EVERY WEEK JAN. 7, 1922

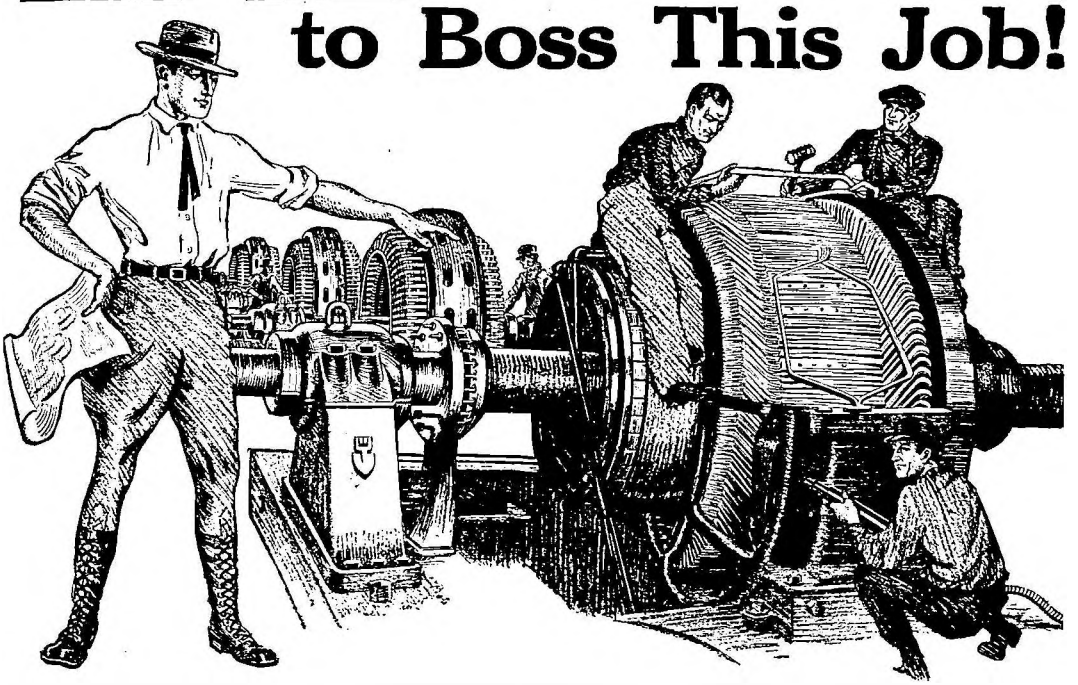
Western Story Magazine

VOL. 22 No. 6

15 Cents

BIG CLEAN STORIES OF OUTDOOR LIFE

You, Too, Can Learn to Boss This Job!



"ELECTRICAL EXPERTS" Earn $12 to $30 a Day

What's *YOUR* Future?

Trained "Electrical Experts" are in great demand at the highest salaries, and the opportunities for advancement and a big success in this line are the greatest ever known.
"Electrical Experts" earn $70 to $200 a week. Fit yourself for one of these big paying positions.

Be an "Electrical Expert"

Today even the ordinary electrician—the "screw driver" kind is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the "Electrical Expert"—who is picked out to "boss" ordinary electricians—to boss big jobs—the jobs that pay.

$3,500 to $10,000 a Year

Get in line for one of these "Big Jobs," by enrolling now for my easily-learned, quickly-grasped, right-up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home Study Course in Practical Electricity.

Age or Lack of Experience No Draw-Back

You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School graduate. My Course in Electricity is the most simple, thorough, and successful in existence, and offers every man, regardless of age, education, or previous experience, the chance to become, in a very short time, an "Electrical Expert," able to make from $70 to $200 a week.

I Give You a Real Training

As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works I know exactly the kind of training a man needs to get the best positions at the highest salaries. Hundreds of my students are now earning $3,500 to $10,000. Many are now successful ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS.

Satisfaction Guaranteed

So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you, *too*, can get into the "big money" class in electrical work, that I will guarantee under bond to return every single penny paid me in tuition, if, when you have finished my course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made.

FREE—Electrical Working Outfit—FREE

I give each student a Splendid Outfit of Electrical Tools, Materials and Measuring Instruments absolutely FREE. I also supply them with Drawing Outfits, examination paper, and many other things that other schools don't furnish. You do PRACTICAL work—AT HOME. You start right in after the first few lessons to WORK AT YOUR PROFESSION in a practical way.

L. L. COOKE, Chief Engineer, Chicago Engineering Works, Dept. 431, 1918 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir: Send me at once full particulars of your great Special Offer; also your Free booklet on "How to Become An Electrical Expert." No obligation on my part.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

SAVE $45.50 BY ENROLLING NOW

You can save $45.50 in tuition by enrolling now. Let me send you full particulars of my great Special Offer, and my Free booklet on "How to Become an Electrical Expert."

L. L. COOKE, CHIEF ENGINEER.
CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS
INCORPORATED
Dept. 431, 1918 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago, Ill.

THE "COOKE" TRAINED MAN IS THE "BIG-PAY MAN"

When You Write, *Typewrite,* **then people will be glad to get your letters, for typing is now becoming the universal method of communication, even outside of business. Hand-writing is fast disappearing, and the increase in typewriters in the home means that typing is replacing tiring, laborious longhand.**

Save Half

Why Pay Double For Any Typewriter?

Easy Terms

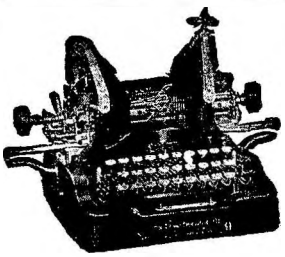
Ask yourself—after reading this advertisement—if there is any reason on earth why you should pay $100 for a typewriter.

That has been the price for 25 years, and half of it, we found, was wasteful selling expense.

So we adopted a new method of selling direct from the factory to the buyer and we subtracted what it cost us to maintain a great force of salesmen and agents, costly branch houses in 50 cities and other extravagances.

As a result, the standard $100 Oliver now sells for a new low price of $49.50, without a single change nor cheapening. In fact it is the finest typewriter we ever built, our latest and best model.

Only $49.50 For the Oliver



FREE TRIAL

Our new selling method is simple. We ship the Oliver for five days free trial to all who are interested. You can get it by mailing the coupon below.

When it comes, compare it with any $100 standard typewriter. Note the Oliver's superiorities—its simplicity, durability, easy operation and fine work. Note its speed.

Then if you agree that it is the finest typewriter regardless of price, and desire to buy it, send us $49.50 cash. Or if you wish to pay in installments, the price is $55, payable $3 after trial, then $4 per month.

BUY DIRECT FROM THE FACTORY

If you want to return the Oliver, ship it back at our expense, and we even refund the out-going transportation charges, so that the trial does not cost you a single penny.

This is the most liberal typewriter offer ever made by any manufacturer. You get your money's worth without paying extra for non-essentials. Were it not for the superiority of the Oliver, such an offer as this would be impossible.

Send No Money

The coupon below brings you EITHER a free trial Oliver or Further Information. Check which you wish.

Remember, this is a brand new, latest model Oliver, not second-hand, not rebuilt. You are dealing directly with the manufacturer, a $2,000,000 concern.

Sending the coupon does not obligate you to buy. It simply gives the Oliver an opportunity to sell itself and it helps you save $50.50. So mail the coupon NOW.

Canadian Price, $79

The OLIVER Typewriter Company
731 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY,
731 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver No. 9 Typewriter for five days' free inspection. If I keep it I will pay $55 as follows: $3 at the end of trial period and then at the rate of $4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for. If I make cash settlement at end of trial period I am to deduct ten per cent and remit to you $49.50. If I decide not to keep it, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

My shipping point is.....

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name.....

Street Address .....

City..... **State**.....

Occupation or Business .....

Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. XXII Contents for January 7, 1922 No. 6

ONE COMPLETE NOVEL

TWO SERIALS

SIX SHORT STORIES

MISCELLANEOUS

DEPARTMENTS

Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. ORMOND G. SMITH, President; GEORGE C. SMITH, Treasurer; GEORGE C. SMITH, JR., Secretary. Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this Magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as Second-class Matter, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. Canadian subscription, $7.60. Foreign, $8.50.

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YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $6.00 **SINGLE COPIES, 15 CENTS**

5,000,000 Men Are After the Routine Jobs—

Break Away From This Competition—

Command Big Pay!

When business slackens, can your employer "let you go"—and tomorrow hire almost any routine man from this army of 5,000,000 men and find him competent to take your place?

Observe that when a business trims its crew, it is almost never the *big-pay* men who walk the plank.

Not only are the specialists retained—the Accountants, Production Managers, Traffic Managers, and, in fact, the managers of any of the important departments of a business—but they are frequently *promoted.* Other concerns are in need of their ability, and come bidding for their services.

Many of these men who today are going rapidly ahead were no better off than you, several years ago. Today, while others walk the streets, these men walk into the better jobs.

There is no mystery about their swift advancement. There is a way that's interesting and practical whereby any man of average intelligence can get the training that will put him in the big-pay class. Literally thousands of ambitious men have found this way in the LaSalle Problem Method. They have chosen the line of work that most appealed to them—then, right in the quiet of their own homes, without losing an hour from work or a dollar of pay, they have solved the problems they today are meeting in the better jobs.

Situations which they face today are identical with those they faced in spare-time study. They have been shown exactly how to meet them—guided every step of the way by some of the ablest business men, in their respective fields, in America.

Read these statements, typical of over 1,000 which we will send you in booklet form and which represent but a small part of the many thousands of similar letters in our files:

"The most efficient and most rapidly promoted men in our whole organization are LaSalle-trained."
"Promoted to General Manager."
"Now a director in two banks."
"From bookkeeper advanced to chief accountant—salary increased 500%."
"Passed bar examination with highest grade, in competition with many resident school graduates."
"The Problem Method increased my income $2,500 a year."
"Passed C. P. A. examination. You will be interested to know that 50% of the successful candidates were LaSalle-trained men."

An analysis of the letters from 1,089 LaSalle members reporting definite salary increases during 3 months' time shows *an average increase per man of 56%.*

While the axe hangs over every business office, it's the time of all times to free yourself forever from the treadmill jobs.

Mark on the coupon the training that attracts you, sign and mail it to the University. It will bring you full information, together with particulars of our convenient-payment plan; also your free copy of the inspiring book—"Ten Years' Promotion in One."

Break away from the crowd of routine pluggers. Find out today what YOU must do to put yourself among the men who command big money. Mail the coupon NOW.

— — — — — — — — — — — — *INQUIRY COUPON* — — — — — — — — — — — —

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY, Dept. 165-R CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Please send me catalog and full information regarding the course and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of your booklet, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation to me.

☐ Business Management	☐ Law—Degree of LL. B.	☐ Banking and Finance	☐ Expert Bookkeeping
☐ Higher Accountancy	☐ Commercial Law	☐ Personnel and Employment Management	☐ Business English
☐ Traffic Management—Foreign and Domestic	☐ Industrial Management Efficiency	☐ Modern Foremanship & Production Methods	☐ Commercial Spanish
☐ Railway Accounting and Station Management	☐ Modern Business Correspondence and Practice		☐ Effective Speaking
			☐ C. P. A. Coaching

Name..... *Present Position*.....

Address.....

Classified Advertising

Agents and Help Wanted

BE A DETECTIVE. Excellent opportunity, good pay, travel. Write C. T. Ludwig, 436 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

MEN—Age 17 to 55. Experience unnecessary. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 114, St. Louis.

RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTORS earn from $110 to $200 per month and expenses. Travel if desired. Unlimited advancement. No age limit. We train you. Positions furnished under guarantee. Write for Booklet CM 28, Standard Business Training Institute, Buffalo, N. Y.

$10.00 WORTH of finest toilet soaps, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 427, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS, $60 to $200 a Week, Free Samples. Gold Sign Letters for Store and Office windows. Any one can do it. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 431T N. Clark Street, Chicago.

SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants agents to sell work and dress shirts direct to wearer. Big values. Exclusive patterns. Free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

YOUR name on 35 linen cards and case 20 cents. Agents outfit free. Big profits. John W. Burt. Coshocton, Ohio.

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Travel. Excellent opportunity. Experience unnecessary. Particulars free. Write, American Detective System, 1968 Broadway, N. Y.

WE WANT MEN AND WOMEN who are desirous of making $25.00 to $200.00 per week clear profit from the start in a permanent business of their own. Mitchell's Magic Marvel Washing Compound washes clothes spotlessly clean in ten to fifteen minutes. One hundred other uses in every home. Nothing else like it. Nature's mightiest cleanser. Contains no lye, lime, acid or wax. Fastest selling article ever sold through agents. Free Samples make sales easy. Enormous repeat orders. 300 per cent profit. Exclusive territory. We guarantee sale of every package. No capital or experience required. Baker, Ohio, made $600 last month. You can do as well. Send for Free Sample and proof. L. Mitchell & Co., Desk 333, 1308-1314 E. 61st., Chicago, Ill.

MEN WANTED to make Secret Investigations and reports. Experience unnecessary. Write J. Ganor, Former Gov't Detective, 120, St. Louis.

AGENTS—Steady income, large manufacturer of Soaps, Perfumes, Toilet Articles and Pure Food Products, etc., wishes representatives in each locality. Manufacturer direct to Consumer. Big profits. Honest goods. Whole or spare time. Cash or Credit. Send at once for particulars. American Products Co., 5726 American Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

FIREMEN, Brakemen, Baggagemen. $140-$200; Colored Porters by Railroads everywhere. Experience unnecessary. 915 Ry. Bureau, E. St. Louis, Ill.

WANTED. Men over 17, Railway Mail Clerks. $135 month. List positions free. Write Franklin Institute, Dept. T 2, Rochester, N. Y.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything; men and women $30 to $100 weekly operating our "Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 29, East Orange, N. J.

BIG MONEY FOR AGENTS, Crew Managers, Salesmen. Write at once for particulars regarding the quick selling "Common-Sense" Electric Iron. Big Money can be made. Every home needs an iron. We have several plans which sell these irons. Write for details today. Address Corporation Appliance Company, Household Department 10, 538 South Dearborn Street, Chicago.

Automobiles

AUTOMOBILE Owners, Garagemen, Mechanics, Repairmen, send for free copy of our current issue. It contains helpful, instructive information on overhauling, ignition troubles, wiring, carburetors, storage batteries, etc. Over 120 pages, illustrated. Send for free copy today. Automobile Digest, 530 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

Farm Lands

CLAY LOAM LANDS—20, 40, 80 acre tracts in clover district of Michigan; rich soil; $15 to $35 acre. Easy terms. Send for Free booklet. Swigart Land Co., X-1265, First National Bank Bldg., Chicago.

Help Wanted—Female

$6—$18 a dozen decorating pillow tops at home, experience unnecessary; particulars for stamp. Tapestry Paint Co., 110 LaGrange, Ind.

WANTED—Girls—Women. Become Dress Designers. $135 month. Sample lessons free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. T 561, Rochester, N. Y.

Patents and Lawyers

INVENTORS desiring to secure patents should write for our guide-book "How To Get Your Patent." Send sketch or description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. Write for Evidence of Conception Blank and free guide book. Send model or sketch and description for free opinion of its patentable nature. Highest references. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 767 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. Highest references. Rates reasonable. Best results. Promptness assured. Booklet free. Watson E. Coleman, Patent Lawyer, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS, Trademark, Copyright, foremost word free. Correspondence, solicited. Results procured. Charges reasonable. Write Metzger, Washington.

INVENTIONS WANTED. Cash or Royalty for ideas. Adam Fisher Mfg. Co., 223, St. Louis, Mo.

INVENTORS: If you have an invention and don't want to spend unnecessary money in securing a patent, write to Inventors & Engineers Consulting Co., P. O. Box 344, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS SECURED. Submit sketch or model of your invention for examination. Write for Record of Invention blank and valuable book, free. J. L. Jackson & Co., 305 Ouray Building, Washington, D. C.

Personal

DO You want success? To win friends and be happy? Wonderful results. "Success" key and Personality sketch for 10c and birthdate. Thomson-Heywood, 300 Chronicle Bldg., San Francisco.

ASTROLOGY—Stars tell Life's Story. Send birth date and dime for trial reading. Eddy, Westport St., 33—74 Kansas City, Missouri.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music and guarantee to secure publication on royalty basis by New York publisher. Our Chief Composer and Lyric Editor is a song-writer of national reputation and has written many big song-hits. Submit poems on any subject. Broadway Studios, 275 Fitzgerald Bldg., New York.

ASTROLOGY. Send dime and birth information for reliable scientific test to Plato, oldest astrologer, Box 102, Buffalo, N. Y. One year's future one dollar.

ZEE Beautiful girl pictures. 10 wonderful poses $1.00; 18 specials $2.00. Bairart Co., 125, St. Louis, Mo.

ARE YOU INTERESTED in your future? Trial reading for birthdate and 10c. F. Crane, 840 Advertising Bldg., Chicago.

Salesmen Wanted

SALESMEN—Ambition and training. That's what it takes to get the Big Jobs today. We train you and secure the position; write today. American School of Salesmanship, Eighth Floor, 20 E. Jackson St., Chicago.

TRAVELING Field Representatives wanted. Should net $10,000 yearly. Choice of territory. Weekly advances. Merchants School of Advertising, Dept. 14, 22 Quincy St., Chicago.

Shorthand

SHORTHAND—Best practical system, learn in 5 hours; speed with easy practice. Proof lessons, brochure free. King Institute, EB-26, Station F, New York.

Short Stories and Photoplays

WRITE NEWS ITEMS and Short Stories for pay in spare time. Copyright Book and plans free. Press Reporting Syndicate (406), St. Louis, Mo.

WRITE PHOTOPLAYS: $25—$300 paid any one for suitable ideas. Experience unnecessary; complete outline Free. Producers League, 439 St. Louis.

FREE to writers—A wonderful little book of money-making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie writing. Absolutely Free. Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 89, Auburn, N. Y.

WRITERS! Stories, Poems, Plays, etc., are wanted for publication. Literary Bureau, 175, Hannibal, Mo.

AMBITIOUS WRITERS send today for Free Copy, America's leading magazine for writers of photoplays, Stories, Poems, Songs. Instructive, helpful. Writer's Digest, 605 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED for California Producers; also stories. Submit manuscripts, or, if a beginner, write for Free Plot Chart and Details. Harvard Company, 560, San Francisco.

Songs, Poems, etc.

YOU Write the Words for a Song. We'll compose the music free and publish same. Send Song-Poem to-day. B. Lenox Co., 271 W. 125th St., New York.

WRITE A SONG POEM, Love, Mother, Home, Comic or any subject. I compose music and guarantee publication. Send words to-day. Edward Trent, 625 Reaper Block, Chicago.

HAVE YOU SONG POEMS? I have best proposition. Ray Hibbeler, D102, 4040 Dickens Ave., Chicago.

SONGWRITERS! Learn of the public's demand for songs suitable for dancing and the opportunities greatly changed conditions offer new writers, obtainable only in our "Songwriters Manual & Guide" sent free. Submit your ideas for songs at once for free criticism and advice. We revise poems, compose music, secure copyright and facilitate free publication or outright sale of songs. Knickerbocker Studios, 304 Gaiety Bldg., New York.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG—We write the music, copyright and print professional copies which are distributed to over 200 performers and theaters and submitted to 80 publishers for outright sale. Our Chief of Staff wrote the Greatest Ballad Success of All Time. Millions of copies of his songs have been sold. Bell Studios, 1490 Broadway, Dept. 707, New York.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG—We revise poems, compose music and guarantee to secure publication on royalty basis by a New York music publisher. Our Chief Composer and Lyric Editor is a song-writer of national reputation and has written many big song-hits. Millions of copies of his songs have been sold. You can write the words for a song if you try. Do so now. Submit poems to us on any subject. Send today. Do not delay. Broadway Composing Studios, 159C Fitzgerald Building, New York City.

SONG POEMS—You write words, we'll write music; print 100 autograph copies. Copyright in your name. Write for terms. B. & C. Studios, Suite 5, 469 Broad St., Newark, N. J.

Stammering

ST-STU-T-T-TERING And Stammering Cured At Home. Instructive booklet free. Walter McDonnell, 80 Potomac Bank Building, Washington, D. C.

How I Found a $10,000 Job in a Waste Basket

Truth is often stranger than fiction as evidenced by the fact that I found an opportunity in a waste basket that quickly placed me in the $10,000 a year class.

By Philip Wilson

IF anyone had told me a couple of years ago that I would be in the position I am in today it would have made me sore, because at that time my prospects did not amount to a row of beans. After ten years drudgery as a bookkeeper I was only earning $35.00 a week. Further promotion was almost impossible and even if it came my way, it could only mean five or ten dollars more a week at the most.

From morning until night I worked on endless rows of figures, punched the clock on my arrival and again on quitting. Frankly, I was sour on life. And then, as though by a touch of magic, my entire prospects changed—thanks to a dilapidated old waste basket.

And now for the other side of the picture. At the present time I am earning about $10,000 a year, have a comfortable home, earn enough to enjoy the luxuries that make life worth while, have a bank account that is growing each month, to say nothing of the fact that I am engaged in work that seems like play, that fascinates, thrills and enables me to live like a gentleman.

The funny part of it is that if anyone had told me two years ago that I could make good in my present profession, I would have scorned the idea as impossible.

I found my opportunity in a **waste basket.** In my case I was eating lunch in our stock room because I could not afford to go to a restaurant. In the corner of the room I noticed a waste basket. Sticking out of it was a dirty looking old magazine. Not finding anything of interest among the articles, I idly turned over the advertising pages when something stopped me. For fifteen minutes or so I studied the page before me carefully. Then I took it over to the stock room clerk.

"What do you think of this, Jim," I asked.

Poor Jim, who is still in that stock room, only read the headline and sniffed in contempt.

Anyway the advertisement set me thinking although my negative condition at that time made me feel somewhat the way Jim did. But anyway, I ripped that advertisement out of the magazine and stuffed it in my pocket.

Several times that afternoon I pulled it out and studied it carefully. Every time I read it my pulse quickened, because if true at all, it pointed a way for me to increase my earning power many times over, to say nothing of getting away from the drudgery of bookkeeping.

"Why couldn't I do the same?" I asked myself.

Then Old Man Negative whispered in my ear that I was foolish to even think about it—that I was not cut out for it. So I put the advertisement in my desk and for the time being I forgot it.

Several weeks later I ran across it again and this time I acted. I mailed the coupon in for particulars.

Philip Wilson, who tells on this page how chance brought to him, from a dilapidated old waste basket, the secret that suddenly lifted him out of the rut to wonderful success and big earnings.

The Secret of My Success

What was responsible for my remarkable increase in earning power? What did I do to lift myself out of the low pay rut and step into magnificent earnings? **I got into the great field of selling** through the aid of the National Salesmen's Training Association—an organization of top notch salesmanagers and salesmen, formed just for the purpose of showing men how to become **master** salesmen.

Through the help of the N. S. T. A., hundreds of men have been able to realize their dreams of success, health, and independence. Men without previous experience or special qualifications have learned the secrets of selling that make star salesmen—for salesmen are **not** "born," but made, and any man can easily master the principles of salesmanship through the wonderful system of the National Salesmen's Training Association. On record in the Association files are hundreds of letters similar to the few shown on this page. The most amazing part of it all is that these successful men had no previous selling experience before the N. S. T. A. trained them and helped them secure sales positions.

In my own case for instance, it may sound like a fairy tale but at the end of my first month I received a letter from my salesmanager congratulating me on my success. **I had made a record for my territory.**

Previous Experience Unnecessary

Salesmanship is not a natural gift—it is an Art and Science that is open to any man of average intelligence. There are many fundamental rules and principles that anyone can learn and put into practice. There are certain ways of doing and saying things in selling and once you are master of these selling secrets, the world is before you. The man who understands the underlying principles of salesmanship has a two fisted grip on prosperity.

A Great Book on Selling Sent Free

The interesting book "The Knight of the Grip" will be sent absolutely free to those sending in the attached coupon. This valuable book tells you all about the N. S. T. A. method of Salesmanship Training and Free Employment Service. In addition, you will read of the big opportunities open for you in the selling field and personal stories of men from all sections of the country and from all trades and professions who have suddenly stepped from small pay jobs to magnificent earnings as a result of the N. S. T. A. system.

Simply fill out and mail the attached coupon and "The Knight of the Grip" will be promptly mailed to you. **National Salesmen's Training Association, Dept. 4-A, Chicago, Illinois.**

National Salesmen's Training Association,
Dept. 4-A, Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.

Please send me, without any obligation on my part, your free book, "A Knight of the Grip," and full information about the N. S. T. A. system of Salesmanship training and Employment Service. Also a list showing lines of business with openings for salesmen.

Name .....

Street .....

City..... State.....

What Others Have Done

$524 in Two Weeks

I had never earned more than $80 a month. Last week I cleared $806 and this week $218. You have done wonders for me.—Geo. W. Kearns, 107 W. Park Place, Oklahoma, Okla.

Earns as High as $100 a Day

I took your course two years ago. Was earning $18 a week clerking. Am now selling many of the largest firms in the U. S. I have earned more than $100 a day. You secured me my position. Our Sales Manager is a graduate of yours.—J. L. DeBonis, 1628 S. Crawford Ave., Chicago, Ill.

$1,562 in Thirty Days

My earnings for the past thirty days are $1,562.00 and I won Second Prize in March although I only worked two weeks during that month.—C. W. Campbell, Greensburg, Pa.

9,000,000 Autos Need Help!

Earn $40 to $150 a Week!

Think of it—over 9,000,000 automobiles are in use in the U. S. There never was a better opportunity for money making than the automobile field offers you right now. Think of the money spent every year to keep all these cars in a going condition. Think of the chances for the repairmen, chauffeurs, engineers and garage owners. Look at the autos being sold—both old and new. Look at the garages springing up here and there. This all means money, money, money for the fellows in the game. Get your share now. Men like you are needed everywhere to fill big paying jobs.

Easy to Learn We have made it easy for you to fit yourself for a job paying from $40.00 to $150.00 a week. You don't have to go to school. You don't have to serve an apprenticeship. Everything is worked out for you by fifteen great automobile engineers so you can become an auto expert in your spare time and keep on earning while you learn.

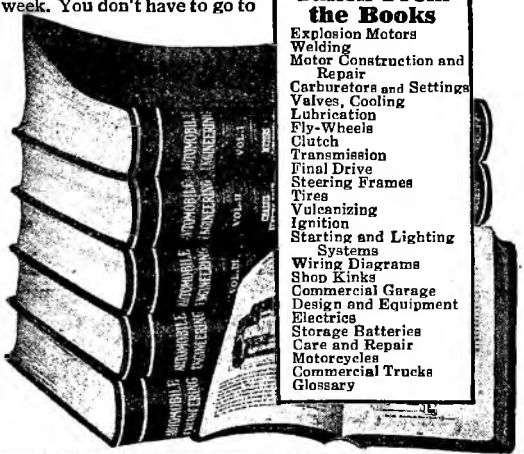
Auto Books

SIX VOLUMES Sent FREE

Now ready for you—the new 6-volume Library of Automobile Engineering—right up-to-date, showing all the new cars and the latest and best ways of doing things. It covers the construction, care and repair of every kind of automobile, truck and motorcycle. Just chock full of advance information on Ignition, Starting and Lighting Systems, Garage Design and Equipment, Welding and other repair methods. Everything that a mechanic or any man interested in automobiles should know. Written in simple language that anyone can understand. 2700 pages and 2400 pictures, plans, blueprints and wiring diagrams, all bound in tough, wear-resisting material and stamped in gold. Over 75,000 sets have been sold on our free trial—no money down plan.

A Few Things Taken From the Books

- Explosion Motors
- Welding
- Motor Construction and Repair
- Carburetors and Settings
- Valves, Cooling
- Lubrication
- Fly-Wheels
- Clutch
- Transmission
- Final Drive
- Steering Frames
- Tires
- Vulcanizing
- Ignition
- Starting and Lighting Systems
- Wiring Diagrams
- Shop Kinks
- Commercial Garage Design and Equipment
- Electrics
- Storage Batteries
- Care and Repair
- Motorcycles
- Commercial Trucks
- Glossary



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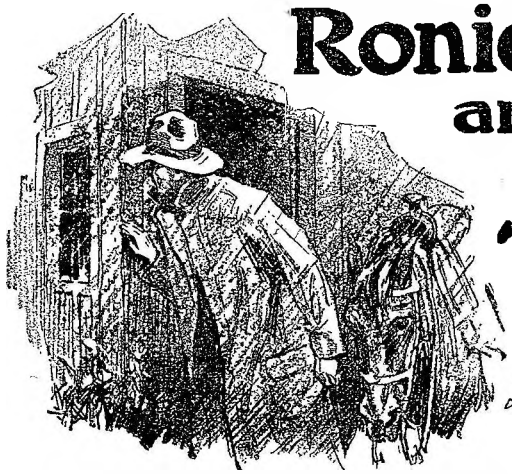


Ronicky Doone and the Cosslett Treasure

BY David Manning

Author of "Ronicky Doone, Champion of Lost Causes," etc

CHAPTER I.

SHELTER FOR STRANGE COMPANY.

SNOW had already fallen above timber line, and the horseman, struggling over the summit, looked eagerly down into the broad valleys below, dark with evergreens. There was half an hour more of sunshine, but by the time he had ridden through the belt of lodgepole pines, those stubborn marchers up to the mountaintops, a stiffening north wind had sheeted the sky from horizon to horizon with clouds. Even before the rain began he put on his slicker to turn the edge of the gale, but, as he came out of the pines and into the more open and gently rolling lands beyond, the rain was beginning to drive down the valley. The lower he dropped toward the bottom lands the lower dropped the storm clouds above him, until the summits were quite lost in rolling gray masses and a mist of thin rain slanted across the trail.

The mare turned her head sideways to it, taking the brunt on one flattened ear and from time to time shaking off the drops of moisture. Between her and the rider there existed an almost conversational intimacy, it seemed. He had spread out the skirt of his slicker so as to cover as great a portion of her barrel as possible; as the chill of the rain increased, he encouraged her with talk. She replied with a slight pricking of her ears from time to time and often threw up her head in that way horses

have when they wish to see the master the more clearly.

Meanwhile, she descended the precipitous trail with such cat-footed activity that it was plain she had spent her life among the mountains. The rider made little effort to direct her but allowed her to follow her own fancy, as though confident that she would take the quickest way to the bottom of the slope. And this, indeed, she did, sometimes slackening her pace for a moment to study the lay of the land ahead, sometimes taking a steep down pitch on braced legs, sometimes wandering in easy loops to one side or the other.

In such manner she came in the dusk of that late, stormy afternoon to the almost level going of the valley floor. Now it was possible to see her at her best, for she sprang out in a smooth and stretching gallop with such easily working muscles that her gait was deceptively fast. Here, again, the rider simply pointed out the goal and then let her take her own way toward it.

That goal was the only building in sight. Perhaps for miles and miles it was the only structure, and the face of the rider brightened as he made out the sharp angle of the roof. The ears of the mare pricked. Their way across the mountains had been a long one; they had been several hours in the snows above timber line; and this promise of shelter was a golden one.

But it was a deceptive promise, for when they came near in the face of the driving storm they found that the tall building was not a ranch house but merely a ruined barn. It had once been a portion of a large establishment of some cattle owner, but the house proper and its outlying structures had melted away with the passage of time and the beating of such storms as that of this day. The sheds were mere crumbling ridges; the house was a ragged mound from which rotting timber ends projected. Only the barn subsisted.

It was of vast size. Hundreds of tons of loose hay could have been stored in its mow; scores of horses could have been stalled along its sides. And it had been built with such unusual solidity that, whereas the rest of the buildings had disintegrated, this one kept its original dimensions intact through half of its length. The south front was whole. Only the northern portion of the building had crushed in. But for some reason this combination of ruin and repair was more melancholy than the utter destruction of the rest of the ranch.

The horseman regarded this sight with a shake of the head and then looked again up the valley. But it would be difficult to continue. By this time it must have been sunset, and the storm dimmed the earth to the colors of late twilight. Every moment the wind freshened out of the north, picking up the drifts of rain and whirling them into gray ghost forms. The mountains were quite lost from view most of the time, only looking out now and then through a partial lifting of the storm; and cold and forbidding were their forms seen in this manner. To continue down a blind trail in the face of this gale, with no well-known destination, was madness. The horseman resigned himself with a sigh to staying in the ruined barn until dawn.

He rode the mare, therefore, through a fallen section of the south front of the structure and into what had once been the mow. Stale scents of moldy straw still lingered in it.

Once inside, there was barely sufficient light to show the wanderer the dim outlines of the barn, and it was even more imposing in dimensions from within than from without. To the roof was a dizzy rise. A broad space extended on either side to the supporting walls. Half a regiment might bivouac here. Most important of all, the north gable was almost entirely blocked. That

end of the building, though fallen, had not yet crumbled to the ground, and the broken roof formed a sort of enormous apron extending against the wind.

As soon as he had discovered this, the wanderer began at once to make systematic preparations for spending the night. He first rode the mare back into the open air to a rain rivulet, where she was allowed to drink. Then he returned, dismounted, gathered some fragments of wood, and lighted a fire.

The first leap of the yellow light transfigured the gloomy place. It started a shudder and dance of great shadows among the network of rafters above and in the corners of the building; it also showed the mare, from which the traveler now removed the saddle and rubbed her down—a bit of work of which most of the other riders of the Rocky Mountains would not have thought. He dried her as well as he could, and, before paying the slightest attention to his own wants, he produced from his saddle bags a mixture of chopped hay and crushed barley, a provision for his horse which he carried with him wherever he went. This he now poured for her on a broad, smooth plank which he had first scrupulously dusted. She stood by, meanwhile, never offering to touch the provender until she was invited, though she was in ravenous appetite. Not until the master stood back did she step in; but then her eyes shone, and she attempted, after the fashion of all good horses, to eat her entire portion in the first mouthful.

The result was that a handful was scattered in the dust, and the rider cautioned her away. She went back tossing her head, and he called her again and taught her to eat more daintily, so as to keep her rations from spilling in the dust. She learned readily and presently began to nibble at her food in a circle, beginning at the base of the pile. Still the master observed her for a time, heedless of his own wants, and making sure by her appetite, by the brightness of her eye, by her carriage, and by a score of small signs, that she was none the worse for the labors of the day. His glance, indeed, wandered affectionately over her, for truly she was a beautiful creature.

In color she was a rich bay. Her stature was rather less than the average, for she was not more than fifteen hands and three inches in height; but what she lacked in height she made up in the exquisite nicety of her proportions. At first glance she looked rather too fine for hard mountain work, but a little closer examination showed ample girth at the cinches, nobly sloped shoulders, and quarters to match. In fact, she could have carried a heavyweight, and the bulk of her owner was a trifle for her strength.

He proved a slenderly made fellow as he turned away from the mare and threw more wood on the fire—a man of medium height and in no way imposing physically. His carriage alone struck the eye. He was erect as a whipstock, bore his head high and proudly, and moved with a light, quick step, as though he had been forced to act quickly so often that the habit had formed and hardened on him. That alert and jaunty carriage would in itself have won him some respect, even if his name had not been Ronicky Doone, whose fame in the more southerly ranges was already a notable thing. Horsebreaker, mischief-maker, adventurer by instinct, and fighter for sheer love of battle, he carried on his young body enough scars to have decked out half a dozen hardy warriors of the mountains, but the scars were all he had gained. The quarrels he fought had been the quarrels of others; and, a champion of lost causes, the rewards of his actions went to others.

Now he rolled down his blanket beside the fire, which he had built for the sake of warmth and good cheer rather than for cooking. His fare con-

sisted of hard crackers and was finished off with a draft of cold water from his canteen; then he was ready for sleep.

He had hardly turned over in his blanket, however, after calling a good night to Lou, his mare, when a more powerful blast of the storm tore away a section of the roof above him and let in a volley of rain. The drops pelted him and hissed on the fire, and he had to get up and look about for new quarters.

At the north end of the mow he found them. Here a great section of the disintegrating roof had fallen and stood end up, walling away a little room half a dozen paces in length and something more than half of that in width. By the vague light cast from the fire, which was rapidly blackening under the downpour of the rain, he took up his new abode for the night, and Lou followed him into it, unbidden. When they camped out in the wilderness, her place, like a faithful dog, was at his feet all the night, unless there were grass to graze on.

The new place was more comfortable than the old. The fallen timbers walled him on the south. The sagging roof protected him from the north; east and west there was a narrow, triangular opening. And here he wrapped himself again in his blanket and was almost instantly asleep.

He was wakened, after how long an interval he could not guess, by the sound of Lou getting to her feet, and a moment later he heard voices sounding in the big mow of the barn. Other travelers had taken refuge from the storm, it seemed. And Ronicky Doone, glad of a chance to exchange words with men, rose hastily and walked to the entrance to his quarters.

As he did so, a match was lighted, revealing two men standing beside their horses in the center of the great inclosure.

"A fine place for a meeting," said he who held the match. "How come we got to ride out here to the end of the world?"

His companion answered: "Maybe you'd have us meet up in a hotel or something, where the sheriff could scoop the whole bunch of us in. Is that your idea, Marty?"

Ronicky Doone had already advanced a step toward the newcomers, but as he heard these speeches he slipped back again, and, putting his hand over the nose of Lou, he hissed a caution into her ear. And glad he was that he had taught her this signal for silence. She remained at his back, not daring to stir or make a sound, and Ronicky, with a beating heart, crouched behind his barrier to spy on these strangers.

CHAPTER II.

TO TEACH A LESSON.

ALL I say, 'Baldy' McNair," said Marty, "is that the old man is sure stepping out long and hard to make things seem as mysterious as he can. Which they ain't no real need to come clean out here. This makes fifty miles I've rode, and you've come nigher onto eighty. What sense is in that, Baldy?"

The match burned out. Baldy spoke in the dark.

"Maybe the work he's got planned out lies ahead—lies north."

"Maybe. But it sure grinds in on me the way he works. Never no reasons. Just orders. 'Meet here to-day after sunset.' That's all he says. I ups and asks him: 'Why after sunset, Jack? Afraid they'll be somebody to see us out there—a coyote or something, maybe?' But he wouldn't answer me nothing. 'You do what I say,' says he, 'and figure out your reasons for yourself.' That's the way he talks. I say: Is it fit and proper to talk to a gent like he was a slave?"

"Let's start a fire," said his companion. "Talk a pile better when we get some light on the subject."

In a minute or two they had collected a great pile of dry stuff; a little later the flames were leaping up in great bodies toward the roof and puffing out into the darkness. As the flames soared, the long roof was revealed and hidden by alternate waves of light and shadow.

The firelight showed to Ronicky two men who had thrown their dripping slickers back from their shoulders. Marty was a scowling fellow with a black leather patch over his right eye. His companion justified his nickname by taking off his hat and revealing a head entirely and astonishingly free from hair. From the nape of his neck to his eyebrows there was not a vestige or a haze of hair. It gave him a look strangely infantile, which was increased by cheeks as rosy as autumn apples. He had, moreover, a habit of continually smiling about nothing whatever, as though he were so well contented with himself and the world in which he moved that he could not avoid mirth. Altogether, the two made a sharp contrast. But their clothes were the same; their horses, now approaching the fire so closely that their wet, cold sides steamed with the heat, were the same type of durable cowpony, with lines of speed, but not too well bred to be delicate.

"Now," went on Baldy McNair, "let me put something in your ear, Lang. A lot of the boys have heard you knock the chief. Which maybe the chief himself has heard."

"He's give no sign," muttered Marty.

"Son," said Baldy, who was obviously much younger than the man of the patched eye, but who apparently gained dignity by the baldness of his head, "when Jack Moon gives a sign, it's the first sign and the last sign all rolled into one. First you'll hear of it will be Moon asking you to step out and talk to him. And Moon'll come back from that talk alone and say that you started out sudden on a long trip. You wouldn't be the first. There was my old pal Lefty and 'Gunner' Matthews. There was more, besides. Always that way! If they start getting sore at the way he runs things, he just takes them out walking, and they all go on that long journey that you'll be taking one of these days if you don't mind your talk, son! I'm telling you because I'm your friend, and you can lay to that!"

"What I don't see," answered Marty Lang, "is why the chief wants to hang onto a gent forever. You make it out? Once in the band, always in the band. That ain't no sense. A gent don't want to stick to this game forever."

"Oh, ho!" chuckled Baldy. "Is that the way of it? Well, son, don't ever let the chief hear you say that! Sure we get tired of having to ride wherever he tells us to ride, and we want to settle down now and then—or we think that we want to—and lead a quiet life and have a wife and a house and a family and all that. For that matter, there's nothing to keep us from it. The chief don't object."

"Don't object? How can a gent settle down at any thing when he's apt to get a call from the chief any minute?"

"Wrong again. Not more'n once every six months. That's about the average. And then it's always something worth while. How long you been with us?"

"Four years."

"Ever gone hungry for four years?"

"No."

"When you was sick, two years back, were you took care of?"

"Sure."

"What did you have when the chief picked you up?"

"Nothing."

"All right. You were down to zero. He picked you up. He gave you a chance to live on the fat. All you got to do in return is to ride with him once in six months and to promise never to leave the band. Why? Because he knows

that if ever a gent shakes clear of it he'll be tempted to start talking some day, and a mighty little talk would settle the hash of all of us. That's the why of it! He's a genius, Moon is. How long d'you think most long riders last?"

"I dunno. They get bumped off before long."

"Sure they do. Know why? Because the leaders have always kept their men together in a bunch most of the time. Moon seen that. What does he do? He gets a picked lot together. He gets a big money scheme all planned. Then he calls in his men. Some of 'em come fifty miles. Some of 'em live a hundred miles away. They all come. They make a dash and do the work. Soon's it's done they scatter again. And the posse that takes the tracks has five or six different trails to follow instead of one. Result? They get all tangled up. Jack Moon has been working twenty years and never been caught once! And he'll work twenty years more, son, and never be caught. Because why? Because he's a genius! Steady up! Who's that?"

Straight through the entrance to the mow came two riders.

"Silas Treat and the chief himself," said Lang.

What Ronicky Doone saw were two formidable fellows. One, mounted on a great roan horse, was a broad-shouldered man with a square-cut black beard which rolled halfway down his chest. The other was well-nigh as large, and when he came into the inner circle of the firelight Ronicky saw one of those handsome, passionless faces which never reveal the passage of years. Jack Moon, according to Baldy, had been a leader in crime for twenty years, and according to that estimate he must be at least forty years old but a casual glance would have placed him closer to thirty-three or four. He and his companion now reined their horses beside the fire and raised their hands in silent greeting. The black-bearded man did not speak. The leader, however, said:

"Who started that fire?"

"My idea," confessed Baldy. "Matter of fact, we both had the same idea. Didn't seem anything wrong about starting a fire and getting warm and dry."

"I seen that fire a mile away," said the leader gloomily. "It was a fool idea."

"But they's nobody else within miles."

"Ain't there? Have you searched all through the barn?"

"Why—no."

"How d'you know somebody didn't come here?"

"But who'd be apt to some this way?"

"Look at those cinders over there. That shows that somebody lately has been here and started a fire. If they come here once, why not again?"

"I didn't notice that place," said Baldy regretfully. "Sure looks like I've been careless. But I'll give the barn a search now."

"Only one place to look," said Jack Moon, "and that's behind that chunk of the roof where it's fallen down yonder."

"All right!" The other nodded and started straight for the hiding place of Ronicky Doone.

The latter reached behind him and patted the nose of the mare, Lou, in sign that she must still preserve the utmost silence. Then he drew his revolver. There was no question about what would happen if he were discovered. He had been in a position to overhear too many incriminating things. Unlucky Baldy, to be sure, would be an easy prey. But the other three? Three to one were large odds in any case, and every one of these men was formidable.

Straight to the opening came Baldy and peered in, though he remained at a distance of five or six paces. Ronicky

Doone poised his gun, delayed the shot, and then frowned in wonder. Baldy had turned and was sauntering slowly back toward his companions.

At first Ronicky feared that the fellow had seen the fugitive and the mare, and that, with perfect self-control, realizing his danger, Baldy was going to get out of point-blank range before he warned his companions of what he had seen. But now the voice of Baldy reassured him.

"Nothing there," he was saying to the chief.

Ronicky hardly believed his ears, but a moment of thought explained the mystery. It was pitch dark behind that screening wall, and the darkness was rendered doubly thick by Baldy's probable conviction that there must be nothing to see behind the fallen roof section. He had come there prepared to find nothing, and he had found the sum of his expectations and no more.

"Sure there ain't," and Jack Moon nodded. "Which don't mean that you wasn't a fool to light a fire and give somebody a light to shoot you by in case they was somebody lying around. Now, into the saddle both of you. We got a hard ride ahead."

They scrambled up obediently, and Ronicky, with a sigh, realized that they were about to pass out of his life and his vision. And yet if he knew their destination, how great a crime might he not prevent?

"Something big on hand?" asked Marty Lang.

"There's a lesson for yaller-livered sneaks on hand," said Jack Moon, his deep bass voice floating smoothly back to the ear of Ronicky. "Hugh Dawn has come back to Trainor. We're going to drop in and call on him and ask him what he's been doing all these ten years."

The low, growling murmur of the other three rolled away in the rush of rain beyond the door of the barn. The four horsemen disappeared, and Ronicky stepped out into the light of the dying fire. He had hardly taken a step forward when he shrank back again against the wall.

Straight into the door came Jack Moon and peered uneasily about the barn. Then he whirled his horse away and disappeared into the thick downpour. He had seen nothing, and yet the true and suspicious instinct of the man had brought him back to take a final glance into the barn to make sure that no one had spied on the gathering of his little band.

CHAPTER III.

OUTSIDE THE DAWN HOUSE.

SMALL things are often more suggestive, more illuminating, than large events. All that Ronicky had heard Baldy say about Jack Moon and his twenty years' career of crime had not been so impressive as that sudden reappearance of the leader with all the implications of his hair-trigger sensitiveness. Ronicky Doone was by no means a foolish dreamer apt to be frightened away from danger by the mere face of it, but now he paused.

Plainly Hugh Dawn was a former member of the band, and this trip of Moon was undertaken for the purpose, perhaps the sole purpose, of killing the offender who had left his ranks. Ronicky Doone considered. If Hugh Dawn had belonged to this crew ten years before, he had probably committed crimes as terrible as any in the band. If so, sympathy was wasted on him, for never in his life had Ronicky seen such an aggregation of dangerous men. It scarcely needed the conversation of Lang and Baldy to reveal the nature of the organization. Should he waste time and labor in attempting to warn Hugh Dawn of the coming trouble?

Trainor, he knew, was a little crossroads village some twenty miles to the

north. He might outdistance the criminal band and reach the town before them, but was it wise to intervene between such a man as Jack Moon and his destined victim? Distinctly it was not wise. It might call down the danger on his own head without saving Dawn. Moreover, it was a case of thief against thief, murderer against murderer, no doubt. If Dawn were put out of the way, probably no more would be done than was just.

And still, knowing that the four bloodhounds were on the trail of one unwarned man, the spirit of Ronicky leaped with eagerness to be up and doing. Judgment was one thing, impulse was another, and all his life Ronicky Doone had been the creature of impulse. One man was in danger of four. All his love of fair play spurred him on to action.

In a moment more the saddle was on the back of the mare, he had swung up into his place, flung the slicker over his shoulders, and cantered through the door of the barn and into the teeth of the storm.

It was no longer the gale that had been blowing. The wind, veering more to the west, had been perceptibly checked since it no longer had the uninterrupted length of the valley to course along, gathering impetus. The rain, too, was dropping in smaller volume, and it had packed the sand to good footing beneath him instead of washing it to slush.

With such going to aid, it would be strange indeed if Lou did not outstrip the others by a great margin. Particularly the black-bearded Silas Treat, on his heavy roan horse, would not be able to strike and maintain a fast pace, and the gait of the whole party must be the gait of the slowest member of it. As for Lou, she had been weary at the end of her day's trip, but food and a few hours of rest had mostly refreshed her. Now there was the morning freshness in her gallop, and she carried her head easily and high through the storm.

Ronicky Doone swung her well east of the trail which wound along the center of the valley. This, beyond question, the band would follow, but inside half an hour Ronicky estimated that his mount would outfoot them sufficiently to make it safe to drop back into the better road without being in danger of meeting the four.

Such, accordingly, was the plan he adopted. He struck out a long semicircle of half a dozen miles, which carried him down into the central trail again; then he headed straight north toward Trainor. The rain had fallen off to a mere misting by this time, and the wind was milder and came out of the dead west, so that there was nothing to impede their progress. The mountains began to lift gloomily into view, the walls of the valley drew steadily nearer on either side, and at length, at the head of the valley, he rode into the town of Trainor.

With the houses dripping and the street a river of mud under the hoofs of Lou, the town looked like a perfect stage for a murder. Ronicky Doone dismounted in front of the hotel.

There was no one in the narrow hallway which served as clerk's office and lobby. He beat with the butt of his gun against the wall and shouted, for there was no time to delay. At the most he could not have outdistanced Jack Moon by more than half an hour, and that was a meager margin in which to reach the victim, warn him, and see him started in his flight.

Presently an old fellow with a goat beard stumbled down the stairs rubbing his eyes.

"And what might you want this late, partner?" he inquired.

"Hugh Dawn," said Ronicky. "Where does Hugh Dawn live?"

"Hugh Dawn?" said the other, his eyes blank with the effort of thought.

But then he shook his head. "Dunno I ever heard about any Hugh Dawn. Might be you got to the wrong town, son."

It was partly disappointment, partly relief that made Ronicky Doone sigh. After all, he had done his best; and, since his best was not good enough, Hugh Dawn must even die. However, he would still try.

"Any other town around here with a name that sounds anything like Trainor?"

"Yep," said the clerk, yawning prodigiously and drawing over his shoulders the suspenders which had been dangling about his legs. "There's the town of Tragessor, over the hills about forty mile."

"Tragessor? No, that can't be it. You're sure there's no Dawn family living in these parts?"

"Dawn family? Sure there is. But there ain't no Hugh Dawn ever I heard of."

"How long you been around here?"

"Eight years come next May Day."

"Very well," said Ronicky brusquely, recalling that it was ten years before that Hugh Dawn, according to Jack Moon, had disappeared. "Where is the Dawn house?"

"Old Grandpa Dawn," said the proprietor, "used to live out there, but he died a couple of years back. Now they ain't nobody but Jerry Dawn."

"The son?"

"It ain't a son. She's a girl. Geraldine is her name. Most always she's called Jerry, though. She teaches the school and makes out pretty good and lives in that big house all by herself."

"And where's the house, man?" cried Ronicky, wild with impatience.

"Out the east road about a couple of miles. Can't help knowing it, it's so big. Stands in the middle of a bunch of pines and——"

The rest of his words trailed away into silence. Ronicky Doone had whipped out of the door and down the steps. Once in the saddle of Lou again, he sent her headlong down the east road. Would he be too late, after this vital delay at the hotel and the talk with the dim-minded old hotel proprietor? But here he thought again of the bulk of the black-bearded man and the weight of the roan. No, Lou must have given him a comfortable handicap.

The house, as he had been told, was unmistakable. Dense foresting of pines swept up to it on a knoll well back from the road, and over the tops of the trees, through the misting rain and the night, he made out the dim triangle of the roof of the building. It was larger than the houses which were ordinarily put up in this section of the mountains. Its size suggested large fortune at one time possessed by the Dawn family.

But with the rush of Lou carrying him momentarily nearer, he had little time to make preconceptions of the house, its occupants, and their past history. In a moment the hoofs of the mare were scattering the gravel of the winding road which twisted among the trees, and presently he drew up before the house.

The face of it, as was to be expected at this hour of the night, was utterly blank, utterly black. Only the windows, here and there, glimmered faintly with whatever light they reflected from the stormy night, the panes having been polished by the rain water. As he had expected, it was built in the fashion of thirty or forty years before. There were little decorative turrets at the four corners of the structure and another and larger turret springing from the center of the room. He had no doubt that daylight would reveal much carved work of the gingerbread variety.

A huge and gloomy place it was for one girl to occupy! He sprang from the saddle and ran up the steps and knocked heavily on the front door. Inside, he heard the long echo wander

faintly down the hall and then up the stairs, like a ghost with swiftly lightening footfall. There was no other reply. So he knocked again, more heavily, and, trying the knob of the door, he found it locked fast. When he shook it there was the rattle of a chain on the inside. The door had been securely fastened, to be sure. This was not the rule in this country of wide-doored hospitality.

Presently there was the sound of a window being opened in the story of the house just above him. He looked up, but he could not locate it, since no lamp had been lighted inside.

"Who's there?" called a girl's voice.

It thrilled Ronicky Doone. He had come so far to warn a man that his life was in danger. He was met by this calm voice of a girl.

"Who I am doesn't matter," said Ronicky Doone. "I've come to find Hugh Dawn. Is he here?"

There was a slight pause, a very slight pause, and one which might have been interpreted as meaning any of a dozen things. Then: "No, Hugh Dawn is not here."

"Lady," said Ronicky Doone, "are you Geraldine Dawn?"

"Yes," said the voice. "I am she."

"I've heard of you," said Ronicky. "And I've heard of Hugh Dawn. And I know that he's in this house. What I want to do is——"

"Whatever you want to do," broke in that amazingly mild voice, "you will have to wait till morning. I am alone in this house. I do not intend to have it entered before daylight comes. Hugh Dawn is not here. If you know anything about him, you also know that he hasn't been here for ten years."

And there was the sound of a window being closed with violence.

To persist in efforts at persuasion in the face of such a calm determination was perfect folly. Besides, there were many explanations. Perhaps Jack Moon had heard simply that Hugh Dawn was coming back to his home, and the traitor to the band had not yet arrived at his destination. Perhaps at that moment the leader was heading straight for a distant point on the road to lay an ambush. "Dawn is in Trainor," he had said, but that might be a metaphorical statement. It might simply mean that he was on the way toward the town. Or perhaps the fugitive had received a warning and had already fled. At any rate, Ronicky Doone felt that he had more than done enough to free his conscience. He had ridden during a large part of a stormy night to give a vital warning to a man of whom he had never before heard, and who was, in all seeming, himself a criminal of the most brutal type.

There was only one thing that upset this conviction as Ronicky swung back into his saddle and turned the head of weary Lou back down the road through the pines. This was the memory of the voice of the girl. There is no index of character so perfect and suggestive as the voice, and that of Jerry Dawn was soft, quiet, steady. It had neither trembled with fear nor shrilled with indignation. If any of the blood of Hugh Dawn ran in her veins, then surely the man could not be altogether bad.

Of course, this was wild guesswork at best, but it carried a conviction to Ronicky, and when, halfway down to the main road, he remembered how Jack Moon had returned to the door of the barn to investigate a suspicion which was based on nothing but the most shadowy material—when, above all, he recalled how justified that suspicion was—Ronicky Doone determined to imitate the maneuver. For were there not reasons why the girl should refuse to admit that this man Hugh Dawn—her father, perhaps—had returned to his house?

No sooner had the determination come to Doone than he turned the head

of his horse and swerved back toward the house for a second time. He now rode off the noisy gravel, walking Lou in the silent mould beneath the trees; and so he came back again to the edge of the clearing. Here he tethered the mare, skirted under shelter of the trees halfway around the house, and then ran swiftly out of the forest and up to the steep shelter of the wall of the dwelling. Here he paused to take breath and consider again what he had done and the possibilities that lay before him.

He could have laughed at the absurdity of what he had done. He was, in reality, stalking a big house which contained no more than one poor girl, badly frightened already, no doubt, in spite of that steady and brave voice. What he was actually doing was spying on the possibility of Hugh Dawn—trying to force himself on the man in order to save his life!

Very well. He would be a sane and thinking man once more. The devil might now fly away with Hugh Dawn for all of him. Let there be an end of this foolishness. Ronicky Doone would turn his back on Dawn and all connected with him. His own path led otherwhere.

He had made up his mind to this point and was turning away, when he heard that within the house which made him stop short and flatten his ear against the wall.

It has already been said that sound and echoes traveled easily in that frame building, with its time-dried wood. And now what Ronicky Doone heard was a slow repetition of creaking sounds one after another, moving through the second story of the building. He recognized the intervals; he recognized the nature of the squeaking and straining. Some very heavy person was moving by stealth, slowly, down one of the upper halls.

Certainly it was not the girl who had spoken to him. Could it be Hugh Dawn? Or was it a member of Moon's band, who might have slipped into the building from the rear, say?

Ronicky Doone intended to investigate.

CHAPTER IV.

RONICKY'S WARNING IS DELIVERED.

FEAR has its origin in diverse causes, but perhaps there are few things which cause so much natural terror, so much ghostly awe, as danger when it comes in the setting of a dwelling, particularly an old, partially occupied, partially ruined house. Because, in addition to the actual danger, whatever that may be, there are unearthly premonitions—the ghosts of those who have lived there before may seem to be in council with the assailants.

At any rate, Ronicky Doone, bravest of the brave though he was, now bent back his head and looked up with a rapid-beating heart to the formidable height of the wall of that house. From a dozen windows at a dozen angles he might be exposed even now to the eyes of persons within the building. Yonder, inside of any of the night-dark spaces, there might be spies armed and waiting for him to take a single aggressive step. Perhaps they might even be chuckling in their confidence. And the thought of a laughing enemy in a situation such as this is the most chilling element. It has a connotation of madness—or of cold malevolence, at least. So it seemed to Ronicky, as a hundred surmises went through his excited brain. But he began at once to search for a means of entrance.

Ordinarily he would have attempted to get in through one of the windows of the basement, but when he tried them he found every one stanchly secured from within, and when he attempted to turn the catch with the blade of his knife he could not succeed. The locks had been rusted strongly in place.

Since he could not take the bottom

way in, he would take an upper. Yonder, the turret which projected from the upper corner of the building was continued all the way to the ground through the three stories of the house in a set of bow windows. The result was that between the angle of the projecting windows and the wall of the house itself there were scores of footholds, precarious and small to an inexpert climber, but to athletic Ronicky Doone as safe as walking up a stairway.

The chance to use his muscles, moreover, after this chilling wait, was welcome to him, and he went up with the agility of a monkey until he reached the smaller window on the third story of the structure. Here he clambered onto the projecting sill and tried to lift the window. It was locked as securely as those of the basement. There was only the chance that it might have been used more recently and had not been rusted into place.

Accordingly, he opened his stout-bladed knife again and inserted it in the crack between the upper and the lower sash, feeling along toward the center until he reached the little metal crossbar which made the windows secure. It resisted the first tentative pressure. But the second and more vigorous effort made the lock give with a faint squeaking sound. In another instant Ronicky had raised the window and thrust his head into the room.

His whole body followed at once, and, lowering himself cautiously into the room, he found himself at last definitely consigned to the adventure, whatever it might bring forth.

A new atmosphere had at once surrounded him. The air was warmer, less fresh, drier. But more than all these things, it was filled with the personality, so to speak, of human beings. The darkness had a quality not unlike that of a human face. It watched Ronicky Doone; it listened to him as he crouched by the wall and waited and listened.

For now, no matter how innocent his errand, the people of the house, if indeed there were more than the girl present, would be amply justified in treating as a criminal a man who had forced his way into their home. If he were shot on sight the law would not by the weight of a single finger attempt to punish the slayers. And still he persisted in the adventure.

Eventually, by whatever uneasy light filtered from the night and through the window, he made out that the room in which he stood was utterly bare of furniture of any kind. It was deserted. By the soft feel of dust beneath his shoe he shrewdly guessed that it had been deserted a matter of many years, and when he tried the boards with his weight his conjecture was further reinforced by the whisper which replied, and which would have grown into a prodigious squeak had he allowed his whole weight to fall.

This particular made his exit from the room a delicate matter. He managed it without noise only by staying close to the edge of the wall, where the flooring, being here firmly attached, could not possibly have any great play. Facing out to the center of the room, since in this manner he could slide closest to the wall, he managed to get to the hall door of the room and thence into the hall without making a whisper loud enough to have caught the attentive ear of a cat.

Once there he paused again, swaying a little, so lightly was he poised, with the rhythm of his breathing. The house below was still as the grave, but presently it was filled with murmurs. For the wind had freshened and was now striking the house with a renewed vigor. His thought flashed back to Lou, standing patiently in the shelter of the pines, and then he turned again to the work before him.

It was peculiarly embarrassing. He could not simply stand in the hall and

shout his good intentions and his warnings. That would be sheer madness. There remained nothing but to hunt through the house and hope to find Hugh Dawn, surprise him, perhaps cover him with a gun, and then deliver his tidings at its point. For otherwise Hugh Dawn, no doubt in terrible fear of his old band, would shoot the first stranger on sight.

Ronicky began to slip down the hall. The noise of the wind, starting a thousand creaks in the house, favored his progress immensely. It covered other footfalls, to be sure, but it also covered his own. In order that the noise he made might be completely blanketed by the shakings of the wind, he waited for flurries of the storm and took advantage of them to make swift progress forward, then paused through the intervals of comparative silence.

So he fumbled down the upper hall balustrade until it swerved to the right and down, leading him onto the stairs. In this way he came down to the second story, where, he was sure, he had first heard the footfalls. It was in utter darkness. Yet by striving continually to pierce the wall of shadow he had so far accustomed his eyes to the strain that he could make out the vague proportions of that wide and lofty hall.

Where the stairs turned easily onto the hall flooring he paused a moment, in a lull of the gale, to wait for the next flurry and the crashing of the rain against the roof. The moment it began he started once more, turning to the right, determined to try each door he came to and so start a gradual examination of the house. But he had hardly taken a step on his way when a light click sounded close behind him, and then a shaft of light struck past his head.

Ronicky Doone whirled and dived down, not away from the direction of the light, but toward it, whipping out his revolver as he fell upon his supporting left arm. The shaft of light, launched from a pocket electric torch, was wandering wildly. Behind it he caught the dimly outlined figure of a man. Then the light fell on him as he gathered himself for another leap, and a revolver roared straight before him.

There was a twitch at the shoulder of his coat—the bullet had come as close as that!—then Ronicky Doone sprang, animallike, from hands and knees, swerving out of the flash of the light as the gun spoke again and missed again. He struck with his left hand as he shot in. All his force, multiplied threefold by nervous ecstasy, went into that whipping punch, and the knuckles crunched home against bone. It was a solid impact. The jar of it left his arm numb to the shoulder. And the vague outline of the man behind the light collapsed.

As he did so, the electric torch fell from his hand, spinning and filling the hall with wild flashings until it struck the floor. The revolver crashed to the boards an instant later, and Ronicky, scooping up the light, turned it down into the face of his victim.

It was a big body, lying with the long arms thrown out crosswise, so completely stunning had the blow been. Ronicky, estimating the power in that now inert bulk, was grateful that his first punch had struck home. In a struggle hand to hand he would not have had a chance for victory.

Somewhere in the distance there was a woman's shrill cry of terror. Ronicky paid little heed to it, for he was too busy examining that upturned face. It was a man of about forty-five, with a seamed and lined face, clean shaven, rather handsome, and sadly worn by the passage of time and many troubles, no doubt. But the expression was neither savage nor sneaking. The forehead was broad and high with noble capacity for thought. The nose was strongly but not cruelly arched. The mouth was sensitive. If this were

Hugh Dawn, he was by no means the criminal type as Ronicky Doone knew it, and in his wanderings he had known many a yegg, many a robber.

The knocked-out man began to revive and came suddenly to his senses, sitting up and blinking at the dazzling shaft of light. Then he reached for his fallen gun, but the foot of Ronicky stamped over it at the same instant.

All this, of course, from the first snapping on of the light, had filled only a few seconds. Now the calling of the girl broke out clearly upon them as she threw open a door. And Ronicky saw her form rushing down toward them and heard the rustling of her clothes. There was the dim flicker of a gun in her hand.

"Lady," said Ronicky, holding the electric light far from him, but still keeping it focused on the face of the other man so that his own body would be in deep comparative shadow, "I'm here for no harm. But mind your gun. If this is Hugh Dawn—if he means anything to you—mind what you do. I've got him covered!"

"Oh, dad!" cried the girl excitedly. "Are you——"

"I'm not hurt," replied the other. "They've got me, that's all. Stand up?"

"Stand up," said Ronicky. "Are you Hugh Dawn?"

The other rose. He was even larger than he had seemed when he was lying on the floor, and his glance wistfully sought his fallen revolver.

"I'm Hugh Dawn, right enough," he said. "I don't figure that you knew that?" And he sneered mockingly at Ronicky. The girl, despite the warnings of Ronicky, had slipped to his side. Now he caught the revolver out of her hand and glared at his captor.

"I see the gun," said Ronicky. "Don't try no play with it, Mr. Dawn. I'm sure watching you close. Understand?"

The other nodded and swallowed. But there was a desperate determination about his face that made Ronicky uneasy.

"Where's—the chief?" gasped Hugh Dawn. "Where's he?"

And his glance rolled up and down the hall.

"Not here," said Ronicky, "but coming."

The other quaked and then shrugged his shoulders.

"Well?"

"Get me straight," said Ronicky. "I've not come here to get you. If I wanted to do that I could shoot you down now. I want something else."

"I know what you want," shouted the other, "but you won't get it! Not if I have to die ten times! Never!"

"What you're talking about," said Ronicky, "I don't know. Here's my yarn; believe it or not, as you want to! I lay out in a barn to-night, heard Jack Moon and his crew plot to come here and grab you, and rode on around them to give you a warning. That's why I'm here. I tried to get through the door. The lady, here, wouldn't talk to me. I played a hunch that you might be here, anyway. I came back, shinnied up the wall, opened a window, and here I am. Does that sound like straight talk to you?"

"Straight enough," said the other gloomily. "Except that it's a lie. Moon and you and the rest—I know I'm through with my trail. I know that I got my back agin' the wall, but I don't care a rap for you all! I won't beg, and I won't tell you where Purchass hid his stuff. That's final! Bring on Moon. I'll tell him the same thing!"

CHAPTER V.

HIS HAT IN THE RING.

WHAT it all meant Ronicky could only vaguely guess. It was not only the death of Dawn that Moon wished. The renegade also possessed a secret which the outlaws considered be-

yond price. And for the retention of this secret the man was willing to lay down his life. Naturally enough, the man refused to believe that Ronicky was not an agent of the leader.

"Partner," said Ronicky, "my name's Doone. I ain't very well known up around these parts of the range, but down farther south they'll tell you that I'm a tolerable square shooter. Maybe I ain't any wonder, but nobody that walks on two feet ever accused me of lying. And I give you my word of honor that I got nothing to do with Jack Moon or whatever his name is—him and his men. I've come here to tell you the straight of what I heard tonight. And I rode ahead to warn you to start on your way if you want to start without being salted down with lead."

The other was staggered a little.

"How come you to beat out Moon?" he asked.

"I've got the fastest trick in the line of hossflesh that ever packed a saddle," said Ronicky proudly. "I got half an hour to the good on Moon. But you've used up most of that time already. I say, Dawn, if you want to save your life and your secret, whatever that is, start riding now!"

"And jump into the hands of Moon the minute I leave the house?" cried Dawn, the perspiration streaming down his face. "No, sir."

For the first time the girl turned from her father and faced Ronicky. She was not beautiful, but she was very pretty. Her hair was sand-colored and further faded by the sun. Constant exposure had tanned her dark bronze. But her big gray eyes were as bright and as steady as the torch in Ronicky's hand. There was something wonderfully honest and wonderfully feminine about her whole body and the carriage of her head. Ronicky guessed at once that here was a true Western girl who could ride like a man, shoot like a man, perhaps, and then at the end of the trail be gentleness itself. She was tensed with excitement as she looked to Ronicky now.

"Dad," she cried suddenly, "I believe every word he's spoken. His name is Doone. He has nothing to do with the band. And he's come here out of the honest goodness of his heart to warn you of Moon's intentions."

"Thanks, lady," said Ronicky. "It sure does me proud to hear you say that! Dawn, will you come to and see that what she says is the truth? I'll go one further. Now, Dawn, we're on even terms. Would one of Moon's men put you there?"

Hugh Dawn was staggered, for Ronicky had slipped his revolver back into his holster at his right hip. It was worse than an even break for Doone, because Dawn held in his hand, bared of the leather, the light, thirty-two-caliber revolver which he had taken from the girl.

"Jerry," he said, "I dunno—I dunno. Moon's more full of tricks than a snake is of poison. But maybe this is square. Maybe this gent ain't got a thing to do with Moon."

"Then," cried Ronicky Doone, with a sudden passion, "for Heaven's sake act on it! Jump out of this house, saddle your hoss, and ride! Because Moon's coming!"

There was such honest eagerness in his voice that Hugh Dawn started as though to execute the suggestion. He only hesitated to say: "How come you to do all this riding and talking for me? What d'you get out of it? What am I to you?"

"You're a gent with four crooks on your heels," said Ronicky calmly. "I heard them talk. I couldn't let a murder be done if I could keep you from it. That's why I'm here."

The other shook his head. But the girl cried: "Don't you see, dad? He's simply—white! For Heaven's sake, be-

lieve him—trust in my trust. Get your things together. I'll saddle the gray and——"

The storm of her excited belief swept the other off his feet. He flashed one glance at Ronicky Doone, then turned on his heel and ran for his room.

The girl raced the other way, clattering down the stairs. Perhaps when she sprang outside into the night Jack Moon and his men would already be there. But she had never a thought for danger.

Ronicky Doone only delayed to run into the front room on that floor—the room from which the girl had spoken to him when he tried the front door—and there he lighted a lamp and placed it on the table near the window. After that he sped down the stairs, untethered Lou from her tree at the side of the house, and hurried with her to the back of the house and the old, tumble-down horseshed which stood there.

Lantern light showed there, where the girl was saddling a tall, gray gelding. She was working the cinch knots tight as Ronicky appeared, so fast had been her work, and now her father came from the house at a run, huddling himself into his slicker.

"How could they find out that I come here?" he asked. "After ten years!"

"No time for questions," his daughter said, panting. "Oh, dad, for Heaven's sake use the spurs to-night. Go back. Never return!"

"And leave you here alone?" asked Ronicky sternly. "Not when Moon and his gang are on the way. I seen their faces, lady, and they ain't a pretty lot! Leave you to be found by them? Not in a thousand years."

She grew a little pale at that, but she still kept her head high. "I've nothing to fear," she said. "They wouldn't dare harm me."

"I'll trust 'em dead, not living," said Ronicky. "You're going to ride with your father and on that hoss yonder!"

There was a companion to the gray, hardly so tall, but even better formed.

"He's right," said Hugh Dawn. As he spoke he caught saddle and bridle from their hooks and slapped them onto the horse. "I ain't thinking right to-night. I ain't understanding things. Doone, you put shame on me! Of course I ain't going to leave her alone!"

Ronicky heard these remarks with only half an ear.

He called from the door of the shed, where he had taken his stand: "Now put out the lantern! No use calling them this way with a light!"

He was hastily obeyed. Through the darkness they led out the two grays beside Lou.

"And you, Doone," said Hugh Dawn, who seemed to have been recovering his poise rapidly during the past seconds, "ride down the east road. We'll go over the hills. To-morrow Jerry can come back, when it's safe. And—— Doone, shake hands! I forgive that punch that knocked me cold. Some day we——"

"Shut up," whispered Ronicky Doone impolitely and with savage force. "There they come!"

Four ghostly, silent figures, stooping low, advancing with stealthy stride, came out of the pines and slid toward the house. They could not be distinguished individually. They were simply blurs in the mist of rainfall, but for some reason their very obscurity made them more significant, more formidable. Ronicky Doone heard a queer, choked sound—Hugh Dawn swallowing a horror that would not down.

"And—and I near stayed there in the house and waited—for this!" he breathed.

Ronicky Doone jerked up a threatening fist. Not that there was a real danger that they might be overheard at that distance, but because he had odd superstitions tucked away in him here and there, and one of those superstí-

tions was that words were more than mere sounds. They were thoughts that went abroad in an electric medium and possessed a life of their own. They might dart across a great space, these things called words. They might enter the minds and souls of men to whom they were not addressed. The idea had grown up in Ronicky Doone during long periods of silence in the mountains, in the desert where silence itself is a voice.

That raised fist brought the hunted man's teeth together with a snap. Then the gesture of Ronicky commanded them to go forward, on foot, leading their horses. He himself went last and acted as the rear guard while they trudged out past the horseshed—blessing the double night of its shadow!—and up the grade, then swerving around among the trees on the narrow up-trail which would eventually take them over the hills. They came even with the side of the house.

"Good Lord!" breathed Hugh Dawn. "They sure ain't got up that high already—but—they's a light in the front room—your room, Jerry!"

"I left that lamp," Ronicky Doone told them, grinning. "I thought it'd keep 'em nice and quiet for a while and make 'em sneak up to that door slow and easy, slow and easy—then pop! wide goes the door, and they run in and find—nothing!"

He laughed fiercely, silently—no sound coming save the light catching of his breath.

"You got a brain," said the rescued man.

"Heaven bless you!" whispered his daughter.

"We can climb the hosses now," said Ronicky, who seemed to have been admitted into the post of commander. "No danger of being seen. But ride slow. Things that move fast are seen a pile quicker than things that stand still. Like a squirrel. Now!"

He gave the example of swinging into the saddle on Lou. The girl, as she imitated, went up lightly as a feather, but Hugh Dawn's great bulk brought a loud grunt from the gray he bestrode, and the three sat a moment, straining in fear. But there was no sound. The four shadows had melted into the greater shadow of the house.

They began at a walk. They climbed higher on the swinging trail among the trees until they were above another eminence and looked down. The house seemed as near as ever, the trail had zigzagged so much to make the altitude. They could see the front of the building clearly, and suddenly the light wobbled, flashed to the side, and almost went out; then it grew dimmer in the center of the apartment.

"They've found out the trick," said Ronicky Doone, speaking in a natural voice and chuckling.

"Hush!" panted the girl.

"We can talk out now, long's we don't do no shouting. They've sprung the trap, and they've got nothing! Not a thing!" He laughed again.

"Thanks to you, partner," said Hugh Dawn. "Thanks to you, lad!"

There was a ring to his low voice. Ronicky Doone felt a thrill of response in him, a thrill of shame to receive such a reward of gratitude for such a small act, as it seemed to him. And at the same time he knew that, no matter what the relations of Hugh Dawn had been to the band, he was by no means an entirely bad man. Bad men are not capable of this heart-filling burst of thankfulness. Bad men, he knew—and, ah, how well he knew them!—are incapable of the act of self-abasement, self-surrender, which is implied by the mere expression of a debt. Naturally he was forced to dodge the burden of gratitude.

The girl was speaking now, a pleasant grace note to what her father had said: "To think," she said, "that when you

spoke from the door—such a little time ago!—I was paralyzed with fear. I though you were they. I thought they had come for dad! And—well, every day that he lives from now on is a day due to you, Mr. Doone. And he will never forget. I will never forget."

For some reason that assurance that she would never forget meant more to Ronicky Doone than any assurance from the grown man.

"Look here," he said, "you don't owe nothing to me. It's Lou that done it. It's Lou that outfooted their hosses and give me the half hour's head start. She piled that up inside of twenty miles' running, too, and after she'd gone a weary way yesterday. Yep, if you got anything to thank, it's Lou. Me, I just done what anybody'd do."

"You rode twenty miles to tell me?" said Hugh Dawn, after a time of silence on his part and pleasant words from the girl. "Well, if I'd known one gent like you twenty years ago, maybe things——"

His voice trailed off into another silence. Ronicky Doone, for his part, liked men of silences. Such fellows were usually capable of action in moments of crisis.

"I'll leave you folks here," he said, as he got to the top of the crest of the hills with them.

"Leave us? Oh, no!" cried the girl. And she added hastily: "But of course. You see, I forget, Mr. Doone. It seems that so many things have happened to the three of us to-night that we are all bound together."

"I wish we were," said Hugh Dawn. "But you got your business, lad. Besides, I bring bad luck. Stay clear of me, or you'll have the bad luck, too!"

Ronicky's esteem of the man rose up the scale.

"Folks," he said kindly, "I'm one of them with nothing on my hands but a considerable lot of time and an itch for action. Seems to me that there may be some more action before this game's done and over. And I'd sort of like to horn in and have my say along with you, Dawn. If you want me and need me, I mean!"

What the girl said, now, did not matter. But Dawn answered: "It's on your own head, if you do. Doone, I'm in fear of death. But—need you? Why, man, I have the greatest thing in the world to do, and I'm single-handed in the doing of it. That's all. But if you'll take the chance, why, I'll trust you, and I'll let you in on the ground floor. But if you come with me, lad, you'll be taking the chances. You'll be playing for millions of dollars. But you'll be putting up your life in the gamble. How does that sound to you? But remember that if you come along with me, you get Jack Moon and his tribe of bloodhounds on your trail, and if they ever come up with you, you're dead. Understand?"

"Dad," cried the girl, "I'm burning with shame to hear you talk——"

"It's his concern!" declared her father. "Let him talk out. D'you know what I'm talking about? Millions, girl, millions—not just mere thousands! Millions in bullion!"

"Million of fun," and Ronicky Doone laughed. "That's what it sounds like to me."

"Then," said the older man eagerly, "suppose we shake on it!"

"No, no!" cried Jerry Dawn. She even rode in between them.

"What d'you mean, Jerry?" asked her father impatiently.

"Oh," she said, "every one has tried the cursed thing, and every one has gone down; and now you take in the one generous and kind and pure-hearted man who has ever come into our lives. You take him, and you begin to drag him down in the net. Oh, dad, is this a reward for him? Is this a reward for him?"

There was almost a sob in her voice.

"Lady," said Ronicky Doone, "you're sure kind, but I've made up my mind. Remember that story about Bluebeard's wife? She had all the keys but one, and she plumb busted her heart because she couldn't get that one key and see inside that one room. Well, lady, the same's true with me. Suppose I had the key to everything else in the world and just this one thing was left that I couldn't get at; well, I'd turn down all the other things in the world that I know about and take to this one thing that I don't know anything about, just because I don't know it. Danger? Well, lady, danger is the finest bait in the world for any gent like me that's fond of action and ain't never been fed full on it. That's the straight of it."

"Then," said the girl sadly, "Heaven forgive us for bringing this down on your generous heart!" And she drew her horse back.

The two men reached through the dark night and the rain. Their wet, cold hands fumbled, met, and closed in a hard grasp. It was like a flash of light, that gripping of the hands. It showed them each other's minds as a glint of light would have shown their faces.

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

CALIFORNIA'S FLOWER SHOW

THE flower show and plant exhibition which was held at Exposition Park, Los Angeles, California, during the latter part of October, was one of the finest and largest exhibits of flower and plant life ever held in this country. It covered ten times the area of any previous show in the same territory, and it had on exhibition a thousand times as many blossoms. Besides seven solid acres of flowers in the sunken garden, it had a tented field for indoor flowers.

Every horticultural endeavor of the State was represented, and every part of the State had its place, from the roses and avocados of coastal regions to date palms and their fruits from the Coachella and Imperial Valleys. San Francisco, Oakland, San José, and northern points sent carloads of flowers and blooming plants.

ALASKA HAS NO HOUSE FLIES

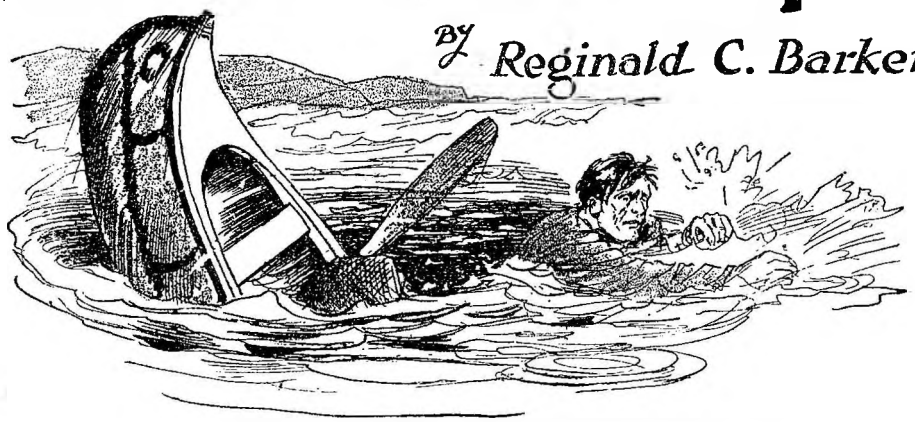
ACCORDING to Doctor J. M. Aldrich, of the United States National Museum, who made an insect survey of Alaska during the past summer, our great Northern possession has millions of mosquitoes but no house flies. Even so far north as Seward and Fairbanks, hordes of mosquitoes are found during the Alaskan summer, and smudges are a national institution there as everywhere in the Territory. In the interior, where the summer is sufficiently warm for swimming, the boys guard against the pests by constructing a hut of branches on the bank of the stream and protect it from the mosquitoes by a smudge. Laborers wear mosquito nets and heavy gloves.

The mosquitoes of Alaska do not carry malaria and yellow-fever germs, as those of the United States and the tropics, but they are very vicious. They literally fill the air. Doctor Aldrich says he captured one hundred and ten mosquitoes with one sweep of an insect-collecting net.

The absence of house flies in Alaska has raised the interesting question whether there is a Northern limit to the house fly. It has been a common assumption up to this time that the domestic fly accompanies man wherever life is possible. The observation of Doctor Aldrich has thrown a new light on the subject.

The Guest of the Whirlpool

By Reginald C. Barker



Author of "When Winter Came," etc.

INFINITELY more dangerous than the racing rips of white water that thundered past it upon either side, the great whirlpool lay in oily looking content, waiting for the night and that which the night might bring.

A belted kingfisher, perched upon the outflung, decaying limb of a dead snag, saw it happen.

It was only a red-winged grasshopper, who, overestimating her strength, fell, and was flipped on a fleck of foam to the edge of that glassy pool.

The grasshopper was not built for swimming, but so calm was the surface of the water that a hope of reaching shore came to her mind, and, striking out with her long hind legs, she did what she could to help herself.

As the grasshopper floated toward the center of the pool, it seemed as though the whirlpool was trying to help her, for she became conscious that she was gyrating in gradually narrowing circles.

Smaller and smaller grew the circles, and swifter became the gyrations of the water.

As the circles of water narrowed, the center became depressed, forming a deep funnel, into the vortex of which the grasshopper found herself irresistibly drawn, as, vainly struggling, she tried to climb the sides of the swirling funnel of water.

Faster and faster whirled the water until the vortex was no larger than the body of the unfortunate grasshopper who suddenly disappeared with a slight sucking sound.

No sooner had the grasshopper disappeared than the character of the funnel of water changed, and the center of the funnel seemed to fill up until the water was all upon the same plane. Again the surface of the pool lay oily looking and smooth.

The kingfisher understood, for he had seen such things happen before. Then hurriedly he flew away. And as the pool became shadowed in the soft, gray draperies of evening, the bands of gnats hovering over its sinister surface struck up a funeral dirge upon their tiny violins, and night fell.

With the coming of complete darkness the swarming orchestra ceased their rhythmic hum, and the only sound that broke the silence of the night was the ceaseless roar of the rapids.

A threaded beam of moonlight

swung lightly across the river, and, as though touched by a magic wand, the sleeping whirlpool awoke.

The quiet waters once more gyrated until a funnel was formed; then, as before, the funnel filled up from the bottom, and from somewhere far down in the depths of the pool the whirling water brought to the surface the body of the red-winged grasshopper.

II.

"An' gold is where yuh find it," remarked "Big Bill" Shanklin as he and his partner, "Shorty" McGuire stood at the edge of the river some miles above the whirlpool and gazed at the island of rock that divided the waters of the waterfall known as the Twin Brothers. "We've creviced up the river, as far as this," continued Big Bill, "an' I don't aim tuh pass by that bunch o' rock without findin' out what's in it. Looks tuh me as if there's gravel on top of it, too."

"Even if gold is there, I for one, don't see how a man is goin' tuh get out there tuh find it," answered his partner. "Yuh couldn't take the canoe that close tuh the falls, no, not even if yuh snubbed it to a tree an' let it down a foot at a time. For why? 'Cause them jagged points o' rock would bust the bottom out of her, that's why."

"No, partner, yuh're right enough 'bout the canoe, but what about snubbin' a man on a line while he jumps from point to point o' them rocks yuh're a-speakin' about," suggested Big Bill.

Shorty McGuire shuddered as he looked at the black, slippery points of rocks that barely protruded from the glassy sheet of water that fell with the noise of thunder into an immense caldron some fifty feet below.

"Not for me," he answered. "I ain't goin' tuh go a walkin' tight ropes around no sech places as that."

"I ain't askin' yuh tuh, Shorty. Yuh kin do the snubbin', I'll do the rock jumpin' proposition. I wants tuh know what's on top o' thet bunch o' rock out there, an' I'm a-goin' tuh find out," stated Big Bill.

Shorty McGuire knew that when Big Bill spoke in that tone of voice there was no use trying to argue with him.

The following day the two prospectors returned to the falls with a coil of rope and Big Bill, making one end fast to his waist in such a manner that it could not tighten up and cut into him if he should slip, handed the other end of the line to his partner, who took a half turn around a small tree growing upon the river bank. Then, armed with a light bar to steady himself as he leaped, and a sack containing a pan and a light prospector's pick upon his back, Big Bill started to jump from one to another of the half-submerged rocks in an effort to gain the bluff that parted the waters of the river.

Before making each leap he would shout back to his partner the amount of slack he wanted, so that in the event of slipping, at no time could he fall more than a few feet, as Shorty McGuire held the line snubbed in such a manner that it could not run out.

Many a time it looked as though the swirling water would sweep Big Bill off his feet, but always he managed to regain his balance by the aid of the sharp-pointed steel bar that he jammed into the crevices of the rocks, and, at last, soaked from head to foot, and in spite of his strength, trembling from the strain upon his nerves, he stood upon the top of the immense rock that no man had gained before.

One glance convinced him that he had not been mistaken. There was a shallow deposit of yellow gravel upon the top of the rock.

"She'll pay big," was the verdict of Big Bill Shanklin, when, an hour later, he stepped ashore with half a

teaspoonful of coarse gold in a little bottle he always carried.

"Pay big is right," echoed Shorty McGuire. "But accordin' to what yuh say, there's too much ground tuh pan; an' I don't see how we're goin' tuh work it any other way. Prob'ly that's the reason it ain't never been worked before."

"No, Shorty, that ain't the reason," answered Big Bill. "No prospector ever was on that rock until to-day, or I miss my guess. Yuh see," he continued, "I reckon no one happened along when the river was as low as it is this year. If the water was a foot higher I couldn't 'a' made it across them rocks. An' no one ever happened tuh think the rock that divides the falls was any different to the country rock that forms the river bed. But she is, Shorty. She's part of a dyke of blue basalt that crosses the country rock, an' it bein' so much harder than the country rock, when the water kep' cuttin' down through the granite on each side, it left part of the old river bed on top of the dyke. Boy! There's a patch of pay dirt six inches deep by ten feet square on top of thet rock, an' she'll go close tuh two dollars a pan!"

"Don't make no difference tuh me if it goes two hundred tuh the pan. I ain't goin' tuh make a trip across them steppin' stones o' yours, no way yuh look at it," persisted Shorty.

"Suppose yuh want me tuh go an' wash it all out an' come back an' give yuh a nice little sack o' dust all tied up with a pink ribbon?" suggested Big Bill. Then, seeing that his partner was getting riled, he hastened to add: "Keep your shirt on, old-timer. I know them short legs o' yours ain't built for wadin', an' I don't know as I blame yuh any. I've been a-thinkin' the thing over. I reck'n workin' thet piece o' dirt is as easy as fallin' off the waterfall. All we got tuh do is tuh rig an endless cable. I'll go out there an' fill the buckets, an' yuh can haul 'em ashore. Then, when we get the rock cleaned, we'll rig up a sluice box an' run the dirt through."

Day after day, from sunup to sundown, the buckets of pay dirt were swung across the river; and day by day Shorty McGuire watched the mound of gravel rising. As he worked he was thinking of the gold that lay hidden in the pile of gravel awaiting the sluice boxes. Then, one day, the line broke, and as he watched the bucket of gravel disappear over the edge of the falls, a startling thought came to him. Suppose, just suppose the snubbing line should break some evening when he was hauling his partner ashore!

Once born, the thought persisted. How easy it would be, just a slash of a keen knife, and the gold would be all his own!

"After all," he reasoned, "it was as much his as anybody's. Big Bill Shanklin hadn't put it there. It was just chance that he had found it. If Bill hadn't found it the chances were that some one else would have done so."

Shorty McGuire didn't try to fight the thought down; he wasn't that kind. The lure of the gold hidden in that pile of gravel was too much for him, even as it has been to better men than he.

Came a day when Big Bill announced that the last of the gravel would be sent ashore that evening, and then he added: "We'll start building a sluice box in the morning, and inside o' two weeks we'd oughter clean up close tuh ten thousand apiece!"

"Ten thousand apiece! That's twenty thousand for one," thought Shorty McGuire, as, hand over hand he hauled upon the line that brought the gravel swinging across the water. Twenty thousand dollars! Enough to keep him in comfort the rest of his life. Then, from the stripped basalt dyke

Big Bill Shanklin gave the signal to haul in upon the snubbing line, for he was coming ashore.

Shorty McGuire repeated the amount to himself as he slowly took up the slack of the line that held his partner's life in its keeping.

When Big Bill was halfway across the river, Shorty McGuire knew that he must make his decision or it would be too late. Ahead of Big Bill was the most dangerous leap he had to make, a round, slippery protuberance of rock over which the water swirled and eddied more than knee-deep.

Shouting to his partner to take up the slack in the line the instant he jumped, Big Bill made the leap.

While still in mid-air he saw his partner's knife flash in the sun. Then the current caught the end of the severed line, and as it was swept over the brink, the sudden pull of the water overcame the balance of Big Bill Shanklin, who pitched, headfirst, into the seething caldron fifty feet below!

III.

It was done! In the two buckskin sacks tied securely in the bottom of the canoe, Shorty McGuire had placed nearly one hundred pounds of gold dust.

With a week's provisions aboard he thought he would be able to run down the river to its confluence with the Columbia. Then, paddling up one of the tributaries of that mighty stream he would lie low in some remote part of the tangled forests of the Pacific coast until all danger was past.

Shorty McGuire was sure that Big Bill would eventually be missed, for he was known and well liked throughout the hills. But then, even if his body was recovered there was no proof to show that he had met with foul play, for the grinding of the rapids would have done its work, and identification was unlikely. Too, it was unknown that Big Bill had had a partner, for he had picked up Shorty as the latter was going over to the Mystery Mine to get a job, and Shorty was a stranger in that part of the country.

"Twenty thousand in dust!" said Shorty, as, giving one last glance around, he stepped into the canoe and shoved off into the quiet water a couple of hundred feet below the falls.

As he figured upon doing his traveling by night, he did not make a start until the sun was setting over the crest of Thorne Creek Peak. Purple shadows were settling over the veil of spray that arose where the falling tons of water met the seething pool below.

For two hours he steered steadily down the cañon, and like a thing of life the canoe leaped swiftly and silently through the gathering night. Then, ahead of him, he heard the roar of the Great White Rapids, where the stream he was on made its confluence with the waters of the North Fork. Between these two streams lay the whirlpool.

As the swift current grew swifter, Shorty rose to his knees in order to better handle the canoe, and, with straining eyes, peered forth into the chaos of white water that lay ahead. In the center of the rapids the water boiled up into a long comb, at least two feet higher than the surrounding surface. Shorty McGuire knew that he must keep the canoe head on, exactly in the center of this ridge of water, as it would instantly be swamped if he allowed it to swing into the white rips that surged upon either side.

Each minute it seemed as if the canoe would be swamped, but, like a thing of cork, so lightly she rose and fell, as straight and true Shorty McGuire steered her on the crest of that racing comb of water.

All would have been well, but, suddenly, dead ahead of the canoe, a partly submerged log thrust its end up-

ward. Exerting all of his strength Shorty tried to swing the canoe, and at the same time keep her quartering to the waves. But the instant the bow came around, the full force of the current swung her broadside on. Then, as the canoe started to careen, a huge, white cross sea rushed under her and flung canoe and man into the center of the waiting whirlpool.

Shorty McGuire was no swimmer, but as he came up in the quiet water of the pool he was able to clutch one end of the canoe, which, bottom upward, began to gyrate. Faster and faster the canoe whirled, ever sinking lower in the water. At last Shorty McGuire could see the walls of water above him as the vortex of the funnel sank.

Then, with a faint hope of being able to reach the surface, he released his hold of the canoe. But, instantly, he felt himself helplessly whirling around the funnel of water.

Suddenly the canoe disappeared from his sight. As it did so the motion of the water changed, and, to his surprise, Shorty McGuire felt himself being brought to the surface.

As the funnel of the whirlpool filled, and the surface of the pool became quiet, Shorty once again felt himself sinking. Suddenly, out of the dark waters around him, he saw the white face of Big Bill Shanklin. Then, with the desperation of a drowning man, Shorty McGuire, flinging out his hands in an effort to save himself, clutched the hand of the man who had been his partner.

Slowly, at first, the waters of the great whirlpool started to gyrate, until all moving objects were sucked down into its vortex. Then, as before, the vortex filled. When dawn broke over the crest of Thorne Creek Peak the great pool lay quietly listening to the roar of the rapids.

TWO MONUMENTS ERECTED ON HISTORICAL ROAD

THE secretary of the Washington State Historical Society, W. F. Bonney, recently selected two sites, one on the Apple Way and one on the Palouse Highway, for two monuments which will be erected by the society to mark the old Mullan military road. Both sites are some miles out from the city of Spokane. The monuments will consist of markers nine feet high, made of concrete and cobblestones, bearing brass plates with appropriate inscriptions telling of the historical importance of the spot.

GEESE DROP DURING RAIN STORM IN SEATTLE

A SALESMAN named F. R. Davis, of Seattle, Washington, was recently returning from a business trip to Everett, a neighboring town. About six miles south of Silver Lake, Mr. Davis and his automobile were overtaken by a severe electrical storm. Mr. Davis reports that he saw a flash of lightning, followed by a violent peal of thunder, and then it began to rain wild geese. One goose hit the road in front of him, several dropped alongside the car, and two more struck the top and bounded off.

When he stopped his car and got out, the road behind him for several hundred yards was strewn with dead wild geese. He took several of the dead birds, which were immediately picked up by the people living along the road, and brought them into Seattle. None of the birds bore a mark of shot or a burn from the electricity. It is supposed that the geese flying south through the heavy rain, were in direct line with the bolt of lightning, and numbers of them were electrocuted while the rain itself was charged with the electricity.

Rustlers, Beware!

By Arthur Chapman

Author of "Held for Ransom," etc

CHAPTER I.

SEALED ORDERS.

"I'M glad you've decided to throw in with us, Milt. It'll beat punchin' cows for a crusty uncle. You'll have a change of scenery from Texas to Wyomin', and all kinds of excitement, includin', mebbe, a little shootin', which ought to appeal to a young feller like you."

Two men sat conversing in the railroad station. One was middle-aged, with grizzled hair and mustache, tall and big-limbed, but with no extra flesh on his massive frame. His face was long-jowled and determined looking, and his keen gray eyes were overhung with bushy brows, which were often drawn together in a scowl. Asa Swingley had awed many an opponent into submission. Others, whom his aggressive appearance could not impress, he had beaten or shot, for "Two-bar Ace" was equally at home in a rough-and-tumble or a gun fight.

"Well, I've said I'd come, and you can count me in," said Swingley's companion. "But I reserve the right to drop out if I think things aren't on the level."

Swingley's brows drew together quickly, and he shot a stabbing glance into the eyes that looked into his. But there was no quailing under the look. The big cattleman gazed into the face of a youth whose determination equalled, if it did not exceed, his own.

Milton Bertram was only slightly smaller of build than the giant cattleman. Both men had laid aside their coats, owing to the heat of the station. In their flannel shirts, with cartridge belts and guns sagging at their waists, trousers tucked into high-heeled, spurred boots, they typified perfectly the man's country from which they had come. Bertram had laid aside his sombrero, showing a luxuriant crop of black hair with a distinct tendency to curl. His forehead was broad, its whiteness in strong contrast with his deeply tanned features. His smoothly shaven face was regular in outline, and his dark eyes, for all their straightforward and fearless expression, had a half-humorous twinkle in them which mystified Swingley.

"It's too late for you to quit now," declared the latter finally, discovering

that he could not "look down" the youth at his side.

"I didn't say anything about quitting," answered Bertram easily. "I've thrown in with you, though it is at the last minute. But, to tell you the truth, I haven't exactly liked the looks of this scheme very much from the start. You've shown too much secrecy about it—getting all these men together under sealed orders."

"You'll find it's got the right brand run on it."

"All right, but you've got to admit I've had some grounds for suspicion. The gang you've picked up is the worst in this section. You've headed the bunch with Tom Hoog, a notorious killer, and the others aren't much behind him."

"I like men who can take care of themselves," replied Swingley.

"Well, you've got 'em over there," went on Bertram, looking into the adjoining waiting room, where, in a haze of blue smoke, many cow-punchers could be seen, lolling about on bed rolls, waiting for the calling of their train.

They were, as Bertram said, a formidable-looking outfit. Nearly every man had a record as a killer. With big pistols slapping at their hips, as they walked, and with rifles in leather scabbards, stacked in the corners of the room, or leaning against the rolls of bedding, the outfit took on the appearance of an armed camp, during a moment of ease.

Tom Hoog, who had been mentioned by Bertram as the leader of this daredevil lot, sat apart from the others, gloomily smoking. He was of medium height, spare but sinewy, with an aquiline nose, which tended to curve downward over a thin-lipped mouth, in which a cigarette was always crimped as in a vise. Hoog's hands evidently were his pride. They were long and slim, and they had always been kept so well gauntleted that they were as white as a gambler's. A wonderful shot with rifle or revolver and gifted with uncanny quickness on the "draw," Hoog had a reputation as a killer that had made his name feared throughout the district.

"Those fellows are all right," went on Swingley, "but, outside of Hoog, they ain't oversupplied with brains. That's the big reason why I wanted to get you. With you and Hoog as my lieutenants I'm goin' to be sure that things will go right, and my orders will be carried out."

"Much obliged," replied Bertram dryly.

"I had you in mind right from the first," continued Swingley, with a keen glance at the young cattleman's ingenuous face. "I knowed you had a row with your uncle, old Bill Bertram. Old Bill's a hard one for any one to get along with, and the more land he gits control of the harder he is on them around him. I'm glad you've come in, even if it is at the last minute. Our special train'll go inside of an hour, right behind the regular train for the north. You'll have to look after your own beddin' and guns and other stuff, but the wranglers'll see to gettin' your saddle aboard the baggage car, after they've loaded the horses, which they're doin' now. I'll look for you around here in about an hour."

The big cattleman rose and, with a growled "good-by" to Bertram, made his way to the adjoining room, where he took a hasty survey of the scene and spoke a few words to Hoog. After satisfying himself that none of the cow-punchers had succumbed to the lure of the town and drifted away from the station, Swingley strode out on the platform and was lost to sight along the tracks, where he had gone to superintend the last of the loading of the horses.

Left alone, Bertram smoked a mo-

ment, with his elbow on the arm of the bench. He knew that he had engaged in a desperate enterprise of some sort, but the thought of withdrawing was prompted not by the danger, but by the suspicion, that perhaps the expedition was of a shady character.

"If we were heading the other way, I'd swear it was a Mexican revolutionary project of some sort," thought Bertram. "But there's no doubt that we're going north. I can't think what it is, unless it has something to do with the cattle trouble that's been going on in Wyoming. Anyway we'll find out soon enough. Gee, but I hate the job of having to tie up with Tom Hoog and that gang in there!"

As he rose and put on his coat and stepped out of the station into the darkness at the poorly lighted entrance, Bertram's attention was attracted by a young woman. He had noticed her a few minutes before in the station. She had come in alone, and, when the northbound train was called, had arisen and started for the door leading to the gate. But apparently she had lost her ticket, as, after a hurried search, she stood irresolute. Then, as if at a loss what to do, she had turned and walked out of the station.

"You seem to be having trouble, ma'am," said Bertram, raising his hat. "Is there anything I can do?"

The girl, for she seemed to be hardly more than eighteen, drew back in alarm at first, but something in Bertram's voice apparently reassured her, as she answered: "I've lost my railroad ticket."

"Where are you going?"

"To Denver. I must go on this train, and I'm ashamed to confess that I haven't enough money to buy another ticket."

The girl's voice was as appealing as her face, the beauty of which had attracted Bertram's attention in the waiting room. She was of medium height and of slender proportions, but life and determination were reflected in her quick, graceful movements and in her speech, which just now seemed to have lost some of the certainty which was a natural part of it. Her level brows were drawn together in a frown, and, in the light from the station window, Bertram could see something like tears glistening in the brown eyes.

"Have you inquired in the station?" asked Bertram.

"No, because I know that would be of no use. The ticket was stolen by somebody who wanted me to miss this train."

The cowboy's eyebrows were raised slightly, and he whistled. "Who'd want to stop you?"

"I can't tell you, but I have known that an attempt would be made to prevent me from going to Denver—and beyond. I noticed a rough-looking man next to me at the ticket window, an hour or so ago, when I bought my transportation. Then he was beside me again when I was checking my baggage. It must have been at the baggage window that he took the ticket from this bag."

"Well, your train goes in five minutes," answered Bertram. "There's only one thing to do, and that's to get another ticket pronto. Or, if there is any one watching you, maybe it'd be better if I bought the transportation. You wait here, and I'll see what I can do."

Before the girl could reply the young cowboy, who was used to acting on impulse, reëntered the station and sauntered over to the ticket window. In a voice loud enough to be heard in the adjoining room he asked the ticket seller if the clock in the waiting room was right. Then, in a lower voice, he asked for a Denver ticket, accomplishing the exchange of money and transportation without calling any undue attention to the transaction. Then he

sauntered to the door and stepped outside again.

"Come on," he said, thrusting the ticket into the girl's hand and keeping tight hold of the little fist. "There's no use of your going through the ticket office. We'll hurry around the end of the building, and you can dodge past all those trunks and get to the gate, just as easy as a colt slipping through a corral."

"Where can I send the money for the ticket?" asked the girl, as they hurried through the darkness.

"Oh, just send it to Milton Bertram, care of William Bertram, of the Box Ranch, Bertramville," replied the cowpuncher. "If you don't write me a long letter, telling me how you enjoyed the trip, I'm going to be sure peevish."

The girl laughed, and the note of her laughter was as clear as a meadow lark's trill. Bertram stood in the darkness near the baggage room and watched her disappear through the gate. He saw the train depart and then turned regretfully away, his hand still thrilling to the touch of the girl's hand, which had given his own a quick clasp of thankfulness.

CHAPTER II.

WESTERN SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE.

ON the way to Denver, Bertram began to find out something concerning the nature of the enterprise with which he had become identified.

The train was divided into two sections, the first consisting of three passenger and two baggage cars. A hundred men rode in the coaches, and the baggage cars were filled with a miscellaneous assortment of tents, saddles and general camp equipment.

"There's a train follerin' right behind," said Archie Beam, a cowpuncher, into whose seat Bertram had dropped. "It's a stock train, and it's got enough hosses for all us and more. I hear that every other train along the line has to give our two trains the right of way. You might think we was goin' for the doctor, or somethin' instid of bein' on a stunt that prob'ly will make a lot of other fellers call for the doctor."

"Think we're in for a scrap, do you, Arch?" asked Bertram, looking out of the window at the sagebrush that flitted by in a never-ending stream, as the train whirled through the desolate plateau country, where many an emigrant train had met a sad fate.

"Boy, I know it!" said the cowpuncher, delighted to air his superior knowledge. "We're goin' to be jumped right in the middle of that northern Wyomin' cattle trouble, and we're goin' to be told to begin shootin' right and left, and never to let up till there ain't a native hombre, left alive."

"Where'd you get your information, Arch?"

"Don't josh me, Milt. You know as well as I do that there's been a heap of trouble in Wyomin', for the last few years, don't you?"

Bertram signified assent. Along the great cattle trails, stretching from Texas to the Canadian line, there had come news of serious and long-standing troubles in northern Wyoming. Rustlers and big cattle interests were almost at a point of open war. The cattle interests claimed that the rustlers had been carrying on wholesale operations. Every small rancher was under suspicion. The great herds were being depleted, it was claimed, and numerous small herds were being built up at the expense of the heavily capitalized interests. Men who had counted themselves millionaires were faced with ruin, owing to the melting away of their herds.

"These single cinchers all tell the same story when they come down to this part of the country," said Archie, alluding to the single rig of the northern cattlemen, as opposed to the double cinch of that district. "They say

there's been much trouble all over the northern part of the State. The thing has got so bad that the little cattlemen have took to pottin' the big ones. A cowman, who don't belong with the rustlin' majority, is takin' chances every time he throws his leg over a saddle and starts out to git a little fresh air."

"Which side is right?"

"What's the difference which side is right?" said Archie, asking a question in answering one. "We're out to play the game for the side with the most money, which is the big cattlemen, of course. I ain't constitutionally opposed to rustlin' cattle. I've packed a runnin' iron in my boot so long that it's made me a little stiff-legged, but a man in that game's got to take his own chances. I took mine, and these Wyomin' rustlers have got to take theirs. I guess they'll think somethin' popped when this gang cuts loose on 'em. There ain't a hombre in this crowd that ain't got his man, I guess, all but you, Milt. Old Two-bar Ace must have thought you had gone far enough lately to be part and passel with us. You sure have been hittin' it up, boy, to be classed in with a fightin' gang like this. Well, so long, and a short war and a merry one."

Bertram's grip on the seat in front of him tightened, as the cowboy departed, called by some riotous members of the gang.

The young Texan knew that the cowboy had spoken the truth. Bertram had been traveling a fast pace, even for the great outdoor land, where restrictions were few. He had been brought up on a ranch on the Brazos, where he had spent as much of his time as he could induce his devoted mother to let him subtract from school. He had even attended college at Austin, but his mother's death, before he had graduated, had brought to light the fact that the ranch had been mortgaged to pay for Bertram's education.

Before Bertram realized what had happened, the ranch had passed from his control. He sought to drown in wild companionship his sorrow at his mother's death and the poverty he had unwittingly brought upon her. At last he had been offered a job as cowpuncher on the big ranch of his uncle, one of the large landowners in the southern part of the State. He had accepted, but he had found no consolation in the change, as his uncle was an utterly uncompanionable man. Bertram tried to put up with the old fellow's caprices for a while, but soon they became unbearable. There were open disagreements between the men. Bertram did his work well, as there were few who could equal him in the saddle, but nothing could stop the old man's harsh complaining. Finally the old attractions began to summon the youth. There were wild excursions to near-by frontier towns. Bertram became a leading spirit among the daredevils who frequented the bar and the gambling tables. His name became known along the trail for its owner's wild exploits.

One day there came an open break with his uncle. Laughing at the old man's senile anger and turning his back upon the reproaches which his uncle hurled at him, Bertram rode to the big town, where, in just the right mood for any adventure, he had been picked up by Asa Swingley and had been enlisted in the adventure which Archie Beam had foreshadowed as something desperate in character.

"He's right. I'd gone farther than I ever imagined," declared Bertram, as he glanced about him and made a mental note of those in the car.

There was Tom Hoog, who killed for the love of killing. Hoog had been a figure in much range warfare. He had played a part in a cattle war in that country, which had assumed such proportions, that the governor of the State

had intervened. It had been said that Hoog had fought on both sides in that war, putting his services at the disposal of whichever side happened to bid the higher at the moment. He had fought men single-handed and in groups. He had been captured and had escaped, generally leaving a trail of death behind him. Yet his killings had always gone unpunished, because the fear of the man even extended to officers of the law.

Others in the party were the possessors of reputations only a shade less evil than Hoog's. A few, like Archie Beam, were merely wild and irresponsible, and they had joined the expedition for a lark.

Swingley passed among the men, loudly solicitous of their welfare. Food was brought in, and there was some drinking. Several of the men were maudlin before Denver was reached. Others were at the quarrelsome stage, Swingley stopped several incipient gun fights, but otherwise let the men behave as they pleased. Bertram took no part in the drinking, though he joined an occasional game of cards. He was not inclined to depart from the letter of his bargain with Swingley, but he was thinking hard, as the train pounced over the desert, beside the long, blue chain of the Rockies.

Noticing his abstraction Swingley rallied Bertram about it. "Things'll be more lively, soon after we leave Denver," he said, pausing at the young Texan's seat. "We've got some more people to meet there, and we'll be tied up several hours. I want you to help me keep an eye on some of these drunken punchers, to see that they don't wander away where we can't get 'em."

At Denver the motley crew piled off the special and swooped down upon the station. Swingley's orders against "seeing the town" were strict, but some of the cow-punchers attempted to slip away and were turned back. It was evening, and, in the half-light on the station platform, Bertram thought he recognized a woman's figure, as it flitted around the corner of the building. A few hasty steps brought him to the side of the young lady whose ticket he had purchased.

"I see that the ticket we got wasn't counterfeit, and you arrived here, all right," observed Bertram delightedly. He saw that she had smiled, as she greeted him, and she seemed genuinely pleased, in spite of the evident perturbation under which she was laboring.

"Yes," she said, "but I'm afraid all your generosity has been in vain."

"What's the trouble? Is there any way I can help you further?"

Bertram was looking at her, as he spoke. Her face was pale, but evidently owing to the mental strain. Her eyes just now were clouded with sadness, and her voice trembled with agitation.

"You've done enough as it is," she answered—"more than any other stranger has ever done for me. I've met friends here, and now I can pay you the money for my ticket."

"I didn't want you to bother about that," said Bertram, as she opened her pocketbook and counted out the bills into his reluctant hand. "Settling this thing deprives me of a chance of meeting you again, unless you're going to be kind enough to let me meet you, anyway."

Even in the semidarkness Bertram could see the girl's quick blush, as he went on speaking. "I'm going to be honest enough to say that I admire you a whole lot. I've been counting on hearing from you later on. Won't you tell me your name?"

"It would do no good," said the girl. Then, with an earnestness that startled Bertram, she added: "but, if you want to please me and do the right thing by yourself, you will go no further on this expedition."

"I can't do that, because it would be going back on my word," replied Bertram. "But why should I leave the expedition?"

"If you don't, there will be the death of honest men on your hands," said the girl. "Why did you promise to go with a man like Swingley, anyway?"

"Just plain foolishness, I guess, the same as any other soldier of fortune shows."

"Those men are not soldiers of fortune—they are soldiers of murder," exclaimed the girl. "If you go on with them you'll be one with them."

"Then it means something to you?" asked Bertram triumphantly.

"Yes," said the girl, with another quick flush. "It means just what it would if I saw any young man on the wrong road."

"Well, even if you put it that impersonally, still I'm glad," replied the young Texan. "I've got to go on with the outfit, but I'll promise you one thing—that, if there's any murder done, my hands won't be red."

Just then, from around the corner of the station, came the sound of men's voices, in a cowboy song.

"They're coming," said the girl. "I don't want them to see me. I'm going to be on the northbound train that goes just ahead of yours."

"But your name, and where can I see you?" persisted the cowboy, clinging to the soft little hand which he found in his big fist.

"If you'll let go my hand, I'll give you a card," said the girl, with a nervous laugh. Bertram reluctantly released her hand. He felt a card thrust into his fingers, and an instant later the girl had disappeared around the end of the station. He followed her swiftly moving form with his glance, as she passed along the dimly-lighted platform and vanished through the gate leading to the tracks. Then he stepped to a light and read the card eagerly.

"Alma Caldwell!" he exclaimed, repeating the name several times. "Pretty name for a prettier girl! I wonder why a girl like her knows about Swingley's little expedition, and why she's so anxious to keep ahead of us."

CHAPTER III.

BERTRAM MAKES A GO-DEVIL.

THE men detrained at a little northern Wyoming town, the terminus of the railroad, after an all-night journey from Denver.

Swingley was everywhere, asserting his leadership. There was none of the jocularity about him now, which he had assumed during the long journey. His orders were sharp and imperative. They were accompanied by blows, on two or three occasions, when cowpunchers did not move quickly enough to suit him. One of the men, who had made a move to draw his gun, was knocked bleeding and insensible before he could drag the weapon from its holster.

Evidently things were moving according to a prearranged program. There were chuck wagons on hand, into which food and cooking utensils were piled. Also there were wagons for the bedding.

Twenty or thirty additional men had joined the outfit at Denver, and these were reinforced by as many more, who were waiting at the station when the special train arrived, followed in an hour or two by the train carrying the horses.

The new men were apparently of the same ilk as those who had joined from the start—sunburned, hardy-looking fellows in cowboy garb, and every one of them was heavily armed. There were greetings between some of their number and a few of the new arrivals, as the long trails abounded with men who were accustomed to drifting from one ranch to another, and whose circle

of acquaintances was correspondingly large.

The only accident preparatory to getting the cavalcade under way was one that was destined to affect Bertram strangely.

"Milt," called Swingley, reining his sweating horse in front of Bertram, who was smoking a cigarette and wondering what had become of the girl whose card had been taken out and scanned many times. "Milt, I know you're handy at blacksmithing. Old Jim Dykes, the only horseshoer we've got along, has got himself kicked in the arm, and he won't be any more good to us on this trip. Come and help us out."

Bertram accompanied Swingley to the improvised forge, where the groaning blacksmith was having his injured arm set by an amateur surgeon. The young Texan had often been called upon to shoe fractious bronchos on his uncle's ranch, the work presenting little difficulty to him on account of his exceptional skill in managing the wildest horses.

Seeing that the old blacksmith was incapable of further work, Bertram took off his coat and rolled up his sleves, disclosing a pair of muscular arms, and in an hour he had completed the tasks necessary to set the caravan moving.

"It sure was lucky that I remembered seein' you blacksmithin' on your uncle's ranch," said Swingley, reining his horse beside Bertram's, shortly after the start was made. "You may have to help us out a little more before we git through, but, anyway, mebbe you'll have pleasanter work mixed in with the blacksmithin'—a little shootin' at a mark, for instance." Swingley had grinned meaningly, as he spoke.

"I've heard there might be some shooting," observed Bertram dryly, "but I might as well let you know right now that I always get an awful attack of buck fever when I'm shooting at men."

"You'll forget it when we hit into the thick of the fightin'," returned Swingley, not catching the sarcasm in Bertram's voice, or deliberately overlooking it. "I don't mind tellin' you that we may be in for a little ruction inside of another twelve hours. We've come up here to put an end to cattle rustlin' in this part of the State. The rustlers are so strong that they've been runnin' things as they wanted. But, when they see what they're up against now, it may be that they'll quit without a fight. If they don't—so much the worse for them."

Swingley turned in his saddle and looked proudly back at his little army. The sight would have inspired pride in any captain. Here was a grim company of tanned, resolute-looking horsemen, riding with that easy grace peculiar to the saddlemen of the Western plains. The loud jests that had been heard on the train were not in evidence. The men rode quietly. Pistols were ready to the grasp, as were the guns in the scabbards at the horses' sides. Behind the command rumbled the camp wagons.

"Cattle rustlin' is goin' to be a lot less popular than it has been, before this outfit is through," observed Swingley, "and there'll be some old scores that'll be paid off in full, too."

The cattleman's voice was thick with passion. His heavy brows were drawn together in a frown, and the muscles of his powerful jaws worked spasmodically, as he clenched his teeth determinedly.

"I hope this crowd ain't been brought up here just to settle some old personal scores," answered Bertram, his voice bringing Swingley back with a start.

The cattleman, darting a quick glance at Bertram, realized that he had said too much. Muttering something about picking a camping place for the night he spurred ahead, leaving Bertram plodding with the column at the

moderate pace which had been prescribed.

The young Texan's thoughts went back once more to the girl whom he had met at the station. He paid scant attention to the talk of Archie Beam, who had taken Swingley's place at his side. He was wondering about the girl —who she was, and the mission which had sent her on her long journey. Evidently it was a mission of some danger, for she had hinted at enemies who had sought to interfere with her progress. And her apparent knowledge of the purpose of the expedition was a puzzle. How much did she know of Swingley's invasion of Wyoming, and what interest could it hold for her?

"Well, if nothin' else'll wake you up, pardner," said Archie good-naturedly, after many ineffectual attempts to arouse Bertram to conversation, "mebbe the smell of a little bacon and coffee will help. It looks as if we're goin' to camp right ahead, and them chuck wagons can't come up too soon fer me. I could eat everything in them wagons and then chase the hosses."

Swingley had picked an admirable camp site in a grove of cottonwoods, beside an alkali-lined stream. Several springs near by afforded plenty of pure water for cooking purposes. Soon the wagons rattled up. Tents were put up, beds were unrolled, and the cooks had supper started. The men lolled about at ease, but there was no drinking, nor was there any card playing. Conversation was carried on in low voices. As soon as supper was over and the night herders were told off most of the men turned in and were sound asleep in a few minutes. They might be called on to fight before the night waned, but these men, used to the arbitrament of firearms, were not to be robbed of their sleep.

Bertram was aroused, apparently before he had more than dropped off to slumber. Swingley was shaking him by the shoulder, and Hoog was standing in the entrance to the tent. The moon was high, and Bertram could see the faces of both men distinctly.

"Come on out," said Swingley gruffly. "We've got some special work for you."

As he dressed hurriedly, the young Texan saw that it was only a little past midnight.

"We've had your hoss brought in," said Swingley briefly. "Saddle quick and come on with us."

Without any questions Bertram saddled his horse. The three men mounted and rode out of camp silently. As soon as they struck the road Swingley and Tom Hoog took the lead, Bertram riding close behind them at an easy gallop. Nothing was heard for an hour or more but the pounding of hoofs on the hard road. Then Swingley and Hoog turned in at a long, one-story building, which was set a short distance back from the road. Bertram followed, and the three men dismounted.

Swingley and Hoog, dropping their reins, entered the wide doorway of the building. After they had lighted two lanterns, that were bracketed in the wall, Bertram saw that the place was a fairly well-equipped blacksmith shop. There was a pile of old horseshoes in one corner, and in another was considerable farm machinery of various sorts.

"Can you take something out of that pile of junk and make up a sort of fort on wheels?" asked Swingley of Bertram. "I might as well tell you that we're goin' right on to Wild Horse, the county seat, forty mile from here. Before we reach the town we may have to do some purty stiff fightin', and I figger that somethin' armored may come in handy. Old Jim, the blacksmith, was outlinin' somethin' that he had in his head—a kind of go-devil on wheels he called it—but now he is useless, and I want you to help me out."

Bertram showed no surprise. In fact no development of this strange adventure, in which he found himself cast, could surprise him. He looked the pile of machinery over carefully.

"There are the wheels and frame of a hayrake," said Hoog. "And there are a couple of road scrapers. Take the bottoms of those scrapers and fasten them to the hayrake frame, and you've got something that you could walk right up to a nest of rifles with. Ain't that right, Bertram?"

The young Texan nodded. "I reckon it might work out that way," he replied, "but I didn't know that you were accustomed to getting your men from behind things like that, Hoog."

The gunman darted a murderous glance at Bertram, and his hands moved toward his hips, but Swingley stepped quickly between the two men.

"Hyar! No fussin'!" he commanded. "We ain't got more'n two hours start of the gang, and we'll have to work fast. Let's have that go-devil fixed 'fore the boys git here."

Bertram knew that to refuse outright would be equivalent to a declaration of war. Yet he was far from having so detached a viewpoint regarding the expedition as he had at the start. Previous to his meeting with the girl he had been ready for most any adventure. As an alien gunman—a Hessian in cowboy traps, as he bitterly called himself—he would have cared little about any harm he might bring to those concerned in this range war, so remote from his home. Cattle interests or rustlers—it had made no difference to him until he had met Alma Caldwell. Since then a growing distaste for the whole business had come upon him. Yet he could not very well drop out. He would be a marked man in a strange country, and somebody would be certain to slay him as one of the invaders.

Working so leisurely that he made Asa Swingley curse fervently under his breath, and deepened the glitter of hate in Tom Hoog's eyes, Bertram started the forge fire and performed the comparatively simple task of attaching the scraper bottoms to the wheels.

When the work was completed Swingley crouched behind the contraption and pushed it about with an enthusiasm that was almost boyish.

"You've been slow enough about it, Milt," he said to the young Texan, who stood with bare arms folded over the leather apron Swingley had provided, looking at the cattleman in undisguised contempt. "But it's a good job, all right. If anybody holes up in front of us, they ain't goin' to stay holed up very long, now that we've got this go-devil."

It was as Swingley said. The machine would afford protection for two men, who might push it with their hands under the very muzzles of rifles and revolvers. Bullets might rattle against that thick shield of iron, but the men behind it would be safe.

"Old Jim had the right idea!" exclaimed Swingley, "and you've worked it out in good shape, Milt. It's time for the crowd to be comin' up, and, if I ain't mistaken, you can see this go-devil tried out, purty quick after daylight."

As Swingley spoke, the advance guard of the command could be heard coming, and soon the road by the blacksmith shop was filled with mounted men, none too good-humored at being routed out before sunup and without breakfast.

"There'll be plenty to eat after a little work that's mapped out first," said Swingley, haranguing the crowd. "The first rustlers we've got to git are not more'n a mile ahead of us, in a cabin to the left of the road, toward the foothills. You can't miss the place. I want it surrounded. If any man from the cabin shows his face after daybreak,

he's to be shot—and shot dead. But I don't want any noise and no firin' till you see somethin' to shoot at. Tom Hoog will take half the men this side of the cabin, and I'll take half around on the other side. Be careful shootin' across, so we don't hit each other."

Hoog and his division started up the road. The moon was beginning to pale, and there were bird noises from the prairie, indicating that dawn was not far away.

Bertram had not put on his coat, but still stood in his leather apron, a sledge hammer in his hand.

"That's right, Milt," said Swingley, reining his horse beside the young Texan, "you stay here and be ready to bring up this go-devil when I send for it. Arch Beam, you stay here with him."

Bertram knew that Swingley was suspicious, that he had detailed Beam as his guard. He smiled grimly, as the leader of the expedition clattered away at the head of his half of the command.

"Arch," said Bertram, as the last echo of hoofs died away, "let's see your gun."

"Sure," said the cowboy, handing over his six-shooter, with a grin. Bertram put the weapon in his own belt, beneath the blacksmith's apron. Then he stepped to the cowboy's horse, which was standing riderless in the doorway. Drawing Beam's rifle from its scabbard Bertram extracted the cartridges from the magazine. Then he put the weapon back where he had found it.

"Now Arch," said Bertram calmly, "consider yourself held up. Both guns are useless, and I'll ask you to step back in the shop and not move, while I undo a little piece of work I've had to do for Swingley."

"Sure," replied the imperturbable Arch, with a grin. "I've seen so many queer things on this queer picnic that nothin' is goin' to surprise me—I'll give you warnin' of that."

Bertram swung the sledge and with half a dozen strokes destroyed the wheels of the go-devil, past all fixing. Then he flung the hammer into one corner of the smithy and, rolling down his sleeves, put on his coat.

"Arch," he said, "I'm quitting this expedition right here. Want to desert with me?"

"I don't guess I do," replied Arch, surprised in spite of himself. "The people in this country will scalp you alive when they learn that you came in here with this gang. You'd better stay on and chance it with us, Milt."

"I'd have to fight Swingley when he saw that," replied Bertram, pointing grimly to the destroyed go-devil. "Between the two camps of enemies I seem to have made, there's nothing for me to do but take to the brush. Good-by, Arch, and sorry to have had to hold you up."

Bertram flung down the cowboy's empty gun and, swinging into his own saddle, cantered down the road, with a backward wave of his hand to the puzzled cowboy in the doorway of the blacksmith shop.

CHAPTER IV.

A BATTLE AND A BULLET.

BERTRAM knew that the wagons would soon be coming along, under guard. Accordingly he turned off toward the foothills, which were beginning to be touched with pink. At a few rods from the road he was indistinguishable in the tall sagebrush and scattered groves of quaking asp and cottonwood. As he neared the foothills the tree growths became thicker, and soon he was moving in a forest which was comparatively free from down timber and underbrush.

The loneliness of the country struck Bertram as amazing. They had passed by no ranch houses on the road during the journey of the invaders from

the railroad terminus. The blacksmith shop was undoubtedly the first outpost of civilization. All else was given over to unfenced prairie.

As the light grew stronger, and the bird sounds more pronounced, Bertram heard the sound of firing from the direction in which the raiders had gone.

There was a heavy volley, succeeded by firing at irregular intervals.

Being without any definite purpose in mind Bertram determined to make his way as close as possible to the firing and observe what was going on. Sheltered in the trees on the sides of the foothills the task was not difficult. From one glade he caught a glimpse of the blacksmith shop and saw that the mess wagons and bed wagons were grouped about the building. From the smoke he judged that the cooks were getting breakfast.

Pushing on, but always keeping in the shelter of the trees, Bertram advanced nearly a mile. The sound of firing grew more distinct, as he went on. There were no more volleys. Evidently the men were firing at random, but shooting steadily.

When he judged that he was about opposite the scene of the combat, Bertram tied his horse in a clump of quaking asp and made his way cautiously to the edge of a clearing, where he could command a view of the scene below. Through the binoculars, which he always carried, he watched with interest the development of a drama which had already taken the form of tragedy.

In the center of a considerable tract of cleared land stood a cabin. It was a small cabin, evidently not more than one room, but stoutly built of logs. There was no porch, but close to the single step, leading to the front door, lay the figure of a man, evidently dead. A water bucket, upturned, was near his outstretched hand.

"They didn't give him a chance, the curs! They must have shot him, as he started to the spring for water," said Bertram aloud, noticing the well-worn trail from the door to a small ravine, one hundred yards or more away.

Sounds of firing came from the ravine and from the clumps of trees on all sides of the clearing in which the house stood. Answering shots came from the house. It was evident that the defense was being put up by one man, an expert marksman.

"He must have hit some of 'em right at the start," muttered Bertram, "or they'd have rushed the house."

The cabin seemed to be liberally provided with loopholes, as shots came from all sides. The lone defender, plainly enough, was distributing his shots impartially, keeping a good lookout to see that no parties gained the shelter of the cabin walls.

The bright sunlight crept down the foothills and flooded the scene of battle. Still the fight went on. One hour passed—then two. The man in the cabin seemed to have an unlimited supply of ammunition. If he could manage to hold out much longer, perhaps the countryside would be aroused and come to his rescue. Bertram knew from the talk of Swingley and others that there were many ranches between this outpost and the county seat, where the invaders had planned to dispossess the sheriff and strike their heaviest blow. If they were delayed too long, their surprise march would be futile.

The Texan could imagine how Swingley was fuming at the unexpected resistance, and how he was urging the cowboys to renewed efforts to "get" their man. But, in spite of the countless shots that were directed at the windows and loopholes on all sides of the cabin, not a bullet seemed to take effect. The return fire came steadily from the cabin—first from one side and then from another.

Bertram saw two cowboys being led away from the field of battle, evidently victims of the man who was fighting against such odds.

"Unless they've got something up their sleeve," thought Bertram, "Swingley's men might as well move on. This man seems to have plenty of ammunition, judging from the free and easy way he is firing, and he can keep up this long-range fighting all day, unless a chance bullet hits him."

Hardly had the thought crossed his mind when, under cover of unusually heavy firing from that side, Bertram saw a two-wheeled armored device, similar to the one he had recently smashed, being pushed along the road that led from the highway to the house.

"By the gods, Swingley has had his way in spite of me!" ejaculated Bertram. "Blacksmith Jim must have come up and told them how to fit those scraper irons to another pair of wheels."

Slowly the improvised war engine moved toward the house, under a concentrated fire of rifles. Bertram, from his elevated position, could catch a glimpse of the feet of the men behind the armor, as they pushed the go-devil toward the cabin.

The lone defender of the ranch house sensed the danger to which he was exposed by this new element in the fight. He fired shot after shot at the advancing go-devil, but still it came on.

Bertram watched intently. At first he thought it was the intention of the men to reach a loophole or a window and fire through it, but he soon saw that such was not their idea.

A bundle of straw was tossed over the top of the go-devil, against the cabin door. Another bundle followed, and then the go-devil was slowly backed away from the cabin.

"Burning him out, as if he might be a wolf, without a chance for his life!" exclaimed Bertram, striking his forehead in anger. "I'll bet Ace Swingley himself is behind that go-devil. No one else could think up such a plan and carry it out."

Almost as the Texan spoke flames burst from the straw pile at the cabin door. In a few seconds they had crept up the dry woodwork and had reached the roof. By the time the men with the go-devil had reached a place of safety, one side of the cabin and the roof were ablaze.

Thinking that the defender of the cabin would attempt to escape by way of the rear door, Swingley brought most of his forces around on that side. To Bertram's amazement the front door opened, and a man, bareheaded and coatless, carrying a rifle in one hand, ran swiftly toward a gulch in the foothills. The man had a good start before the besiegers realized how cleverly they had been outwitted. If there were any riflemen concealed in the growth of timber and underbrush, toward which the man was making his way, they were too surprised to shoot. But bullets began flying from the thicket on the opposite side of the cabin. A few yards from the protecting gulch the runner stumbled and fell heavily. Animated by a determination which even his foes must have admired, he rose slowly to his knees and then to his feet, using his rifle as a crutch.

The rifle fire had died away, as everybody seemed intent on watching the next move. Then a single shot was heard, as the defender of the cabin started to run again, and the man fell and lay still, his arms outstretched, his face turned to the sky.

The brutality of the killing caused the young Texan to tremble, as if he had been smitten with ague. He had seen sudden death in many forms, but this murder of one man by scores of assassins shook his consciousness to the center. It seemed as if a crime so monstrous could not go unpunished on the

instant. Bertram almost looked for a lightning bolt to descend from the blue sky and strike down the riflemen. When the rifle firing had ceased serenity had returned to the scene. The meadow larks resumed their trilling, and, if it had not been for the burning cabin and the two still forms in the clearing, one might imagine that death and destruction could never visit so peaceful a haunt.

Now that their mission at the cabin was over, the invaders paid no further attention to their handiwork. Evidently under orders from Swingley, they swarmed out of the clearing toward the road, ready to take up the march without further delay.

Through his glasses Bertram saw Swingley approach the body at the edge of the clearing. The big cattleman appeared to be writing something. Then he stooped and attached a piece of paper to the dead man's breast. Turning hastily aside, Swingley strode across the clearing, intent on marshaling his forces.

Bertram saw the dust and heard the clatter of hoofs, as the cavalcade took up its march. Then he could hear the rumble of the wagons. The roof of the cabin fell in with a crash, and the crackling of flames began to subside. The young Texan led his horse down the slope and into the clearing, which had been the center of such spirited conflict.

The body of the first man still lay where it had fallen, close to the cabin door, with the water bucket a few feet away. Approaching as closely as he could, and shielding his eyes from the mass of coals that had been the cabin, Betram saw that the man was rather below medium stature and past middle age. Evidently he was a ranch helper —a cowboy who had seen his best days.

The man at the edge of the clearing was tall and powerfully built. As he lay with his arms outstretched, his brawny hand still clutching the rifle, he made an imposing figure even in death. His features were aquiline, his nose having the curve of an eagle's beak. Though he, too, was past middle age, there was no hint of gray in his hair. Plainly enough he had been a leader of men, a foeman to be feared.

Bertram, stooping, read the message, scrawled in lead pencil on the square of paper attached to the dead man's breast. It said:

NICK CALDWELL
KING OF THE RUSTLERS
LET OTHERS BEWARE

As he read the name Caldwell, Bertram uttered an exclamation. It was the name of the girl he had met at the start and again at Denver. Probably he was the girl's father. In the bitterness of his heart Bertram cursed Swingley and the expedition. Then, his attention being attracted by some papers, the edges of which peeped from the man's belt, Bertram drew the documents forth.

There were two letters addressed to Nick Caldwell. Glancing through them in the hope of finding something more concerning the man's identity, Bertram gave a whistle of astonishment.

The letters indicated that the recipient, while ostensibly favoring the cattle rustlers, was in reality working for certain great cattle interests.

But, if Swingley and this slain man had been associated on the same side in this great war of the range, how had it come about that the leader of the expedition had been so determined to kill his confederate? Was Swingley unaware that Caldwell was really working for the cattle interests, or had some personal feud arisen between the two men?

"Probably it's a case of wheels within wheels," thought Bertram. "Maybe this man Caldwell threatened Swingley's leadership. Or it may be that Caldwell was not so much on the cattlemen's side as these letters indicate,

and the word was given to Swingley to get him first of all."

Dropping on one knee beside the body Bertram glanced over another paper, which he had taken out with the letters. It was in the form of a diary, loosely scrawled on several sheets of paper. It was a brief account of the fight which had just taken place.

"By George! this Caldwell was a cool one," thought Bertram. "He found time to jot down a story of the fight, while he was standing off that bunch."

The opening entry said:

Five-forty—The fight's on. They've got Nate Day—shot him, as he stepped out after water. I can see from the window that he's stone dead.

Then followed entries in which the writer told of the fight as it progressed. He mentioned wounding or killing four men, and he told of bullets that whistled through the windows and loopholes, yet did not hit him. The final entries read:

Eight-fifteen—They're bringing out some kind of a go-devil on wheels, with an armored front. I can't see the men behind it, and bullets don't go through the iron. I guess I'm done.

Eight-twenty-five—They've set fire to the cabin. Throwed straw out from behind that go-devil. Curse the man that made that, anyway. I might have had a chance if it hadn't been for him.

Eight-thirty-five—The roof's afire. I've got to make a run for it. If I can make the gulch I may get away, but the chance is slim. Good-by all.

Bertram did not put the diary in his pocket with the letters. He thrust the rudely scrawled notes back in the man's belt, and he left undisturbed the notice which Swingley had pinned to Caldwell's breast.

Still kneeling beside the body Bertram for the first time thought about himself. Should he go or stay? No doubt the whole countryside was being aroused, and men would soon be flocking along the trail of the invaders. It would not do to be found at the scene of the fight, but would he be better off anywhere else? He was a stranger in a hostile land. He had entered the country as one of a band of armed invaders, and it was not likely that any explanations he might make would be heeded. Hot-headed men, intent on vengeance, would not hesitate to shoot him down at sight. He smiled ruefully, as he thought of Arch Beam's words: "The people in this country will scalp you alive!" No doubt Arch was right. But, if he was to be killed, it would be better to meet death on the open road, rather than at the scene of a crime so despicable.

As Bertram was about to rise to his feet a rifle cracked from across the clearing, and a bullet tore through the young Texan's left shoulder. Although the shock of the impact spun him half around, Bertram struggled to his feet. His heavy revolver was drawn with amazing celerity, and he was about to empty the weapon in the direction from which the shot had come, when he heard a cry in a girl's voice.

At the same time the thicket parted. As the young Texan stood with feet firmly planted, in spite of the intense pain that racked him, while his finger almost pressed the trigger, Alma Caldwell came running toward him.

CHAPTER V.

A RIDE TO SANCTUARY.

THE Texan had only a confused idea of the events that followed immediately after he had been shot. He knew that the wound was serious, for the impact of the bullet had fairly staggered him. Yet he managed to find his feet steadily enough, and the young woman, who ran toward him, had no idea that he was hurt.

To Bertram it seemed as if the girl floated toward him on a billowing sea of ether, instead of running swiftly, as she did, across the sparse verdure

of the clearing. Also, in the young Texan's eyes, she seemed more lovely and more unattainable than before. He had caught only fleeting glimpses of her during their previous meetings, and one of those meetings had been under a very poor brand of artificial light. But now, in the bright Wyoming day, he caught the full beauty of her youthful color, the regularity of her features and her grace of movement. Her lithe figure was outlined in all its charm against the green of the thicket from which she had sprung. She had dropped her hat and tossed aside her riding gauntlets, and her spurs jingled at the heels of her small riding boots, as she ran.

"By all the gods!" thought the wounded and dazed Bertram, "this country up here was made as a background for her."

Horror and questioning were written on the girl's features, as she reached Caldwell's side and flung herself on her knees beside the body. One glance told her what had happened, and she buried her face in her hands.

Meantime Bertram's wavering attention had been attracted by another figure, following closely behind the girl. It was the figure of a youth, hardly taller than Alma Caldwell and nearly as slender. Yet, for all the newcomer's youthfulness and slenderness, there was something so threatening in his attitude, as he approached more slowly than had the girl, that Bertram half raised his revolver. The boy, who was carrying a rifle, hesitated a moment, as if to bring the weapon to his shoulder.

"Stop!" said the girl, looking up. "Jimmy Coyle, put down that gun. You had no business to fire in the first place, without my telling you."

"So that's the person who shot at me, is it?" asked Bertram, lowering his weapon and turning toward the girl. "I'm glad you've stopped him from doing it any more, as it seems to me there's been quite enough shooting around here to-day."

The spreading crimson stain on the young Texan's shirt front caught the girl's eye. With an exclamation of concern she rose to her feet.

"It's nothing worth bothering about," the Texan said. "You've got sorrow enough on your hands, for I take it this man must have been your father. I just want to tell you that I don't—I don't——"

Bertram intended to say that he did not take her advice about quitting the expedition in Denver, and he had therefore been compelled to do so when it was a matter of more personal difficulty, but the words refused to shape themselves. The young Texan wiped the cold beads of agony from his forehead. His words came haltingly, and he swayed and fell in a faint beside the body of the man whom Swingley had dubbed the "king of the rustlers."

The touch of cool water on his forehead revived the young Texan. He was lying on his back, with his head comfortably pillowed on a rolled-up blanket. He was in the shade, and the branches of a tree waved between him and the sky. Then he found himself looking into the face of Alma Caldwell. He thought it was much pleasanter than looking at the sky or at trees, and he did not even blink for fear the vision would vanish.

The girl smiled at him faintly and said: "Your shoulder—how does it feel? Do you think you can ride?"

Bertram felt of his shoulder. To his surprise it was neatly bandaged, and the stained part of his shirt had been cut away. The numb sensation was gone from his side. He sat up.

"I'll be all right in a minute," he said. Then he saw that he was down by the spring, where the first man at the cabin had started to go when the work of assassination began.

"How did you get me down here by the spring?" asked the Texan.

"Jimmy carried you down," replied the girl. "He's strong. Of course I had to help him a little."

The events of the morning rushed into the Texan's memory. Again he saw the beleaguered cabin, heard the firing, saw the slain men. "Your father?" he asked. "What's become of his body? I must help you with it. And the other man who was killed?"

"There's nothing to do. After we brought you down here and fixed up your shoulder, some men came—men we knew. They took Nate and my stepfather—for the man you saw killed wasn't my father, as you thought—and have arranged for their burial."

"Why didn't the men find me?"

"None of them came down here, and we didn't tell them there was any one at the spring. They were in a hurry to get on the trail of the invaders. Other men will be coming from every direction. The whole countryside is being aroused. The ranchmen are furious, and there will be more fighting. Oh, why couldn't I have arrived in time!"

"How could you have stopped it?" asked the Texan.

"Easily enough. I could have had such an army of men at the railroad that the invaders never would have come this way. I was visiting near the station, where I first met you. It was my stepfather's old home. I received a hint of the invasion when it was being planned. Finally, a day or two before the invaders started, I learned the whole truth—that Swingley was raising a body of freebooters under the guise of punishing rustlers. I wrote, and then I telegraphed. Then I thought that probably neither my letters nor my telegrams would be delivered. I determined to come in person, and I expected to arrive ahead of Swingley's train, if it were possible. But every effort was made to stop me. I was robbed of my transportation, as you know, and I would not have reached Denver if you had not helped me."

"They didn't bother you after you left Denver, did they?" asked the Texan.

"I was called from the train at a little station, not far from the end of the line. The station agent said he had a telegram for me. Then he said he could not find it—that he must have been mistaken. Meantime the train would have gone on without me, if I had not been watching for such a move. I frightened the conductor by telling him that I knew there was a plot to get me off the train. He did not dare try any more such tricks, and I reached the terminus. The telegraph agent there did not know about any of my telegrams. The place was full of strange men, and I saw the wagons there, ready for the use of the invaders. I tried to get a horse, but the town was practically under martial law, with one of Swingley's lieutenants in command.

"I could get nothing in the way of a conveyance. I went to the hotel, where I had put my hand baggage, and I changed to my riding dress, thinking that I would be ready when the opportunity came. I heard the invaders' train, as it came in, and then the horse train. I saw the preparations for the start. I knew they were setting out to kill relatives and friends of mine. I thought I would go out to plead with Swingley to give up the expedition, but I was stopped at the foot of the stairs and given to understand that I was a prisoner in the hotel. Nobody offered to molest me. I saw the men start out—you with them. When they had gone some time the hotel proprietor brought in Jimmy, my cousin, who had been concealed in the barn. He found horses for us, and we followed the trail

of the invaders. Evidently Swingley did not care to detain me further, after he and his men were on their way."

"He didn't think he would be held up here at this cabin so long," observed Bertram.

"My stepfather made a great fight," said the girl, her eyes glowing with pride. "There was not a better shot in the State than Nick Caldwell."

"He was a brave man, too," said Bertram, "brave and cool. In fact, he was the gamest man I ever heard of. Did you find the diary that was in his belt? I glanced through it, just before you came. Any man who could write that under fire has my admiration."

"Yes," responded the girl, "and it shows that they would never have beaten him if they had not used unfair means. Whoever made that go-devil was the means of killing my stepfather. I'll find out who it was, and that man shall pay and pay!"

The girl's eyes flashed, and her hands clenched. Bertram did not tell her that he had been called upon to fashion the go-devil in the first place, and that he had destroyed it, only to have it refashioned by some one else. Nor did he say anything about the letters which he had found on Caldwell's body, which indicated that the "king of the rustlers'" was identified with both sides in the range war. Those letters, the Texan made sure, were still in his pocket, undisturbed. He did not want to destroy the girl's faith in her stepfather, after her heroic efforts to save him.

The conversation was interrupted by the youthful Jimmy Coyle, who, with his rifle still clutched in his right hand, came scrambling into the hollow from the clearing, his flapping leather chaparajos looking absurdly wide for his slim and boyish figure.

"We've gotta git outa here," remarked Jimmy, without preliminary words of any sort. "You can't tell what side's goin' to stray in here next. The invaders might even be comin' back."

"You're right, son," replied the Texan, getting to his feet. "It's dangerous for you to be here with me. If you'll just bring my horse down here where I can get him, I'll be obliged. Then you folks had better be riding on."

"You're going with us," replied Alma.

"Where?" asked Bertram. "There's no place in this part of the country where they won't hang my hide on the barn door, after the thing that's happened right here."

"Yes, there is. We're not all savages here. I don't dare take you back to the home ranch, up Powderhorn River, but Jimmy and I have a hiding place all arranged for you, where it won't be necessary to explain things to folks."

"Yes, I reckon most people here will be inclined to shoot first and listen to explanations afterward," said Bertram. "But you can't afford to put yourself in a questionable light by sheltering one of Swingley's rustlers. I can't hide the fact that I'm a Texan."

"Nobody wants you to," answered the girl with a smile. "Jimmy will have the horses at the edge of the draw in a moment, and we'll start on a nice quiet trail back into the hills, where we won't meet a soul."

"But—but I haven't any claim on you," stammered Bertram.

"Oh, yes you have—two claims. Didn't you help me on my way, once when I started home, and once in Denver?"

"But those things didn't amount to anything. And you know I came in here with this invading crowd that killed your stepfather. How do you know that I didn't have a hand in shooting him?"

"Those things can be straightened out later. Right now you're badly hurt,

and the one thing is to get you cared for."

"That's putting it impersonally enough," ventured Bertram.

"Why should I put it otherwise? I wouldn't leave even a known enemy under such circumstances, and I don't know that you are an enemy—not yet."

The young Texan smiled quizzically. "Since you put it on that basis," he replied, "I'll accept your offer. I admit that I'm too wabbly to put up much of an argument with any man who might stop me, orally or with a gun."

Just how "wabbly" Bertram was, he did not comprehend until he had climbed to the top of the draw, where Jimmy had brought the horses. Even though Jimmy assisted him on one side and Alma on the other, he had difficulty in negotiating the steep trail. But he managed to get into the saddle without aid.

"It's queer how just the grip of a saddle horn puts life in you," he remarked, as they started out of the clearing, with backward glances at the still smoking cabin. "That's a right smart gun you're carrying, Jimmy. I never got a worse knock in my life."

"It's only a .38," said Jimmy modestly, though a flush of pride overspread his freckled features at this tribute to his weapon and his marksmanship. "It's jest drilled a little hole in you, as far as we could see when we was bandagin' you up. Purty quick I'm goin' to git a .45. If I'd have been packin' the gun I want, it would have torn your whole shoulder off."

"Well, I'm glad you're still sticking to small horses," replied the Texan genially. "You and I are going to be on a permanent peace footing before you get that .45. I reckon I'll take no further chances with you."

Jimmy's reserve and suspicion had melted away before they had more than caught a last glimpse of the cabin smoke through the trees on the foothills. He chatted with the Texan, who did not indicate, by word or facial expression, how much pain the journey was causing him, even though the horses went no faster than a walk.

To Bertram's disappointment Alma Caldwell rode ahead, apparently with a view of being the first to meet any travelers on the trail. But the little procession continued on its way for two hours or more without meeting any one.

"It's lucky we didn't go by the main road," said Jimmy, "or we'd have been stopped every mile or so. I'll bet every man in the county is in the saddle now. But leave it to Alma to find a way out of a difficulty. She's a wonder, but"—here Jimmy's voice sank to a confidential murmur—"I'm goin' to skip off and help fight these invaders, as soon as we git you took care of at Uncle Billy's."

"Who is Uncle Billy."

"Oh, he belongs to the Coyle side of the family—the side that I'm from. Only he ain't a fightin' man like the rest of the Coyles and all the Caldwells. He jest believes in lettin' everybody do what they want—and the animals, too. He's queer, but everybody likes him, and you'll be safe there because nobody bothers Uncle Billy. There's his place now."

The Texan, who was wondering how many rods farther he could ride without falling from the saddle, looked ahead, past the slim figure of Alma Caldwell, and saw a tiny cabin nestled in an opening in the pine forest. In the doorway stood a tall, white-bearded man, watching from beneath a shading hand.

CHAPTER VI.

SWINGLEY HAS HIS SAY.

THE young Texan's life during the next few days was in striking contrast with what had gone immediately before. He had a confused recollection of sinking to rest on a comfortable bed,

in a room filled with the forms of animals—elk, deer, bears and smaller creatures, all in most lifelike poses. There were even some shaggy buffaloes in a perfect state of preservation. In small glass cases were groups of insects, and there were some giant trout on the wall, evidently taken from near-by lakes, or from the alluring stream which ran close to the cabin.

Bertram's recovery, under the ministrations of Uncle Billy and Alma Caldwell, was rapid. In a few days he was able to walk about the place. The inflammation left his shoulder, and his strength returned to him, as it always returns to healthy youth in the great outdoors.

The old naturalist proved a delight to Bertram, and he was both expert and gentle in applying surgical dressings. Alma accounted for his skill by explaining that he had studied to be a surgeon.

"But he had no real taste for the profession," said the girl. "What he wanted was to live close to the heart of nature, to study wild life at its source. So he moved here, when the rest of the family came, and, after a few years of ranching, gave up everything else and settled down in this little place in the mountains, determined to follow out his ambition."

The girl had ridden over to Uncle Billy's place from the Caldwell ranch, and she was walking about in the bright sunshine, while the Texan stood in front of the naturalist's cabin.

"Well, I can testify that if Uncle Billy had turned surgeon he would have made a success of his calling," said Bertram, stretching his arms above his head, in the joy that a strong man feels when convalescent. "He's fixed me up more quickly than I would have thought possible. Your fighting cousin's bullet, it seems, just nicked the top of a lung. Luckily it drilled me clean and did not shatter a bone, or I might have been on Uncle Billy's hospital list a long time."

"This was the only place to bring you," said Alma. "The one practicing physician and surgeon in this part of the State lives twenty miles from where you were hurt, and he had taken his rifle and joined the men who were opposing the invaders. I couldn't have taken you to any ranch house without your presence being known elsewhere, on account of all this excitement. Neighbors are visiting everywhere, and any one who had sheltered a stranger at this time would have come in for general suspicion. But, unless somebody deliberately sets out to trail you, no one will be likely to know you are at this place. It is known that Uncle Billy is opposed to the taking of human life, and that he could not be enlisted in this dispute on either side."

"Well, Swingley and Tom Hoog will soon be on my trail," observed the Texan. "I'll not stay here any longer than I can help, on Uncle Billy's account. Also on your account," he added, "as it is not going to do you any particular good to have it known that you helped one of the invaders to safety. People are going to grow more bitter than ever, now that Swingley and Hoog are dominating things in such high-handed fashion."

"High-handed is a mild term for what they are doing," replied the girl, her eyes flashing. "They are trying to set up a despotism for the big-cattle interests. After they shot my stepfather and Nate Day, at our little ranch house on the Powderhorn, and had burned the cabin they found the settlers opposing them just the way the farmers opposed the redcoats at Lexington. Things were made so hot for Swingley and his men that they had to fortify themselves in a ranch house, several miles from their objective, the county seat at Wild Horse. They were besieged two days and would have been captured to the

last man, if United States soldiers hadn't intervened. The invaders were taken to Wild Horse under military escort, but it wasn't ten hours before every one of them was out under bail."

"There must be bigger men than Swingley mixed up in it," observed the Texan.

"There are, of course—the biggest cattle interests in the West. But they haven't shown their hand, and Swingley apparently does just as he pleases. He has headquarters at Wild Horse, with a big bodyguard of fighters, led by Tom Hoog, ready to do his bidding. The rest of the invaders have been scattered among the big-cattle ranches, presumably as cowboys, but really as fighters. It looks as if the trouble had only started."

The girl's voice was lowered, but took no new intensity of expression as she continued. "Everybody thought there would be open war in Wild Horse, when my stepfather and Nate Day were buried," she said. "But the ranchmen made such a showing then that even Swingley seemed to be overawed for the moment. Wild Horse never was so full of armed men. But the ranchmen were determined that, if there was trouble, they would not be the aggressors. They crowded the little church, where the services were held, and scores of them stood outside. Everybody was heavily armed. When the funeral procession went through the streets, with all those grim, determined-looking men, riding so silent, with their rifles across their saddles, it was terrible!"

The girl bowed her head in her hands. The young Texan wanted to take her in his arms. For the first time it came to him, fully and undeniably, that he was in love with this slim, dark-haired young woman whom chance had thrown across his trail. Only the Texan did not call it chance. He wanted to tell the girl that it was Fate that had caused their trails to cross and recross. They had seated themselves on the tiny porch that shaded the front doorway to the cabin. Giant pine trees crowded in friendly fashion about the few acres which the naturalist had cleared. Over the tips of the biggest pines could be seen the white hoods of the mountains. Across the circle of blue sky, that compassed the clearing, drifted masses of white clouds. From the forest came the indistinguishable murmur, that went on always, mingled with the sound of the trout stream, which had first lured Indians and then white men along its course.

"I'll be going away from these parts in a few days, Miss Caldwell—Alma," said the Texan. "I reckon I might complicate matters if I stayed here, particularly as I don't want to bring any trouble on you or your folks, because I was one of Swingley's crowd. But I don't want to have you forget me. In fact I just don't intend to let that happen, because it would be a calamity, as far as I'm concerned. I might as well tell you that I fell in love with you the first time I saw you, and I fell deeper in love in Denver, and, since I've been seeing you up here, it's just been a case of being lost hopelessly."

The Texan put his hand over the slender fingers that covered the girl's face. The girl did not draw her hands away, and he drew them down slowly. Her eyes, still wet with tears, were wide and startled. The Texan felt her slender frame tremble. Then her expression changed, and she pushed his hand away, laughing her musical, rippling laughter.

"What suddenness!" she exclaimed. "And yet we Northerners have always felt that you Southerners are rather deliberate in all things."

The Texan smiled as he rose. Something in that first glance, which she had

given him, told him that his cause was not lost.

"Not in love or in war," he said. "Nobody ever accused us of being deliberate in those things."

"Well, apparently there's too much war in the atmosphere around here, just now, for any other sentiment to flourish," retorted the girl.

"Nothing can supplant real love," said the Texan. "It's thrived during centuries of wars. I've said my say, and, before I leave this part of the country, I'm coming for my answer."

"Well, I answer all civil questions and some impertinent ones," replied Alma. "Maybe I'll answer yours in the latter category. But, anyway, it's lucky you've put off getting your answer, for here comes Uncle Billy."

The tall figure of the naturalist could be seen coming across the clearing. He seldom rode, and this habit alone would have condemned him as mildly insane, in a country where men were known to mount their horses rather than walk across a road. But there was not any part of the high hills that the naturalist had not covered in his daily prospecting for whatever treasures the forest might yield. In his later years he cared nothing about killing wild animals. He had secured a mounted specimen of every species of game, even to the final survivors of the wild bison, and now all that interested him was to observe the wild creatures in their haunts.

"Mr. Bertram says he is going to leave us, now that he considers that you have cured him, Uncle Billy," was the girl's greeting.

Uncle Billy paused, his face showing keen disappointment. Although his rough clothes hung loosely on his gaunt frame, there was a certain dignity in his movements that never failed to impress. His gray eyes, under their shaggy brows, were kindly, as they turned to the Texan.

"I'm sorry," said the naturalist. "I had hopes that you could finish writing out those notes for me."

He alluded to some secretarial work, which Bertram had started during his illness, the transcription and arrangement of valuable, but scattered, notes which the naturalist had made.

"I'll come back and finish that some day, when all this range trouble is over," said the Texan. "I think it's better for me to go before any one finds where I've been hidden. It'll save trouble for those who have befriended me."

Before the naturalist or the girl could answer, the faint sound of hoofbeats came to the ears of the little group. The sound was irregular and rapid.

"Somebody's coming fast," said the Texan. "It's more than one in the saddle, from the sound. I reckon I'm not going to make my get-away without being seen, after all."

"Let us hide you," said the girl.

"It wouldn't be any use. There's too much of my truck scattered around, and there is my horse in the corral."

"You have no weapons with you."

"No use anyway," was the mild answer. "I wouldn't desecrate Uncle Billy's peaceful abode by doing any shooting here, and I don't believe any one else will."

The hoofbeats grew louder, and Alma and the Texan exclaimed in unison, as two horsemen dashed into the clearing: "Swingley and Tom Hoog!"

The leader of the invaders and his lieutenant came at breakneck speed, reining their horses up with a sharp jerk beside the waiting group. Swingley grinned in triumph, as he gazed at the Texan. Hoog, with perpetual malice written on his long, saturnine features, looked on impassively from the saddle.

"Well, we didn't know what your trail was goin' to bring us to," said Swingley, addressing Alma. "We've followed it since you left your ranch,

but it's been worth the trip for us. We didn't have any idea of findin' our fellow invader, Milt Bertram, here. I s'pose Uncle Billy has been holdin' you here against your will, ain't he?" asked the leader sneeringly.

"I didn't write out my resignation when I quit your outfit at the Powderhorn Crossing," said Bertram, sitting down on the porch and lighting a cigarette, "but you knew I'd resigned."

"You hadn't ought to have done it, boy," said Swingley. "You ought to have stayed with us. It didn't seem to pay you to quit us, for it looks as if you'd been havin' a struggle of it."

"He was shot in the shoulder when he was brought here," observed Uncle Billy. "A few more days will find him as good as new."

Swingley's face showed genuine astonishment. "Somebody got ahead of Milt Bertram on the draw! Well I'll be dashed!" he exclaimed. "I wouldn't have believed anybody could have done that, unless it might be Tom Hoog, here."

"Or mebbe yourself," put in Hoog.

"Oh, well, count us as equals," went on Swingley. "But somebody must have got Milt from ambush."

"Well, you know a lot about ambushes," observed Bertram calmly. "Especially about throwing blazing straw from iron ambushes, I might say."

Bertram was not certain that it had been Swingley who had been behind the go-devil, who had tossed out the burning straw which had set fire to the cabin. His chance shot told, for Swingley's brows darkened.

"That's no kind of talk from you, Bertram," he said. "Remember we count you one of us. If you don't come with us, some one of these rustlers will shoot you before you get your horse's nose turned out of this country."

"You know when and where I quit, and I'll add to that knowledge by telling you why I quit," pursued the Texan. "It was because I didn't intend to be a party to a deliberate murder, such as you and those with you committed, there at the Powderhorn Crossing."

Swingley cursed, and Hoog made a motion to draw, but the leader of the invaders held up a warning hand.

"No shootin' to-day, Tom," he said. "This young cub is goin' to listen to reason. I know what's the matter with him. He's fell in with Nick Caldwell's stepdaughter here, and he wants to throw in with the rustler faction, thinkin' that that'll help him along with his love affair. But listen here, young lady, and you, Uncle Billy, who have been harborin' this youngster. It was Milt Bertram who made it possible for us to burn out Nick Caldwell at the Powderhorn ranch. If it hadn't been for Milt, here, we wouldn't have had the go-devil made, the thing that made it possible for us to get right up to the cabin. I believe Nick would have stood us off all day if it hadn't been for that thing. Do you deny that you made a go-devil for us, Milt?"

Bertram felt that the girl's questioning eyes were turned upon him, but he made no sign.

"See, he don't dare say no," said Swingley, "because he'd know he wasn't tellin' the truth. He belonged to us at the start, and he belongs to us now. You know where to find us, Milt, when you're well enough to ride. And I'm advisin' you to come right back to the reservation and be a good Indian, if you don't want trouble. We may want you to make another go-devil for us." With a laugh Swingley turned his horse and dashed away, Hoog following.

Bertram threw away his cigarette and stood up.

"Why didn't you tell him it wasn't true?" asked the girl.

"I didn't think it was necessary," said the Texan.

"Then I'm to assume that it was true?"

"I can't help what folks assume."

The girl turned away and began gathering up her horse's trailing reins. "You need never come for that answer," she said, "and the sooner you go away from here the better."

"I'll come for the answer, and it's going to be a favorable answer, too," replied the Texan. "Furthermore I've changed my mind. I'm not going away, but I'm going to try homesteading on a little land I've got picked out, up the creek. I'm going to settle down and be a citizen here, and I want you to treat me like a good neighbor."

The girl did not answer, but, swinging lightly to the saddle, dashed away from the cabin.

The Texan watched her until she disappeared down the trail that made a short cut to the Caldwell ranch. Then he said: "We'll have plenty of time to finish the job now. Let's go in and work some more on those nature notes, Uncle Billy."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MASKED HORSEMAN.

ALMA CALDWELL assumed the burden of managing Nick Caldwell's ranch. She was the only heir of the man who had been dubbed by his slayers "the king of the rustlers," but who, as Bertram had discovered, had some prominent connection with the other side in the cattle war.

Most of the Caldwell cattle were running in the hills, mixed with the stock from other ranches in the neighborhood. Comparatively little of Nick Caldwell's ranch was under cultivation. Like most other ranchers in that part of the State he contented himself with raising enough alfalfa for his saddle stock and a little winter feeding, in case of an unusually severe season. But for the most part it was "horseback farming" that was practiced everywhere.

Alma's day was largely spent in the saddle. With her, as a small, but valiant, bodyguard, went young Jimmy Coyle. There was only one point of difference between the cousins, and that was Alma's dismissal of Milton Bertram. Jimmy not only stood up for the Texan, but visited him frequently during the remainder of Bertram's stay at Uncle Billy's. Also it was Jimmy who came to Alma with the first news that the Texan had made good his words, and had located on a homestead.

"It's up at the headwaters of the Roaring Fork, 'way up above Uncle Billy's," said Jimmy. "Milt's got a cabin all built, and he's took on a pardner, a cowboy named Archie Beam, from Swingley's outfit. Beam couldn't stand Swingley's goins on, so he and Milt have hooked up together. They've got some good range right back of 'em, and Milt's goin' to have some cattle drove up from Texas, and I'm bettin' they make good, right from the start."

Alma refused to show any interest.

"I don't see why you're mad at Milt Bertram," went on Jimmy. "He's a dandy, I think. And say, I never saw anybody shoot the way he can. He's that quick with both hands. I can see now that it was only fool luck that kept me from bein' filled full of lead, after I had plugged him in the shoulder that time. He never asks about you, but I know he wants to hear all about what luck you're havin' at ranchin'. I've told him as much as I could about things here, specially about the cattle you've been losin' lately."

"I'm sure there are at least fifty more gone from that bunch over on Devil's Head," said Alma. "The other ranchers around here are sure they are losing cattle, anywhere from ten to

fifty head at a time, but they can't seem to catch any one at it."

Alma was soon to learn, however, that Swingley was not to be content with getting cattle by means of occasional raids.

The ranchmen throughout the county were served with notice that the newly organized Cattlemen's Association, of which Swingley was ostensibly the head, intended to put in effect a series of district round-ups. All cattle were to be gathered and inspected, and unbranded cattle, or any livestock that carried suspicious-looking brands, were to become the property of the new organization.

No sooner were the notices served than the round-ups were organized, all manned by Association men. The cow-punchers, who had made up the invading army, which was now spoken of only in terms of hatred and contempt by the small ranchmen, were scattered about in small, but aggressive, delegations, with the different round-up wagons.

Swingley himself captained the round-up outfit that combed the Powderhorn Valley, from its wide reaches on the plains, to the final ranch in the foothills.

When the riders had gathered the cattle from the vicinity of her ranch Alma was dismayed at the smallness of her herd. Fully half of Nick Caldwell's cattle had been spirited away. Swingley, as sole judge and dictator, when the inspection of brands was going on, threw at least half of the remaining cattle into the Association's pool.

"It's an outrage!" protested Alma. "There's no question about the validity of all those brands you've claimed."

"You don't know nothin' about the cattle game, young lady," responded Swingley callously. "Every brand I've claimed was made with a runnin' iron. Nick Caldwell's title of the 'king of the rustlers' was well earned. And it'd be better for all who sympathized with him if they moved out of this country, without standin' on ceremony," added the rustler significantly. "We're not through with 'em yet."

The girl did not lose the general meaning of the threat, but at first she did not get its full import. A few weeks later she learned what Swingley had meant. Immediately after the completion of the Association round-ups, which resulted in many thousands of cattle being seized from small ranchers by the big cattle interests, there began a series of assassinations which soon had the entire countryside terrorized.

One ranchman after another, who had been identified with the opposition to the big cattlemen, was shot down by a mysterious riflemen. It was apparent that the work was done by one person, yet the shootings occurred at such divergent points of the compass that it seemed impossible that a single rider could cover so much ground in such a short space of time.

Two bachelor brothers, who conducted a small ranch on one of the tributaries of the Upper Powderhorn, were shot dead, as they sat at their evening meal, the assassin firing, with deadly accuracy, through the open window. To the cabin door was attached a paper, on which was printed in rude letters: Rustlers, Beware!

A day after this double murder the county was thrilled by the news that Fred Hersekorn, a prosperous ranchman in another part of the valley, had been shot, as he was riding home after a trip to Wild Horse. The ranchman was murdered almost at the door of his home. His wife, who had rushed to the yard at the sound of the shot, had found her husband shot through the head. It was dusk, but she descried a horseman riding across the prairie, on the opposite side of the road. The rider turned with a defiant wave of the

hand, and the woman saw that he wore a black mask, covering the upper part of his face.

On a tree beside the driveway leading to the ranchman's house was found a sign similar to that posted on the cabin of the assassin's victims on the Upper Powderhorn.

The countryside was terrorized, the feeling of helplessness being intensified because the sheriff was notoriously indifferent to anything that was not to the best interests of the big cattlemen. Men were afraid to meet on the main-traveled roads. When a traveler saw another traveler approaching there was a mutual survey at long distance. Then, to make assurance doubly sure, each horseman usually made a detour. Men did not stir outdoors unless they were armed. Curtains were put up at ranch house windows that had never previously known such obstructions to the light.

In spite of the fact that hundreds of ranchmen were searching for and laying traps for him, night and day, the visitations of the masked horseman went on. Arson was added to his crimes, as he burned the ranch of a newcomer on Lone Lake Mesa, after shooting the homesteader, as the others had been shot. Again men examined the mysterious square of paper, with its poorly printed message of warning.

Milton Bertram and Arch Beam, on the headwaters of the Roaring Fork, the stream which later on foamed past the naturalist's cabin, felt that only extreme vigilance could save them from being victims of the assassin. They went cautiously about their work each day and seldom exposed themselves to fire from the points of attack that covered their cabin, without first making reconnoisance.

They felt that their caution was not misplaced, when, on two occasions, they found pony tracks in the thickets that commanded unobstructed views of their homestead.

"That feller is a real rifleman, whoever he might be," observed Arch Beam. "He never shoots until he has his man well covered. But some day he's goin' to slip up, and a better man than he will do the shootin' first."

"I hope that time isn't far off, Arch," returned Bertram. "There's no use fooling around in the open with an enemy like that, a man who won't even give you as much warning as a rattlesnake gives before he strikes. He'd simply add you to his victims, as easily as you might mark up another point on a billiard string. A man like that has to be caught off his guard. He knows there are plenty of men looking for him in the open, and that's why he's not going to be caught there."

"Where are you goin' to get him, then?" asked Archie doubtfully.

"I don't say I'm going to get him," responded Bertram. "But whoever does get him will probably land his game in some totally unexpected place. Wild Horse wouldn't be a bad place to look. I think I'll drift around there a little more than I have been."

Bertram followed out the hint he dropped to his partner. He rode to Wild Horse, where he had seldom been seen since he and Archie had taken up their homestead.

Wild Horse was typical of the towns of the frontier. Most of its one-story business houses were spread along both sides of a broad street. There were a few general stores, two banks, a hotel, several restaurants, and numerous saloons and gambling places. All were prosperous, and, while the sun might cease to illumine Wild Horse at evening, there was plenty of light there, of an artificial kind, till well along toward the next daybreak.

The topic of conversation in Wild Horse, as everywhere else, was the work of the masked horseman. But

here the comments were a little more guarded, on account of the feeling that some inside ring of the cattle interests was prompting the assassinations, and Wild Horse was headquarters of those interests, which fact Swingley did not allow to be forgotten for a moment.

Bertram had hardly seated himself in the hotel restaurant before Swingley saw him and came over to his table. "Milt," he said, "you're too good a man to be wastin' your young years on a hopeless homestead proposition like the one you've got. If you've come up here, prepared to listen to reason and to throw in with us again, I can put you where you'll be on the road to a fortune in the cow game."

"I'm glad it's the cow game and not making go-devils," said the young Texan, as he poured his coffee with a steady hand.

Swingley smiled saturninely. "I've got it figgered out what's turned you wrong," he said. "When you first agreed to go along with us you didn't have any particular idee of kickin' over the traces, did you?"

"Maybe not."

"Well, you met this girl, and then you got some foolish idees in your head. As a matter of fact the killin' of Nick Caldwell wasn't nothin' for you to be sore about, as Nick deserved what he got. It is true he was good enough to that stepdaughter of his, who took his name, and who looked on him as a father. But he was the leader of the rustler crowd."

"I don't know whether he was or not," replied the Texan, with a keen glance at Swingley. "I've sort of drawn some conclusions of my own to the effect that Caldwell was really a power with the cattle interests, though maybe only a little inside circle knew what he was doing. He might have had a falling out with a big man in that inside circle. Maybe that other man was jealous of Nick's power. Maybe Nick had some information about the other man's crookedness. Anyway, the other man figured that Nick had to go. So there wasn't any powder spared in getting him when the chance opened up."

Swingley turned pale with rage, but he choked back his inclination to denounce Bertram.

"Do you mean to say that I was mixed up in any deal with Nick Caldwell?" he demanded.

"I said it looked as if some other man was, that man being in the confidence of the cattle interests," responded the Texan coolly. "I didn't say it was you, but it might have been. Do you want me to spring any documentary evidence I might have?"

"Do you mean you've got letters, papers of any kind?" Here a note of anxiousness crept into Swingley's voice.

"You had it right the first time. There are some letters of interest, and I want to tell you to quit your high-handed persecutions in this county, or they're going to be made public."

"That girl's turned 'em over to you, if there is anything of the sort," said Swingley, his face working convulsively, his voice thick with anger and fear.

"The girl has had nothing to do with it," responded Bertram. "But she's one of the people around here that you've got to let alone from now on."

"I'll let nobody alone," said Swingley, liquor and his anger getting the better of his tongue. "There ain't enough left of her herd now for her to make a living with, but there's worse in store for her, if she don't clear out of the country. As for you, you're a marked man, and you won't be safe till you're on the other side of the mountains."

"Better not have me marked too plainly, Swingley," observed the Texan. "I'm not fool enough to carry those let-

ters on me, you know. I've left them where they're sure to come to light if I'm killed. So call off the man who's been prowling around our cabin lately, and tell him to pack his guns elsewhere. Speaking of gunmen, there's Tom Hoog looking for you."

Swingley looked around, just as Hoog came through the doors leading from the hotel office to the restaurant.

"Oh, yes," he said, "Hoog's been around all the afternoon. Here I am, Tom," he called to his retainer. Then, as Hoog beckoned to him, Swingley rose and added:

"I've been talkin' kinda strong, Milt, because I've had a little more liquor than common. I ain't given that way as a rule, so fergit what I've been sayin'. Think over that offer I've made you. It's good as gold, and all you've got to do is reach out your hand and get a fortune. I'll have you set up in an ideal grazin' country, with a smackin' big herd of your own, inside of a month."

"I wouldn't take any range, nor run any cows that came to me by way of you and Hoog, if the cattle were all prize-winners, and the grass on the range was belly-deep, all the year round, and the weather was always June," replied the Texan.

Swingley turned, as if to make a heated answer, but Hoog's voice came insistently: "Ace, come here. Here's news!"

The cattleman joined Hoog, and the two walked through the swinging door together. Every one else had gone out of the room but Bertram. He rose, troubled in mind about the threat Swingley had made concerning Alma. He turned cold at the thought that some harm might come to her.

"I never thought it, not even of such scoundrels as these!" he muttered. "Women have always been safer in the West than anywhere else in the world. Perhaps they're going to strike at her in some way that I hadn't thought of."

With his mind full of plans for the protection of Alma, Bertram left a coin on the table for the waitress and walked slowly toward the hatrack for his battered, high-crowned felt. He intended to go right to the ranch, to tell the girl that this foolishness on her part had to stop, that her safey was now the prime consideration, and that he himself intended to enlist as a personal guard, until these troubles were over.

The Texan's reflections were broken in upon by confused voices from the hotel lobby and the barroom just beyond. He stepped through the swinging doors and almost ran into the hotel clerk, white-faced with excitement.

"Ain't that the limit!" said the clerk, as Bertram stopped him with a query. "Such a kid, too! Didn't you know about it? Young Jimmy Caldwell was found shot this morning. Another masked-horseman job. Some say the kid's dead, but the latest word is that he's alive at Uncle Billy's place, and that he may live."

As the clerk vanished, to spread the news to the rest of the hotel help, Bertram stood a moment in thought. Then the significance of one of Swingley's remarks came to him, full force.

"By all the gods!" he exclaimed, slapping his leather-clad thigh. "Swingley was careful to tell me that Hoog had been around here all the afternoon. It was an alibi he was parroting. That's slip number one. The rest will follow fast."

Walking swiftly to the barroom the Texan drove his arm against the swinging doors and opened them with a bang. Facing the inquiring crowd he stood looking for Swingley and Hoog. The cowboy's attitude was tense, and his hands were close to the butts of the guns that showed low on his hips.

Swingley and his lieutenant were gone. Turning as suddenly as he had entered the Texan strode out of the hotel and flung himself on his horse.

As he sped toward the foothills, the rage, which had prompted him to kill at sight, died out of his heart, and it was succeeded by a cold determination to bring retribution to those who had committed this new crime. With such retribution would come proofs, which would satisfy others as well as himself, that justice had not miscarried.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MARK OF THE BEAST.

LITTLE Jimmy Coyle would not ride his beloved range again for many a long month. The boy was battling with death when the Texan saw him, but Uncle Billy, who was in attendance, said he would recover. The lad's chaparejos and the rest of his cowboy trappings were on a chair at his bedside, a pathetic reminder, Bertram thought, of the active life the boy loved. His .38 rifle, the weapon which he intended to exchange for a .45 some day, when he grew strong enough, stood at the head of his bed, and no one was permitted to handle either it or the garments. Such were the orders of the new district attorney, young Isham Woods, it was explained.

Alma had found Jimmy at the mouth of a wide moraine, leading out upon a mesa, something over a mile from the ranch house. She had thought he was dead, from a wound just above the heart, but she had found that some remnant of life remained. She had attended as best she could to the wound, and then she had carried the boy to the ranch house, the crisis giving her strength far in excess of normal.

The Texan did not tarry at the ranch house after he learned that Jimmy stood a fair chance of recovery. Following Alma's directions he rode to the scene of the shooting. The moraine afforded an admirable hiding place. In its wide, bowlder-strewn depression one could command an excellent view of the mesa, on which there were always cattle grazing.

Several neighbors were going over the ground, and so was Woods, the district attorney, who had shown an unexpected and most disconcerting disposition to inquire into some of the affairs of the newly organized association of cattlemen. In fact it was currently reported that Woods, who had been figured on as a quiescent tool, had been visited several times by Swingley, with threats of the loss of his political and legal future unless he mended his ways.

Threats apparently had no effect on the young lawyer, with whom Bertram had struck up an acquaintance which was fast ripening into friendship. Together the Texan and the district attorney surveyed the scene. The would-be assassin had hidden behind a bowlder, on the side of the moraine. His horse had been tied in a clump of asps, that grew over the side of the huge depression. There were some footprints and hoofprints, but the ground was so hard that these could be of no value. The discharged cartridge was found, but that, also, was of no value. Forty-five caliber cartridges of that character were carried by thousands of ranchmen in that vicinity.

"Miss Alma wanted me to give you this," observed the Texan, handing the district attorney a small square of paper. On it was the customary sign: Rustlers, Beware! printed in lead-pencil.

Woods examined it with interest.

"Maybe this won't be such bad corroborative evidence," went on Bertram, handing over the paper which he had found on his own cabin door. The same letters were printed on the paper, but the work was done in ink.

"That's a pretty plain thumb print, down in the corner, isn't it?" observed the Texan, noting the interest with which the official observed the new paper.

"Yes," replied Woods. "It's quite

the best one that's come to light, so far. Let's go to the ranch house and see if we can find anything corroborative on Jimmy Coyle's equipment. The assassin came out from his hiding place after he had shot Jimmy and turned the boy over, thinking he was dead. I don't think he meant to kill Jimmy, but probably the boy saw him and opened fire, or tried to get back to the ranch to give the alarm. Probably the fellow behind the rock thought he had made a clean job of it, but he did not reckon on the vitality of youth."

The district attorney and Bertram carried Jimmy's clothes and chaparejos and rifle into a room adjoining the sick chamber and barred out everybody else. "I'm glad to have you work with me in this," said Woods, "because I can't trust anybody from the sheriff's office, and it's clearly impossible to take up such a case alone. I know I can count on you, right up to the finish."

"Right up to the finish," said the Texan grimly, "and that finish can't come too soon."

"I imagine it's not so very far away," responded the young district attorney. "These range murderers haven't learned the advantage of working with gloves, like some of the city criminals."

The official inspected the boy's clothing. "This shirt," he said, "must have been pretty well stained by the time the assassin reached the lad. In turning the boy over he naturally took hold of Jimmy's shoulder, and probably he got some stain from the wound on his hands. Then he'd try to straighten out the boy's legs, and in doing that he might have come in contact with the stains on these leather chaps. It might be a good idea to take a look at those first."

The district attorney brought a small bottle from his pocket and shook some grayish powder into a paper on the table. Then he took a camel's hair brush and began applying the powder to different spots on the leather chaparejos.

"It is what is technically known as gray powder," he explained. "It's made of charcoal, chalk and mercury. A little of it will bring out a finger print with amazing clearness. Here are some that don't belong to the boy."

Under the application of the powder several finger prints stood out clearly. Taking out the paper which Bertram had handed him, the district attorney compared the prints.

"Fate seems to have helped us out," he said finally. "It might be a matter of some time and difficulty in checking up these finger prints, under ordinary conditions. There are four general classes, known as arches, loops, whorls and composites self-explanatory names. But there are over a thousand types, and checking up without a complete set of finger prints is ordinarily a matter of difficulty. But right here is where Fate, as I say, seems to have helped us."

The district attorney called Bertram's attention to two tiny spots, almost in the center of the thumb print, on the paper which had been attached to the Texan's cabin, and a print which the powder had brought out clearly on the leather chaparejos.

"The man that made those thumb prints might have been struck in the ball of the right thumb by a rattlesnake, at some time in his life. Anyway that is what we will assume. There are two small scars, just big enough and deep enough to change the swirl of the thumb marking, almost at the very center. Those markings, no matter what type they may fall into, never become confused naturally. In other words, those tiny corrugations never cross each other, unless by accident of an external nature. Such an accident has happened in this case. The peculiarity of this thumb print can be distinguished with the naked eye."

"Let's see if there isn't another on the rifle," said the Texan. "We can't be too dead sure about this business."

An application of powder to the boy's rifle brought to light several other thumb prints, showing the rattlesnake scar.

"A man who was used to handling guns would pick up the boy's rifle just by instinct," said the Texan. "The man that shot Jimmy picked up the lad's .38, and he probably worked the lever once or twice, explaining the unexploded cartridges that were found on the ground. It's second nature for a gunman to do anything like that."

"These prints on the rifle are even clearer than the ones on the leather," replied the district attorney.

What the official said was true. Under the magic of the gray powder a mixture of thumb prints appeared on the magazine of the rifle which Jimmy had prized so highly. Some of the thumb prints were long and narrow. Those were the marks of Jimmy's hands. Overlapping them in some cases, and in one or two instances, standing out alone, could be seen larger, coarser finger prints. Where a man would place his thumb in the process of aiming the rifle, were two exceptionally clear prints.

In each of them appeared the tiny flaws in the configuration of the strange lines of the skin, lines which scientists have been at a loss to explain, unless, in some mysterious way, they aid the sense of touch. The flaws caused a slight interruption of the flowing, parallel lines, almost in the center of the thumb.

"Can you convict on evidence like that?" asked Bertram.

"Finger-print evidence is absolute. Some Frenchman has figured up the chances of error, and he had to get into fractional atoms before he arrived at a result."

"How about the chances of some one else having a scar like this one."

"There again you'll get into the atomic fractions. Some other person might have a scar made by a blade, or a deep, jagged scar, made by a barb-wire fence or something of that sort which tears instead of cuts; or there might be another person with a single small scar on the thumb, but for any one to have a double scar like this would be so nearly impossible, that you might as well throw the fractions away and say that the thing couldn't be."

The Texan looked thoughtfully at the comparative evidence on the table. "How are you going ahead, now that you've got this far, Woods?" he asked. The district attorney looked troubled. "I know I can be frank with you," he replied. "I can't see that I'm much better off than when I started. Right now is where I need the strongest kind of help from the sheriff, and this is just the time I can't call on him. He's been indifferent, right from the start."

"Indifference is what he was put in there to show," responded the Texan. "He's simply delivering the goods to those who have hired him."

"Well, whatever the reason, I'm brought up against a blank wall. I've thought that I could enlist a little force of my own, a few men like yourself and Archie Beam. I don't want to make the mistake of getting those who are too deeply interested on the rustler side of this war, or they'd be dragging in some of their personal enemies, just to square their own accounts."

"Well, you know you can count on me," said Bertram, "but I don't reckon it will be necessary to have a whole posse in on this thing."

The young official looked surprised. "It's going to take a force of men to capture that assassin," he replied.

"That shows how little you are used to ways and means and men out here," said the Texan, with a short laugh.

"That man isn't going to be captured easily, and he's got to be wounded to be taken," he added. "One man's just as good on his trail as a hundred, provided that one man can get the drop. In fact if you go setting a whole pack of hounds on the trail of a wolf like that, all you're going to do is run him out of the country, and that isn't what's wanted, because an enemy of that sort is an enemy not of any one particular clan or neighborhood, but of all humanity. He's got to be put out of the way for all humanity's sake."

The district attorney was puzzled and inclined to be downcast.

"I'm going to help you some in this case," went on Bertram. "In fact I'm going just as far as it is possible for any one to go. It isn't alone because I think a lot of that little kid in there, who has been struck down in this ruthless way. There's a long score to be settled before Jimmy Coyle's case is to be considered at all. For one thing I believe the man who shot this boy, and who has been doing these murders around here, the work of the masked horseman, is the same person who killed Nick Caldwell."

"I thought Nick was killed by a general volley, fired by the invaders when the ranch on the Lower Powderhorn was burned," said Woods in surprise.

"He was and he wasn't. Nick was wounded when he started to run, but he wasn't badly hurt until he had almost made his get-away. I believe that the boys with Swingley's outfit had so much admiration for the fight Nick had put up in that cabin that they were shooting wild, just to let him escape. Swingley knew that. He had determined to get Nick at any cost, and he wasn't going to see him escape. So, just when the firing lulled, and Nick was about to leap into the underbrush to safety, there came one shot, which drilled him, just as cleanly as that boy was shot, and as Hersekorn has been shot, and as all the rest of the victims of the masked horseman have been shot. There's no telling just who did it, but Swingley was really guilty in Nick's case, whether he fired the shot or whether he didn't."

"Well, in the boy's case we've made a start, at least, toward something tangible," said Woods. "I'm going to turn questioner now and ask you how we are going to go about finding the man who made those finger prints."

The Texan smiled enigmatically. "That's something we'll have to leave to the gods," he replied. "Meantime I want you to give me some of that powder, as I might have to do a little finger-print experimenting myself."

"Take the bottle and the brush," replied Woods. "I believe you can carry this thing along further than I can now. I seem to be at the end of my rope."

The Texan put the bottle and the brush in his pocket. Then he carried Jimmy's clothes and rifle back to the bedroom.

Making sure that the boy was resting easily, and once more getting assurance from Uncle Billy that the patient would recover in due time, the Texan mounted his horse and rode toward town, after saying good-by to the district attorney.

Alma Caldwell watched him through one of the windows of the ranch house. He had hardly spoken to her while he was at the ranch, nor did he turn in the saddle for a backward glance at the place. She saw his broad shoulders and wide gray hat, rise and fall in easy undulations, as the Texan's mount was urged into a gallop toward Wild Horse.

CHAPTER IX.

SOME DEBTS ARE PAID.

THE arrival of one additional horseman in the principal street of Wild Horse was something to attract no attention whatever. Several hundred riders had arrived at that headquarters

of industry and gossip, ahead of Milton Bertram. Most of them, it is to be said, were interested in the gossip, rather than the prosaic affairs of the cattle industry. The news of Jimmy Coyle's shooting by the masked horseman had spread fast and far, and men had ridden far and fast to talk it over.

Only the Texan did not urge his horse at top speed, like the others, as he entered the town. On the contrary he slackened the animal's steady pace a trifle. One might have thought that he had come in from a distant camp for supplies, and that he would soon be heading forth again, a slave of the vast region of silences which binds its victims none the less strongly because they are willing in servitude.

Perhaps something in the unusual keenness of the Texan's glance from one building to another would have told one of his intimate friends that something out of the ordinary was on his mind. But to the average beholder he was merely one more cowboy, riding into town, a handsome fellow to be sure, long of limb, broad of shoulder, and with a certain supple grace in the saddle that marks the born horseman. His features, which ordinarily were expressive of the lightest sentiment that crossed his mind, to-day seemed molded into a hard mask of determination. His dark eyes, under level brows, were calm enough, but it would take little, apparently, to light the fires of anger in them.

Obviously the Texan was undecided just where to stop. He reined his horse momentarily in front of the hotel and then drove on and crossed the street to a saloon and gambling place, known as Laroque's.

As he dismounted and tied his horse to a hitching rack that had little vacant space, the Texan's motions were deliberate. He made sure that his horse was securely tied, something entirely unnecessary, seeing that the well-trained animal would not have stirred away if the reins had been left trailing. But, while he was going through the mechanics of making secure his horse's place at the rack, the Texan's mind had leaped ahead, and he was visualizing Laroque's place something as follows:

"Let's see: Eddie Laroque himself will probably be tending bar. That's good, because Eddie is no rat, and he will stick when trouble starts. There aren't any doors into the room where the gambling layouts are. The open doorway's not more than one jump from the end of the bar. The barroom itself is plenty wide. There's elbow room enough for an orchestra of fiddlers let alone a couple of gun fighters. I guess Laroque's is as good a place as any."

With a good-by pat on the white-starred forehead of his horse the Texan turned toward Laroque's, mechanically adjusting the guns at his hips, as he did so. Here again there would have been nothing to arouse more than passing interest on the part of the ordinary spectator, for every cowboy, who had entered Laroque's, had made that same readjustment of revolvers. It was a fighting man's country, and Laroque's specialized in entertainment for men of that sort. Eddie's shutters had been taken down and used so often to carry out men, who were either dead or desperately wounded, that it was said that the hinges were being worn out. Laroque himself was supposed to order his big mirrors by the half dozen, for every gun fight saw one shattered.

There was a long line of men at Laroque's bar, as the Texan entered the saloon, and others were sitting in little groups at the tables to the right. The Texan instinctively realized that Jimmy Coyle's shooting had caused something approaching a revolt in the Swingley ranks. Hardened as the invaders were and accustomed to the idea of killing,

this shooting of a mere boy and leaving him for dead was something that went against the grain.

Bertram had no sooner set foot in Laroque's place than the group at the first table called him over and inquired about Jimmy Coyle's condition. Bertram sat down, but in such a position that he could see through the open doorway into the gambling establishment.

"Swingley and Hoog are here," said one of the cow-punchers, "and they're sure as restless as a couple of mountain lions. Likewise they've both been taking on more liquor than common."

"I know you don't stand any too well with 'em, Milt, on account of your quittin' the command," observed another puncher. "Onless you are courtin' argymint, I advise your seekin' entertainment elsewhere."

"I'm here, and I always did like the homelike atmosphere of Eddie Laroque's place," responded Bertram quietly. "I reckon I'll stay."

As he spoke, the Texan saw Tom Hoog entering the open doorway. Though he must have seen the Texan, who was in plain view, Hoog made no sign, but walked to the bar.

With one foot on the rail, his elbow on the bar, the gunman let his gaze travel slowly over Bertram, from head to foot. The others at the table shoved back uneasily. Those who were in the direct line of fire rose and stepped to one side. The Texan returned the gaze calmly enough. The men who flanked Hoog at the bar, after a startled glance around, edged away.

"Texas ain't produced but few quitters," said Hoog, in a loud voice, though apparently he was not addressing anybody. "But, when it does produce one, he's all yellow."

Bertram did not change his expression nor his attitude. Hoog's face reddened with sudden passion. As he stood at the bar, his long, saturnine countenance writhing with hate, more men slipped quietly out of the room, feeling that the storm could not be delayed many seconds longer. The gunman stood with one arm resting on the bar, though he had not touched the glass that had been shoved toward him by the despairing Laroque, who had already counted another mirror as good as smashed.

"Push along another glass, Eddie," went on Hoog. "I'm goin' to have a drinkin' companion. Come on over here, you big feller from Texas. You never would drink with me before, but you've got to to-day, because I've got a special toast fer you."

Bertram rose slowly and walked over to the bar, beside Hoog, as calmly as if he had been invited by his most intimate friend. The bartender shoved the bottle of bootleg toward him, and the Texan poured out a drink. The spectators noticed that his hand did not tremble.

"Now pour me a good, stiff drink," said Hoog, determined to goad Bertram into an attempt to draw. "I'm tired to-day, and I need a waiter to pour my liquor for me."

To the amazement of the onlookers, who had surged quietly away from the bar to new positions out of the line of fire, Bertram did as directed. He filled Hoog's glass almost to the brim. Even the gunman was surprised at the obedience to his insulting order. His left hand, which had been half opened at his side, for Hoog was an ambidextrous fighter, dropped away from the pistol butt that peered from the worn leather scabbard at the gunman's hip.

"Now let's drink," said Hoog, jubilant at having humiliated Bertram before the crowd. "Drink to the State you've disgraced—Texas."

Both men drank, Hoog raising his glass to his lips with his right hand and tossing off the liquid. As they set down their glasses, Hoog said: "If there's

any word that'll make you fight, Bertram, tell me what it is, and I'll say it."

But the Texan apparently did not hear. He had produced the little bottle of gray powder which the district attorney had given him. Evidently he had palmed the bottle before he had stepped to the bar, as he made no move toward his pocket to get it. With the little brush, which was inserted in the cork, he dusted some of the powder on the outside of Hoog's whisky glass.

The gunman, with every one else in the room, was watching with undisguised interest, as the Texan inspected the glass.

"Goin' to give us a little parlor magic?" asked Hoog.

Bertram set down Hoog's whisky glass, carefully refraining from touching it, where the gray powder showed on the outside.

"Hoog," he said softly, "that was a long, long time ago when you got bitten in the right thumb by a rattlesnake, wasn't it?"

"How do you know I had a rattlesnake bite me?" asked the gunman, disconcerted at the unexpectedness of the question.

The Texan's eyes and face blazed into anger. His supple frame tightened, and his voice came, quick, sharp and electrifying.

"Because you leave the mark of it on everything you touch, you prowling hound. You didn't know it, but you might as well have signed your name, every time you posted a notice, you masked assassin. You left your thumb print, with the snake scar on it, on little Jimmy Coyle's chaps and rifle. You've left it on this whisky glass, and it's your confession and your death warrant, all rolled into one. Now, if you want to fight, draw and we'll see if I have disgraced Texas."

Confronted thus suddenly and unexpectedly with evidence of his guilt, Tom Hoog was a fraction of a second late in reaching for his weapons. The young Texan had given the gunman a fair chance at the draw, but Hoog, for the first time in his life, was not equal to the emergency. Before his terrible guns were out of their holsters two bullets had been sent from the weapon of the crouching Texan.

Hoog stood for a moment, a wound in either arm, just above the elbow. His long, sinuous hands were powerless to grasp the revolvers that had never failed before. Then he fell in a heap on the floor.

The men, who had prepared to rush from the room at the first sign of conflict, had not stirred. The fight had developed so unexpectedly, after every one believed that all signs of trouble were over, that even the most phlegmatic had been taken completely by surprise.

Leaping over Hoog's prostrate form the Texan ran through the open door. At the sound of the two shots the gamblers had ceased all play. Asa Swingley, who had just started a game at the head of the room, kicked over his chair and, drawing both guns, had started toward the barroom. He saw Bertram in the doorway, his smoking weapons in his hand.

Instinctively Swingley raised both revolvers, but, before he could pull a trigger, Bertram had "creased" him twice, and the outlaw leader staggered to a chair.

The Texan, firing from the hip, had disabled the second man even more quickly than the first.

Sheathing one of his weapons, but carrying the other at a threatening angle, Bertram turned back to the barroom. "Laroque," he said, "see that these two disabled outlaws are properly guarded until the sheriff arrives." Then, picking up Hoog's whisky glass, Bertram held it out to Laroque. "Here, Ed, take this whisky glass in the

palm of your hand. Careful, now, and don't touch that powder on the outside of the glass. That's state evidence against this assassin, Hoog, and his employer, Swingley. Put it away in your safe, and the district attorney will be in here in a few minutes to get it. If you've brushed so much as a speck of the dust off that glass, you'll be run out of town. Swingley's reign is ended in this county. We're going to hand these assassins over to the court, and we'll see that they get what is coming to them. From now on law and order are going to rule here."

Paying no attention to the questions and congratulations that the men showered upon him, the Texan made his way to the door. As he untied his horse, he could hear the babel of voices, as the cow-punchers, with their tongues loosened, began to crowd about Swingley and Hoog.

CHAPTER X.

THE TEXAN HEARS FROM HOME.

UNCLE BILLY COYLE, after having, as he thought, catalogued every living thing that ranged the hills and plains of Wyoming, had run across an entirely new specimen. It was the human being in love that bothered Uncle Billy.

"I've studied the effects of loco weed on cows and horses," observed Uncle Billy to Alma Caldwell, "but the vagaries of human beings, who have been attacked by the love germ, are past all scientific consideration. Now you admit that you're in love with Milton Bertram, and that ingenuous young Texan has confided in me that he thinks more of your lightest word than the council of all the encyclopedias I have in my library. Yet apparently something seems to be holding you as far apart as it is possible for persons to ge' "

"If you're going to start on that subject again, Uncle Billy, I'm going to leave you," said Alma, flicking disconsolately at a fallen leaf with her quirt. "I came over to tell you how well little Jimmy is getting along, and how he took his first horseback ride to-day. I didn't care to hear about Bertram."

"Well, you'll have to hear considerable talk about him, wherever you go," observed the naturalist. "When a young fellow nails two such gunmen as Tom Hoog and Asa Swingley, and practically ends the reign of assassination and terror in this part of the State, he is bound to figure in the general conversation."

The girl did not reply, and Uncle Billy continued gently:

"If you're thinking about your stepfather, girl, it's time I told you something. Nick Caldwell was a good man in many ways, but in some other ways he let his greed run away with him. He took good care of you, which I always held so strongly in his favor that I never took him to task for some of the things he did which I knew was wrong."

Alma looked at the naturalist with startled eyes.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you this, if it destroys any ideals you may have had. It does you credit to think so well of Nicholas Caldwell, and to pay him back so handsomely in loyalty and love for the material advantages he gave you. But, after all, you may as well know all sides of the man's character. Nicholas was a leader among the cattle rustlers, as has been charged. That much I know, but I also know that his rustling operations were carried on merely as a blind to hide larger operations in the interests of the cattle interests. He and Swingley were in the inner circle which was dominating those great interests, but they had a personal falling out. Swingley had vowed that he would kill Nicholas at the first opportunity, on account of their personal feud, which had developed

suddenly, and which not even I had suspected. When Swingley led his invaders into this county his first thought was to kill Nicholas Caldwell. That was why he went to such lengths to burn the cabin on the Lower Powderhorn.

"All this I found out when this young Texan was brought to my place, wounded. In his clothing I found letters, which he had evidently taken from the body of Nicholas, just before you and Jimmy came upon him. I did not scruple to read those letters, because they concerned my own kin. As soon as he recovered sufficiently to ask for his clothes and to stir about a little, the young Texan burned the letters, thinking no doubt that by so doing he would protect Nicholas Caldwell's name, and thereby save you from any heartache."

"But the go-devil," said Alma. "I was told that he was responsible for making the machine that was really the cause of my stepfather's death."

"I happen to know that he was not," replied Uncle Billy. "It is true that he made such a machine, or rather completed it, under Swingley's orders. But Archie Beam told me that the machine was really the cause of Bertram's desertion of Swingley's invaders. Rather than continue with an outfit that made war in such a way, Bertram smashed the go-devil which he had just completed, and then he started alone into the hills. Beam was present when the machine was smashed, and he tried to dissuade the young Texan from going to what seemed sure death. The go-devil was fixed up later, when the invaders' blacksmith arrived, but Bertram really caused a great delay in the final attack on the cabin.

"There is another matter which probably you do not know," went on the naturalist. "That is the fact that when he captured Swingley and Hoog, this young Texan got the men who were actually responsible for your stepfather's death. Swingley's guilt, of course was apparent, but you did not know that, when the others in the command were disposed to let Nicholas escape, as he was running toward the foothills, it was Tom Hoog who was called upon to fire the fatal shot. Swingley cursed the other cowboys for their purposely bad marksmanship and commanded Hoog to get the fleeing man. Hoog aimed deliberately, and it was that final shot which brought about Nicholas Caldwell's death."

Alma Caldwell rose unsteadily. "Then I owe him everything," she said. "What a wrong I have done by taking so much for granted!"

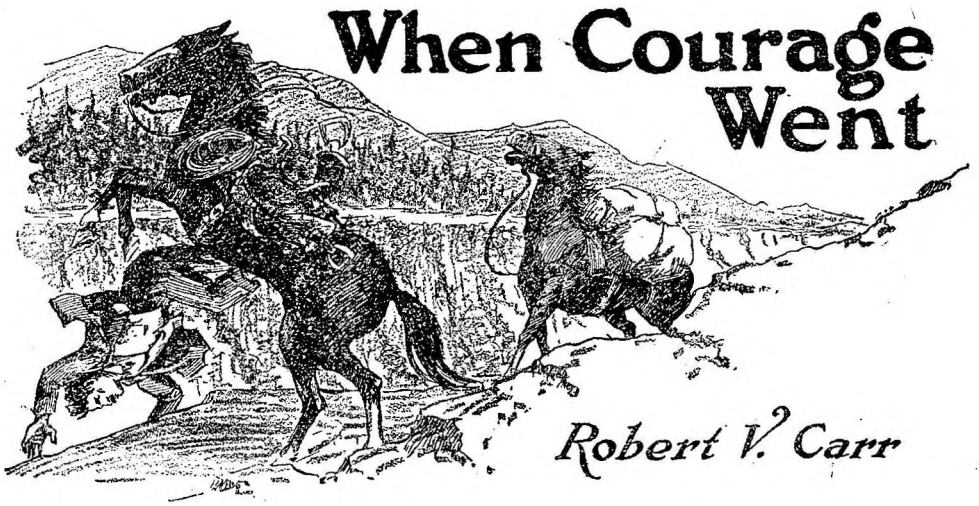
"Well," rejoined the naturalist, "he's coming now, so you can tell him, like a good girl."

But it was the Texan who did the telling. "Alma," he said, as the girl came to meet him, and the naturalist discreetly retired to the companionship of the stuffed specimens in the cabin, "Alma, I'm going back to Texas. My uncle has written me that he wants to turn over his ranches to me, as part owner and manager. I never felt lonesome down there before, but I'm going to this time, unless you go with me. Can you leave this country, as the wife of one of the invaders?"

The girl's eyes smiled into his, as she replied: "I always did like Texas."

Then, as his arms went about her, she added: "And Texans!"

When Courage Went



Robert V. Carr

UNVERSED in knowledge regarding habits of horses, was Mortimer Blund—to the deplorable extent of walking along a narrow and dangerous trail in the Short Pine Buttes with the bridle reins looped over his shoulder.

The trail wound round the edge of a cliff that fronted a dry watercourse. Suddenly some animal crashed out of the underbrush on the opposite side of the draw, and the saddle horse reared back with an attack of equine nerves. At the same time Mortimer Blund was jerked around and over the cliff. The startled horse stood for a moment with head held high and nostrils quivering. Then, with neck curved so that he might not step on the trailing bridle reins, he proceeded on his way, the pack horse obediently following.

When Blund recovered sufficiently from his fall to take stock of his hurts, he found that his ankle was injured. Apparently he had struck with his full weight on one foot, the ankle had turned, and he had fallen back on some rocks, about fifteen feet below the level of the trail. His hands were bleeding, and the side of his head was bruised. He attempted to rise, but found that an agony. He was dizzy and sick.

For a time he lay quiet, then again he attempted to rise. Summoning all his strength he gripped a near-by sapling and half dragged himself to a sitting posture.

After a time it came to him that he was in a serious predicament. He was about eighty miles from a settlement, and unarmed, for in walking up the narrow trail he had unbuckled his belt and hung it on the saddle horn.

Clutching the sapling, he finally drew himself up on his uninjured foot. Gingerly he touched the ground with the hurt one and pressed a little weight upon it. It crumpled beneath him like paper.

"Helpless as a babe," he muttered.

With the sapling's aid he eased himself again to the ground and fumbled for his pipe and tobacco. A terrible twinge of pain in his ankle halted the operation. With bruised and bleeding fingers he began unlacing the heavy shoe.

An inquisitive magpie sailed across the cañon, dropped down a few feet from him, and stared at him with bright, curious eyes.

Blund halted in the tedious unlacing of his shoe, and with a sudden gust of anger, yelled at the bird:

"Get out!"

The magpie gave a mocking, raucous cry and flew to a near-by tree, where it perked its head insolently.

"Go away!" yelled Blund. "I ain't dead yet."

It was his belief that magpies were scavengers, and that they instinctively knew when any animal was mortally hurt.

"That bird thinks he's due to pick my bones—ah—oh—there!" And he pulled off the heavy shoe and rolled down the stocking. The ankle was badly bruised and discolored.

Blund hit upon a plan. He would wrap his stocking around his ankle and over the stocking he would tie his shoe lace. He could not stand the heavy shoe rubbing about the throbbing ankle.

What should he do next? He could not walk. About all there was left to do was to call for help. It was a ludicrous and silly thing to do, he thought, to cry for help in a wilderness. But he raised his voice in a lugubrious howl.

"Hay-a-a-a-a!" he howled. "Hay-a-a-a-a!" the cañon echoed, and then the magpie gave a mocking, rasping squawk and sailed away in graceful flight.

Blund yelled again: "Hay-a-a-a!" and again the cañon echoed his weird cry.

A sense of desolation and hopelessness swept over him. He was alone in a country where everything was cruel. The sun was cruel. The pallid cliffs of limestone and gypsum were cruel. The animals lurking in the shadows were swift and hardy and cruel. There was nothing but what was harsh and cruel.

Now, in the city, if a man was injured, he had protection and certain rights. He would be immediately picked up and taken to a hospital and looked after and cared for. Out here, he could die, and the magpies could pick his bones, and no one would ever know anything about it.

Mortimer Blund was known as a brave man, and courageous. But his deeds had always been done among a thick press of people. He had done many things that required cold nerve, but always was that thick press of people about him.

But now in that stony cañon, and amid that appalling loneliness, he whimpered. He felt as if the very spirit of the country was leagued with torture and death—a lonely death, a slow death. Here he was, helpless; and he might shriek himself hoarse, and always would come that fiendish echo.

He remembered the trail from Night Hawk—eighty miles of sage and gumbo flats, steep cañons, and water-worn hills—and he had not met a human being. He had been informed by a citizen of Night Hawk that the buttes were the winter range for the Three-Seven cattle outfit, and that no one lived in there.

"Of course, a rock pounder like you," the Night Hawkite had added, "might meet up with Kid Caldwell, but he hain't sociable to speak of. Maybe he's in the buttes, an' maybe he ain't. They say he sometimes hangs around up there."

"I am entirely satisfied," Blund had replied with what he deemed the manner befitting a scientist, "to be alone. I am simply hunting for some specimens—as I have said before—which I understand are plentiful in the Short Pine Buttes."

The talkative citizen of Night Hawk had rolled a cigarette and leaned against the cribbed hitching rail.

"You kin git 'most anything you want in this country," he had returned.

II.

ENLARGING on Mortimer Blund's Night Hawk experiences, it may be well to state he deemed it the proper thing to treat the citizens of that dusty hamlet to a round of drinks before departing on his journey. He beckoned the way into the inn.

"Have something on me," he said genially.

The leading citizens of Night Hawk lined up at the bar. For some unaccountable reason a short man, with a fierce mustache faded by the sun to the color of old rope, hung back. Blund beckoned him.

"Come on and join us."

The short man approached Blund rather meekly. In his hand he held a chunk of ore spotted with gleaming bits of yellow metal.

"You're a expert," said the short man humbly, "a expert on rock, they tell me. Here's something I'd like to know about." He handed over the specimen. Blund looked at the piece of ore gravely. Of course, the yellow stuff was gold, and it excited Blund for a moment. Solid cubes of the yellow metal projected from the ore.

"I would call that gold," he said, with an air of superior wisdom.

"You think it's gold?" the short man queried, his saddle-colored face blank and expressionless.

"Sure; any one could see that was gold," replied Blund.

For a subtle reason known to them all, the crowd resumed their old positions of ease, leaving their drinks untasted. Blund stared at them open-mouthed.

The bartender turned suddenly and busied himself with some glasses on the back bar.

Just then the little man burst into a hoarse laugh. He guffawed until the tears stood in his eyes. His merriment taking on a more concrete form he flung his hat on the floor and jumped on it.

The bartender, having finished his arduous toil with the glasses on the back bar, turned, and for a moment looked at the specimen reposing on the bar where Blund had placed it. Then the dispenser of drinks, being of a coarse, heavy type, bellowed his amusement.

Presently the short man picked up his hat, placed it jauntily upon his head, and passed out with a grotesque wink at the bartender, which caused that worthy to bellow afresh.

The entire affair mystified Mortimer Blund. And about it all was a disagreeable sense of danger. Still, they might just be poking fun at him. But, then, why the abandoned drinks, which the bartender had, without remark, emptied under the bar? He walked out rather stiffly.

Before the door closed behind him he heard the heavy voice of the bartender: "Shorty's the keen one—iron pyrites—fool's gold!" Then again came the bellow of mirth.

Blund noted that the short man had disappeared. He was glad that the humorist had not lingered, for there was something about him that Blund did not like. Beneath his coarse laughter there seemed to be lurking a purpose—a plan—and the plan seemed to spell danger. It was all hidden, but Blund sensed peril, and it came to him that its source lay close to the little man with the rope-colored mustache.

When he began to pack—for Blund had outfitted in Night Hawk—he called to some loungers in front of the inn.

"I need some help in packing that horse. I'll pay for it," he said, in the brief, impersonal way of a man making a trivial purchase.

One of the loungers detached himself from the group and proceeded to explain the mysteries of a diamond hitch.

"I guess you hain't never been out on a trip like this before," said the diamond-hitch expert tentatively, and with averted face.

"No; not with a pack horse," acknowledged Blund.

"Never done much rock huntin' in the West, then?" queried the Night Hawkite, with polite disinterestedness, flinging the rope deftly over the pack.

"No; my work has been largely in foreign countries."

"So?"

"Yes." Blund resolved to give a final explanation of the cause of his presence in Night Hawk. "I have always heard there were many rare minerals in this section, and I propose to investigate the matter to my own satisfaction. My life has been spent in pursuit——"

"Of rocks," interrupted the citizen of Night Hawk innocently, as he put the finishing touches on the diamond hitch.

"Yes; you might call it that."

"Know all about rock?"

"Certainly," replied Blund, with some show of dignity.

The Night Hawk gentleman turned away. "Hope you git what you're lookin' fer," he said abruptly.

The Westerner's remark was lost on Blund. He reached in his pocket to pay for the tying of the diamond hitch. But his erstwhile assistant had already joined the loungers in front of the inn. Blund felt a little embarrassed.

"How much do I owe you?" he called.

The loungers were silent, seemingly intent upon the antics of a playful kitten held by one of their number.

Somewhat puzzled, Blund replaced the money in his pocket, mounted his saddle horse, and, gripping the pack horse's rope, fared forth.

"Good-by," he called to the group in front of the inn.

But the loungers still preserved their puzzling silence, and, still absorbed with the kitten, failed to see the departing mineralogist.

III.

NOW, it seemed to Blund, as he sat there in that lonely cañon, nursing his injured ankle, that there was a similarity between the raucous cry of the magpie and the laughter of the short man. Both of them were cruel, and with a cruelty that vexed him mysteriously. And the specimen—what was there about a gold specimen to excite laughter?

Again he raised his lugubrious cry of "Hay-a-a-a." And again the cañon echoed.

Then his heart seemed to come up in his throat, for he heard a voice behind him. In a low, natural tone it said: "What's the trouble?"

Blund turned his head slowly, as if fearful of seeing a ghost. He had heard no one approach. He had been sitting there howling, and suddenly to hear a voice almost at his elbow was a shock to the already overwrought nerves of the scientist.

He beheld a slim young man, clad in a flannel shirt, a pair of nondescript corduroys, and moccasins. The youth was heavily armed. Blund noted that his face was as smooth as a girl's, and that his eyes held the watchful, unflinching look of some fierce, wild thing. He reminded Blund of an eagle he had once seen in captivity.

"You gave me quite a start," said Blund. "I guess my ankle's in bad shape." His thick body shuddered a little, and as he looked up at the youth, his ferretlike eyes were dull with pain.

"So?" he said noncommittally.

"Yes; I was going along with the bridle reins looped over my shoulder. Deer or something frightened the horse. He jerked back, and I fell over that cliff."

"Let's look at it," suggested the youth. He bent over, removed the stocking, and examined the injured ankle. "Jes' a bad sprain; that's all," he said, with a conclusive shortness.

"It's certainly not pleasant," observed Blund, making a wry face; "I can't even stand on it."

"How long you been here?" inquired the youth.

"Good share of the afternoon," replied Blund, feeling for his watch.

"Why didn't you use your gun instead of hollerin'?"

"Didn't have any," explained Blund simply. "It's hanging on the pommel of my saddle."

The youth was surveying the injured man meditatively. He noted the heavily molded face and the wrinkles about the little eyes that told of middle age. He observed the bulk of the shoulders, the deep chest, and the powerful arms. He also noted that the tan on the thick, short neck was several shades lighter than the tan on the cheek—the collar mark of the city dweller. Arriving at a conclusion, the young man announced:

"I'm goin' to pull you through, but you'll have to do what I tell you."

"Go ahead! Anything you say goes," agreed Blund, gingerly replacing the stocking about his ankle.

The scientist's new-found friend started toward a clump of trees up the cañon. "I'll be back in a second," he assured him, and presently returned, leading a horse.

With some difficulty he got Blund into the saddle.

"Now," said the young man tersely, "I'm goin' to blindfold you." He slipped a foot into the stirrup and raised himself up behind Blund.

As the Easterner felt a handkerchief pressed across his eyes, and deft fingers knotting it securely, he said, somewhat protestingly:

"I don't know your game, but I don't just see the use of this."

"Keep that where it is, an' don't touch it," said a soft voice close to his ear. Blund noted that with all its softness there was a certain menace in that voice—a vibrant, dangerous note.

At that moment a great idea came to Blund. Why had he not thought of it before? He turned his head and spoke to his companion.

"Surely," he half questioned, "I should know the name of the man who has been so kind to me?"

The answer was rather disconcerting: "What you don't know won't hurt you."

"It can't be," said Blund rather foolishly, "that you are Kid Caldwell?"

"Suit yourself," came the laconic reply.

Blund was silent. It seemed that he was always making mistakes in this country. All of his superior cunning, all of his vaunted knowledge of human nature seemed of no avail among these apparently simple people. He dimly realized that there was a new kind of sagacity in their curt speech and aloof manners.

This young man behind was Kid Caldwell; of that he was positive. The description given him tallied exactly with this youth who had picked him up. The blindfolding settled the matter. Doubtless the outlaw was taking him to some lonely retreat and did not desire him to know the trail to his secluded camp. In that Blunt was correct.

It seemed an age before the youth pulled in the horse. Blund was suffering excruciating torture with his ankle, but made no sign. He was once more in command of himself. He was with a human being, and his world had to a certain extent righted itself.

The young man helped him to dismount and half carried him into a place that smelled musty as a cave smells. Removing the blindfold the youth assisted him to a bed of spruce boughs.

"Lie down, an' I'll fix that ankle."

Blund obeyed, and right gladly, too.

His host disappeared and presently returned with a can of water and a flask of whisky. He unwound the stocking and began bathing the ankle. After in a measure subduing the pain, he passed over the flask of liquor, and ordered:

"Take a shot o' that."

Blund took a deep draft. Finally the young man soaked a piece of blanket in water and wrapped it about the ankle.

"That's better," sighed Blund in relief.

"I'm not through yet—I'll have to fix up that head," and with skillful hands he washed the bruise, and, at a loss for a bandage, he fumbled beneath the blankets at the head of the bed and brought forth a clean white undershirt. Without hesitation he jerked off a sleeve and wrapped it about Blund's head, snugly tucking in the ends.

"Feel good? All right. I got to git somethin' to eat now," with quick adaptability, beginning some culinary operations at the mouth of the cave—for it was a cave, with some brush piled against one side of the entrance.

The meal that the young man brought his guest was simple. It consisted of some fried venison, a huge flapjack, and a tomato can full of hot coffee.

"Throw that into you an' you'll feel better," he said.

He then left the cave, but returned just as Blund was finishing the last scrap of the flapjack.

"Enough?"

"Yes; thank you," replied Blund, with a long sigh.

"Smoke?"

"Got a pipe and tobacco in my clothes somewhere." Blund began searching awkwardly with his bruised hands for his pipe and tobacco.

His host glided quickly to his side. "Let me help you." His slim, deft hands began feeling about Blund's body. Finding the pipe and tobacco he gave them to his guest and once more retreated to the opposite side of the cave.

Already the shadows were gathering in their retreat; and, as Blund lit his pipe, the youth observed that it was "about time to turn in."

"If you don't mind," said Mortimer Blund, "I'd like to have you take another turn at that ankle."

The request was complied with swiftly. He bathed and rubbed the swollen part until Blund remarked that he felt but little pain, and believed he could go to sleep.

But Blund did not sleep. Between partially closed lids he watched the youth furtively. The young man spread a blanket on the rock and dropped down like a tired young animal. In the deepening gloom Blund could not discern whether he unbuckled his cartridge belt or not.

Blund made up his mind to stay awake. He strained his ears to catch the sound of his host's breathing; but apparently the youth was a light sleeper, for he listened in vain. Now he was fighting against an overwhelming drowsiness. Exhausted and worn with the events of the afternoon, he found it increasingly difficult to keep awake. Anyway, why should he keep awake? Of course there were some things on his person that he would not care for the youth to see. But apparently there was no guile in the young man.

A wave of weariness swept over him. He would take a little nap, and he—— But even as the thought flashed through his mind he had fallen asleep, and his stertorous breathing sounded through the cave.

Then a shadow drifted to the side of Mortimer Blund. Light, deft fingers felt him over and presently secured a packet. Silently the shadow drifted to the mouth of the cave and was gone; in a little while it returned and replaced the packet.

When Mortimer Blund awoke, it was broad daylight, and his host was preparing breakfast.

"How's the ankle?" inquired the young man in his abrupt, crisp style.

"Better," replied Mortimer Blund.

"I got your horses," the youth informed him.

"Well, that's good," said Mortimer Blund. "You must have got up early."

"I always git up early," replied his host.

IV.

THERE came a day when Mortimer Blund could rest his weight on his ankle and feel comparatively little pain. He hobbled about the cave and even ventured down to the spring.

"You're doin' pretty well," observed his host.

"Fine," said Blund enthusiastically.

The days had passed uneventfully. The youth prepared the meals, and about all there was for Blund to do was to think. He thought a great deal. There was always a great problem he was trying to solve.

The youth was always armed, and never once had he permitted Blund to get close to him in the cave. He would bring his guest food, but always with a certain caution. He talked little. Once Blund caught him looking at him with his big gray eyes in a fashion the Easterner admitted he did not like.

It was a warm, bright afternoon when the youth slipped into the cave and informed his guest that he must prepare to leave for Night Hawk the next day. Then it was that Blund arrived at certain conclusions.

The youth's rifle was leaning against the wall of the cave. Blund, with a slight limp, walked over to it with an air of interest. It was a beautiful and costly weapon, and the sunlight streaming in through the mouth of the cave gleamed upon some silver work in the stock.

"Pretty gun that," said Blund, picking up the weapon.

"Yes," agreed the youth carelessly.

Blund threw down the lever, and a cartridge flipped up and dropped on the floor. He brought the lever back and noted another cartridge slip smoothly into the barrel. He turned swiftly and brought the muzzle of the gun to bear on the youth.

"Hands up, Caldwell!" he called sharply.

But the youth did not put up his hands.

Instead he asked simply: "What fer?"

"Because I've got you," said Blund snarlingly. "Put 'em up—quick!"

Kid Caldwell raised his hands slowly, and then his face—usually so masklike—became as if transfixed with horror.

"Back o' you, man!" he cried, with vehement warning; "rattlesnake!"

Blund whirled, with starting eyes. It was only a split second, but it was enough.

When Mortimer Blund again confronted his host, the youth's hand held a cocked gun, and his body was well out of the rifle's line of fire.

"Drop it," commanded Kid Caldwell softly. "Drop it or lose a hand."

The rifle clanged to the floor of the cave.

"Go over there and set down; I'm going to talk to you," said the Kid.

Blund obeyed sullenly, seating himself on the bed.

The Kid replaced his gun in the holster, came over, and surveyed his guest.

"What fer did you try to git the drop on me?"

"Oh, don't talk to me," cried out Blund angrily.

A smile crept into the Kid's eyes. "What did I ever do to you?" he inquired gently.

"Nothing," admitted the still surly Blund.

"You're a detective, hain't you?" pursued the Kid sweetly.

"Well, what of it?" Blund was very much mortified with his own bungling methods.

"Sent out by the railroad to take me in?"

"Huh! You must 'a' frisked me."

"'Frisked' you! What's that?" inquired the Kid innocently.

"Went through my clothes," said Blund impatiently.

"Yes," drawled the Kid, "I did look

you over some. But what gits me is why you want to git the drop on me?"

"I'm an officer, and you're a hold-up," replied Blund severely, as if that settled the entire affair.

"But you say you have nothin' agin' me?"

"No."

"Then why do you want to git me?"

"What you ringing in a third degree on me for?" burst out Blund desperately.

" 'Third degree?' " echoed the Kid.

"Yes; ask questions, ask questions, keep asking them!"

"Uh-huh! But don't you know you couldn't git the drop on me?"

"Well, I had, but I'm——"

" 'Fraid of rattlers, hey?"

Blund shuddered.

"No, you didn't have the drop on me," explained the Kid as an elder speaking to a refractory child. "I could 'a' killed you before your finger touched the trigger." A yellow butterfly drifted into the mouth of the cave and fluttered softly down on a tiny point of rock. "See that butterfly?" said the Kid. His gun seemed to jump from the holster—and bang!—there came a roar, and wisps of powder smoke drifted lazily toward the mouth of the cave. Where the butterfly had rested was a gray splotch—the leaded scar of the bullet. "Jes' to show you—that's all," said the Kid modestly, "how sudden you might 'a' passed in your checks." He carelessly dropped his gun into the holster.

Blund made no reply. He was beginning to get a different viewpoint. He had invaded many a den of criminals, desperate safe crackers, murderers, and ex-convicts; but here was a different species of quarry. In all his experience as a police officer and detective he had worked on the assumption that all criminals at heart were cowards; that they would take no chances; that they always struck in the dark when all was in their favor. He had never found one that would look him in the eye.

But this one—this Kid Caldwell—whom a great railroad company had sent him out with a promise of a huge reward to capture—he could not classify.

There was a light in this outlaw's eye that Blund could not understand. It was a light that seemed to tell of a higher range of things—a knowledge of a higher form of danger already dared and made mock of.

It now occurred to the detective that Caldwell could have killed him at any time. Why had he not done so? The detective looked at the youth with a sense of awe that puzzled him.

He was a mere boy, that was plain enough, probably twenty-three or twenty-four; slim, smooth-faced; but the eyes—the detective wished that he did not have to look Caldwell in the eyes.

"But you haven't really told me what you tried to git the drop on me fer?" patiently insisted the Kid.

"My duty," said the detective abruptly.

"Duty to what?"

"The law."

"What law?"

"For the love of Heaven, man, don't you know anything!" The outlaw's question sounded idiotic to the detective.

"I said, 'What law?' " The Kid bent upon him a somber and disconcerting gaze.

"The law of the United States," replied Blund uneasily.

"Who made it?"

"Aw, fergit it!" In his anger the detective was dropping into the vernacular of his police-force days.

"I never fergit anything," said the Kid quietly; "I asked you who made this law."

"Lawyers, of course."

"Are you workin' fer lawyers?"

"No."

"Railroad company?"

"This time; yes."

"Did they help make the law?"

"No."

"I thought you said your duty was to the law."

Blund suddenly turned an admiring gaze on the Kid. "It's a pity you weren't a lawyer," he observed not unpleasantly.

The intended compliment was lost on the Kid. "What I want to know is the real reason you're after me."

Rather hopelessly, Blund answered: "The real reason is that I'm a man hunter by trade and need the money."

"Why didn't you say so in the first place? Shorty had you sized up right. You thought pyrites was gold. Huh, an' you thought you could git me." The Kid smiled with his eyes—a smile that passed like a shadow. "I guess you're new to this country," the outlaw went on in his old, gentle style. "I travel alone mostly, but I has friends—even in Night Hawk I has friends; an' when they thinks I'm goin' to have visitors they sort o' drifts up to a place I knows of an' leaves a note or something. If you'd 'a' had your gun an' been in shape, we might 'a' had a little row, maybe." He made a slight gesture as if the affair of a dispute with Blund would have been of little moment. "But of course you bein' hurt an' helpless changed it all; an' then you came in an' ate my grub. You can't fight a man what eats your grub. Nor you can't fight a cripple."

But the detective, trained only in the customs of civilization, could not follow the Kid's idea. If he himself were after a man, he would do anything to get him; it would be justifiable. He remembered having made friends once with an absconding cashier; secured his trust and confidence; and then, when the time was ripe, snapped the handcuffs on him. The Kid might as well have addressed him in Sanskrit as to have talked of the sacredness of hospitality. The Kid was a fool in that respect, thought Blund.

"I kin see that you're new to the country," continued the Kid gently; "an' I kin overlook a lot of things. But you hadn't ought to try to git the drop on a man what has fed you an' took care o' you. Do you think that's right?"

"That is not the question," said Blund doggedly; "I did my best to get you and failed; that's all."

"You think that's all?" queried the Kid softly. "You're dead sure that's all?"

Blund looked up at his host, but he could not stand the gaze of the Kid's eyes. "Why—I—suppose so," he faltered.

The Kid suddenly sprang into action. His hand flashed to his gun, and in a breath the muzzle was over the heart of the detective. "Lay down!" came the sharp command. Blund obeyed swiftly. Still holding the gun on the detective the Kid backed to a corner of the cave and secured a rope. It became apparent to Blund that he was about to be tied—trussed up like a calf going to market.

With a deft left hand the Kid looped the rope about his guest.

Blund could see no opening in the Kid's defense, and it would be useless to struggle. The outlaw would kill him as a candle is snuffed out. Surely he would not leave him there. Probably wanted to secure him until he made a trip to——

"Now," said the Kid sweetly, as he looked down at the bound detective, "I'm goin' to do a little Injun work with you. I see you're a-scared o' snakes." All his life Blund had been in deadly fear of snakes and toads—a fear given him by his mother. He shuddered with a terrible apprehension. "So

I've got a rattler out there, an' I'm goin' to leave him with you fer company. An' I hope——"

As the ghastly purpose of the outlaw dawned on the detective his face changed from stolid indifference to frantic fear. The cords in his neck stood out, and he began a vain struggle to free himself. Again that shadowy smile came into the Kid's eyes.

"I'll put him on your chest an' in time——"

Blund began gasping for breath. "Oh, you wouldn't—you wouldn't do such a thing," he whispered hoarsely, with the dreadful inarticulateness that comes with a nightmare.

"Sure," said the Kid serenely. "You kin git ready to welcome his snakeship in about a minute."

Blund turned a ghastly, convulsed face to the outlaw. His lips were twitching and his eyes rolling. "I can stand anything—kill me—anything—snake—no—my mother before I was born—oh! don't—don't—don't——"

The Kid did not seem interested in the fears of the mother of the detective. The outlaw started for the entrance of the cave.

With one despairing shriek Blund made a final appeal: "Come back! I'll go away—anything—you can't harm a man who is eating your grub——" It was the last plea of a soul winding down in the depths. The Kid paused. "Sounds like what I said," he remarked, as if not quite positive he was being quoted correctly.

"Yes, yes," implored Blund, "you said it—you said it!"

"Well, if I said it," the Kid spoke naturally and as if engaged in commonplace conversation. "If I said it, I suppose I'll have to stick to it." He returned and released the detective from his bonds.

Blund sat up feebly. He felt as if he had suddenly grown very old. His courage was gone. Never again would Mortimer Blund face danger of any kind. The certainty of this overwhelmed him. He had failed to conquer his greatest fear, and his days as a hunter of men were ended.

His case was not unusual. Prize fighters experience it, soldiers experience it, and all men that follow dangerous callings are liable to experience it. How often is heard that expression, "He lost his grip!"

Kid Caldwell looked him over with the eye of an expert. "I guess I won't have to bother with you any more," he said tersely.

The outlaw was not horrified at the death of a man's courage. He had at times wondered at the passing of that quality in men known as "nerve," but it held no appalling features for him. Yet the Kid had not harmed his guest. He had hewn close to the line in the matter of hospitality. Doubtless there was not a rattlesnake within forty miles of the cave. Seldom did a snake penetrate the upper levels of the buttes, preferring the foothills and the cacti flats where the prairie-dog villages flourished. The Kid had simply discovered the detective's pet fear and played on it as a skillful musician plays upon an instrument.

"Could I have a drink of water?" asked Blund rather pathetically.

"Of course," replied the Kid. "Help yourself. Anything I've got is yours."

Blund dragged himself wearily across the cave and drank long and deep from the battered tin bucket.

The Kid slipped to the entrance of the cave. "I won't be with you tonight. Be back in the mornin'. Be ready to hit the trail."

Blund came up to the outlaw with hand outstretched. "Do you have to go?" he asked, with an odd gulp.

"No-o-o," replied the Kid slowly, "but——"

"I wish you'd stay. It's lonely—lonely as——"

"Oh, I'll stay then," the Kid agreed kindly.

Blund gave an audible sigh of relief. Again that odd light crept into the eyes of the Kid.

The outlaw did not speak to Blund until they arrived on the edge of the sagebrush plain. He reached over and unknotted the blindfold.

"Night Hawk is about forty miles directly east," the outlaw said in a voice so changed that the detective looked up, startled. "But before you go I'm goin' to tell you something." The Kid spurred his horse up, and, leaning over, bent his somber gaze on the detective. "Blund," he said in a voice of deadly menace, "don't ever come West ag'in." The Kid swept a hand toward the buttes in a gesture of haughty ownership. "An' if I ever hear of you lookin' fer me ag'in, I'll come where you are an' cram a live rattler down your neck."

But the sublime and perfect insult was yet to come. The Kid reached over and returned to the detective his gun and belt. "Put them on," he commanded. The detective clumsily took them in his hands.

Then Mortimer Blund did a strange thing. He dropped the gun and belt to the ground, and, putting his hands over his face, sobbed like a great, overgrown boy.

When he looked up, the Kid was riding toward the buttes.

The detective and pseudo scientist looked about him helplessly. Then he turned his horse toward the east, the pack horse obediently following.

THE MOUNTAIN LION OF CALIFORNIA

THE advance of civilization usually spells the decline of the beast of prey. But the mountain lion of California is one wild animal that has continued to increase its numbers in spite of man's encroachment on its territory. Although thousands roam the hills, and a score are killed every year in southern California, the mountain lion is so sly that some men who have lived in the heart of the lion country for years have never seen one. It combines the cunning agility of the cat, the ferocity of the tiger, and the strength of the lion.

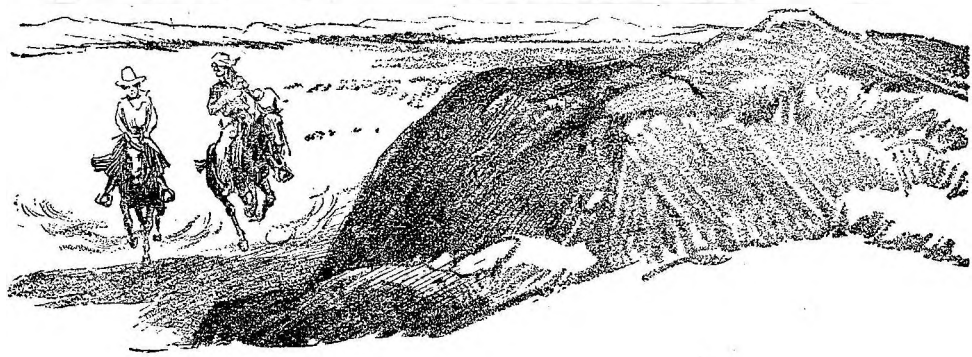
The mountain lion of California is the puma of South America and the cougar of Central America. Although it has the coloring of the Asiatic lion, it is merely a big cat with claws like razors and a terrible ferocity that makes it a dangerous game for the most skilled of hunters. Its ravages on sheep and cattle are enormous. It sleeps by day and prowls by night, sneaking up on its victims with noiseless movements.

POST-GUIDES IN REDWOOD FORESTS

BECAUSE of the frequency with which travelers in the big-tree country of California get lost, a novel system of guide posts has been installed to aid them. The posts are set at frequent intervals throughout the forest, a red and a yellow arrow-shaped board being nailed to each one. The red arrow indicates the way to a central camp; the yellow one indicates the way from it. As an aid to the traveler in locating the posts, brilliant-colored bull's-eyes, which can be seen at considerable distances away, are nailed to the tops of the posts. A camper can now start out in the morning on a long hike with far less danger of being lost.

"Luckless"

By Charles Marcus Horton



FRANCISCO ESPOR banged a trump card down on the table. Espor was not so fat as Falstaff, nor so mad as Hamlet; but he was fair half of each. The cards had been running for seven hours, and what with the bottle passing freely, and Espor drinking twice with each round, as befitted his position as head of the notorious gang, the temper of the little adobe saloon throughout was blue white. And Espor, like the Danish prince, had been losing. Not a very—— But let it pass!

Miguel, Pedro, and Juan, true men all, and lean, were his opponents. Each sat with soft hat drawn low and cards well up under his chin. The light of the single smoky lamp was none too bright; yet Espor, his own bulging eyes roving, became suddenly conscious of a pair of eyes looking over his shoulder. Innocent enough they were; but to the leader of the gang they were inquisitive and foreign.

"Cabrone!" he snarled, leaping out of his chair. "You—you——" His thick tongue choked back the words. The mild-mannered wood hauler, who had just entered the saloon, stepped back in alarm. But not fast enough. Espor shot forth a pudgy fist and struck him brutally. A cry of fear escaped the swelling lips, and the stranger turned toward the door. But again not fast enough. Espor hurled his heavy body upon him, and, beating and thumping the fear-crouched innocent, forced him to the threshold, and over it, head first. Then Espor returned quietly to his chair.

"I feex thot hombre!" he growled with satisfaction, breathing heavily. "I haf lose——" He checked himself and turned attentive ear toward the door. A wood wagon was clattering away. "All right! Thot's all right!"

The others sat in stolid silence while Espor picked up his cards. The bartender hovered nervously near; then, espying a hat on the floor, carefully picked it up and placed it gently upon the leader's small head. Espor looked the self-consciousness of him who accepts such things as homage.

In a few moments the game was finished and a new one started. The cards were being riffled when the door opened and a man stepped into the establishment. All appeared unaware of his entrance, save the bartender, who hurried to take the order. Standing behind the bar, he recognized in the broad, loosely hung shoulders and steady blue eyes before him the cow-puncher who once had

headed the Z L outfit in persistent warfare on the man and his gang seated at the table. No, Horatio never bent more solicitous eyes upon friend.

"You ain't Luckless?" he inquired, his tones fraught with anxiety. "Because——"

"I'm Luckless," interrupted the other, his boyish eyes twinkling. "Just had a tea talk with Old Dobbins."

"Quit?"

"Yes, quit." He swallowed the drink with signs of but little relish. "You was saying something?"

The bartender flashed his eyes upon the gang. "There's Espor," he whispered. "Uglier than I've ever seen him."

Luckless poured himself another drink thoughtfully.

The bartender watched him curiously. He knew Luckless by reputation; knew some good of him and a little bad. There were those who told of the man's wonderful gun hand and love for the square deal; others who hinted maliciously at his continued hard luck, which they somehow believed due him for deeds unknown; and still others who recited an enthusiastic tale of cool fighting under warm conditions, an engagement from which Luckless had been dragged with a nickname for all time.

It happened when the Z L and the Arrow O were at war over a fence line. The fighting had been random for a week, when, like a slow swirling cloud of dust, both sides drew into the settlement of San Felipe. The Arrow O gained the ground first, and Luckless, cantering up onto the edge of a "tank," perceived the enemy safely ensconced in an adobe ablaze with sporadic shooting. Then the thing happened.

Without hesitation, Luckless spurred his horse to a point under their very nose, flung himself to the ground, grappled with a wheel scraper till it stood on edge, and dropped behind it with rifle spitting nastily. The kingbolt of the scraper was gone, leaving the only hole in the sheet-metal protection. This hole was not more than a half inch in diameter. But through this hole—and it could not have happened again in a million tryouts—came with almost the first return fire a bullet that lodged in Luckless' shoulder.

"There's Espor," warned the bartender again.

Luckless pulled himself together. He placed the glass to his lips with a nod of understanding. As he did so, Espor, turning his head deliberately, became aware of the presence of his enemy. He played out his hand, pausing twice to adjust small claims of reneging, then shoved back his chair. He made unsteadily for the dark recesses in the rear. Directly Luckless placed his glass on the bar and turned toward the front.

He had taken but a step when from the black depths behind came the crash of a revolver. A panel in the front door splintered. Luckless promptly wheeled, and the crash of his own shot lapped over that of the first. Espor fired again; Luckless responded; Espor cut loose a third time, wildly; and his men caught his lifeless body as it was about to fall in a heap.

The bartender carefully placed the whisky glass behind the bar.

"You'd better hit out," he advised grimly.

"I'm thinking that way," said Luckless, tossing down a coin. Then he strode out of the door. "But I ain't thinking of the Z L," he added to himself, running lightly down the three loose steps. "Though the boys 'u'd just about clean that gang for old scars."

Once in the saddle, he gave heed to the night. It was black and moonless, a night crisp, hard, silent, impenetrable. From the north, against his lean cheeks, came a slow-weaving zephyr which brought to his nostrils the nipping odor of pines. To the south lay the Z L, and

Old Dobbins. So Luckless headed his horse in the opposite direction. He hoped to gain the hills before the gang overtook him. For they would pursue him, this gang, set out under the shock of the death of their leader with red eyes and drink-swollen lips, and the mercy of a band of painted Sioux on a raid of sheer destruction.

"Well," he mused whimsically, "it's a start. I'm quit with the ranch, with Old Dobbins, with his daughter, with the whole cussed Territory. Never did have any luck with the Z L. Maybe she'll change."

North, on the mesa, they fled for an hour, two hours, three. And still the night, pulsating with stillness, gave no sounds of pursuit. Finally Pedro began to feel out his master, and, finding the reins limp, gradually slackened his pace. When within the damp of the hills he fell into a walk, describing a giant arc; for there was grumbling within, and his direction homeward with the instinct of thirst-hungered animals. Stars came out, from atop the hills the sheen of a rising moon, and Pedro moved out of distasteful shadow and into the whitening mesa at a fox trot.

It was this change of gait that aroused Luckless from his thoughts. He jerked erect his head; settled into his stirrups; pulled the reins taut. Pedro responded, coming to an impatient stand; and the moon, breaking full over the range, flooded man and beast in beautiful green-white light.

"Maybe she'll change," said Luckless dully, as if closing a long preamble with himself.

He found in the majestic waves of moonlight a kind of tonic for his memory-riven soul. He soaked himself in it to the very core. It was white, this stuff, and clean, and silent, and steady, not a changing substance probably fraught with misfortune for him. Suddenly a thought came to him. Movement had always brought upon him bad luck. Then why not remain still for once? He would; and like a man hemmed on all sides, he now sat his horse—tense face drawn, in a kind of fear, watching the moon steadily mount into the starlit heavens.

Fate again pulled her strings.

A rust spot flared in the shadow of the hills; another flared; a third flared. The bark of a rifle smote his dull ears; then another spoke, and another. The song of bullets purred around him—first overhead; then to his right; the last beneath the belly of his horse.

"Sure!" burst forth Luckless grimly. "It had to come!" He broke his mount into a gallop for the nearest friendly haven, a projecting shadow that lay a quarter of a mile to his forward right—the rust spots had appeared to his left rear.

Thus began a fascinating spectacle. Luckless appreciated his part to the full. He regarded Pedro with cold eyes kindling, while the horse, dashing across the green-white sea of light, leveled himself heroically—sturdy legs reaching like machine parts, muscles gliding under close-cropped hide, ears alertly flat to the rear, teeth and lips snug around loose bit, nostrils quivering with suppressed eagerness!

And himself, Luckless, hugging the pommel, conscious of a moving shadow immediately to his left, a shadow becoming with each stride less attenuated—swinging steadily forward with a rocking motion, sweeping finally to his very front, and there crowding underneath the thundering hoofs of his horse!

Then the sudden whirling of his brain! Then his last grim urging to the line of light and shadow; across it as a mighty runner crosses the tape; into the friendly haven, and a group of unexpected horsemen, familiar to his bleared eyes! And his sudden plunge over the head of the stumbling Pedro, and in his buzzing, clanging, grating

ears the single outcry of a woman, a woman he knew, a woman he loved—Millie Dobbins!

Now another voice, high-pitched, shouted: "Come, Zeke! Swing out along the aidge o' that shadow—you and Steve! Tom keep along o' me in this arroyo! You stay here, Millie! He's all right, and it's safe! Tear out a sleeve o' your waist! He's hit in two places—arm and a graze along the haid! Take keer o' him; we'll be back in a jiffy!"

And growing faint, firing, trampling hoofs, voices exchanging orders; then a blank; dead, flat, sweet; and on his lips, though he did not know it, a murmuring: "Maybe she'll change."

Luckless returned to consciousness and the gentle pressure of Millie's arm under his head. He looked up with dazed recollection. He saw the same dark eyes with brows curving, the same little mouth with drooping lower lip, the same straight nose with healthy nostrils, the same low forehead half hidden in wealth of brown hair, the same oval face topped jauntily with red tam-o'-shanter—saw all these, and seeing them so close after his recent dismissal of them for all time, he shifted his body uneasily, and his closed lips opened and closed again——

"Millie?"

The girl smiled.

"Luckless," she said gently, "you're hurt—not badly—but you must keep quiet." Then her smile gave way to a look of anxiety. "Why did you do it?"

Luckless slowly gathered his wits. It was no easy task, for his shoulder burned, his head pained as of a twisting knife. Slowly he crooked his well arm, and, thrusting a supporting hand underneath his head, looked into her troubled eyes.

"Kill Espor? I—I had to do that. He——"

"No," interrupted the girl gravely. "Why did you quit daddy?"

"Oh!"

Luckless removed his arm and sank back. He felt her own arm still there, and his heart beat fast. Then he reflected that perhaps it had been mean of him to quit. Old Dobbins had always treated him civilly, even well at times for a man who viewed life through stern and humorless eyes. Still, it hadn't been the man so much as the girl here beside him.

"You knew we needed you," she continued reproachfully. "Why, when the boys heard you had quit they formed a kind of human round robin and protested—declared they wouldn't carry on the work without you. That's how much everybody needed you! And daddy——"

"The boys did that?" Luckless was on his elbow again, incredulity stamping his features. "They——"

"Yes," said the girl, pleased with his surprise. "And more! They insisted upon going out and bringing you back. Daddy——"

"Did Old Dobbins—I mean, did your father—your father tell them which way?" He peered at her sharply.

Millie understood this play of emotion, and gazing at him with narrowed, tantalizing eyes, relaxed her features into a smile; the seriousness of this big boy was to be coped with femininely. Then she was sober again. "Daddy always said he hoped you would never leave him."

Luckless sank back.

"After that——" He interrupted himself. "How did you get here?"

Again her tantalizing look. "Why," she hesitated, "we thought, as a matter of course, that you would be in town. I wanted to take the ride, and they let me; that's all."

"But—but——"

"Yes; he told the boys which way you went off. And when we got to town the man in the saloon told us of the shooting, but forgot, or else didn't know, or didn't want us to know, about

the gang following you. So I didn't go back. Bill argued with me, but as it was night then he finally let me trail along. Did you know that Pedro's thrown a shoe?"

"Which one?" inquired Luckless absently.

"The left hind foot. We lost your trail hereabouts, and were looking to pick it up again when the Espor gang opened fire. We saw you coming across in the moonlight and—and now it has led to this."

"Any one hurt?"

"Luckless," she said softly.

He lay still. He could not understand many unexpected things. Old Dobbins, for instance! A lean, mean, grizzly, hawing, hemming, bickering cuss, small-eyed, smaller souled with work, *work*—and any fit man *the* man for the job, giving his direction to the boys—*his* direction!

And the boys, a joshing, bantering, mouthy lot, forming a round robin in his behalf—*his* behalf!

The girl for whom he had lain out in the open many nights and gazed at the stars, wondering whether she believed, or believing, whether she cared; the girl who had dismissed his seriousness with a light laugh more than once in the past year, setting out in the face of danger and opposition to find him and bring him back! It *was* incredible! It——

"Why so still?" she inquired softly. "Does your head ache?" She was very close now, legs crossed tailor-fashion, hand in his fevered hand, eyes intent upon his own.

"I'm thinking," he said quietly.

She smiled.

"You mustn't think, Luckless!" she said. "The bandage forbids."

Luckless reached up his arm. Sure enough his head was bandaged! But though he was puzzled, he made no comment. He turned his eyes up at the tiny clouds fretting on the borders of the moon, a great, round, luminous sphere that seemed to fit well the tense quiet of the desert. At length he spoke.

"Millie," he said, turning his eyes full upon her, "I'm going to repeat what I've put to you a lot of times in the last year." He gripped the hand about to slip away. "I don't know why, either—unless it's the light here, and that you're alone with me again. But—but I want to know whether you—you care for me—that way." His voice caught with agitation.

The girl trained her eyes heavenward.

"Daddy felt mean because you quit the way you did," she said evasively. "I think we all did. The least you could have done was to say good-by." She looked down at him suddenly. "He likes you, and he always did. And—and listen! Bill is going to visit his mother in Los Angeles—says the old lady ought to be glad to see him after fifteen years—and you are to be the new foreman."

He did not repeat his question. With a look of resignation, he began to trace the lines of her splendid countenance, conscious the while of the warmth of her hand, and of his own chaotic thoughts ranging through the years in quest of a single incident which might be construed as evidence of a reversal of Fate's decree. Seven years had he suffered——

"Luckless!" suddenly exclaimed the girl, withdrawing her hand in alarm. "They're shooting again!" She rose hastily. "It's—it's coming this way!" She gazed across the mesa, eyes round with dismay, lips parted under the stress of fear, standing like a frightened doe—collected in a way, and still.

Luckless gained his feet with a wince. His whole body rebelled at the movement. But he set his jaw grimly, and then, clutching his limp arm, awoke to the second bandage.

"You—you did this, too?"

"What?" she burst forth nervously.

Then she broke down. "Luckless, they're coming! I can see them—and Bill and Steve and the rest behind them, shooting! What—what shall we do?" A stifled sob escaped her.

Luckless peered out gravely. He saw rust spots flaring in the shadow of the hills. He narrowed his eyes and waited—calm, poised, intensely alert. And now the rifles sounded; and suddenly out of the great shadow, scattering as they rode, returning an intermittent fire, swept three horsemen furiously, behind them, flaring, dying, flaring again, more vivid rust spots.

Bullets purred in their vicinity.

"We've got to get out of range," said Luckless quietly. He hoped to allay her fears. "The boys ain't so cool as they might be." He reached forth his well arm. "Come! we'll head into deeper shadow, the slopes, trees, rocks—shelter. This won't last." She took his hand, and he helped her to mount. Then he made for Pedro. "This way," he called, swinging into the saddle. "No; to my other side." He turned left. "Now let's cut for it like a jack rabbit!"

He knitted his forehead against the throbbing pain in his head; he listed his body to stay the swaying of his limp arm; he tried to forget that he was weary and faint and played out. Yet he rode no less hard, for he knew that beside him, slender body leaning, hair snug and wispless, tam-o'-shanter hat jaunty, rode the girl he loved; more, the girl who had come out in the face of opposition to bring him back. The old feel of protection, man's heritage, surged in his heart.

To the rear more firing, more bullets in their vicinity. Luckless became more alert. He looked back frequently; spurred more and more viciously; pierced the shadow ahead with swift, searching eyes. And suddenly he drew rein. The shelter which he sought was near; but it was treeless, steep, offered no protection. With a warning outcry, he dragged Pedro's head to the right. Millie quickly adopted the new course. Man and woman rode straight for the moonlight-flooded mesas.

"It's the one move!" explained Luckless grimly. "We got to hit the light. The boys'll see us then; be more careful." Then he realized something; became savagely cold. "Swing around, there!" Then he drew rein. "Wait! I'll shift!" He swerved Pedro mightily; he put spurs to the horse. "Now, then!" They galloped ahead, relative positions changed. Luckless was between the girl and the oncoming horsemen.

And then they swept out into the moonlight.

Instantly the firing ceased. Luckless was pleased with the accuracy of his judgment. He slackened the pace and relaxed his tense muscles; then he quelled the shrieking pain in his arm and looked at the girl with solicitous eyes. He saw the death fear upon her, the white face, and wide eyes; he drew to a point almost within touch of her.

"Millie," he began, thinking to dispel her fears with chatter, "do you remember——" he paused; his face winced, grimaced; his arm was asserting itself. *"Do you remember,"* he persisted, "the day I rode up to your corral looking for a job? How Pedro here spilled me over the bars and all over your father, who was bending over pinching warts off the legs of the black stallion? And how he flung me back over the fence again and under the hoofs of Pedro, who'd caught his reins around a post and was pulling like Sam Hill to get free? And how——"

"Luckless!" interrupted the girl. "I think they—they have swerved and are riding—riding for us! They're going to run us down and—and shoot us for—for that—that affair in——"

"No, they ain't!" blurted forth Luckless. Then he turned his head. "They're cutting across——" He checked him-

self. He pulled Pedro up onto his haunches. "You know how to shoot, Millie," he said quietly, as the girl swung around in a sharp circle. "Take one of these." He unholstered a revolver. "When the time comes, and it's necessary—use it!"

He spurred grimly, the girl following; both moved south in the white light of the moon, the girl with revolver and reins well in hand, the man fighting a threefold agony; a throbbing head, a torturing arm, a rending fear for the safety of the girl he loved.

Luckless aroused himself to a truth. The line of light was not unending; ahead projected a broad, indeterminable shadow. He knew that the moment he rode out of the moonlight the boys to the double rear, pursuing Espor's crowd, and alive to their evident intentions now, would take a chance and open fire. Further, he knew the limit of Millie's endurance; the girl already was listless with fatigue; could not hold the terrific pace set by those in the rear. What, then, to do?

The answer came to him, hard, luring, daring; sent to his ends a tingling chill. He carefully viewed it from all angles; then with set teeth pulled down his excited horse. The girl drew rein in surprise.

"Luckless!"

"Just a minute, girl," he said, flinging out of his saddle. "I'm going to make a speech." He disclosed the situation to her quietly. "It's a chance, Millie," he concluded desperately. "This thing here ain't much of a one. We've got to keep in the light, and pushing along this way ain't going to do it." He looked back, then at her again. "We've got to make a stand some time; we might as well make it here. Here's the place, too; not ahead there in the shadow."

"But Espor's crowd——"

"I—I don't worry," he faltered. "They'll pass us like the devil possessed! Won't dare fire; glad to get along! They'll see us, of course; they see us now! But so do the boys."

Millie slipped quietly to the ground. Somehow she felt confidence in this man whose own daily movements gave frequent proof of his faulty judgment. Still, she was trembling; realized her nervousness; forced to the surface a calm which she did not feel.

"Where shall we stand?"

Luckless' love for her surged anew. He wanted to take this little woman in his arms, and for her courage alone tell once more of his love. But he quelled the longing, and faced the more urgent issue.

"Turn your horse straight up the mesa," he said lightly. "That's it—face the bunch coming! There! Now stand close to his forelegs—so! They'll thrash through on the other side." Then he wheeled his own horse into a position just outside the other and a little ahead. "It's a chance, Millie," he said quietly, standing close to Pedro—"a chance."

Thus they waited.

Luckless was gazing hard through the moonlight. Far up the mesa galloped the Espor gang. Luckless' eyes were upon them, his whole body keyed to tense expectancy. He lost much of his composure, his grip upon himself. He grew mindful of his physical pain; under its stress he shifted his weight from foot to foot, repeatedly examined his revolver. Finally he looked back at the girl, and, while searching her face for signs of distress, awoke to a second idea battling in his aching brain.

"Miss Dobbins," he began, oddly enough, "I'm thinking about a certain thing that might interest you." He listed his body carefully; his arm was swaying with pain. "It's about this hard luck of mine; we've often discussed it, you know. Seems like it's a sort of creed with us. I like to talk about it." He was silent.

She looked the surprise she was feeling at this unexpected turn in the man.

"I'm wondering about this chance," continued Luckless bluntly. He turned strained eyes up the mesa. "I can't help thinking," he went on absently, staring hard at the distant approaching horsemen—"I can't help recognizing this thing as a kind of supreme test. You know what I mean," he said, turning back to her. "If they pass, Millie, without taking a crack at me—get this—we'll both know that my luck has changed." His voice broke awkwardly. "If they do fire—— But, pshaw! They won't dare to fire." He turned abruptly to his horse again.

The girl looked after him with mist-beclouded eyes. And suddenly her fingers relaxed on reins and gun; her heart took on strange antics—beat rapidly, then slowly, then rapidly again; melted finally to a soft pulsating under the pressure of woman's sympathy and love. She stepped away from her horse; she circled the animal and stood beside the man; she dropped the revolver convulsively, gave full power to her inner longing, reached up both arms and clasped him around the neck.

"Luckless," she sobbed, "I've been very mean to you. But—but I always answered your question—answered it every time you asked—though you did not know it. And—and my answer was always the same. You—I like you—that way."

The man felt himself go limp.

"You—you angel!" he cried hoarsely.

Five hundred yards away the oncoming gang! Luckless saw moving specters, three. Shadows more than horsemen, he saw, because any mesa viewpoint seems elevated. He kept firm grasp on the girl.

Four hundred yards! And in his ears the faint chug of trampling hoofs, nasal voices, dull, distant, straining. Then three hundred yards! And the impact of hoofs more firm, a chug no longer, a beat clearly defined. Two hundred yards! And squatty shoulders, limp hat brims, lashing quirts, sharp exclamations, hoofs striking hard, true, sharp-edged. Would they shoot?

His whole strength seemed to surge into his good arm; unconsciously he held the woman in an embrace of steel; his brows furrowed deeply, and trembled; the corners of his mouth forced down; his lower lip became thin, straight; his breath ceased to come; his very head, aching, pounding, drooped as if to ward off a blow. Would they shoot?

A hundred yards! And now nasal voices clear— *"Haya! Cabrone! Haya!"* And the crack of quirts; the dig of rowels; the crunch of leather; flaring hat brims. Fifty yards! And grim-set jaws, heaving sides, flecked chests, throbbing hoofs. Twenty-five yards! Would they shoot? Would they?

Twenty yards, fifteen, ten, five——

"Crack!"

It was not a shot; only a quirt, handle reversed, against flat rump.

The ground heaved and rocked as with rolling cannon; dust clouds, flying gravel.

Millie sobbed hysterically; she struggled to support Luckless; he sank in a faint to the ground.

Bending low, Millie heard him murmur——

"She's—she's changed."

ALASKAN CAPE IS STORMIEST PLACE

CAPE PRINCE OF WALES, the westernmost point of Alaska, is reputed to be the stormiest place on earth. Storms from the arctic assail it all the year round. It is marked by a considerable mountain three thousand two hundred and ten feet high, and fierce winds blow there almost perpetually.

Gems of Promise

by Arthur Preston Hankins

Author of "Squatters at Dabchick Lake," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

ON his way from Mexico to California Morgan Tuttle, saddle tramp, finds an old Spanish doubloon; this he splits edgewise and sees inside an inscription which directs attention to "the place in the cañon called Fresco whence came The Gem of Promise." Further directions, the inscription says, are contained in papers hidden in the wall of the Palinqua Mission, in Lower California.

Morgan goes to the mission and finds that the portion of the wall where the papers are supposed to be hidden, has been torn out since the mission was constructed. He abandons hope of finding the papers for the present; instead he buys a gem mine in Fresco Cañon from a married couple who have been working the mine for years without success.

While Morgan is at the Calhoun Ranch purchasing supplies, he learns from Ala Mariposa, a half-breed Indian girl, that the padre at Palinqua Mission found some papers in the wall when he was having reconstruction work done; also that the padre was not inclined to take seriously their references to a gem mine. Neosho Calhoun, the ranch owner's daughter, does; she gets the padre to give her the papers, with permission to search for the mine.

Morgan works for a year on the Calhoun Ranch. He falls in love with Neosho, and they continue together their search for the mine; at last they find it to be on the claim which Morgan owns. Intensive mining produces a quantity of valuable stones. They write to a purchaser in New York hoping to realize enough money on the gems to save Calhoun's ranch from loss by foreclosure. For reply to their letter they receive word that representatives of two rival jewel houses are on their way to Fresco Cañon.

CHAPTER XXII.

TORCIDO REPORTS PROGRESS.

FIVE puzzled conspirators sat about their inevitable bottle of jackass brandy in the little room at Cactus. Torcido had just arrived from a long, tiresome vigil in the hills, where he had strained his beady eyes through a powerful telescope, and reported the strike in Fresco Cañon. What puzzled the quintet was just how to go about depriving the discoverers of their wealth.

"What we oughta done," gloomily observed Bill Dover, "was to put on masks and held up the Calhoun girl and got the papers away from her. We acted like a bunch o' kids."

"What good would dat done?" growled Dutchy Bell, one of the tramp conspirators. "Torcido says it looks like dis Tuttle boid was already located on de claims. Mighty funny, I'll say. A boid goes an' buys a no-good mine an' makes out like he's woikin' 'er, an' a jane comes along wid a funny ol' paper tellin' about de ice; an' dey get togedder an' find rocks w'ere—— Aw, youse guys messed up ever't'ing. I tol' youse to——"

"Aw, youse tol' us nuttin' wid any savvy to it!" crossly interrupted Froggy Fisk, the second tramp. "Youse didn' know no more wot to do

dan de rest of us. We couldn't jump de claims an' get away wid it, could we? Well, now we've stuck aroun' an' had de Injun pipe dese boids off; an' wot 'a' we got? Nuttin'!"

"We wasn't sure it was a mine they was lookin' for," Dover pointed out. "We thought it was buried treasure. I don't want any mine and never did want one. I want my stones already mined. If I wanta work I c'n ride fence or herd."

"Wot d'youse mean by dat, ol'-timer?" asked Froggy.

"I mean that we ain't lost nothin' a-tall. We're better off than ever. These Ikes have kept the strike dark. Down at Palinqua you can't hear a word about a new strike. Only Calhoun and his bunch and us know anything about 'er. Torcido says they struck pockets and 'a' got out a tub-ful o' stones. What more do we want? I like mine already dug up."

Torcido grinned. "Dat ees de good talk," he observed.

"You mean stick 'em up for de ice?" asked Bell.

"Surest thing you know. Since there never was any buried treasure to beat 'em to, why, le's get what we can. There's five of us. We oughta be able to put on masks and clean out the bunch —an ol' rube, two girls, a nut from the mountain, an' another man."

"And some miners," Fred Glenn reminded his partners.

"Get the rest when the miners are in the tunnels. Maybe, now, this bad man will be there, too, and all we'll have to deal with'll be the girls."

Torcido shrugged. *"Muy peligroso,"* he muttered. "An' he iss call dat caballo wid whistle. I see dat caballo come fas' w'en he whistle, an' lay down for him an' kees him an' all like dat. An' he walk on hees hin' legs, dat hoss. Me no sabe. I guess maybe he talk, too. I dunno."

"Never mind all that!" said Fred Glenn. "Dover's right. Le's get things ready an' move over near Fresco Cañon and camp. Then we c'n sneak down an' see what's doin'; an' when we get a chance, we'll rush 'em."

"An' wot'll we do wid de ice?" asked Froggy Fisk.

"Cache it till the storm blows over. Then we c'n ship it East. Dutchy says he c'n sell it to a fence in N' York—whatever that is."

"Youse guys get 'em; I'll peddle 'em," proclaimed the tramp called Dutchy.

A little later the five left the small room to begin putting their plans into practice. And a little later still Mr. Albert Bush, who of late had shown a strange liking for the miserable lodging house back of the Cactus Saloon, left the bunk in which he had been lying and listening through a crack. He climbed hastily into his automobile and began driving rapidly toward Los Angeles to consult with Nathan Graham over this new turn of affairs.

Toward the close of the afternoon a few days later five men crawled through the sage and chaparral to an eminence that overlooked Nameless Cañon and the cabin and the mines "whence came The Gem of Promise."

"Look!" said Torcido, lifting himself from the ground like a lizard.

The white men, hidden by the heavy gray growth, looked long and eagerly at Mariposa and Neosho as they occasionally came from the cook tent.

"An' dey're keepin' de rocks down dere, wid only dose janes to watch out fer 'em?" asked Dutchy Bell.

The half-breed nodded. "In two tubs," he said in Spanish, which Bill Dover translated for the benefit of the yeggs.

"Good night!" breathed Froggy Fisk. "Like takin' candy away from a baby. Rock candy, eh? Dat's a joke."

"Me, I teenk maybe dey bury heem,"

observed Torcido. *"Muy peligroso* no fool, *yo penso."*

"Sure he'd bury 'em somewheres," agreed Fred Glenn. "We gotta wait a while and watch till we locate the cache. Then it'll be a cinch. But we don't wanta be too sure about that schoolma'am. She's packed a six for years, an' I've seen her pull off the double roll like an ol-timer an' hit a tin can tossed up."

"She ain't got any gun on 'er now," said Dover.

"Oh, it'll be easy if we c'n get down to 'em without bein' seen. But first we gotta locate where they're hidin' the gems at. Likely we won't know till they strike another pocket, 'cause they won't go to the cache till they got somethin' more to hide."

"We may have to wait a month for that," growled Dover. "But I guess we gotta do it."

CHAPTER XXIII.

R-R-RITZ.

GO to it, boys!" Morgan shouted, encouraging his miners. "Some fellows are coming from New York to see what we've got, and I'd like to strike a pocket just about the time they show up. There's one about due in each mine, it seems to me."

On the ninth of December Morgan and Sligo Ryan struck lithia in The Neosho, and the last shots before quitting time next evening opened a pocket.

Morgan stepped out and shouted the glad news down to Neosho.

Up in the sage on the hillside the five weary spies exchanged triumphant glances as they heard Morgan's shout.

"Now dey'll be hidin' wot dey got, an' we'll get de dope on dere cache!" Froggy Fisk chuckled.

Down at the mine, Morgan said: "We'll not take out a stone now. We'll let our visitors see for themselves just what we've got and how we get it."

So next morning Morgan and Sligo worked with the other two in The Padre's Hope. And up in the sage five men wriggled uneasily about and wondered why no gems were brought from the tunnels.

That night and the following morning were periods of anxiety. January third, Beaver P. Calhoun's great day, was rapidly closing in on them. This was the twelfth of December, and the man Ritz was expected to arrive at Palinqua on the noon stage. Calhoun would meet him with the runabout.

Shortly before two o'clock Morgan made one of many trips to the mouth of the tunnel, to look off over the lowlands to the southwest, and saw the car creeping over the *sienega.* He hurried down the trail and told Neosho; and together they walked toward the mouth of the cañon to meet the arrivals.

Soon they saw Calhoun walking up the creek ahead of a large-framed man carrying an overcoat. He lumbered along and kept turning this way and that as Calhoun's waving arm pointed out the peculiarities of the landscape.

"Hello, youngsters," greeted the rancher as he reached them. "I've got your man."

The big fellow waddled to the front, mopping a red face with a large silk handkerchief.

He was a monstrous man. His feet were monstrous; his head was monstrous; his face was monstrous, with features set far apart; he had a monstrous brown beard. His big eyes were blue as the sky. He was a trifle fidgety for all his great size, and he was puffing like a Santa Fe mogul.

Calhoun began the introductions, but the other's big, thick hand stopped him.

"Vait!" puffed Mr. Ritz. "Just vun breath of air first. I haff not climbed so much since I vas a poy."

He sat down heavily on a round

bowlder. "You vill excuse me, blease. I am eggzausted."

The others laughed sympathetically, and Mr. Ritz sat wiping his face and inside his turndown collar. At last he rose like a big bear after his sun bath. He smiled broadly and responded to the delayed introductions with rare, old-fashioned courtesy.

"I am Gustav Ritz, D. Sc.," he informed them, "and I haff come to see your mines." He looked up at the tunnels and lifted a thick finger. "Up there? Your mines?"

"Yes," said Morgan.

"I neffer make it!" and Mr. Ritz groaned.

Morgan laughed. "What do you weigh, Mr. Ritz?" was his rather personal question.

"I? I veigh two hoondert und seffenty-six."

"Don't worry. I have a burro that will take care of you for a short stretch like this."

"A burro! Vun of dose leetle mules, hey? Goot! If he giff oudt, I carry him a vays." Mr. Ritz laughed enormously.

Up on the hillside, in the sage, Dutchy Bell remarked to Bill Dover: "Who's dat dey got? I t'o't it was a box car comin'."

"Search me! I'm wonderin' more about when they're goin' to clean out that last pocket."

Down below, Mr. Ritz started walking up the cañon with Neosho. Morgan and Beaver P. Calhoun lagged a little behind.

"Well, you got him," Morgan observed.

"Every ounce of him, Morg."

"What have you learned?"

"Very little. I've tried to pump him, but he gets round things pretty well. I couldn't learn how the two of 'em got a peek at the stone. But I think we got 'em goin'. Le's don't close any deal till we round up this fellow Geist."

At camp Morgan led the party to the supply tent and showed the visitor the collection of gems.

If only the five on the hillside could have seen through those canvas walls and realized that the gems were not cached!

Mr. Ritz's big blue eyes fairly bulged as he collapsed heavily on a stool and began digging through the pile. He held many of the stones to the light. He grunted frequently and gutturally as he pawed through them, but it was difficult to interpret his feelings by these signs.

"You haff a fine collection," he commented at last. "Dis iss very fine spodumene. It iss somet'ing new I haff discuffered. You vish to sell der mines?"

"Yes, we'll sell our entire holdings," Morgan replied. "This is because we have other matters to attend to."

"Ah, der development project! Mr. Calhoun has showed me your land. Maybe I puy some. I haff thought of California investment a long time already. You convince me, I puy. Vell, how many pounds of spodumene you got here, Mr. Tuttle?"

"I think we've got close to three hundred pounds."

"So? An enormous quantity. It vill glut der market, I suspect. Und you found tourmalin, too, in vun tunnel? Such an accommodating mine!"

He shook himself. "Vell, I don't peat about der pushes. If all dis comes up to der grade of der piece you sent us, I giff you seffenty-five dollars a pound for der pile." He waved his hand toward the collection of dull stones. "I ship it to New York und giff you an immediate report."

Morgan smiled and shook his head. "It's all up to grade," he said. "I've made up my mind that this stone is worth twenty-five dollars a pound more than any spodumene mined in Cali-

fornia. Up until we discovered this here——"

"Found! *I* discuffer!"

Morgan laughed at this whimsicality. "Well," he continued, "up until we found this, the product of The Palinqua Chief was considered the finest stone from any California mine. It brings a hundred dollars a pound. This is worth twenty-five dollars more, we're bettin'. But we'll talk about that later. If I can sell you our mines at a figure that seems right, we'll have no trouble settling on the price for these. Now, if you're ready, look over the mines, I've got an unopened pocket for you to see. We struck it a little while back, and I left it untouched."

"Goot!" agreed Ritz and struggled to his feet. "I go. Get me der burromule. I got too much vind to valk up dere. Und say—I puy dese mines, der chem must be called r-r-ritzite—see? After me, der discufferer. Calhoun says dis is der Chem of Promise. Dat iss goot, *aber* r-r-ritzite is better."

"I was strugglin' under the impression all along that we were the discoverers," said Morgan dryly.

"Vat you call him, den? Tuttleite? Ach, rotten! Dere iss no discuffery till science hass approved. You find—I discuffer. See? R-r-ritzite—it iss der goot name."

Gustav Ritz's trip on Mono up the trail was the liveliest time in the cañon since the finding of the first pocket. He was a kind-hearted man and could not make himself believe that he was not killing the sturdy little toiler. He insisted on walking and had his way. He would climb two hundred steps, then, crying: "Ach, I got too much vind!" he would get on a stone and remount fearsomely. Then fear of falling and compassion would cause him to slide off once more, only to remount again after a breathless struggle upward. When it was at last over he faced Mono about and slapped his narrow rump.

"Goot-by," he said. "Go down. I don't need you any more. I stay up here foreffer now."

He stayed the remainder of the afternoon, at any rate, and puffed ponderously down at quitting time. Next morning he and Mono tried the trail again and, after sundry experiments, reached the top.

That morning, to the miners' immense satisfaction, Tag McMasters and Bert Davis struck the long-looked-for pocket in The Padre's Hope. Mr. Ritz's big blue eyes bulged as he watched the operations. He had no comments whatever to make on any of the proceedings. At night, after Mr. Ritz had lumbered down in the cañon again, Morgan knew no more about his opinion of everything than before.

But the next day would be the fourteenth. It was expected that Calhoun would deliver Mr. Geist at the camp somewhere around two o'clock. For the life of him Morgan could not determine whether or not Ritz knew that Geist was coming. Gustav Ritz was something of an enigma.

After lunch in The Neosho, however, Mr. Ritz began talking business.

"Of course, Mr. Tuttle, you haff filed on claims all about here to keep me off, hey?"

"You bet your neck, Mr. Ritz!"

"Und you vill sell dese claims und der chems already taken oudt—der whole shootin'-match—for how much?"

Morgan drew a long breath and tried to control the slight tremble in his voice.

"One million dollars," he said.

"Himmel! Preposterous! Ridiculous!"

"Can't see it any other way," and Morgan laughed. "But what, now, were you thinking of offering, Mr. Ritz?"

"Just half," came the quick answer.

"Not enough for our business," Morgan told him.

But he was secretly happy. Sligo Ryan had told him The Palinqua Chief had sold for six hundred thousand. Five hundred thousand was enough for Morgan. Half a million! The mines were as good as sold. Yet he knew now they were worth much more, and it was legitimate that he should get all he could.

"Vell," said Ritz, sighing, "I been vasting my time, it seems. I guess I go back to New York to-morrow."

"And let Culver & Company add these mines to their monopoly?" quietly suggested the saddle tramp.

Ritz was a master at controlling his feelings. Only his big blue eyes grew a little bigger and bulged more.

Immediately he was smiling his broad smile.

"I understand you vant money pretty pad," and he laughed. "Last night I heard you und Beaver P. Calhoun ven you had der pig talk about der ranch. How about Chanuary third, hey? All iss fair in pusiness dese days. I sneaked up on you and listened vile you talked down py der leetle riffer. Big? Yes, *aber* I sneak pretty goot. Der rock I hide behindt was pigger as me yet, Tuttle."

Morgan stared at him.

"Don't hate me," Ritz begged quaintly. "It iss pusiness. I got vind through now-und-den remarks I hear, und I vait my chance und sneak to hear more. Says Calhoun: 'Chanuary third iss on der ving, und den I got to pay all on der ranch.' Und she iss on der ving. Der Culver & Company people cannot reach her in time. Iss not half a million enough? Ha-ha! It iss pusiness, Mr. Tuttle."

"I forgive you." Morgan smiled as he spoke. "Don't try to excuse yourself. What you have stumbled on might be of vast value to you if it weren't that I expect Mr. Geist at two o'clock to-day."

"Geist!"

"Oh, you've heard of him?" Morgan could not help chuckling.

"Geist iss coming here at two to-day?"

"You said 'er."

Ritz rose ponderously to his feet. "Vell, oudt vid it!" he snapped. "You got me! I don't peat about der pushes."

"One million dollars, Mr. Ritz."

"Not! Geist or no Geist, emphatically not!"

Ritz meant it, Morgan felt. He rose and pretended to stretch. "Well, I'll have to wait and see what Geist has to offer, den," he remarked listlessly.

The big fellow snorted and waddled out of the tunnel. Morgan saw him jerk his watch from his pocket as he disappeared from the mouth.

The saddle tramp stepped to the trail and took a long look over the *sienega*. The runabout was not in sight. He went back into The Neosho and resumed work on a block hole.

Perhaps fifteen minutes had passed when the light on the face of the drift grew dim. Somebody was entering the tunnel. Morgan kept on hammering without looking back. Presently Ritz stepped to his side.

"Der machine iss coming," he said. "Tuttle, I don't fool mit you ven I say vun million iss fierce. It is oudt of my reach. I offer you der limit my people giff me, if, in my scientific judgment, der mines are vurth it. Seffen hoondert und fifty t'ousand dollars. Take it or leave it. Dis is der end."

"How can I accept, with Geist almost here? I'd be foolish."

"Say, I tell yo' somet'in, Tuttle: I know vat Culver & Company paid for der Palinqua Chief und all der udder mines. Der Palinqua Chief vas sold for six hoondert t'ousand dollars. I bet you Geist don't offer more as dot!"

"Then you'll get it, of course, for seven hundred and fifty——"

"I vill not! I get it for just a leetle more dan Geist offers. Pecause you

need der money right avay—see? I got you, after all, Tuttle. You ain't got der time to vait for Geist to telegraph his people, even. Ha-ha!

"Listen, Tuttle: I offer you seffen hoondert und fifty t'ousand dollars. You refuse it. Geist comes und offers six hoondert t'ousand. You say, 'No, Ritz hass offered me more.' Den Geist says he vill vire his people und see if dey can raise my offer. If dey vire back dey cannot, den I get it for a leetle ofer six hoondert t'ousand, und you lose der balance. Be vise, Tuttle! Be vise!"

Morgan smiled grimly. "You're a clever hombre, Mr. Ritz," he said, "but you haven't convinced me. I'll wait for Geist."

"All right! You see! You lose close to a hoondert und fifty t'ousand by your pig-headedness!" And he stamped out of the tunnel.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ALGERNON GEIST.

WHEN at last Calhoun came up the trail with a slight, dark little man who wore a Vandyke beard, Morgan met them at the top.

"Mr. Geist, Mr. Tuttle," Calhoun introduced.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Tuttle," said Geist, offering his hand. "I——" He stopped and stared.

"Hello, Geist, old poy!" greeted Ritz, coming suddenly from The Padre's Hope. "Velcome to our city!"

"Well, this is a surprise," remarked Geist coldly. He glanced frowningly from Ritz to Calhoun, then to Morgan. "I wasn't prepared, Mr. Tut——"

"Aw, cut oudt der foolishness, Geist," drawled Ritz. "Vat you goin' to offer us for der mines? Dot's der qvestion. Did you come vay oudt here und climb dis pyramid to say 'I vasn't prepared?'"

"I didn't know you were to be here," Geist kept on coldly.

"Und I didn't know you vas to be here, Geist. But here ve are. Der mines und everyt'ing iss goot. I haff made my offer. Now you."

"I think I shall deal with Mr. Tuttle." Geist turned his back to Ritz. "I'm sorry, Mr. Tuttle, that you neglected to mention that you were letting the Grover A. Allen firm consider this purchase."

"To tell the truth," Morgan replied uncomfortably, "I didn't mean to raise a row. I wrote to you, thinking you were with the Grover A. Allen Company."

"Not any more," put in Ritz. "He vas vonce, *aber* now dey got me."

"I've been with Culver & Company for three years," explained Geist, ignoring his competitor.

"Now, let's quit quarreling," suggested Ritz, "und get down to pusiness. If everyt'ing iss goot, Geist, vat you pay for Tuttle's holdings?"

Geist smiled. "Do you take me for a fool, Ritz?" he asked, arching his dark brows.

"I know vat you giff, Geist."

"Oh, do you? What?"

"Just vat your people paid for der Palinqua Chief, ven you were mit my house."

"You're exceedingly clever, Ritz."

"Vell, I ain't denyin' dat, Geist. Anyvay, I offered Tuttle seffen hoondert und fifty t'ousand dollars for der entire holdings, including about t'ree hoondert pounds of goot chems. Can you peat it, Geist? Pecause if not, I vant to close der deal und get pack to New York."

Geist paled a little. "Is this right, Mr. Tuttle?"

Morgan hesitated, then said: "Yes, that's his offer."

"And if I don't raise it, you'll accept?"

Again Morgan hesitated, but in the end confessed that he would.

Geist was thoughtful a little. "I'll have to look things over," he said at length, "before doing anything definite. Then I'll have to wire my house. To be frank, seven hundred and fifty thousand is my maximum. It may as well be known now as any time. I can't go over that figure without instructions."

Ritz roared with laughter. "More as I expected, Geist! More as I expected. *Aber* Tuttle can't vait till you get your instructions. By der time you vire pack and forth und tell each udder everyt'ing und make arrangements for der money, Calhoun's ranch vill be *aus gespielt!* Ha-ha! Afterward day might vait und get more money for der mines, *aber* dey vants der ranch vorse.

"Vell," Ritz continued, "I know you go der limit, Geist, ven you look t'ings ofer. Der mines iss goot—der chems are beautiful. Geist, it vould be a shame to name dot beautiful stone geistite. Geistite! It tvists your face all up to say it. Rotten! R-r-ritzite iss a goot name. It make dot chem famous, Geist. Geistite! Ach! So, Geist, I giff seffen hoondert und fifty t'ousand und fifty dollars. Now you! Let's see if you vas pluffing."

Geist's face flushed with anger. "Seven hundred and fifty thousand is my limit," he said. "I told the truth."

"*Aber* can't you be a sport, Geist? Dat's my limit, too. I offer fifty dollars oudt of my own pocket to keep dot beautiful chem from being called Geistite."

Geist turned angrily away. "If you can wait, Mr. Tuttle——"

"Mr. Ritz has told the truth." Morgan smiled soberly. "We must have the money immediately."

"Then, Mr. Calhoun, if you will take me back——"

"Goot-by, Geist!" called Ritz. "I giff you maybe a ritzite pin for Christmas. Tuttle, help me down der pyramid, und ve draw up a vat-you-call-him—contract."

And that was the last of Algernon Geist. He had not been ten minutes at the mines, and he went away angrily without having seen Sligo Ryan, his old friend. Which disturbed that amiable Irishman not a little.

Calhoun called back as he led the way down the trail:

"Be over after you and Mr. Ritz in the morning, Morg. We may as well go on down to San Diego and clean everything up at one fell swoop."

"All right—we'll be ready," Morgan shouted back.

When Mrs. Ormiston's letter arrived it explained much of the Ritz-Geist misunderstanding. She had gone with the stone to the Grover A. Allen Company and asked for Mr. Geist. On being informed that Mr. Geist was no longer in their employ, she had naïvely concluded that the more she advertised the gem, the better. So she showed it to the Grover A. Allen Company and explained everything. Then she went to Culver & Company and saw Geist, craftily neglecting to mention that she had shown the sample to the competing firm.

Ritz himself explained the rest. He had never seen the spodumene until he was led to the pile in the supply tent. He had been out of the city when the sample was shown in New York and had been ordered to Palinqua by wire with license to outbid all competing buyers.

In the cabin that night they drew up a temporary agreement regarding the sale and the consideration, which was witnessed. Ritz promised to have an initial payment of two hundred thousand dollars in San Diego a week before the fateful third of January. He and Morgan planned to leave early next morning for the rancho and later go to San Diego to close the deal.

Morgan and Neosho sat under a cloudy sky that night, sleepless, planning their future. They were awake when, near midnight, it began to rain in true California style, which means that no one had thought of such a thing occurring.

When they arose next morning Nameless Creek was a rampageous torrent. Morgan knew what effect this would have on the slough.

Up in the sagebrush hills five wet men shivered pitiably, but dared not build a fire there and dared not leave their lookout post to build one back in the forest. Strange happenings were taking place down below, and they had reached the obvious conclusion that the two men dressed in city clothes had come to buy the mines. If the quintet were to prosper, whatever they were to do must be done quickly or their chance would be gone forever.

"Dey left de stones up in de pocket to show dat elephant," growled Froggy Fisk," and never took 'em to de cache."

"I ain't agreein' with you, ol'-timer," observed Bill Dover. "They ain't no cache. The rocks are in that tent where they took the big hombre when he rambled into camp. An' if we're gonta get 'em, we gotta do it pretty soon and get outa this rain. If we hang around too long, the *sienega'll* get soft, an' we can't get our hosses out. I know this country! We gotta get those gems today, or to-night—that's all."

"*Muy peligroso*," reminded Torcido with a shrug.

CHAPTER XXV.

R-R-R-RITZITE AND RAIN.

"WELL, Mr. Ritz," said Morgan after breakfast the morning of the fifteenth of December, "we're prisoners for a time. Calhoun won't come for us to-day." And he went on to explain about the wet land between Nameless Cañon and the road to the ranch.

It was still raining gently, coming straight down.

"Dot's fierce," complained Ritz.

They boxed the gems for shipment that morning. Morgan had recommended Sligo Ryan as a good superintendent, and Ritz had doubtfully decided to leave him in charge of the camp while they were settling the deal in San Diego.

Up in the sage five pairs of avid eyes watched the boxing of the gems and realized that some new move was being contemplated down below. The quintet doubted if the owners of the gems could get out across the *sienega.* That meant that they would try traveling over the mountain. And they could ask for no better chance than this would offer.

It did not clear off that afternoon. But the heart of the saddle tramp was light for all the heavy clouds. He was sipping the sweets of achievement and eagerly looking forward to more. Fortune had flipped her apron and showered wealth upon them. Surely it would take more than this petty downpour to dampen the spirits of the saddle tramp.

The rain ceased that night. Next morning the sun shone a little. But heavy clouds were mobilizing over Opaco, and by ten o'clock it was pouring once more.

"*I* can get out any time, of course," said Morgan to Neosho. "I can wade that slough if I sink to my waist. But Ritz!"

Mr. Ritz was taking his imprisonment with equanimity.

"My people t'ink I'm tead," he would say with a chuckle. "But ve get oudt some time, Tuttle. Ve get you dot money in time, you pet. I vade dot mud puddle, I pet you, if der vurst comes to der vurst."

"You couldn't go fifty feet," Morgan gloomily told him.

"I? I bet you I vade pretty goot,

Tuttle. You vait. I got lots o' determination."

On the afternoon of the twenty-second, with the rain still falling, Morgan, muttering something about a straw and the back of a camel, went down to the mouth of the cañon. Testing the slough barefooted, he decided that he might get across. But Mr. Ritz was the one they must get in touch with the world, and Ritz was the one who would have sunk exhausted before he had dragged his great bulk half a mile through the clinging mud. Then, there was quicksand to be reckoned with.

Morgan turned back up the cañon with a sigh, to find himself facing Beaver P. Calhoun, astride the big black Tovit had ridden when he conducted Morgan and Neosho to Pio Estrada's hacienda.

"Hello, Morg! Think it'll rain?"

"Well, where did you drop from?"

"Top of Opaco. Hoofed it up yesterday and spent the night with old Pio. It's over the mountain for Ritz, I reckon."

"But it's a case of hoof it down the other side, isn't it?"

"It certainly is, Morg. A horse c'n carry him as far as the dam site, then it's a plunge down through the jungles for fifteen miles. How long's it gonta take Ritz to get that money from New York?"

"He tells me now," said Morgan, "that he can have it telegraphed as soon as he gets out. Take two days, perhaps. You can bet I'd have got him out some way if we were obliged to depend on the mails. At first, you know, he intended to have it come by letter or express."

"Why can't I take his message back with me over Opaco and forward it right away?" suggested Calhoun.

"We'll try him out," said Morgan.

They walked along in silence for a hundred yards, Calhoun leading the black; then Morgan asked: "What's new?"

"My partners were down feelin' again the other day. They smell some disturbance over this way. That man Geist, on his way back, stopped to look over his company's mines at Palinqua and let the cat outa the bag. So when Graham and Bush camped at Palinqua for lunch the other day they heard the news."

"Mm," muttered his listener. "Well, it can't hurt us any."

"Only it robs us of a neat little surprise we mighta sprung on 'em. Now," Calhoun broke off, "if it don't clear up by to-morrow, you better not take any more risk. It may take a week to move that big exhibit over the mountain, and you better start at once."

When the two reached camp Ritz greeted Calhoun with: "Ach! Vere you come from?"

"Oh, I swooped down from the mountain, Mr. Ritz."

"Dot's der pig mountain! You come ofer him?"

"Sure!"

Mr. Ritz sighed heavily even at thought of such an undertaking. "Vell, you got dot town made yet, Calhoun? Maybe I vant to move der old lady und der kids oudt here, since ve got der mines. You convince me, I puy."

"Just to show you my heart's in the right place," said Calhoun, "you get outa here in time to clear the money proposition for us, and I'll deed you your pick of a home site in Calhoun for one dollar."

"Py golly, I climb dot mountain, *aber* I vin dot bet, Calhoun! But say, if ve have to do dot, how 'bout my chems?"

"Oh, we can leave them here till we get back," Morgan put in.

"Not! Dose chems go to New York at vunce. V'y, we don't got a chem in der house. Culfer & Company got 'em all."

Morgan frowned. "You could ride a horse, then, and we could pack the gems. It's a pretty big load, but I think we could handle it. But you don't understand, Mr. Ritz. We can ride only to the top of the mountain. We'll have to walk down the other side. There's no trail."

"I can't valk!"

"You were going to wade through the slough. That's far worse."

"I vade through slough on my feet! Not on your life! I meant dot I vould vade through on dot burro-mule. You don't take me for a frog, do you, Tuttle?"

"I thought you understood, Mr. Ritz. No horse even could carry you across that *sienega.*"

"Vell, I can't vade—dot's a pipe-cinch. Ach, dis country!" Mr. Ritz shook his enormous head. "Maybe I sacrifice myself und valk ofer der mountain," he said, "but der chems got to go mit me."

"Morg," put in Calhoun, "I think maybe your burro and a horse c'n get down with the load, if you and Tovit go ahead with axes. I'll ask Tovit what he thinks about it, and I'll have him guide you folks." He turned to Ritz. "There's no tellin' what else may come up to keep you folks back. You may break a leg goin' down or be kept back in a dozen ways until the last minute. Now why not write a telegram, tellin' your folks the deal's practically closed, and tellin' 'em it'll take two hundred thousand dollars to clinch it. I c'n wire it for you. That'll prevent trouble at the last moment, if you folks run into another snag."

"I don't know, Calhoun—I don't know." Ritz shook his enormous head seriously. "It ain't pusiness. Dot money's got to come to me—R-R-Ritz."

"Let her come to you! Tell 'em to wire it to you at San Diego. You're sure they'll do it?"

"Oh, yes! Dey opey me like a dog. But dot's lots o' money, Calhoun. I vant to send dot message myself."

"Now be reasonable, Mr. Ritz. You know our fix. Certainly I'm a man of some standing. I couldn't afford to be crooked for——"

"Ach, I ain't insinuatin' dot, Calhoun! But I better send dot message. Don't you vorry. I like you fellers. Pesides, I got to vin dot house lot. Ve be oudt, I bet you, in two days. Hey, Tuttle?"

"I hope so," replied Morgan and led Calhoun out of the tent.

"He's a tank-head," growled Calhoun. "If the rain don't let up to-morrow, Morg, lift him outa here."

"Oh, I'll lift him," prophesied Morgan and snapped his teeth.

"Now I'll eat a bite, I guess," said Calhoun, "and get back. I'll look for you, then, in a very few days. But if you're kept right up to the last minute, shall I go on down to San Diego, say about January first, whether you folks are out or not?"

"Yes, you'd better go on down if we're kept back to that date. But, now, look here," Morgan went on in a tone of earnestness, "what will happen if we fail to make it?"

"Well, son, here she is in a nutshell: If I can't hand The Ravenscroft Company one hundred thousand dollars, plus the interest due for the last quarter, on the third of January I lose the ranch and all I've put into her."

"Then," said the saddle tramp, "I'll have to get Ritz there on time. I've thought all along that perhaps you had something up your sleeve—something that might save us even if we didn't come up to scratch with the money."

Calhoun's bright blue eyes began twinkling, and the crow's-feet danced to their corners. "I ain't sayin' that, if the money wasn't there on the dot, I wouldn't try to convince The Ravenscroft Company of the evil o' their ways," he drawled.

Every day until the twenty-ninth of December the sky looked as if it were going to clear, then clouded up and poured rain again. This kept Morgan undecided. But on the twenty-ninth it settled down in earnest and poured steadily all day long.

"Over we go to-morrow morning, Mr. Ritz," Morgan ruled bluntly.

Mr. Ritz sighed heavily. "Vell, maybe you're right, Tuttle. I ain't disputin' you. I make a pluff at it, anyway."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE START FOR SAN DIEGO.

THE saddle tramp had by no means forgotten the half-breed, Torcido, and long ago told Calhoun what little he knew about him. But he had refrained from worrying Neosho by speculating with her over what had brought the spy of the mission roof into the Fresco Cañon country early in October. Furthermore, the days that had just passed had been intensely busy days, and he had had enough on his mind to cause him to exclude all trifling puzzles.

Now on the night of the twenty-ninth of December, however, with the gems all boxed for shipment, and nothing ahead but the stern trip over the mountain, he took cognizance of past events and wondered that he had seen Torcido only once in that part of the country.

He was seated alone in his tent, smoking in the flickering candlelight. His brows drew down. It seemed strange to him now that the half-breed had not appeared again. If he knew anything of the lost mines he had not forgotten it, nor would he have given up trying to find out more.

"Don't like it; don't like it," he mused. Then he rose and went to the tent pole on which hung his cartridge belt and two holstered, ivory-handled six-guns of the old single-action type.

It is strange that many old-time gun-toters do not take kindly to the new automatic pistol. Neither did they espouse the double-action revolver when it was new. There are many who cock a single-action revolver simultaneous with the draw, and their first shot—well, Morgan Tuttle, for one, had been trained in the school where second shots are not taken into consideration. If you are quick enough to shoot first you get your man with the first shot. If you fail to do this, there is no opportunity for a second shot, for in the meantime he has got you.

The saddle tramp carefully cleaned and oiled the heavy old .45's and fondled them lovingly.

"I thought," he said, "that I'd lay you boys away when I got Neosho and settled down to ranchin'. Maybe to-morrow you'll sing your swan song. And if you do, sing hearty."

At seven o'clock next morning the little party started through the rain—Neosho, Ritz, and Morgan.

Mr. Ritz in a yellow slicker rode El Caballero Loco's big sorrel. Neosho brought up the rear on Governor, her .38 hanging at her hip. Not until the last moment had Morgan dreamed that she would go. He had tried to dissuade her; but she had fervently pointed out that to see the end of her father's difficulties was something she had craved so long it would take more than rains and a mountainside to cheat her of the satisfaction. As Lucifer and the burro, Mono, were packing the gems, Morgan walked.

He guided them round the toes of the mountain, keeping to the level though muddy land at the edge of the slough. The party was approaching the long, sage-covered spur when Mr. Ritz uttered his first complaint.

"Py golly, Tuttle," he remarked, "I don't know 'bout dis horsepack pusiness. Dis horse he valk so long, kind of, I schlip pack und forth fierce. I

bet you I get pretty stiff, Tuttle. I don't ride a horse since I vas a poy."

Morgan laughed sympathetically but made no comment. There was nothing to say. Ritz had begun to feel the saddle even sooner than Morgan had expected. Grave doubts as to how Ritz would stand the steep mountain trail assailed him.

The big fellow had nothing more to say for an hour. They had gone through the passage between the large bowlders, beyond which Morgan had found Neosho camped when they were trailing Mariposa and Pio Estrada's son. They were clambering up the steep trail beyond this spot, when Ritz suddenly burst out:

"Py golly, it's fierce! Tuttle, vot you say ve vait a leetle?"

Morgan stopped and looked back over the pack animals at Mr. Ritz, squirming in the saddle, his face twisted with deep concern.

"We might rest a time," he gave in. "But we mustn't make too many halts, or night will get us in the forest."

Morgan went back and helped Ritz to dismount. His legs were trembling visibly. He rubbed them and walked back and forth a little.

"Sit down a while," suggested the saddle tramp. "I'll go ahead a ways and see how the trail looks."

As he started forward Neosho spoke to him in a low voice: "Morgan, why don't you hang those heavy forty-fives over the fork of my saddle?"

He had been expecting this from her and dreading it. Still it was better that she understood, perhaps. He looked up into her eyes and saw that they were troubled.

"I understand, Morgan," she said. "You'd not be foolish enough to walk and pack those heavy guns because you love them. Tell me: Is it Torcido?"

He nodded.

"I've been thinking of him, too, and his nonappearance since that first time. It's queer. I'm glad I came."

"I'm not."

"Don't worry about me," she said. "If there's any trouble ahead, you'll be glad I'm here. Go ahead and see if you can scout out anything. I know that's what you had in mind."

He nodded his head and walked ahead along the trail. Neosho hitched forward her holstered Colt, and her slim brown hand lay close to the butt of it. Her face was a little paler; her lips were set. Her dark eyes flashed quick glances here and there through the trees and rocks and brush beside the trail.

Of a sudden she saw the big blue eyes of Ritz, who was sprawling over a trailside log, fairly starting from the pouches of fat about them. Quick as thought she knew that the dreaded moment was upon them—that Morgan's leaving had precipitated the climax.

With a lightninglike movement her right hand flew to her gun. Ritz had half risen, his big head thrust forward, his eyes the picture of terror.

Neosho's Colt leaped out, and she leaned low in her saddle, searching the woods for what Ritz was seeing.

Then, from behind her, a rope fell neatly over her head and shoulders. There came a swift jerk, and her arms were pinioned to her sides. At the same time a masked man, running low bent, darted from the trees with his six-shooter covering Ritz.

The lariat was being drawn tighter and tighter about Neosho from behind. With great presence of mind she flipped both feet from the stirrups, at the same time wriggling back over the cantle of her saddle. She lifted a booted foot and set it against the rear-end of one seat jockey and gave a quick push. Back over Governor's slick rump she went skidding, reckless of a fall. Her actions were designed to bring slack in the taut lariat before it could be taken

up again, and thus bring her gun hand into play.

Governor leaped forward as she slid to his rump, and this aided her purpose. Down over his tail she skidded to the ground. She fell on her back. The rope had gone slack. She flopped over like a fish, and next instant her .38 sent a stream of fire at two more masked men, one of whom was frenziedly trying to take in the unexpected slack in the lariat.

"I told you to look out for that girl!" yelled one of the men as he staggered back and went reeling about drunkenly, dropping a six-shooter from fingers that had gone suddenly useless.

Again the girl's .38 roared, and a bullet went ripping through the leaves beyond the other masked man, who held the lariat.

Neosho knew that she had missed, for the man regrasped the lariat and began running with all his might into the forest. The rope went taut again just as Neosho's third shot rang; her aim was ruined. The man dodged behind a tree, and, pulling with all his might, with the tree trunk for leverage, began dragging her over the ground. Desperately she held on to her gun, though the tightened noose had pinned her arms to her sides again. She tried to struggle to her feet, but the man with the rope fought this move by hauling in rapidly.

From the trail ahead came Morgan's shout. A third masked man ran from the trees and joined the rope-puller, adding his weight and strength. The helpless girl was now dragged swiftly from the trail, over stones and roots.

Then came pounding feet and the clatter of hoofs and shrill whistles. A .45 roared in Neosho's ears. Her speed slackened as one of the men loosed the lariat, threw up his hands, and staggered back. Again the saddle tramp fired. His target had been small—merely the arm and shoulder of the first rope-puller showing from behind a pine. But to the man's shoulder the bullet went true. The man was spun about from the impact of the heavy missile, reeled into plain view, and fell on his face.

The two-gun man crouched and waited, both .45's held ready for the man to rise, all the time whistling shrilly. But the wounded man did not rise. He had crept off through the brush, never raising himself from the ground.

Neosho had struggled to her feet and shaken off the rope. The saddle tramp, still crouching and watchful, darted glances at the sprawled victim of Neosho's .38 and the man whom he had shot off through the trees. Neither of them moved, and he straightened slowly.

"Morgan! The gems! Ritz!"

"Two of 'em got away with Lucifer and the burro," he said quietly. "I was whistlin' for Lucifer, but he didn't hear or couldn't break away. Ritz's sorrel was stampeded, too. Ritz is either dead or wounded. There he lies behind that rock."

From behind the rock that Morgan pointed out Ritz rose ponderously.

"Deat!" he gurgled. "I ain't deat, Tuttle! I vish I vas. My chems! Ach, vot a country!"

From a great distance through the forest came two faint reports.

"What's that?" cried Morgan. "Sounded like a rifle. Stay here, Neosho. You're safe now. I'm goin' to run toward those shots. They can't cross the *sienega* down below with the gems and the horses. Maybe I can corner 'em yet."

Hitching up his .45's he dashed off down the trail, unaware that Neosho was racing after him at the top of her speed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TRAPPED.

ON down the steep and rugged trail Morgan Tuttle's feet pounded, Neosho following him at a distance as best she could. After running for ten minutes, sliding over bowlders and plunging across steep cañons, the panting saddle tramp was drawing close to the little rocky nook in which he had overtaken Neosho on the trip up Opaco's side to quest for Mariposa and El Caballero Loco.

As he came closer to this spot, but while it was still hidden from him by the towering rocks about it, a shout rang through the forest and arrested his steps.

Morgan cupped his hand back of his ear and listened. Again came the shout, echoing down from some lofty eminence in the woods:

"Whoa, dah, Cap'n Tuttle! Dis heah's ole Tovit—firs' white man on de mountain! Ah got dem ole bandidos bottled up in de rocks below you-all, cap'n! Don' rush down dere!"

In absolute bewilderment Morgan stood still and listened to the echoes ringing away. Neosho, panting heavily, reached his side. He was too puzzled to scold her for disobeying his order to remain with Ritz.

She gulped for breath and cupped her hands about her red lips.

"To-vit!" she called. "Where are you, Tovit?"

"Dat you-all, Miss Neosho? Ah'm up heah in de rocks on de side o' de main cañon. Ah done got dem ole bandidos bottle up in dat li'l' cup in de watahcourse down dere. You-all come up dis a way, missy. Ah——"

Bang!

"Ah was tellin' you-all, cap'n, to sen' Miss Neosho up heah to me, suh, w'en one o' dem outlaws done try to run Tovit's blockade. He don' want to now, Ah reckon. Come on up, li'l' missy, an' we figger this thing out! You-all stay whah you is an' gahd de trail, Cap'n Tuttle, please, suh!"

The saddle tramp grasped Neosho's hand. "We'll have to look into this," he said. "Go up and find out what it means. I'll stay here, as Tovit ordered."

"But, Morgan," the girl protested, "if the bandits have stopped down there in the cañon, couldn't you whistle for Lucifer?"

"I could try it. He'd come on the jump if nobody is holding him. Ten to one the burro would trail him, too. That way we might get the gems back. But I hate to risk it. If they saw Lucifer breaking away up the cañon they'd try to pot him, and, next to you, that horse is about what I live for. No, go up and hear what Tovit has to say before we try that!"

Twice, as the girl struggled up the hill, Tovit's .30-30 spoke. The barking reports guided her, and after a time she heard Tovit calling again.

"Turn to youah right an' sneak along dat li'l' ravine," he instructed. "Don' show youah haid. Ah'm waitin' foh you-all right heah."

Neosho found the old negro flattened out behind a natural stone parapet, with his rifle laid through a notch. His eminence was a craggy overhang that gave a view of the creek below, plunging down its wild, bowlder-strewn cañon.

She crept to him, keeping her head below the parapet.

"How you-all, li'l' missy?" he greeted her, without removing his eyes from the straight and narrow path along the top of his rifle barrel.

"Jes' look down dere," he offered. "Dem ole highwaymen don' know jes' what to do." He chuckled gutturally.

Neosho found a niche in the rocks and gazed down into the cañon.

All about the little cup in the watercourse where she and Morgan had met

after three months' separation stood the towering bowlders. Both walls of the cañon were nearly perpendicular and tenoned with overhanging rocks. It was absolutely impossible for horses to get out of that grim inclosure except by following the cañon either up or down. If the hold-up men were in there, they now had their choice of traveling back up the cañon and facing the saddle tramp, or continuing on down to the narrow stone gateway, through which a rider could not ride naturally without scraped legs.

And now Neosho noted this gateway more closely and gave a little gasp of surprise.

"Why, Tovit," she said, "a big bowlder has fallen into the gateway!"

"Yes'm, Ah reckon dat's right!" Tovit chuckled. "Dat gate done close' to traffic, li'l' missy. Tovit he done close hit. Tovit—li'l' black rabbit dat scout 'roun' through de sage so quick an' mysterious. He done shut de gate."

"I can't imagine how you came to be here, Tovit. And tell me about that bowlder."

"Well, Mistah Beavah P. Calhoun, youah dad, he done tell Tovit to kinda scrooge roun' a li'l' an' keep his eye open while you-all on de trail. 'Better play safe 'count o' dat Torcido fella,' he say. Dat's about all to dat. So de li'l' black rabbit he snuk 'roun' an' see de tracks o' dese heah bandidos. But befoah he c'n git to Cap'n Tuttle an' you-all he heah de guns a-poppin', an' he know dey ain' no use.

"So, 'stead o' gittin' ovah dah, Tovit he run to de gate rocks. He know if dem bandidos git dose gems, dey make it down de cañon pretty fas'. Dey jes' natcherally got to get out dat way, he know. So Tovit he close de gate kerplunk an' climb up heah. An' w'en dose stick-ups come a-ramblin' down wid de gems, dey fin' de gate closed an' Tovit up heah sayin': 'Whoah dah, you-all!' wif his ole thirty-thirty. Da's all to dat."

"But how did you close the gate?"

"Dat Marse Pio's scheme. Yeahs an' yeahs ago, li'l' missy, Marse Pio he know 'bout de balanced bowlder dat hang jes' ovah de gateway, on top o' one o' de gateposses. It's bigger dan a wagon, but yo'-all could rock hit wif youah li'l' brown han'. Marse Pio done say:

"'Tovit, ef you-all put a iron bah under dat rock an' git hit goin' back an' forth, den give a big heave, she roll down between dose udder rocks an' close de gate. Time come, maybe,' he say, 'w'en we lak to close dat gate, Tovit, an' we jes' keep a piece o' ole iron pipe hid clost to lift hit wif.' An' Ah reckon dat time done come now."

"And they're in that cup and can't get out down the cañon?"

"Not wif de horses an' de gems, li'l' missy. Dey c'n climb one o' de walls o' de cañon dere own selves, but dey can't take none o' dem pretty li'l' stones along."

"But couldn't they unpack the horse and the burro and carry the gems, a few pounds at a time, down the cañon? It looks as if a man might crawl under the rock that you rolled into the gateway."

"A man kin, li'l' missy. But Ah got mah ole thirty-thirty aimin' right at dat gateway, an' hit don' look lak dose holdups lak to try hit any moah. Dey done tried hit twice an' got a li'l' rock-dus' in dere eyes. Ah jes' say 'Whoah!' an' press de trigger—an' dey don' wanta git t'rough dat gate."

"How many of them are there?"

"Dey's three of 'em. One of 'em's dat no-good Torcido. Firs' dey was two come wif de burro an' Cap'n Tuttle's snip-nose, an' dey fin' dereselves bottled up by de li'l' black rabbit. Den one moah come sneakin' down de cañon. Looks lak dat fellah done been hurt in de shouldah. He got his shirt

pulled open an' Ah see red. You-all done shoot dat po' white trash, Ah reckon. Dey ain't showin' dere haids down dere, an' dey got de hosses hid, too. Ah reckon dey havin' a big confermence."

"Tovit, you've saved our gems!" cried Neosho.

"Ah reckon dem gems jes' natcherally gonta stay in dat cañon, anyway, li'l' missy. Now you-all go down an' tell Cap'n Tuttle what de li'l' black rabbit do; an' fin' out what he say we do now. Ah'll stay right heah an' gahd de gate."

All excitement to report to the saddle tramp the story of Tovit's coup, Neosho withdrew from the little stronghold and soon was hurrying down to Morgan.

She found, on arriving in the trail, that Mr. Ritz, fearful of being left alone in the forest, had waddled down to the saddle tramp. He now sat beating his big head and pulling his hair and sputtering over the loss of his gems.

He smiled broadly once more when Neosho had finished her recital.

"Py golly, Tuttle!" he cried. "I gif dat feller a r-r-ritzite stickpin! Dis iss goot! Now vat ve do, Tuttle?"

Morgan Tuttle pondered. "I hate to risk old Lucifer's gettin' a flock of bullets under his skin," he said at length, "but I guess I'll have to. We've no time to spare to make war on those birds." He heaved a long sigh. "Well, here goes," and he placed two fingers to his lips, hesitated a moment, then sent a shrill whistle ringing down the gorge.

Breathlessly they waited. Then above the roar of the rushing water there came the deadened sound of a shot from down below.

Morgan groaned, but he whistled again and again; and soon, to his vast relief, they heard the frantic clatter of shod hoofs below them on the trail.

"Didn't croak him, anyway!" Morgan gulped as he spoke.

Then Lucifer galloped up to them, neighing and tossing his magnificent head as his eyes searched for his beloved master.

The three stared at him as he caught sight of them, whinnied shrilly, and raced on toward them.

"We might have known!" cried Neosho, as they caught sight of him and Morgan quickly went over the horse in search of a bullet hole. "They'd taken off the packs so they could get him and Mono through the gate."

"Of course!" The saddle tramp was angry at himself for his own stupidity. "There's not a scratch on him, thank Heaven! That means, like as not, that they got little Mono. He trails Lucifer like a dog. But his pack would be off, too. If they shot him, they did it for pure meanness. I think now we'll just take a little time, and——"

"Oh, Morgan, don't!" pleaded Neosho. "Let's have no more bloodshed. I can still see that man that I shot staggering about with his head hanging down!" She shivered. "If we can, let's get the gems and let them go."

"You couldn't have done otherwise," he said, trying to soothe her. "Well, I'll see if I can do as you say. If we can get the stones back, we'll let 'em get away across the *sienega* and the mesa. But if they've killed Mono——"

He broke off suddenly and turned to Ritz, handing him one of his .45's. "Can you shoot?" he asked.

"Py golly, I bet you I make an awful noise, Tuttle!"

"Then hide behind a tree and guard the trail. Drop the first man that tries to run up this way. Neosho, you sneak up to Tovit again and tell him that I'll circle through the trees and get on the other side of the cup where those gents are bottled up. I'll holler down to 'em

and tell 'em what we'll let 'em do and what we won't let 'em do. If a single one of 'em disobeys my orders, you and Tovit let him have it."

Neosho fled back through the pines and began scrambling up the hill. Ritz took his post behind a big fir close to the trail. The saddle tramp cut through the hills and cañons in the opposite direction to that taken by the girl, hurrying in a half circle toward the trap that Tovit had sprung on the outlaws.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MORGAN OPENS THE TRAP.

IT was nearly half an hour before the saddle tramp was crawling on hands and knees through low chaparral and rocks, to a point opposite Tovit and Neosho's position, from where he could look down into the locked cup in the cañon.

At last, wriggling cautiously now, he reached the frowning rim of the cañon side and could see down into the cup. Far up on the other side he saw the dull gleam of Tovit's rifle as it lay through a notch in his rocky parapet.

Down in the cup Morgan at once observed what was hidden from Neosho and the stanch black man. On his side of one of the gigantic bowlders that upreared itself from the cañon's floor stood several animals, and among them were Ritz's sorrel and Mono. The burro was tied to a tree, but the pack had been taken from his back. The saddle tramp breathed a sigh of relief over the safety of his shaggy little burden-bearer. He, perhaps, had started to follow Lucifer, but had been captured. The shot that he had heard, then, had been fired at Lucifer and was a miss.

Three men were huddled in the shelter of the bowlder, one of them with a bandaged shoulder. The saddle tramp decided that the band had followed his little party to this point, where they had left their horses and made headquarters. Then they had cut across the ridges and come upon the travelers from the northeast.

He settled himself behind a protecting rock and, cupping his hands about his mouth, startled the undecided trio below by a sudden shout.

Three faces were turned up toward him, and then he began speaking distinctly.

"Well, buckaroos," he said, "nice little piece of fly-paper you dropped down on, eh? Now listen: Maybe you've heard about me, and maybe you haven't. I deplore to be seemin' to brag, gents; but there are hombres who'll tell you I didn't learn to handle a smoke-iron yesterday afternoon. Furthermore, they might tell you that I kinda like to handle the things, and that if this was happenin' somethin' like two years ago there wouldn't be many hungry c'yotes in this cañon tonight.

"But there's a lady in my party, and she kinda puts a restrainin' hand on my enthusiasm over handin' you gents what's comin' to you. So I won't pull the trigger till just before it begins to grow dark. You'd get out, maybe, when it got dark, if I was to restrain myself as long as that.

"So here's the proposition, boys: Throw the saddles and bridles off your own caballos, so they can wander out and rustle their feed, and turn my jackass loose. Then lay your guns in a nice little pile where I can see 'em, and walk, one at a time, to the gate and crawl out under the bowlder that fell down and ruined your little play. If one of you even points a finger at either of those pack bags, I'll drop that gazabo in his tracks. There'll be three sixes and a thirty-thirty leveled at you as you walk out; there's no use to try goin' back up the trail, because that's covered by my big friend, Calhoun, and old Pio Estrada's son."

"You're a liar!" Bill Dover shouted

up. "Calhoun's gone out of the mountains, and Pio's kid is down below."

"All right, ol' hoss, we'll let it go at that!" Morgan retorted. "That bein' the case, it's likely you'll be goin' back up the cañon pretty soon. But before you start, just notice that hat layin' a little way from the gray hoss."

Morgan's six-shooter roared as he ceased speaking, and a neat hole appeared in the high, peaked crown of Torcido's Stetson.

"All right! Well, who's first to start up the trail?"

Down below the three drew together and held a hurried conference. Then Bill Dover lifted his voice to the saddle tramp.

"She's your pot, ol'-timer!" he called.

"I'm beginnin' to think the same thing, hombre!" the saddle tramp threw back.

A minute later the three were ready to depart. Their revolvers lay in a pile on the ground; their horses had been turned loose to graze.

"All right!" Morgan shouted down. "First gent!"

Bill Dover stepped out.

"Climb the air ladder before you start, amigo!" drawled Morgan.

The vaquero raised both hands above his head.

Morgan shouted across to Tovit: "They're goin' out down the cañon, one at a time! Let 'em go till you see a crooked move!"

"Yes, sah, cap'n!" the answer came floating back.

"Go ahead, you!" Morgan ordered Bill.

The vaquero stepped out and walked slowly to the narrow gap, where he stooped and crawled under the bowlder that had been wedged in by its crash from above. Under it there was little room to spare as Dover crawled through.

"Next gent!"

Froggy Fisk, the tramp, the man with the bandaged shoulder, followed Bill and disappeared. Then Torcido, holding his hands above his head, trailed after Fisk.

But just before the half-breed ducked under the obstructing bowlder he cast a taunt up at the saddle tramp:

"*Muy peligroso,* eh! Me I teenk annudder time maybe I get you."

"When I'm not otherwise engaged, any old time, ol'-timer!" Morgan told the breed as he darted under the great stone.

After five minutes Morgan called across to Neosho and Tovit:

"You two climb down and get the guns and throw the packs on Mono and one of their *caballos.* I'll watch out for funny business."

Morgan's shouted order had been designed to lead the departing highwaymen into the belief that he himself would remain above the cañon and guard his friends from there. Instead, as Neosho's and Tovit's figures appeared over the parapet on the other side, the saddle tramp went slipping and sliding down his cañon wall and reached the floor of the cup ahead of the two, darting at once to the gateway. But the beaten trio made no attempt to turn the tables.

Neosho and Tovit hastily collected the gems and threw on the packs, hazing the other animals up the trail. Morgan followed them fifty yards behind until they reached the waiting Ritz, who greeted them with:

"You got dat r-r-ritzite, Miss Calhoun? Dot's goot! Py golly, I got quite a leetle rest, didn't I? I pet you I ride ofer der mountain now in vun fell svoop!"

They changed the pack on one of the outlaw's horses to Lucifer's back and started on again. When they reached the two silent figures beside the trail, Neosho, trembling visibly, turned away her white face while Morgan made an examination. Tovit knew one of them

as a Peligroso Rancho vaquero, but the other was the tramp, Dutchy Bell, and was unknown to any of the party.

"We pile bresh ovah 'em," said Tovit, "an' Ah tell Marse Pio about hit. W'en Marse Luis come up de mountain Marse Pio git him to fix dese gen'men some way, Ah reckon. Ah guess dey got to be buried or go to a coroner —Ah don' know."

In spite of Mr. Ritz's bold assertion, he could not ride twenty minutes without demanding a halt, when he would scramble stiffly to the ground and bemoan his fate again. At noon they stopped for a rest which lasted two hours. Several times Ritz essayed walking during the afternoon, but each time he was confronted with the problem of "too much vind," and asked to be helped back into the saddle.

The outcome of it all was that night had fallen hours before the party reached the top of the mountain. Here, after a long trip through the dripping trees, with Ritz surprisingly quiet and not once calling a halt, they reached the sequestered hacienda of Pio Estrada, where a warm dinner and a warmer welcome awaited them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MEETING ON THE MESA.

THREE disconsolate bad men, covered with thin blue mud to their waists, sighed with relief as, just at sundown, they dragged themselves from the *sienega* at the foot of Opaco Mountain. Torcido, Froggy Fisk, and Bill Dover had been hours in crossing from Fresco Cañon to the Calhoun Ranch side, and many times they had found it necessary to drag one another from treacherous quicksand.

Being unarmed, they had avoided the camp of the gem miners. Now they were congratulating themselves on their deliverance from the Slough of Despond and on their further security, when two men suddenly uprose from the chaparral and approached them.

"Great guns, wot now!" growled the wounded tramp. "Dey look like bulls to me. Look at dere rags. How'd dose boids up dere get woid to de dicks? Got enough o' dis bad-man racket—me!"

To the vast surprise of the discomfited trio, however, the well-dressed men who had appeared so mysteriously, hurried toward them with no signs of hostility on their faces.

"Hello, Dover!" one of them addressed the cow hand. He was a fat little man with piggish eyes, and his overcoat collar touched his ear lobes.

The three halted suspiciously. Bill Dover looked doubtful. He knew the man by sight and by name, but had never spoken with him.

"You know me, I'm sure," said Mr. Albert Bush with a patronizing smirk. "I'm Bush, Calhoun's partner. And this is my associate, Mr. Nathan Graham."

Bill stripped mud from his leather chaps.

"Admire to meet you, gents."

"Like to have a word or two with you men," Bush went on. "Let's go over to the foot of the hill and sit down. We can talk while you scrape mud. Soft in there, eh?"

Bush and Graham wonderingly eyed Froggy's bandaged shoulder, but said no more until the five were seated on stones back from the *sienega*. Bush then passed a morocco case containing aromatic cigars, cleared his throat, and drew a long breath. Mr. Bush did not consider himself a bad man at all. Bad men robbed peaceful citizens at the point of six-shooters. Mr. Bush robbed peaceful citizens with obscure legal phrases and cleverly worded documents. He was hesitant over telling these really bad men that he knew they were such. He did not exactly

know whether bad men liked to be called bad men or not.

But time was growing precious with Mr. Bush and Mr. Graham. Bush made the plunge.

"You'll be surprised to know, Mr. Dover, that I am aware that you and your friends here—ah—er—have designs on a gem mine owned by—er—Morgan Tuttle, I believe the name is."

The three exchanged worried glances. There was not a gun among them. Froggy Fisk imagined he saw handcuffs bulging in one of Bush's overcoat pockets. All three wisely held their counsel.

Haltingly Bush went on to explain that he had overheard their plans through a crack of the miserable bunk house at Cactus.

"Now listen," he said smoothly as he became aware of the dark looks of the nervous trio. "That doesn't concern Mr. Graham and me at all. We have no desire to interfere in your affairs. In fact we—er—have certain designs on those people ourselves, and thought we might—er—make it worth you men's time to let us know how your scheme worked out."

After a silence Bill Dover said bluntly: "We ain't sayin' nothin', stranger. We don't know nothin'. But maybe, if you'll come clean, we c'n think o' somethin'. *Habla!*"

Mr. Bush began to *"habla,"* then, and gave a brief outline of the conspiracy to beat Calhoun out of his vast holdings. Gradually, as Bush proceeded, Fisk and Dover and the half-breed showed brighter countenances.

"So you see," Bush concluded, "we are anxious to know what you men accomplished over there on the mountainside. We imagined we heard faint shots hours ago. We'll pay you handsomely merely to tell us whether or not you succeeded. If you did succeed, Calhoun is as good as ruined, we think. If you did not—well, then, an eleventh-hour plan must be figured out whereby he'll be made to fail in producing the money on January third. Time is precious, and none must be wasted. Mr. Graham and I drove over here in our car to see if we could learn what was going on in the cañon across there. We've been watching for hours but have learned nothing, and we couldn't get across the slough."

"We did," said Dover thoughtfully. "What d'you say you gents take a little stroll around while me and my friends talk a bit? Maybe we can dope out somethin'."

"Certainly; certainly." Bush and Graham rose with alacrity. "But make it snappy. Every hour is precious to us."

Bush and Graham walked away to where they had left their car in hiding beyond the hill. After ten minutes had passed they climbed in and drove back to the holdup men.

"Well?" queried Bush eagerly, leaning out toward them.

"Wot's in it?" flatly asked Froggy Fisk.

"Depends." Bush grew businesslike and cautious. "If you'll tell us that you got what you were after, a hundred dollars."

"An' if we didn't?"

"Then we'll give you a chance to make good yet."

"Dose stones are gone now," observed Froggy recklessly. "Dey'll ship 'em from some boig by express."

"Then you didn't get 'em?" Graham's teeth snapped.

"Maybe not, ol'-timer."

"In that case, would ten thousand dollars interest you?"

"I'll say so"—from Dover.

"All right. You'll get it for the kidnaping of a big fat gem buyer named Gustav Ritz. Tuttle is hurrying him to San Diego, where he is to make settlement for the mines. We're sure of this, because in no other way can Cal-

houn plank down the money. If Ritz is not authorized to draw a check, he'll wire his New York house to telegraph the money to San Diego. The fact that they made such an effort to get him out is proof that he did not give Calhoun a check. So here's the thing in a nutshell: Gustav Ritz must not arrive in San Diego for the third of January. And if he doesn't there's ten thousand dollars for you men to split three ways. That's better than risking the handling of a load of gems, isn't it?"

"Boss man, it is," said Froggy Fisk fervently. "Prove dat youse c'n deliver dis big jack, an' tie yourself up so's youse'll have to deliver it, an' youse've hired t'ree mighty good plugs for dat performance."

Ten minutes later the five were rolling away in Bush's handsome car toward Cactus.

To be concluded in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

STOUT PERSONS KEPT FROM CAVES

A RECENT order, by which all persons having a waist measurement of more than thirty-three inches are to be excluded from the Crystal Caves, one of the attractions in the Sequoia National Park, California, is to be effective until further notice. The explanation for the restriction is found in an accident of a rather curious nature. A man of more than average waist measurement attempted to enter one of the caves, which is reached through a narrow crack between the rocks. He succeeded in pushing his way in, but he progressed to a point where he could neither go ahead nor turn back, and was held a prisoner between the rocks. After having been there three days without food, he lost enough weight so that forest rangers were able to free him by chipping away the rocks around him.

NEW TEST FOR THE PURITY OF GOLD

A NEW method of determining the purity of gold has been developed by the U. S. bureau of standards. An instrument is used which passes small sparks between two pieces of the gold to be tested. These sparks are photographed through a diffraction grating, and the spectroscopic lines appearing on the negative show impurities as small as one part in one million parts. This method is said to be faster, less expensive, and more accurate than the old assay method. It has proved that the one thousand fine of gold, which is the highest grade, is only ninety-nine and ninety-seven hundredths per cent pure.

LIVE-STOCK EXHIBITION IN SPOKANE

THE Western Royal Live-stock Exhibition, which was recently held in Spokane, Washington, was one of the largest and most interesting exhibits of its kind ever held in the State. More than three thousand pure-bred animals, the pick of the best herds in the Northwest, were assembled for the occasion, and the competing animals were valued at more than a million dollars. Three city blocks were required to house the horses, cattle, sheep, and swine that were shipped into Spokane. There were special days for stockmen from Montana, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia.

Silver Gray

By

Herbert S. Farris

Author of "The Precious Pack," etc.

"HE'S a grub walloper—just a no-good, boozing grub walloper—that's what he is," announced Suna's postmaster and storekeeper. "He's been in Alaska ten years, an' what's he done? Why, if he——"

"Aw, say, Sandy," protested "Overtime" Jones, "he ain't a booze fighter, that's a cinch. I know he got lit up a time or two, when he should've paid you something on your grub bill, but, after all, I'll bet you couldn't float a Siwash canoe in all the hooch he's licked up in his whole life.

"As for his bein' a grub walloper, well, it looks a little bit like you might be right about that, but you're not. Last winter, when most of you thought he was loafin' in his tent an' just punishin' his grub pile, he was out sinkin' holes in that claim of his. Yes, an' when he wasn't prospectin', he was out lookin' after his trap line. I know what I'm talkin' about, for I was on the trail at the time, an' I was snow-bound for a week at his place last winter."

As if this settled the matter Overtime Jones dangled a short, black brier pipe from the corner of his mouth. Then he whittled the exact supply of tobacco to fill it, from a plug which he drew from the pouch in his parka. But Sandy MacBane was far from satisfied.

"Sinkin' prospect holes in that claim of his, huh!" Sandy snorted. "An' runnin' a trap line! Say, he's got as much chance of findin' gold on that claim of his, or trappin' a pelt that's any good, as a snowball's got in Fresno, Californy."

"He don't owe you much, does he Sandy?" asked Overtime Jones.

"About two hundred an' fifty."

"That's no money. He'll drift in here some day with a black-fox skin, or maybe a silver-gray—something worth two or three thousand, an'——"

"Shut up, will you! I don't care what any of you say, I've sized him up as a no-good walloper, an' I'm tellin' you that he won't eat any longer at my expense—I'm through. I'm expectin' him in here pretty soon for another sled load of grub, an' I'm goin' to tell him where to head in. I'm goin' after him like a blind horse trottin' over a cut bank."

"You sure got a heart," said Overtime Jones sarcastically.

"Yes, I got a heart," was the quick retort, "an' that's why I'm always broke—stakin' every freak that blows into the country."

"But this is different—you know it is!"

"How's it different?"

"He's—he's gettin' old, for one thing."

"So's everybody else, for another thing."

"An' everybody's sickly like him, too, I suppose," rejoined Overtime Jones. "Why, last winter, when I stopped with him, the old jiggaroo would come into camp after a hard day, coughin' like a stern-wheel river steamer. He gets as weak as tea on a plate, an', after one of these spells, he looks like one more clean shirt would do him. Tell you what you do, Mac. Give him another chance, an', if he don't make the riffle, I'll pay you myself."

Sandy MacBane addressed the little crowd about the brick-red, sheet-iron stove. "Boys, do you hear that?" he asked. "Overtime says he'll pay if 'Old Man' Manners can't come across. Why," he continued, ignoring Overtime Jones completely, "any time I let any of you boys stand good for my bad accounts, you'll be pickin' bananas out of the snowdrifts, an' strawberries'll be growin' out of the glaciers. No, sir. I either credit a man, or I don't. An' in his case I don't."

Scarcely had MacBane delivered this ultimatum when Old Man Manners entered the store. Clad in a shabby, drill parka, he stood at the door for a moment, undecided. He was small and wizen, and he gave one the impression that he would fall to the floor if he took another step forward. Pulling a sled without the assistance of dogs had almost broken the old man. He went to the tiny window which opened to the store from the small coop of a post office. MacBane entered the coop and carelessly tossed out three letters.

"One from the girl?" he asked. "How is your daughter gettin' along, Mr. Manners?"

"Splendidly sir, thank you," replied the old man, scanning the letter he had hurriedly opened. "She is anxious that I come and live with her, but my interests in this country will prevent that for some time, I fear. I must stay in Alaska until I realize at least a few thousand from my claim, or until my affairs in the States develop sufficient to insure a competence for me."

From behind the stove came a subdued howl of delight. Sandy MacBane turned to the crowd angrily.

"You, Ted Towers!" he shouted. "I heard that joke you was tellin', as Mr. Manners came in, an' I want to tell you that I don't think much of it! If you want to spin yarns like that go to the saloon. I won't have it in here!" He left the old man and rushed behind the stove. "Say, you fellows," he said in a tense whisper, "I won't have any laughin' at Mr. Manners. If he thinks he's got a million in that claim of his, you let him think it!" After further admonishing them with a terrifying glance MacBane turned again to the old man.

"Now, Mr. Manners, what can I do for you?" he asked.

"Oh, yes." Old Man Manners leaned weakly against the counter, while he consulted a notebook. "I want a small order filled, and here's a list I've made out. It isn't much, for I can't haul very much on my sled today. The trail is too difficult. If it were only easier to keep them I'd purchase a few dogs for my sled, but they're such a nuisance. I'd much rather pull my supplies to the mine by myself."

"You're right about dogs," answered MacBane. "They're a pest, always howlin' an' eatin' their heads off, an' I don't blame you for not wantin' to fool with 'em. I see you overlooked

butter an' a few other little things on your list, Mr. Manners, so I'm puttin' 'em in for you. I know how it is when a man's busy—can't remember everything."

"Yes, yes. Thank you, MacBane. By the way," the old man continued, indicating a small bundle on the counter, "here are a few skins. Just apply whatever they are worth on my account, please. And, if you don't mind, would you give me a lift with these provisions? It's getting late, and I must reach the claim by dark, if possible."

MacBane saw the old man down the steep river bank to the trail, returned to the store and looked disgustedly at the row of grinning faces, half circling the stove. "Well, I got rid of the old skinflint at last," he said blusteringly. "If he'd asked me for another thing, I wouldn't have let him have anything. I'd a turned him down cold."

"Aw, you give me a pain in the gizzard, you old hypocrite," said Overtime Jones. "Say, you couldn't turn down the blankets on your bed; that's why you use a sleepin' bag."

Without answering, MacBane went behind the counter, took a worn cashbook from a shelf and proceeded laboriously to enter the items he had sold to Manners.

II.

All was bustle and confusion on the river front. The first steamer of the spring had arrived with the mail, and it was soon to sail. A long, snakelike line of miners wound out of the tiny post office and down the trail, jostling each other good-naturedly, as they waited for letters from the States.

Old Man Manners wormed his way through the door and, once outside, opened a letter. After reading his letter he took a small notebook from his pocket, carefully made an entry, tore the page from the book and, after folding it carefully, tucked it under the bit of rawhide which fastened a parcel he was carrying. He squeezed through the crowd at the door and up to the small wicket of the post office. He shoved his bundle through to MacBane and left the store without a word. With head high and shoulders thrown back he walked up the gangplank aboard the steamer, where he took his place at the rail with the other passengers. At last he was bound for civilization, the "big outside."

The mail distributed at last, Sandy MacBane entered the store. The usual crowd of loafers watched him curiously, while he laid the small parcel on the counter, preparatory to unwrapping it. The note fastened under the rawhide caught his eye. The old Scotchman glanced at it hurriedly, then a puzzled look spread over his shrewd face.

"Listen to this, boys," he said.

"MR. SANDY MACBANE,
Suna, Alaska.

"DEAR SIR: I have just received good news from my daughter in California. My affairs have turned out really better than I had anticipated, and consequently I am leaving rather hurriedly. I wanted very much to thank you in person for your kindness in extending credit to me for the past three years, but this was impossible, as it would necessitate my waiting for more than three weeks in Suna, until the next boat arrives.

"I feel confident that the skins in the package I am handing you will more than cover my small account with you, but, in the event that it does not, if you will communicate with me, in care of my daughter, whose address you have, I will promptly make good any arrears. Should the balance be in my favor, please do not trouble to send it to me, but retain the same as a slight appreciation of your kindness to me. Very truly yours, JOHN H. MANNERS."

After laboriously reading the stilted note MacBane scratched his head in bewilderment.

"What do you think of that old walloper! Skipped the country, owin' me three hundred dollars!" Then he

turned to the package. "Suppose the old rascal left me a few four-bit ermine skins, an' thinks there might be some balance in his favor!"

Disgustedly he unwrapped the parcel. "Just as I thought," he ejaculated, "only, instead of ermine, it's the summer skin of an otter, worth about three dollars!"

Carelessly he tossed the otter skin aside, then stood transfixed at the sight that met his gaze. At his startled cry of mixed joy and surprise the little crowd of loafers joined him at the counter and looked with open-mouthed astonishment at the object in the bottom of the package. It was the perfect pelt of a silver-gray fox.

THE CRUMBLING WALLS OF ROBBERS' ROOST

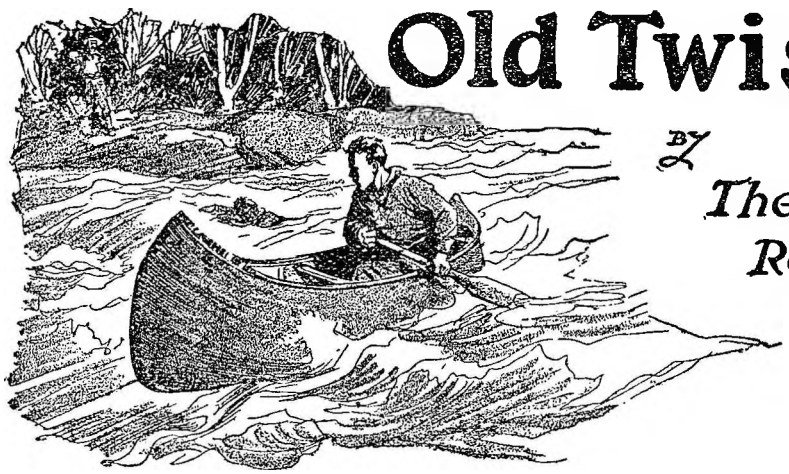
SOME fifty miles north of Clayton, New Mexico, on the edge of Oklahoma, near the southern line of Colorado, by the banks of a stream known as the Carrizo, stands the ruins of a stone structure, all that is left of Robbers' Roost, where organized bands of thieves held sway in the early days of Colorado and New Mexico. This ruin of bygone days is a stone structure some thirty-five feet long and sixteen feet wide, and its history goes back about sixty years.

About 1862 a company of desperate plainsmen, led by a man named Coe, began the erection of this building, half fort, half residence, known as Robbers' Roost. Whence these undesirables came is unknown, and their numbers varied as much as their characters. In the beginning Coe had as many as twenty men, but they dwindled in a short time to half that number.

The site of these highwaymen was well chosen. Fifteen miles to the south lay the broad Santa Fe Trail, stretching from Independence, Missouri, to the territorial capital of New Mexico. Along this road passed thousands of wagons with heavily loaded cargoes. Although these were generally well guarded, there were plenty of opportunities for surprise attacks, when the robbers carried off stock and merchandise. Northward, along the banks of the Arkansas, lay many ranches, and southward were many New Mexico settlements, with thousands of cattle, horses, and mules.

From far and near the Coe band would gather horses, cattle, and sheep. Then they would trail their stolen stock to far-away points in Colorado, Texas, or Wyoming, where they were sold. For four years they continued their depredations unmolested, and then the end came.

In 1867 members of the band descended on the Bernals, two brothers who had gathered a large number of sheep in this locality. They killed three of the herders and drove off toward Pueblo two flocks of sheep numbering more than three thousand head. On the strength of this last outrage reports of the band were carried to Fort Lyon. A man from the fort gained the confidence of Coe, and for a time worked with him. The leader never suspected that the man was a spy. A contingent of regulars from the fort, with a piece of ordnance, eventually reduced the robbers' fort. Most of the band were killed, but Coe himself escaped to the brakes back of the house, secured his horse, and fled overland to the upper Cimarron. After alternate riding and hiding he reached a ranch where he found temporary sanctuary. On the mesa north of the Cimarron he was surrounded and captured, and near the ruins of his old post he paid the penalty for his reign of lawlessness.



Old Twisty

BY

Theodore Roberts

THE worst piece of water on Baker's River is Old Twisty. In the seasons of spring freshets and autumn rains it shortens to a half mile of champing riffles and big eddies, with a leap and fall of black and white at The Jump, midway its length and fair in midstream. In the time of moderate water, which holds through the greater part of the summer, it is at its worst.

It then shows its fangs on every side, spins hundreds of new snares, beats hundreds of tons of water into white foam and blowing spray, tempts the unwary voyager with three disastrous channels, and makes of The Jump a crested curve of roaring green and white with a sheer fall of eight feet.

But toward the end of an extra dry summer its tricks lie exposed, uncovered by the dwindled waters. The three channels become the courses of three shallow, inoffensive streams, up which men drag their canoes fearlessly, lifting them from pool to pool, across silent ledges where once the riffles thrashed and tottered, and across empty pits where once the eddies span around their oily centers. The Jump, its roar thinned and fallen to a silver babble, is then nothing more formidable than a brow of black rock leaning above a four-foot ledge and a narrow basin of amber water.

Sam Pringle's place was on the north shore of the river, and just below the tail of Old Twisty. Sam and his wife had carved the farm out of the wilderness by hand. Under a wide roof of homemade shingles and between log walls they had raised a stalwart and God-fearing family.

The accomplishment of all this had occupied them from their twentieth to their fifty-fifth years. One by one, year by year, the sons and daughters had left the shelter of the log house below Old Twisty to make their own ways in the noisier but narrower life of the down-river settlements. Now only Annie May, the youngest child, was left to them beneath the roof of homemade shingles.

Annie May was seventeen years old; and now the danger of losing her to the busy settlements threatened the toil-worn pioneers. A married and prosperous sister at Milltown wanted Annie May to visit her for a year. Sam and the mother knew what that would result in, for the girl was strikingly pretty, bright and winning in manner, and had made the most of her opportunities at the little school down at Blue Bend. She would marry some far-away farmer, lumberman, or storekeeper, and they

would be left to face the long twilight in an empty house. The clearings they had made so long ago and cherished throughout so many hopeful years would lose their last meaning. Even the familiar and companionable voice of Old Twisty would flatten to strange and desolate notes.

But Sam and his wife were too heroic and fair-minded to try to hold the girl by so much as a hint of what her departure would mean to them. While she hesitated they did their best to appear cheerful and unconcerned. They hoped that love of them, known without words, might prove stronger than the new ambition that was astir in her breast.

And they placed some faith in the old spell of the brooding forests, sheltered clearings, and brawling river; but, most of all, they placed their hope in Barney Lear. It might be that Barney's devotion had made a deeper impression on the girl than her manner led her parents to suppose. But, even so, the girl was very young; and, doubtless, the Milltown bachelors far outclassed Barney Lear in smartness of tongue and attire.

Early in July a third letter came to Annie May from the married sister in Milltown. Sam brought it over from Blue Bend just before supper time. The girl read it, then sat very still, with the open sheet in her lap, and a light of uncertainty and longing in her clear eyes.

"What's the news from Kate?" asked the mother, turning from setting a plate of hot biscuits on the table. Her lips smiled but her voice trembled.

"She still wants me to go and visit her," replied Annie May.

"Be ye goin', baby?" asked Sam.

"I want to go—if you an' mother won't be lonesome—for a little while."

Sam paused in drawing his chair up to the table and looked around at his wife with a brave smile.

"Yer ma an' me was all alone when we commenced on this here farm," he said, "an' I reckon we can finish alone without kickin' none—if we try. What d'ye say, Polly?"

"I guess maybe ye're right, Sammy," returned the woman.

The three took their seats at the supper table, which stood in the middle of the wide kitchen, between two open doors. Through one door Sam gazed at the river, and through the other his wife gazed at the square, forest-girt clearings. Annie May glanced covertly from one parent to the other.

"I won't be away long," she said. "Only a week or two, I think."

Others had said the same; but Sam and Polly forced themselves to look as if they believed and were content.

After supper, as the three sat on the porch facing the river, old Sacobie arrived on the scene. Sacobie was a shiftless but harmless Maliseet. His shack was upriver, just beyond Barney Lear's new farm."

"Barney, he one darn fool," said Sacobie. "He go dig out trouble like Injun dig out musquash. Bah!"

"What's he doin' now?" asked Sam.

"He go get hisself made fish an' game warden. You know dat?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"Dis mornin' he start upriver to nose 'round where dem Gallop fellers has built one little shack. He get idee in his head how dem Gallops spear some salmon an' kill one cow moose, maybe."

"Then I hope he gets 'em," said Sam. "Barney's a smart lad, an' laws is laws."

"Dem Gallops smart fellers, too," said the Maliseet. "An' bad, too. Tom Gallop, he spend ten year in jug, one time, for shootin' one game warden. Bill, he one darn bad feller, too."

"Did Barney go alone?" asked Annie May.

"You bet. He axe Sacobie to come 'long—but Sacobie not fool 'nough for dat."

"Has Barney got a warrant?" inquired Sam.

"Nope; but he say if he find proof he not wait for warrant. His temper a'mighty bad nowaday, anyhow, like one ol' b'ar wid hornet in his ear. Dat a'right. He find Tom all alone, anyhow."

"All alone? How d'ye figger that?"

"Bill, he down acrost from my place, strippin' bark for one canoe. See 'im jes' one, two hour ago."

Next morning Annie May went upriver, following a path that twisted along the top of the wooded bank. She had plenty of time in which to prepare for her journey to Milltown, as the stage from Blue Bend to the nearest railway did not leave until the afternoon of the following day. She would give the morning to the woods and river; and, incidentally, she would see if Barney Lear had returned from his official trip upstream.

She liked Barney very well, though she did not agree with her father about his being smart. In fact, she considered him dull—a person of few words and a few mixed ideas. Mr. Sanson, of Milltown, who had once taught school at Blue Bend, was her ideal of a smart young man.

But she felt enough interest in Barney to be angry at him for having gone single-handed to investigate the activities of the notorious Gallops. She felt sure that he would fail to prove himself a match for those two. She even wondered how so dull and youthful a person had managed to get the job of warden.

Annie May had just reached the edge of Barney Lear's lower clearing when she met Sacobie.

"Dat young fool ain't back yet," said the Maliseet. "Guess he like de fish hawk dat stick his claws into one sturgeon heap too big for him."

"He is not a coward, anyway!" flashed the girl.

Sacobie accepted this statement with a pensive smile and a wag of the head. Annie May passed on until she came to a high brow of shelving granite and clinging spruces that overhung the river. From this point she had a clear view of the river and the opposite shore for several miles. She could see upstream as far as Squaw Point and downstream the whole smashing, roaring length of Old Twisty.

With the water at its present height the rapid was at its worst. The three disastrous channels showed plainly, black, narrow, and smooth with the darting smoothness of snakes. They were hedged and separated by the white and black of torn water and tearing rock. But the outside channels were deeply pitted with eddies, and both were lost, after a half mile of darting and twisting, in a chaos of leaping spray and rending snags. The middle channel was freer from eddies than either of the others, and its finish was clear and unbroken; but midway of its length it went over The Jump in a bellowing arch of green and white.

Annie May looked down fearlessly, even affectionately, at formidable Old Twisty. She was no more daunted by his terrific aspect and thunderous voice than by sight and sound of the brown, steady reaches above and below. Her earliest recollections were of the big rapid. She dreamed its ancient history, knew its modern, and was familiar with all its moods.

Three summers ago, in mid-August of the driest season the country had known for many years, she and Barney Lear had made a thorough investigation of the rocky course of Old Twisty. By wading and scrambling, they had reached The Jump and explored the shallow grotto and narrow ledge beneath it. On the ledge they had found a broken framework of bones, which Barney had identified as the skeleton of a lynx. Dead or alive, the animal must have

drifted down the middle channel and dropped through the arched roof of water.

It was then Barney had told her the legend of how Gluskap, the Maliseet demigod, had once lived for a period of three moons behind the leaping veil of The Jump, eating raw salmon and meditating the undoing of the Mohawks.

A canoe slid into sight around the green wedge of Squaw Point. Annie May advanced to the edge of her rocky perch and gazed eagerly upstream. She could see two men in the canoe, one sitting low and motionless in the bow and the other kneeling high in the stern and plying a paddle with a long, unhurried stroke. By the cut of his lean shoulders and the tilt of his wide hat of soft-gray felt she knew the man with the paddle for Barney Lear.

But the other? Could it be that he had arrested Tom Gallop? Could that be Tom Gallop sitting so resignedly in the bow of the canoe? A throb of pride darkened the delicate tinting of her cheeks.

The canoe approached at a good pace on the strong, brown current; and now the girl could see the barrel of a rifle slanting upward and forward in front of Barney and convenient to his right hand. She understood the other's air of resignation.

When the canoe was within fifty yards of Barney's landing place, silently and suddenly the head and shoulders of a man appeared above the low bushes of scrub willow on the opposite shore. The girl saw him on the instant, and knew that he must be Bill Gallop.

Then things happened with such astonishing rapidity that she was too dumfounded to cry out or move. The man on shore raised a rifle to his shoulder just at the moment that the men in the canoe caught sight of him. Tom Gallop got swiftly to his feet, faced his brother for the fraction of a second, and sprang into the river. The canoe whirled broadside to the current and almost capsized. Barney steadied it with a tremendous effort, swept its head around, and started after the swimmer and fair toward the man with the rifle. The water was so swift here that he could not afford to stop paddling and take up his own weapon.

Bill Gallop fired. A white splinter flew from the shoulder of the blade and the paddle slipped from Barney's numbed fingers and was swirled away. The canoe drifted broadside on to the head of the rapid. Barney leaned forward, snatched up another paddle, and brought the bow of the canoe around fair for the middle channel of Old Twisty. It was too late to make either shore! He must try to do what no other caoneman had done since the legendary age of Gluskap—beat Old Twisty at his worst.

Bill Gallop lowered his rifle and stared aghast. Tom, hip-deep in the swirling water, yelled between hollowed hands: "Quit yer canoe afore ye come to The Jump an' try to drop through."

Though a hardened lawbreaker and a careless man with a gun, yet it was evident that he did not want to see the young warden die in the grip of Old Twisty. Still shouting, he splashed ashore and ran along the tangled edge of the river, followed by his brother. On the north bank Annie May threw off the spell of horror and ran wildly downstream.

As she ran she saw the canoe darting straight down the middle channel, between the hungry, crashing lines of torn green and white, fair for the silver crest and arched fall of The Jump. She saw Barney lay his paddle inboard and quickly slip over the stern into the racing channel.

He clung to the stern of the canoe, then to the left gunwale a foot or two forward. He seemed to be working desperately, with a clear purpose in

view. Then he still had hope—still fought for his life against the terrible rapid!

The girl's heart took courage at the thought. The canoe tipped and took in a foot of water. Slowly, sluggishly, she veered around until she lay broadside to the current. In this position she raced down toward The Jump, as heavy and low in the water as a log, with Barney clinging to her amidships of the upper gunwale. She struck the ragged crest of the fall, hung there for a moment surging and leaping like a living thing mad with terror, then heaved upward, rolled over, flashed forward, and vanished. As the canoe went over The Jump, Barney Lear's head dropped from sight in her wake.

The canoe showed itself again below The Jump; but only for a second. Then it lurched heavily, filled to the shattered gunwales, and sank forever. The smooth, black channel was empty of any sign of the man!

After reaching the quiet water below the tail of the rapid, Annie May lay full length on the ground for a few minutes, panting to recover her breath. When she got to her feet she saw the two Gallops on the opposite bank. They gesticulated freely; and it was evident that they shouted, though the bellowing of Old Twisty drowned their voices.

Tom Gallop beckoned to the girl, then pointed up the rapid to the curved arch of The Jump. She understood that he, too, entertained the mad hope. And Barney also had thought of that one chance of escape—had quit the canoe and reduced the speed of its drift before reaching The Jump.

She had seen him struggling for a moment at the crown of the fall—and then he had slipped down from her sight. Had he reached the ledge? Had he obtained a foothold under that arch of roaring water? She knew that if any man on the river could accomplish it that man was Barney Lear—and this new, sudden realization of Barney's quality brought a surging of new strength to her heart and limbs.

Annie May dragged her father's canoe from the bushes, placed two poles and two paddles aboard, and launched it into the river. She paddled strongly across, drifting downward a few yards in the passage. Tom Gallop seized the bow of the canoe.

"Skip ashore, girl, an' give Bill an' me the loan o' yer canoe," he said. "There's the life o' a durned smart man to be saved quick, so hop ashore an' give Bill an' me a chanct."

"Do you mean Barney Lear?"

"Sure. Didn't ye see? We figger as how he's under The Jump thar—dead or alive—an' as 'twas us got 'im into the mess we mean to have a try at gettin' 'im out. Nerviest man around, that young feller!"

"I am goin' with you," said the girl.

Tom Gallop was a broad, swarthy man with a fierce mustache and daring eyes; but he looked as mild as Sacobie now.

"It's a man's job, sis," he returned, "an' ye'd best wait here an' let Bill an' me see what we can do. Mind ye, sis, 'twon't be no Sunday-school treat, this here goin' up the middle of Old Twisty an' forkin' Barney Lear out from under The Jump. I wouldn't take on the job for two hundred dollars 'cept that Barney an' me has got pretty well acquainted of late. Now, sis, come ashore like a good girl—for Barney's sake."

"You will do your best—both of you?" she asked tremulously.

"Sure we will!" replied Tom. "Don't ye go worryin' about that, sis. Full steam ahead at everythin' from bustin' a game law to savin' a game warden—that's Bill an' me!"

Annie May gazed from one to the other and was satisfied that the elder meant what he said and that the younger agreed with him. She relinquished the paddle and stepped ashore.

She looked upstream toward the flashing arc of The Jump, brushed a sudden dimness from her eyes, and looked again.

"Can it be done? Oh, can it be done?" she cried.

"We figger as how it can," returned Tom Gallop dryly.

Then they took their places, Bill in the bow and Tom in the stern. They paddled out to midstream and then headed straight up for The Jump. The water in the middle channel was from three to four feet deep. The bottom was of clean rock, grooved and fibered, but unbroken.

When the canoe reached the tail of the rapid, Tom laid aside his paddle and selected one of the poles. He stood up, found his balance with bent knees and braced feet, flashed the pole into the racing water, and surged steadily upon it with every ounce of his weight and every trick of his hard-earned skill. Bill, still kneeling, also exchanged his paddle for a pole. The canoe crawled forward a yard, hung motionless, then crawled forward again. And so, yard by yard at first, and then foot by foot, she gnawed her way up the middle channel of Old Twisty.

II.

Barney Lear crouched on the dripping ledge in the shallow cave under The Jump. The place was full of fine spray and a greenish-amber twilight. The twisted, sinewy, braided water leaped from the torn rock above his head, curved abruptly, and flashed down into a churning, boiling chaos not two feet from the edge of his crouching place. The mist of powdered water and the goblin twilight pulsed and vibrated with the terrible outcry of the fall. Barney crouched with his face toward the twisted, flashing barrier of white and green. He was bruised in a dozen places and his hands and wrists were torn. He was half suffocated by the spray and dazed by the tumult.

"Here I be," he muttered. "Here I be, right where Tom Gallop wants me. Maybe they'll find my bones, come low water. I'd better gone over with the canoe—and died quick!"

The convulsed water boiled up to the very lip of the dripping ledge. He lay flat and gazed down at it, remembering the day on which he and Annie May had waded out across the shriveled channels of Old Twisty and counted the imprisoned trout in the motionless, amber pool below The Jump. It was queer, he reflected dully, that the difference of a few feet in the height of the river should mean, in this particular spot, the vast and terrible difference between life and death.

It seemed to him that he had lain for a whole day on the dripping ledge, chilled to the bone, half suffocated, dazed, and deafened by the shock and tumult of falling waters. Then he was aroused by an amazing thing.

Something cut and scarred the living wall and fell to the rock close beside his left hand. It was the iron-shod end of a canoe pole!

The tough spruce sagged and trembled under the hammering of the water. For a few moments Barney stared at it with unmixed astonishment, then with dawning comprehension and hope. He leaned forward and felt along it with his bleeding hands as far as he could reach without endangering his balance. It seemed to be firmly held at the hidden end. He drew his hands back, squatted at the brink of the ledge, and breathed deeply. With a tremendous effort of will he suddenly plunged from the ledge. His hands gripped the horizontal pole at the same instant as the avalanche of water smothered him.

When Barney at last recovered consciousness and opened his eyes he found himself lying on the sun-warmed beach

below Old Twisty. Annie May Pringle knelt beside him and the two Gallops stood near.

"Guess we'll be steppin' along now," said Tom. "Bill an' me has got to get home an' do some packin'. Sis, here, can get ye acrost the river all right, I reckon. We want to find some country where the game warden's a skunk, so when we best 'im we won't feel mean about it afterward."

Barney felt far too ill and dazed to ask a question. The Gallops pressed his limp right hand.

"Take good care of him, sis," said Tom. "An' don't ye let 'im try runnin' Old Twisty again, for Bill an' me won't be handy to dig 'im out next time."

Then they strode away toward their distant shack on the upper waters of the river.

All this happened three years ago, and Annie May still lives within sight and sound of Old Twisty. Sam Pringle and his wife are not lonely, for it is no more than a pleasant walk from their place at the tail of the rapid to Barney Lear's place at the head of it. Annie May is too sensible a young woman to put on airs; but in her own heart she does not make light of the fact that she is married to a very nervy young man.

BEAR CHASES HUNTERS

A PARTY of mountaineers on a bear hunt recently had an exciting experience with one of the three animals they had come upon. Some fifty miles from Walla Walla, Washington, the hunters had killed two young cinnamon bears, and they desired to capture the third one alive. The bear had been treed by the hunters and dogs, and they decided to bring it down by a rope and wire lariat. A long rope was attached to the end of a wire, and two men went up the tree after the bear. The wire circle was finally slipped over the head and front legs of bruin and drawn taut.

Then the bear decided he would come down, and there was a race between the two men on one side and the bear on the other. The mountaineer continued to hold the end of the rope, and the bear followed it toward the man. He tried to sidestep, but failed, and the bear and the mountaineer mixed it on the mountainside for several minutes. The mountaineer lost most of his clothing and was covered with scratches before a bullet from one of the rifles in the party ended the battle. These same hunters on the same day secured a black bear, besides the three cinnamon ones.

LESS ILLITERACY IN NORTHWEST THAN IN ANY OTHER STATES

FIGURES recently made public by the census bureau show that Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, and Washington had less illiteracy among their native white population in 1920 than any other States. The native white population of these five States classed as illiterate—that is, unable to write—amounted to three tenths of one per cent. The District of Columbia had the same percentage, and South Dakota, Nevada, and Oregon ranked next, each with four tenths of one per cent. The State of New Mexico had the greatest illiteracy among its native white population in 1920. Among the foreign white population the largest percentage was thirty-three and eight tenths for Texas, and the smallest was four and seven tenths for South Dakota and Washington.

Before the Snow

BY

A. M. Chisholm

IF you journey three days down the Little Pigeon by canoe from the height o' land, you shall come at sunset—if you have had moderate luck with rapids and the like—to a huge pine standing by the bank of the river on a tempting little flat. It is towering, enormous, a giant of its kind, rough-barked and venerable. It is heavily topped, and standing beneath it you may look up at a dense canopy of dark green, with never a glint of sunshine or sky striking through. Occasionally its odorous depths are invaded by garrulous crows or chattering squirrels, or more rarely an aristocratic marten; now and then a questing hawk alights on its feathery utmost top; otherwise, it is devoid of the smaller life.

Under its bushy top the ground, carpeted with fallen brown needles, is always dry. Far below, reaching out thirstily, its roots drink from living springs and from the river itself. On every side, save riverward, the little flat on which it stands is sheltered by wood of smaller growth—maple, birch, poplar, alder, and willow. In the middle of a howling, midwinter gale you can light a match there unshielded, so complete is the protection.

Through this lesser growth run the game trails, winding through swamps, through second growths, through hardwood, over Norway ridges, dipping down and rising up until they become faint, less trodden, and finally vanish.

Following these forest highways come the forest folk, sometimes by twos and threes, but more often singly; seldom hurried, always watchful, preferring to travel up wind when they may, ever intent on their business, be it food, water, safety, or love-making. Up and down them stray the slim, graceful red deer; the ungainly, lordly moose; the pig-eyed black bear; an occasional mountain lion; and many a huge-pawed lynx and ghostly timber wolf, with a host of lesser quality—fox, rabbit, fisher, wolverene, skunk, and porcupine.

Coming then at about the hour of sunset—which is the time when the sensible man thinks of making camp—to the big tree and this little flat so manifestly intended by Providence to spread blankets upon, the chances are that you will make the suggestion over your shoulder to the man in the other end of the canoe. But if he be Felix Desjardalais or Onesime Charron or Flatfoot McCarty or Moise Stick, or any one of the native born who use the Little Pigeon, he will tell you that it is not a

good camping spot—which is manifestly a lie—and lean strongly against his paddle. And if you had eyes in the back of your head, you might see him bless himself hurriedly.

In the end you will camp after dark three or four miles farther on, in a spot which your judgment tells you is inferior in every way to the pine flat, and you will wonder why, and possibly ask why. And the chances are that Felix or Onesime or Flatfoot or Moise will either not tell you at all or merely lie again. But this is why:

Pierre Latour, thrusting strongly with stiffly outstretched arm and weight of shoulder on the paddle, swung his canoe around the bend above Burke's Landing and translated his satisfaction into purring blasphemy as the few log buildings that made up the Landing hove in sight. He laid the paddle across the gunwale and proceeded to fill his pipe leisurely, as one whose work is done.

The canoe, a light, roomy bark, was loaded to within three inches of the water and was consequently as unstable as a floating log. It was crammed with bundles, sacks, cooking utensils, tools, and traps; for Pierre Latour—better known as Latour Noir, from his exceeding swarthiness due to a dash of Indian blood, of which he was not proud—was down from the winter's hunt, and the canoe held not only his catch of skins, but most of his earthly belongings, since he did not intend to return again to the district in which he had just wintered.

For this there was a very good reason—namely, the suspicion of Baptiste Fish, a particularly vindictive and cunning old Cree, that Latour had, on one occasion, at least, robbed his traps.

There was no proof whatever of it, and there could be none. Baptiste had never even seen the silver fox whose beautiful robe was now carefully stowed in the canoe apart from skins of lower degree. Latour knew that, but he also knew that the suspicion would be good enough for Baptiste, who would in all probability shoot him if he visited that district again.

It was not that he was afraid. If he had greatly desired to trap there, he himself would have shot Baptiste, as a preliminary to peaceful enjoyment. But he considered that he had skimmed the cream from that territory; and in the event of a killing suspicion would point directly to him.

No, he reflected, eying the bale in which the fox pelt was carefully wrapped, he would not go back. He had trapped wickedly, wastefully as was his custom, fur-bearing female as well as male. But there was much country. When one place was exhausted, he would go to another. This one he would leave to old Baptiste. The leavings were good enough for a Cree. Perhaps next winter he would not trap at all, or, at any rate, not alone.

For there was Kathleen—Kathleen Burke, the daughter of Dennis Burke of the Landing—Kathleen with the great coils of golden-bronze hair, the cheeks of milk and wild roses, the eyes that mocked him waking and invited him softly in his lonely dreams through the interminable winter.

He had seen her grow from a slender slip of a child to a young woman, and he had made love to her after his fashion, bringing her moccasins embroidered with beads and dyed quills, garments of soft doeskin marvelously tanned, barbaric necklaces of claws and teeth, and even odd nuggets of gold that had passed from hand to hand among the scattered bands until their source had been forgotten, if it had ever been known. Also, he had given her choice skins of his trading and taking—glossy, shining furs, such as a princess or a queen might be proud to wear.

She had taken them and thanked him, and that was well. But when he would

have spoken of love, she had put him off, fencing, parrying, deftly turning the talk, so that he was baffled and half angry.

Now he swore to himself that he would have no more of it. He would give her the silver fox skin, and he would ask her to marry him, taking her in his arms and kissing her lips, and she would consent. If she did not—ah, but he was no foolish youngster to let a girl say no to him. He was Pierre Latour—Latour Noir, a man grown, and a dangerous one. Was there one within five hundred miles as strong, as swift of foot, as good a fighter, as cunning, and as fearless? No, there was not one.

And his estimate of himself was not too high. Never, since he reached man's estate, had he met his match among men. To a great strength and power of endurance he united the marvelous activity of a wild animal, and he was absolutely fearless.

Bred to the long trail from his babyhood, inured to hardship, seasoned to danger, cunning in the craft of the wilderness, owing a temper that flamed to white heat at a wrong, real or fancied; vengeful, capable of any cold-blooded cruelty, he was admired and yet shunned by the men of the woods. None trusted him; almost all feared him secretly; not one would hunt or trap with him. Therefore he wintered alone.

Burke's Landing was not imposing. It consisted of a few log houses merely. It was a tiny outpost of civilization, established some years before by Dennis Burke, who was at once storekeeper, fur trader, logger, prospector, and postmaster. And civilization seemed satisfied to allow the Landing to remain an outpost.

Year after year there was little change. The logs of the houses turned from yellow to brown, from brown to gray, checked with the weather, warped a little, settled a little. The years shot Dennis Burke's hair with silver, took toll of the spring of his muscles, added to his girth. They took his wife from him, but they saw his daughter grow into a backwoods beauty who wrought havoc with the hearts of the young men.

As the bow of his canoe grounded, Latour stepped carelessly overside knee-deep in the water, and waded ashore. Wet moccasins were nothing to him. He drew the canoe a little higher and began to unload it. Suddenly he became aware that he was not alone.

Only a few feet away stood a stranger, a great lean man with a mane of tawny hair. He was bareheaded, and his attire was the ordinary one of the woods—flannel shirt, belted trousers, and moccasins—but it was plain in half a dozen ways that he was no ordinary woodsman. His eyes were as chilly, hard, and blue as a clear arctic sky, and they were also proud, mocking, and carelessly insolent. The attitude, the poise, the eyes—all advertised the entire self-confidence and strength of the man.

As Latour straightened up and looked, he felt an instinctive enmity stir within him. He did not analyze it, he did not try to explain it, but he knew that he saw an enemy. Perhaps the stranger had a similar feeling. Their eyes met in a hard, measuring stare as they appraised each other.

The tawny man nodded, and to Latour the nod expressed condescension, which was an insult.

"Bon jour, mon ami," he said. "You have a heavy load."

"Not ver' heavy."

"Some furs, eh?"

"A few."

"If you have anything out of the ordinary, a black or a silver fox, say, I might buy it."

Latour glanced at him suspiciously.

How did he know of that silver fox skin?

"M'sieu' is a trader, hey?"

"No, but I will pay a good price for a good skin."

"I have one silver fox—yas," said Latour, "but I do not sell heem."

"You mean you have sold it?"

"No. But I do not sell heem."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not choose," said Latour, resenting the tone of the question more than the words themselves. "The skin he is mine, yas? Then I do wit' heem what I please."

"All right; eat it if you like," returned the other unpleasantly.

"I do not eat heem," said Latour. "A skin of the silver fox is not to eat. He bring moche monnaie, heem. Me, I do not need monnaie, so I give heem away."

"Well, I'll take it that way, to oblige you."

Latour laughed. "M'sieu' is mak' the joke. That skin he is for the lady w'at is to marry wit' me."

He announced it proudly. Not every man could give such a present to a fiancée. It was worth several hundred dollars, at the least. He felt that it would give him importance in the eyes of this stranger, whom he disliked. But the stranger threw back his head at the words, and emitted a deep-chested roar of laughter.

"M'sieu' laughs," said Latour softly. *"Et pourquoi?* It ees so fonnee, then! Or per'aps m'sieu' does not believe me?"

"I laugh at a coincidence, my friend."

Latour scowled. The word was strange to him, but he received the impression that it was an epithet, doubtless insulting, applied to himself.

"M'sieu'," he said, "I am not good man to fool wit', me!"

"Why, here is the coincidence and the joke," the other explained. "I wish to buy a skin for the lady who is to marry me; you wish to keep the skin for the lady who is to marry you. It is clear as noonday that one lady must be disappointed. The only question is—which?"

Latour smiled unwillingly, and responded:

"I have sorrow, but it mus' be the lady of m'sieu'."

"That," said the stranger, "I am not so sure of. I usually get what I go after, and if this skin is a good one I want it. Will you show it to me?"

Latour did so. The stranger stroked the glistening fur and nodded.

"The skin is prime. Put your own price on it."

"I do not sell."

"Double the price. I will toss a coin, cut a pack of cards, or play you any game you like for the skin against its double value."

"No," Latour refused stubbornly, though the offer stirred his gambler's spirit.

"Or I will wrestle you or fight you for it on the same terms."

Latour showed his teeth. "M'sieu', per'aps, does not know who I am. I am Pierre Latour—Latour Noir!"

The stranger did not seem impressed.

"My name is Roderick McLeod. You will take up my offer?"

But no. The offer was fair enough. He, Latour, had never been beaten. M'sieu' McLeod was big and strong. It would be a good fight. Men would talk of it for years. But he had not come to the Landing to fight, but for a softer game. A battered lover, even if victorious, made a poor wooer. The skin of the fox was necessary to him. M'sieu' would understand. Later, when his wooing was done, he would fight for the pure fun of it, to see which was the better man.

"Then it will be too late," said McLeod. "And I never fight without good cause. So it would seem that, after

all, I am not to have the skin. But suppose, Latour, your wooing does not prosper. Why look so black, man? There's many a slip 'twixt lip and lip, *mon brave.* True, also, that absence does not always make the heart grow fonder, and that while the cat is away the mice will play. The lady of your heart, Latour—la petite Corinne, or Suzanne, or Celeste, or Marie—she may by this time have another, a more favored lover. And then what will you do?"

"I kill heem," gritted the trapper. The airy persiflage of the other was like hot irons on raw flesh.

"But the skin, Latour, the skin! After you have slain the lover and cursed the faithless lady, will you sell it me, or play me or fight me for it?"

"Yas, I will tell you when that time comes," said Latour grimly. "You are one fonnee feller, M'sieu' Rodrique McLeod. You have some fon wit' me now, hey? I tell you again I am not good man to fool wit'."

"I'll have the skin yet!" cried McLeod. "Come, man! Play or fight for thrice the value of it, if you win!"

But Latour turned away, cursing. The mockery beneath the words stung him. This McLeod, so sure, so self-confident, with his lightly flung gibes—after he had settled matters with Kathleen he would reckon with him.

His canoe unloaded and the cargo safely bestowed, he made a complete change of garments, putting on the garb of civilization that cramped and hindered the free play of his great muscles and supple limbs; and thus attired for conquest, with the skin of the silver fox neatly parceled under his arm, he sought Kathleen Burke.

II.

Beside the window in the large living room of her father's house, Kathleen Burke sat and watched the sun sinking behind the low, pine-clad hills. Its glory touched the surface of the river so that the dark waters blazed with crimson and gold.

To the girl it typified the path of life as it lay before her illumined by the light of her first love. For she was very happy, and her daydreams were those of life's springtime, fairylike, delicate, pure, and beautiful beyond the telling—dreams which, though they may never be realized, remain forever fragrant memories, sweetening the arid years of after life. And so, absorbed in happy thoughts, she uttered a little startled cry when a voice behind her said:

"*Bon jour,* Mees Kat'leen. I have return' once more."

Pierre Latour stood just behind her, ungraceful in his ill-fitting, ready-made garments, his white teeth flashing in a smile.

"You startled me," she said. "Why didn't you knock, Pierre Latour?"

"Pardon. I have knock two, t'ree tam, but you do not hear. I am ol' frien', is it not? I walk in."

"Being careful not to make a noise. I don't like it."

"If I mak' no noise, it is because all my life I have walk' soft-footed. The blame is not to me. I see you sit by the window an' regard the reever an' the woods. It ees one beautiful picture w'at you mak'. You are more beautiful than ever before, Kat'leen."

She made a gesture of distaste. "We'll leave my looks out of it, if you please. They don't matter to you."

"Pardon! I am permit' to see, to admire. I am an ol' frien'. Behold"—he shook out the glossy, shining robe of the silver fox—"behold a leetle gift from the ol' frien'."

Gloom fell upon him as she shook her head.

"I can't take it."

"You cannot tak' heem! *Pourquoi non?* Before, you have taken gifts from me."

"It is worth a lot of money. That is one reason."

"Monnaie—pouf!" Latour made a lordly gesture. "What do I care? There are other, greater things. An' I am not a man to mak' poor gifts where I love."

"Where you——" She paused, amazed and indignant. Recently she had heard things about him which, if true, forbade even toleration.

He nodded.

"Where I love—yas. I have love' you since a long tam, Kat'leen. I have watch' you grow to a woman, an' I have said not'ing. But all winter while I dwell in my leetle cabane in the beeg snows, I see your face each night in the fire. When I dream it ees of you. I mak' leetle marks on the wall, me, one for each day until I return; an' each night I cross one out. Now, at last, I am here, an' I go no more until you go wit' me."

"But I'm not going with you," she told him emphatically. "I can't marry you, Pierre. I never thought of it. Besides, I'm going to marry some one else."

Amazed, incredulous, he swore a great oath.

"It ees not true. It cannot be. You are fool wit' me!"

"No, it is quite true."

He scowled darkly, his fingers opening and shutting in passion, all the evil in him astir.

"You have smile' on me; you have tak' my gifts. Now you say, 'Bah! It is only Pierre Latour. He does not mattaire. When he ees no more use to me, I t'row heem away.' But listen while I tol' you somet'ing! You shall marry wit' no man but me. I will not permit it. First, I will kill heem."

Red flamed into the cheeks of the daughter of a hundred hot-tempered Burkes.

"Talk," she said contemptuously, "the boasting of a half-breed."

She regretted the taunt as she saw the spasm of rage that convulsed him. But before he could reply the door opened. Roderick McLeod stood on the threshold.

In a flash Latour comprehended. It needed not the sudden, glad light in Kathleen Burke's eyes to tell him that this was the man. And the other, too, looking at the man and the girl and at the skin of the fox lying unnoticed on the floor, knew.

Now the personal devil that abode with McLeod was that of mockery. He made a mock of life and death, of things human and divine. He could no more help it than he could help breathing. That this black French half-breed should aspire to the golden beauty of Kathleen Burke angered him. With his anger, tempering it, he saw the humor of the situation, but not its tragedy, its danger, which, indeed, he would have cared nothing for. His evil star being in the ascendant, he laughed. He might better have patted a rabid wolf.

"Why," he said, "it is my friend of the fox skin. And how goes the wooing, Latour? Has the lady been kind? No, I see by your face she has not. Tut, my friend, be more cheerful. The fortune of war! And now, perhaps, you will sell me the skin."

"You knew," said Latour, with stiff jaws; "all the time you knew."

"Knew what?" said McLeod lightly. "Let us come to business, Latour. *Revenons à nos moutons,* or, to be more exact, to our fox skin. Alas, my friend, I am afraid that you will lose money, for furs vary in price. One year a certain fur is up; the next year it is down. And why? Because of fashion. And who sets the fashion? The ladies, God bless them! But just now it seems that the ladies do not like the fur of the silver fox. Therefore, I cannot offer you——"

Latour struck him on the mouth. The next instant McLeod had him by wrist

and throat and slammed him up against the log wall with a force that almost drove the breath from his body. There, in pale, deadly fury, holding him in a grip that defied even the Frenchman's great strength, he first shook him as a terrier shakes a rat, and then proceeded to choke him.

Kathleen threw her weight on her lover's arm. "Rod, Rod! Do you hear me? Let him go, I say! You are killing him."

He smiled at her, a cold-eyed, devilish smile, but did not relax his grip.

"Why not? He struck me."

"Yes, but you maddened him. Couldn't you see? It was your fault; it was cruel; it was not like you."

He dropped Latour suddenly and stepped back.

"You're wrong," he said deliberately. "It was exactly like me—or like the devil that bides in me and talks with my tongue. Every word you have said is true. So then I will do all that I can do—I will ask the pardon of the man who struck me."

Latour drank in the blessed air with great gulps, filling his empty lungs. He leaned against the wall, his intensely black eyes watching every movement of the stronger man.

"You struck me with good cause," said McLeod, "I ask your pardon for my words, of which I am ashamed. I ask you, too, to believe that this morning I had never even heard your name."

Latour moistened his lips, and his voice was soft and smooth and deadly calm.

"It ees a leetle t'ing—a joke, ees it not?—to tak' from a man the woman of his heart, to mak' fon of heem because she will no longer tak' hees gifts which once were welcome, to choke heem on hees neck? Ah, yas, a ver' fonnee joke! It ees to laugh—yas. It ees all to be made smooth wit' a word. M'sieu' has but to say that he ess sorry, that ees all."

"What more can I do?"

"M'sieu' still desires the skin, though fox pelts are down," Latour purred softly. "Ver' well. He is mak' me one, two, t'ree offer for heem. M'sieu' per'aps remembaires. He will pay me monnaie, he will play me leetle game of card'—or one odder way. *Bien!* It ees the last offer w'at I tak'. M'sieu' comprehends?"

Indeed he understood perfectly. He had offered to fight for the skin.

"As you like," he answered. "When will you take your pay?"

"I am poor man," said Latour. "I will tak' heem to-night." He stooped and picked up the fox pelt, stroking the fur lovingly. "The silver fox he is not plentee. It ees but two I have skin' since I am alive. But never have I skin' one yellow fox. That will be great pleasure—yas. Mees Kat'leen, au revoir. M'sieu', au revoir also. I await your coming outside."

He was gone softly, with a baleful flash of black eyes.

"What did he mean?" the girl asked, "What offer did you make for the skin?"

"Only what I can well afford to pay," answered McLeod, smiling.

Latour sat on a log in the swiftly descending twilight. He did not rise as McLeod stood in front of him.

"This is folly, Latour," said the latter. "I am stronger than you, and I am a fighting man as well. I do not say it to boast, but I have beaten better men than you. You have felt my strength. Let us not be foolish. Set a price on the skin, and I will pay it and be done."

"You have offer' to fight me for it. Ver' well. I tak' that offer."

"I don't want to fight you. My offer was more or less of a joke. Besides, you have no chance against me. I know it, and so do you."

"M'sieu' is ver' strong an' ver'

queeck. Me, I am strong—mebbe not so strong as m'sieu'—but I am as queeck. We will not fight wit' the fist an' the foot, m'sieu'—we will fight wit' knives."

"We'll do nothing of the sort," said McLeod.

"Non?"

"No!"

"M'sieu'," Latour said softly, "ees one beeg, yellow coward. He ees strong—oh, yas!—an' he will fight one not so strong wit' hees fist or choke heem, but he fears the fight w'at is mak' even wit' leetle piece of steel. He is scare' that he will lose the life that is in hes beeg body."

Roderick McLeod glared at him.

"I have been called hard things before," he said, "and some of them were true. But never was I called a coward. If you must have it, you shall have it. I will fight with any weapons you choose."

"That is bettaire," said Latour. "Then you will get a knife now, an' I will get mine, an' we will go into the dark woods together; an' one of us will come back—per'aps?"

"No—for there is law in this land," McLeod refused. "I have no mind to hang for the killing of you. But I will do this, *Monsieur le Métis*. I will get me a knife, and I will go about my business; and my business will take me in ten minutes' time to the open space in front of the house of Joe Corriveau. If you attack me there, I will defend myself, and if I kill you I will be justified."

"And if I kill you, I hang, is it not?"

"It is very possible. At any rate, I hope so," said McLeod coldly.

Latour considered.

"It ees not the square deal—it ees the brace game. It ees that you wish to play wit' loaded dice. I am no fool, me. M'sieu'—I say it again—ees a coward. So I will geeve heem the chance to ron away. If he wishes to live, he will leave this contree before the dawn, an' he will leave Kat'leen, an' he will see neither again. I geeve heem this chance, for the contree is not beeg enough for both of us."

"Then leave it," said McLeod.

"You will not go?"

"No."

"Bon!" said Latour. "I have given m'sieu' the chance to fight, but he will not fight; I have given heem the chance to ron, but he will not ron. Ver' well. M'sieu' the yellow fox will die——" He paused and considered. "Will m'sieu' say when he hopes to marry?"

McLeod laughed at him. "A barking dog! Will it help you to know? Then not before next spring. That will give you a margin of prophecy."

"The yellow fox," said Latour, "will never see the spring. He will die before the first snow." He said it with absolute certainty, smiling to himself, the evil, turbulent soul of him looking from his eyes.

McLeod laughed once more harshly. "Threatened men live long, *Monsieur le Métis*. How will you kill me? Will you shoot me from ambush or stab me while I sleep?"

"Did I say that I would kill you?" asked Latour. "No. I said that you would die. A wise man would not wish to know the manner of his death."

McLeod's patience, worn thin, snapped.

"Look to it that you do not meet your own," he said snarlingly. "Do not drive me too far. I am no man to play with or threaten, Latour."

Pierre Latour rose and made him a mocking bow. He waved his hand largely toward the north. "It is a beeg contree, but it is not beeg enough for us both. It is you or me. Remembaire!"

He turned his back on McLeod and strode into the dusk, soft-footed, gliding, malevolent, the incarnation of a hatred that bided its time. In the

morning he was gone, and through the drowsy, full-leafed summer and the crisp, tanging autumn days there came no word of him. He seemed to have vanished in the immensity of his own land.

And yet, though he was not afraid, a Shadow seemed to haunt Roderick McLeod, striding at his elbow on trail and portage, squatting just behind him as he drove his canoe the length of lonely lakes, flitting just outside the circle of light thrown by his camp fire.

He did not connect it with the half-breed's threat. He had been threatened before, by men whose trade was killing, and he had survived. Though he remained watchful, it was from habit. Having no nerves, he attributed the Shadow to his eyes or his liver, neither of which had given him concern before.

Least of all did it occur to him that this impalpable, intangible something that seemed to haunt and yet hide from him might be a premonition, a warning, a mysterious message from that unknown world which surrounds life. And so winter drew nigh.

III.

McLeod's purpose was to find a timber area which he might obtain cheaply and then hold until advancing price and advancing settlement should make him a large profit. As a side issue he prospected, but without faith. This business took him into the lonely places, outside the beaten track, but always he clung to the neighborhood of streams, for these meant transportation for logs.

Toward the end of October, when the days shortened and crisped and the nights were clear and cold, the haunting Shadow drew a little closer. And there came to McLeod now and then the feeling that he was being followed. Yet he had no tangible evidence of it.

Once, years before, he had had the same feeling late one afternoon on a lonely winter's snowshoe trip. So strong was it that he had deliberately hidden and watched his back track, to find that he was being trailed by a mountain lion, gaunt and savage with famine. He shot this trailer, and was troubled no more. But then the sensation of being followed had lasted but an hour or two; this persisted day after day.

Remembering the episode of the cougar, in which his instinct had not played him false, he cached his canoe and spent one entire day in watching; but he saw only the natural play of forest life. Thereupon he came to the conclusion that the months of loneliness were affecting his nerves, and, never having recognized the existence of these in himself, he was angry, and refused to pay any attention to them.

Late in the fall, having found a stretch of timbered land to his liking, he turned his face south to the Landing and Kathleen Burke. A week or two with her, then a trip to the outside to obtain a title to this timber, after which he would return and be married in the spring—those were his plans.

The weather turned cold. When he had humped his canoe and scanty dunnage over a three-mile portage into the Pigeon, he knew that it was doubtful if he could make the Landing by water. From the deciduous trees every leaf had been stripped by howling gales. They lay thick on the forest floor, a rustling carpet, hateful to its dwellers, who prefer to walk silently, but a protection to the weak, since they gave warning of the approach of the strong.

After the gales came days of calm, with wan sunlight and snapping, sparkling nights through which the aurora thrust and flamed in columnar, upshooting streams and spears of vivid light. The water thickened, and the drip from the paddle blade lay on its surface in a thousand tiny quicksilver globules.

Thin rim ice lay along the shores, and formed where the water was currentless. Overhead, geese strung southward, holding little conversation among themselves, their energies bent to keeping the pace set by the great ganders at the head of their winged squadrons. The fur of the rabbits, already graying at the ears, turned white. All things, from the rotund little muskrats smoothing their coats on the shore beside the weed-draped shallows to an occasional great raven croaking solemnly out of the north, foretold the coming of winter.

So for three days McLeod put all his splendid strength into the paddle from daylight to dark; driving the slim craft downstream swiftly and steadily, taking bad water with the good, surging through rapids where the teeth of sunken rocks tore the racing current not a handbreadth from the frail skin of the flying canoe, and the upflung spray from great, blockading bowlders blew across his face.

On the evening of the third day on the Pigeon, just at sunset, when he was stiff and cramped from long hours in the canoe, he came to the great pine standing by the river, and, having camped there overnight before, he turned the bow of his canoe until it took the sand gently.

He rose slowly in the stern, straightening his stiffened knees, and as he did so he turned his head sharply, for it seemed to him that he had heard a faint rustle and a gentle sigh at his very ear. But there was nothing. He felt a sense of loss, of absence, and suddenly he knew. The Shadow that had companioned him for months had gone.

Nor was this all, for, as he stepped from the canoe, the face of Kathleen seemed to float toward him, the eyes pleading, the lips parted almost in speech. Involuntarily he took a pace forward and stretched out his arms. Then it, too, vanished, and he was alone with the wilderness and the falling night.

"A grown man—and visions!" he mocked himself. "The old women of the coast would say that I was fey. They tell of warnings to men of my house who have died in battle. Warnings? Bah! I'm in love, that's what it is—though God knows I've been in love often enough before. Natural affection, plus a meat and fish diet. Results—vision! Cure—marriage, vegetables, and pills."

He laughed aloud, scorning the obscure, the occult, explaining the inexplicable by physiology after the manner of modern man, finding an easy solution of it in the intimate relations, between the human stomach, eyes, and brain.

McLeod picked up his blankets, grub sack, and ax, and carried them to the big pine. He started his fire, filled his pail, and hung it to boil, and then looked about for the best place to unroll his bed, finding the desired spot between two surface roots of the big tree.

Off to one side, close beside a fallen trunk, lay a cone-shaped heap of leaves as high as his waist. Evidently they had been gathered for a bed by some other traveler, and for some reason not apparent, had not been used. McLeod noted them with satisfaction, for they saved him trouble. Stooping, he spread his arms and thrust his hands deep into the bottom of the heap to gather it to his breast for transportation to the spot he had selected.

His hands came together, touching a foreign substance, hard, cold, serrated. Something gave. Instinctively, as an animal recoils from a suddenly suspected danger, McLeod bounded upward and backward, every nerve and sinew in his great body strung to the leap.

It was too late. There was the rasp of metal sliding on metal, a scurry of painted leaves, a sudden pang, an awful

numbing blow, and his forearms were held in a grip of steel. Clamped on them, emerging from the leaves like a wild beast from its lair, came an enormous bear trap, toothed, two-springed, a hideous engine of torture and destruction. The high, backward bound was suddenly checked—so suddenly that McLeod was jerked forward and fell on his face. The trap was held by a chain fastened solidly.

A paradox of life is that only the little things of it find adequate expression in action and in speech. The big things stun and numb. A man will jump and swear at a pin prick; he will receive his death wound in dumb wonder. Deep in each the conviction is firmly planted that no great evil can come to him. When it comes he is at first incredulous. His mind, trained to unbelief, refuses to believe. It is the egoism of all life, its protest against extinction, futile but clinging, almost ineradicable, persisting to the last.

Thus McLeod rose to his feet and gazed in slow wonder at the jawed thing that pinioned his arms. If his hands had been free, he would have rubbed his eyes, to make sure that he saw correctly. That he should be taken in a trap like a wild beast was unbelievable. His mind staggered back from the shock, as yet incapable of meeting the situation fairly.

Streams of aching, intolerable anguish running up his arms brought the grim reality home. The pain gripped the very fibers of his being, turning him weak and sick. A deadly fear, the first real fear he had ever known, clutched at his heart. But he was a man of stern breed, and, clenching his teeth, he put the pain and the fear from him by a supreme effort of will and faced the situation.

First, he investigated the trap. It was a huge affair, larger than any he had ever seen. The toothed jaws of it were driven into the flesh of his arms with a grip that held him absolutely helpless. From one of the springs a particularly strong ring and chain led under the fallen tree. On the other side of the trunk it was secured to a small log some four feet in length.

The tree was large and tight against the ground, so that the clog log could not possible be dragged underneath it without much digging; and the soil, a mass of small roots and fibers, rendered that impossible save with free hands and tools.

The trap had been well set. No oubliette of the Middle Ages ever held a prisoner more securely. And yet the customary procedure is not to anchor the clog, but to leave it free so that while hampering the movements of the trapped animal it makes a plain trail for the trapper to follow; for if it is made fast a large beast will break the chain, or tear a foot loose, or even, in rare cases, gnaw it off.

Again, there was no bait, and why should a trap be set beneath a great heap of leaves?

But McLeod did not ask himself these questions. They were nothing to him. To get free—that was the problem, not how, or when, or why the trap had been set. He stooped until it touched the ground, and then knelt on the springs, putting his full weight on them, wrenching upward on his pinioned, lacerated arms in an endeavor to get more purchase.

The springs gave not at all. He lost his balance and toppled forward on his face.

Again and again he made the attempt. It was useless. In his heart he had known it before he had tried. The trap had been set by levers; only by similar means could the great springs be forced down sufficiently to release the jaws.

He flung himself on the frosty leaves, burying his face in them. The pain in his arms was not so great now. A mer-

ciful numbness had succeeded the waves of agony. It was bitterly cold, but he dropped into a species of torpor, scarcely to be called sleep. So he lay through the night. Now and then he stirred and moaned, but the dawn found him lying white with hoarfrost, motionless.

When the sun rose, pouring glad light upon a sparkling, bejeweled world, he raised a haggard face toward it. Hope had died within him. He was already of another world, a man who was as dead. He looked at the blackened space of his extinct fire, his blankets, his bag of food, his ax, his rifle—at the things which a few hours ago had meant comfort, subsistence, safety. He regarded them aloof, incuriously, as one who has passed the age of toys might regard the playthings of children. They no longer interested him.

But there was the river! He saw it, and was conscious of a great thirst. Oh, to walk down to the edge of it and bury his throbbing arms in the icy current and drink, drink, drink! As the desire of Dives for a cup of cold water, so was his longing. He licked the frost from the leaves within the tether of his chain.

IV.

Suddenly McLeod raised his bowed head and listened. Had his ears tricked him? No, for there it was again, the sound of a man's voice singing. Now he could hear the sound of a paddle. He shouted. The paddle stroke ceased. Then over the bank, beneath which lay his own canoe, appeared the figure of a man, bulky, swarthy—Pierre Latour.

Leisurely the half-breed approached until he stood by McLeod and looked down at him. McLeod stared back, and for a long moment of silence eye held eye without a waver. Then Latour spoke.

"An' so," he said, "M'sieu' the yellow fox is caught in a trap; and the trap holds."

"I am caught," said McLeod. "Lever down these springs and loose me, Latour."

The half-breed laughed exultantly.

"M'sieu' is strong. He may set himself free. I will not hinder."

"I cannot free myself," said McLeod, staring at him, the hope turning to ashes in his breast. "I have tried."

"That," said the other, "is true; for I saw it."

"You saw it!"

Latour nodded. "For a mont' I have watch' m'sieu' day an' night. It is two, t'ree days since I set the trap. Las' night I am hidden close by."

"You devil! You devil!"

"I set the trap, an' I catch the fox. Aha! I am good trapper, me, you bet. But it is easy. M'sieu' loves to sleep soft. Each night he rakes leaves for a bed. I have seen heem. So then I gather leaves for hees bed. Under them I place the trap. It is easy, lak to roll from one log. He comes, he takes the bait. Well, it is the feenish for m'sieu'."

"You devil!" said McLeod again. He got to his feet and stood looking down at the trap clinging to his arms. He held them out. "See, my arms are swollen to the shoulder, bitten to the bone. My hands are as those of a dead man. I have had a night of torture. Is it not enough?"

Latour shrugged. "Once I gave m'sieu' hees choice—to fight or to ron or to die. He chose to die. Ver' well. He is now dying. He has leetle pain, yas. But when he dies it will cease."

"True," said McLeod; "true."

His tone was quiet; but his downcast eyes flamed. Suddenly he swung his arms, pivoting as he did so. The trap struck Latour in the face, cutting his cheek, and sending him to the ground. With a lithe movement the half-breed rolled over and away. At the end of

the chain McLeod raged like a frenzied dog, struggling to get at him.

Latour sat upon the log at a safe distance.

"Bon!" said he, *"bon!* That is lak a man. So I would have done. It is beeg pity m'sieu' would not fight."

"Loose me now, and I will fight you," said McLeod. "My hands would not hold a knife, but I will fight with such things as God gave me."

"It is too late," said Latour.

"Let us understand each other now," said McLeod. "You have me. I am helpless. What are you going to do?"

"Not'ing."

"You will let me die in this trap?"

"It is the good guess."

McLeod turned from him and lay down. The half-breed built a fire close by and cooked and ate; afterward he smoked, watching his victim.

All day and all night there was no word spoken. Then suddenly McLeod's stoicism gave way like the going out of a dam. He heaved himself up, a pain-maddened beast, wrenching, struggling, leaping in the air from side to side; and when he fell from exhaustion he bit at the steel of the trap until his teeth broke.

Then an hour afterward he uttered Latour's name.

"I think," he said feebly, "that I am dying, Latour. I cannot breathe. I have no strength to move more. There are letters—papers—in a bag hung around my neck. Open my shirt now and take them. I will tell you——" His voice failed.

The half-breed stooped, and his fingers fumbled at the neckband. Suddenly the dying man sprang to fierce action. With a snap he caught Latour's hand between his teeth, and at the same moment kicked his legs from under him. His own locked around them in a viselike grip. They rolled on the ground in silent, deadly, but most unequal combat.

It could not last. Latour, with his free hand, got his enemy by the throat and choked him till his jaws opened for air. He tore himself loose and stood up, wringing the hand mangled by the broken teeth, cursing him for a mad dog, and he half drew his knife.

McLeod, panting on the ground, jeered at him; piling insult on insult, raking three languages for epithets for him. The words stung and scorched, but Latour shoved his knife back and laughed.

"For sure you have the cunning of the fox," he said. "It ees hard to die slowly, hey! You try to mak' me give you queeck feenish wit' my knife, yas. I savez plentee, me. It ees no good, yellow fox!"

McLeod turned his face away and lay staring up into the sky, no grayer and colder than his own heart, from which the last hope—even the hope of speedy death—had fled. In the night he was delirious, babbling of many things which Latour did not understand, the ghosts of his stormy life having their will of his tongue.

Coma succeeded the delirium, and when that passed his mind was clear, though the flame of life was faint. Once more the Shadow squatted beside him, and now he knew it for the Shadow of Death, whose warning he had not heeded; and he welcomed its return, for he knew that the end was near. He had no pain, only a great weakness and a desire to rest.

He looked at Pierre Latour, hating him still, but with contempt, as one powerless to harm him more. And he spoke with the certainty of one who has seen the future clearly:

"The snow is very near, Latour, but I shall not see it fall nor feel its coolness. The pain is over now, and your revenge fails; for I go willingly, and the worst is past. But for you, you black devil, who sat by and saw me suffer while I lived, the bitterness of

death is still to come. Strong you are, and young you are, and yet you shall never see the ice go out and the trees green-leafed again. Do not laugh, man, for I have already seen you die—and you were afraid! I lay this upon you, that when your end comes you shall see my face among the shadows beside you, and you shall tell to strangers the story of these days and nights, and go before God with the tale hot on your soul's lips!"

Latour laughed hollowly, for the words and their certainty chilled him.

"I shall die when my time comes, an' not before," he said. "I have not fear, me. I am afraid of not'ing. A leetle while, an' Kat'leen will tire of waiting for the yellow fox. Then we will marry an' live until we are ol'."

Then in McLeod's dying eyes the old fire of mockery lit for an instant.

"You fool!" he said, in tones barely audible. "I am going to her now!"

He sighed, stretched out his fettered arms, and lay still. Out of the gray overhead a great, white flake fluttered softly and rested on his cheek. Another and another followed it. The first snow was falling.

All day, by the big pine, the great flakes spilled and sifted steadily, muffling the leaves, softening the stark outlines of the bare-armed trees, weighting down the bushes, changing the aspect of the dark woods utterly; spreading a coverlet tenderly above the racked body of Roderick McLeod. There was a great, white silence, unbroken by breath of wind, by sound or motion of life.

Latour, after his enemy's passing, had wasted no time. In half an hour he was gone, driving his canoe with mighty strokes down the river running black between whitening banks. In due time he made Burke's Landing and swaggered into the store of Dennis Burke.

But years seemed to have fallen upon Burke. He nodded to Latour and immediately forgot him, staring at vacancy.

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed the half-breed, "you are seeck, is it not?"

"I'm well enough," said Burke slowly. "What is it you want?"

"Not'ing—now," said Latour. "I call in to say *bon jour,* that is all. How ees Kat'leen?"

Burke stared at him, dull-eyed.

"She's dead—drowned from a canoe ten days ago," he said.

If Felix or Onesime or Flatfoot or Moise cared to tell you the truth, they would tell you this story—tell it impressively beside the little camp fire, with many gestures of brown, paddle-calloused hands, and furtive glances into the yawning glooms without the circle of light.

They would add that McLeod's prophecy came true—that Pierre Latour died before the spring; also that he was afraid, and went hence shamefully, babbling confession to those who stood beside him, to ease his soul.

And if they told you the whole truth as they see it—what they one and all believe—it would be that Latour Noir and Rod McLeod still crouch o' nights by the shadow of the big pine, reënacting the tragedy that was the end of the one and the beginning of the end for the other, which they must do until the world ends, or until their bitter souls learn to respect and forgive and find peace thereby. Wherefore the big pine is accursed, and a place to be avoided.

But neither Felix nor Onesime, Flatfoot nor Moise will tell you these things, because they are simple men with a primitive belief in the powers of good and evil; and you, being able to read books and therefore the possessor of much wisdom, might laugh at them.

Historical Events of the West

GREAT JANUARY DAYS IN THE WEST

January 1, 1822.—The first American settlers establish themselves in Texas. Twenty-two years later they conquered the Mexicans.

January 1, 1833.—Two hundred Comanches attack returning Santa Fe caravan on the Canadian River. One white man killed.

January 4, 1896.—After "forty years in the wilderness," Utah becomes a State.

January 5, 1893.—Driving of the last spike of the Great Northern Railway in the Cascade Mountains.

January 6, 1864.—Colonel Kit Carson starts from Fort Canby to round up hostile Navajos. Last war with this tribe.

January 6, 1912.—New Mexico becomes the forty-seventh State.

January 8, 1847.—The battle of San Gabriel, California, between American and Mexican troops, in which there were almost no fatalities.

January 8, 1850.—The great Sacramento River flood. The new town of Sacramento remained under water for days.

January 8, 1859.—Discovery of rich silver vein near Virginia City, Nevada.

January 8, 1877.—General Miles wins victory over Chief Crazy Horse in Montana.

January 9, 1908.—Muir Woods, a grove of redwoods, becomes a national monument.

January 10, 1870.—The first railroad to Salt Lake City completed.

January 10, 1917.—Death of William F. Cody—"Buffalo Bill"—in Denver.

January 11, 1858.—Ives takes the first steamboat up Colorado River from Yuma.

January 13, 1847.—Mexicans surrender the pueblo of Los Angeles.

January 13, 1880.—More than one hundred thousand dollars in ore taken from the R. E. Lee Mine at Leadville, Colorado.

January 15, 1859.—Discovery of Gold near Bowlder, Colorado.

January 15, 1888.—San Francisco's coldest day, twenty-nine degrees above zero.

January 20, 1865.—Cheyenne and Sioux Indians raid overland stage line.

January 21, 1813.—Birthday of Frémont the Pathfinder.

January 23, 1863.—Frank A. Root, famous overland stage man, makes first trip from Atchison to Denver.

January 23, 1870.—The Second Cavalry raids Piegan Indians in Montana.

January 24, 1848.—James W. Marshall discovers gold in California.

January 29, 1861.—Kansas becomes a State.

January 30, 1847.—Yerbe Buena becomes San Francisco.

January 31, 1807.—Pike builds a fort on the Rio Grande in Spanish territory, now San Luis Valley, Colorado.

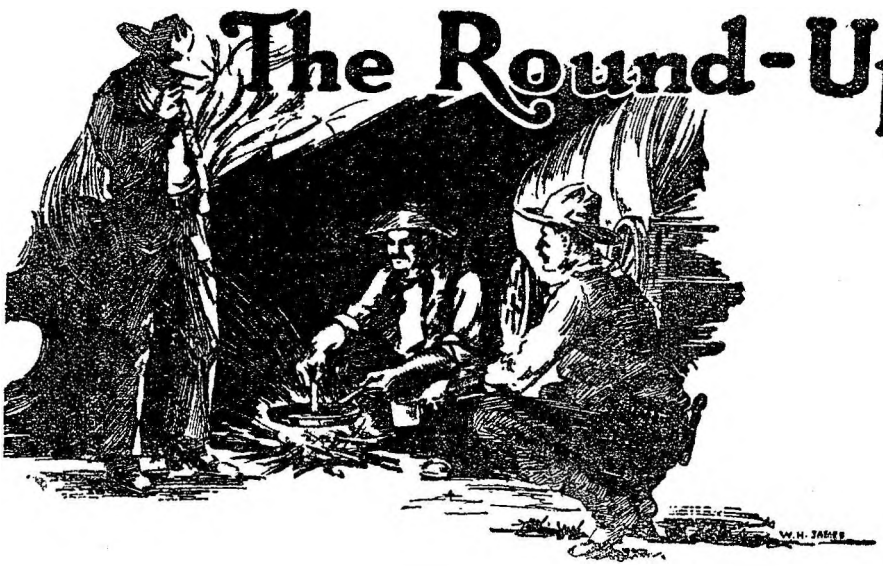
January (?) 1743.—The French explorer Verendrye reaches the foothills of the Big Horn Mountains, in Wyoming.

January (?) 1825.—James Bridger discovers Great Salt Lake.

January (?) 1859.—Six quills of gold from Colorado reach Omaha and cause new gold rush in Pikes Peak region.

January (?) 1864.—Vigilantes of Montana execute twenty-two outlaws during the month.

The Round-Up



WELL, folks, here is a wanderer sure enough, and he knows that the question he asks will be answered with a great big "YES" and a great big "WELCOME!" Don José, tell 'em about it.

"What's the chances of this hombre sittin' in with the outfit? I've been readin' WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for quite a spell, and listenin' to those hombres spin their yarns at the Round-up, and thought I'd like to unlimber a bit.

"To begin with, I've got no home except the West, but it's sure been a good one. Right now I'm in Cincinnati, on my way to Florida—me and my faithful bronc—to view the country; but I'm feelin' like turnin' back any time and takin' the sandy trail in place of these Eastern roads.

"I have spent much of my time in the West among the Spanish-speakin' people; was known at Don José; picked up quite a little Spanish, but I guess you no *sabe Español,* so I'm writin' to you in English.

"I am a man of one book—*hombre de un libro*—and that book is the West. As I said before, I feel like turnin' back. I don't know what it is, but there is something in the vastness of the West, something in the trackless desert, the sandy trail, the cactus and the sage, the rolling prairie, the vast plains and lofty mountains that calls me.

"Excuse me, gents. I'm not tryin' to tell you hombres what the West looks like, but when a fellow gets away from home he begins to get sort o' soberlike and gets off the trail now and then. In my tent on a ranch in California I used to enjoy readin' WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, but now it makes me restless and wantin' to be on my way back to the West. I don't know whether I'll see the Atlantic Ocean or not.

"I've wandered over the States of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, up and down California from the Golden Gate to Tia Juana, and through the Mojave Desert, and worked at the borax camps known as West End and Trona. I've been through the wild Sierra Nevada Mountains, the sand wastes of Nevada and Utah, and over the great plains of Wyoming and Nebraska, and through the Rockies of Colorado. I have stood on the Puenti Hills night after night and watched the sun sink into the great Pacific, and on the mountaintops and gazed over an awe-inspiring scene that would make any gent take his sombrero off—saw mile upon mile of billowy expanse without a sign of human habitation, and

I rejoiced that I was a part of that vast solitude, though such a small part. And now here I am in the East, wishin' I was in the West.

"Well, gents, I think, since I've come this far, I'll see the Atlantic or bust a saddle cinch—and then me for the West.

"To you Eastern lads who want to see the West: Go if you have the nuggets; but the life is hard, if one don't know the trails. And you need money, so don't run off, for you'll hit hard goin' 'fore long.

"As for me, when I hit the long, long trail, I want it to wind up where my dimmin' eyes can see the snow-capped mountains, with my feet in a cool mountain stream and my head on mother earth, far from the trail. All I ask is that some one will please take care of my faithful bronc. Adios."

Ha! Ha! Threats, efforts to intimidate, boasts! And it's embroidery they would make out of us! What do you know about that? Hark ye to "Hoss" Weaver, of Dexter, Missouri:

"Howdy, folks! I am giving you hombres a fair warning. I am not running your rodeo, but myself and others are buying the branded stock. And we-all don't ask to change our brand, neither, so a bunch of us guys down here in this li'l' ol' draw they call Mizzoury is jest natcherally gonna ride up there to that there burg they call New York and mob an outfit of magazine publishers. We'll shoot you so full of holes you'll look like a piece of embroidery if you don't round up a maverick and let Arthur Preston Hankins put the brand on him. We give you fair warning that we are bad guys to deal with when we get started, so look out."

"Hello, people!" greets J. A. Robbins, of No. 861 Wall Street, Los Angeles, California.

"Seein' as how 'spinnin'' is in fashion, would you-all mind if I spin one?

"I note an article in this week's W. S. M., 'Roadway Through Idaho Wilderness,' which brings back to my mind some mighty happy days. I have been over that part of Idaho on foot, hossback, by stagecoach, and freight wagon, and allow me to rise up and state that there is no more scenic bit of country anywhere in the land.

"And 'Jerkline to Ragtown' sure made me hark back to the times when I was skinnin' six to a lead and trail wagon hauling freight for 'Montana' Mitchell, from Stiter, Idaho, to Orogranel, Idaho, a distance of sixty-five miles over roads that they just naturally take the bottom out of from about the first of September till it snows and freezes up, which is any time after November 1st.

"Should this letter stray by chance up around Stiter, Clearwater, or Grangerville, Idaho, I would like very much to hear from some of the outfit up that a way.

"Well, fellers, chuck up the fire for the next hombre, and I'll say adios, too."

Just simply can't get away from shootin'; it's part and parcel of us. And we hope we never will get away from it. Listen to what C. S. Hoover, of New Orleans, Louisiana, has to say:

"What is the matter with some of the outfit? They seem to be holding back with some of those good old stories about fancy shooting. I happen to have had quite a bit of experience with guns and pistols; have owned and used all makes from the old muzzle-loading to the latest automatics, and have attended quite a lot of shooting matches where you could see some fancy shooting with rifles and pistols. Will say that about the best I ever saw was a fellow by the name of Rhodes. He used a .45 Colt single-action, and would have six small cans or bottles thrown in the air at one time; before the last one hit the ground his gun would be empty, and every can or bottle would either be busted or have a hole in it. He also was a fine rifle shot, but I never saw him using the rifle.

"As I said before, I have done a good bit of shooting myself with all kinds of guns, but have a .38 special S. & W. military model now. This, I think, is the best gun I ever used, including the famous Colt.

"Now some of you old longhorns come along with your stories."

And now, if some of you folks will bank up that fire good and plenty, we'll all roll in. If any of you haven't got enough bankets, there's plenty of 'em stored away over in that vehicle back of the chuck wagon, an' you're welcome to 'em.

Good night, and pleasant dreams!

The Swappers' Exchange is conducted for our readers. The service, for the present, at least, is entirely free of charge. It must be distinctly emphasized that any who take advantage of it, do so with the complete understanding that the Editor and Publishers of this magazine will not hold themselves responsible in any way for losses sustained by readers, nor can they act as arbiters in disputes. We will run an advertisement as long as we can give it space, and we ask you to let us know just as soon as arrangements have been completed for your swap.

ADDING MACHINE, mandolin, harp, three camp stoves, a motor-cycle engine and wheels, a two-horse-power engine—all for a small folding camera or a Mandel No. 3 post-card size minute machine camera or a pair of field glasses. M. J. Hart, Sioux Street and Lakeview Avenue, Parkers Prairie, Minnesota.

BRAND NEW, never used electrical apparatus for removing hair, purchased for twenty-five dollars. Will swap for fifteen dollars—or what do you offer in exchange? J. J. Lee, 28 Congress Street, Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

LEATHER CHAPS, silver-mounted spurs, big Stetson, riding cuffs, a .44 six-gun, fancy cartridge belt with two gun holsters, and a dandy stock saddle, with rope hanging on the horn; will swap for an automobile or a motor cycle. C. J. Dedrick, R. F. D. No. 1, Hamilton, New York.

ONE PAIR brand new shop-made boots, cost price twenty-one fifty, and a pair of spurs; swap 'em for a crisp ten-dollar bill—or what will you offer in exchange? Thomas Griffith, Rockport, Texas.

WIRELESS SETS, receiving and sending; buzzer phones; telegraph instruments; telephone equipment, and smaller pieces. Will swap for chaps, cuffs, lariat ropes, fancy bridles, or most anything in a cow-puncher's outfit. H. T. Rhunhardt, General Delivery, Camp Benning, Georgia.

COMPLETE developing and printing outfit, with a plentiful supply of chemicals; will exchange for guns or anything reasonable. Herman Gsber, 1121 Seaview Avenue, Far Rockaway, Long Island.

WILL SWAP a pair of good binoculars for twenty dollars, and a pistol, .30 caliber, for twenty dollars—or what have you? Address "Sure Shot," in care of this magazine.

VIOLIN AND WOOD CASE; film-pack, small camera—for firearms; long-barrel, .22 caliber revolver preferred. Might throw in a pound sack of cigarette tobacco, if I get a good gun. Harris L. Thurston, Box 42, Milton, N. H.

CROCHETED YOKES, camisoles, boudoir caps; tatting yokes, handkerchief edges; knitted sweaters, or anything in this line—for Indian beadwork, riding skirts and hats, bridles, et cetera. Elizabeth Ford, 128 Front Street, Binghamton, N. Y.

I HAVE ten or twelve dollars to swap for a .45 caliber Colt. Frank Ball, Mount Forest, Ontario.

SADDLE, bridle, rope, Stetson rawhide hat, white Angora batwing chaps, white leather boots, spurs, straps, leather riding cuffs, and slicker. Will sell or trade for guns or what you have. A. J. McDowell, 20 N. 23d Street, Lafayette, Indiana.

NEW TYPEWRITER, set of electrical guides, vest-pocket camera, and a .32 caliber automatic revolver. Will sell or trade for riding equipment or traps or guns. "Friend," P. O. Box 57, Kent, Conn.

COLT AUTOMATIC, .45 caliber; Colt automatic, .32 caliber; .22 caliber W. R. F. Colt police positive revolver, six-inch barrel—all in good condition. Will trade any one for a .22 caliber Colt automatic. W. B. Kennedy, Rexburg, Idaho.

FORTY-FIVE CALIBER, frontier six-shooter, seven-inch barrel; pair of spurs; handmade bridle with fancy reins—for a .22 caliber target pistol or rifle in good condition. C. Howard Marr, 935 Dolores Street, San Francisco, California.

FIFTY COPIES of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and an automatic pistol, .32 caliber—for a .22 caliber rifle, a twelve-gauge shotgun—or what have you? B. E. Flanders, Box 147, Chelsea, Vermont.

PAIR of deerskin trousers, with rose bushes beaded on both legs—for a pair of black Angora chaps. Also a beaded vest—for—what have you? "Diamond," in care of this magazine.

BLACK TABLE, sixteen inches by twenty-four, with invisible pockets complete; one magic flag vase; one magic fire bowl with stand, bowl of fire changing to bunch of flowers; one coin-catching wand, will catch half dollars from the air; one spirit telephone set for mind reading; one five by eight American flag, silkaline; one rising card trick, cards rising from empty glass—everything complete, with instructions from manufacturers; whole outfit would cost about one hundred dollars. Want a .22 caliber Remington or Winchester automatic rifle, or a .38 caliber, six-shot Colt's police positive special revolver. James C. Jones, Box 241, Fort Meade, Florida.

FORTY-FIVE CALIBER Colt automatic, government model, with no marks on it; also a pistol shot only five hundred times at one shooting match, making a score of four hundred and thirty. What have you to exchange? F. J. Simons, 407 Ross Avenue, Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania.

WHAT do you ask for every copy of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE from the first issue up to August 27, 1921? Lee C. Hudson, Princevelle, P. O. Box 392, Cook County, Oregon.

"STRAD" MODEL VIOLIN, value fifty dollars; four by five folding camera, with tripod, value ten dollars; sprayer model, value nine dollars; several oil paintings of Western scenes, also an elk and a moose, valued at from ten to fifty dollars, sizes from twenty by thirty to thirty-six by fifty, really excellent. What have you to trade for any or all? George W. Miller, Box 1534, Mobile, Alabama.

BOOKS on training and breaking horses, one complete set; also a new breaking bridle. What am I offered? Frank Goodroe, 40 Walling Street, Providence, Rhode Island.

CASH—for a good buckskin riding skirt. Metta Colburn, Kent, Washington.

REVOLVER, Smith & Wesson, special, six-and-one-half-inch barrel, .38 caliber; one .44 special Smith & Wesson, six-and-one-half-inch barrel, with target sights; one .25-.20 Winchester carbine; one .32 special Winchester carbine, with peep sights; one .30-.30 Savage, special target sights; one twelve-gauge, six-shot Winchester trap grade shotgun—all in good condition, each with a case. What am I offered for one or all? Alfred Raver, P. O. Box 355, Edgemont, South Dakota.

VIOLIN, bow and case; also one Henri Farni clarinet, Albert system, high pitch A. Will swap them for seventeen dollars apiece—or what have you? E. Goddard, 3376 West Thirty-fifth Avenue, Denver, Colorado.

JUMPING SPARK COIL for gasoline engine; two electric doorbells with push buttons; three brand new batteries, and a pair of roller skates or a Victor bicycle—for a rifle or a shotgun. Joseph Cormick, Masontown, Pennsylvania, Box 448.

WESTERN SADDLE in good condition—for a good Colt .45 automatic pistol and holster. Edwin J. Barker, 2704 Lafayette Street, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

CAMERA, folding, with leather bellows, reversible back, double extension, rack and pinion, view finder, rising and falling and double-sliding front, high grade lens, seven-and-one-half-inch focus, Wollensak shutter; works from time to one hundredth of one second; sole leather carrying case for camera and holders, with shoulder strap, four five by seven double plate holders and focusing cloth; also a .32-.30, sixteen-shot Winchester rifle. Will swap for a .22 repeating Winchester or Remington. C. A. Tibbets, Mansfield, Illinois.

EDISON PHONOGRAPH, old-fashioned, excellent tone and playing, with sixty good records. Would like a good mandolin or banjo-mandolin. Verla M. Holman, General Delivery, Graybull, Wyoming.

COLT AUTOMATIC, .45; wireless outfit; fishing tackle; Kodak—all in A1 condition. Want some new, large-sized Navajo rugs of bright colors. L. G. Brown, 309 Elk Street, Buffalo, New York.

SNOWSHOES, new, length forty-two inches. Will swap for a .22 Stevens pistol, a camera, or a .25-.20 rifle. Arthur Tyler, Vermontville, Michigan.

MOVING PICTURE MACHINE, Power No. 5, complete, in good running order, with eight full reels of film and one calcium lighting outfit. Worth one hundred dollars. Will consider seventy-five dollars for all—or what have you to trade? L. J. Eastman, Papin, Wisconsin.

RIFLE, Savage, 250-3000, 1898 model; 100 soft-point bullets; two auxiliary cartridges, to shoot .25 Colt automatic shells; .80 Colt automatic .25 shells. Will swap for $50.00, or .30 Remington automatic rifle. Earl Davis, Eubanks, Oklahoma.

SHOTGUN, twenty-gauge Stevens hammerless; new canvas case and cleaning rod—for an Airedale male between three and six months old; must be eligible for registration. Walter T. Hagen, M. D., 113 North Washington Street, Green Bay, Wisconsin.

HYGIENIC ELECTRIC MACHINE. Professor Roche's fully equipped for all external treatment. Cost fifty dollars. Forty dollars takes it—or what will you swap? Fred J. Litzinger, Box 659, Pitcairn, Pennsylvania.

REPEATING RIFLE, .25-.20 Winchester, lever action, octagonal barrel; .32 five-shot revolver, Meriden Firearms Company, double action, tip-up ejection; .22 Winchester repeating rifle, pump action, full nickel plated, brand-new; Corona folding typewriter, in case, slightly used; larger typewriter, nearly new; ukulele, with case; New Todd Protectograph; F. & E. check writer; fine old violin, refinished and new fittings put on by a violin maker, has a fine tone and looks like a new one but shows age and wear where the chin rests on it, has some pits in wood on back, also shows wear under bridge, evidence of age; have new case and bow for it, case with nickeled lock and two nickeled clasps, place for two bows and compartment for extra strings and bridges and rosin; experts say this violin is worth two hundred and fifty dollars; one zither; small electric motor, A. C., made for sewing machine, will run any light machinery; lot of books on how to sell to mail-order trade. I want a good bird dog, one that is trained and a good retriever; also a Remington automatic shotgun in good condition. Will trade any or all of above for these, or for anything you have. What have you to offer? Might consider a small motor boat. H. S. H., Box 85, Shreveport, Louisiana.

STETSON HAT, Carlsbad style, size 7; one pair cowboy boots, calf-skin lined, with stays in back, size 6½; one pair spurs—all for fifteen dollars, or—what have you to swap? Ira Buffamyer, 309 West North Street, Wooster, Ohio.

MOTOR, 2½ horse power Evinrude, battery ignition—for a Colt or a Smith & Wesson, or whatever you have. H. T. Tennant, 1718 South Third Street, Ironton, Ohio.

RADIATOR, Ford racing; guitar; large assortment of auto mechanic's tools. Will sell or swap. What have you to offer? L. D. Price, Fessenden, North Dakota.

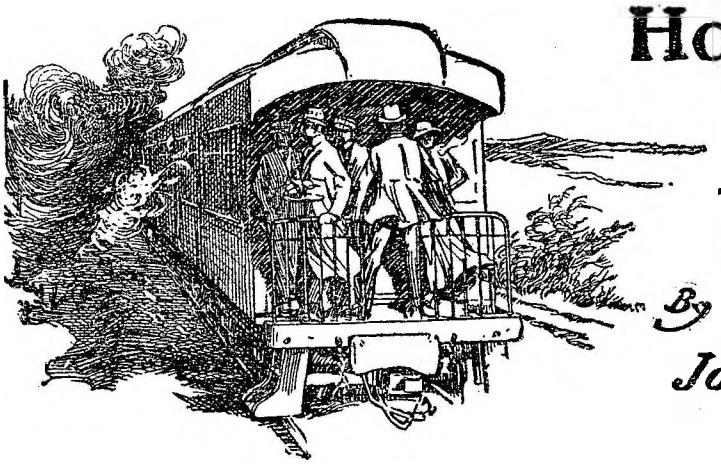
DRAWING SET, mechanical, German silver, in leather case; little used. Will swap for a Kodak or something of like value. A. L. Anderson, Roche Percee, Saskatchewan, Canada.

MOTOR-CYCLE ENGINE, single-cylinder Excelsior, with coil and carburetor complete, recently overhauled and in A1 condition. Will swap for .45 six-shooter, repeating rifle, wireless apparatus—or what have you? William D. Alleman, 455 Jefferson Avenue, Buffalo, New York.

REVOLVER, Smith & Wesson special military model, square butt, with handmade belt and holster, .38 caliber; .44 six-shot Belgian revolver with holster; folding Kodak, takes postcard size pictures; one-minute camera with tripod and complete outfit, takes pictures two-and-three-quarters by three-and-three-quarters. What have you to swap? C. S. Hoover, 4173 Orleans Street, New Orleans, Louisiana.

TYPEWRITER, good as new—for forty dollars or a repeating shotgun in first-class condition. 41 D. A. Colt, 6-inch barrel—for smaller gun, either Colt or Smith & Wesson. Single-barrel shotgun, 41 Derringer, and .22 Stevens rifle for trade. No. 1 coon and possum hound, four years old; No. 1 fox hound, four years old; few rabbit dogs—for sixty dollars, fifty dollars, and twenty-five dollars apiece, respectively—or what am I offered in exchange? T. K. Steeleman, Catlettsburg, Kentucky.

Where To Go and How To Get There



By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

SHUFFLIN' THROUGH THE MAIL

A FELLOW who runs a correspondence department has a mighty interesting job, and mine is no exception. Somehow, a number of people seem more ready to confide in a stranger than in an old friend. Perhaps they know in advance that the friend isn't sympathetic, and the stranger seems likely to be so. Again, the stranger is impersonal. He gives his advice and then forgets all about it, whereas the friend is likely to bring the subject up again and learn whether his advice was taken. Then, if it isn't, and things turn out badly, he is liable to say: "I told you so!" which is about the most annoying phrase in the English language.

They come to me with all sorts of problems and queries, these readers of this department who have ambitions for a different and better life than they have hitherto been leading. Sometimes I can give them a hint that proves of value; sometimes the best I can do is to advise them to stay home and attend to their business. Here goes to look over a few of them in this week's mail:

GOVERNMENT LAND

DEAR MR. NORTH: I am an ex-soldier and unmarried; I would like to find some good government land to file a claim on. I want to go to New Mexico or Colorado. If possible, I would like to get into some country where I could find work while I am not on my claim. If you know of some good land, please give full description. S. C. W.
Cisco, Texas.

This is a typical query. It is the case, I am afraid, of a man with little or no capital, lured by the magic of the phrase "free government land." Such a question is always difficult to answer. Because unappropriated government lands are given away, it does not follow that taking them up under the homestead law is a good thing for a man without money. These lands are practically given away because the government wants a certain region developed. The authorities are willing to coöperate with men who can put some time, money, and labor into the

land. Ordinarily, one should have a good bit of agricultural experience and about two thousand dollars in order to embark on such an enterprise, and I ought to say "Don't!" to any one who has not such qualifications.

On the other hand, there are some exceptional men who by sheer grit and industry and perseverance can take up a homestead tract and work it into profitable shape on the proverbial shoe string. So, Brother S. C. W., I rather think it's up to you to decide whether you are the man for the job. You know yourself better than I do. All homestead land needs developing. Some of it will not be worth while until irrigation projects, which now exist only on paper, are completed. Some of it will be all right when certain railroad building is done, but which, in its present state, lacks proper transportation facilities to convey its products to the markets. You see, the situation needs careful study from every angle. Then there is the question of picking out your tract. Here again individual good judgment is essential. You can get information about homestead lands from the department of the interior, Washington, District of Columbia, or about the States in which you are particularly interested from the secretary, New Mexico bureau of immigration, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the Colorado State board of immigration, State Capital, Denver, Colorado.

WELCOME, NURSE!

DEAR MR. NORTH: I am a graduate nurse and wish to locate out West; have no objection to a country district. Could you advise me where to go? Is there a good field for nurses in the West? I love the outdoors and would love to locate in some place where I could be useful and enjoy it. A. B. C. D.
Montreal, P. Q.

If you mean by a "good field," a place where you can be useful and beneficial to suffering humanity in your chosen vocation, I would say that there should be plenty of opportunity for you in the West. On the other hand, if you have the matter of compensation in mind, I doubt if you would do better than in the big Eastern cities. I would try Albuquerque, New Mexico, for one place, as there are lots of sanitariums in and around that city; also Prescott, Arizona; Denver, Colorado, and vicinity, and similar localities that are famous as health resorts. I think you would find there the kind of life you desire.

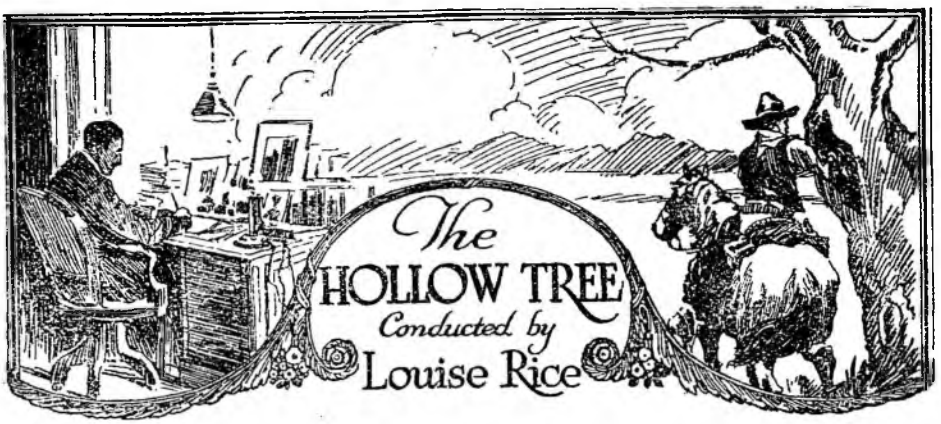
THE OLD, OLD STORY

DEAR MR. NORTH: I am writing for information regarding a position as cow hand, but I do not know where to apply. Do you know of anybody who needs a new cow hand? I can do farm work and can drive a team and can ride fair. I am eighteen years old and five feet eight inches in height. I would like to get work in Montana or Wyoming. W. LOUTH.
Ashtabula, Ohio.

Every mail brings me several letters of this nature. I always try to answer them sympathetically and candidly. The answer, briefly, is that I cannot steer the inquirer into a ranch job and would advise him to think seriously regarding his qualifications for the life before he determines on following that line of work. If he still feels cow-struck, let him save a little money and go out to the cattle country and try his luck. There are going to be lots of hard knocks and setbacks before he gets hardened into a regular cow hand or else decides that the life is not for him.

HEN PICKS UP NUGGETS IN OREGON

THE finding of two gold nuggets in the craw of a hen has led O. H. Willard, the owner of the fowl, to wonder whether he has a gold mine on his property. Willard's home is near Cottage Grove, Oregon. Willard and his neighbors are looking over their ground carefully these days in the hope of discovering more gold.



Miss Louise Rice, who needs no introduction to the fiction-reading public, will, in conducting this department, see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rice 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. Please write your name and address plainly. This service is free. Come one, come all.

YOU all remember a li'l' talk that we had some weeks back about helping one another—sort of giving a friendly hand here and there? Well, here is a brother of The Tree Outfit who would like to hear from some of you folks out West, either from those directly or indirectly able to help him to a location. Address him in care of The Tree.

MY DEAR MISS RICE: Having been a steady reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, I want permission to make use of your very valuable department in a matter that concerns me and my future.

About myself first. I am an American of Western stock, age twenty-three, five feet eleven and one half inches tall, weigh about one hundred and seventy-five pounds, am healthy and husky, a graduate of grammar and high school and a law prep school. I have had considerable farming experience both in agriculture and cattle raising. Of course I can ride a "bronc;" used to be able to bulldog and hog tie cattle, too.

Now then, the reason for these statements is that I want to go West, and I have full realization, I think, of what I am doing. I know the life and understand a good deal of the business conditions in some portions of the West. Where I will settle will depend on what I hear from my brothers of The Tree. I won't answer any real-estate agents or people who merely want to sell me their ranches, so they might as well save their time and postage; but I will answer every one who shows a genuine interest in telling me where I can locate best. If I can find a place that I like, and where the climate suits me, I will put in some capital—from one thousand five hundred dollars to four thousand dollars, according to how things shape up. I am a bit of a tenderfoot, I know, but I think that I could soon get out of that, and I believe that I would be a good partner for some one who wants a fellow with pep and stick-to-itiveness.

Miss Rice will forward any mail for me. I would give my name and all of it here, but I hold a pretty responsible position, and, to be frank, I don't want my employer to know that I have this intention until I am ready to tell him definite things about it. Maybe it'll take quite a time for me to find what I want, and meanwhile I might as well keep my job!

"INVESTMENT."

Well, that's that. We hope that you folks will not write this brother unless you can really help him to use his modest capital safely.

Now let's see what else there is in the ol' Tree.

DEAR HOLLOW TREE: I have been reading the notes that others have left with you, and so I have decided to do it, too. I live in Prescott and have been here two years. Each year

I have attended the Prescott Frontier Day Celebration, which is very entertaining. There are four days of the celebration. The fun includes cowboys' riding contests, bulldogging, fancy riding, and lots of parades and things like that. I am not much of a cowboy myself, but I have ridden horses a good deal, and I have kicked across the desert from Tucson to Globe twice, walking every step of the way. How's that, you hoss riders?

If anybody wishes information on Arizona, I shall be glad to give it. Yours very truly,
Box 605, Prescott, Arizona. JOHN J. WILLIAMS.

DEAR MISS RICE: I am just beginning the study of forestry in a forestry school, and I would like to hear from some one else who is interested in this subject. I keep myself in condition by hiking and camping, but I think that I would like to have a good saddle horse. I would rather have a Western one than any, as the horses in the East do not have the free gait of those from the West. I would like to hear from people in the West who have horses that they would sell reasonably, and I would like to be told how much the charge would be for shipping the horse east. Yours truly, LESTER MAYLATH.
523 East Eighty-fourth Street, New York, N. Y.

Engineers, here's a brother who has talk that you will understand and appreciate.

TO THE HOLLOW TREE: As brother Henry M. Marrin of Utica told you folks about some big country products, I guess that I will tell you about a big engine that I helped to build. It is located at East Syracuse, New York. It has five acres of grates and four acres of netting in the smoke box. It takes a man a day and a half to walk through one of its cylinders. It takes two men forty-five minutes to light one signal lamp. The tender holds ninety-seven cars of coal. Every time this engine exhausts, it rains over a surrounding area of five miles for thirty minutes. Any engineer that has it, goes blind after two months; he'd go mad in three if he could stay on the job. It takes a powerful telescope to see it as it dashes by. It runs anywhere and makes tunnels as it goes. Once in a while it runs wild, and then there is an earthquake in Hongkong. When the water tank is filled, the Hudson is appreciably lowered.

Come on, brother liars. Let's see what you can do! R. G. SUMMERS.
219 Reynolds Street, Rochester, New York.

DEAR HOLLOW TREE: My chief hobby is camping, which of course includes hunting and fishing. When in camp I usually read at night, something on woodland lore or Western stories, and I find many helpful points for the camp life in them.

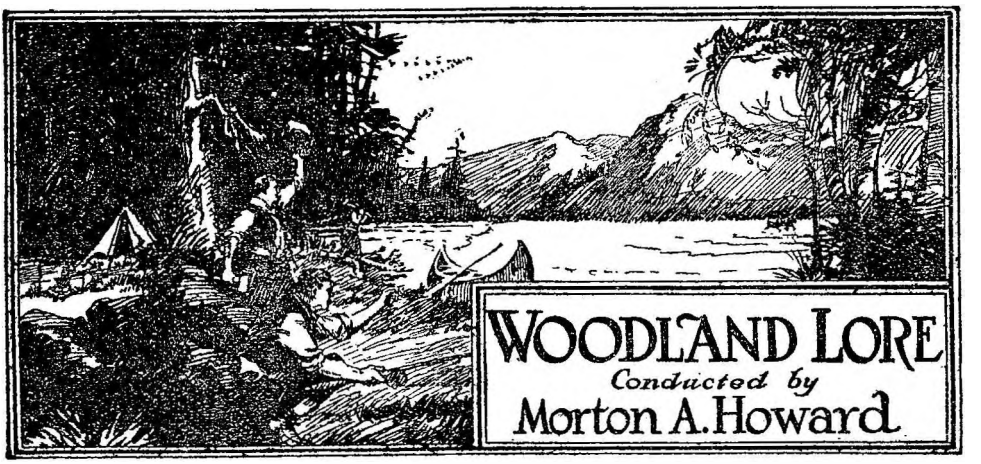
Perhaps some one about my age, which is twenty-four, would like to hear of the outdoor life of Maine and New Hampshire? I have also traveled a good deal in the New England States, having played in a band for five years. I have also railroaded; that is the way I make my living at present. A. D.

Here's a practical chap whom some of you boys in lumber camps ought to be able to give a tip to.

DEAR MISS RICE: I am a lad in my teens, strong and healthy, and I want to get out where there is more chance for me than I have here. I would like to go to a mining camp or a lumber camp as a dish washer or a cook. At present I am a baker's helper; I can cook, as well as make bread. I want to get out where there will be an opportunity to make a home, after a while, for my mother and me. I thank you, Miss Rice, and I hope that some of the boys will write and tell me of likely places. CHARLES RICHTER.
618 South Eighteenth Street, Newark, New Jersey.

A FOREST-FIRE HERO HONORED

PUBLIC recognition for her act of bravery was recently accorded to Miss Violet Hall, fifteen years old, a resident of Verduge Hills, Los Angeles, California. A great forest fire was about to sweep down the beautiful La Canda Valley when Miss Hall jumped on her pony, and, in the course of a breakneck ride through cañons that were endangered, notified the hundreds of residents. Then she guided Forest Ranger R. J. Miller and his men over the smoke-clouded trails to the most advantageous points for checking the fire.



This department is for the benefit of those of our readers who are interested in camping, hiking, and holidaying in the outdoors. Mr. Morton A. Howard, the practical woodsman who conducts it, will answer queries pertaining to all phases of life in the open, if you will inclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your request for information. This service is free.

Mr. Howard will be greatly pleased to hear from woodsmen, and will include in his articles any tales of interesting woods experiences or accounts of new woodcraft he receives.

THE ADAPTATION OF PLANTS TO ENVIRONMENT

LAST summer I took a number of walking tours, having for companions people who wished me to help them to a better understanding of the interesting things in nature which are usually overlooked by those not well acquainted with the out-of-doors. As usual, there were some who were instinctively observant, as well as those who, "having eyes, saw not." To the latter the variations in leaf and flower, the astonishing diversity of form, and the great facility of plants to adapt themselves to their environment so that life could be sustained under exceedingly adverse conditions seemed a book which their fingers could not open. They said: "Oh, indeed!" and: "Isn't that wonderful!" and all the time their restless and bored eyes were darting about in search of something which really appealed to them as interesting or exciting.

This restlessness of the eye, as we tread the woodland path, is a good indication of whether we are really capable of *seeing* what we are looking at. The true woodsman and the real lover of nature, whether familiar with her ways or not, will look attentively at certain objects and will glow with pleasure at what seems to the unobservant nothing but a vague mass of foliage. And when told of the wonders of nature he who is born her devotee will listen with the close attention of one who hears important news—often in silence, for those who praise nature aloud are usually rendering lip service only.

I had some of these thoughts while I was explaining to a group of people a while ago how the compass plant, instead of fanning its leaves out in all directions from the stalk, points them always north and south—or, at least, nearly always due north or south, and, when not exactly so, then approximately so to such a degree as to be dependable. If you are lost you often can guide yourself as accurately by these little plants as if they were signposts put up by human hands. The reason for this is its sensitiveness to the midday sun. It tries in this way to present as little surface to the heat as possible, which object it attains by the compassing of its leaves.

The adaptability of the compass plant does not cease when it is taken away from its wild environment and given the shade and moisture afforded by the human gardener. Perceiving that it is no longer in danger from the burning rays of the sun, it begins to teach itself not to waste so much energy in the long, spindling stalk. It draws itself together and sends down a rounder, more compact root to take advantage of the water with which it is liberally supplied. It becomes a plant with many broad leaves. This is the lettuce of our markets which does not head into a compact mass. It is halfway between the state in which it is a compass to man and is taking full care of itself, and the state in which it is a rounded ball and needs incessant attention from man for its preservation.

As the compact and rather hard ball, with white crisp leaves in the interior which have greedily sucked up all the moisture that the judicious gardener will give it, the lettuce proves that its facility has not deteriorated through civilization. It is now adapting itself to a specialized care. Yet the generations which lie between the spindling compass plant, maintaining a precarious existence in a state of wild life, and the exotic and highly specialized "Boston lettuce" of the compact and crisp white leaves, are no more than the generations which lie between us and our forbears who settled this country.

The way that wild lettuce, which to-day we may find in many a little dell not ten feet from the whirling dust of one of our great highways, has changed is also a history of the progress of civilized eating in a new country. The thing which sent our great-great, et cetera, grandmothers out into the trackless forest with keenly anxious eyes bent upon the unfamiliar green at their feet was the need for something with which to vary the diet of bread and meat and beans. They searched for something that would look to them like the "garden greens" in their English, Irish, Scotch, and French homes, which they knew to be remedies for much that a bad and restricted diet could do to a human stomach.

They took the queer-looking new plant because it smelled and tasted like some salad plant, and in time they found that it would throw out more leaves if transplanted to their bits of garden. A few years more and some garden-wise dame found that she had a particularly close, low-growing "salat," as they used to call it. She saved the seeds and carefully sowed them the next year, for the little colony was growing into more exacting ideals for its table as the first extreme hardships of the earliest pioneer days passed away.

In fifty years the plant had learned that it would be cared for, and soon it began to grow quickly and with confidence; again the human hand was placed on it to make it crisper and more dainty, for now ships were passing to and from Europe, the standards of living had changed immeasurably, and what was wanted was a product that would stand transportation for distances unthought of in the earlier days. The lettuce responded to that demand. The Boston, which can travel from Maine to California and keep its heart sweet for us, came into being.

This subject, "The Adaptation of Plants to Environment," will be continued.

BAG THREE BLACK BEARS

THREE ranchers, Ivan Bader, Frank Blow, and Roy Henderson, who live near Ault, Weld County, Colorado, recently passed through Fort Collins on their return from a hunting trip in the Cameron Pass section, about a hundred and thirty miles northwest of Fort Collins. Among their quarry they displayed three black bears, a female weighing two hundred and twenty-five pounds, and two cubs, each weighing ninety pounds. The hunters first shot and wounded the mother, which ran some distance to where the cubs were hiding. The men followed and killed all three.

MISSING

This department, conducted in duplicate in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us 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.

When you hear from the person you are seeking, tell us, so that we may take your notice out.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

SILK, WILLIAM, generally known as "Silky." He is about five feet eleven inches tall, with brown hair and eyes and very fair complexion. He is a chauffeur, and was last heard of in New York State. Any information that will lead to his present whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by Thomas Ball, 233 East Eighty-second Street, New York City.

La ROSE, J. B., clairvoyant. Please write to H. W., care of this magazine.

BOYLAN, MRS. KATE.—She left Brooks, Alberta, on March 6, 1921, for her aunt's home in New York City, and has not been heard of or seen by any member of her family since that day. She was born in Ireland and speaks with an Irish accent. She has light-brown hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. Any information that will help to know what has become of her will be gratefully received by her aunt, Mrs. V. Bushnell, care of this magazine.

LOVERIDGE, EVA, formerly of Westfield, Massachusetts, and when last heard of was working in Worcester, about ten years ago. She is asked to write to Mrs. Laura Johnson, Princeton, Massachusetts.

JOSEPH S. S.—"Chuck." Have lost your address. Remember P. I. and Raguio, "Gasoline," "Chook," and all the bygone days, and please write to me.—"Chick," V. C., care of this magazine.

RANKEE, BOB.—He is a cook and was last heard of in California five years ago. He is about fifty years old, and generally works around the West on ranches. His sister is very anxious to hear from him and will be glad of any information that will help her to communicate with him. Mrs. M. Gardner, 1111 Wenstanley Avenue, East St. Louis, Illinois.

GREENWELL, CLYDE.—His home is somewhere in Kentucky. He was last heard of in France. Any information about him will be greatly appreciated. L. C., care of this magazine.

SHEPARD, HAROLD NORTH.—He is about twenty-five years old, tall, fair, and slender, and was last heard of in Los Angeles in 1916. It is thought that he went overseas. Any information about him will be very much appreciated by J. Martin, 111 West One Hundred and Twenty-seventh Street, New York City.

HICKMAN.—I was born in 1899, and was adopted by M. Johnson through the Iowa Children's Home. My name before adoption was Fred (Fritz) Hickman. There were two or three children, and one sister came to see me in Sioux City when I was six or seven years old. I would be very happy if I could hear from some of my relations. R. H. Johnson, 704 South Second Street, Yakima, Washington.

FORTUNE, MRS. THELMA BRAZIL.—She was last heard of in February, 1920, in Phoenix, Arizona. She telegraphed to say that she was married, but did not give her marriage name. A friend would be very glad to hear from her, or from any one who knows her present name and address. Vera Ashurst Route 1, Box 79, Strathmore, California.

WARNER, GEORGE E.—He was in Co. C, Third Infantry, Eagle Pass, Texas, and later was at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio. When last heard of he was overseas. If he should see this, a friend will be glad to hear from him, or from any one who knows his address. Mrs. S. C. Barrow, 704 Van Buren, Amarillo, Texas.

GEORGE.—Where are you? Have news for you. Baby and I need you. Please write if you see this, or come home.—D.

ROHER, JOE, WILL, SAM, and two sisters, **KANSAS LENOX** and **LILY**, all formerly of Virginia. Their father was at one time sheriff of Wyth County, Virginia. Their brother's wife has news for them, and it will be to their advantage to write to her. Mrs. Ben F. Roher, 110 Hedges Street, San Antonio, Texas.

HAMILTON, JOHN H.—He is about forty-two years old, six feet tall, with light hair and blue eyes, and was last heard from at Van Nuys, California, in 1918. His family is anxious to communicate with him, and will appreciate any information. Please write to his sister, Mrs. Josie Evans, Coleman, Texas.

ROSS, CHARLES COLEMAN.—He was last heard of in Los Angeles in March, 1917. He is about fifty-eight years old and has a scar on the left side of his nose. Any news of him will be greatly appreciated by a relative, Mrs. Viola M. Ross, care of this magazine.

GAINES, MARIE.—About eighteen years ago a baby girl was placed in an orphan asylum in New York, and was given the name of Marie Gaines. About two years later she was adopted by a family named Barney, in New York. It would make her very happy if she could find out something about her people, and any information that would help her to know her parents, or other relatives, would be very greatly appreciated. R. L. Johnston, 60 East Sixteenth Street, Paterson, New Jersey, care of Barney.

MUTART, WILLIAM MICHAEL.—He is about forty-six or forty-eight years old, of medium height, of dark complexion, and is one quarter French. He was last seen in Owen Sound, Ontario, in 1917. His name is sometimes spelled Mutard. His mother's second marriage name was White. Any information about him will be greatly appreciated by Mrs. John R. Jones, Vimy Ridge, Ontario, Canada.

MARIE V.—In July, 1921, she was in Grand Rapids, Michigan. A friend would be glad to get her present address, and would like to hear from her. J. Z., care of this magazine.

ASH, DAVID FULLER, is anxious to get into communication with his old friends of the **CANAL ZONE HIGH SCHOOL** and the **TENTH INFANTRY**. Information about **WILLARD R. TRASK** will be especially appreciated. Please address D. F. Ash, Mount Vernon, Iowa.

R. R. R. R. BIG BOY.—Please write, as your mother is grieving for you.—Your Littlest Six.

CAMPBELL, HARRY ASHLEY, formerly of Elmira, New York, and last heard of in De Soto Park, Florida. He is twenty-eight years old, very dark, and has been a railroad man most of his life. His sister, who has been trying for years to find him, wants him to write to her at once. She will be glad to hear from any one who can give her his address. B. Dame, 307 South Hennessy Street, New Orleans, Louisiana.

LEONARD, SYLVIA.—She was last heard of in Savannah, Georgia, in 1915. Any information concerning her will be gratefully received by her half brother, Victor Stansbrough, Box 125, Avon Park, Florida.

BENOLA E. ROSE.—She is nineteen years old, with light golden hair and gray eyes. She is five feet four inches tall and has an enlarged knuckle on the third finger of her left hand. She made her home with people who are very fond of her and would be happy to have her come back to them. She stayed with them five months, and disappeared as suddenly as she came. On the night of January 23, 1919, she said she was going to Des Moines to find her mother, and promised to return on the Monday following. Nothing has been heard of her since. A letter addressed to R. H. Lippert, Deming, New Mexico, was found among her belongings. Perhaps he could tell what has become of her. Any information will be gladly received. A Mother, care of this magazine.

A. C. F.—I would like to know what has become of little A. C. F., seven years old, who was taken from the home of his grandmother in Houston, Texas, in 1916, by his mother, and was given to another woman, who was heard of, with the child, in or near Monterey, Mexico, in the summer of 1917. Any information that will help to know where this child is will be most gratefully received. Relative, care of this magazine.

JOHNSTON.—Information is wanted in regard to any relatives of this name who are kin to Ed Johnston, who was a bartender in Amarillo, Texas, and later was a jewelry drummer. He died in 1904 in Dalhart, Texas. His son would be glad to hear from any of his father's people, whose last known place of residence was Fort Worth, Texas. Charles Johnston, care of this magazine.

STEVENS, WALTER LEE, of Augusta, Maine, and last heard of in Sebomook, is asked to write to his cousin Hattie, who would be very glad to hear from him. Box 2043, North Vancouver, B. C., Canada.

DION, GUY.—When last heard of he was in the Fire Truck and Hose Co. at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Information regarding him will be gladly received by Billie McDaniel, Cotton Exchange, N. P. Anderson Building, Fort Worth, Texas.

BACON, EDWARD CLAUD.—He was last heard of on his way to his home in Hastings, Nebraska. Any one who knows his address, or who can give any news of him, will do a favor by writing to G. M. B., care of this magazine.

DONADIO, VINCENT.—He is about six feet tall and weighs two hundred and thirty pounds. On May 20, 1921, he went out to look for work, and has never been heard of since. Any one who can give information about him will earn the deepest gratitude of his family. Please write to his brother-in-law, Frank Marzio, 27 Thompson Street, New York City.

McDONALD, JOHN, formerly of Summerside, Prince Edward Island. If he wishes to hear from his mother, or from his sister Agnes, he is asked to write to 7 Ferry Street, Sydney, Cape Breton.

CUMBERLAND, CLARA JUNIOR, formerly of Vashti Industrial College, Thomasville, Georgia, whose home is in Shreveport, Louisiana, is asked to write to Eunice, care of Mrs. Alfred Dauvin, 7419 Race Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

ATTENTION.—Former members of Headquarters Co., 139th Infantry, are asked to write to an old friend, who would be glad to hear from them. Jack Horner, care of this magazine.

TIMOTHY, EDGAR J., is asked to write to a friend who has been trying to find him for some time. Faith, care of this magazine.

WILLIAMS, WILLIAM EDWARD, also known by the name of Buba. He is five feet six inches tall, broad shouldered, with black hair and blue eyes. He left his home on July 20, 1919, and went to Atlanta to go to work, but went away, and was last heard from in South Carolina, when he wrote saying he was going to New York. His wife and daughter are worrying about him, and any information that would help to find him would be most gratefully received by his daughter, Mrs. J. A. Franklin, 1118 Murietta Street, Atlanta, Georgia.

HOWARD, GEORGE VERNON.—An American who married Maria Preodee in London, England, in 1839-40, and sailed for the United States in 1840, returning to England in the winter of 1840-41. He was never heard of again, the ship being lost with all hands. Between 1870-80 the heirs of a George Vernon Howard, shipbuilder, of New York, were advertised for. There may be no connection between these two men of the same name, but the grandson of the first named would be glad to hear of the family of his grandfather, who are living in the States. Frank Vernon Howard, [illegible] One Hundred and First Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

[illegible] GEORGE E.—He is a specialist, and his last [illegible] East Thirty-second Street, New York City, [illegible] April, 1914. Any one who knows where he is now will do a great favor by writing to M. I. Young, Box 314, Barnsville, Minnesota.

WHITTMORE, WILLIAM J.—He was last seen in Granite, Oklahoma, in 1915. He was fifty years old, six feet two inches tall, with dark-gray hair, brown eyes, and a heavy mustache. Also his son, **COLUMBUS WRIGHT WHITTMORE,** who was last seen in Mountain Park, Oklahoma. He was five feet six inches tall, with dark-brown hair, brown eyes, and a ruddy complexion. Any one who knows the whereabouts of these two men will do a favor by writing to Jesse Cagle, care of this magazine.

HICKERNELL, JOHN.—You have nothing to fear by coming home. I am worrying about you. Send me your address and let me know what you are doing.—Mother.

MANNION, SARAH, or **MANNING.**—She left County Galway, Ireland, about thirty-three years ago and went to Philadelphia. A short time after she married a man named Patterson, who was said to be a plumber. She left two brothers and one sister at home. The sister died in 1910, leaving several children, and one of her daughters promised that she would try to find her aunt Sarah. She hopes through this notice to hear from her, or from some of her children, as it is understood that she had several. Any information will be most gratefully received by her niece, Mrs. C. W. Conklin, care of this magazine.

MOORE, C. T.—Tom, please let me know how you are. I am so worried, and am anxious to know what has become of you. Please write. I am still waiting.—E. M., care of this magazine.

C. E. H.—If you still wish to hear from C. V. Hensley, who used to live near Boise, Idaho, his address is Glencairn, Kentucky.

HALSTROM, GEORGE.—I was put in the Montrose Avenue Orphan Asylum, Brooklyn, New York, and have an older brother somewhere, whose name, I think, is George. If I have any other relatives I should be very glad to hear from them. William Halstrom, 610 Park Avenue, Worcester, Massachusetts.

WEXLER, CHARLES.—He left his brother's home on July 1, 1919, and has not been heard from since. He is five feet eleven inches tall, and has dark-brown hair and eyes. Any one who knows anything about him will earn the gratitude of his family by writing to Mrs. E. Wexler, 65 East Ninety-eighth Street, New York City.

CURTIS, H. DONALD.—He was last seen in Superior in the spring of 1912. At one time his home was in Stillwater, Minnesota. He is thirty-six years old, five feet seven inches tall, with blue eyes and light-brown hair. Any one who knows his present whereabouts will do a great kindness by communicating with Mrs. Ida M. Curtis, Box 332, Grand Rapids, Minnesota.

LITTLE, NETTIE M., or Mrs. E. B. Griffith. She is nineteen years old, with red hair, and is slightly freckled. She was last heard of in South Chicago, Illinois, in May, 1921. Any information concerning her will be greatly appreciated by her brother, who begs her, if she sees this, to write to him at once. Shorty, care of this magazine.

ANDERSON, CLYDE, sometimes known as Jack Lee. He is twenty-seven years old, and is a sailor, a marine cook. Any one who can give any information about this man, or who knows his present address, will do a great kindness by writing to Red Cross, care of this magazine.

LOFGREN, CLINTON, formerly of Newton, Iowa. He is about seventeen years old. A friend would be very grateful to any one who can send his present address. E. C., care of this magazine.

POPP, JOSEPH.—About twenty or twenty-five years ago, when I was between five and seven years of age, I was put in the Home of Our Lady of Victory, at West Seneca, Buffalo, New York. I have gray eyes, light-brown hair, a deep scar across my chin and another on the right side of my neck. I would like to find out who put me in the home, and if I have any relatives in the world I would be glad to hear from them. Joseph Popp, care of this magazine.

RAY.—Please write to me.—Yank.

CAIRNS, JAMES, and **THOMAS MOSS.**—These boys were taken from Old Forge, Pennsylvania, to a home in New York City by Salvation Army workers. James is my full brother, fair of complexion, twelve years of age, very thin, with brown eyes and red hair. Thomas is my half brother, is six years old, with very light hair and brown eyes, and is short and fat. I am now able to give them a good home, and will be very grateful to any one who can tell me where they are. Mrs. Annabelle Nicholson, 129 Crothers Avenue, Glendale, Carnegie, Pennsylvania.

SNOW, FRANK.—He was last heard of in Loraine, Ohio. His old home town is Stockbridge, Massachusetts. His people are very anxious to know where he is, and will greatly appreciate any information as to his present whereabouts. C. B., care of this magazine.

RUSSELL, JOHN HENRY, is very anxious to hear from his father, who went away when he was seven years old. He is now eighteen. His mother has died since his father left, and she told him that the last time she had heard of his father he was in Knoxville, Tennessee. He will be very grateful to any one who can help him to find his father. John Henry Russell, care of this magazine.

MELVILLE, LEWIS.—He is twenty-three years old, about six feet tall, with brown eyes and hair. He was seen at a reunion in Portland, Oregon, after the war, and it was heard that he had joined the merchant marine. His folks have not seen him since 1916. Any one who can give news of him will do a favor by writing to M. N. Massengale, Runge, Texas.

HABKUS.—My parents came here from Germany, and my father died shortly before my birth. My mother went to a Catholic home, I think in Cleveland, Ohio, where I was born on July 30, 1883 or 1884. When I was three days old I was adopted by Mort Keifer and his wife, Gathren, and was baptized in St. Joseph's Church in Youngstown, Ohio. I have not seen my mother since, and would be glad to know if she is living, and would be very happy if I could find her. My right name is supposed to be Habkus. I shall be very grateful to any one who can help me to know something about my people, or to find my mother. Mrs. Alma C. Meger, care of this magazine.

SIGLER, LUCILLE M.—Who lived in San Diego and Ocean Beach, California, in August and September, 1920, and was in San Francisco when last heard from, when she was living with her mother and stepfather, whose name was Gunn. If she should see this she is asked to write as soon as she can to F. M. H., care of this magazine.

CRAFT, MRS. HARRIET.—She was living in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, when her adopted son went over with the army of occupation in Germany in 1919, and he has not been able to find her since. He will be grateful to any one who can send him her present address. Henry Meza, care of this magazine.

THURTLE, CECIL.—He was last heard of in Great Falls, Montana, where he was sick in a hospital. He is now thirty-seven years old, and was born in Bad Axe, Michigan. His mother, who is in poor health, would be glad to know where he is, and will be most grateful to any one who can help her to find her son. Mrs. Margaret Thurtle, 346 Champion Street, Battle Creek, Michigan.

CLARK.—I was born in Warren County, Pennsylvania, in 1887, and when I was nine years old was placed in a home with my three brothers, Henry, Claud, and Elmer, and one sister, Maude. I was the eldest. When I was eleven years old I ran away from the home, and I have never known what became of my brothers and sister. Kind readers of this magazine have given me information about my father, John Clark, who was inquired for in these columns, and I have learned through them that he died in 1914. Now I am hoping that I shall get some news of my brothers and sister in the same way, and I shall certainly be very grateful for any information that will help me to find them. Walter Clark, care of this magazine.

NEWMAN, FRANK I.—His home is in New York, but he worked through the printers' strike in Philadelphia, during June, 1920. He is asked to send his address to "Red," care of this magazine.

DOHLMAN, JAMES C.—He was last heard of in Omaha, Nebraska, when he was mayor of that city. A daughter of the late Doctor Fred J. Dohlman would like to hear from him, and will greatly appreciate any communication that will help her to learn his present address. Dorothy Worsley, care of this magazine.

SULLIVAN, T. J. (Tim).—He was last seen in Whitetail, Montana, in December, 1920. He is six feet tall, with blue eyes and light hair. It is believed that he is somewhere in Canada. He is a rancher. If he sees this he is asked to write to his old friends Alkali Pete and Moonlight Curly, in care of this magazine.

SUDLOW, GEORGE W., known as "Kansas City Red," is asked to write to his friend Elmer Gilmore, Big Heart, Oklahoma.

BRADLEY, JOHN ROBERT.—He is a hoisting engineer, is thirty-five years old, with gray eyes, light hair, and very fair complexion, nearly six feet tall, and broad shouldered. His mother has not seen him for over four years, although she has tried every means to find him. He is the only boy left, as his younger brother, Samuel E., was killed in action on September 26, 1918. Any information that will help her to know where her son is will be most gratefully received by Mrs. Annie Bradley, care of this magazine.

BARNARD, ARTHUR WILLIAM.—He is thirty years old and was last heard from when he was demobilized from an Ohio regiment, right after the armistice was signed. The number of his regiment is not known. There is important news awaiting him that he should know, and if he sees this he is asked to write to his cousin at once, who will greatly appreciate any information that will help him to communicate with him. Charles E. Glover, care of this magazine.

De LUCCA, FRANK, Jr.—He has served in the U. S. Coast Guard, Marine Corps, merchant marine, and Canadian army. He was discharged from the navy in 1918 at Annapolis, enlisted in the Canadian army the same year, went overseas, and was discharged in 1920 on account of wounds received in action. He is five feet eight inches tall, with black hair, dark complexion, and an aquiline nose. There is a scar across his forehead which was received in a hand-to-hand combat in the Argonne. His buddy has important news for him. His dad is getting old and is worrying about him, and wants to see him before he dies. Any assistance in finding him will be gratefully appreciated. Frank de Mar, care of this magazine.

LARSON, CARL.—He is a Swede, is about forty-five years old, and was last heard from fifteen years ago, when he was at Leadville, Colorado. His sister is anxious to find him and will be grateful for any news of him. Ida Larson, care of this magazine.

TRENT.—I would like to hear from some of my father's relatives. His name was Harry C. Trent, and his old home was at Rushville, Illinois. He has a sister named Pauline, and I think she married a man named Brounson. Any communications from them will be gladly received. Ward C. Trent, 1615 1-2 Twelfth Avenue, Moline, Illinois.

M. F.—Please write at once, regardless of circumstances, or let me join you. There is good news now. I am heartbroken. Your wife, E. O. F.

ABBOTT, GUS.—He was last heard of in Pennsylvania in 1914 or 1915. His brother is dead and his sister would like to hear from him or from any one who can tell her what has become of him. He is about fifty-eight years old. Any information will be thankfully received. Mrs. Mamie Johnson, 1104 Oriental Avenue, San Antonio, Texas.

CONKLIN, ELMER E.—He left his home at Seneca, Illinois, three years ago, and has never been heard from since. It was thought that he had been seen working in shipyards in New York, but nothing definite was known. He is now about sixty years old, with dark eyes and hair, and is rather tall. His sister will be grateful for any information about him. Mrs. Ida M. Steele, Box 624, Slick, Oklahoma.

O'LEARY, EDWARD.—He left Cleveland, Ohio, nearly three years ago, and was last heard from about one year ago in West Point, Nebraska. He is about twenty-four years old, six feet two inches tall, with fair complexion and a heavy beard. He was in the navy for some time, and his buddy will be most grateful to any one who will help him to know where his old pal is. Mac, care of this magazine.

DAMRON, MISS FAYE.—She was last heard from in Los Angeles, in 1911. Any information as to her whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by a friend. J. M. F., care of this magazine.

BROTHERS, ALMA or **ANITA**, formerly of Vanceboro, Maine. Her married name is not known. If she sees this she is asked to write to Alma A., care of this magazine.

MURPHY, MILTON M.—He was last heard of in Salt Lake City in November, 1920. He is a mechanic, but is acting as a traveling salesman. He is six feet tall, with blue eyes and fair hair. His mother is very ill, and is worrying so much about him that her health cannot improve. Any one who knows where he is will do a great favor by writing to P. O. Box 920, Yakima, Washington.

DONAHUE, W. F.—Bill, please let us hear from you and tell us where you are. Everything will be all right. We are broken-hearted at your absence. I am still at mother's, so please write me there, and we will forget the past.—Fern.

HASWELL, BERKELEY.—He is an actor and was last heard of at Nowater, Oklahoma, while acting there in the week of March 26, 1921. A friend is very anxious to hear from him, and will be deeply grateful to any one who will do the favor of sending his address or of calling his attention to this notice. Paul H. Fuller, 461 Second Avenue, West Haven, Connecticut.

HALEY, W. H.—He was last heard of in Lubbock City, New Mexico. His daughter will greatly appreciate any information about him. Mrs. Grace Wiggins, 109 Chenevert Street, Houston, Texas.

MOORMAN, FRANK.—He has been missing since November, 1920, and when last heard of was in California. He has three little children, the oldest six years old and the baby was born after he left home. He is about five feet six inches tall, of slender build, with dark hair and blue eyes. His wife will be deeply grateful for any news that will help her to find him. Mrs. Alice Moorman, care of this magazine.

CALENDA, NICK.—He left his home about two years ago and was last heard from in Tennessee. His mother is not well, and it would make her very happy to hear from him. If he sees this he is asked to write to her as soon as possible. 311 Hubbell Street, Utica, New York.

LEE, LUTHER L.—He is five feet eleven inches tall, with dark hair and brown eyes. He has a father and a brother somewhere in Texas. Good news awaits him if he will write to L. J. Marsh, 121 Peach Street, Sumter, South Carolina.

MINOR, CARL (CURLY), last heard from in California is asked to write to an old friend, D. W. L., P. O. Box 854, Meridian, Mississippi.

BRELYEU, WALTER (FRENCHIE).—He was last seen at Hutchinson, Kansas, in May, 1920. Any one who knows where he is will do a great favor by notifying his pal, Vernon Gregg, Box 585, Shamrock, Oklahoma.

VACHA FRANK.—He enlisted in Chicago in 1917 and served with me in the late war in Company C., D. B., at Camp Fremont, California, until I was discharged in November, 1918. He gave me his former address in Chicago, but all letters sent there have been returned. If he should see this I hope he will write to me. J. J. P., care of this magazine.

HART, INEZ A.—During last winter she lived on West Twenty-seventh Street, New York City, but all trace of her has been lost. If she sees this she is asked to write at once to J. H. Hart, 120 North Eleventh Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

DETRICK, EMMA.—She went away in 1900, and stayed for a time with a relative in McGregor, Iowa, where it is thought she married a man named James Henry. From there she went to Osage, same State, and no trace of her has been found since. Her daughter is very anxious to find her and will greatly appreciate any information. Edna Detrick Johnson, care of this magazine.

COBB, EDNA A.—She was in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1918, where she had a position in the Wells Studios, and went to Macon, Georgia, with this firm in the same year. A friend would be very happy to hear from her. C. L. G., P. O. Box 56, Wewahitchka, Florida.

McCROSSIN, FLORENCE, who lived at 7425 1-2 Finance Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and who graduated from the Sterret School in June, 1914, is asked to send her address to a friend, who has written to her at her old address, but letters have been returned. V. G. G., care of this magazine.

JOHNSTON, MINNIE, formerly of Ruckle Street, Indianapolis, Indiana. It has been learned that she is married, but her married name is not known. A friend would be glad to hear from her, and hopes she will see this and write to E. M. B., care of this magazine.

STREETER, HELEN.—She was taken to Lorain, Ohio, by a Mr. Smith, and no doubt was placed in a home. She was last seen at her mother's grave in Norwalk, Ohio. Also her brother **RAY**, who was last heard from in 1913, when he was aboard the U. S. S. "Kansas." Their brother would be glad to know where they are, and will be grateful to any one who can help him to find them. Harry Streeter, care of this magazine.

HART, MRS. GEORGIA.—She is seventeen years old, five feet four inches tall, with black-brown eyes and brown hair. She left Van Buren in company with her people, in a covered wagon drawn by two mules, one gray and one bay. She has two sisters, two brothers, and a baby sister. Her father is about fifty years old and is half Indian, with high cheek bones, dark complexion, and jet-black hair. His name is J. W. Lane. Any information will be gratefully received by the young woman's husband, Harry A. Hart, care of this magazine.

MONTGOMERY, MRS. DAVE (LOUISE).—She was last heard of at Kansas City, Missouri. Any one who knows her address will do a favor by writing to 403 Monroe Street, Black River Falls, Wisconsin.

FORBES, SERGEANT EARL.—He sailed on the U. S. S. "Artemis" from Brest on July 21, 1919. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by A. T. Pine, 527 Huron Street, Toledo, Ohio.

WELLS, CATHERINE.—She is fourteen years old and lives in St. Louis, Missouri. A friend will feel much obliged to any one who can give her street address. If she sees this she is asked to write to S. Skinner, 402 First Avenue, S. W., Watertown, South Dakota.

FELTON, HARRY, sometimes called "Blackie." He left Leadville, Colorado, in 1915, with another man, and it is thought they were headed for the Pacific coast. He is about six feet tall and of slender build and was born in Canada. An old friend of Leadville would be glad to get his present address. M. L. H., care of this magazine.

HASKETT, CLAUD.—He was last heard of at Beatrice, Nebraska, about fifteen years ago. His sister is very anxious to find him. She would also like to get news of her mother, Mrs. Zinger, who was last heard of in Denver, Colorado. The daughter's name before she was adopted was Maude May Haskett. Any information about her family will be greatly appreciated. Mrs. L. M. S., care of this magazine.

ROLLINS, R. L.—He is a first-class electrician, and left Philadelphia two years ago for New York and later went to a small town on Long Island, and was last heard from about a year ago. A friend would be glad to hear from him or from any one who can give his address. E. C. Stedman, 2440 South Darien Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

H. L. B.—His mother has important news for him and wants him to write home at once. Evelyn is O. K.—His mother.

JOHN MACY C.—Get in touch with your brother, the barber, at once. Charles Oliver C., Y. M. C. A., Bellefontaine, Ohio.

HATTING or **HATTINGS, JOHN** or **JAMES.**—Members of the Twenty-fourth Battalion, Victoria Rifles, Canadian army, who saw service in France, are appealed to for information regarding this man. He was last seen in a casualty clearing station, and it is possible that he may be in some government hospital, as he was suffering from shell shock, or he may have been killed in action later. He is of Irish descent, with blue eyes and brown hair, short of stature, and inclined to be stout. Any news concerning him during his time in the army from some of his former buddies, or from any one who knew him "over there," or who saw him in the hospital, will be gratefully received by his wife and children. They are trying to get their claim settled with the Canadian government, and further proof is needed to show positively whether he is living or dead. Any kind assistance in this matter will be most gratefully appreciated. Please write to his daughter, Miss Doris Hattings, 106 Arch Street, New Britain, Connecticut.

E. L. E.—Come home quick. Love from your wife and baby.—M. E. E.

WHITE, REUBEN.—When last heard of he was in Aberdeen, Washington. His niece, who has not seen him since she was quite small, would be glad to get some news of him, and hopes he will see this and write to her. Mrs. Bertie Gaines Russell, 833 North Avenue, Miami, Florida.

LARSON, HARRY.—He left Crystal Falls, Michigan, in 1911, and went to Chicago with a boy named Oscar Lampfield. They parted in Chicago, and Oscar returned home, but Harry has never been heard from since. He was seventeen years old when he went away. Any news of him will be gratefully received by Clifford Larson, 724 Warren Street, Flint, Michigan.

DEAR JO.—Your mother wants you to write. Your father, Robert, is very sick, and would like to hear from you. Please write to me in care of this magazine.—Mother.

KEOGH, MARGARET AEOLA or **YOLA,** daughter of Dennis Michael Keogh and Sarah Clark, who in 1887, at the age of five years, was taken by relatives from Salford, Lancashire, England, and brought to Philadelphia. The relatives while in England were engaged in the silk and cotton business. Any information that will help to find this young woman will be greatly appreciated by her younger sister. Please write to B. J. M., care of this magazine.

BRINE.—A war veteran seeks information regarding his children—Ethel Rosaline, fourteen years old, with medium complexion, brown hair and eyes, and Arthur John, seven years old, of the same coloring. They left Toronto, Ontario, in December, 1919, for the United States, with their mother, Rosaline Maude Brine, thirty-nine years old, slim, of dark complexion, and about five feet in height. A man named Arthur Wills accompanied them. Any information that will help to find the children will be thankfully received and fully appreciated. Arthur George Brine, care of this magazine.

MORRIS, MAT.—He has been away for a number of years, and his wife would be glad to get news of him. Also **MICHAEL MURPHY,** an uncle, who left Winlaton, County Durham, England, for America. Mrs. Margaret Morris, care of this magazine.

MOORE, CORPORAL HOMER, of Company A, Eleventh Infantry. He was wounded in France on October 21, 1918, and died seven days later. If any of the boys of Company A should see this, and if they know where he was wounded or where and how he died, they would do a great favor by writing to his widow, Mrs. Effie Moore, North Chattanooga, Tennessee.

DYER, HARRY, formerly of Alderton, Washington, and last heard from at Kennewick, same State, about twelve years ago. He is six feet tall, of slim build, and has curly, brown hair. He is asked to write to Fred W. Kinne, R. F. D. 1, Sumas, Washington.

GODFREY, MORIAH.—She was married in Schenectady on September 16, 1908, and returned to her home in Lowell, Massachusetts, alone, in November of the same year. After a short stay she went out one day and has never been seen since. She is about five feet seven inches tall, slender, with sharp features, dark eyes, and rather golden hair. She is now about thirty-two years old. Her mother would be most grateful for any information that would help her to know what has become of her daughter. Mrs. W. Godfrey, care of this magazine.

MONTANA WILLIAMS, or **J. PEARSON.**—He is about thirty years old, and at one time was a moving-picture actor, and later was in vaudeville. Any information about him would be greatly appreciated by his mother, dad, and sisters. Brother, if you see this, please write or come home. Your loving sisters, Sadie, Minnie, and Myra. Please write to Myra Pearson, care of this magazine.

TURNER, VIVIAN LILLIAN.—Sis, please write to your old pal and sister. I have been very lonesome without you. There is lots of news, too. Ida, care of this magazine.

BILLY.—Write to me as soon as you see this. I have important news for you. Your old shipmate, Ben, care of this magazine.

EVERETT, FRANK.—When last heard of he was in Los Angeles. His folks have a farm near Kansas City, Missouri. An old pal would like to hear from him, or from any one who knows his address or how to reach him. George A. Beitzer, R. F. No. 2, Ventura, California.

McGRAW, JAMES.—When last heard of he was in Havana, Cuba. He is asked to write to Roosevelt Mitchell, 3117 Main Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

CONWAY, IRA.—He enlisted in Montana when he was fifteen years old. He went to France in 1918 with Battalion E, 163rd Artillery, First Army, and when he returned was with the Ninth Company, C. A. C., at Fort Tilden, Rockaway, New York, for several months. About April 1, 1919, he was transferred to Third Company, C. A. C., at Fort Caswell, North Carolina, and in the winter of 1919-1920 was transferred to Second Company, C. A. C., at the same place, and passed examinations as mechanic. He is twenty-eight years old, five feet nine inches tall, and of medium complexion. His last known address was Kansas City, Missouri. His father's name was Vanduyn. Any information that will help to find him will be greatly appreciated by a friend. Please write to M. C. G., care of this magazine.

WILSON, GEORGE, and his wife. They left home about fifteen months ago at Comanche, Colorado. He is tall, with sandy complexion, and she is short and dark. Her mother is heartbroken at her absence and will be most grateful for any news that will help her to find her only child. Mrs. N. Helmerick, care of this magazine.

SHEPARD, LULA.—She married a man named Golden and was last heard of in Oklahoma. She is about thirty-seven years old, with fair hair and complexion and brown eyes. Her mother will be glad to hear from any one who can tell her where she is, and she hopes, if she should see this, that she will write to her at once. Mrs. I. L. Shepard, 2100 North Twelfth Avenue, Birmingham, Alabama.

GRAY, JOHN EDDIE.—Please write at once to your cousin, Lillie Harwell, 1197 Wilson Street, Memphis, Tennessee.

ATTENTION.—URAL H. DAVIS, GLADOV, and former members of the Ninth Field Artillery, Pill Rollers, drop a line to Fred Schneider, Windsor Hotel, Denver, Colorado.

LAMBERT R. M.—He is about thirty-one years old, six feet tall, with very dark, curly hair, and is a veterinary surgeon and live-stock buyer and shipper. He has a wife and a little girl eight or ten months old. He smokes a good deal and talks with his cigar in his mouth. Friends are anxious to get some news of him. M. O., care of this magazine.

JUMBO A. S. L.—Your grandfather, John, and Helen are dead. Philip is doing well. I am married again and am very happy. There are some things that you and I should settle with others. Please write to me in care of this magazine. Your only sister, Lucile.

EMERY, CLARENCE.—When last heard of he was a railroad engineer running on one of the lines with terminal at Chicago. An old school chum would like to hear from him and would be glad to get his address or that of his mother, Mrs. Stella Emery, who is believed to have remarried and to be living in the vicinity of Hartford, Connecticut. Also Miss Hazel Holt, who graduated at Rockville, Connecticut, High School in 1902 and is thought to have gone West some years later. There is information of interest for her. And news that will help to find these people will be greatly appreciated. A. M. P., care of this magazine.

MOMBOUQUETTE, MARY E.—She married a man named Cronin and lived in Roxbury, Massachusetts, eight years ago, when she was last heard from. Any information about her will be gratefully received by her sister, Mrs. Catherine Kawaja, 1346 Fulton Street, Brooklyn, New York.

BOWDEY, JOHN.—His sister will be glad to hear from any one who can give her information about him or any of his brothers. Grace Bowdey, care of this magazine.

WISE, HERBERT.—He is about five feet eight inches tall, with black hair and eyes and dark complexion, and was last heard of in April, 1920, near Orofino, Idaho. His father would be deeply grateful for any information that would help him to find his boy. George H. Wise, Box 552, Nelagoney, Oklahoma.

ST. JOHN, HENRY.—He is eighteen years old, five feet nine inches tall, with medium dark hair and gray eyes. He was last heard from at Canton, Kansas, in November, 1920. Any information concerning him later than that date would be gladly received by his mother, Mrs. Maggie St. John, 2507 Third Avenue, Columbus, Georgia.

PARTEE, HARRY.—He was last heard of in Belleville, Illinois, about 1918. Also **GRACE PETERS**, or her sister, **CALLIE BOMBARG.** An old friend will be glad to hear from any of these people. M. H., care of this magazine.

MORRIS, WILLIAM, JR., who formerly lived in Webster, Massachusetts, and was last heard from in Fayetteville, North Carolina. He is about twenty-one years old, has dark-brown hair and gray eyes, and plays the piano. His father will be glad to hear from any one who can give him news of his son. William H. Morris, Thompson Road, Webster, Massachusetts.

ECKSTEIN, EVA.—She was born in San Francisco, July 21, 1884, and is anxious to know something definite in regard to her parentage. She was taken from a home in Oakland, California, and was adopted by the late C. W. and Mary Eckstein, of San Francisco. Any information that will help her to find some of her relatives, or to know if she has any, will be most gratefully received. Eva Eckstein, care of this magazine.

VAN CORE, ALVIN.—He is fifty years old, with dark-brown hair, sandy beard, blue eyes, and is about five feet eight inches tall. He has been away for seven years, and his people miss him very much and hope he will see this and write soon. He usually goes into the woods in northern Maine in wintertime. Any information about him will be gladly received by his brother, D. Van Core, 1811 Van Buren Street, St. Paul, Minnesota.

CORSAM, PEARL.—When last heard of she was in New Mexico. Her brother is anxious to know her whereabouts and will greatly appreciate any information that will help him to communicate with her. Private H. S. Corsam, care of this magazine.

FRANKLIN, W. C., who was last heard of in Fort Dade, Florida, is asked to write to Evelyn, care of this magazine.

BERRY, FLOYD.—He is fifteen years old, with light hair and complexion and gray-blue eyes, and is five feet eight inches tall. He left his home on September 12, 1921. His father and mother are very anxious about him, and will be most grateful for any information that will help them to communicate with him. His mother hopes, if he sees this, that he will come home at once or write. Mrs. Lester Berry, Route 3, Canton, Illinois.

SPENCER, JACK.—He served in the Civil War with the Northern forces and returned to his home in Tennessee, but went away again without telling any of his family where he was going, and they have not seen or heard of him since. He has children living in Georgia, Tom, Emma, Charlie, William, and Alice. He would be now between seventy and seventy-five years old. His people are anxious to know what has become of him and why he never came back. Any one who can give information about him will do a great favor by writing to his grandson, who would be happy to hear from any one who has known his grandfather. Dewey Spencer, Sargent, Georgia.

CLUNE.—I left Chicago about twenty years ago, and have not heard from my people since. I have written several times lately to old addresses, but have received no answer, and would be very grateful to any one who can tell me where my folks are. Elmar George Clune, Telluride, Colorado.

CONNOR, MOLLIE or **ANNIE.**—When last heard from Mollie was in Providence, Rhode Island, about twenty-four years ago. Their brother Michael, who married a Georgia girl, is dead, and so is his wife, but they left one child, a girl, who would be very happy to hear from her father's sisters and would greatly appreciate any information that would help her to get in touch with them. Mollie, care of this magazine.

PETTITT, MRS. MARY.—She left her husband and four little children and was last heard from on the 3rd of October, 1920, when she wrote from Salt Lake City saying that she was leaving there for her home. She has one child with her, John, who is four years old, with light-brown hair, blue eyes, and a fresh complexion. Mrs. Pettitt is about thirty-three years old, five feet six inches tall, very thin, and has bluish-gray eyes. Her children are grieving for her and her husband is almost distracted. Any one who knows where she is will do a very great favor by writing to him. G. W. Pettitt, care of this magazine.

JENNINGS, CLEAVE, or his wife, who was Miss Pearl Tanner, the daughter of the late Thomas Tanner, of Radford, Virginia. Any one who knows where they are will do a favor by writing to J. A. Tanner, Stony Creek, Virginia.

LONG, GORDON.—When last heard of he was in Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1901, when he was serving with the U. S. M. C. at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Any information about him will be very gratefully received by his son, Henry K. Richey, care of this magazine.

LINS, JOHN.—He lived in San Francisco in 1889, where he conducted a retail wine house. He is sixty-six years old and has dark hair and blue eyes. His brother would like to hear from him or from any one who can give him information as to his whereabouts. J. A. Lins, 334 Main Street, Berkley, Virginia.

ATTENTION.—Engineers with A. E. F. Siberia. Members of Engineer Detachment who left Manila in August, 1918, with Captain Earl W. Jennings, are requested to communicate with their old pal, Frank Brecka, former saddler of Engineers, who left them in 1918 on route to the United States via Manila. Any one who knows the whereabouts of these members of that expedition will do a favor by writing: R. W. **STOKES**, of Tennessee; R. W. **TRAVIS**, of California; **CUMMINGS ROSE** and **GEORGE ROBERTSON**, of Passaic or Paterson, New Jersey. Also members of Engineers who left Manila in January, 1918: **FRED SHIPLEY, OTTO C. ADAMS, JOHN LEMONS**, and **JAMES** and **ROBERT JOHNSTON**, who were mounted men. Please write to Frank Brecka, 38 Oak Avenue, Irvington, New Jersey.

SQUIRREL.—He is a tattoo artist, and his left leg has been cut off above the knee. His body is completely covered with tattoo marks. He was last heard of in San Antonio, Texas. His real name is not known. Any one who knows his address will do a favor by sending it to Carl McCaleb, P. O. Box 16, Columbus, Georgia.

GROLL, JOHN.—He has been missing about sixteen years. When last heard of he was going to Arizona. His brother would be happy if he could get some news that would help to find him. Conrad Groll, Route 1, Box 41-A, Brookfield, Wisconsin.

ADAMS, JOHNNIE.—He left his home in February, 1921, and has not been heard from since. He is twenty years old, with light hair, brown eyes, and fair complexion. He is asked to write to his parents, who are worrying about him, and will be grateful for any information that will help them to communicate with him. Mother.

PERRY, ROY E.—When last heard from he was in New York City and had recently returned from an ocean voyage. If he sees this he is asked to write at once to Mrs. H. C. Abernethy, 311 Effingham Street, Portsmouth, Virginia, who has news for him concerning his mother and who will be glad to hear from any one who can give the address of this young man.

BUDD.—Please write or come home. Everything is settled. Your daddy wants you to come back. Your anxious sister, Helen.

O'BRIEN, HENRY V.—He is about six feet tall, with dark hair and brown eyes, and is of slender build, with round shoulders. He is about thirty-five years old and is a machinist. When last heard from he was employed by the Brier Hill Steel Company, at Youngstown, Ohio. His wife is worrying very much over his unexplained absence and is quite ill with anxiety. She will be deeply grateful to any one who can give her information that will help her to find him. Mrs. Nora O'Brien, 777 Waelde Avenue, Meadville, Pennsylvania.

HECKELWRITE, ANDREW.—He was last heard of in Denver, Colorado, in 1910. Any one who knows his present address will do a favor by writing to Mrs. T. Fitts, 1505 Lakeside Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

GRUELL, MRS. WALTER, whose maiden name was Rose Dinges, and who was last heard from in St. Louis. Any information as to her whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by her brother, Sergeant J. J. Dinges, Marine Barracks, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

RHYNES, JOHN and **WYLIE.**—They were last heard from at Carico, Kentucky, several years ago. Their brother Garrett would be very happy if he could hear from them. Any one who knows where they are will do a favor by writing to Mrs. James B. Boley, care of this magazine.

McCLOSKEY, MONA ELIZABETH.—She is about seventeen years old, with blue-gray eyes and light-brown hair. There is a small scar on her forehead above the right eye, and she has perfect teeth. She was last heard from in Little Rock, Arkansas, in January, 1921. Also **GEORGE E. McCLOSKEY**, twenty-two years old, about five feet eight inches tall. He was in the Fourth Cavalry, Troop E, during the war and was discharged from the Mexican border in March, 1919. Also **JOSEPH McCLOSKEY**, fourteen years old. He was in Little Rock with his brother Sam during the fall of 1920. Their mother is anxious to find these children and will be most grateful for any information that will help her in her search. Mrs. Florence McCloskey, care of this magazine.

CUMMINGS, EARL, or **BILL**, and **NANNA F., YOLA P.**, and **PAPINTA JEFFREYS.** Their sister has some important news for them from "Red Rose," and asks them to write to her. Any one who knows them will do a favor by calling their attention to this notice. Reba Barnes, care of this magazine.

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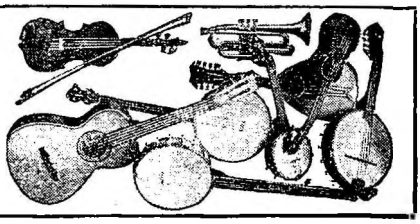

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