal and the finding of the arrest warrant for Pardee had spread through the populace along the grapevine telegraph, and it was rapidly taking the rôle of the drop which makes the cup of resentment flow over.

So far no consequences of the preceding day's battle had presented themselves, and it was Lee Carey's earnest hope that the near election day would arrive without further bloodshed. For the present, it was his main object to hold his side of the street and prevent Ferris's crowd from interfering with the newspaper. Sam Tollson controlled half of the insurgent force stationed at the store while Lee himself was in charge of the other half at the print office, both detachments keeping eagle eyes on the street, with patrols spying ardently for any possible move on the part of the enemy.

Frank Williams, leading four men on the best and fastest horses that the outfit commanded, was on a recruiting expedition as Lee's representative, appealing to those ranchers whom he thought might join the movement.

Lee himself was busy helping Lawson, turning out copy for the press, putting every ounce of persuasion he could summon behind an editorial appeal for the support of Sam Tollson's candidacy for mayor.

The Laredo Kid was lounging near the doorway, his hard young eyes roving up and down the practically deserted street, hands on his six-guns.

A CLOUD of tension hung with an almost physical pressure over the town and culminated in the main street. People moved about with care. No horses were at the hitch rails, and stores and saloons did scant business. It was odd, this near stillness, in which men's hearts beat faster in expectation, and minds raced with daring plans. An unheard, unseen movement was felt by all on either side of the sun-beaten, barren street, behind the drab, unpainted walls and dusty windows. Storm, brewing by the hour; fury waiting to be unleashed in deadly torrent.

In the print shop only the clatter of type and the scratching of Lee's pencil broke the silence, interrupted now and then by the clanking of the press as Lawson, assisted by one of the cattlemen, ran off another proof.

Lee looked up and regarded the Laredo Kid momentarily. The position of the desperado was an odd one. The men knew what he was and regarded him with amused interest. They had known him years before when he was a cowhand at Sage Creek. Still, they felt as Lee did, that it was no moral help to their cause to have a bandit in their ranks. It was not right and the wavering voters would surely point their fingers at this, regardless of the Kid's loyalty for Lee and his fearlessness as a fighter.

"Kid," said Lee suddenly, forcing out the words that had to come, "I've got to tell you this—not that I like to say it, but there is no other way——"

The Laredo Kid turned reluctantly from the door and faced the speaker as though he sensed what was to come. A soft, almost resigned look hazed the hard blue eyes. He nodded, "Yes, Lee?"

"Not that I don't appreciate your friendship," began his former boss, "and that you saved Lawson's life; but when this is all over and done

with, there'll be law in Jackson Valley and you'll have to go. It's only fair to tell you now. You don't have to stay; for afterwards you'll be a wanted man. It's not my choice—try to understand that—it just has to be. God knows I wish it could have been otherwise——"

The Kid studied the floor for several moments, then turned to the door and spun his guns a couple of times on their guards. "Yeah, Lee," he said, with a voice which struggled hard to be clear, "I reckon it's in the cards that way. I understand," he nodded and shrugged, apparently with a world of nonchalance. "I'll stick around a while yet and I'll go when my time comes. Don't worry."

"I'm sorry," was all Lee could say as he resumed his work.

The Laredo Kid began whistling the old tune, "The Eyes of Texas Are Upon You; You Cannot Get Away." The men worked feverishly for another half hour, then Lawson stood up from the press and lighted a cigar.

"Another minute, Lee, and we'll be turning them out. Are the men ready to ride and distribute? And I'll need a couple of hands to turn the press."

His words had carried to the men in the back. There was a stir at the rear door, growing excitement. The Kid was whistling his sad tune again. Then suddenly he stopped.

"Look!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Look here! What's this——"

A RIDER had dismounted in front of the newspaper office and came, pale and ghostly, with feverish, uncertain steps to the door. It was Helen Lawson, horror written on her features. Behind her Lee saw Anne Bennett.

She leaned against the jamb, snatching for air, her breast heaving, her hair disheveled by the wind.

"Henry!" she groaned. "Henry! She's gone! They took her! Mildred!"

A volley of gunfire from the other side of the street could not have staggered the little assembly more. Lee reeled back against the desk for support as Helen Lawson found her way to her husband's arms. She did not cry and her silence was terrible as Henry Lawson, speechless, mechanically patted her shoulder.

In broken sentences the two women told of how four riders had surprised them as the child had been romping about in the garden while they were busy in the kitchen. Anne knew the men as belonging to the Ferris and Pardee bands, and had understood the meaning of the action at once. They had saddled immediately and ridden to town, not having dared to use the rifles they had on hand for fear of hitting the child.

Lee was stunned. Now it had happened He had risked the lives of the little family to further his purpose in the valley, and the most precious of them, a little child, was in danger. It was too late to curse himself for not having thought of the possibilities of this before. Surely, he had thought, the days of kidnaping and murdering children had passed with the Indians.

So that was why no move had been made on the part of the enemy after the encounter yesterday. This was their ace in the hole.

And it was all his fault. Yes, he wanted law and order and the railroad, and also success for himself and his friends; but this price! It must never be paid. Better give up

and start all over again. Grievously he recalled the blue-eyed, curly-haired child, trustingly sleeping in his lap in the coach.

"Never fear," he told the Lawsons, "we'll get her back. We'll get her if we have to smash the press and I have to leave Jackson Valley. I can start over again. Time doesn't matter."

"Don't lose hope so quickly, Lee," said Lawson, bravely composing himself. "There'll be a way out. I know. Besides, they wouldn't hurt Mildred. They just wouldn't."

"I'd like to believe that," said Lee darkly, "but I wouldn't trust any one in that crowd. I know Pardee and Ferris too well. It's that murder of the marshal that's burning them. No, I'll have to go, and the Jackson *Eagle* will have to wait for another time to unfold its wings. My carelessness is to blame!"

He looked up and met Anne Bennett's eyes. To his amazement he saw no antagonism there, no accusation for what had happened.

"I don't think any one is to blame," said Helen Lawson slowly. "How could any one know that people could sink so low? We must realize now, more than ever before, that such as *they* are must be wiped from the surface of the earth."

Silence fell upon the little group at these words, and the eyes of the men rested in admiration on her.

"Those are brave words," said Lee, "but nothing must be spared to get her back!" He moved toward the rear door. "I'll go to Ferris Johnson. Give myself up if I have to. You folks stay here and wait."

With leaden steps he reached the rear door and turned once, glancing about him at the dejected faces. His own heart was heavy. Shattered were the dreams of his empire; bitter was the taste of defeat before battle.

Lawson made an empty gesture as though to speak, but found no words. Oh, well, there'd be another time, another day——

His last look at them took notice of the fact that the Laredo Kid was no longer present. Then he quickly reached his horse, which one of the men brought forward, mounted, and rode down along the back of the houses till he reached opposite the Golden Horn Hotel. There he emerged into the street, halted the mount in the middle, and hailed Ferris.

THIS, he was well aware, was a foolhardy move. From the heavily barricaded hotel it would be easy to pick him off with a rifle. However, he was beyond caring much about his own safety. To get Mildred back was his one thought.

"Ferris!" he called again.

At last a table top was moved from a window in the second story and Pardee's sallow, narrow-eyed countenance appeared, flanked on either side by a rifleman.

"Make a wrong move," Pardee greeted Lee, "an' you're a dead un."

Lee clutched his hands over the saddle horn till the knuckles went white. The hate and loathing of the other brought a cold sweat all over him and he threatened to tremble in the saddle. "I see you're making war on little children," he finally managed. "You do yourselves prouder than I expected. Where's Ferris?"

"*You* brought the war to the valley," retorted Pardee. "I warned you when you came. Whatever comes of it is *your* making."

"Where's Ferris?" demanded Lee

again. "Is he too yellow to show his face behind the rifles?"

Icy rage shone in Pardee's ruthless orbs. "I'm speaking for him; and watch your tongue if you want to talk business."

"In Heaven's name, don't incense him, Lee," said a low voice behind him. "Think of Mildred!"

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Anne Bennett, whose horse had carried her silently over the thick dust.

"Get out of the way," he whispered, but she kneed the horse closer. There was an expression on her face which did not invite argument. Yet her nearness filled him with a strange emotion and almost lent him strength.

Pardee spoke again:

"I'll give you an hour to pack up and get out of town. You and those that came with you. I want the printing press and all that goes with it. When you're going through Tyndall Pass, we'll fill our part of the bargain. Make one false move—take one piece of paper out of that newspaper office——" He paused momentarily. "Well, you figure it out."

Lee could not bear the sight of the man and lowered his eyes, staring down before him, trying to control himself.

"Of all the vile scum"—he heard Anne say in a hardly audible tone, her face drained of all color—"that ever claimed the name of man——"

"And this," said Lee to himself, the significance sinking heavily into his consciousness, "means that if they didn't have Mildred, they know we'd have them licked."

He was about to give Pardee his answer when Anne suddenly touched his arm and moved her head. "Look! Down there! Look!"

Into the far end of the street had suddenly swung a large group of riders, moving over the small square in close formation. They were heavily armed and all carried rifles. In their lead rode Ferris Johnson on a jet-black horse.

In a flash Lee's glance went to Pardee at the window. *He* had not yet caught sight of the riders.

Lee and Anne at once wheeled their horses and trotted down the street toward the riders.

"Just an hour, mind you!" Pardee called after them.

As they approached the group, several of the men instantly leveled their guns at Lee. Lee raised his hands above his head as soon as his horse came to a halt twenty yards from the group.

Seeing the girl, Ferris waved the guns aside and trotted his horse forward. His glance went inquiringly to Lee and the two age-long enemies took stock of one another once more. Hatred, opposition, conflict, seemed to cut the air between them.

"A word with you, Ferris," said Lee.

Eying him with suspicion, the master of Jackson Valley urged his mount a few paces forward, not failing to raise his hat to the girl.

"Good morning, Miss Bennett," he said with calmness, which made Lee's blood boil. "I did not expect to meet you so soon again. It's a pleasure."

Anne's face went taut. "Not on my part," she retorted.

Ferris glanced from one to the other. His tone was slightly irritated, yet puzzled, as he demanded of Lee: "Well?"

The words choked Lee, but he got them out finally. "You win, Ferris," he said. "You hold all the

aces in *this* deck. You can have the valley. Yes, I'll leave. Take the newspaper; smash it! Sure, I'm licked, and I know it; but don't forget—some day a man will come that you won't be able to lick. If you don't kill *me*, I'll be back, but you probably will, you'll have to for your own safety——"

HE stopped speaking to catch his breath, which labored in coming. Ferris, his dark eyes squinting, kept looking from the man to the girl in increasing wonderment.

"I never thought I'd live to hear you say 'enough,' Lee," he said, a smile of contempt creasing his harsh features, "but I'm glad you had enough sense in you after all. We can avoid bloodshed. I want no more of it than I can help——"

"And I hope you're proud of the way you beat me," Lee broke him off. "I've hated and fought you for years. I've made it the purpose of my life to rid this country of you, but I've always, in spite of what you did, judged you a man——"

"What are you raving about?" demanded Ferris, annoyed. "I've listened to enough of your talk. Make yourself clear, man. Make sense!"

"The mighty Ferris Johnson had to steal a little child from its mother," Lee grated with acid sarcasm. "To threaten an innocent life——"

The three words that his enemy now spoke, hit Lee's numbed senses like a pistol shot.

"What little child?"

For many seconds there was only the sound of the horses and the squeaking of leather while Lee and Anne stared in sudden dawning realization at Ferris. Then the girl blurted out: "I knew it couldn't be true. You wouldn't! Little Mildred Lawson—Mr. and Mrs. Lawson's girl, just five years old——"

Agitatedly she told the story of the kidnaping, and they saw Ferris's countenance change as hot rage surged up in him and flushed it with color. He never took his eyes from the girl while she spoke.

"I couldn't believe that of you," she finished, "no matter what else you——"

"Thanks," he said absent-mindedly, and added, in a strange and distant tone, "a little girl, just five years old—just five."

Lee had never seen the man like this. He was no longer the willful power before whom all other men's wills must bend. Anne Bennett had seen that look in his eyes once before; one day when he had spoken those exact words. It was as though something slid from the man's shoulders as he sat there on the horse, his eyes lost in the girl's. The hardness was gone from the lined, dominant face and of a sudden he seemed to Lee utterly alone.

It lasted but a minute, then he told Lee: "You and Miss Bennett go back to the newspaper office. Wait there. I'll bring the little girl to you. I'll bring her!"

He straightened in the saddle and the usual snap was back in his voice as he issued orders to half of his men to deploy behind the Golden Horn and to the others to follow him to the front.

From the door of the Jackson *Eagle* they watched Ferris Johnson dismount in front of his men and hand one of them the reins of his black horse. Then he walked with springy, determined steps across the porch and disappeared inside.

Minutes went by during which

none of the little group in the print shop spoke. Helen Lawson stood with her eyes glued to the hotel, her husband's arm about her waist. Tollson was there now. Every one waited breathlessly. Lee wondered what had become of the Laredo Kid, but no one had seen him go in the excitement. Perhaps he had followed the advice given him and had cleared out already. Still, it was not like him, Lee thought.

The stillness of the town felt as though a gigantic hand was pressing down on it with crushing force. It seemed as though no human voice had sounded for centuries.

Then a single, muffled shot from the direction of the hotel pricked a hole in the silence. Nerves went taut, waiting for another. A door squeaked at the Golden Horn and a man walked stiffly out on the porch and stepped to the ground. Turning to the mounted men he spoke to them. At the Jackson *Eagle* they could see his arm move in a gesture, but it was too far a distance to hear the words. It was Ferris Johnson.

THERE was a stir and confusion now among the men. Eventually Ferris stopped speaking and some of the riders wheeled their horses and galloped out the other end of the town, soon to be lost in a dust cloud, while the rest, rounding the corner of the hotel, disappeared behind the building.

Ferris had turned now and was walking up the street toward the group at the newspaper, ignoring the black horse which stood unattended in the middle of the street, looking after the man and scraping up the dust in little puffs by way of showing its puzzlement.

As he came nearer, Lee saw to his amazement that Ferris was no longer armed. On and on he came, with an odd, stiff gait which sent tremors of apprehension through the little crowd. Helen Lawson wrung her hands. Where was little Mildred?

Ferris Johnson was opposite the Jackson *Eagle* now, facing them with a countenance gray as the dust, immobile as stone. He was hatless, and a lock of his dark hair fell across his brow. Lee and Anne stepped forward, questions on their lips; but the man seemed not to heed them. His dark eyes drowned themselves in the girl's with a look of dull hopelessness and remorse, of which Lee had never thought them capable. Suddenly he clutched his side and as his coat was drawn aside, they saw that his vest was soaked with blood.

His lips moved feebly in an attempt to speak.

"—to — the — vanquished——" was all they heard; and he was abruptly, surprisingly, lying prone and inert in the dust at their feet.

Lee could hardly believe his eyes. A few minutes ago: the master of Jackson Valley. Now——

When he stepped over and knelt down, Ferris was already dead. Anne was trembling at Lee's side. "Pardee killed him," she said. "Pardee killed him."

The Lawsons and Tollson came out of the shop. "What now? What about Mildred?"

The answer was a barrage of shots from the vicinity of the Golden Horn. The little group looked up, startled, the men hurriedly jostling the women to cover in the print shop. The ranchers immediately swarmed to the front, cocking their rifles.

"Look!" exclaimed Lawson. "Look! Laredo! Mildred!"

Then they all saw him. The slight form of the desperado, darting from the corner of the hotel, clutching a small figure to his breast. Staggering, stumbling over his own feet, he made his way up the sidewalk, hugging the houses to keep out of the gunfire that raked along the fronts, trying to reach him. Outside the livery stable he sank to his knees but got up again.

"Give 'em all you've got!" shouted Lee, and a salvo roared from the men at the office, smashing against the Golden Horn like a thunderclap, with an after-whine of ricocheting bullets and hail of splintered glass.

Lawson and Lee raced across the street to the Laredo Kid's side, the editor snatching the child as Lee gathered the rescuer up in his arms like a baby and began running for cover.

"Don't bother with me, you fool!" the Kid gasped. "I'm done for—lemme be!"

But Lee kept running and saw Helen Lawson meet her husband in the middle of the street, bullets whipping up the dust around them. Seemingly by a miracle, they escaped to cover.

Tollson and half the men had crossed the street farther up, and were pressing Pardee's men from the buildings near the hotel, driving them from house to house, attacking them from the rear so that soon the enemy's force was concentrated in and closely about the Golden Horn. There they barricaded themselves in the yard and in the stable and adjoining buildings, returning the fire with deadly precision.

Lee, on his side of the street, ordered his half of the men down to a position opposite the hotel, several of the ranchers climbing to the roofs for better shots, and began a hectic siege of the place. He was determined that no one should escape. What counted now was to deliver a crushing defeat before more of the hostile gunmen, employed on Ferris Johnson's ranches, could come to the support of Pardee. If Pardee succeeded in holding the hotel till relief came, there was no calculating the consequences. If Ferris had been a hard master of Jackson Valley, Pardee, his sudden usurper, would be a devil incarnate.

THE quiet street was suddenly transformed to a fury of bullets that often ended their swift journeys with ominous, dull thuds.

Yet Lee found time to dash back to the newspaper to see how the Laredo Kid was doing. He was glad that he did. He found Helen Lawson sitting on the grass behind the building with the young desperado's head in her lap, her face wet with tears. Anne was desperately, hopelessly, trying to stop the flow of blood from the numerous wounds, and Lee wondered how the Kid ever had gotten as far as he did.

Lee wanted to ask a flock of questions, to say a thousand words of praise, but something kept the words from coming, and a fearful trembling shook him as he knelt down. As the Kid saw him, a faint smile creased the face from which all hardness was gone.

"All right, Lee, don't worry," he whispered, "I'll be going now——"

A slight shudder ran through his body and his head was still. He looked such a child, with his downy chin and that unruly hair in Helen Lawson's embrace. Gently she

closed his eyes, and Lee rose swiftly and turned away.

Lawson, who had been sniping at the Golden Horn from the front of the print shop, came to the rear door. A question was on his lips, but died when he saw Lee's expression.

There was no telling what moment Pardee's crowd might counter attack. The women and the child would not be safe behind the newspaper office.

"Go up to the store," Lee told them, "and stay there till its over."

Anne was about to protest but obeyed at a look from him. When they were gone, Lawson pointed to the body of the Kid.

"I'm going to get Pardee for this," he said, clutching the butt of his six-gun, "if it's the last thing I do."

Lee glanced at him sharply. The editor's voice was fraught with emotion, keyed up by the experience of seeing men die about him.

"You'll stay here," declared Lee firmly.

In response Lawson turned and headed for the street in the direction of the hotel where the shooting was still rattling the air incessantly. "He saved Mildred. I'll kill Pardee with my own hands!"

Lee caught up with him in an instant. "Think of your family," he said, grasping the other by the arm. "Stay here and protect the newspaper. Do as I tell you."

There was madness in Lawson's eyes now, and he jerked his arm free and proceeded on his way. There was only one thing for Lee to do, and he did it, swiftly and expediently.

Whirling his revenge-mad friend, he knocked him down with a fast right to the jaw and carefully laid him out of danger against the house wall.

The shooting was now tuning down to a careful exchange of shots from well-covered positions. Some of Tollson's men, stationed at the livery stable on the other side of the street, had set fire to bunches of hay and straw and were pitching them from the roof of the stable to the porch of the hotel, covered by the guns of their fellows. Already black smoke was swirling up the end gable of the Golden Horn and Lee heard the crackle of the dry boards as they twisted in the heat.

Hurrying down to join his men opposite the burning hotel, he was hailed from behind. Sam Tollson's clerk, gun in hand, came running toward him.

"They're gettin' ready to make a get-away," the man gasped, out of breath. "Saddlin' all the horses and fixin' to break out of the yard! Sam wants to know what we better do. Shall we let 'em get?"

Lee shook his head. "No, no! Don't let them get out of that yard. Tell Sam to keep up the shooting. Spread out to surround the place if you can."

The man threw up his hands. "That's the trouble. We ain't got enough men for that."

"All right," said Lee, "go back and tell Sam to keep up the good work. We'll keep them from this side. Once the fire really gets hold of the building, we'll have them from three sides in the yard."

The clerk ran with the order and Lee tried to think of a plan. Once Pardee and his men got out of the hotel and away, they would be as dangerous as ever.

"If I could only get Pardee," he thought. "If I could only get Pardee."

SMOKE was now drifting through the long bar and gaming room of the hotel, driving the defenders from the smashed windows on the street side. Behind the hotel, in the yard, there was a frantic milling of horses and men, preparing for a final charging escape. Lee, watching from a roof top, realized that it was only Pardee's leadership that kept them from drifting out pell-mell. United, they were strong enough to beat their way through.

"If I could only get Pardee," he thought again. "If I don't get him now, I may never have the chance."

By this time the firing from the front windows had ceased and Lee ordered half of his men to watch the far end of the building. Crossing the street to the livery stable he made a sudden dash for the hotel and stood, a second later, in the smoke-filled barroom. It was increasingly hot and he had a difficult time breathing.

From the rear of the hotel came the sound of the enemy evacuating the house through the kitchen door and dining-room windows. They relied completely on the fire and smoke to guard their escape from the street; and well they might. The smoke was so dense that it was necessary for Lee to get down on all fours. In this position he inched toward the rear of the building, listening for the voice of Pardee, praying to hear it, every so often stumbling against a still form on the floor.

As he reached the kitchen door the last man was leaving the building. Frantically his smoke-throbbing eyes searched for Pardee's tall form among the milling riders in the yard, but found it impossible to pick him out. He caught sight of Byers directing the men and ached to send a bullet at him.

He began to wonder if the Laredo Kid had killed Pardee when he rescued little Mildred. He must have known the interior of the Golden Horn well, to find his way about. Lee would have given much to know just what had taken place in those crowded minutes. Pardee must have planned the overthrow of Ferris's power for a long time ahead.

Sudden quick steps from the interior of the hotel made him whirl. Some one coughed lightly and in the next second Louis Pardee stepped into the smoky kitchen, a heavy saddlebag slung over an arm, another over his shoulder. On either side of him came a man with drawn gun, each also carrying a saddlebag. Pardee squinted, half blinded, at Lee, who stood next to the rear door leading to the yard, and thus out of the light.

"I thought I told all you hombres to get out and mount," he rasped. "What are you doing in here?"

"Waiting for you, Louis," said Lee with gritty calm. "Just waiting."

The gasps from all three men as they recognized his voice came almost simultaneously. The next instant the two men fired their guns, then started at the impacts of Lee's bullets and reeled in the doorway, slumping to the floor with a clanking of metal from the saddlebags.

Pardee, not having had his gun drawn, had disappeared from sight.

As Lee stepped over the bodies of the two men on the threshold, a bullet whizzed past his head and embedded itself in the door jamb with a smack. The shot had come from the stairway at the far end of the house, on which he now heard Pardee's heavy but hasty steps. Lee sprang after him, whirling at the foot of the banister post, raking the top landing with his fire. There was no sound from upstairs and he

knew that Pardee must be standing up there somewhere waiting for him. The smoke was now beginning to fill that end of the hotel, making breathing a painful task.

As Lee began inching up the steps on his belly, Pardee coughed somewhere close to the top. Reaching the landing and raising his guns above the floor, Lee fired in the direction of the sound as Pardee coughed again. A shot smashed the wood of the step two inches from his hand and Lee dodged to the left, sending another bullet to the spot where, he calculated, Pardee must be standing.

The man coughed again, choking and gasping, cursing when he caught his breath.

"How's the smoke?" asked Lee. "If you don't like it, come down here where it's not so thick. I'm still waiting for you."

THE answer was a barrage of explosions as Pardee emptied one of his guns at the stairway, then came the sound of hasty retreating footsteps. Instantly Lee sprang up and darted forward.

Halfway down the smoke-filled corridor he saw a vague form whirl, and flame spit at him. Going to his knees, both of his guns roaring, he saw the figure dissolve out of the smoke and heard a dull thud above the distant crackling of the flames below.

Not until he had walked over and made certain that the man was dead did he realize that Pardee had nicked him twice. His left arm was dampening his shirt with blood, and he felt the searing pain from a crease wound in his thigh.

It was high time to get out of the hot building, but before he turned to go his glance fell upon the sight of an open door leading to the room from the window of which Pardee had earlier spoken to him.

Sitting around a small table in the center, slumped on overturned chairs, were four dead men, all facing the door, guns in hands, astonishment on their faces. In the far corner of the room lay a little girl's hat.

Lee could picture the Laredo Kid standing in this doorway, after having kicked open the door; how his eyes had instantly surveyed the scene and two guns had fired four shots with deadly precision.

What had taken place between Pardee and Ferris, no one would ever know. Perhaps that had been the very moment when the Laredo Kid saw his chance to save Mildred.

"Thanks, Kid," he said softly.

Slowly he turned and went downstairs. In the kitchen he was met by Sam Tollson, whose face lighted up at once as he saw Lee.

"They told me you were in the building," gasped the storekeeper. "I thought sure you were done for."

Lee chuckled grimly. "You're the only candidate for mayor now," he said.

Tollson told him how Frank Williams had arrived with reënforcements just as the cavalcade was bursting from the yard. Byers had been at the head of them and had fallen in the first volley. Most of the gunmen had thrown down their arms as the horses became unmanageable and began milling in confusion. As the two men carried the money-filled saddlebags out into the yard, the last of Pardee's crowd were being herded into the street and toward the jail.

"What about the hotel?" Tollson asked, as Frank Williams came toward them.

Without looking back, Lee

shrugged his shoulders. "Let it burn," he said without emotion. "Let it burn."

AFTERWARD Lee found Anne sitting on the board walk near where Ferris was still lying. In her hand was a faded old photograph which she had found in his pocket. As he gazed on it he saw a young woman with a little five-year-old girl in her lap.

"I didn't know till now that he was my father," she said slowly. "But I think I felt it all along. Poor dad."

Lee sat down and put his arm about her. As though she had done it a thousand times before, she leaned against him and put her head to his cheek. Neither of them spoke.

The street was quiet again, prisoners being herded into the old courthouse jail, wounded being carried to the houses and dead to the undertaker. Eventually people came and took Ferris away.

But other sounds now made themselves heard. One was the clear, innocent laughter of a little girl, as the heavy press in the newspaper office began clanking and thumping out the copies of the Jackson *Eagle* that soon would spread its wings free and unhampered over the land.

And in the hazy distance Lee could almost see the shining bands of steel grow toward him from the horizon, coming ever nearer under the sweating labors of the track crews. Law and order, prosperity. Yes, he could almost hear the whistle of the locomotive as it would thunder into Jackson Valley.

His dreams of empire come true.

COWS IN RAINCOATS

FOR twelve years, Henry Leirer has maintained a herd of dairy cows in Seward, Alaska. Cows and barns are always kept in excellent condition, and every care is exercised to continue this high standard.

Even weather conditions are made pleasant for the cows. When it rains they wear raincoats, and, if necessary, their owner would provide hats, too, he says.

Milk from these cows sells for twenty-five cents a quart. Cream is thirty-five cents a half pint, and whipping cream fifty cents a half pint.

TERROR ON THE TUNDRA

By PAUL ELLSWORTH TRIEM

Author of "Turned To Stone," etc.

THROUGH the wan clarity of *Woosha Kua*, the arctic twilight, "Caribou Jim" drove his malemutes down the long slant that led to the cabin.

A diminshed and blood-red sun had swung above the horizon for two hours, at midday. Now it was gone—as if it had dropped into vast nether spaces of eternal darkness. The air was so still that a lighted candle would have burned with its tiny cone of orange flame pointing straight up. But the cold was biting and dangerous.

Caribou Jim had neither kith nor kin; he belonged nowhere. He had spent the summer far to the northeast—sojourning among the Hareskins and Dog-ribs. Now he was headed for Fort Yakut, which he hoped to reach before winter closed down.

Running behind the sled, he peered under the great thatch of his tangled eyebrows toward the two buildings—cabin and dog barn. He

had been here before. There was no light in the window, no smoke curling from the chimney. Caribou Jim hadn't expected either, for the cabin had long been deserted.

He didn't put the dogs into the barn. Jim's dogs were his friends, the only friends he recognized. There was something about his huge, burly body and about his whiskered face, its massive features apparently executed by some pagan god in a moment of ribald mischief, that repelled even tough-minded sourdoughs. And the chechahcos always took him for a bad man.

So Caribou Jim unharnessed his dogs and held the door open while they trooped, single file, into the cheerless cabin room. There was a stick-and-mud fireplace, a floor of hewn logs, a table, and a rough bunk of lodge-pole pine.

Jim closed the door on the malemutes. They were too tired to fight. He loosened the whang-leather thongs of his sled and lifted out his blankets and the burlap-wrapped package containing salmon, caught in the icy waters of Great Bear Lake, and subsequently dried. This was the last of Caribou Jim's provisions for his dogs, but he wasn't worrying about that. When he returned to the cabin the malemutes had curled up with their bushy tails over their noses.

They lined up and Caribou Jim fed them. Thereafter he tied them securely. They would be rested before he was and would be at each other's throats in the night, otherwise. Jim ate his own cheerless meal, and half an hour after sighting the cabin he was rolled up in his blankets, sleeping heavily.

It must have been somewhere after midnight when he was partly aroused by the creak of sled runners, the whine of hungry dogs. Caribou Jim rolled over till his massive back was toward the door. He felt no curiosity and he had no desire for conversation. He fell again into his dreamless sleep.

STILL later he heard the sudden clamor of the malemutes. They were snarling like so many wolves. Caribou Jim became aware of faint yellow light in the cabin. He started to sit up and something struck him across the head.

He was fighting to throw off his blankets. Blows drove him to the floor. He was aware of a great boiling surge of pain—of blood streaming over his face—and then he felt nothing.

Caribou Jim awoke—or came to—and tried to sit up. He was sick and dizzy—and cold. His blankets were gone; but for his heavy parka and fur-lined leggings he would have frozen.

He raised his hand to his head. It felt like pounded beefsteak. Then he got to his knees and saw the dogs staring at him with their burning green eyes.

He had no mirror, he hadn't seen his bearded face for years, but he knew that the thatch of his whiskers was caked with frozen blood. He went lurching and staggering around the room, then swayed across to the door and threw it open.

There stood the skeleton frame of his sled, but everything he had left on it was gone.

After a time he moved out from the cabin. There were two sets of tracks in addition to his own. One led in from the west; another set headed straight away over the hill.

Caribou Jim scowled. He didn't understand. Crimes of violence were few in this north country. And why

had any man attacked him in his sleep? He had nothing of value.

Then he asked himself another question: Why had this murderous stranger struck off into the interior country—with winter about to close down?

There came a sound—a stealthy sound—and he whirled. A man was coming cautiously toward him—a tall, wide-shouldered fellow who held his carbine pointed straight at Caribou Jim's massive body.

"Stand still!" the newcomer rasped.

He came on, his wintry eyes narrowed and threatening. Then he stopped and grunted.

"Oh, it's you!" he growled. "Caribou Jim, aren't you? All right, where is the other fellow?"

Grimly, Caribou Jim told his story. Constable Bent, from Fort Yakut, listened.

"You're some guy," he commented at the end. "If your head hadn't been made of walrus ivory, he'd have killed you. He killed Bert Sims, the express clerk, in Yakut. And got away with fifty thousand dollars in currency and gold!"

Caribou Jim's moody eyes took in the tall, formidable figure of the officer. Bent nodded, as if to put a period to his story.

"Sorry I can't do anything for you," he said. "I'm traveling light—and my job is to get this killer!"

He went back over a low rise, and five minutes later Caribou Jim saw Constable Bent's dog team disappearing into the frozen woods to the east.

CONSTABLE BENT, running behind his sled, thought briefly of the man he had left at the cabin.

He mildly regretted that he hadn't been able to do anything for Caribou Jim, but business is business. Bent had been sent out to bring in a killer, not to play nursemaid to seasoned sourdoughs who ought to be able to take care of themselves. The big musher would probably get through alive.

"The thing that will gripe Jim most is his dogs," the constable thought. "He'd be willing to haul in his belt if the malemutes could be fed. Well, I got to catch Carnright!"

The trouble was that the killer knew this country they were heading into far better than Constable Bent did. Carnright had prospected and trapped for years in the interior country. Undoubtedly he was heading for some distant cabin where he had plenty of grub cached.

"If I don't land on his back within a week, I'll lose him!" Bent muttered. "Maybe sooner than that—we're going to have snow!"

He scowled up at the lowering sky. There wouldn't be even an hour of sun, to-day. And another downfall of snow would obliterate Carnright's tracks. Then searching for him would be futile.

So Constable Bent cracked his long whip over his dogs and yelled, "Mush, you devils!" and they sped on through the ghostly light of the *Woosha Kua*—the twilight of delusion, which makes of the northland in winter a region of wraiths and of ghostly shadows.

Bent made no stop at noon. From every rise he scanned the country ahead. There were patches of frozen muskeg, where the niggerheads thrust their conical shapes up through the snow—and deeper and deeper woods.

The light began to fade, what there was of it. An occasional big flake of snow drifted down.

Bent knew that pushing on now

was dangerous. He couldn't see the killer's sled tracks more than a few yards ahead.

He came up over a ridge, and before him and below him was a narrow valley, filled with black, rigid pines. Not a breath of wind stirred. Bent stopped the dogs and stood listening.

Far away he heard a wolf howling—and then that abysmal silence.

"Mush!" Bent cried stubbornly, and the malemutes headed down the white slope of the hill.

Sharp and venomous there came the crack of a rifle. A little stab of flame showed from the thicket ahead. Bent felt something like a red-hot poker go through him.

He was down—then up on his knees, swaying, trying to steady his carbine.

Another ear-splitting shot crashed and he dropped the gun and settled slowly against the crust of the snow.

For a time sounds came to him through swirling darkness. The shrill yelp of his dogs—other dogs challenging them—snarls and howls of rage as the two team met. Then a man's voice, guttural and authoritative.

"Get apart, hellhounds! Back!"

And the pistollike report of a whiplash. More howls, of pain this time. Then a great iron cone seemed to drop down over Constable Bent, and he lay without moving. A red stain spread out on the snow.

Something came creeping up the hill. A tall, bent figure—a face hawklike and cruel—a rifle held ready. The killer stopped and rolled the man on the snow over with his foot. Then Carnright stooped over with a contemptuous grunt and picked up the constable's carbine.

"He won't need that!" he muttered, and turned to swing away down the hill.

SNOW was falling, at last. It came in a soft and silent haze, settling against the black branches of the firs, covering slowly but inexorably the tracks of the dogs. And it fell upon the motionless figure of Bent.

Soon he was covered until he looked like a grave mound. The red stain was gone. By morning his frozen body would be hidden for the winter—unless the wolves dug it out.

Silence. Down under the white shroud Constable Bent stirred.

"Carnright!" he muttered.

He was momentarily conscious—knew what had happened, what would happen. Just another peace officer hadn't been smart enough to do his job!

Constable Bent had known, when that flicker of awareness drifted out of him as he lay in the snow, that he would probably never awake again. But suddenly he did awake; to a consciousness of red light playing over him, of heat in his face.

He lay on his back. There was a roof over his head—a roof formed of slim conifers slanted into a lean-to. The red light came from a roaring fire at his right.

And there, so close that Brent could have reached out and touched him, sat the vast figure of Caribou Jim.

The musher turned his bearded face. He blinked down at Bent. From the rim of the circle of firelight came the soft whine of dogs. Bent twisted his eyes and saw them sitting there—Caribou Jim's malemutes, their green eyes watching him.

"How—how——" he muttered.

"I dug you out," Caribou Jim said. "Get some sleep. As soon as the snow quits, we'll mush out of this!"

Bent wanted to ask questions, but

he was deathly weak. He lay with closed eyes, and after a time he must have fallen into another exhausted sleep.

He awoke to a consciousness of sounds near at hand. The fire was a great mass of incandescent coals. Off out of sight somewhere he could hear Caribou Jim talking to his dogs.

The musher came into sight. He stooped and looked down at Bent.

"I'm moving you," he said gruffly. "There's no grub and no blankets, but we'll make a run for it!"

Bent thought despairingly: "We'll never make it! I'll be dead before we reach Yakut!"

Caribou Jim stopped and picked him up. He swayed out from under the lean-to, and carried Bent with great swinging strides to the sled. Caribou Jim laid the wounded officer on a pile of pine needles and began to heap more needles over him.

Then he was back behind his sled and his whip cracked.

"Mush!" he cried.

Constable Bent lay with closed eyes, aware of the swift forward motion of the sled, aware of the cold. It came slowly upon him. And he was hungry and sick.

"We'll never make it!" he thought again. "Anyhow, I won't!"

All through the long day he lay there, fighting against panic. Jim's dogs made no stop. Then the brief period of dawnlike light was over.

Bent must have fainted, at last, for he was unaware that they had stopped.

HE awoke and lay looking up at the ceiling. It was of slender fir poles, covered with shakes. He turned his head weakly and saw log walls on four sides. There was a rusty Klondike stove in one corner of the cabin, and a chair and a table.

Bent saw the luminous eyes of the malemutes staring at him. They were ranged like bronze statues at the farther side of the room.

Steps sounded—creaking steps, obviously in the snow outside the little building. A door swung inward and Caribou Jim entered. In his arms he carried something that looked like billets of wood.

Caribou Jim turned his bearded face toward the bed. He seemed aware that Bent was looking at him but he said nothing. Instead, he turned and began to throw the things he carried to the dogs—one stiff billet to each dog. Then Constable Bent realized that Caribou Jim was feeding the malemutes their accustomed meal of dried salmon.

He was so weak that he wanted to cry.

"Where did you get—those fish?" he whispered.

Caribou Jim again looked silently at him. He finished feeding his dogs and went at his massive stride across to the stove. On it stood a small kettle.

Caribou Jim lifted the kettle from the stove and came toward the bed.

"Hungry?" he demanded.

"Yes! But——"

Constable Bent wanted to ask again where the dried salmon had come from, but Caribou Jim sat down on the side of the bunk, scooped out an iron spoon, and with it extracted part of the steaming contents. He stooped, blew over the spoon, and thrust it toward Bent's mouth.

The wounded officer gulped. Then he tried to sit up.

"What's that stuff?" he whispered querulously.

Caribou Jim scooped out another spoonful.

"It's all you'll get," he grunted, "so take it or leave it!"

Constable Bent ate. He knew that he was eating the same kind of supper the malemutes had eaten, except that his fish was cooked. At another time the idea would have nauseated him—not that the fish weren't clean, but they were intended for dog feed. Now, after the first uncertain gulps, he ate hungrily.

"Where did you get the fish?" he asked, after the meal was finished.

Caribou Jim stood up and walked back across the room. Without reply he opened the door and vanished into the night.

Bent slept fitfully. His bullet wounds burned, and toward morning he heard eerie laughter.

He tried to get to his elbow. The candle on the table had burned low, the stove glowed, and the dogs lay asleep.

Crunching steps sounded outside and the door swung inward. Caribou Jim stood in the room, staring first at his dogs, which roused themselves to yawn and stretch, then at the man in the bed.

"I'm flighty," Bent said. "Infection has set in!"

Jim stared somberly at him and came across to the bed. He pulled off his mitten and reached his big hand down to Bent's face.

He nodded and turned back to the table. He pinched out the smoldering wick.

"Try to rest," he said, and went out.

Bent didn't try to rest. He tried to think. What was this big musher up to? Where was he spending his time?

Adumbrations of ideas flickered through the wounded officer's fevered brain, but they were like sparks from a cedar fire, quickly gone. His heavy lids sagged over his hot eyes; he knew that he was talking, laughing, singing.

ONE of the dogs began to howl forebodingly. Constable Bent was aware of pain which flowed through him in a series of rhythmic impulses.

For a time he must have sunk into a torpor. When he opened his eyes, Caribou Jim was moving heavily about the room. He unleashed his dogs and took them out. He had replenished the fire; Bent could hear it roaring up the chimney. Bent was burning with fever, but at the same time the frigid air which flowed in when the door swung open and the dogs came trooping back made his teeth chatter.

Jim fastened the dogs and came across to the bed. He looked ponderingly down.

"You got to fight it," he rumbled. "A man can quit—and die. But he doesn't have to!"

He turned his great body and went about the task of preparing breakfast. Stewed salmon, Bent saw—and a thought that was like a flame went through his delirium. Where was Caribou Jim obtaining these fish? His sled had been stripped clean, and Bent's entire outfit had been stolen.

Bent couldn't eat. He could feel his heart racing, could feel the steaming blood boiling in his arms and legs, and in his brain. That day the gloom hardly lifted. Through the one window, covered with an oiled hide from which the hair had been scraped, there came for a brief time a faint, sullen glow. Then again darkness.

Toward evening the sick man's

fever mounted. He caught himself screaming. He threw off the hooded parka which Caribou Jim had placed across his legs and tried to get up. Caribou Jim sat on the edge of the bed, holding him down.

"You got to fight it, Bent," he said. "I can't do nothing for you!"

Caribou Jim had been in and out all day. Constable Bent tried to ask him where he spent so much of his time, but his tongue was paralyzed. He knew that he was lying with his eyes half open, breath as hot as the vapor from a blowtorch whistling in and out between his cracked lips.

He dimly knew that another night had come. He lay quiet, now. The crisis was at hand. Either he would die, to-night—or he would throw off the infection. He dropped into a heavy torpor, and when he next opened his eyes he felt that a long time had passed. The room was dark. The stove glowed, one of the dogs whined in its sleep, and Caribou Jim was gone.

Bent lay for a time without moving. He felt weak, but the fever had left him and his head was clear.

Now he could think. Something which he did not understand was happening—right around him. Here they were, he didn't know where—evidently far enough from anything resembling civilization. They had no blankets, no arms, no grub except dried salmon. And Caribou Jim wasn't even making an effort to escape from the great iron hand of arctic winter, which at any moment might crash down upon them.

Slow Bent sat up. He was steadier than he would have believed possible. Clean, spare living and the frozen purity of the northland air had given him a constitution of iron.

He got to his feet. His parka and mittens lay at the foot of the bunk. He drew them on and moved cautiously toward the door.

A wind was beginning to moan through the frozen branches of the fir trees surrounding the cabin. It came straight from the direction of the arctic circle.

THEN Bent stepped out from under the lean-to porch and stood tensely listening. There was no sound save the sighing of the wind. Before him lay a grim expanse of snow and forest.

He looked down at the crust. Here where the cabin shut off the sweep of the wind, he could make out footprints—the great tracks of Caribou Jim. They led straight toward the summit of a wooded ridge.

Constable Bent started in pursuit. Where in the name of the Great Dipper had Caribou Jim gone? Did he just go out into this wintry forest and sit under a tree? It didn't seem likely.

He went up the long, white-clad slope, and now the tracks were gone. The icy wind had swept the frozen crust clear. But Bent pushed on, and after a time, breathing hard, he came to the top.

He peered down the slant before him—and slowly his mittened fists drew tight. Below and before him were two buildings. With a feeling of foreboding he recognized them. There was the cabin where Carnright had come upon Caribou Jim and had tried to slug him to death while he slept! The dog barn with its shed roof was over at the left.

The two log buildings were distinct against the snow. Was Caribou Jim down there? What did it all mean?

Realizing that he would be visible

here on the summit of the ridge, Bent moved back, step by step. He came to a bramble of dwarf cedars and pushed in among them.

The night in that first moment was utterly still. It seemed to press in upon Constable Bent's eardrums like the air in a hydraulic chamber. Then from far away came a long-drawn howl—and another. The throaty howl seemed to roll like the voice of a tocsin along the crust of the snow. Constable Bent recognized it for what it was—the blizzard howl of an arctic wolf.

He felt like a man in a dream. Nothing made sense. What was Caribou Jim thinking of? Why had he tarried here? When——

The wolf's cry was gone. Moments of oppressive silence followed, then there came another sound. A sound which brought Bent stiffly round, facing the northeast.

A faint hissing—and once or twice a low "Yip!" It came through the darkness—down the farther side of the valley.

He peered out from his hiding place. All that he could see was the black trees, swaying as the wind struck them; and the snow. He turned his head to listen.

For another long moment the sound of a sled hurtling downhill over the crust reached him.

Then silence.

Bent felt his lips quiver. Despite the cold, sweat broke out upon his forehead, dripped slowly down his back.

Something was happening—something eerie, incredible. He thought of the tales the Indians told—tales of frozen magic, of the powers of evil at work in the black winter forests.

For down there somewhere Caribou Jim was waiting—as if he were keeping a tryst, as if he had known this mysterious traveler would appear, sooner or later!

"My God, suppose it should be Carnright!" the shaking man whispered.

That was a mad idea, if ever he had had one. By this time Carnright was safely hidden in his distant cabin—gloating over his loot.

NO sound, now, save the whisper of the wind. The wolf had finished his song of icy death, the sled had stopped—or gone back.

Bent stood with his face thrust out among the cedar branches, staring down the hill. And after perhaps half an hour, he saw something move.

A black blot—coming from the northeast, a man, skulking down through the trees on foot. He circled the cabin warily. Bent could see the long black thing he carried over his arm.

A rifle! And there was something about that tall, bent figure with its loose-kneed stride which he recognized. The short hairs on the back of Constable Bent's neck stood up, his eyes bulged.

The circling figure stood still, seemed to be listening. Then it went straight toward the cabin. The rifle was held thrust ahead.

Another pause, within five feet of the little building. Then the man with the gun vanished into the shadows.

Bent heard a door creak on its frozen wooden hinges. It slammed shut, and presently there came to him through the square hole where once a window had been the gleam of candlelight.

He could stand it no longer—he had to know what was going on!

Perhaps Caribou Jim had been in league with Carnright, all the time!

That thought appalled him. If it were true, what could he do about it? His strength was hardly restored, and he was unarmed.

Constable Bent went creeping down the long hill. Stealthily, aware that he had never been in such deadly peril in all his life, he approached the cabin.

He could hear some one moving inside. He stood with his ear pressed to the logs.

Then he slid on to the window. At first he just crouched there, not daring to raise his face and look through. A bullet through the head would be final; there would be no recovering from that.

The sound of steady and mysterious activity came to him through the aperture above his head. Slowly he straightened himself. His eyes came above the level of the sill.

There was a table, against the farther wall. On it stood a candle, its spirelike flame vibrating in the draft. And in front of the table, on his knees, his back turned to the window, was——

He had lifted up three of the heavy logs. Now he crouched low and, with his back steeply tilted, reached down under the floor. He was drawing something up into the candlelight.

Standing on the side lines, Constable Bent saw the wash leather pouch which came into sight, and recognized it. And he saw the stiff, murderous face of Carnright, turned momentarily in silhouette toward the window.

All that, in one flashing moment. Then the door slammed back against the wall, and through the doorway came something that looked like a charging grizzly. Bent saw the kneeling figure leap with a snarling oath to its feet.

The tableau was blotted out. Carnright had caught up a rifle and tried to swing its muzzle toward the massive figure that leaped upon him. The table went down; the candle was extinguished.

As Bent raced round for the door, he could hear them smashing into the walls, stamping on the floor, he heard the table go crashing across the room—and then he heard the splintering explosion of smokeless powder, and a moment later something went down like a felled ox.

He came into the doorway, aware of gooseflesh on his forearms, of sweat that drenched his hair under his fur cap.

Silence, now—silence till some one said, "Find that candle and light it!"

BENT recognized Caribou Jim's voice. He came into the room, got down on his hands and knees, finally found the thick cylinder of the candle.

Bent stood up and fumbled for matches. At this moment Caribou Jim lighted one.

By the flickering light, Constable Bent saw the figure on the floor—arms flung out sidewise, ugly head twisted till one gaunt cheek lay flat against the logs.

Caribou Jim raised the table and set the candle on it. He picked up the sack of loot and handed it to Bent.

He stood looking through smoldering eyes down at the killer.

"After he slugged me and made his get-away, and after you'd been through and told me what it was all about," Caribou Jim said, "I fig-

gered I'd have to light out for Yakut. My blankets and gun was gone, and I didn't have so much as a handful of dry beans to eat.

"But I did have grub for my dogs. I never take no chances on them going hungry. When I come here I——"

Carnright was beginning to stir. His hand groped up to the great purple cushion on his jaw where Caribou Jim's iron fist had landed, to end the fight in the dark.

"You trailed me——" Bent began.

"Sure. I had them fish cached in a hole under the floor. When I lifted up the logs to get at it, I found Carnright's pouch. And pretty quick I knowed just what was going to happen."

Caribou Jim stooped down and felt over Carnright's heavy clothing. Apparently satisfied that the killer carried no side arms, Jim stared broodingly at Constable Bent.

"I trailed along because I knowed Carnright would try to get the drop on you and kill you," he said. "He'd cached his loot in case you outtricked him, but that would be his plan. When I came on you, lying there under the snow, I knowed things were working out all right.

"So I brought you back to the old shack over the hill—it was built by Tumwater Johnny Hines, who later built this cabin—and we holed up. I kept track of this place night and day. And to-night came the finish. There's your man, Bent—and the loot."

Constable Bent felt weak and futile and foolish.

"You got him for me. You'll get the reward and you're entitled to it. You're a better constable than I am, Jim!" he muttered.

Caribou Jim had turned toward the door, but now his bearded face slowly appeared over his massive shoulder.

"Reward—me?" he grunted. "Say, what do you think I done all this for? For money? Or for the law? The devil with all that! Carnright slugged me and that was all right. I ought to have watched him.

"But when he mushed off with the dog feed and left my malemutes to die of starvation, he done the one thing there ain't no forgiveness for. After that I'd have followed him if I'd had to go on my hands and knees. I'd have followed him across the Dominion and back—there ain't no place he could have hid where I wouldn't have dug him out. Men and the law can look out for themselves, but my dogs is sacred—next to Holy Writ!"

GOLD DUST FROM SAW DUST

By RAY HUMPHREYS

Author of "Bumble Bee Bill's Burro," etc.

BUMBLE BEE BILL, so called by his neighbors in the backwoods section because of his habit of mumbling—"buzzing"—to himself, most of the time, leaned on his hoe at the edge of his flourishing mountain head lettuce field and watched the stranger come riding up the trail. He wasn't looking at the stranger so much as he was staring at the stranger's spirited saddle horse, a very trim, very blue roan gelding.

"A real nice horse, by Jericho!" remarked Bill softly, his eyes sparkling with admiration. "Good, square trotter—lots of style!"

The stranger, by this time, had reached Bumble Bee's fence. He nosed the blue roan in, waved a hand at Bill in a gesture that was both a greeting and an imperial demand.

"Hi, there! Brother!"

"Yes, sir?" answered Bumble Bee Bill stiffly. He was not any too well pleased with the stranger's manner.

And now, as he looked at the man he was not particularly impressed with his appearance, either. The fellow was too heavy for the horse he was using, for one thing. He was built, thought Bill, something like a gorilla, with arms that were too long and shoulders excessively massive. The fellow's face was red. He had thick lips, bushy eyebrows, and exceedingly sharp, piercing eyes.

"Well—come over here a minute!" ordered the man impatiently.

Bumble Bee started for the fence. But he took his hoe with him. The hoe was strong and sharp and the handle could do for a stout weapon, if necessary. Apparently the stranger wore no gun, however. As Bill approached he noticed that the man's clothes were not those of the ordinary cowhand. He wore expensive boots, tweed trousers, a leather jacket over a rather loud flannel shirt of red-and-yellow pattern.

"Howdy, stranger," said Bill, reaching the fence.

"How are you, brother?" asked the stranger, leaning from his saddle to extend a pudgy hand to Bill. "My name's Graham. I come up here to see you. I figure you're Bumble Bee Bill, seeing you working the lettuce. An old codger down the road a ways, with a beard, referred me up here and——"

"That'll be Uncle Joe McMeel," nodded Bumble Bee, thawing out a trifle. "What was it on your mind, mister?"

"Not a great deal, Brother Bee!" answered Graham, with a shrug of indifference. "Maybe Uncle Joe exaggerated matters a little. You see——"

He pulled out a package of cigarettes and offered them to Bill.

"Have a pill? No? Well, that just saves me one, doesn't it?" Graham laughed softly. "I will have one myself, thanks!" He struck a match carelessly. But all the time Bumble Bee realized that he was being extensively appraised by the stranger's keen, shrewd eyes. Bill waited for the gentleman to continue, which he did in a moment. "You see," went on Graham, "I'm a horse buyer—a very special sort of horse buyer—I buy particularly fine horses for circuses——"

"Circuses?" asked Bumble Bee, startled into greater interest.

"Yeah, circuses—you know—big tents, camels, elephants and lions—music playing—the man on the flying trapeze—the dog-faced boy and the bearded lady!" Mr. Graham was growing breathlessly eloquent, it seemed. "Circuses—where they have the finest rosinbacks—those are the horses the bareback riders use in the rings; the finest trick horses, the greatest four, six, eight, and twelve-horse draft hitches; the most beautiful pintos, the rarest roans, the honest-to-gosh golden sunset palaminos—everything, my friend, everything in the way of wonderful horseflesh!"

BUMBLE BEE'S eyes were glowing now. He was beginning to warm up to Mr. Graham. Circuses? Why, if Mr. Graham only knew—but, thought Bill, suddenly, suspiciously, maybe Mr. Graham *did* know—which might account for his almost one-hundred-per-cent perfect approach.

"What—what did Uncle Joe McMeel say about *me?*" asked Bill abruptly.

"Why, to be frank with you, he didn't say a great deal!" protested the stranger, either surprised or annoyed at Bill's interruption. "I just asked the old boy if he had any good horses for sale—any odd or unusual colors—and told him I was a circus

buyer, and the old coot just waved both hands at me and cackled until the tears came into his eyes. And then he controlled himself long enough to tell me if I was looking for circus stuff I should ride on up the trail here until I saw Bumble Bee Bill—that you were my meat, or words to that effect!"

"Oh," said Bill, in relief. Maybe Mr. Graham didn't know, after all!

"Now I took it, from what the old fool said, that maybe you had a horse you figured was extra fine—that maybe you had been bragging about him, maybe hoping you could see him in the big money?" Graham was watching Bill, but Bill's face was a mask. "Of course, the old devil might have been trying to be sarcastic, trying to clown at my expense—er—are you—interested, brother, in circuses? Or circus horses, maybe? Or——"

Mr. Graham was uncertain. He paused, hoping for a lead from Bumble Bee.

"Well," faltered Bill, with a slight flush of embarrassment. "I guess maybe Uncle Joe McMeel was doing two things to once—kind of making fun of me and at the same time telling some of the truth!" Bumble Bee hesitated. He didn't know whether to go ahead and "spill" further detailed explanation or not. He was interested—vastly intrigued, as a matter of honest fact, but there was something about Mr. Graham that seemed to counsel caution. Bumble Bee's lips tightened. No, he would not explain—he would not tell Mr. Graham that old Uncle Joe McMeel had been dead right in directing any one interested in circuses to him, seeing that he, Bumble Bee Bill, possessed the best and only zoo in all the section—a private menagerie acquired with great difficulty—and consisting of a pair of twin antelopes, a bald-headed eagle, a tame skunk, an old camel, a peccary, a burro that was part zebra, and a small brown bear that was supposed to have come from Europe many years before Bill had acquired it from a defunct circus.

"Well?" urged Mr. Graham owlishly. "Have you anything in the way of horses that *would* interest me?"

"Why, yes, maybe I have," admitted Bumble Bee, seeming to carefully weigh each and every word. "I have a horse named Beau Geste that——"

"Names mean nothing to me, brother!" interposed the circus buyer hurriedly. "We rename 'em, anyway. Why do you think this Beau Geste animal would interest me? Come on, my man, speak right up!"

"Beau Geste is a mare, as a matter of fact," said Bumble Bee, "but she's the oddest mare you ever laid eyes on, mister! She's big and rangy, but nimble as a cat, and pretty smart—and her color is—well—I don't know just how to describe her to you, sir. It's a splash of——"

MR. GRAHAM was beginning to wonder, it appeared, whether he was not wasting his time and his talents on this yokel. He made an impatient gesture with an air of finality.

"Let's see the horse—trot her out, brother!" exclaimed the buyer. "I can tell in a minute whether or not I'd be even slightly interested!"

"Very well," agreed Bumble Bee, with a sigh. "You ride up the lane yonder until you come to a wire fence gate. Open the gate. Ride on to my shack and I'll cut across the field and meet you there!"

"Good!" Mr. Graham mounted

his blue roan and headed for the near-by lane.

Leaning his hoe against the fence Bumble Bee went across the field hurriedly and yet carefully. He didn't trod on any lettuce. He picked his steps by instinct, it seemed, for his mind was busy—and his lips.

"Mighty peculiar guy, that hombre!" Bumble Bee warned himself. "He has eyes like a coyote, I'd say. And he's too familiar. I ain't his brother—or even his nephew, by gosh! He reminds me of somebody, too, but I can't think who! Maybe some circus bird I saw around somewheres—maybe when I paid nine dollars for that bear at the auction of that busted circus at Dolores, or maybe it was when I bought Fatima, the camel, at the sheriff's sale of that attached dog and pony show at Pandora! He may have been around one of them shows! But I'll show him Beau Geste, anyway, and see what he has to say! There can't be any great harm in doing that!"

Blessed with long legs, Bumble Bee had no difficulty in making exceedingly good time across the field. He reached the house, ducked around to the rear and was presently waiting in front, with the mare, when Mr. Graham jogged up and pulled his roan to a quick stop.

"This is Beau Geste, sir!"

Mr. Graham did not immediately get down off his horse. He sat in his saddle with his eyes and his mouth quite open, staring at the mare. He saw a tall, rather stylish animal that gave unmistakable signs of thoroughbred or standard bred somewhere in her ancestry. But it was the mare's color that held Mr. Graham entranced and speechless—he saw a horse that might be called a pinto by people who knew nothing at all about horses.

Yet Beau Geste was not, strictly speaking, a pinto. Perhaps a cowhand might classify her as a "calico," but Mr. Graham didn't. He saw a horse that was a veritable patchwork of conspicuous splotches —white, bay, black, brindle, dun, and a golden tan. The mare's nose was mouse-colored and her mane and tail was a glorious combination that reminded Mr. Graham of a rainbow. In fact, the animal looked as if nature, in a delirious mood, had dumped the remnants of many tints and hues on the mare when she was foaled. Beau Geste was the most remarkable conglomeration of colors that Mr. Graham had ever seen, even in dreams.

"Well," he gasped, finally, "well, well—by heck, son—you—yes, that is an odd horse! What—what color *do* you call her?"

"Well," drawled Bumble Bee, and there was a queer expression on his face momentarily. "I personally figure that Beau Geste is what they call a Shoshoni Sunburst, and——"

"A what?" asked Mr. Graham in amazement.

"The Shoshoni Indians had horses like this in the very earlies," said Bumble Bee, nodding his head. "I've heard mention of 'em from some of the oldest settlers back in the hills!"

Mr. Graham stroked his chin.

"Ah, yes, to be sure!" he agreed softly. "I never saw one before, or even heard the name in all my years of—puttering around circus stuff. You suppose that there might be others like her?"

BUMBLE BEE drew a design in the dust with his boot toe.

"I swanny," he answered slowly, "that's a question I——"

"Well, never mind," cut in Mr. Graham. "I doubt it. What do

you want for this Beau Geste animal? Remember, I'm paying no fancy prices. I don't like her knees. Does she stumble a great deal, falter a lot, give on this leg and that, stagger, and appear often to be about to fall on her nose?"

"Why, no," retorted Bumble Bee hurriedly. "What makes you ask that?"

"The look she has in that left eye," Mr. Graham responded promptly. He advanced on the mare and seized her, opening her mouth expertly and giving her teeth a hasty glance. "How old do you say she is?"

"Six," said Bumble Bee.

"I'd say nearer seven," grumbled Mr. Graham, just as a matter of business. "Well, what is it you want for her, brother? Not too much now!"

"I want a hundred dollars!"

"Give you forty!"

"Nope, I ain't anxious to sell—a hundred's my price!"

"Give you forty-two fifty!"

"No, I guess——"

"Forty-four dollars—not a red cent more!"

"No!" Bumble Bee's tone was sharper now.

Mr. Graham shrugged his shoulders. He turned and walked away a few paces, shaking his head and mumbling. Then he pivoted, pointed a finger.

"Forty-five dollars!"

"No!"

"Well," said Mr. Graham, and Bumble Bee thought he sensed some relief in the stranger's voice. "I couldn't use her, anyway, brother. No, not just one horse like that. Now, let me see—if I could get a team like that, or better, a four-horse hitch, all that color—or say, ten like her for a ring set-up of trained Liberty horses, as we call 'em in the show business—why, I'd be willing to shell out—say—a hundred or more each. Yes, in that event I——"

Mr. Graham rubbed his hands together in ecstasy.

"Yes, in that event, brother—if we could accumulate about ten of these Shoshoni Sunbursts, as you call 'em, I could almost let you name your price. Yes, I'd give one hundred fifty dollars each for 'em, and no great trouble about age if they were agile and sound. What a group that would be! Our horse trainer would go hysterical! Yes, yes—but I suppose I am talking nonsense. There couldn't be ten like her. But listen, friend, I have an idea. You got this mare in this locality, I presume?"

"Back in the hills," said Bill.

IT might pay us to scout around a bit, if you are inclined to gamble with me!" declared the circusman. "We might look for some such horses. Maybe this mare has a relative somewheres that would do? And while we were looking for the Shoshoni nags I could also pick up other likely horses. I could pay you a commission if we found any Sunbursts. I need a guide, a man like you who can get me acquainted with folks, lead me to those with real horses and the like. I been observing you, brother, and I can see you're fast, smart, shrewd, honest, and fair. I need a man like that! What do you say to that, sir?"

"Well, I don't know," hesitated Bumble Bee, and he flushed like a schoolboy, "I'm not sure it would be right——"

"Everything is hunky-dory!" beamed Mr. Graham, patting a breast pocket of his coat affectionately. "I have the dough-ray-me right here. But just to assure you,

my dear young brother, that everything is strictly oblongata ipsey facto, as the lawyers say, I will deposit enough money in the bank in Rico, in your presence, to pay for *ten* of them Shoshoni Sunburst horses, provided we find 'em! You can tell your friends that, too, to prove to 'em that my credit is good. Brother, opportunity is rapping at your door, and remember you can't lay in bed and eat your cake, too, as the poet said. Is it a deal, my backward but honest friend?"

"Well, now, wait a minute," urged Bumble Bee, perspiration coming out on his forehead. "I dislike to say——"

"And your commission!" beamed Mr. Graham, patting Bumble Bee on the shoulder. "Bear that in mind, youngster! I'll pay you ten dollars a head 'commish' on every additional Shoshoni Sunburst horse we locate! And, further, by George, perhaps I could say a quiet word to some of our high dignitaries in the circus business and get you a job, attending the seals, or steward to one of the bigger elephants, or manager of a lion or two——"

"Well," Bumble Bee fidgeted with his hat. "If I say yes——"

"You've said yes," interposed Mr. Graham. "Now, go saddle a horse. You might saddle this mare. I'd like to see her in action. And we'll ride into Rico and put the money up at the bank——"

PAPPY STEWART, the teller at the Rico Savings Bank, was so amazed that he swallowed his tobacco, which interfered seriously with his giving Mr. Graham the really extra-special smile of welcome that he should have given.

"Well, well," Pappy managed to sputter, after a bit of choking. "Let me get this right! You're Mr. Graham and you want to put in fifteen hundreds dollars cash money to be held to pay for ten what-you-call-'em horses——"

"Shoshoni Sunbursts," said Mr. Graham. "And I delegate my worthy friend and confidential agent here, Mr. Bumble Bee, to draw out such money when, if, and, to wit, we discover ten of the so-called Shoshoni Sunburst horses, my brilliant aid here to be the soul judge——"

Pappy Stewart fondled the roll of currency Mr. Graham had produced from his wallet. It was mostly in hundred-dollar bills. Pappy examined the bills rather minutely, fearful of discovering that they might be counterfeit.

"Oh, it's not bogus!" protested Mr. Graham, good-naturedly. "I am buying horses—all sorts of good horses—for the circus, Mr. Banker. I rather guess that money fully establishes my credit, eh, what? Keep it safe, my fine-whiskered financial expert—keep it safe!"

"Sure—sure!" agreed Pappy Stewart, still astonished about several things—that so much cash would ever come in on one deposit, that any one was crazy enough to pay so much money for ten whatever-they-were horses, and that Bumble Bee Bill should be skylarking around in such distinguished company. Pappy watched Bumble Bee and Mr. Graham depart.

"This is the age of miracles!" exclaimed Pappy, fervently. "If the bank had only been smart enough to pick up a couple of them dog-gone Sunbubble horses cheap! Boy, oh boy, fifteen hundred dollars in real cash!"

Outside the bank, Mr. Graham shook hands with Bumble Bee.

"I am at the Regal hotel," said the circus buyer, "and I suggest I meet you there at six o'clock to-mor-

row morning! We must get started. I have rented that corral back of the packing plant where I have several horses on approval, awaiting the arrival here, in a few days, of our general manager. This roan is one of them. But fare-you-well, proud lettuce magnate, until to-morrow. I'm going to rest up, prepared for several arduous days!"

"So long," said Bumble Bee softly.

All the way home Bumble Bee rode like a man in a trance. He looked neither to right nor to left and while he did look straight ahead, right over Beau Geste's ears, he saw nothing. He was thinking and, at times, he argued fiercely with himself aloud.

"Maybe I ain't doing the square thing!" he exploded once, angrily. "I never figured, Bumble Bee, that you'd knowingly and selfishly take advantage of a fellow human! Why was your tongue so silent, your lips so still, your pounding heart so crammed with cunning, when Mr. Graham asked about more Shoshoni Sunburst horses? Why did you remain quiet? Why, in the first place, did you ever mention the name 'Shoshoni Sunburst' to him, to mislead, to delude, to deceive a perfect stranger?"

Bumble Bee clenched his right fist and banged hard on the saddle horn.

"I'll tell you, Bumble Bee! I'll tell you why you sunk to deplorable levels of cupidity!" Bill's voice grew harsh: "You was battling fire with fire, playing loaded dice against crooked cards! Yes, sir! Somewhere, deep in your ignorant mind, instinct warned you to be on your toes! Yes, sir! You have met this Mr. Graham before and the recollection, dim as the Spanish Peaks through the morning mists, is not pleasant. Think! Where did you see this Mr. Graham? This man who calls you 'brother'?"

But, remaining silent himself after asking the questions, he received no answer except the pounding of Beau Geste's hoofs on the rocky trail. Great beads of perspiration came out on Bumble Bee's wrinkled forehead. The moon, coming up over Battle Mountain, saw a mighty troubled rancher heading home.

AT the gate to his place Bumble Bee paused to address the mail box.

"No, sir, I did not see Mr. Graham at Dolores when I bought that bear for nine dollars from that busted circus! No, sir, I did not see Mr. Graham at the sheriff's sale at Pandora at the auction of that circus stuff when I bought Fatima, the camel!"

Bumble Bee reached in the mail box and took out his mail. He got a bulky handful and even in the fading light he saw that he had drawn three seed catalogues to add to his huge collection, a mail-order-house catalogue, and copies of two papers, one a stock-growers' magazine, and the other a circus publication. There were no letters, as usual.

"Jumping tadpoles in January!" exploded Bumble Bee, staggering back as if some one had struck him a stunning blow. He steadied himself against Beau Geste momentarily. Then, with a wild yip that startled the mare, he leaped forward, opened the gate, led the mare through, closed the gate and flung himself into the saddle. He made the cabin in a few seconds. There he jumped down, tossed the reins over Beau Geste's head and with incoherent but determined sputterings he rushed into the cabin. The light went on—but it stayed on only a few minutes and then it blinked out,

and a moment later, still jibbering, Bumble Bee appeared, a bundle under one arm and a frightened, feverish look on his twitching face.

"Beau Geste!" he gasped, as he reached for the anchoring reins. "We got to work fast—even faster than fast! Suffering cats!"

He was up, and off! He didn't remember, afterward, whether he opened the gate or went right through it. When he did finally realize what was going on he was tearing down the trail, the cool evening air whipping his flushed face refreshingly. He recalled then that he was going to Uncle Joe McMeel's, his nearest neighbor, and that he had urgent business to propose to Uncle Joe—business that must be done immediately.

The mare was slightly winded when Bumble Bee, muttering vague things in a tone that was mysterious and subdued for him, reached Uncle Joe McMeel's place. There was a light in Uncle Joe's cabin.

"Uncle Joe!" yelled Bumble Bee, cupping his hands. "Uncle Joe!"

Several bob-tailed ranch dogs came bounding out of the night, barking furiously. The mare fidgeted at the assault. Uncle Joe stuck his head out.

"What in Sam Hill's coming off here?"

"Come right out, quick—and better put your chaps on!" cried Bumble Bee excitedly. "We ain't got a minute to lose!"

"Dam on Cherry Creek go out?" whooped Uncle Joe.

"No! But hurry, Uncle Joe! Hurry, for the love of Mike!"

Uncle Joe rushed, apparently. He appeared again in a few seconds, struggling into a leather jacket. He carried a shotgun, too.

"Lynching party?" questioned Uncle Joe hopefully.

"No—get your horse!" snapped Bumble Bee, "and leave the gun here!"

When Uncle Joe came thudding around the end of the house, Bumble Bee was well on his way to the road. Uncle Joe applied his spurs to his gray gelding and caught up with him.

"Where are we going, hang it, and why?" demanded Uncle Joe.

"We got to round up some horses back in the hills, Uncle Joe!" explained Bumble Bee, shakily. "We're going up Chipmonk Gulch, over Squaw Pass, down into Tincup Valley! Then we're having to drive 'em in to Rico, pell-mell! We ain't got a minute to lose, either!"

UNCLE JOE grunted. He ran shrewdly appraising eyes over Bumble Bee. He saw he carried a bundle but no weapon, apparently.

"Whoa now!" cried Uncle Joe, pulling up hastily. "I declare, Bumble Bee, if I didn't know you so well I'd say you'd been drinking tequila or some other ghost stuff that comes in bottles! But I know that ain't true. However, I think you're moon-touched. This is no time o' night to be running horses, and I, for one, am going back to my warm bed, dad blast it!"

"Wait a minute!" yelled Bumble Bee, and there was authority in his voice. "If you ain't with me you're against me! I never needed help so badly in all my life! You got to come on along! You must!"

"Nobody ever told me I must since I left school!" declared Uncle Joe, angrily. "Them horses can wait until daylight——"

"They cannot! They got to be in Rico as fast as we can get 'em there!"

"What for, then?" persisted Uncle Joe, suspiciously.

"For sale, that's what!" retorted Bumble Bee, excitedly.

"Who is buying horses this time o' night, you lunatic?" whooped Uncle Joe. "And who is selling 'em this time of night? What is this business—skulldoggery of some sort? You up to something shady, Bumble Bee?"

"*Yes!*" screamed Bumble Bee frantically. "Maybe I am. But you're coming with me! You ain't backing out——"

Bumble Bee adjusted the bundle under one arm. Uncle Joe McMeel saw some significance in that movement. He decided to be careful.

"What you got in that bundle, Bumble Bee?"

"And that's none of your business, either," answered Bumble Bee tartly. "We're riding; we're rounding up horses; we're rushing 'em into Rico to——"

They rode. Uncle Joe remembered now how often he had heard folks remark that they thought Bumble Bee was a bit "touched" in the head. Now, he made up his mind, there was no question about the matter, the fellow was batty as a screech owl. No doubt he had a gun wrapped up in the bundle, or maybe dynamite. Yes, he'd have to go along and round up horses and pretend to like it! He swore under his breath, swore fervently.

But they continued to ride. The moon, now in full brilliance, made the trail silvery. It was easy going. Bumble Bee, pressing on, didn't notice that, however. Uncle Joe, riding reluctantly, likewise had no time for the moon. He just thought what folks would think, in Rico, if they heard the thunder of broncho hoofs and peeked out of their beds to see him going high-tailing past with a bunch of fuzztails, heck bent for election!

"They'll figure—maybe rightly—that I'm rustling!" he thought, dismally. But he did not voice his fears. He was impressed by that peculiar bundle Bumble Bee carried and he craved no argument of any sort.

Once, as they neared the top of Squaw Pass, Bumble Bee swung in his saddle and favored Uncle Joe with a crisp, cryptic remark.

"I sure pray I'm doing right, Uncle Joe! My head's in a whirl!"

"Pleasant evening, ain't it?" said Uncle Joe, soothingly. "Gosh knows I'm fully enjoying every minute of the outing. We almost there?"

"Yes," said Bumble Bee. "We're almost there!"

Fifteen minutes later, with Uncle Joe more fidgety than ever, they reached tiny Tincup Valley. Bumble Bee, still clinging to his bundle, stopped and announced the procedure.

"We're rounding up nine head of them crazy-quilt horses," he said. "No matter the brands, the size or nothing—but the colors!"

Uncle Joe McMeel's heart almost stopped! Now he was sure!

"We're taking—taking other people's stock, eh, Bumble?"

"Yes—and don't bother to argue!" shot back Bumble Bee. "I'm having enough battling with my conscience and my secret thoughts. I ain't got time to have trouble with you. Come on, let's go!"

They edged off, gingerly, for the horses were not visable just then. Uncle Joe rode with palsied hands, twitching face. So—he was rustling, after all! Running off stock at night! A common horse thief! And who would believe that he had accompanied Bumble Bee on the crime

against his will? A lynching party would laugh mighty nastily at that alibi!

"Wait a minute, Bumble!" begged Uncle Joe, in an agonized tone.

"There they are! Come on!"

THEY went, but it can truthfully be said that Uncle Joe McMeel did very little actual work in the round-up. He eased his conscience by letting his horse follow around after Bumble Bee's mount. Bumble Bee, however, worked like a Trojan. He cut here, sliced there, swung, twisted, headed off, whooped, whistled, and circled, until, almost before Uncle Joe realized it, nine head of the patch-color horses were going out of the valley before Bumble Bee's Beau Geste. Uncle Joe shivered at the prospects.

"Going right into Rico, be we?" he asked apprehensively.

"Yes—and at a fast clip, too!" said Bumble Bee.

It was all downhill to Rico and Bumble Bee set a mighty fast pace. Again and again Uncle Joe tried to summon up enough courage to desert the cavalcade but the moonlight stayed him. There could be no dodging away in the dark this night. And if he did try a sneak and Bumble Bee caught him it might be curtains. No, he'd have to stick!

Bumble Bee appeared calmer as they neared Rico. His voice was almost normal when he finally ordered Uncle Joe to ride ahead and open the packing-house corral gate. Uncle Joe shrugged his shoulders. It was a poor place, he thought, to cache stolen stock, particularly those dazzling calico beasts. But orders were orders—and Bumble Bee still clung to his bundle.

The winded horses dashed into the corral a moment or two later.

"Tie your horse and come with me and keep your mouth closed tight!" ordered Bumble Bee. "We're going up to the home of Pappy Stewart——"

"The bank fellow?" gasped Uncle Joe, aghast, "at three in the morning?"

"Yes," said Bumble Bee. So they went. Pappy, it appeared, was a sound sleeper, but at length Bumble Bee succeeded in arousing him.

"What is it?" he called, drowsily, from the window.

"It's Bumble Bee, with a consignment of Shoshoni Sunbursts, come for the money!" sang out Bill. "Get dressed, and hurry——"

"But at this time of night?" protested the banker.

"We fellows don't count hours," said Bumble Bee. "Snap into it, sir!"

"We—that is—are you—robbing the bank?" asked Uncle Joe in a hushed voice. "I swanny I wish I'd never——"

"Shut up until you're spoken to!" responded Bumble Bee, exasperated. It was plain Bumble Bee was laboring under a great strain, thought Uncle Joe. Well, if it was to be bank robbery now——

Pappy Stewart appeared, mad and grumbling. But Bumble Bee talked fast. He reminded Pappy of some agreement, and together the three went to the corral where, among other animals, the banker was shown nine of the vividly splashed horses. Beau Geste made the tenth.

"I want that fifteen hundred dollars pair over now, to Uncle Joe here," said Bumble Bee. "Uncle Joe is selling the bulk of them horses!"

"Whoa now!" exploded Uncle Joe, coming to life suddenly. "I swear

to goodness if I don't balk right here. I'm no dog-gone——"

"Calm yourself!" cried Bumble Bee, laying violent hands on Uncle Joe. "You can't back out of the deal now. You sold them horses and you know it! Come on, Mr. Stewart, we got to get hold of that fifteen hundred dollars right now!"

"You circus dealers!" said the banker ruefully. "You're a reckless, gay lot! But you're sure doing the business. Why, Mr. Graham must have had fifty head of fine animals hazed into the corrals this afternoon, after you left. Everybody heard about his credit, and you being mixed up with him, and things boomed! He'll leave a lot of money in this community when he pays off. He's just got the stuff on approval, now——"

"I know," said Bumble Bee, "let's get the money!"

IT was the first time in Pappy Stewart's long banking career that he ever opened the bank, and the bank vault, at three thirty in the morning. But business was business. He got the currency that Graham had deposited.

"You going to write a check for it, Bumble?" he asked.

"Naw—give you a receipt is all!" said Bumble Bee. He reached for the money, took it, while Uncle Joe blinked. "Write out a receipt and I'll sign it!" Bumble Bee stuffed the currency in his pockets. "And let's hurry!"

Emerging from the bank Bumble Bee seized the speechless Uncle Joe by the arm and propelled him breathlessly into a shadow in the doorway of the Rico Feed Company store. There, while Uncle Joe stared in amazement, Bumble Bee opened his package, pulled out a pair of overalls and a gay shirt and proceeded to don them. Then he tapped Uncle Joe on the shoulder.

"I am going across to the hotel—I'll be back pronto! You wait!"

Uncle Joe waited. Bumble Bee was gone but a few minutes. He came running back, panting. Again he changed his clothes, placing the gay shirt and the overalls in the bundle.

"Watch that hotel!" he ordered grimly. "Watch it close!"

"You didn't set it afire—or rob it?" asked Uncle Joe in a whisper.

"No—just watch!"

The vigil was not long. A window opened on the second floor, and a man, using the rope that was to be used only in case of fire, dropped silently to the roof of the adjoining store. He slid down a rain spout from there. He ducked into a shadow but was visible, a moment later, running hard, to the west. The through freight train from Durango whistled at the water tower just then and the figure swerved and headed in that direction.

"Well!" breathed Bumble Bee, in evident relief. "Now to the corral!"

Uncle Joe had stopped asking questions. The night had become a delirious nightmare for him and one never had questions answered during a nightmare.

At the corral, Bumble Bee flung wide the gates. He rushed in and a moment later an avalanche of horses poured out. They scattered to the four winds, neighing, kicking up their heels.

"They'll go home," said Bumble Bee with a chuckle. "So can we!"

"Wait a minute!" exploded Uncle Joe. "Now that you seem human again I'd like to ask——"

"Rummaging through some old

circus magazines frantically early this evening," said Bumble Bee, "I come across this. I tore it out——"

He handed Uncle Joe a ragged piece of paper. It was light enough for Uncle Joe to read it with some effort. He read:

"The above picture is that of one Robbins, alias Johnson, alias several other names, who is working a new racket through the South. Posing as a buyer of circus horses he gains the confidence of local dealers, establishes credit, and has horses brought in to be held for final decision. He seeks certain rare types, but condescends to take other good animals. Suddenly he withdraws his bank deposit and he and the horses disappear overnight, assisted, apparently, by accomplices. He has just bilked the farmers at Sandy Crossing, Georgia, out of more than a thousand dollars in colts."

"Well?" asked Uncle Joe, blinking.

"I just went and told the night clerk to wake the bird up and tell him a fellow from Sandy Crossing, Georgia, wanted to see him!" grinned Bumble Bee. "I guessed what would happen! That train whistled just in time!"

"Say!" exclaimed Uncle Joe, his mind functioning again. "There was a man named Graham at my place to-day. I referred him to you——"

"That was Graham you just saw," said Bumble Bee. "It was also Robbins, alias Johnson——"

"I swanny!" breathed Uncle Joe. "What you going to do with the money?"

"I'm wiring that to Sandy Crossing, Georgia," said Bumble Bee, "where them swindled guys can divide it. Let's go on home, Uncle Joe!"

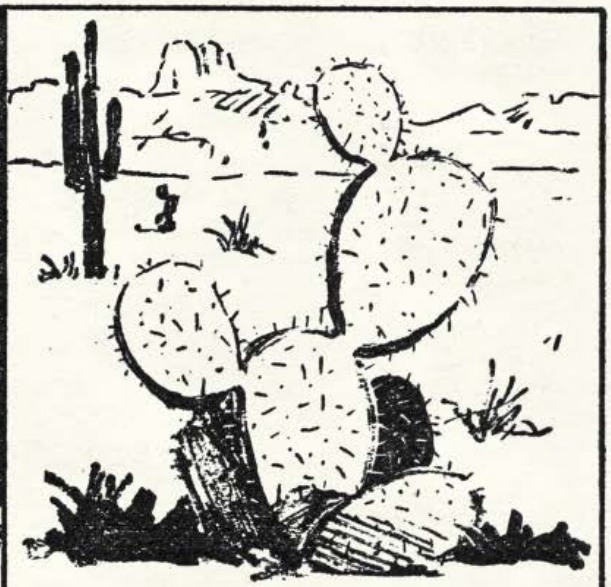
MILK FOR ALASKA

THERE are certain things one doesn't have when one lives in Alaska, and, after a while, one forgets about wanting them. One of these commodities is milk. But Warren G. Ferguson, of Kotzebue, Alaska, proposes to remedy this. He has ordered a cow to be shipped to Alaska, where there is good grazing in the summertime. In the winter he will put it in a room heated by oil. Milk will keep from fall until spring, for, just outside of the warm room, the temperature is fifty degrees below zero most of the time. Ferguson's cow will be the first to venture so far north.

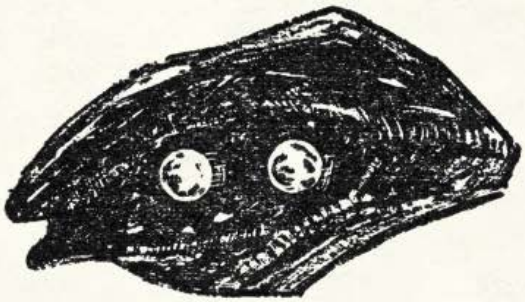
Interesting And True

By H. FREDRIC YOUNG

THE OWL, SYMBOL OF WISDOM, IS FAR LESS INTELLIGENT THAN MANY OTHER BIRDS.



CACTUS THORNS MAKE EXCELLENT PHONOGRAPH NEEDLES.



R.E. HAYNER, MEDFORD, OREGON, FOUND TWO PEARLS IN A PIECE OF DEVONIAN FOSSIL WHICH GEOLOGISTS DECLARE TOBE MORE THAN SIX MILLION YEARS OLD.

FREQUENT BATHING IN MONA LAKE, CALIFORNIA, TURNS THE BLACK HAIR OF THE INDIANS TO A DULL RED.

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.

GHOSTS' GOLD

By ELI COLTER

Author of "Menace I n Red Chaps," etc.

WELL, well—there she be!" "Gold Rush Joe" Budd slapped an affectionate hand on his fat little old burro's shoulder. "There she be, Nancy; our town!" Joe's eyes gleamed with a kind of musing pride. His town, Johnsonville, lying down there in the valley beyond the tops of the pine trees that clothed the slope between. "We started that town, Nancy; remember? Man, that was a real gold rush!"

It had been a real one, too, he repeated to himself, the wild mad rush that comes when the gold is really there. He'd found the gold, and a horde of men had followed him, and Johnsonville had been born. But it hadn't gone ghost, as a lot of mining towns had done. No sir, not his Johnsonville. It had thrived and grown, and he had had a great deal to do with its thriving, too. He'd come back to it year after year, for several years, and fostered it, and petted it, and watched it bloom. Old Joe smiled, and his eyes were a little misty. She was a swell town, yes, sir! With nice stout buildings lining the long dusty street, and jovial men in mining garb stamping about and shouting the latest news at each other.

"Good thing I did hang around

pretty frequent, too, Nancy," Joe told the burro. "Henry Jevons would 'a' ruined her, dang him. Gosh, how he was set agin' that town, Nancy! Jest because we started her. Jest like he was set agin' us, ever since we stopped him from ruinin' young Bill Sly fifteen year ago. Sure hated us, didn't he, Nancy? But we fixed his clock for him good. I guess he'll hate us till he dies, if he ain't already dead yet. Wonder where he's got to? Well, move along, Nancy! I can't hardly wait to get there. It's plumb like comin' home."

He slapped the burro on the rump, and, as she reluctantly lifted her feet and ambled forward, Joe's gray eyes brooded ahead, on the spot where Johnsonville lay. Though, in reality, he couldn't see the town yet. All he could see of it was the church spire, and the great golden cross atop the spire, gleaming in the sun. And the sight of the cross raised another train of thought.

"Jevons didn't want the church to come to town, either," Joe said, with a scornful grimace. "Plumb determined there wa'n't goin' to be no church, jest because I said it would be nice and peaceful there in the valley for a church. Danged, godless, crooked son of a coyote, that's what he was. Nigh broke old Dad Laird's heart, too, when he thought he wasn't goin' to get no church, and Jevons was smart enough to fix it so there wasn't a place in town he could get to build on. But we fixed that, Nancy, didn't we?"

And Joe chuckled aloud, remembering the discomfiture of Henry Jevons, when he, Gold Rush Joe, had settled the whole question by donating his discovery claim to the cause, and Parson Laird's church had come to life there on the banks of the purling Johnson Creek, in the most beautiful spot in the whole town. Just on the edge of town, it was, but still in town.

JOE drew a breath of delight as he and Nancy rounded the last bend in the trail, and Johnsonville came full into sight, peaceful and fair in the valley, only a little way below them now.

Joe's gaze caught again on the great golden cross, and he smiled again, a little soberly, remembering how he had run the crooked Jevons out of his town, threatening to put him in jail for his sins—which he could have done—if he ever dared come back, and remembering, too, what old "Dad" Laird had said to Jevons when they had escorted him to the edge of town and ordered him to depart.

"'God go with you, poor misguided man,' that's what he said, Nancy," muttered Joe. "Then he turned and pointed back at the church, and he said further to that dang crook, 'And may your sins be blotted out in the shadow of the cross.' He was a plumb grand and godly man, was old Dad Laird, but I reckon nothin' could blot out the sins of any skunk as crooked as Henry Jevons. Oh, well, that's all gone and forgot, I guess. And here we be at last. Home again, Nancy. Our town!"

But he frowned, as they turned into the long street, and his eyes widened. What had they done to his town? The sun beat down with furnace heat on Main Street, but the street wasn't dusty and friendly and marked by the tracks of countless boots. It was black, dirty black, and it stank to high heaven. Joe sniffed the air, and scowled, as he and Nancy started down the street. His feet touched the stinking black

stuff, and it stuck to the soles of his boots, and he knew what it was.

Asphalt! That's what it was! That darn stuff they brought in from some crazy island, Trinni—Trinn—oh, Trinidud or Trinidad or something like that. Joe heard Nancy snort and he turned his gaze on her, and his indignation grew. Nancy lifted her hind foot and shook it, as a cat does when it steps in a pool of water. Nancy hated sticky stuff on her feet. Joe snorted, too, in rising anger and disgust. The idea of putting asphalt on streets in a town where it got as hot as it did here. Why, it was plumb foolishness.

He'd stayed away too long, that's what he'd done. If things like this were going on, he might as well have let Jevons wreck the town in the first place, as he'd sworn to do. He'd find out about this business, pronto, he would. He wondered if Zeppy Minico were still here? He'd go right to Minico's saloon and find out first thing. Zeppy knew everything that was going on. Zeppy'd tell him how this had come about. So would Lee Adler, if Lee was still on deck. Lee had been a pretty good friend of his. But he'd see Zeppy Minico first.

He was still cursing the black stuff on the streets, and commiserating with Nancy, when he came at last to the door of Minico's saloon, and even as he swung open the doors and stepped inside, he was conscious that there was more wrong with the town: there was a queerly dull and apathetic air about it, somehow, nobody in sight. And, worst calamity of all, the gold paint was peeling off the great cross on old Dad Laird's church. And the agreement had been that that cross was to be painted new every year, the great cross that was to cast forever a shadow over Henry Jevons's sins. All in all, Joe was as nearly in a fury as he ever became, as he stepped into Minico's saloon and glanced about.

AND he saw, to his relief, that Zeppy was there. Zeppy was standing behind the bar, at the nigh end, his chin in his hands, staring into space. Three men were gathered at a table in the back of the room, but two of them were strangers to Joe, and the third one had his back turned toward him. They paid no attention to Joe's entrance, and even Minico didn't bother to look till Joe stepped up to the bar.

"Hello, Zep, you darned old soak," said Joe. "I'm glad to see you're still here."

Minico's eyes flashed to him then, quickly enough, and a look lighted his face that was queerly compounded of relief, and appeal, and a modicum of hopeless despair.

"Joe!" he breathed, and leaned over the bar. "Man, am I glad to see you. Eight years you been away, you dang deserter, and see what happens! Yeah, I'm still here, but it don't look like I'll be here much longer, Joe."

"No?" Joe looked a little startled, but he hid that behind a frown. He'd known something was wrong. He'd known it from the minute he saw that black stuff on the street and the peeling gold paint on the great cross. His gray eyes probed Minico's gaze. "What's up, Zeppy?"

Minico jerked a thumb toward the three men at the table in the rear of the room. "Slip down this way a little, Joe, and listen. You'll get an earful."

Joe followed him unobtrusively down the bar a few feet, but the two of them needn't have been so

cautious. The other three men were too absorbed in their discussion to pay any attention to Zeppy Minico and Gold Rush Joe.

"Who authorized all these improvements, anyway?" one of the men was saying, a small fat man with a sweating, worried face.

"That's Adolph Popper," whispered Minico to Joe. "Swell fella, one of the leading citizens in town during the last six, seven years."

One of the men roused in his chair to answer Popper, the man who sat with his back to Joe. "And that's Lee Adler," Minico told Joe. "He's mayor of Johnsonville now."

"Who authorized them?" Adler retorted, leaning across the table toward Popper. "Why, the citizens of Johnsonville, of course. I'll admit that I might have had a little to do with it, convincin' them that we ought to be progressive and have paved streets and such, but every merchant on Main Street and most of the property owners of the town agreed that it would be a good idea to have the town fixed up a bit. We didn't have the money to do it, so we had to borrow it, didn't we?"

"Yeah?" drawled the third man, who, Minico whispered, was Tom van Hess. "But it's this eight-per-cent interest that chills me. You say now that you gave the town's bonds to this backer of yours at eight per cent. We all understood that it was to be six per cent, Lee."

JOE could see Lee Adler shift uneasily in his chair, and Joe's gaze fixed on the back of Lee's head. Adler roused in some defiance. "Let's have this understood," he snapped back at Van Hess. "Hank came to me with this proposition for improving Johnsonville. I put it up to the people of the town. They approved it. We let Hank put sixty thousand dollars' worth of improvements into the town and gave him the town's bonds for 'em. And then hard times come, and we cant' pay——"

"So he's goin' to take over the town," Popper cut in dryly, "on account of our default in payments."

"And charge us rent after he forecloses," said Van Hess, with open bitterness. "High rent! He knows none of us can pay it. It will wreck the town, Lee."

"Well, what can I do?" returned Adler angrily. "Now that it's done, why turn on me for it? It's no more my doing than anybody else's. What we're here for is not to get into a fight with each other, but to try to figure out some way to keep Hank from foreclosing on the town."

"There ain't no way," said Tom van Hess, still bitter.

"Zeppy," said Joe Budd. "Come on. We're goin' back there and get into this discussion."

Minico shrugged, but he followed down the bar, and as they approached they heard Adolph Popper saying to Lee Adler:

"I'm not so sure it wasn't more of your doin' than you want to admit! You was awful chummy with Hank when he was here, and that there matter of the difference between six and eight-per-cent bonds might bear a little lookin' into."

"Look into it all you want," said Adler hotly. "The bonds was all signed in legal order by twenty-three of the leading citizens. You're not going to hold me responsible."

"Oh, they're not, eh?" said a grim voice at Adler's elbow, and Adler turned quickly, to look up into the face of the little gray man gazing sternly at him.

Adler half rose from his chair, and an odd look flashed into his eyes, it

might have been a flash of fear, and his face paled. "Joe Budd!" he ejaculated. "You back here? Why —why, we all sort of figured you was gone for good."

"Uh-huh," Joe agreed dryly, "looks like it." And he knew in that instant that Lee Adler was his friend no longer, that whatever had gone wrong with his town it was very bad, and it was crooked, and Lee Adler was at the bottom of it somewhere—with the fellow called Hank.

Adolph Popper stared at Joe in quickly rising excitement. "Joe Budd? Say, does he mean Gold Rush Joe? Are you him? The fella that started this town?"

"Yeah," said Gold Rush Joe. "I'm him. I started this town, and I wet-nussed it through its teethin' days, and no dang fools is goin' to wreck it now. What's goin' on here?"

Tom van Hess got to his feet and held out a hand. "Sure pleased to meet you, Joe! I'm Tom van Hess. This is Adolph Popper. I'll tell you what's happening, Joe. About two years and a half ago Hank come to this town and convinced some of the leading citizens that we needed improvements, such as paved streets and the like. He sold a couple of miles of pavin' to Johnsonville and took the town's bonds for sixty thousand dollars. The mines around here have all played out, Joe. That is, for anything big. We get enough to live along peaceful and quiet, but sixty thousand dollars is a lot of money."

YEAH, and the timber's most all cut, too," Adolph Popper put in, eager to explain to the legendary man who was Gold Rush Joe. His fat, honest face was sweating in excitement. "And there's only a dribble of money comin' in, Joe. Tryin' to save up to make them payments has brought hard times on us, and even then we can't pay. And if we can't pay now, how are we goin' to pay after Hank forecloses on this town, and charges us big rent to get his money out of us? We just can't, Joe. The town's done. He's wrecked it, the crook. She'll be a ghost town inside of another year."

Joe's fury mounted, and burned in his gray eyes. "Pavin'!" he said in boundless scorn. "You mean that sticky, gooey stuff Nancy and me had to tromp over tryin' to get into town?"

"Well, it does get a little soft in hot weather," Lee Adler admitted defiantly, and his eyes were hostile as they swept Joe's face.

Joe shook his head, as if this catastrophe were not to be believed. His town, on the verge of being wrecked, after all he had done, after all these years. "You mean to tell me?" he said slowly. "You mean to tell me that the intelligent citizens of Johnsonville give some high-grader named Hank a mortgage on the town jest for some sticky black stuff that come from some furrin island to spread it over the streets and gum up the progress of honest prospectors like Nancy and me?"

"But you don't understand, Joe!" Adler suddenly decided to try to placate Gold Rush Joe. He remembered sharply that Joe considered this his town, and Joe might do some gumming up himself if he wasn't stopped. He had to be stopped, Adler thought grimly; that extra two cents per, the difference between eight and six per cent, was to go into his own pocket, Hank had promised that. And if they got their money, what if it did wreck the darned town? One town more or less was nothing to Lee Adler.

He leaned toward Joe, twisting sidewise in his chair. "You see, improving our town is progress, Joe. Just because we're a mining town away out in the hills, is no reason why we need to have dust and mud in the streets."

Gold Rush Joe snorted in anger and disgust. "They's somethin' substantial about mud and dust. Course, I wouldn't want to stand in the way of progress, but they's a lot of things worse than mud and dust, Lee. You know I feel sort of responsible for the town, because I started it myself when I found gold on Johnson Crick. And though I don't care about that part of it so much for myself, still and all, gettin' that sticky black stuff inside Nancy's hoofs might make her feet sore, and it ain't no right welcome for a wanderer to come home and find his town all gooed up and swamped in debt."

Adler stared up at him for a moment, eyes narrowed, then he set his mouth and rose to his feet. "No use arguing with a stubborn old fool like you, Joe!" he snapped, and he turned and stamped out of the saloon.

Joe scowled after him, then turned to Minico, who had stood listening to the whole discussion, dour and silent, leaning on the end of the bar. "Just who is this fella Hank, Zeppy, anyhow?"

"Oh, some guy I never saw before," growled Minico. "Hank's a nickname for Henry, you know, Joe. His name's Henry Jevons."

JOE stood still, and something inside him seemed to grow hard and cold, and a little sick. His ancient enemy! Come to wreck the town at last in pure spite, the minute he thought Joe's back was turned. To wreck the town, and corrupt Joe's old friend, and gloat over Joe's shock and grief when Joe should learn of it. The little gray man straightened suddenly, as a man on the firing line straightens when the enemy comes into sight. His voice turned almost brisk.

"Yeah? Hm-m-m! So, Jevons has got the whole town sewed up, has he? Even the church, Zeppy? Even old Dad Laird's church?"

"Well, no." Minico shook his head. "Not the church, Joe. You donated that land, you know. And you sort of sewed it up yourself, by makin' old Dad Laird promise that nothin' should ever happen to it. Dad Laird ain't got the church any more, Joe, though. He died two years ago, and his son Dale took over the business of bein' parson. But Dale wouldn't have nothin' to do with the bonds. He said the church was on consecrated ground, and it was goin' to stand clear. But the church ain't been operatin' for almost a year now, Joe; on account of bein' out of funds."

Joe saw in his mind's eye the great cross and the peeling gold paint. "Is that right, now?" Dismay harshened his voice. "Well, now, Zep, that *ain't* right! A nice town like this with no church nor parson."

"Oh, we got a parson all right," Minico hastened to explain. "Only he ain't workin' at it. Dale's still livin' here, hopin' to see the church goin' again. But he's been workin' in Popper's general store, on account of he can't stand to see his family go hungry. He's got a wife and two kids, Joe."

"Where does Dale live?" asked Joe briskly.

"Why, we built a home for the parson, five year ago, Joe. Right by the church. Dale still lives in it. It's his right, bein' parson.

Little yellow house right by the church. You can't miss it."

"Thanks," said Joe. "Pleased to have met you gents." He bowed with dignity to Popper and Van Hess. "Reckon I'll be goin'."

For Gold Rush Joe the meeting was adjourned. He paused at the bar long enough to gulp hastily the drink Zeppy Minico thrust toward him, and hurried out. As he and Nancy crossed the street to turn north toward the parson's house, he stamped angrily on the asphalt beneath him, and scowled blackly.

"Sticky, gooey, good for nothin'," he grumbled. "Bonds, interest, mortgages. What the heck is this country comin' to, anyway? Purty quick now me'n Nancy will have to hole up in the bad lands to keep from gettin' our toenails chipped off by all these newfangled ideas people get."

As he approached the house that had been built for the parson, he noted that the tall hedge growing around the churchyard had become a high and impenetrable screen of green. He had helped to plant it with his own hands when he had last been in Johnsonville eight years ago. He calculated that the graveyard couldn't be anywhere near full yet. Things had quieted down a lot after the surface gold had been washed out of Johnson Creek, and people had gone to farming and cutting timber instead of doing nothing but mining.

He left Nancy standing in the shade of the hedge, and as he turned up the walk toward the parson's door he glanced up at the great gold cross. It gleamed in the light of the setting sun, reaching toward the skies, and its long shadow fell like a benediction across the graveyard where the departed slept.

DALE LAIRD himself answered Joe's knock at the door, and his face lighted with instant recognition. "Why, Joe! Bless your heart, man! Welcome home! You've been gone a long time."

"Too long, seems like," sighed Joe, as he stepped in, and Laird closed the door. "Gonnies, Dale! You was just a long lean ganglin' boy when I was here last, and now you're the parson. My, my! How time skitters. And they tell me a fella named Jevons has got a strangle holt on my town, Dale."

"Yes, Joe, I'm afraid so," Laird admitted regretfully, as he led Joe in and offered him a seat in the best room. "Johnsonville wasn't ready for such things, Joe. They've brought us awfully hard times. I don't think we needed them anyway, Joe. We could have been so happy and peaceful just the way we were. We had enough for our own quiet living. But we didn't have enough for any such big move as that. It broke us, Joe. And Jevons is terribly vindictive in pressing his claims."

"He would be," said Joe.

"You know him?" asked Dale quickly.

"Hearn tell of him," said Joe. Evidently old Dad Laird had never told his young son about the transgressions of Henry Jevons. That was like Dad Laird. He wouldn't have told anybody, it was just between him and Joe. He'd always said it was wrong to advertise another man's sins. Jevons's sins. The sins he had prayed to be blotted out in the shadow of the great cross. "Paint's peelin' on the cross," said Joe.

"Yes, I know, Joe. We couldn't afford to paint it new."

"Jevons ain't got no claim on the church and graveyard," said Joe.

"No, he hasn't. I stopped that! For Dad's sake, and yours. But I don't see what bearing that could have on the predicament we're in now, Joe."

"You ain't known Johnsonville as long as I have," replied Joe. "I want to make a deal with you, Dale. If my guess is right, the graveyard ain't a quarter full yet, is it?"

"Why, no." Dale stared at him in wonder, then in sudden suspicion. "But Joe—you wouldn't, no—you don't mean that! Difficulties aren't settled that way any more, Joe. The old wild days of killing a man off to——"

"Don't get your cart ahead of your hoss," admonished Joe dryly. "You're not thinkin' the same as me. Listen!"

And for over an hour Dale Laird and Gold Rush Joe bent their heads together in earnest conversation. Then Joe rose and left the parsonage, and there was a smile on his face, and a prayer in his heart. And he looked up at the great cross gleaming silvery white in the moonlight, and said aloud:

"You guide me, Lord. I got to save this town. And I know you never let an honest man down yet. Jest guide me! I'll do the rest."

Then he went to Zeppy Minico's saloon. He sidled up to the bar and Minico came from the card tables out on the floor to wait on him. Joe ordered a whisky, and sipped the liquor a little, then he leaned close to Minico.

"Zeppy, when is this Henry Jevons comin' back to collect? And can I put up a sign on that scandal board of yourn back there?"

Minico glanced at the blackboard he had erected at the back of the saloon for the benefit of his customers. There men displayed free of all charge whatever "for sale," or "for rent" or "wanted" signs they wanted to write upon its dingy surface. Minico smiled.

"Jevons will be back on the fifteenth of August," he answered. "And you can write any blamed thing you want to on that board any time!"

JOE finished his whisky. He took a wet rag from Zeppy and went back to the blackboard and climbed onto a chair and wiped the board clean. He picked up a piece of chalk, and on the now clean black surface he wrote with his gnarled old hand, in huge, laboriously printed letters:

BIG REVIVEL AT THE CHURCH. AUGUST FIFTEENTH AT HIGH NOON. ALL PROPRTY OWNERS OF JONSONVIL INVITED. REVERENT DAIL LAIRD, PASTER.

Then Joe got down from the chair, and hurried out, before any one could get a chance to ask any questions. He went to the livery barn where he had left Nancy, and, with certain blasphemous remarks which had better be omitted here, he took out his pocketknife and began cleaning the sticky asphalt from the cove of the burro's hoofs.

The next morning Dale Laird was wakened by a gentle knock at his back door. He hurried to the door to find Joe and Nancy there.

"You're up early, Joe," he greeted the little gray man.

"Uh-huh," said Joe. "I didn't want any snoopers to see me comin' here and tell Jevons. I told everybody I was leavin' town this mornin'. You get the boards all right?"

"I did. I put them out behind the church, along with the saw and hammer and nails."

"Thanks, Dale. Now, if your missus will just slip a bit of grub through the hedge now and then—I'll see you the fifteenth of August. You see—I know it's goin' to be all right, Dale, because—the Lord's guidin' me." And he glanced up at the great golden cross as he turned away.

And Gold Rush Joe, and the frowsy fat old burro, disappeared through a small break in the hedge into the churchyard, to be seen no more by the citizens of Johnsonville. For all they knew, he had gone as he had come, unobtrusively, unheralded and unnoticed.

He found the graveyard just as he had expected to find it. It was a quiet drowsing square, cut in two by Johnson Creek. All the graves were in the northwest side, just a few green mounds in the far corner. And he stood still and gazed, he noted that across the southeast side and upon the purling waters of the creek there, there fell the shadow of the great cross, pointing, like a sign.

If the citizens of Johnsonville heard faintly thereafter for a time the sound of pounding and sawing and hammering coming from the parson's back yard, they thought nothing of it. The parson was always tinkering. And the hot August days slipped by, and the hot August nights, and the day of the fifteenth came, sweltering and enervating. And with it came Henry Jevons, seeking Mayor Adler and the leading citizens of Johnsonville.

Jevons wanted to call an immediate meeting and have the thing settled without delay, he knew there would be no payments. He wanted to get his hands on that town. But Adolph Popper and Tom van Hess said no. The business with Jevons would have to wait. There was a big revival meeting to be held at the church at twelve o'clock, and they had promised Parson Laird that they would all attend that one last meeting before they signed over their town and saw the old days done. And they stuck to it, much to Jevons's disgust, and Jevons went with a leer to take in this last big church meeting. He told himself that it should be good. He supposed the parson would do a lot of crying and wailing, and end up by praying for his soul, or something.

And he remembered how another Parson Laird, years ago, had prayed that his sins, his, Henry Jevons's, would be blotted out in the shadow of the cross. And he laughed aloud as he entered the church and sat down in a pew where he had a good view of everything.

He stared with supercilious satisfaction at the population of Johnsonville, the people gathered there in a hushed packed group, waiting their parson's last word, and the death of their town, and they were bowed of head and their hearts were sad. And again Jevons laughed, softly, to himself this time. This was going to be very good! Wait till Gold Rush Joe Budd heard about it, out in whatever wilds he roamed.

THEN the parson appeared upon the platform, and stood for a moment behind the pulpit, with his face lifted. But the parson was not sad. His face was calm and content, and there was a light in his eyes. And he looked out over his people, and turned slowly toward the altar.

He said clearly: "Dear God, we thank Thee."

Then he reached out a hand, and Jevons noticed for the first time, with a feeling of vague surprise, that upon the altar sat a large canvas sack. Funny thing to be on an altar. Dale Laird laid his hand on the canvas sack.

"My friends," he said gently, "if a baby walks too soon, he falls and suffers. If a bird tries to fly before its wings have developed, it falls to earth and is pounced upon by some beast of prey. We, here in Johnsonville, stepped ahead of our stride and found a beast of prey upon us."

Jevons blinked. Was the parson looking at him?

"But a way out has come to us," Laird went on, and his voice rose, and something pealed in it like the mellow reverberations of a bell. "In our trouble a man has come to us, a man who has loved this town even more than we have loved it. On this fifteenth day of August we are pledged to pay to Henry Jevons sixty thousand dollars. And here in this sack upon the altar—we have sixty-five thousand dollars in pure gold. Our benefactor is not here to receive our thanks. He has gone away, on to other trails, with his faithful burro before him. But he gave me permission to tell you this. He is Gold Rush Joe.

"Gold Rush Joe donated his discovery claim for the grounds of this church, when there was no other land in the town to be had. He was always sure he had not exhausted the claim, but he did not know where the remainder of the gold lay, and he would not dig on in consecrated ground. But this was different. The gold that was there was consecrated, too, he said, and the Lord's building needed it.

"He gave me the gold he dug up and sluiced out with the waters of the creek. Sixty thousand dollars is to go to pay our debt. The other five thousand is to go to keep the cross painted every year, and to pay men to take up the sticky asphalt from the street and take it out of the town and burn it. I tell you last, in his own words, what Joe said last to me:

" 'You pay off that crook Jevons, Parson, and you tear up yourself them I O Us he's got on my town. I always knowed the gold was there, only I didn't know just where. But the Lord guided me. I found the gold, parson, I found it—in the shadow of the cross."

Six-gun Spurs

PART V.

By E. B. MANN

HAVING successfully brought up his herd from Texas to bed grounds outside Bird City, Clay Bannerman contracts to sell it to Felix Hardman and John Stanley. Clay meets Janet Harker, Hardman's niece, and later Clay and Stanley visit Ben Sabin's Paradise.

Bannerman once had a "run-in" with Sabin, but the latter now professes to hold no grudge. Leaving the Paradise, Clay encounters an enemy, Bob Trent, and kills him in a gun fight. That night, during a storm, Bannerman's herd is stampeded, and Lefty Lee, his horse wrangler, is killed. Marshal Dan Leffinger of Bird City offers Bannerman a job as deputy. Bannerman refuses.

Then the wild Parsonses—Dave, Sam, and Jim—try to "buffalo" the town, and Marshal Leffinger is killed. Mayor Alderman asks Bannerman to be marshal; again he refuses. Sue Cameron, who runs a game at the Paradise, upbraids Bannerman for his refusal. Then Deputy Bert Blaine is shot by the Parsons crew, and Steve Etheridge, Clay's friend, is found blinded and beaten, presumably by the same group. Bannerman then announces he will be marshal.

In a battle with the Parsons outfit, Bannerman kills Sam Parsons and two other men, and is himself wounded. Meanwhile Sue Cameron learns that Sabin has been searching her room, looking for something,

she thinks, that belonged to her father. Sabin suspects Sue is using his boy, Jeff Jones, to spy on him, and sets a trap for the lad.

Bannerman, recovered from his wound, announces his determination to get the men who killed Lefty Lee. He posts notices making it a misdemeanor to wear guns within the limits of Bird City. This arouses some resentment.

Janet tells Bannerman she loves him, and seeks to dissuade him from continuing as marshal. Sue Cameron, who also loves him, urges him to do his duty. She warns him that Sabin is behind the Parsons crew. Ignoring the plea of Janet, Bannerman keeps his badge and announces he will fight.

CHAPTER XVII.

DANGER SIGNALS.

DAVE PARSONS glared down at the solitaire layout spread on the bunk, then smeared it with a violent sweep of his hand that sent cards slithering across the floor. The cell's four other occupants shot startled looks at him, then looked away.

"Three days!" Parsons spoke barely above a whisper, but the words vibrated in the moist air like wire stretched to the breaking point. "Three days, and Sabin ain't so much as showed his face! I'm sick of it!"

His bloodshot eyes dared a retort. None came. He licked his lips. "Silversmith, pussyfootin' in here ——" He mimicked Silversmith: " 'Sabin can't do anything until the law gets organized. As soon as Bannerman takes over, Sabin'll go to work for you.' Well, Bannerman took over this mornin', didn't he?"

Somebody laughed unpleasantly. "You don't expect Sabin to get us out o' here in one day do you, Dave? We're in here on a murder charge —or was you forgettin' that?"

"I ain't forgettin' nothin'! But I'm beginnin' to wonder! I'm beginnin' to wonder if Sabin aims to get us out o' here—at all!"

Four pairs of eyes slid up to him and rested there. Dave Parsons grinned. "Willin' to listen now, eh? All right, listen! Silversmith says Sabin's scared to ship the herd. Why? It's always been easy enough before, ain't it? Drive 'em in at night, have the cars waitin', slip a hundred or so to a certain inspector, load 'em and roll 'em east. Then everybody meet at the Red Mill the next day for the pay-off. What's different now?"

Parsons leaned forward suddenly. "I'll tell you what's different! We're in jail! We're in jail waitin' for Sabin to spring us on a murder charge—and Sabin's rich! He's got money in the bank, and a sight more in that big safe o' his over at the Red Mill; money he didn't dare put in the bank for fear ol' Gimlet-eye Hale over at the Drovers' would wonder where he got it. And now he's got a nice beef herd back in the hills that he's afraid to ship! Afraid! It's funny to me that Ben Sabin should get so cautious all of a sudden! And Silversmith—he's scared. You notice that? All the time he was talkin' to us this mornin' he was jumpy as a cat. *Why?*"

Some one said mockingly, "All right, Dave: why?"

"I don't know. Maybe Silversmith knows somethin's gonna break and he's tryin' to figure which way he should jump. All I knew is, Silversmith is dependent on Sabin's backin', the same as we are; and Silversmith is scared. Why? Well, maybe he knows he's about to lose

that backin'. Maybe Sabin figures he's crowded his luck far enough and aims to quit. That herd—if Sabin didn't have to split with us, he'd clean up big. He could set back then, quit takin' risks, and live easy. Sabin made his pile by trimmin' the suckers, didn't he? What if he aims to play *us* for suckers?"

He had their strict attention now. A man beside him drew a strident breath. "He wouldn't dare! He was there the night Johnnie Ward got his, remember? He knows what'd happen to him if he crossed us."

DAVE PARSONS grinned. "Yeah? What'd happen? Listen, you numskulls! We're in jail! We can't do nothin' to Sabin. We're dependent on Sabin to hire lawyers and pull strings to get us out. And that's what worries me. Ben Sabin's got a lot to gain, and nothin' to lose, by lettin' us stretch rope! And Sabin's smart. Don't ever think he ain't thought o' that!"

"By golly, that's right!" A man sat up; relaxed again. "But, what the devil, Dave! Sabin got Jim out, didn't he? Why would he do that if he didn't mean to shoot straight?"

"Maybe," Parsons said softly, "maybe it was because Jim was due to get out anyway. Maybe Sabin figured, by helpin' him, he could get the kid to do a job for him!"

"A job? You mean—killin' Bannerman? What's wrong with that? Like Silversmith said, if Jim downs Bannerman a lot o' folks will sympathize with him. Bannerman downed Sam; Jim downs Bannerman. A jury'd take that into consideration, I reckon. Be a sight different than if an outsider done it. It might not even come to trial. Come to think of it, Dave, ain't that the answer to all your worries? Ben framin' Bannerman, I mean? He wouldn't do that, would he, if he was figurin' to double-cross us? And he *is* framin' him. Silversmith said so."

"Sure. And suppose the double cross begins right there? Look! Silversmith says there's to be a man hid out somewhere, and when Bannerman goes for his gun this hombre's to drop him. But suppose this hombre don't do it? Then it's an even break between Jim and Bannerman; and give Bannerman an even break, he can spot the kid high, low, jick, jack, and game and still beat him, easy! Well, with Jim out o' the way, all Sabin has to do is sit tight and let 'em hang *us* and he's in every dollar we've earned him! I tell you, I don't like it! The more I think about it, the *less* I like it!"

There was a long, uneasy pause. Some one said nervously, "We'd better warn the kid——"

Dave Parsons grunted. "How? You heard what Silversmith said: 'No visitors.' Bannerman's orders, Silversmith got by because he's sheriff. But he won't be back—and we can't send for him."

A hard-eyed man leaned forward a little. This was his first month with the Parsons outfit, and he hadn't liked it. But advice from a newcomer was always unwelcome in any outfit and so he'd let them talk. But now——

"You're awful suspicious o' this Sabin all of a sudden, ain't you? Before this, it's been Ben Sabin this, Ben Sabin that. Now, you'd bite a dollar if Sabin handed it to you! All right; I ain't kickin'. I never liked the guy myself. But talk won't get us out o' here. What d'you aim to *do* about it?"

Dave Parsons said sarcastically,

"Maybe *you* got a suggestion to offer?"

"Maybe I have, at that! All this time, you guys've been dependin' on Sabin. Not me! Sabin don't mean a thing to me. I don't know him; how do I know he's on the level? So I ain't spent three days in this coop without doin' some figurin' about what I'd do if Sabin *ain't* on the level."

The speaker shot a wary look at the door. "Look! Silversmith said Bannerman wasn't to show at the Paradise till after eight. At seven, Old Whiskers out there brings us our supper. All right! Every time Old Whiskers brings us a meal, what does he do? He sets the tray down on the floor, pulls out that old cannon o' his, and makes us all get back to the back end o' the cell, don't he? Then he gets his keys, unlocks the door, shoves the tray through, and locks the door again. Right? And when he comes for the tray again he goes through the same rigmarole, only backward."

"Yeah," Dave Parsons said. "And I reckon you're gonna suggest that while he's got the door open we rush him. Well, you're crazy! Old Whiskers, as you call him, is a jasper by the name of Benjamin Tate. He's old, and they give him the job o' keepin' jail mostly out o' charity, maybe; but Ben Tate used to be a fightin' man! As slick an hombre with a gun as you'd want to meet. He can still shoot. That old-timer could down all five o' us before we'd lay a hand on him!"

THE hard-eyed man slid one hand down inside his boot. It came up gradually—holding a knife. Dave Parsons stared at it.

The man grinned craftily. "Whiskers may be a second Wild Bill Hickok with a gun—but when it comes to friskin' prisoners, he ain't so hot! You gun fighters got the idea there's nothin' but a gun; let me tell you somethin'! With this bright baby o' mine up my sleeve, I'll take on any gun fighter that ever lived at any distance up to thirty feet and I'll put five inches o' steel in his throat before he fires a shot!"

"I doubt it," Parsons said flatly. "But—you got somethin' there, at that. Tate won't be expectin' anything—and you could have the knife all set, ready to throw——" He nodded thoughtfully. "That'd give us Tate's gun, and there's plenty more in the armory in Bannerman's office." His lips drew back. "I hope he's there when we go after 'em! Smash him, then pay a little call on Ben, collect what he owes us——"

"Owes! Take all he's got!" The hard-eyed man caressed his boot. "This baby o' mine is a good persuader! You slide the point under a man's toenails, for instance—— Sabin even might open up that safe o' his! And we can pick up the herd on our way out. Might as well make a clean sweep of it. And it'll be easy. There's only three or four men out there."

Dave Parsons grinned. "Pard, looks to me like I been underratin' you! You're smart! With Sabin's bank roll and Sabin's herd for a starter, we can drift west a piece and hole up. A few more Indian raids on the trail herds, plus natural increase, and by the time the railroad reaches us we'll have more cattle than John saw! And nobody to split 'em with, either! Man' we'll be rich!"

Early afternoon sunlight slanting steeply down over the top of the Drovers' bank building laid a warm golden carpet on the dusty square.

Ben Tate, dozing beside the jail, smiled faintly in his sleep and turned his other cheek to it.

Quick footsteps down the shadowed hall behind him wakened him. He yawned and stretched and turned his head—and blinked. A girl in blue stood before the closed door of the marshal's office and it was a full minute before Tate recognized her.

Sue Cameron smiled down at him. "Sorry to wake you, Uncle Ben. I want to see Clay Bannerman."

Tate scrubbed his chin. "Lord love you, child, I'd wake up any day to see a purty thing like you! Done me a favor's what you sure did. Reckon Bannerman'll say the same thing, if he's got sense. He's in there, all right. He's rootin' through Ben's files. Go right on in."

He watched the door close after her and smiled. Bannerman might never be the peace officer that Dan Leffinger had been—that was a thing that time alone could tell; but Bannerman had caused one marked improvement in this town. Sue Cameron had never dressed like that to call on Leffinger!

"Excited, too, she was," Tate thought. "Cheeks red as peonies, and her eyes a-shinin'——" His smile died wistfully. "Pshaw! *Peonies!* I ain't seen peonies in twenty year! I'm gettin' old!"

Bannerman pushed his chair back and stood up stiffly. The desk in front of him was littered with two hour's work. Files; bits of evidence; case histories in Leffinger's small careful script; guns neatly ticketed: "Colt, .45 caliber, walnut grips. Property of Jim Hilton. Exhibit A, Sheldon case." "Smith & Wesson, .44-40. Property Wm. Barth. Exhibit A——" et cetera. Histories of every case Dan Leffinger had touched; minute details; a complete record of Dan Leffinger's term of office from the first day of his incumbency down to the pasteboard box labeled, "Contents of Marshal Dan'l Leffinger's pockets at time of death."

Contents of Dan Leffinger's pockets. One rifle cartridge, two silver dollars and some change, two knives—— One was the knife the cook had found beside the picket line the morning after Bannerman's stampede. A Barlow, one large blade, one small, the wooden handle scarred by fire.

BUT it was the contents of Leffinger's brain that Bannerman needed. Some one had known enough to send Dan Leffinger to Bannerman that morning after the stampede. Who? "If I knew that," Clay thought, "I'd have a starting point."

Footsteps came down the hall and stopped outside the office door and Bannerman stepped silently aside. A little murmur of voices reached him. He touched his gun. The door swung in, half shielding him.

Sue Cameron came through and stopped, facing the vacant desk. She held a package in her hands; a small flat bundle wrapped in brown paper.

It was odd, he thought, that she should come just now. Only a moment ago he had finished reading Leffinger's terse history of her father's death. The file lay open on his desk now; the file, and Monte Cameron's gun. It, too, was ticketed: "Colt, .22 caliber, bone butt plates, carved." They had found it in his hand with an empty shell under the hammer. Leffinger had ended his record with the words: "Coroner's verdict, suicide." The gun had stirred a vague curiosity in Bannerman. A .22-caliber gun in a .45-caliber country——

He saw the girl's flushed eagerness die gradually, giving way to disappointment and bewilderment. He saw her find, and recognize, the gun. He said, "I'm here, Miss Cameron." And closed the door behind her.

It startled her. She wheeled, her eyes suddenly wide. "Oh! Oh, I—see!"

He shrugged. "I'm a new dog in a strange kennel, Miss Cameron. And I'm a careful man."

Her laughter had the sound of muted bells. "You mean that seriously!" she said. "You do, don't you?"

He shrugged. "Why not?"

She shook her head at him, her eyes still sparkling. "Tell any one in this town that you're a careful man, Clay Bannerman, and see if they don't laugh at you!"

He grinned. "There's ways, and ways, of bein' careful, ma'am. Won't you sit down?"

She took a chair beside the desk. It struck him now, a second time, that she was sweetly made. Her eyes were just as he remembered them from his first glimpse of her; a darker blue than he had ever seen. Her mouth was richly wide, made for laugher—or for love. There'd be no coldness there, he thought—and felt ashamed, as of a vague disloyalty.

She met his gaze. "I'm sorry if anything I said this morning helped to persuade you into anything that you'll be sorry for. I mean—Miss Harker seemed to think——"

He shook his head. "I've got a job to do. I started it; I can't back down. I reckon that's a thing a woman couldn't understand."

She smiled. "I'm not an ordinary woman, Mr. Bannerman. I'm Monte Cameron's daughter."

It was a simple statement, tinged with pride. She'd put it differently before: man-raised. She'd told Jan Harker that.

"That's what I came to talk to you about. About my dad. You see, I've just found out—dad didn't kill himself. I've known that all along, of course. A man would have to be afraid of something, wouldn't he, to kill himself? Dad never was afraid of anything! You knew him, didn't you?"

Clay nodded. "Yes. Not well. But well enough to know why you're so proud of him. He was a man."

She smiled. "He liked you, too. He played poker with you, remember, when you were here before."

SHE turned and reached across the desk. "This is his gun; the one they found—beside him." She let her fingers rest on it. "It's really mine. He bought it for me; taught me to shoot with it." Her eyes filled suddenly. "Oh, don't you see? He never would have used my gun! Not even if——"

She choked, and then went on again. "I told Dan that. Dan Leffinger. He said it wasn't evidence. That's why I took dad's job. I thought by putting myself in his place, among the people who knew him—it had to be one of the people who knew him, you see. He was left-handed; and they found the gun in his left hand. He didn't *deal* left-handed. He shot and ate and wrote that way. So it couldn't have been just any one who'd played with him. It had to be some one who knew him well. And so I took his place. I even lived in the very room where it—happened. I thought, sooner or later, I'd see something, hear something—Jeff helped, of course."

"Jeff? Oh, yes. The boy in Sabin's place; the kid in uniform."

Sue smiled. "Dad gave him that. He worshiped dad. He's loyal."

Loyal. Loyal—and curious. Clay sat completely motionless. A light was dawning! A boy like that would overhear—a lot of things!

"Jeff told me something this morning; something dad had said to him. About the wardrobe; the one in his room—my room, you know. It meant something; I knew that. But I couldn't think what. It wasn't until I walked into the room a while ago, after I'd talked to you, that it occurred to me to measure it——"

Clay straightened suddenly. "Wait a minute!" He slid a hand into his shirt pocket and laid a paper on the desk; a note; the note John Stanley had given him the day he came. *"You're a friend of Clay Bannerman's, aren't you? Get word to him to double his night guard after he crosses the Cimarron."* He kept it covered with his hand.

"Listen! The morning after my herd was stampeded, Dan Leffinger came out there. He said somebody'd told him there'd been some sort of trouble. The only ones who could have told him that—who could've known it—were the ones who started that stampede—or somebody who had overheard them talkin'!" He closed his fist. *"You* told him, didn't you?"

She nodded. "Yes——"

"And you wrote *that!*"

He held the note in front of her. She glanced at it.

"I wrote it; yes."

"How did you know?"

"Why, Jeff—Jeff heard them talking about it——"

"Them? Who?"

"Sabin, and Dave Parsons, and Pierre le Du——"

"Sabin, and Parsons, and Pierre le Du!" Clay smiled. "Of course! It would have been the Parsons outfit who would've hit me on the trail."

Sue looked at him. "I thought you knew. Dan did——"

"Dan didn't tell me anything. He said I'd have to be a deputy before ——" He stopped and frowned. "Look here! You say Dan knew—and yet he didn't put a stop to it!"

Sue said impulsively: "Don't blame him, Clay. He tried. Remember, Dan had no authority outside of town. And most of these things happened down the trail somewhere. That's why he wanted you so badly. He planned to make you his deputy and then, secretly, get you a commission as a United States deputy marshal, so you could work outside.

"He worked outside himself, sometimes; whenever he dared leave town. He was out somewhere, hunting for evidence, the time Jeff overheard them plotting to raid your herd down on the Cimarron. That's why I had to send that note to Stanley. When they *did* hit you, we didn't know it was coming until after it was over. We didn't even know, then, what had happened——"

She made a little pleading gesture. "Don't you see? Dan was methodical. He needed proof. All he had was Jeff's word. A mere boy—— He couldn't go to court with that."

"Court?" Bannerman clipped the word out savagely. *"Court!* Judge Colt——" He paused and shrugged. I know. Dan was a lawman, clear to the core. He'd have to do a thing the legal way. Tip Kline was right; *I'm* not. I don't need proof——"

He paused, his eyes fixed on the knife some one had dropped beside his picket line. "Or if I do——" He picked it up. "You ever see this knife before?"

It was a chance; an odds-on chance.

Sue glanced at it. "Why, yes! It's Pete le Du's. That burned

place on the handle—he was sitting at my table one night, watching the play. I asked him to help me stack my chips. He laid his cigarette across the knife——"

Clay grinned. "That's all the proof I need!" he said.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VOICE FROM BEYOND.

CLAY stepped to the door and called Ben Tate. "Get Whit McAllister," he said, "and fetch him here."

He turned to Sue again. There was a bright exhilaration in him now; an eagerness. Movement! No more long waiting days! No more delay! He said, "Where's French Pete now?"

"He's sleeping off a drunk, Jeff said. In Maizie's house. Maizie lives in a little house out on the west end of Catlin Street."

"She lives alone?"

"Except when Pete is there."

Bannerman nodded and sat down. He smiled a little, his eyes glinting with a deep inward fire. Abstractedly he poked his left arm out, flexing the heavy muscles back of it. There was but little soreness there. The wound might hamper him a little in the long run; lessen his endurance; but a slightly weakened left was less of a handicap than was a hang-over. With a hang-over, a man's reflexes are delayed and slow. French Pete would have a hang-over——"

Sue looked at him. "You're planning something, Mr. Bannerman. Mind telling me——"

He grinned at her. "You called me Clay a while ago."

She flushed. "All right, then. Clay!"

He leaned forward a little. "Listen! The night my herd was stampeded somebody tried to raid my picket line. I busted into them. Somebody took a cut at me with a knife and, in the tussle, he dropped the knife. This knife—it was Le Du's. So the men I want—the men who hit my herd that night—were Pete le Du and the Parsons outfit. They were actin' under Ben Sabin's orders. That's proved by what Jeff overheard. They got six, seven hundred head of my cattle that night. Since then, Ben Sabin's bought the Parsons herd. It's a ten-to-one bet that the Parsons herd was made up mostly of stolen stock. Sabin hasn't shipped those cattle. I know, because my men have been watchin' the shippin' pens. He's still got 'em."

He was entirely serious now. He paused; began again upon another tack. "You heard Tip Kline raisin' Cain about the new city ordinance. Tip's wrong. You had the right of it. Guns haven't helped us Texas men. Guns never will. Not in the trail towns.

"Anything that happens to a Texas man in a town like this, the public shrugs and says, 'Another gun-totin' Texan started somethin' he couldn't finish.' That's all. But take a man that's checked his guns—he's made it pretty plain that he ain't lookin' for trouble, ain't he? Fun, maybe; but not trouble. So if anything happens to *him* nobody can say he had it comin' to him, can they? That's my idea.

"But I've got to have the Texas men behind me. I can't fight them and the town, too. That editorial in the paper came as near to wreckin' me as anything could, I reckon. But this deal with Jim Parsons gives me a chance to square myself. With the Texas crowd, I mean. If it works out the way I want it to—— I've talked to Kline. He's the man

to do it. Tip's as comical as a lop-eared pup when he's drinkin', and he's popular. If he stays just sober enough to say what I told him to say——"

He let that ride.

"Suppose that works out like I think it will. That'll be a beginnin'. But——" His eyes drew tight. "Suppose, right followin' that, I was able to show that Texas crowd *results!* Suppose I was able to show 'em who promoted all them raids; show 'em who's been stealin' their cattle? You said Leffinger couldn't go to court with nothin' but a boy's testimony; suppose we was to try Ben Sabin before a court of Texas men, presentin' maybe ten or fifteen hundred head of stolen beef? We'd have the boy's testimony, too, to fall back on; and we'd have French Pete's knife, with witnesses to swear where it was found. But if we had the cattle——"

Sue's eyes were shining now. "Suppose," she said, "you had a confession signed by a man who used to work for Dave Parsons; a man Parsons killed because he got drunk and lost some money Ben Sabin had given him to give to Parsons? Would that help?"

CLAY stared at her. "I'll say it would! The only thing is, we haven't got it."

"Oh, but we have!"

Sue touched the package in her lap. "When I came in here a while ago, and before you so rudely interrupted me, I told you that I'd just discovered that my father didn't kill himself. That didn't seem to strike you as being awfully important, at the time——"

Bannerman's face turned slowly red. "I'm sorry!" he said contritely. "Sue, honest, I—if kickin' me would help——"

Sue laughed. "I didn't mind. And anyway it fits in better now. Did it ever occur to you that it was odd that Ben Sabin should give a woman a job at one of his tables? It did to me. I asked for it, but I didn't think he'd give it to me. If I'd been a decorative thing—you know: enticing; luring men to their ruin; that sort of thing—but I wasn't. I made it a point not to be. The clothes I wore, for instance. Sabin even complained about that. But he let me stay. I wondered.

"And then I found out that Sabin was taking a peculiar interest in my room. Several times when I was out, Le Du and Sabin searched that room. Jeff saw them. Naturally, it occurred to me that dad must've left something there; something Sabin knew about, and wanted, but couldn't find. Well, I couldn't find it either.

"This morning, Jeff told me a queer story about dad's telling him to tell me never to sell his wardrobe; that it'd been in his family for countless years, and so on. Well—it hadn't! I was with him when he bought that wardrobe, and it was since we came here. I'd searched that wardrobe before, of course. I searched it again. And I found—nothing! Not a single solitary thing!

"Then, after I got back from the Trail's End Inn this morning, it occurred to me to measure it. I did—and I found that there was a difference of four inches between the inside and the outside measurements, from top to bottom. Dad had fitted a false top into it, leaving a space between it and the old top. He'd done it cleverly. Even after I knew it was there it took me an hour to find out how to open it."

She was unwrapping the package in her lap as she talked. She paused

and let the paper fall away. Bannerman leaned forward a little. He saw a flat brown book; a cigar box, its cover held by rubber bands; and —nothing else.

Sue's voice went on. "The only thing of dad's that was missing, so far as I knew, was this." She touched the book. "I asked Sabin about it. He said he remembered, vaguely, seeing Leffinger or Blaine or one of the coroner's jury—somebody —looking at some such book as this in dad's room. I supposed they'd found it and took it to see if there was anything—a note, perhaps——"

She held it out. Bannerman took it, running the pages through. It was a diary. Not an orderly one with daily entries, but an irregular haphazard record of a man's affairs. Notes; dates, so many dollars won or lost. Once or twice the man had made daily entries over a period of a week or so, but these were rare.

These things, together with a running history of the life of a girl child spoken of as Sue, or "Kitten," but oftenest simply as "she"; as if, to the writer, the word could have but one possible meaning. "She said ——" "She beat me playing double sol to-day." "She's eighteen years old to-day, and growing prettier."

He was aware again of Sue's voice. "You see it isn't a regular diary. It was only when I was away from him that he'd write down what happened; a little every day, so when I got back I could read it and know —what he'd been doing; what he'd thought about——" Her voice broke jaggedly.

When she spoke again her voice was flat, strictly controlled. "He knew it was coming. He sent me away, that last time, to keep me out of it. Here; let me show you the important parts."

She took the book and turned to a page well toward the back. She read aloud: "'Ben borrowed your pistol this morning. Said there was a rat in his office and the .22 wouldn't tear up the floor as bad as a .45 would. So if I should forget it and you miss the gun, ask Ben for it.'"

SHE raised her eyes to Bannerman's. "You see? Ben Sabin knew him well enough—and he had the gun."

Bannerman nodded. His lips were drawn to a thin hard line.

She turned the page. "Now, this:

"Kitten, this will look pretty foolish, maybe, my writing this instead of just waiting until you come back and telling you about it; but something happened to-day and—well, I'll feel easier in my mind, maybe, if I get it down on paper.

"First, I'll have to go back a bit to make it clear to you. You've never liked Sabin—and neither have I, for that matter—and I reckon you've wondered why I stayed with him. The fact is, Kitten, I was trying to do right by our little Nell; trying to make you rich! No; seriously: Ben's smart. I knew that, and I thought he'd make me some money.

"It happened this way: Sabin and I hit Bird at about the same time, and you know how it is when you meet somebody you know in a strange town. Ben had a bankroll at that time, but he socked it into real estate. He bought the corner where The Paradise is now; and, later, he bought the old bank building out on North Second Street; the building where the Red Mill is now. In the meantime, he'd had that run-in with Clay Bannerman—you were here yourself by that time—and the suckers Ben had been trimming were scared of him after that and they laid off of him. Too, he had a run of bad cards. To make a long story short, he was broke.

"In the same meantime, I'd had a run of luck and I had more money than I'd had in years. Ben knew that, and he came to me for a loan. He had visions of building the biggest saloon and gambling joint west of the Mississippi; said he'd clean up a fortune if he could get going in time to reap the harvest that was coming up the trail from Texas. Well, I knew if I kept my roll I'd

probably lose it; so I let him have ten thousand and he gave me a mortgage on The Paradise and a contract promising me ten per cent of any profits the place made.

"Well, that's the background. I didn't tell you, because you hated The Paradise and wouldn't have liked knowing that I was part owner of it. I didn't like it, either, the way Ben handled it; but I had no say-so in the running of it, ever. My idea was to cash in soon and surprise you.

"It wasn't until about a week ago that I got wise that Ben was back of this cattle stealing. Indian raids down on the trail—not Indians at all but white men, the Parsons boys and others, working for Sabin and selling their beef through him and Steen. I asked Ben, then, to buy me out. He hedged. That was when I decided it'd be a good idea for you to visit your mother's folks.

"With you away, I started putting the pressure onto Ben, trying to get him to pay me off. He laughed at me; said I was a fool to call in a good investment. He said, too, that he didn't have the cash. That was a lie and I knew it. Ben's been making more money than he could account for, and he's been caching the surplus in the Red Mill. Remember, that was the old bank building. He got the bank's big safe, along with the building.

"The Red Mill, by the way, is another reason why I wanted to cut loose from Ben. It's just a dive, but it gives Ben a place to trim the poor devils he'd rather not have hanging around The Paradise. If a sucker can't be separated from his cash any other way, Ben manages somehow to get him into the Red Mill and, when he wakes up, he's sure to be a sadder if not a wiser man! You know; Mickey Finns, or just a plain rap on the head; any way to get his roll. I've known that for quite a while, but there wasn't anything I could do about it.

"You'll think, I'm afraid, that I turned out to be a pretty good for nothing, helpless sort of dad, Kitten; getting roped into all this nastiness and not being able to do anything about it, and all. I guess that's right; but, Sue, I did so want to leave you safe——

"Anyway, that brings us down to what happened to-day. Last night, rather. There was a big game running until about two o'clock and when it ended I slipped out for a breath of air. Crossing that deep arroyo north of town I heard a man groaning. He was lying in a clump of weeds and, even by moonlight, I could tell that he was done for. He'd been shot and beaten to a bloody pulp. But he was still alive. It's amazing, sometimes, how the human animal can cling to life! His name was Johnnie Ward; just a kid, in years; and —he was scared.

"It took him more than two hours to die, Kitten. I stayed there with him. He wouldn't let me go for a doctor; said it wasn't any use. And he was right. He didn't suffer much. He'd got past that before I found him.

"He talked. It seemed to do him good to talk. And I listened. Later, sitting there beside him, I wrote his story down on the back of your last letter. He signed it just before he died. He had a checking account with the Drovers', he said; so his signature could be proved authentic if necessary."

SUE paused. "The letter's here," she said. "I'll read it, so you'll understand.

"To Whom It May Concern:

"I, John Ward, being about to die from wounds but being of sound mind and clear memory, do state the following as being true, so help me God:

"I have been employed for the past year by Dave Parsons. Working for him and by his orders I took part in the stealing of cattle by means of raids on trail herds. On these said raids, I and the said Dave Parsons and his brother, Sam Parsons, and others named or called as follows——

"He goes on here to name the men, describe the various raids as to time, place, and the ownership of the herd raided and numbers of cattle stolen——"

"The cattle so acquired were driven to Bird City and there disposed of by Ben Sabin who acted as buyer and managed the shipment of said cattle by the aid of a stock inspector whose name I do not know.

"Acting on behalf of Dave Parsons I did to-day receive the sum of one thousand dollars from Ben Sabin, to be paid to Dave Parsons; but being drunk I did engage in a gambling game and did lose the said money. Upon meeting with Dave Parsons later, in the Red Mill, with Sam Parsons, Ben Sabin, Pierre le Du and others also present, the said Dave Parsons accused me of stealing the money I had lost and himself and to-

gether with Pierre le Du beat me and later shot me and did carry me in a buckboard to an arroyo about one mile north of Bird City and did there leave me for dead.

"This statement is made to and written down by one Monte Cameron who found me here; which writing I have read and do affirm to be the truth as I have stated it and as it actually happened.

"Signed: JOHN WARD.

"This 7th day of June, 18—."

Bannerman stood up stiffly, his big hands knotted into fists. "That clinches it!" he said.

Sue raised her hand. "There's more. Listen. This is from dad's diary again——"

"I went to Sabin this morning and told him what I'd found and that I had the boy's dying statement. Maybe I should have gone to Leffinger. I know I should. But you know how it is. All my life I've never been too friendly with the law. A gambler can't depend on the law to take care of him; he's got to take care of himself. Maybe I'll go to Leffinger yet. The more I think of it, the more I think I'll have to. I can't let things go on like this.

"But to go on: I went to Sabin, told him what had happened, and told him that I wouldn't be connected with that kind of business, directly or indirectly. I told him unless he paid me what he owed me I'd turn the kid's confession over to Dan Leffinger.

"Call it blackmail. That's what it is, I suppose. But that money is yours, Kitten; the only chance I've got of making your life safe after I'm gone. And my part of it is honest money. I never turned a crooked deal, or a crooked card, in my life.

"I gave Ben till noon to-morrow."

Sue Cameron looked up. "That was written the day before he—died. The rest is short."

"Ben paid me this morning; eighteen thousand in big bills. But it's nothing to shout about, because Ben's even smarter than I thought! Smarter, and crookeder. He's got the mortgage I held, and the contract—he wanted Johnnie Ward's statement, too, but I kept that—and he intends to have the money back, besides!

"I was still in bed when Ben came to my room. I got up and dressed as soon as he left, figuring to take the money to the bank. When I stepped out into the hall, Le Du was there. He said, 'Get back inside, Cameron. You ain't goin' nowhere!'

I don't know, yet, why I didn't go for my gun. He was nasty about it; made it real plain that he expected trouble, and wanted it. I'm not afraid of Pete, Lord knows! He had a gun, but he's no great shakes on the draw. I could have dropped him.

But I didn't. I stepped back into my room and took my gun out and looked at it. Sue, the cartridge next to the hammer was a blank! It would have fired, made a racket, but there was no slug in it!

"The gun was hanging at the head of my bed when Ben waked me up this morning. It had been there all night. Either Ben fixed it, or somebody slipped in during the night. If I'd gone for my gun when Pete stopped me a minute ago, slow as he is Pete would've downed me before I could have fired a *second* shot.

"I don't know what I'll finally do. I could reload the gun and shoot my way out, or try to. Or I could open the window and yell for help. I'd hate to do *that,* though. Before I do anything else I want to write this down, so you'll know. I'm putting the money and this diary in a place I fixed in the wardrobe some time ago. I've told Jeff a wild tale about the wardrobe being an heirloom. He'll tell you that, and, being a smart kitten, you'll know there must have been some reason for my telling such a whopper. You'll find the stuff, I think. Unless Ben finds it first.

Keep your chin up, Kitten——"

SUE choked. "I can't—read any more," she said brokenly. "It's just his way of telling me—good-by."

Bannerman nodded and laid an awkward hand on her shoulder. It wasn't hard to figure what had happened next. Either Monte Cameron had gone out into the hall to shoot his way out, and had failed, or some one had gone into Cameron's room and murdered him. Just how the thing was finally done would probably never be known; but no matter how it was done, no matter who

had actually pulled the trigger, the guilt rested primarily on Ben Sabin. Sabin had had the gun, and the motive.

Bannerman said gruffly: "Does Sabin know you've found these things?"

Sue shook her head. "I left the wardrobe like it was before. In case he searched my room again."

Bannerman nodded. "Here's what you do. Take this money over to the Drovers' and deposit it. Take the diary, too; and John Ward's statement. Get Hale to verify Ward's signature. If it checks, ask him to make a copy of the statement and lock the original up in his vault."

Some one knocked lightly at the outer door and Bannerman called instantly, "Is that you, Whit?" He got McAllister's reply and said, "Come in."

Standing beside the desk, Sue spread the wrapping paper flat and paused. Clay Bannerman had turned to speak to Whit McAllister. The gun, her father's gift to her, lay on the desk. She touched it tentatively—and slipped it inside the folds of the wrapping paper. Wrapped loosely with the box and the book, the added bulk was hardly noticeable. She picked it up and turned.

Clay Bannerman glanced down at her. "Miss Cameron—this is Whitney McAllister. Whit'll go with you to the bank. Leave her there, Whit, and round up all of our boys you can find easy. If you see Wes Camp or any of his outfit, or any other men you know you can trust, get 'em. The more the merrier. But I want good men, and good horses. There'll be hard ridin', with maybe some hard fightin' at the end of it; and no time to lose. If they lack rifles, here's a key to the gun cases yonder; only don't make a show of yourselves gettin' 'em. The quieter we get out o' town, the better. Have my horse saddled and fetch him along. Meet me at Maizie's house, on Catlin Street. Miss Cameron'll tell you where it is."

McAllister's grim face cracked in a grin. "I got it, Clay. Give me three quarters of an hour."

Bannerman nodded. He turned to the desk and raked its litter into open drawers. His hat had fallen to the floor and he stooped to rescue it, setting it firmly on his head. His lips were tight, but he was smiling now. No more dillydallying! No more uncertain measuring of pros and cons. From here on out a man could put his shoulders into it. Action, straight down a given path, gaining momentum like an avalanche——

Sue stared at him. "But you, Clay? What are you going to do?"

He grinned. "Me? I'm goin' to have a little talk with Pete le Du!"

"Alone?"

He shook his head. "I'll take Ben Tate along—to hold my coat."

SHE opened her mouth to protest and closed it again and turned slowly, knowing the sure futility of argument. "To hold his coat." She knew the meaning back of that. He meant to beat a confession out of French Pete. But surely, with Ben Tate along, he would be safe——

McAllister followed her outside, across the square. He must, she thought, be tortured by a keen curiosity. She felt his sidelong gaze but did not look at him, nor did he question her. That took a stoic self-control, she knew; and she was grateful.

Hale, too, asked only what he had

to ask, accepting her answers with a grave courtesy. Sue did the necessary things mechanically; but when Hale left them for a moment to secure a necessary witness to her signature, her thoughts went instantly to Bannerman.

He meant to try Ben Sabin before a court of Texas men. No evidence, no knife with a burned handle, no boy's testimony, not even the sworn statement of a dying man, could sway those Texas men as certainly, as irresistibly, as the mute testimony of blotched illegal brands. That herd, if Bannerman could offer it in evidence, would probe old wounds, rouse bitter memories. All the old resentments—the cattlemen's hatred for the cattle thief; the frontier hatred for the renegade white man who fought with Indians or made personal vendetta behind Indian war paint—all these would flame to swing the Texas men behind Clay Bannerman. Later, perhaps, those other bits of evidence might play their part; but now the need was for a telling stroke, startling, spectacular.

And Bannerman must first locate the herd. He meant, she thought, to get that knowledge from Le Du. But was that possible? She knew Le Du; had seen grim samples of his strength, his cruelty. She knew his unreasoning devotion to Ben Sabin. No threat would ever make him talk; nothing but sheer brutality, matching his own.

She wrote a final signature for Judson Hale and stepped outside. Without a conscious aim, she turned left down West Main Street to Catlin Street, then left again. She remembered that peculiar gesture Bannerman had made a while ago; that stretching movement of his wounded arm. "To hold my coat." Far down the street ahead of her she saw Clay Bannerman turn through a sagging gate.

He was alone.

CHAPTER XIX.

INK-SPOT TARGET.

IT was a little later than usual when Sue Cameron came down the stairs into the main room of the Paradise.

Already, early as it was, the Paradise was filling rapidly. The hum of voices already held a brittle undertone of tense expectancy. Men lined the bar or stood in little groups, talking in quick, excited bursts. Sue moved to her table and arranged her chips, but there were no players. This crowd was not in any gambling mood.

Out of the corner of her eyes she saw Ben Sabin come to the door of his office and stand there for a time, looking down the long lamp-lighted expanse of bar and gambling room. She felt his gaze touch her and stop. She knew that he was noticing her dress. She had not changed, tonight. There'd been no time.

The front doors swung inward violently and Sue looked up. A gun spoke twice, the bullets driving through the floor. A man's defiant, mocking yell rose high above the barking echoes of the gun. Jim Parsons stood motionless for a moment, just inside the swing of the doors, his head thrust forward, low, the smoking gun held warily, his beady eyes searching the room.

The three men in the doorway back of Parsons made him seem small; yet no one, seeing them, would ever fail to pick the deadly member of that little group. Jim Parsons's eyes were hot with a defiant recklessness, a wild insanity. A lock of hair hanging across his eyes gave him a twisted, leering

look. The gun he held was cocked. So was the man.

Ben Sabin, watching him, frowned angrily. Jim Parsons was an ally, but he was a dangerous one. The boy was as unstable, as unpredictable, as dynamite.

Sabin stood motionless till Parsons moved. Convinced at last that no immediate danger threatened him, Jim Parsons swaggered to the bar. He sheathed his gun. Ben Sabin licked his lips, relaxing gradually.

Jeff Jones came down the stairs and turned toward the door of Sabin's office. He was, again, a messenger with no good news and he disliked the rôle. Sabin scowled down at him. "Well?"

"Boss, I went to Maizie's house and knocked but nobody answered me. I saw a light through the keyhole, but nobody come to the door."

Ben Sabin swore. Le Du gone; and Ames, sent out to find Le Du, had disappeared! Not that Ames would be much help, even if he were here; Ames and his silly scruples. But Pete le Du was needed; badly needed. Le Du's absence meant the changing of certain plans——

"Jeff, you go tell Jim Parsons, yonder, that I want him. Tell him to go outside and come around to the outside door to my office. Better go with him and show him the way. The outside door, you understand?"

Jeff rolled his eyes. "Yes, sir!" he said.

"Then what you waitin' on?"

Jeff wheeled and broke into a shuffling trot. Over his shoulder he saw Ben Sabin turn and enter his office. The door closed solidly and Jeff altered his course a little. His new direction took him to Sue Cameron's table.

Sue looked up at him and smiled and nodded. Jeff spoke very low, keeping a wary eye on the door to Sabin's office. "Boss just told me to tell Parsons to come to his office. You want I should listen?"

Sue's nerves drew tight. She'd warned Clay Bannerman that Sabin was mixed up in this. This was the proof! But—how?

She said, "Please, Jeff! You must! It must be something about Clay—about Mr. Bannerman, Jeff. A frame-up of some kind. I've got to know. You'll do it, won't you? You're not afraid?"

"You dog-gone tootin' I'm afraid! I'm scared of the dark, and I'm scared of snakes, and I'm more scared of Cap'n Sabin. But I'll do it! I'll listen and tell you what they say."

Sue tried to smile. Out of the corner of her eye she watched Jeff sidle to the bar. She saw him reach out warily and touch Jim Parsons's sleeve. The man wheeled angrily and Jeff drew back. He delivered his message and Parsons nodded, shrugged, and gulped his drink. She watched him leave, flanked by his men.

Seven o'clock. What was it Bannerman had told McAllister? Hard riding, with maybe hard fighting at the end of it. But Pete le Du had said four men; and at least a dozen men had gone with Bannerman. Surely—surely he would be safe.

IN the bedroom adjoining his office, Ben Sabin laid his coat aside and changed his shirt. The one he had worn was frayed a little at the cuff.

He'd left the outer door unlocked. He heard it open noisily and close again. He called, "Is that you, Jim? Be with you in a minute."

He tied his tie and settled his coat carefully.

Jim Parsons was sprawled in Sabin's chair when Sabin entered the outer office and Sabin smiled at him. "Well, Jim? Our little trick worked, didn't it? Bannerman fell for it, hook, line, and sinker."

"You didn't send for me to tell me that, did you?" Parsons asked venomously. "I know that! What d'you think the whole town's talkin' about? I got two ears!"

Sabin said gently: "You ain't got any fool ideas about this thing, I hope? Give Bannerman an even break and he'll shoot you into doll rags. You know that, don't you?"

"I ain't so sure of it! But nobody's figurin' on givin' him an even break, are they? The way I heard it, you was to have French Pete hid out somewhere, and when Bannerman goes for his gun, Pete's to drop him."

Sabin nodded. "That's right. The only trouble is, Pete's drunk. That's why I sent for you. One of your friends, here, will have to take Pete's place."

Jim Parsons shrugged. "Suits me," he said. "Fact is, I'd rather have Ike, here, backin' me than French Pete, anyway. French Pete might —miss." His glance met Sabin's meaningly.

Sabin said gently, "Why, Jim, you don't think——"

"Never mind what I think! Ike's backin' me and that's O. K. with me. O. K. with you?"

Sabin nodded. This glimpse of the distrust in Parsons's mind had startled him a little; the boy was smarter than Sabin had thought he was. But that was unimportant now.

"O. K. Before you go, though. let's go over it again. You boys'll be at the Red Mill. Better go there as soon as you leave here and stay out o' sight till I send for you. I'll get word to you as soon as Bannerman gets here. Ike, you'll come in here, sabe? Through the outside door, same as you did a minute ago. The door leadin' into the bar will be open a little. Get behind it and have your gun handy. The rest of you, give Ike time to get set, then go on around to the back entrance —the doors at this end of the building—and when you get there, start raisin' hell! Fire four or five shots, and yell. Act plenty drunk. Jim, you be damned sure you fire a shot or two, yourself. I want your gun dirty, see?"

Parsons nodded stiffly. "I got it."

"All right! But put the gun back in the leather before you come in, understand? This is supposed to be an even break. Inside the doors, you swing a little to the right. Get as close as you can to the door of this room. Only be sure you don't block it. Remember, Ike'll be shootin' past you.

"Stand there; make Bannerman come to you. He will, all right. Don't hurry it; you want to give the crowd time to spread out of the line of fire. Ike, you and Jim carry the same size guns, don't you?"

"Yeah. Colt .44s."

"So that's all right. Jim, you'll make your draw—but don't shoot! Ike'll do the shootin'. Ike, you'll have a bead on Bannerman. When he goes for his gun, let him have it! The flash of your gun'll be within a foot or less of Jim's gun hand. Jim'll be standin' in smoke when it's over, and he'll have an empty shell under the hammer of his gun. The gun's just been fired. Get it? Not a man in the world will ever doubt that Jim killed Bannerman! Ike, as soon as you've dropped him, slip outside. Ease around the build-

ing and come in the front way. Mingle with the crowd. You won't be noticed. Now, is that all clear?"

PARSONS stood up. "It ought to be," he said peevisly. "You've told us twice." He turned and laid his hand on the doorknob.

Sabin lashed out at him with sudden violence. "You fool! This thing is serious! It's got to be exactly right!"

"It will be. Stop worryin'."

Parsons opened the door, not waiting for Sabin's answer. He stepped outside. The others followed him and Sabin stood for a long moment, staring after them. He shrugged at last and sat down. He had, he thought, prepared for every possible contingency.

His toe touched something on the floor under his desk. He stooped to look at it.

A pencil!

Sabin straightened slowly, frowning. He had forgotten that!

Swiftly, he solved the problem in his mind. He had sent Jeff to summon Parsons. Jeff must have crawled under the building before Sabin entered the outer office. The pencil must have fallen then. It moved as Sabin looked at it.

He slid his hand inside his coat. There'd be another kind of spot on Jeff's coat this time!

The gun came clear. The ink spot made a neat target. He lined the sights and fired five shots. Behind the echoes, he heard a muffled strangled little cry. Later, there were some scrambling sounds, soon done. Ben Sabin smiled.

The roar of gun fire filled the Paradise and silenced it. Men wheeled, beginning a concerted rush.

Sue Cameron stood up. Parsons was in Sabin's office. The shots had come from there. Perhaps they'd quarreled. She joined the movement toward the door to Sabin's office.

It opened suddenly and Ben Sabin stood there in the opening, smiling, his smoking gun still in his hand. Sue heard him say: "It was just a rat. Sorry, boys. I didn't mean to startle you. A rat just ran across the floor and I shot at it without thinkin'. The worst of it is, I missed! The joke's on me. Which means the drinks are on the house. About face, every one! Step up to the bar and name your poison!"

Sue stepped aside, out of the crush. Voices welled up, laughing, making a joke of it. Sue wondered if it were a joke? If Sabin had killed Jim Parsons——

She watched as Sabin led the onslaught toward the bar. She turned then, swiftly, moving down the long line of gambling rooms to the door of Sabin's office. It stood ajar. She slipped inside and closed it after her.

The marks of Sabin's slugs were plain: five bullet holes—all five of them inside a spot no bigger than a man's hat.

A spot—of ink!

Sue's hand came up against her mouth. A spot of ink! Jeff—crouching there, under the floor—dying, perhaps. Jeff, dying in the dark he feared——

She darted past the desk. The outside door was not locked. She opened it, half stumbling down the steps outside. Down on her knees, she peered into a darkness black as —ink. She whispered, "Jeff!"

She got no answer, but she thought she heard a faint whisper of movement back there in the darkness. She parted the barrier of

weeds at the edge of the building and pushed through it. Weeds tore her hair. A spider web touched her face and clung to it. Dust eddied up. Loose lumber shifted under her. She struck her knee against a nail.

"Jeff!"

She whispered the name over and over again and got no answer. Jeff's fear of snakes came to her mind. Her hand touched something round and smooth. She almost screamed.

Only a stick.

SHE breathed again, and pushed ahead. The darkness closed around her like a solid wall. She was crying now, silently, in the sheer agony of desperate impotency.

Her hand touched cloth. Above her head, a floorboard creaked and she crouched down, her heart pounding. If Sabin came back to the office now and heard her here——

But nothing moved up there and the paralysis of fear relaxed its hold on her. She moved her hand a little and touched warm flesh. Jeff's face! She found his lips and felt them move.

"Miss Sue?"

"Yes, Jeff. Don't speak out loud or——"

"I heard you callin' me—only—it seemed jes' like a dream, at first. You're mighty brave, Miss Sue—comin' in under here for me——"

"I had to come, Jeff. I couldn't just leave you, could I? How badly are you hurt?"

"Hit's purty bad. Hit's in my laigs. Miss Sue, you reckon I'm agonna die?"

"No, Jeff! I'll get you out of here. I'll get a doctor. Doctor Meredith wouldn't let you die, Jeff. You know that, don't you? And I'll get him. I promise!"

"Hit's gonna hurt, though, movin' me, ain't it? I tried to move, right after the shootin'; it hurt then. Next thing I knowed was you a-touchin' me."

"It'll hurt, Jeff. But you'll be brave, won't you? You won't cry out?"

"No, ma'am. I kin stand it, I reckon. Only, le'me tell you, first, what I heard 'em say. Maybe I won't feel like tellin' you, after you move me. Hit wuz about Mister Bannerman, all right. They're gonna have a man hid behind the door to Mister Sabin's office, and when Mister Bannerman goes for his gun, this man's gonna shoot him. You tell him, Miss Sue. Tell him Parsons ain't gonna shoot at all. This other man—behind the door——"

The whisper faded and became inaudible.

Sue thought, "He's dead!" The thought filled her with an unreasoning panic. She conquered it and thrust her hand inside Jeff's shirt. It took her minutes—years—to find his heartbeat. And even then she wasn't sure. She sobbed, and tugged at him.

That long struggle back toward the open air, dragging Jeff's inert dead weight over the loose débris beneath the Paradise, was an endless nightmare, the details of which were never clear to her. It seemed to take her countless years; years of straining labor; years of fear; of desperate, sobbing haste.

She came out finally into the light of stars. No light had ever seemed so sweet to her!

She stood erect at last and lifted the boy's limp shoulders in her arms. His head rolled horribly. She dragged him, moving backward down the long length of the building until she reached the angle under the stairs. She laid him down

there and rolled him back as far as possible under the down slant of the steps. It was black dark there and there were weeds to hide him.

She wondered desperately what time it was. It had been long past seven when Sabin fired those shots. Clay Bannerman would come at eight.

She breathed a prayer: "Please, God, don't let him come too soon!" And ran——

She had to get Doc Meredith. She'd promised Jeff.

To be concluded in next week's issue.

CIRCLE FIGHTING

OF the prairie Indians, the Sioux are pretty generally conceded to have been the best riders, although old scouts and plainsmen tell of superb horsemen among the Pawnees, Omahas and Arapahoes. Whether at war, in the hunt, or at the rough tests of horsemanship at their tribal celebrations, a Sioux warrior was worth looking at. It was this tribe more than any other that practiced the form of attack known among early settlers as "circle fighting"; it was the most dreaded menace to travel on the western prairies and seldom failed to win over stagecoaches and small emigrant trains.

A large number of well-mounted Sioux warriors, armed with powerful bows and a full quiver of arrows, would suddenly appear in a long line at the top of a near-by ridge. The leader, usually a young chief or the son of a prominent member of the tribe, rode a few yards in advance, estimating distances and natural obstructions, such as ravines, cut banks, buffalo wallows, et cetera. At what he decided upon as the best moment for the attack he gave his war cry, swung his body along the side of his pony at high speed, directly in front of the quarry.

If the object of the attack was a six-horse stagecoach, the circle formed quickly behind him, and the ring of howling savages closed in, shooting their long arrows through the bodies of the lead horses. In this manner they often were able to stop a stage and get extra mounts of valuable stock. In these attacks the Indians rode on one side of the horse, exposing only a foot and the top of a warlock to the aim of the defenders. When repeating rifles came into use circle fighting was soon abandoned by the Indians.

G. C. F.

The Good Bad Man

By W. RYERSON JOHNSON

Author of "Rustler's Surprise," etc.

SIX men waited at the water hole. Johnny Anselmo came on, while the dust, hoofed up by his lazy-stepping black, trailed in a sullen cloud.

A brooding hush shrouded the range-garbed men who waited. But if Anselmo sensed anything wrong, he gave no sign of noticing. His glance did touch on their guns. And on their hands. None of those hands were feeling for a draw. If anything, they were held stiffly back.

Anselmo's fingers smoothed across his own ivory-handled guns resting in holsters against his flat thighs. Famous sixes, these. They had blazed their owner into a reputation as wide as the West. Not a savory reputation, the way most folks looked at it.

In close, with the taut silence holding, Anselmo dropped his reins to let the black drink at the water hole. Men stepped aside to give him room. All except one man, who stood stiffly with his back against a cottonwood bole. This one stayed unmoving even when the horse, burying nostrils in the cool water and blowing, showered him from his gun belt down.

None of the six so much as lifted a hand in greeting. After four years they didn't recognize him, Anselmo reasoned. He caught a glimpse of his reflection in an unruffled part of the water surface. A lean, hard face, lips tight, eyes lidded down, looked

back at him. The utter bleakness on that face was startling, even to himself. A man can change a lot between the years of nineteen and twenty-three if he's been crowded, forced against his will to live by his guns.

Again his fingers brushed lightly against the butts of his famous ivory-handled "peacemakers." The gesture was instinctive, springing from the same impulse that makes a man raise his hand to feel his hat brim when he knows all the time it's angled the way he wants it.

The innocent action had a peculiar effect on the six who waited. They froze more stiffly still than ever, as though they stood in hypnotic fear of something. Anselmo wanted to laugh.

He recognized some of them. The beefy-shouldered hombre standing in the unnatural position with his back to the cottonwood trunk was Joe Hopsicker. Anselmo had gone to the same log schoolhouse with him, and they had ridden round-up together before they were fourteen years old.

Anselmo broke the brittle silence then. "Hello, Joe."

Joe Hopsicker answered, but with odd restraint. "Hello," he grunted.

Anselmo let his glance sweep the others. "Hiya, Herman."

"Hiya," Herman Clegg spoke back, swallowing as though his mouth was dry and the effort of speaking hurt him.

Anselmo stepped slowly out of the saddle. In contrast to their ramrod stiffness, he stood in a lazy slouch, the muscles mobile and untensioned over the whole of his lean body.

"Reckon none of you remember me."

Joe Hopsicker showed his buckteeth in a forced grin. "Sure, Johnny, we remember you."

HE considered them quietly. His old-time friends. But he didn't notice any of them crowding to shake his hand. And after four years! Tension was building up every second. Something wrong as a rattler here.

He put a question. "Thad Leepers still around?"

"Yeah," Herman Clegg blurted. "He's borrowed money from old man Childers, and buildin' him up a little spread."

"Where?"

"The old Bar T place."

Anselmo's hand waved out. "You're all wearin' deputy's badges. On a trail?"

The silence that met his question was like something alive, writhing. They stood there like stumps. Finally Joe Hopsicker, with his beefy back still glued to the cottonwood trunk, showed his buckteeth in another grin. But it was a feeble effort. Sweat was beading out on his chunky face—and it was still too early in the morning to be hot.

He said: "Yeah. We all been deputized. We're on a trail."

Anselmo's horse had quit drinking and had moved a little away to nose at the dried bunch grass cropping out of the red gravel. Anselmo stepped closer to the pool. Ripples had run away on the water surface. The deep pool was like a chunk cut out of the sky.

A frosty smile touched his lips as he jerked his thumb behind him. "Trail into Feather Gap still run that way?"

"Yeah," one of them told him, tensely.

Anselmo turned slowly to look behind, and the smile still held on his bleak face, not lighting it, but mak-

ing it more implacably grim than before. It was as though he knew a huge ironic joke which he would share with no one. Half way round he turned, until his eyes were looking away at an angle which momentarily excluded them.

It seemed to be an action they were waiting for. The instant his back was turned they were at him, like wolves tearing at a crippled pack leader. They struck, all six of them, for their guns. Anselmo couldn't see them.

They knew he couldn't. That was why their faces went ashen, and pure terror struck at them, like acid splashing, when something happened away off schedule. Before any of the six had cleared guns from leather, Anselmo had dug boot toe into ground and spun the rest of the way around to confront them. At the same split-wink, seasoned muscles had sprung his wiry body far enough to one side so that two bullets, blazing from upreared guns, punched air harmlessly in the space where an instant before he had stood.

Those two shots mingled close echoes with two more from Anselmo's guns. It was unbelievable, but there it was, happening before their stunned gaze: Anselmo in his lethal crouch, lips and eyes cruel slashes in the lean savagery of his face; and his guns, those dread "peacemakers," snug in hand and talking.

Just those two answering shots—no more. And in each case a gun was bullet-slapped from a man's grasp. The two disarmed deputies jerked tingling hands close in while their six-shooters, lead-glazed from the smashing bullets, plunked to the ground. The other four lost their guns, also—voluntarily. They dropped them with a haste that was ludicrous, and raised their hands high.

"We're in the air!" Joe Hopsicker shouted hoarsely.

Johnny Anselmo's lips cracked just wide enough apart for scathing words. "Next time you go to shoot a man in the back, be sure you stage it away from a pool where your reflection shows."

"We wasn't set to kill you, Johnny," Herman Clegg whined. "Jus' wing you on the edge. It was the only way. You're *dangerous!*"

Johnny Anselmo grinned thinly, and his grin was worse than his smile. "With six of you gunnin', you'd have plumb perforated my edges, wouldn't you? Dangerous? Keep rememberin' it, boys, because the next one of you I meet I'll shoot on sight. Now leave your irons and git!"

HIS famous guns roared, gouging up dirt at their feet. They turned in panic and ran for their horses, jostling each other, teetering off balance on their high boot heels. Herman Clegg fell twice, sprawling flat on his face.

Johnny Anselmo watched them go. The savagery on his face turned to bleak weariness. With the dust kicked up by their routed horses hanging in the sunlit air with a crystalline glitter, he holstered his ivory-handled guns, and turned his attention to the reason Joe Hopsicker had been standing so stiff and close to the trunk of the cottonwood tree.

The man's broad back had hidden a poster. The poster carried a picture of Johnny Anselmo. Underneath it, black-lettered printing said something about "for the apprehension of." Accumulated rewards amounted to five thousand dollars.

Anselmo's lips curled. "Bounty gunners! So even here they know!"

It was a bad moment for him. Maligned, dishonored, crowded to

the dim trails in the West of his choosing, he had turned away from all of it and come back home. Here in the tranquil Feather Gap country, beyond the desert Creosote Range, he had thought he might find peace and a chance to live his life openly as other men did.

But even here his gun rep had preceded him. He had his "move on" order before he had even entered town. It was clear enough that Luke Rose, sheriff of Feather Gap, had received word he was headed this way. Various "reception" committees were doubtless scouring the country. One of them he had just dispersed.

"I'm so tough," he muttered, "that, six to one, they were afraid to draw until I turned my back."

Awareness of his invincibility only saddened him. He was too good with guns. Too good for his own good. His ivory-handled six-shooters had blazed a barrier between himself and all the things he wanted from life—love and friends and peace.

Abruptly he turned and called the black. The horse came at once. He lifted into the saddle and rode. He didn't even tear the reward poster down. He used to do that when his picture on the infamous prints was a novelty. But what was the good of it? Now he let them stay.

Through the lower mountain benches, buried in desert scrub, mesquite and greasewood, he rode; and later in the hot sunlit morning he cut a familiar trail. He held to it warily until, below in a lush valley, he sighted the Bar T ranch buildings and corrals that the rabbity posse men had told him had been taken over by Thad Leepers.

Thad was the closest friend he had ever known. Raised on adjoining ranches, the two had lived their whole rough-and-rollicking boyhood lives together. Johnny Anselmo had led. But Thad Leepers had always been quick to follow.

Warm eagerness shone in Anselmo's tired eyes as he anticipated a reunion with his old friend. Thad, at least, would understand that because the world gave a fellow a bad name it didn't always follow he was deserving of it.

Anselmo let his horse pick a path down the rocky trail into the valley. He came upon Thad mending harness in the tool shed. For a long moment they stared at each other. The years had done something to Thad Leepers, too. He had filled out, grown huskier; but the greatest change was in his face. It wasn't a happy face, as Anselmo had remembered it. The eyes weren't quite as forthright, and the lips, though they were firm enough, seemed set in a twist that might have been called, among other things, cynical.

THE result of hard, grueling years building up this run-down spread, Anselmo guessed. Though perhaps he himself had grown so cynical that he was imagining the whole thing.

Thad Leepers laughed suddenly in sharp delight and reached out his hand. "Put her there, old-timer! The news got around you were headed this way. I been champin' to see you."

Their hands held in that hard grip for a long while. Anselmo grinned, and it was something like his old-time expression, with most of the bleakness pushed away. Good old Thad. Here was one man, at least, who accepted him on the old valuation.

"Stickin' close to home while I've been trampin'. Buildin' yourself somethin' solid. I envy you, Thad."

"Huh? Me? Would you envy a work horse?"

"I know it's been work, old man. But, like I said, you've been buildin' solid."

Thad Leepers snorted. "Solid as a swamp! I had to mortgage my life to old man Childers at the bank. You remember the cacklin' old crow? It ain't enough for him to get his pound of flesh. I got to listen to him tell me how to run my life. Twice he come near foreclosin' when I busted the traces and went on a week-end bender. These's past-due payments he's holdin' over my head right now. Yeah, solid as a swamp, Johnny. You're the one to be envied, you old fox."

Anselmo shook his head. "You wouldn't say that if you knew. There ain't a spot in the West where I can look in and be sure I won't get my hat shot off. Even Herman Clegg and Joe Hopsicker cut down on me this mornin'."

"No! Why, the dirty bounty gunners!"

Anselmo shrugged. "Maybe they were right at that. Reckon they figgered they were upholdin' needful law and order. They likely believed all the stuff that's been circulatin' about me."

"Huh? Sure, they believed it. Why not?"

Anselmo's eyes narrowed. "How you mean, why not?"

"It's on top the grass, ain't it? I mean, you're one gunner that's gettin' away with it. You won't find me like them others. It's no skin off my teeth what you do, Johnny. Listen, I been waitin' to talk to you." Thad moved close, and his hand reached out to clutch a fistful of Anselmo's leather vest. "Listen," he hammered. "I'm ready to take a run-out on this and team with you. Remember how it was when we were kids, Johnny? I was always right behind you. Well, I'm fed up on this two-bit spread. I'm ready to back your plays from here on out. How about it, pard?"

Anselmo felt something akin to physical sickness creeping over him. His old friend was accepting him, yes; but not on the old valuation—*on the new one!*

"Thad, listen; two things I want to get across. First, there ain't the easy life and the gravy to it you're imaginin'——"

Thad chuckled a little hoarsely. The twist on his lips could be called cynical now beyond all doubt. "I'll take my chances, Johnny. Sure can't be no worse than tryin' to make an *honest* livin'."

"The second thing," Anselmo went on, "and I hope it gets across to you better than the first: I ain't tied in on that kind of stuff, anyhow."

"Huh? Don't hand me that!"

"It's straight. I thought you'd know that, Thad. They crowded me out of the game on a stacked deck. Since then I've had to do a little gunnin' here and there to keep my head up. But that's all. The rest of it's lies a mile wide."

Thad Leeper's lips were slack now and quivering. "Whadda you think I am, handin' me that?" he snarled. "You got somethin' good, and you ain't cuttin' your old friends in. All right, Johnny!"

IT was another bad moment for Johnny Anselmo, worse than the one at the water hole where his lesser friends had turned on him. He tried to cool Thad off by switching the talk.

"What about Maya Starr?" he asked. "She ever get married?"

Thad stared with a curious brood-

ing before he answered. Anselmo recalled it vividly afterward.

"No," Thad growled, "she never got married."

Anselmo felt a certain singing set up inside of him that was different from anything he had experienced since he could remember.

"Maya—I always liked her. I'm thinkin' I might stop by and see her before I head out."

"You locoed?" Thad snarled. "The whole country's bounty-gunnin' for you."

"But not too eager to tangle," Anselmo said grimly. "And they won't be lookin' for me to show so close in."

Thad was staring at him speculatively out of half-lidded eyes. "Look, Johnny; forget about me flyin' off the handle. Go ahead, see Maya. Then come back here. With my note overdue to Childers, that old skinflint moralist is watchin' me like a hawk. I can't go to town for a slam-bang jamboree. But neither can you. I'm throwin' a little party of my own to-night. Right here. Plenty of new bottles—and I'll round up a woman for you. Afterward we'll talk some more about me stringin' with you. You're holdin' out, I reckon, on account you don't figger I'd be much help. But I can shoot with any one around here, Johnny, and—I'm not chicken; I never walked out on any of your plays when we were kids, did I?"

"You sure didn't, Thad." Anselmo smiled wearily. "I wish I could get it through your head I was framed to the owl-hoot and that most of the stuff checked to me's been done by others usin' my name for cover. But we'll leave it like you say for now. I'll see you to-night and maybe we'll get things straightened out."

Approaching the Starr ranch house under the blaze of the high sun, Anselmo held to the concealing shade of a windbreak of feathery tamarisks. He found Maya—alone, on her knees, transplanting things in her cactus garden.

For a long moment he watched in silence. There was a glow in his eyes; and his face, that lean, hard face, was strangely softened. Maya, fresh and clean, like a breath of sage-tanged air shot through with sunrise coolness.

Clean things, these last long years, hadn't played much of a part in Johnny Anselmo's life. He had known too many little men with sordid motives. Outside the law and inside it. Greedy men. Cruel. And women pathetically beaten down by the sheer drudgery of living. The places open to him hadn't been clean ones, either. Even away from the *cantinas* and sawdust-floored saloons of trail towns and boom mining camps, on dim trails high in the cool pines, dirt had been there, because the men he had been forced to string with for survival had been dirty.

Amazingly often he had thought of Maya. Sometimes awareness of her was the only reason he could think of for wanting to keep on living. But the bitter years had weighed one on top of another until the vision of Maya had become so wraithlike that often he wondered if she had ever been real.

Now here she was. Bending over her garden with the wind blowing her dress of soft summer gingham against her living body. When she had been a small girl, with dress above her knees and ribboned pigtails to her waist, she had fussed a lot, he remembered, at straightening the books in her desk at school. Now he bet she spent an uncommon lot of time moving the cactus plants

all over the garden and back again. When she was married and happy in a place of her own, she would be the kind to go humming about and changing chairs and pictures around every time she cleaned house.

IF she could be married to him! The thought of it put a breathless bursting pressure against his chest, and out of his shadowy past came to life for a moment a little bald-headed man, a United States deputy marshal in Santa Fe. There seemed to be no connection at the moment. The man had urged Anselmo to give himself up, to put his trust in the fairness of legal processes. But Anselmo had been too wise for that. Trusting too much was what had pushed him into the gun-smoke years. *Not* trusting had kept him living since then.

Anselmo stirred. He thought now he would go away, silently, unseen, as he had come. The forces which separated him from Maya were too overwhelming. Just seeing her was almost more than he could bear. To speak to her would be inexorable torture.

She straightened up then, with the soft oval of her sun-tanned face turned to him—and uncontrollably he breathed her name, "Maya!"

He was glad he did. She came to him. It was a moment he could cherish as long as he lived: Maya coming close to him under the tamarisks, with the feathery green branches caressing her hair and fingering her brown shoulders in the short-sleeved dress.

And then they were talking quietly. Through the gray days and black nights he had tried to imagine how it would be when he met Maya. But he had not foreseen this, that they should talk quietly, almost as though he had left her the night before.

She asked: "Why did you wait so long?"

"They crowded me," he said vaguely. She seemed to be waiting for something else, and a touch of the bitterness that lived with him flared out; he asked: "But what was there to come back to? With the ranch sold, my folks gone——"

"There was me to come back to."

It was so simply and directly spoken. The kind of thing he wanted to hear from her above everything else—but the thing he had been most desperately hoping to forestall. There was no chance under heaven of blending their lives, and this kind of talk could only serve to make it harder for them both.

He wanted her to know, though, how it was with him. "There's nothing I'm ashamed of, Maya. I've been living by my guns, of course—that part's true. But I've done no more shooting than was forced onto me——"

"There's no need for you to explain, Johnny."

"You—believe me?"

"Didn't you know I would?"

His eyes burned. "You're the only one! Even Thad didn't."

Her hand went out to him. "You've seen Thad?"

"Yes."

"Then he must have told you."

"Told me what?"

"That we—we're engaged to be married?"

Anselmo nodded slowly. "You and Thad! Should have guessed it, I reckon. I mind now he was a little restless when I sprang it on him about dropping by to see you. Soon, Maya?"

"Soon as Thad has the Bar T secure. It's been a long uphill fight,

with old man Childers holding his note, like a club, over his head. Childers gets worse as he gets older. I—I almost hate him. Sanctimonious old meddler—using his money to force people to live by his own joyless, penny-grubbing standards. He's threatened to foreclose on Thad. And he will; I know he will the very next excuse he gets. That would finish Thad. He hasn't your staying powers, Johnny. He'd go bad, I'm afraid, in a big way."

Anselmo, remembering Thad's eagerly expressed wish to "throw in with him," could realize the truth of what Maya was saying. Something else he realized, something which struck through him in sudden harsh knowledge. There was menace under the tamarisks! Menace, close, impending!

HE moved two tigerish steps away from Maya, elbows held high and stiff to put his widespread fingers above the ivory-handled guns.

"Owl-hoot's sharpened yore faculties, son," a voice said, from somewhere behind screening branches. The stalker pushed into view, a tall, gaunt man with bristling cow-prong mustache. He wore a law badge, and his gun in the open-flap holster was tuned for quick drawing. But he didn't start anything. With his gun hand he tilted his sombrero rim to scratch thoughtfully at his head.

Anselmo remembered him well enough. Luke Rose, frontier sheriff of Feather Gap, a cunning and hard-shooting peace officer.

"Luke, you ought to make more noise when you walk up to a man like that. Some one might question your honorable intentions."

"Every one knows my intentions, Johnny. I uphold the law. But I'm just as quick to give protection to any man the law might have wronged in another county."

Luke Rose was talking all right. And he was holding his gun hand right. But Anselmo still didn't like the way it looked. He liked even less what happened next.

Luke Rose turned his head and shouted over his shoulder, "All right, Childers, you can come on along now."

There was a sound of crackling branches, and in a few moments a querulous old man, muttering in his scraggly beard and slashing with his cane at the tamarisk branches, ranged into sight.

The sheriff explained: "Ran across Childers on my way here. Seems we both had the same idee, Johnny, about findin' you here, rememberin' as how you used to be courtin' Miss Maya right strenuous. But I had Childers hold back till I sounded out the way ahead."

"What's he want with me?" Anselmo flung out.

"I'll answer that there myself, young hellion," Josiah Childers said in his shrill complaining voice. "I heard talk in town about you askin' the boys at the water hole where Thad Leepers lived. I wanted to find out somethin' for myself, so I went to the Bar T, but you weren't there. Then I came here, and here you are, bein' harbored by Thad's intended wife. That's the same as if it was Thad, and any one harborin' a dangerous criminal is a criminal himself. Criminals ain't deservin' of soft consideration. I'm crackin' down this here very day and takin' over the Bar T, that's what I'm doin'."

"Sounds like the kind of deal an old skinflint hypocrite like you would be makin'," Anselmo said tightly. "Since Thad's got the Bar T on a payin' basis, you've been sit-

tin' up nights figgerin' a moral excuse to let you take over, haven't you?"

Maya's voice sounded, low, intense. "You've got to give Thad another chance, Mr. Childers! You can't know what this would do to him——"

Childers pounded his cane and started talking her down. To Anselmo, suddenly, came a heightening in the uneasiness which had been growing on him. What the old man was saying was well enough in keeping with his character; there was no doubt he would seize this opportunity to take over from Thad—but there was an element of falseness somewhere. Things seemed too pat, too staged——

THAT was it. Staged! Suppose Sheriff Luke Rose had brought Childers along for a front? With the gun rep Johnny Anselmo had built up, the sheriff, as well as his deputies, might hesitate to draw openly against him. But with old Childers here, spouting at the mouth, taking attention from the sheriff, arousing anger to replace cool judgment——

The next split-wink, Anselmo knew he was right. Out of the tail of his eye he caught a blur of movement as the sheriff crouched and drove hand for holster. He may have been going to blast; he may have intended merely to cover. His true intentions were never known, because Anselmo went for his gun, too.

The sheriff had a head start, but Anselmo more than made up for it by speed. There was a single roar of gunfire, curiously swaddled by the close-pressing branches. And when the echoes seeped away, Anselmo's gun was steady in his hand, curling smoke from its muzzle, and the sheriff's six-shooter was on the ground, where it had been bullet-smashed. A trickle of blood ran between the sheriff's stiffly outspread fingers where a splinter had struck.

So again Anselmo was riding, with a misery heavy as the world weighting him down. There was no peace for him. Nowhere in the West that he knew and loved was there a place where he could mingle with men and women and live quietly.

He was too good with guns. His ivory-handled six-shooters kept him living. But it was a stark, barren existence. Even here on his ' y-hood range they wouldn't accept him. To the end of his days he would be hunted like an animal, his life made intolerable by man's inhumanity—denied friends, denied love, denied everything that made life worth living. And even this poor existence couldn't be guaranteed for long. He had already outlasted most gun fighters of his kind. There was a bullet notched for him and overdue, the same as there had been for Hickok and Billy the Kid.

Anselmo's decision then was a natural one. Since life wasn't worth the living in the way he had to live it, and since, anyhow, the odds were against his living it much longer, he might as well choose his own manner of leaving it.

A LITTLE of the bleakness lifted from his face as he turned his horse down the sun-baked greasewood slope toward the Bar T and Thad Leepers. For the first time, now, in years he didn't have to worry about what might happen. He knew what was going to happen. He didn't even have to cover his trail. It was his last trail, and so he had nothing to lose by leaving it wide open as a barn door.

Faster and faster he urged the black along, sardonically aware that he was riding with the same wild abandon, and over the same familiar territory that he had covered as boy. It was fitting, too, that his last ride should be to see Thad, as his first ones had been so long ago in the barefoot years.

When he rode in at the ranch-house yard, he was going over in his mind what he would say. He'd make it short. Probably something like: "You and Maya are the only real friends I've got, Thad. You two love each other, and you could be happy if you could pay off old Childers and settle down here together. Childers is set to scuttle you. But you can fool him. You can pay off his whole note. *You can do it by collecting on me!*"

Thad would balk, of course, and the job then would be to make him understand that Johnny Anselmo didn't have any life left to live, anyhow. Some bounty gunner would be collecting. So it was better all the way round that the two he loved should benefit.

Hitching at the rack near the low porch, Anselmo was aware of a heavy silence pervading the place. There was no one anywhere in sight. Suddenly, cutting through the silence in a way almost unreal, a girl's laugh sounded from within the house. It was unrestrained laughter, and it had a grating, tinny sound.

Anselmo stepped quickly to the porch and knocked. Thad himself threw open the door and dragged him in.

"You didn't have to knock, pard. Latchstring's always out for you." Thad's voice was loud. Anselmo didn't need to see the opened bottles on the table to know that his friend had already started drinking. Thad nudged him, grinned crookedly. "Got a surprise." He raised his voice in the direction of the bedroom door. "Come on out, girls. It's the rest of the party that's here."

The door opened and two girls came out, walking with a soft swing to their hips. One held a cigarette. Both smiled familiarly, showing white teeth against red lips. They were pretty in an overdone, brittle way. Cheeks too rouged, eyes too penciled, hair too obviously colored, gowns cut low and tightly fitted.

"The classiest kids that ever shook a hoof at the Palace Saloon," Thad introduced them. "This is gonna be some party, Johnny."

Anselmo shook his head slowly. "There's not gonna be any party, Thad. I came back for another reason. Listen——"

"You listen," Thad cut in. He had lifted a six-shooter from a holster hanging from a cowhorn rack, and now he carried it close. "You're a six-gun expert, Johnny. Whadda you think of this chucker? I got it in a swap."

Anselmo reached for the gun, and when he did that, Thad said: "Jus' keep on reachin'."

Thad's cynical lips were drawn to a thin knife edge. His eyes were slitted and blazing. His limp hand which had carried the gun had suddenly stiffened. The muzzle was boring dead for Anselmo's middle.

"Move even one knuckle of one finger and I'll let you have it! All six through the stomach!"

Hearing the savage voice, seeing the cruelly set face, Anselmo in that first moment of stunned surprise stayed motionless.

ONLY his lips moved. "You're joking, Thad."

"Will I be jokin' when I cash your carcass for five thousand dollars?" Thad slashed. "I gave you

your chance. You wouldn't cut me in. You had it too good. You wanted to ride alone. All right. You'll ride alone. So will I. But I'll have five thousand dollars to start me off——"

"To start *us* off, honey man," one of the girls chipped in. "Don't commence by making the same mistake your friend did."

Anselmo felt fury as he had never felt it before. He had come here to give his life to his friend. But even before he could make the offer, his friend was demanding. He saw Thad now in his true light. He was cheap, vicious, utterly selfish. He had never loved Maya. More than anything else, it was thinking of Maya which caused Anselmo to make the first uncalculated act of his outlaw career.

Squarely into that threatening gun he lunged. Not with his own ivory-handled irons. With his fist. Thad was too startled to do much. But finger reflex pulled the trigger. Close in like this, he couldn't miss. The gun roared and the bullet bit through bone and muscle.

But gun lead wasn't potent enough to keep Anselmo's fist from getting through. Hard on Thad's chin it landed with a smack that sounded above the clattering gun echoes. Thad's neck stretched back and tipped his body high on his heels. Anselmo chopped from the side, and this time Thad dropped in an unconscious heap.

So once again Anselmo was riding. The old, old story—escape and ride. Riding into what? Into another escape and the blight of continued living. Or into death, and maybe that was better. He carried a shoulder wound this time. Sharp pain daggered with every move of the horse under him. But more searing was the torturing knowledge that his best friend was no different than the rest. Bounty gunners, all of them. They had all betrayed him.

Under the day-long heat of the desert sun, the greasewood flats reflected heat like a hot griddle. The small, thick leaves of the greasewood oozed oil, and in among the high-bushed thickets the heat waves danced in blinding glare.

Pounding along, not looking much where he was going, caring less, Anselmo reined to a hoof-rearing stop. His body lurched and he narrowly missed pitching from saddle. He thought at first that the heat and his mental and physical pain, which were sapping his strength, had ganged up on him in another way, and were conjuring an image from the writhing sun glare. But the image spoke, and then he knew that the rider who had angled swiftly through the tiny-leafed scrub to cut him off was real.

Anselmo answered with a single jetting word, "Maya!"

Maya leaned from saddle, spoke breathlessly: "Luke Rose and Childers chased back into town to round up a posse. I followed along here as quick as I could. You left a pretty wide trail, Johnny. In a hurry, or don't you care any more?"

He muttered a lie. "In a hurry, Maya. Thanks—for tippin' me about the posse." He swayed a little in saddle. He was holding himself stiffly sidewise. He didn't want her to know about the gunshot wound.

SHE was looking at him intently. "It wasn't the posse I came to tell you about. You can duck it easily enough."

"Then what was it, Maya?"

"I came to say—I'm riding with you!"

"Ridin' with me!"

"Wherever you go, Johnny."

He stared with a wild restlessness. Now he was sure that the desert heat had got into his gunshot wound and locoed him; he was dealing with mocking phantoms. But she reined close, and leaned closer still until she touched him. The soft firmness of her hand against his body was like a flame.

"It's like this, Johnny: You still love me. I could tell that. And I—I love you."

"But Thad——"

"That's all over. It's been all over almost since it started. I—I've stuck because I thought he needed me. But I've just come from his place. He—doesn't need me any more. You do, Johnny. And I—I need you."

"But don't you understand?" he blurted desperately. "I'm Johnny Anselmo, with a price on my head and——"

"You're Johnny Anselmo, the finest man I ever knew——"

"The rest of the world doesn't think that!"

"They will. We'll prove it to them. You and I together, Johnny."

"You don't know what you're saying, Maya!"

Her hand tightened on his arm. "Look, Johnny, there was a nice little bald-headed man, a United States deputy marshal, hanging around here about a year ago. Checking up on you. I talked to him. I got to know him very well. He gave you a clean bill, Johnny. Said you could reach him in Santa Fe, and that if you'd give yourself up, you could count on him to see you all the way through."

Anselmo smiled tightly. "It's a false alarm, honey. I know about that deputy marshal. He got the same message through to me. But how do I know it isn't a trap? Instead of smoothing things like he says, he likely figgers to hang me instead. I can't trust him. I'm Johnny Anselmo. I'm outlawed. I can't trust anybody."

"Don't you trust me, Johnny?"

"You're the single, solitary exception."

Her words were eager. "One exception's enough! If you didn't trust anybody, maybe you couldn't see this, but since you do trust one person, then it stands to reason, doesn't it, that out of the whole world, millions and millions of people, there must be some more somewhere you can trust?"

"I reckon," he admitted. "Here and there and far between."

"Then ride with me to Santa Fe, Johnny!" She was pleading now, her face white in its desperate earnestness. "You trust my love. Then trust my judgment of that United States marshal."

Seeing her sweet face so close, Anselmo could feel the weight of the gun-smoke years dropping away from him. A quickening ran through his whole body, hinting of peace that would replace turmoil, and love that would drive out hatred.

He gathered the reins in his hands. "Let's ride, Maya," he said.

HOSS-TAIL TROUBLE

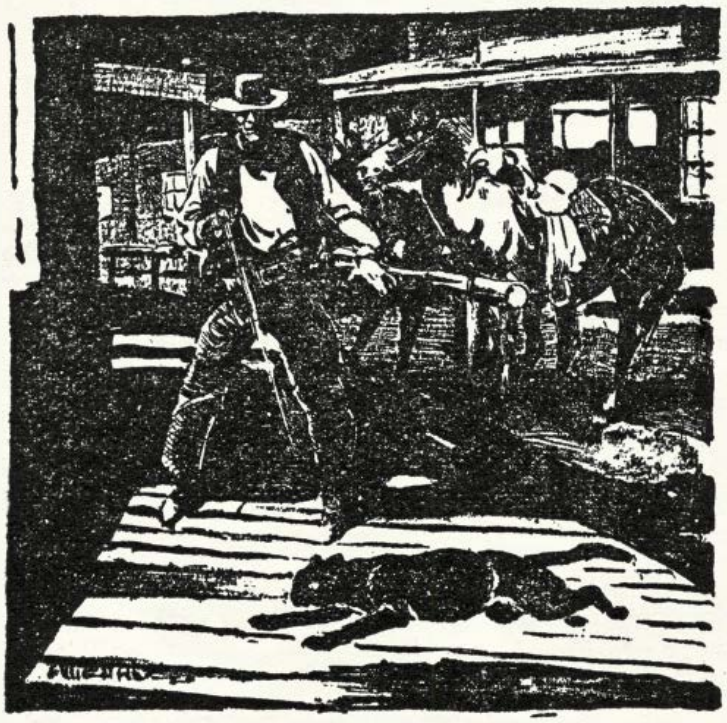
By C. WILES HALLOCK

Now, the Dingledew brothers, "Slim Willie" and Gus,
Fogged into Laporte for to shoot up a fuss,
Up-endin' the town in a whirlwind of noise—
Two vurry tough lads was them Dingledew boys!
Folks quivered and quaked at their threatenin' looks,
And quickly shied clear of them desperate crooks.
The shuriff skedaddled along with the rest,
A-blushin' with shame at the star on his vest.
'Twas easy to see every citizen there
Was vurry afraid of that Dingledew pair!

With yelpin' and shootin' which terrified us,
Them Dingledew brothers—Slim Willie and Gus—
Up-reared their two hosses and made 'em cavort
In front of Dan Anderson's gamblin' resort.
Then cussin' prodigious, with gun-roarin' din,
Slim Willie dismounted and boldly strode in
Dan's Palace of Chance for to plunder and rob,
Whilst Gus stayed outside for to menace the mob.
Two vurry tough gents (ask the shuriff and others!)
Was Willie and Gus, them there Dingledew brothers!

Waal, "Buddy" McCracken, a vurry tough kid,
Which hadn't no parents to mind what he did,
Strolled up for to watch them shenanigans grim;
But Gus didn't pay no attention to him,
Account of the lad bein' only a child.
But Buddy McCracken was pesky and wild!
He moseyed up close to the hosses and slipped
Between 'em unnoticed by Gus, who jest flipped
His six-guns around in a insolent way
As if pullin' holdups was nothin' but play.

Slim Willie backed out of the gamblin' shebang,
Plumb loaded with loot and defyin' the gang,
Swung into his saddle and bellered: "We're duckin'!"
But—snortin' and squealin', their broncs started buckin'
And kickin' each other so savage, by heck!
Them Dingledew brothers got throwed on their neck!
'Cause Buddy McCracken—praise be to his hide!
Whilst snoopin' betwixt them there hosses jest tied
Their two tails together—not makin' no noise—
Which crimped the career of them Dingledew boys!



A CAT TALE

By C. L. DOUGLAS

WESTERN legend simply sets down his name as Peterson, but regardless of more fulsome cognomen, he was cutting something of a figure in the middle '70s down on the Mexican border, where he served as United States commissioner for the district in and about the city of Laredo.

In this more modern day he might be termed a typical case of "rugged individualism," for besides the legal title he carried another distinction —the doubtful, but at that time rather fortunate honor, of being the best pistol shot between the Nueces and the Rio Bravo.

It has been said, but without any conclusive proof, that he could ride across a prairie on a galloping horse and plug five jack rabbits before reloading his six-shooter; and that he could, almost any time, knock down a white wing while in flight. But these are accomplishments which grow with every telling.

Texas, in her hectic frontier days, produced many sons who were capably handy with firearms, and doubtless Commisisoner Peterson played second shot to few—but that is not the tale, though his prowess with the revolver helped with its beginning.

This story has to do with a peculiar chain of events which started with the killing of a cat, and which threw the town of Laredo into a state of tumult that was not quieted

for many weeks. In those events Mr. Peterson played an important and humorous rôle.

The commissioner and a companion, journeying home late one night, saw a cat scurry across their path. The chance of a moving mark presented a temptation too great to overlook and so, just to keep his hand in, Peterson drew and fired. The poor animal let out just one feeble miaow and forthwith surrendered its nine proverbial lives.

The young companion of the man of law casually remarked that it was a pretty fair display of marksmanship, the cat as well as the night being more than ordinarily black, and the pair went on to Peterson's house and went to bed.

They hadn't been long under the blankets, however, before there came a rapping at the door with a Latin-tinctured voice demanding entrance. Peterson arose, threw open the portal to ascertain what manner of person dared disturb his slumber, and found his visitor to be none other than the marshal of Laredo, with whom he had been involved in several recent tilts over proper enforcement of the law.

"So sorry, señor," said Marshal Gonzales, "but I have come to arrest you—for disturbing the peace by shooting in the streets."

Mr. Peterson, because of his high government office, didn't like this over much. He said it was "a fine time to get a man out of bed for such a small matter," but, despite the fact that he was, ordinarily, a man of high temper, he dressed and went along to answer the charge before a Mexican magistrate.

That worthy listened in apparent boredom to the marshal's complaint, and then set bail.

"We shall make it, señor—let us see—$2,500."

Still Commissioner Peterson kept his temper in check. He growled a little, routed out firends, put up the money, and returned home, with hearing set before the magistrate for 9 a. m. next day.

But the commissioner did not return to bed. Arriving home, he went immediately to his desk, rummaged among his papers, and at last turned up a stack of affidavits purporting to show that Marshal Gonzales, the mayor, and many of the principal merchants of the city, all of Mexican extraction, had been engaged in smuggling goods across the international line.

Mr. Peterson smiled, and there was nothing pleasant about his smile.

"And now," he said to his young friend, "we are going to hold a little court of our own, and I'm going to swear you in as a deputy United States marshal to help me hold it. Excuse me while I make out a few warrants."

And so it came to pass within the hour that the marshal, the mayor and the others were routed out of bed and brought, at 2 a. m., before the commissioner to answer smuggling charges.

They raised a mighty howl and a chorus of "not guiltys."

"I will accept your pleas of not guilty," said the commissioner, gravely, "and set your bail. We'll make it—let me see now—well, $20,000 each."

There was a great deal of fuming and fussing about the town of Laredo in the small hours while the mayor and his friends found bondsmen—but they raised the security, and were ordered to appear at 10 a. m.

At 9 a. m. Peterson and his friend went into the city court. The offi-

cials were all smiles. They had, they said, changed their minds. After all, it was but so little to shoot a cat, and they had no witnesses—therefore, señors, the charges would be dropped.

But if these gentlemen thought that Peterson would swap out they did not know their man.

After all of them had taken a *pascar* over to his court at 10 a. m. he reset the bonds and forthwith ordered his young marshal to serve another batch of warrants against merchants in the town.

Following this announcement from the bench, there was a general scattering among the spectators, and a general exodus across the Rio Bravo—and some of the most prominent citizens remained on the Mexican side until sure that the commissioner was in a more affable frame of mind.

Commissioner Peterson did, at last, conveniently forget the matter, but thereafter he could shoot at all the cats he desired to shoot at, when taken by the urge.

He celebrated his victory, so the story goes, by taking a dozen or so "shots" of different sort in the local saloons—in company, of course, with his "deputy United States marshal."

THE STOCKTENDER

THE unsung hero of the Overland Stage lines into the West was the "Stocktender," who lived alone on the prairie, caring for the horses that must be ready for a quick change when the stage arrived. He not only had to be able to shoe the horses, repair harness, mend a broken lead chain and weld a brake rod, but he often had to defend his home against the attacks of Indians.

The stage stands were located twelve miles apart, and were also the headquarters in some instances, of the Pony Express riders. They were under the protection of quiet, courageous men, competent horse-handlers and accurate rifle shots. Often they cultivated gardens and from small beginnings prosperous ranches originated. One such ranch is still owned by the lineal descendants of an old-time stocktender. It is on a beautiful mountain stream a few miles west of Del Norte, Colorado.

On the main lines across the prairies, where three or more coaches passed each day, the stage stand became an important place. Freighters arranged their daily drives to stop there, and because of the number of horses required there were sometimes several stocktenders. But for the most part these men lived solitary lives, their loneliness broken only for the few minutes required to take out the tired horses and hitch in fresh ones.

The driver climbed to his high seat, the passengers, who had gotten out stiffly to stretch their cramped muscles, reëntered the coach, and the stocktender stood watching the cloud of dust disappear in the west, but not for long. The six weary horses must be cooled out and rubbed dry, their harness inspected for a worn spot, perhaps a rein or a trace resewed with a waxed end, and all made ready for the eastbound coach.

G. C. F.

The Round-Up

SOME very encouraging news comes this week from W. Ryerson Johnson, one of our old yarn-spinners. He says a lot of folks bemoan the passing of the old West. "What are they moaning about?" asks Johnson. He claims that just as the "Best of the West" is recorded every week in Western Story Magazine, so the best of the old West still exists beyond the Mississippi. It isn't even tucked away in remote valleys. Any one who'll turn off a dozen miles from the hard roads that run to California can find it.

But, he says, better swap your car for a hoof-sure bronc when you do that. No filling stations on the range. Better pack a sizable canteen, too. The deserts are as hot and dry and lonesome as they ever were. Better take a blanket roll. No tourist camps off the hard road, though the latch strings will be out for you in genuine Western fashion at any ranch house or line shack you come across. It mightn't even be amiss to pack a belt gun. Chances are you won't have to use it. But if you *should* be hungry, it could come in mighty handy for shooting food. There's sidewinders, too, and other varmints, some of 'em almost human. One last cautioning word. Look twice before you get off your horse. There's thousands of square miles of rolling prairie and rocky range where shaggy-hided beefs give a man a real run for his life.

It so happens that Johnson is not a Westerner born and raised. But sometimes a fellow can go into a country and, if he keeps his eyes open, he can see more than some one who's lived there all his life. You know how it is—close up sometimes a man can't see the cows for the herd. He started out in a small town in Illinois—Divernon. His father was a country doctor, his mother a newspaperwoman. He spent his summers on a farm dreaming about the Far West. Before he was through school he had covered twenty thousand miles of country between Mexico and Canada on freight-train decks and passenger blinds. He worked at the wheat harvests in Dakota, punching cows in Montana, forest ranging in Wyoming, and in unproductive prospecting in New Mexico, and for two years he labored in a coal mine,

during which time he got a degree from the College of Commerce at the University of Illinois.

Then came the urge to travel again, and at the same time he felt the desire to write of his experiences —that is, to write stories based upon places where he had been, and people he had met. After two years as a warehouse superintendent in Boston, he went to the Balkans, and worked his way around with a musical saw. Melancholy Slavic folk songs were a natural for the saw. He had a lot of fun and played it everywhere, in the harvest fields, where men and women sang, cutting wheat by hand, and once in the Bulgarian National Opera House. Even in the customs office he played it, in order to prove that the saw was a musical instrument and not an implement of labor, and so, dutiable. After six months of that, he was pretty well sawed out and got a chance in Antwerp, Belgium, to ship-herd twenty horses to the International Stock Show in Chicago. They were big Belgians, two-year-old stallions, just off the grass, and about as tractable as jungle elephants. Wooden stalls were slapped together for them on the open deck. An equinoxial storm caused considerable excitement; water swamped the deck, smashed down the stalls, and turned the horses loose to splash around among the timbers, winches, and baled hay. It was the first time he had heard a horse scream. They were making more noise than the wind and the water. Finally, with the mate's help, he got the horses corralled.

Upon his return to the States, Johnson dug in seriously to learn the trade of writing, and was greatly helped by William Byron Mowery, who was then an established novelist.

At the time Johnson worked in the coal mine he had quite an adventure. He says: "A coal mine is different from a gold mine in that you always find plenty of what you are looking for—sometimes all over your head and shoulders! My first day in the mine the manager put me to cleaning up the manway, the safest entry in the mine, until I could get my mining feet under me, so to speak. The timbering gave way and the top came in for a ten-car fall, smashing my dinner bucket and burying the shovel I had in my hands. I thought if this could happen in a 'safe' place, then the rest of the mine must be like Sherman said war was.

"But in the next two years nothing much worse than that happened, though there were some just as bad. Had the hair singed off the back of my neck between pit cap and collar when I dived to the floor under a gas explosion. Once lost my light in a black-damp entry in some old workings. Black damp hugs the floor if there isn't too much of it. Kept my head high and hoped. I knew when they found my brass check hanging alone on the big board, they'd come looking. They did. I was out three days with monoxide poisoning, but that was all. I think it was in the coal mine I started getting ideas about making the world in general more livable for more people."

Johnson still has the wanderlust. He never stays long in a place at a time. Besides his ambition to write better stories, he has a few radical ideas for making the world a lot better place for a lot more people. He isn't married. Just as he finds it hard to decide in what part of the country to settle down, it is equally hard for him to decide upon the right girl, so he keeps on traveling, seeing new places and new faces.

MINES AND MINING

By

J. A. THOMPSON

THE hombres with British Columbia in mind for their gold-prospecting trip, and who really want to go places in search of yellow metal, would do well to consider the Dease Creek sector far up in the northwest corner of the province. It's a hard trip and a long trek, but there's gold to be found there.

It is this general area that Howard Curtin, of Philadelphia, had in mind when he wrote us recently from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

"An ambition of mine is about to be realized—an honest-to-goodness gold-prospecting trip up to the fascinating, wild, mountainous country of northern British Columbia. My partner and I have always been interested in the gold-bearing Cassiar Range. Surely that rich region can't have been thoroughly prospected out yet. And how about the sections around Dease and McDame Creeks? Is it difficult to get in there? What is the best route to take getting in? Through British Columbia or by way of Alaska?"

We think, Howard, you are choosing a fine prospecting region. In spite of the fame and richness of the early strikes in the Cassiars, the auriferous country in that region is patently so extensive that aside from the immediate vicinity of the well-known placer-producing creeks, the prospector game enough and able to branch out on his own has a chance to make new discoveries.

In other words much of the general region has been sketchily prospected, if at all. There is opportunity for the enterprising to tackle virgin territory in a bonanza gold-bearing country.

Now then, let's get organized on your other questions. The best route in? By way of Alaska. In fact, that is the only feasible route to the section which lies high on a far north upland plateau and drains northward toward the Arctic Ocean. Elevation of the plateau floor is from two to four thousand feet above sea level and the striking bare peaks, and rocky, sharply cut ridges of the Cassiars, tower above the level country to attain elevations of approximately five to seven thousand feet.

There is regular steamer service from the West coast to Wrangell, Alaska. And that's your entry port. From Wrangell a river boat will carry you during the open-water season, which usually starts about May 15th, up the Stikine River to Telegraph Creek in British Colum-

bia. That's a two or three-day trip in itself, and you have still got quite a way to go. An auto road makes a seventy-two-mile path across the divide from Telegraph Creek and brings you to Dease Landing, on Dease Lake. Next you make the seventy-mile run down Dease River on a flat-bottomed, power-driven river scow which brings you to McDame's Post, the central supply replenishment point for the whole area.

From McDame's Post you are on your own. There is likely gold-prospecting territory all around you. Pack trail or river travel will bring you to side streams and gulches which might be tested profitably with your gold pan. Watch out for "float" too, and outcrops of vein matter that may start you off on the scent of a rich lode gold mine. Ranging north you'll have no man-made settlements to bother you. It's big, open country, the land of the fur trapper and the gold prospector.

Spruce woods clothe the lower valley slopes. Pine, balsam and birch forest the upper valleys, with willow and alder in the valley bottoms. The streams abound in grayling, trout, whitefish and pike to vary your camp diet. Grouse, ducks and geese are still plentiful. And you may get a shot at a moose, or, higher up among the peaks of the Cassiars, a mountain goat.

In short it's "man" country, if there ever was any.

Gold Pan Creek up in that neighborhood reported a few seasons ago a prospector who took out around a hundred ounces of gold, and there have been reports of others making good recovery. Little Muddy River seems another likely place, and fairly new. Take in particularly, if you get a chance, the headwaters of the Little Muddy, and the side streams. You may find yourself something entirely untouched in the way of a virgin placer prospect.

Of course McDame Creek is an old stand-by, nearly a million and a half in placer gold having been taken out of it during the twenty years production when it was in its heydey. But it is only within the last year or so that gold-bearing quartz veins of considerable promise have been discovered in the basin area up around McDame Creek's head waters.

There you are, Howard. That's a brief outline of the rich section you and your pard are heading into. Good luck to you both.

And Prospector Billy G., of San Francisco, California wants to know if he can use timber in a national forest for building himself a cabin on a claim located there. You can, Billy. It has been declared by law that timber and stone in national forests may be used by bona-fide settlers, miners, prospectors et cetera for firewood, fencing, building, mining, and domestic purposes under forest service regulations.

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

ABOVE the Great Basin and to the westward is the Winnemucca mining country of northwestern Nevada. "Nevada Jack" is looking for a pardner to trek into this "outback" stomping ground with him.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Pards, let's get together and maybe we will be swinging over the trail with each other this summer. I am anxious to contact an Eastern pard as I am at the present here in the East. The pard need not be experienced in prospecting or mining but he must have a grubstake and a small car. I have a grubstake and I will help on the oil, gas, and the driving. I have some camping equipment from my last prospecting trip. I have had about twenty years of camping experience and I can also cook fairly well.

I have prospected in California, Oregon, and Nevada. I have a hard-rock claim in Nevada about forty miles north of Winnemucca. I spent several months prospecting around Winnemucca.

This pardner must be over twenty-five years of age and of an agreeable nature. I myself am forty-six years young. So fill my mail box, boys. I will answer you, one and all. NEVADA JACK.

Care of The Tree.

From far-off India comes this Pen-Pal seeker.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

During these last few years I have almost forgotten the ways and customs of a European city as I'm a soldier in the British army serving in India. I'm in the artillery and I know plenty about the ways and customs of this race of people—the Indian! I'm almost an expert in jungle trips, too, having been on several tiger shoots, and I can assure any one who writes an inexhaustible supply of jungle snaps.

I'm twenty-three years of age, and I want Pen Pals from all over the world, folks. GUNNER G. BRIERS, 806449.

3rd Light Battery, R. A., Haig Lines,
Ambala Cantonment, India.

Shirley is an "Aussie" whose home is in Adelaide.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

My father owns several splendid horses on his farm and many times I ride my horse out in the paddocks and bring in the sheep with their little lambs. My age is nearly sixteen, and my favorie hobbies are riding, reading, and writing. I have five brothers and no sisters. I board in Adelaide, for my home is in the country where there is only the primary school. I go to a business college.

My favorite sport is hockey. Last year I was on a school team and I thoroughly enjoyed the games we had after school and

the matches we played on Saturday afternoons.

I hope the old Holla will be able to find me many overseas Pen Pals for I am very interested in other countries.

SHIRLEY NORTON.
99 Fisher Street, Fullarton,
Adelaide, South Australia.

An hombre from Minnesota would like some near-by Pen Pals.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Will The Hollow Tree be so kind as to assist me in getting in touch with some of The Hollow Tree friends in my State or neighboring States nearest me or perhaps in my town or adjoining towns? I am a young man twenty-nine years of age, clerk in an office, but work short hours thus giving me a lot of time on my hands which I could put into letter writing. I am interested in just about everything, appreciate art, good literature, and music. I have a fancy for pioneer history.

So please, folks, help me to locate some good friends near me. ROY EDDY.
169½ West Kellogg Boulevard,
St. Paul, Minnesota.

This young educational adviser of the Civilian Conservation Corps is looking for your friendship.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Folks, I am in the triple Cs and at the present time I am holding the position of assistant educational adviser. My job is not of a lonely nature, but it requires many hours on duty so that it is tiresome. I would like to have Pen Pals who would like to cheer me as I am located in the town of Moro that boasts only about one hundred and fifty inhabitants. The nights here drag on interminably as I have no one to talk to after my day's work is done. I would like to hear from young men around the age of twenty to thirty years of age. I myself am twenty-six, and I have traveled considerably and have seen service in Uncle Sam's navy. My hobbies are lyric writing, poetry, one-act plays, and I am very fond of hiking, camping, and exploration work.

If the old Holla will make it possible for me to get a few Pen Pals I will be greatly indebted to you-all.

EDGAR S. FEMINO.
Camp Moro, Moro, Oregon.

You young married folks will appreciate this Pen Pal.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Are there some young married women who would care to write to a young wife of eighteen? I am anxious for some Pen Pals. I live in a construction camp in a house trailer so I have plenty of time to write. I would like to hear from married women around my age. I will answer all letters and exchange snapshots.

MRS. DORIS PARKINSON.
Box 532, Sunrise Dam, Wyoming.

You hombres who are anxious to take the trail into the out-back country will do well to hear what Nevada Jack has to say. He is looking for an Eastern Pard. Wear your friend-maker, membership badges, boys, and speak up.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering be sure to state which you wish.

Is there any one who has some suggestions to offer to this lonely woman?

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Perhaps the old Holla can get me in touch with some one who wants a partner to start a poultry ranch or some one who wants a caretaker for her home while she is working. Or is there some one who wants help on a homestead and a Pal who will stick? I am interested in trying a homestead myself—in Washington or Oregon or California.

Folks who know of any good locations and who are willing to impart such information will earn my gratitude. I am a war widow, age forty-five. I am hard of hearing, which makes it rather difficult to get by. I am working here in a very lonely place, and I have no chance to get around much, so I would like a few of you folks to write to me and help me to pass the

lonely hours. I was born and raised on a farm, and I understand the work and the life. I understand poultry of all kinds.

MRS. RUBY RINKER.

San Geronimo, California.

Paul hails from New Zealand.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Here is a young native lad of seventeen years who would like very much to get acquainted with some cowboys on the Western ranches. I've longed for the outdoor life of the West myself and I have planned to go wild horse chasing. I would like to hear from any one who knows how to handle wild mustangs. PAUL TERAU.

Waimiha, New Zealand.

Jack is looking for a Pal to make a cross-country hike with him.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Although I am only sixteen years of age I am looking for a pard to hike across the country with me in the summer of 1938. I would like to find a Pal who will be through school by then. JACK COMFORT.

Enola, Pennsylvania.

An Ontario lad would like a pardner for a prospecting trek.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Will a few of the boys from California and other Western States write a few lines to a lonesome boy from the north part of Canada? I am interested in ranching, gold hunting, and camping outdoors. I would like to find a partner to go prospecting with me. I live in a mining town but I would like to go farther west.

I will answer all letters and post cards.

WILFRED E. MILLER.

Tashota, Ontario, Canada.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Will some one from the Peace River country in Canada write me on the homestead situation up there? I am thinking of taking up a homestead somewhere, and the Peace River country interests me. Is there still good tillable land to take up? What crops? And how long is the growing season? Although I am a woman I love farming, and I am capable of it, both financially and otherwise. LADY FARMER.

Care of The Tree.

Al can yarn with you-all about the radio.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

This young fellow of nineteen years would like very much to hear from Pals all over the country. I play the guitar, banjo, and sing and yodel. I love all kinds of old-time Western and hill-billy tunes. I've played in two cowboy bands on a popular radio station for about a year now and I travel around with them quite a lot.

Come on, now, all you Pals, everywhere. How about rustling up a few lines for me? I sure do want to hear from you-all.

AL RAWLEY.

32 Harding Terrace,
East Dedham, Massachusetts.

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

THE hombre who travels western trails to-day finds a wealth of scenic beauty and historic lore, as he speeds along with ease and comfort, past territory where weary ox teams once plodded across the plains, or looks out of his car or train window to mountains where red men once rode in quest of big game. Perhaps he skirts streams out of which fabulous sums were washed in the gold days, or looks down upon the gorgeous colorings of canyon walls, or studies the fascinating prehistoric dwellings of an ancient race.

This is just what Jack C., of Ogden, Utah, plans to do. "I'm going to visit Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado, Mr. North, and see those marvelous ruins. I expect to travel by train to Grand Junction, Colorado, from which place I believe I can go by car or bus to the park. Is this right? I suppose there are regular motor tours through Mesa Verde? What is the season there and how about accommodations? Any other data you can give me I'll appreciate."

Mesa Verde National Park, in southwestern Colorado, hold within its boundaries some of the most impressive and best preserved of all prehistoric ruins, Jack. You can

take a three-day motor tour to the park from Grand Junction, Colorado, along the Chief Ouray Highway through picturesque Uncompahgre Valley, across Red Mountain into the majestic San Juan Range. Entering the park, a vista of mountain 135 miles long, bathed in a mystical haze, stretches before your eyes. There are many scenic thrills, apart from the sublime antiquity of the Cliff Dwellings, whose spell never fails to inspire awe and reverence. In the widespread panorama, at this elevation, you will enjoy the unique and only experience of its kind in the United States, looking in one glance upon portions of four States, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico and Utah.

Wild life in the park is protected, adding to the primordial atmosphere of the region. You'll see deer, porcupine, rabbits, squirrels, a variety of other species, and occasionally a bear. Eagles, too, soaring aloft, are a common sight.

You can secure accommodation at a lodge in the park from June 15th to September 14th; cottages and tents are also available. And a corps of government rangers is on hand to conduct parties of tourists among the Cliff Dwellings.

Mesa Verde is one of America's mysteries. Who were the people to inhabit the Cliff Dwellings, and Kivas, worshiping at Sun Temple, and burying their dead with rites of a highly advanced religion? From where did they come and where did they go? How long were the Cliff Dwellings occupied and at what period in the civilization of man? These and hundreds of other questions will arise as Cliff Palace, Spruce Tree House, and other ruins are studied.

Of all the ruins left by prehistoric man in this country, those at Mesa Verda in the side canyons of the Mancos River, are said to be the most remarkable, and Mesa Verda National Park is one of the few large tracts of land in the United States, which has been taken from the public domain for the purpose of preserving the antiquities it contains.

Another traveler, Dan S., now in Tucson, Arizona, is driving to El Paso, Texas. "How long a drive is it from here to El Paso, Mr. North, and what highway would you suggest that a fellow take? I would appreciate it very much if you would outline a route for me, and give me some pointers about various towns through which I will pass.

If you're the sort of hombre who likes to travel light and minus the frying pan, you'll be interested in information about no equipment camp meals. Ask John North, care of this magazine.

I'd suggest that you take U. S. Highway 80, via Douglas, Arizona, Dan. It's a 410 miles trip to El Paso from Tucson, and an interest-

ing one. You'll pass through Benson, then through Tombstone, Arizona, a town famous in southwest history, and where is held an annual celebration of Helldorado Days, depicting early times. This is cattle country, and there are many points of historical interest.

At Bisbee, Arizona, which you'll reach soon thereafter, and which is built on the side of a mountain, are famous copper mines; Sacramento Pit is one of the many points of interest.

Then comes Douglas, Arizona, with its larger smelter for the surrounding mining district. It is on the Mexican border, with Agua Prieta only a five-minute drive away.

Soon you'll reach the Arizona-New Mexico state line, and pass through Rodeo, New Mexico. At Lordsburg is the only government airport in the State, while Deming, farther along the route, is a lively trade center, in a country of agricultural activity and cotton raising. The Texas State line passes through the center of the town of Anthony, and from there you'll spin on along toward El Paso.

This is the largest of the Mexican border cities, and very attractive to visitors. It lies in the most western point of the Lone Star State at the entrance to the lowest, snow-free pass in the Rocky Mountains, from which it takes its name. Transcontinental railways, highways and airways serve this city, which has a population of more than 100,000.

The scenic drive across Mount Franklin above the city; Fort Bliss, largest U. S. Cavalry post; old missions in the valley below the city, the Hueco Tanks, and the smelter district, are among Al Paso's points of interest. It is also the distribution center for a vast scenic playground of the Southwest.

Perhaps some of you outdoor hombres who like hot biscuits when you're in camp would be interested in information about a handy camp baker. John North will pass it along pronto if you'll ask him, care of Western Story Magazine.

It is Oregon's City of Roses that holds the interest of Bob C., of Fresno, California. "I'm going up to Portland soon, Mr. North, for my vacation, and would like to have some information about that city."

Portland is a city of commercial importance.

The most notable scenic attraction is the Columbia River Highway, known the world over as being the most beautiful one-day drive. From Council Crest, the highest point of the hills which slope to the Williamette River, upon the banks of which Portland is building, you can see the snow-blanketed domes of Mount St. Helena and Mount Hood. And you'll be fascinated by the river harbor, where ships of all nations, destined to deliver the commerce of the Northwest at ports of every sea, are to be seen.

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.

GUNS AND GUNNERS

By

CHARLES E. CHAPEL

First Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps

THE top-notch positions among the nation's crack shots in the small bore rifle competitions for 1936 was accorded Mr. W. P. Schweitzer, of Hillside, New Jersey, according to a report recently released by the National Rifle Association. Rankings are based on a scientific system which takes into account the position gained, and the number of competitors faced, in each match at every registered tournament.

Schweitzer, by winning the grand aggregate in the St. Petersburg, Fla., shoot in March, a first place and five seconds in the Eastern small-bore tournament at Camp Ritchie, Md., in July, and three firsts in team events in the national matches at Camp Perry, Ohio, in September, along with additional honors in other tournaments, showed a year-round consistency which gained him the number one position with a slim but ample margin over his rivals.

Dave Carlson, of New Haven, Conn., took second place, and William Woodring of Alton, Ill., earned third with a late season spurt. Carlson led the field at the national matches, while Woodring became the first individual on record to mark up possible scores of 400 in three different events in one day.

You, too, can gain fun and fame in the marksmanship game. Whether you are a banker or a boy scout, drop us a line and we shall do the rest.

Every one cannot be an expert shot, but all can find pleasure in some phase of the gun game. Here are answers to some of this week's questions:

The Rollin White Arms Co.

F. B. J., Griffin, Georgia: The Rollin White Arms Company was

The U. S. Rifle, (Enfield), Model 1917, Caliber .30, in excellent condition, is sold to citizens of the United States, by the government, for $8.87, under certain conditions which will be explained to readers sending a stamped, addressed envelope.

A ten-cent handbook for boy and girl marksmen will be mailed *free*, as long as the supply lasts, to those who request it. Please inclose the usual stamped, addressed envelope.

located in Lowell, Mass., prior to 1864, when the name was dropped in favor of the "Lowell Arms Company." The reason for this peculiar change was that this company was formed in 1864 to make revolvers that proved to be an infringement of the Smith & Wesson patents. When Mr. Rollin White learned this he forced the change of names. The only weapon bearing the name "Rollin White" was their single-shot cartridge pistol, caliber .32 short, rim fire, and a similar model in caliber .38 short, rim fire. For a while a .22-short revolver bore his name, but carried the Smith & Wesson name underneath.

Antique arms prices rise.

P. F. R., Saso, Maine: With the return of prosperity, prices for antique firearms are rising rapidly. Now is the time to lay in your missing numbers for your collection. During the depression antique arms, like other luxuries, fell in price until they were worth about as much as scrap iron as collectors' items.

Medal-winning scores.

H. B. H., Muncie, Indiana: Winners in .22-caliber matches usually get 100 at all ranges when prone, 97 sitting, and 80 to 85 when standing. No beginner can expect to approach these scores.

Darling not a sweetheart.

D. W. A., Orlando, Florida: The name "Darling" on pepperbox pistols was not a term of endearment, rather, it was the family name of two brothers who made arms in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, during the last century.

Pursuit firing.

R. S. C., Granite, Illinois: Pursuit firing is an old and once very popular form of rifle shooting that was in vogue many years ago. It was abandoned because it was difficult to find safe ranges for big-bore rifles but it is being revived for the .22-caliber rifles. It consists of firing within a time limit, moving forward on signal with your competitors, firing on a new line, and continuing until the shortest range is reached. As many shooters can compete as there are targets.

Hunters outnumber target shooters.

F. B. A., McComb, Mississippi: There are seven times as many hunters on the membership rolls of the National Rifle Association as there are target shooters.

Aim higher when sitting.

C. J. C., Granite, Illinois: Sometimes in shooting the shots go lower than when prone. This is because the marksman is not steady, and he does not aim with the top of his front sight quite so close to the bottom of the bull. The cure is to raise the rear sight slightly. This forces the shooter to elevate the front of his rifle and he hits into the bull's-eye.

These assertions are the private opinion of the firearms editor, and are not to be construed as official, or reflecting the views of the Navy Department, or the naval service at large.

Address inquiries regarding firearms, marksmanship, and hunting, to Lieutenant Charles E. Chapel, "Guns and Gunners," Street & Smith's WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., and inclose a stamped, addressed envelope.

MISSING DEPARTMENT

CAMPBELL, ALLEN BAYLIS.—He is my half brother. Have not heard from him in over two years. At that time he was going back to Baltimore with his daughter Doris, who is about nine years of age. He had a bad heart affliction. Sad news about his brother Willis. Information greatly appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Violet Drew Barlow, 10866 Magnolia Blvd., North Hollywood, California.

BAUER, BRUNO.—My brother, who is twenty-one years of age. He left home in July, 1934. Please write to Arnold Bauer, Gr. III Service School, N. O. B. Unit B 4-37, Hampton Roads, Virgina.

BRYSON, MRS. ROBERT and sons, RALPH, ROYAL and BERT, also a stepdaughter, MRS. MAUDE BRYSON FISHER.—Am anxious to get in touch with the above relatives. When last heard from they were in Seattle, Washington. At one time they lived in Santa Monica, California. Mrs. Fisher is about fifty-four years of age and has a son, Bert Whalen, who is about twenty-five years of age. Any word from these relatives would be gratefully received by Mrs. C. M. LaBrash, 1313 3rd Street East, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada.

NEWBY, EDWARD.—He is my father, who enlisted in the World War with a Texas division. He is forty-eight years of age and was born in Indiana. He left there in 1922 and was last heard from in 1925 when he was living in Tacoma, Washington. Father, if you read this, please answer at once as your daughter and grandson want to see you. Any one knowing his whereabouts please notify, Mrs. Mary Benefiel, R. R. No. 2, Anderson, Indiana.

WHORTEN, MRS. MAE.—My father's sister. She had four children. The two oldest ones were Clifford and Helen. She has two sisters, Mrs. Etta Gibbons and Mrs. Lucy Maddon. Would like to hear from her or any of her relatives. Please write to Mrs. Willie Wortham, Arlington, Arizona.

BOWLEN, KENNETH FRED.—My husband, who is thirty-three years of age. He has black hair, brown eyes, a wide mouth. He had three teeth missing on the upper right side. He is five feet six inches tall and weighs one hundred and twenty-five pounds. A painter by trade. Any information concerning him will be greatly appreciated by Mrs. K. F. Bowlen, 312 E. Pascagonla Street, Jackson, Mississippi.

McKINNEY, MAMIE.—The only daughter of James and Mary Ann McKinney. We have been separated since we were small children. We were put in a home in Mulberry Street, near Third Avenue, New York City. Later I was removed to West 99th Street, New York City. Please communicate with your brother, William McKinney, R. F. D. No. 1, Sangerville, Maine.

JOYCE, JACK.—He is six feet tall, slim, a good singer and fond of cowboy songs. He travels a great deal and was last seen in October, 1928, at Grey Eagle, Minnesota. He was once a sailor. Please write to me, Jack, as it is important. Your best pal, G. E. G., care of Western Story Magazine.

SMITH, MRS. GRACE.—Her address in January, 1937, was P. O. Box 2064, Station A, Waterloo, Iowa. Have lost her later address. Grace, please write to me and I will explain. H. F. Miller, Route 1, Rochelle, Texas.

DRUMMUN or DRUMMAN, JUNE.—She may be married by this time. Last heard of in 1925, when my father, Lyman Ward Reese, died. My mother, brother, and I moved to Indiana. She lived in Asheville, North Carolina. Please write to a childhood playmate. Any one knowing her whereabouts please communicate with Pauline Reese, R. F. D. No. 4, Monticello, Indiana.

O'NIELL, O. CARL.—Last heard from in Indiana, July 13, 1935. Have had trouble since I last heard from you. Must go to California, and dread it. Am always thinking of you and your lonely life in a town with no acquaintances. Wish I had that real pal I used to tell my troubles to. Life is so discouraging. Why can't you forgive me and write to Kathryn, care of Western Story Magazine.

POORE, HELEN.—Father left you in Santa Barbara, California, in 1913 or 1914. Please write to your brother and sister, Jerry and Jewel Poore, 1816 F. Street, Sacramento, California.

GLADYS, STEWART.—When last heard from in June, 1927, he was in St. Louis, Oklahoma. He is probably working in the oil fields. He is thirty-seven years of age, has brown hair and blue eyes. He is five feet four inches tall and has a Southern accent. His father did live in Clavert, Texas, and he has a brother in Handley, Texas. Am anxious to hear from him. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write to Dot, care of Western Story Magazine.

There is no charge for the insertion of requests for information concerning missing relatives or friends.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

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Large, substantial, all-metal mike. Practise radio singing, broadcasting, programs, etc., thru your own radio. Reproduces voice in loud, clear tone without distortion. Regular table model—can be held in hand. Guaranteed. Connected without tools. Price **75c**

ALL WAVE WORLD WIDE RADIOS

Remarkable results—simple operation—low prices! **15 to 600 meters.** Gets police calls, foreign stations anywhere, code, short wave, foreign and domestic broadcasts, etc., with remarkable volume and efficiency. Each set complete without tube, phone, battery or aerial. **ONE TUBE BATTERY SET.** Good headphone volume. **Complete Kit $1.55** Wired ready to operate **$2.30. SUPER ONE TUBE BATTERY SET.** Gives better volume & reception. **Complete Kit $2.00** Wired, ready to operate **$2.75. ELECTRIC TWO TUBE.** Operates on house current. Uses no batteries. Powerful, sensitive, selective. **Kit, $3.00. Wired, ready to operate, $3.75.**

NOVEL CIGAR LIGHTERS

Four unique Lighters are illustrated above at the low price of 15c each. Full sized pencil & lighter; key; bullet; and one which looks like a Cigarette—will fit into your cigarette case! Your choice **ONLY 15 CENTS EACH.**

Midget Bible Size of postage stamp. Over 200 pages. Said to bring good luck to owner. **Price 15c.**

FIELD GLASSES 25c

WOW! What a bargain! Real genuine Field Glasses **with six power magnification.** Center piece quick, one finger focussing. **Permits full, unhampered, two eyed vision** that gives remarkable scope and clarity. Swell for nature study, hiking, sports, and a million other things. Complete with cord, packed in box, **ONLY 25c**

Pocket Telescope

Eagle-Eye Vision **Six Power 25c**

Big, 3 draw, 6 power telescope for only 25c! Swell for outdoors, nature study, sports, looking at the moon. Converted into **Solar telescope** by using smoked glass so you can see sun spots, etc. 5" long. **Price 25 cents**

IRWIN PROJECTOR

A real **Electric Movie Machine** for only **35c!** Shows bright, clear pictures about 14 x 18 inches in size. Just insert the film, turn the crank and watch the pictures as long as you like! Uses 2 flashlight cells obtainable anywhere. Bright red enameled steel case, measuring 5x3x3 inches. Complete with bulb, ready to use. 16 mm. film. **Price 35c. FILM,** choice of Felix the Cat, Wild West, Mutt & Jeff, Tom Mix, etc., **15c EACH.**

BlankCartridgePistol

50c $1.00

Two of the latest, newest models now out—**50c and $1.00.** Patterned **after the latest type of revolver.** Shoots 22 caliber blank cartridges obtainable everywhere. Handy protection against burglars, tramps and dogs. Fine for 4th of July, New Years, stage work, starting pistol, etc., etc.

6 Shot Automatic

Blued steel 6-shot automatic blank pistol. **Fires blanks only.** Looks exactly like expensive automatic. **Shipped by express, not prepaid. Price $5.50. Uses special cartridges, 75c per 100.**

Looks Like A Real Revolver

Strongly constructed with a flashy nickel finish. Has dip barrel that allows the cartridges to be loaded in a second. **Medium size, Large size $1.00. Blank Cartridges 50c per 100. Holster (Cowboy Type), 50c. SHIPPED BY EXPRESS, NOT PREPAID.**

Hi-Powered Air Pistols

A powerful high grade Air Pistol shaped like an automatic, pocket size. Fires B B shot obtainable anywhere. Very powerful yet perfectly safe for boys to handle. Two styles. Single shot Pistol or Repeater. The Repeater fires 100 shots in one loading. The Single Shot shoots rifle Darts and BB Shot. Well made and durable; all metal parts nickle plated; natural grain wood stocks. Front and rear sights. Better than an air rifle. Shipped express collect. **Single Shot Pistol $2.50; 100 Shot Pistol $5.00**

LUMINOUS PAINT

LUMINOUS PAINT, when applied to an object, emits rays of white light, rendering it visible in the dark. The darker the night—the brighter it shines. Simple to use—you can do it! Apply some to the dial of your watch so you can tell time at night. Paint pushbuttons, switches, anything, everything with it. **Small Bottle, 25c. Medium size 50c. Large size $1.00 postpaid.**

HOW TO TAP DANCE

PRICE 25c

Why envy the easy rhythm and fascinating grace of Step'n Fetchit, Fred Astaire etc. Tap dance in ONLY 6 HOURS by a new simplified course by Prof. Wilson. No special ability needed. Be smart! Everybody's tapping. The whole town is tapping. Beat out a tune with your feet. **310 Illustrations** Hostesses love it. Friends adore it. Besides, tap dancing is not only invigorating and entertaining but is also a healthful exercise for making the limbs supple and giving a "springy" feeling of fitness to the whole body. Promotes slimness nature's way—no pills, drugs or dieting. Readers say: "...wonderful benefit. Thank you for adding tap dancing to my accomplishments." **Price 25c postpaid.**

MIDGET POCKET RADIO $1.00

Listen to Music Programs and Sports Everywhere You Go! Loud Tone

Beautiful clear tone while you walk! The amazing midget pocket radio gives you all the entertainment of a radio wherever you are—in the country, office, on a boat, in a car, hotel, in bed, on bicycles, **ANYWHERE and EVERYWHERE.** Size of a cigarette package, yet it operates perfectly. **Beautiful clear tone.** Range, 50 miles. No static or noise. **No batteries, no tubes, no crystals to adjust,** just one moving dial to locate stations. New sensitive rectifier and high efficiency design. Not a toy. **Price Postpaid $1.00. Earphone, 89c. Phone & Radio Set $1.79.**

Learn DANCING

OVER 101 ILLUSTRATIONS

25 Cents

LATEST STEPS. Be popular. Good dancers are always admired—always popular guests. Partners welcome them eagerly. The newest, smartest steps without a teacher. Don't make excuses when the music starts. Get lots of fun from parties and dances.

If you want to become a perfect dancer, learn to dance at home this new easy way. **BOOK TELLS:** How to develop poise and control, improve your dance steps, art of holding, how to walk to music, how to lead, latest fox trot steps, Natural and Reverse Turns, the Reverse Wave, The Quickstep swaying to music, Waltz, Backward changes, the Continental, The famous Kiss dance, the Manhattan, the College Rhumba, the Carlo, Charleston, etc. **Art of Dancing 25c**

CRYSTAL RADIO 25c

This is a radio in itself as it is possible to get reception with it alone within 25 miles of a station (or up to 100 miles under good conditions). All you need is an aerial & ear phone. Completely assembled & wired with supersensitive crystal, stand, base, crystal cup, arm with cat's whisker, etc. Reception guaranteed. **25c**

YACHT CAPS 25c

Smart, snappy. Just what every real boy is wearing. Cool and comfortable. **White Twill Yacht Cap,** with black oilcloth peak, sweat band, gold braid and brass buttons with anchor. **Price 25c** **White Duck Yacht Cap,** superior quality duck, white celluloid cap, gold cord, brass buttons and red, white and blue anchor on front. State size. **Price postpaid 35c**

BOYS! BOYS! BOYS!

THROW YOUR VOICE!

Into a trunk, under the bed or anywhere. Lots of fun fooling teacher, policeman or friends.

THE WONDERFUL VENTRILO

a little instrument, fits in the mouth out of sight, used with above for Bird Calls, etc. Anyone can use it. Never fails. A complete book with full course on Ventriloquism together with the Ventrilo. Sent postpaid for only....... **10c**

CHAMELEON 25c

A LIVE PET

WATCH IT CHANGE COLOR!

Get one of these most wonderful of all creatures. Watch it change color. Study its habits. Wear one on the lapel of your coat as a curiosity. Shoots out its tongue to catch flies and insects for food. No trouble to keep. Can go for months without food. About 4 in. long. Shipped to any address in USA by mail. We guarantee safe arrival and live delivery. **Only 25c**

New Vest Pocket Adding Machine

Adds, subtracts, multiplies, divides. Does work of a costly machine. Ten million capacity. Simple and accurate. **NOT A TOY.** Easy to operate. No keys to punch, no lever to pull. Total always visible. Guaranteed for 5 years. Lightning calculator and time saver. Constructed of steel ensuring strength, durability and reliability. Lasts a lifetime. Compact and light. Weight 7 oz. Will fit right in vest pocket and can be carried about without inconvenience. 3x6in. **Price $1.50**

Hands Up! Pistol Cigarette Case 25c

It looks like a deadly weapon, but it is merely a novel Cigarette Case. Better than the real thing in many an awkward encounter. Great fun "sticking up" your friends. They squirm and protest. Pull the trigger and the slide flies open, disclosing cigarettes. **Price 25c**

Confessions of a Minister's Daughter

A startling book value. Amazing story of a girl who bares her life's tragedy. A warning to every mother's daughter. **Price 10c.**

HOW TO BUILD A MIDGET RACER from junk yard parts for a few dollars. Complete blueprints, plans, diagrams, etc. **Price 25c**

NOVELTY ASH TRAYS

Popular Designs

Three sensational brilliantly glazed, imported china novelties. Bright colors, snappy designs. Your choice: **Outhouse Novelty 15c. Ash Receiver (center) 25c. China Toilet (right) 15c. All Postpaid.**

JU-JITSU DON'T BE BULLIED 30c

The Japanese art of self-defense. New methods of attack and defense are given, illustrated so that you cannot fail to understand them. Deals fully with trips, throws, wrist locks, body holds, defense against revolvers, strangling, armlocks, scissors, splits, headlock, holding a man down, double knee throw, stick attack, defense against knife, one hand throat grip, defense against two assailants, stomach throw, secret thumb knockout, nerve punches, and numerous others. Learn to protect yourself under all circumstances with nature's weapons. Fear no man, guns or knives! "Science of Ju Jitsu" **Only 30c.**

Open Any Lock

Did you ever lose or forget your keys! Probably many times. Don't worry any more about lost keys (or any keys, for that matter), as these master keys will open almost any ordinary lock. Five different keys for various types of locks. Will save their cost if you only use them once, but you'll probably find them so handy that you'll always carry them.

5 MASTER KEYS Price 25c

WHOOPEE CUSHION

Whoopee Cushion is made of rubber, inflated like a balloon, and then placed on a chair, couch, seat, etc. When the victim unsuspectingly sits upon the cushion, it gives forth noises that can be better imagined than described. Price **25c**

ELECTRITE PENCIL

Write in Gold on Any Article

Electrite Pencil writes in gold, silver, red, yellow, purple, green blue etc., on leather, wood, paper, bakelite, cellophane, silk, rubber, etc., etc. Put your name, monogram or initials in gold or any other color on your car, wallet, golf clubs, fountain pen, stationery, etc. Print and decorate anything. Live-wire boys and girls can earn extra cash easily by doing it for other people. Every time you print a name or monogram on an article you can easily get 25c for it, yet it costs almost nothing except few seconds time! Easy to use. Just plug in electric light socket and the pencil is ready to write. **ELECTRITE PENCIL,** complete with supplies. **ONLY** **$1.25**

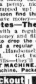
FORTUNE TELLING CARDS

Tomorrow?

What will it bring for you? What will happen? Let Madam Le Normand's Fortune Telling Cards predict the future! Just get a deck and friends for miles around will want to get in on the fun. At parties, gatherings, evenings, etc., everyone will want you to tell their fortunes. When things start to slow up and the guests start to sit down and mumble about the weather, pull a pack of fortune telling cards and watch 'em sit up! It interests and fascinates them. Yet there is nothing difficult to telling the fortunes—every card is plainly marked with its meaning and the connection between the cards becomes at once apparent. Complete directions with each deck. **Price 35c per deck. Deluxe deck** with 53 ivory finished cards, **75c. postpaid.**

INSERT A COIN AND OUT COMES A DELICIOUS CHOCOLATE BAR

Thrift Bank and Slot Machine



The most novel, popular and useful bank ever invented! A regular slot machine, savings bank and profit-maker all in one. Just think of having this handy bank around, and as soon as your friends drop in a penny, nickel or dime—out comes a chocolate bar, all wrapped up! **Leave the bank around the house and you will soon find that it fills up while you're gone.** An easy way to save money—and make money!

Get Plenty of Chocolates—They'll Go Fast!

Well made of sheet metal with a regular locked door so you can open and remove the money and fill it with chocolate bars. On the front is a **slot to drop the coin in, a window showing the chocolate bars, and a regular drawer that opens when each coin is deposited.** Handsomely lithographed in brilliant yellow, green and red. Get two or three banks and PLENTY of refills—they'll go fast. **25c**

SWEET THRIFT BANK & SLOT MACHINE. Only

Chocolate Bars to fit in the Machine. Package of 10.. 10c

Cigarette Stinkers

These Cigarette Stinkers can be placed in any cigarette so they will not be noticed, yet when the victim lights up and takes a few puffs, the cigarette throws off an awful "stink." A good Joke for moochers. **6 stinkers 10c**

CIGARETTE MAKER

Roll your own and save money. Better and quick—saves more than half. Neat, useful, handy. Pocket size, weighs ½ ounce. Nickel plated metal. **Price Postpaid 25c**

250 Magic Tricks

An excellent little book containing 250 Parlor Tricks, tricks with cards, coins, handkerchiefs, eggs, rings, glasses, etc. So simple that a child can perform them. Profusely illustrated. Entertain and amuse everybody. **Only 10c postpaid.**

Sex Indicator Fascinating discovery that is used by some to tell the sex of eggs, handwriting, etc. **Price 10c**

BIG ENTERTAINER

326 Jokes & Riddles, 25 Tricks, 10 Parlor Games, 73 Toasts, 13 Stories, 105 Money-making Secrets, 22 Monologs, 21 Puzzles, Problems, Comic recitations, Funny Readings, 10 Parlor Pastimes, 13 Flirtations, 1000 Names & their Meanings, 10 Picture Puzzles, 37 Amusing Experiments, Deaf and Dumb Alphabet, Shadowgraphy, Fortune Teller, Fortunes with Cards, Crystal, Tea Cup, etc., Hypnotism, Ventriloquism, Cut-outs for Checkers, Chess, Dominoes, Fox and Geese, 9 Men Morris, Anagrams, 25 card Tricks, Crystal Gazing, etc., etc. **Only 15c**

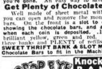
FUN LICENSES 10c

Large size, nicely printed with seal, suitable for framing. Hand one of these to your friend and he will never forget you! Your choice: **Liar's License; Bootleggers Diploma; Marriage Certificate (it looks real); Liar's & grafter's Certificate; Gossiper's Certificate; Spanish Athletes (Bull Throwers) Certificate; Gold Diggers & Grafters Certificate; One Armed Drivers & Neckers Certificate; Kibitzer's Certificate; Death Certificate; Birth Certificate; Arrest Warrant; College Diploma, Dog License; Gold Mine Stock Certificate; Divorce Certificate; Air Pilot's License; Doctor's Certificate. Only 10c each, 3 for 25c.**

SWEATER EMBLEMS

BOYS: Just what you've wanted—dandy, brilliant blue-on-orange **FELT EMBLEMS,** all ready to put on the front of your sweater or jacket, or hang them in your "den." Easy to sew on and they look keen. Select the design you want: **Fanny Dancer, Skull & Crossbones, Diving Girl, Lizard, Pirate, Good Luck Emblem, Football, Basketball, Baseball, Boy Scout or Lizard. Price Each Postpaid 25c.**

POP EYE Knockout BANK



Big, jumbo 3½x2½x5" bank with regular boxing floor and two figures, **Pop-Eye** and his opponent. Each and every time a coin is inserted in the bank, the fight begins, and Pop-Eye delivers a terrific KO punch, flooring his opponent! Friends, neighbors and relatives put money in your bank just to see the fight. Lithographed in colors, with lock and key. **25c Price Postpaid**

Quartermaster - Navy - CCC - Marine - Army Ring

Big jumbo size, with a flashy emblem, surrounded by the American Eagle. Like the U.S. Government men wear! State type and size. **Silver Finish, 25c Sterling Silver, $1.00. 14 kt. Gold Ring, $1.75.**

JOY BUZZER 28c

Funniest novelty ever invented! Fits the finger like a ring, but concealed in palm is the **TICKLER.** The **Buzzer, or tickler,** contains a clockwork mechanism that is wound up. Whenever it is touched, the mechanism is released, giving the victim a shock. Every time you shake hands, your friend will get a violent shock. Touch them on the back, and watch them jump. They will hit the ceiling if they sit on it. **Under a sheet it feels like a mouse.** Use it as a "tic-tac" on window. Hundreds of uses. **ONLY.... 28c**

THRIFT VAULT 50c

A 3 dial safe lock and Vault Bank. Just dial the three numbers and open the vault just like any safe. Big and roomy—it measures about 4x3 in. Swell to keep your money, jewelry, etc. in. Constructed of heavy metal with red and black trimmings. Full instructions with each bank. **VAULT BANK only 50c postpaid.**

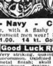
THRIFT VAULT Similar in appearance to the above only made of welded steel, and slightly larger. Packed in a box, with complete directions for opening. Price, ppd **$1.25**

SIDE SHOW SECRETS Here is a popular book which exposes the tricks and deceptions practised by carnivals and circus sideshows. Price **10c**

Good Luck Ring

Very striking, quaint and uncommon. Oxidized gun-metal finish; skull and crossbones design; two brilliant flashing imitation rubies or emeralds sparkle out of the eyes. Said to bring good luck to the wearer. **Only 25c.**

FRENCH PHOTO RING



A handsome ring, finished in imitation platinum & set with a large imitation diamond. In the shank of the ring is a small microscopic picture almost invisible to the naked eye, yet magnified to an almost incredible degree. Pictures of bathing girl beauties, French actresses, views of France, Panama Canal, Lord's Prayer (every word legible). **Price Postpaid 25c**

SWIM IN ONE TRIAL!

WATER WINGS

Water Wings impart such confidence in water that everyone can learn to swim and float at once. Expert swimmers use them to cover long distances, to swim in deep water, etc. Will support up to 180 lbs. Can be carried in the pocket and blown up when arriving at seashore. **Price 25c**

Ladies' Panties Hanky

A perfect model of the most necessary lingerie garment worn by ladies, which, when folded and worn in the pocket, has the appearance of being a gentleman's handkerchief. A clever, funny joke. **Price 15c Postpaid.**

COWBOY SONG BOOK

Gene Autry's sensational collection, containing 30 big hits. Silver Haired Daddy of Mine, Gangster's Warning, I'll be Thinking of You Little Gal, My Old Pal of Yesterday, Rheumatism Blues, Why Don't You Come Back to Me, and 24 others. 64 page book. **Price Postpaid.... 39c**

Ken Maynard's Songs. 25 big 8x10" songs with words, ukulele, guitar and piano accompaniment, including Wheels of Destiny, Trail Herd, Singin' on the Range, etc. **Price.... 39c**

Win Prize Contests

HOW TO WIN PRIZE CONTESTS

Tells the best methods and principles for winning some of the big prize contests which are announced almost daily. People make tidy sums of money by solving the various contests. Methods and principles presented have been selected from those advanced by the winners of some of the hardest and largest contests staged thus far. **Price 10c.** 600 page Novelty Catalog, 10c.

WONDERFUL X-RAY 10c

GREAT CURIOSITY! With it you can apparently see the bones in the fingers, lead in a pencil, even the flesh seems transparent. Always ready for use. **Only 10c ppd.**

SILENT DEFENDER

Used by police officers, detectives, sheriffs and night watchmen as a means of protection. Very effective. Easily fits the hand. Useful in an emergency. Aluminum. Wt. 2 oz. Pocket size. **25c. 2 for 45c.**

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Send 10c for our NEW CATALOG, or 25c for the DELUXE EDITION with permanent cloth binding. Bigger and better than ever. New items - different items - things that you never thought existed - articles you always wanted but never knew where to get. Nearly 600 pages of magic tricks, latest novelties, joke goods, useful time savers, seeds, unusual books, sporting goods, puzzles, games, etc., etc. ***Stamps Accepted.***

SNAPPY JOKES

A big collection of rich and rare jokes by a jolly bartender for stag parties, smokers, etc. Good clean humor—not a dull page in the whole book. Don't be a clam in company. Get a copy before your friend does. Costs but a dime, but contains a dollar's worth of fun. Hundreds of jokes and illustrations **Price 10c postpaid. RED HOT JOKE BOOK 10c postpaid.**

LIVES OF HOTCHA CHORUS GIRLS Tells the secrets of how many of the chorus girls live and what they do for excitement. **Price Postpaid Only 10c**

OLD MADGE'S DREAM BOOK Dreams, lucky numbers, fortunes, oracles, fortune telling tablets, astrology, marriage, divorce & births, etc. **Price 25c.**

LOVER'S SECRETS Wooing, Winning and Wedding. A psychological treatise on how to develop personality. Courtship, love letters, bashfulness, etc. Complete. **Price only 25c postpaid.**

fun?

SURE IT IS

—and mighty strenuous too!

"SPORT, even for the fun of it, can be tense and tiring," says Miss Gloria Wheeden, who is shown aquaplaning above and at left. "Like most of the folks who go in for water sports, I pride myself on my physical condition. Yes, I smoke. When I feel a bit let-down, I light up a Camel and get a 'lift' in energy." When an active day drains physical and nervous energy, Camels help you renew your flow of vim. And being mild, they never get on your nerves.

"MANY A TIME I've smoked a Camel to get a 'lift,'" says Harry Burmester printer, *{left}*. "With Camels handy, I feel I can take the tough spots right in stride. Camels never tire my taste or irritate my throat—even smoking as much as I do."

COSTLIER TOBACCOS

Camels are made from finer, MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS—Turkish and Domestic—than any other popular brand.

1060 PARACHUTE JUMPS—no mishaps! Floyd Stimson *{right}* started smoking Camels at his first parachute jump. "Camels are so mild I take healthy nerves for granted," says Floyd. "I've found what I want in Camels. Mildness — tastiness."

Get a Lift with a Camel!